

Developing a Sense of Humor: Congruence Between Humor Type and Brand Personality

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Humorous ads grab the attention of viewers and are a go-to approach for many advertisers. Funny ads can have a positive effect on brand recall, purchase intentions, and attitude toward the ad and brand. However, the use of humor does not always produce positive results for brands. Humorous ads often fall short of connecting with the brand's target audience, leaving them feeling confused, disappointed, or offended. One possible explanation for these failures is that the type of humor used in the ad is a poor match to the brand personality dimensions developed by marketers. This paper proposes a conceptual framework to assist advertisers in choosing a type of humor that is suitable, or congruent, to the personality dimensions portrayed by the brand. This framework forms a bridge between Speck's (1991) Humorous Message Taxonomy and Aaker's (1997) Brand Personality dimensions and is designed to be useful for advertising practitioners and a step forward for advertising and humor theory. Application of the framework and future research possibilities are also discussed.

Keywords: advertising, humor, brand personality

INTRODUCTION

Humorous ad recipe for success: A popular comedian with a strong brand connection, a unique selling point, and a stingy old businessman getting hit in the groin by a football. However, the recipe did not work for Groupon's 2018 Super Bowl commercial. Groupon recruited Tiffany Haddish, star of the movie 'Girls Trip' and an avid Groupon user. The ad touted a popular benefit of using Groupon – that taking advantage of the deals on the app supports local businesses. Yet, the analysts' immediate reaction was harsh: “[I]nstead of letting [Tiffany Haddish] make the pitch, Groupon forces in some dumb physical ‘comedy’... Just let Tiffany be Tiffany” (Johnson 2018). It was “so disappointing... the message of supporting local businesses never came across as funny or authentic” (Bennett 2018) and “the script seemed like it took 30 seconds to write” (Goldberg 2018). The editor of the industry publication Ad Age summarized it this way:

First, we get Haddish, who is funny and super-watchable. Then we get...a cheap hit-in-the-nuts gag. Groupon blew \$5 million to gain the attention of 100 million people to show them an “America’s Funniest Home Videos” outtake. (Braiker 2018)

Viewers discussed the joke’s similarity to a gag on *The Simpsons* TV show rather than discussing the brand (Rice 2018). Some viewers not only disliked the humor, but took offense at the setup (“So a black woman mocking a rich white guy getting hit in the nuts is a valid marketing strategy for Groupon?” - Rice 2018). Viewers, critics, and industry insiders panned the ad. The humor fell short, and Groupon was perceived as inauthentic and juvenile.

Humor is a useful tool for advertisers, and can aid brands in achieving several positive outcomes. For example, humor has a positive effect on attention (Curran 2012), attitude toward the ad and brand (Chung & Zhao 2003; Flaherty, Weinberger & Gulas 2004), the memory of the ad, positive affect, and purchase intention (Eisend 2009; Strick, Holland, van Baaren, & van Knippenberg 2012). Humorous ads outperform non-humorous ads on persuasion with products that do not require a high level of involvement. Humor can prevent the formation of negative brand associations and encourage the formation of positive associations (Strick et al. 2012). The positive effects of humor are thought to be stable and reliable (Eisend 2009).

However, humor does not always lead to positive results for brands. For example, the effects of humor on recall and persuasion can vary broadly according to the type of product and the relevance of the humor to the product (Weinberger & Campbell 1991). Attempts at humor can fail to connect with the audience, or even cross the line into offense (Beard 2008a). Humor is therefore a risky strategy for many brands. Ads that fail at humor do not get credit from the viewer for the attempt and are liked considerably less than ads in which the humor succeeds (Flaherty et al. 2004). When humor crosses a line into offense, the brand may be perceived as arrogant, distasteful, aggressive, or other negative traits. Thus, advertisers need to use humor with care and consideration.

One frequent criticism of humorous ads is that, though entertaining, they do not always drive outcomes of importance such as product recognition (Strick, Van Baaren, Holland, & Van Knippenberg 2009) or recall (Weinberger & Campbell 1991; Kellaris & Cline 2007). Humor can also significantly reduce source credibility if executed poorly (Eisend 2009). Research into the poor execution of humorous ads attributes partial blame to factors such as a lack of resolution in the humor process (Lee & Lim 2008) and a lack of congruence with the cultural dimensions of the viewers (Lepkowska-White, Brashear, and Weinberger 2003; Lee & Lim 2008). Another factor is the level of entertainment (i.e., humor, visual imagery, music) contained in the ad. According to Teixeira, Picard, & El Kaliouby (2014), the level of entertainment in an ad has a complex relationship with purchase intent, in which low and high levels of entertainment lead to lower purchase intent than moderate levels of entertainment.

