Humour and culture

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Abstract

Humour and culture are inseparable since humour is a mirror of the culture in which it is produced. However, topics that provoke laughter are not specific to one culture. We are all human beings and we sometimes laugh at the same things, even though we may look at them from different perspectives. In other words, humour which is related to sex, marriage, politics, religion and stereotyping is common among many people from different cultures, but the way in which people compose their jokes is normally bound to their culture and their understanding of the world around them. This paper discusses the relationship between culture and humour and it sheds light on some common sources of humour in different cultures. The paper also presents a thorough discussion of the development of humour and its various types in the Arab world form Pre-Islamic era to the present. This discussion is needed since there is considerable shortage of research in the field of humour development, especially in the Arab world.

Keywords: culture, humour, Internet-based media, stereotyping, political humour
1. Introduction

In each culture people share common beliefs, behaviours, customs, and experiences. In fact, they create what Wenger (1998) calls “Communities of practice”, which refers to shared linguistic styles and cultural traditions. For example, what a person refers to can be understood by the other members of the same society. This applies to humour as a social phenomenon which is associated with a certain group of people who have their own shared knowledge of the world, and their humorous and joking references which are relevant and appreciated by each member of this group. This paper will shed light on humour across cultures, in which some topics that provoke laughter are analysed. The article concludes with a detailed analysis of the development of humour in the Arab world throughout different periods of time from the pre-Islamic period to the present.

2. Humour in culture

Humour normally targets various common topics which are interesting and controversial, including marriage, religion, politics, sex and stereotyping. Friends, colleagues and opponents use different types of humour such as jokes, sarcasm, irony and teasing in everyday life interaction, whether to socialize, criticize each others behavior, or even to fight against some global issues such as racism and war crimes.

Let us take politics as a prominent source of humour which is usually tackled by people from different countries. Citizens normally mock politicians and crack jokes about new regulations and laws that may affect their lives and the world in which they live. We all come across different jokes about some world leaders and their political decisions. These jokes can be heard among a group of people sitting in a cafe or chatting using social media. According to Shehata, political jokes are perceived as a way of relieving pressure from what is called “political oppression”, especially for those who cannot ridicule the political figures and decision makers in public or in media, such as in some countries in the Arab world (1992: 76).

In contrast to politically oppressed people, citizens in developed and democratic countries use humour to ridicule and mock political issues on both personal and public levels, whether through daily interaction or through comic shows. A good example of comic TV shows that target politicians is David Letterman’s Late Show, in which he mocks and makes fun of US presidents and ministers. Also, the show targets global policies and foreign leaders, which makes it not only well known in America but also in different parts of the world.

Political humour does not only exist between citizens and leaders or the leaders of different parties in a particular country. Humour can be used as a tool of showing the superiority of one country over another, which in many cases reflects the historical relationship between the two countries. A good example of this is the way the Portuguese perceive Brazilians, as they used to subjugate Brazil for four hundred years. Martins (2012: 92) states that the Portuguese used to crack jokes about Brazilians, who have developed on both economical and political levels, in order to claim their superiority over their “former colony”: 
Another area in which different cultures vary in using humour is stereotyping. It is very common between different people from different societies that there is a sort of stereotyping, whether between a particular group of people in a particular society or even between different nationalities. For example, a primitive Falah in Egypt is a person and is not well-educated who is normally perceived as stupid because s/he cannot act properly when faced with normal life challenges or some technological issues that are beyond his/her knowledge. On an international level, Italians are dirty, French are arrogant, Argentineans are chatty, Chinese are nerds and Americans are uncultured. This sort of stereotyping is normally used when telling jokes about different nationalities.

