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## IMPACT OF HUMOROUS ADVERTISEMENTS ON CUSTOMERS' BEHAVIOR

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**Abstract:** *Humor has a universal language. It doesn't need degrees in obscure languages, hardly ever in Clinical Psychology and it is one of the few devices used to make people smile and think at the same time. Humor has been widely used in advertising. However, while humor has attained popularity in advertising, its use is continuously being debated. The reason for this debate is that there are a number of both positive and negative effects which can be attributed to the use of humor.*

*The purpose of this research paper is to answer following questions:-*

- a) The impact of gender & age on the degree of affection to the ads.*
- b) The effect of humor appeal in Ads, on the consumer's buying decision.*

*To develop the conclusions exploratory & descriptive research designs are used. Primary data are collected with the help of Focus group technique & questionnaire method & data is analyzed with the help of various statistical techniques.*

*The conclusions of this paper help in clarifying the dilemma of humorous advertisements.*

**Keywords:** *Humor, Appeal, Advertisement, Customer behavior, Buying decision etc.*

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## **INTRODUCTION:**

Advertising is one of the critical marketing variables which marketers use to differentiate products in a cluttered marketplace. In order to increase the effectiveness of advertising for a product, advertising messages should be unique and meaningful. This concurs with the von Restorff effect, which concludes that interference is minimized by the presentation of a unique item in a group of similar items. Companies have attempted to use many vehicles to create this differentiation effect. One such vehicle is the employment of humor.

In order to have a better understanding, we need to further explore the world of advertisements, the appeals used, the targeted decision making components and the effects of Ads on the targeted consumer as a whole.

There are two main components advertisers aim to effect; the affective component, where affective message strategies are applied by invoking feelings and trying to match them with the product or service offered in an effort to increase the likeability of the product, and also the cognitive components, where the Ad focuses on the attributes and benefits of the product, encouraging the consumer to buy it. Such components are affected by the leverage points in an Ad; these are the features in the Ad that helps the consumer transfer the advertised message into personal value.

In order to achieve that, over the years, advertisers have attempted a wide variety of advertising approaches, there are seven main ones; fear, humor, sex, music, rationality, emotions and scarcity. Advertisers use one or combine several of these appeals to ensure that their targeted audiences receive their message.

However, nowadays, humor appeal is being used extensively sometimes combined with others, but most of the time it is strong enough to be used solely. Humor in advertising constitutes billions of dollars in spending each year (Campbell et al. 44).

A variety of benefits have been suggested for humorous appeals including:

- 1) Humor attracts attention.
- 2) Humor can increase retention of the advertising message.
- 3) Credibility of the source can be enhanced with humor.
- 4) Attitude toward the ad can be enhanced with the use of humor.
- 5) Counter arguments may be minimized with the use of humor because it acts to distract the audience from making cognitive responses.



Furthermore, the popularity of humor is evident in the fact that 24.4% of television advertisements attempt to be humorous (Alden & Hoyer 29). However, while humor has attained popularity in advertising, its use is continuously being debated. The reason for this debate is that there are a number of both positive and negative effects which can be attributed to the use of humor. Throughout the literature of this paper, the debatable effect of this appeal is discussed.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW:**

There has been numerous researches proving that advertisement with humorous appeal can gain consumers likability. A strong positive correlation is also found between the degree of how well an advertisement is liked with the likability to the brand advertised (e.g., Gelb & Pickett, 1983; Haley & Baldinger, 1991; Weinberger & Campbell, 1991; Zhang, 1996). In short, adding humorous elements can enhance one's likability of an advertisement and eventually increase liking to the brand advertised.

### **DEFINING HUMOR**

Humor has been widely used in advertising. It has been suggested that 24.4% of prime time television advertising in the U.S. is intended to be humorous (Weinberger & Spott, 1989). Regarding to advertising budget, 10% to 30% out of the total expenditure of \$150 billion in the U.S. national media, is paid for the placement of advertisements that are having humorous content (Spotts, Weinberger & Parsons, 1997). Operationally, humor is defined, according to Sternthal and Craig (1973), as "heightened arousal, smiles, and laughter exhibited by an audience in response to a particular message" (p.13). Moreover, humor can be defined in terms of how well the audience perceive the level of humor and it can be administered by pencil and paper

test to measure how the audience perceive a particular message is humorous and funny or not.

### **HUMOR IN ADVERTISING AND ITS EFFECT**

The reason why humor has been widely used in advertising is due to its power of create liking towards the advertisement by from the consumer. It has been found by Weingerber and Spotts (1989) that advertising practitioners coming from the U.S. and U.K. are generally favor in the use of humor on advertising. A couple of reasons are found and supported by



many other researches that humor can enhance one's favorable attitude towards an advertisement. It is reviewed by Weingerber and Gulas (1992) that ten advertising studies and seven non-advertising studies report a positive effect of humor on liking while only two advertising studies and three non-advertising studies report neutral or mixed findings.

### **OBJECTIVE:**

The purpose of this research paper is to answer following questions:-

- a) The impact of gender & age on the degree of affection to the ads.
- b) The effect of humor appeal in Ads, on the consumer's buying decision.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

**(a) Research Design:** - To have a better understanding about the issue exploratory research design was used. Two focus groups (i.e. one for each gender) were conducted to get the in depth insights about the topic. Each group consisted of 7 persons.