One factor that is important to the success of humorous ads is the relevance of the humor to the brand and the message (Curran 2012). Brand-related humor leads to stronger brand connections than unrelated humor (van Kuilenburg et al. 2011). Humorous ads are most effective when the humor is strong and highly related to the message (Weinberger & Campbell 1991; Weinberger & Gulas 1992; Cline & Kellaris 2007). Additionally, humor that is relevant to the brand’s claims can increase recall of those claims, even when the target experienced only incidental exposure to the ad (Krishnan & Chakravarti 2003).

Choosing a form of humor that is relevant to the brand requires a strong understanding of both the brand and humor mechanisms. Marketers must choose a type of humor that not only delivers the message effectively but also reflects the core identity of the brand. A brand identity is a unique set of characteristics consumers associate with the brand, which solidifies the brand’s symbolic meaning in consumers’ minds (Ghodeswar 2008). One cornerstone of brand identity is brand personality, or “the set of human characteristics associated with a brand” (Aaker 1997). Brand personality, though it is not perfectly analogous to human personality, is a useful mechanism for evoking emotions or feelings associated with the brand, and for connecting with consumers on a human level. Effective humorous ads are relatable (Curran 2012) because they succeed in forming these connections with viewers.

Based on the above, this research proposes a framework for mapping types of humor used in ads with the dimensions of brand personality that a marketer may wish to convey. First, we discuss the concept of

brand personality and its application in advertising. Second, we examine the best method available for classifying humor, Speck's (1991) Humorous Message Taxonomy. We then propose relationships between the types of humor available to advertisers and the dimensions of brand personality. We discuss the managerial and theoretical contributions of this research and explore the application of the framework in three campaign scenarios: (1) establishing a brand personality for a new brand, (2) reinforcing the personality dimensions of an existing brand, and (3) repositioning a brand toward a new personality. Future research pathways are also discussed.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

Brand Personality

Through the symbolic use of brands, a consumer can express his or her self (Belk 1998; Aaker 1997) or an ideal self (Malhotra 1988; Aaker 1997). The symbolic use of brands is made possible because consumers often imbue human personality traits onto brands, and form powerful associations between brands and these personality traits (Aaker 1997; Saavedra 2004). In other words, brand personalities are "what type of person the brand would be if it were human and what it would do and look like" (Hawkins et al. 2001, p. 376; Okazaki 2016; Matthews 2015).

Consumers utilize these brand personalities when creating or reaffirming their self-concept (Aaker 1999, Diamantopoulos et al. 2005), which is "the totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object" (Rosenberg 1979, p. 7). Consumers prefer brands whose personality traits are congruent with their own and reject those brands whose images are dissimilar (Sirgy 1982; Aaker 1999; Diamantopoulos et al. 2005). Brand personalities are also important for firms because they allow firms to differentiate their brands from other brands in the same category, and because they assist firms in developing long-term brand equity (Supphellen and Grønhaug 2003, Okazaki 2006).

A brand's personality does not exist independent of a consumer's perception of the brand (Sung and Tinkham 2005). Rather, brand personalities are the result of direct and indirect contact between the consumer and the brand (Sung and Tinkham 2005; Sung et al. 2015). Directly, brand personalities are formed by a consumer's observation or perception of the CEO, other brand users, or employees (Aaker 1996; Supphellen and Grønhaug 2003; Sung et al. 2015). Indirectly, brand personalities are formed through product attributes, advertising style, price, and distribution channels (Aaker 1996; Supphellen and Grønhaug 2003; Sung et al. 2015).

Thus, brand personalities are not only formed by physical attributes and the functions of brands, but also by factors that are not related to the product such as consumers' past experiences and marketing communications. Marketing communication is considered one of the most influential factors in developing and maintaining a brand's personality (Okazaki 2016). To help nurture brand personalities, firms often engage in extensive marketing campaigns and attempt to link brands with certain specific symbolic associations (Vermeulen et al. 2010).

Brand personality affects the strength of the relationship between a brand and a consumer (Aaker et al. 2004). Brand personality has also been found to have to be significant predictor of satisfaction, loyalty, brand preference, and purchase intention (Lee and Oh 2006; Toldos-Romero and Orozco-Gomez 2015).

