Relationship Between Humor in Advertising and Attitude Towards Ads : A Meta-Analysis

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Abstract

Humor is anything that is funny or is intended to be funny. Humor is a fundamental social communication ingredient used profusely in advertising worldwide. Humor in advertisements makes it an excellent tool for companies and brands to lure people into liking their products. The purpose of this paper was to do a systematic review and conduct a meta-analysis of studies analyzing the relationship between humor in advertising and attitude towards the ads. We found 171 articles that mentioned humor in advertising ; 71 articles were found with studies on both humor and attitude towards the ads. After scrutiny and systematic review, only 13 studies were included in the final study. The random effect model was used for the effect size because the studies belonged to different populations. Baujat plot was used to detect the studies causing heterogeneity. It was found that there was a large amount of variance in studies included in the analysis.

Keywords : meta-analysis, systematic review, humor, humor in advertising, attitude towards ad, marketing, advertising

M eta-analysis refers to the statistical procedure of combining the results of multiple studies having similar research questions or suppositions (Ang & Eisend, 2018). It expands the sample size, which increases the ability to examine the effects under scrutiny by integrating prime studies whilst taking into account the sizes of the involved studies. Meta-analysis is more objective than other approaches, like narrative reviews, as it is less influenced by the reviewer's personal views and relies on statistical and mathematical guidelines.

In narrative reviews, it could be hard to analyze the impacts of studies that make use of different metrics to compute alike results. The questions are subjectively addressed by the reviewer by concluding and by summing up all the discoveries of different studies. Since different reviewers use the same evidence to draw contrasting conclusions, therefore, narrative reviews result in errors and are more biased. By applying a methodological procedure, the biases in the meta-analysis can be minimized. Therefore, proof with an outstanding level of correctness can be provided through meta-analysis. Effect size estimates clearly explain these findings. To measure the magnitude of the relationship between two variables, a quantitative measure is used known as the

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effect size. The relationship can be represented by the correlation coefficient (Ang & Eisend, 2018). An effect size is a measure of the strength of advertising inputs (e.g., source) and outcome measures (e.g., attitude) relationship when it comes to advertising. The advertising research concept has an explanatory potential which is indicated by effect size. Stronger the relationship, the higher the explanatory potential (Eisend, 2018).

The accuracy of the results of each study depends on the total number of subjects. A more summarized estimate of the basic effects can be obtained through statistically integrating data from various studies individually. Thus, meta-analysis reveals the effect of interest, minimizes the chance of negative-false outcomes, and overcomes the constraint of small sample sizes of each study. Moreover, disagreements from the studies with contrasting results can be settled using meta-analysis.

Hornik et al. (2016) discussed that some of the commonly used methodological moderators to perform a meta-analysis of experimental studies are: Number of subjects, number of phenomenon measures and number of effect sizes, subjects' response versus experimenter observed criterion measures, proximity and order of measures. Site of study (laboratory or field), respondent's type (nonstudent or student), the status of publication, coding year of publication, and source of publication are the standards that are involved in reporting meta-analyses. As suggested in previous studies, results obtained from single-item scales differ from those produced by multi-item scales (Szymanski & Henard, 2001). There are limited studies that have performed a meta-analysis on the relationship of humor in advertising and attitude towards the ads. Thus, this study tries to fill that void, and it might help marketers and advertisers to understand their customers and audience in a better way.

Humor in Advertising

The use of humor in advertising, especially in electronic media, is very common (Stern, 1996). Humor generally captivates every individual, as everybody loves to have a good laugh. Thus, humor in advertisements makes it a great tool for companies and brands to lure people into liking their products. But it is critical to consider the type of audience being targeted as a commercial that can make a person laugh out his/her guts can leave a frown on others' forehead. If there is a larger demographic as the target audience, then the humor will appeal more broadly. On the other hand, the humor will be more niche if the audience is confined. Humor advertisement works best with products that consumers think the least before buying.

Januz (1977) and Phillips (1968) noted that if humor is used well in advertising, then the outcome of the same can be effective. Very little is known about how the risks and benefits of using humor are related to its communication effects, regardless of its extensive use by advertisers (Markiewicz, 1974; Sternthal & Craig, 1973).

