

# THE ROLE OF HUMOUR AND ABSURDITY IN CREATING MEMORABLE AND PERSUASIVE BEVERAGE ADVERTISEMENTS

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## Abstract

**Motivation:** Lately, some advertisements use particularly absurd and/or humorous elements to draw attention. We will focus on segments of beverage marketing - in particular, the categories of colas, milk, and water - to investigate the effects of conventional marketing compared to absurd marketing to distinguish memorability.

**Methodology:** In a set-up of marketing campaign pictures (static images) displayed for an even amount of time, examples for all three categories will be provided in randomised sequences within the category to avoid ordering bias. Experimental participants will be a convenience sample of the student population within an academy held in Copenhagen, Denmark. After each stimulus category, brief questions need to be answered based on the memorability concerning the ads. Additionally, we will use biosensors to measure participants' galvanic skin response (GSR), Eye Tracker (ET), and electroencephalogram (EEG) data. An evaluation of participants' bodily responses concerning the ads will take place along with their self-report on memorability. After this, the authors used ideal stimuli to obtain the quantitative results after examining 116 participants' online forms to see how people react to stimuli that have a humorous, absurd, or non-sensical approach. The survey was conducted with the students of OTH Amberg Weiden.

**Results:** Participants will display emotions (FEA) when seeing humorous or absurd ads, focusing more on the campaign's taglines and picking up on clever word games, whereas conventional advertising will not arouse responses (GSR). Similarly, the ET will provide insights into the advertisements' gaze plots and heat maps, which can be correlated with the memorability of logos, brands, and taglines. Through measures of electrodes, the EEG data will indicate whether brain activity in the areas of the frontal lobe was involved in higher mental functions such as judgment, emotional expressions, and concentration while looking at the ads. We expect the same results with the online survey method.

**Recommendations:** Our survey self-report highly correlates with the bio-sensory data collected and indicates that humorous or absurd advertising draws attention and leads to higher memorability.

**Keywords:** *Absurdity, advertising, bio-sensor experimental research, memorability, recognition.*

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## 1. Introduction and theory

The advertising industry has undergone radical transformations, influenced by technological advancements and rapidly changing consumer behaviours (Sprott, 2008). Therefore, it can be challenging to stick to only traditional and conventional marketing strategies. It has become essential to be creative and find new ways to connect with the targeted audience more deeply (Mitra, 2021; Permana et al., 2021).

One strategy has risen to prominence as both promising and captivating, especially within the context of the beverage industry: the strategic inclusiveness of humour, absurdity, and non-sensicality in advertisements (Danatzis et al., 2020). Humour and absurdity are increasingly used as marketing strategies in the beverage industry (Eisend, 2008). However, not all types of humour and absurdity are equally effective, and may also have negative consequences (Flaherty et al., 2004).

### 1.1. Humour, absurdity, and non-sensicality

Humour, in its various forms, can elicit positive emotions, enhance attention, and make messages more memorable (Liu & Chen, 2019). The obviousness and recognizability both exist in humour (Berlyne, 1972).

Absurdity is a state or quality that is unreasonable, senseless, or defies accepted standards of logic and reason (Bal et al., 2022). Absurdity disrupts one's usual thought processes, arousing interest and a desire for cognitive resolution (Metcalf et al., 2021).

Non-sensicality can be described as the characteristic of lacking sense, logic, or rationality (Moore, 2012).

## 1.2. Traditional or conventional marketing vs. contemporary or modern marketing

Conventional marketing means the systematic approach of strategising and implementing the development, pricing, promotion, and distribution of concepts, products, and services with the aim of facilitating conventional marketing methods to make a profit for individuals or businesses. (Sharma et al., 2021).

Contemporary marketing, commonly known as modern marketing, is a modern methodology that utilises technology and data analytics to analyse consumer behaviour and personalise advertising strategies accordingly (Cham et al., 2022). Contemporary marketing techniques prioritise consumer demands over profitability (Keller, 2009).

