

The University of Edinburgh Management School

Who's in the Mood for Funny Business? Context Effects,
Consumer Personalities and the Role of Humour in Advertising

By

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*To my parents,
who first taught me about the value of a good laugh.*

Declaration

I composed the following thesis by myself and the work herein is entirely my own.

9/12/01

Date

Abstract

Although humorous appeals are common and increasingly used in advertising to sell products and services, there is little agreement in the literature on the efficacy of humour in advertising. This thesis seeks to provide a greater understanding of its merit in meeting the communicative goals of the advertiser. Amongst other things, contextual factors and individual differences in consumers are likely to mediate the effectiveness of such appeals. The current research focuses on the television medium where humour is most frequently used and believed to be the most successful. Because advertising in this medium occurs within the context of a programme, the affective tone of the TV broadcast may be a relevant moderator of the effectiveness of humorous ads. Until now, the programme context has not been considered with regard to humour appeals. Furthermore, personality attributes of the target viewers may also affect the likelihood of success. Need for cognition (NFC) has been one such factor that has been suggested to moderate the persuasive power of humorous advertising. These variables have been explored by controlling the programming tone and NFC and comparing consumer reactions to humorous and chiefly informative ad types through an experimental pre-test/post-test design. The research demonstrated that humour is an effective way to enhance consumers' attitudes towards the advertised brand, especially when advertising low-involvement, indulgent products. It can be successful when placed into programmes that have very different effects on the audiences' mood state, but its persuasive impact will be greatest when placed within a show that generates a positive mood. NFC has been shown to be an important mediator of advertising influence for high-involvement and/or functional products. However, this thesis demonstrates that individual differences in this trait do not compromise the effectiveness of humour for the low-involvement, expressive products for which it is the most appropriate.

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Table of Contents

Section I: Backdrop to the Study

1 AN INTRODUCTION	
1.1. Planet Promotions	1
1.2. Land of the Rising Pun	2
1.3. Current Research on Humour in Advertising	3
1.4. Ad Processing & Motivation	4
1.5. Context Factors & Mood State During Exposure	5
1.6. Need for Cognition	6
1.7. The Research Question & Relevant Design	7
1.8. Structure of the Thesis	8

Section II: Review of the Literature

2 THE HUMOUR CONSTRUCT: AN INTRODUCTION	
2.1. Preamble	11
2.2. Social Significance of Humour	13
2.3. Theories of Humour Elicitation	18
2.3.1. Cognitive Theories	19
2.3.1.1. The Incongruity-Resolution Mechanism	19
2.3.1.2. The Cognitive Congruency Principle	25
2.3.1.3. Cognitive Mastery Theory	25
2.3.1.4. Contextual Elements	26
2.3.1.5. Incongruity Without Resolution	29
2.3.1.6. Criticisms of Incongruity Only Theories	29
2.3.2. Affective Theories	33
2.3.2.1. Psychodynamic Theory	34
2.3.2.2. Arousal Theory	36
2.3.2.3. Freedom Theory	37
2.3.2.4. The Arousal-Safety Mechanism	40
2.3.3. Social or Interpersonal Theories	42
2.3.3.1. Humorous Disparagement Processes	43
2.3.3.2. Superiority Theory	44
2.3.3.3. Dispositional Theory	45
2.3.3.4. Synthesis with Incongruity-Resolution	47
2.3.3.5. Tendentious Humour Revisited	49
2.4. The Humorous Message Taxonomy	49
2.4.1. Resultant Humour Types	50
2.4.1.1. Comic Wit	51
2.4.1.2. Sentimental Humour	53
2.4.1.3. Satire	55
2.4.1.4. Sentimental Comedy	57
2.4.1.5. Full Comedy	59
2.4.2. Relatedness of Humour	61
2.5. Concluding Remarks	63

3 THE EFFECTIVENESS OF HUMOUR IN ADVERTISING	
3.1. Preamble	66
3.2. Setting the Stage for Humour Appeals	67
3.3. The Elaboration Likelihood Model	69
3.3.1. The Central Route to Persuasion	72
3.3.2. The Peripheral Route to Persuasion	74
3.3.3. Consequences of the Route to Persuasion	77
3.3.4. Opposition to the Elaboration Likelihood Model	79
3.4. Humour Appeals & Supporting Objectives	83
3.4.1. Humour Appeals & Attention	84
3.4.2. Humour & Brand Awareness	86
3.4.3. Humour & Ad Liking	88
3.4.4. Humour & Source Credibility	89
3.4.5. Humour & Comprehension	91
3.5. The Role of Humour in Advertising	100
3.5.1. The Information-Processing View	101
3.5.2. The Distraction Hypothesis	106
3.5.3. Behavioural Theories I: Operant Conditioning	108
3.5.4. Behavioural Theories II: Classical Conditioning	112
3.5.4.1. Challenge to the Classical Conditioning Model?	117
3.6. Humour Appeals & Persuasion	121
3.6.1. Generalisations of Humour Appeals and Persuasion	122
3.6.2. Executional Variables	123
3.6.2.1. Product Considerations	124
3.6.2.2. Humour Type	126
3.6.2.3. Strength of the Humorous Response	128
3.6.2.4. Relatedness of Appeal to the Advertising Message	129
3.6.2.5. The Effect of the Advertising Medium	132
3.6.2.6. Number Of Exposures to the Humorous Message	133
3.6.3. Audience Variables	136
3.6.3.1. Prior Brand Attitude	137
3.6.3.2. Gender of Message Recipient	138
3.6.3.3. Group Dynamic of the Exposure Audience	140
3.6.3.4. Mood State During Ad Exposure	141
3.6.3.5. Need For Cognition & Humour Effectiveness	141
3.7. Concluding Remarks	142
4 MOOD EFFECTS ON PERSUASION & ADVERTISING IMPLICATIONS	
4.1. Preamble	145
4.2. The Consequences of Mood in Advertising	147
4.3. Implications for Media Planning	149
4.4. Defining Mood States	152
4.5. Mood & The Persuasion Process	155
4.6. Theories for Mood Effects on Persuasion	156
4.7. The Peripheral Cue Theories	159
4.7.1. Mood States & Learning Theory	160
4.7.1.1. Criticisms of Learning Theory	161
4.7.2. Mood as Information Hypothesis	163
4.7.2.1. Criticisms of the Mood as Information Hypothesis	164

4.8. The Information-Processing Theories	165
4.8.1. Mood Congruency Theory.....	167
4.8.1.1. Network Models & Spreading Activation	168
4.8.1.2. Predictions for Mood Congruency	170
4.8.1.3. The Evidence	173
4.8.2. Change in Criteria Theory	178
4.8.2.1. Predictions for Change in Criteria Theory	179
4.8.2.2. Criticisms of Change in Criteria Theory	180
4.8.3. Contemporary View of Mood as Information Theory	181
4.8.3.1. Predictions for the Contemporary Mood as Information Theory	183
4.8.3.2. The Evidence	184
4.8.4. Motivational Theory.....	184
4.8.4.1. Predictions for the Motivational Theory.....	185
4.8.4.2. The Evidence	187
4.8.4.3. Alternative Stance for Negative Programme-Induced Moods	190
4.8.5. Cognitive Capacity Theories	195
4.8.5.1. Predictions for Cognitive Capacity Theory.....	195
4.8.5.2. The Evidence	196
4.8.5.3. Alternative Rationale & Predictions.....	197
4.8.5.4. The Evidence for the Alternative.....	197
4.8.5.5. The Common Ground	198
4.8.5.6. The Resolution for Capacity Theory: Intensity not Valence	199
4.8.6. Capacity vs. Motivation: The Evidence & Verdict	200
4.9. Synthesis	203
4.10. Concluding Remarks	207
5 THE NEED FOR COGNITION & ADVERTISING IMPLICATIONS	
5.1. Preamble	208
5.2. The Need for Cognition Construct	209
5.2.1. Differences in Processing Preferences	210
5.2.2. Discriminating Between NFC & Intelligence	212
5.3. Relationship Between NFC & Persuasion	214
5.3.1. Individual Differences in Persuasive Response.....	215
5.3.2. Consequences of Processing Differences.....	217
5.4. Relationship of NFC to the Mood Literature	221
5.5. Implications for Advertising Effectiveness	223
5.5.1. Processing of Ad Content	223
5.5.2. Strength of Ensuing Brand Attitudes	227
5.5.3. Caveats to Advertising Response Patterns	229
5.6. The Impact on Humour Appeals	230
5.7. Remaining Issues for NFC	232
5.7.1. The Advertising Medium	232
5.7.2. The Advertised Product.....	233
5.7.3. The Creative Execution of the Humour Appeal	237
5.8. Media Planning	238
5.9. Concluding Remarks	239

Section III: The Primary Research

6	METHODOLOGY I: CONTENT ANALYSIS	
6.1.	Preamble	241
6.2.	Examination of American Media	244
6.3.	Content Analysis	246
6.4.	Sampling	248
6.5.	Categorisation & Coding Instructions	250
6.5.1.	Sponsored Television Programme	250
6.5.2.	Humour Appeals	251
6.5.3.	Hard & Soft Sell Executional Elements	253
6.5.4.	Product Classification	255
6.6.	Coding	259
6.7.	Results of the Content Analysis	261
6.7.1.	Assessment of Reliability	261
6.7.2.	Sample Representativeness	261
6.7.3.	Humour Types Usage	261
6.7.4.	Intentional Relatedness of Humour to Message	264
6.7.5.	Target of Humorous Content	264
6.7.6.	Placement of Humorous Content Within the Ad	267
6.7.7.	Humour Usage by Product Cell	267
6.7.8.	Ad Length	269
6.8.	Limitations of the Content Analysis	270
6.8.1.	Reliability Issues	270
6.8.2.	External Validity Considerations	271
6.8.3.	Internal Validity Matters	272
6.9.	Concluding Remarks	272
7	METHODOLOGY II: EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN	
7.1.	Preamble	275
7.2.	Research Objectives & Hypotheses	277
7.3.	Design	282
7.3.1.	Independent Variables	285
7.3.2.	Dependent Variables	285
7.3.3.	Product Cell Focus	286
7.3.4.	Use of Real Television Commercials	286
7.4.	Selection of the Experimental Ads	288
7.4.1.	Database of Television Ads	288
7.4.2.	Wearout Considerations	289
7.4.3.	The Ad Screening Process	290
7.4.3.1.	Identifying Potential Humorous Ads	293
7.4.3.2.	Identifying Potential Informational Ads	295
7.4.3.3.	Ad Length Considerations	296
7.4.3.4.	Brand Familiarity	296
7.4.3.5.	Product Class Condition	299
7.5.	Pre-Test of Ad Conditions	301
7.6.	The Final Experimental Pods	305
7.6.1.	Mundane Realism of the Pods	305
7.6.2.	Consistency Between Pod Conditions	306

7.7. Mood Condition 308

 7.7.1. Use of Television Segments 308

 7.7.2. Selection of Programme Genre 310

 7.7.3. Search Criteria & Selection of Documentaries 312

 7.7.3.1. The Positive Mood-Inducing Programme 313

 7.7.3.2. The Negative Mood-Inducing Programme 313

 7.7.4. Pre-Testing of Programmes 314

7.8. Experimental Test Conditions 314

7.9. Pre-Testing of Procedures 317

7.10. Participant Recruitment 317

7.11. Participant Sample 320

 7.11.1. Demographics of the Sample 321

7.12. Experimental Procedure 324

 7.12.1. Single Exposure Decisions 324

 7.12.2. Pre-Test/Post-Test Sessions 327

 7.12.3. Trial Sizes & Group Dynamics 327

 7.12.4. Cover Story 328

 7.12.5. Administration of Treatments 329

 7.12.5.1. Informed Consent 330

 7.12.5.2. Pre-Test 331

 7.12.5.3. Television Exposure & Post-Test 331

7.13. Debriefing 332

7.14. Qualitative Discussion 332

7.15. Questionnaires 333

 7.15.1. General Format 333

 7.15.2. Pre-Test Format 335

 7.15.2.1. Content Decisions 335

 7.15.2.2. Brand Interest Items 335

 7.15.2.3. Brand Attitude & Purchase Intention Measures 337

 7.15.2.4. Ordering Decisions 338

 7.15.2.5. Length Considerations & Product Involvement 339

 7.15.2.6. Length Considerations & Attitude Towards the Research 341

 7.15.2.7. Length Considerations & Scale Combinations 342

 7.15.3. Post-Test Format 343

 7.15.3.1. Mood State Design Check 343

 7.15.3.2. Positioning of the Mood Short Form 344

 7.15.3.3. Positioning of Programme-Related Items 344

 7.15.3.4. Other Design Checks 346

 7.15.3.5. Attitude Towards the Ad 348

 7.15.3.6. Need for Cognition 348

 7.15.3.7. Additional Filler Items & Open-Ended Questions 351

Section IV: Results & Conclusions

8 DATA ANALYSIS & FINDINGS	
8.1. Preamble	353
8.2. Checking the Design	353
8.2.1. Brand Familiarity Check.....	354
8.2.2. Prior Ad Exposure Check.....	356
8.2.3. Ad Type Check	357
8.2.4. Context-Induced Mood Check.....	360
8.3. Hypothesis Testing	363
8.3.1. Correlation between Attitude Measures	363
8.3.2. Recall of Ads	364
8.3.3. Ad Liking.....	365
8.3.4. Persuasiveness of the Ads	366
8.3.5. The Effect of Context-Induced Mood State	370
8.3.6. Results of the NFC & Prior Brand Attitude Data	373
8.3.7. Product Issues	381
8.4. Concluding Remarks	381
9 DISCUSSION	
9.1. Preamble	383
9.2. Abstraction of the Findings	383
9.2.1. Relationship Between Aad, Attb, & Pl.....	384
9.2.2. Humour Appreciation.....	385
9.2.3. Persuasive Consequences of Humour in Advertising.....	386
9.2.3.1. The Food Products	386
9.2.3.2. The Clothing Products	391
9.2.4. Mood State & The Programming Environment.....	394
9.2.5. The Effect of NFC on Advertising Response.....	403
9.2.6. The Effect of Prior Brand Attitude.....	406
9.3. Concluding Remarks	407
10 CONCLUSIONS	
10.1. Preamble	408
10.2. Implications of the Current Research	409
10.3. Limitations of the Research	417
10.3.1. Internal Validity Issues.....	417
10.3.2. External Validity Considerations	425
10.4. Proposals for Future Research	429
10.5. Contributions to Knowledge	432
10.5.1. Theoretical Contributions.....	432
10.5.2. Methodological Contributions.....	434
10.5.3. Managerial Contributions.....	435
10.6. Final Reflections	436

Section V: References

REFERENCES	438
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Section VI: Appendices

A Coding Form for Content Analysis	473
B Product Classes Used in Content Analysis	477
C Distributions of Content Analysis Sample	480
D Brand Familiarity Pilot Survey	482
E Ad Treatments Appraisal	489
F Sample Request for Participants	497
G Breakdown of Participant Sample by Course of Study	498
H Introductory Script for Experimental Sessions	500
I Informed Consent Form for Research Study	501
J Debriefing Form	503
K Pre-Test Questionnaire Sample	504
L Post-Test Questionnaire Sample	511
M Contents of the Video Appendix	525

List of Tables & Figures

2	THE HUMOUR CONSTRUCT: AN INTRODUCTION	
	Figure 2.1. M&M's: Example of Incongruity-Resolution	21
	Figure 2.2. Incongruity-Resolution Model	24
	Figure 2.3. Leventhal's Duel Process Model	28
	Figure 2.4. Crown Royal: Example of Comic Wit	52
	Figure 2.5. Bollé: Example of Sentimental Humour	54
	Figure 2.6. BT Cellnet: Example of Satire	56
	Figure 2.7. Killarney's: Example of Sentimental Comedy	58
	Figure 2.8. Absolut: Example of Full Comedy	60
3	THE EFFECTIVENESS OF HUMOUR IN ADVERTISING	
	Figure 3.1. The Elaboration Likelihood Model of Persuasion	71
	Table 3.1. The Impact of Humour on Attention	95
	Table 3.2. The Impact of Humour on Source Liking	96
	Table 3.3. The Impact of Humour on Source Credibility	97
	Table 3.4. The Impact of Humour on Comprehension	98
	Figure 3.2. Durex Condoms	102
4	MOOD EFFECTS ON PERSUASION & ADVERTISING IMPLICATIONS	
	Table 4.1. Summary Table of Mood Theories	157
5	THE NEED FOR COGNITION & ADVERTISING IMPLICATIONS	
	Figure 5.1. Appeal Effectiveness by Involvement	237
6	METHODOLOGY I: CONTENT ANALYSIS	
	Table 6.1. Sampled Time Slots	249
	Table 6.2. Programme Classification	252
	Table 6.3. Execution Styles	253
	Figure 6.1. Humour Type Usage	262
	Figure 6.2. Target of Humour in Sample	265
	Figure 6.3. Placement of Humour	267
	Figure 6.4. Use of Humour Appeals by Product Cell	268
	Table 6.4. Distribution of Humour Use by Product Dimensions	269
	Figure 6.5. Ad Lengths of Sample	270
7	METHODOLOGY II: EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN	
	Figure 7.1. Tactical Considerations for Humour in Advertising	276
	Table 7.1. Test Products Selected	301
	Table 7.2. Ad Comparison Example	304
	Table 7.3. Ad Pod Conditions	306
	Figure 7.2. Preliminary Brand Familiarity Data	307
	Table 7.4. Experimental Conditions	316
	Figure 7.3. Sample by Assigned Condition	321
	Figure 7.4. Sample by Institution & Department	322
	Figure 7.5. Academic Departments Sampled	323
	Figure 7.6. Experimental Sample by State of Origin	325