Review of Literature

Customers rely on advertisements positively as they feel more confident to buy a product after watching its ad, provided that the advertisement has some relevant content related to the product (Raina & Khajuria, 2012). Advertisements nowadays play a pivotal role in changing people's thinking and perception, in other words, attitude (Durai, 2005). Humor is considered an important tool to engage the audience considering the present advertising scenario. Ads containing humor appeal can influence people to buy the product as they can associate emotionally with the ad, making them smile (Siddhu, 2021). Gendron (2017) wrote about the rising popularity of Labatt USA beer brand due to the use of humor in its marketing campaign, which is a reinforcing result that humor attracts buyers. Advertisers rely heavily on humor to provide information about the product as well as to lure the audience into liking it. Humor is predominantly used as a device for persuasion.

Features of humor stimuli decide whether an ad is enhanced by humor. The previous research studies did

disagree at least once for each of these factors, which can be examined using meta-analysis. Maximum practitioners opined that a young and educated audience is the demographic on which humor works best, male in particular (Madden & Weinberger, 1984). Understanding of humor is followed by appreciation, which results in affecting the liking of consumers towards the advertising (Kellaris & Cline, 2007; Woltman Elpers et al., 2004).

The probability of incongruity-resolution to produce humorous results is more than incongruity (Flaherty et al., 2004). However, Flaherty et al. (2004) also mentioned that there was no substantial influence of incongruity compared to incongruity-resolution on ad attitude and brand attitude. To influence attitude towards ads and brand positively, the attempt needs to be perceived as humorous. If humor fails to produce a humorous effect, it may negatively influence attitude towards a product. Spielmann (2014) presented contrasting results wherein arousal safety was found to be more impactful than incongruity-resolution. When it comes to private label brands, customers' attitude substantially affects their purchase intention for that brand (Kumar, 2019). In another study, Pangriya and Kumar (2018) revealed that factors of attitude like cognitive, behavioral, and affective had a strong influence on each other and also affected purchase intention towards private label brands to a great extent. This purchase intention eventually led to buying private label brands online.

Khandeparkar and Abhishek (2017) studied different aspects affecting the effectiveness of two processes of humor, namely arousal-safety and incongruity-resolution. Incongruity-resolution was influenced more by negative mood than arousal safety. Surprise levels also influenced the humorousness of ads (Alden et al., 2000).

Incongruity-resolution is more popular among individualistic cultures such as Germany than collectivistic cultures like Spain. Furthermore, arousal safety is enjoyed more in collectivistic and feminine cultures like Spain when compared with individualistic and masculine cultures like Germany (Hoffmann et al., 2014). Wang et al. (2019) also conducted a cross-cultural study wherein it was found that humorous ads, including Chinese brands, were liked much by US viewers than US brands. On the other hand, the Chinese audience did not show much of a difference in their responses to ads of both countries.

The research conducted by Chung and Zhao (2011) examined the effect of perceived humor on ad attitude. Humorous ads positively affected the ad attitude. Chattopadhyay and Basu (1990) suggested that humorous ads positively affected the attitude towards a brand. Brand attitude and ad attitude shared a positive relationship. To form a brand attitude, consumers rely on an ad attitude when they are not familiar with the brand (Campbell & Keller, 2003).

Grougiou et al. (2020) found that ethicality perception of an ad was a mediator for the relationship of disparagement in ad and attitude towards the ad. Sabri (2012) observed the effect of taboos of an advertisement on the recall and attention of the audience. The study revealed that maximum recall and attention were attained with the help of the ideal level of taboo-arousal. Advertising can also contribute to social issues. Nandi et al. (2019) revealed that progressive messages added in advertisements not only boosted the attitude of the audience toward social issues, but also enhanced the brand perception.

Social media advertisement campaigns are very common nowadays. But the creativity and informativeness of these ads greatly influence the audience's attitude towards social media advertisements (Padival et al., 2019). Gender also plays a moderating role as both males and females show different attitudes towards ads (Padival et al., 2019). On the contrary, Verma and Saranya (2014) suggested that gender had no substantial influence on attitude towards online advertisements. The attitude was found to be affected by the product price and animation preference of the audience.

Methodology

The articles considered for this study are the ones that talked about humor present in advertisements from 1968 – 2021. Only those studies were considered, which provided a correlation value for the relationship between humor in advertisements and attitude towards the ads.

