# Humor Styles, Impoliteness, and Online Viewers' Appreciation of Egyptian vs. American Pedestrian Questions: A Cross-cultural Study

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## Abstract

This study contributes to cross-cultural humor research in an understudied genre, namely entertaining semi-structured man-on-the-street interviews. Two entertainment shows, Egyptian مذيع الشارع /muði:ʕəʃʃæ:riʕ/ 'street broadcaster' and American *Pedestrian Question* (PQ) segment in *Jimmy Kimmel Live*, pose humorous questions to random pedestrians. Within a comprehensive framework integrating three theories of humor (Superiority, Incongruity and Relief), the humor dimensions/styles (Martin et al., 2003), and Culpeper's (1996, 2005, 2011a, 2011b) Model of Impoliteness, this study contrastively investigates the humor styles and themes intended through PQs in 80 YouTube video clips. Two styles have been identified in both shows: aggressive other-deprecating and affiliative relief-based. The former, mapped to impoliteness strategies, may feed audience's feelings of superiority at the pedestrians' expense. The latter may offer the audience 'voyeuristic pleasure' while deriving relief from pedestrians' confessions, fantasies, and the daring of authority. In confessions and fantasies, PQ themes are conservative on the Egyptian show but often unorthodox on the American show. The study further explores the effect of culture and humor style on YouTube viewers' appreciation measured by percentage of likes (%Likes). The effect of culture has only been statistically significant regarding relief-based humor, where Egyptian clips have achieved more %Likes than have the American clips.

*Keywords:* humor styles, impoliteness, online viewers' appreciation, pedestrian questions, culture

# 1 Introduction

Humor has been described as a 'puzzling phenomenon' (Robinson & Smith-Lovin, 2001) that is difficult or even 'impossible' to define (Attardo, 1994). However, from a psychological perspective, humor has been perceived as a broad term that refers to anything that people say or do that is perceived as funny and tends to make others laugh (Martin, 2007, p. 5); from a cognitive perspective as a frame of mind, a manner of perceiving and experiencing life … which has a great therapeutic power (Mindess, 1971, p. 21); from a social interactional perspective as a common element of human communication (Abbas, 2019; Crawford, 2003) and as a strategy for creating power and solidarity (Hay, 2000). Characterizations of humor, however, often overlook its dark side, its ability as a double-edged sword to create pleasure and amusement for some at the expense of others who may be subjected to belittlement and deprecation (Baltiansky et al., 2021; Plester, 2016). Hence, several humor theories (see Section 4.1) and styles (see Section 4.2) usually integrate to account for the different aspects of humor.

Other deprecation, an aggressive style of humor, lies at the heart of impoliteness. Impoliteness involves the speaker's 'intentional' use of communicative strategies designed to attack the hearer's face, and thereby cause social conflict and disharmony (Culpeper et al., 2003, p. 1546). In his analysis of impoliteness strategies in the entertainment quiz show *The Weakest Link*, Culpeper (2005) argues that impoliteness might be 'entertaining' (p. 35). As such, impoliteness can be interpreted as part of humor, 'a vehicle for humor' (Toddington, 2015). Research on the relationship between humor and impoliteness emphasized the interactional role of jocular mockery in coating expressions of outright aggression (Kotthoff, 1996; Haugh, 2010). In the present paper, several strategies of impoliteness have been identified in relation to aggressive humor in the humorous man-on-the-street interview genre with subtle cross-cultural (Egyptian vs. American) differences.

Research into the relationship between humor and culture has been motivated by an argued cultural tint of the way humor is expressed and/or appreciated (Fry, 1994; Guidi, 2017). However, as indicated in Section 5 (Review of Literature), cross-cultural humor research has seldom addressed the Egyptian culture. In addition, studies investigating viewers' preferences of humor styles are scarce. The present study intends to fill these gaps.

The present study has three aims. The first is to investigate the potential effect of culture on humor production through pedestrian questions (PQs) in 80 YouTube video clips equally representing two popular entertainment talk shows that reflect the man-on-

the-street interview genre: Egyptian مذيع الشارع /muði:ʕ əʃʃæ:riʕ/ 'street broadcaster' by *Ahmed Ra'afat* and American *Pedestrian Question* segment in the *Jimmy Kimmel Live* show. The second aim of this study is to explore the relevance of impoliteness strategies to humor production in the present genre, especially with respect to aggressive humor styles. Finally, the study aims to explore the effect of culture and humor style on YouTube viewers' attention and appreciation measured by view counts and percentage of likes (%Likes).

The theoretical framework for the present study combines three theories of humor (Superiority, Incongruity and Relief), humor styles/dimensions (Martin et al., 2003), as well as Culpeper's Model of Impoliteness (1996, 2005, 2011a, 2011b).

The paper consists of nine sections. After this Introduction and Objectives of the Study (Section 2), the Research Questions (Section 3) are laid out. The Theoretical Framework (Section 4) reviews humor theories and styles, as well as Culpeper's model of impoliteness. Section 5, Review of Literature, reviews relevant past studies on humor and impoliteness, cross-cultural humor research, and humor appreciation. Section 6, Methodology, provides a brief description of the data and the procedure for managing and analyzing the data both qualitatively and quantitatively. Section 7, Analysis, offers qualitative and quantitative analyses of different aspects of the data. Section 8, Discussion, summarizes and comments on the study results and methodological limitation. Finally, Section 9, Closing Remarks, highlights the contribution of this study, and offers some recommendation for future research.

## 2    Objectives of the Study

The study has three main objectives:

1. Contrastively identify the humor styles and themes targeted through the pedestrian questions in the selected video clips from the Egyptian and American shows with a view to detect potential cross-cultural effects.
2. Detect the use of impoliteness strategies in the present data, especially in relation to aggressive humor styles.
3. Contrastively assess the effect of two independent variables, culture and humor style, on online viewer's attention to and appreciation of the video clips under study through quantitative analyses of relevant YouTube view counts and percentage of likes.

## 3    Research Questions

The study has been guided by the following three research questions. The first two questions are answered qualitatively while the third question quantitatively:

1. What are potential cross-cultural effects in term of the humor styles and themes attempted through the pedestrian questions in the selected video clips from the Egyptian vs. American show?
2. Which impoliteness strategies have been identified in the present data, especially in connection with aggressive humor styles?
3. How far have the two independent variables of culture and humor style influenced online viewers' attention to and appreciation of the video clips under study as measured by YouTube view counts and percentage of likes?

## 4    Theoretical Framework

### 4.1 Humor theories

Three complementary theories of humor are most prominent: Superiority, Relief/Release, and Incongruity. Formally developed by Thomas Hobbes (1650, 1651), Superiority Theory has been the earliest with roots in Greek philosophy. Plato's explanation of the 'emotion' behind laugher in *The Philebus,* according to Davidson (1990), signals 'a mixture' of the positive pleasurable aspect of laughter as a source of our own amusement and the malicious sinful aspect of humor in feeding our feelings of superiority from ridicule and derision at the misfortune or ignorance of another person, 'the pleasure of being superior' (Culpeper 2011a).

From a psycho-analytic perspective, the beneficial liberating effects of humor on its recipient have been the focus of the Release/Relief Theory, where humor has been found to offer a relief from boredom, anxiety and/or sadness, and to improve both physiological and psychological health and wellbeing (Freud, 1991/1905). The positive effects of humor have been acknowledged early on by 16th- and 17th-century authors such as Laurent Joubert and Descartes and more recently by many like Attardo (2017), Fry (1994), Jiang et al. (2020), Martin and Ford (2018), Meyer (2000), and Mindess (1971).

Incongruity Theory is essentially cognitive. Humor is generated from inconsistencies, contradictions, bisociations, or violations of rational patterns in humorous entities (e.g., a word, a statement, a joke, body movement, or situation) when, suddenly, the expectation is turned into nothing (Attardo, 1994, p. 48). Recipients are initially misled into some erroneous interpretation of an ambiguous humorous entity. Then, after a brief cognitive struggle to disambiguate and resolve the perceived incongruity, humor is generated.

## 4.2 Humor styles

Martin et al. (2003) identified four humor styles: two benign/adaptive styles that include 'affiliative' and 'self-enhancing' humor, and two non-benign/maladaptive/aggressive styles which may be directed at others (i.e., 'other-deprecating/disparaging'), or at oneself (i.e., 'self-deprecating/disparaging'). Adaptive humor styles have been linked to openness, high self-esteem, emulation, and intercultural willingness to communicate while maladaptive styles to emotional instability, low self-esteem, and ethnocentrism (Miczo & Welter, 2006; Owens, 1993; Saroglou & Scariot, 2002). A relevant distinction is that between affiliative vs. disaffiliative laughter, hence 'laughing with' vs. 'laughing at' (Glenn, 1995).

