

## Assessing the Impacts of Humorous TV Ads on Young Consumers' Cognitive, Affective and Behavioural Responses

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of humour level and congruity level in humorous TV advertisements on young consumers' cognitive, affective and behavioural responses. A 2X2 between groups experiments were conducted involving 100 participants, who were randomly assigned into four different treatment conditions. In this research, four newly developed TV ads were used as the experimental stimuli featuring the same product and brand but with combinations of different levels of humour and different levels of congruity between humorous message and the advertised product. The four treatment groups were a) High Humour and High Congruity Group, b) High Humour and Low Congruity Group, c) Low Humour and High Congruity Group and d) Low Humour and Low Congruity Group. Results showed a significant main effect concerning Level of Humour on cognitive, affective and behavioural responses. Meanwhile, Level of Congruity showed a significant main effect on cognitive and behavioural responses only. However, there was no significant interaction effect between Level of Humour and Level of Congruity found on all cognitive, affective and behavioural responses. The findings of the study make significant contribution to both the academia and industry by providing a more conclusive empirical evidence on the positive effect of humour in inducing various cognitive, affective and behavioural outcomes.

**Keywords:** *Humour, Television Advertisement, Congruity, Schema-Congruity Theory, Experiment*

### INTRODUCTION

Humour is one of the least understood advertising elements, even though numerous efforts have been made to identify how to maximize the effectiveness of humorous commercials (Sutherland & Sylvester, 2008). Until now, the impact of the humour dominant has not been addressed especially in the Malaysian advertising industry and consumer behavioural context. This study focuses on how humour dominant, as compared to information dominant and image dominant of TV ads affects consumers' attitudes toward the ads and general brands in different cultural contexts. This study was intended to fill the gap by assessing the impacts of humorous TV ads on consumers' behavioural responses.

In Malaysia, DiGi, a telecommunication company has brilliantly employed humour by embedding it in its advertising campaign. As a smaller player at the time compared to other big telco companies such as Maxis and Celcom, it succeeded in capturing the hearts of consumers with its hilarious and cheeky Yellow Man campaign in late 2006. The bubbly and funny Yellow Man functioned as DiGi's brand ambassador who easily connected to many levels of society and appeared in most DiGi's media launches. Accompanied by its happy jingle 'I Will Follow You', DiGi's advertisement stayed in the minds of consumers and is remembered as among the funniest ads.

An advertisement can use humour in many different ways. Some use puns, understatements, jokes, ludicrous situations, satire or irony. Humour is common in TV advertising; 24 to 42 percent of all commercials contain some forms of humour. The popularity of humour as a message device is not surprising because it works in increasing levels of fondness among consumers towards the ads and the brand (Hoyer, Macinnis & Pieters, 2012). However, there was a claim saying that, unless humour is tied or related to the offering, consumers will only pay attention to the humour and ignore the brand. This phenomenon is known as Vampire Creativity; a term to describe advertisements with overly-developed creative themes. Viewers remember the commercial, but not the product or the service offered (Hoyer et al., 2012).

Consumers' reaction towards humorous TV ads will affect their attitudes towards the brand as well. Attitude is defined as evaluation of ideas, events, objects or people. They are positive or negative but they also can be uncertain at times. Every attitude has three components. They are generally represented as per The ABC Model of Attitudes; Affective (A), Behavioural (B) and Cognitive (C). The affective component refers to the emotional reaction one has toward an attitude object and the emotional reaction is called as affectively based attitude. The next component is the behavioural component; where the way one behaves when exposed to an attitude object and the reaction made is known as behaviourally based attitude. The last component is the cognitive component which refers to the thoughts and beliefs one has about an attitude object. The reaction that is primarily made based on the cognitive process in one's mind is also known as cognitively based attitude.

Hence, this study aims to look deeper into the impact of humorous ads on the three components of attitude. How can and how far a humorous TV ad affects those three components in the minds of consumers and whether it could lead to a significance increase of purchase intention among consumers?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Humorous Ads in Malaysia

Although there was no valid statistic of how many humorous TV ads have been produced, their presence in Malaysia is undeniable. In 2013, humorous ads were ranked among the top five watched ads according to YouTube Malaysia annual ads leader board results. ([www.marketing-interactive.com](http://www.marketing-interactive.com)). A recent analysis from Nielsen identified five common characteristics of TV ads that resonate with consumers. One of them is Audience-Appropriate Humour ([www.nielsen.com](http://www.nielsen.com)). Based on the findings, we know that humorous TV ads were somehow affecting consumers' attitudes and responses toward the brands, products, or services that appeared in commercials.

