

A FIELD STUDY OF THE EFFECT OF HUMOR
IN PRINT ADVERTISING ON DIFFUSION
OF THE ADVERTISING MESSAGE

By

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PREFACE

A field experiment was used to measure the effect of humor in print advertising on diffusion of the ad message. Three versions of the same advertising message were created. Two of the advertisements differed in terms of the integration of humor with the major selling point of the ad. The third one communicated the message without any funny item. The advertisements were sent out to sixty-five randomly selected student subjects, split into the three different groups. The subjects who received the humorous ad in which humor is unrelated to the main selling point were distracted by the unrelated humor. The recall of the main selling point was high when the humorous ads in which humor is related to the main selling point and the serious ads were received. High recall of the main selling point did not yield to the higher diffusion of the main selling point.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables	5
List of Figures	7
Chapter 1: Research in the Field	8
A. Review of Humor Research	8
B. Diffusion of Humor	13
Chapter 2: Theory	17
A. Studies Related to the Diffusion of Humor	17
B. The Process of Storing the Humorous Content	22
Chapter 3: Hypotheses	38
A. Purpose of the Study	38
B. Hypotheses	43
Chapter 4: Methodology	44
A. Advertisements	44
B. Manipulation Checks in the Pretest	46
C. Experimental Procedure	50
D. Dependent Variables	53
E. Control Variables	55
Chapter 5: Results	59
A. Manipulations Checks in the Final Study	59

TABLE OF CONTENTS (cont.)

B. Demographic and Psychographic Specific Characteristics of the Experimental Groups	59
C. Hypothesis 1	61
D. Hypothesis 2	64
E. Hypothesis 3	68
F. Hypothesis 4	66
G. Hypothesis 5	70
Chapter 6: Discussion and Suggestions For Future Research	72
A. Discussion	72
B. Suggestions for Future Research	75
References	78
Appendix A	81
Appendix B	84
Appendix C	88
Appendix D	89
Appendix E	91
Thesis Approval Page	97

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1:	Differences Among Three Stages of Verbal Memory	28
Table 4.1:	The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficiencies of the Integration Scales	48
Table 4.2:	One-way ANOVA Findings as a function of the Degree of Funniness and the Degree of Integration	49
Table 4.3:	The Result of Reliability Analyses for Emotional Response Scale in the Pretest	57
Table 5.1:	One-way ANOVA Findings for the Degree of Funniness in the Final Study . .	60
Table 5.2:	Reliability Scores of Emotional Response Indices	62
Table 5.3:	One-way ANOVA Findings for the Degree of Retention.	63
Table 5.4:	One-way ANOVA findings for the Main Selling Point Recall Scores	65
Table 5.5:	The Effect of Funniness of Recall Components	67
Table 5.6:	One-way ANOVA findings for the Diffusion of Content	69

LIST OF TABLES (cont.)

Table 5.7: One-way ANOVA findings for the Intention	71
Table 6.1: The Recall Percentages by Experiments	76

LIST OF FIGURES

- Figure 2.1: Random Curve and Some Types of
Deviations from It 18
- Figure 2.2: Flow Chart Depicting the Process
of Humor Hypothesized by Suls . . . 20
- Figure 2.3: Flow Chart Depicting the Memory
System Hypothesized by Shiffrin
and Atkinson 26
- Figure 2.4: Flow Chart Depicting the Memory
System Storing Humor 29
- Figure 3.1: Flow Chart Depicting the Memory
System Both Humor and Ad 40

CHAPTER 1: RESEARCH IN THE FIELD

A. REVIEW OF HUMOR RESEARCH

Humor has a pleasant appeal, widely used in advertising to enhance the effect of a message. Research findings, however, have been somewhat conflicting in this area. Some argue that humor improves advertising effectiveness, while others report little or no effect with the use of humor.

Although there is still no comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of humor in general, let alone in advertising, humor has long been an important element in the communication program of many advertisers (Madden and Weinberger, 1982).

The humor literature has been reviewed in depth in three studies (Sternthal and Craig, 1973; Markiewicz, 1974; Duncan, 1979). The most frequently cited one is Sternthal and Craig's synthesis of the literature in 1973. After reviewing the literature, they suggest tentative conclusions about humor that they hoped would guide practitioners and serve as a framework for future research. Their conclusions were:

- i. Humorous messages attract attention.
- ii. Humorous messages may detrimentally affect comprehension.
- iii. Humorous messages may distract the audience,

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- i. Humorous messages attract attention.
- ii. Humorous messages may detrimentally affect comprehension.
- iii. Humorous messages may distract the audience,

yielding a reduction in counter-argumentation and increase persuasion.

- iv. Humorous appeals appear to be persuasive, but the persuasive effect is at best no greater than that of serious appeal.
- v. Humor tends to enhance source credibility.
- vi. Audience characteristics may confound the effect of humor.
- vii. A humorous context may increase liking for the source and create a positive effect of the message.
- viii. To the extent that a humorous context functions as a positive reinforcer, a persuasive communication placed in such a context may be more effective.

Sternthal and Craig also suggest future research be directed at the following issues:

- i. Do humorous introductions of an otherwise straight-forward appeal enhance its persuasability?
- ii. Do humorous conclusions increase influence?
- iii. Is humor more effective for particular products than others?

Some studies have been conducted since 1973. It is possible to categorize them by using Sternthal and Craig's conclusions;

Attention. Most humor studies in advertising suggest that there exists a positive relationship between humor and attention (Markiewicz, 1974; Maden and Weinberger, 1982; Duncan and Nelson, 1985).

Comprehension. Some studies support the idea that humor seems less appropriate in achieving objectives relating to comprehension and was less effective than a serious message (Brooker, 1981; Duncan and Nelson, 1985; Cantor and Venus, 1980).

Source. Gelb and Pickett showed that perceived humor was positively related to liking the sponsor image (Gelb and Pickett 1983).

Audience Characteristics. Several studies explained that audience characteristics such as gender, race or culture confound the impact of humor (Schama and Coughlin, 1979; Whiple and Courtney, 1980; Madden and Weinberger, 1982).

Humorous Content. Two studies showed that perceived humor was positively related to liking of an ad (Gelb and Pickett, 1983; Duncan and Nelson, 1985).

Distraction. Duncan and Nelson's study did not support the idea that humor had a significant relationship with distraction experienced during the commercial.

Persuasion. Madden (1982), in his Ph.D. thesis, compared humorous versus non-humorous commercials in terms of the entire persuasion process concluding that humor did

facilitate the persuasion process and this facilitation was primarily due to heightened attention level.

Another study investigated the humor-sleeper effect (H. Bruce Lammers, et al, 1983). This study suggested that humorous appeals might be more effective than serious appeals because they stimulate the penetration of cognitive responses in the long term.

Chattopadhyay and Basu (1990) found that the effect of humor in advertising is contingent on the subject's prior attitude towards the brand.

Sutherland, et al., (1990) also found that the order of presentation may affect perceived humor and emotional response to alternative types of humor in advertising.

It is obvious that most of the research effort has attempted to deal with the range of conclusions and future questions which Sternthal and Craig outlined. Over the years, academic research in this area has yielded equivocal conclusions. Everybody agrees that humorous content fosters attention to messages. However, it is not clear whether it serves to draw that attention away from the serious point and toward the humor itself.

The reason for the lack of studies drawing clear conclusions about the effects of humor may be in the nature of humor itself. As mentioned before, there is still no comprehensive understanding of humor in general. No doubt, elusive nature of humor has caused the lack of

theoretical explanation in humorous advertising studies. Theoretically driven investigations are missing in the literature with the exception of Duncan's study (1979) evaluating previous studies in the context of a single conceptual framework. Researchers still do not know whether or not the effects or lack of effects of humor can be explained theoretically. Nevertheless, advertisers, advertising agencies, and advertising scholars continue to wonder why it is so common to use humor in marketing communication strategies, and particularly in advertising copy.

In the psychological literature, most scholars agree that humor is a difficult concept to define scientifically (Chapman and Foot, 1983). Following the lines of this agreement, in the advertising literature, there is no attempt to define what humor is except Sternthal and Craig (p. 20, 1973). Everyone thinks he or she knows. In the persuasion field, Gruner (1976) supplies a foundation for the definition of humor referring humor as, "...laugh or smile-provoking stimuli of a good natured sort...likely to be minimally offensive to the object of the laughter or smiling...playful poking of fun with the sole aim of amusement...likely to deal with the inconsequential (or the serious treated as inconsequential), the whimsical, the incongruous."

According to Brooker (p. 30, 1981), issue may be

taken with Gruner's view of the objective, being the sole aim of amusement in the case of humorous advertising appeals, because the aim will go beyond solely amusing the viewer or reader of an advertising.

Gruner's approach leads to a sense of understanding of what humor is, but is too broad to operationalize in a simple manner. From this point of view, Sternthal and Craig's suggestion is helpful to define humor operationally. According to them, humor in advertising may be defined by: 1) its stimulus properties, 2) the behavioral responses elicited, and 3) the perceptual responses of the audience. The third alternative is used in our study. Humro is defined in terms of the perceptual responses of the audience. Regarding to the purpose of sutdy, it is sufficient to now whether or not communication recepients perceive a persuasive message to be humorous.

B. DIFFUSION OF HUMOR

An understanding of humor in advertising requires a grasp of the factors and mechanism which underlie consumer response to humorous stimuli. At this point in time, most studies have explored the capacity of humor to stimulate changes at various cognitive levels of audience response. Researchers have basically tried to explain how humorous stimuli promote attitude change and what principles or theoretical foundations govern this process.

In the present study, we will change the direction of the questions. Instead of asking what humorous content of advertising does to people, we will ask what people do with the humorous content of advertising. Asking this question, our assumption is that people show natural and accidental responses to humorous advertising and take its catchy phrases and use them intentionally or unintentionally in their daily conversations. In the literature of the studies of media audience behavior based on the ethnographic research, there is enough evidence to suggest that the humorous content of advertising circulates in everyday life. In contrast, there is little empirical evidence supporting this phenomenon.

In the present study, we intend to use the term of diffusion to explain the circulation of advertising content in daily life instead of using the terms word-of-mouth or social interaction. The reason for this usage is that there is a relationship between the nature of humor and the "Diffusion of Innovations Theory" of Rogers. We will discuss this relationship before starting to review the studies related to our subject.

