

HUMOUR IN FOOD ADVERTISING

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ABSTRACT

Humour is known to help relational outcomes, in all communicative settings. In the present case study, in product-based business sectors, constructive humour styles play a defining role. In particular, this study aims to identify how humour impacts the presentation of food products to the public. The discussion is based on studies on humour effect in marketing and consumer psychology. Food advertisements are analysed in an attempt to identify the ways in which humour determines consumers to buy one food product or another. Constructive humour has positive effects on business performance and work relationship quality no matter the business sector. The only limitation of the research concerns the cultural context (only Romanian advertisements are analysed). This study allows strategic insights into how to use humour in an advertising context. To the best of the authors' knowledge, no previous Romanian study has thus far examined the impact of humour on the selling of food products as a result of advertisements. the disciplines of marketing and psychology.

Keywords: humour discourse, advertising, food products.

INTRODUCTION

The most common techniques identified in advertisements are: bandwagon, common sense, emotional appeal, exaggeration, exigency, facts and figures, free or bargain, glittering generalities, heart strings, humour, name calling, reasoning, repetition, rhetorical question, snob appeal, sounds good, testimonial, and transfer (HOSSEINIZADE, 2013). Humour is used in to make the consumer laugh, remember the advertisement, and associate positive feelings with the product, but it provides little information about it (HOSSEINIZADE, 2013; SPARKS & LANG, 2014). "Humour is a social expression with beneficial effects on physical and psychosocial health and well-being. In advertising, humour constitutes a communication strategy that targets consumers' attention and aims to create positive attitudes towards the ad and the brand" (HATZITHOMAS, BOUTSOUKI & ZOTOS, 2009).

Humour has been defined by English language dictionaries as both "the quality of being amusing or comic, especially as expressed in literature or speech; the ability to express humour or amuse other people", and "a mood or state of mind" (LEXICO). The second definition implies that humour can determine one's mood or state of mind. Therefore, it is relevant to tackle the effect of humour in advertisements, irrespective of the type or category.

Therefore, the communicative effects of humour have been extensively studied in education, marketing, psychology, speech, and advertising, but few of them refer to food advertising specifically or non-specifically. The influence of humour on the effectiveness of advertisements has been largely investigated in the last four decades. Thus, in the 1960s,

humour, idioms, and puns were widely used in advertisements; in the 1970s, idioms were dropped out; in the 1980s, humour and idioms came back (CHRISTOPHER, 2013).

In the 1980s, researchers studied the persuasiveness of humorous appeals or communications (LAMMERS ET AL., 1983), the successfulness of humorous advertising (MADDEN & WEINBERGER, 1984), the effect of humour on advertising comprehension (DUNCAN ET AL., 1984), and humour's communication effects (SPECK, 1987). Two decades later, researchers focused on the shift from humour to product advertised (CEBRZYNSKI, 2008), on the effect of humour on attitude towards ads, attention, and positive effect (EISEND, 2009), on the impact of culture and product type on humorous advertising (HATZITHOMAS et al., 2009), and on humour-generating figures of speech (SCHNEIBERG, 2010).

In the second decade of the 21st century, researchers approached topics like humour and cultural values in print advertising (HATZITHOMAS ET AL., 2011), humour in TV commercials (ÇAĞLAYAN ET AL., 2013), rhetorical strategies in advertising (CHRISTOPHER, 2013), persuasive markers in TV food advertisements (HOSSEINIZADE, 2013), humour in advertising (STRICK ET AL., 2013; KONESKA ET AL., 2017), stylistic features of English advertising slogans (DUBOVIČIENĖ & SKORUPA, 2014), prankvertising (< prank “practical joke” + advertising) (KARPIŃSKA-KRAKOWIAK & MODLIŃSKI, 2014), effects of sexy and humorous content in advertisements (SPARKS & LANG, 2014), effectiveness of humour advertising (DJAMBASKA, PETROOVSKA & BUNDALEVSKA, 2016), humour in advertising (GUSTAFSSON ET AL., 2016), rhetorical figures in British print advertisement (BIZZOCA, 2017), and implications of humour in advertising on consumer's buying behaviour (BATALLA ET AL., 2019). In addition, Martin (2008) tackled the idea of the highly beneficial effect of humour upon human health through the promotion of a ballanced diet/lifestyle (eating healthy foods, maintaining an appropriate body weight, performing regular physical exercise, and refraining from smoking and excess alcohol consumption).

