

## INTERNET HUMOR AND THE NORMALIZATION OF STEREOTYPES IN THE ARAB DIGITAL LANDSCAPE

 Zakaria Erraziqi <sup>1</sup>  Youssef Boutahar <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> ENS, Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University, (Morocco)  
[zakaria.erraziqi@usmba.ac.ma](mailto:zakaria.erraziqi@usmba.ac.ma)

<sup>2</sup> ENS, Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University, (Morocco)  
[Youssef.boutahar1@usmba.ac.ma](mailto:Youssef.boutahar1@usmba.ac.ma)

**Abstract:** This study investigates how humor on Arab social media contributes to the construction and normalization of stereotypes. Focusing on memes, jokes, and short videos circulating on Instagram and Facebook,. The research explores how people are represented in humorous digital discourse and aims to decode the different types of stereotypes circulating online. The study is grounded in three interrelated theoretical frameworks: social semiotics (Hodge & Kress, 1988), which interprets how visual and verbal signs create meaning within cultural contexts; multimodal discourse analysis (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006), which examines how multiple semiotic modes - text, image, and sound - work together to shape representations; and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995). When integrating these frameworks, the study analyzes the interplay between linguistic, visual, and auditory signs in humorous content. A qualitative analysis of 20 popular posts collected from Instagram and Facebook in 2025 reveals recurring stereotypes related to gender (e.g., the submissive wife, the incompetent husband), physical appearance (short stature), regional origin (e.g., Doukkala and Northern Moroccan dialects), class, and religious affiliation (associations between visible piety and extremism). Findings show that while some humor appears playful, it consistently reinforces hierarchical binaries and normalizes prejudice through repetition and virality. Audience engagement analysis reveals a paradox: even when users resist stereotypes in comments, their interaction amplifies the visibility of the content. The study concludes that social media humor frequently reinforces and normalizes prejudice, confirming that these platforms perpetuate a wide range of stereotypes. It calls for greater critical media literacy among Arab digital users and content creators.

**Keywords:** Humor; social media; stereotypes; the Arab digital landscape; normalization; multimodal discourse analysis

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<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author: Zakaria Erraziqi . Authors' ORCID ID : <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-4252-7013>

## 1. Introduction

Humor is one of the most important means by which humans express their feelings, such as happiness and joy. This is one of the reasons why some like cracking jokes. However, humor oftentimes goes beyond its limits to shape and reshape certain social views, social attitudes, and produce ideologies (see LaPlant, 2025; Zemfira, 2025). From this standpoint, there have been numerous, though still insufficient, studies that tackled issues related to humor and its role in society.

In the digital era, humor functions as a vehicle for reinforcing and perpetuating different types of stereotypes. There are plenty of reels, memes, and jokes that circulate on social media; these tools affect people's lives in many different ways. Rasool et al. (2024) give the example of mocking comedy (the intention to make fun of others) (p.1287). One might make fun of others based on their gender, like men/women, political affiliations, class, physique, etc. Such discrimination often culminates in false ideologies that become deeply rooted in the very fabric of societies.

In this regard, this research emerged in response to the widespread use of social media platforms, particularly people's growing obsession with humorous content based on different types of stereotype. Moreover,

### **In claiming that a discursive event**

works ideologically, one is not in the first instance claiming that it is false, or claiming a privileged position from which judgements of truth or falsity can be made. One is claiming that it contributes to the reproduction of relations of power (Fairclough, 1995, p. 18).

#### *1.1 Statement of the research problem*

Online humor is a powerful medium that shapes social views and public attitudes. Memes and jokes disseminated on Facebook and Instagram often reinforce existing social divisions, though the content might seem humorous. Despite evidence that social media perpetuates a plethora of stereotypes, the processes (semiotic and discursive) by which they circulate and normalize bias are underexplored in Arab academic research.

#### *1.2 Theoretical background*

The study employs three interrelated theoretical frameworks: social semiotics (Hodge & Kress, 1988), which interprets how visual and verbal signs create meaning within cultural contexts; multimodal discourse analysis (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), which examines how multiple semiotic modes - text, image, and sound - intermingle to shape representations; and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995), which unveils the ideological dimensions of humor and its role in sustaining or contesting power relations.

## 2. Literature Review

Social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram, are regarded as powerful tools for circulating stereotypes. Essien (2024) provides important statistics showing how media either perpetuates or reinforces 'human-related stereotypes'. For example, Noor & Arshad (2024) conclude 'that memes are not only a source of entertainment but also address society's serious and worth-noticing problems under the mask of humor'. From this standpoint, we understand that social media is regarded as a stereotype accelerator.

What adds fuel to the flame is that these platforms function as rhetorical instruments that frequently embed and normalize ideological messages (like sexism and classism) by making them funny. Research asserts that social media is a powerful tool that produces and

reproduces different types of stereotypes, shapes people's thoughts, and promote specific ideologies (Deepali & Dennis, 2021; Rasool et al., 2024; Tan, 2025). Not only does social media reinforce or perpetuate stereotypes that culminate in the establishment of a plethora of ideologies, but 'they can also be used to intimidate, harass, and marginalize individuals and groups' (Mukherjee, 2025).