8 DATA ANALYSIS & FINDINGS	
Table 8.1. Participant Familiarity with Brands.....	355
Figure 8.1. Average Brand Familiarity	355
Table 8.2. Previous Exposure to Test Ads	357
Table 8.3. Perceived Humorousness of Ads.....	359
Table 8.4. Regression for Humour Perception Statistics	359
Figure 8.2. Mean Perceived Humour Ratings	360
Table 8.5. Two Sample t-Tests Between Mood Conditions.....	362
Figure 8.3. Mean Mood Ratings by Condition	362
Table 8.6. Correlation between Measures	364
Table 8.7. Analysis of Ad Recall.....	365
Table 8.8. Analysis of Aad.....	366
Figure 8.4. Mean Aad Ratings.....	366
Table 8.9. Analysis of Brand Attitude Data	367
Table 8.10. Analysis of Purchase Intention Data.....	368
Table 8.11. Analysis of Brand Interest Data	369
Table 8.12. Effect of Mood State on Attitudes	371
Table 8.13. Effect of Mood State on Intentions.....	372
Table 8.14. Effect of Mood State on Brand Interest.....	373
Table 8.15. Regression for Attitude Towards the Ad	376
Table 8.16. Regression for Brand Attitude Change.....	378
Table 8.17. Regression for Purchase Intention Change	379
Table 8.18. Regression for Brand Interest Change	380
Table 8.19. Summary Table of Hypotheses	382
9 DISCUSSION	
Table 9.1. Correlation Between Attitude Measures	385
Table 9.2. Aad Across the Mood Conditions.....	399
10 CONCLUSIONS	
Table 10.1. Attitude Towards the Test Programme	419

Section I

Backdrop to the Study

Chapter One

An Introduction

1.1. PLANET PROMOTIONS

As consumers, we are bombarded with advertising. Promotional messages can be found in the least likely of places, becoming so commonplace that a break in this thesis to plug the sponsors would probably be unsurprising. Advertising is deeply ingrained into all modern cultures, serving as both the offspring and architect of needs and desires. It creates as much as it validates consumers' unremitting wish lists. Whether it is accepted that it reinforces or reinvents functional as well as psychosocial needs, one thing for certain is that advertising is here (and there) and it is here to stay:

"Look anywhere: in schools there is Channel One; in movies there is product placement; ads are in urinals, played on telephone hold, in alphanumeric displays in taxis, sent unannounced to fax machines, inside catalogs, on the video in front of the Stairmaster at the gym, on T-shirts, at the doctor's office, on grocery carts, on parking meters, on tees at golf holes, on inner-city basketball backboards, piped in along with Muzak...ad nauseam (and yes, even on airline vomit bags)" (Twitchell, 1996, 68-69).

This is not inevitably a bad thing. While the conventional attitude towards advertising is not always favourable, it need not be an interminable and unrelenting monotone of tormenting selling points that sometimes are not true, and more often do not matter. Rather, modern ads are capable of entertaining without even a mention of product attributes or a plea for buyer behaviour.

1.2. LAND OF THE RISING PUN

With an increase in ad clutter, advertisers are constantly challenged to generate better creative executions to help their brands break through all the *noise* in the promotional environment. Consumers can only attend to so many messages, and thus in a world where they are overworked and forced to concentrate on so many mundane stimuli, they are more likely to be moved in their free time by what is interesting or entertaining. One approach that has become popular is the incorporation of humour with the promotional message. In general, people enjoy laughing and this has become a popular means of grabbing consumers' attention and standing out in the promotional environment. Regardless of the product class, about half of all television ads may incorporate some form of humour, at least in commercials in the United States (Burnett, Fisk, & Lunsford, 1987). Research has suggested that the figures are even higher in the United Kingdom (Donnelly III, 1999; Weinberger & Spotts, 1989a; Weinberger & Spotts, 1989b; Weinberger & Spotts, 1993). Clearly, this has become one of the most popular appeals used in advertising.

In the year 2000, world advertising agency billings were estimated to have reached about US\$260 billion ("Agency report", 2001). This is an astonishing figure, comparable to approximately half the annual federal budget of the United Kingdom (see www.treasury.gov.uk). Considering the proportion of ads that use humour, it does not take a mathematician to grasp the scale of the investments pinned on the hope that consumers are buying into comedy.

1.3. CURRENT RESEARCH ON HUMOUR IN ADVERTISING

Despite the amount of capital that is funding such appeals and the number of sellers that use them, the effectiveness of humour in advertising is not very well understood and certainly not universally endorsed. With such a grand scale of faith and finance invested into joke sponsoring, greater empirical investigation, which may help to increase the success rate of this appeal, is undoubtedly warranted. Some areas of research have been conclusive. Humour appeals do tend to be superior in drawing consumers' attention, and generating liking for the ad and the source. However, there is a great deal of disagreement regarding its impact on message comprehension, source credibility and most importantly, persuasion (Weinberger & Gulas, 1992).

Undoubtedly persuasion is the ultimate goal for the advertiser, because this is what results in sales. Marketing is about selling, and for an initial sale or a repeat purchase, either attitudinal or behavioural persuasion is a necessity. However, all other communication objectives, such as attention and ad liking, feed into this process. The disagreements that have arisen are no doubt partly to do with the subjective nature of humour. Individual differences in consumers, along with differences in the advertiser's execution of humour are important mediators of its likely ability to sell a product.

A number of factors are known to affect the capacity of humour appeals to persuade effectively. These include executional variables, such as the product class advertised (see Spotts, Weinberger, & Parsons, 1997), the medium used (see Weinberger, Spotts, Campbell, & Parsons, 1995), and the integration of the appeal with the message (see Ziv, 1988). Even the type of humour used has been cited as a potential executional

variable of significance (see Speck, 1991). Several audience variables also regulate the likely response to a humorous appeal, including prior attitude to the advertised product (Chattopadhyay & Basu, 1990). However, the likelihood of success with regard to humour appeals may also stem from the consumer's incentive to learn about the product and attend to the ad. Consequently, an important model that incorporates this motivational feature of consumer behaviour will be introduced in the next section.

1.4. AD PROCESSING & MOTIVATION

According to the Elaboration Likelihood Model, how individuals are influenced by persuasive stimuli is largely a function of the extent to which they process incoming information. This is affected by both their ability and motivation to process information (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986a). In advertising, motivation is commonly the x-factor. This is partially because many consumers are ambivalent towards the institution of advertising. Mittal (1994) found that as many as a third of consumers consider advertising inconsequential and even unnecessary. Clearly, advertisers are frequently at the disadvantage of struggling to make themselves heard by a sceptical if not unwilling audience. Additionally, consumers are exposed to more promotional messages than ever before, with the average American showered with approximately 1600 advertising messages per day ("Overview", 1993). Due to regular contact with a virtually continuous supply of advertisements, consumers demand that processing attention be earned by the advertiser.

By and large, motivation to process the ad is based on involvement with the product (see Andrews & Shimp, 1990; Miniard, Dickson, & Lord, 1988). However, advertisers of most products do not always have the luxury of relying on a high

product involvement from an eagerly attending consumer. “At any given time relatively few consumers are in the market for a particular product, so much of the advertising consumers are exposed to every day is not particularly relevant to their end goals and values” (Peter & Olson, 1996; 557). The assumption then is that for most mass media advertising, consumers do not actively attend to the message. Peter and Olson back up this contention with day-after recall data, which demonstrate that most ads are only recollected by about 20% of its exposure audience.

However, this does not mean that advertising is incapable of persuading under most circumstances. As some have advised, to be successful advertising must either inform the consumer or transform the product use experience (Puto & Wells, 1984). The transformational approach is recommended when the product serves an indulgent or expressive (i.e.: image-based) need and/or when processing motivation is low. It is when both of these conditions are met that humour appeals appear to thrive. Through this transformational strategy, consumers need not be overly focused on the product-related content. Rather, the positive feeling associated with the humour can be directly associated with the brand. In such cases, elements such as ad liking are more important than strong product attribute information (Biel & Bridgewater, 1990). This approach to advertising has led some consumers to concede that at times they enjoy the commercials even more than the programmes (Mittal, 1994).

1.5. CONTEXT FACTORS & MOOD STATE DURING EXPOSURE

Similarly to product involvement, other variables will have an impact on a consumer’s motivation to process information effortfully, which ultimately may moderate the persuasive potency of humour appeals. In television advertising

especially, the context may be a crucial moderator of advertising effectiveness. The only reason that consumers are even exposed to a television ad in the first place is because they are watching some type of programme. The primary motivation of the audience for attending to this medium rests with the programme. Their involvement with the television show during ad exposure is likely to be high. These programmes are often emotionally stimulating, and given the potential involvement with the show, the affective impact on the consumer can be significant.

Especially in the case of affectively appealing ads, such as those that use humour, the residual effects of the mood generated by the programme may mediate the efficacy of the ads. If a 30-second ad slot can generate a lasting affective response, then preceding experiences, including their exposure to an emotionally stimulating programme, may also influence the ad response. Some researchers have suggested that neglecting the programme context in advertising research degrades the ecological validity of the findings (Park & McClung, 1986). Specifically, disparate mood states affect the amount and type of information that people use to process incoming messages. Consequently, such context-induced mood states may have an impact on the types of ad appeals that consumers find engaging and persuasive.

1.6. NEED FOR COGNITION

An additional mediating factor of processing motivation is simply an intrinsic personality trait. This is the strength of individuals' *need for cognition* (NFC), which is their propensity towards analytical thinking. Some individuals have an affinity for critical thinking tasks, while others prefer to avoid such analysis, favouring the outcome over the process of thinking (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982). The implication for

advertising response is that consumers varying along this individual difference are likely to be agreeable to different types of persuasive strategies. Those with a high NFC may prefer issue-relevant, product attribute information when making purchase decisions, while others prefer to make decisions more effortlessly (see Haugtvedt, Petty, & Cacioppo, 1992). Low NFC consumers should therefore be more amenable to humour and other affective appeals, unless their product involvement is high enough to boost processing motivation.

1.7. THE RESEARCH QUESTION & RELEVANT DESIGN

In this current research, the effectiveness of humour in advertising is the subject of investigation. Due to its prominence in the advertising media, a better understanding is needed of contextual effects and the impact of individual differences in consumers. With greater insight into the nature of this appeal and the variables that may influence response to it, more informed creative execution decisions in advertising can be made. This, in turn, may enhance advertising effectiveness in general. Through an examination of the existing literature, the question that has been raised is whether the persuasiveness of humour in advertising is influenced by the type of humour employed, the mood of the audience, and their individual NFC.

The television medium was the focus of the research not least because this is where the majority of ad expenditures are allocated. Additionally, the television medium is where humour appeals are the most frequently placed (Weinberger & Spotts, 1993). The study was set in the United States because it is an icon of consumer culture. The 1600 advertising messages to which Americans are exposed each day are a testament to this.

An experimental design was employed for the primary investigation. This was the best design to meet the objectives of this empirical enquiry for a number of reasons. This study is predominantly an inquisition into causality, intended to reveal a variety of factors that may influence advertising success. Subsequently, an experimental design was employed partly because this is the best method for addressing issues of causality in social research. An additional advantage to an experimental method is that data collection may be executed without revealing the full intent of the research to participants. This permits the elicitation of more accurate and natural responses. Moreover, if people are sometimes unaware of these effects, how could they accurately report such an effect through a design that involved a simple survey or a focus group? Furthermore, the dynamic temperament of the marketplace precludes a valid study conducted in a naturalistic context. Control was essential to be sure that the research was actually examining what it purported to assess. An experimental approach was clearly the best design for these research questions. Nevertheless, a qualitative element was also included in the data collection to supplement the quantitative data with some explanatory power where applicable.

1.8. STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The remainder of this thesis is divided into nine additional chapters in three sections. The next section will include four chapters of literature review. Prior to the application of humour appeals in advertising, the construct of humour needs to be defined and clarified. What exactly humour is and its social purposes are the subjects of Chapter Two. The primary theories that account for humour elicitation and what makes something funny will be reviewed within the major realms of cognitive, affective, and interpersonal theories. Finally, Speck's (1991) Humorous Message

Taxonomy will be introduced. This is a classification system that bases humour types on underlying processes and will be used as a framework throughout the thesis.

Chapter Three will examine the advertising context. First, discussion will focus generally upon persuasive responses to communications, including advertising. This will be accomplished in the context of the Elaboration Likelihood Model of Persuasion (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986a), which focuses upon two distinct means of persuasion and conditions under which each one is optimal. The remainder of the chapter will scrutinise humour appeals in advertising. The primary theoretical roles that humour plays in advertising will be investigated. While persuasion in advertising is always part of the big picture, initially the focus is on the proficiency of humour appeals in meeting incremental communication goals. Specifically, such goals include attention to the message, liking for the ad and source, comprehension and recall of ad content, and perceived credibility of the advertiser. The ability of humour to facilitate persuasion will be directly investigated and the primary executional and audience-related mediators will be discussed.

Chapters Four and Five will provide evidence for the two additional moderators investigated in this research. Both variables are likely to affect how an individual processes information, and thus they may influence reactions to a humorous ad appeal. In Chapter Four, the context in which the ad is shown is considered. Television advertising is shown during affectively stimulating programmes, which may affect persuasive response to commercials. The main theories of mood effects on information processing will be reviewed and applied to this very applicable context.

In Chapter Five, NFC will be examined. This is a personality trait that may shape consumers' responses to various types of ads.

The section that follows will review the empirical research conducted for this current project. Prior to the main study, an examination was conducted of television advertising in the United States, to ensure that the central study was designed around typical advertising practices. Specifically, a content analysis was carried out on American TV advertising, so that an externally valid experimental study could be designed around realistic American advertising. All steps of this content analysis, including the results will be detailed in Chapter Six. Chapter Seven is devoted to the primary experimental research. The main research objectives will be detailed and the methodological decisions will be defended. All stages of the design of the study will be presented, along with the recruitment of participants and the experimental procedures.

Section Four is where the results will be revealed. In Chapter Eight, the statistical analysis of the data will be reviewed. The methods chosen will be described and the results of the analysis exposed. Chapter Nine will include a discussion of these findings. The results of this study will be teased out, and tied back into the literature. Finally, in Chapter Ten, the contributions to current advertising and consumer behaviour theory will be made explicit through the conclusions that are drawn. Of course, the limitations of this study will be discussed, as well as the implications for marketing strategy.

Section II

Review of the Literature

Chapter Two

The Humour Construct: An Introduction

“Laughter is part of the human survival kit.” - David Nathan

“Show me a person who doesn't like to laugh and I'll show you a person with a toe tag.” - Julia Roberts

2.1. PREAMBLE

Prior to examining the effect that humour appeals can have on consumers in an advertising context, it is first necessary to explore the concept of humour more generally. Humour is a deeply entrenched and critically important component of all known cultures. It plays a very valuable role in interpersonal relations and can fulfil several prominent roles in society. So important is humour to our civilisation that some of the most eminent scholars in all of history have studied and theorised about the concept. This distinguished list includes Aristotle, Bateson, Bergson, Freud, Hobbes, Kierkegaard, Koestler, Plato, and Spencer (O'Sullivan & Kavanagh, 1999). There are members of our civilisations, such as comedians and clowns, whose chief function is to create amusement and mirth. However, what is the specific importance of humour, and what makes something funny? What makes irony, satire, jokes, puns, and silliness comical? These are important issues to address prior to scrutinising the specific goals that humour appeals can be expected to meet in advertising.

As a result, this chapter will focus on the social significance of humour and theories of humour elicitation. By *elicitation*, what is meant is exactly what is it about humorous discourses, which makes the recipient laugh, gives them amusement, or otherwise allows them to *get the joke*? Initially, humour will be examined from a social standpoint. This will include the significance and purpose of humour in society. Following this, specific theories of humour will be examined. One of the main problems is that so many theories on humour have been put forth and there is no agreement as to what qualifies as humour and what is actually funny. While historically there have been many diverse theories on humour elicitation and classification, it will be argued that many were looking at specific instances of amusement and humour, rather than looking at more exhaustive taxonomies based on humour processes. The three basic perspectives on humour appreciation consist of cognitive, affective, and interpersonal theories.

The chapter will conclude with a look at Speck's (1991) Humorous Message Taxonomy. His various humour types are built through the combination of three humour processes, which coincide with these three main viewpoints. As will be illustrated, his classification system is based entirely upon these underlying humorous processes, rather than the more shallow themes that arise in humorous discourse. It will be contended that many of the historical theories (some of which are extremely dated) can all be encompassed within and accounted for by Speck's classification system.

2.2. SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF HUMOUR

Humour is deep-rooted into every facet of our social structure. “People crave it desperately and lavishly reward humorists, comedians, jokesters, and clowns. It is all pervasive; we don't know of any culture where people do not have a sense of humor [sic]¹, and in contemporary societies it is found everywhere- in film, on television, in books and newspapers, in our conversations, and in graffiti” (Berger, 1987; 6). On the other hand, even though it is known to be so universal, Berger and others (see Fugate, 1998) have acknowledged the difficulty in actually defining the concept. Rather, most focus upon what makes something funny and why people laugh at humorous material. This chapter largely focuses upon this aspect of humour, along with the construction of humorous discourses, and the social functions that it serves. However, what can be said is that the *sense of humour* has been identified as a multidimensional construct, consisting of not only an appreciation of humour and an ability to recognise it, but a general sense of playfulness, the ability to produce it and use it to reach social goals (Thorson & Powell, 1991).