While there were numerous studies on the effectiveness of humorous TV ads toward consumers' responses, only a few had been conducted within the Malaysian consumers' context. Besides that, the issue of adopting humorous approach in TV ads is relevant to

Malaysian advertisers and people in the creative industry as there was a lack of information on the effectiveness of the delivered humorous message in their own ads. Despite the large amount of advertising revenue generated, for example RM 13.6 billion in 2015 ([www.thestar.com.my](http://www.thestar.com.my)), less is known about the effectiveness of humorous TV ads. Will consumers recall the brands, products, or services in humorous TV ads? Will they understand the message conveyed? Will they like the brand? Will they have intention to purchase? The most important question is to determine to what extent a humorous TV ad is effective? Is there any limit in the level of humour?

### **The Impact of Humorous Advertisements on Consumers' Responses**

The impact of humour in advertising has received ample attention in other countries especially in the West. In Malaysia, research on humorous advertising is greatly lacking except for a few studies conducted by Omar Zaki, Mohtar and Kamarulzaman (2019), Yoong (2017) and Chen Khin Wee (2016). Yoong's study for example explored on the use of humour in a Malaysian radio phone-in programme to examine on the stereotypical conceptualization of men and women. Chen Khin Wee (2016) on the other hand, used an online ethnographical approach to explore on the use of citizen satires in communicating dissent on Facebook. Except for Omar Zaki, Mohtar and Kamarulzaman's study in 2019, past studies on the use of humour in the context of Malaysia are very interpretive and qualitative in nature while some other studies simply infused the humorous appeal in a general marketing studies examining the effect of various types of advertising appeals on behavioral outcomes.

Generally, researchers have demonstrated a positive link between humour and attention to commercials (Madden & Weinberger, 1982). Zhang and Zinkhan (1991) similarly noted that humorous print advertising enhanced recall. Humour is also said to contribute to advertising likeability. Advertising likeability is important because it relates well to sales. Biel and Bridgewater (1990) reiterated that people who liked a commercial, were twice as likely to be convinced by it as compared to people who simply felt neutral towards the advertisements. Prior studies have indicated on the presence of a relationship between advertising likeability and consequences of performance. Higher likeability increases customers' purchase intention and affect ads performance (Kim & Reinhard, 2007).

Similarly, Kim and Waller (2006) stated that incorporating humour in magazine, tv and radio advertisements has a positive effect on the audience's attention towards the ads as it imposes greater mental processing effort. According to Shapiro and Lang (1991), the punch line of a joke should serve to orient the viewer towards a humorous commercial. Once attention is focused on an ad, the conscious mind tries to make sense of the stream of information. Thus, humour creates an unthinking call for higher-order processing. Jokes trigger the brain's higher order or central processing to focus on the information in a commercial thus, increasing recall and comprehension. Sparks and Lang (2015, pg. 135) similarly found that humorous content produced "novelty orienting response that increases attention, followed by a sense of pleasure once the humor has been cognitively processed".

Furthermore, humour in TV ads could be one of the motivations needed to trigger customers' purchase intention. Consumer purchase intention refers to consumers' willingness to buy a certain product, service or an idea. The humorous content in the ads could lead viewers to watch the commercial more than once. Hence, this might lead to an increase of exposure compared to non-humorous TV ads. The greater amount of joyous moments and exposure could significantly increase a person's purchase intention in favour of buying the products.

Despite the positive link between humour and recall/attention/advertising liking/purchase intention as evident in past literatures, Lammers, Leibowitz, Seymour, and Hennessey (1983) found a negative link between humour and recall of commercials and they further surmised that the distraction element of humour in broadcast ads may counteract increased attention. Berger (1987), while agreeing that humour influences consumers' attitudes toward brands and affects their brand information recall, however posed a question. If the advertisement focuses so much on the humour aspect, audiences might not get the product benefits highlighted. Humour attracts audience's attention but can disrupt message processing. Hence, can humorous messages be persuasive and effective?

Past research has also generated mixed findings on the effect of humour on message comprehension. The effect of humour on message comprehension has been shown to be negative in some instances (Brown & Bryant, 1983; Duncan, 1979) and positive in others (Duncan, Nelson, & Frontczak, 1984; Weinberger & Campbell, 1991; Zhang & Zinkhan, 1991). It is likely that such effects are dependent on the level of humour used. Advocates of humour in advertising argue that light humour in ads attracts audience, increases memorability, has positive effect on sales and enhance the persuasive power of the message (Duncan, 1979). Humour in the form of one liner jokes promote message comprehension and help audience in processing the information (Duncan, Nelson & Frontczak, 1984) while highly humorous ads may disrupt message processing. In line with review of past literature, it can be hypothesised that:

- H1 There is a significant main effect of the level of humour in TV ads on brand recall, advertising likeability, product liking and purchase intention of the advertised product.

