

Digital Humor in Memes- how linguistic and psychological humor categories vary across 5 generations and gender

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Saving The World In 1944



Saving The World In 2020



Yo, fingiendo estar congelada en mi clase virtual cuando el profesor me pregunta algo.

[Translate Tweet](#)



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1. Memes in the pandemic:

Negative social aspects:

- “a human right crisis”; implementation of new technologies that affect privacy
- Change of civil rights (lockdown, mask wearing, social distancing, testing) (Wintour, 2020)

Positive social aspects:

- Covid 19 forces a re-imagination of social life:
 - Digitalization of working world, education and social life
- “The virus is a portal, gateway between one world and the next” (Roy, 2020)

2. Pragmatics and Memes

- Memes share features of jokes often they includes a set-up, an incongruity and a resolution and overlapping scripts (or schemas) (Attardo 2001)
- Often, they represent a re-entextualization of visual arguments (Wiggins 2019)
- The constituent parts of an utterance, as well as facts or information present in the discourse situation, lead to the successful interpretation of an utterance (Evans 1982, 69)
- Context is referred to as assumed common ground- the set of background facts, assumptions and beliefs presupposed to exist in the mental model of the participants (Schiffrin 1995)
- Meme as communicative act and mediated action (Jones and Norris, 2005; Vásquez & Aslan (2021)

Mememes in discourse

- Memes can be viewed as a genre of communication
- Human agency in the production and dissemination of memes (Duranti, 1997; Wiggins, 2019)
- Construction of identities within a social system which needs digital technology
- Memes are personalized and situated in specific social contexts and they re-create and communicate certain stances towards real lived experiences.
- These experiences differ across cultures and generational groups.
- The „digital communicative competence“ varies across generations.

2.2 Humor and Age

Previous research on the topic:

Feng et al. (2020) investigated the relationship between humor styles and subjective well-being and the moderating roles of culture and age in a large scale meta-analysis.

According to their results, neither cultural background nor age moderate the relation between humor styles and psychological health

Bischetti et al. (2021) focused on studying Covid-19 humor appreciation in social media communication.

They found out that “[c]ompared to young and middle-aged groups, more mature adults judged Non-Covid 19 humor as funnier and Covid-19 humor as more aversive” as age is one of the Covid-19 risk factors.

2.3 Dark Humor

- Memes involve some kind of linguistic creativity and carry negative evaluations (Dynel, 2018).
- The aim of dark humor is invariably to convey trenchant criticism while potentially amusing non-targeted message receivers. The linguistic creativity of sarcastic utterances is immense. (Dynel, 2014, 2018; Partington, 2006)
- Dark humor commentaries often communicate ideologies about the sociopolitical situation (Dynel, 2018).
- Dynel et al. study confirms that 'for those more distant from the event', rather than being a coping strategy, dark humor 'might provide very different pleasures' (Kuipers, 2002: 452).



"your 20s are going to be your best primes years!"
this pandemic:



(1) German:
"The Coronavirus won't stay long!"
Coronavirus:
(5) Lebanon:
Transl. Arabic: You have to live with Corona!

(6) Russian
Transl. Russian:
„This is the world after we won over Covid-19
And in the meantime Covid-20 be like“

(7) India
Translation Malayalam "
After sanitizing my hands and keeping social distance from everyone, I got inside a train!"

(4) Bangladesh
Translation Bangla
„Corona is like a wife
You think you can manage her but you will not“
(8) German:
(on the grave) regular semester start
Coronavirus

My classmates on Instagram



My classmates on Zoom




7:23 pm · 16 Mar 2020 · [Twitter Web App](#)

69.8K Retweets 220.3K Likes

Psychological Humor	Meme example	Definition	Translation
Affiliative		To maintain and enhance interpersonal relationships (Martin et al. 2003)	
Self defeating		Self- deprecation (Martin et al. 2003)	When you are working from home and you pressed video instead of audio
Self-enhancing		To augment one self, adaptive humor style (Martin et al. 2003)	
Aggressive		To enhance oneself at the expense of others maladaptive humor (Martin et al. 2003)	