Affiliative humor can be observed in telling non-offensive jokes and funny stories to amuse others (Leist & Müller, 2012), resulting in more bonding and solidarity (Glenn, 1995; Mehu & Dunbar, 2008), the resolution of tension and conflict (Ziv, 1984), an overall pleasurable atmosphere and positive affect (Smoski & Bachorowski, 2003), and a show of amusement and appreciation of an attempt at humor (Attardo, 2014). Self-enhancing humor, on the other hand, seeks improvement of one's image or status through a generally humorous outlook on life, a tendency to be frequently amused by the incongruities of life, and to maintain a humorous perspective even in the face of stress or adversity (Martin et al., 2003, p. 53), and is thus relevant to the use of humor as a coping strategy (Dangermond, 2022; Martin, 1996; Miczo, 2021). Interestingly, benign self-enhancement can be achieved through rationed self-mockery just to invite mutual amusement to a conversation (Yu, 2013). In addition, a (moderately) self-deprecating speaker becomes more accessible, less arrogant, less threatening, and hence closer to and more liked by the audience (Haugh, 2010; Martin et al., 2003; Stewart, 2012; Ziv, 1984). From a different perspective, by emphasizing the playful nature of 'belittling oneself' (Yu, 2013, p. 1), self-mockers signal that they are in control of the situation and their faces are not vulnerable to momentary humiliations (Zare, 2016, p. 790). On the other hand, excessive self-mockery which involves allowing oneself to be the 'butt' of others' humor, and laughing along with others when being ridiculed or disparaged (Martin et al., 2003, p. 54), may give the audience the opportunity to experience a sense of superiority at the speaker's own expense (Glenn, 1991/1992; Schnurr & Chan, 2011) and may also result in the speaker losing some of his/her social status in the eyes of others (Kidd et al., 2009). Hence, as Lukk (2016, p. 12) argues, speakers who choose to humorously self-deprecate often have a high enough social standing that they can afford to reduce it.

Aggressive other-deprecating humor refers to remarks that are intended to elicit amusement through the denigration, derogation, or belittlement of a given target

(Ferguson and Ford, 2008, p. 283). It involves teasing (mocking but playful jibes against someone (Drew, 1987, p. 219)), combining playfulness with intentional provocation (Haugh, 2010; Keltner et al., 2001) as well as sarcasm and ridicule (Zsila et al., 2021). It and may include disparaging jokes or stories based on categorical or ethnic group membership, i.e., ethnic humor (Winick, 1976). Other-deprecating humor has close affinity with Superiority Theory (Ziv, 1984), where the speaker's feelings of superiority are fed by subjecting the target of humor to public ridicule (Lukk, 2016). This may promote distancing and disaffilaition (Glenn, 1995). However, the speaker may resort to the *safety shield of humour* (Plester, 2016, p. 31) by establishing a playful non-serious jocular frame that would enable him/her to escape social scrutiny and pressurize the target of the mockery to not take it too seriously (Ferguson & Ford, 2008; Goddard, 2009; Haugh, 2014, 2017; Radcliffe-Brown, 1940). If a speaker manages to elicit audience laughter at an opponent, s/he establishes a strong emotional connection with their audience and creates distance between the audience and the target of humor (Stewart, 2012).

### 4.3 Culpeper's model of impoliteness (1996, 2005, 2011a, 2011b)

The Model of Impoliteness by Culpeper (1996) and Culpeper et al. (2003) was founded on and usually understood against Brown and Levinson's (B&L, [1978] 1987) model of Politeness which had at its heart Goffman's (1967) notion of face as the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself (Goffman, 1967, p. 5). Parallel to B&L's model of Politeness, different levels of directness of impoliteness were represented through five strategies.

**Table 1: Impoliteness strategies in descending order of directness**

| | Name of Superstrategy | Brief description | Example realizations |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Bald on record impoliteness | Applied in face-relevant situations, with full intention to attack the other's face | Direct, brief, and unambiguously clear attacks to the other's face |
| 2 | Positive impoliteness | Intended to damage the hearer's positive face wants | Ignoring the other, dissociating oneself from the other, name calling, and use of taboo words |
| 3 | Negative impoliteness | Designed to damage the other's negative face wants | Physically and/or linguistically frighten, condescend, ridicule, associate the other with a negative aspect, ask challenging questions, or invade the other's personal space |

| 4 | Sarcasm or mock politeness | Use of politeness expressions but with insincere intensions | Thanking the other for an offence |
| 5 | Withhold politeness | Keep silent or refrain from any act when politeness work is expected | Failing to thank someone who has given you a gift |

(Adapted from Culpeper (1996, pp. 356-358; 2005, p. 44), Culpeper *et al* (2003, p. 1554-1555)

The model was later developed by Culpeper (2005) who introduced Off record impoliteness, performed through implicature. Off-record impoliteness would later extend to include sarcasm or mock politeness as well as withholding politeness (Culpeper 2011a). In addition, Culpeper (2005) adopted Spencer-Oatey's (2002) face categories and distinguished between attacks on 'Quality face' like attacking someone's inability to answer a question, and attacks on 'Social Identity face' targeting someone's regional accent or profession. Furthermore, Culpeper (2005) revised earlier speaker-biased accounts of impoliteness by arguing that impoliteness would be made relevant by the speaker's intentional attack and/or the hearer's perception of an attack in the form of taking offense. In the present data, evidence of impoliteness counterstrategies by the humor targets (the pedestrians) rendered impoliteness relevant, despite presumed lack of speaker intentionality. A relevant distinction was made by Goffman (1967) who argued that face attacks could be *accidental* (i.e., unintentional and unforeseen), *intentional* (i.e., usually motivated by feelings of spite), or *incidental* (i.e., may be expected but occur as a by-product of another action).

## 5   Review of Literature

The relevant literature comprises past studies on the impoliteness-humor interface, cross-cultural humor investigations, and viewers' appreciation of humor.

Past studies premised on the impoliteness-humor interaction often contributed to explaining its nature and proving its relevance while addressing a variety of discourse genres like TV entertainment programmes (e.g., Culpeper, 2005; Culpeper & Holmes, 2013; Ibrahim, 2021), telephone conversations (Antonopoulou & Sifianou, 2003), fictional dramatic discourse (Dynel, 2013; Toddington, 2015), and media discourse (Zaytoon, 2021). Notably, Culpeper (2005) used his micro-analysis of interactions in *The Weakest Link*, a television entertainment quiz show, in refining his model of impoliteness (see Section 4.3). Culpeper (2005) emphasized the relevance of impoliteness to 'exploitative' chat and quiz shows which were intent on humiliating the guests. Evidence of impoliteness counterstrategies by humor targets proved that they took offence. The

humorous context of the activity type (the game show) did not 'neutralize' the impoliteness. Context was overridden by the salience of impoliteness signals like prosodic features and acoustic mimicry.

Dynel (2013) recognized the humorous potential of impoliteness in film talk as a category of disaffiliative humor. She identified two levels of communication in fictional discourse: the 'characters'/inter-character' level and the 'recipient's level.' The former would usually (but not necessarily) be dyadic while the latter included all the hearers of the characters' talk. The hearers could be other untargeted characters in the film, or a distant audience (home viewers). Recognition of the humorous potential of impoliteness rested on the recipients outside the inter-character level. Unlike the case in natural discourse, recipients of film talk would usually be informed of the characters' intentions, which guided their (the recipients') perception of impoliteness. To explain the linguistic aspects of disaffiliative humor, Dynel (2013) found incongruity theory to be the best framework. Superiority theory, on the other hand, only accounted for the recipient's mirthful pleasure at the butt's plight.

Zaytoon (2021) adopted Culpeper et al.'s (2003) model of impoliteness as well as Dynel's (2013) multi-party model of communication in discourse. In twelve samples of media discourse including ads, a prank show, and a competition show, Zaytoon (2021) explored the relationship between impoliteness and humor, especially disaffiliative humor targeting the elderly. In that context, impoliteness was used as a tool for entertainment (at the recipient's level) to amuse an external audience at the expense of the elderly group (at the inter-character level). Ideological group polarization isolated the elderly as the inferior out-group and joined both media producers and the external audience as the superior in-group., Zaytoon (2021) identified several strategies of impoliteness used against the elderly group. Those included Bald on-record impoliteness through derogatory insults, positive impoliteness through snubbing and unsympathetic exclusion of the elders, and negative impoliteness through ridiculing and emphasizing relative power. Incongruity emerged when the elders were ridiculed as being socially inefficient, which contradicted a traditional image of the elders as the wise experienced group.