Dimensions of Brand Personality

Aaker's (1997) identified 5 dimensions of brand personality (Sincerity, Competence, Excitement, Sophistication, and Ruggedness) and 15 facets encompassing 42 Personality traits (Sung et al. 2015). Three of Aaker's five brand personality dimensions relate to three of the "Big Five" dimensions of human personality (Sincerity-Agreeableness, Competence-Conscientiousness, and Excitement-Extroversion). Sincerity and Agreeableness both encapsulate the notion of warmth and recognition. Following this framework, sincere brands, such as Ford, Hallmark, and Coca-Cola are considered down-to-earth, honest, cheerful, and wholesome. Meanwhile, Competence and Conscientiousness both capture responsibility, reliability, and confidence. Competent brands are perceived as reliable, intelligent, and successful, such as Microsoft and The Wall Street Journal. Additionally, Excitement and Extraversion both connote a sense of

sociability, liveliness, and activity. Hence, exciting brands, including Monster Energy and Virgin, are perceived to be daring, spirited, imaginative, and up-to-date.

The remaining two dimensions put forth by Aaker (Sophistication and Ruggedness) differ from any of the “Big Five” trait dimensions. Aaker explained that “whereas Sincerity, Excitement, and Competence tap an innate part of human personality, Sophistication and Ruggedness tap a dimension that individuals desire but do not necessarily have” (Aaker 1997, p. 353). The sophistication dimension makes brands like Mercedes Benz and BMW seem charming and upper-class, and occasionally, even pretentious. Finally, rugged brands are seen as vigorous, outdoorsy, and tough and include brands like Jeep and Harley Davidson.

Brand Personality and Advertising

Advertising is the main avenue for conveying brand personality. The semiotic approach presents a framework for how brand personality is formed through advertising. From a semiotic perspective, an advertisement is defined as: “a sign, representing the actual product image (or object), the meaning of which is dependent on the interpretation of the ad recipient (interpretant), which in turn is based on the context in which the ad (sign) occurs” (Dingena 1994, p.36).

In this framework, the “actual product” refers to the existing image of the product or service (Pieters & van Raaij 1992), which is shaped through an objective depiction of the product or service (i.e., size, shape, materials). On the other hand, the product’s “meaning” refers to the attributes, benefits, and values of the product. The product’s meaning is an important source of brand personality creation, and the ad conveys that meaning (Dingena 1994). When there is congruence between the representation in the ad and the actual product, the message successfully conveys information about the brand (Pieters & van Raaij 1992).

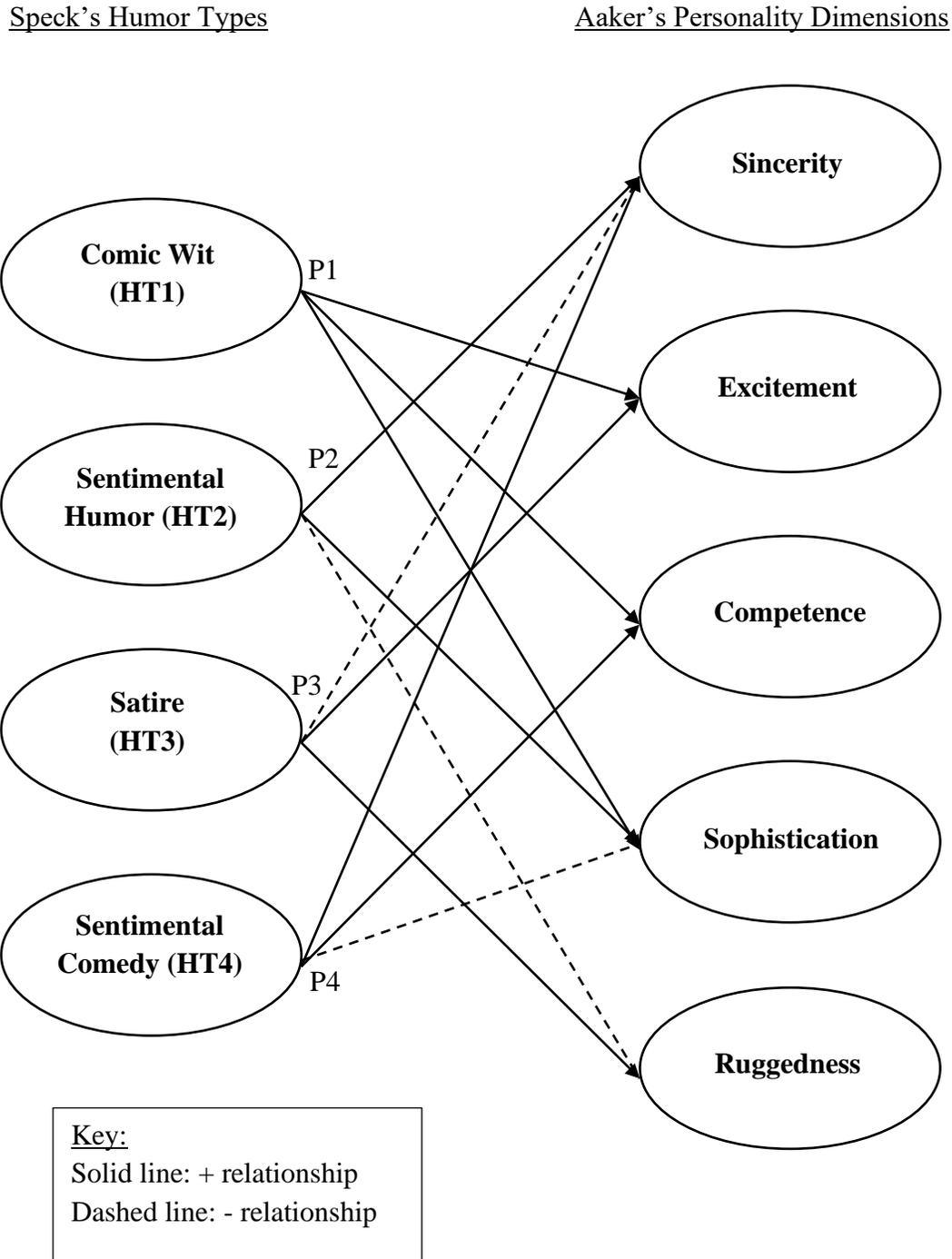
For a brand personality to be effective, the personality has to be associated with the advertised product. The consumer then builds the personality in their mind through this association (Colmenares Delgado et al. 2009). Marketers may craft a brand personality and communicate it successfully, but that does not guarantee that consumers will comprehend and associate the intended personality with the brand (Narvaez et al. 2006).