The essence of the "Diffusion of Innovation Theory" (Rogers, 1983) is the information exchange by which one individual communicates a new idea to one or several others. This process is also the same for circulation of humorous content in advertising. People communicate

humorous phrases in everyday life because they perceive them as a new humorous item to share with their families and friends. The origin of this idea comes from Suls' study (1972). His study suggests that humor springs from newness. That is, diffusion of humor in advertising can be described as a process in which people communicate humorous phrases taken from advertising to one another because of the nature of its newness.

The diffusion process of humor may not be the same process as the one resulting from the uncertainty which is generated by innovation (defined as an idea, practice, or object which is perceived as new by an individual). People experiencing the diffusion process of humor might not be motivated to seek further information about humorous items in order to cope with any uncertainty created. Indeed, regardless of the adjective used to describe it, this kind of diffusion is different from information seeking processing such as diffusion of innovation or word-of-mouth because, in one instance, it may sometimes be a spontaneous, unplanned spreading of humorous phrases. In the other one, it may be a planned action. However, this does not mean that humor would be different from other new information. On the contrary, humor is a unique example of "new" information which has its own specific characteristics.

Reviewing the consumer processing models, Thorson

(1990) makes an excellent remark on this subject. She points out that advertising should not be thought of primarily as information. She continues that much of the advertising should not be seen as giving only information, but rather as creating images and emotional stimuli. According to her, consumers read newspapers to find out the latest world events and watch television to be entertained, to be stimulated emotionally, or just to relax. Occasionally, the consumer is motivated to find and thoroughly process the information in advertising, but some programs, like humorous commercials, attract his or her attention more than the other kind of programs (Thorson, 1990).

To conclude this chapter, it may be stated that researchers still do not know whether or not the effects or lack of effects of humor can be explained theoretically. One thing that is clear is people use the humorous content of ads intentionally or unintentionally in their daily conversations. For this reason, changing the direction of previous research and understanding humor in the social context will enhance our understanding of the role of humor in advertising.

CHAPTER 2: THEORY

A. STUDIES RELATED TO THE DIFFUSION OF HUMOR

The first scholar using humor as a diffusion item is Chaffee (1975). Explaining diffusion in political communication, he mentions that diffusion does not always follow the S curve because some structural factors constrain interaction or render interaction non-random. Diffusion might have greater or less speed than an S curve predicts. This means that, in the same social system, some topics will deiffuse quite normally, whereas others will fail to diffuse extensively. The other side of this coin is that some topics are of a character that stimulates communciation so that very rapid and comple diffusion may occur. Figure 2.1 depicts this situation. According to Chaffee, "a good joke is one which stimulates communication." For example, a good joke tends to travel fast throughout a group of co-workers. From this point of view, humor may be the one of the ways to stimulate social interaction among consumers.

Dichter (1966) also says that catchy slogans and clever advertising copy are ways to increase personal conversation, and humor is one of them. Bayus (1985), supporting Dichter's comment, claims that marketing efforts could affect personal conversation activities. Further he says that advertising may be an effective means.

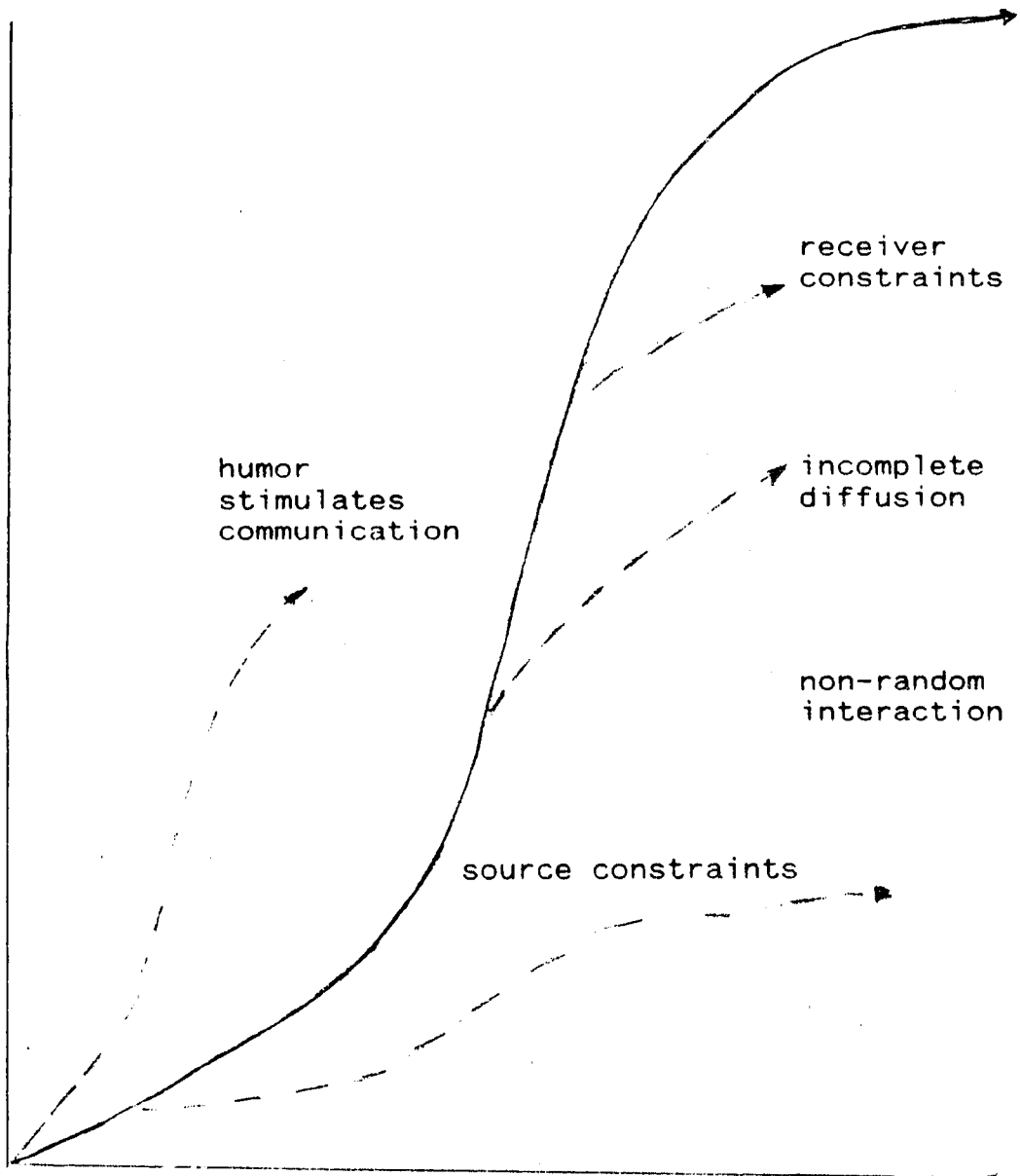


Figure 2.1: Random curve and some types of deviations from it (Chaffee, 1975)

of stimulating social interaction.

Most scholars agree that media are important and uniquely employed resources in interpersonal systems. Advertisers may stimulate personal conversation through the use of mass media. De Fleur (1987), summarizing the result of diffusion of news studies, makes some good points about the diffusion process and the importance of personal conversation in this process. His results can be summed up in the following words:

"Changing media technologies in the United States have led to changes in the way people receive their first information about important news events...TV has become the most frequently cited source followed by radio...Newspapers have become suppliers of great detail...Word-of-mouth remains important in some cases...The two-step flow model does not describe the pattern by which most of the daily news reaches the public...Truly urgent news travels between all kinds of people: friends, neighbors, members of families, fellow workers, even strangers (De Fleur, p. 2)."

As Avner (1984) pointed out, people tend to share humorous experiences together. In some cases, humorous content of advertising can be seen as "urgent news" to share with the other people. At this point, the important question to ask is why people tend to share humor with someone else. Where is this tendency derived from?

Avner gave the answer to this question (Avner, p. 30).¹ Humor can help an individual to climb the ladder of social hierarchy, to be accepted, to win affection, and to gain status. It can also help him to

avoid sanctions. On the other hand, the main social function of humoring a group is the lessening of tensions and conflicts. Moreover, the experience of shared laughter adds to our feelings of pleasure in the group.

According to Alperstein (1990), the tendency of sharing the humorous content creates an opportunity for people to find common experience and materials to be exchanged in interaction. This situation is basically the results of the conditions of modern life. Certain content of humorous commercials enters the network of interpersonal communication and subcultures become points of reference. Humorous phrases of advertising are useful for people because they create relationships and expedite social goals.

Alperstein (1990, p. 15) describes this phenomenon as "playing with the content of advertising in the context of discourse. Then he makes an interesting comment about it: "Americans, in their play, have become advertising educated, automatically mimicking some advertising..." For example, Americans have used the following phrases in their daily conversation:

- Where is the beef?
- I can't believe I ate the whole thing.
- What are you, some kind of nut?
- Nothin' honey.
- You'n me, babe.

According to Alperstein, learning advertising messages as children empowers them into becoming adults, as these messages are refined and later applied to adult situations.

In Alperstein's studies based on ethnographic research and content analysis, informants confirmed that the source of information is not always media based; humorous phrases may be learned through interaction with others. Some people learn and use humorous phrases without being directly exposed to the media when they enter the social discourse. Alperstein (1990) further points out that some catchy phrases can be twisted and turned or "played with," to suit a particular use and to fit a particular context. Therefore, in the natural setting, sometimes the overt information or the intended meaning of humorous messages is not the important thing. The important thing is the interpretation or reintegration of the content.

As mentioned before, the process of diffusion may be a spontaneous unplanned spreading of humorous phrases. On the other hand, in another instance, one may look forward to telling someone in particular a joke. In both situations, a single diffusion strategy involves at least four apparently simultaneous steps: Alperstein (1990, p. 16) describes these steps as follows: first, there must be perception or awareness that the joke is good for

such use; second, there must be an understanding of the audience and the social situation that would make the use meaningful; third, the individual must store the content in his or her memory; and, fourth, the individual must recall the content to tell to someone else. According to him, all four steps are the function of the memory process.

In many situations what consumers remember may be incidental rather than deliberate. For this reason, the important thing is how information enters, remains, and is retrieved from the memory when the receiver is not actively seeking such information. In the context of storing humorous content of advertising, capacity of the memory is a limiting factor regulating which information is processed further (i.e., stored) and which information is lost (Madden, 1982, p. 24).