Religious stereotyping is also another source of humour in many countries as a result of the fighting and bigotry that exists between different religions around the world. This stereotyping is not only concerned with the religion itself and with its rules and concepts, it also involves targeting religious scholars and their believers. It is common to find people who believe that Jews are cheap, Muslims are terrorists and Christians are hypocritical. Accordingly, people start making jokes based on the way they perceive these religious followers. The following joke illustrates this, in which the Jewish father is so stingy that he keeps reducing the amount of money his son asks for:

**Example (35)**

Two Brazilian people were admiring the Colosseum in Rome...

- My God! Isn’t that amazing?
- Oh yeah! Now just imagine when it will be finished!

Sex is also without doubt, a common topic and a prominent source of laughter, to the degree that most jokes normally revolve around sex or at least contain some sexual references. We all agree that cultures have dissimilar perceptions of sex, in most western countries it is acceptable to discuss sex related topics whether in public or with a relative or friend, not to mention the presence of sex in movies, TV series, talk shows, advertisements and even presidential campaigns. Let us take Obama’s campaign in 2012, when sex and humour were used to promote political agendas and convince people to vote for Obama. In an advertisement called ‘My First Time’ which is dedicated to Obama’s campaign, a girl named Lena Dunham talks to camera in a way that makes you think that she is talking about sex instead of political issues. This is obvious in her funny utterances such as “You want to do it with a great guy. It should be with a guy with beautiful … somebody who really cares about and understands women”. The advertisement plays on words and ideas, in which voting for the first time is compared to losing one’s virginity (MacMillan 2012).
Contrary to this, sex is considered to be a prickly issue in some Islamic and Arabic countries, where it is socially and sometimes religiously prohibited to mention anything about your sex life, especially in public. At the beginning of El Feki’s book, one interviewee says \textsuperscript{(12)}:

\begin{quote}
In the Arab world, sex is the opposite of sport. Everyone talks about football, but hardly anyone plays it. But sex – everyone is doing it, but nobody wants to talk about it.
\end{quote}

However, despite all the facts about sex and the way it has been perceived in different cultures, it still has a close connection to humour in both liberal and conservative societies. People tell sexual jokes and enjoy practising this, even if it is socially unacceptable in some parts of the world. Furthermore, with the advent of social media (e.g., Twitter, Facebook and Youtube) and short films, the trend towards circulating sexual jokes and humour that contains sexual references has begun to increase.

The following section will discuss humour in the Arab world, in which a detailed discussion of some of the prominent sources of humour is presented. In addition, a brief discussion of the development of humour in the Arab world during different periods of time, including the pre-Islamic period, mediaeval Islamic era, the Fatimid period, Ayyubid dynasty, Mameluke period, Ottoman Empire, and modern Arab world.

3. Humour in the Arab world

Humour as a social phenomenon is deeply rooted in the lives of inhabitants of many nations, even though they have different backgrounds. It can be argued that we share the same concept of what humour is and how we respond to it. However, despite the recognition of this phenomenon, each society has unique techniques for cracking jokes and provoking laughter which, in many instances, distinguish them from other societies. In other words, as human beings, we may find the same topics such as sex, marriage, politics and stereotyping humorous, but we still have something exclusive and special when utilising these topics in our daily interactions; something that reflects our own lifestyle, beliefs and traditions. The Arab world is not an exception.

Arabs have their own language and unique culture, and humour is an essential aspect of their everyday lives. Apart from the daily interactions between individuals that normally involve discussing humorous topics, the existence of humour in Arabic culture, especially in literature, can be traced back to the Pre-Islamic period. In this era humour played a major role in poetry, which held an important position in Arabic civilization and usually had a tribal colour, especially when depicting a war of words between two tribes as poets used their poetry to praise their tribes and denigrate others. In other words, poets were the defenders of their tribes as they used satire to mock and exploit the demerits of the opponent’s tribe. Satire is the only common
form of humour in the pre-Islamic era that is extant in the literature from that time as a result of the absence of any cultural interaction with other civilizations.