There have been numerous studies on the different types of stereotypes on social media: racial, gender, etc. (Hill et al., 2025; Lattu & Innanen, 2025; Parsons et al., 2025). Not only this, but there have been a considerable number of studies which explored stereotypes in humor on media, one example is the study by Castro Bravo (2025), which concludes that Trevor Noah's Stand-up Comedy Routines rely on 90.3% of cultural stereotypes.

The digital landscape today functions by employing a multimodal-discursive framework in order to circulate, reinforce, sustain, or rarely resist stereotypes. Additionally, there are a number of studies, like (Noor & Arshad, 2024; Naqvi & Naeem, 2025), that tried to dismantle and explore stereotypes in humorous content on social media. However, despite evidence that social media perpetuates a plethora of stereotypes, the processes (semiotic and discursive) by which they circulate and normalize bias are underexplored in Arab academic research.

When considered collectively, the reviewed studies all point to the same conclusion: social media functions as a powerful accelerator of stereotypes, normalizing ideological bias, especially gender-based bias, through multimodal discourse and comedy. However, significant variations in focus and scope become apparent. While studies like, Rasool et al. (2024), and Tan (2025) treat social media as a general ideological reproducer without dissecting the particular semiotic mechanisms at work, Noor & Arshad (2024) investigate stereotypes embedded in particular content types (pandemic coverage and memes, respectively). In a similar vein, Castro Bravo (2025) measures the use of stereotypes in stand-up comedy but ignores the ways in which digital platforms magnify or alter such content as it spreads online. The majority of current research focuses on Western or South Asian contexts, leaving the Arab digital landscape notably underrepresented. This is another geographic divide. By investigating how stereotypes, especially gender stereotypes, are created, disseminated, and normalized through amusing reels on Moroccan social media, the current study fills this gap. It does this by combining semiotic and discursive analysis to shed light on the very processes that previous research has neglected.

### **3. Methodology**

The study uses a qualitative multimodal discourse analysis. The corpus consists of 20 humorous posts (10 from Facebook, 10 from Instagram, all from 2025). Data was collected with the date and link for each post. The analysis of the study moves through three main steps: 1) the identification of the signs used; 2) CDA is used to interpret how these signs relate to broader ideologies and cultural power; 3) audience engagements were examined to explore how humor is received, accepted, or resisted. Taken together, these steps offer a closer look at how certain stereotypes seem to survive, and sometimes flourish, on social media.

This study adheres to the ethical standards commonly applied in social media research. All data analyzed – reels and comments - were retrieved from publicly accessible Facebook and Instagram pages, and no private or restricted content was included. Since the data are publicly available, formal informed consent from content creators or commenters was not required. Nevertheless, to protect the privacy of individual users, all usernames and identifying information appearing in the data have been anonymized, and no attempt was made to identify or contact the individuals behind the accounts. The study focuses exclusively on the content itself as a cultural and discursive artifact, not on the personal profiles or identities of its producers.

### 3.1 Sampling procedure

The corpus consists of 20 humorous posts - 10 retrieved from Facebook and 10 from Instagram - all published in 2025. Posts were identified through a systematic search using relevant hashtags and keywords, including #stereotypes and #humor, alongside their Arabic-language equivalents. The selection was guided by a set of inclusion criteria: posts had to be (1) humorous in nature, (2) in Arabic - encompassing its various regional varieties as used across the Arab world, and (3) published within the 2025 timeframe. The criterion of audience engagement was taken into account on the grounds that high engagement signals the wide circulation and cultural resonance of the content. No posts were excluded once these criteria were met, and the final corpus of 20 posts was determined by thematic saturation relative to the study's focus on stereotypes.

### 3.2 Analytical framework

Using two complementary theoretical frameworks, the study employs a qualitative multimodal discourse analysis. The social semiotic method, which analyzes linguistic and visual signs as socially driven meaning-making resources, was proposed by Hodge & Kress (1988) and subsequently expanded by Kress & van Leeuwen (2006). This approach informs the analysis for the multimodal dimension. The study uses Fairclough's (1992) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) paradigm for the discursive dimension, which looks at how language and discourse perpetuate power dynamics and ideological frameworks.

