Humorous advertisement categories

Emese Babinszki
University of Debrecen, Hungary
babinszki.emese@gmail.com

Katalin Balázs
University of Debrecen, Hungary
balazs.katalin@arts.unideb.hu

Abstract

Humour is a prevalent strategy in advertising, but research findings are contradictory regarding its effectiveness. A potential resolution of the contradictory findings could be to create a category system distinguishing between the basic types of humorous advertisements, which could systematically be used in future research. Several classifications have been reported and some typologies have been suggested, but none is based on the audience's representations. Our aim was to identify the basic types of humorous advertisements with an approach that considers both the previous typologies and the non-experts' representations.

In the present study, 18 humorous advertisements were assessed based on a questionnaire study with 13 questions and 246 adult participants. Based on the cluster analyses of the empirical data, three basic types of humorous advertisements were identified: taboo-breaking, exaggeration, and cute or sentimental humour. Eight items were differentiated most clearly among the humorous advertisement types. Both the humorous advertisement categories and the applied items are worth consideration in further studies. Conscious use of the identified categories in future research could help to develop a more comprehensive model of humorous advertising effects.

Keywords: humour, advertising, advertisement types, typology, humorous advertisements

1. Introduction

The study focuses on the humorous advertisement types differentiated on the basis of the audience's perception. Research on humorous advertisement types is essential for the theoretical understanding of their impact (Weinberger & Gulas 1992), especially as some research findings on humorous advertising seem to contradict each other (e.g., Eisend 2009).

Humour has always been a widely used tool for advertisements, mainly because of its attention-grabbing nature and emotional impact (Weinberger et al. 2015). The humorous

advertisements continue to be used, and humour is used globally as a communication strategy (Alden et al. 1993).

The prevalence of the humour strategy supports its effectiveness implicitly, but beyond the advantages, empirical research also tends to show an adverse effect (e.g., Beard 2008; Eisend 2009; Djambaska et al. 2016; Warren et al. 2019). Contextual features and advertisement types together could explain the seemingly controversial results. The importance of humorous advertisement types was already highlighted in Weinberger and Gulas's review article published in 1992, and the type was identified as a significant moderator of the effect of humorous advertisements in later studies (Walter et al 2018). The latest trends bring the potential negative impacts of these advertisements into focus (e.g. Blackford et al, 2011; Warren et al, 2019). On the other hand, the impact models refer almost exclusively to positive impacts (e.g., Eisend, 2011), and are therefore not able to explain all the aspects of the humour effects. The need for systematic usage of different types of humour in the analysis is clear; however, there is no widely accepted typology which could support researchers.

This study aims to reveal the current audience representations of different humorous advertisement categories, explore their characteristics and thus move a step forward in this line of research. This study is expected to contribute to more accurate predictions of reactions to the revealed advertisement types. The research presented is an extension of our previous study, using more and different advertising stimuli than before (Babinszki & Balázs, 2015).

With this approach, our aim is to outline a humorous advertisement typology that is simple enough to be easily applied in impact studies yet covers the majority of humorous advertising. If a category system could meet these two criteria at the same time, it could be easily used as a dependent variable in advertising research and thus contribute to the work of practitioners in the longer term.

2. Humour

Humour is a human-specific phenomenon that is represented in every culture and almost every kind of communication (e.g., Schnell 2022), but it is still hard to define. Eysenck (1972) stated that defining humour is similar to dissecting a frog: while you examine it, it dies. However, many scientific researchers have made attempts to understand the construct. Some theories that try to explain the phenomenon of humour originate from the humour-response, i.e. laughter (arousal, relief and superiority theory), while other theories try to identify its components (incongruity, benign violation theory).

The most widely held theory among marketing researchers is the incongruity theory (Weinberger & Gulas, 2019b), which holds that humour requires outliers that are different from our norms and expectations. According to Raskin (1985), these incongruent elements are necessary but not sufficient to evoke humour. There is a need to resolve the incongruent situation. The audience must realise that the situation is not serious, and so a so-called play signal is needed (Raskin, 1985). Alden and his colleagues (2000b) add surprise and warmth as key elements beside the incongruity and its resolution.

The latest humour theorists - McGraw and Warren (2010) - suggest that the incongruity is just a form of a more general phenomenon, benign violation. Based on the hypothesis of Veatch (1998), McGraw and Warren developed a model where humour can be experienced only if we evaluate a situation as a violation, albeit we recognise its benign nature.

Martin and Ford (2018, p. 3) define humour in the book entitled "The Psychology of Humor: An Integrative Approach" as a term referring to a multifaceted, broad phenomenon. According to them, either statements or behaviours can be perceived as humorous when they

are amusing, funny or make people laugh. They consider humour as a social phenomenon which involves the emotional response of mirth.

Humour can be understood as a characteristic or a stimulus: the mental process of creating or perceiving it; or the emotional response (Martin 2003). Although humour occurs mostly in interpersonal contexts, it can be completely intrapersonal as well. Ruch and his colleagues emphasized (2019, p. 3) that humour is related to playfulness, cheerfulness and laughter, but humour can also be "scorn directed at people", and sarcasm can be based on immature behaviour, as well.

Weinberger and Gulas (2019b, pp. 914 – 915) defined humorous stimuli as messages that had been created with the intention to provoke cheerfulness or laughter. These reactions imply affective, cognitive and conative responses. In this study, we focus on the humour in advertising stimulus, and consider an advertisement humorous when people perceive it as such; that is, our approach focuses on the assessment of humorous advertisement stimuli from the audience's perspective.

