

Analysis of the humour in advertisements in Discord's posts on Twitter

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Abstract

This research note focuses on humour and its use in advertising on a social media platform – Twitter (also known as X). In particular, the research focuses on the activities of a communication software company – Discord. First, humour is introduced and briefly described. Then, the article discusses the general usage of humour for advertising. A humour classification system adopted for this study is also summarised. The corpus built for the study includes 62 multimodal posts from the company's Twitter account. The type of humour used in the posts is discussed and a short description of all quantitative data gathered is provided to allow for comparison with similar studies. The analysis shows that Discord opts to mainly use humour techniques from the Surprise, Parody and Slapstick clusters in their humorous posts.

Keywords: humour, social media, advertising.

1. Introduction

Humour plays an important role in people's everyday conversations. It has also become an important form of advertising (Strick et al., 2013, p. 3; Thannikkottu et al., 2023, p. 1). Because of this, there is a growing body of work in recent years centring on the use of humour in advertisements and the advantages and challenges that come with it (Lin, 2023; Stwora, 2023, Tshuma et al., 2024). However, the existing descriptive literature on the issue often focuses on advertisements in television (see e.g., Feiz et al., 2013; Toncar, 2001). The aim of this paper is to contribute to filling this gap by analysing Discord's social media presence on X (formerly known as Twitter) focusing on the engagement of users with the humorous posts. The main research questions are:

- RQ1: What humour techniques are used most often in Discord's humorous posts? What humour clusters do they belong to?

- RQ2: How are the humour techniques manifested in the posts?

2. Theory

The aim of this section is to define and describe main humour-related concepts pertinent to this work and provide background knowledge that may prove vital in later parts of this paper. According to Stwora (2023), humour always depends on the person experiencing it (p. 131). Some people might find certain content humorous while others do not. Additionally, it is important to note that the humour must first be recognised and understood by the receiver. Then it is subject to following variables:

- context,
- upbringing,
- culture,
- gender,
- language (Stwora, 2023, p. 134).

2.1. Humour in advertisements

According to Lin (2023), using humour has become an integral part of advertising strategy to keep people's attention and focus on the advertised product (p. 1). This realisation has sparked research interest in this topic and humour in advertisements is frequently studied by researchers (Strick et al., 2013, p. 33). Some notable examples include Lin (2023), Stwora (2023) and Tshuma et al. (2024). However, sometimes using too much humour is not beneficial either. According to an online article, a survey showed that brands may appear as outdated when they focus their advertising efforts mainly on humour. Some respondents stated they would prefer if companies shared more posts on serious topics with a serious tone. Otherwise they have no way to stay original (*Twitter Users Tire of "sea of Same" from Brands, Report Finds | Marketing Dive*, n.d.). A similar failure of humour in advertisement was observed by Dore (2020) before.



Figure 1. Controversial Burger King advertisement. Source: Dore (2020, p. 108)

According to Dore (2020), the use of taboo humour in this advert was considered distasteful by many (p. 108). It is also the case that generally the use of taboo humour in advertisements might have a negative effect on the perception of the advertised products (Babinszki & Balázs, 2023, p. 48).

2.2. Categorising humour

A complex system of categorisation was created by Buijzen and Valkenburg (2004), who proposed the following clusters of humour in audio-visual media:

- Clownish humour – includes clownish behaviour, anthropomorphism, speed and chase techniques.
- Surprise – includes conceptual surprise, visual surprise, transformation and exaggeration techniques.
- Parody – includes parody, bombast, rigidity, absurdity and infantilism techniques.
- Misunderstanding – includes misunderstanding, ignorance, disappointment and peculiar sound techniques.
- Slapstick – includes slapstick, peculiar face, peculiar voice, coincidence, clumsiness, stereotype, ridicule, malicious pleasure and repartee techniques.
- Satire – includes satire, irreverent behaviour, outwitting and peculiar music techniques.
- Irony – includes irony, sarcasm, embarrassment, puns and scale techniques.
- Miscellaneous – includes grotesque appearance, sexual allusion, eccentricity, imitation, impersonation and repetition techniques (pp. 158-162).

To demonstrate, the advertisement from Figure 2 is using the exaggeration technique from the Surprise cluster.



Figure 2. Lego Technic advertisement. Source: Babinszki & Balázs (2023, p. 42)

The absurdity technique from the Parody cluster may also be observed in this example as it is absurd that such a young child could assemble a given kitchen appliance from the parts lying on the table.