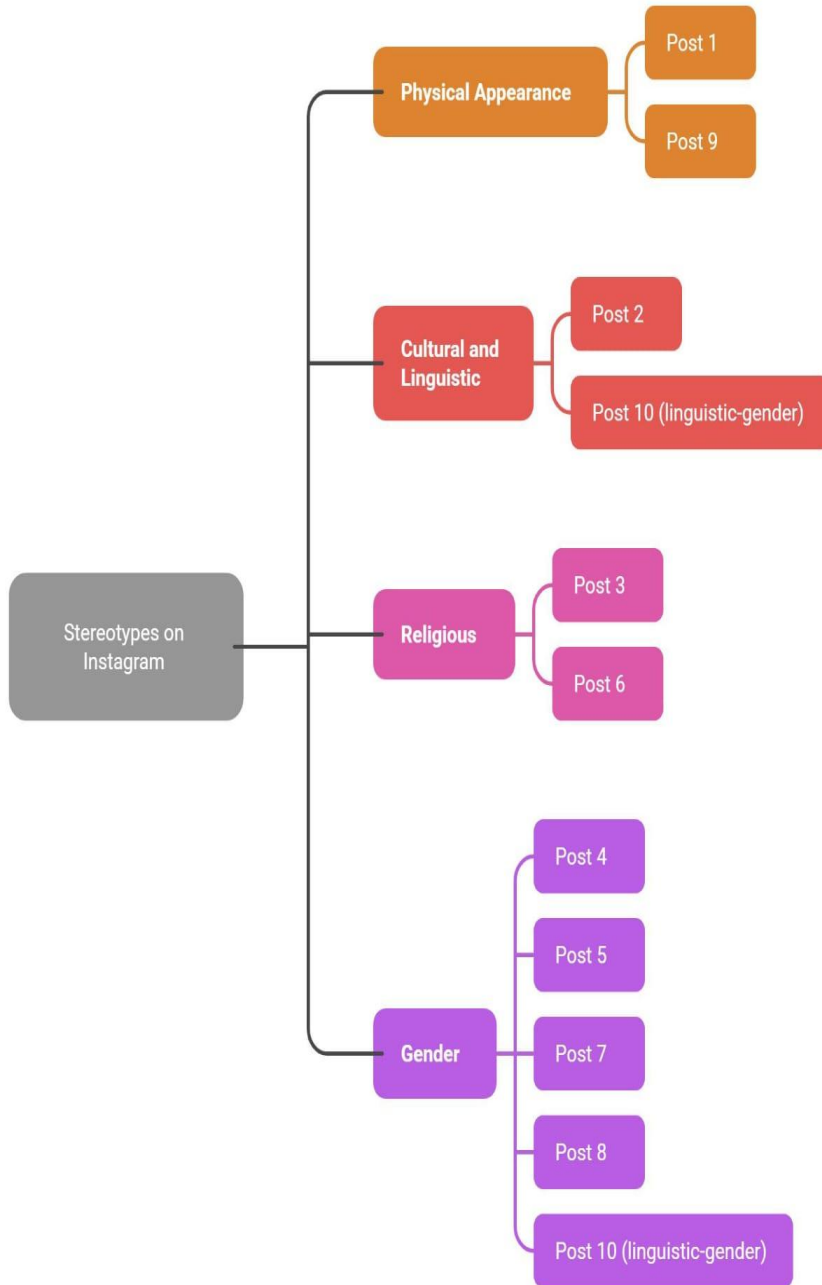
The analytical procedure was applied in three successive steps. First, the semiotic signs present in each post were identified, covering both visual elements (imagery, setting, gesture, color) and linguistic elements (text overlays, captions, spoken dialogue). Second, CDA was applied to interpret how these signs relate to broader ideological formations. Third, audience engagement data were examined to explore how humor is received, accepted, or resisted. The analytical categories - including *theme*, *visual elements*, *linguistic elements*, *captions*, *tone*, and *audience engagement* - were pre-defined based on a critical reading of the theoretical frameworks, ensuring that the coding procedure was systematic and theoretically grounded rather than purely inductive.

### 3.3 Audience engagement analysis

Audience engagement was treated as both a quantitative indicator and a qualitative lens. Quantitatively, metrics such as the number of likes, shares, and comments served as indicators of the reach and cultural resonance of each post: high engagement figures were interpreted as evidence of wide acceptance of, and interaction with, the stereotypical content. Qualitatively, the comments sections were read and analyzed in light of the theoretical frameworks, with particular attention to whether users challenged, reinforced, or simply reproduced the ideological content of the posts. This qualitative reading of comments led to the conclusion that audiences largely consume and interact with stereotypical humorous content unreflectively, suggesting that the normalization of such stereotypes operates, at least in part, at an unconscious level.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Instagram