2.5 Linguistic Humor categories (Vásquez 2019)

Linguistic category	Definition
Creative reappropriation	Taking elements from established contexts and weaving them into a new expression (Miner, 2016 in Vasquez, 2020: 28)
Incongruity resolution	A juxtaposition of two incongruous elements that invites readers to “recognize this contrast and activate a process of inference...” (Alamán and Rueda, 2016: 41)
Voicing	Imitating and reproducing recognizable linguistic features in order to “voice” particular individuals. (Vazquez, 2020: 9)
Ambient affiliation	Conviviality, shared cultural knowledge (Varis and Blommaert 2015)
Parody	Voicing someone with a different voice
Exaggeration	The representation of something as more extreme or dramatic than it really is
Paronymy	The relationship between words partly identical in form and/or meaning, which may cause confusion in reception or production
Polysemy	The coexistence of many possible meanings for a word or phrase
Personification	The attribution of a personal nature or human characteristics to something non-human
Register variation	Inserting a different style of language into a text which is not typically associated with the given text and/or context (Ruiz-Gurillo, 2016 in Vasquez, 2020: 7)

Humor category Linguistic- Digital basiert	Example meme	Definition	Translation
Incongruity Resolution		A juxtaposition of two incongruous elements that invites readers to "recognize this contrast and activate a process of inference..." (Alamán and Rueda, 2016: 41)	Jens Spahn (Minister of Health) announces a vaccination offer for all until summer. Seven days Mallorca (Half pension) incl. vaccination and a Welcome for Sangria 499 €!
Creative Reappropriation		Taking elements from established contexts and weaving them into a new expression (Miner, 2016 in Vasquez, 2020: 28)	The battle of Aldi ca 2020 n. Chr.
Personification	<p>"your 20s are going to be your best primes years!" this pandemic:</p> 	The attribution of a personal nature or human characteristics to something non-human	

3. Methodology

:

Variationist Multimodal Pragmatic Approach (Du Bois 2021)

1. H1: Smart phone communication via memes with multimodal Covid-19 humor varies among different sexes and generations.

Convenience Sample: Around 250 students submitted 3-6 Covid-19 memes that were sent from different generations (Dimock, M. 2019 Pew Research Center) and sexes, which resulted in almost 800 memes including their demographic data, such as age, date sent, gender.

1. **Generation Z** (1996-2010)
2. **Generation Y** (1980-1995)
3. **Generation X** (1965-1979)
4. **Baby Boomers** (1946-1964)
5. **Silent Generation** (1928-1945)

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Psychological

- Affiliative
- Aggressive
- Self-enhancing
- Self-defeating

Linguistic

- Incongruity Resolution
- Creative Reappropriation
- Personification
- Voicing
- Country-based
- Exaggeration...

HUMOR

Memes
Cartoons



Generation Z

Generation Y

Generation X

Baby Boomers

Silent Generation



Example 2: Meme From Baby Boomer

MAXQDA2020 Start Import Codes Memos Variablen Analyse Mixed Methods Visual Tools Reports Stats MAXDictio 67% Do. 8:05 PM Dr. Inke Du Bois

/Users/Inke/Desktop/GENERATIONCovid19HumorProject_ALL_23.02work.mx20 - MAXQDA Analytics Pro 2020 (Release 20.0.8)

Start Import Codes Memos Variablen Analyse Mixed Methods Visual Tools Reports Stats MAXDictio

Texte, PDFs, Tabellen | Transkripte | Fokusgruppen-Transkripte | Bilder | Audios | Videos | Survey-Daten | MAXApp-Projekt | Twitter Daten | YouTube Daten | Web Collector Daten | Strukturierter Text | Dokumente aus Excel-Tabelle | Dokument erstellen | Text umwandeln

Dokument-Browser: DallasGroupsatRisk

Humor types\Sexist

English Translation:
If you recognize him you belong to the risk group.
STAY AT HOME!!!