3. Humorous advertising

For many decades, humour has been part of the tools used by advertising professionals to persuade and attract attention (Weinberger et al. 2015). Analysing the advertisements which won OBIE Awards from 1925 till 2009, the authors found a continuous growth in the proportion of humorous advertisements. A similar study on the international advertisements featuring in the WARC Awards for Effectiveness showed an increase in humorous advertising, from 40% to 46% from 2016 to 2018 (Núñez-Barriopedro et al. 2019).

Humour and incongruity as fundamental contributing factors were detected in advertisements of several cultures (Alden et al. 1993; Pornpitakpan & Tan 2000). Unger (1996) highlighted that it is beneficial to use humour because with this tool the advertisement becomes a "good traveller", so a campaign can be used in several countries with no or only minor changes. Zhu and her colleagues (2021) investigated the effect of different cultures on the perception of advertisements. They find that people from countries with high uncertainty avoidance perceive *cognition-evoking humorous advertisements* positively, while people from collectivist countries perceive *emotion-evoking humorous advertisements* positively.

In general, humour in advertisements can attract attention, create a positive mood and positive feelings towards the source, increase comprehension, recall and source credibility, and have a 'word of mouth effect'; that is, people tend to talk about them (Djambaska et al. 2016; Madden & Weinberger 1984; Sternthal & Craig 1973). On the other hand, humour has a 'vampire effect' (Eisend 2011), as it is not only more persuasive as it acquires cognitive capacity but can also distract the perceiver from the main message. To achieve a positive effect, the humour should be related to the message and the product type should be an appropriate subject for a joke (Runyon 1979).

Failed humour (boring, offensive or unrealised) has a clear negative effect (Flaherty et al. 2004). The audience is often offended because of intentionally humorous advertisements; however, this has more to do with the themes involved, which are often aggressive arousal safety humour, including violation of social norms or taboos (Beard, 2008; Dore 2020). Furthermore, humour is subjective, and repeated encounters with the advertisement reduce the fun (Ackerman 2011, as cited in Djambaska et al. 2016). Finally, the effectiveness of humour is hard to measure (Djambaska et al. 2016).

One of the key factors of humour is incongruity (Alden et al. 1993). *Incongruity* is the mismatch or blend between incompatible elements (Suls 1983). This factor and the resolution of the confusion (e.g., Raskin 1985) elicit a humorous response, which can help develop

positive attitudes towards the message. Incongruity is followed by surprise, which can be turned into fear or humour, depending on contextual factors (Alden et al. 2000b). The reaction depends partly on the degree of incongruity (Pornpitakpan & Tan 2000); moderate incongruity is reported to lead to a more positive brand and advertisement attitude and purchase intention than extreme incongruity. *Schema familiarity* is shown to moderate surprise (Alden et al. 2000b). According to classical theories, the humorous response itself is a positive experience based on factors that trigger positive emotions such as playfulness, resolution, surprise (Alden et al. 2000a) and a feeling of warmth (Alden et al. 2000b).

Based on Eisend's (2009) meta-analysis, humorous advertisements attract attention, lead to positive attitudes and thoughts, reduce the appearance of counterarguments, and increase purchase intention. However, humour can have a negative effect on the assessment of the source's credibility.

Eisend (2011) created an emotional-cognitive model regarding the effect of humorous advertisements, thereby emphasizing that the emotional response and cognitions are mutually influencing processes, which together affect the attitude towards the advertisement and the brand. According to Eisend's approach, in addition to the fact that humour induces positive feelings, it reduces negative feelings, and at the same time, the evoked emotions affect advertising and brand-related cognitions. According to the model, cognitions themselves influence the attitude towards advertising and the attitude towards the brand.

Qualitative research conducted among an Azeri audience (Hasanova 2019) confirms that humorous advertisements are not very convincing; however, based on the results of a questionnaire study, the respondents consider humorous advertisements more attention-grabbing and memorable than those without humour.

According to a meta-analysis (Walter et al. 2018), the effect of humour on persuasion can be described by an inverted U-shaped curve rather than a linear one. Humour that is too weak does not attract attention and is not sufficiently persuasive; while too much humour can divert the viewer's attention and focus from the message.

Walter et al. (2018) point out that to understand the effect of humour it is not enough to examine the classic indicators (persuasion, knowledge, behavioural intention); the match between the topic and the humorous approach can be important as a moderating factor. This moderating matching effect was found to be stronger for marketing advertisements than for political advertisements. As a conclusion, it seems to matter whether or not the use of humour is accepted in the given area. Relevant humour - when the humour fits well with the message - is also more effective for involved target groups. Recently, humorous advertisements with a more *negative tone* have become increasingly popular: the subject of the joke is often violence, the ridicule of others or even taboo subjects in society (Weinberger & Gulas 2019a, 2019b). Weinberger and his colleagues (2015) reviewed the types and trends in humorous advertising over 100 years and pointed out that humour in advertising is constantly changing as a response to the macro-and micro-environment. The popularity of each type can vary depending on the spirit of the age. However, experts have no consensus on the typical types of humorous advertisements (Weinberger & Gulas 1992).

In light of the above-described literature, differentiating factors of humorous advertisements can be incongruity, playfulness, resolution, schema familiarity, surprise, positive and negative emotions, aspersion and outrageous features. In the following, we aim to gather further features which can be a basis for humorous advertisement type differentiation.

4. Typologies of humorous advertisements

Empirical data supported the hypothesis that the type of humour and the cultural background of the viewer have an effect on the perceived humour (Muller et al. 2011). According to Muller et al. (2011), the type of humour influences the positive effect on the attitude towards the advertisement, which affects the attitude towards the brand.

Weinberger and Gulas (1992) reviewed the literature on humorous advertisements, focusing on which communication goals of what type of products can be supported for which target groups by this type of advertisement. Furthermore, they investigated the execution factors of the advertisements. They raised the rarely tested issue of humour types in advertising and their potential. Subsequent studies (e.g., Walter et al. 2018) continue to report that there is little research on these types. In the following, the history of research on humorous advertisement types is outlined briefly, in order to search for differentiating factors among these types.