**Figure 1.**

*Stereotypes circulating on Instagram*

#### 4.1.1 Physical Appearance

**Table 1.**

*Physical appearance posts*

post ID	theme	Visual elements	Linguistic elements	captions	tone	Audience engagement
1	Leisure/ Entertainment	A short man dancing, exaggerated movements, bottle put in trousers, casual clothes, laughter from background; bright environment.	No spoken words; body gestures dominate; Moroccan song about drinking reinforces the 'party' context.	T.G.I.F and laughter emojis — link the act with celebration and relaxation.	Humorous, mocking, playful.	17.2K likes, 27.2k shares, 68 comments, many with laughing emojis.
9	Physical Appearance/Stature	<b>Setup/Misdirection:</b> A cameraman deliberately focuses on a short-statured man (in black clothes) while a man on a tall horse speaks. <b>Punchline:</b> The man on the horse (not the short man) is revealed to be pointing to a small pony nearby, not the short man	Spoken Dialogue: The man on the horse says: " هذا طفرة جينية، وضعف في النمو، وقصير قامته تقريبا زي ما تقول عندو مشكلة في النمو" (This is a genetic mutation, has stunted growth, is short in stature, and almost like you'd say, has a growth problem)	"المصد" "ور قليل ادب" (The cameraman lacks manners), accompanied by two laughing emojis. <b>Caption:</b> Multiple laughing emojis...)	Humorous/ Mocking; the entire comedic effect is built on the audience believing the short man is the subject of the insult, which is then subverted by the pony reveal	115K likes, 967 comments, and 192K shares. The engagement confirms the success of the joke's structure

The humor in the Physical Appearance category (Posts 1 and 9) is built upon an integrated discursive process that normalizes body-shaming by equating physical deviation with comic deficiency. From a Social Semiotic Perspective, the discourse relies on the semiotic representation of the body, where physical traits - specifically short stature (Post 9) and bodily exaggeration/gestures (Post 1) - are framed as primary signs of social inadequacy that invite laughter, rather than remaining neutral attributes. This hierarchy between "normal" and "deviant" bodies is maintained through compositional elements like camera angle and framing. The Multimodal Discourse Analysis shows how the humorous effect is achieved through the orchestration of modes: upbeat music, exaggerated movements, and emoji-filled captions ("T.G.I.F",) function as powerful modality markers that legitimize the comic tone and guide the audience's emotional response toward collective amusement. Finally, through Critical Discourse Analysis, this collective amusement is interpreted as a reproductive ideological act that normalizes ableist and body-normative discourses. By circulating and gaining high engagement (likes and shares), these visual jokes reproduce social hierarchies by equating deviation from dominant physical standards with comic deficiency, thus legitimizing the marginalization of those whose bodies fall outside normalized expectations under the guise of entertainment.

This implies that the humor does more than just amuse; it subtly perpetuates the idea that some bodies are odd and hence funny. These posts' high levels of engagement indicate that viewers are actively disseminating these concepts, frequently without even recognizing it.

#### 4.1.2 Cultural and linguistic stereotypes

**Table 2.**

*Cultural and linguistic stereotypes posts*

Post ID	theme	Visual elements	Linguistic elements	captions	tone	Audience engagement
2	Language and cultural misunderstanding	A veiled Muslim woman and an American man in a public place; gestures and trilling used for comic effect	Dialogue in both English (“What’s wrong, man?”), “What the f * was that?”) and nonverbal trilling sound; Darija caption for Moroccan audience	“فاش كتمشي لمريكان ومعندكش اللغة” (When you go to America but you don’t speak English)	Humorous, mocking, and light	22K likes, 938 comments, 66.8 k shares; audience relates to cross-cultural misunderstanding
10	Linguistic Competence and Male Intelligence	Split-screen format showing a Moroccan young girl speaking and two Moroccan men reacting (one main subject, one interviewer)	young girl speaks in English. Man replies, pretending he "can't hear her well" (feigning deafness to mask his lack of understanding). <b>Punchline:</b> Man says, "bring me a Moroccan girl" (a line used as a desperate, humorous retreat from linguistic inadequacy)	خونا " سطل فالانجليزية وكيقول 'فهمت' (while he's a total disaster in English, he is still pretending that he understood), accompanied by laughing emojis.	Humor/ Mocking; the tone uses humor to directly mock the man's linguistic failure and resulting social awkwardness	7,998 likes, 594 comments, and 38.8K shares

The analysis of Cultural and Linguistic Stereotypes (Posts 2 and 10) demonstrates how these Instagram Reels leverage multimodal elements and specific discursive strategies to reinforce negative associations between linguistic inadequacy and competence. Social Semiotics and Multimodal Discourse Analysis highlight how the visual composition - such as the juxtaposition of the veiled Muslim woman and the American man in Post 2, or the split-screen emphasizing the subject's non-comprehension in Post 10 - frames the linguistic conflict as a source of humor, with nonverbal signs like trilling and feigned deafness acting as key semiotic codes for communicative failure. At the micro-level of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the use of rhetorical devices, such as the man feigning deafness in Post 10 to mask his failure, and the explicit linguistic labelling in the captions are crucial; for example, the *Darija* caption "خونا سطل فالانجليزية" – (He's a total disaster in English) in Post 10 functions at the meso-level to directly invite the audience to consume the content through mocking, thereby normalizing the link between not knowing English and intellectual incompetence. Ultimately, at the macro-level of CDA, both posts reinforce the social and ideological pressure that validates English proficiency as a marker of competence and social adequacy, perpetuating the stereotype of the 'linguistically inferior' Arab/Muslim or man by trivializing linguistic and cultural differences through humor.



