

Effectiveness Of Humor Appeal In Advertisements Of Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCGs)

* **Rakshita Puranik**

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Advertising in multidimensionality is a form of mass communication, a powerful tool of marketing, a component of economic system, a means of mass media, a social institution, an art form, an instrument of business management, field of employment and a profession. AMA Chicago defined advertising as, “*Any paid form of non - personal presentation of ideas, goods and services by an identified sponsor*”. Advertising is the communication link between seller and buyer, or the consumer. It does not simply provide about a product and service, but is an active attempt at influencing people to act by an overt appeal to reason or emotion. In other words, advertising does not end with the flow of information from the seller to the buyer - it goes further to influence and persuade people to action or belief. This is, however, only communication point of view of advertising functions. There is another way of viewing the advertising function - that is the marketing point of view. Several critics of advertising often claim that advertisements are generally designed to deceive the consumers - we can only say that this, too, is a misconception, because it is not only a one shot sale. Organization has to repeat sales. By advertising, one can make fool of some people for sometime, but not all the people, all the time. Hence, marketers in their own interest cannot indulge in such a racket.

The power of advertising is so great that some authors have argued that it cries for the discretion in their market place and makes it possible for suppliers to manage demand in the criticisms of advertising. Economics assumes that market response is directly proportional to the amount spent on advertising. The bigger the advertising budget, the greater is the market manipulative power available with the marketer. Another assumption is that advertising is too expensive - not really within the capacity of medium and small size firms. The third assumption is that once a company or a firm takes a lead over its rival, it cannot take away or snatch the market share from it again.

According to **Clyde Miller**, all success in business and industry depends on the process of planned persuasion. Creativity inherent in advertising leads to discovery of new relationships that can change the perception of prospects.

HUMOUR APPEAL IN ADVERTISING

As per **Abhijit Awasthi**, “*Humor is the best way to cut clutter. If your ad manages to bring a smile on the viewer's face, half the job is done. I insure the instant brand recall*”.

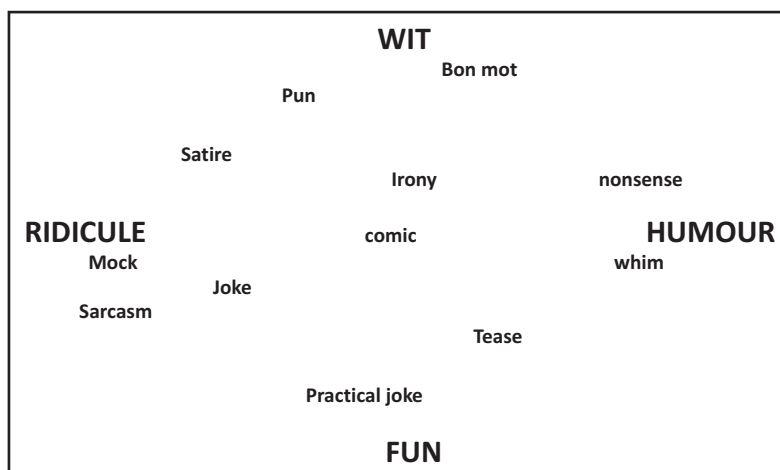
The role of feeling in an advertisement is not important when consumers don't have a deeply conserved attitude towards the brand. Humor is an example of feeling evoking appeal, and has not tended to be appropriate in high involvement situations.

In recent years, as the amount of advertising clutter has increased dramatically, the ability of humorous advertisements to gain attention has become more valuable. Even a casual observer of humor in advertising will note that the humour in advertisements is of different types. Some are worm, sophisticated, clever, boisterous and silly commercials. Humour provides one strategy with which an advertiser may evoke positive feelings. These positive feelings can potentially lead to cognitive processes that motivate the recipient to buy the presented product. Considering the fact that involvement during commercial breaks is generally rather low, humour may be an appropriate means to catch the recipient's attention. In order to be able to work with the term “*humour*”, it needs to be defined. The word itself originates in Latin, meaning “fluid”; it refers to antique medicine which believed that human tempers were made up different mixings of bodily fluids (“humores”). Since the 18th century, the term is used in the way we use it today. Humour, though, is something that goes beyond the “simply funny” things in life. At the moment, there is no consistent scientific definition of humour. The Encyclopaedia Britannica defines humour as a “*form of communication in which a complex, mental stimulus illuminates, or amuses, or elicits the reflex of laughter*”. It is, though, not just a one-dimensional phenomenon, but has rather many facets which have to be differentiated, e.g. comic wit, sentimental