According to Freud, the reaction to humour is a relief; more specifically, it is a tension reduction of frustrations caused by unfulfilled desires (e.g., Freud 1905; Meyer 2000). He differentiated two types of humour: aggressive and sexual. He calls humorous content that does not fall into these categories non-tendentious humour. Goldstein and McGhee (1972) further developed this approach and separated tendentious humour into two types: aggressive, and sexual. Goldstein and McGhee also renamed Freud's non-tendentious category as non-sense and their definition was rather related to incongruent elements than simply being the opposite of tendentious humour. In these early typologies, more emphasis is placed on negative humour than in later categorisations. Recent research again raises attention to their relevance. A notable example is the study by Warren and his colleagues (2019). They found that people may experience *negative emotions* even if they perceive the advertisement as humorous. Nowadays, humorous advertisements containing aggressive content or evoking negative feelings are popular; however, the negative feelings moderate brand attitudes (Warren et al. 2019).

Later, Speck (1987) established his typology based on the presence or absence of three components. The components considered are the induction of *arousal safety, incongruity-resolution,* and *humorous disparagement*. Arousal safety humour evokes empathy and relief. Incongruity resolution provides a feeling of decoding. Humorous disparagement is an element that appeared as aggressive humour in Freud's concept. Speck's typology defines five humour types along the three components: full comedy (all three elements are present), sentimental comedy (disparagement is absent), satire (arousal-safety is absent), sentimental humour (only arousal-safety is present), and comic wit (only incongruity-resolution is present). This system of humorous advertisements takes into account combinations, hence becoming more complex. Speck (1987) and McCullough and Taylor (1993) distinguish sentimental humour, although later theories reveal that an essential factor in humour is the heart-warming emotion (Alden et al. 2000b). Alden and his colleagues (2000a) called it *warmth*.

Catanescu and Tom (2001) created an easier-to-use and more practice-oriented model than Speck's model. They examined roughly 600 television and magazine print advertisements and identified seven types. The types are the following: comparison, personification, exaggeration, pun, sarcasm, surprise and silliness (which presents a somewhat unrealistic scene). It is an easily applicable category system. The *exaggeration* type appears in the typology of Catanescu and Tom (2001) but is not mentioned in the other typologies.

The issue of categorisation is further complicated by the fact that different studies use different approaches to classify advertisements. There exist, for example, a content-based approach (e.g., Buijzen & Valkenburg 2004), and a structural separation approach, based partly on the effect on arousal levels (Speck 1987).

Walter and colleagues (2018, p. 354) used Buijzen and Valkenburg's (2004) content-based typology to classify the advertisements used in their research into the following categories:

slapstick, clownish humour, surprise, misunderstanding, irony, satire, and parody. Their results show that humour types act as moderating factors in the knowledge of the subject of advertisements. However, the different types have different effects: while the effect of parody is positive, irony tends to decrease the recall of the message. The researchers (ibid., p. 350) also point out that the effects of humour types are underrepresented in the literature.

There are examples in other areas of advertising research of the importance of typology. Goldenberg, Mazursky and Solomon (1999) created a category system for creative advertisements, and during their investigations they found that advertisements that could be classified well in one of the categories performed better than other examined advertisements. In sum, a widely accepted categorization can help to create more effective advertising. The utility of such a typology for humorous advertisements seems to be very similar.

First, it is necessary to develop categories that can cover a large range of humorous advertisements before one can investigate the different types of humour systematically. Our study focuses on target group evaluations of humorous advertisements, as their perception is vital for effectiveness. In this respect, it seems important to consider the following aspects as differential factors of humorous advertisements: evoked positive / or negative feelings; warmth; exaggeration; incongruity-resolution; humorous disparagement; sexual and aggressive content.

5. Empirical study

The study aimed to differentiate humorous advertising types based on the perceptions of the audience. In the literature on advertisements, several categorization systems can be found (e.g., Buijzen & Valkenburg 2004; Catanescu & Tom 2001; Speck 1987). Walter and colleagues (2018) found that different humour types had different effects on the audience.

> Based on these findings, our first research question is whether the humorous advertisement categories can be differentiated on the basis of the audience's perception.

According to the conclusions of previous research studies, it seems that positive and negative evoked feelings can differentiate among humorous advertisements (Eisend 2009, 2011; Warren et al. 2019; Weinberger & Gulas 2019a, 2019b). The rate of humour matters (Walter et al. 2018). Incongruity, playfulness, incongruity resolution, schema familiarity, surprise (Alden et al. 1993, 2000a; Raskin, 1985; Suls, 1983) and a feeling of warmth (Alden et al. 2000b; McCullough & Taylor 1993; Speck 1987) also seemed important. Humorous disparagement, aspersion (Chen et al., 2019; Speck 1987) and outrageous, morbid, irritating features (Warren et al. 2019), and also exaggeration were mentioned (Catanescu & Tom 2001).

> Based on the above-cited literature, the study focuses on the following features: positive and negative evoked feelings; level of humour; incongruity; playfulness; incongruity resolution; schema familiarity; surprise; feeling of warmth; humorous disparagement; aspersion; outrageous-; morbid-; irritating features; exaggeration. Our second research question is whether these factors differentiate the humorous advertisement types.

We planned a within-subject study design in which the examinees assessed several features of advertisements. The aim was to differentiate distinct humorous advertisement categories based on the provided assessments. As a target audience, we chose to investigate adults in their active years (from 16 to 65 years in Hungary). Only two-dimensional, print advertisements were applied in the study, as they are easier to handle technically in an online questionnaire. As we planned a questionnaire design, in which one of the first steps was the selection of the

investigated two-dimensional advertising stimuli and the wording of the potentially differentiating features.