Type of Research

This is statistical research in which studies were integrated which discussed the relationship between humor and attitude towards ads. Statistical inferences were drawn from, and conclusions were drawn based on these inferences.
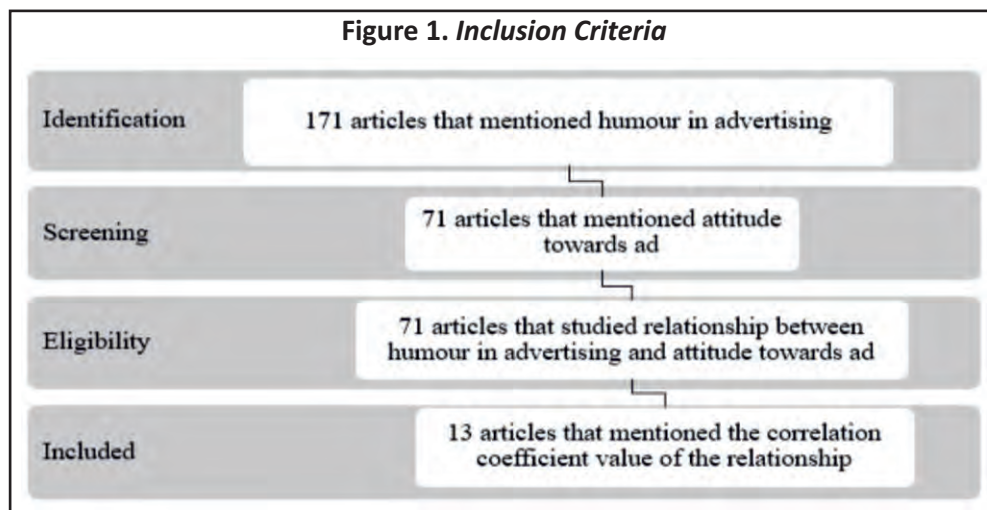
Research Design of Meta-Analysis

Meta-analysis involves a methodological approach that conglomerates the results of several individual studies with the same subject at their core to produce a quantified result. We followed basic steps of research design for meta-analysis, which included research question, gathering studies, selecting relevant studies, collecting data, coding selected studies, and data analysis.

Literature Search

Several approaches were employed to gather the data that was relevant to our topic of focus. We searched scholarly databases like Google Scholar, PsycINFO, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, etc., for dissertations and articles on "humor in advertising." Next, we combed the reference lists of articles on humor in advertising and looked for the studies that included attitudes towards the ads. We also searched separately for articles that included attitudes towards the ads. Finally, we looked for articles that included both humor in advertising and attitude towards the ads.

Inclusion Criteria

This meta-analysis focuses on the research articles that measured the relationship of humor in advertising and attitude towards the ads. Articles had to fulfill four criteria. First, we decided to include articles about humor in advertising. We found 171 articles that mentioned humor in advertising. Then, in those articles, we looked for studies that mentioned attitude towards the ads. After rigorous scrutinization, out of them, only those articles were taken that studied the relationship of humor in advertising and attitude towards the ads; 71 articles were found with studies on both humor and attitude towards the ad. Finally, only those articles were considered for the meta-

Figure 1. *Inclusion Criteria*

Identification	171 articles that mentioned humour in advertising
Screening	71 articles that mentioned attitude towards ad
Eligibility	71 articles that studied relationship between humour in advertising and attitude towards ad
Included	13 articles that mentioned the correlation coefficient value of the relationship

analysis, which gave the correlation value between humor and the ad attitude. We found many articles that talked about the relationship of humor and ad attitude, but there were only 13 studies that mentioned the correlation coefficient value of the relationship, which was necessary to carry out the meta-analysis. Thus, we carried out the analysis of those studies (refer to Figure 1).

Results and Discussion

For the analysis of the data obtained, R software is used, specifically "robumeta" and "metaphor" packages of R. R is a very effective tool used for statistical data analysis. One of the important advantages of using R is that it is open source, and almost all kinds of analysis can be done on this. The data obtained after systematic review contained only 13 studies. The data table prepared based on 13 studies is given in Table 1. The data contains the author's name, year of publication, the correlation coefficient between humor and attitude towards the ad, the study's sample size, study designs, and controlled variables.