Many consumers purchase and use brands whose personality is congruent with their self-concept, and firms use advertising to build and maintain brand personalities. As stated above, if congruency exists between the actual product and the claimed image of the product and brand, the likelihood that the consumer transfers and consolidates the brand personality increases. Therefore, it follows that when brands use humor in advertising, the type of humor used should be congruent with the personality of the brand to strengthen the consumer’s cognitive associations.

Humorous Message Taxonomy

Many frameworks exist to classify and study humor. Examples include the technique typology (Kelly & Solomon 1975), the script-based semantic theory (Raskin 1985), the taxonomy of comic types (Stern 1996), and the humorous message taxonomy (Speck 1991). Many researchers consider Speck’s taxonomy to be a more comprehensive framework than the others, in that it classifies nearly everything humans find funny (Spotts et al. 1997; Beard 2008b). Thus, we draw from Speck’s taxonomy for our framework.

FIGURE 1
PROPOSED RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN HUMOR TYPE USED AND BRAND
PERSONALITY DIMENSIONS



Speck's (1991) humorous message taxonomy identifies three types of humor processing (HP1-HP3), which can be combined to form five different humor types (HT1-HT5) as seen in Figure 1. The first type of humor processing (HP1) is incongruity resolution. In this process, an initial schema is established, such

as a non-humorous dramatic narrative. A contradictory element, or interrupt mechanism, is introduced which goes against initial expectations. This causes an incongruity that requires resolution. The audience searches for additional cues that could lead to a second interpretive schema (explanation), which would explain all of the information. Once the secondary schema is found, resolution occurs (Speck 1991). In fact, “the very process of resolving the incongruity is thought to be rewarding and thus may contribute to the resulting positive effect” (Meyers-Levy & Tybout 1989, p. 40). Incongruity-resolution is the most common type of humor found in ads around the world (Hatzithomas, Boutsouki & Yorgos 2009; Hatzithomas, Zotos, & Boutsouki 2011; Hoffmann, Schwarz, Dalicho, & Hutter 2014).

Arousal safety is the second type of humor processing (HP2), in which the subject is aroused to a heightened state of alertness (i.e., fear), and must judge whether the situation is safe or unsafe. If the situation is deemed to be safe and inconsequential, laughter can result. However, if it is judged to be unsafe, the subject will be in distress and will want to flee. Tension is relieved by the subject adopting a different view of the situation (Speck 1991). The arousal-safety hypothesis was first put forth by Schultz (1976), who observed children playing peek-a-boo and being tickled and chased. The same effect can be emulated in humorous advertisements.