During the Islamic period, and more specifically when Prophet Mohammad was preaching Islam and calling on his tribe, Quraish, to accept Islam, some Quraishites who were against his new message mocked and ridiculed him in an attempt to undermine his character, thus impeding the spread of his message to the rest of the tribe and to the rest of the people of Makkah. In addition, certain types of humour, such as parody and irony, were used by various opponents of Prophet Mohammad (Peace be upon him) at that time. One of the most famous examples of parody was used by a well-known non-follower of the Prophet, who claimed prophecy and composed some funny verses that he alleged were a revelation from God. The verses were rhythmically similar to Quran but they were absolute nonsense.

An important development during the golden age of Islamic civilization (from 661 until 1258), was the flowering of a rich literary tradition. Humour was a prominent element in most literary works because of stability and development, as well as the openness to foreign cultures such as Indian, Persian and Roman civilisations. In addition to satirical and ironical poetry that prevailed in Arabic literature and which was adopted by well-known poets such as Jarir, Al-akhtal Al-farazdaq and Al-hutai’ah, new poets and prose writers like Bashshar bin Burd, Abu Nawās, Hammād ‘Ajrād, Abdul Samad, al-‘Atabi, al-Hamdumi, Ibn al-Rūmi, Ibrasakra, al-Jāhiz, Abu al-‘Aīna and Badul-Zaman al-Hamdani led the literary revolution in this period, paving the way for the emergence of new and different forms of humour (Mubeen, 2008: 18). In addition, this period witnessed the emergence of a group of poets called the al-Shu’ra al majāneen (lunatic poets), such as Abu al ‘Ibar and Abu Galāla al-Makhzusmi, who used mockery and ridicule in their works.

In addition, the mediaeval Islamic era witnessed the emergence of various amusing characters, like Abu Dulama and Ash’āb, who are still recognised by many Arabs, to the degree that some of these characters have been imitated and utilised in certain Arabic films and TV series. Abu Dulama, who was well-known as a poet and satirist, used to use his poetry to flatter caliphs. As a result of his satirical verses and humorous anecdotes, many of his figures of speech are still being used in modern Arabic literature, as well as occasionally in conversations in Arabic daily life. One of Abu Dulama’s more famous amusing stories is that he was in caliph Almahdi’s court, which contained an elite group and was asked by the caliph to compose some verses that would satirically address one of the elite. The caliph threatened to cut his head off if he refused to do so. When Abu Dulama looked at the people, he could not pick a person to ridicule as the elite were asking Abu Dulama not to target them (they were winking). Eventually, Abu Dulama chose the safest way and preferred to satirise himself with the following three verses (Al-Hamarnah 2004: 19):

ألا أبلغ لديك أبا دلامة     فليس من الكرام ولا الكرامة
إذا لبس العمامة كان قرداً    وخنزيراً إذا نزع العمامة
جمعت دمامةً وجمعت لؤماً    كذاك اللؤم تتبعه الدمامة
فإن تك قدأصبت نعيم دنيا   فلا تفرح فقد دنت القيامة

Back translation:
Tell Abu Dulama that he has neither value nor dignity
He resembles a monkey when putting on his Imamah
And looks like a pig when he takes it off
You combine between ugliness and meanness
As meanness is always followed by ugliness
And do not be happy that you have been living blissfully
As your life has come to an end

Another famous historical personality in the history of humour in mediaeval Islamic literature (the Umayyad period) is Ash’ab (the greedy). Ash’ab had the required skills to make money as he could both sing and dance and succeeded in entertaining people on many occasions until reached the top of the entertainment profession. The stories of Ash’ab’s extreme stinginess and stupidity have long been shared by Arabs and some of them have been adopted in many Arabic TV series. Ash’ab had the ability to outwit people and to convince them in order to get what he needed from them. In one of his stories, he managed to persuade a girl that a gold coin gave birth to a silver one and then vanished in childbirth. Another story that reflects his imbecility is when he told some children that used to bother him that there was someone in the town giving people presents. When the children ran towards the man, he followed them thinking that there might be someone giving away presents.