At first, the data was imported into the software as a CSV file. Since the data contained the value of the correlation coefficient and the values did not follow a normal distribution, hence the values were transformed into their corresponding z - scores. The random effect model was used to assess the effect size because the studies belonged to different populations. All studies were considered to be performed under the same conditions as a whole when it comes to fixed effects. The sole distinction among studies is their ability to note the result of interest. The random-effects approach is considered to be a more logical choice than fixed effects by many researchers. The

Table 1. *Data Table Prepared Based on 13 Studies*

Paper Id	Authors	Year	n	r	Study Design	Variables Controlled
1	Hameed et al.	2016	209	0.591	Experimental	None
2	Hornik et al.	2016	312	0.38	Meta-analysis	None
3	Schwarz et al.	2015	266	0.65	Experimental	Emotional responsiveness, involvement, age, education
4	Gelb & Pickett	1983	2400	0.2162	Experimental	None
5	Zhang	1996	240	0.69	Experimental	None
6	Warren et al.	2019	75	0.6 (Study 1)	Experimental	Fixed effect of types of ads (humorous and non-humorous)
7	Warren et al.	2019	60	0.42 (Study 2)	Experimental	Fixed effect of types of ads (humorous and non-humorous)
8	Brown et al.	2010	165	0.264	Experimental	None
9	Chung & Zhao	2011	158	–0.379 (for a familiar brand)	Experimental	Brand familiarity, prior brand attitude
10	Chung & Zhao	2011	158	0.497 (for an unfamiliar brand)	Experimental	Brand familiarity, prior brand attitude
11	Gregory et al.	2019	923	0.538	Experimental	Need for humor, need for cognition, country, gender, age
12	Zhang & Zinkhan	2006	240	0.83	Experimental	None
13	Srivastava & Dorsch	2020	345	0.57	Experimental	None

larger studies with less variance are given less weight in the random effect model as compared to the fixed-effect model, therefore, it calculates a wider confidence interval (CI).

Study Heterogeneity

Heterogeneity is the effect size to be calculated for meta-analysis. To measure true heterogeneity, Q-statistics is used, which is the proportion of observed heterogeneity to the within-study variance. Q-statistics examine the null hypothesis that the effect size of all the studies is the same. When the Q-statistics is significant, it means that the effect size is heterogeneous, but the non-significant value of Q-statistics should not be interpreted as an indication of homogeneity of effect size (Quintana, 2015).

Test for Heterogeneity

Q value with 12 *df* was found as 488.8726, and the corresponding *p*-value < .0001. The Q-statistics is 488.8726 ($p < 0.0001$), which is significant. Hence, the sample studies are heterogeneous. The Pearson's *r* value along with 95% CI was also calculated back from Fisher's *z* [$r = 0.149$; 95% CI (0.088, 0.209)].

A similar measure is I^2 statistics which measure the proportion of variation that occurs due to actual variance in studies and not because of within-study variance. Higgins et al. (2003) suggested criteria for measuring I^2. He mentioned that a value of I^2 as 25% is considered to be signified as low variance, a value of I^2 as 50% is considered to be signified as medium variance, and a value of I^2 as 75% is considered to be signified as high variance. Tau-squared value also signifies heterogeneity. The zero value of tau-squared is indicative of heterogeneity. The results are presented in Table 2.

The value of I^2 is 97.98%, which shows a high level of variance. The tau-squared value represents similar

Table 2. *Random-Effects Model (k = 13; tau^2 estimator : REML)*

Measure	Value
tau^2 (estimated amount of total heterogeneity)	0.1377 (SE = 0.0585)
tau (square root of estimated tau^2 value)	0.3711
I^2 (total heterogeneity / total variability)	97.98%
H^2 (total variability / sampling variability)	49.45