**Figure 2.**  
*Post 2 comments*

### 4.1.3 Gender-based stereotypes

**Table 3.** Gender-based stereotypes post

Post ID	Theme	Visual Elements	Linguistic Elements	Captions	Tone	Audience Engagement
4	Gender Roles in Sports/Domesticity	<p><b>Setup:</b> Two female football players demonstrating skill on a field.</p> <p><b>Punchline:</b> Both women abruptly transition to a kitchen setting, running around the stove and cooking utensils.</p> <p>Reaction: Clip of a famous laughing man.</p>	"ههه فشلت" ("I'm bursting into laughter" – confirming the humorous impact of the punchline)	Laughing and relieved emojis. High engagement prompt: "Voter · 5,323 réponses"	Humorous and mocking; implies the women's attempt at sports was a comical detour, with "failure" returning them to their expected domestic role.	58.5K likes and 654 shares/saves, with thousands of interactive responses, indicating strong cultural recognition.
5	Physical Competence and Gender Roles	<p><b>Setup:</b> Two women attempting an exercise in a gym setting with a pink foreground; one woman fails and falls backward.</p>	A male speaker says: "Here are two kitchens, what a video, wow" – immediately recontextualizing the gym activity.	"رجعوهم للمطبخ" (Take them back to the kitchen), with laughing emojis.	Mocking; the gym failure is used as "proof" that the women do not belong there and should return to the domestic sphere.	87.9K likes, 1,846 comments, and 168K total shares – indicating widespread agreement or highly entertaining content.

7	Female Intelligence	<b>Setup:</b> A female journalist interviewing a stylishly dressed woman in public. <b>Punchline:</b> Close-up of three men watching and laughing. <b>Reaction:</b> Final clip of two men bursting into laughter.	ما هو "أقرب كوكب الى الارض" (What is the nearest planet to Earth?). The woman replies with Zomuroda, a fictional planet from a cartoon.	—	Mocking	31K likes and 54.9K shares – the public found the display of ignorance highly amusing and shareable.
8	Social Behavior / Neighbors	A man standing on stairs; facial expressions suggesting mockery; night setting typical of casual gossip.	Everyday spoken Arabic, informal tone.	"عندكم "جارة" نفسها ("Do you have a neighbor like this?")	Humorous, mocking.	114K likes, 5,205 comments, and 236K shares.
10	Linguistic Competence and Male Intelligence	Split-screen: a Moroccan young girl speaking and two Moroccan men reacting (one main subject, one interviewer).	Young girl speaks in English. Man pretends he "can't hear her well" (feigning deafness to mask lack of understanding). Punchline: Man says, "bring me a Moroccan girl."	"خونا سطل" فالانجليزية "وكيقول فهمت" (Our brother is an idiot in English and says he understood) , with laughing emojis.	Humor/Mocking – uses humor to directly mock the man's linguistic failure and social awkwardness.	7,998 likes, 594 comments, and 38.8K shares.

This discourse uses comedy to strongly support traditional gender roles. The jokes rely on a visual trick: they show a woman succeeding (in sports or intellectual tasks), only to immediately "cancel out" her success with a punchline that sends her back to the kitchen. When audiences widely share and laugh at these posts, they are normalizing the idea that women's efforts outside the home are temporary failures. On a wider scale, the jokes reinforce the belief that a woman's true place is the private home. They also add a new social pressure on men, suggesting that not having important skills, like knowing English, makes them look inadequate.