* Senior Lecturer, CH Institute of Management & Commerce, Gram Baroli, Palia Road, Nr. Revti Range, Ujjain Road, Indore, Madhya Pradesh. E-mail : rakshita.puranik@chgroup.in

humour, satire, sentimental comedy and comedy (**Speck (1990)**). This rather large amount of terms standing in context with humour already indicates that there cannot be one single definition, but rather, a whole field concerned with this topic. Semantically, **Attardo (1994)** has built up this field in the following way:

Figure 1



Humour can be best utilized for those brands for which consumers already have a positive attitude, or when the product is having low involvement. Even advertisers make use of humour appeal when the product is not upscale, and gravitas is not the brand's aspired positioning. Then the product pokes fun at itself. If appeals are not used properly in ads, then it may spoil the image of the brand. Similarly, the Humor Can Backfire When the ad makes fun of a specific group; and it is in bad taste, relative to the sophistication or culture of the audience.

HUMOUR WORKS BY

- ✿ **Aiding Exposure:** Blocking zapping and zipping. Preventing consumers from avoiding the commercial by switching channels (zapping) or avoiding the commercial by fast-forwarding while watching a prerecorded program (zipping).
- ✿ **Holding Attention:** Getting people to listen to or watch the ad (rather than shift their attention to something else);
- ✿ **Helping Memory:** Making people remember the ad by the joke.
- ✿ **Gratification:** Adds to the enjoyment people derive from the use of media. It leaves a pleasant feeling by having amused the consumer, and this pleasant feeling rubs off on the brand.
- ✿ **Multiplier Effect:** Repeated self-rehearsal. People like to tell jokes and talk about funny commercials; doing so further helps memorizing.

HUMOROUS VS. NON - HUMOROUS ADS.

Humour may increase source liking and decrease sceptical attitudes towards the product. Marketing studies proved this thesis, finding that humorous ads get higher scores in the categories of source liking and product preference. The main result is that humorous ads have a greater capability of evoking the recipient's attention than non-humorous ads. Humour, however, may distract the recipients' attention from the actual product towards to ad itself. In humorous ads, the humour itself must be easily recognizable; otherwise, it runs the risk of not being understood by the recipient. Forms like satire, irony or sarcasm might be misinterpreted due to their complexity, and therefore, might "ruin" the ad's message. Humour may exert a positive influence on source liking, but may also enhance previous experiences or attitudes towards the product. If the recipient's attitude has already been positive, this attitude might be even improved. However, the same could also apply to negative attitudes, them being even worsened.

THE FMCG SECTOR

FMCG is an acronym for '**Fast Moving Consumer Goods**', which refer to things that we buy from local supermarkets

on a daily basis, the things that have high turnover and are relatively cheaper.

The Indian FMCG sector is the fourth largest sector in the economy, with a total market size in excess of US\$ 13.1 billion. It has a strong MNC presence, and is characterized by a well established distribution network, intense competition between the organized and unorganized segments, and low operational cost. Availability of key raw materials, cheaper labour costs and presence across the entire value chain gives India a competitive advantage. The FMCG market is set to treble from US\$ 11.6 billion in 2003 to US\$ 33.4 billion in 2015. Penetration level as well as per capita consumption in most product categories like jams, toothpaste, skin care, hair wash etc in India is low, indicating the untapped market potential. Burgeoning Indian population, particularly the middle class, and the rural segments, presents an opportunity to makers of branded products to convert consumers to branded products. Growth is also likely to come from consumer '*upgrading*' in the matured product categories, with 200 million people expected to shift to processed and packaged food by 2010. FMCG sector generates 5% of total factory employment in the country, and is creating employment for three million people, especially in small towns and rural India.