5.1. Preliminary study 1

5.1.1. *Purpose of the preliminary study*

To avoid researcher's bias and to meet the goal of measuring lay representations we needed a layman's wording of the potentially important humorous advertisement features. Besides reviewing the relevant literature, we decided to organise focus groups to explore layman's terms for humorous advertising. To illustrate the initial difficulties, consider the term schema familiarity which is commonly used in the studies. It would be strange to ask how familiar you feel with the schema presented in the advertisement. We considered these terms: familiarity, typicality, originality, novelty, and creativity, but we needed to test which resonated more with the layman's understanding. Therefore, the focus groups were able to serve as a basis for forming the final items of the main study.

Furthermore, we also tested whether we can predict more or less which advertisement(s) they find humorous. It was important because we intended to include both humorous and neutral advertisements in the empirical study, to avoid examinees comparing humorous advertisements to each other, instead of to a baseline level.

5.1.2. *Methodology and sample*

We organised focus groups where the participants commented on 20 humorous advertisements and assessed 12 other advertisements on paper and pencil questionnaires followed by a discussion on the questionnaire items.

Three focus group studies (N=32) were carried out in which university students participated. All participants and the target group of the main study fall into the active age category.

5.1.3. *Results*

As a result of both the literature review and the focus groups, we selected "original" and "typical" as the terms to approach the schema familiarity. Similarly, warmth or incongruity resolution wording was modified to make it more understandable for lay participants. We also included typical negative feelings evoked by humorous advertisements (e.g. irritation). Furthermore, as an initial check, we used an item to measure how humorous the advertisement was for them. As a final result, we created the 13 following items in Hungarian for assessment (in some cases, the explanation of the original term – i.e. the one we intended to investigate – is provided):

1. How original is this advertisement? (schema familiarity -)
2. Did this advertisement evoke strong positive feelings?
3. Did this advertisement evoke intense negative feelings?
4. Is this advertisement unrealistic? (exaggeration)
5. Is this advertisement cute? (warmth)
6. Was this advertisement hard to figure out? (incongruity resolution +)
7. Is this advertisement humorous?
8. How typical is this advertisement? (schema familiarity +)
9. Is this advertisement derogatory? (humorous disparagement, aspersion)
10. Is this advertisement morbid?

11.   Is this advertisement outrageous?
12.   Is this advertisement irritating?
13.   Is this advertisement clear? (incongruity resolution -)

Regarding the humorous assessment, we found clear individual differences, as expected, but it seemed that many of the advertisements we thought to be humorous were also perceived to be so by the participants. This confirmed the functionality of the advertisement selection method.

5.2.   Preliminary study 2

5.2.1. Purpose of the preliminary study

We attempt to test if we can identify humorous advertisement categories and their characteristics in a questionnaire study (Babinszki & Balázs, 2015); therefore, we can consider this a pilot study.

5.2.2. Methodology and sample

In an online questionnaire, the participants (N= 138) rated 17 advertisements based on the selected items above. 15 advertisements were selected as humorous; two were non-humorous and served as control stimuli. The participants were recruited on the university's social media platforms and communications channels (e.g., courses and talent programs).

5.2.3. Results

As a result of the questionnaire survey, based on a hierarchical cluster analysis of the assessment values, four categories are identified: exaggeration, taboo-breaking, cute and youthful-trendy.

The *exaggeration* category contained demonstrations of the product utility enlarged. Participants felt these advertisement were unrealistic, somewhat morbid and irritating. *Taboo-breaking* advertisements, which were mostly increasingly sexually charged, were considered by the participants to be very explicit and novel. It was the most morbid and irritating of the categories. Previously, sexual categories had appeared in McCullough and Taylor's (1993) five-group and Goldstein and McGhee's (1972) three-group system. However, not all the advertisements in the category were purely sexually taboo-breaking. The *cute* category was also distinct. The participants considered these advertisements as cute, unrealistic, and humorous. The fourth category was considered by the participants both novel and typical. Based on these characteristics and content, we have provisionally given the name *youthful-trendy* to this category. However, we felt this category was not described perfectly by this label.

In addition to unclear and emerging issues, the most important conclusion from the perspective of this study is that the method of investigating humorous advertisements in a questionnaire study to reveal categories seemed to work well. Therefore, as reported in the following, we planned and completed a study applying this method with several humorous advertisements.

5.3.   Method of the main study

The investigation aims to explore possible categorisation possibilities of humorous advertisements and clarify the issues raised by the characteristics of concrete categories found in the previous study (Babinszki & Balázs, 2015).

The aim was to carry out an empirical research study with more and completely different advertisements than in the pilot studies to reveal humorous advertisement categories. Therefore, the advertisements in the study were chosen to be humorous, and different from the previous stimulus material. In addition, advertisements that do not seem to fit neatly into the previously established category system should be included in the stimulus material. In this way, we tried to avoid the bias of asking participants to rate only those advertisements that fit into the categories we had previously identified.

Figure 1. FeedClean's disinfectant wipe advertisement. Source: http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/feel_clean_dog

Figure 2. Advertisement included in the stimulus material as a neutral one. Source: http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/vitarella_studying

The stimulus material for the study included 38 advertisements, of which 20 were initially categorized as humorous (e.g., Figure 1) and 18 were categorized as neutral (e.g., Figure 2). The neutral advertisements were designed to get respondents to judge not only humorous advertisements against each other, but also use advertisements as their reference system. For ordering advertisements, the humorous advertisements were mixed with neutral ones, thus avoiding the interference effect between the humorous advertisements. The advertisements were downloaded from adsoftheworld.com (see Appendix).