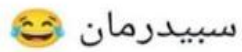
## Commentaires



Répondre



Répondre



Répondre Voir la traduction



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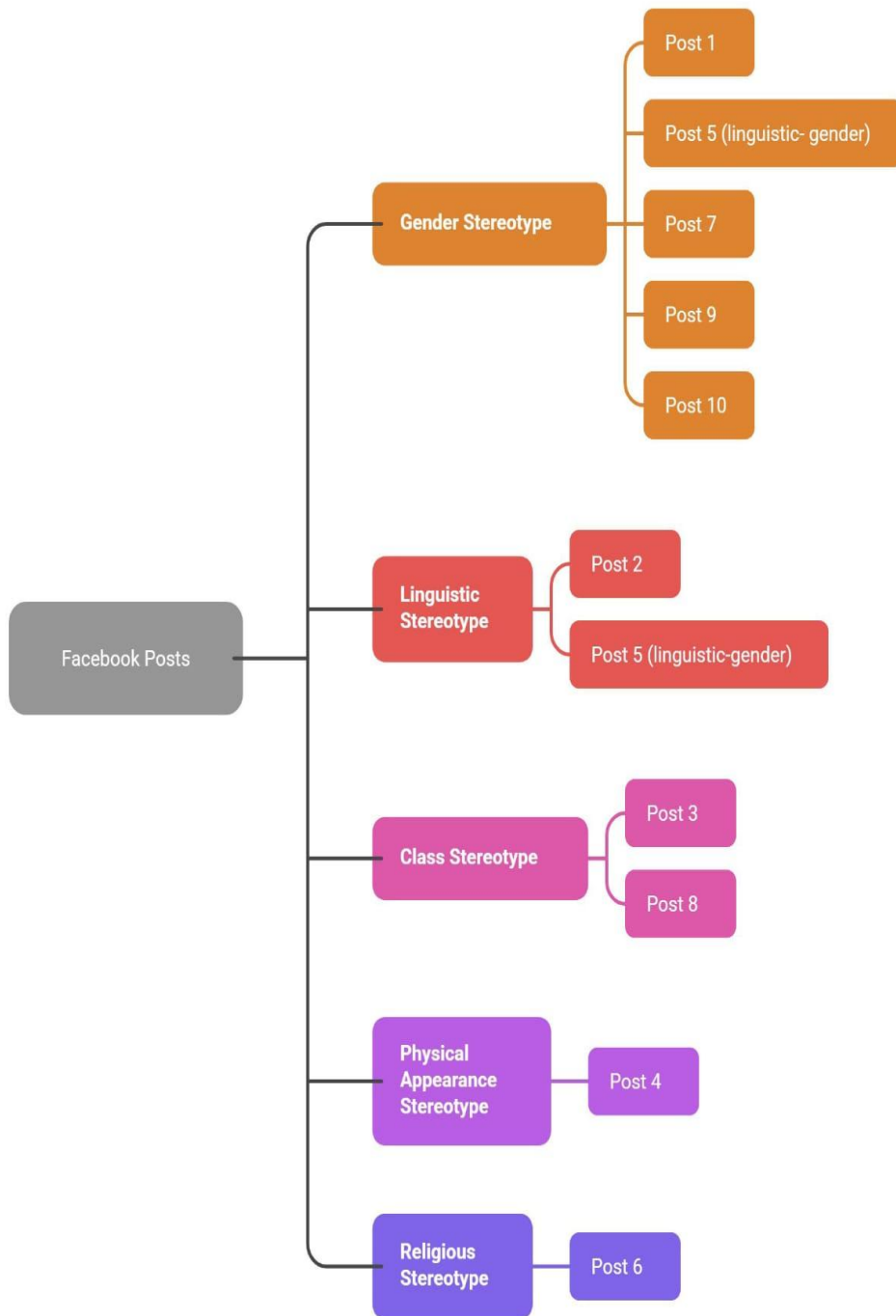
Répondre



Figure 3.

*Post 5 comments*

4.2. Facebook



**Figure 4.**

*Stereotypes on Facebook*

#### 4.2.1 Gender stereotypes

**Table 4.**

##### *Gender stereotypes*

Post ID	theme	Visual elements	Linguistic elements	captions	tone	Audience engagement
1	Gender and Authority in Politics	Visual Setup: A split-screen showing a female session chair ( <i>ra'isat al-jalasa</i> ) speaking from the podium (wearing a headscarf and mask) above, and a male politician (the speaker) looking confused or dismissive below	Spoken Dialogue: The male politician replies to the chair's interruption with the phrase: <i>أش كتقول هاذي</i> (What is she saying!?). This phrase is considered gender-based and disrespectful in Moroccan Darija when used in this context	“شلاتقول هاذي” (What is she saying!?) and “البرلماني السيمو علام” (Simo, What a funny politician!), using the gendered phrase as the highlight	Mocking	534 comments and 708 shares

5	Regional Accent	A female politician (dark clothes, long hair) speaking from a podium; visual cuts to male politicians reacting	Session chair mentions “16 minutes.” Female politician uses the Northern pronunciation “عشرين” (for twenty). Male Politicians’ Reaction: Men comically exaggerate offers of time: “I will give her one hour,” “I will give her three,” “I will give her my life.”	“لشمالية فاش” “كتخدم” (The Northern woman gets a job), accompanied by a “laughing clown” logo. Caption: “تشبع ضحك” (Fill yourself with laughter), followed by multiple laughing emojis.	Mocking/Humorous Exaggeration	22k likes, 976 comments, and 2k shares
7	Gender and Malicious Power	An actress is in traditional, earthy-colored clothing (dark brown/green), a hooded cloak/hat, and an exaggerated, menacing facial expression (the “witch” caricature)	“فاش كنتقولها لي” “فجهديك ديريه، هي” (When you say to her: do your best to take revenge of me) “Rekkouch!” - a character name, often associated with a strong or malicious personality)	Humorous/Cultural Reference; the humor relies entirely on the audience’s instant recognition of the actress as the ‘witch’ character and the association of women (specifically, this character) with malicious power.	0	10k likes, 62 comments, and 707 shares
9	Gender Roles and Marital Power	Two men are seen trying to hide: one wearing a light blue/green Jellaba and a white scarf, and	“رجال ليسو قفطان” “خافين من العصا” (Men wearing Caftans, afraid that their wives might beat them)	laughing emojis	Humorous; the humor is based on the visible humiliation of the men adopting a	9k, 219 comments, and 482 shares