For the sake of this work, the authors decided to adopt this system because it is comprehensive and generally well accepted by other researchers. It is important to note, however, that humour categorisation systems are heavily contested and may depend on the interpretation of the viewer.

2.3. Advertising in social media

Another key concept that is crucial while analysing Discord's posts on social media is to understand the basis of social media advertising. As Hanandeh et al. (2024) states, nowadays, companies must use varied social media strategies in order to advertise themselves well. This might include following new trends to engage their customers and building a community (p.2334). Different social media platforms offer varieties of features that might be used for those purposes. When it comes to Twitter, the main and most recognisable feature of this platform is the ability to create posts that consist of a maximum of 280 characters (as of July 2025).

3. Methodology

The main aim of this essay is to investigate the humour in Discord's posts on Twitter, categorising it and identifying trends in the use of humour as a promotional tool. As a basis for analysis, the authors incorporated the above-mentioned categorisation proposed by Buijzen and Valkenburg (2004).

All the posts included in the corpus were taken from the main Discord profile on Twitter and fall within the time frame from 22 March 2023 to 8 June 2024. During that period Discord published 196 posts, out of which 62 could be considered humorous (31,6% of all posts during that period). A given entry was classified as humorous if the comment sections included at least one funny or laughing emoji, phrases such as 'lol' or 'xd' or comments that made it clear that the post was considered funny by the viewers (similar to Dynel, 2021, p. 181). It was also classified as humorous if both authors marked it as such.

The authors performed an analysis of all humorous posts. One such example is presented and thoroughly described. Then, the numerical data is provided.

3.1. Analysis

The example from Figure 3 includes exaggeration technique from the Surprise cluster. This technique can be often used to exaggerate flaws and make fun of something (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004, p. 154). In this particular case, it is the exposure of Discord users who do not mute their microphones when they are not speaking and various sounds can be heard in the background. In order to enhance the effect of the post, vulgar language, which states "mfrs when you ask them to mute: "oh you can hear that?"" and a picture that is meant to exaggerate the situation even further are also used. Using the image of the Discord mascot in a noisy concert reinforces the message and adds a humorous dimension. The photo on the left is intended to portray an unaware user who is having fun and does not pay attention to the fact that his microphone is not muted. However, the second one shows a slightly surprised face after hearing the comment on this topic. It can be assumed that Discord wanted to build camaraderie with its users by making fun of a situation many of them would find familiar.

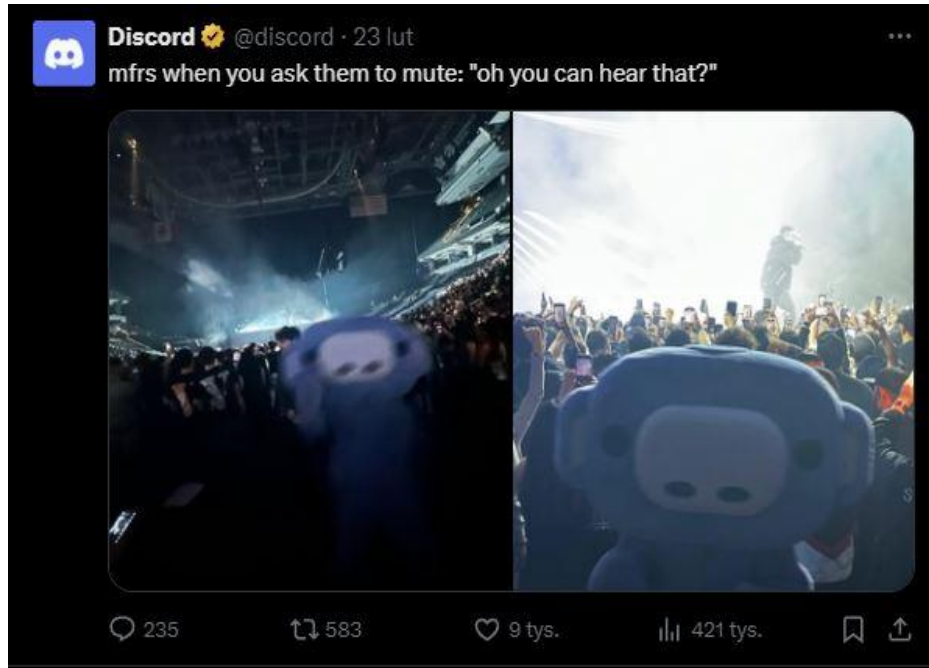


Figure 3. Example of exaggeration from Discord’s post on Twitter. Source: <https://x.com/discord/status/1761073445528309834>

After analysing all of the posts from the timespan between 22 Mar 2023 and 8 June 2024 in the same manner as the example above, the authors established that all of the eight main humour clusters were found in the corpus. The graph below presents the number of posts which contained at least one technique from a given category.