## 2. Research methodology

To explore how the integration of humour, non-sensicality, and absurdity influences the memorability and recall of beverage advertisements, this research will be an explorative case study combining two methods, qualitative and quantitative. It has been categorised into three popular beverage industry segments: water, milk, and cola-based products. The authors selected 5 advertisements per product category for the qualitative and quantitative approach, some with humour, absurd, and non-sensical elements. With the help of galvanic skin response (GSR), facial expression analysis (FEA), and electroencephalogram (EEG), and eye tracker (ET) tools, software, and devices, the authors assessed the respondents' reactions to those stimuli. Based on the qualitative results, stimuli were selected for the online survey (quantitative study) with a convenience sample of n=116 students of OTH Amberg-Weiden.

H<sub>1</sub>. Humorous, absurd, or non-sensicality increases memorability of beverage advertisements.

H<sub>2</sub>. Positive emotional associations like humor, absurdity, or non-sensicality enhance attention.

H<sub>3</sub>: Contemporary advertising with humorous, absurd, or non-sensical elements is more effective than traditional and informative advertisements in the beverage industry.

## 3. Qualitative and quantitative analysis

The authors experimented with 15 (5x3) stimuli of beverage advertisements, conventional as well as contemporary (with absurd, humorous, and non-sensical elements), as a qualitative study. The FEA-based eye tracker exposed participants' concentration; GSR and EEG provided in-depth insights into participants' psycho-physiological arousal. It is noticeable that most participants were focused on certain parts of the stimulus (see Figure 1) from iMotions exported heatmaps, mostly the product itself.

Figure 1. Heatmaps generated from iMotions.



As part of the experiment, a qualitative survey involving n=10 participants was conducted. For cola products, a notable majority (7) expressed the view that RC Cola's advertisement stands out, primarily due to the presence of a scary-looking bunny. However, upon examining the GSR timestamps,

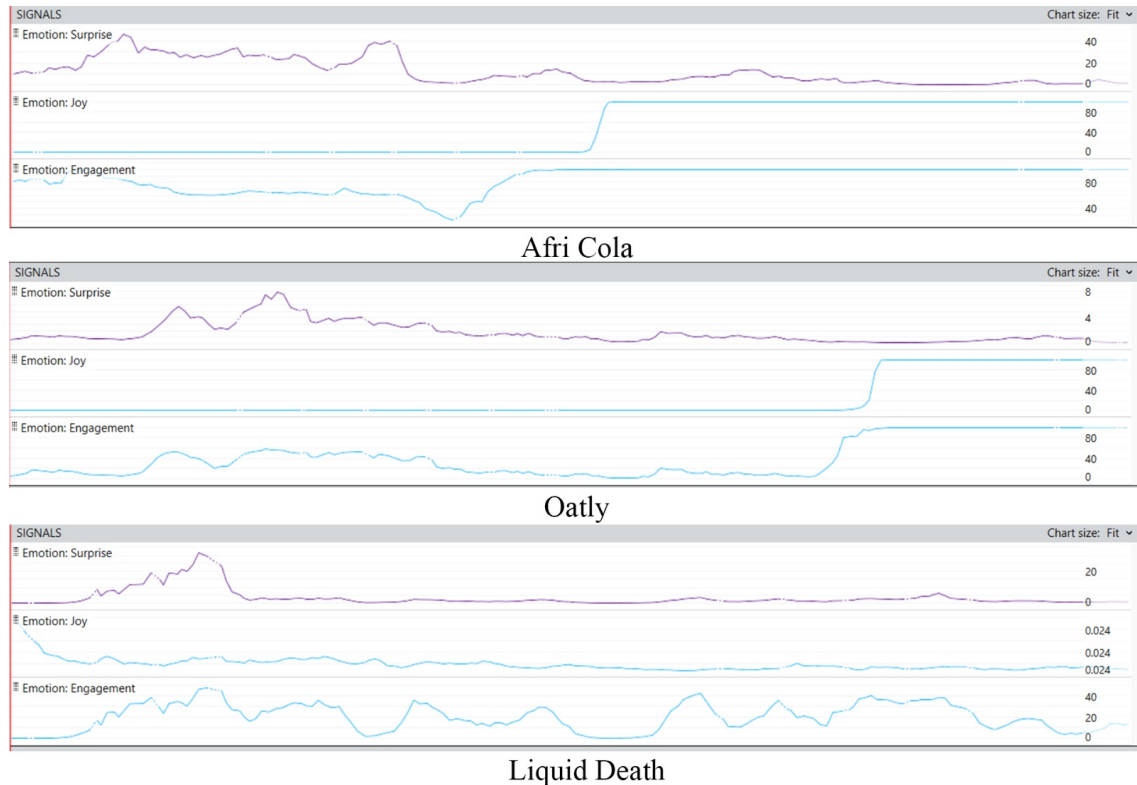
it becomes evident that the number of GSR peaks was higher in response to the fritz-kola advertisement. In contrast, the majority of the peak amplitude, on average, ranged between 0.1000  $\mu$ S to 0.2000  $\mu$ S.