Next, the memory system as hypothesized by Shiffrin and Atkinson will be used to explain how the process of storing the humorous contents of phrases would work.

B. THE PROCESS OF STORING THE HUMOROUS CONTENT

Figure 2.2 shows the incongruity-resolution model (Suls, 1972) explaining the process of being exposed to humor. Let's assume that a person is exposed to the advertising below:

1. Person: I used to snore so loud that I would wake myself up. But I solved the

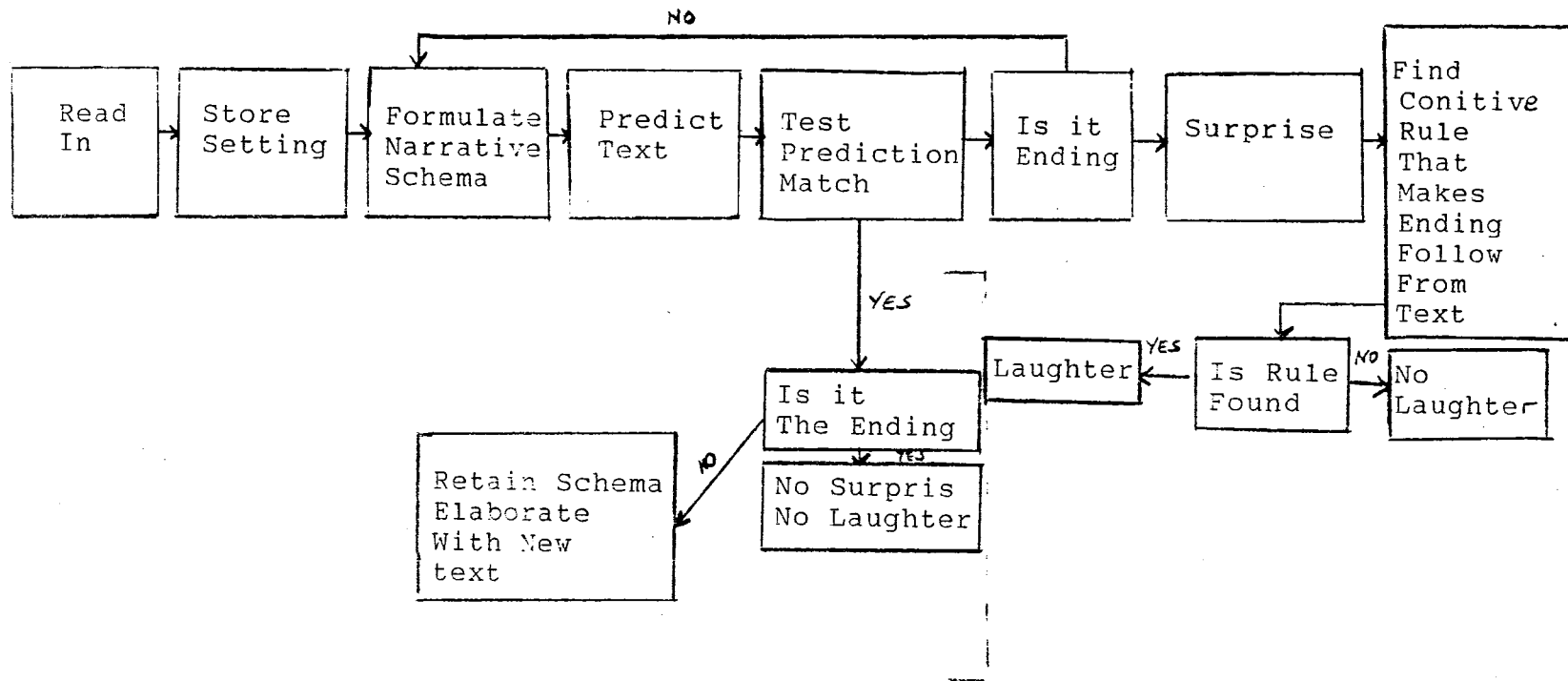


Figure 2.2: Flow chart depicting the process of humor hypothesized by Suls.

problem.

2. Person: I know. You started sleeping in the next room.
3. Person: No, I took SNORESTOPPER. I do not snore anymore.

According to the Suls' Model, a person follows the steps below:

1. The first line of copy exposed: I used to snore so loud that I would wake myself up.
2. The copy setting is stored, and schema is formulated. The person predicts the next entry of copy: But I solved the problem.
3. The person asks, does the copy prediction match the incoming copy? In this case, it does. Has the joke ended? No, there is additional copy.
4. The schema is retained and elaborated with a new line of the copy: But I solved the problem.
5. The second line of the copy is exposed: I know...
6. Again, a prediction is made about copy: You went to see your doctor.
7. The punch line is exposed: You started sleeping in the next room.
8. Does the text prediction match the punch line? In this case it does not. And the person is surprised by the incongruity between his

prediction for the context and punch line.

Basically in this model, a person searches for a cognitive rule that makes the ending follow the preceding context. If such a rule is found, the audience experiences amusement or a surprise by the type of humor. If one of these outcomes are not experienced, the person who is exposed to the ad experiences puzzlement.

Keeping the above model in mind, we may look at how the entire memory system works. Figure 2.3 depicts a flow chart of the memory system as hypothesized by Shiffrin and Atkinson (1969). This system is a suitable representation of the multistore theory of memory. In this theory, the long-term store is the permanent repository of information. Information in the short-term memory can be maintained indefinitely if it is not lost within the first thirty seconds. Storage is assumed to consist of three primary mechanisms: transfer, placement, and image-production. The transfer mechanism is a control process ruling over what, when, and how to store information in the long-term store. The particular location in which a given ensemble of information currently under consideration will be stored is controlled by the placement mechanism. The proportion of information within the ensemble currently under consideration in the short-term store that will be transferred to the long-term store in a designated location is governed by the image-

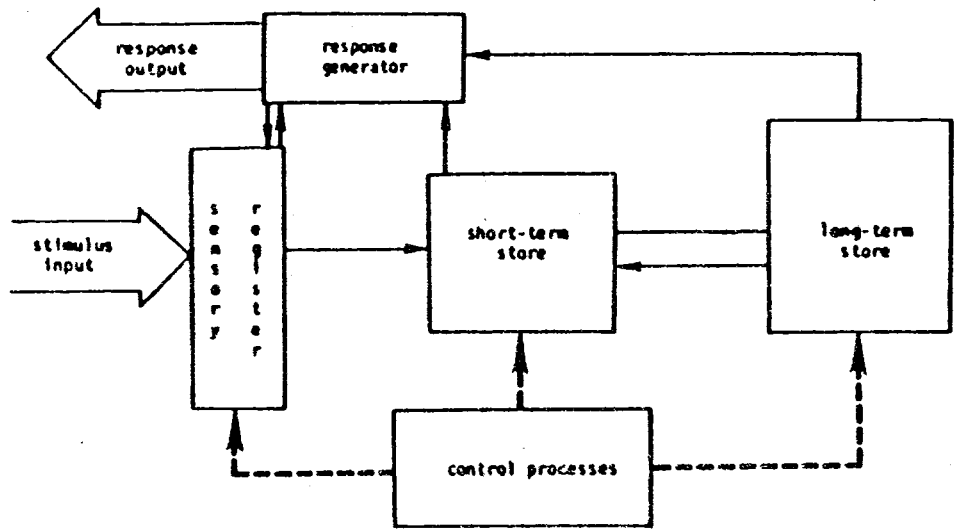


Figure 2.3: Flow chart depicting the memory system hypothesized by Shiffrin and Atkinson.

production mechanism. The specific amount of information which will be stored is dependent on the period for which the ensemble is maintained in the short-term memory.

Table 2.1 provides the commonly accepted differences among three stages of verbal memory (Craik and Lockhart, 1972).

Taking the Suls' Model into account, exposure to a humorous commercial can be viewed as a function of the sensory register. In this context, Suls' model explains how people elaborate a humorous message in the short term memory. It would not be wrong to call this stage as "short-term, maintenance" because the humorous message is rehearsed in this stage (see Figure 2.4). If the punch line and prediction match, there will be no further processing. In contrast, when getting a positive feeling, the person will try to decide whether or not it is a good joke and if it is interesting or worthwhile enough to call up again. In other words, episodic effect, laughing or smiling, stimulates the semantic memory (Thorson, 1984).

In the next stage, the person will make a judgment whether the humorous content is to be called up again and passed on to friends and family members based on comparison of new humor with previously stored information in the long term memory. The rationale of this process is based on schema theory, so it is necessary to outline the main principles of schema theory first.

<u>Feature</u>	<u>Sensory Register</u>	<u>Short Term Store</u>	<u>Long Term Store</u>
Entry of Information	Pre-Attentive	Requires Attention	Rehearsal
Maintenance of Information	not possible	continual attention rehearsal phonemics probably visual possibly semantic	repetition organization
Forward of Information	literal copy of input	small displacement possibly decay	largely semantic some auditory and visual
Capacity	large	-	no known limit
Information loss	decay	-	possibly no loss
Trace duration	1/4 - 2 seconds	up to 30 seconds probably automatic items in consciousness	loss of accessi- bility or discriminability
Retrieval	readout	temporal/phonemic cues	minutes to years retrieval cues possibly search process

Table 2.1: Differences among
three stages of Verbal
Memory (Craik and Lockhart, 1972).