One aspect of humorous laughter that does seem obvious is that it tends to be a social phenomenon (Hertzler, 1970). It has been shown in studies within group settings that a variety of interpersonal and relational variables can affect the amount that participants smile and laugh when presented with humorous materials. Such factors include how much partners look at one another, how close in proximity they are to one another, how familiar people are to one another and whether they are friends, the extent to which the other partner(s) laugh or smile, whether the partner can also attend

¹ A great deal of the literature in this thesis comes from American sources, where English spelling varies significantly from the United Kingdom. Throughout this work, where direct quotations have come from a US source, the original spellings have been retained to preserve the integrity of the quotes.

to the humour, etc. (Chapman, 1983). The social ingredient to humour is evident in the fact that what we deem as *funny* is culturally determined. Funniness is determined through a subjective process by which the receiver, with the aid of humour cues in the stimulus, makes a subjective judgement on the material. This is a culturally determined process in that what is and is not labelled as funny by the receiver is learned in the social environment (Zillman & Bryant, 1980)

On sporadic occasions, laughter may occur when we are alone, leading some to suggest that the social feature of humour has been overstated (Berlyne, 1972). People may be thinking back to comical occurrences involving others, or when engaged with some form of amusing discourse such as books or television. However, even in such circumstances, laughter occurs as if others are actually present. There is a psychological presence even under these solitary circumstances that eclipses the physical isolation, which is why laughter is considered a social reaction (Chapman, 1983). The social nature of laughter is no more readily apparent than in situation comedies, where the producers often insert canned laughter to leave the illusion of a live audience celebrating the mirth. Even when this has obviously been done, it diverts the isolated spectators' attention away from the realisation that their amusement was expressed in solitude. A social contagion effect is realised and the merriment is thus stronger.

Humour also serves many social functions within society. Humour helps to establish community by defining group confines and allowing in-group members to convey their status as a clued in member of the group outlook (Fine, 1983b). Certainly the

subject of humour as well as the responsiveness to it is modified according to how one defines their in-group boundaries at that moment. For example, enjoyment of sexist humour tends to be limited to jokes where the target of the joke is of the opposite gender (Chapman & Gadfield, 1976).

Nowhere is this fact more apparent than in the United States, where the melting pot of cultures has made for several overlapping in-group boundaries. At any one time, depending on how the conveyor wishes to define their group at that moment (which of course depends on their goal), humour may be targeted at a cross-state rival city, a different socio-economic class, a different race or religion; or a north-south partition may be made, an east coast-west coast rivalry; groups may be divided by national heritage, political faction or even jokes targeting other nationalities if the in-group is defined as the entire nation. For example, when the salient outlook is a local sporting event, residents from Pittsburgh and Philadelphia may disparage one another, defining their group boundaries through the state of Pennsylvania. At other times, they may consider themselves part of the same in-group with a communal understanding displayed through humour appreciation when the topic switches to a disparagement of the southern way of life. However, even those from below the Mason-Dixon Line are considered part of the in-group during the Olympic Games, when the salient humorous themes take on a more nationalistic appeal.

Humour can serve a variety of additional social functions that go a step beyond the simple highlighting of group boundaries. For instance, a joke targeted at an out-group may increase morale and foster group unity by nurturing and directing socially acceptable and seemingly passive aggression towards those foreign to the group

(Chapman, 1983). Groups are motivated to remain unified when threatened by outside forces that attempt to dismantle or otherwise aggress against it. Having a collective sense of humour is a means to cultivate group cohesion to respond to such pressures (Fine, 1983b), especially when it is directed outward. When directed inward at group members, the same effect is realised, because disparaging humour breeds harmony through the realisation that laughing at one another's idiosyncrasies is indicative of a trusting group rapport. Demonstrating a collective sense of humour also validates to the group that they are close knit because they evidently have a shared viewpoint and impart similar social standards and moral principles (Davies, 1982).

Furthermore, humour can be used in social settings as a signal that the group is having a good time. Likewise, it can also be utilised as a gauge to ensure that there is equal social status between participating parties. The capacity to use derogatory humour on one another is indicative of parity in the social hierarchy between participants and substitutes as an expression of intimacy by talking about subjects that would be forbidden in more formal relationships (Fine, 1983b). Humour is also used in a strategic utilitarian capacity to serve as a medium in which to communicate sexual desire between people. By communicating indirectly through sexual humour, the interested party can estimate the receiver's interest without risking candid rejection (Fine, 1983b). A positive retort through laughter may be indicative of a willing party, while a negative response allows the sender to save face as a blunt rejection is averred.

Humour also can serve as a channel in which to create social conflict and wield social control over people. By employing such deprecating forms of humour such as satire, caricature, parody, irony, sarcasm, and burlesque, aggression can be tactfully exerted to segregate the in-group from an unwanted out-group. Concurrently, hostility can be bred in the exiled group through such antagonistic jesting, further escalating the initiated conflict (Davies, 1982). Social control, similarly, is maintained over an in-group by punishing unwanted behaviour through ridicule. It is a behavioural shaping method that forces the group to accept norms and renounce what the group considers to be deviant behaviour. Friends often engage in playful *ribbing*, which exposes their expectations for one another without being blatantly punitive (Fine, 1983a). This effect is evident when the group mocks the friend who does not wish to go out with them on the weekend in a masked attempt to get them to change their mind.

Social control can also be maintained through jesting discourse in more formal relationships. Because social protocol mandates that disparaging humour in less casual relationships only be directed down the status hierarchy (see Chapman, 1983), the public expression of such denigration allows the communicator to assert and restate their dominance in the pecking order. While there are many other social functions of humour, they depend on the type of humour that is exercised and the accepted theory of how a humorous response is elicited in the first place. At this point in the discussion, it would be useful to describe the various theories and then address the social functions of humour that are applicable to the various forms of humour.

2.3. THEORIES OF HUMOUR ELICITATION

There are many classifications of humour, depending on how the construct is conceptualised. Too frequently, theorists have focused on the themes in the humour rather than the mechanism that causes the amusement response. This had led to a multitude of disjointed, overlapping theories that are neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive. By examining the underlying mechanisms that initiate the elicitation of a humorous response, a more firm foundation can be developed to classify humour and examine its effectiveness within persuasive discourse. Along with examining this modern conceptualisation of humour mechanisms, the more context-specific theories will be explained within their relevant mechanistic theory. This will include a discussion of cognitive, affective, and interpersonal theories of humour elicitation. Again the term humour *elicitation* refers to the means by which humorous stimuli provoke a mirthful reaction. Finally, the discussion will conclude with an analysis of Speck's (1991) Humorous Message Taxonomy, which is an exhaustive and mutually exclusive classification system in which to classify forms of humour by the elicitation mechanisms. As will be reasoned in this thesis, this system is useful for analysing the effectiveness of humour in meeting various communication objectives.

Theories of humour elicitation can essentially be broken down into three categories, based on the underlying process. These basic groupings for humour theories are cognitive, affective, and social or interpersonal perspectives, which correspond with Speck's (1991) three humour mechanisms. Each will be discussed in turn. Several other older and narrower thematic theories of humour fall within these broader categories. All such thematic, superficial theories will be introduced within the context of the more comprehensive humour mechanisms.

2.3.1. Cognitive Theories

Cognitive theories of humour elicitation focus on the incongruity of conditions or circumstances and the cognitive activity performed in such situations to successfully decode the incongruity. The main mechanism involved in cognitive theories is *incongruity-resolution*, although this class also includes *incongruity without resolution*, surprise, and *cognitive mastery* theories. This mechanism underscores the process and structure of humour, transcending beyond mere thematic substance (Herzog & Larwin, 1988). In other words, it depicts a process that is the determinant as to why something is perceived as funny, rather than focusing on the content of the joke, pun, or other humorous discourse. Incongruity-resolution is the basic building block on which nearly all humour is built (Cho, 1995), and thus the crux of the discussion will be on this mechanism. However, these other variants will also be analysed.

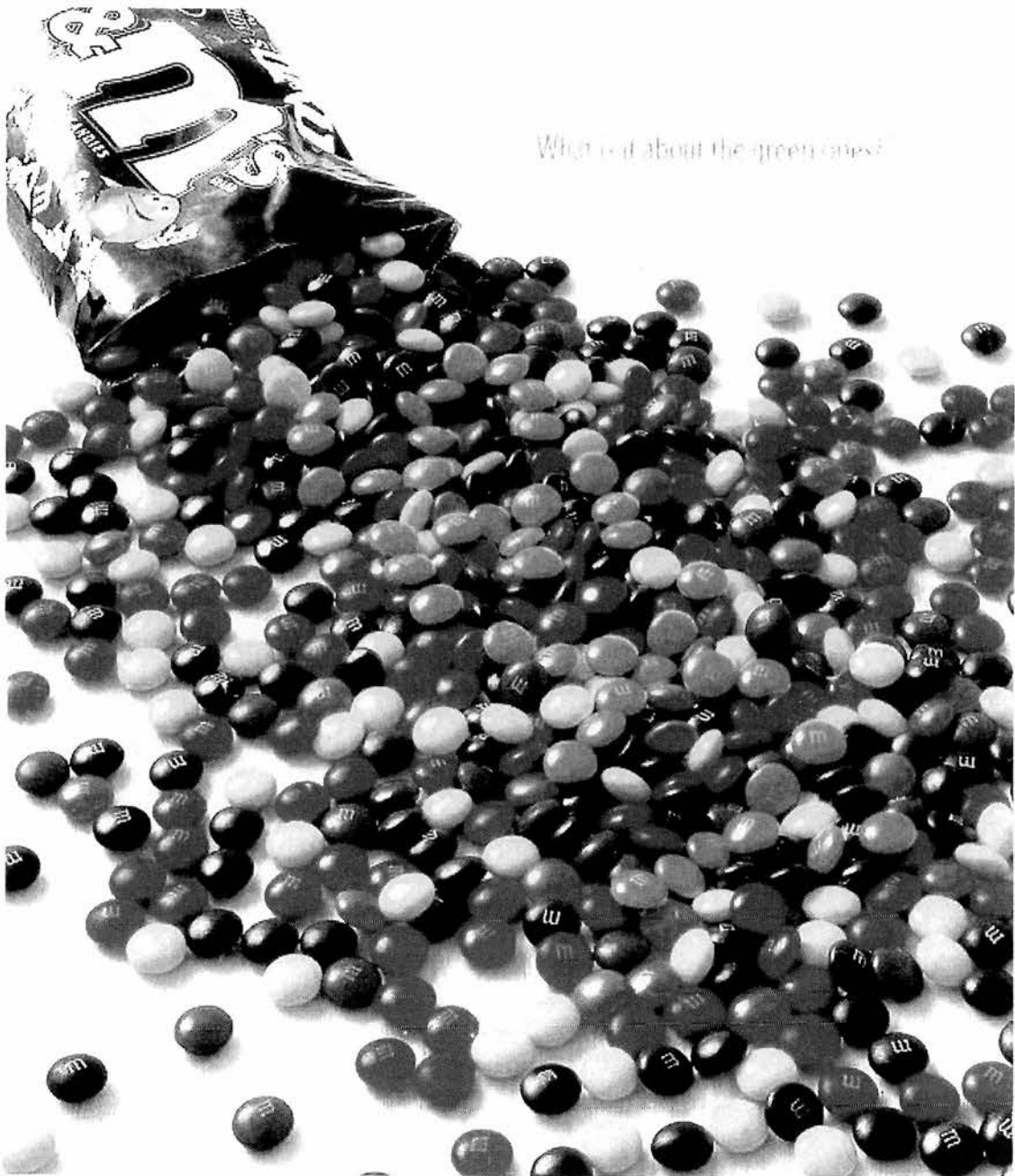
2.3.1.1. The Incongruity-Resolution Mechanism

In incongruity-resolution theory, humour is viewed as a two-step process. Incongruity occurs when two or more stimuli or elements are presented and cannot be integrated during processing within a single mental schema or conceptual framework. In other words, multiple elements are presented and the receiver does not understand how these components relate, interact, compare, or otherwise tie together. Furthermore, incongruity can arise when the entire scenario presented does not conform to the receiver's expectations (see Wicker, Barron, & Willis, 1980). What is presented is an unconfirmed expectation that has yet to be resolved (Wicker, Thorelli, Barron, & Ponder, 1981). The result is confusion, perceptual contrast, and disruption all inferred as playful or with humorous intent (see Suls, 1983).

Resolution is the second phase whereby the incongruous elements are reprocessed and integrated into a similar framework whereby the elements can be compared, related to one another, and tied together. The resolution immediately follows the *punch line* of the joke (Berger, 1987) where the elements are reintegrated and discovery of meaning occurs between the expectation and the realisation (see Speck, 1991; Suls, 1983). This is when the audience utilises problem-solving behaviour and searches for a cognitive rule that allows the punch line to bridge the incongruous elements previously presented (Suls, 1972). Incongruity can be thought of as a *surprise* element, whereas resolution is the cognitive *fit* (Mindess, 1971). It allows the receiver to explain or make sense of the joke and appears to be a crucial part of humour appreciation (Wicker et al., 1980). “In the case of jokes, it is the surprise element in the punch line- in terms of both timing and subject matter- that is of concern. The punch line generates a surprise, and an incongruous situation leads (in good jokes that is) to laughter or some kind of humorous response” (Berger, 1987; 8).

An example of this process can be demonstrated in Figure 2.1. When reading the tagline, “What is it about the green ones?” the viewer is presented with an incongruity, which causes confusion that is manifest by the lack of apparent relationship between this line and a picture of the M&M’s haphazardly strewn across the table. However, this incongruity can be resolved as new meaning is attached to the ad when told to look more closely at the green M&M’s and read the word that they spell out. Viewers should now feel amusement at having bridged the incongruous elements of picture and text, and appreciated the obvious absurdity that the green coloured chocolates are somehow linked to this positive attribute. This of

Figure 2.1 M&M's: Example of Incongruity-Resolution



course, is an incongruity in itself, resolved by the realisation that it is an insincere, playful testimonial.

Raskin (1985) further teased out the types of incongruity contrasts that can generate a humorous response, including existing/non-existing, expected/unexpected, and possible/ impossible cognitive contrasts. Expected/unexpected contrasts are the most commonly found, which largely account for the surprise element of humour (Alden, Mukherjee, & Hoyer, 2000), although the other two can be used when there is some element of fantasy included in the content. While all of these contrasts have been found in humorous advertising appeals (Alden, Hoyer, & Lee, 1993), there is considerable overlap between these categories and as a result, they really are not of practical use in segregating different variants of the same type of humour mechanism.

Evidence that incongruity-resolution is the primary mechanism in most forms of humour comes from the fact that most jokes lose much of their comedic value when presented a second time (Kuhlman, 1985) (and subsequent times), as the important surprise element begins to wear out. Further support for incongruity-resolution and the importance of surprise is provided by the point that explaining a joke dissipates its comedic effect (Rothbart, 1976; Suls, 1983). Comprehension must be an impulsive, unprompted response for the resolution to generate a humorous reaction. This point should be evident from the example above, in which the spontaneous problem-solving feature was removed by explaining the ad in advance of presenting it, no doubt diminishing some of its humorous potential.

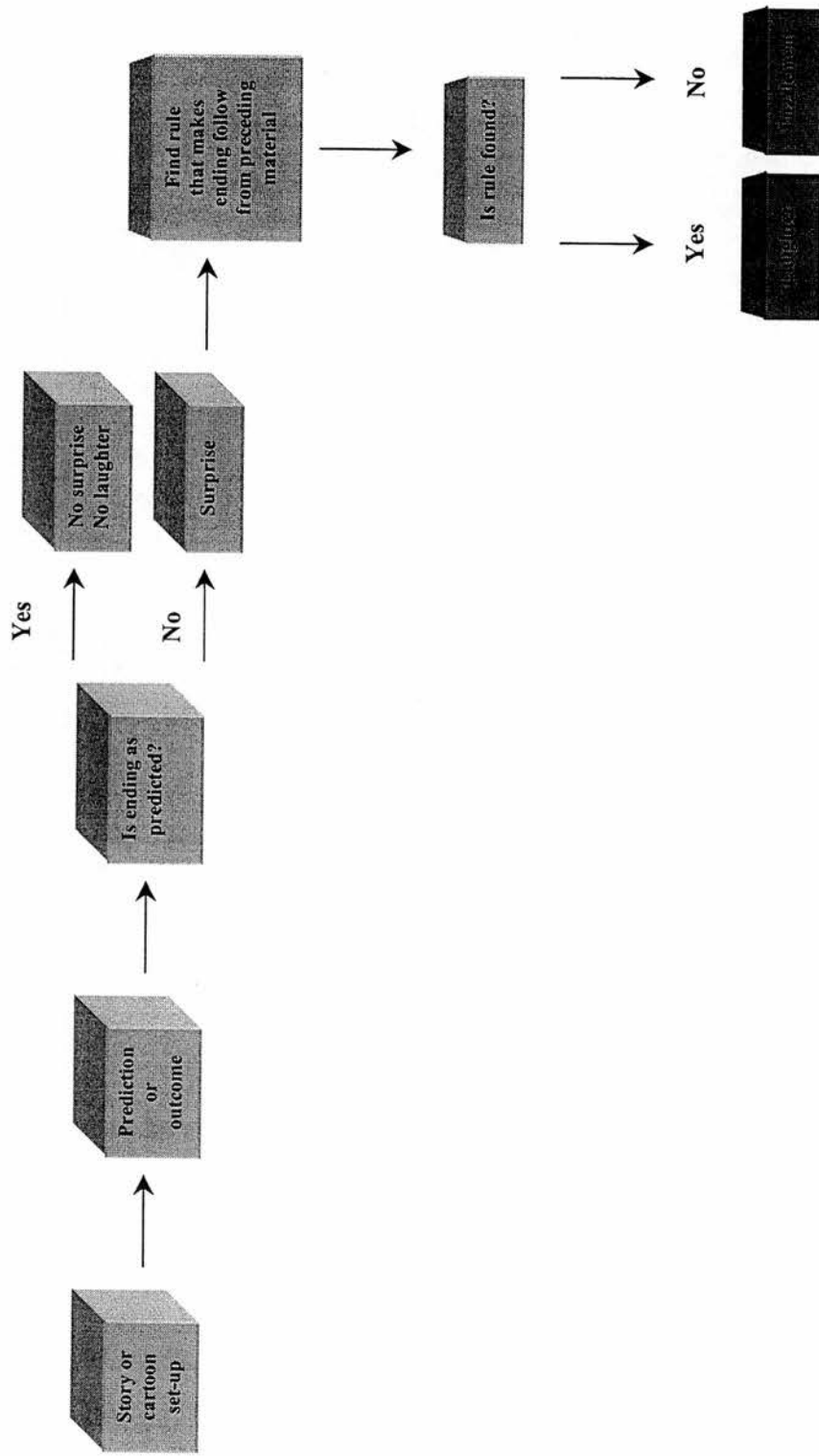
Incongruity-resolution (see Figure 2.2) appears to be the primary mechanism in most forms of humour appreciation (Pollio, 1983; Speck, 1991; Wicker et al., 1981). The most straightforward instance would be a pun, where two typically distinct planes of semantic meaning are concurrently applied to the same information or experience (Wyer & Collins, 1992). Such an example would be, *atheism is a nonprophet organisation*. However, in most instances, the disparate planes of thought or meaning that are juxtaposed often involve much more multifaceted schemata or schools of thought. Take for instance the following joke:

A blind man walks into a shop with his guide dog. Walking directly into the centre of the shop floor, he casually picks up the dog and starts to swing the poor creature around his head. The shop clerk, noticing a flying dog in his store, curiously inquires into the man's actions. "What on earth are you doing?" exclaims the clerk, to which the blind man replies, "I'm just having a look around."

