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Humor in Digital Marketing Through Cognitive and Discursive Mechanisms of Persuasion

Abbos Sattorov ^{a,*}^a Department of Languages, Faculty of Philology, Oriental University, 100066 Tashkent, Uzbekistan.* Correspondence: abboskhoja255@gmail.com (A.S.)

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Abstract

Humor has become a prominent persuasive strategy in contemporary digital marketing, particularly within social media environments characterized by multimodal communication and participatory audience interaction. However, the mechanisms through which humor influences consumer cognition and engagement remain insufficiently integrated across cognitive, discursive, and multimodal perspectives. This study examines how humor functions as a persuasive strategy in digital advertising by analyzing its cognitive mechanisms, discourse practices, and multimodal configurations. The research is based on a corpus of 180 humorous digital advertisements across Instagram, TikTok, YouTube Shorts, and branded meme campaigns. A triangulated methodological approach was applied, combining cognitive-linguistic analysis, discourse analysis, and multimodal semiotic analysis. The results show that incongruity-based humor is the dominant cognitive mechanism, facilitating audience attention and message recall by resolving unexpected conceptual contrasts. Conceptual blending and metaphorical integration further enhance humor by combining multiple conceptual domains to generate creative interpretations. The findings also indicate that humor reshapes brand-audience relationships by promoting conversational communication styles and participatory engagement within digital platforms. Moreover, humorous advertising relies heavily on multimodal coordination of visual, textual, and auditory cues to amplify persuasive effects. This study concludes that humor functions as a multidimensional persuasive resource that strengthens cognitive engagement, emotional resonance, and interactive communication in digital marketing environments.



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1. Introduction

The rapid transformation of digital communication ecosystems has fundamentally altered how organizations, brands, and consumers interact. In the contemporary media environment, communication increasingly occurs on networked digital platforms characterized by algorithmic curation, participatory culture, and the circulation of multimodal content (Van Dijck, 2013). These platforms, such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook, enable the rapid dissemination of messages through text, images, audio, and video, thereby reshaping the dynamics of persuasion and audience engagement. Within this evolving landscape, humor has emerged as one of the most

influential and versatile persuasive strategies employed by contemporary brands.

Unlike traditional advertising, which often relies on rational appeals, product specifications, or informational arguments, digital marketing frequently prioritizes emotional resonance, creativity, relatability, and entertainment value. Humor thus functions as a communicative tool that attracts attention, reduces resistance to persuasion, and fosters emotional connections between audiences and brands (Du et al., 2025; Bismo et al., 2025).

The persuasive power of humor has long been recognized in linguistic, psychological, and communication research. Classical theories of humor suggest that humorous effects arise from cognitive

mechanisms such as incongruity detection, script opposition, and reinterpretation of meaning (Attardo & Raskin, 1991; Attardo, 2024). According to the General Theory of Verbal Humor, humor often emerges when audiences recognize a conflict between two conceptual scripts and resolve the resulting incongruity in a cognitively satisfying manner (Attardo & Raskin, 1991).

This process triggers positive emotional responses and enhances information processing, thereby making humorous messages more memorable and persuasive. Cognitive linguistics further explains humor through mechanisms such as conceptual blending, frame shifting, and metaphorical mapping, which enable audiences to integrate seemingly incompatible conceptual domains into coherent interpretations (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Gibbs, 2017). These cognitive processes contribute to the persuasive effectiveness of humor by facilitating deeper engagement with communicative messages and reducing critical resistance toward persuasive content.

Within advertising contexts, humor plays a particularly significant role in shaping consumer perceptions and behavioral responses. Research indicates that humorous advertisements can stimulate emotional arousal, increase cognitive flexibility, and ultimately enhance consumers' willingness to adopt or purchase new products (Du et al., 2025). Similarly, empirical studies demonstrate that humor-based advertising strategies improve brand recognition and stimulate positive electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), particularly among digitally native audiences such as Generation Z (Bismo et al., 2025). Humor can therefore function not only as an entertainment device but also as a strategic marketing tool that strengthens brand identity and increases audience engagement. The persuasive potential of humor is closely related to emotional framing processes in communication, in which emotional cues shape how individuals access information, interpret messages, and make decisions (Nabi, 2003).