Figure 2. *Baujat Plot*
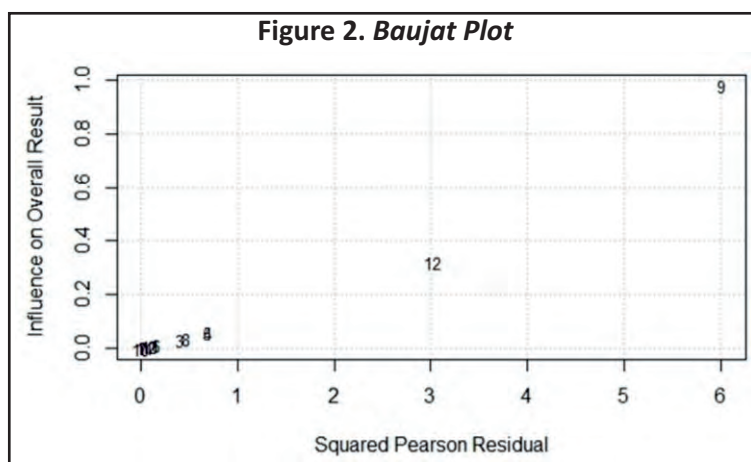
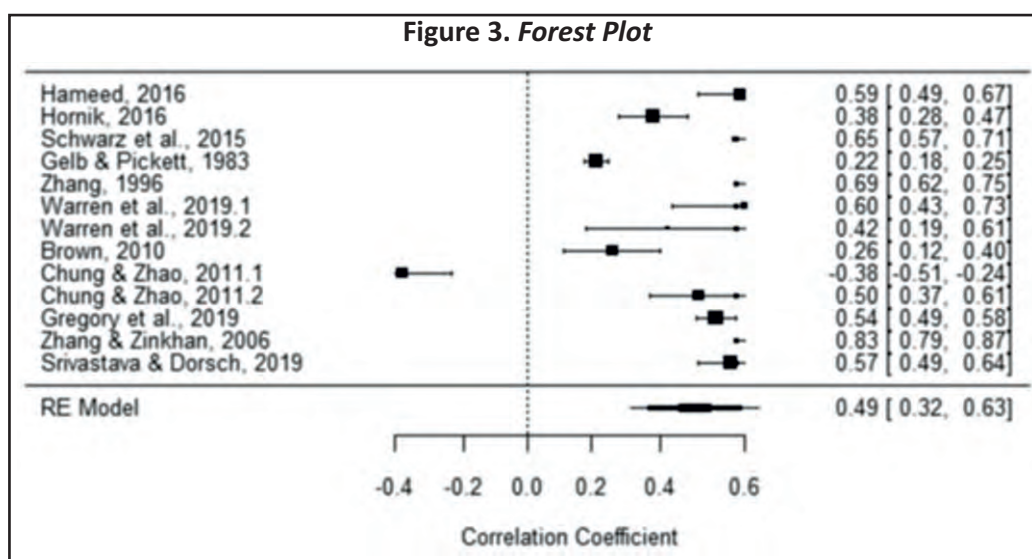results. Based on the results in Table 2, it can be concluded that studies show a high level of variance.