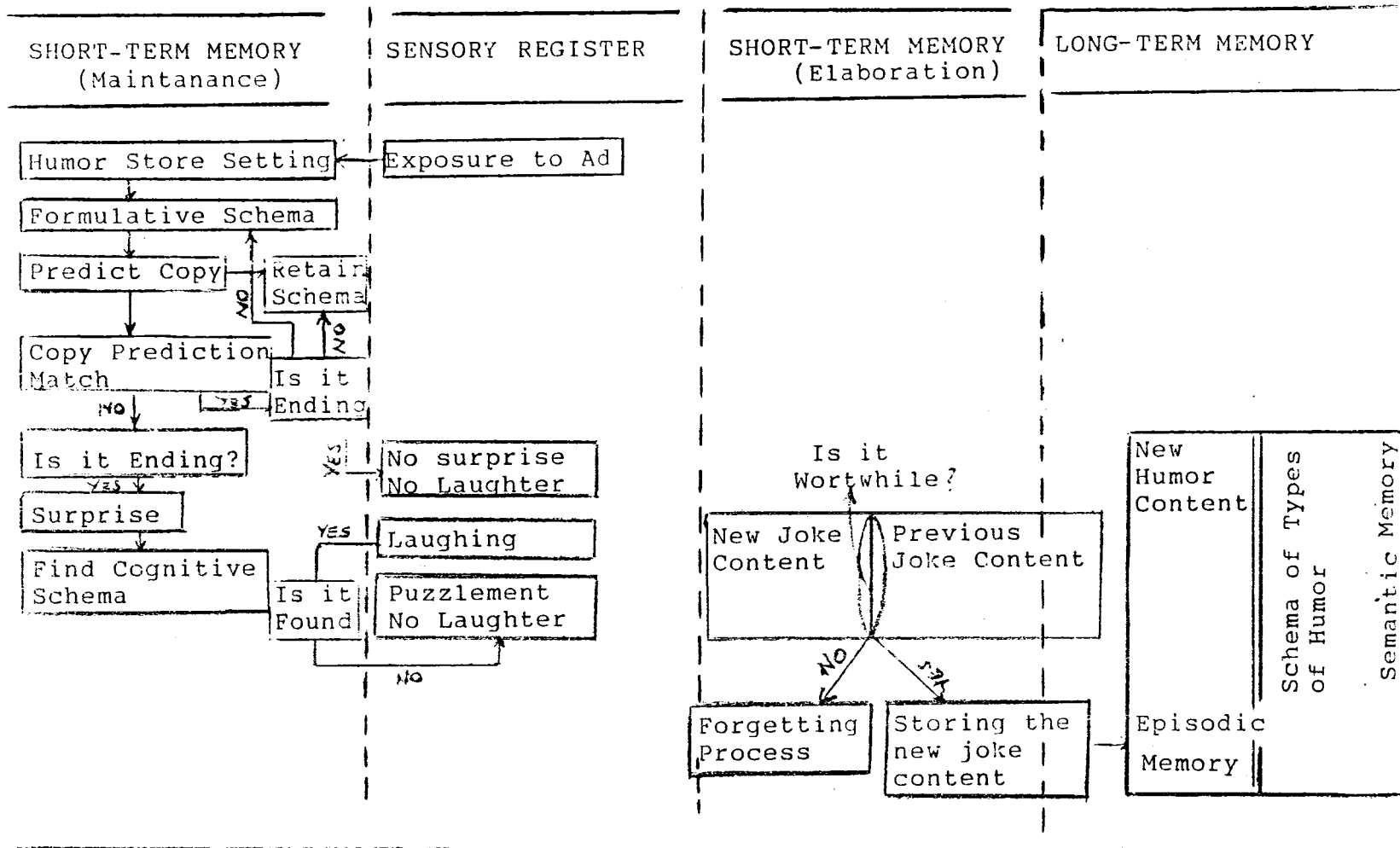


Figure 2.4: Flow chart depicting the memory system storing humor.

Schema theory emphasizes the role of prior knowledge and past experience, claiming that what we remember is influenced by what we already know (Brewer and Nakamura, 1984, p. 170-21). According to this theory, the knowledge we have stored in memory is organized as a set of schemas, or knowledge structures, which represent the general knowledge about objects, situations, events, or actions that have been acquired from past experience.

Barlett (1932) introduced the idea of schemas to explain why and when people remember stories. They typically omit some details, introduce rationalization and distortion, and reconstruct the story so as to make more sense in terms of their own knowledge and experience.

Schemas represent all kinds of knowledge from simple knowledge such as the shape of the letter A, for example, to more complex knowledge such as knowledge about political ideologies or astrophysics. The important thing is that knowledge schemas may be linked together into related sets, with superordinate and subordinate schemas. So, for example, the schema for "table" would be linked to schemas for furniture, rooms, and houses (Cohen, 1989).

Brewer and Treyens (1981), in an experiment, showed that people remember objects that are typical, normal, and consistent with the currently active schema better than objects that do not fit the schema.

A memory representation is actively constructed by a

process that is strongly influenced by schemas in a variety of ways, as outlined by Alba and Hasher (1983):

Selection: The schema guides the selection of what is encoded and stored in memory. Information that is relevant to whichever schema is currently activated is more likely to be remembered than information that is irrelevant.

Storage: A schema provides a framework within which current information relevant to that schema can be stored.

Abstraction: Information may undergo transformation from the specific form in which it was perceived to a more general form. Specific details of a particular experience tend to drop out, whereas those aspects that are common to other similar experiences are incorporated into a general schema and retained.

Normalization: Memories of events also tend to be distorted so as to fit in with prior expectations and to be consistent with the schema. They are sometimes transformed toward the most probable or most typical event of that kind. People may remember what they expected to see rather than what they actually saw.

Integration: According to schema theory, an integrated memory representation is formed which includes information derived from the current experience, prior knowledge relating to it, and default values supplied by the schema.

Retrieval: Schemas may also aid retrieval. People may search through the schema in order to retrieve a particular memory. When the information that is sought is not represented directly, it can be retrieved by schema-based inferences.

In short, the most important prediction from schema theory is that what is normal, typical, relevant, or consistent with pre-existing knowledge will be remembered better than what is unexpected or irrelevant. For example, psychologists have developed some taxonomies in the study of humor. Table 2.2 contains a listing of humor categories (Long and Grasse, 1988). The person may have this schema in his/her long-term memory and try to match new humorous content with it. Then, he or she decides whether or not new humorous content may make their friends, family members, or colleagues laugh. For instance, if a new joke consistent with pre-existing schema will be remembered better than what is unexpected or irrelevant.

Chaffee (1975) pointed out that some individual factors may constrain diffusion. As a result of these constraints even the process of diffusion might not start. These factors which constrain interaction can be divided into two categories: (1) individual factors; (2) social factors. We will explain these factors in terms of diffusion of humor in advertising before

Table 2.2

Taxonomy of Jokes

1. Nonsense
2. Vocal satire
3. Philosophical
4. Sexual
5. Hostile
6. Demeaning to men
7. Demeaning to women
8. Ethnic
9. Sick
10. Scatological

concluding this chapter.

(1) Individual factors.

Studies in both social psychology and cognitive psychology suggest that individual differences alter humorous response (Leventhal and Safer, 1977). Individual differences seem to fall in two clusters: (a) age, sex, and intelligence; (b) the type of humor and degree of funniness.

(a) Age, sex, and intelligence. Ziglet, Levine and Gould (1967) showed that as mental age increases, more complex forms of humor elicit a humorous response. According to Leventhal and Safer (1977) understanding involves more than the structural factor of mental age. To respond to a particular form of humor, one must understand the informational background with particular themes. However, the fact that one understands a joke does not insure that the joke will elicit humor; indeed there are many things we understand which are not at all funny. There are things we understand which are not all funny, and there are things we understand that were once funny but are no longer. Moreover, Zigler, Levine and Gould (1966) found a curvilinear

relationship between the level of difficulty and the funniness of jokes. In the advertising field, several studies have explored the effect of gender on responses to humorous advertising. Courney and Whipple (1979), and Madden and Weinberger (1982) reported evidence that females were less responsive to humorous advertising than men. Shama and Coughlin (1979) found no differences between men and women. In non-advertising studies, Cupchick and Leventhal (1974) found females less responsive to humor than males using stimuli of cartoons and jokes. These findings suggest that there are some individual differences responding to humorous advertising in terms of age, sex, and intelligence. Due to that, it may be argued that some phrases or content of humorous commercials may diffuse quite normally, whereas others may fail to diffuse extensively.

- (b) The type of humor and degree of funniness. Certain studies in the psychological literature (Landis and Ross, 1973; Terry and Ertel, 1974; Groch, 1974) suggest that

males prefer hostile humor while females prefer nonsensical humor. The main hypothesis of psychological studies in humor is that a humorous stimuli (an incongruity in Suls' model) creates a humorous experience when it is synthesized within an emotion category. However, competing emotions of fear, shame, and guilt (Levine and Redlick, 1955), mechanisms such as denial, social attitudes of conservatism and closed-mindedness (Miller and Bacon, 1971), a variety of sex-linked attitudes (McGhee and Grodzitsky, 1975), can block the synthesis of funny material with the humor and can block diffusion of humorous phrases. In advertising studies, Sutherland, et al, (1990) found that nonsensical and hostile humor in ads may not evoke different emotional responses between males and females.

These findings also suggest that there may be important individual differences in response to different types of humor in advertising. There is enough reason to think that these differences may constrain interaction.

(2) Social differences. The person who has stored

the joke may not get an opportunity to tell it to his or her friends and colleagues and therefore would be unable to diffuse the information. However, these social constraints do not affect the multistore process of the content of humor. Therefore, the tendency of for keeping humorous content in mind might still be effective in the individual.

To summarize some theoretical approaches to the circulation of humor, it is evident that humor stimulates communication. The process of circulation may be a spontaneous, unplanned spreading of humorous phrases. In some cases, one may look forward to telling someone in particular a joke. In both situations, this process is basically a function of the memory process. An individual makes a judgment whether humorous content is to be called up again and passed on to friends and family members based on comparison of new humor with previously stored information in the long term memory.

1. This question was also put to Woody Allen in an interview (quoted from Avner, 1984). Allen addressed himself to it as a professional humorist who sees his main function as making others laugh. He explained four possible motives; (1) exhibitionism and narcissism, (2) aggression, (3) developing relationship, (4) aesthetics.

CHAPTER 3: HYPOTHESES

A. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The literature reviewed and the memory system introduced attempting to explain diffusion of humor provide a rationale for managers of advertising. This rationale suggests that humor can be used in promoting the main selling point in ways other than the traditional manner which associates humor with attention getting, and consumers' attitude toward advertising. As we said before, we still need to understand which humorous content and phrases find their way into daily conversations. However, even if we understood this phenomenon, diffusion of humor would only work in favor of advertisers when humorous content and main selling points or brand name are stored and passed person-to-person. Otherwise, the thing which is stored and passed person-to-person will be the humor itself, and more repetition of the advertising message will be needed to create an association between the humor and the product being advertised.

Regarding the subject discussed above, Duncan (1979) hypothesized that humor relevant to the main selling points will be more effective in changing audience response levels than irrelevant humor. Scott, et al, (1990) tested this hypothesis within a field setting and found that where humor is relevant to the object of

promotional effort, manipulation of humor will increase patronage activity, but that humor not relevant to the objective of the promotion will have either no impact or a negative impact.