From a discourse perspective, humor contributes to the transformation of communicative norms within digital marketing environments. Contemporary advertising increasingly relies on conversational styles, informal language, and culturally resonant references to build relational proximity between brands and consumers. Humor allows brands to adopt more humanized, approachable, and socially attuned voices that align with the communicative practices of online communities (Bury, 2023).

In social media, humor often takes the form of memes, ironic commentary, or playful brand responses, enabling companies to participate in ongoing digital conversations and cultural trends. Internet memes represent an important mechanism through which humor circulates in digital culture, as they allow users to replicate, remix, and reinterpret messages through shared visual and textual templates (Shifman, 2013).

Studies of meme-based marketing demonstrate that brands strategically employ humor, sarcasm, and pop-cultural references to strengthen brand awareness and customer loyalty (Kiljańczyk & Kacprzak, 2024; Abbas & Rehman, 2025).

Humor also functions as a powerful linguistic and rhetorical device within advertising discourse. Advertising language frequently employs creative rhetorical techniques, including metaphor, semantic ambiguity, wordplay, and figurative expressions to capture attention and enhance memorability (Vasiloaia, 2025). From a rhetorical perspective, persuasive communication often relies on emotional appeals, particularly pathos, to influence consumer attitudes and engagement with brand messages (Amjad & Hashmi, 2023). Metaphors, in particular, play an important role in shaping persuasive narratives by framing complex ideas in familiar conceptual terms and evoking emotional associations that resonate with audiences (Charteris-Black, 2011). Such rhetorical strategies contribute to the persuasive power of humor by combining cognitive stimulation with emotional engagement.

In addition to linguistic features, humor in digital communication is inherently multimodal. Contemporary digital media enable the integration of multiple semiotic resources, including visual imagery, audio cues, gestures, and textual elements, to produce complex communicative effects. Multimodal communication research highlights that meaning is often constructed through the interaction of different semiotic modes rather than through language alone (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2020). Advertising messages frequently employ multimodal metaphors that combine images, sounds, and words to convey persuasive meanings (Forceville, 2007). Similarly, studies of conversational humor demonstrate that humor is often co-constructed through multimodal signals such as facial expressions, prosody, gaze, and gestures (Attardo et al., 2013; Gironzetti, 2022). In online interactions, multimodal humor may also involve emojis, images, and short videos that collectively signal humorous intent and reinforce social bonding (Sampietro, 2023).

The multimodal nature of humor becomes particularly significant in intercultural and digital contexts. Research on intercultural humor indicates that humor may function either as a source of misunderstanding or as a mechanism for building shared understanding among participants from different cultural backgrounds (Ladilova & Schröder, 2022). In digital environments, humor often relies on culturally specific references, linguistic play, and shared symbolic frameworks that audiences must interpret collaboratively. As digital communication becomes increasingly globalized, understanding how humor operates across cultural and multimodal contexts becomes essential for analyzing its persuasive potential in marketing communication.

Another important dimension of humorous communication is its role in shaping social relationships and brand–consumer interactions. In digital platforms, brands increasingly engage in conversational exchanges with consumers through comment sections, customer reviews, and social media responses. Research suggests that humorous brand responses to positive consumer reviews can strengthen parasocial interaction and foster stronger emotional bonds between consumers and brands (Liao et al., 2022). Humor thus contributes to the relational dimension of digital marketing by humanizing corporate communication and encouraging audience participation.

Despite the growing prevalence of humor in digital marketing practices, academic research has only partially addressed the complexity of humorous persuasion in contemporary digital environments. Existing studies often examine humor from isolated perspectives, such as psychological responses, rhetorical strategies, or linguistic structures, without integrating these perspectives into a unified theoretical framework. Furthermore, the rapid evolution of digital platforms has introduced new communicative dynamics, including short-form video content, meme-based marketing, and algorithmically mediated interactions, which traditional theories of humor and persuasion may not fully capture. The rise of participatory digital cultures and multimodal communication practices calls for a more comprehensive analytical framework that integrates cognitive, discursive, and multimodal perspectives.