### **The Impact of the Level of Congruity on Consumers' Responses**

Incongruity between the humour and the products seems to be the most popular basis for determining whether a particular material will be considered funny and lead to a humorous reaction (Berger, 1987). According to some researchers, incongruity in humour is important (Rothbart & Pien, 1977) to increase message processing. Similarly, Oring (1995) said that incongruity is important but it must be appropriate. The incongruity between the humorous message and the product resulted in arousal changes that leads to novelty, surprise, resolution and cognitive reorganization (Deckers & Buttram, 1990; Oring, 1995). Weinberger and Gulas (1992) however posited that humour related to the product or service is likely to enhance results, whereas unrelated humour may be detrimental. In other words, the level of congruity would predict a humour response with related humour leads to a positive reaction, while unrelated humour may resulted in a negative response.

In relation to this, Schema Congruity theory (Peracchio & Tybout, 1996) has been used by researchers to explain how consumers use schema-congruity to process and evaluate ads. Based on the Schema Congruity Theory, the high level of congruity between the humorous content with the product nature could create such important affective/ behavioural/ cognitive responses that lead to greater attributes like brand recall, advertising likeability and product liking. Schemas have been defined as organized structures of prior knowledge stored in memory (Stayman et al. 1992), which include attributes of a category, prototypes of the category, and attitude toward the category (Goodstein, 1993). According to Schema theory, people apply their accumulated knowledge about a schema whenever they encounter a new instance of the schema. Schema-based processing allows faster, easier evaluations because individuals do not have to reevaluate information that has already been processed (Fiske,

1982). For example, when an individual watches a movie, his schema prepares him for characters, plot, etc. Besides that, schema can also contain affect, including attitudes and emotions toward the schema (Fiske, 1982; Fiske & Pavelchak, 1986). Therefore, if a person dislikes action films yet watches a movie in that genre, his schema for action movies will prepare him to dislike the movie.

Hence, in the context of humorous contents in TV ads, funny contents play an important role to prepare consumers to like the commercial and the advertised product/brand in it. Based on the theory, those who dislike the commercial, an individual's early developed schema might lead to a greater tendency to dislike the brand/ product advertised in the commercial. Therefore, producing a humorous TV ad is like preparing the right schemas needed for consumers to like the advertised product.

The congruity of the schema that individuals apply to new information impacts the processing and evaluation of that information. When it matches schema expectations, schema congruity is achieved, and little cognitive processing is required (Hastie, 1980; Srull, Lichtenstein & Rothbart, 1985). On the other hand, when a mismatch occurs, it produces schema incongruity, which leads to greater cognitive processing in order to reconcile the incongruent information (Hastie, 1980). Incongruent information must be evaluated piecemeal; attribute by attribute, which requires more time and effort (Sujan, 1985).

Schema incongruity can have various effects, both positive and negative on affective response. Schema-congruity can influence the success of a humorous advertisement. Many advertisers try to produce humorous ads that are unique, unexpected, and even shocking to be different from others. However, the research on schema-congruity suggests that incongruent humorous advertising that is too unfamiliar would require higher cognitive processing, hence will more likely be ignored by consumers. On the other hand, schema-congruent advertising does not create additional arousal or cognitive processing thus, will be approached mindlessly. Due to incongruence results of past studies, the following hypotheses are posited:

H2: There is a main effect of the level of congruity between humorous message and the advertised products/services on brand recall, advertising likeability, product liking and purchase intention.

While various empirical evidences have been accumulated in the past supporting on positive impact of humour appeals in advertising, less is known on how does humorous advertising work? In what situation and through which media, does humorous advertising most effective? What moderates the effect of humorous advertising on various behavioural outcomes? A thorough review of recent studies have exhibited this emerging trend. Warren and McGraw (2016) while concluded on a positive effect of humorous advertising based a series of studies, reiterated that the issue now revolving on a question of how does humorous advertising work, rather than a question of does humorous advertising work. Findings derived from their studies showed that humorous advertising and marketing would be detrimental to a brand if it features a highly threatening humorous ad or makes fun of a subset of the population. Hoffmann and Hutter (2015) studied on the moderating effect of gender on various types of humorous advertising and results reveals various gender-free as well as gender-specific effects.