FMCG Categorized in household care, Food and Health beverages, Personal Care - and some of the top players in FMCG Sector are Hindustan Unilever Ltd., ITC (Indian Tobacco Company), Nestlé India, Dabur, Marico Industries and many more. Some examples of FMCG advertisement using humor appeal are Fevicol, Chlormint, Centerfresh, Fanta, Closeup, Sprite, Britannia, etc.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Jennifer Pyfrom (2008) says that humor is one of the most commonly used communication strategies in advertising. In fact, approximately 11% to 24% of television ads in the United States use humor (**Speck(1991)**). International television commercials appear to use humor at the same rate as American television commercials (**Alden et al., (1993)**). Additionally, other media like radio even use humor at similar rates. Humor appeals are more effective for low involvement products such as food than for high involvement products such as cars (**Weinberger and Gulas(1992)**). Perhaps, humor does not work well in advertisements for high involvement products, because high involvement products tend to involve a more intense and lengthy thought process before purchase.

Das(2009) considers the infusing humor in ad in the Indian perspective. She said that Humor has been one of the most accepted and utilized appeals in advertising, as it helps to put message into exasperating. **Sutherland & Sylvester(2004)** wrote that the interesting thing is that jokes, as well as humorous ads are often built intuitively by writers. They notice the ambiguity in something and then create an incongruity. Instead of adopting the most obvious interpretation that everyone will take, they develop instead an alternative one. An interpretation is that it fits, but which is highly unlikely or bizarre in the context.

Pointing towards effectiveness of humor appeal in advertising, **Batra, Myers & Aaker (2006)** says that humor is not a feeling itself, but it can evoke feeling such as urgency, joy, energy, cheer and happiness. The potential then exists for the feelings engendered by this humor to become associated with the brand, thereby affecting the attitude towards the brand and perhaps its image as well. Humor ads form almost 25% of prime time TV ads in US.

Belch & Belch (2005) found that advertisers use humor for many reasons. The Humor message attracts and holds the consumers' attention. It enhances effectiveness by putting consumers in a positive mood, increasing their liking of ad itself, and their feeling towards the products or service, and humor can distract the receiver from counter arguing against the message.

Shankari revealed that though humor is considered highly effective in capturing the attention of the viewers; it is a tough task to find the suitable type of humor that perfectly goes with the product to guarantee success. If the type of humor is directly associated with the product that is being promoted, the attention span increases by manifolds, by enhancing the advertising effectiveness. The following factors make an ad. funny: the environment, the situation, the character and the dialogue.

The effect of nonsensical humor on recall and perceived message credibility was investigated in an experiment conducted with 219 college students. **Sutherland and Sethu's (1987)** study uses actual television commercials employing humorous appeals for familiar as well as unfamiliar products with the straight versions created by removing the humorous components of the commercials. Results indicate that humor is no more effective than a straight commercial in generating recall and message credibility.

A hypothetical model regarding the impact of humor was developed and tested by **Gelb and Zinkhan (1986)** on such response variables as recall, attitudes, purchase intention and actual behavior. Results show the humor is negatively related to recall and positively related to brand attitudes. No consistent relationship of humor is found with purchase probability or choice behaviour.

Distinguishing perceived humor from manipulated humor, the study by **Duncan and Nelson (1985)** founds significant effects of perceived humor on attention to the ad, liking the ad, liking the product, and irritation experienced from the ad. The perceived humor is found to have little impact on counter-arguments, product-related beliefs, buying intention, experience of distraction, or recall of selling points.

The research conducted by **Duncan, Nelson, and Frontczak (1983)** examines the impact of humor on message comprehension by focusing on type of humor measurement (manipulate vs. perceived) and humor location in the ad. The study was conducted with 157 male undergraduates, who are exposed to 60-second radio commercials for a hypothetical brand of men's hair care product. Results of the study indicated that the perceived humor promotes message comprehension and offers support for information processing and operant conditioning views of the humor influence process. The findings also argue for the importance of distinguishing between the perceived and manipulated humor.

A study conducted by **Gelb and Pickett (1983)** using an ad for a smoking cessation kit, relationships among attitude towards the ad, perceived humor in the ad, and four measures of advertising effectiveness (attitude toward the sponsor/brand, credibility, persuasiveness, and purchase intention) were examined in a mail survey to a random sample of licensed drivers, smokers or non-smokers. Results indicate that if an ad is perceived as humorous, all others being equal, it is more likely to be associated with a favourable Ad. While the study finds a significant association of Ad with all the effectiveness measures, perceived humor is found to be significantly associated only with the sponsor's image.