Following this line of thought, we might also say that humor related to and well integrated with objectives and message of an ad or brand name will be more effective in circulating the content of advertising than irrelevant humor. The reason behind this thought comes from the memory model introduced. If the humor is related to a major selling point or the brand name, the humorous content and the advertising content will more likely be stored together. In Figure 3.1, it can be clearly seen that humor relevant to the brand name or message will create an "acoustical code" in long term memory. The content of advertising will be reminded by the humor as an acoustical code. Zillman (1977) explains this phenomenon in the following words:

"Humor acts as a reward in an operant conditioning paradigm, reinforcing not only attention to the message, but rehearsal and even the retelling of the ad's content..."

In other words, the person during the elaboration, continues to remember the benefit of the product. To better explain this, let's continue the example that was

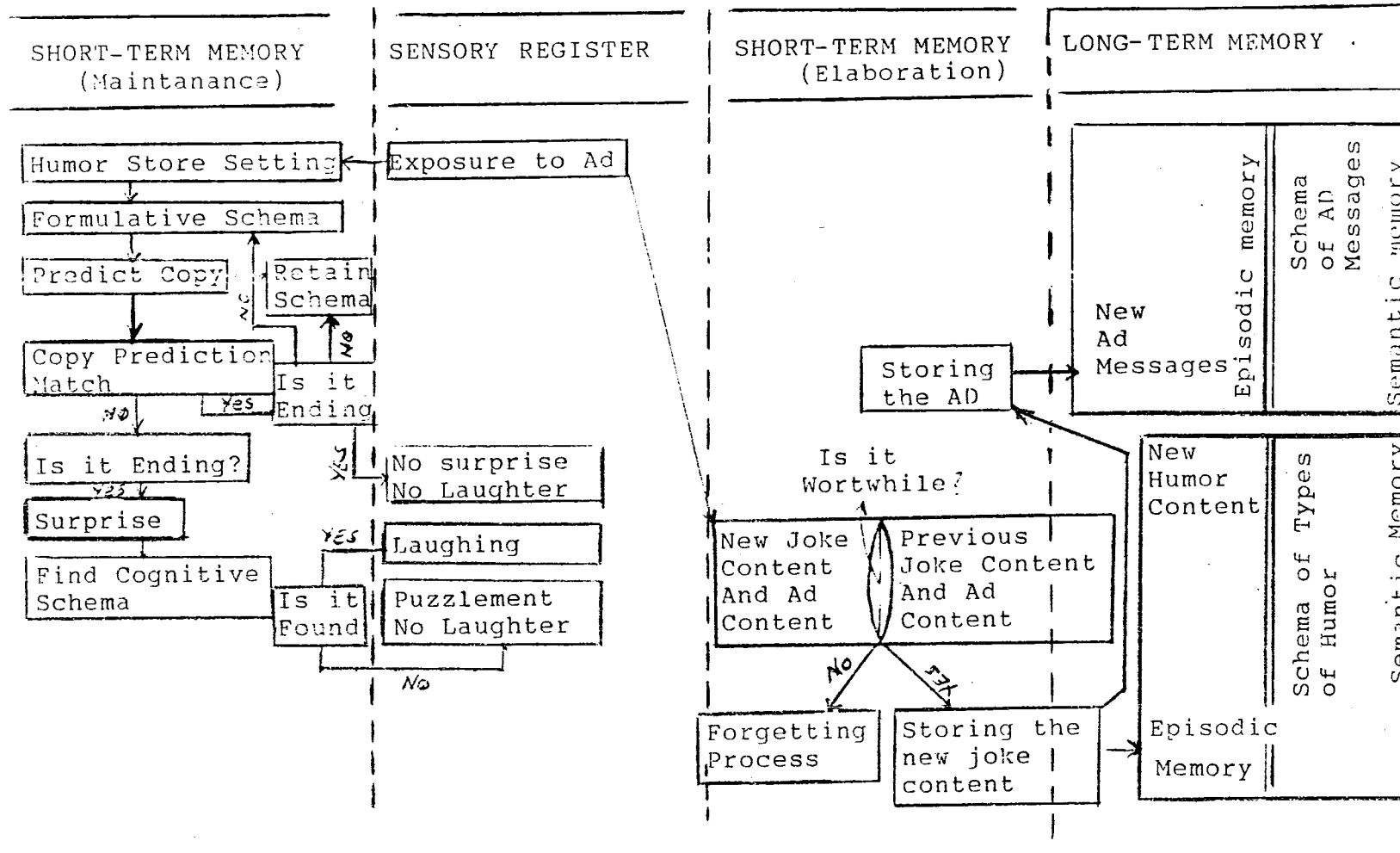


Figure 3.1: Flow chart depicting the memory system storing both humor and ad.

used before:

1. The first line of copy exposed. I used to snore so loud that I would wake myself up.
2. The copy setting is stored, and schema is formulated. The person predicts the next entry of copy: But I solved the problem.
3. The person asks, does the copy prediction match the incoming copy?
In this case, it does. Has the joke ended?
No, there is additional copy.
4. The schema is retained and elaborated with a new line of the copy: But I solved the problem.
5. The second line of the copy is exposed: I know....
6. Again, a prediction is made about copy: You went to see your doctor.
7. The punch line is exposed: You started sleeping in the next room.
8. Does the text prediction match the punch line?
In this case it does not. And the person is surprised by the incongruity between his prediction for the context and punch line.
9. The person laughs.
10. The third line of copy is exposed which is "No, I took the SHORESTOPPER..."
11. Humor is directly related to the content of

advertising and brand name. This situation increases the person's response level and both humor and the content are experienced together.

12. In this case, the person laughed. That means it is found worthwhile to call up and compare to the previous joke schema. This situation enhances long term memory.

13. If it is stored in long-term memory, there is a probability of using it during conversation. If it is not stored, this condition accelerates the forgetting curve.

To better understand this process in advertising and to bring some explanations to the factors which may constrain diffusion of humor, we will link our hypotheses to the studies reviewed so far and the memory system used trying to explain the process of storing humor. To grasp the role of humor in advertising, additional research is needed in diffusion of humor because the capacity of diffusion gives humor a unique power; mitigating the wearout of messages even after repetition. This unique power was first propounded by Gelb and Zinkham (1990). They hypothesized that if more than one person is listening to or watching a commercial message, then this social dimension increases the likelihood that a message will be perceived as humorous, even after repetition. In the present study, we think that having one or more people

exposed to a humorous message is not the only way to achieve this effect. Besides that, we think that this effect is not limited to only TV and radio messages.

B. HYPOTHESES

1. The retention of advertising messages will be significantly higher for a humorous ad in which humor is related to the main selling point as opposed to a humorous ad in which humor is unrelated to the main selling point.

2. The recall of the main selling point will be significantly higher for a humorous ad in which humor is related to the main selling point as opposed to a humorous ad in which humor is unrelated to the main selling point.

3. The number of people who tell the ad content (diffusion) will be significantly higher for a humorous ad as opposed to a serious ad.

4. The number of people who tell the main selling point of the ad will be significantly higher for a humorous ad in which humor is related to the main selling point as opposed to a humorous ad in which humor is unrelated to the main selling point.

5. The intent of circulating the ad content will be significantly higher for a humorous ad as opposed to a serious ad.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

A field experiment was used to test hypotheses under investigation. A simple one-way randomized design with $K=3$ was chosen. Three different 8.5 x 11 color flyers were created using a Quark Express software computer program on Macintosh Plus.

A. ADVERTISEMENTS

The humorous ad in which humor is related to the major selling point communicated the major selling point in a humorous fashion. A photograph of a naked baby and a headline regarding the "casual dress" were used to create association between humor and the main selling point. That is, the humor was integral to the communication. See Appendix A-1 for the first experimental stimulus. In the humorous ad in which humor is unrelated to the major selling point, the humor was extraneous to the major selling point. See Appendix A-2 for the second experimental stimulus. The serious advertisement simply communicated the message content without any funny item. The method used to create three copies of the same message is similar to the method used in Madden's Radio experiment (Madden, 1982). See Appendix A-3 for the serious version of the ad.

To get enough humorous impact, humorous versions of advertisements included a color-visual image. To provide

the homogeneity of visual effect, the same size of visual material was used in the serious version of the message. The reason for this was that the results of most studies showed that pictorial advertising stimuli can yield different outcomes than verbal advertising stimuli. In general, pictorial stimuli are better recalled (Edell and Staelin, 1983). A naked child and a puppet - like professor - were used as visual items to reinforce the verbal part of humor in humorous versions of ads. Also, the reason to select the Statue of Liberty in the serious version of the ad was the same; to reinforce the verbal part. As is known, the best advertising uses the visual to reinforce the verbal (Wells, Burnett and Moriarty, 1989).

Each advertisement had identical layout, spacing and body copy. In addition, each flyer contained a seven-line headline and used the same size and style type. To get the headline to attract readers, humorous messages were used in headlines. As is also known, more people read the entire ad if the headline hooks them (Jewler, 1985, p. 65).

Finally, an imaginary restaurant name was used in the flyers to ensure that prior brand preconceptions had no influence on the experiment. However, it should be noted that several visual images used in other printing materials were used.

B. MANIPULATIONS CHECKS IN THE PRETEST

To ensure homogeneity of information and the heterogeneity of humor-main selling point relationships among the three ads, a pretest was conducted. A convenience sample of 60 Marquette University students, 20 for each experimental stimulus, was independently exposed to the ads. Using a standardized questionnaire, manipulations and the scales used in the final study and were tested. See Appendix B for the questionnaire used in the pretest.

The result of the pretest showed that the students perceived some degree of humor in the serious version. For this reason, the serious version of ads was changed and retested once again, using another sample of 20 convenient Marquette University students. See Appendix C for the changed copy. After this change, the result of a one-way analysis of variance was statistically significant. In addition, the first ad and the second ad means were different from the third ad means at $p. \leq 0.05$ by DUNCAN multiple range test in terms of the degree of funniness. In the pretest, the degree of funniness was measured on 5 point scales ranging from very funny (5) to not at all funny (1). Then the scale was recorded as follows: (4 5) as humor; (3 2) as mild-humor, and (2 1) as serious for one-way ANOVA test.

