

# Hispanic Humor Styles on Facebook: An Analytical Study

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## ABSTRACT

To better understand how humor is used in today's multicultural virtual environment, this study investigates the humor styles of Hispanic Americans in a virtual community. Based on the four humor styles, the current study builds a theoretical framework to explain why cultural norms, gender role, acculturation, and education influence the humor styles of Hispanic Americans in computer-mediated communication. Two research questions and five hypotheses are developed in the research framework. The statistical analysis is based on content analysis of 400 Hispanic Facebook users, 93 of whom use humor in most recent News Feed. The results provide preliminary evidence of the influences of cultural norms, gender role, acculturation, and education on Hispanic humor styles.

## KEYWORDS

Analytics, Culture, Facebook, Gender Role, Hispanic Americans, Humor Styles

## INTRODUCTION

The excessive psychological benefits of humor have long been studied in research. Previous research found that humor not only can be used for relieving intrinsic stress (Dixon, 1980), but also helps build personal relationships and cope with interpersonal tension (Ziv, 1984). Wise usage of humor can elicit many positive signals, therefore lubricating personal appeal and interpersonal communications (Cann, Calhoun, & Banks, 1997; Martin, 2007). In particular, people appear to be creative and intelligent when using humor in relationship building (Cann & Calhoun, 2001; Miller, 2000). People equipped with a good sense of humor are also viewed as sociable and self-confident (Chafe, 2007). Many past studies have highlighted the positive role of humor in effectively building and maintaining interpersonal relationships (Cann, Zapata, & Davis 2011; Li et al., 2002; McGee & Shevlin, 2009; Sprecher & Regan, 2002).

In advertising research, a general premise is that humor messages can create positive emotional reactions through delivering a "surprise" (Elpers, Mukherjee, & Hoyer, 2004). From this perspective, using humor in advertising and communications has been shown to have high effectiveness in stimulating consumers' positive psychological responses (Chung & Zhao, 2003; Cline, Altsech, & Kellaris, 2003; Lee & Mason, 1999). The positive impacts include some of the most important

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outcomes, such as viewers' positive attitudes toward the message and its sender, as well as attention to the message (Eisend, 2009). Given that our understanding of humor has been focused on traditional face-to-face and advertising contexts (Cann, Zapata, & Davis 2011; Galloway, 2010; Martin et al., 2003), it will be very interesting to examine how humor is used in the fast-growing virtual community.

Computer-mediated communication has fundamentally changed the way interpersonal interaction is carried out (Walther, 1996). In a virtual community, interpersonal communications are rather hyperpersonal because the members have a greater tendency to use an optimized presentation of self (Walther, 1996). Virtual community members also found it hard to make accurate impressions about others due to the absence of nonverbal cues (Okdie et al., 2011; Walther, 2007). Although humor can be strategically used to build emotional ties in the lack of nonverbal cues, previous research has not yet explored the determinant cultural and demographic factors that shape humor usage by virtual community members.

Thus, to bridge this research gap and better understand how humor is used in today's multicultural virtual environment, this study attempts to investigate the humor styles of Hispanic Facebook users. Based on the four humor styles conceptualized by Martin et al. (2003), we intend to find the percentage of Hispanic Americans using humor on Facebook and the popularity of the different humor styles used by Hispanic Americans. Furthermore, the current study builds a theoretical framework to explain why cultural norms, gender role, acculturation, and education may influence the humor styles of Hispanic Americans who are involved in computer-mediated communication. Further, the investigation on humor styles may provide further evidence on whether humor is significantly used by the Hispanic culture, and which humor styles are more popular than others in this culture. The findings also offer insights into understanding the communication styles of Hispanic Facebook users from psychological and sociological perspectives.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Humor Styles

In advertising research, Speck's (1991) typology of humorous advertising styles, which consists of incongruity-based, arousal-safety-based, and disparagement-based humor, has been used in many studies dealing with humorous advertising (Beard, 2008; Hatzithomas, Zotos, & Boutsouki, 2011; Lee & Lim, 2008; Spotts, Weinberger, & Parsons, 1997). By the same token, Martin et al. (2003) provided rich insights into humor styles, with a greater social discernment. The Humor Styles Questionnaire in Martin et al.'s (2003) study contains four humor styles with respect to individual use of humor from an intrapsychic standpoint. Follow-up studies have confirmed high reliability of the humor style measures reported in the original Humor Styles Questionnaire (Galloway, 2010; Kazarian & Martin, 2006).

Martin et al.'s (2003) Humor Styles Questionnaire specifies four humor styles: affiliative humor, self-enhancing humor, aggressive humor, and self-defeating humor. The *Affiliative Humor Style* portrays jokes and flirts in a group where the "entertainer" articulates humor and expects to charm others during this process. The *Aggressive Humor Style* is a harsher form of humor that typically implements humor as mockery, loss, and it also tends to omit others without considering the consequence. The *Self-Enhancing Humor Style* is described as an affirmative humor style that is closely aligned with coping and an optimistic viewpoint on life. Lastly, the *Self-Defeating Humor Style* is used by individuals who tend to present and accept a low self-efficacy through excessive self-downgrading and self-mockery.

Humor can be divided into positive (adaptive) and negative (maladaptive) kinds (Duncan, Smeltzer, and Leap, 1990; Zeigler-Hill and Besser, 2011). The affiliative humor style and the self-enhancing humor style are positive based on its effects, whereas the aggressive humor style and the self-defeating humor style result in negative disparagement (Martin et al., 2003). Martin et al.'s

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