The incongruity presented in this odd scenario is resolved when the schema of how sighted versus blind people navigate their way through the world is applied to the incomparable situation of browsing in a store. However, it relates multiple scripts in a more complex fashion than the typical pun. This process underlies most forms of humour (puns, punch lines, comic reversals, humorous comparisons, comic irony, understatements, exaggerations, etc.) in which this form of information processing is used to *get the joke*. While some theorists have claimed that incongruity is the only necessary element in the sequence (see Nerhardt, 1976; Rothbart, 1976), most evidence supports the belief that resolution is an equally critical stage in the process. Without the resolution, only confusion and frustration result. Together, the cognitive dissonance and schematic resolution combine to form this most common and primarily cognitive humour process.

Figure 2.2

Incongruity-Resolution Model



Source: Suls, J. M. (1972). A two-stage model for the appreciation of jokes and cartoons: An information-processing analysis. In J. H. Goldstein & P. E. McGhee (Eds.), *The Psychology of Humor: Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Issues* (pp. 81-100). New York, NY: Academic Press.

2.3.1.2. The Cognitive Congruency Principle

One of the mediators of the humour response according to the cognitive perspective is what is known as the *cognitive congruency principle*. This supposition views the humorous response along a parabolic continuum dependent upon the cognitive effort necessary to decode the incongruity. Humour appreciation, according to this tenet, should increase as the cognitive effort required to resolve the incongruity increases. This is because greater satisfaction is derived from comprehending and working out the cognitive puzzle contained in the joke. This is true as the material goes from easy to moderate in cognitive difficulty. Without a minimal amount of incongruity, information processing will not be diverted enough from its natural plane. As a result, the joke is predictable and very little gratification and amusement are experienced through resolving the problem (Wyer & Collins, 1992). This is why many puns, such as, *raising rabbits is a hare-brained scheme*, are not perceived as particularly funny. However, there is a threshold level for the cognitive challenge beyond which humour appreciation is reduced. Once the challenge becomes too great, curiosity, anxiety, and finally apathy overwhelm the audience, distracting from appropriate resolution (Kuhlman, 1985). The cognitive congruency principle states that appreciation of humour is optimal at moderate levels of cognitive difficulty (McGhee, 1976; see also Cho, 1995; Meyers-Levy & Tybout, 1989).

2.3.1.3. Cognitive Mastery Theory

Closely amalgamated to incongruity-resolution processes is cognitive mastery theory. Proponents of this theory claim that the satisfaction gained from comedy comes from the comprehension of the amusing material. Personal pleasure is achieved, according to this theory, by way of successful navigation through the cognitive puzzle presented

in the humorous scenario (McGhee, 1974). It is the resolution of problems or paradoxes of logic that gives the joke receiver pleasure (Berger, 1987).

While this provides a strong explanation behind the precise reasoning why incongruity-resolution mechanisms cause laughter or mirth, it in itself does not really offer anything new in terms of a complete theory of humour. This theory is really subsumed by incongruity-resolution theory, which explains the full humour process. Cognitive mastery merely accounts for the humorous response that occurs during resolution.

2.3.1.4. Contextual Elements

Incongruity-resolution proponents also contend that the context in which the information is interpreted is important. To be comedic, they believe that the communicator must set up a frame of reference that conveys to the audience that whatever appears in that frame is intended to be funny (Berger, 1987). In order for the resolution of an incongruity to be perceived as funny, the receiver must first label the scenario or atmosphere as *playful* or comical. Furthermore, they must be in the appropriate mood in order to set up this playful frame (Suls, 1983). This cognitive-based humour mechanism is grounded in a problem-solving schema and obviously not all successful problem solving is perceived as funny.

Playfulness is a prerequisite for humour appreciation. The receiver must be in this mind set, which dictates that the conventional rules that govern cognitive processing or conduct be temporarily suspended (Speck, 1991). While there must be some fit between the earlier expectations presented in the joke and the newly reintegrated

information for resolution to occur, it need not be a perfect fit. In the joke involving the blind shopper, clearly it does not make logical sense for him to browse through a store in this way. However, while shopping in a store can not be rationally compared to navigating through the world, this outrageous action represents the shopping equivalent in a comparison to normal, expected behaviour. It is assumed that some rules of normal information processing will be disregarded (Suls, 1983), but for this *willing suspension of disbelief* (McGhee, 1972) to occur, the necessity of such action must be communicated to the message processor. For this to happen, there must be social or environmental cues present to activate these playful scripts in the audience.

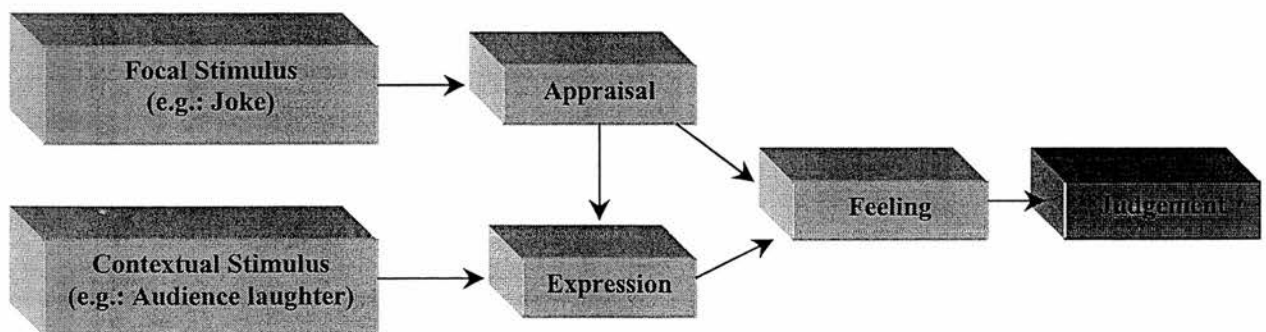
Indeed, when people tell jokes, there are cues to indicate that the story that they are telling should not be taken seriously but should be comprehended in a comical context. These play cues help the audience to process the material as it was intended, by way of what is referred to as *fantasy assimilation* (Cho, 1995; McGhee, 1972). Processing the joke material in this playful set has two effects that facilitate the humorous response. “By recognizing that the punch line is only a part of a joke, the respondent understands that it need not evoke concern, fear, or distress. In addition, a fantasy set allows for resolutions that may not be fully satisfactory or logical” (Suls, 1983; 43). This would explain why when someone is unsure, they immediately interrupt with something to the effect of, “Wait, is this a joke?” It is important for them to orient themselves into a comedic script.

Leventhal (1979) recognised the importance of environmental cues in emotional elicitation such as humour in his Duel Process Model of emotion (see Figure 2.3). In the case of humour, there is an objective cognitive assessment of the humour, which is

based on such matters as the incongruity-resolution processes. However, there is also another level of information processing, which is based on the subjective response to such things as kinaesthetic feedback from our own expressive reactions (e.g.: smiling and laughing) (Suls, 1983). These reactions are contingent upon social stimuli and other environmental influences, such as the response shown by others. The perception of humour is based on an amalgamation of these two forms of processing.

Cognitive mastery is also where the omnipotent concept of *timing* becomes so critical in humour appreciation (Kuhlman, 1985). Everyone has heard that phrase when referring to someone who is funny: “It’s *all* in the delivery!” Apathy or frustration are likely when the incongruity is maintained for too long a period, while introducing the incongruity too slowly curtails the critical surprise ingredient and is not captivating (Pollio, 1983). Similarly, too swift a delivery does not give the audience ample time to process the incongruity, thus reducing the chances of successful resolution.

Figure 2.3 **Leventhal’s Duel Process Model**



Source: Leventhal, H. (1979). Toward a comprehensive theory of emotion. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 12.

2.3.1.5. Incongruity Without Resolution

The fact that cognitive mastery is a necessary part of incongruity-resolution theory rather than an autonomous model brings up one of the most long-standing debates in cognitive theories of humour elicitation. This is whether incongruity alone is enough to elicit a humorous response. The incongruity or surprise theorists agree that resolution is frequently a part of humour elicitation, but that amusement can occur with only the presence of an unresolved incongruity (see Nerhardt, 1976). Playful confusion is asserted as the primary driver of humour. Those theorists that argue that incongruity alone is the necessary and sufficient element to evoke a humorous response believe that humour is a result of the dissonance between two mental sets. One of these is created by the body of the joke, while the other comes from some other concept that is introduced by the punch line. It is believed by proponents of incongruity theory that the difference in level of perceived humour has a direct relationship with the size of the deviation between the expectation and the surprise (Alden, Mukherjee, & Hoyer, 2000; Suls, 1983).

2.3.1.6. Criticisms of Incongruity Only Theories

Most humour researchers now agree that surprise alone is not enough to evoke a humorous response. For a start, not all surprises induce a comical reaction. Indeed, it would come as a surprise to find a corpse lying in one's bed, but this is not likely to be a mirth-rousing event. As a result, the theory was fine-tuned with the amendment that to induce a humorous response, the encounter with the incongruity must occur in an atmosphere that is perceived as safe and unthreatening (Nerhardt, 1977).

This requisite perception of a safe environment in which exposure to the incongruity must occur, according to incongruity-only theory, can be equated to the playful contextual cues necessary in incongruity-resolution theory. However, incongruity-resolution proponents do not feel that the presentation of an incongruity even when interpreted as playful is enough to evoke a humorous response. Without such cognitive mastery of the incongruous presentation, the receiver will be frustrated, perplexed, or disoriented, which would annul any amused response (Alden & Hoyer, 1993; Forabosco, 1992; Suls, 1983). In other words, the receiver would not *get the joke*.

The best argument that the incongruity (without resolution) theorists have presented is centred on a set of studies conducted by Nerhardt (1970) that have been repeatedly replicated (Deckers & Kizer, 1974; Gerber & Routh, 1975). He had subjects come into the lab and measured their reactions to the presentation of an incongruity with no apparent resolution. He did this by manipulating the participants' expectations and then deviating from these expectations in a variety of ways. For example, in one study subjects believed that they were there to determine how sensitive people are to weight discrepancies in a simple lifting task. Participants would then lift a series of weights very similar to one another, leading to the expectancy that they were judging very fine differences. The final weight would then severely deviate from the others by either being significantly heavier or lighter. As expected, participants smiled and laughed when presented with this incongruity; and the amount of apparent mirth was directly concordant with the amount of discrepancy between the last weight and the one before. In other words, greater weight difference led to more smiling or more laughter. He concluded that incongruity was sufficient to produce a humorous

response, because he believed that there was no cognitive resolution to this inconsistency.

While the argument was compelling, it has a couple of cavities. Firstly, laughter and smiling are not strong measures of perceived humour. People can find humour in something without actually laughing or smiling. Similarly, as may be the case here, the actual *presence* of smiling and/or laughter does *not* necessarily coincide with perceived humour (Chapman, 1983). Obviously there are many reasons for smiling that go beyond humour response, and the same can be said of laughter. People laugh when they are nervous, uncertain, guilty, embarrassed, afraid, angry, etc. (Suls, 1983). Sometimes, laughter may serve as a defence mechanism to help to save face (Chapman, 1983). It is quite possible that the laughter evoked by the incongruity in this context is a result of one of these other sentiments. Participants may have been nervous or embarrassed about this task because there is something that they are not *getting* and they are uncertain how to respond. A formal study has been carried out on what appears to be a simple, obvious task. The nervous tension that they feel would be no different than participants in the classic social psychology studies on conformity carried out by Solomon Asch. These were the studies where subjects incorrectly identify obvious line length discrepancies to conform to the confederates' clearly wrong responses (see Hewstone, Stroebe, & Stephenson, 1996).

However, even assuming that subjects had a genuine humour response, it still is not supportive of incongruity-only humour. If participants responded with a humorous response, then they would have to do so by reinterpreting the scenario as playful or comical. This in itself would be the resolution of the incongruity. The participants

believe that they are in a serious study on weight judgements. When lifting the final weight, the incongruity is presented. This is the punch line. It is the realisation that this study cannot be serious and the reinterpretation of the situation as playful, which is a form of resolution. They see the study in a different light when they recognise that the incongruity was presented intentionally. When they see the lengths that were carried out to *pull off* this joke, a humorous response may result.

What is evident at this point is that for most forms of humour, incongruity and resolution are required to elicit a humorous response. This has been demonstrated in studies that test three forms of the same joke, only one being the complete humorous piece. In the other two forms, one removes the incongruity and one removes the resolution. What is clear from these results is that at least for adults, incongruity *and* resolution are both necessary elements to induce a mirthful reaction (McGhee, 1972, 1976; Shultz, 1972, 1976; Suls, 1972, 1977), and this in fact is the nature of most forms of humour (Shultz, 1977; Suls, 1983). Without resolution, humour cannot be discerned from nonsense. Some type of resolution always occurs even if its purpose is to recognise the illogical and droll nature of the material, and to thus concede (such as the case with very physical humour) that no rational resolution is possible (Herzog & Larwin, 1988). The exception to this rule appears to be children who have not yet reached their concrete operations stage (approximately 8 years of age). Prior to this stage, incongruity alone may be enough to produce laughter (Shultz, 1972), although even such children also appreciate simple resolutions in humour (Pien & Rothbart, 1976).

Incongruity-resolution is a pervasive mechanism found in a great deal of humour. In an advertising context, this cognitive process has been found in the majority of humorous ads in many diverse cultures (Alden & Hoyer, 1993). It is one of the integral processes necessary to elicit a humorous response. However, as has been discussed, simply presenting a cognitive incongruity and an environment that encourages resolution does not always lead to a humorous response. It has been mentioned that the appropriate play cues, as well as the mood of the participant, the level of cognitive difficulty contained in the task, and an opportunity for a relatively swift resolution all play a role in the level of perceived humour. These of course are not the only factors involved. There are many different forms of humour, even if they all involve the resolution of incongruous material. Clearly there must be other mechanisms that combine with incongruity-resolution to form these disparate humour types. The discussion now will turn to the affective theories of humour elicitation.

2.3.2. Affective Theories

The affective perspective on humorous response emphasises physiological arousal associated with the humour perception (Cho, 1995). Most of the theories centre on the thematic content of the humour, which as discussed earlier cause problems in comprehensive classification. This section will include a discussion of the *Arousal-Safety* mechanism, which is found in some forms of humour. First, the predecessors of this component will be analysed. This is a group of theories collectively referred to as *Arousal-Reduction Theory*. Such theories include *psychodynamic*, *arousal* or *tension-release*, and *freedom* theories. Each of these will be reviewed in succession.

2.3.2.1. Psychodynamic Theory

All Arousal-Reduction theories focus on the release in swelling arousal levels (Wyer & Collins, 1992). Within the psychodynamic theory, humorous responses are believed to be motivated by expressive drives. This conceptualisation focuses on the thematic content of the humour, in that it is the expression of certain themes that are the motivating force (Kuhlman, 1985). As tension and arousal mount people are motivated to reduce or release that tension, but are often deterred from doing so. According to Freud (1960), this tension is the result of sexual or aggressive urges, with society serving as the inhibitor. It has also been suggested by these theories that the arousal may be a direct result of the humorous stimulus, but need not be. Frequently, the tension may be pre-existing where the humorous discourse serves merely as the release valve, rather than the catalyst as well. Freud believed that the enjoyment of sexual or obscene humour was especially substantiated by this theory (Zillman & Bryant, 1980). Basically, the expression of any topic through humorous discourse that related to repressed urges or thoughts would result in a mirthful reaction. This is because, for the participant, enjoyment symbolised a transient vanquishing of their anxiety over the repressed feelings. Sexual themes, though, were what he believed to be the most repressed. Consider the following:

An elderly gent goes into confession and says to the priest, "Father, I'm 80-years old, married, have four kids and 11 grandchildren, and last night I had an affair and I made love to two 18 year old girls. Both of them. Twice." The priest said, "Well, my son, when was the last time you were in confession?" "Never Father, I'm Jewish." "So then, why are you telling me?" "I'm telling everybody!"