Cross-cultural humor research seldom addressed the Egyptian culture. American/Canadian vs. Chinese have been the most common. For example, differential attitudes towards humor and humorous individuals were investigated among Chinese vs. American students (Jiang et al., 2011) and among Chinese vs. Canadian students (Yue & Hui, 2011). Chen and Martin (2007) studied the differential preferences in using certain humor styles as a coping strategy by Chinese and Canadian students. American vs.

Japanese humor in stand-up comedy was studied by Katayama (2009). American vs. Serbian cultural conceptualization was explored in humorous dialogues within telecinematic discourse (Stankić, 2017). East vs. West investigation of how culture affects humor perception, use, and psychological well-being was carried out by Jiang et al. (2019). Only one study could be found to contrast the American with the Arab (Egyptian and Lebanese) cultures in terms of reported individual preferences for certain humor styles (Kalliny et al., 2006). Kalliny et al. (2006) reported that Americans used significantly more self-defeating and self-enhancing humor than did their Arab (Egyptian and Lebanese) counterparts. To account for their results, Kalliny et al. (2006) depended on Hofstede's (1984) cultural dimensions that predicted how certain characteristics in culture would affect the use of humor. They explained that Americans might not feel threatened to lose status via self-defeating humor in a society with more status equalization. In traditional Arab societies, by contrast, self-defeating humor would be inconsistent with maintaining high power distance. Kalliny et al. (2006) further clarified that, unlike the (presumably) collectivist Arab culture, the (presumably) individualistic American culture urges individuals to seek attention and be more self-focused, which is consistent with greater use of self-enhancing humor. The study reported no cross-cultural differences in the use of affiliative and aggressive other-deprecating humor. It should be noted, however, that Hofstede's (1984) model was unbalanced; it compared the USA against a broad (and not perfectly homogenous) category labelled the 'Arab World' which included Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. In addition, the model was set more than 35 years ago.

Studies investigating viewers' preferences of humor styles were scarce. Cann et al. (2015), for example, investigated gender differences in responses to videos reflecting affiliative vs. aggressive humor. They found that both men and women reported positive affective reactions to affiliative humor and negative evaluation of aggressive humor as disturbing and nasty. Zsila, Urbán, Orosz and Demetrovics (2021) found that American sitcom comedies with predominantly offensive nature attracted younger viewers as well as viewers who reported higher use of aggressive humor. In the present data, online viewers' metrics (e.g., age, gender) are not available. YouTube reserves access to such metrics exclusively to video creators.

To the best of the author's knowledge, the present study is the first to investigate potential cross-cultural effects on humor production in the man-on-the-street interview genre and to attempt a quantitative analysis of online viewers' appreciation of humor styles. Notably, addressing the Egyptian culture contributes to filling a significant gap in cross-cultural humor research.

# 6  Methodology

## 6.1 Data collection and backgrounding

After watching a sizable number of YouTube video clips from the two humorous shows under study, the pedestrian questions (PQs) have been found to reflect two humor styles: aggressive other-deprecating and affiliative relief-based. For equal representation of both shows and both humor styles, video clips falling under four equal data sub-sets have been collected: Eg(yptian)-Agg(ressive), Am(erican)-Agg(ressive), Eg(yptian)-Relief, and Am(erican)-Relief. Each sub-set includes 20 PQs from 20 YouTube video clips, ranging from 2 minutes to 13 minutes. Detailed reference information about the 80 video clips under study is presented in Appendix A and Appendix B, respectively.

The Egyptian show, مذيع الشارع /muði:ʕəʃʃæ:riʕ/ 'street broadcaster,' is created and hosted by Ahmed Ra'afat. It has been broadcast on YouTube since 2014 in the form of short video-clips. Each clip has a central question that the host circulates among random pedestrians who are interviewed either individually or in small groups. Question-answer segments are usually preceded by a brief warmup chat, so we get to know a bit about the pedestrians as individuals. In certain clips, Ra'afat would ask a pedestrian to call a family member or a friend to get their response to a question. In addition to the distant audience (online viewers), non-participating bystanders often cluster around during an interview, sometimes to just wave at the camera. This creates a complex setting with multiple humor targets/audiences (Dynel, 2013).

The American show, *Jimmy Kimmel Live,* is a late-night talk show created and hosted by Jimmy Kimmel. It has been broadcast on *ABC* since 2003. Contrary to its name, the show does not air live except on rare occasions. In the PQ segment, the host (Kimmel) entertains a studio audience and communicates through an earpiece with an often-rushed street broadcaster who carries out the actual street interviews (usually without a warmup chat) right outside the studio on Hollywood Boulevard, Los Angeles. This set-up does not allow direct host-pedestrian interaction, a point that will be elaborated on in the analysis and discussion. Inside the studio, the immediate audience, who follow up with the street segment through transmission screens, are sometimes requested to guess the answer by each participating pedestrian at paused intervals before the transmission is resumed to provide the pedestrian's actual answer. The humor targets (i.e., the participating pedestrians on Hollywood Boulevard) do not see or hear what concurrently goes on inside the studio including audience reactions. The distant audience (home and online viewers) see it all in the safety and comfort of their homes; they are allowed access to what goes on in the studio and on the street. Analogous to the multiplicity of humor targets in the

Egyptian show, few American PQ segments involve directing the humor at both a pedestrian and an accompanying family member or significant other.

The relevant segments in both shows share an exploitative nature with a quiz show (Culpeper, 2005), yet diverge from it regarding the element of surprise, unpreparedness, consent to participate, motivation, self-consciousness, and the venue. Regular pedestrians going about their daily routines are caught on the street by a broadcaster with a microphone and a camera crew. The asking and granting of consent to participate may have occurred but have never been included in the taped version. No reward is sought; the pedestrians' consent/motivation to participate could be due to social pressure or to a desire to chat or appear on TV. On the street, pedestrians may easily get distracted or annoyed by noise and intruders. The host or broadcaster starts to shoot questions (with or without a warmup chat), sometimes getting too close to adjust the position or angle of a pedestrian before a rolling camera. In such compromised context, it is not surprising that some pedestrians may seem unfocused, distracted, and challenged by otherwise simple questions.

## 6.2 Procedure

The study offers both qualitative and quantitative analyses of two aspects of the data. The qualitative analysis aims to contrastively identify the main humor styles and themes targeted by the pedestrian questions in the Egyptian and American shows, and to detect the impoliteness strategies in the data, especially in aggressive humor. The quantitative analysis attempts an investigation of the effect of two independent variables, culture and humor style, on online viewers' attention to and appreciation of the video clips reflecting the identified humor styles and themes. Viewers' attention is usually measured through raw view counts (Jin et al., 2021). Viewers' appreciation is calculated through the percentage of 'likes' in relation to the view counts of individual video clips. Video performance analytics (i.e., counts of views, comments, and likes) have been extracted for all 80 clips from YouTube on two successive days: the 1st and 2nd of February 2022. Management of the numerical data as well as statistical analyses have been carried out in MS Excel (One-drive link provided in Appendix C).

# 7    Analysis

## 7.1 Identifying humor styles and themes

Two major humor styles have been identified in both shows: aggressive other-deprecating and affiliative relief-based, splitting the present data into four sub-sets: Eg(yptian)-Agg(ressive), Am(erican)-Agg(ressive), Eg(yptian)-Relief, and Am(erican)-Relief.

### 7.1.1 Aggressive humor style

The link between aggressive/disaffiliative humor and impoliteness has been established in a variety of discourse genres (see Sections 5). It is further assumed, following Culpeper (2005), that face threats in entertainment shows have an incidental nature (see Section 4.3 for Goffman's (1967) classification of face threats' intentionality). Yet, despite a presumed lack of speaker intentionality to cause social disharmony, it is assumed, following Culpeper (2005), that impoliteness would become relevant if an impolite act has been perceived as such by the Hearer/pedestrian in the form of taking offence. In the present data, there is abundant evidence for impoliteness counterstrategies by offended pedestrians who either accept the face attack and self-deprecate (e.g., Example (1)) or attempt to block the face attack by fighting back (e.g., Example (5)). Guided by the scaling of impoliteness strategies and Culpeper's (2005) distinction between attacks on quality face and those on social identity face following Spencer-Oatey's (2002) face categories (see Section 4.3), three levels of directness have been identified in both shows presented below in descending order.