Code: Age\Age Sender\Baby Boomers

Kommentar	Dokumentgru...	Dokumentname	Code	An
		RamadanOutfit...	Age\Age Sende...	12
	Test	FacemaskTan	Age\Age Sende...	11
		FrenchTextBoy...	Age\Age Sende...	34
		VirusintheMetr...	Age\Age Sende...	91
	Test	MerkelAndCoro...	Age\Age Sende...	41
		DallasGroupsat...	Age\Age Sende...	52
		ShiningLearnin...	Age\Age Sende...	62
		NoPersonalHyg...	Age\Age Sende...	67
		ToiletPaperasA...	Age\Age Sende...	79
	Test	NiceDaysAtHo...	Age\Age Sende...	11
	Test	AttackingPostl...	Age\Age Sende...	71
	Test	SnowFromGove...	Age\Age Sende...	81
	Test	SantaAndGrinch	Age\Age Sende...	11

0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | Einfache Segment-Suche (Oder-Kombination von Codes)

Example 3: Meme from Generation Z

The screenshot displays the MAXQDA Analytics Pro 2020 software interface. The main window is titled "Dokument-Browser: SpongeBobQuarantine" and shows a meme titled "My 4 moods during quarantine" with four panels of SpongeBob in different states: looking sad, looking at a refrigerator, looking tired, and looking angry. The interface includes a menu bar at the top with options like "Start", "Import", "Codes", "Memos", "Variablen", "Analyse", "Mixed Methods", "Visual Tools", "Reports", "Stats", and "MAXDictio". Below the menu bar is a toolbar with various icons for document management and analysis. On the left side, there is a "Liste der codierten Segmente" (List of coded segments) table with the following data:

Code	Count
KatnissEverdeenTheHungerGames...	12
JetskiQuarantineBeforeAfter	12
ForgettingTheMask	10
ManWithChartsFear	14
ElmoGrandpaSesameStreet	22
SpongeBobMonster	0
CoronaBeerNameChange	9
ClassicalSculptureToiletRoll	10
GynecologistHomeoffice	14
HandSanitizerGlitter	15
SquidwardTentaclesGravePlans	25
MonkeyPuppetDailyLifestyle	13
StickmanQuestionAnswerCheering	0
SpongeBobQuarantine	15

Below this table is a "Liste der Codingsystem" (List of coding systems) table:

Code	Count
Codesystem	6407
Covid Humor Project	1100
Humor types psychological	536
Humor types	0
Incongruity resolution	231
Creative Reappropriation	247
Voicing	155
Personification	80
Cartoon Character	28
Ambient Affiliation	66
Exaggeration	52
Country based	42
Parody	32

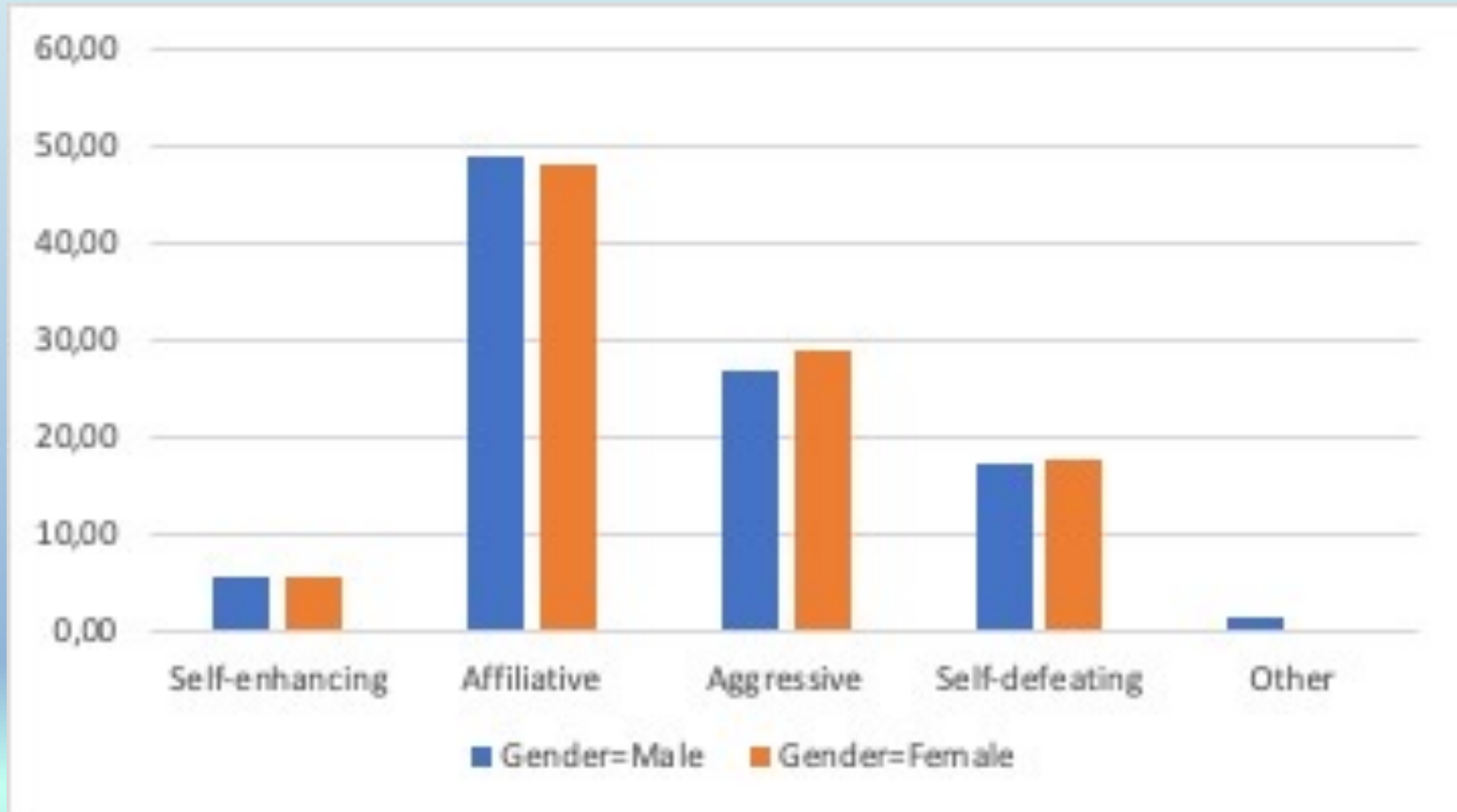
The main workspace shows the meme image with a search bar containing "Humor types(Cartoon Character)". Below the image, there is a "Liste der codierten Segmente" (List of coded segments) section with the text: "Aktivieren Sie Dokumente und Codes, um codierte Segmente zu listen ...". The bottom status bar indicates "28 codierte Segmente (aus 24 Dokumenten, 0 Doku".