Another pertinent issue is the moderating or interaction effect between the level of congruity and level of humour in advertising. How do different level of congruity and different level of humour influence various advertising outcomes such as recall, likeability and purchase intention? Hoang, Knoferle and Warlop (2018) found a mixed finding with regards to the

effect of incongruous and congruous humour advertising on the competence impression of advertisers while Djambaska and Petrovska (2019) found that humorous advertising is most effective for a highly relevant or congruent products. In view of several mixed findings pertaining to the interaction effect between the level of humour and the level of congruity of humorous advertising, the following hypothesis is posited:

H3: There is an interaction effect between the level of humorous and the level of congruity between humorous message and the advertised products/services on brand recall, advertisement likeability, product liking, and purchase intention.

## METHODOLOGY

To investigate the effects of humorous TV ads on Malaysian consumers' attitudes, a 2 x 2 between groups experiment was employed involving one hundred young male and female consumers, aged between 18-25 years old. The participants of the experiment were randomly assigned to one of the four different experimental/ treatment groups namely a) high humour and high congruity group, b) high humour and low congruity group, c) low humour and high congruity group and finally d) low humour and low congruity group. Each group consisted of 25 participants.

To reduce artificiality as normally associated with an experiment, each group was handed to watch a short drama that was embedded with the assigned TV commercial. After the session ended, a questionnaire set was distributed to assess the participants' brand recall, advertising likeability, product liking, and purchase intention.

### Conceptualisation and Operationalisation of Variables

Humorous TV ad is conceptualized as an advertisement that carries humorous message which must at least adopt either verbally or non-verbally or both, one of the following humour devices: nonsense, eccentric character, word play, sarcasm, satire, parody, stereotype, repetition, frustration, comparison, exaggeration, personification, pun, silliness, surprise, irony, ludicrous situation (Murphy, Morrison & Zahn, 1993; Catanescu & Tom (2001).

A low level of humour is characterized by humorous message that is a) conveyed either verbally or non-verbally in a single TV ads and b) adopted only one humour device in a single TV ad. A high level of humour is characterized by humorous message that is a) conveyed both verbally and non-verbally in single TV ads; and b) adopted more than one humour devices in a single TV ad.

A low level of congruity is characterised by a) a humorous message in the TV ad that is lowly/ hardly connected to the brand/ product/ service or b) the humorous act(s) in the TV ad is lowly/ hardly connected to the brand/ product/ service or c) the humour device used in the TV ad is lowly/ hardly connected to the brand/ product/ service. A high level of congruity is characterized as a) a humorous message in the TV ad that is highly/ easily connected to the brand/ product/ service, and b) a humorous act is highly/ easily connected to the brand/ product/ service and c) the humour device(s) used in the TV ad is highly/ easily connected to the brand/ product/ service.

Brand recall was assessed through a series of open-ended questions. The participants were asked to recall the type of product, model of the product, name of the brand and main colour of the product that was advertised in the TV commercial. All correct answers were counted to determine the total scores for brand recall.

Advertising likeability was measured by asking participants about their emotions, perception of the commercial attractiveness, appeal of the actor and so on. A 7-point

Semantic Differential Scale with two opposite adjectives or attributes were used to measure participants' liking towards the commercial shown. Participants were asked the following 1) What do you feel about the TV commercial that was showed to you? A 7-point Semantic Differential Scale with two polar adjectives from "Very dull to Very fun" was provided to the participants. The next question was 2) Rate the level of attractiveness of the TV commercial that you have just watched? A 7-point Semantic Differential Scale with two polar adjectives from "Very boring to Very interesting" was provided to the participant to answer. The final item question was 3) Rate the appeal level of the actors and the background music played in the commercial that was showed to you. A 7-point Semantic Differential Scale with two polar adjectives from "Not lovely at all to Very lovely" was provided to the participants of the study.

Product liking was also measured with a 7-point Semantic Differential Scale. Two opposite adjectives were used to measure participants' liking towards the product shown in the commercial. Participants were asked; state to what extent, do you like the product shown in the TV commercial (Hate it to love it) and state to what extent, do you agree that the product shown in the TV commercial is attractive (strongly disagree to strongly agree). As for purchase intention, the participants were asked to respond to two questions to measure purchase intention namely; state on the extent to which, you will soon buy the product shown in the TV advertisement and state how likely would you like to purchase the product shown in the TV commercial in the future?

### **Pilot Test and Manipulation Check**

A pilot test involving 32 participants was conducted before the actual experiment to check on the effectiveness of the manipulation strategies of the independent variables. In this study, the manipulation of the independent variables involved varying the level of humour and congruity. The manipulation check was conducted to observe whether variation in the manipulated variables cause differences in the dependent variables. Four different videos that were recorded earlier were tested in the pilot test. The first video contained high humour and high congruity levels, while the the second video contained low humour and low congruity levels. The third video contained high humour and low congruity level while the final video contained low humour and high congruity level.