## Level A: Positive impoliteness - Attacking pedestrians' social identity face

Level A, mapped to **positive impoliteness**, involves direct attacks on pedestrians' social identity face with blunt questions about sensitive potentially embarrassing issues (juxtaposed in **Table 2**) like one's self-perception of his/her own body shape (P(edestrian) Q(uestion)s Am(erican)-1 and Eg(yptian)-1), personal aptitude (PQs Am-2, Eg-2, and Eg-3), and personal dwelling choice (PQ Am-3). In terms of PQ themes, there is great similarity across both shows at this level, especially regarding globally offensive negative qualities like being fat, stupid, naïve, or psychologically ill. To go on living with the parents beyond adulthood, however, is a socially unacceptable dependent behavior particular to the American culture. In terms of question phrasing, the American questions have consistently assumed the Yes/No interrogative structure. These direct unambiguous polarity questions may be answered by a quick *yes* or *no*, consistent with the fast-paced up-beat style of the show. The Egyptian questions have reflected a mix of structures. In

addition to Yes/No questions (e.g., PQ Eg-3), quite wordy wh-questions (e.g., PQ Eg-1) and gap-filling declaratives (e.g., PQ Eg-2) have been used. The latter two require lengthier answers, which have often been followed up by further questions by the host (e.g., Example (1)). This would allow for a more intimate interview where the threat to face could be mitigated by the host during the interview as discussed below.

**Table 2: Aggressive humor - Level A - PQs**

| | Am(erican) | Eg(yptian) | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | *Are You Fat?* | لو المصيف بالجسم شكل جسمك يوديك فين؟ <br> 'If body shape were to determine the luxury of a summer vacation, where would your figure take you?' | 1 |
| 2. | *Are You Stupid?* | كنت اهبل لما ... <br> 'I was naïve when …' | 2 |
| 3. | *Do You Still Live with Your Parents?* | إنت مريض نفسي؟ <br> 'Are you psychologically ill?' | 3 |

Both hosts engage in face work to mitigate the offense and escape public scrutiny. On the Egyptian show, such face work occurs within the street interview, i.e., during social interaction, as in the following example:

(1) PQ Eg-1: لو المصيف بالجسم شكل جسمك يوديك فين؟ [00:00:48]

| T1 | Pedestrian: | ((Smiles sadly)) < ما يودينيش جمصة > <br> <My figure won't even secure me a vacation in *GamaSa*>' |
|---|---|---|
| T2 | Broadcaster: | < أصلاً؟ \| طب تروح فين؟ > <br> >Seriously? \| Where would you go then?<' |
| T3 | Pedestrian: | ((Faint smile and sad voice)) < مش عارف / مش هروح أصيف / أروح > <br> < فين بجسمي ده؟> <br> <Don't know \| no vacation \| where would I go with this out-of-shape figure?>' |
| T4 | Broadcaster: | ههه \| مش هنلاقي حتة \| ((jokingly touches his own big belly)) <br> وهنقعد احنا بقى <br> hhh \| We won't find a place to go \| we'll stay behind! |

While delivering PQ Eg-1 (Example (1)), Ra'afat reciprocates the pedestrian's self-deprecation by touching his own belly (T(urn)4), hence non-verbally drawing attention to his own obesity. In the same turn, Ra'afat enhances solidarity by the use of inclusive *we*

and by speaking of a shared destiny where he and the pedestrian won't be able to go on vacation due to their obesity. This would mitigate the threat to the pedestrian's face and help create a bond with the show host.

On the American show, by contrast, Kimmel has no direct contact with the pedestrians (see Section 6.1 for a brief background on the show set-up). In anticipation of eminent face-threats, Kimmel's face-work occurs in the studio, i.e., it is inaccessible to the pedestrians interviewed on the street. Hence, Kimmel's face work would help him escape public scrutiny by the studio audience and viewers at home or on YouTube. Yet, it would not contribute to mitigating the face threats to the interviewed pedestrians. For example, during the warmup comic in the studio, Kimmel self-deprecates by acting stupid enough to misspell the word 'dumb' before the camera moves to the street broadcaster who circulates PQ Am-2 across several pedestrians (see PQs in **Table 2**). In addition, before PQ Am-1 and PQ Am-2, respectively, Kimmel euphemistically characterizes the 'overweight' problem as of a general nation-wide nature and cites a research study finding that humans (not just Americans) are getting dumber. Moving the problems (overweight and stupidity) from the sensitive personal space to the less sensitive public space diffuses the threat to face.

Evidence for the pedestrians' perception of the face threats can be observed in both shows. As shown in Example (1) above, one pedestrian on the Egyptian show jokingly but sadly accepts the face damage and engages in self-deprecation (T1 & T3) in response to PQ Eg-1. In response to the same PQ, another pedestrian attempts to block the face attack through sarcasm as shown in Example (2):

(2) PQ Eg-1: ‏لو المصيف بالجسم شكل جسمك يوديك فين؟‏ [00:00:32]

| T1 | Pedestrian: | ‏الريفييرا | فرنسا‏ ((pretending to be serious)) |
| | | Riviera \| France |
| T2 | Broadcaster: | ‏والعة كدة والعة | الفورمة بتاعتك تروح‏ ((playfully sarcastic tone)) ‏الريفييرا؟‏ |
| | | Cool \| You will go to the French Riviera with this body shape?' |
| T3 | Pedestrian: | ((pretending to be snobbish and playfully shaking his body)) ‏فورمة إيه؟ | فورمة أمين أمم متحدة | فورمة وزير خارجية في أمريكا ...‏ |
| | | My figure? \| I have the figure of a UN Secretary \| of the Foreign Minister of America … |
| T4 | Broadcaster: | ‏ههههه إن شاء الله | إيه الجمال ده؟ | إيه الثقة دي‏ ((playfully sarcastic tone)) ‏يا حاج؟‏ |
| | | hhh \| God willing \| how beautiful \| how self-confident, Hajj!' |

While assuming a playful body shake and a snobbish style, the pedestrian engages in self-mockery by bragging about his own figure (Example (2), T1 & T3). The broadcaster plays along through mock politeness by praising the pedestrian's over-confidence (T4).

On the American show, pedestrians' counterstrategies include light-hearted acceptance, denial, and physical fight backs as shown in the following examples:

(3) PQ Am2: *Are you stupid?* [00:02:25]

> Pedestrian: (Smiling jokingly) Yes | sometimes | I can be | and I make very stupid decisions

(4) PQ Am-1: *Are you fat?* [00:01:01]

| T1 | Pedestrian: | ((nervous tone)) >↑no< | >↑no< |
| T2 | Broadcaster: | = >What about ↑<u>now</u>?< |
| T3 | Pedestrian: | ((maintains the nervous tone)) >↑no< ((studio audience laughter)) |
| T4 | Broadcaster: | = >What about ↑<u>now</u>?< |
| T5 | Pedestrian: | ((maintains the nervous tone)) >↑no< ((studio audience laughter)) |

(5) PQ Am1: *Are you fat?* [00:02:55]

> Pedestrian: No | I gotta look good | (touches his belly and smiles) I need to lose | but I'm not fat | (points at the female broadcaster's legs) she got it goin fellas … (grabs the female broadcaster and turns her to reveal her behind on camera and asks the photographer to zoom in on her butt to reveal that she is over-weight herself)

One pedestrian jokingly engages in light-hearted self-deprecation by admitting to occasional stupidity (Example (3)), a second pedestrian resists the nagging attack through repeated nervous denials (Example (4)), and a third pedestrian progresses from denying being fat, to admitting the need to lose some weight, and finally to physically attacking and mocking back the broadcaster in retaliation (Example (5)).

## Level B: Negative impoliteness - Attacking pedestrians' quality face

Level B, mapped to **negative impoliteness,** involves an attack on pedestrians' quality face through mocking their inability to answer simple mundane questions. Although most questions at this level are quite simple (see Appendix A), most of the pedestrians interviewed on both shows seem challenged by them, which could be due to the compromised context of street interviews (see Section 6.1) or due to selective editing to

only show those who couldn't answer correctly. Challenged pedestrians would appear ignorant enough by, for example, failing to tell today's date (PQ Eg-4) or to name any book (PQ Am-6), or simple enough to entertain silly questions like why footballers don't play barefoot (PQ Eg-11), or naive enough to be tricked into disclosing their own password on TV (PQ Am-16).