In the milk section, the Oatly advertisement stood out among (8) participants. Meanwhile, milk got a higher peak level.

Liquid Death received the most attention among all other water-based products with a remarkable n=8 respondents attributing it to the brand's distinctive naming style. The generated heatmaps show that the respondents also looked intensively at other water brands as well.

Figure 2, given below, also shows the selective stimuli-based attention span from facial expressions and indicates that each advertisement shown during the experiment was effective and impacted human emotions.

Figure 2. Selected data\* from all three beverage advertisement categories.



\*Note: FEA (Facial Expression Analysis) data collected from iMotions

Based on the data collected via iMotions with the GSR, it is evident that some specific brand advertisements have better peak numbers than other advertisements. In Figure 3, given below, Afri-cola, fritz-kola, and Curiosity cola have the lowest peak levels in the cola section, gotmilk, Silk milk, Nourish, and Oatly have better peak levels, whereas alpro has lower peak levels. Accordingly, Fiji water has a lower peak level in the water section. It indicates that some advertisements impact GSR peaks as they have absurd, humorous, and nonsensical elements.

Figure 3. EEG and GSR peak response toward stimuli (qualitative data).

1	Respondent Name	Afri Cola	curiosity cola	Fritzkola	Kafola	RC cola		silk milk	alpro	got milk	nourish	Oatly		Fiji Water	Icelandic Wat	Liquid Death	Poland water	Smart Water
2	Respondent 1	0	0	1	1	0		0	0	0	0	0		0	0	1	0	0
3	Respondent 2	1	0	1	0	0		0	1	1	0	0		0	0	0	0	0
4	Respondent 3	1	1	0	0	0		0	0	2	0	0		1	1	0	0	2
5	Respondent 4	2	0	1	1	1		2	1	2	1	0		0	1	1	0	1
6	Respondent 5	0	0	0	1	1		0	0	0	1	0		0	0	0	0	1
7	Respondent 6	0	0	0	1	0		1	1	0	1	1		1	1	1	2	0
8	Respondent 7	0	0	1	0	0		0	0	0	0	0		0	0	0	0	1
9	Respondent 8	1	0	0	1	0		0	0	1	0	2		0	0	0	0	1
10	Respondent 9	0	0	0	0	0		0	0	0	0	0		0	0	0	0	0
11	Respondent 10	0	0	2	1	1		1	0	1	1	1		1	1	1	1	1
12	Grand Total	5	1	6	6	3		4	3	7	4	4		3	4	4	6	4

The quantitative sample comprises 73 (62.9%) male participants and 43 (37.1%) female participants, resulting in a total sample size of n=116. A significant portion of the participants falls within the age group of 15-24 (47.4%), closely followed by the age group of 25-34 (44.8%). The majority of the

participants are students (77.6%), with about 44% reporting purchasing beverages weekly and 17.2% even daily. This indicates that most of the population is exposed to beverage marketing or beverage products. Most of them might also be familiar with the beverages displayed as a stimulus, which can impact their biases toward purchase decision-making or decision-making towards any answer during the survey (Peighambari et al., 2016).