The present study seeks to address these gaps by examining humor as a persuasive strategy within digital marketing discourse. Drawing on theoretical insights from cognitive linguistics, discourse analysis, multimodal communication, and digital media studies, this research explores how humorous messages operate within contemporary digital platforms to influence audience engagement and consumer cognition. By analyzing how humorous frames, metaphors, and conceptual blends interact with visual, auditory, and interactive elements, the study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how humor functions as a multidimensional persuasive mechanism in digital marketing environments. Ultimately, this research contributes to the broader literature on digital persuasion by conceptualizing humor not merely as an entertainment device but as a complex communicative strategy that integrates cognitive processes, social interaction, emotional resonance, and cultural meaning-making.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Foundations of Humor in Communication

The study of humor has a long interdisciplinary history spanning linguistics, psychology, philosophy, and

communication studies. Among the most influential frameworks is the script-based semantic theory of humor, which explains humor as the result of incongruity between competing conceptual scripts (Attardo & Raskin, 1991). According to this model, humor arises when a message activates two incompatible interpretations that audiences must cognitively reconcile. This framework was later expanded into the General Theory of Verbal Humor, which identifies multiple knowledge resources, such as script opposition, narrative strategy, and linguistic form, that jointly structure humorous discourse (Attardo, 2024). These theories highlight that humor is not merely an aesthetic device, but a structured communicative phenomenon grounded in linguistic and cognitive mechanisms.

Cognitive linguistics provides further insights into the mechanisms underlying humorous communication. Conceptual metaphor theory argues that human thought is fundamentally structured by metaphorical mappings between abstract and concrete domains (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). These conceptual mappings allow individuals to interpret complex ideas through familiar experiential frameworks. Subsequent research has demonstrated that metaphorical reasoning influences not only language but also perception, decision-making, and social cognition (Gibbs, 2017). Within humorous discourse, metaphor and conceptual blending often generate creative associations that trigger incongruity and reinterpretation. Such processes are particularly relevant in advertising and media communication, where creative metaphors are used to attract attention and enhance message memorability.

Despite the explanatory power of cognitive theories, critics argue that traditional humor frameworks have often focused primarily on verbal language, overlooking the multimodal nature of contemporary communication. Forceville (2007) notes that metaphors and humorous meanings in media texts are frequently conveyed through combinations of visual imagery, sound, and language. Consequently, understanding humor in modern media environments requires moving beyond purely linguistic analyses to consider multimodal communication processes. This critique is particularly relevant in digital marketing contexts, where visual and audiovisual elements often play a central role in shaping humorous messages.

Another theoretical dimension concerns the relationship between humor and emotional persuasion. Research on emotional framing suggests that emotions function as cognitive frames that influence how individuals interpret information and make decisions (Nabi, 2003). Emotional stimuli, including humor, may therefore guide information accessibility and shape subsequent judgments or policy preferences. From this perspective, humor operates not only as a cognitive mechanism but also as an affective stimulus that influences attitudes and behaviors. However, while

emotional framing theory highlights the persuasive potential of humor, it provides limited insight into how humor interacts with specific media environments such as social media platforms.

2.2. *Humor and Persuasion in Advertising and Marketing*

In marketing communication, humor has been widely recognized as an effective persuasive strategy that enhances consumer engagement and brand perception. Empirical studies demonstrate that humorous advertisements can elicit emotional responses, thereby increasing audience attention and improving recall of advertising messages (Du et al., 2025). Humor also appears to promote cognitive flexibility, enabling consumers to process novel product information more openly and increasing their willingness to adopt new products.

Similarly, research on digital advertising indicates that humor contributes significantly to brand recognition and consumer engagement, particularly among younger audiences who frequently interact with digital content. Bismo et al. (2025) found that humorous advertising campaigns significantly improve brand recognition and stimulate positive electronic word of mouth. Such findings suggest that humor not only attracts attention but also encourages audience participation and message dissemination across social networks.

However, the persuasive effects of humor are not universally positive. Chan and Lowe (2021) demonstrate that while humorous contexts may increase brand recall, they can also reduce audience involvement with the content, potentially weakening brand attitudes under certain conditions. These findings highlight the complexity of humor as a persuasive strategy and suggest that its effectiveness depends on contextual factors, including audience characteristics, psychological traits, and communication context. Consequently, humor should not be viewed as a universally effective marketing tool but rather as a strategy whose outcomes are mediated by multiple cognitive and situational variables.