Since the above results depict heterogeneity, the indication about the studies which are causing variation has not been reflected in the results. Hence Baujat et al. (2002) suggested a plot popularly known as Baujat Plot to detect the studies causing heterogeneity. The Baujat Plot (Baujat et al., 2002) is a graphical method that diagnoses the studies and shows the studies that extensively contribute to the heterogeneity of meta-analysis. The contribution of every study to the heterogeneity of the whole analysis, which is calculated by Cochran's Q, is represented on the horizontal axis, whereas its effect on the pooled effect size is represented on the vertical axis. As we aim to examine the heterogeneity and the research studies that add to it, every study on the right-hand side of the graph is pivotal to observe because this denotes that these studies contribute to the majority of the heterogeneity. The Baujat Plot is given in Figure 2.
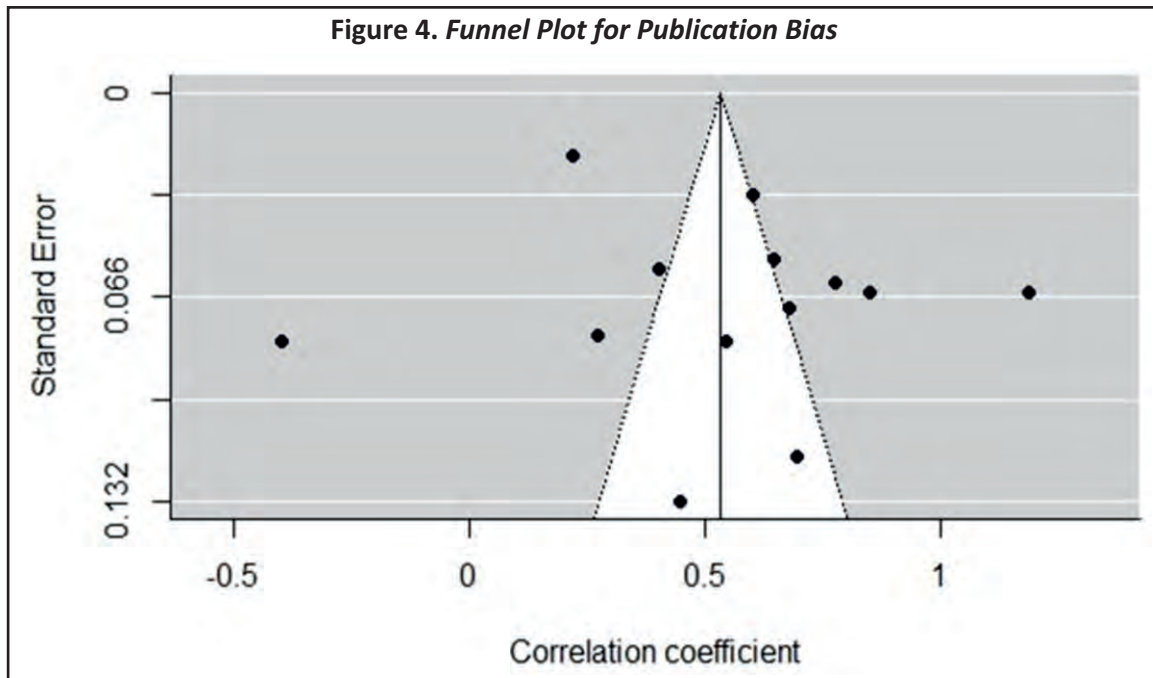
The horizontal axis of the plot represents heterogeneity, and the vertical axis signifies the influence of the study on the overall results. The paper id has been shown in the plot. The paper or study id shown at the top right corner of the plot represents the reason for possible heterogeneity. The paper id 12 (Zhang & Zinkhan, 2006) shows some heterogeneity but has less influence on the overall results, as shown in the plot. The paper id 9 shown on the top right corner, which is a paper by Chung and Zhao (2011), contributes mostly to the heterogeneity.

Forest Plot

The forest plot represents the effect size and confidence interval (CI) from the studies included in the meta-analysis. The fine horizontal lines that come out of the solid box depict the confidence interval magnitude. If the line is longer, that means the confidence interval is wider, which in turn depicts that the data is less reliable. On the other hand, if the line is short, the confidence interval is narrower, which shows that the data is more reliable. Also, if the box or the line cuts the no effect y-axis, the corresponding research data is considered statistically insignificant. In the forest plot given in Figure 3, Schwarz et al. (2015), Zhang (1996), and Zhang and Zinkhan (2006) show narrower confidence intervals. Thereby, this means that these studies had more reliable data than others. A point estimate is used for each study, and a polygon is used for displaying the summary effect size.

The forest plot depicts the contribution of each study in summary effect size. The larger the size of the squares, the more is the contribution of the study to the variance. In the above-illustrated plot, Gelb and Pickett (1983),

Figure 3. *Forest Plot*

Hameed, 2016		0.59 [0.49, 0.67]
Hornik, 2016		0.38 [0.28, 0.47]
Schwarz et al., 2015		0.65 [0.57, 0.71]
Gelb & Pickett, 1983		0.22 [0.18, 0.25]
Zhang, 1996		0.69 [0.62, 0.75]
Warren et al., 2019.1		0.60 [0.43, 0.73]
Warren et al., 2019.2		0.42 [0.19, 0.61]
Brown, 2010		0.26 [0.12, 0.40]
Chung & Zhao, 2011.1		-0.38 [-0.51, -0.24]
Chung & Zhao, 2011.2		0.50 [0.37, 0.61]
Gregory et al., 2019		0.54 [0.49, 0.58]
Zhang & Zinkhan, 2006		0.83 [0.79, 0.87]
Srivastava & Dorsch, 2019		0.57 [0.49, 0.64]
RE Model		0.49 [0.32, 0.63]

-0.4 -0.2 0.0 0.2 0.4 0.6

Correlation Coefficient

Figure 4. *Funnel Plot for Publication Bias*

Hornik et al. (2016), Gregory et al. (2019), Srivastava and Dorsch (2020), and Hameed et al. (2016) show larger sized squares, which means these studies are more meaningful as compared to others and contribute more to the pooled results of the study. The summary effect size is 0.49 with 95% CI (0.32, 0.63).