The third type of humor processing (HP3) is humorous disparagement. Disparagement involves three actors: the joke-teller, the joke-hearer, and the victim. Humor cues must accompany the disparagement for the joke to be seen as funny rather than mean. These cues inform the joke-hearer that the disparagement is not serious, and it provides the freedom to laugh at the disparagement without feeling guilty (Speck 1991). It is worth noting that the three actors do not necessarily have to be different entities. For example, in self-deprecating humor, the joke-teller and victim are the same.

Speck (1991) showed that one could use these three dimensions of humor alone or in combination to form five distinct humor types: Comic Wit (HT1), Sentimental Humor (HT2), Satire (HT3), Sentimental Comedy (HT4), and Full Comedy (HT5) (see Figure 1). Incongruity resolution and arousal-safety can stand on their own as humor types (HT1 and HT2 respectively), while humorous disparagement must be combined with other types of processing to be effective.

Comic Wit (HT1) relies solely on incongruity-resolution processing and is a form of intellectual humor. Comic Wit is the art of saying clever or funny things, which can take the form of jokes, puns, sarcasm, snappy comebacks, and witty retorts. This category also includes comic exaggeration or understatement (Beard 2008b) and is the most used type of humor in American ads (Speck 1997). In addition, consumers, regardless of gender, tend to favor comic wit over other humor types (Schwarz, Hoffmann, & Hutter 2015). One example of comic wit is a 2017 Super Bowl ad from Sprint that begins with a man pushing an SUV off a cliff, with a dummy in the driver’s seat that resembles him. As the SUV crashes below, the man turns to two children and says “Well kids, daddy’s dead.” This incongruous event is a deviation from expectations that leads to surprise and uncertainty. The viewer experiences tension. The Sprint spokesperson appears behind the family, and asks: “Let me guess: Faking your death to get out of your Verizon contract?” The tension is resolved, leading to a funny moment. We realize that the father is simply going to ridiculous lengths to change phone carriers. In this case, Comic Wit takes the form of comic exaggeration (i.e., nobody needs to go to such ridiculous lengths to change their phone carrier).

Sentimental Humor (HT2), also called Resonant Humor, relies solely on arousal-safety humor processing. It has an empathy-anxiety-relief structure, which produces humor during the relief stage. Sentimental humor is a simple form of humor perceived as cute, non-confrontational, and warm. The safe nature of this humor type can enhance the trustworthiness of the source (Speck 1991). Sentimental humor has broad appeal, especially with children and seniors. Speck (1991) suggested that this is the least-used type of humor in American ads, and other studies have found similar results in Greece (Hatzithomas, et. al 2009) and the U.K. (Hatzithomas, et. al 2011). One possible explanation for the infrequent use of sentimental humor in ads is that the evaluation of sentimental humor depends on the cultural background of the respondents. Hoffmann et. al (2014) suggest that members of collectivistic and feminine cultures (e.g., Spain) like arousal-based sentimental humor ads more than members of individualistic and masculine cultures (e.g., Germany and the U.S.). However, it does little to reach consumers who prefer more complex or risqué humor. An example of this type of humor is the long-standing radio advertising campaign Motel

6 has with humorist Tom Bodett. In the ads, Tom uniquely uses language to tell short stories about the troubles faced by middle-class consumers (such as affording a hotel room amidst a tough economy), and how Motel 6 can help solve their problems. He ends each ad with the signature line “I’m Tom Bodett from Motel 6, and we’ll leave the light on for ya.”

Satire (HT3) comes from combining incongruity resolution with humorous disparagement. It is identifiable by the use of sarcasm, irony, parody, exaggeration, or other similar techniques, in which human vices and shortcomings are the targets of scorn or ridicule. The intent is usually to shame individuals or society as a whole into improving themselves. Satire is usually meant to be funny, however, it can often serve a higher purpose of social criticism, in which the message may be more scathing than funny. For advertising, satire is often kept light and playful, rather than dark and derisive. One popular method of using satire in advertising is to have celebrities parody themselves or their past work. Understandably, satire will not appeal to everyone. Some people reject sarcasm, often fail to recognize irony, or may not understand what is being parodied.