The four versions of television commercial featured a newly created shoe brand called Genko. Based on the conceptual definitions of the level of humour and congruity, four TV commercials utilized mainly eccentric character for the lowly humorous ads, while incorporating parody, eccentric character and silliness in the highly humorous TV ads. As for the low level of congruity, the TV commercial adopted a humorous act that is hardly connected to the brand. The highly congruent ads incorporate humorous acts, messages and devices that are highly connected to the brand.

After they watch the TV commercials, they were asked to respond to the following questions using a 7-point Semantic Differential Scale: a) Was the TV commercial that you have just watched funny? (Not funny at all to very funny); and b) Was the TV commercial that you have just watched hilarious? (Not hilarious at all to very hilarious).

The question used for manipulation check for the level of congruity were a) Rate to what extent, the message of the TV commercial that you have just watched is related to the product (Not related at all to very related); and b) Do you think that the acts/scenes shown in the TV commercial are relevant to the product? (Not relevant at all to highly relevant). A 7-point Semantic Differential Scale was used to assess the response.

Result derived from Pair-Samples t-test indicates significant mean difference in the level of humour and congruity between the four group conditions,  $p < 0.05$ . The low humour, low congruity group recorded mean humour value of 2.03 and mean congruity value of 2.76. The low humour, high congruity group recorded mean humour value of 2.51 and mean congruity value of 5.06. The high humour, high congruity group recorded mean humour value of 5.01 and mean congruity value of 5.16 while the high humour, low congruity group recorded mean humour value of 5.11 and mean congruity value of 2.04.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results of the study indicate 67% of the participants were female while 33% were male. The mean age of the participants is 21.3 years. Students represent 97% of the total participants involved in this study.

The first analysis was carried out to examine whether the level of humour and level of congruity influence the participants' brand recall ability towards the advertised product and to examine the interaction effect between level of humour and level of congruity on the brand recall ability. As indicated in Table 1 below, the two-way analysis results of variance between groups indicates a significant main effect for level of humour  $F(1, 96) = 4.760$ ,  $p < .05$  (Sig. = .032) and level of congruity  $F(1, 96) = 31.769$ ,  $p < .05$  (Sig. = .000) on brand recall. However, result indicated no interaction effect between level of humour and level of congruity  $F(1, 96) = 0.826$ ,  $p > .05$  (Sig. = .366) on brand recall as also displayed in Figure 1 below.

Table 1: Test of Between-Subjects Effects on Brand Recall

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Level of Congruity	38.440	1	38.440	31.769	.000
Level of Humour	5.760	1	5.760	4.760	.032
Level of Congruity * Level of Humour	1.000	1	1.000	.826	.366
Error	116.160	96	1.210		

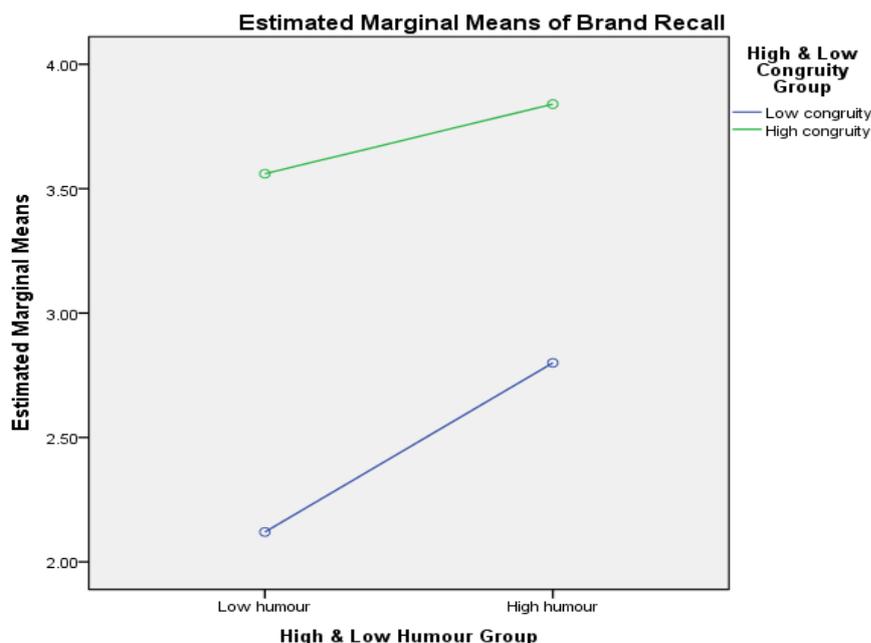


Figure 1: Between-Subject Analysis on Brand Recall of the Advertised Product

The descriptive analysis further showed that television commercials with high levels of humor generated higher recall on the advertised product among the participants compared to that of the low humour group (High humour,  $M=3.320$ ,  $SE=0.156$ ; Low humour,  $M=2.840$ ,  $SE=0.156$ ) while television commercials with high levels of congruity generated higher recall on the advertised product compared to TV commercial with low level of congruity (High congruity,  $M=3.700$ ,  $SE=0.156$ ; Low congruity,  $M=2.460$ ,  $SE=0.156$ ).