The late mediaeval period witnessed new forms of humour that were utilised to criticise social follies and vices and to teach people moral values. Accordingly, various satirical plays and novels became popular, such as those written by Al-Jāhiz, including Kitab al bukhalā (Book of Misers), Kitab al nawadir (Book of Jokes), kitabnawadar al Hasan (Book of Hasan’s jokes), kitab al mulahiwaalturaf (Book of funny stories and comic anecdotes), and kitab al muzāhwa al jidd (Book of humour and seriousness) (Mubeen 2008: 19). It is also worth mentioning the work of Ibn al-Muqaffa, who was Persian and who lived in Basra during the Umayyad Caliphate and who was murdered on the orders of the Abbasid caliph Abu Ja’far al-Mansur after being accused of importing Zoroastrian thoughts into Islam. Ibn al-Muqaffa’s work combines humour and seriousness, and in some cases he criticised Arabs who ridiculed Persian culture. In addition, he was a pioneer of literary prose, which he introduced to Arabic literature after he had translated KalīlahwaDimnah into Arabic (Jum’ah 2008: 66).

In the Fatimid period, political humour prevailed as Egyptian poets used humour to criticise the Fatimid Caliphs, especially the religious and historical relationships between these caliphs and Prophet Mohammad’s daughter Fatimah. Another reason why people used humour to ridicule the caliphs and their secretaries was that they were offered key positions. One of the leading poets in this period was IbnQādūs al-Dimyāti and his famous verses criticising hypocrisy (Mubeen 2008: 24-25). The utilisation of humour in political conflicts continued throughout this period until the Ayyubid dynasty, which saw the emergence of educational humour that was adopted to motivate people to make changes in their societies. However, mockery and ridicule returned to their positions as predominant forms of humour, thanks to Al-Bahā’ Zuhair. Another key figure in this period who was recruited to a key position during the Ayyubid dynasty was al As’ad bin Mamāfī, who edited a book entitled al
Humour in the Mameluke period witnessed the introduction of public theatre, which played a major role in the flourishing of public entertainment and which took humour to a new level. As a result of the establishment of the theatre (khayāl al-Zill), some poets composed notable works that addressed social and political life. For example, Ibn Daniel was a humourist and a poet who dedicated his work to enhancing the role of comedy theatre and who composed three dramas, namely “

During the Ottoman Empire, political humour prevailed as a result of the political suppression at that time. In fact, there was a form of censorship, as well as restrictions on poets and writers, which prevented them from producing literary work that reflected the political life of many people in all areas that were under Ottoman rule. However, some notable efforts were made by various writers who travelled abroad and had the chance to observe the role of the theatre in western countries. An example is Maroun Al-Naqash, who was a pioneer of Arabic theatre and who went to Italy to study the work of some western playwrights. In 1848, he translated Molière’s five-act comedy *The Miser*, which was performed in house in Lebanon by some of his relatives. After the success and popularity of Al-Naqash’s theatre, the Ottoman authorities gave permission for the establishment of a public theatre (Zabash 2012: 174-175). This major step in the history of Arabic theatre paved the way for the flourishing of theatre in many Arabic countries such as Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Algeria and Tunisia.

Theatre became more popular in Egypt, which encouraged some Syrian and Lebanese writers and actors to emigrate to Egypt. This included Salem Al-Naqash and Adeeb Alshaq, who came with their theatrical group and performed some translated humorous works. At the beginning of the 20th century, different theatrical groups were established by various writers and actors, including George Abiadh, Youssif Wahbi, Aziz Eid and Nagib al-Rihani, who was a great comedian both on stage and in films, and who is considered to be the father of comedy in Egypt (Siraj Aldeen 2006: 26). Al-Rihani’s theatrical group performed many plays, including “Taaleeli Ya Bata”, “KeshKesh Bey Fee Paris”, “Homore We Halawa” “Aham El Ezz”, “HokmKarokosh”, “HizzYaWizz” and “BalashAwantah”. Similarly, Aziz Eid was also a famous comedian and presented many comic plays, such as “Lilat al-Dokhlah”, “Umm Arab’ WaArba’een” and “DokholeAlhamam Mosh ZaiiKhroujeh” (Abdulhameed et. al 2004: 70-71).