Sentimental Comedy (HT4) is made by combining incongruity resolution with arousal-safety mechanisms. It originated in 18th-century English plays as a means of reaffirming middle-class values. In sentimental comedy, middle-class protagonists are subjected to moral trials, which they overcome by making wise and virtuous decisions. Virtuous people are rewarded, and the wicked are punished. This type of humor is frequently used in advertising to appeal to middle-class consumers. The characters in the ad are often subjected to trials involving everyday struggles relating to work, home, and family life. This type of humor can be very useful, however, it is not for everyone. Young adults, lower-income, and upper-income consumers may have trouble relating to the middle-class protagonist in the ad.

Full Comedy (HT5) features all three types of humor processing and can be used to great effect in advertising. Full comedy can add a level of depth to a humorous ad. Since full comedy makes use of so many elements of humor, it seems like this type of humor may perform better than types involving just one or two processing types. However, it is worth noting that full comedy requires the audience to recognize the usual clues involved in incongruity resolution, as well as those for arousal-safety, while not being turned off by the disparaging elements. Since full comedy requires so much of the audience, it seems equally plausible that the humor may be lost on some consumers, particularly those who do not give their full attention to the ad.

HUMOR-PERSONALITY FRAMEWORK

While brand personality is not perfectly analogous to human personality, it is useful as a workable framework for marketers who wish to develop an approachable and engaging persona for a brand. Human personality can influence several characteristics and behaviors easily observed by others. One such characteristic is a person’s sense of humor. Personality traits such as extraversion/introversion, neuroticism, and agreeableness can manifest themselves in a person’s sense of humor (Greengross, Martin, & Miller 2012). What a person finds funny, and what kind of humor they embrace, is a reflection of who they are and how their mind operates. In humans, this connection is natural, with very little processing involved.

However, with brands, a sense of humor does not come naturally. Rather, humor arises from a series of managerial choices and constant refinement, in the same way, that the brand’s personality is subject to management and refinement. Marketers spend considerable time and effort to make a brand’s humorous ads and social media posts appear natural and germane to the brand. However, many marketers are flying blind when it comes to choosing a type of humor that fits the brand. If advertising is created in-house, brand managers may have more control but little expertise with humor. Agencies have more experience with the use of humor in ads but may lack a full understanding of the brand’s persona.

With this challenge in mind, we propose a framework for finding congruence between a brand’s personality dimensions and the types of humor available to advertisers (see Figure 1). Given the five dimensions of personality (Aaker 1997) and the five types of humor (Speck 1991), it is possible to identify types of humor that may be more (or less) likely to convey certain personality traits and personality traits

that may be more (or less) likely to exhibit certain styles of humor. Next, we will discuss the reasoning behind each of the proposed relationships.

Comic Wit (HT1) is widely used because of its broad appeal and versatility. Comic wit is smart, yet accessible. The lack of disparagement in this type of humor allows marketers to use clever retorts, exaggeration, and even sarcasm, with less risk of alienation or offense. The intellectual component of comic wit can help brands exude confidence by demonstrating adequacy, capability, or a certain level of perceived knowledge. Smart humor can be perceived as high-brow, which makes it effective at conveying sophistication and class. In comedy, a witty retort conveys more sophistication than a football to the groin. Comic wit can also make a brand appear exciting through the imaginative use of language and imagery that engages the brain. Therefore, we propose:

P1: Use of Comic Wit (HT1) will have a positive effect on the perception of a brand's Confidence, Excitement, and Sophistication.

Sentimental Humor (HT2) produces humor by placing an empathetic individual or creature (e.g., a child, a dog, or an overwhelmed parent), placing them in an anxiety-inducing arousal situation, and delivering the individual to safety. The relief of the last stage generates a laugh. Sentimental humor often uses everyday situations centered on home and family as the context. Therefore, this type of humor is considered safe and warm, which makes it a good fit for conveying sincerity, or a wholesome and down-to-earth trait. The warmth of this type of humor can also be charming, which can help convey sophistication in certain contexts. However, the safe and non-confrontational nature of sentimental humor prevents it from conveying ruggedness and toughness. We propose:

P2: Use of Sentimental Humor (HT2) will have a positive effect on the perception of a brand's Sincerity and Sophistication, but will harm a brand's perceived Ruggedness.

Satire (HT3) comes from a combination of the incongruity-resolution mechanism and humorous disparagement. Satire uses sarcasm, parody, and other methods which portray an image or scene that is not to be taken literally, but rather as an imitation of a real situation. This disjointed nature gives satire its strength, but it also means that satire is unlikely to convey sincerity, which relies on the source being straightforward and honest. The risky and edgy nature of satire is best suited for conveying excitement (i.e., daring and spirited) and ruggedness (i.e., tough and unrefined). Therefore, we propose:

P3: Use of Satire (HT3) will have a positive effect on the perception of a brand's Excitement and Ruggedness, but will harm a brand's perceived Sincerity.