Beyond psychological effects, humor also plays an important role in shaping advertising discourse and rhetorical strategies. Advertising language frequently relies on creative linguistic techniques such as semantic ambiguity, metaphor, and wordplay to capture audience attention and enhance message memorability (Vasiloaia, 2025). These rhetorical devices align with Aristotle's classical framework of persuasion, which identifies emotional appeals as a central mechanism for influencing audience attitudes. Empirical research on advertising slogans confirms that emotional appeals, particularly pathos, are among the most frequently used rhetorical strategies in marketing communication (Amjad & Hashmi, 2023). Humor thus operates within a broader

rhetorical framework that integrates emotional, cognitive, and linguistic persuasion.

Nevertheless, much of the existing literature on humor in advertising remains primarily focused on individual consumer responses, often neglecting the broader discursive and cultural contexts in which humorous advertising operates. As digital media increasingly blur the boundaries between advertising, entertainment, and social interaction, scholars have called for more comprehensive approaches that consider humor within broader communicative ecosystems.

2.3. *Humor, Memes, and Participatory Digital Culture*

The rise of social media has transformed the nature of advertising communication, shifting it from one-directional messaging to participatory, interactive environments. Within these environments, humor often circulates through memes and other user-generated content. Shifman (2013) conceptualizes memes as cultural units that spread through imitation and transformation across digital networks. Memes typically combine visual and textual elements to create humorous commentary on social, cultural, or political topics.

In marketing contexts, memes have become an increasingly popular strategy for engaging online audiences. Studies show that meme-based marketing campaigns can enhance brand visibility and create positive associations between brands and digital culture (Kiljańczyk & Kacprzak, 2024). Similarly, research on Instagram marketing shows that brands often use memes that incorporate cultural references, irony, and visual humor to strengthen audience engagement and brand identity (Abbas & Rehman, 2025). These strategies enable brands to participate in online cultural conversations and position themselves as socially aware participants within digital communities.

Humor also plays an important role in shaping brand-consumer relationships in social media environments. Digital platforms allow brands to interact directly with consumers through comment sections, reviews, and social media responses. Research indicates that humorous responses to consumer reviews can strengthen parasocial interactions between consumers and brands, leading to more positive brand attitudes and purchase intentions (Liao et al., 2022). This suggests that humor can serve as a relational strategy, humanizing brand communication and fostering emotional connections with audiences.

Despite these developments, integrating humor into participatory digital culture also raises important challenges. Digital humor often relies on rapidly evolving cultural references and online trends, which may limit the longevity and universality of humorous marketing strategies. Furthermore, humor can be interpreted differently across cultural contexts, potentially leading to misunderstandings or unintended negative reactions.

Consequently, scholars emphasize the importance of considering cultural and contextual factors when analyzing humorous communication in digital media.

2.4. Multimodal Perspectives on Humor in Digital Communication

One of the most significant developments in contemporary humor research is the growing recognition of multimodality as a central feature of communication. Multimodal communication theory suggests that meaning is produced through the interaction of multiple semiotic modes, including visual, textual, auditory, and gestural elements rather than through language alone (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2020). In digital environments, humor often arises from the interaction among these different modes.

Studies of conversational humor demonstrate that humorous interactions often rely on multimodal signals, such as facial expressions, gaze, gestures, and prosody, to convey humorous intent (Attardo et al., 2013; Gironzetti, 2022). Similarly, research on mobile messaging interactions shows that emojis, images, and visual memes play an important role in signaling humor and facilitating social bonding among participants (Sampietro, 2023). These findings highlight the importance of analyzing humor as a multimodal phenomenon rather than a purely linguistic one.

Multimodal approaches are particularly relevant in digital marketing contexts, where advertisements often combine images, text, sound effects, and animation to create engaging content. Forceville (2007) demonstrates that multimodal metaphors in television commercials often rely on the interplay between visual imagery and verbal language to construct persuasive messages. Such multimodal metaphors enable advertisers to convey complex ideas quickly and memorably.