The adverts were displayed on separate pages, so the respondents only saw one advertisement at a time and had to rate it on 13 criteria. The 13 items were the same as those used in the previous study. The examinees assessed the items on a 7-point Likert scale. After evaluating the advertisements, demographic questions were asked on age, gender, and education.

The questionnaire was available online. Evaluating 38 adverts would have been burdensome in one go, so the stimulus material was broken down into two versions (see below as A and B groups). Both versions were presented in order and in reverse order; therefore four questionnaire versions were created. The participants were randomly assigned to one of the four questionnaires.

5.4. Sample

The participants were recruited mainly through university students in various courses and online, using the snowball method. In the recruitment process, we sought to achieve heterogeneity of participants across their majors. For example, we promoted the questionnaire to students on teacher training courses and minor modules and asked psychology students to recruit non-psychology peers in both full-time and correspondence courses. A total of 246 people completed the four versions of the questionnaire, distributed as follows:

- "A" advertisements in order: 58 people
- "A" advertisements in reverse order: 68 people
- "B" advertisements in order: 61 people
- "B" advertisements in reverse order: 59 people

Finally, 180 women and 66 men completed the questionnaires. The gender ratio was similar in the evaluation of group "A" and "B" advertisements, with 96 women and 30 men in group A and 84 women and 36 men in group "B".

Regarding all participants, the mean age was 32.3 years (standard deviation = 12.76) for each advertisement group, as follows:

- For "A" advertisements, the average age is 30.37 years (standard deviation = 10.8)
- For "B" advertisements, the average age is 32.27 years (standard deviation = 12.76)

5.5. Results

The analysis of data started by calculating the medians of the 13 aspects rated on the seven-point Likert scale. This data matrix can be viewed as the typical perception of the advertisements, and it was the basis for the categorisation. However, before the analysis, the assessment of humorousness was crucial. The inclusion criterion in the cluster analysis was a minimum median value of three in the humour rating, meaning that it is humorous to a medium extent. This criterion was met for 18 advertisements. Some advertisements were pre-classified

as humorous advertisements in the stimulus material (Figure 3), but the participants did not consider them humorous (median= 1). Later, we asked the students about these advertisements in small groups. For example, regarding the advertisement in Figure 3, we found that some people see the reference to the film Mignons clearly, while others find it challenging to find it even with help.

Figure 3. McCafe's advertisement features the popular fairy tale character, the Minon. Source:
https://www.adsoftheworld.com/campaigns/minions-257716ac-4eae-4c71-bd8c-97f559615568

However, there were also cases where an advertisement that was previously considered neutral ended up being included in the subsequent analysis as a humorous advertisement (Figure 4) based on the participants' perceptions, as it was considered humorous (median= 4).

Figure 4. BarraShoppingSul advertisement. Source:
http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/barrashoppingsul_one_piece_missing_girl

So, as a first step in the analysis, we excluded those advertisements that did not score at least a median of three on the humour subscale. Four of the 20 humorous advertisements - as categorised before the study - were not considered humorous by the respondents, and two of

the 18 neutral advertisements were considered humorous. Naturally, the preliminary categorisation and rating of the participants overlapped for most of the advertisements (e.g., Figure 5 - a humorous advertisement). Finally, a total of 18 advertisements considered humorous by the respondents were analysed further.

Figure 5. Lego Technic advertisement. Source:
http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/lego_kitchen_0

Aggregate data on the medians of the 13 dimensions of perceived humorous advertisements were classified using hierarchical cluster analysis with Ward's (Ward.d2) minimum variance criterion. In the analysis, the medians of perceptions were the input data, and the advertisements were the basic units of analysis. To explore the structure and determine the optimal number of clusters as accurately as possible, we used a variety of analyses to understand the split of clusters.

After calculating the Dunn index (inter-cluster variance/intra-cluster variance), the five-cluster division (*Dunn index=.48.*) seems to be the most strongly supported. However, it can also be seen that, for example, the five-cluster model is effectively composed of three larger clusters, with one-one outlier advertisements (15 and 12), each separating to form two single-element clusters, and the middle cluster splitting into two clusters (see Figure 6).

If we examine the same advertisements with k-means cluster analysis, with the number of clusters increasing continuously, we see that the explained sum of squares does not improve after the two-cluster model by applying the elbow method. There are two breaks: a sharp one at two clusters and a more insignificant break at three clusters.

These are the same two clusters as in the case of the first split in the hierarchical cluster analysis, where the advertisements are broken down into two groups. However, if the first, smaller cluster (advertisements 15, 7, and 38) is reapplied, leaving out the k-means cluster

analysis, the result is still two sharply different clusters, which means that the larger cluster can be classified into two smaller, well-differentiated clusters.

In sum, we conclude that the three-cluster model seems correct, bearing in mind that advertisements 12 and 15 are outlying from their clusters. This result seems to answer the first research question that, based on the audience's perception, humorous advertisement types can be differentiated. The following section examines the identification of the clusters in the three-cluster model. We will examine the characteristics of the three clusters in terms of the assessed aspects.