The result of the one-way ANOVA test for humor-main

selling point relationship was also significant. Further analysis using DUNCAN multiple range test showed that the mean of the first ad is different from the mean of the third ad, and the mean of the second ad is different from the mean of the third ad in terms of the degree of integration at $p = .05$. To measure humor-main selling point relationship, two questions were asked using the five-point scale. While one of them was ranged from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1), the other one was ranged from very integrated (5) to not at all integrated (1). To avoid a possible Halo effect, these two questions were separated from each other.

After having recorded the scales, the combination of the two questions were used as an integration index. Pearson r was computed to validate the scores of indices for each experimental stimulus. Pearson r 's are presented in Table 4.1. The correlation of the two items for each experimental condition is quite high. In the one-way ANOVA, the result of indices were recorded as follows: (4 5) as integration, (3 2) as mild integration, and (2 1) non-integration. See Table 4.2 for the results of the ANOVA's regarding the degree of funniness and the degree of integration.

TABLE 4.1

The correlation coefficients
of the integration scales

		<u>Pearson R</u>
1.	Ad	0.87
2.	Ad	0.91
3.	Ad	0.79

TABLE 4.2
 One-way ANOVA findings as a function
 of degree of funniness and the degree
 of integration

	<u>1. Ad</u> n=20	<u>2. Ad</u> n=20	<u>3. Ad</u> n=20	<u>F</u> <u>Value</u>	<u>P</u> <u>_____</u>
Degree of Funniness*	a2.60	a2.45	b1.85	22.67	0.00
Integration*	c1.42	d .82	e-.10	29.15	0.00

* means with the same letter do not differ significantly from each other at the .05 alpha level using the DUNCAN multiple comparisons.

In light of the findings of the pretest, the first ad (Appendix A-1) was assigned as the humorous ad in which humor is related to the main selling point. The second one (Appendix A-2) was assigned as the humorous ad in which humor is unrelated to the major selling point. Finally, the third one (Appendix C) was assigned as the serious version of the same message.

C. EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURE

Sample. Due to practical constraints, the population was restricted to Marquette University students. A computer program was used to select a random sample of 130 students from the student database at Marquette University. Nine students who did not have a phone or a full address were eliminated from the sample. Because of the budget constraint, the sample was limited to 130.

121 students were randomly assigned to each of the three different experimental conditions. Each group consisted of approximately 40 students. After this process, the ads were sent to each individual. At the same time, each individual selected was sent a letter indicating that the enclosed advertisement was for a new restaurant which will be opening near them. All subjects were approved for the experiment. See Appendix D for the copy of the cover letter used in the study.

Five days after the ads were mailed, the subjects were called for the interview. The reason for waiting

five days was to give the subjects an opportunity to talk with someone. A lottery with a monetary price (\$100) was used as an incentive in the final study. The names of subjects were entered into the drawing for the \$100. Three interviewers consisted of a graduate student and two professional actors. The interviewers were also randomly assigned to interview different groups. To avoid "the sensitization" effect, the call-back procedure was not used in the study because students had a chance to look at the ad they received. A call-back would have caused a bias regarding recall scores.

An effort was made to keep the group sizes approximately the same. The response rates for each group were respectively 50%, 60%, and 53%. The overall response rate was 50% (n = 65).

In the interview, a standardized questionnaire focusing on scales relating to the dependent variables were used. The questionnaire ended with the measurement of demographic variables. See Appendix E for the questionnaire used in the final study.

Statistical procedures. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSSX) on VAX was used to analyze the data. The basic statistical methods used in this study were one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Chi-square. For multiple comparisons, the DUNCAN multiple range test was applied. F distribution is robust with respect to

violation of the assumption of homogeneity of population-error variances provided that the number of observations in the samples is equal (Cochran, 1947). However, for samples of unequal size, violation of the homogeneity assumption can have a marked effect on the test of significance (Kirk, 1968, p. 61) in the study. In the cases of the suspicion of heterogeneity, HARTLEY's F test was used for some of the ANOVA findings reported in Chapter 5. The results of all of the HARTLEY's F's were not significant. The largest of the sample sizes which is 24 was used for purposes of determining the degrees of freedom for these tests. According to Kirk (1968, p. 62), this procedure leads to a slight positive bias in the test, that is, in rejecting the hypothesis of homogeneity more frequently than it should be rejected.

As Bruning and Kintz (1987) suggested, recall scores for each component of overall recall was coded as follows: '0' as "don't remember" and '1' as "remember". This process allowed us to compute an one-way analysis of variance for each component of recall. Also, the same procedure was used for diffusion data to determine the effect of the integrated humor on diffusion.

To examine the intention of telling the ad content, the data was recorded form the "+2" to "-2" scale. This is the standard scale used in the "Behavioral Intention" models.

For the purpose of some further analyses, three groups were combined into one composite group. This combination yielded a larger sample size to work with.

D. DEPENDENT VARIABLES

Retention. In the light of the theoretical discussion, retention was measured by using a set of unaided recall measures used by various studies. (Bogazzi and Silk, 1979). These measures simply require the subject to list the information they could remember. After seeing the advertisement in the pretest, the subjects were asked to list the information they can remember about the ad they read. According to the results of this open-ended question, the recall measures were divided into four categories in regard to the hypotheses of the study; humor-photo identification, brand identification, main selling point identification, and total number of details remembered. These categories were mutually exclusive and exhaustive. The information obtained from the pretest was assigned to one of four categories by each experimental condition based on the features of the each category:

i. Humor-photo identification

Humorous related: Naked Baby

Humorous unrelated: Professor, a Puppet, Staying in
School

Serious: The Statue of Liberty¹ and Sunset

ii. Brand identification

"Liberty" for each experimental condition.

iii. Main selling point

"Dressing is not important" or "casual dress" for each experimental condition.

iv. Detail

Credit cards, State Street, low price, and good food each experimental conditions. (If two of the four details were remembered, 1 point was added to respondent's recall scores.

With this dependent variable, we assumed that the number of categories remembered indicated the degree of retention. The scores ranged from 0 to 4.

Diffusion. This dependent variable is operationally described as "telling about the commercial to somebody." To measure it, the respondents were asked whether or not they told anything to anybody about the advertisement they received. This measure parallels the measure used by Smith (1974) to measure the interaction of mass media content.

In addition, if they told the content of the ad to someone, then the respondents were asked to mention what information they gave in conversation. Once again, using the data gathered in the pretest, the information given during the conversation was divided into four categories in regard to the hypotheses of the study, diffusion of

humor, diffusion of the main selling point, diffusion of brand name, and diffusion of detail.

Intention of circulating the content. Subjects were asked to indicate on a 5 point scale ranging from "will definitely tell" (5) to "will definitely not tell" (1) the extent of how likely they would consider telling the content of the ad to someone. This measure also parallels those used to measure purchase intention (Smith and Swinyard, 1983).

E. CONTROL VARIABLES

Perceived humor or funniness, emotional response to advertising, gender differences, the possibility of interaction with someone, liking going out to eat, liking dressing up to go out, talking about the ads in general, the elapsed time since last viewing the ads, processing the ad content after seeing it, were used as control variables.

Perceived humor was measured by using the same scale used in the pretest.

Emotional Responses were measured using the Standardized Emotional Response Profile (SEP) developed and tested by Holbrook and Batra (1988). The SEP contains 27 different items which are collapsed into three major dimensions of emotions: (1) pleasure; (2) arousal; and (3) domination. The reported multi-item reliabilities for these emotional indices range from .47 to .96, with a mean

of .81, which are "...commensurate with the commonly accepted cutoffs of .80 for refined instruments and .60 for instruments still under development." (Holbrook and Batra, 1988, p. 105). In the pretest, the reliabilities of SEP scales were checked in terms of the experimental stimuli under investigation.

Table 4.3 shows the result of the reliability analyses of the emotional response scale. To determine emotional response, the means of 27 items were collapsed to form nine indices: faith, affection, gratitude, interest, activation, urgency, sadness, fear, and skepticism. Then the means of the nine indices were collapsed to arrive at a final measure of the emotional dimensions of pleasure, arousal, and denomination. Multi-item reliabilities for these emotional indices ranged from 0.29 to 0.87 with a mean of 0.67. As Holbrook and Batra suggested, SEP was decided to be used in the study to measure emotional responses.

In order to obtain a measure of the possibility of interaction with someone, two measures were used. In one instance, respondents were asked how many people they live with. In the second one, respondents were asked whether or not they worked during the last week. These two measures were combined to obtain a single measure ranging from (0) to (2). The higher the score, the stronger the possibility of interaction with someone.

TABLE 4.3

The Result of Reliability
Analyses for Emotional Response
Scale in the Pretest

Indices	Humorous <u>related</u> (alpha)	Humorous <u>unrelated</u> (alpha)	<u>Serious</u> (alpha)
Pleasure	0.69	0.77	0.82
Arousal	0.65	0.64	0.87
Dominant	0.58	0.74	0.29

The following were measured on a 5 point scale ranging from very often (5) to not at all (1). The frequency with which respondents go out to eat; 2) the degree to which respondents like to dress up to go out; and 3) the extent to which people talk about the ads.

1. Even though the third ad was assigned as a serious ad, a number of students perceived a little degree of funniness because they associated the Statute of Liberty with "Dressing Up".

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

This chapter will provide a brief result of manipulation checks in the final study and then present the result of the study.

A. MANIPULATIONS CHECKS IN THE FINAL STUDY

As required, the humorous versions of the ads were significantly perceived more humorous than the serious version ($F=8.47$, $p<0.001$). Duncan Multiple Range Test indicated that humorous ads were significantly different from the non-humorous ads at 0.5 alpha level. See Table 5.1.