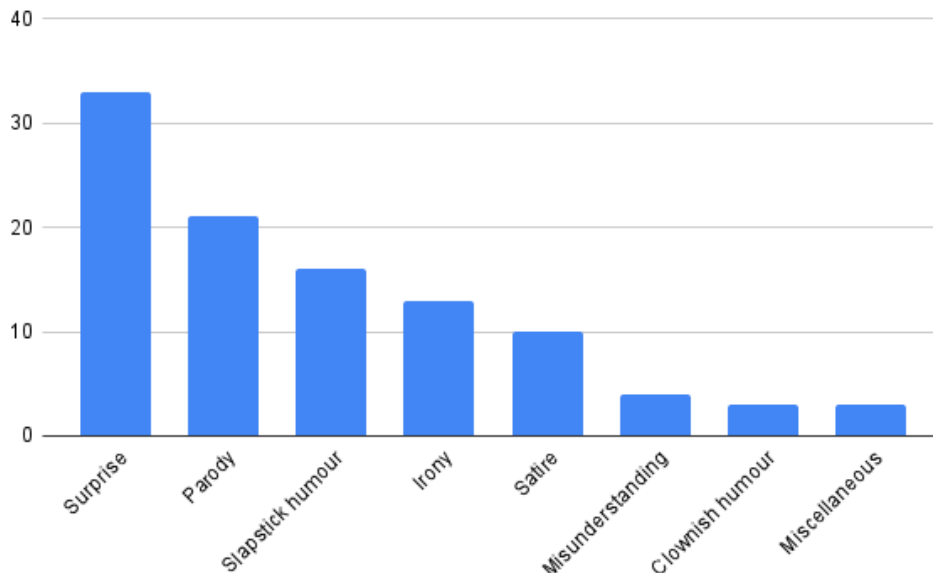


Figure 4. Graph representing all of the technique clusters with number of occurrences. Source: authors’ own study

All of the examples were tagged by both authors independently and then the results were compared. The authors fully agreed in about 79% examples (49 posts), partially agreed on about 9.5% (6 posts) and disagreed on about 11.5% (7 posts). The classification of the ambiguous examples was agreed upon after discussion and in most cases included both interpretations. Through the process of analysis it was established that the most common techniques used on Discord's profile belong to the humour cluster of Surprise. 33 out of the 62 analysed humorous posts contained one of those techniques which constitutes for over half of the corpus. The Parody, Slapstick, Irony and Satire clusters were also popular, each of them containing between 20 to 10 examples. The humour techniques that were rarely used come from Misunderstanding, Miscellaneous and Clownish humour clusters. Each of those was seen in less than 5 posts.