3.1. Hypotheses

Ho: There is no relationship between the generations (age) and psychological and linguistic humor types.

Ho: There is no relationship between the sexes and psychological and linguistic humor types.

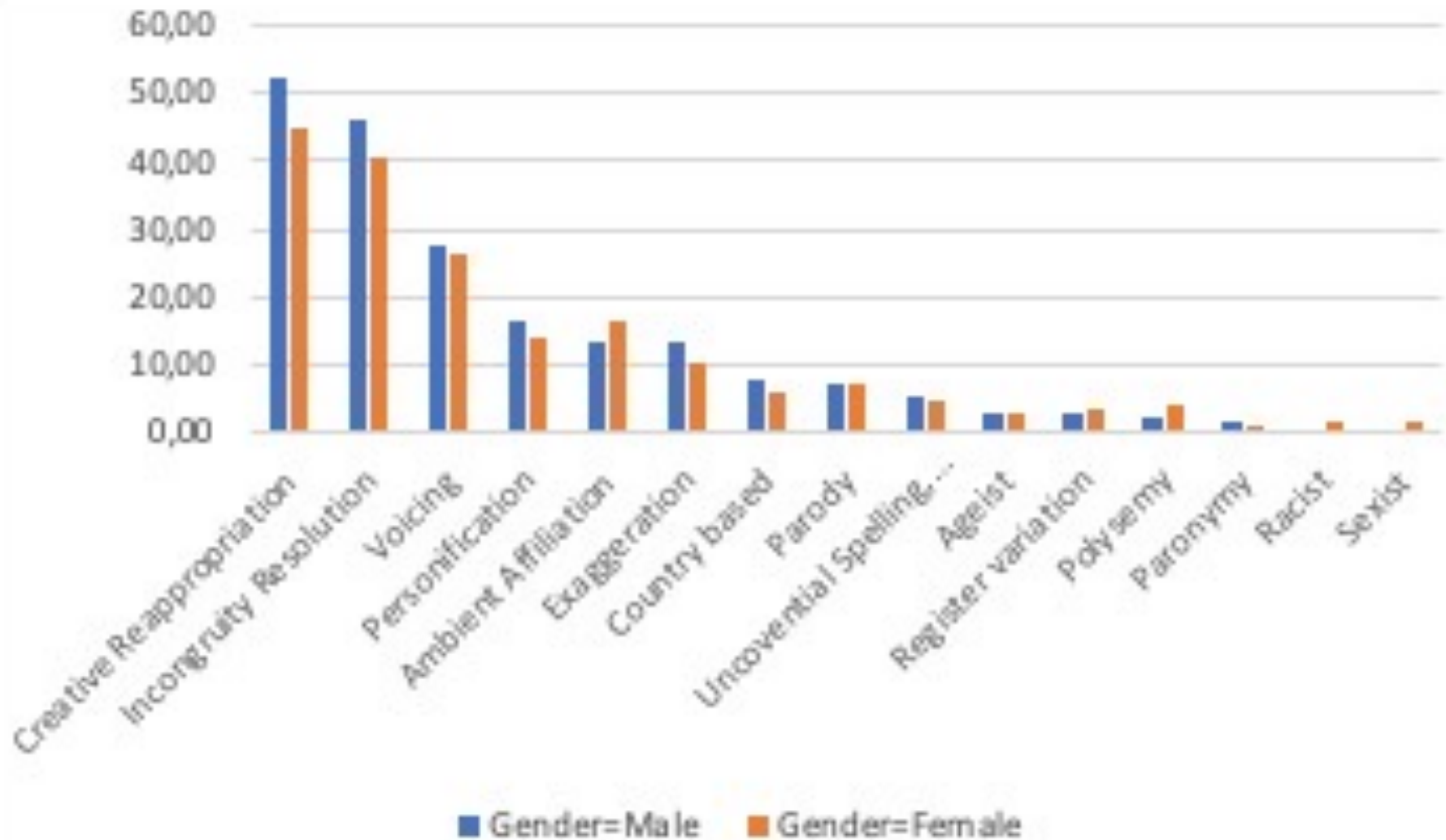
4. Sex and Humor Types*



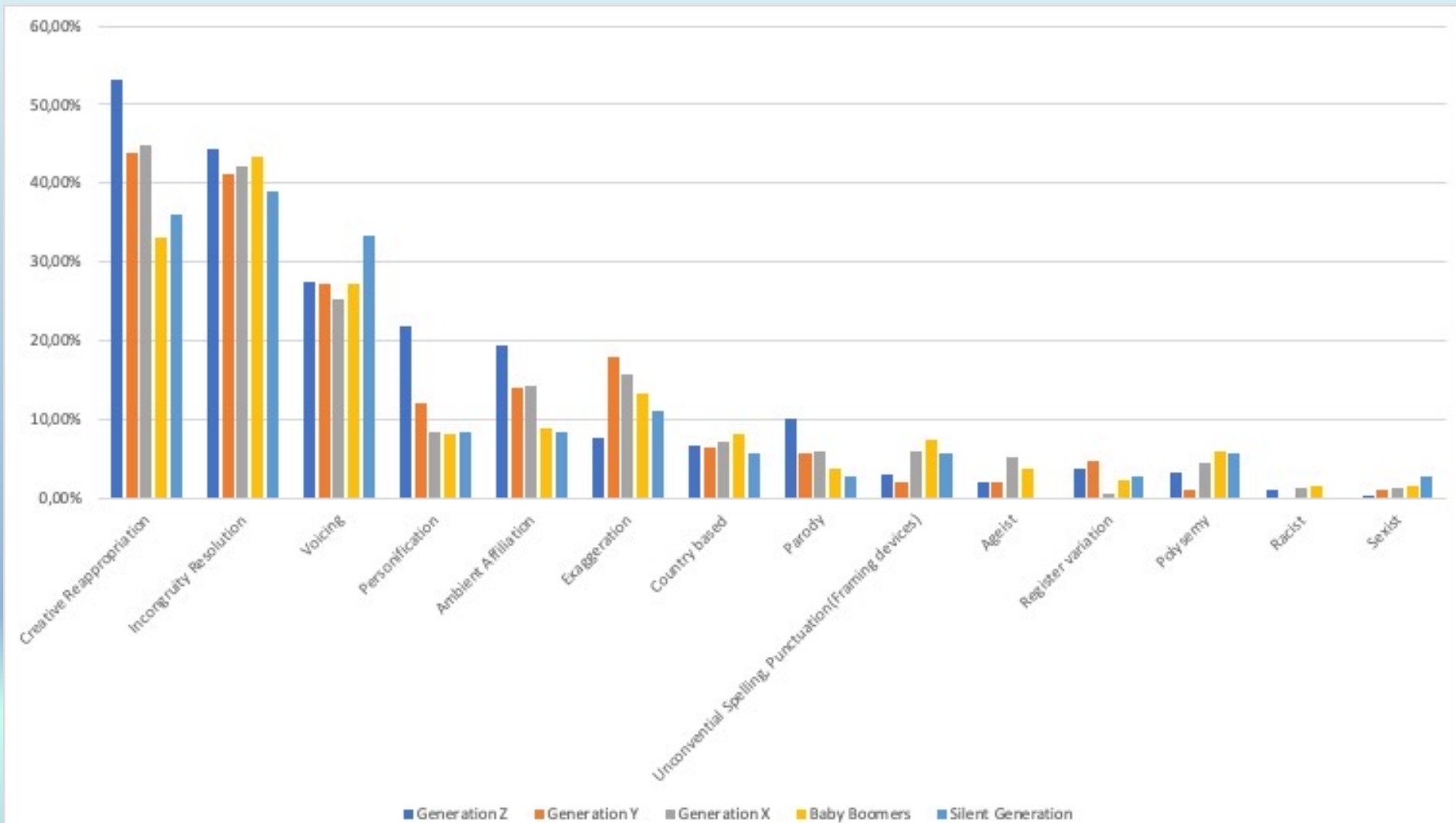
* There were no enbi or trans* people among the senders

