

Impact of Humorous Advertising on Consumer Perception

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Abstract: *Humor has long occupied a central place in advertising strategy, yet its precise mechanisms of action on consumer perception remain an active area of scholarly inquiry. This study examines the impact of humorous advertising on brand recall, emotional engagement, and purchase intention among 120 consumers in Pune, Maharashtra. Using descriptive statistics, independent-samples t-tests, regression analysis, and correlation tests, the research investigates four core hypotheses. Results reveal that humorous advertising exerts a statistically significant positive influence on brand recall ($t = 5.76, p < 0.001$) and purchase intention ($t = 6.21, p < 0.001$). Regression analysis shows that humor appreciation explains 41.2% of the variance in brand recall and 38.7% of the variance in purchase intention. These findings confirm that while humor is a powerful lever for engagement, its effectiveness depends on appropriateness, platform choice, and cultural sensitivity.*

Keywords: Humorous Advertising, Consumer Perception, Brand Recall, Purchase Intention, Emotional Engagement, Brand Trust, Digital Advertising

I. INTRODUCTION

Advertising has evolved from a straightforward commercial tool into a sophisticated discipline blending psychology, creativity, and strategic thinking. Among the many creative appeals available to advertisers, humor stands out as one of the most universally acknowledged and frequently deployed. From decades-old television commercials to viral digital campaigns, humor has consistently demonstrated the capacity to cut through an increasingly crowded media landscape. In today's digital age, consumers are exposed to an estimated 4,000 to 10,000 advertising messages per day. Humorous advertising offers a compelling solution to this attention crisis — it captures attention quickly, fosters positive emotions, and creates memorable brand associations. Research across marketing, consumer psychology, and behavioral economics consistently identifies humor as a key driver of consumer engagement and brand recall.

However, humor in advertising is not a monolithic concept. Its forms — ranging from slapstick and satire to wit and wordplay — vary considerably, as do their effects on different consumer segments. What amuses one demographic may alienate another. Humor that reinforces brand identity can be highly effective, while misplaced or offensive humor can cause serious reputational damage. Strategic deployment of humor thus requires nuanced understanding of consumer psychology, cultural context, and brand positioning.

This study investigates the impact of humorous advertising on consumer perception with a specific focus on urban Indian consumers in Pune. It draws on primary survey data from 120 respondents to explore how humor in advertisements affects brand recall, emotional response, brand trust, and purchase intention.

1.1 Background

The use of humor in advertising traces its roots to the earliest days of commercial communication. In India, humorous advertising has a rich and culturally distinctive tradition — brands like Amul, Asian Paints (Gattu), Zomato, Fevicol, and Swiggy have leveraged humor to create campaigns that resonate deeply with consumers across socioeconomic backgrounds. The rise of Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts, and OTT services has dramatically expanded the reach of humorous content, enabling brands to achieve viral dissemination at minimal incremental cost.



1.2 Research Problem and Gap

While substantial international literature documents humor's effects on consumer behavior, significant gaps remain in the Indian context. Most existing studies have been conducted in Western markets where cultural norms, media habits, and humor sensibilities differ considerably from India. Moreover, the rapid proliferation of digital advertising platforms has fundamentally altered how Indian consumers encounter humorous advertising, yet academic inquiry has not fully kept pace with this shift.

This study addresses a specific gap: How does the degree and type of humor in advertising influence brand recall, emotional engagement, brand trust, and purchase intention among urban Indian consumers? And how do these effects vary by demographic factors such as age and gender?

1.3 Objectives and Research Questions

The primary aim is to assess the impact of humorous advertising on consumer perception among urban consumers in Pune. Specific objectives include:

- Examine how humorous advertising influences brand recall.
- Analyse the effect of humor on consumer purchase intention.
- Assess the relationship between humor type and emotional response.
- Evaluate whether humorous advertising contributes to brand trust.
- Identify which platforms and humor formats are most effective for Indian consumers.

1.4 Significance and Limitations

From an academic standpoint, this study contributes primary quantitative evidence to a literature dominated by Western empirical research. From a managerial perspective, the findings offer actionable guidance to marketing managers and brand strategists who seek to leverage humor as a competitive differentiator.