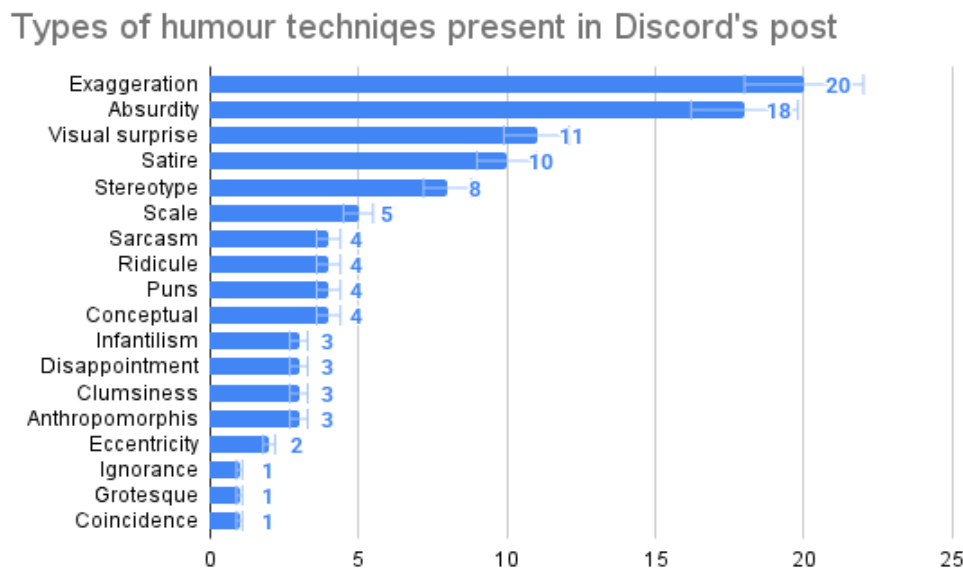


Figure 5. Graph representing all of the used humour techniques and number of their occurrences. Source: authors' own study

All of the techniques that were found in the analysed corpus are presented on Figure 5 with their number of occurrences. As one can conclude from the graph, the most popular technique was exaggeration from the Surprise cluster and appeared in 20 posts. The second most popular technique was absurdity which was recognised in 18 entries. It belongs to the Parody cluster which was the second most common cluster. The third most visible technique was visual surprise which similarly to exaggeration belongs to the Surprise cluster. The last technique that appeared in 10 or more posts was satire from the Satire cluster. The rest of the techniques present in the corpus appeared less than 10 times. The exact numbers can be found on Figure 5.

4. Conclusions and implications for further research

While the data gathered from one company's account is not enough to reach definite conclusions on the way humour is used as advertising on social media, the analysis still provided many insights worth further research and discussion.

In the corpus the authors analysed, Discord used to a certain degree all of the humour technique clusters on their Twitter account. However, the most popular techniques were: exaggeration (32,2%), absurdity (29%), visual surprise (17,7%) and satire (16,1%). Those types of humour (especially absurdity and visual surprise) make good use of the visual capabilities of social media and are often coupled with an image.

If one was to compare the results of this research with studies performed by other researchers, it would become apparent that Discord never used humour that could be considered taboo-breaking, at least in the small sample of 196 Discord posts. This aspect differs from the activities of other companies analysed by Dore (2020), who researched taboo-breaking humour in other media. It could be seen as an area deserving further study with a bigger sample of posts. It may also be beneficial to analyse the engagement of the community with the posts. Especially the types of comments that appeared under the posts. This could provide important insight about why certain clusters of humour are used more often by Discord and whether the choice was dictated by community engagement and advertising purposes. Finally, it is important to note that other companies may use humour on social media in different ways and this paper may serve as a point of departure for further explorations in this direction. After all, humour, advertising and social media are important areas of many people's lives and every contribution to studying those subjects matters.

Appendix

Discord posts used for the corpus:

<https://x.com/discord/status/1785729491551105517>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1783554478894977381>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1782462037219521007>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1780310854908440941>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1778844938584613271>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1767289043060949262>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1766189984707465608>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1761073445528309834>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1760372028723347765>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1758568774230212739>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1757857841984274569>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1742239311930761655>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1732974414210461931>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1731732973056368788>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1721591176548024779>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1706710133269500133>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1702362670836621351>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1696935623888908693>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1695114322211676310>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1691497055062269952>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1689688048349687809>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1686073232313499678>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1684625849658855424>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1682158849115947008>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1677381895607431169>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1674858044877058054>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1674138859419111424>

<https://x.com/discord/status/1672296485705138211>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1666177533618929666>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1799463904038277262>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1788252804882030707>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1782882602489377218>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1781004910747676697>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1778151640366830007>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1775225927842369611>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1768735582895677796>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1757825642802864142>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1756014540825694515>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1754573810009833922>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1753147116652818483>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1751281412370526275>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1742239311930761655>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1730652840073589016>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1727016681791168584>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1725581175908114566>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1724487141399654468>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1722670511090762119>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1720470880705257981>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1719492395618980073>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1718364370433122595>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1715770923179991415>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1712507615723532598>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1799190158967021908>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1657430510950555648>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1705267521803387071>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1695466676874047639>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1693669463034593375>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1690046579435323392>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1686428486809116672>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1679892608867520512>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1678454481611280384>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1664697074435215362>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1743678816495738954>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1741869042661515650>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1739330218924400985>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1638934550930919426>
<https://x.com/discord/status/1790790587920105877>
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