**Table 3: Aggressive humor - Level B - Sample PQs**

| # | Am | Eg | # |
|---|---|---|---|
| 4 | *Can You Name This Country?* | أسئلة بسيطة (النهاردة كام هجري وكام ميلادي؟ - تعرف تقول النشيد الوطني؟)<br>'Simple questions (e.g., What's today's Hijri date and Gregorian date? – Can you recite the national anthem?)' | 4 |
| 6 | *Can You Name a Book? ANY Book???* | الجامعات المصرية … الدائرة فيها كام ضلع؟<br>'Egyptian universities … How many sides are in a circle?' | 6 |
| 16 | *What is Your Password?* | ليه اللاعيبة مش بيلعبوا حافيين؟<br>'Why don't footballers play barefoot?' | 11 |

The potential for face-damage is maximized by the broadcasters' follow-up questions highlighting the incongruity between the expected ability to answer such simple mundane questions and the actual failure to do so:

(6) PQ Eg-6 الدائرة فيها كام ضلع؟ 'How many sides are in a circle?' [00:00:32]

| T1 | Pedestrian: | (2.0) تلاتة |
| | | three |
| T2 | Broadcaster: | بتدرس إيه؟ |
| | | What do you study? |
| T3 | Pedestrian: | هندسة |
| | | Engineering |

(7) PQ Am6: *Can You Name a Book? ANY Book???* [00:02:12]

| T1 | Pedestrian: | ((smiling)) < Sorry, I'm totally blanked out on books> |
| T2 | Broadcaster: | What do you do for a living? < |
| T3 | Pedestrian: | ((smiles in embarrassment)) < I was a librarian | now I am unemployed |

Ironically, an Egyptian Engineering student erroneously thinks that a circle has three sides (Example (6)) and an American woman who can't name a book used to work as a librarian (Example (7)).

**Level C: Off-record impoliteness - Mocking whole social groups**

Finally, level C, the least direct and least aggressive, is mostly directed at whole social groups, i.e., the aggression is diffused and hence mitigated (see Appendix A). Level C questions ridicule and belittle the mocked group through implicature, which is consistent with **off-record impoliteness.**

**Table 4: Aggressive humor - Level C - Sample PQs**

| # | Am | Eg | # |
|---|---|---|---|
| 17 | Who's Smarter - LA or NY? | ايه الحاجات اللي مابيعملهاش الا المصريين؟ (تفتكر إيه اللي مظبوط على مصر؟) 'What are the things that only Egyptians would opt to do? (What do you think is characteristic of Egypt?)' | 17 |

Implicated impoliteness can be denied if challenged (Culpeper, 2011b). In PQ Eg-17, for example, the host asks Egyptian pedestrians to talk about things exclusively characteristic of Egypt and of Egyptians. On the surface, the question doesn't appear to target negative characteristics of Egypt. However, the broadcaster seems to encourage responses involving negative characteristics (e.g., المخدرات 'drugs') by nodding his head, hence urging the pedestrians to go on. By contrast, the broadcaster doesn't show any reaction to pedestrians' classic responses like popular local dishes and the Egyptians' sense of humor. Interestingly, some pedestrians have employed mock politeness by praising the nobleness and elegance of Egyptians while maintaining a sarcastic tone. In response, the broadcaster has made funny faces in disbelief; he has sarcastically asked one pedestrian to swear that she was telling the truth. On the American show, Kimmel sets up inter-group rivalry (LA vs. NY residents, PQ Am-17). In response to *Who's Smarter - LA or NY?*, each group selects itself as the smarter group, implying that the other group is the less smart group.

### 7.1.2 Affiliative relief-based humor style

Questions in this group attempt to grant the pedestrians a sense of relief via two means. The first (A. Confessions & Fantasies, Appendix B) is by offering the pedestrians the opportunity to publicly disclose secrets, to confess to doing or wanting to do otherwise hidden wrongdoings or sinful fantasies, hence enabling them to triumph over feelings of guilt and/or apprehensions. The second (B. Teasing, Appendix B) is through enabling the

pedestrians to dare parental authority via teasing their parents. The audience is served as well; they may experience 'voyeuristic pleasure' (Culpeper, 2005) in deriving relief and pleasure from pedestrians' confessions, fantasies, and the daring of authority.

Cultural differences are clear regarding question phrasing and themes. In category A (Confessions & Fantasies), Egyptian PQs mostly depend on pragmatic presupposition to boost pedestrians' confessions and on a hypothetical 'what if' layout to trigger their fantasies. For example, PQ Eg-21 asks about the biggest scam, hence presupposing the perpetration of scams on one's family. PQ Eg-24 pre-supposes that the interviewed young ladies have boyfriends, which would be quite upsetting to conservative Egyptian families. Pedestrians on the Egyptian show have fantasized about doing an unidentified wrong and escaping punishment (PQ Eg-25), becoming hackers (PQ Eg-27), escaping from the present via travelling through time (PQ Eg-28), and reversing power relations with an invigilator during an exam (PQ Eg-34).

**Table 5: Affiliative relief-based humor – Sample PQs**

| # | Am | Eg | # |
|---|---|---|---|
| 21 | *Have You Ever Smoked Crack?* | ايه اكبر صفقة نصب عملتها علي اهلك ، وطلعت بكام؟<br>'What has been the biggest scam you have perpetrated against your family, and how much money have you made from it?' | 21 |
| 24 | *Have You Ever Been High at Work?* | لو امك عرفت انك بتجيبي هدية لحبيبك هتعمل ايه ؟<br>'If your mom ever finds out you were getting a gift for your boyfriend, how is she going to react? | 24 |
| 25 | *Have You Ever Watched Pornography at Work?* | إيه الغلط اللي نفسك تعمله ومحدش يعاقبك عليه؟<br>'What wrongdoing you are tempted to do and escape punishment?' | 25 |
| 26 | *Have You Ever Been Naked in Public?* | لو بقيت هاكر ايه اول حاجه هتعملها ؟<br>'If you ever become a hacker, what would be the first hack you do?' | 27 |
| 30 | *Have You Ever Had Sex with Someone You Met on the Internet?* | لو في آلة زمن كنت هتروح لعصر مين او لزمن ايه او سنة وليه؟<br>'If there existed a time machine, which age would you travel to? Why?' | 28 |

| 32 | *Have You Ever Punched Someone in the Face?* | أمك بتقول على أصحابك ايه؟<br>'What does your mother say about your friends behind their backs?' | 29 |
|----|----|----|----|
| 34 | *What Would You Say to Your Boss if You Won the Lottery?* | لو جالتك فرصة تراقب علي المراقب اللي بيراقب عليك هتعمل ايه ؟<br>'If you ever get the chance to switch roles w the invigilator, what will you do?' | 34 |

American PQs consistently prompt confessions and fantasies through the 'Have you ever …?' templatic form. In terms of themes, American PQs elicited confessions to or fantasies about non-orthodox acts like substance abuse in general (PQ Am-21) and at work (PQ Am-24), indecent conduct (watching porn) at work (PQ Am-25), public nudity (PQ Am-26), sexual promiscuity (PQ Am-30), physical violence (PQ Am-32), and reversing power relations with their boss if they ever win the lottery (PQ Am-34).

In Category B (Teasing), the targeted parents are present in person in the American show but contacted via a telephone call on the Egyptian show.

**Table 6: Affiliative relief-based humor – Sample questions**

| # | Am | Eg | # |
|----|----|----|----|
| 36 | *What's the Biggest Lie You Ever Told Your Mom?* | كلم ابوك واطلب منه ٧٠٠ جنيه علشان تسهر في كباريه في راس السنه<br>'Call your dad and ask him for 700 pounds to go to a nightclub on New Year's Eve.' | 36 |
| 38 | *Kids Tell Dads the Worst Thing They've Ever Done* | كلم ابوك وقوله عديتي هتبقي ايه ؟<br>'Call your dad and ask him how much he will pay you as Eid/feast allowance?' | 37 |

For example, the Egyptian host asks youthful male pedestrians to call up their fathers to request money to celebrate New Year's Eve in a night club (PQ Eg-36) and to inquire about a future feast allowance (PQ Eg-37). On cell telephone speakers, the provoked fathers burst out in anger and express their disappointment at their sons' behavior. On the American show, parents who accompany their children get provoked by hearing about the biggest lie (pre-supposing lies; PQ Am-36) their kids have ever told them and the worst things (pre-supposing bad things; PQ Am-38) their kids have ever done.

## 7.2 Online viewers' attention

Online viewers' attention is usually measured through raw view counts (Jin et al., 2021). However, considering that the video clips under current study span eight years from 2012 to 2020, time could possibly be an extraneous variable. A correlation test between time (video upload dates) and raw view counts for the 80 video clips under study has indeed revealed a relationship of negative correlation ($r$ = -0.5303) as indicated by the scatter plot in **Figure 1** extracted from the 'Time-Views' tab in Appendix C. Calculation of $r$ has been preceded by exclusion of outliers based on a box and whiskers plot (see Appendix C).