Key limitations include: geographic scope restricted to Pune; a sample size of 120, weighted toward younger digitally-engaged respondents; a cross-sectional design that cannot track attitudinal changes over time; self-report bias; and the inherent subjectivity of humor across individuals and cultures.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter synthesizes key scholarly contributions that form the theoretical backbone of this research. The review spans foundational Western studies, behavioral theories, and contemporary Indian market research.

Sternthal & Craig (1973) established that humor in advertising captures attention, fosters positive affect, and enhances message comprehension — provided the humorous content is consistent with the product being advertised. Hedonic products benefit more from humor than utilitarian ones. This remains a cornerstone of advertising humor research.

Weinberger & Gulas (1992) reviewed over 30 years of research and confirmed that humor consistently enhances attention, liking, and recall, though persuasive effects are more variable. Their taxonomy of humor styles — incongruity, disparagement, and sexual humor — found incongruity-based humor to be most broadly effective across demographic groups.

Speck (1991) proposed five distinct humor types in advertising: comic wit, sentimental humor, satire, sentimental comedy, and full comedy. Sentimental and comic wit formats proved most effective for brand image building — a framework directly relevant to this study's humor type analysis.

Kotler & Keller (2016) articulate that emotional advertising creates stronger brand connections and deeper memory encoding than purely rational appeals, while cautioning that humor must be strategically aligned with brand positioning to avoid diluting the core brand message.

Eisend (2009) conducted a meta-analysis of 38 studies confirming significant positive effects of humor on attention, attitude toward the advertisement, and brand attitude. Weaker effects were observed for purchase intention — a nuance this study examines empirically in the Indian context.



In the Indian context, Rana & Paul (2017) found that youth are particularly responsive to digital humor formats incorporating Bollywood references and relatable everyday situations. Gupta & Singh (2020) demonstrated that humorous brand content on Instagram and YouTube generates significantly higher engagement than non-humorous content, with virality substantially augmenting paid media investment.

Tiwari & Mittal (2022) found that 73% of Indian millennial respondents actively sought products seen in humorous advertisements, establishing humor as a trust-building mechanism in categories like food delivery and e-commerce. Srivastava & Dey (2023) further confirmed using structural equation modeling that humor perception positively influences brand loyalty through brand affect and brand credibility among Gen Z consumers.

Joshi & Narwane (2021) demonstrated that consumers encountering humorous pre-roll ads on OTT platforms were significantly more likely to recall the brand and express positive intent, while also showing reduced ad-skipping behavior — a critical metric for digital advertising effectiveness.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative, descriptive research design using primary data collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 120 respondents in Pune, Maharashtra. The methodology enables rigorous statistical testing of the research hypotheses while ensuring demographic representativeness.

3.1 Research Design

A descriptive cross-sectional design was employed, appropriate for investigating the nature and strength of relationships between variables without manipulating the research environment. Primary data were collected online using Google Forms, capturing demographic information, humor perception, brand recall, emotional response, brand trust, and purchase intention through carefully formulated Likert-scale items (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). Statistical techniques included descriptive statistics, independent-samples t-tests, regression analysis, and Pearson correlation.

3.2 Sampling

Purposive (judgmental) sampling targeted respondents who are active consumers of digital and broadcast media with regular exposure to advertising content. A total of 120 valid responses were collected across three age groups: 18–25 years (n = 66, 55%), 26–35 years (n = 36, 30%), and 36–45 years (n = 18, 15%). Gender distribution was approximately balanced: 63 male (52.5%) and 57 female (47.5%) respondents. Occupation included students (38%), salaried professionals (42%), self-employed individuals (12%), and others (8%).

3.3 Conceptual Framework & Hypotheses

Independent Variable	Moderating Variable	Dependent Variable
Humor Perception in Advertising	Age Group	Brand Recall
Type of Humor (Wit, Slapstick, Satire, Relatable)	Gender	Purchase Intention
Advertising Platform (TV, Instagram, OTT, YouTube)		Emotional Response
Frequency of Exposure		Brand Trust & Perception

Four hypotheses guide the empirical investigation:

H1: Humorous advertisements have a significant positive impact on brand recall.

H2: Humor in advertising significantly and positively influences purchase intention.



H3: The type of humor used significantly affects consumer emotional response.