Humorous advertisements
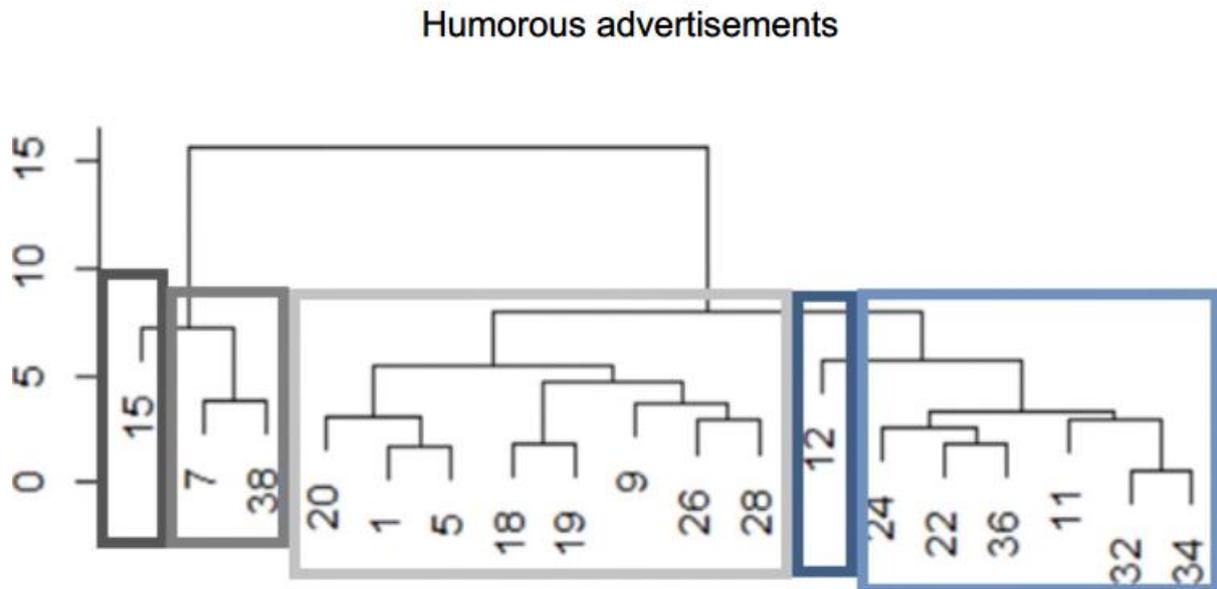
Figure 6. Elements of the five-cluster model on the dendrogram of the hierarchical cluster analysis

The 38 adverts were viewed by two groups, as we asked one person to view 19 advertisements in the evaluation. Working with merely the humorous advertisement data below, excluding the outlying advertisements 12 and 15, these two groups saw and rated the advertisements in the following breakdown:

- Group A: 1, 5, 7, 9, 11, 18, 19
- Group B: 20, 22, 24, 26, 28, 32, 34, 36, 38

Grouped by the cluster membership identified earlier, if the median of the ratings of these advertisements per person is calculated, we get a typical rating for each cluster on all 13 criteria for each person. These typical scores can then be compared, and differences between clusters can be searched for using the non-parametric Friedman test. The results of the Friedman test with Kendall's W value were added to reveal the magnitude of impact and show the significance of any potential differences. The fact that we can compare these advertisement groups for *two measurements* allows us to highlight *systematic* differences.

The results of the Friedman test and Kendall's W are summarised in Table 1. Semi-bold highlighting indicates the systematically different evaluation dimensions. Italic highlighting indicates the less systematic aspects. For Kendall's W values, one asterisk indicates a small effect size (W<.2), two asterisks indicate medium (.2<W<.5) and three asterisks indicate large

(W>.5), according to Cohen's rule (e.g., Makowski et al. 2019). The seven aspects highlighted in the table will be addressed in detail below.

The three clusters were compared pairwise using a paired Wilcoxon test along with the seven most discriminating criteria. The analysis shows that the third cluster is significantly different from the other two clusters in terms of both negative and positive feelings. The advertisements in this cluster evoke the most positive emotions (Vs>0, ps<.001) and, in line with this, these advertisements evoke the least negative emotions (Vs>2774, ps<.001).

Table 1: Medians of Group A and B advertisements ratings and results of the Friedman test

Cluster	Medians for the group assessment			p-value	W	Medians for Group B assessment			p-value	W
	First cluster	Second cluster	Third cluster			First cluster	Second cluster	Third cluster		
Original	6	5	5	.001	.157*	5	5	5	.216	.013*
Evokes positive feelings	2	3	4	*.001*	.124*	3	3	4	*.001*	.371**
Evokes negative feelings	3	2	1	*.001*	.232*	2	2	1	*.001*	.588***
Unrealistic	5	4	4	.046	.024*	5	5	4	.001	.367**
Cute	**1**	**3**	**5**	**.001**	.434**	**2**	**3**	**5**	**.001**	.635***
Induces the emotional state of the 'aha experience'. – hard to figure out	7	6	7	.002	.048*	5	5	5	.382	.008*
Humorous	5	4	5	.001	.102*	4	5	5	.001	.170*
Typical	2	3	2	.001	.137*	2	3	3	.001	.112*
Derogatory	**2**	**1**	**1**	**.001**	.535***	**2**	**1**	**1**	**.001**	.617***
Morbid	**3**	**1**	**1**	**.001**	.585***	**2**	**1**	**1**	**.001**	.650***
Outrageous	**6**	**1**	**1**	**.001**	.868***	**4**	**1**	**1**	**.001**	.808***
Irritating	**3**	**1**	**1**	**.001**	.553***	**2**	**1**	**1**	**.001**	.550***
Clear	6	6	6	.370	.008*	6	5	5	.006	.043*

* W<.2; **.2<W<.5; *** W>.5

The second cluster is cuter than the first (Vs>988, ps<.001), and the third cluster is cuter than both (Vs>0, ps<.001), so the first cluster is the least and the third cluster is the cutest.

The first cluster differs from the second and third clusters in the following aspects for both groups: more derogatory (Vs>2616, ps<.001), more morbid (Vs>3080, ps<.001) and more outrageous (Vs>4752, ps<.001). The first cluster seems more irritating than the third category (Vs>2210, ps<.001).