		the other covered entirely in a light-colored cloth/sheet (mimicking women's covering)			disguise to escape their wives' physical threat	
10	Domestic Violence & Gender Roles	Visual Setup: A man and woman standing close in an indoor, home setting; the man is wearing a patterned sweater, and the woman is in a dark blue/green dress. The scene visually shifts from verbal conflict to physical aggression (battering)	Dialogue/Plot Point: The woman is shown as talkative and belittling the man. The man changes from being kind/submissive to violent (battering her) <sup>2</sup>	رشيد صدم المغاربة "كاملين اليوم" (Rachid shocked all Moroccans today). Caption: Mentions "بردلي" (He cooled my heart regarding her /He satisfied my anger regarding her). <sup>3</sup>	Serious/Controversial; presented as drama but used for humor/shock value in the reel format. The caption's tone validates the violence as justified relief.	6k likes, 66 comments, and 36 shares

This combined category of posts reveals a pervasive structure of gendered power relations (Foucault/Bourdieu), which is systematically reproduced through both linguistic and visual communication. The Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach highlights two core, opposing ideologies: the incompetent/trivialized female authority (Posts 1, 5) and the controlling/malicious woman (Posts 7, 9, 10). At the micro-level, Posts 1 and 5 use gender-based rhetorical devices like the phrase "أش كتقول هاندي" (What is she saying!?) and the feminization of a northern accent, respectively, to linguistically dismiss the women's political speech and reduce their symbolic capital. Social Semiotics reinforces this through the analysis of modality: in Post 7, the actress's low-modality appearance (earthy clothing, menacing expression) acts as a powerful visual signifier for the stereotype of the female witch/sorceress, visually classifying the woman as a source of dark, manipulative power. Post 10, concerning domestic violence, leverages a high-modality (naturalistic) visual setup - a realistic indoor home setting - to frame the man's violence as a justified and relatable response to the woman's 'talkativeness', thereby normalizing violence within the comedic meso-level of audience consumption. his discourse operates at the macro-level of CDA by reinforcing the ideology that male authority is both necessary and fragile, using humor (Post 9, where men hide in women's clothing) to simultaneously mock men who lose power and vilify the women who gain it, maintaining the patriarchal status quo.

<sup>2</sup> Disclaimer: This content is analysed as harmful and legally prohibited behaviour

<sup>3</sup> This caption frames domestic violence as "justified relief". This is contrary to Islamic ethics (Quran 4:19; hadith on kindness to spouses)



**Figure 5.**

*Post 10 comments about gender-based stereotype*

The comments on Post 10 demonstrate how the meso-level of consumption transforms severe gender conflict (including violence) into normalized entertainment. The audience's polarized responses ("she deserves it" / "he deserves it") and the widespread use of laughing emojis indicate that the conflict itself, rather than the violence, has been simplified into a comedic trope where blame is arbitrarily assigned. This engagement, where viewers treat the characters as merely figures in a fictional fight, serves to diffuse the seriousness of the original macro-level gender power relations (Foucault) that structure domestic life. By failing to condemn the underlying aggression and instead assigning blame for the *conflict* - the micro-level action - the audience reinforces the overall ideology that domestic strife is inherently cyclical, deserved, and, most alarmingly, a justifiable source of humor.

#### 4.2.2 Linguistic stereotype

**Table 5.**

*Linguistic stereotypes posts*

Post ID	theme	Linguistic elements	captions	tone	Audience engagement
2	Regional Linguistic Difference	Dialogue in two distinct Moroccan Darija varieties, with one (Doukkala) being the specific target of the stereotype (described as harsh, tough, and backward)	"دكالي ملي كيهضر" (a Doukkali is speaking), often accompanied by two green heart emojis. The word "دكالة" (Doukkala), followed by many laughing emojis.	Humorous/Mocking	19k likes, 218 comments, and 639 shares
5	Regional Accent	Session chair mentions "16 minutes." Female politician uses the Northern pronunciation "عشرين" (for twenty). Male Politicians' Reaction: Men comically exaggerate offers of time: "I will give her one hour," "I will give her three," "I will give her my life."	"الشمالية فاش كتخدم" (when a Northern woman gets a job this is what happens), accompanied by a "laughing clown" logo. Caption: "تشبع ضحك" (Fill yourself with laughter), followed by multiple laughing emojis.	Mocking/Humorous Exaggeration	22k likes, 976 comments, and 2k shares

This category focuses on linguistic difference as a primary source of comedy, operating at the micro-level of CDA by explicitly targeting specific dialectal phonetics and vocabulary as inferior. Post 2 uses the Doukkala dialect's perceived "harshness" as the comedic device, while Post 5 targets the Northern accent's perceived "cuteness" or "femininity." This linguistic marking creates a hierarchy of cultural capital (Bourdieu) by suggesting that certain dialects are aesthetically or functionally inferior. Social Semiotics contributes by examining how the interactive participants (Post 5's male audience vs. female speaker) visually frame the accent: the men's exaggerated, objectifying reactions ("I will give her my life") act as visual classifiers, reducing the female politician from an authority figure to an object of charming distraction. At the macro-level of CDA, both posts reinforce power relations (Foucault) by validating and perpetuating the ideology that linguistic identity is tied to social prestige; they use humor to normalize regional and gendered stigma, transforming dialectal difference into a source of ridicule that reaffirms a central linguistic standard.