Sentimental Comedy (HT4) is unique among the types of comedy in Speck's model, in that it often features middle-class protagonists overcoming the challenges of everyday life. The ad is often set in the home, but other familiar locations such as school or the workplace are also featured. The optimal audience for this type of humor can be rather specific. Upper-class consumers are unlikely to relate to the middle-class protagonist. Everyday situations around the home are likewise unlikely to strike a chord with young, single, or high-end consumers. Therefore, sentimental comedy is not likely to lead to perceptions of sophistication. However, the wholesome nature of this type of comedy, and its moral lessons should convey sincerity. Often in ads using sentimental humor, the branded product is key to solving the problem faced by the protagonist. This should help convey a brand's competence (i.e., reliability and effectiveness). Thus, we propose:

P4: The use of Sentimental Comedy (HT4) will have a positive effect on the perception of a brand's Sincerity and Competence but will harm a brand's perceived Sophistication.

Full Comedy (HT5) is the final type of humor in Speck's (1991) humorous Message Taxonomy. This type of humor can add depth, and can therefore be quite useful for advertisers. However, since this type of comedy relies on all three humor processes (incongruity-resolution, arousal-safety, and humorous disparagement), there is nothing inherent to full comedy that points to specific personality traits. The personality effects would depend on the structure and context of each processing type in the ad, as well as the interaction between all three processes. Its complexity also requires that consumers give full attention to the ad, pick up on the multiple cues in the ad, and understand the references. Due to this complexity, we cannot propose specific personality effects in this study without accounting for multiple moderators. We consider this an area for future research.

DISCUSSION

Humorous ads can be an effective tool for marketers and are quite popular among both viewers and advertising professionals. Around 20% of U.S. television ads use humor (Curran 2012) and funny ads can drive several positive outcomes for marketers. Successful humorous ads can also reinforce and strengthen brand personality, which in turn can positively affect consumers' attitudes toward the brand. However, ads that miss the mark with humor can create confusion around the brand's personality and overall identity. Therefore, using humor that is aligned with the brand's personality could lead to more consistently positive outcomes.

To improve the effectiveness of humorous ads, we present a comprehensive conceptual framework to aid marketers in the use of humor. The propositions in this research offer guidelines for practitioners and a path forward for academics who study humor and advertising. In the following sections, we address the managerial and theoretical implications, as well as future research possibilities.

Managerial Implications

This paper offers a conceptual framework that can be useful to managers who wish to use humor to advertise their brands. Specifically, our model maps the types of humor used in ads with the dimensions of brand personality they are most likely to impact, either positively or negatively. Advertisers can use this framework to create a new brand personality, reinforce an existing brand personality, or reposition an ailing brand's personality.

First, managers can use our model to create humorous ads that establish personality traits for a new brand. To maximize the benefits of the framework, marketing managers should assume a customer-oriented view and determine the brand personality dimensions that a good fit with the personality of their target customers (Malär, Krohmer, Hoyer, & Nyffenegger 2011). This seems obvious, but previous research shows that marketers tend to use an internal congruency approach when crafting a new brand personality, in which they align the brand personality with the internal corporate identity without any consideration of brand-consumer interaction (e.g., Simões, Dibb, and Fisk 2005). However, brand personality is established via an inferential process occurring in the consumers' minds (Johar, Sengupta, & Aaker 2005). It, therefore, makes sense to use an external, customer-oriented approach to brand personality development. This could enable individuals to feel a strong resemblance between the brand's personality and their own.

Consumers may infer a brand's personality from communication efforts (Aaker 1997). Research suggests that humorous ads could be ideal for new brands due to their ability to drive awareness (Chung and Zhao 2003). The framework in this research provides a useful guide to marketers to help them differentiate among humorous ad executions and better understand the likely impact these ads would have on the brand's personality. For example, managers could use the safe and non-confrontational nature of sentimental humor to convey a brand's sincerity.

Second, managers can use this framework to reinforce various dimensions of an existing brand's personality. Consumers are more likely to endow a brand with personality associations when they have a positive and significant experience with the brand (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello 2009). Humorous ads are a unique and effective communication experience (Weinberger & Gulas 1992) that can be viewed repeatedly and shared with friends on social media. In this way, consumers get to know brands in ways they

never could before. Thus, marketers should examine current consumer perceptions of the brand based on their experiences, and use a type of humor that is consistent with these perceptions. For example, if consumers perceive a brand as edgy and exciting, advertisers could use forms of satirical humor (e.g., sarcasm or parody) to reinforce these characteristics of the brand in consumers' minds.