We attempt to find the appropriate name for each cluster and summarise the category profiles in the following. The first cluster's advertisements are morbid and outrageous; and of the three clusters, they are the most derogatory, irritating, and most frequently combined with negative emotions. Along with this, they elicit the least positive feelings, and they are the least cute advertisements. Based on the above characteristics and the advertisements (e.g., Figure 7), the name *taboo-breaking category* fits the cluster perfectly.

The second cluster was rated between the first and third clusters along with several variables. It has an unrealistic quality, evoking positive feelings rather than negative ones. These advertisements have a certain cuteness, but they are also less derogatory, outrageous and less irritating. They are also between the first and third clusters in terms of humorousness. Therefore, it was challenging to find a name for the cluster and the variables, but after reviewing the advertisements (e.g., Figure 8), the cluster was labelled as *exaggeration*. This cluster was similar to the earlier defined youthful-trendy category, but a more general label seemed to fit better.

The third cluster is the cutest and these advertisements evoke the most positive feelings. Regarding the more negative characteristics, some medians stand out, i.e., they do not evoke negative feelings and are not morbid, derogatory, outrageous or irritating. Moreover, these advertisements were considered the most humorous by the participants. Based on these characteristics, and after viewing the advertisements (e.g., Figure 9), we reconsidered the earlier applied cute label, and the cluster was given the *sentimental comedy* label.

In sum, three distinct humorous advertisement categories were differentiated based on participants' perceptions: taboo-breaking, exaggeration and sentimental comedy advertisements. Furthermore, we can conclude that some of the investigated features clearly differentiated among the revealed advertisement categories, especially features such as cute, derogatory, morbid, outrageous, and irritating. This finding seems to answer the second research question.
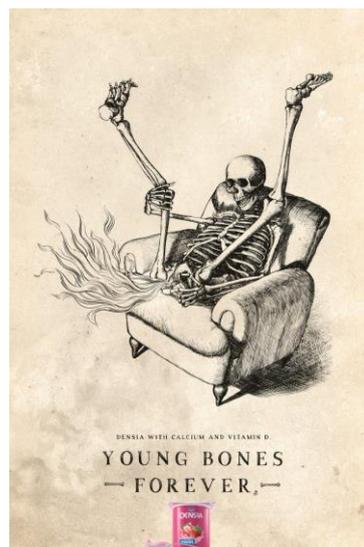
Figure 7. Danone's advertisement is an element of the taboo-breaking cluster. Source: https://www.adsoftheworld.com/media/print/danone_fart

Figure 8. The Steigl beer advertisement is an item in the parodistic exaggeration cluster. Source: www.adsoftheworld.com/media/print/stiegl_crafted_with_patience_2

Figure 9. Mitsubishi electric car advertisement is one element of the cute cluster. Source: https://www.adsoftheworld.com/media/print/mitsubishi_chimp

6. Conclusion

The primary objective of the empirical study presented in this paper was to contribute empirical data to humorous advertisement typology research, based on the audience's perception. A humorous advertisement typology can be crucial in the effectiveness of humorous advertising (e.g., Weinberger and Gulas 1992; Walter et al. 2018). Based on the assessment of the participants in our study, 18 humorous two-dimensional advertisements were considered in the analyses. We followed the approach often used in communication science, i.e. that humorous advertising is perceived as humorous by the recipient (e.g., Meyer 2000). The humorous advertisements were evaluated through 13 items describing potential features of humorous advertisements based on the literature. Based on the participants' responses, we identified three types of humorous advertisements: taboo-breaking, exaggeration, and sentimental advertisements.

The first category was *taboo-breaking*: it contained adverts which are negative, morbid, outrageous, sarcastic, and irritating. These advertisements are humorous despite their negative qualities, in line with recent research on humour concepts. In particular, aggressive content that generates fundamentally negative emotions can elicit a humorous response in advertising as much as content that generates positive emotions (Warren et al. 2019). Freud's (1905) typology of humour included tendentious (aggressive and sexual) humour, of which later Goldstein and McGhee (1972) defined aggressive humour as a separate category. In their work, Buijzen and Valkenburg (2004) emphasise that several humour techniques (e.g., irony, satire) are offensive and do not intend to induce innocent laughter. This category is in line with full comedy in Speck's typology (1991) in terms of underlying processes. It involves aggression, and provides negative affect and incongruity resolution. Our study confirms the clear distinction of this humorous advertisement category. Based on the literature, both positive and negative features can be attributed to this humorous advertisement type, when the receiver resolves the incongruity, and understands that this advertisement breaks a social norm, or a cultural standard. This increases the arousal level of the receiver, which is decreased by an emotional outburst, i.e. laughter. The emotional processing of the advertisement is like sitting on a roller-coaster, which is a memorable experience but involves an ambivalent mix of feelings. Both positive and negative feelings are evoked and, based on the literature (Eisend 2011; Warren et al. 2019), these feelings affect the attitude towards the advertisement and also toward the brand. In sum, although this advertisement type is memorable, it can affect brand attitudes and purchase intention negatively.

The second humorous advertisement category was *exaggeration*, also clearly distinguished in our previous study (Babinszki & Balázs, 2015). If we study the advertisements in this category, it becomes clear that they are often effective caricatures, where a product feature is exaggerated to parody a situation. In the category system of Buijzen and Valkenburg (2004), parody appears as a separate category, but exaggeration as a humour technique belongs to surprise. Catanescu and Tom (2001) define parody and exaggeration as two separate categories, too. Based on the recipients' ratings, their characteristics are very similar. Exaggeration is characterised by being rated between the other two categories regarding positive and negative emotions and being unrealistic. It is undoubtedly a vital area for the subsequent study to explore where the boundary between parody and exaggeration lies, whether there is a boundary between them at all or whether they could be merged, or whether exaggeration is a form of parody. If we are talking about the cognitive processes this category is in line with satire in Speck's typology (1991). Exaggeration combines humorous disparagement and incongruity resolution. This type of humorous advertisement is more similar to advertisements employing sentimental humour

than to taboo-breaking advertisements. The distinction between these lies in the fact that the first two evoke mainly positive feelings. Besides, even if negative feelings arise in the case of exaggeration, that is not aggressive, as this type of advertisement does not go too far in breaking norms. Therefore, we can expect that these advertisements are likely to affect consumers' attitudes in the preferred direction.