Humour is also a prominent element in most Arabic films and TV series. For example, in Egypt, Al-Rihani presented a number of great films like “Sahib al-Sa’adahKushckePayh”, “HawadethKushckePayh”, “YagootAfendi” and “Abu Halamos”. In addition, Ismail Yaseen, who was also a famous comedian, presented a series of films including “Khalaf El Habayb”, “Ali Baba We El ArbeenHarany”, “Al-SitatAfareet”, “Ismail Yaseen Fee El Guieh” and “Ismail Yaseen Fee El Segn”. In Syria, there were three famous comedians, Duraid Lahham, Yasseen Bakoush and Nihad Qali. These three actors presented a well-known TV series called “Sah El
Nawm”, which was filmed in 1971 as a film with the same name. In Lebanon, Hassan Ala’ al-Dean (also known as Shosho) was a comedian and was also one of the founders of the Lebanese national theatre. He participated in many comedy films, such as “Shosho We El Million”, Ya Salam Ya Hub”, “Salam Ba’ed El Mout” and “ZamanYa Hub”. He also presented various comic shows and TV series, including “HalacaatFocahiyyah”, “YaMaudeer” and “Sharee’ al-Ezz”.

In addition to the great amount of humorous works presented on stage and in films, other forms of humour were utilised in different media, like newspapers and magazines, particularly in Egypt, which has been considered to be the fulcrum of the Arab world and the cultural centre from 1933 onwards. As a result of the political stability and prosperity in Egypt, more than 170 comic newspapers and magazines were established between 1876 and 1952, including “Abu Nazarah”, “Abu Zumarah”, “Alhawi”, “AltankeetWaAltabkeet”, “Ala’freet”, “Abu Nawas”, “Almajnoon”, “AlgholeZagzouqWaZarifah”, “Anta Wa Ana”, “Ha’ Ha’ Ha””, “Joha” and “Idhak”. Numerous newspapers and magazines paved the way for a completely new form of humour, caricature. Some newspapers, such as “Ha’ Ha’ Ha”, attempted to produce caricatures while others, such as AllataifAlmasriah, copied caricatures from western newspapers and presented these to the readers (Abdulhameed et.al 2004: 70). In 1919, during the Egyptian revolution, caricatures were used frequently in all forms of literary work, particularly in political newspapers, in which caricature was used as a weapon in the conflicts between different political parties at that time. In some cases, caricatures were used to criticise the government and its policies.

3.1 Humour in the modern period

Humour in the Modern Arab world (from 1945 to the present) has changed dramatically as a result of the enormous changes that have taken place at the economic, social, educational, and industrial levels. Accordingly, the number of theatres has increased rapidly, many acting schools have been established and a huge number of AV productions have been created. Egypt and Syria have been the leading countries in both cinema and TV production; in fact, Egyptian and Syrian TV comic series and films are broadcasted on different Arabic TV networks and Cinemas. In Egypt, different generations of comedians have entertained Arabic audiences for the last fifty years, such as Adel Imam, Sa’eedSaleh, Sameer Ghanim, younusShalabi, SuadNasir, Hassan Hussni, Al-Muntasirbellah, Sana’ Younus, Ahmad Adam, Ahmad Bedeer, Halafakher, WaheedSaif, Mohammed Najm, Mohammed Sobhi, Mohammed Humaidi, and Mohammed Sa’ad. These actors and others have participated in different comedy productions which normally ridicule social follies and governmental policies that affect ordinary people.