The second analysis was carried out to examine whether the level of humour and level of congruity influence the participants' measure of likeability towards the advertisement and to test the interaction effect between the level of humour and level of congruity on advertising likeability. The two-way analysis results of variance between groups (see Table 2) indicates a significant main effect of level of humour  $F(1, 96) = 115.995$ ,  $p < .05$  (Sig. = .000) on advertising likeability. However, the result indicates no significant main effect for level of congruity  $F(1, 96) = .385$ ,  $p > .05$  (Sig. = .536) and no interaction effect between level of humour and level of congruity  $F(1, 96) = 0.161$ ,  $p > .05$  (Sig. = .689) on advertising likeability as also displayed in Figure 2 below.

Table 2: Test of Between-Subjects Effects on Advertising Likeability

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Level of Congruity	.321	1	.321	.385	.536
Level of Humour	96.694	1	96.694	115.995	.000
Level of Humour * Level of Congruity	.134	1	.134	.161	.689
Error	80.027	96	.834		

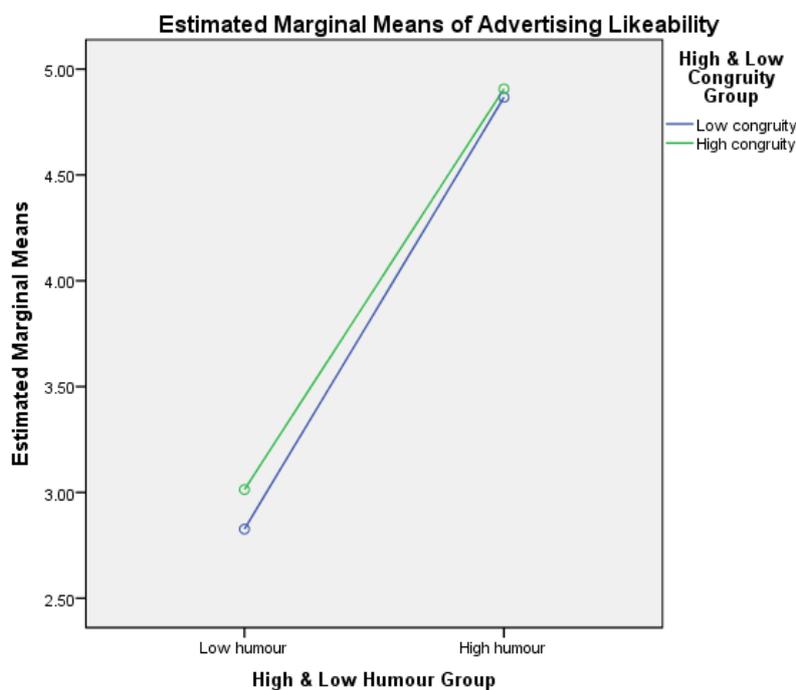


Figure 2: Between-Subject Analysis on Advertising Likeability of the TV Commercial

Descriptive analysis of the variables showed that TV commercials with high level of humour generated higher advertising likeability among the participants compared to that of the low humour group (High humour  $M=4.887$ ,  $SE=0.129$ ; Low humour  $M=2.920$ ,  $SE=0.129$ ).

However, descriptive analysis indicates no significant mean difference in advertising likeability between participants in the high level of congruity group and those in the low level of congruity (High congruity  $M=3.960$ ,  $SE=0.129$ ; Low congruity  $M=3.847$ ,  $SE=0.129$ ).

The third analysis was carried out to examine whether level of humour and level of congruity influence the participants' interest towards the advertised product and to test the interaction effect between the level of humour and level of congruity on product liking. The two-way analysis results of variance between groups (Table 3) indicates a main effect for level of humour,  $F(1, 96) = 46.510$ ,  $p < .05$  (Sig. = .000) on product liking. However, there was no significant main effect for level of congruity  $F(1, 96) = .949$ ,  $p > .05$  (Sig. = .332) and no interaction effect between level of humour and level of congruity  $F(1, 96) = 0.08$ ,  $p > .05$  (Sig. = .930) on product liking as also displayed in Figure 3 below.