A laboratory experiment involving 184 undergraduates was conducted by **George E. Belch and Michael A. Belch (1983)** with type of message (humorous vs. serious) and exposure level (one, three, or five). Two additional five-exposure conditions were used, whereby, the stimulus commercial (humorous or serious) was seen three times and another commercial (serious or humorous) was shown twice. 30-second "*Federal Express*" television commercials that had not been aired for at least six months prior to the experiment were used. The dependent measures included cognitive responses, message recall, and advertiser credibility, attitude toward the ad as well as the service, and usage intention. The results indicated the differences in the pattern of effects due to repetition for the two types of messages. Findings also indicate that wear out due to high levels of exposure can be reduced by the use of varied message execution, particularly, for a humorous commercial.

John C. Sutherland and Lisa A. Middleton (1983) found that subjects perceive the "*nonsensical*" ad less credible than its serious version, while the "*pun*" and its serious counterparts do not differ in perceived credibility. In terms of recall, no difference is found between humorous and non-humorous ads.

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The researches conducted so far indicate that humor can have a favourable impact on some people and at the same time, can appear unfavourable to some. This is to say that two effects viz. positive and negative of a particular humorous advertisement can be there, affecting the individual. In other words, a humorous advertisement can be positively interpreted by one person and negatively by other. The study was conducted to see the effectiveness of humor appeal in advertisements on the purchase decision, especially on FMCG products. The main aim of the study was to see whether it can create awareness and induce purchase of fast moving consumer goods.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objective of the present study are:-

- ✿ To study the effectiveness of humor appeal in advertisements of FMCGs in creating consumer awareness.
- ✿ To study the effect of humor appeal in recalling the product.
- ✿ To study the role of humor in making the customer to act.

METHODOLOGY

✿ **The Study :** It is an exploratory research and it was conducted to clarify and define the nature of the issue. Under consideration, it provided opportunity for considering the different aspects of the problem under study. The respondents were asked to recall a humorous commercial on the basis of their selection. The study aims at identifying the effectiveness of humor in advertisements of FMCGs. The source of data collection is primary.

✿ **Sampling Procedure :** In this study, random sampling was used because the study did not require any special group of society as the respondents.

✿ **Sample Size :** The sample size comprised of the 100 respondents. The response was collected from both male and female in each area of different age groups with the help of different questions. Indore City was selected as a geographical area to conduct this study.

✿ **Data Collection Tools :** A Questionnaire was used as a tool for data collection. The questionnaire was prepared according to the scale of effectiveness of humor in advertisements by “Dhar & Dhar 2003”, and the scale was made up of 16 statements. The questionnaires were filled by the personal meeting with the respondents.

✿ **Data Analysis :** Raw data was collected and tabulated and subjected to item total correlation. Then the statistical tool of Factor Analysis was used to arrive at the results.

RESULTS

All correlation except item no. 1 ($0.077224 < 0.159$) are significant, therefore item no. 1 has been dropped. The raw data was tabulated and subjected to Factor Analysis, as a result of which, five factors have emerged. These factors and their item - wise variances are given below:-

Table 1: Rotated Component Matrix (a)

Item No.	Correlation (r)
1	0.077224
2	0.17312
3	0.451057
4	0.451965
5	0.367749
6	0.61096
7	0.457053
8	0.390576
9	0.470642
10	0.542935
11	0.511058
12	0.509848
13	0.539853
14	0.401651
15	0.535488
16	0.619522

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Five factors emerged through factor analysis that affect Effectiveness of humor appeal in advertising of fast moving consumer goods. They were Novelty, Appealing, Catchy, Entertaining and Thematic.

✿ **Factor 1: Novelty**, it had emerged as the factor with maximum load of 1.982261 and variance of 23.608 percent. This factor constituted of three items (12, 15 and 16) i.e. easy to remember, conveys product superiority and can't forget it.

Table 2: Factors

Items	Factors				
	1	2	3	4	5
VAR00002	-.104	.177	.135	.110	-.721
VAR00003	.409	-.091	.573	-.006	.109
VAR00004	.105	.078	.799	-.057	.001
VAR00005	.113	-.118	.185	.690	-.179
VAR00006	.302	.467	.205	.305	-.249
VAR00007	.360	.011	.120	.417	.240
VAR00008	.088	.345	-.257	.659	.156
VAR00009	.015	.856	-.044	.060	-.005
VAR00010	.324	.527	.304	-.055	-.179
VAR00011	-.033	.254	.694	.273	-.090
VAR00012	.565	-.060	.322	.218	-.046
VAR00013	.304	.506	.170	.000	.361
VAR00014	-.178	.288	.242	.369	.584
VAR00015	.694	.313	.038	-.095	-.011
VAR00016	.723	.187	-.003	.270	.082

✿ **Factor 2: Appealing** - It had factor load of 2.531944 and variance of 10.243 percent. This factor is constituted of five items (2, 6, 9, 10 and 13), which are - composition of lots of fun, keeps running through mind and leaves a deep impact, makes me learn more and persuades to try the product, meaningful and arouses interest and desire, makes me feel like looking at it for a long time and recall the commercial.