According to this theory, the reason that the audience would find this funny is that it allows them to outwardly express appreciation of the elderly man's sexual conquests, which they would normally be required to stifle. The normally reverent setting for the

joke only intensifies the sensation of breaking through the confines of social restraint. Under this theory, differences in the intensity of the humour response are a result of disparities in the strength of the repressed or suppressed feelings affiliated with humorous stimulus.

The reason why Freud presumed that people can feel safe to express these otherwise taboo feelings in this context is that jokes contain innocuous elements, which Freud called *joke work*. This joke work includes the non-tendentious structural elements of the discourse, such as plays on words and other incongruities. In the example above, the non-tendentious element could include the incongruity of a Jewish man seeking penitence in a Catholic confessional, which is resolved by the surprising revelation that he is only there to brag. These structural elements are believed to be unconnected to the thematic elements. Participants can disguise the expression of their repressed feelings (i.e.: sexual and aggressive urges) by attributing their reaction to their enjoyment of the joke work (Suls, 1983; Zillman, 1983). This is a much more socially acceptable way for people to express their forbidden feelings without overtly violating social norms.

While Freud's theory was extremely influential when it was first conceptualised, it is basically dismissed today. While there is evidence that jokes containing socially taboo material generate a greater humour response than neutral jokes (Kuhlman, 1985), there is no solid support for the notion that humour serves in a cathartic capacity (McGhee, 1979). This psychodynamic conception of arousal-reduction also suffers from the same problems of generalisability to all humorous discourse. With Freud's conception, the limitation is fairly straightforward. There is such a

considerable range of stimuli that any given person finds funny. According to his view, the humour is a result of repressed feelings related to the thematic content of the humour stimulus. For any particular person, there would have to be an extraordinary number of repressed feelings, which is unlikely (Wyer & Collins, 1992). Given the sorts of innocuous things that people sometimes find funny, there often does not seem to be a motive underlying repression. Not to mention, his overemphasis on sexual and hostile humour does not leave room for classifying humorous discourse that does not centre on these themes. Nevertheless, his work is influential in that he highlighted the fact that humour does *at times* contains aggressive themes, which surely has helped to develop the views on disparagement mechanisms.

2.3.2.2. Arousal Theory

Another take on Arousal-Reduction was conceptualised by Berlyne (1971). He assumed that pleasure is derived from maintaining a certain level of physiological arousal. Humour response is viewed as a drive to retain arousal within an optimal level. According to this view, within a set range, an increase in arousal intensifies experiential pleasure. Beyond this optimal level of stimulation, anxiety and tension burgeon, which eclipse the positive affect. A humorous response, it was proposed, is created by first escalating arousal levels beyond their optimal level through the body of the humorous discourse. The punch line releases this tension by promptly bringing the arousal back into the pleasurable range. This reduction in arousal results in an increase in pleasure, which is experienced as humour. This process was what Berlyne (1972) referred to as *arousal jags*. More laughter occurs when the subject of the humour focuses on themes that ordinarily would produce negative affect because there is a stronger discharge of arousal (Wicker et al., 1981).

Unfortunately, research has shown that perceived humour response is not correlated with reductions in physiological arousal that follow the punch line of a joke (McGhee & Goldstein, 1983). Aside from the empirical evidence that refutes the entire effect of this theory, Berlyne's view on humour also cannot be generalised to all circumstances. This model assumes that prior to the humorous response, the individual encounters a situational boost in arousal levels prior to exposure to the humorous stimulus. This unfortunately does not explain the variety of humour-producing events that occur unpredictably during everyday communications, without any chance for elevated arousal prior to exposure (Wyer & Collins, 1992). The perfect example of course is witticisms that occur sporadically during routine conversations. Furthermore, this theory does not differentiate humorous responses from other situations in which an arousal jag may occur that is not perceived as comical, such as problem-solving behaviour (Shultz, 1976).

2.3.2.3. Freedom Theory

Freedom theory is similar to the psychoanalytic theory discussed above. Its difference lies in its thematic emphasis in that it does not necessarily focus on sexual and aggressive urges. According to this theory, a humorous response liberates the joke participant from their usual worries, concerns, internal discord, or cognitive processing approach. In doing so, humour affords a brief release from what Mindess (1971) refers to as our *stabilising systems*. The stabilising system to which he refers is created by both internal as well as societal constraints. Such restrictions serve to limit expressive freedom, but must be respected if one is to continue as a positive member of society. As in all of the affective theories, humour is viewed as an

emotional release. In this case, the emotion is a sense of freedom experienced ever so briefly through the temporary rejection of social conventions.

Like the psychodynamic perspective, the freedom theory would contend that laughing at the confessional joke affords an affective release of pent up emotion. However, it is not necessarily an unleashing of sexual or aggressive feelings, but rather a release from social conformity. The laughter is not so much a result of the appreciation of the sexual content of the joke, as it is an opportunity to poke fun of religious dogma and social decency, which restrict self-expression. Social customs forbid the elderly to boast like a teenager about their sexual prowess, especially to a man of the cloth. The appreciation in the joke comes from the defiance of societal norms.

Laughter can be thought of as an outward explosion, from both the literal sensation of laughter to the social implications it has on its participants. Take the term *cracking up*, a slang phrase indicative of laughter. What exactly is meant by this? Plessner (1970) gave an account that Pollio (1983) later expanded upon:

“What is ‘breaking up’ is the person and what is being ‘broken up’ is the person’s experience of his or her body in some specific situation, in some specific society, in some specific period of history; in short the person has ‘exploded’ or ‘broken out’ from the psychological limits imposed by the contemporary situation and for a moment is afforded the experience of what some philosophers...might term radical freedom. On an experiential basis, laughter provides a continuing body metaphor for freedom in which the person experiences himself as free of the constraints imposed by others, society, time, and even his own body...The experience of laughter is neither a strictly intellectual nor emotional one; rather it is a total person response to the specifics of a particular contemporary situation” (Pollio, 1983; 215).

The basic idea here is that all people have certain constraints imposed on them by themselves and society at large. Whether it is an external limitation in the form of conformity or a personal restraint such as naïveté or feelings of inferiority, these

restraints can curb one's sense of sovereignty. However, to continue to be a positive part of society, everyone must accept certain boundaries. Humour can often be a socially acceptable medium by which we can be liberated from these types of constrictions by portraying them as ridiculous, illogical, or at least inconsequential (Mindess, 1971). However, like laughter, this is a fleeting experience, as most of us are still dependent upon the support bestowed by the very limitations that we fight to periodically flee from through the discourse of comedy. However, humour gives everyone an outlet to feel a heightened sense of self-awareness through this, however brief, rebellion against social forces. This also explains why taboo topics are often the source of much humour. Compared to non-taboo topics, the socio-psychological constraints imposed against the expression of forbidden material or even a reaction to the articulation of the material are much more fervent. Because of this, it takes greater inner strength to overcome the social forces to appreciate the joke; and thus the ensuing eruption of laughter is much greater (Pollio, 1983).

Once again, however, the focus on thematic content is a weakness to this theory. Because it focuses on rebelling against social constraints, its scope is limited to humour focused either on antisocial content, such as racist and sexist themes, aggressive humour, or other deprecating humour where the target is social conventions. As is similar to the other Arousal-Reduction theories, it explains certain classes of humour, but is not a comprehensive theory of humour elicitation.

Furthermore, the freedom of expression and nonconformist defiance is not necessarily funny in itself. How many protestors would consider their efforts laughable? Instead, there is a dependence on incongruity-resolution mechanisms for such themes to be

humorously appreciated. While the theme of the confessional joke may be enjoyable, it is funny because an incongruity is presented: a Jewish man is attending a confession; and it is resolved: he is merely there to brag about, rather than repent for his debauchery. In studies of humour appreciation, incongruity-resolution measures have been found to interrelate with affective factors in successful humorous stimuli (Wicker et al., 1981). This indicates a relationship between affective and cognitive elements, which necessitates a theory that incorporates multiple perspectives to explain the humorous response.

2.3.2.4. The Arousal-Safety Mechanism

This mechanism is the affective component in Speck's global assessment of humour. While some of its roots lie within the other affective theories reviewed, arousal-safety is not intended as a comprehensive theory of humour elicitation. Rather, it has been conceptualised as one mechanism, similar to the incongruity-resolution mechanism discussed above. As will be revealed, it can occur in isolation or in conjunction with incongruity-resolution and disparagement (which will be analysed next) to form a much richer and more comprehensive nomenclature of humour elicitation. This generalisability is where these older theories have fallen short, because such theories are too tightly adjoined to specific themes and cannot account for all of the different possible forms of humour.

Arousal-safety, similar to the tension-release theories, is a mechanism by which a humorous response is elicited due to the relief of some sort of strain, stimulation, or anxiety caused by affective uncertainty or repressed feelings. The social transmission of a humorous communication moderates the tension that is severe enough to

potentially cause an adverse reaction if misunderstood (Cho, 1995). In particular, the apprehension is usually related to an empathic concern for the subject of the discourse. The arousal can take on many forms, but the key factor for humour to result is the interpretation of the arousal as harmless or trivial (Rothbart, 1973). Without this discernment, the scenario will be construed as serious, triggering a problem-solving behaviour. The safety function is sparked when some cue allows the audience to comprehend the situation as playful, which is indispensable for the resultant humour reaction. This is analogous to the play cues necessary in the incongruity-resolution mechanism to provide a humorous rather than problem-solving response.

The outcome is a sentimentality response in which benevolence and kindness are felt for the characters "...that we consider cute, warm, friendly, or familiar. In its fullest form, arousal-safety involves empathic bonding with someone who narrowly avoids disaster" (Speck, 1991; 6). It is essentially an affective humour process. Unlike incongruity-resolution, which requires both parts to induce a humorous reaction, this process need not incite the full cycle to elicit the response. Often the vital relief stimuli, in the absence of an immediate tension stimulus can simply be presented to extract this mild and affective humour reaction. Rather, tension fostered by a prior negative mood state unrelated to the message could be discharged through this warm and sentimental humour response. In Section 2.4, this process will be illustrated with a number of examples.

2.3.3. Social or Interpersonal Theories

Social or interpersonal theories of humour elicitation primarily focus on disparaging humour and the motivational basis of such comic discourse. Humour, according to this tradition, can be rationalised in relation to the social and interpersonal environments in which it originates (Cho, 1995). Within the original theories centring on deprecating humour, there is some obvious overlap with affective theories. This is especially the case with the Freudian perspective. As has been the central theme throughout these discussions, this intersection of the elicitation theories is due to their inefficiency as classification systems that are both exhaustive *and* mutually exclusive. That was, of course, until Speck's (1991) Humorous Message Taxonomy was developed, focusing on the underlying mechanisms rather than on thematic content.

Humour disparagement is the final mechanism in Speck's taxonomy that will be discussed below. This fits neatly into this section, since the interpersonal theories on humour appreciation focus on the disparagement mechanism. The primary difference, once again, is that the earlier theories viewed disparaging humour as an all-encompassing theory of humour inception, whereas Speck viewed it as a single mechanism in a larger classification scheme. Furthermore, the early theories focus on the motives behind the utilisation of deprecating or aggressive humour. Following a discussion of humour disparagement processes, the older *superiority* and *dispositional* theories will be reviewed. The psychoanalytic perspective will also be reassessed as it pertains to this aspect of humour elicitation.

2.3.3.1. Humorous Disparagement Processes

The final process within Speck's classification scheme is humorous disparagement. As the theories will verify, this is a more self-serving humour process from the perspective of the message sender. In addition to the sender and receiver of the humorous message, a third relationship is established with the victim or target of the humour. When the object of ridicule is a person or group, disparagement is unquestionably underlying the humour. The process primarily consists of the sender who attacks the target who may or may not be present. The sender, by transmitting the message with humorous intent, asks the recipient to support the attack by responding positively. Because it is a socially acceptable form of hostility and antagonism that is actually reinforced through laughter, there frequently is no residual remorse from such action (Cho, 1995).

The precise form of disparagement humour used is based on the purpose of the denigration, and can include satiric (moralising or educational), put-down (embarrassment for other's enjoyment), and sarcasm (embarrassment without concern for other's enjoyment) (Speck, 1991). Furthermore, self-deprecation, ethnic, racist, and sexist humour are all forms of disparagement humour. It is primarily a social form of humour based upon criticism and control. The objective is to enhance the egos of the message sender and recipient, who perceive themselves as unaffiliated with the target (see Zillman, 1983). The reaction by the receiver is dependent on their relationship to the disparaged party (see Cho, 1995; Wicker et al., 1981). When they see the mockery as deserved, out of their control, unrelated to them, and condoned by others, a positive response is more likely as long as they do not think such a response will be condemned (Speck, 1991). Typically, this process is combined with

incongruity-resolution to form a specific type of humour that will be explicated in the succeeding section.

2.3.3.2. Superiority Theory

Superiority theories, which were originally intended as a self-contained theory of humour, are really a subclass of disparagement theory. According to this theory, the positive response that is manifested as laughter results from the mirth that is felt from favourably comparing ourselves (as joke senders and receivers) to some out-group. This occurs by targeting the humour upon someone else's shortcomings (Keith-Spiegel, 1972; LaFave, Haddad, & Maeson, 1976; Pollio, 1983; Wicker et al., 1980). "Those others, needless to say, tend to be inept, ugly, dumb, clumsy, weak, poor, and so forth, and the sudden revelation of these traits in characteristic behaviors is what is seen as prompting the self-enhancing comparisons that fuel laughter" (Zillman, 1983; 87). Pleasure, in the form of laughter, is engendered by the feeling of supremacy over others when their deficiencies are observed and ridiculed. It is an issue of control and power over another person that is sustained or restored through glee and laughter (Purdie, 1993; Wyer & Collins, 1992) in an effort to satisfy ego-defensive drives (Cho, 1995). Humour then, is entirely a cultural or social phenomenon according to these theorists. Consider the following:

Q: What do Manchester United supporters use for birth control?

A: Their personalities.

The problem with discussing disparaging humour, is that the best illustrative examples run the risk of offending potential readers. This example was used because it does not ridicule a particular attribute that is characteristic of any one group. It is a harmless example because any group or organisation can be inserted. Nevertheless, it

is likely to be appreciated by all rival team supporters because of the feeling of superiority that is felt through denigrating someone else. Particularly with the annual success of Manchester United, rival supporters may feel the need to boost their own egos through the denouncement of some feature of their fan base. By highlighting some negative feature of *theirs*, we feel better about *us*, and our own shortcomings.

This conception is hardly new as it was iterated by Hazlitt and Baudelaire in the 19th century, by Hobbes centuries before that and even by Plato and Aristotle. All of them expressed moral concerns over the human proclivity towards deprecating humour, which can be delineated in this quote from Hazlitt (1926): “We grow tired of every thing but turning others into ridicule, and congratulating ourselves on their defects” (p. 239; essay originally printed in 1826). Self-deprecating humour can be explained through superiority theory by realising that we mock an inferior version of ourselves that we have overcome (Berger, 1987), at least through the acknowledgement of our shortcomings.

2.3.3.3. Dispositional Theory

More recently, the theory has been developed further to account for differences in humour response. This can be explained with the realisation that we do not delight in the derision of everyone equally, but rather base our enjoyment on our relationship to the vilified agent. According to *dispositional theory* (Zillman & Cantor, 1976), enjoyment of humour stimuli increases the more negatively we feel towards the slandered target. Similarly, enjoyment decreases when greater sentiments are felt or more affiliation is held with the target of the humour.

The mirth that is felt can be experienced as extreme elation when the negative temperament towards the debased entity is very intense (Zillman & Bryant, 1980). This subjective feature of humour appreciation extends to those targets that are perceived of as deserving such treatment. For example, jokes have been evaluated more positively when the target of the disparagement previously acted in a socially undesirable manner. In such instances, those participating have more incentive to attack them. This has been observed in non-humorous contexts such as the appreciation derived in dramas and sports spectating, but more relevantly in the appreciation of aggressive humour.

Contempt for the disparaged party serves as a motivation in humour appreciation. Dispositional theory clearly predicts "...that loss of value inflicted upon our enemies and gain of value obtained by our friends is appreciated, and that gain in value obtained by our enemies and loss of value inflicted upon our friends is deplored" (Zillman & Cantor, 1976; 113). Hardships are enjoyed when they transpire on our foes, but are not so funny when they befall our allies. However, the dispositional theory spreads beyond friends to any *affiliated object* that can be considered an extension of the self and *unaffiliated objects* that are considered external to the self-identity. Therefore the denunciation of *anything*, even through humour, that can be construed as an affiliated object (including reference groups) would generate discontent and exasperation because self-deprecation is generally disliked (Zillman, 1983). The opposite would be predicted for unaffiliated objects (or anything for which a negative affective disposition is held) that are disparaged. This is precisely where amusement can be found, according to this theory.

The effect of affective disposition on mirth extends beyond the humour target to the antagonist or humour agent. If the transmitter of the disparagement is held in a negative regard, then less amusement will result. On the other hand, where the joke teller is liked, more humour will be elicited (Zillman, 1983).