Only very few of the authors referenced above have approached the topic of humour in food advertising. While some of them have tackled this topic in a non-specific way, some others have addressed it more specifically. Non-specific approach of humour in food advertising is our main target for the purpose of conducting extensive conceptual analysis on the corpus we have collected. Four decades ago, Madden & Weinberger (1984) asserted that “the most currently mentioned products best suited for humour were soft drinks and food, followed by alcohol, candy; restaurants; health and beauty aids; and toys and games – in this order”. They also found out that the segments of the consumer market that employ humour in advertising are low-involvement, non-durable products among which snack foods. Speck (1987) named products such as soft drinks, beer, snack foods, automobiles, credit cards, clothing, or beauty aids “attitude objects”. Eisend (2009) pointed out the effect of product colour on the impact of humour and reached the conclusion that red, white, and yellow goods enhance humour impact. Specific approach of humour in food advertising.

Furthermore, Cebzynski (2008) analysed three Quiznos (an American franchised fast-food restaurant based in Denver, CO, USA, that specializes in offering toasted submarine sandwiches) TV spots and concluded that they had toned down humour in favour of food focus because “a so-called food-focused ad loses its focus if the viewer is focusing on a wrestling match between a dog and a man and not the sandwich they're wrestling for”. ÇAĞLAYAN ET AL. (2013) noted that “Food is expected to give pleasure to the consumers. In

commercials it is essential to provide a nice setting and a reason for food consumption. That is why in commercials, food is presented in the most pleasant manner and mostly in humorous ways in order to be more attractive.

In this respect, it is not surprising to see that most of the humour factor could be found in the food advertisements.” They found that food shared 14% of humour percentage, coming after drink (18%) and bank (17%), but before furniture (12%) and communication and malls (10% each). Hempelmann (2008) explained that a computational humour system can create advertising puns such as cereal killer “a fan of breakfast cereals” from cereal “breakfast food” and (serial) killer based on the identical pronunciation of cereal and serial.

According to Speck (1987), “there are three types of relatedness between humour and product – intentional, semantic / thematic, and structural”:

- intentional relatedness (the relationship between humour and message type and message processing) can be: humour dominant and message dominant (information-focused): “Humour in the advertisement is semantic, contains message arguments and requires a different processing style than that in humour dominant advertisements. If the humour is removed, the advertisement still makes sense.” (DJAMBASKA ET AL., 2016); image-focused: “Humour in the advertisement is visual and closely related to the product and/or user. However, if the humour is removed, the advertisement still makes sense.” (DJAMBASKA ET AL., 2016);
- semantic / thematic relatedness (the relationship between humour and the theme related to the product) allows more insight on the relationship between humour and product benefits, name, and use;
- structural relatedness (the syntactic function of humour with in message-dominant advertisement): in this case, the distinction between structural relatedness and thematic relatedness is clear; and of product information with humour-dominant advertisement: in this case, structural relatedness is quite often confused with thematic relatedness.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research is based on the methodology of linguistic analysis, in convergence with food studies and new developments in multidisciplinary theory (DRAGOESCU URLICA, 2021). The terminological corpus sample used in the analysis below represent Romanian food advertisements from the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries collected from web-retrieved food advertisements. The method employed is qualitative corpus analysis, along with terminological and conceptual analysis. Among the varieties of agrifood products presented in Romanian food advertisements from the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries, the most recurrent ones are chicken, liver pate, pickles, and chocolate, which also represent the corpus of food advertisements analysed in our research.

RESULTS

Only four of the allegedly 45 types of humour (TYAGI, 2021) materialise the complex relationships between humour and product (CĂTĂNESCU & TOM, 2001; KONESKA ET AL., 2017): black humour “comedy, satire, etc., that presents tragic, distressing, or

morbid situations in humorous terms; humour that is ironic, cynical, or dry; gallows humour” (LEXICO); personification “the attribution of a personal nature or human characteristics to something non-human, or the representation of an abstract quality in human form” (LEXICO); pun “a joke exploiting the different possible meanings of a word or the fact that there are words which sound alike but have different meanings” (LEXICO); and silliness “lack of common sense or judgement; foolishness” (LEXICO).

Chicken advertisements illustrate two types of humour – black humour and silliness:

- black humour, by an advertisement presenting a chicken carrying a roast chicken on a platter, and by an advertisement presenting a younger chicken carrying a box of chicken carcasses with the slogan Consumați delicioasa carne de pui hrănitore – economică! (Eng Eat delicious, nutritious – economic chicken!) (Figure 1a, b);
- silliness, by a cartoon-advertisement showing a hen surrounded by little chicks urging consumers to eat chicken, and by an advertisement for Transavia chickens showing a little boy unpacking a chicken carcass and telling it Zboară, puiule, zboară! (Eng. Fly, chicken, fly!), and (Figure 1c, d);



Figure 1. Chicken advertisements; source: food advertisements

Liver pate advertisement illustrates the use of two humour types:

- personification: it is the case of the blue (!!!) pig from the company Antrefrig, one of the most long-lived “characters” in the history of Romanian advertising spots, that runs “shouting” hysterically Comentezi? (Eng. Comment?), Ficat, ficat, ficat!