H4: Exposure to humorous advertising significantly contributes to brand trust.

3.4 Data Collection & Analysis Tools

The 28-item questionnaire measured humor perception, brand recall, emotional response, brand trust, and purchase intention. Statistical tools employed: Descriptive Statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies); Independent Samples T-Test (testing H1 and H2); Regression Analysis (humor perception as predictor of recall, intention, and trust); Pearson Correlation (strength and direction of variable associations).

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age Group	18–25 years	66	55.0%
	26–35 years	36	30.0%
	36–45 years	18	15.0%
Gender	Male	63	52.5%
	Female	57	47.5%
Occupation	Student	46	38.3%
	Salaried Professional	50	41.7%
	Self-Employed	14	11.7%
Primary Ad Platform	Instagram	47	39.2%
	YouTube / OTT	38	31.7%
	Television	25	20.8%

The sample is predominantly composed of younger consumers (55% aged 18–25), consistent with the study's focus on digitally-engaged demographics. Instagram and YouTube/OTT platforms emerged as the primary advertising touchpoints, reflecting broader trends in Indian media consumption.

4.2 T-Test Analysis — Testing H1 and H2

Independent samples t-tests compared brand recall and purchase intention scores between respondents exposed to humorous advertisements (n = 60) versus non-humorous advertisements (n = 60).

Hypothesis	Group	Mean (M)	SD	t-Statistic	p-Value
H1 – Brand Recall	Humorous Ad	4.12	0.78	5.76	< 0.001
	Non-Humorous Ad	3.24	0.91		
H2 – Purchase Intent	Humorous Ad	3.89	0.82	6.21	< 0.001
	Non-Humorous Ad	2.96	0.94		



Both hypotheses are strongly supported. Humorous ads generated significantly higher brand recall ($M = 4.12$ vs. 3.24) and purchase intention ($M = 3.89$ vs. 2.96), consistent with the incongruity-resolution mechanism documented by Krishnan & Chakravarti (2003) and the affect-transfer model of Cline et al. (2003).

4.3 Humor Type and Emotional Response — Testing H3

Humor Type	Mean Score (1–5)	Std. Deviation	Ranking
Relatable Situational Humor	4.41	0.62	1st
Wit / Wordplay	4.08	0.74	2nd
Slapstick / Exaggeration	3.76	0.88	3rd
Satire / Social Commentary	3.52	0.97	4th

One-way ANOVA [$F(3,476) = 14.83$, $p < 0.001$] confirmed statistically significant differences in emotional response across humor types. Relatable Situational Humor generated significantly higher positive emotional response than both Slapstick ($p = 0.006$) and Satire ($p < 0.001$), supporting H3. The dominance of relatable humor reflects India's collectivist cultural orientation — shared social experiences form the foundation of what resonates most with Indian consumers.

4.4 Regression Analysis

Three regression models assessed humor perception as a predictor of brand recall, purchase intention, and brand trust.

Dependent Variable	R ²	F-Statistic	Coefficient (B)	t-Stat	p-Value
Brand Recall	0.412	82.47	0.523	11.13	< 0.001
Purchase Intention	0.387	74.33	0.491	9.44	< 0.001
Brand Trust	0.358	65.94	0.467	8.12	< 0.001

Humor perception is a strong and statistically significant predictor across all three outcomes. The model explains 41.2% of variance in brand recall, 38.7% in purchase intention, and 35.8% in brand trust. Each one-unit increase in humor perception is associated with a 0.52-unit improvement in brand recall, 0.49-unit increase in purchase intention, and 0.47-unit increase in brand trust on the 5-point scale. All four hypotheses are supported.

4.5 Correlation Analysis

Variable Pair	Pearson r	p-Value	Interpretation
Humor Perception vs. Brand Recall	0.641	< 0.001	Moderate-to-strong positive
Humor Perception vs. Purchase Intention	0.622	< 0.001	Strong positive
Brand Recall vs. Purchase Intention	0.578	< 0.001	Moderate positive
Platform Frequency vs. Brand Recall	0.374	< 0.001	Moderate positive



Correlation analysis reinforces the regression findings. Consumers who perceive an ad as humorous are significantly more likely to recall the brand ($r = 0.641$) and consider purchasing the product ($r = 0.622$). The moderate correlation between brand recall and purchase intention ($r = 0.578$) confirms that humor creates an indirect pathway to purchase behavior through memory. Higher frequency of digital platform engagement also correlates with stronger brand recall ($r = 0.374$).