Table 3: Test of Between-Subjects Effects on Product Liking

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Level of Congruity	1.210	1	1.210	.0949	.332
Level of Humour	59.290	1	59.290	46.510	.000
Level of Humor * Level of Congruity	.010	1	.010	.008	.930
Error	122.380	96	1.275		

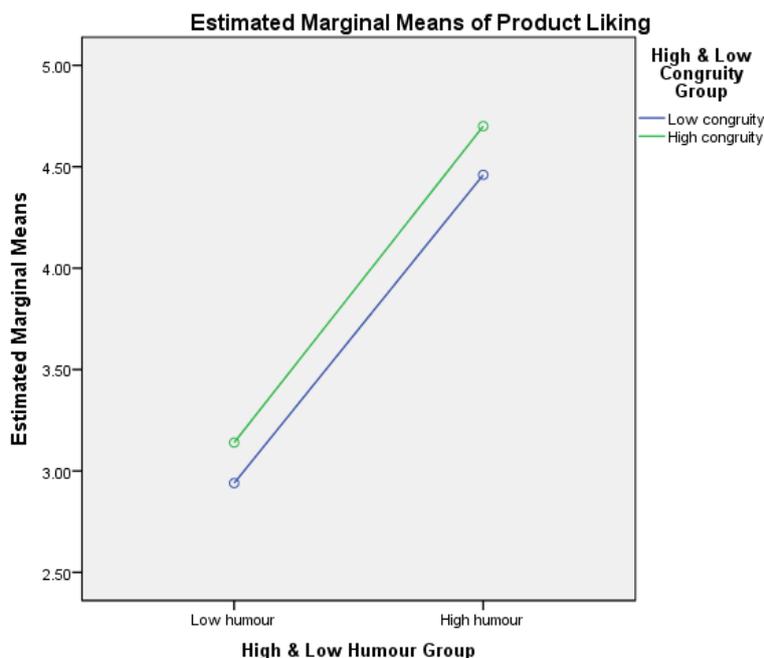


Figure 3: Between-Subject Analysis on Product Liking of the Advertised Product

Descriptive analysis showed that participants who watched television commercials with high levels of humour generated a significantly higher product liking than those in the low humour group (High humour  $M=4.580$ ,  $SE=0.160$ ; Low humour  $M=3.040$ ,  $SE=0.160$ ). However, the level of product liking was found to be quite equal for both the high and low congruity group (High congruity  $M=3.920$ ,  $SE=0.160$ ; Low congruity  $M=3.700$ ,  $SE=0.160$ ).

The fourth analysis as indicated in Table 4 below, was carried out to examine whether the level of humour and level of congruity influence the participants' purchase intention towards the advertised product and to test the interaction effect between the two variables

on purchase intention. The two-way analysis results of variance between groups indicates a significant main effect of the level of humour  $F(1, 96) = 12.736, p < .05$  (Sig. = .001) and the level of congruity  $F(1, 96) = 4.666, p < .05$  (Sig. = .033) on purchase intention. However, result further indicates no interaction effect between Level of Humour and Level of Congruity  $F(1, 96) = 0.079, p > .05$  (Sig. = .779) on purchase intention as displayed in Figure 4 below.

Table 4: Test of Between-Subjects Effects on Purchase Intention

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Level of Congruity	5.290	1	5.290	4.6666	.033
Level of Humour	14.440	1	14.440	12.736	.001
Level of Humour * Level of Congruity	.090	1	.090	.079	.779
Error	108.840	96	1.134		

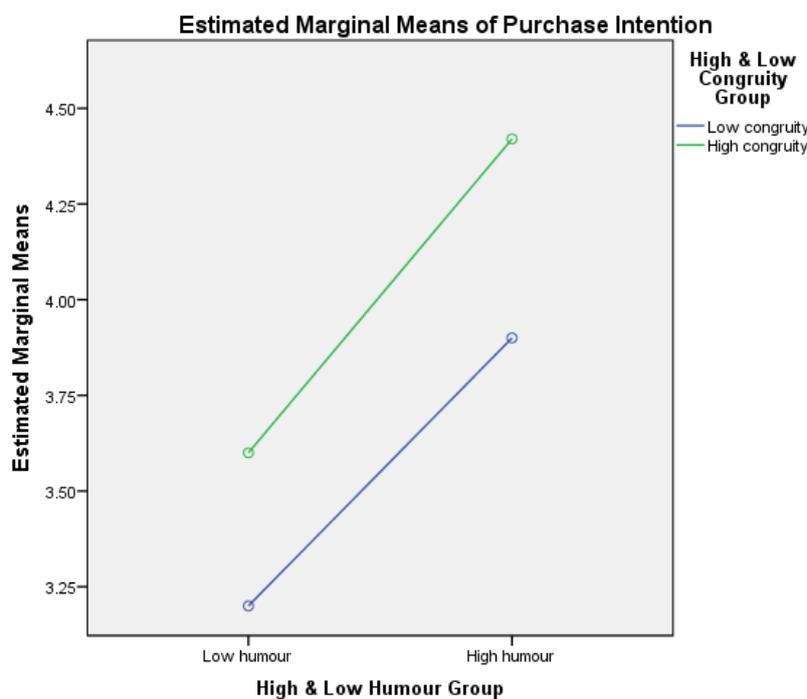


Figure 4: Between-Subject Analysis on Purchase Intention of the Advertised Product