2.3.3.4. Synthesis with Incongruity-Resolution

As has been the case with many of the theories reviewed up to this point, the problem with disparagement theory is that its theorists try to make it do too much. It cannot classify all types of humour, as is obvious from the fact that not all forms of humour are denigrating to some target. This has been recognised by Speck, who has combined the three various mechanisms to form a meaningful classification system that delves beyond the thematic content into the root of the humorous process.

However, this was not the first time that a fusion of different theories was proposed. Other theorists realised that incongruity-resolution occurs in conjunction with disparaging humour (Suls, 1983). This ties directly into the previous point about enjoyment being based on the relationship to the target. Denigration in humour makes more sense when the target is unpopular. To bring back a phrase from incongruity-resolution, it makes for a better *fit*. Therefore the emotional tie to the victim correlates with humour enjoyment because the affect influences joke resolution (Suls, 1977). When a negative attitude exists towards the protagonist, there is more resolution because more suitable schemas can be utilised to reconcile the incongruity presented as disparagement (Wicker et al., 1980).

Furthermore, for a *humorous* response to result, there must be non-disparaging elements in the form of incongruity presentation. While the original disparagement theories can account for the *enjoyment* that is derived from seeing an unaffiliated object ridiculed, without the resolution of some incongruity, no *humorous* response will be generated (Suls, 1977). Freud even alluded to the notion of incongruity-resolution mechanisms as a supplementary constituent with his conception of *joke work* elements in tendentious humour. Disparagement may be appreciated, but it is not necessarily funny. It really is a mechanism that facilitates a humorous response, rather than autonomously generating it. Incongruity-resolution in the form of playfulness, wit, and surprise is a necessary constituent (Speck, 1991). In the Manchester United jibe, incongruity arises when the expectation that a form of contraception will follow the question is violated. It is resolved when the connection is made that a rotten personality will result in an inability to find a consenting partner. This unsolicited abstinence of course can be construed as a form of *birth control* when the term is reinterpreted to include such circumstances. This incongruity-resolution mechanism facilitates the humorous interpretation of the disparagement.

The more tightly integrated these elements are, the more amusement that will result. Some obvious overlap is required with cognitive theories to fully account for disparagement humour, which is another way in which these social theories are inefficient. Aside from the fact that they ignore many forms of humorous discourse that do not contain disparagement, they also do not clearly fuse incongruity-resolution mechanisms into those forms of humour that do in fact utilise disparagement. In Speck's taxonomy, these mechanisms are more evidently integrated to explain this specific form of humour (as well as all others).

2.3.3.5. Tendentious Humour Revisited

Similarly, elements of affective theories have also been associated with the older versions of these interpersonal theories, also lending support to Speck's more clear-cut classification system. As has been elucidated earlier, the psychodynamic theories proposed by Freud largely highlight the camouflaged hostilities evident in humour appreciation. Recall that Freud focused on obscene and hostile forms of humour, also known as tendentious humour. Because of the humorous context created by play cues in which the situation is deemed non-threatening, and because the laughter can be attributed to the non-disparaging elements, the aggression is deemed more socially acceptable. Without the humorous contextual cues, social protocol would demand that enjoyment not be derived from the scorn of another member of society.

While in many instances the hostility is readily apparent, the discharge of motivated antagonism can be ascribed to the comic format, and more specifically to the innocuous elements (Zillman & Bryant, 1980). However, Zillman (1980) has shown that indeed the humorous response is a result of the debasement of a resented figure and not actually a product of those cues to which the mirth is attributed. Rather, the contextual cues permit the actor to publicly enjoy the disparaging aspect of the humour under these disguised pretences.

2.4. THE HUMOROUS MESSAGE TAXONOMY

As has been resonated repeatedly in this chapter, humour research too often has not clearly delineated between disparate humour types, which has generated conflicting and inconsistent findings. Consequently, several researchers have attempted to devise taxonomies for analysing and comparing the utilisation and effectiveness of different humour styles. As has been explicated, some attempts unfortunately, have been

excessively context specific, relying too heavily on the superficial content of the joke. With such an over-dependence within the classification on the subject matter of the humour, no emerging pattern materialises concerning the effectiveness of an individual humour type. Furthermore, most taxonomies have been unidimensional, notwithstanding indications that humour is multidimensional (see Speck, 1991).

At this point, it is obvious that such a broad pattern of executional types of humour cannot possibly be accounted for through a single humorous process (Cho, 1995). As a result of these problems, Speck (1991) has devised a categorisation that looks at underlying humour processes and not only respects the multiple dimensions of humour, but also looks more deeply at the humorous processes beyond the superficial substance. His system distinguishes between humour classes on a level that considers the assorted processing requirements and audience engagement necessary to comprehend each type of humour irrespective of the more surface-level content. This classification is rooted on the three underlying processes discussed above. These consist of incongruity-resolution, arousal-safety, and humorous disparagement processes. These three mechanisms operate either in unison or in various permutations to form a rich nomenclature of humour. As has been specified repeatedly above, incongruity-resolution is the dominant mechanism that appears in most forms of humour. As a result, humour elicitation is primarily influenced by this mechanism, with the others serving as mediators (Cho, 1995).

2.4.1. Resultant Humour Types

At this point, it is necessary to look specifically at the various combinations necessary to produce Speck's classification of humour. Through various groupings of the three

processes, five primary humour types have been identified. Each will be reviewed in succession.

2.4.1.1. Comic Wit

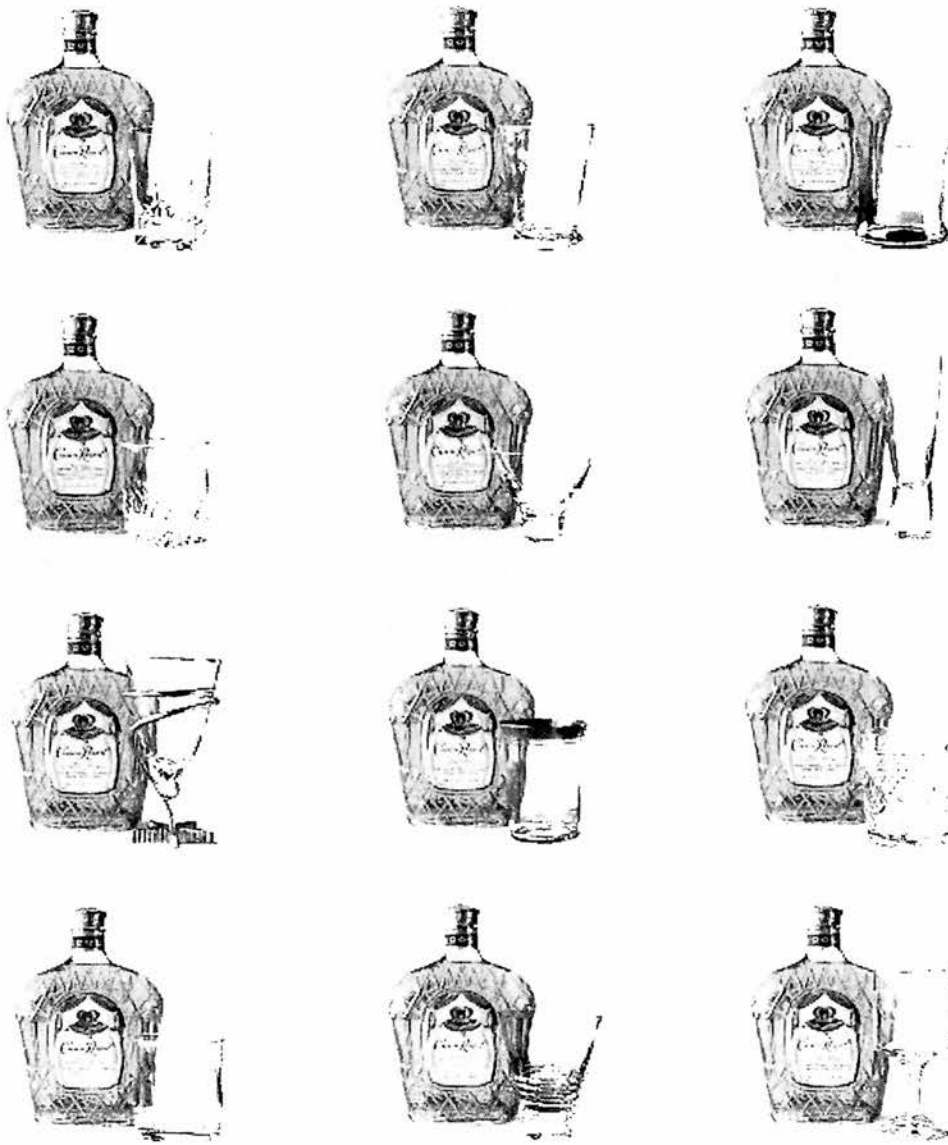
One of the most simple yet commonly used forms of humour (both in advertising and general contexts) is comic wit (see Example 2.1 & Figure 2.4). This type of humour relies entirely upon incongruity-resolution. It is most frequently manifested as visual puns, ironic juxtaposition, perceptual displacement, and exaggeration (Speck, 1991). This kind of humour taps into puzzle-solving skills, the reward of which is a humorous release. Its appeal lies in the pleasure of working out a perceptual or cognitive test (Unger, 1996). Although considerable attention and efforts are often needed initially to solve this primarily cognitive task, it is usually not too difficult as the incongruity is not ordinarily abstract. It is a fairly common, unsophisticated type of humour that is encountered often. Consequently comic wit often requires only low-level exertion. However, the more complicated and abstract the incongruity is to resolve, the more effort that is needed, and consequently the greater reward in the form of increased humour perception (Suls, 1983).

Example 2.1 Comic Wit

Consider the following ad for Pizza Hut, introducing a thinner, crispier crust pizza. As the ad opens, *That's Amore* plays in the background. The ad shifts back and forth between images of pizza and metaphorical, yet humorous images of other flat, round objects. It shows a dog jumping for a Frisbee, a man jumping onto a skim board, and cartoon clips of characters being flattened by heavy objects. The closing image is footage from a silent movie of a man trying to hold up a large door. A frantic mob then rushes in, knocking the door over on top of the man and runs over him.

This ad is a supreme example of comic wit. It is an entirely cognitive form of humour that requires the audience to shift between incongruous schema. First, the music is a love song. An incongruity is presented as the viewer hears a love song that is not followed by romantic images. However, the song happens to have the words "pizza pie" in it. As the viewer begins to realise that there are no romantic images being presented, they abruptly recognise that the love affair is meant to be between the pizza and the audience. Furthermore, there is the successive presentation of all of these seemingly disjointed images. While this causes an incongruity, juxtaposing them alongside images of pizza, the connection is made. While they are such contrasting, unrelated images, they are associated on a very superficial level. It becomes obvious that the relationship is between these pictures and the new thinner (or flatter) pizza. The audience solves the puzzle and an entirely cognitive humorous response is elicited.

Figure 2.4 Crown Royal: Example of Comic Wit



Variety is the spice of life.

Those who appreciate quality enjoy it responsibly.

An incongruity is presented when comparing the tagline that boasts that “Variety is the spice of life” with the image of twelve identical pictures of Crown Royal whisky. This is resolved through the realisation that what has been varied in each is the glass. The connection is made that Crown Royal *always* makes life exciting. If your life needs diversity, merely change the glass because altering the *contents* of the glass would be silly!

2.4.1.2. Sentimental Humour

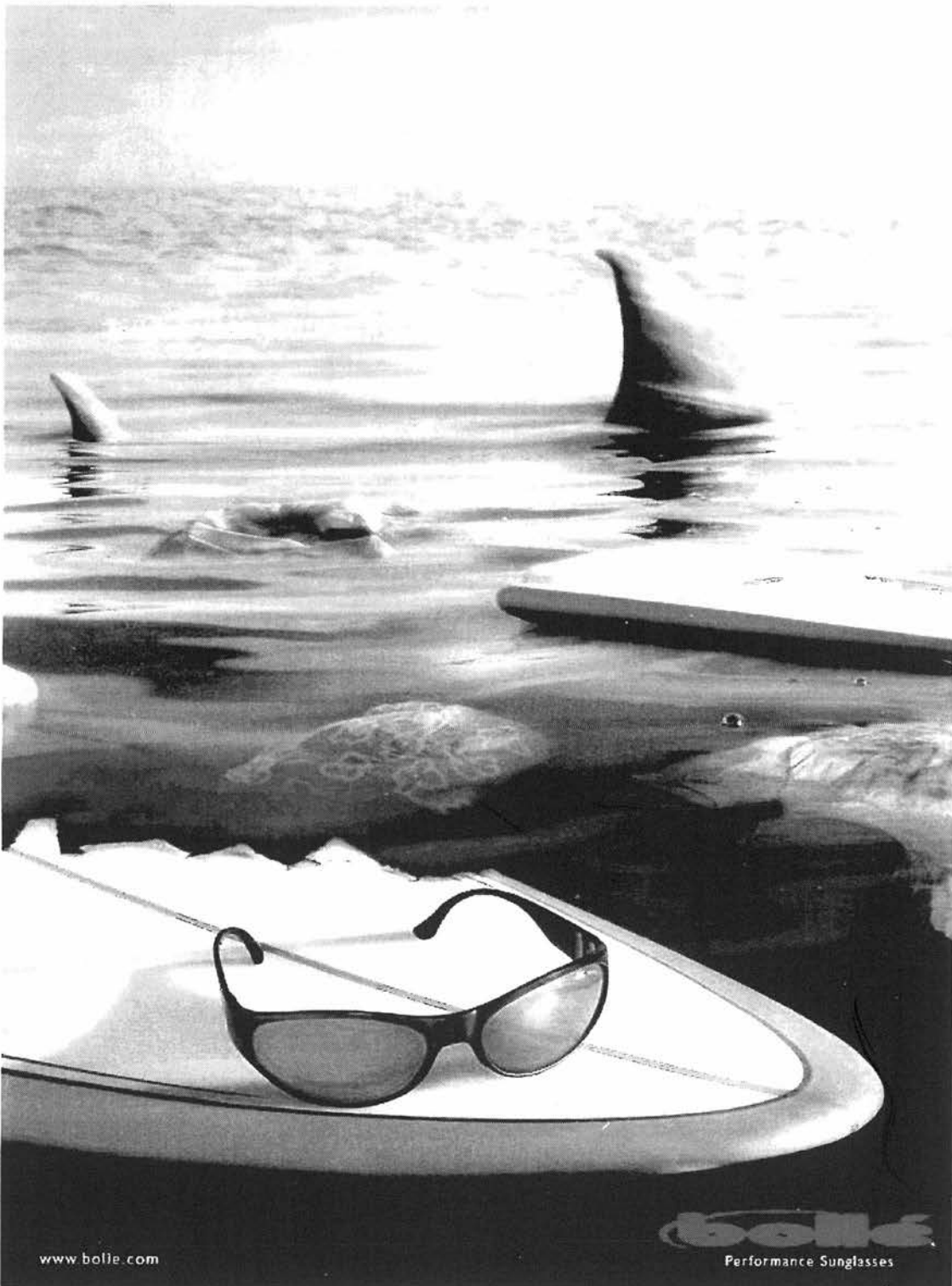
Sentimental humour is another undemanding type of humour, as it also only employs one process (see Example 2.2 & Figure 2.5). However, this is not driven by incongruity-resolution, but by arousal-safety processes. Comic melodrama is the most conventional manifestation. It is a mild form of humour because no real cognitive efforts are expended. It is affective rather than cognitive, commanding little exertion and therefore modest reward. However, the discharge of distended tension allows for a release that is interpreted as amusement. The audience empathises with the characters and the potential misfortunes that they evade. Affection, family values, and sentimentality are often emphasised and warm affect and amusement are the ensuing responses. In these instances, the viewers strive to be like the characters for whom they perceive as having the perfect lifestyle, able to overcome anything because of their relationships to one another (Speck, 1991).

Example 2.2 Sentimental Humour

Sentimental humour can be illustrated through the following Kool-Aid commercial. The ad shows many children, none of whom are smiling. They will not play, and only stare towards the audience with sad, gloomy expressions. An adult comes into the picture carrying a pitcher of Kool-Aid, and a jingle begins with the words, "Give me some of that smile." All of the children are trying their hardest not to smile, but they cannot contain themselves. They start to cover their mouths to conceal their smiles. Finally, images of all of the children playing after drinking the Kool-Aid are flashed.

Clearly, this ad induces an arousal-safety response. There are no cognitive conundrums to resolve, but a humorous reaction is still provoked. It is simply a shifting in affect that causes the effect. Initially, the sad children cause negative arousal. When all it takes is Kool-Aid to make them happy again, the arousal is released. The audience experiences a warm sentimental response from the abrupt contrast between negative and positive affect. They find humour in the children, who try so hard to contain their happiness over such a trivial delight. The arousal that was originally labelled negatively has now been interpreted as safe and thus can be given a positive valence. A humorous response is induced in the audience because every one can relate to the way children behave.

Figure 2.5 Bollé: Example of Sentimental Humour



There are no cognitive puzzles to *solve* in this ad. The gruesome image merely generates arousal that is released when the scenario is interpreted as playful. This occurs when the reader realises the absurdity of the idea that the sunglasses are so tough that they survived a shark attack and outlived the unfortunate wearer of the glasses. The situation is deemed safe and playful and a mild humorous response is the result. Without an incongruity to resolve, this reaction is likely to be very minor, almost comparable to *warmth*.