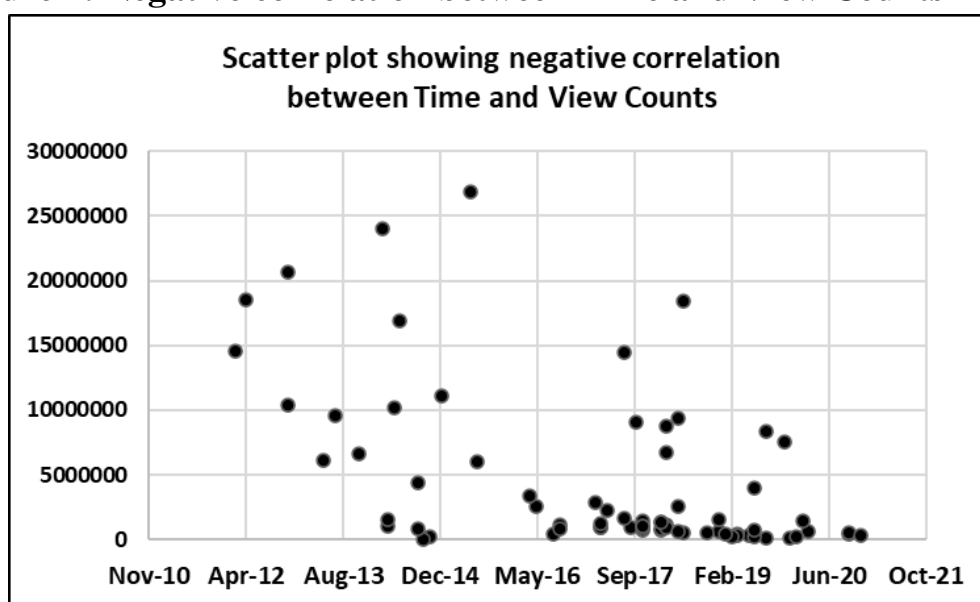**Figure 1: Negative correlation between Time and View Counts**



**Figure 1** indicates that the earlier the upload date, the higher the view count. In other words, older videos seem to have had a longer time window for accumulating views. Time as an extraneous variable renders ambiguous the interpretation of view counts. Are they the result of the mere passage of time? Or are they an indication of greater attention by the viewers? It follows that view counts may not be considered an accurate measure of viewers' attention in the present data. Hence, part of the third research question of this study remains unanswered (see Section 3).

## 7.3 Online viewers' appreciation

The targeted indicator of viewers' appreciation is the percentage of likes (%Likes) in relation to view counts as extracted from YouTube analytics. To capture the distribution of the data, **Figure 2** presents a box and whisker plot extracted from the '%Likes' tab in Appendix C. The plot indicates that, unlike the Egyptian sub-sets, the American sub-sets display consistent distribution of data as indicated by the symmetrical lengths of the four quartiles in their box plots. The greatest range of variation and variance in the data are observed in the Eg-Aggressive sub-set with concentration of the data towards the lower values of the range as indicated by the longer upper whisker in its plot, and by the highest values of range, variance, and SD shown in **Table 7** to follow. By contrast, the Eg-Relief sub-set displays concentration of the data towards the higher values in the range.

**Figure 2**
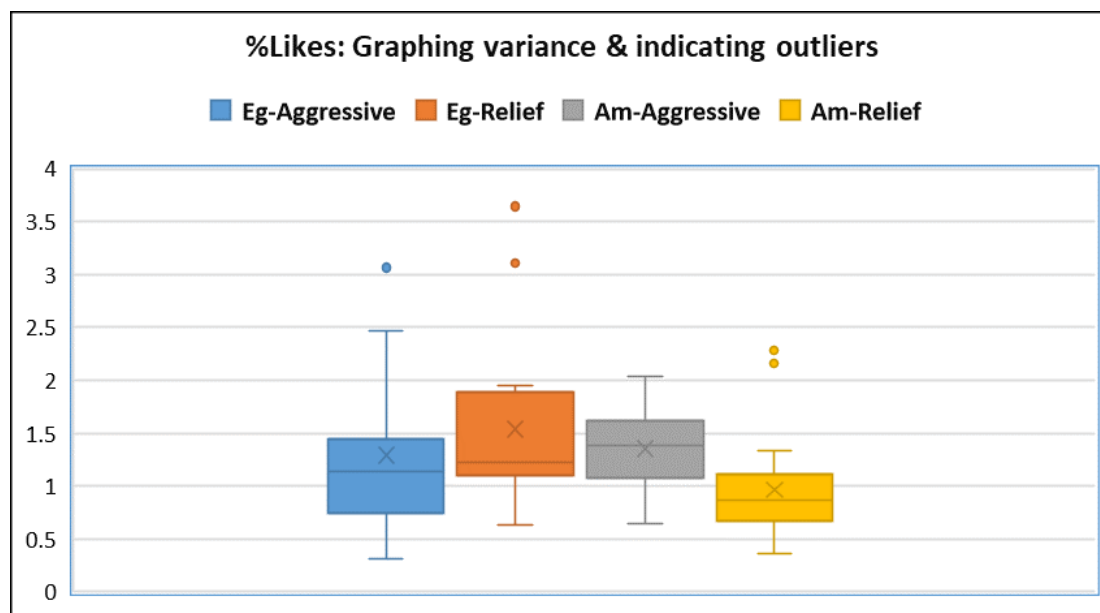


Outliers represented by the dots above the boxes in **Figure 2** have exceptionally high values compared to other data points in the sample. While these outliers have been excluded before statistical analysis to avoid distortion, yet the corresponding clips have been identified as the most liked themes in the data. In Eg-Aggressive, the most liked themes (overlapping dots for PQs Eg-11 & Eg-12) relate to soccer, which is the most popular sport in Egypt. In Eg-Relief, the most liked themes involve naughty disclosure of familial secrets (PQ Eg-29) and teasing the parents over the phone about participating in a fake crime (PQ Eg-39), hence igniting audience's imagination. In Am-Relief, viewers exceptionally like two clips. In the first, pedestrians publicly confess to being high at

work, hence challenging leadership and running the risk of losing their job (PQ Am-24). The second displays funny home videos with children's cute reactions to their parents telling them they ate all their Halloween candy (PQ Am-40). There are no outliers in the Am-Aggressive data. However, the most liked clips are PQ Am-4, where, ironically, several Americans could not identify their own country when blacked out on a map, and PQ Am-20, where kids make funny impressions of Donald Trump.

After excluding outliers, the means of %Likes in relation to view counts across the four data sub-sets are graphed in **Figure 3** and further analytics are presented in **Table 7**.
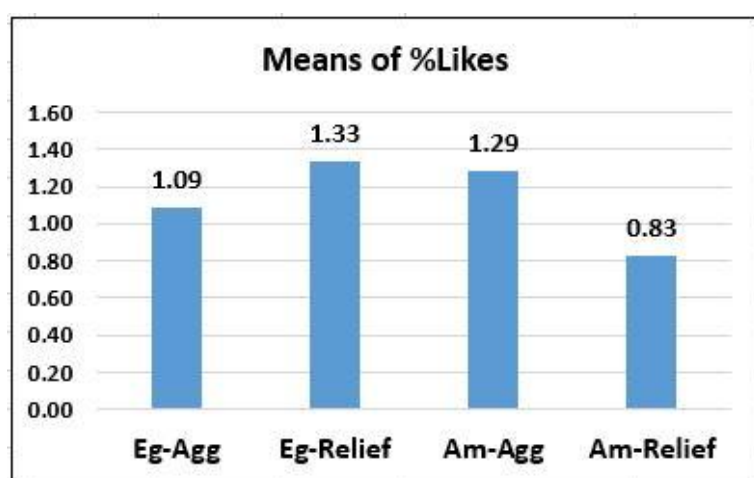
**Figure 3**



**Table 7: Numerical data of %Likes**

|  | Eg-Aggressive | Eg-Relief | Am-Aggressive | Am-Relief |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Range | 2.16 | 1.32 | 1.21 | 0.98 |
| Variance | 0.24 | 0.14 | 0.14 | 0.08 |
| *SD* | 0.48 | 0.38 | 0.37 | 0.27 |
| Mean | 1.09 | 1.33 | 1.29 | 0.83 |
| Means by culture | Egyptian (both styles) | | American (both styles) | |
|  | 1.21 | | 1.06 | |
| Means by humor style | Aggressive (Am & Eg) | | Relief (Am & Eg) | |
|  | 1.19 | | 1.08 | |

The mean values of %Likes are observed to be considerably low across all four sub-sets. In appendix C, even lower values can be observed for the other publicly available YouTube analytic, i.e., the percentage of comments (see Appendix C). This suggests that YouTube viewing has predominantly been passive.

Based on the means, viewers of the Egyptian show seem to like relief-based humor slightly more than they do aggressive humor. However, this numerical difference is not

statistically significant based on the *p*-value ($p = 0.102165$, i.e., $p > 0.05$) of the post-hoc t-test (**Table 9**). On the other hand, viewers of the American show have an opposite pattern with significantly more %Likes for aggressive humor based on the shaded significant *p*-value ($p = 0.000157$, i.e., $p < 0.05$) of the post-hoc t-test (**Table 9**).