Nevertheless, research on multimodal humor also reveals significant complexities. For instance, humor may not always be interpreted uniformly across cultural or communicative contexts. Ladilova and Schröder (2022) show that humor in intercultural interactions can either facilitate shared understanding or create misunderstandings, depending on participants' cultural knowledge and interpretative frameworks. These findings suggest that humor's effectiveness depends heavily on shared cultural references and communicative cues.

Although the existing literature provides valuable insights into humor in communication, several important research gaps remain. First, many studies focus on isolated dimensions of humor, such as cognitive mechanisms, emotional responses, or rhetorical strategies, without integrating these perspectives into a comprehensive analytical framework. As a result, the complex interplay between cognitive, discursive, and

multimodal processes in humorous communication remains insufficiently explored.

Second, while research on humor in advertising has traditionally focused on television commercials or print advertisements, relatively limited attention has been given to humor within contemporary digital marketing ecosystems characterized by participatory communication, meme culture, and algorithmically mediated content distribution. The rapid emergence of short-form video platforms and meme-based advertising strategies introduces new communicative dynamics that traditional advertising theories may not fully capture.

Third, most empirical studies examine humor primarily in terms of consumer attitudes or behavioral outcomes, often neglecting its discursive and cultural dimensions. Digital humor often operates within broader cultural conversations and identity negotiations in online communities, yet these sociocultural dynamics remain underexplored in marketing research.

To address these limitations, the present study adopts an integrative framework that combines insights from cognitive linguistics, discourse analysis, and multimodal communication studies. By examining how humorous messages operate across cognitive, emotional, and multimodal dimensions, this research seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of humor as a persuasive strategy in digital marketing. Through this interdisciplinary approach, the study aims to contribute to the broader literature on digital persuasion and marketing communication by conceptualizing humor as a multidimensional communicative mechanism embedded within contemporary digital media ecosystems.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Research Design

This study adopts a multi-method qualitative analytical design to examine how humor functions as a persuasive strategy in digital marketing. Given that humorous advertising in digital environments operates through the interaction of cognitive mechanisms, discourse practices, and multimodal communication, a single-method approach would be insufficient. Therefore, the study integrates corpus-based, cognitive-linguistic, discourse, and multimodal semiotic analyses. This triangulated framework enables a comprehensive examination of humorous advertising by analyzing how cognitive structures, communicative strategies, and multimodal elements interact to produce persuasive effects.

3.2. Data Collection and Corpus Construction

The empirical dataset consists of a corpus of 180 humorous digital advertising units published between January 2023 and October 2024. The dataset includes:

- 100 humorous social media advertisements from Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube Shorts
- 30 branded meme campaigns produced by international and regional brands
- 50 short-form promotional videos featuring humorous narratives, parody, or ironic storytelling

The corpus was constructed using purposive sampling, guided by three selection criteria:

1. Humor functions as the central persuasive strategy in the advertisement.
2. The content demonstrates measurable audience engagement, indicated by metrics such as likes, shares, comments, stitches, and duets.
3. The advertisement contains multimodal elements, including interactions among text, visuals, audio, and editing structures.

This sampling strategy ensures that the dataset captures both dominant and emerging forms of humorous digital marketing communication while maintaining ecological validity within contemporary social media environments.

3.3. Analytical Framework

3.3.1. Cognitive-Linguistic Analysis

The first stage of analysis examines the cognitive mechanisms underlying humorous persuasion. Drawing on cognitive linguistic theories of humor, the analysis focuses on incongruity detection, frame shifting, and conceptual integration. Each advertising unit was coded to identify:

- Types of incongruity (semantic, pragmatic, visual, or situational)
- Conceptual blends and cross-domain mappings
- Narrative scenarios that trigger humorous reinterpretation

This analysis reveals how humorous messages activate cognitive processes that facilitate attention, emotional engagement, and message retention.