Digital linguistic humor	males	females	total
Creative Reappropriation	50,5% (198)	45% (240)	438
Incongruity Resolution	43,4% (170)	38,1% (203)	373
Voicing	25,8% (101)	25,3% (135)	236
Personification	16,3% (64)	15,9% (85)	149
Ambient Affiliation	13,3% (52)	16,3% (87)	139
Exaggeration	14,8% (58)	11,3% (60)	118
Country based	7,7% (30)	6,0% (32)	62
Parody	6,6% (26)	6,9% (37)	63
Spelling, Punctuation (Framing devices)	4,6% (18)	4,3% (23)	41
Discriminatory: Ageist/Sexist/Racist	4,6% (18)	5,1% (27)	45
Language Play: Polysemy and Register variation	6,4% (25)	8,3% (44)	69
SUMME	759	971	1730
N = Dokumente	392	533	925

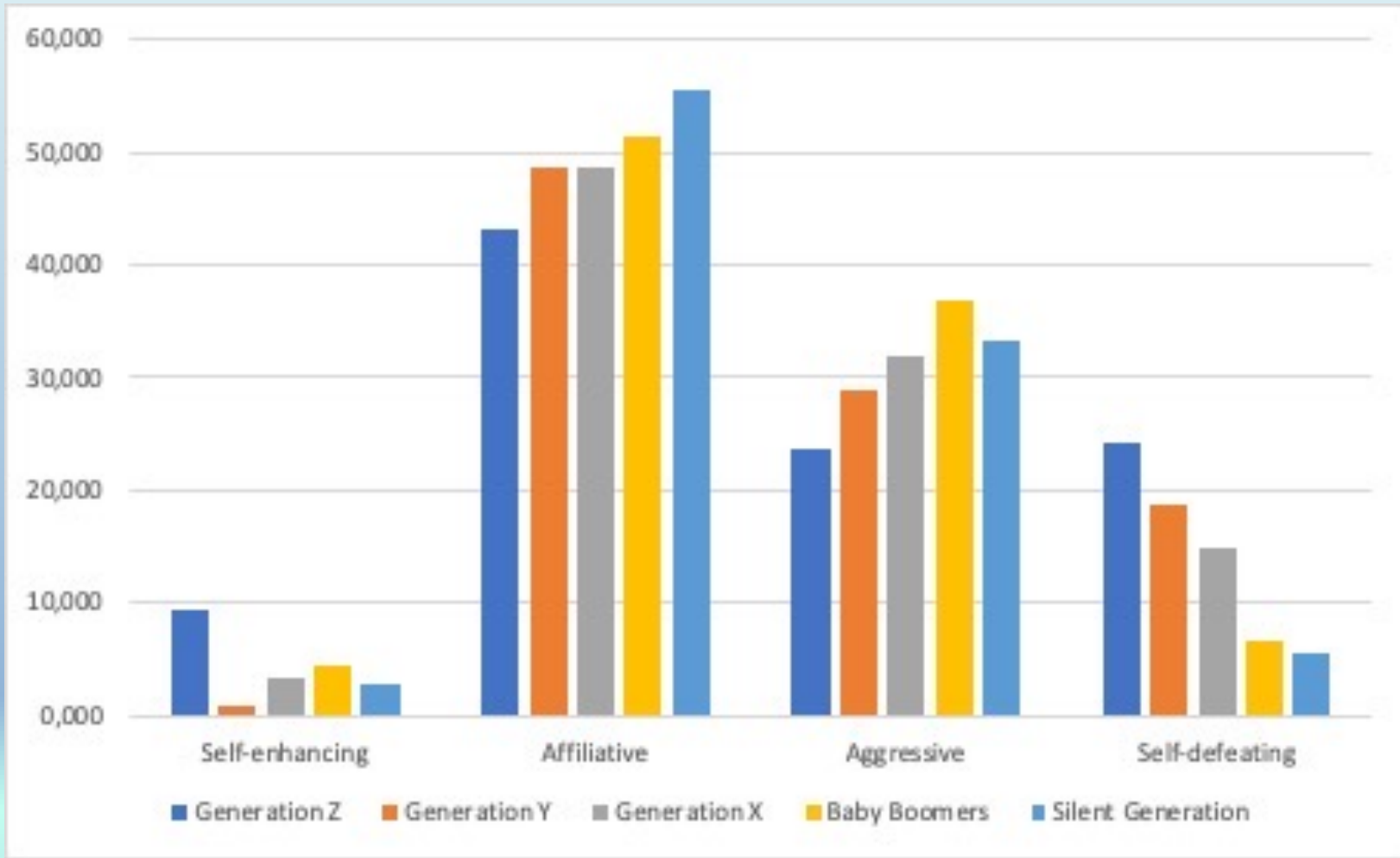
Sex and Linguistic Humor Types



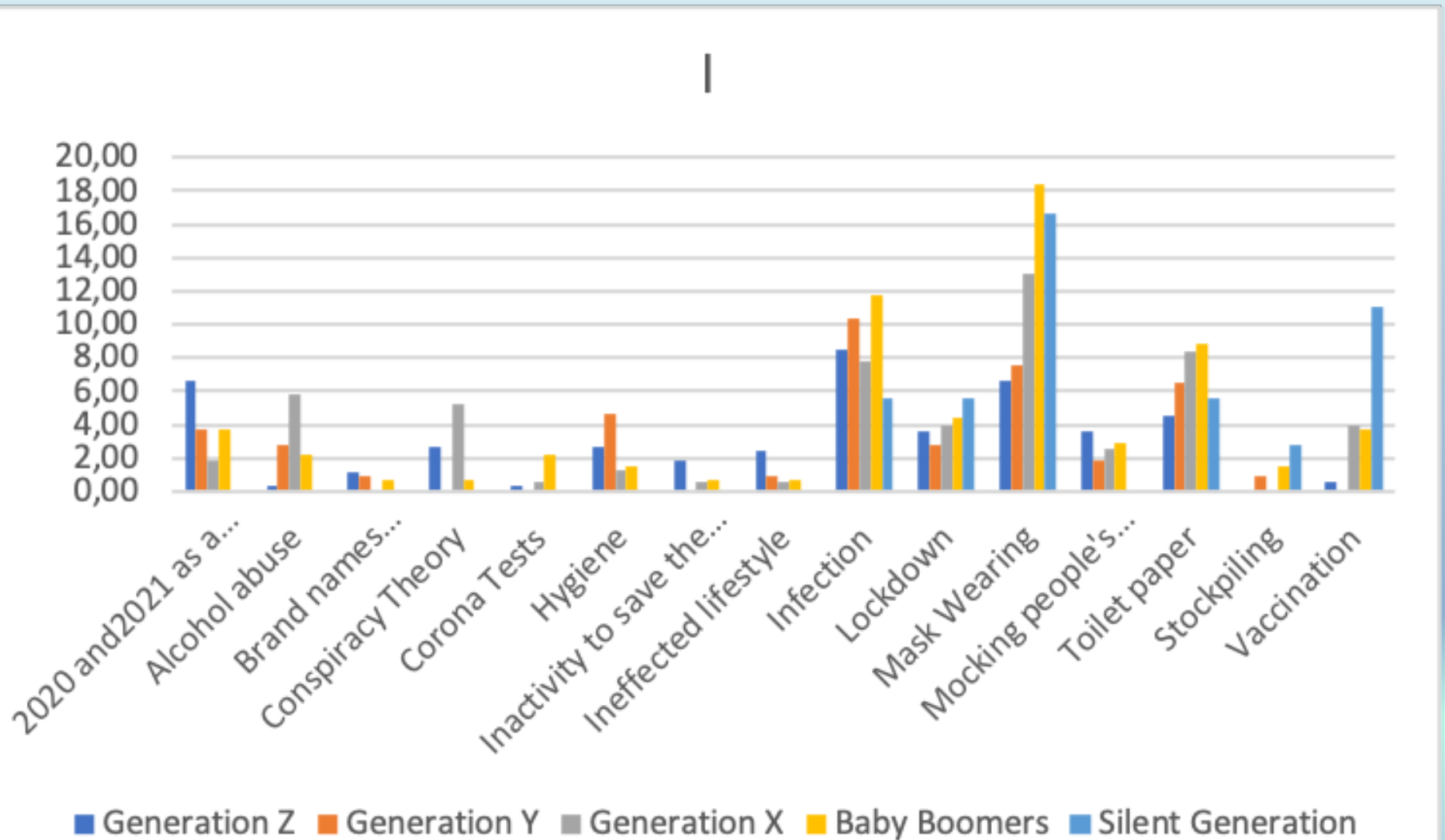
4. Generations and Humor Types



Generations and Psychological Humor



Generations and Covid-19 Topics in Memes



4. Discussion

- The generations differ in both psychological and linguistic humor types.
- Generation Z uses more self-defeating and self-enhancing humor.
- The Baby boomers use more aggressive humor than the other generations.
- All generations use affiliative humor in Covid-19 memes the most.

4. Discussion Generational Humor

- These findings show that there are significant differences in the psychological humor categories in the usage of memes across generations.
- Baby Boomers and the Silent Generation used more affiliative humor in the Covid-19 memes
- The linguistic humor types differ significantly
- Generation Z applied personification and creative reappropriation as humor type significantly more than Baby Boomers.

4. Discussion Generational Humor

- Further, among the young generation, there were references to voicing, creative reappropriation applied to video games, cartoon characters and Netflix series which are unknown to older generations.