✿ **Factor 3: Catchy** - had factor load of 2.066092 and variance of 8.513 percent. Further, it is composition of three items (3, 4 and 11) with - clever and entertaining, enthusiastic and catchy, makes me feel good and makes me remember the product.

✿ **Factor 4: Entertaining** - It had factor load of 1.765901 and variance 7.780 percent. This factor is constituted of three items (5, 7 and 8) Further it is composition of ad is not just selling the product or entertainment, very funny, dissatisfied with what I am using now.

✿ **Factor 5: Thematic** - This factor is constituted of one item (14) with a total factor load of 0.584204. This factor has covered 7.249 of the percent of total variance. It states that - its composition engrosses me so much that I don't pay much attention to features of product and messages in advertisement.

DISCUSSION

On the basis of analysis, the percentage variance of **Factor - Novelty** is the highest, as it contributes to 23.608%. This contribution makes the factor an important constituent in humorous advertisements.

In a study of advertising humor and attention gaining, 94% of advertising practitioners agreed that humor is effective in gaining attention, and 55% of advertising research executives believed humorous advertisements to be more effective in gaining attention than advertisements that were not humorous (**Weinberger and Gulas, 1992**). Many authors said that humorous advertisements are more desired by professionals as attention getters, it was found that of the four attention measures (initial attention, sustained attention, projected attention, and overall attention), non-humorous advertisements were outperformed in all areas (**1992**). ESPN uses humor in their advertisements to maintain the image that the public has for them; sports are supposed to be an escape and they make sure to keep the negativity to a minimum. The best audience for humorous advertisements is an audience composed of young males, who are better educated (**Weinberger and Gulas(1992)**), which is perfect for ESPN, due to the fact that it is their target audience (**Kerwin(1997)**).

Humor appeals are more effective for low involvement products, such as soap than for high involvement products such

as cars (**Weinberger and Gulas, 1992**). Perhaps humor does not work well in advertisements for high involvement products because high involvement products tend to involve a more intense and lengthy thought process before purchase. Additionally, high involvement products tend to have a longer product life cycle prompting prospective consumers to seek out hard facts and information about the product before purchasing the product. Humorous commercials typically do not offer consumers hard facts and information about the product. Additionally, humorous ads are more effective than non-humorous ads only when the target audience already has positive attitudes toward the brand (**Chattopadhyay and Basu (1990)**). **Duncan and Nelson (1985)** found that the perceived humor has little impact on counter arguments, product related beliefs, buying intentions experience of distraction or recall of selling point. **Alden et al (2000)** found that humor that is appropriate for the product category and well-integrated with message themes has been shown to enhance attention, credibility, recall, evaluation and purchase intention. Humor can also reduce counter argumentation, boost comprehension, and increase transfer of positive affect from the ad to the brand (**Alden et al., 2000**). **Aaker, Stayman and Hagerty (1986)** found that humor may create warmth and other emotional responses, in addition, the laughter or smile that is usually associated. This research does not find any emotional response that humor may create.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded from the study that through humorous commercials, customers remember the product. The factors emerged contribute to the customer awareness and recall of the product. However, no evidence has been found to conclude that humorous advertisements necessarily lead to purchase of product. Humorous ads cause a deep impact and attract the audience. The advertisements became exclusive and helps in reminiscence through humor.

IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

✿ **For Advertisers:** This study will help the advertisers to decide upon the elements which make a humorous advertisement effective. The factors identified can help the advertisers in choosing a right mix to make the advertisement humorous and equally persuasive, especially in case of FMCG ads.

✿ **For Researchers:** There is a scope for product specific study in this type of research. Researchers can go for studying this effect on a larger population. Future research should be particularly cognizant of humor type and relatedness.

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