

Chapter 27

The Use of Humor in Award-Winning TV Commercials in Turkey

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the award-winning television commercials of Turkey's Cristal Apple Advertising Competition are studied in terms of their use of humor. The commercials are content analyzed, and humorous devices are organized according to the studies of Sterthal and Craig (1973), Kelly and Solomon (1975), Buijen and Valkenburg (2004), and Yee (2011). The humorous devices are listed according to four distinct product categories—banking, decoration, detergents and household cleaners, and foods—and determined according to four distinct categories designed by Weinberger, Campbell, and Brody (1994). All the award-winning advertisements are analyzed according to humorous devices used and product types comparatively. As a result, it is observed that there are significant differences in terms of humor use in advertisements in different sectors. Accordingly, the most humorous advertisements are in the food sector. The humor devices used in the advertisements differentiate from year to year.

INTRODUCTION

Type of entertainment in a society is one of the most important differential features of a culture. While there are collective and “out of house” entertainment types are popular in some societies, entertainment culture has transformed to a more individual and media-oriented sense with change of technology and social structures. In particular,

television has become a popular entertainment tool during years. Postman, from a critical point of view, examines this entertaining function of television (Postman, 2004). According to him, what makes television a popular entertaining tool is mostly its content. It is obvious that the economy of television, like other media, is based mostly upon advertising. So advertising can be analyzed as a part of entertainment culture.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-6190-5.ch027

It is very popular to use entertaining appeals in advertising nowadays, for there is a rough competition between programs (and also advertisements) to keep the audience in front of television. Comstock and Scharrer (1999) found that 80 percent of viewers are likely to leave the room during commercial breaks and most people watching prerecorded material will fast forward the commercials. This urges an upgrade on both the content and execution of television advertising in order to make commercials as rewarding to watch as television programs are. The increasing sophistication of television advertising over the years in fact reflects the need to compete with programs.

One and most used appeals used in entertaining advertisements is humor. The use of humor in advertising has been studied extensively, and debates still occur over its ability to promote favorable reactions from consumers. Marketers rely on humor to increase advertising performance because it may influence advertising memorability, product evaluations, persuasiveness, and consumer attention (Chattopadhyay and Basu, 1990; Cline and Kellaris, 2007; Eisend, 2009; Krishnan and Chakravarti, 2003; Kellaris and Cline, 2007; Skalski, Tamborini, Glazer, and Smith, 2009; Strick, Van Baaren, Holland, and Van Knippenberg, 2009; Zhang and Zinkhan, 2006). Others have stated, however, that humor should be used carefully, because it may offend the audience (Beard, 2008), and it should not be used in themes such as illness or death (Runyon, 1979) or to mask deceptive advertising (Shabbir and Thwaites, 2007).

Sternthal and Craig (1973) first reviewed the humor literature related to advertising and reached some tentative conclusions based on the work conducted up to that time. Because of the many influences from the humorous message, the nature of the product, audience factors, communication goals, humor relatedness, humor style, and humor placement, generalizations about the effects of humor have been rare (Weinberger and Gulas, 1992).

Humor as a communication element has been found to be an important component of advertising in numerous countries (Eisend, 2009; Weinberger and Gulas, 1992). As humor is a universal dimension of culture (Lefcourt 2001), Alford and Alford (1981) determined that —no society was reported to be without humor (Alford and Alford 1981, 162) While humor is acknowledged to be a universal element of culture (Lee and Lim 2008; Lefcourt 2001; Martin 2007), the content of humor may require adaptation when communicating in different cultural contexts. The sense of humor is universal in all human societies (Apte, 1985), but ones preferences for (and responses to) humor greatly differ across cultures (Lee and Lim, 2008). Humor, including its content, target, and style, is largely decided by a society's values, norms, and customs (Hertzler, 1970).

In this study, the advertisements in Turkey are analyzed according to their use of humor. The advertisements, which are content analyzed, are award-winning television commercials from Turkey's Cristal Apple Advertising Competition in last ten years. The sectors of these commercials are from four different sectors organized by Weinberger, Campbell, and Brody (1994).

BACKGROUND

Humor remains one of the most poorly understood (Sutherland and Sylvester, 2000), and yet at the same time, one of the most prevalent of communications strategies employed in advertising (Alden, Mukherjee, and Hoyer, 2000). This is the case despite a growing body of literature within advertising on the use and application of humor (Weinberger and Gulas, 1992).

It is essential to have a general concept of how humor is defined before looking at humor advertising but there is no an easy way to conceptualize humor and a coherent theory that can handle humor in all disciplines has yet to be formed. Many researchers doubt about the possibility to investigate humor in a scholarly manner because

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