In Syria, the focus of all TV productions has been on TV series reflecting the traditional life of the common people, and these often contain humour. The most well-known comedian who has dedicated his entire career to criticising various social and political pitfalls in the Arab world is Yasser Al-Azamah. He produced a TV series entitled “Maraia”, which is one of the most famous productions to address the many political and social issues facing society. He does this in a highly satirical way. The series was first produced in 1982 and is still produced every year. Another popular
Syrian TV series is “Jameel We Hana”, in which Ayman Zaida and Norman As’ad play a typical married couple. The topics covered and situations presented are often filled with humour.

In North African countries, such as Morocco, Tunisia and Libya, and some Gulf countries, such as Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, the production of comedies is very limited in comparison. There are different reasons for this. One is the religious and social restrictions affecting female participation in films as in a country like Saudi Arabia. Another possible reason is the lack of acting schools and a film industry. A third reason is the linguistic barriers which sometimes make it difficult for other Arabic speaking audiences to comprehend TV shows and films. For example, Moroccan or Saudi films and TV shows are normally produced in Moroccan and Saudi dialects of Arabic respectively, making it hard for the other Arabic speaking audiences to understand and appreciate the jokes in these materials.

However, despite all the factors that constitute a serious impediment to the flowering of the film and TV industries in some Arabic countries, several attempts at producing comic shows are worth mentioning. In Kuwait for example, many theatres have been established in which comedies are performed. A well-known comedian in the Gulf region and the Arab world who has acted many plays and TV shows is Abdulhussain Abdulredha. He performed “Bye London”, one of the most popular comedies in the Arab world, in which he sarcastically criticises politics in the Arab World and the unacceptable and shameful behaviour of some individuals when travelling abroad. Abdulredha also participated in what is considered to be the most popular comedy series, “Darb Al Zalag” (The Slippery Path).

Comedy productions have more recently begun to appear in other Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Tunisia, Iraq, Jordan, and Yemen. In Saudi Arabia for example, “Tash Ma Tash” (No Big Deal) is a popular television comedy series that has been running for eighteen seasons during the holy month of Ramadan. The show, which heavily relies on two comedians, Nasir Al-Gasabi and Abdullah Al-Sadhan, has no specific story, but rather each episode has a different plot and characters. In Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria, as stated previously, comedy shows are unpopular in the Arab world because of the difficulty involved in comprehending the language used in these materials. However, despite this unpopularity, some series have been produced at a local level. For example, in Morocco, many TV shows have been broadcasted in the last few years, such as “al-A’uni” and “A’elah Muhtaramah Jeddah”, which both revolve around two Moroccan families living a normal life with humourous stories involving each member of these families.

The use of humour has changed recently in the Arab world and has been taken to a new and different level thanks to the advent of new technologies and the emergence of social media (Youtube, Twitter, Facebook and What’s up). Accordingly, new comic shows have been adopted in which different types of humour are utilised for social and political purposes and, in some instances, these shows intend to amuse the audience for the purpose of entertaining them. In fact, what makes these comic and satirical shows more appealing is the absence of any
censorship that may stifle the quality of these productions and impose restrictions on the prickly and even critical topics that are normally addressed.

These new channels of communication between users have changed the whole concept of AV productions, as they are normally made by individuals for their interests and at their own risk, especially those dealing with contentious political issues. For example, some Youtube users who dedicate their Youtube channels to mocking presidents or politicians have been arrested and, in some cases, questioned and told not to criticise the government. This sort of harsh attitude on the part of government officials towards Youtube users and their comic shows is a result of their popularity among local audiences, as these short videos address their social, political and economical concerns in a funny and satirical way.

The use of internet-based media such as Youtube has played a crucial role in the lives of many Arabs to the degree that many Arab leaders have been overthrown as a result of the political will of young people such as the activists Wael Ghonim and Abdulrahman Mansour, who created a page on Facebook called “We are all Khaled Saeed”, which played a major role in supporting the protestors. The page satirically used facts about the oppressed people in Egypt and incidents that justify the need for the removal of Mubarak’s regime and the ill-treatment of the police.