2.4.1.3. Satire

Satire conversely operates through the union of two processes: incongruity-resolution and humorous disparagement (see Example 2.3 & Figure 2.6). Because disparagement cannot really be executed without incongruity-resolution, this humour type is in essence described in the prior section on the disparagement process. Ridicule and aggression are the primary characteristics. It is frequently employed successfully in comparative advertising. “Since members of the audience see only what the advertiser presents, since they are not personally at risk, and since they can expect humorous pleasure in return for their co-operation, they generally allow the attack to proceed without questioning the accuracy of the joke-maker’s account” (Speck, 1991; 14). It is also utilised effectively where self-deprecation and eccentricity are valued by the audience. For example, the British are known for their love of eccentric characters (Caillat & Mueller, 1996; Nevett, 1992) and self-deprecating humour (Sippitt & Fowler, 1999).

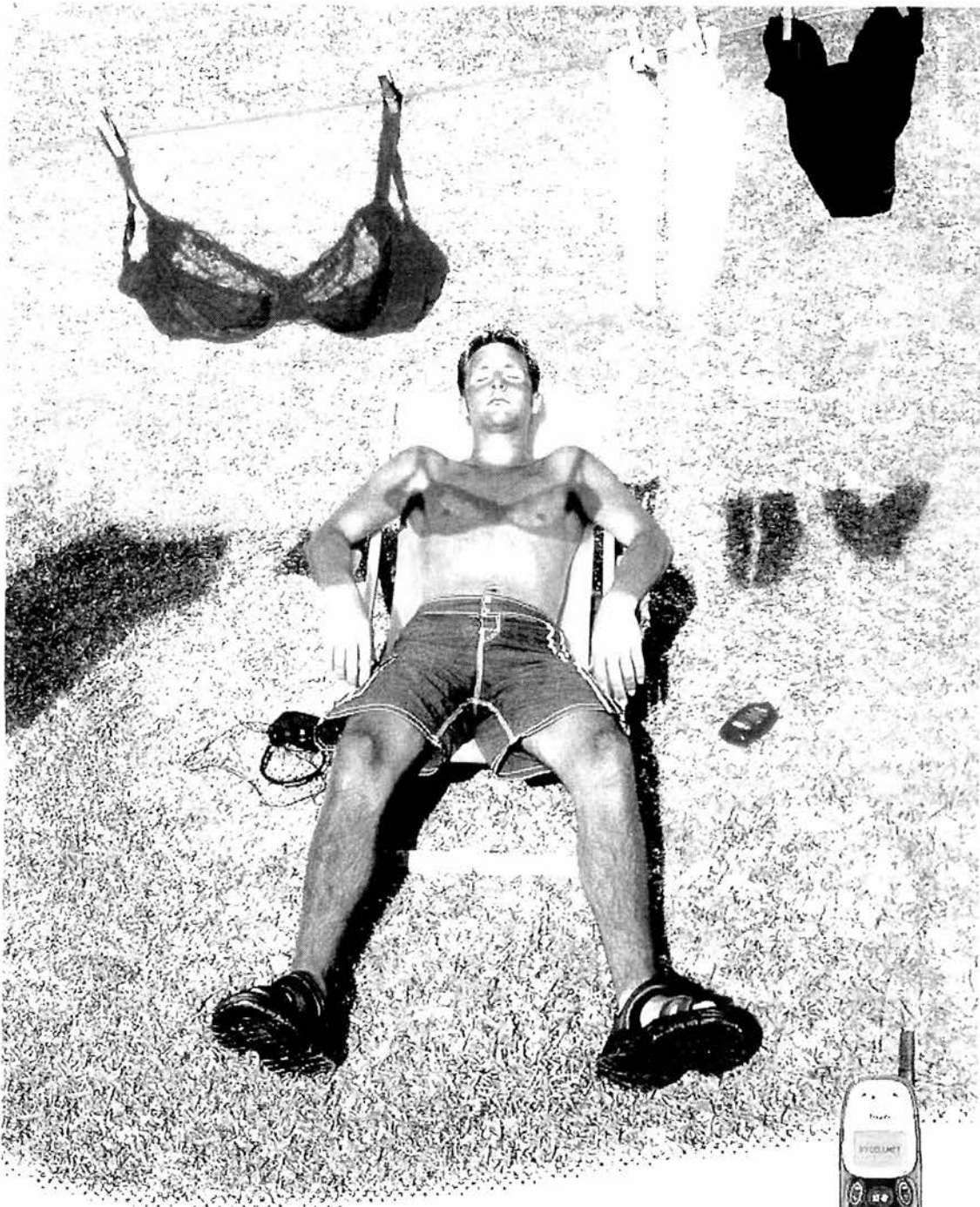
Example 2.3

Satire

Satire can be easily exemplified by the following Volkswagen Golf ad. A man is shown sitting in a car in the middle of the city looking nervous and shifty-eyed. Suspense-thriller music is played in the background as if he is on an important mission. He looks to his friends on the street as a traffic light in front of him turns red. They shout “NOW!” to him and he pulls the car up. He gets out of the car and they quickly carry a mattress down from the doorway of a flat. Working swiftly and efficiently, they place it on the roof of the car. From one side, one of the friends throws a rope to the other two and they quickly tie the mattress down to the roof. In the meantime, strangers around them are observing what they are doing. Suddenly, they finish, and with a relieved and congratulatory look at one another they all say, “done.” The light turns green, and they go to get into the car. However, they have tied the rope over the doors preventing them from opening. As all of the cars that have gathered behind them begin to sound their horns, the voiceover pipes in, “The new VW Golf. Smarter...looking at least.”

In this ad, both incongruity-resolution and humour disparagement processes are employed. An incongruity is initially introduced when the incident that is set up as this suspenseful story is reduced to a few friends moving apartments. However, the scenario is interpreted as funny because to ordinary people, this is an adventure. This is the resolution. The characters are presented with a sticky situation where they have to move this mattress, but there is no place to pull the car over. Furthermore, they are perceived as competent. They have planned this out perfectly. Incongruity arises again, as people start to stare at them with puzzled looks. The audience knows now that the ad has a humorous intent, but are unsure how it will manifest itself. They seemingly have planned everything right, but by the expressions of onlookers, it is obvious that something will go awry. They even finish before the light turns green. However, the resolution is made when their mistake becomes apparent. They are disparaged as they stand there hopelessly trying to pull open the doors. Their well-planned scheme has been foiled and they stand there helpless. They are further disparaged by the tagline, as the audience compares them to the claim that the car is smarter looking at least.

Figure 2.6 BT Cellnet: Example of Satire



LIFE CONTAINS ENOUGH EMBARRASMENTS WITHOUT YOUR MOBILE BEING ONE.

Get the latest stylish mobiles on BT Cellnet Pay & Go.



The incongruity presented by this odd image is resolved by connecting the shame of having an outdated mobile phone to a much more embarrassing episode. The disparagement is evident, as the audience is aware of the *rude awakening* that awaits this unsuspecting sunbather. Due to the blend of cognitive and deprecating elements, a stronger humorous response is expected.

2.4.1.4. Sentimental Comedy

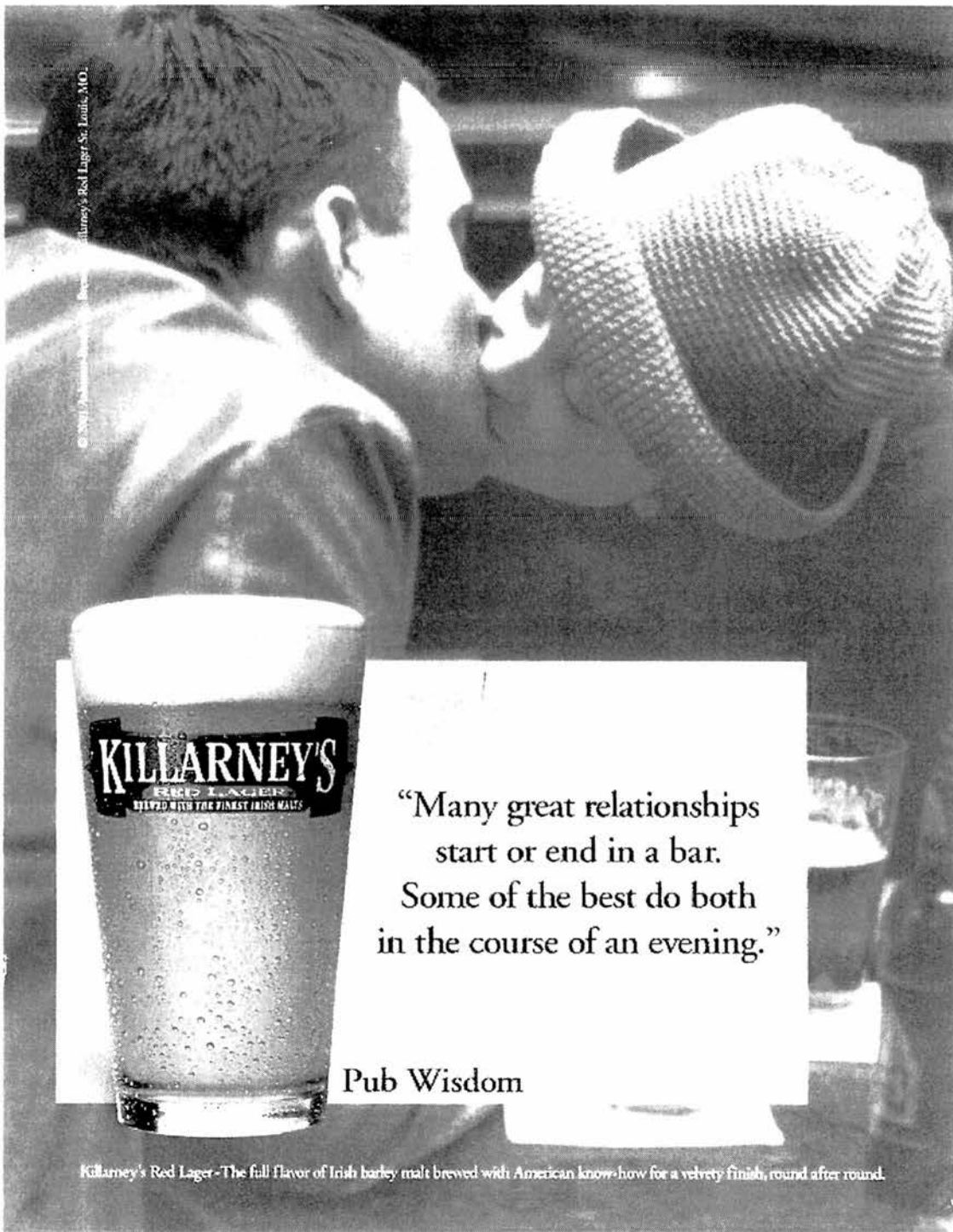
Sentimental comedy also exploits two processes (see Example 2.4 & Figure 2.7). In this instance, they are arousal-safety and incongruity-resolution. It is a fusion of comic wit and sentimental humour. Sentimental comedy is obviously similar to sentimental humour, but contains cognitive arousal and therefore heightened humorous stimulation. The same affective pleasure is present, but cognitive energy is mandatory here to resolve an incongruous condition. The sentimentality is intensified by the pleasure derived from the resolution of the cognitive challenge (Speck, 1991).

Example 2.4 Sentimental Comedy

The following ad for Whirlpool washing machines is a strong example of sentimental comedy. A family is shown on a camping holiday. The voiceover claims that “A vacation should be a vacation from laundry.” The ad then shows the family together with sentimental family images, but getting their clothes very dirty. The mother falls forward into the mud while reaching into the water for a canoe, and the kids are carrying large fish held up against their clothes. The voiceover then says, “...at least until you get home.” The mother is left with many bags of laundry, and the ad presents product information. In the end a voiceover claims that, “Whirlpool gets really big loads really clean, so you might just get a vacation from laundry.” As this is being expressed, the mother is shown sitting outside the house having a drink and petting the dog. The laundry room is still in the foreground, and a whole new pile of clothes is dropping down the laundry chute out of the resting mother’s view.

The same warm emotion is articulated as in sentimental humour, but with a cognitive element. Dirty clothes and laundry are immediately made salient in the target audiences’ minds. This causes the ensuing scenes at the camp to initially cause arousal. However, the family is happy together on a holiday, so suddenly such soiled laundry is not perceived as quite so horrifying. Besides, there is a Whirlpool machine at home to come to the rescue. The images that initially caused negative arousal are labelled as safe and innocuous, leaving behind residual warmth and sentiment. Now the arousing scenes of the filthy family are interpreted humorously. An incongruity is established when the mother is sitting and resting because the laundry room is still suspiciously in the foreground. The resolution occurs when the clothes drop down and the voiceover claims that you might just get a vacation from laundry. The audience makes the realisation that life goes on in this cycle, and relates to this comically witty scene. The incongruity-resolution process intensifies the sentimental humour. It adds a cognitive element to a warm, comical family scene to which the audience can associate.

Figure 2.7 Killarney's: Example of Sentimental Comedy



Arousal is generated in this ad over the idea of meeting that special someone, and is heightened by the negative feelings associated with *breaking up* with a significant other. However, the stimulation is released when there is a cognitive resolution that allows the scenario to be reinterpreted as not a serious relationship, but rather a casual meeting in a bar. The idea of an end to a relationship no longer produces arousal because it is a *safe* situation involving a relationship that does not involve deep emotions. The favourable comparison of such a shallow relationship to a meaningful one intensifies the sentimental reaction. A sentimental yet humorous response is the result of this union of incongruity-resolution and arousal-safety mechanisms.

2.4.1.5. Full Comedy

Finally, full comedy is a humour application that executes all three processes (see Example 2.5 & Figure 2.8). It is complex and rich not only on the cognitive level (through incongruity-resolution), but also the affective (from arousal-safety), and social (via humorous disparagement) levels. It appends aggression to sentimental comedy. However, the added hostility is somehow equalised by the sentimentality. Negative and positive affect meet and are counterbalanced in this form of humour.

Example 2.5

Full Comedy

Consider the following ad for the Visa Check Card, which is a direct debit card. It starts from a first person view of what is seemingly a voyeur looking through a keyhole at a beautiful woman dressed up in her flat. Seen from the perspective of the intruder, the audience is eyeing her up and down as she talks on the phone. She gets off the phone and has detected that she is being watched and slowly creeps over to the door and looks through the keyhole. Suddenly, she says, "Honey, I tried every locksmith in the city and they won't take a cheque." The view switches to the other side of the door, and it is not the outside of the apartment, but the bathroom. It was the woman's boyfriend staring through the keyhole because he is locked in the bathroom. He then makes clumsy attempts to break down the door but only hurts himself. After a voiceover lectures on the importance of having a Visa Check Card in case cheques are not accepted, the woman who has clearly given up on their night out asks her boyfriend what he is doing in there. He claims "nothing," but the audience sees him trying on her facial creams in a humorous attempt to pass the time.

A complex mix of humour processes makes this ad rich in humorous content. The arousal is initially created through this apparently voyeuristic scene. Initially, the audience fears for the woman. The music and the female's unawareness of the prowler create an eerie feeling. This process is then combined with incongruity-resolution when the frightening schema of a lurking stranger outside is compared with the safer actuality of the boyfriend locked in the bathroom. The arousal-safety is intensified by the incongruity-resolution. Disparagement is also mixed in because this man has foolishly locked himself in the bathroom. This is played out further by his futile and whimsical attempts to escape. Finally, the man is ridiculed further through his odd behaviour at the end. However, the aggression towards the man is somewhat diluted by the positive affect created by the arousal-safety processes. Satire and sentimental comedy meet in this richer form of humour.

Figure 2.8 Absolut: Example of Full Comedy



Arousal is engendered immediately in this ad as the audience views this all too familiar scenario. The arousal is relieved and interpreted as playful when the outline in the gum reveals the shape of a bottle, demonstrating that the scene is not real. It is a safe situation, but is still seen as sentimental because everyone knows how that feels. The incongruity, which is the puzzlement experienced at seeing this undesirable image in a magazine is resolved when the image is reinterpreted as a part of Absolut's now famous campaign. The mockery of the poor individual who is attached to the foot that is in view represents the disparagement. He is ridiculed for having stepped in the gum as well as for his very common response. It is a full mix of cognitive, affective, and interpersonal humour.

2.4.2. Relatedness of Humour

One further element of Speck's taxonomy that demands attention is how the humour relates to the message in which it is contained. This applies to humour that is one part of a larger communication (e.g.: an advertisement), rather than pure humour communicated solely for the sake of being funny (e.g.: joke telling). This bears mentioning because the use of humour in the context of this research is humour use within persuasive advertising communications with the motivation of changing or reinforcing brand attitudes.

Speck considers relatedness a part of the classification of humour because of the significance of relatedness of humour in an advertising context. As will be clarified in the next chapter, the relationship of humorous elements to other message components in an ad critically influence the effectiveness of that message. Therefore, it is important to at least build related and unrelated humour into the categorisation:

“If a topically irrelevant pun occurs in the middle of an otherwise nonhumorous message, it could (1) cause distraction, (2) be judged inappropriate, and (3) lead to a negative evaluation of the source. Imagine now the same pun, but used at the very end of a somewhat more playful ad whose message is cleverly repeated by the pun itself. In this case, the pun (1) would probably be judged appropriate and could provide (2) rhetorical closure, (3) reinforcement of important information, (4) motivation to rehearse portions of the ad, and even (5) a more positive regard for the source. How do these cases differ? The pun itself has not changed, but the relationship to the message has” (Speck, 1991; 16-17).