3.3.2. Discourse Analysis

The second analytical layer investigates the discursive construction of humor in digital marketing communication. Drawing on principles of critical discourse analysis, the study examines how brands employ humor to construct communicative identities and engage audiences in participatory digital environments. The discourse analysis focuses on identifying:

- Conversational tone and informal language strategies
- Self-irony and brand personification

- Intertextual references and cultural allusions
- Interaction patterns between brands and audiences in comment sections

This approach situates humorous advertising within broader social and communicative contexts, highlighting how humor shapes relationships between brands and online communities.

3.3.3. Multimodal Semiotic Analysis

Given the inherently multimodal nature of digital advertising, the study also analyzes the interaction of visual, textual, and auditory elements in humorous content. Drawing on visual grammar and multimodal discourse analysis, each advertisement was examined for the coordination of:

- Visual imagery, color, and composition
- Typography and textual cues
- Camera movement, editing rhythm, and visual transitions
- Sound effects, music, and vocal delivery

The analysis focuses on how these elements combine multimodal incongruities and comedic timing, thereby enhancing the persuasive impact of humorous messages.

3.4. Coding Procedure and Reliability

To ensure systematic analysis, the study employed a 52-item coding scheme covering cognitive, linguistic, discursive, and multimodal variables. Two trained coders independently analyzed 25% of the dataset to assess coding reliability. Inter-coder reliability was calculated using Cohen's kappa statistics, producing coefficients ranging from 0.81 to 0.88, which indicate substantial to near-perfect agreement according to the reliability scale proposed by Landis and Koch (1977). These results confirm the stability and consistency of the coding procedure.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

All data were collected from publicly accessible digital platforms. User identities in comment sections were anonymized to protect privacy. The research adheres to ethical standards for digital media research, ensuring transparency, academic integrity, and responsible use of publicly available online data.

4. Results and Discussion

The analysis of the 180 digital advertising units revealed several recurring cognitive, discursive, and multimodal mechanisms through which humor operates as a persuasive strategy in digital marketing. Across platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube Shorts,

and branded meme campaigns, humor emerged as a systematic communicative strategy that enhances message salience, strengthens emotional alignment with audiences, and reshapes brand–consumer interactions in digital environments. These findings confirm that humorous advertising operates as a multidimensional persuasive device integrating cognitive incongruity, participatory discourse, and multimodal communication.

4.1 Cognitive Mechanisms of Humor

The cognitive analysis revealed that incongruity-based humor constituted the dominant mechanism, appearing in approximately 72% of the analyzed advertisements. These humorous effects were generated through different types of schema disruption, including semantic mismatches, exaggerated visual scenarios, and unexpected narrative reversals. Examples included anthropomorphized products expressing human emotions, absurd exaggerations of everyday situations, and humorous contrasts between expected and actual product outcomes.

Crucially, the humorous effect did not arise solely from the presence of incongruity but from its subsequent cognitive resolution, which allowed audiences to reinterpret the message and restore coherence. This finding aligns with the script-based semantic theory of humor, which argues that humor emerges when audiences recognize and resolve competing interpretative scripts (Attardo & Raskin, 1991). Similarly, incongruity-resolution processes are central to broader linguistic theories of humor that emphasize the role of cognitive reinterpretation in generating humorous effects (Attardo, 2024).

The rapid transition from cognitive dissonance to interpretative coherence appeared to produce a positive affective response, increasing both message memorability and audience receptivity. This cognitive “reward state” reflects mechanisms described in emotional framing research, where emotional stimuli influence information accessibility and decision-making processes (Nabi, 2003). In digital advertising contexts, humor thus functions as a cognitive shortcut that facilitates message processing while reducing skepticism toward persuasive content.

4.2 Conceptual Blending and Creative Meaning Construction

A second significant finding concerns the role of conceptual blending and metaphorical integration in humorous advertising. Approximately 56% of the analyzed advertisements employed multi-input conceptual blends combining distinct conceptual domains. Examples included humorous scenarios in which technological devices behaved like human characters, animals represented consumer habits, or

abstract emotional states were embodied by everyday products.

These findings are consistent with cognitive linguistic theories emphasizing the importance of metaphor and conceptual integration in meaning construction (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Gibbs, 2017). In many cases, humor emerged from the interaction of metaphorical mappings and incongruous narrative scenarios, generating creative interpretations that were both memorable and entertaining.