What is interesting about social media during the Arab spring is that users frequently used humour to mock, ridicule and criticise the existing presidents and their corrupt governments. In fact, many jokes have circulated involving the overthrown Arab leaders such as the Tunisian president Ben Ali, the Yemeni leader Ali Abdullah Saleh and the controversial Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi. The following three jokes, taken from (Hazou 2011) illustrate this.

(37) As soon as Ben Ali enters a store looking for footwear, a salesperson comes forward and hands him a pair of shoes with the perfect fit.

Ben Ali: How did you figure my shoe size?
Salesperson: Because you stomped us for 23 years.

(38) Anwar Sadat asks Mubarak: Was it murder or a coup?

Mubarak: No, Facebook.

(39) Saleh meets with his cabinet to discuss Yemen’s economic woes.

Minister: I have the perfect solution.

Saleh: What?

Minister: We declare war on America. After we lose, the Americans will spend billions to rebuild our country – much as they did in Germany and Japan after World War II.

Saleh: But what if we beat the Americans?

In addition to humorous jokes that are full of satire and exaggeration, caricatures are very popular and have been used more frequently on social media as they can be easier to comprehend for ordinary Arabs. These caricatures may mock and ridicule one leader or, in many cases, portray several dethroned leaders in a sarcastic manner. For example, in Figure 4, the three leaders Bin Ali, Mubarak and Gaddafi are in the cartoon, where Gaddafi is praying that what happened to Bin Ali
and Mubarak will not happen to him as they have lost their chairs, which symbolize their rules.

Fig.4 A cartoon with caricatures of Bin Ali, Mubarak, and Gaddafi

The amount of freedom that has been given to people during the Arab spring does not only affect the production of comedy shows in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Yemen and Syria, but has also inspired those who live in countries where less freedom is given. By way of illustration, let us take Saudi Arabia as an example of how comic shows, especially on Youtube, have created a revolution in the development of the forms of humour used in the last fifteen years. These productions rely heavily on humour to address the concerns of Saudi citizens at social, political, and economical levels. As a result of this relative freedom of speech, a considerable number of Youtube channels have been established, such as ‘Masameer’ (Nails) produced by Malik Niger, ‘AlaAttaier’ (on the fly) presented by Omar Hussain, ‘La Yakthar’ (shut up) produced by enthusiastic young Saudis like Ali Alkalthamy and FahadAlbutairy and ‘Sahi’ (vigilant) presented by HadiAlshaibany.

In summary, humour has played an essential role in Arabic culture. This role was in one direction during the pre-Islamic period, in which satirical lines of poetry prevailed and were used to mock opponents’ tribes. The utilization of humour then started to develop throughout the mediaeval Islamic era, resulting in a wide range of humorous plays that were considered to be a new literary form during that period of time. Furthermore, the Mameluke period and the Ottoman Empire witnessed the emergence of public theatres, which had a great impact on the production of comedy plays. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, there was a sort of openness to western cultures which resulted in a rapid development of forms of humour such as caricature, comedy films and sitcoms, especially in Egypt, Lebanon and Syria. In addition, with advent the of new technologies and the emergence of social media, the use of humour has been taken to another level in which individual young people produce their own comic shows tackling many issues relating to social and political topics. These shows are usually presented for the purpose of criticising existing social and political follies in an attempt to drive change.
4. Conclusion

This paper gave a detailed analysis of the relationship between humour and culture and how people from different cultures have different ways of perceiving what is humorous and what is not. In other words, what is funny in a particular culture can be boring or humourless in another. The paper concludes with a thorough discussion of the types of humour in Arabic culture in different periods of time and how the utilisation of humour at social and political levels has changed rapidly in the last few years, resulting in an excessive production of comic shows using social media.
References