Publication Bias

Publication bias represents a situation when the studies with stronger effect sizes have more publication chances. A funnel plot given in Figure 4 is used to ascertain the publication bias. The effect size is represented by the horizontal axis of the funnel plot, while the vertical axis displays a standard error. The middle vertical line in the funnel shows the summary effect size. According to the effect size and standard error of individual studies, a study is expected to spread away from the central line.

As the points are spread almost equivalently on both sides of the vertical line, there is no incidence of publication bias. Also, the rank correlation ($p = 0.5403$) and Egger's regression test ($p = 0.9410$) are also calculated, and both are found to be insignificant. The insignificant value of rank correlation and Eager's regression test also supports the non-existence of the publication bias.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to do a systematic review and conduct a meta-analysis of studies analyzing the relationship between humor and attitude towards ads. After scrutiny, only 13 studies have been included in the final analysis, and it has been found that there is a large amount of variance in studies included in the analysis. The study conducted by Chung and Zhao (2011) causes a lot of variances. The large variance is due to moderating effect of brand familiarity. The results also suggest that there is no publication bias in the studies chosen for conducting the meta-analysis.

Managerial Implications

This study generalizes the relationship between humor and attitude towards the ads. This might help advertisers to create their ads in a way that feeds the relationship between humor and attitude towards an ad in a positive way, as a positive attitude towards an ad influences the purchase intention positively. This can also benefit marketers to design their marketing strategies in a way that focuses heavily on customers' attitudes. If there is an emotional connection between the audience and the product advertisement, they are inclined towards buying it more often than not. Overall, this article exposes some important results which can be very useful for further research. Although many articles have been published on the advertising impact, comprising elaborated research of executional elements, a handful of meta-analyses have been conducted which assess these types of advertising effects quantitatively. So, connecting the studies done in the past with the endeavors of the future and giving generalizations of empirical nature might prove useful for practical decisions of the market.

Theoretical Implications

In general, it has to be kept in mind that meta-analysis should not be taken as an alternative for novel original research. But it surely guides the future original research studies so that the direction they move in is an optimum one. This article can help future researchers as a blueprint to carry out a meta-analysis using other variables with humor in advertising.

Limitations of the Study and Scope for Future Research

This article contains common disadvantages, which the technique of meta-analysis poses. The sample of articles is restricted to the research published in the English language. Although this type of language partiality is usually admitted in meta-analysis for real-world reasons (there will be a need for a lot of coders from diverse countries to review the articles of another language) and for obvious reasons (English is an internationally preferred language), the humor effects that depend on the cultural difference may be overlooked in this meta-analysis as most of the papers considered are published in the USA. But different cultures appreciate and use humor differently (Alden et al., 1993; Toncar, 2001), which makes humor of similar kind induce different effects in different countries. A handy tactic could be examining the relationship between the taxonomy of humor (Speck, 1991) and cultural aspects (Hofstede, 2001).

Out of 171 studies on humor in advertising, we found only 13 studies that gave the correlation between humor and attitude towards ads. Researchers may consider more studies that might get published in the future covering the same relationship to increase the precision of this meta-analysis. The results of the present paper provide guidelines and direction to researchers for considering future studies on similar aspects to help practitioners in deciding the best possible action for framing advertising strategies.

The article includes studies that analyzed the relationship between humor and attitude towards ads and where the correlation coefficient between the two was mentioned. Analysis of the relationship of other variables with humor can be considered in future studies to examine the relationship of humor with variables of importance in advertising, such as the relationship of humor with attitude towards the brand, purchase intention, brand consciousness, etc. Moderator variables can also be considered to assess the heterogeneity in greater details such as gender, brand familiarity, prior brand evaluation, etc.

Authors' Contribution

Dr. Dheeraj Nim and Dr. Shamily Jaggi came up with an idea for this statistical study. Simranjeet Kaur extracted all the papers/articles from various reputed journals, screened the research papers based on their relevance, finalized the studies to be considered for meta-analysis, and extracted the required data from the selected studies. Dr. Dheeraj Nim conducted the analysis and interpreted the results. Simranjeet Kaur and Dr. Shamily Jaggi wrote the final manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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