The independent effect of culture (regardless of humor style) is numerically represented by 'Means by culture' in **Table 7**, where, on average, viewers of the Egyptian show interact with likes relatively more often than do viewers of the American show. However, this has turned out to be statistically insignificant with an ANOVA *p*-value of $0.086814$ (i.e., $p > 0.05$) in **Table 8**. The independent effect of humor style (regardless of culture) is numerically represented by 'Means by humor style' in **Table 7**, where, on average, aggressive clips motivate more %Likes than do their relief counterparts. Statistically, this difference as well has turned out to be insignificant with an ANOVA *p*-value of $0.231429$ (i.e., $p > 0.05$) in **Table 8**.

**Table 8: Results of two-way ANOVA with replication**

ANOVA

| Source of Variation | SS | df | MS | F | P-value | F crit |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Culture | 0.444576 | 1 | 0.444576 | 3.019149 | 0.086814 | 3.981896 |
| Humor Styles | 0.214696 | 1 | 0.214696 | 1.458015 | 0.231429 | 3.981896 |
| Interaction | 2.233607 | 1 | 2.233607 | 15.16859 | 0.000227 | 3.981896 |
| Within | 10.01314 | 68 | 0.147252 | | | |
| Total | 12.90602 | 71 | | | | |

Interaction between culture and humor styles has proven to be statistically significant based on the shaded *p*-value in the ANOVA results ($p = 0.000227$, i.e., $p < 0.05$, **Table 8**). To understand the nature of this interaction, **Table 9** displays the results of four independent post-hoc t-tests. The line graph in

**Figure *4*** provides a visual representation.

**Table 9: *P*-values of post-hoc independent unpaired two-tailed t-tests**

| Multiple comparisons | *P* values |
|---|---|
| Eg-Agg vs. Eg-Relief | 0.102165 |
| Am-Agg vs. Am-Relief | 0.000157 |
| Eg-Agg vs. Am-Agg | 0.183733 |
| Eg-Relief vs. Am-Relief | 0.000050 |

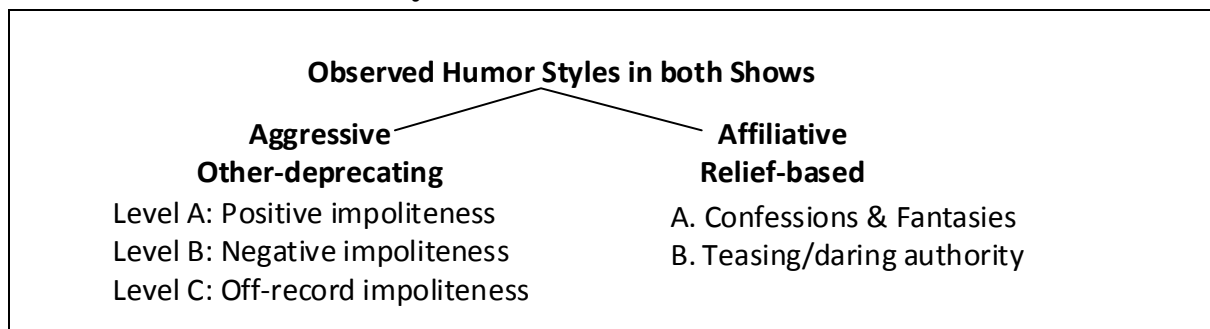**Figure 4: Significant interaction between culture and humor style**
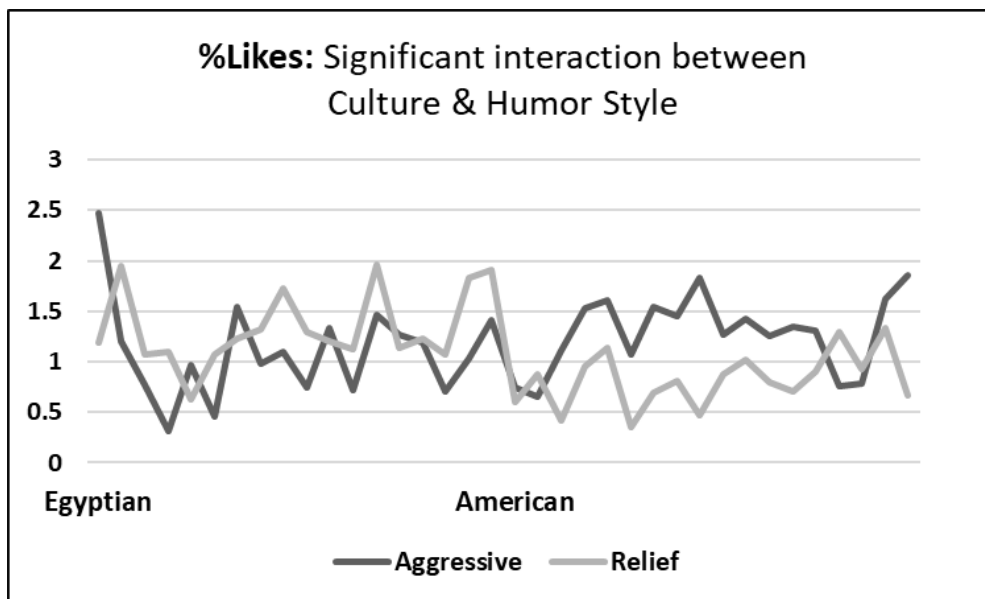


It has been found that cultural difference has only been significant regarding relief-based humor, where viewers of Eg-Relief have expressed significantly more %Likes ($p = 0.000050$, i.e., $p < 0.05$, **Table 9**) than have those of Am-Relief. Difference based on humor style has only been significant regarding the American show, where viewers have expressed significantly more %Likes to aggressive humor (Am-Agg, $p = 0.000157$, i.e., $p < 0.05$, **Table 9**) than to Am-Relief. No significant cultural effect has been found concerning %Likes of aggressive humor, i.e., Eg-Agg vs. Am-Agg ($p = 0.183733$, i.e., $p > 0.05$, **Table 9**). No significant humor style effect has been found regarding %Likes of the Egyptian show, i.e., Eg-Agg vs. Eg-Relief ($p = 0.102165$, i.e., $p > 0.05$, **Table 9**).

# 8   Discussion

The present study offered a cross-cultural analysis of pedestrian questions (PQs) in 80 YouTube video clips equally representing two humorous shows: Egyptian مذيع الشارع /muði:ʕ əʃʃæ:riʕ/ 'street broadcaster' by *Ahmed Ra'afat* and American *Pedestrian Question* segment in the *Jimmy Kimmel Live* show. The study qualitatively detected the effect of culture difference on the humor styles and themes intended via the PQs in the genre of humorous street interviews. In addition, the study recognized the strategies of impoliteness used in the data, especially in relation to aggressive humor. Furthermore, the paper carried out quantitative investigation of the effect of culture and identified humor styles as two independent variables on YouTube viewers' appreciation.

Great similarities were observed in the humor styles across the two shows, which reflected genre-specific rather than culture-specific patterns. Two humor styles were identified in the PQs under study: aggressive other-deprecating and affiliative relief-based (**Figure 5**). Evidence for impoliteness counterstrategies by offended pedestrians rendered impoliteness relevant to the present data following Culpeper (2005). Aggressive other-deprecating PQs, in both shows, were mapped to Culpeper's (1996, 2005, 2011a, 2011b) impoliteness strategies, identifying three levels of directness of face attacks arranged in descending order (**Figure 5**). Especially at levels A and B, PQs aimed to mock and belittle the target (i.e., the pedestrians) to feed feelings of superiority in both the speaker (the broadcaster) and audience (Lukk, 2016), 'the pleasure of being superior' (Culpeper 2011a). In terms of social interaction, the host built an in-group with the audience at the expense of the distanced humor targets, the pedestrians (Stewart, 2012). Paradoxical as it may sound, the 'camaraderie' between the host and audience in that context might signal affiliative potential within disaffiliative humor (Dynel, 2013; Kotthoff, 1996).

