

Abstract

This paper examines the phenomenon of controversial humor on the social networking site Facebook. Here there exist several entertainment pages, dedicated to the purpose of publishing and sharing comic material; most notably jokes in the form of humorous images. Sometimes, some of these jokes become a source of conflicts and a target of criticism by certain Facebook users, who consider them unacceptable. The present study therefore aims at examining the characteristics of these jokes, to help shed light on what is today considered inappropriate in the sphere of humor. For this purpose, an analysis of jokes and comments on them, left by their readers, was conducted on several Facebook pages. This research revealed the fact that jokes about current, medially covered disasters were the biggest source of controversies. Further inquiries into their nature then showed that aversion to this type of humor cannot be explained by applying superiority theory (contrary to certain other types of humor; for example ethnic or sexist jokes). The source of conflicts about disaster jokes is therefore seen in the clash of disparate views, held by Facebook users about the nature of norms, governing what is and what isn't acceptable to joke about. The conclusion to this paper then suggests possible directions for future research, which could help to better understand the processes that lead to the creation of these norms.