B. DEMOGRAPHIC AND PSYCHOGRAPHIC SPECIFIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUPS

To ensure that the three experimental groups did not significantly vary on demographic-specific and psychographic-specific characteristics, measures relating to gender differences, class differences, the frequency with which respondents go out to eat, the degree to which respondents like to dress up to go out, possibility of interaction with someone, the elapsed time since last viewing the ad, processing the ad content after seeing it, the extent to which people talk about the ads, and emotional response variables were examined. Results showed no significant differences for each measurement except the talking about the ads in general. The results

TABLE 5.1

One-Way ANOVA Findings
for Funniness in the
Final Study

	<u>n</u>	<u>means*</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>P</u>
Humorous related	20 a	3.05	8.47	.0006
Humorous unrelated	24 a	3.25		
Serious	21 b	2.00		

*Means with the same letter do not differ significantly from each of .05 alpha level using the DUNCAN multiple range test.

of the analyses in terms of gender differences (chi-square = 2.97, df 2, n = 65), class differences (chi-square = 5.03, df 4, n = 65)¹, liking going out to eat (F = 76, p = .47), liking dressing up to go out (F = 2.03, p = .13), possibility of interaction with someone (chi-square = 2.12, df 2, n = 65), the elapsed time since last viewing the ad (chi-square = 7.48, df 4, n = 65)¹, pleasure (F = 2.41, p = 0.97), arousal (F = 2.85, p = 0.65, dominant (F = .4671 p = .62) were not significant. However, in the third group assigned to the serious versions of ads, the number of students who like to talk about advertising in general are equal to the number of students who do not like to talk about the advertising in general. On the other hand, in the other groups, most of the subjects like to talk about advertising in general (chi-square = 6.71, df 2, p < 0.5, n = 65).

Multi-item reliabilities for the emotional indices ranged from 0.39 to 0.84 with a mean of 0.63. Even though most reliability scores are lower than those obtained in the pretest, they may still be accepted as quite high. See Table 5.2 for reliability scores of emotional response indices in the final study.

C. HYPOTHESIS 1

As explained in Chapter 4, retention was measured by

¹ class measures were recorded as: 4 5 = 3,
3 = 2, 1 2 = 1.

TABLE 5.2Reliability Scores of
Emotional Response Indices

	<u>Humor related</u> <u>(Alpha)</u>	<u>Humor related</u> <u>(Alpha)</u>	<u>Non-humorous</u> <u>(Alpha)</u>
<u>Indices</u>			
Pleasure	0.57	0.52	0.76
Arousal	0.81	0.72	0.84
Dominant	0.45	0.39	0.55

TABLE 5.3
One-Way ANOVA Findings
for Retention

	<u>n</u>	<u>mean</u>	<u>F_ratio</u>	<u>P</u>
Humorous related	20	3.15	1.29	0.28
Humorous unrelated	24	2.66		
Serious	21	3.10		

using a set of unaided recall measures. Table 5.3 shows the results of a one-way analysis of variance test that did not indicate a significant difference between groups in retention scores. In addition, there was no significant relationship found between overall recall and funniness scores. As expected, further processing of an ad after seeing it created higher recall scores (Pearson $r = 0.45$ $p < .01$, $n = 65$). Thus, the first hypothesis was not supported.

D. HYPOTHESIS 2

Table 5.4 shows the results of a one-way analysis of variance that indicated significant differences between groups in main selling point recall scores ($F = 8.26$, $p < .001$). The main point recall means are fractional numbers because as Bruning and Kintz (1987) suggested, recall scores were coded as follows: '0', as "do not remember" and '1" as remember. Duncan Multiple Range Test also showed that main selling point recall scores are significantly higher for the humor related ad as compared to the humor unrelated ad at the level of $p = .05$. On the other hand, main selling point scores are also significantly higher for the non-humorous ad as opposed to humor unrelated advertising at $p = .05$ by Duncan Multiple Range Test. In addition, there was no significant effect of perceived funniness on any recall components. See Table 5.4 for main selling point recall scores.

TABLE 5.4

One-way ANOVA Finding for
Main Selling Point Recall Scores

	<u>n</u>	<u>means*</u>	<u>F ratio</u>	<u>P</u>
Humorous related	20	A 0.70	8.26	.0007
Humorous unrelated	24	B 0.21		
Non-humor	21	A 0.67		

*Means with the same letter do not differ significantly from each other .05 alpha level using the Duncan's multiple comparisons.

See Table. 5.5 for recall components. The second hypothesis was supported.

TABLE 5.5(*)

The Effect of Funniness
on Recall Components

	<u>Chi-Square</u>	<u>Df</u>	<u>n</u>
Humor-Photo Identification	.19 ns	1	65
Main Selling Identification	1.29 ns	1	65
Detail	0.23 ns	1	65
Brand Identification	.10 ns	1	65

*Degree of funniness was recorded as: 3 4 5 = 2, 1 2 = 1.

E. HYPOTHESIS 3

Table 5.6 shows the results of a one-way analysis of variance test that did not indicate a significant difference between the groups in the number of people who told about the ad content to someone else ($F = 1.03$, $p = .36$). Further analyses showed that there was a correlation between the possibility for personal interaction and the circulating of advertising content (Pearson $r = 0.25$, $p < 0.05$, $n = 65$). In addition, the same relation was found between the process of an ad after seeing it and the circulating of the ad content (Pearson $r = 0.30$, $p < 0.05$, $n = 65$). In addition, there was a significant correlation found between overall recall scores and overall diffusion (Pearson $r = 0.24$, $p < 0.05$, $n = 65$). No significant effect was observed in the emotional response versus diffusion analysis. Also, there was a significant relationship found between diffusion and funniness (Pearson $r = 0.21$, $p < .05$). The degree of liking to talk about the ads in general did not affect the circulating of the ad content. The correlation coefficient was not significant. The third hypothesis was not supported.

F. HYPOTHESIS 4

The fourth hypothesis postulated that the diffusion of the main selling point would be significantly higher for a humorous ad related to the main selling point. No

TABLE 5.6

One-way ANOVA for the
Diffusion of Ad Content

	<u>means</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>F_ratio</u>	<u>P</u>
Humorous related	.40	20	1.03	.36
Humorous unrelated	.54	24		
Serious	.33	21		

such effect was found (chi-square = 1.03, p.59, n = 28).

G. HYPOTHESIS 5

According to the fifth hypothesis, the intent of circulating the advertising content would be significantly higher for a humorous ad as opposed to a serious ad. The result of one-way analysis of variance did not indicate such a significant result ($F = 0.36$ $p = .96$). No significant effect was observed in the emotional responses versus intention of circulation of the content analysis. There was no significant relationship found between this dependent variable and recall scores. See Table 5.7 for intention of circulating the ad content.

1. Class measures were recorded as: 45 = 3, 3 = 2,
12 = 1.

TABLE 5.7

One-way ANOVA Findings for
the Intention

	<u>n</u>	<u>mean</u>	<u>F ratio</u>	<u>P</u>
Humorous related	20	1.10	0.36	.96
Humorous unrelated	24	1.29		
Serious	21	1.16		

CHAPTER 6: "DISCUSSION AND
SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

A. DISCUSSION

Several limitations of this study should be mentioned. First, respondents in the pretest were a convenience sample of the college students. They were not randomly assigned to each experimental condition, and also in the final study, respondents were college students. For these reasons, there is a limitation on the generalizability of the results of the study. Obviously, respondents represented only a narrow target audience.

A second limitation is that the messages were delivered only in print. Although one could criticize this research from this point, the focus of the research was directed toward theory testing, therefore placing the value of internal validity as more important external validity.

A third limitation concerns the factor of exposure. In the pretest, respondents were exposed to the print ads only once. In the final study, although an attempt was made to determine elapsed time using self-report questions, there was no way to validate the respondents exposure to the print ads. According to Gelb and Zinkhan (1985), humor in advertising should not be viewed as a phenomenon independent of number of exposures.

Fourth, respondents were aware that they were

participating in research. However, respondents actually did not learn that the advertisements were created only for the purposes of research until they completed the questionnaire. That is, there was no prior understanding of the purpose of the study.

A fifth limitation involves the inherent artificiality of the Likert scale which was used to measure perceived integration. Using the Likert scale assumes that subjects can consciously report what they think is "integration". Also, perceived humor was used to measure in such a way. Respondents reported what they thought was humorous. Addressing the Likert scale's assumption, some have advocated the use of physical means (such as laughter) or physiological measures (such as pulse rate) to measure humor, but the use of these techniques has proved problematic (Gelb and Zinkhan, 1985).

The final limitation is the number of ads used. Creating more than three advertisements, the level of the experimental treatment would have increased.

Although there are several limitations to the study, the following conclusions are indicated.

As expressed in Chapter 3, the result of the present study showed that humor relevant to the main selling point created an "acoustical code" in long term memory. When humor is associated with the main selling point, humor as

an acoustical code helped respondents to have better recall scores. As opposed to this result, the subjects who received the humorous ad in which humor was unrelated to the main selling point were distracted by the unrelated humor. Apparently, the subjects were so caught up with the bold professor who is bored with teaching and missed the most important component of the message. They would have received it had the humor been related to the main selling point. This result supported the result of Cantor and Venus's study mentioned in Chapter 1. It also showed that if humor is related to the main selling point in humorous ads, the distraction hypothesis does not work (Festinger and Maccoby, 1964). This result is also similar to Duncan and Nelson's study mentioned in Chapter 4.

In 1983, Sutherland and Middleton reviewed 16 studies addressing the issue of humor in ads in a 20 year span (1961-1981). Of these, nine studies indicate no difference in an audience's ability to recall the advertising message as a result of humor. Four other studies have found that humor has a negative effect on recall, and three find humor to aid in the overall retention of the message (Sutherland and Middleton, 1983).

In our study, the subject who received the second ad had excellent recall of the characteristics of the professor's mood, but the purpose of the ad was to inform



the subject about Liberty's selling message: dressing is not important. Also, the fact was that the recall of the main selling point was as high as the first ad's main selling point recall scores when the serious ad was received.

See Table 6.1 for the recall percentages by experiments. The results of a one-way analysis of variance for each recall item did not indicate a significant difference the groups.

As opposed to the hypothesis of this study, high recall of main selling points did not yield higher diffusion of the main selling messages. Similar to this result, humorous ads also did not yield to diffusion of the message as compared to the serious ad.

Although the results of our study are related to print ads, conclusions about their relative meaning await a comparison with mean values derived from different types of humor varying in product types and media. This was not the goal of the present study. The research focus here was simply to compare a strategy of using humorous ads in which humor is not related to the main selling point and with the serious version of the same message.

B. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The current study does not suggest that humorous ads hold great potential for getting the ad content circulated in daily conversation. However, most subjects (68%) said

TABLE 6.1

The Recall Percentages
by Experiments

	<u>Humor photo</u>	<u>Detail</u>	<u>Brand</u>
Humorous related	95%	40%	15%
Humorous unrelated	91%	41%	29%
Serious	76%	42%	38

that they talked about the commercial during conversation. 72% of these students who talked about the ads said they talked about the ads only sometimes. In addition, 43% of the subjects said that they circulated the content of the ad they received. Further research should investigate the issue in greater depth through consideration of other variables such as product type (i.e., a service vs. a product/or high vs. low involvement product classes); and the type of humor. In further research, it would be useful to study the interaction between these variables.