Next, descriptive analysis showed that participants in the high humour group recorded higher purchase intention on the advertised product compared to those in the low humour group (High humour  $M=4.160, SE=0.151$ ; Low humour  $M=3.400, SE=0.151$ ). Besides, the analysis recorded higher purchase intention among participants in the high congruity group compared to those in the low congruity group (High congruity  $M=4.010, SE=0.151$ ; Low congruity  $M=3.550, SE=0.151$ ).

Overall results showed that humorous messages in TV ads plays significant effect on a young consumer's cognitive, affective and behavioural responses. Higher levels of humour in TV ads positively affects brand recall, advertising likeability, product liking and purchase intention towards the advertised product. Results showed positive responses towards TV ads with greater levels of humor compared to ads with low levels of humor. Results of the present study are consistent with those of prior studies by Kim and Waller (2006) and Shapiro and Lang (1991) that clearly elucidate on the positive impact of humour in magazine, tv and radio

advertisements on the audience's attention towards the ads by imposing greater mental processing effort and higher-order cognitive processing. Hence, it was concluded that humour plays an important role in moulding young consumers' positive attitudes toward the advertised brand and product.

In terms of congruity level in TV ads, results showed that levels of congruity do not play as much importance as humour did. Congruity levels between humorous message and the advertised product only affect the abilities of young consumers in brand recall (cognitive) and purchase intention (behaviour). However, no main effect of congruity levels in TV ads towards young consumer abilities in advertising likeability and product liking can be observed. The findings of the present study were found to be incoherent with several other studies by Rothbart and Pien (1977) and Oring (1995) who reiterated on the importance of incongruity in producing higher arousal changes and cognitive processing. However, some consistent findings were observed from various other studies by Deckers and Buttram (1990) and Weinberger and Gulas (1992). The findings in the present study thus provide empirical evidences on the importance of humorous message relevancy with the advertised brand in generating greater memory towards the brand which in turn leads to greater intention to purchase the product.

Schema-Congruity theory provides support to these findings. According to the theory, confirmation or disconfirmation of expectations affects individual response, including information processing and evaluation. When people encounter new information that is congruent with prior knowledge structures, they can easily assimilate the new information. If the new information is incongruent, it will challenge prior knowledge structures and cause extra cognitive processing (Hastie 1980; Srull et al. 1985). Hence, this study found that when the participants encountered the new product that was advertised humorously and congruently, their cognitive and behavioural responses were positively affected. The results of the study thus extend the applicability of the theory in the context of humorous content of TV advertisement.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, humorous ads did affect young consumers' cognitive, affective and behavioural responses while message congruity in ads only affect their cognitive and behavioural responses. Lastly, there was no interaction effect between humour and congruity in TV ads toward young consumers' cognitive, affective and behavioural responses.

The results derived from this study provided a great contribution to our advertising industry especially the TV ads industry. Malaysian advertisers and creative directors will now have a new lead in selecting the appropriate approach for their TV ads. Based on findings from the study, Malaysian advertisers and creative people behind the scenes should be looking at using humour as a medium to convey their product and brand messages. Other advertisers (those who have not used humour as their medium in TV ads) should be taking this opportunity to diversify their presentation styles.

This study employed 2X2 between groups design experiment to reflect a natural environment to the participants while they were watching the TV ads. However, due to time and place limitations, the participants were only gathered in a classroom, whereby it was considered as an uncomfortable and very formal environment for them to view the commercials. This classroom situation with LED projector screening was totally different from the comfort of home. The participants might not have some prior experiences viewing

commercials within a classroom, attended by the researcher and surrounded with other people. However, this could not be avoided.

This study used TV ads as its primary instrument for research. TV is a powerful medium that incorporates visual, audio and movement making the whole viewing experience interesting to the audience. In the present study, the humour devices were placed perfectly well in a 30 second TV commercial by incorporating elements of visual, audio and movement. However, the result could be different if other medium was used. Hence, the use of TV ads may be expanded to other mediums like online advertising, print advertising, billboard advertising, radio advertising and other mainstream formats to determine the effect of humour.

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