The third category is humour that evokes explicitly positive emotions: *sentimental comedy*. These advertisements are characterised by evoking stronger positive emotions than the other two categories. Cute advertisements are considered the most humorous category, and they scored high in cuteness. It should be stressed that the negative examined qualities, such as outrageous or morbidity, are not at all characteristic of the elements of this advertisement category. Speck's (1987) categories of sentimental comedy and sentimental humour are similar in that they elicit arousal elevation without the presence of humorous cynicism. Sentimental comedy involves incongruity resolution beyond arousal increment (Speck, 1991). Therefore, this category seems to fit best to the type of advertisements differentiated in our study. Regarding this type of advertisement, it is essential to mention the theory of Alden and colleagues (2000b), who considered positive, heart-warming emotions an elementary ingredient for developing the humour response. However, there is growing evidence that positive feelings are not necessary for a humour response (e.g., Warren et al. 2019). Instead, it can be that evoking positive emotions is a method to achieve a humorous response and this type of advertising can be a separate category of humorous advertising.

As discussed above, Alden and colleagues (2000b) consider the display of heart-warming emotions an essential element of the humour response. This study supports their theory that heart-warming, cute adverts were indeed considered the most humorous. At the same time, there are humorous advertisements which are not cute at all. This finding is in line with those recent reviews (Warren et al. 2019) which emphasize that viewers can find humour in advertisements even when they experience negative feelings during their presentation.

For all three categories, their appearance in the previous categorisation systems suggests that the experts identified similar types of humorous advertisements as the target group in the present study. The assessment of 13 criteria was intended to reveal latent clusters, which could help gain a deeper insight into lay people's perceptions of different types of humour. All items were useful in differentiating advertisement categories, but as few as eight of them were the most differentiating: cute, derogatory, morbid, outrageous, irritating, unrealistic, evoking positive feelings and evoking negative feelings. Further studies can be planned considering these items. The list of important features could probably be enlarged. Researchers in this field, however, always have to consider the limit of participants' attention when filling out questionnaires, which is always a limitation.

As a further limitation, we have to admit that although heterogeneous, a small number of advertisements were included in the study. The study participants were adults, mainly young adults from Hungary. It would be beneficial to investigate this issue in other populations as well. Probably the same types of humorous adverts are present, but different themes or schemes lead to similar target groups' reactions depending on their cultures.

Weinberger and Gulas (2015) point out that current humour is always a reaction to the macro-environment, so naturally, humour in advertising also reflects the current social situation and trends. The fact that more destructive humour can appear in advertisements, and is even considered valid and humorous, could well be a feature of the modern age. However, this means that today, when considering the effectiveness of humour as an advertising tool, it is essential to study its various types. Further analysis and a deeper understanding of this category could also be relevant goals for future research. An interesting research question could be to examine

possible cultural and generational differences or even to repeat the study years later, when social changes may bring new trends in humour.

As a conclusion, we can emphasise that our empirical results indicate that the audience of humorous advertisements differentiates among advertisement types mainly on an emotional and ethical basis, not based on content or humour technique. Furthermore, even though taboo-breaking humour is gaining popularity, it evokes negative feelings and beyond attracting attention, it may involve unwanted effects. Therefore, one should be cautious with this trend, which can be efficient mainly in special target groups preferring cynical, morbid humour, but not in the general population. Although the strong reactions seem to produce proper results, that is only part of the picture and the negative feelings evoked may cause more harm. However, this research was a step forward in revealing clearly distinctive humorous advertisement types from the audience's perspective. Further research is needed to focus on the effect of these distinctive humorous advertisement types. Following Eysenck's analogy: different frogs are found, and now they should be followed to study their behaviour in different environments.

Appendix

Advertisement for the A Group
1. http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/tic_tac_birthday
2. http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/nestle_caramel_honey_macadamia
3. https://www.adsoftheworld.com/campaigns/minions-257716ac-4eae-4c71-bd8c-97f559615568
4. http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/samsung_pink
5. http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/academia_hairdresser
6. http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/cedro_textil_the_1910s
7. http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/banana_7
8. http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/nobile_akaw
9. http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/hairshopeuropecom_hair_memorial
10. http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/pepsi_breakdance
11. http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/maxima_tin_men
12. http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/barrashoppingsul_one_piece_missing_girl
13. http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/philips_apple
14. http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/danone_flower_bomb
15. http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/danone_fart
16. http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/superoptic_waterfall
17. http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/yamaha_couple
18. http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/chumak_apple
19. http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/transamerica_radio_station_elvis

Advertisement for the B Group
20. http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/volkswagen_girlfriend
21. http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/nestle_moon
22. http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/mitsubishi_chimp
23. http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/ariel_forever_colour_3
24. http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/danone_never_share_2
25. http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/samsung_memory_age_is_not_just_a_number
26. http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/feel_clean_dog
27. http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/adidas_yellow

28. http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/stiegl_crafted_with_patience_2
29. http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/skullcandy_become_the_sound
30. http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/hasbro_singer
31. http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/yamaha_neurons
32. http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/lego_kitchen_0
33. http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/apple_our_signature_3
34. http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/lego_star_wars_graffiti
35. http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/vitarella_studying
36. http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/interjet_dogs
37. http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/sony_destinations_2
38. http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/rock_is_religion_hendrix

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