**Figure 5: Observed humor styles in the two entertainment talk shows under study**



Observed Humor Styles in both Shows

**Aggressive Other-deprecating**
Level A: Positive impoliteness
Level B: Negative impoliteness
Level C: Off-record impoliteness

**Affiliative Relief-based**
A. Confessions & Fantasies
B. Teasing/daring authority

Affiliative relief-based PQs in Category A (**Figure 5**) aimed to offer the pedestrians an escape from feelings of stress or guilt through confessing to or fantasizing about wrong doings. PQs in Category B (**Figure 5**) were intended to enable the pedestrians to experience relief through the daring of parental authority. The relieved pedestrians built an in-group with the host who guided them through a journey to freedom from the pressures of life. Members of the audience might also be served by experiencing 'voyeuristic pleasure' (Culpeper, 2005) as discussed in Section 7.1.2. However, given the multiplicity of humor recipients/targets in both shows (see Section 6.1), an aggressive aspect could be observed in both affiliative categories from different perspectives. In category A, (more traditional) members of the audience might be shocked by confessions to sinful acts and taboo topics (particularly in the American data) which would threaten their positive face. In category B, the provoked parents over the phone in the Egyptian show were pressured by unreasonable demands by their sons and daughters. On the American show, on-site parents in category B were forced to take in surprising revelations

by their kids. Hence, parents on both shows were subjected to acts of negative impoliteness.

While delivering the PQs, non-verbal negative impoliteness was almost consistently exercised against the pedestrians in both shows by the host/broadcaster who frequently invaded the pedestrians' personal space by getting too close; jokingly touching their body, or physically grabbing them to adjust their position within the camera field. Furthermore, the compromised context of the interviews undermined the pedestrians (see Section 6.1). This further revealed the exploitative nature of these humorous shows as argued by Culpeper (2005).

Affiliative and self-enhancing humor, whether through rationed self-mockery (Yu, 2013) or through assuming a playful non-serious stress-free tone of voice throughout (Martin et al., 2003), were manipulated by both hosts to entertain the audience and escape public scrutiny through emphasizing the 'humorous frame' of the show (Dynel, 2013). Further interactional advantages to affiliative and self-enhancing humor by the host were available only in the Egyptian show due to the availability of direct interaction between the host and the pedestrians (see Section 6.1). Through benign jocular self-mockery, Ra'afat achieved social closeness with the pedestrians, mitigated threats to their face in the context of aggressive humor, and emotionally pressurized them (as targets of humor) to not take it too seriously (Ferguson & Ford, 2008; Goddard, 2009; Haugh, 2014, 2017; Plester, 2016; Radcliffe-Brown 1940). On the American show, however, Kimmel was confined to the studio while the interviews were run on Hollywood Boulevard by rushed street broadcasters who often assumed a rather mechanical formulaic tone of voice characteristic of a game/quiz show.

With regard to pedestrian question themes, there was a mix of global and culture-specific notions. In the aggressive PQs (Level A), for example, sensitivity about being over-weight would be part of the global culture. However, the negative connotation of living with the parents after a certain age would only be relevant to the American/western culture; Egyptian young adults would normally live with their parents until marriage. Cultural differences were more pronounced in the themes of confessions and fantasies (Category A in relief-based PQs). In the Egyptian show, PQs seemed to observe the values of a conservative society to a large extent; pedestrians confessed to and fantasized about rather inoffensive or euphemistically unidentified wrongs or escapes. In the American show, on the other hand, PQs involved confessions and fantasies about rather offensive unorthodox notions like substance abuse, nudity, sexual promiscuity, and physical violence. Hence, on the level of themes, the present study supported the perception of humor as 'culturally tinted' (Guidi, 2017; Jiang et al., 2019; Stankić, 2017).

Popularity of certain themes among online viewers was observed in each show. In the Egyptian show, PQs revolving around soccer, the most popular sport in Egypt, received extremely high percentages of likes (%Likes) in relation to view counts on YouTube. PQs directed at kids attracted exceptionally high %Likes in the American show. This was not surprising since YouTube videos with kids were found to get three times as many views as videos without kids (Alexander, Jul 25, 2019).

Based on a two-way ANOVA, there were no independent effects of the two variables (culture and humor style) on online viewers' appreciation as measured by %Likes in relation to view counts. However, statistically significant interaction between the two independent variables was observed. Cultural difference was only statistically significant regarding relief-based humor, where viewers of the Egyptian videos expressed significantly more %Likes than did those of the American videos. Based on raw numerical data, viewers of the Egyptian show seemed to favor relief-based humor slightly more than aggressive humor. By contrast, viewers of the American show expressed significantly more %Likes to aggressive humor than to relief-based humor.

Due to a methodological limitation regarding sample selection, it was not possible to investigate online viewers' attention based on YouTube raw view counts. The selected sample of video clips had an undesirable wide range of upload dates from 2012 to 2020. In the sample, time (i.e., video upload dates) was found to negatively correlate with view counts. Older videos seemed to accumulate more views. Hence, interpretation of view counts would have been ambiguous between the mere passage of time and attention by online viewers. It would have been possible to neutralize time by investigating the number of views within a given time bracket (e.g., a year) after the release of each clip. However, such detailed performance analytics are exclusive to video owners on YouTube.

## 9  Closing Remarks

It is hoped that the present study has contributed to our overall understanding of humor attempted in the humorous man-on-the-street interview genre in the Egyptian and American cultures. To the best of the author's knowledge, this is the first study that:

- offers a comparative view of the Egyptian and American cultures in terms of humor styles and themes in the genre of humorous pedestrian questions (PQs),
- maps impoliteness strategies to aggressive humor in this genre, and
- quantitatively investigates the effect of culture and identified humor styles as two independent variables on online viewers' appreciation.

While probing into the humor intended through PQs, it has been inevitable to highlight certain interactional behavior by the street broadcasters (e.g., jocular mockery) and by the pedestrians (e.g., self-deprecation) as the most immediate targets of the attempted humor. Detailed examination of such interactional behavior, especially humor response by the pedestrians has been beyond the scope of the current study. Hence, this would be a possible area for future research. It would further be interesting to investigate potential effects of culture and pedestrians' socioeconomic variables on their humor response whether verbally or non-verbally.

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## Appendix A

Tabulated information on clips representing aggressive humor

https://bit.ly/3A0ze3b

## Appendix B

Tabulated information on clips representing affiliative relief-based humor

https://bit.ly/3nbMyu7

## Appendix C

MS Excel sheet

https://bit.ly/3HNTZ3U

Humor Styles, Impoliteness, and Online Viewers' Appreciation of
Egyptian vs. American Pedestrian Questions: A Cross-cultural Study

# أساليب الفكاهة والافتقار ألى التأدب وتقدير المشاهدين عبر الإنترنت للأسئلة الموجهة لرجل الشارع في البرامج المصرية مقابل الأمريكية: دراسة عبر الثقافات

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## المستخلص

تساهم هذه الدراسة في أبحاث الفكاهة عبر الثقافات في نوع غير مدروس من القوالب، وهو المقابلات ذات البناء شبه المنظم مع المارة في الشارع. وتركز الدراسة على مقاطع من برنامج مصري بعنوان **مذيع الشارع** ومن فقرة سؤال المارة *Pedestrian Question* من البرنامج الأمريكي *Jimmy Kimmel Live*، حيث يقوم البرنامجان على النزول للشارع لطرح أسئلة فكاهية على المارة بصورة عشوائية. في إطار شامل يدمج ثلاث نظريات عن الفكاهة (التفوق والتناقض والتنفيس)، و أنماط الفكاهة (مارتن وآخرون ، 2003)، ونموذج كولبير (1996 ، 2005 ، 2011 أ ، 2011 ب) للافتقار إلى التأدب ، تعقد هذه الدراسة مقارنة بين البرنامجين المصري والأمريكي من حيث أساليب الفكاهة و الموضوعات المقصودة من خلال الأسئلة الموجهة للمارة في 80 مقطع فيديو على YouTube. تم تحديد نمطين أساسيين لإحداث الفكاهة: أسلوب عدواني مهين للآخرين وأسلوب قائم على التنفيس عن الضغوط النفسية والعصبية. الأسلوب الأول قد يغذي شعور الجمهور بالتفوق على حساب المارة، بينما قد يقدم الأسلوب الثاني للجمهور "متعة التلصص" بينما يستمد الراحة من اعترافات المارة وخيالاتهم وتجرؤهم على السلطة الأبوية. لوحظ في الفكاهة القائمة على الاعترافات والأوهام أن موضوعات الأسئلة متحفظة في البرنامج المصري ولكنها متحررة وخادشة للحياء أحياناً في البرنامج الأمريكي. تستكشف الدراسة أيضًا تأثير الثقافة وأسلوب الفكاهة على تقدير المشاهدين على YouTube الذي تم قياسه بنسبة إبداءات الإعجاب. كان الاختلاف الثقافي ذا دلالة إحصائية فقط فيما يتعلق بالفكاهة القائمة على التنفيس، حيث حققت المقاطع المصرية إعجابًا بنسبة أكبر بكثير مما حققته المقاطع الأمريكية.

**الكلمات الدالة:**

أساليب الفكاهة ، الافتقار إلى التأدب، تقدير المشاهدين عبر الإنترنت ، أسئلة المارة ، الثقافة