- All generations shared memes and image macros with incongruity resolution as humor type.

4. Discussion Humor and the Sexes

- Female and male sexes (there was no enbi or trans* gender sender among this group) did not differ significantly in the linguistic humor types they used when sending memes and image macros.
- However, the male senders used more varied linguistic and multimodal humor types than the female senders.

4. Discussion Covid-19 topics

- The Meme topics varied among the generations:
- Toilet paper and mask wearing memes were used more by the older generations and less by Generation Z and Y.
- 2020 and 2021 as disaster year was mostly the topic by Generation Z, alcohol abuse by Generation X.
- Personal hygiene memes were mostly used by Generations Y and Z.
- Conspiracy theory memes were mostly sent by Generation X and second by Generation Z.

5. Conclusion

- This study sheds light on the fact that the kind of humor applied in memes in social media apps varies across generations.
- The most striking findings are that Baby Boomers used more affiliative humor, Generation X aggressive humor and the Millennials applied mostly self-defeating humor. The silent generation did not apply neither self-defeating nor self-enhancing humor.
- Also the Covid-19 topics in the memes varied significantly among the generational groups, e.g. mask wearing, vaccination and toilet paper memes were disseminated more among the older generations.

5. Conclusion

- Generation Z used more varied linguistic and multimodal humor strategies than the older generations.
- This hints towards their higher “multimodal digital competence” or wider use of social media
- This in turn explains why humor is not, or only partially or less responded to by members of different generational groups and in some cases by different sexes.

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