In conclusion, even though the results of the study are not impressive in terms of diffusion of humor in ads, they clearly showed that humor can work when there is a direct relationship to the product being sold. In this situation, humor does not tend to call attention to itself rather than to the product. However, a serious ad will perform as successfully as the ad in which humor is related to the main selling point.

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APPENDIX A



**You Gotta
Love A Place
Where
What You Eat
Is More Important
Than
What You Wear.**

We know you love to go out to eat, but you hate to get dressed up. Why don't you come to a place where casual is king - The Liberty Restaurant. Our portions are big. Our prices are minimum. Stop in our new place at State Street. American Express, Master Card or Visa accepted.

The Liberty
Pub & Restaurant



**You
Don't Have
To Get
Dressed Up
To Go Out
To Eat
Anymore.**

We know you love to go out to eat, but you hate to get dressed up. Why don't you come to a place where casual is king - The Liberty Restaurant. Our portions are big. Our prices are minimum. Stop in our new place at State Street. American Express, Master Card or Visa accepted.

The Liberty
Pub & Restaurant



**You Gotta
Love A Place
Where
What You Eat
Is More Important
Than
What You Wear.**

We know you love to go out to eat, but you hate to get dressed up. Why don't you come to place where casual is king - The Liberty Restaurant. Our portions are big. Our prices are minimum. Stop in our new place at State Street. American Express, Master Card or Visa accepted.

**The Liberty
Pub & Restaurant**

APPENDIX B

The following questionnaire has been prepared as a pretesting instrument for a proposed research study on testing different advertising messages. All of your responses will be kept strictly confidential and will not be used in any other way except for analysis in the pretest study. Thank you for answering the questions.

1. First, I am specifically interested in what you can recall about the flyer you just read. Please report anything you read or saw in the flyer.

2. Would you please rate the degree of funniness in the flyer you just read? Please check () one of the blanks.

- ___ Very Funny
___ Somewhat Funny
___ A Little Funny
___ Not Very Funny
___ Not At All Funny

3. In this part, I would like you to look at the flyer again and tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, feel neutral, disagree or strongly disagree with the following statement:

Strongly Strongly Agree Neutral Disagree Disagree

In this advertisement, humor is related to the "selling points" which are attributes of a product or service that makes it attractive.

4. Now I am interested in determining your reactions to the flyer you just read. How much did you experience each of the following emotions? Please check () one blank for each statement.

	<u>Very</u> <u>Much</u>	<u>Some</u> <u>What</u>	<u>A</u> <u>Little</u>	<u>Not</u> <u>Very</u>	<u>Not</u> <u>At All</u>
I felt anxious	___	___	___	___	___
I felt loving	___	___	___	___	___
I felt distressed	___	___	___	___	___
I felt afraid	___	___	___	___	___
I felt suspicious	___	___	___	___	___
I felt entertained	___	___	___	___	___
I felt sad	___	___	___	___	___
I felt fearful	___	___	___	___	___
I felt lighthearted	___	___	___	___	___
I felt skeptical	___	___	___	___	___
I felt grateful	___	___	___	___	___
I felt friendly	___	___	___	___	___
I felt playful	___	___	___	___	___
I felt sorrowful	___	___	___	___	___
I felt distrustful	___	___	___	___	___
I felt thankful	___	___	___	___	___
I felt spiritual	___	___	___	___	___
I felt aroused	___	___	___	___	___
I felt interested	___	___	___	___	___
I felt excited	___	___	___	___	___
I felt appreciative	___	___	___	___	___
I felt attentive	___	___	___	___	___

I felt curious	___	___	___	___	___
I felt active	___	___	___	___	___
I felt reverent	___	___	___	___	___

5. Would you please rate the degree of integration of humor with selling points in the flyer?

- ___ Very Integrated
- ___ Somewhat Integrated
- ___ A Little Integrated
- ___ Not Very Integrated
- ___ Not At All Integrated

Thank you for taking
the time to complete
this pretest.

APPENDIX C



**Sick And Tired
Of Studying?
Think Of Your
Professors.
They'll Stay
In School
Forever.**

Now you feel better, don't you. How about going out to eat? We know you love to go out to eat, but you hate to get dressed up. Why don't you come to a place where casual is king - The Liberty Restaurant. Our portions are big. Our prices are minimum. Stop in our new place at State Street. American Express, Master Card or Visa accepted.

**The Liberty
Pub & Restaurant**

APPENDIX D

September 29, 1990

Dear

I am a graduate student in the College of Communication at Marquette University. As part of my work as a graduate student, I am conducting research into advertising messages in daily life.

All you have to do is to read the enclosed advertisement for a new restaurant which will be opening near you and to complete a short interview when I or one of my friends calls you in two or three days. If you read the advertisement now and complete the interview when we call you, your name will be entered in a drawing so that you have a chance of winning \$100. The result of drawing will be mailed to you.

I hope you will be kind enough to participate in this project. Let me thank you in advance for your participation and remind you that your name was randomly selected from a limited sample of Marquette students.

Your participation and your ideas are very important to me. Please read the enclosed advertisement and complete the interview.

Thank you for helping me.

Ali Atif Bir
Marquette University
College of Communication

APPENDIX E

DIFFUSION OF HUMOR IN ADVERTISING

GROUP NO: _____
 RESPONDENT NO: _____

RESPONDENT'S NAME: _____ PHONE: _____

Hi! May I speak to [respondent's name]? ♣

My name is _____. I am helping a graduate student with his research work. During the last week, you should have received a letter and a flyer from him explaining the purpose of a study which has to do with the circulation of advertising messages in daily life. Did you receive both the letter and the flyer? [1] No [2] Yes

[In case of "yes"]

I am calling for the interview. The interview will take just about 6-8 minutes. Would you be willing to answer a few questions? [In case of "yes"]. About how long has it been since you last looked at the flyer? _____

About how much of the flyer would you say you read?

[3] All of it [2] Most of it [1] Some of it [0] Did not read

Before I begin, I would like to inform you that your participation is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to answer any of the questions. All the responses you give will be confidential and will be used for the purposes of this study.

I. First, I am specifically interested in what you can recall about the restaurant ad you received. Would you please tell me what you recall about it?

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Naked Baby | <input type="checkbox"/> Good food |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A professor or a puppet | <input type="checkbox"/> Low prices |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The Statute of Liberty/Sunset | <input type="checkbox"/> State Street |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Liberty Restaurant | <input type="checkbox"/> Credit cards |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Casual Dress | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dressing is not important | 1. _____ |
| | 2. _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Staying in school | 3. _____ |

II. In this section, I am interested in your impression of the flyer you received. Would you please tell me whether you think it was very funny, somewhat funny, a little funny, not very funny or not at all funny?

- Very Funny
 Somewhat Funny
 A Little Funny
 Not Very Funny
 Not At All Funny

III. Now I am interested in determining your reactions to the flyer you received. I am going to read a list of possible emotions. Would you please tell me to what degree you experienced these emotions; very much, somewhat, a little, not very, or not at all.

	<u>Very</u>	<u>Some</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>Not</u>	<u>Not</u>
	<u>Little</u>	<u>What</u>	<u>Little</u>	<u>Very</u>	<u>At All</u>
Felt anxious?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Felt loving?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Felt distressed?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Felt afraid?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Felt suspicious?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Felt entertained?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Felt sad?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Felt fearful?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Felt lighthearted?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Felt skeptical?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Felt grateful?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Felt friendly?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Felt playful?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Felt sorrowful?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Felt distrustful?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Felt thankful?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Felt spiritual?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Felt aroused?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Felt interested?	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
Felt excited?	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
Felt appreciative?	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
Felt attentive?	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
Felt curious?	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
Felt active?	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
Felt reverent?	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
Felt worshipful?	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
Felt affectionate?	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]

IV. Now I would like to ask several questions about your use of advertising messages in daily life.

1. Does the group you go around with talk about advertisements?

___Yes (Continue)

___No (Go to 3)

2. Please tell me whether you talk about them all of the time, very often, sometimes, rarely, or never.

___All of the time

___Very Often

___Sometimes

___Rarely

___Never

3. After reading the flyer we sent, did you ever think about it?

___Yes (Continue)

___No (Go to 5)

4. How many times did you think about it? Would you please tell me whether you thought about it once, two times, three times, four times, or more times?

___Once

___2 or 3 times

___4 or more times

___Don't remember

5. Do you remember having talked to someone about the flyer we sent?

___ Yes (Continue)

___ No (Go to V)

6. Now I am going to read a list of possible information. Would you please tell me what information you gave when you talked about the flyer?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tired professor | <input type="checkbox"/> Naked Child |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Statue of Liberty | <input type="checkbox"/> Dressing up is not important or casual dress |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Liberty restaurant | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Staying in school | <input type="checkbox"/> Prices are too low |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Credit Cards | <input type="checkbox"/> Do not remember |

V. Now I would like you to indicate your intention of telling someone the content of the flyer we sent. Would you please tell me whether you will definitely tell, probably tell, probably not tell or definitely not tell during your daily conversation.

___ Definitely will tell

___ Probably will tell

___ May or may not tell

___ Probably will not tell

___ Definitely will not tell

___ Do not know

VI. The last several questions are for classification purposes. As we said before, all responses will be confidential.

1. How often do you go out to eat? (Read options)

___ All of the time

___ Very often

___ Sometimes

___ Rarely

___ Never

2. Do you like dressing up to go out and eat? (Read options)
- All of the time
 - Very often
 - Sometimes
 - Rarely
 - Never
3. How many other people live with you in your home? _____
4. Did you have a job during the last week?
- Yes (Continue)
 - No (Go to 5)
5. What was your age on your last birthday? _____
6. Which social class would you say you belong to?
- Upper Class
 - Upper Middle Class
 - Middle Class
 - Lower Middle Class
 - Lower Class
7. [RECORD RESPONDENT'S SEX]
- Female
 - Male

Thank you for your participation in this project. We will enter your name into the drawing for the \$100! I would like to remind you that there is no such a restaurant whose name is Liberty and will not be. This name was made up for experimental purposes. Thank you.

This thesis has been approved by the following committee:

____ Director