Further descriptive research design was used to get the primary data with the help of close ended questionnaire.

**(b) Sample Design:** - 70 respondents were selected through convenience sampling.

**(c) Analysis:** - The data collected was analyzed with the help of various statistical tools like Chi-square test, ANOVA etc.

### **ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATIONS**

**(a) Exploratory research results: -**

(I) Focus Group (A)

It consisted of 7 males who were asked to provide views on the issue. It was a general opinion that to make the ad interesting & creative there is in no harm in using humor appeal in ad but one also considered it purely offensive. They were also agreed on the fact that some time they buy the product because of Ad effect but product attributes are also equally important.

(II) Focus Group (B)

It consisted of 7 females who were asked to provide views on the issue. A contradiction in views was seen; half of them believed that humor appeal increases the liking of ads while rest treated it offensive or unaffected. 70% of them said that advertisements don't affect the purchase decision.



**(b) Descriptive research results: -**

1. 54% of the respondents were male & rests were female. 24% of the respondents were from less than 30 years age group & 76% were from more than 30 years age group.
2. 55% of the respondents admitted that their intuition or the way they feel about the product finalize their decision of purchasing the product, 35 % considered advertisement of product as the basis of purchase decision and rest purchase the product because of the attributes of product.
3. 62% indeed admitted that they have purchased the product just because they liked the commercial.

Both results indicate the affect of advertisements on the purchase decision of customers.

4. When asked what they look for in an Ad; 45% believed the most important attribute of an ad is creativity, followed by 26% who believed it was the endorsers used & how they relate to them.
5. 56% of the respondents believed that, the use of humor content in advertisements is acceptable for products as long as it's within certain limits. 27% found it offensive & rest said that humor appeal increases the creativity of ads.
6. Four print advertisements containing humor appeal (Refer Appendix) were shown & respondents were asked to disclose their views. The results were as follow:-

Response	Ad 1	Ad 2	Ad 3	Ad 4	Total	Percentage
Offensive	0	7	0	12	19	7%
Interesting	11	16	16	16	59	21%
Creative	24	5	36	19	84	30%
Really Nice	29	29	10	10	78	28%
Unethical	0	7	6	13	26	9%
Unaffected / Bored	6	6	2	0	14	5%
Total	70	70	70	70	280	100%

58% of the customers found the advertisements Creative & nice while very few respondents treated it offensive or unethical, which indicates that respondents are taking advertisements in positive manner.

7. Majority of Respondents (i.e. 75%) replied that they would purchase the product based on the advertisements & the humor appeal used in ads changed their purchase decision.



**(c) Hypothesis Testing: -**

$H_{01}$  = There is no association between degree of affection to the ads & gender of respondents

$H_{11}$  = There is an association between degree of affection to the ads & gender of respondents.

Gender	Degree of Affection			Total
	Smart / Creative	Inappropriate / Unethical	Correct where needed	
Male	8	8	22	38
Female	4	11	17	32
Total	12	19	39	70

χ <sup>2</sup> test			
Calculated Value	Degree of Freedom	Level of Significance	Tabulated Value
1.94	2	5%	5.99

The result of the study shows that the null-hypothesis holds to be valid thus there is no association between degree of affection to the ads & gender of respondents.

$H_{02}$  = Degree of affection towards the ads will be the same irrespective of the age of respondents.

$H_{12}$  = Degree of affection towards the ads will not be the same irrespective of the age of respondents.

Age	Degree of Affection			Total
	Smart / Creative	Inappropriate / Unethical	Correct where needed	
<= 30 Years	1	11	5	17
>30 Years	11	8	34	53
Total	12	19	39	70

ANOVA (F-ratio)			
Calculated Value	Degree of Freedom	Level of Significance	Tabulated Value
1.66	(1,2)	5%	18.501



The analysis supports the null-hypothesis that degree of affection towards the ads will be the same irrespective of the age of respondents. In other words age was found to have no significant differences on the degree of affection to the ads.

$H_{03}$  = Humor appeal doesn't affect the buying decision of respondents.

$H_{13}$  = Humor appeal affects the buying decision of respondents.

Product Purchase	Decision Change		Total
	Agree	Disagree	
Yes	102	107	209
No	19	52	71
Total	121	159	280

$\chi^2$ test			
Calculated Value	Degree of Freedom	Level of Significance	Tabulated Value
10.52	1	5%	3.841

The analysis provides enough evidence to reject the null Hypothesis. In other words Humor appeal affects the buying decision of respondents.

### CONCLUSIONS:

It is a big question in the marketing area that how Humor appeal used in advertisements, is perceived by respondents. In the same line this research was conducted and following conclusions were drawn:-

1. Humor appeal was not taken in negative manner by respondents if it was used in a limit for the relevant products to make the ad creative.
2. Exploratory research shows that there is a thin line difference between the opinion of males & females but as per the chi-square there is no significant difference in the views of males & females towards the advertisements.
3. Respondents of every age group having the same views on the issue.
4. Humor appeal used in advertisements motivated the respondents to purchase the product but attributes of the product also plays a significant role in buying decision.

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#### APPENDIX:



Advertisement 1



Advertisement 2



Advertisement 3



Advertisement 4