Importantly, the analysis also demonstrated that conceptual blending in digital advertising is inherently multimodal. Visual imagery, sound effects, and textual cues often jointly contributed to the construction of humorous meanings. This observation supports arguments that metaphor and humor in media communication frequently rely on multimodal expression rather than purely linguistic structures (Forceville, 2007). As a result, humorous advertising should be understood not only as a linguistic phenomenon but also as a multimodal cognitive process.

4.3 Discursive Strategies and Brand–Audience Interaction

The discourse analysis revealed that humor significantly transforms the interactional dynamics between brands and audiences in digital marketing environments. Approximately 68% of the analyzed advertisements adopted conversational, playful, or self-ironic discursive styles, presenting brands as approachable and culturally attuned communicators.

Such discursive strategies reflect broader transformations in digital communication, where brand messages increasingly resemble informal social interaction rather than traditional advertising rhetoric. In many cases, humorous content employed intertextual references to internet culture, popular memes, and trending topics. These strategies allow brands to position themselves within the communicative practices of online communities and participate in ongoing cultural conversations.

The findings align with research showing that meme-based marketing and humorous brand communication can strengthen engagement and brand identity within digital environments (Shifman, 2013; Kiljańczyk & Kacprzak, 2024; Abbas & Rehman, 2025). Moreover, humorous interactions in comment sections often extended the original advertisement, with users creating additional jokes, references, or visual adaptations. This dialogic process transformed advertising messages into collaboratively constructed communicative events.

Such patterns support the argument that humor in digital marketing operates within participatory media cultures characterized by user-generated content and interactive communication (Van Dijck, 2013). Rather than functioning as one-directional persuasion,

humorous advertising becomes part of a broader network of social interaction and meaning-making.

4.4 Multimodal Construction of Humor

The multimodal analysis further demonstrated that humor in digital advertising is deeply embedded in semiotic orchestration across multiple communicative modes. In 82% of the analyzed advertisements, humorous effects emerged from the interaction of visual, textual, auditory, and temporal elements.

Common multimodal strategies included exaggerated facial expressions, sudden visual transitions, mismatched sound effects, ironic soundtrack choices, and meme-style visual templates. Particularly on short-form video platforms such as TikTok and YouTube Shorts, humorous effects were often achieved through editing techniques like jump cuts, zoom-ins, and rapid scene transitions.

These findings support multimodal communication theories that emphasize the role of visual grammar and semiotic design in meaning construction (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2020). Humor in digital advertising emerges not only from textual jokes but from the synchronization of visual, auditory, and temporal cues that guide audience interpretation.

Similar observations have been made in studies of conversational humor, where multimodal signals such as facial expressions, gaze, and prosody contribute to humorous interpretation (Attardo et al., 2013; Gironzetti, 2022). In digital communication contexts, additional multimodal elements, such as emojis, visual memes, and audiovisual editing, further expand the repertoire of humorous expression (Sampietro, 2023).

4.5 Engagement and Persuasive Impact

Finally, behavioral indicators embedded in platform interaction metrics demonstrated humor's measurable persuasive impact. Humorous advertisements consistently generated higher engagement than non-humorous content, receiving, on average, 2.3 times more shares and 3.1 times more comments. These results support empirical findings that humorous advertising enhances brand recognition and stimulates positive consumer interaction in digital environments (Bismo et al., 2025). The high levels of user-generated remixing and meme adaptation also reflect the viral potential of humorous content, which encourages audiences to actively circulate and reinterpret advertising messages. From a marketing perspective, humor thus functions as a catalyst for participatory engagement, transforming audiences from passive viewers into active participants in the communicative process.

5. Conclusions

This study examined how humor functions as a persuasive strategy in contemporary digital marketing, integrating cognitive, discursive, and multimodal analytical perspectives. Through the analysis of a corpus of 180 humorous digital advertisements across major social media platforms, the findings demonstrate that humor operates as a multidimensional communicative mechanism that reshapes audience cognition, enhances emotional engagement, and strengthens participatory interaction between brands and consumers.