Lastly, managers can use humor as means to reposition their brand's personality. Brand repositioning is a method used to refresh a brand's image in the face of underperforming sales or stiff competition, and is achieved primarily through branded communication (i.e., ads, social media posts, etc.). As a strategy, the first step of brand repositioning is identifying the desired brand identity and personality (Park, Jaworski, & MacInnis 1986). Marketers then design a new set of advertisements to communicate this new identity to consumers. The first goal of the repositioning process is to challenge the old perceptions held by consumers. Thus, it may be beneficial to highlight the incongruity between the historic positioning of the brand and the new brand image (Sjodin & Torn 2006). Consumers will adopt a new perception of the brand to the extent that they see consistency between marketing activities and the new brand personality (Yakimova & Beverland 2005). The framework in this research can guide managerial decisions when planning a strategic repositioning. For example, brand managers looking to shift the personality of their brand from one of excitement to sincerity should consider using sentimental humor because of its natural congruence to the sincerity trait (i.e., wholesome, cute, and honest).

Theoretical Implications

This research makes a unique contribution to the study of humor, advertising, and brand personality theory. Despite the prevalence of funny ads and their usefulness in conveying brand personality, no prior research has bridged the gap between the core taxonomy in humor research (Speck 1991) and the core paradigm on brand personality (Aaker 1997). These two models are studied extensively in their respective academic silos, however, both fields could benefit from having new pathways for productive and useful research.

In the same vein, the study of advertising could benefit from the introduction of Speck's taxonomy. Too often, humor is considered an on/off state; either an ad used humor, or it did not. Other times, humor is treated as if it was a stereo volume slider. Ineffective ads are simply *not funny enough*. These treatments of humor in advertising research miss the complexity of humor and its many forms. For example, sentimental humor and satire are two very different types of humor that lead to very different outcomes. Lumping them together may lead to questionable findings and insights that lead advertising practitioners astray.

Future Research

There are several avenues for future research based on this research. First, the propositions in this paper can be empirically tested, either alone or in tandem. It is possible to use either existing ads or create faux ads with particular types of humor for use in experiments. Measures exist to capture perceptions of brand personality and other outcomes of interest to brand managers and advertisers. Since the use of humor can be context-specific, an initial way to analyze our framework could be through case studies (Eisenhardt 1989). A case methodology allows researchers to study events in their natural settings (i.e., in consumers' homes) and offers the option of tracking consumers' brand evaluations over time as advertising strategies change.

Next, future research could explore the moderators, boundary conditions, and interaction effects that are key to unlocking the greatest benefit from our conceptual framework. Based on a review of previous research, variables such as product type (Chung & Zhao 2003; Flaherty et al. 2004), attention to the ad (Beard 2008b), and the consumer's need for humor (Cline, Altsech, & Kellaris 2003) play a key role in the effectiveness of humorous ads. Also, this research focuses on humor-trait congruence in a 1:1 manner to lay the groundwork for future study. However, realistic personalities (for both humans and brands) are not one-dimensional. Rather, personalities are complex, made of multiple dimensions present at varying degrees. Such complexity necessitates testing a variety of humor types that are likely to elicit the desired

trait mix. One approach is to create a multiple-ad campaign, with each ad conveying a different aspect of the brand's personality. This could give brand personality added depth and complexity.

Advertising researchers can also use this framework to explore the effectiveness of humor in establishing brand personality across advertising media. Previous studies have explored advertising effectiveness across traditional media (i.e., De Pelsmacker, Geuens, & Anckaert 2002; Rubinson 2009) and recently online media (Calder, Malthouse, & Schaedel 2009). However, since the study of Weinberger, Spotts, Campbell, & Parsons (1995), there is little research on humor effectiveness in different advertising media. It may be time to re-examine advertising effectiveness, the role of humor, and brand outcomes across media.

Finally, this framework applies to any communication medium in which brands interact with consumers. Online video ads, mobile ads, and social media postings could all benefit from using this framework. For example, Goodrich, Schiller, & Galleta (2015) found that consumers view online video ads as less intrusive when humor is used, mitigating negative evaluations of the brand. Many brands, such as Wendy's and Netflix, use humor to great effect on social media. The use of humor is key to creating ads that are shared widely across social media (Porter & Golan 2006; Hoedemaekers 2011). However, research has not yet examined humor-personality congruence in these mediums.

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