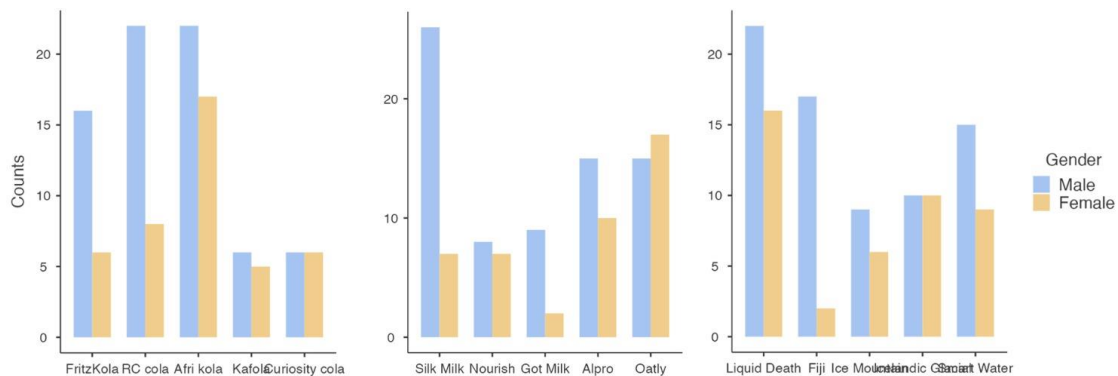
Based on the insights derived from Figure 3, it is apparent that the advertisement for Curiosity Cola lacks elements of humor, absurdity, or non-sensicality. Consequently, it fails to elicit significant psychological and emotional responses from the respondents. This observation correlates with the findings in Figure 4, where the survey results indicate that both Kafola and Curiosity Cola lack the unconventional traits, but do not capture attention as effectively as regular brand advertisements.

In the milk section, based on the peak numbers arrived from Figure 3, it shows that the advertisement of Alpro has the lowest peak count, numbering only 3; on the other hand, Silk milk has the highest peak count of 7. According to quantitative information, Silk Milk is the brand that got the greatest attention throughout and Oatly received more attention from female participants. This can be explained by Oatly being vegan because women are more likely to adopt a vegan or vegetarian diet (Adamczyk et al., 2023). Accordingly, Silk Milk received the most male attention for its humorous advertisement style.

The section on water shown in Figure 3 shows that Fiji water has fewer peak counts, and female participants were less likely to pay attention to the advertisement. However, according to Figure 4, male participants gave it the most attention. Male and female participants were particularly attracted to the Liquid Death advertisement for its absurd naming style.

The evidence supports H<sub>1</sub>, that including humorous, absurd, or nonsensical elements increases the memorability of beverage advertisements and can impact the brand's recall.

Figure 4. Memorability of three categories of beverage advertisement (quantitative data).



After conducting a binomial distribution, the authors observed that for cola, milk, and water-based products, respectively, 68%, 67%, and 72% of participants prefer to share any of the shown advertisements on their social media as it appears humorous, absurd or non-sensical to them. People usually share those contents over social media that emotionally create positive attention to them (Steinert & Dennis, 2022). Therefore, we conclude that H<sub>2</sub> is supported because it enhances attention through emotions.

Among all the advertisements from the cola section, Curiosity cola and Kafola; in milk-based advertisements, gotmilk and Nourish milk; in water-based advertisements, Fiji water and Ice Mountain belong predominantly to traditional advertisements. H<sub>3</sub> is supported because participants remember brands with absurd, humorous, and non-sensical elements more.

#### 4. Conclusion

This research aimed to explore the impact of humour, absurdity, and nonsensicality in beverage advertisements through GSR, EEG, ET, and FEA, and a quantitative online survey. The analysis revealed a more positive buying mentality when exposed to advertisements with absurd and humorous features. The results largely supported the hypotheses, indicating that humorous, absurd, or nonsensical elements in beverage advertisements have the potential to increase memorability, create positive emotional associations, and be more effective than traditional advertising strategies.

Though the study provides important and valuable insights, it also has some limitations. The sample size for qualitative data to determine the effectivity of the stimuli was very small, and due to a

shortage of the necessary equipment, it took a lot of work to run the experiment for a longer period. The broader sample size for quantitative data consisted predominantly of students, therefore not representing all segments of a population. Additionally, the short duration of the experiment could have fully captured long-term effects and consumer behaviour changes. Future research could include a more diverse participant and shorten or extend the observation period for a broader understanding.

Future research could explore humorous and absurd advertisements' long-term and short-term effects on consumer purchasing behaviour. This could involve tracking online and offline purchasing decisions and brand loyalty over long periods. Moreover, investigating cultural influences on the effectiveness of humorous, absurd and nonsensical advertisements could provide deeper insights into global marketing strategies. Furthermore, experimenting with different media, such as video and audio advertisements or interactive campaigns, could offer a better understanding of consumer expectations and responses.

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