First, the results show that cognitive incongruity and its resolution represent the primary mechanism through which humorous advertising achieves persuasive impact. The predominance of incongruity-based humor supports classical linguistic and cognitive theories of humor (Attardo & Raskin, 1991; Attardo, 2024), confirming that humorous effects arise when audiences encounter and resolve conflicting interpretative scripts. In digital environments, however, incongruity is often intensified through multimodal cues, namely visual exaggeration, sound design, and editing techniques, creating a richer cognitive and emotional experience than traditional advertising formats.

Second, the findings highlight the importance of conceptual blending and metaphorical creativity in humorous digital advertising. Advertisements frequently combine multiple conceptual domains to create novel, memorable, humorous scenarios. Such cognitive integration aligns with conceptual metaphor theory and related cognitive linguistic approaches (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Gibbs, 2017), suggesting that humorous persuasion often relies on creative conceptual mappings that facilitate meaning-making while simultaneously entertaining audiences.

Third, the study reveals that humor plays a crucial discursive role in transforming brand-consumer relationships within digital communication environments. By adopting conversational, ironic, or self-deprecating tones, brands reduce communicative hierarchies and position themselves as culturally aware participants in online communities. This relational alignment reflects the participatory nature of digital media ecosystems (Van Dijck, 2013), where audiences actively engage with, reinterpret, and circulate humorous content. The observed patterns of comment-based interaction and meme remixing demonstrate that humorous advertising frequently evolves into collaborative communicative practices involving both brands and audiences.

Fourth, the analysis confirms that humor in digital marketing is fundamentally multimodal. Humorous meanings often emerge from the coordinated interaction of visual, textual, auditory, and temporal elements rather than from language alone. This finding supports multimodal communication theories emphasizing the

importance of visual grammar and semiotic orchestration in meaning construction (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2020; Forceville, 2007). The integration of multiple semiotic resources enhances both the perceptual salience and emotional resonance of humorous advertising messages.

The study demonstrates that humor contributes to persuasive communication in digital marketing through several interconnected processes: capturing audience attention, facilitating cognitive processing, generating positive emotional responses, and encouraging participatory engagement. Humor functions not merely as an entertainment device but as a strategic communicative resource that aligns persuasive messaging with the interactive and culturally embedded nature of digital media environments.

5.1. Research Limitations

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the analysis focuses primarily on a corpus of humorous advertisements from selected social media platforms and may not fully represent the diversity of humorous marketing practices across different cultural contexts or media environments. Second, the research relies on qualitative and discourse-oriented analytical methods, which provide deep interpretative insights but may limit the ability to generalize findings quantitatively across broader populations. Third, although engagement metrics were considered indicators of persuasive effectiveness, the study did not directly measure long-term consumer attitudes or purchasing behavior.

5.2. Research Implications

The findings offer several theoretical and practical implications. From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to the literature on digital persuasion by demonstrating the need for integrated analytical frameworks that combine cognitive, discursive, and multimodal perspectives to examine humorous communication in digital environments. This multidimensional approach expands existing advertising research, which has often focused primarily on psychological or rhetorical aspects of humor.

From a practical standpoint, the results suggest that marketers should design humorous campaigns that strategically integrate creative conceptual metaphors, multimodal storytelling, and culturally relevant humor formats, such as memes and short-form videos. Successful humorous advertising appears to depend not only on comedic content but also on its alignment with platform-specific communication styles and audience expectations.

5.3. Future Research

Future research could extend this study in several directions. First, quantitative approaches, such as experimental studies or large-scale audience surveys, could examine the causal relationships between humorous advertising and consumer attitudes, brand loyalty, and purchasing behavior. Second, comparative studies across different cultural contexts would provide valuable insights into how humor operates in intercultural digital communication environments. Third, future research could explore how algorithmic recommendation systems and artificial intelligence-driven content generation influence the production and circulation of humorous advertising in digital media ecosystems. Finally, longitudinal studies may help clarify the long-term impact of humorous branding strategies on brand identity and consumer relationships.

In conclusion, humor represents a powerful yet complex persuasive strategy within contemporary digital marketing. Its effectiveness lies not only in its ability to entertain but also in its capacity to integrate cognitive stimulation, emotional engagement, and participatory communication within the evolving landscape of digital media.

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Author Initials:
A.S.: Abbas Sattorov

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