### 4.2.3 Class stereotype

**Table 6.** *Class stereotypes posts*

Post ID	theme	Visual elements	Linguistic elements	captions	tone	Audience engagement
3	Class Difference / Social Hierarchy	the man's exaggerated facial expressions — the woman's superiority and the man's confusion; clear lighting and framing that emphasize reactions	Code-switching (Arabic + English); complex English term "socio-political comprehension" contrasted with the man's simple "Who?"	"فرق الطبقات" ("Difference of social classes")	Humorous	30K likes, 421 comments, 1K shares
8	Classism and Hygiene	A woman (long dark hair, glasses) speaking directly to the camera; setting is a modern, indoor space (presumably a video blog/vlog)	—	surprised/shocked emojis.	Mocking; the tone uses public discussion of intimate hygiene to ridicule the poor, implying their practices are backward or sub-standard	1k, 879 comments of controversy/debate, 20 shares

This category utilizes comedy to reinforce class-based ideologies of superiority and inferiority, heavily drawing upon the concept of cultural capital (Bourdieu). Post 3 applies CDA's micro-level analysis through code-switching and vocabulary — contrasting the woman's complex, English-laced jargon (e.g., "socio-political comprehension") with the man's simple, confused response. This linguistic device marks the common person as intellectually inferior to the educated elite. Social Semiotics emphasizes the visual classification in Post 3, using the man's exaggerated, confused facial expressions and the woman's composed demeanor to visually code the represented participants into clear, hierarchical social roles, reinforcing the elite's intellectual superiority. Post 8, concerning hygiene, operates at the macro-level of CDA by connecting a seemingly private act (toilet hygiene) to a public power relation (Foucault), framing the traditional practice of the poor as a sign of cultural deficiency and ignorance.

#### 4.2.4 Physical appearance stereotype

**Table 7.**  
*Physical appearance stereotypes posts*

Post ID	theme	Visual elements	Linguistic elements	captions	tone	Audience engagement
4	Physical Appearance/Stature	A line of people where all individuals are tall and muscular (various colors of shirts: green, blue, yellow); one man of very short stature stands out in the middle, wearing a white and gray striped shirt; the tall people are arguing/gesturing/quarrelling (the short man is visibly yelling but ignored)	Dialogue (from the video): "انتو مش عايشين في الدنيا لوحدكم" (You are not living in the world by yourselves).	Emojis include laughing/crying face	Humorous/Mocking	72k likes, 876 comments, and 865 shares

The post on short stature primarily uses Social Semiotics through its visual composition to reinforce an ideology that physical size equates to symbolic capital and social authority. The scene's visual classification structure (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) pits a group of tall, muscular, and dominant represented participants against a single man of short stature who is physically and symbolically marginalized within the frame. His short stature functions as a low-modality marker for social importance. At the micro-level of CDA, his linguistic frustration ("You are not living in the world by yourselves") confirms his social invalidation, demonstrating a breakdown in the expected social interaction. This mechanism operates at the macro-level of CDA by normalizing the power relation (Foucault) where physical appearance dictates who is visible and who can command social space, using the comic relief of the man's invisibility to validate the social stigma against those who fail to meet the norm of physical dominance.

### 5. Conclusion

This analysis explores how humor shared on Instagram and Facebook in the Arab digital space functions as a subtle, yet disguised, mechanism normalizing stereotypes. Our combined approach - using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA), and social semiotics - indicates that specific markers of modality, alongside visual, auditory, and linguistic signals, appear to legitimize deeply ingrained power structures related to class, gender, values, etc. It seems that this comedic approach often softens social division among users, allowing harmful ideologies to spread in an environment where serious critique is often absent.

Interestingly, audience engagement itself introduces a paradox: even when users resist these stereotypes, their very act of engagement may amplify the visibility of the damaging content they are attempting to counter. These results broadly track with similar conclusions drawn in prior work (e.g., Jalwal, 2025; Mukherjee, 2025). Now, if we accept that these persistent stereotypes truly affect users' daily experiences, the logical next step is to explore potential solutions, much like the solutions proposed by Sharma & Kumar, (2023).

However, we must point out a limitation. Despite the significance of these detailed qualitative findings, relying on a sample of only 20 posts across both platforms likely means the selection is not truly representative of the broader issue of stereotypes on social media. Second, while the corpus draws from both Facebook and Instagram, the study does not offer a systematic platform-by-platform comparison of humor strategies, engagement patterns, or discursive features. Both of these limitations point to directions for future research: a larger corpus and a study design explicitly structured to compare platform-specific patterns would allow for richer and more generalizable conclusions.

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