(Eng. Liver, liver, liver!), and Pateu' cu mult ficaaaaat! Un gust enervant de bun (Eng. A pate with a looooot of liver! An annoying good taste) (Figure 2a);

- pun: the advertising slogan of the pate from Antrefrig posted on Facebook is Am identiFICAT Facebook ca fiind caliFICAT pentru mult FICAT. (Eng. We have identified Facebook as qualified for a lot of liver) – the pun uses the word ficat (Eng. liver) three times (twice as part of a past participle and once as a noun).

Pickles represent pun as a humour type: the text of an advertisement for pickled peppers plays on the polysemy of the word lună (Eng. Moon and month): În orice lună, gogoşarii în oţet sunt un aliment ideal (No matter the month, pickled peppers are an ideal food) (Figure 2b).



Figure 2. Liver pate and pickles advertisements; source: food advertisements;
<https://www.citadinul.ro/antrefrig-porcul-ficat-si-istoria-pierduta/>

Among the corpus of food items we have collected, chocolate is the most advertised food during the studied period. Chocolate advertisements illustrate pun as a type of humour:

- the advertisements for the chocolate bar ROM start from a proverb that initially said Foamea vine mâncând (Eng. Hunger makes the best sauce, literally Hunger comes while eating), turning it into Dragostea vine mâncând (Eng. Love comes while eating); they explain why the 20% off – Să nu-l uiţi curând... (Eng. So that you don't forget it soon...) + the image of forget-me-nots; Să iubeşti oricând... (So that you love anytime...) + a rolling pin on a plank; Să iubeşti oriunde... (So that you love anywhere...) + a heart-shaped hay stack (Figure 3a, b, c);
- the advertisement for the chocolate Milka uses the alliteration to create a funny effect: Lila te inspiră la tandreţe (Eng. Lila makes you gentle), and plays on the impossibility to taste something repeatedly for the first time: Simte tandreţea din fiecare prima data (Eng. Feel the tenderness of each first time) (Figure 3d, e);
- the advertising slogan of the chocolate Pitic (Eng. little person) uses the rhyme and antagonism to create humour: Ciocolata Pitic / Te face voinic (The chocolate Pitic / Makes you sturdy) (Figure 3f);
- the advertising slogan of the chocolate Primola plays on the voices of the verb a simţi (Eng. to feel): Oricum te simţi, Primola te simte (Eng. However you feel, Primola feels you) (Figure 3g).



Figure 3. Chocolate advertisements

Source: <http://drumnou.blogspot.com/2009/05/reclama-ciocolata-pitic.html>

DISCUSSION

The relevance of the study lies in highlighting the communicative effect of humour in food advertising. The discussion above also points to the conclusion that the impact of humour in advertising is twofold, as the relevance of humour in food advertising is both *theoretical* and *practical* (Figure 4), which enhances general effectiveness of getting the message across to the consumers.

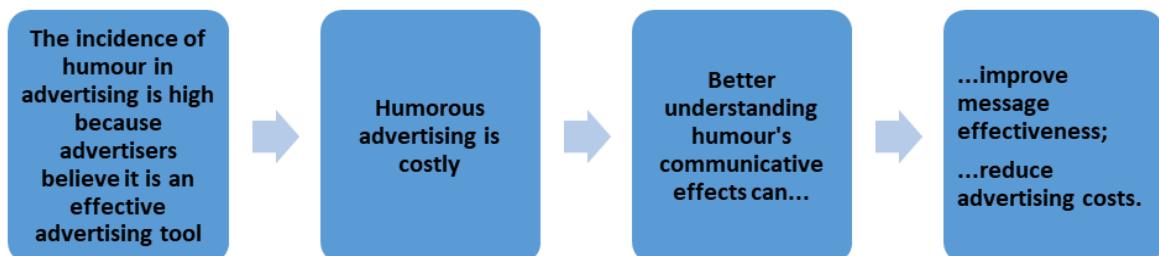


Figure 4. Practical importance of humour in food advertising

The *theoretical relevance* resides in the following:

- A clearer understanding of humour's communicative effects could help better understanding other advertising appeals (animation, fear, music, etc.);
- There is consensus on the mechanisms explaining how humour affects messages;
- There is consensus that humour's effects are beneficial;
- There is consensus that humour influences the effectiveness of a message.

The *practical relevance* resides in the following:

- The incidence of humour in advertising is very high because many advertisers believe that humour is an effective advertising tool;
- The cost related to humorous advertising is very high;
- A better understanding of humour's communicative effects could improve message effectiveness and reduce the cost of advertising.

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