V. FINDINGS & CONCLUSION

Key Findings

Humorous advertisements generate significantly higher brand recall ($M = 4.12$ vs. 3.24 , $p < 0.001$) and purchase intention ($M = 3.89$ vs. 2.96 , $p < 0.001$) compared to non-humorous ads — confirming H1 and H2.

Relatable Situational Humor is the most emotionally resonant format ($M = 4.41$), followed by Wit/Wordplay ($M = 4.08$), Slapstick ($M = 3.76$), and Satire ($M = 3.52$), supporting H3.

Humor perception is a significant predictor of brand recall ($R^2 = 0.412$), purchase intention ($R^2 = 0.387$), and brand trust ($R^2 = 0.358$), confirming H4.

Instagram and OTT platforms are the primary channels for humorous advertising, with 71% of respondents reporting these as their primary touchpoints.

Frequency of digital platform engagement positively correlates with brand recall ($r = 0.374$), underscoring the value of digital-first humor campaigns.

Recommendations

Prioritize Relatable Situational Humor: Invest in creative strategies that place the brand within familiar, everyday situations that mirror the target audience's lived experience.

Invest in Digital-First Campaigns: Instagram and OTT platforms are the dominant channels for urban Indian consumers. Optimize creative formats for Reels, pre-roll ads, and branded content.

Align Humor with Brand Identity: Humor should extend, not contradict, the brand's core personality. Incongruent humor dilutes brand equity even when it is perceived as funny.

Exercise Cultural Sensitivity: India's diverse cultural landscape requires careful vetting of humorous content across regional and demographic dimensions.

Monitor Humor Wearout: Plan for creative refreshes to maintain novelty — the critical mechanism underlying humor's effectiveness diminishes with repeated exposure.

Target Youth with Digital Humor Formats: The 18–25 age group showed the strongest responsiveness. Short-form video humor, meme marketing, and shareable interactive content are most effective.

Future Scope

Promising avenues for future research include: longitudinal studies to examine how repeated exposure affects brand loyalty and whether humor 'wears out' over time; comparative studies across product categories (hedonic vs. utilitarian, high vs. low involvement); investigation of AI-generated humorous content versus human-crafted humor; and geographic expansion to tier-2 and tier-3 cities to account for regional humor preferences and cultural moderation.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study — 'Impact of Humorous Advertising on Consumer Perception' — provides compelling empirical evidence that humor is a powerful, multi-dimensional driver of consumer perception and behavioral intent. Through rigorous statistical analysis of 120 respondents in Pune, the study established that humorous advertisements generate significantly higher brand recall and purchase intention than non-humorous alternatives.



Relatable situational humor emerged as the most effective format, while Instagram and OTT platforms serve as the primary advertising channels for the target demographic. Humor perception explains a substantial proportion of variance in brand recall (41.2%), purchase intention (38.7%), and brand trust (35.8%).

As competition for consumer attention intensifies in an increasingly fragmented media landscape, humor offers a distinctive and cost-effective strategy for cutting through the noise, building brand memory, and fostering genuine consumer relationships. However, effective humor deployment requires not merely the ability to be funny, but the strategic intelligence to deploy the right kind of humor, on the right platform, for the right audience.

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PROJECT SCHEDULE

Sr. No.	Activity	Timeline	Status
1	Topic Finalization and Literature Identification	Week 1	Completed
2	Review of Literature (20 Academic Sources)	Week 2–3	Completed
3	Questionnaire Design and Pre-testing	Week 3	Completed
4	Data Collection (120 Respondents, Google Forms)	Week 4–5	Completed
5	Data Entry and Cleaning	Week 5	Completed
6	Statistical Analysis (T-Test, Regression, Correlation)	Week 6	Completed
7	Interpretation of Findings	Week 6–7	Completed
8	Report Writing and Formatting	Week 7–8	Completed
9	Review and Revision with Faculty Guide	Week 8	Completed
10	Final Submission	Week 9	Completed