Speck considers three specific types of relatedness, depending on whether the humorous elements are related to the intentions, themes, or structure of the ad. However, consideration of *how* specifically the humour relates to non-humorous elements of the communications is really impractical from a marketing perspective, and goes beyond the necessary specificity of any empirical inquiry. His conceptualisations of relatedness are grounded in semiotic and literary theory (Spotts,

Weinberger, & Parsons, 1997), and are not particularly practical in advertising effectiveness studies. For this reason, no previous studies in advertising have investigated the different forms of relatedness by comparing the distinct effect of each type. Furthermore, as will be revealed in the next chapter, evidence is clearly conclusive that humour related to the other elements of the message is much more superior to unrelated humour.

Basically, all research on humour in advertising that includes a treatment of the relatedness construct focuses on intentional relatedness. This is the crucial form of relatedness, which considers how the humorous material is associated with the message and the processing of the message. Specifically, it is the degree to which the ad is *humour dominant* or *message dominant*. Humour dominant ads, are just that: the humour is the focal point of the message. Message dominant ads can rely more on image or information, with the humour playing a subsidiary role. The general rule of thumb is that if the humour is removed and the ad is no longer coherent, it is a humour dominant ad. In Cline and Kellaris' (1999) conception of relatedness, which is really intentional relatedness, they described related humour as being "...integral to understanding or reinforcing the ad claims..." (p. 71). If the humour can be removed with no loss to comprehension, then the humour is merely incidental (Spotts et al., 1997). Due to the overwhelming support in the literature and the obvious logic behind such generalisations, the assumption is that the more integrated the humorous elements are to the message, the more successful the advertiser will be in meeting the communicative objectives of the ad. More on this will be mentioned in the next chapter.

2.5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a context in which to more concretely visualise this concept of humour that is such a pervasive part of all cultures. The objective was to demonstrate the importance of humour in society and how it is believed to provide the amused response that it does. It was valuable to contextualise this concept prior to examining its effect in advertising communications. From the statistics (see Chapter One), it is clear that humour is an extremely popular soft sell appeal in advertising. Specifically how it operates in the context of persuasive communications will be addressed in the next chapter.

In this chapter, it was necessary to first see how it works not in a persuasive capacity, but in a perceptual sense. This was accomplished by outlining the processes necessary to elicit a response. Some of the specific social functions that humour serves were addressed in the early stages. Also reviewed were some of the older theories of humour elicitation. Within this discussion, the major mechanisms that are used in Speck's Humorous Message Taxonomy were reviewed. This classification system has been developed to look at the underlying humour processes, rather than the older theories that tend to be overly concerned with surface-level thematic content. The result has been theories that are often overlapping, and too situation specific. This latter quality has resulted in theories that do not cover the full spectrum of humour-eliciting events.

By looking at processes, rather than themes, Speck has developed an exhaustive and mutually exclusive categorisation, which was highlighted above. His five types of

humour, and at least a general sense of intentional relatedness, are particularly useful for examining specific instances of humour use in motivated communications, such as advertising. Due to the subjectivity of what people find funny, it is critical to scrutinise the specificity of the appeal down to the underlying humour process when determining its effectiveness. By examining specific humour mechanisms, trends in what forms of humour people appreciate the most can be exposed. After all, if humour were entirely a subjective experience, then there would not be nearly as much consensus amongst large groups of people in judging the humorousness of a funny play, film, or television programme (O'Sullivan & Kavanagh, 1999). Through an understanding of the types of humour that people tend to enjoy, more successful judgements in creative execution are likely. It is unrealistic to make generalisations on the effectiveness of humour appeals on the whole without expecting such disparate forms to result in different responses. Humour is a multidimensional construct and must be addressed accordingly.

The three primary processes were reviewed, and the importance as well as pervasiveness of incongruity-resolution was emphasised. In Speck's content analysis, which applied his classification system, he found incongruity-resolution mechanisms in 88% of the humorous ads in his sample. It is to an advertising context that the discussion will now turn. While it should be clear how humour amuses at this point, next the arguments will centre on the ability of humour to generate a more proactive, predictable response when driven by marketing motives. After all, a lingering examination of these processes only ruins the appreciation and enjoyment of the

magnificent discourse of humour. As American author E.B. White put it, “Analyzing humor is like dissecting a frog. Few people are interested and the frog dies of it.” For this reason, the chapter will conclude with a joke entirely for the sake of enjoyment:

Two nuns are ordered to paint a room in the convent, and the last instruction of the Mother Superior is that they must not get even a drop of paint on their habits. After conferring about this for a while, the two nuns decide to lock the door of the room, strip off their habits, and paint in the nude. In the middle of the project, there comes a knock at the door. “Who is it?” calls one of the nuns. “Blind man.” replies a voice from the other side of the door. The two nuns look at each other, shrug, and deciding that no harm can come from letting a blind man into the room, they open the door. “Nice boobs,” says the man, “Where do you want the blinds?”

Chapter Three

The Effectiveness of Humour in Advertising

“Advertising is there to create a positive reaction to the brand, and the most tangible positive reaction is laughter” – James Lowther; Creative Director, Saatchi and Saatchi and former jury member at Cannes International Advertising Festival (Archer, 1994; 33).

3.1. PREAMBLE

In this chapter, the concept of humour that has been previously defined and examined in its own right will be applied to advertising communications. Its effectiveness will be scrutinised for all the major communicative objectives in advertising, and compared with non-humorous appeals. The discussions will utilise research both within and beyond an advertising context. Humour in advertising will be assessed across a variety of advertising media, and areas for further research will be noted.

Initially, humour will be given a context within advertising, and some important theories on advertising effectiveness will be reviewed. Research on humour appeals will then be reviewed that examine their effectiveness in meeting specific communication objectives of the advertiser. While a large portion of the chapter will be devoted to examining the value of humour appeals in reaching the goal of persuasion, the power of humour in achieving several other communication objectives will be initially reviewed. Through this analysis, the major unanswered questions in humorous advertising research will be exposed.

3.2. SETTING THE STAGE FOR HUMOUR APPEALS

Promoting products and services has become an intensified challenge for marketers within today's perplexing media backdrop. The upsurge in advertising and promotions use compounded with a diverse breadth of media in which to communicate the message concurrently add to the amount of *clutter* in the marketing environment (see Peter & Olson, 1996). As such, marketers are continually attempting to devise styles of execution for their messages that will grab the consumer's attention and stand out from the competing communications. One strategy within advertising that has found considerable application is incorporating humour with the advertising message.

While specific estimates differ greatly, American research on the television medium has found that about 50% of commercials incorporate some form of humour (Burnett, Fisk, & Lunsford, 1987). More comprehensive ad studies that examined a variety of media have credited the use of humorous appeals in at least a quarter of *all* advertising (Weinberger & Spotts, 1989b; Weinberger & Spotts, 1993). US annual expenditures on advertising are at about US\$250 billion ("Coen's", 2001). With between a quarter and half of these ads counting on humour appeals to facilitate promotional communication, a better perspective is gained as to just how much capital marketers invest to sell with jokes.

The high usage rate coupled with the astronomical costs of mass advertising underscores the necessity of empirical assessment of the effectiveness of humour as an ad appeal. Whereas the lofty usage rate is indicative of practitioners' faith in the power of humour in advertising, more empirical evidence is needed before

conclusions can be drawn with any conviction. Accordingly, a critical review of some of the communications research on humour and humour in advertising will be undertaken, focusing on the effect of this appeal on the advertiser's communicative goals. While many objectives may be employed in any one advertisement, such as increasing brand awareness or message liking, the ultimate goal of a campaign is to persuade the consumer to either engage in immediate purchase behaviour or to improve their attitude towards the brand to consolidate the chances of repeat purchases (Grossman & Till, 1998). In a highly competitive marketplace, persuasiveness in advertising is nothing less than compulsory to a company's success (Blair, Kuse, Furse, & Stewart, 1987).

However, there are many subordinate goals that are fundamental to a communications process. These often must be met before persuading the audience can even be a consideration. Without first generating attention and basic understanding for the message, changing attitudes is not likely. Consequently, the discussion will initially focus on how humorous appeals facilitate lower-order, incremental communicative objectives towards the desired goal of persuasion. The analysis will look at the use of humour in generating initial attention to the message, how it can facilitate brand awareness and ad liking, and how comprehension of the message claims and credibility of the source is influenced through the use of humour appeals. To determine which objectives require attention, it is imperative to consider their relevance as maintained by a model or theoretical framework. In view of that, findings on various communication objectives will be supplemented with relevant theoretical schema of advertising effectiveness.

The discussion will then turn to the research that has examined the effects of humour in generating behavioural and attitudinal persuasion. Persuasion is obviously at the pinnacle of advertisers' wish lists, and it is the most contested area of research on humour appeals. Therefore, a large portion of this chapter will concentrate on the literature that examines persuasion through the support of humour appeals.

Throughout this review, literature on the use of humour appeals in advertising will be the focus. However, further theoretical reinforcement will be drawn from research in other areas where humour appeals are utilised to facilitate communication. This will include education and public speaking research, which has examined the use of humour as a support appeal. Through such a critical survey of the literature, new areas for empirical focus will emerge, which will help to provide the context for this current research. Before empirical evidence can be reviewed, however, it is important to first recognise an influential model of persuasive communications. A great deal of the arguments raised throughout the remainder of this thesis rest within the context of this model.

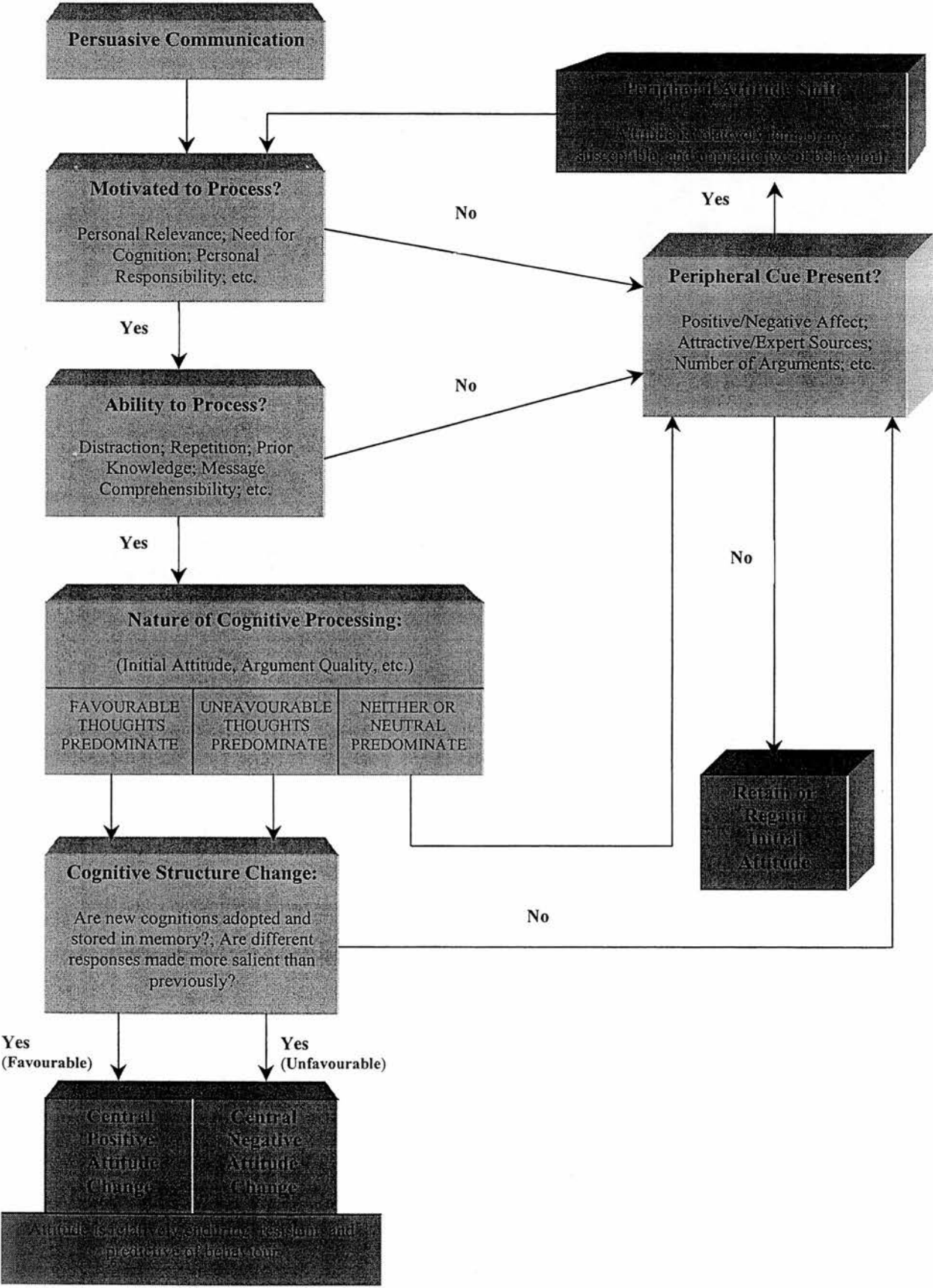
3.3. THE ELABORATION LIKELIHOOD MODEL

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) was developed by Petty and Cacioppo (1981) to identify the processes by which people can be persuaded (see Figure 3.1). The model was originally developed within a social psychology discipline, but they have specifically applied their theory to promotion communications and the effect that they have on consumers. Specifically, they identify two different means by which consumers can be influenced. When someone receives a message (information), they can either process it via the central route or the peripheral route. Which route is

traversed is dependent upon the individual's motivation and ability to process information that is relevant to the argument.

A number of factors can influence our ability to process information, including message (or product) complexity (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984b) or comprehensibility (Ratneshwar & Chaiken, 1991), time pressure (Bitner & Obermiller, 1985), environmental distractions (Petty & Cacioppo, 1985), number of exposures to the message (Cacioppo, 1985; Cacioppo & Petty, 1979), and prior knowledge of the attitude object (Cacioppo, Marshall-Goodell, Tassinary, & Petty, 1992). Similarly, motivation to process is swayed by a number of variables, most notably the personal relevance of the message (Cacioppo & Petty, 1989) (or product) or the audiences' involvement (Petty & Cacioppo, 1979; Petty & Cacioppo, 1984a; Petty, Cacioppo, & Goldman, 1981), the perceived risk or importance of the behavioural decision (Bitner & Obermiller, 1985), the message recipient's need for cognition (Cacioppo & Petty, 1984; Cacioppo, Petty, Feinstein, & Jarvis, 1996; Cacioppo, Petty, & Morris, 1983) (see below), and more basically, how interesting the message is perceived to be. Assuming that for most mainstream advertising consumers have the *capability* to process the ad claims, ability will usually be based on environmental factors (e.g.: distractions during exposure), while motivation will often come down to their level of involvement with the product and advertising message (see Andrews & Shimp, 1990; Areni & Lutz, 1988; Miniard, Bhatla, Lord, & Dickson, 1991; Miniard, Bhatla, & Rose, 1990; Miniard, Dickson, & Lord, 1988; Peter & Olson, 1996; Petty et al., 1983).

Figure 3.1 The Elaboration Likelihood Model of Persuasion



Source: Petty, R. E., & Cacioppo, J. (1985). The elaboration likelihood model of persuasion. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (Vol. 18, pp. 123-205). New York, NY: Academic Press, Inc.

3.3.1. The Central Route to Persuasion

If the message recipient is both motivated and able to process the incoming information in a detailed, systematic manner, they will do so and central route persuasion is more likely. In these instances, persuasion will be a direct result of solid, information-based arguments that convince recipients of the argument's standpoint through their in-depth analysis of the incoming information. This type of processing is comparable to Chaiken, Liberman, and Eagley's (1989) systematic processing. When information is presented that advocates a particular position, a central processor analyses the merit of the arguments carefully and attentively (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986a; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986b). Elaboration likelihood is said to be high because the recipient's ability and motivation to engage in issue-relevant thinking facilitates this probability. As a result, significant cognitive resources are apportioned to understanding, scrutinising, and deliberating upon the persuasive message:

“This means that people are likely to attend to the appeal; attempt to access relevant associations, images, and experiences from memory; scrutinize and elaborate upon the externally provided message arguments in light of the associations available from memory; draw inferences about the merits of the arguments for a recommendation based upon their analyses; and consequently derive an overall evaluation of, or attitude toward, the recommendation” (Petty & Cacioppo, 1985; 128).

Upon analysis of the arguments contained in the message, if they are found to be logical and compelling, positive thoughts in the form of support arguments will lead to attitudinal change in the intended direction. If the message claims are found to be feeble or hollow, counterarguments will be elicited, giving rise to resistance towards the advocacy (Areni & Lutz, 1988; Petty & Cacioppo, 1984a).

In advertising, this means that when the consumer engages in central processing, the appeal needs to be information-driven and rely upon sound arguments and relevant product information. Central cues are considered to be any assertions about product attributes or the presentation of functional and psychosocial consequences, along with any supporting evidence (Peter & Olson, 1996). Consumers in central processing modes diligently attend to the message arguments, and thus are influenced by their total cognitive responses, the sum of their message-oriented thoughts, and specific favourable and unfavourable message-oriented thoughts (Andrews & Shimp, 1990).

This form of systematic processing and ultimately central route persuasion is more likely when the consumer is more involved with the product and attribute a high level of importance to the purchase decision (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984a). In such instances, a hard sell is successful, and the ad should be product-driven. The content of the ad should focus on unique selling propositions, solid comparatives, expert testimonials, and other similar hard sell tactics. The support arguments that will be formed by the consumer in successful instances will include positive opinions regarding product characteristics and the favourable consequences of product use. This, in turn, will lead to positive product beliefs, which will enhance brand attitudes, and hopefully solidify intention to purchase (Peter & Olson, 1996). In cases where the product does offer a clear benefit over the competitors, advertisers may try to boost consumers' product involvement to promote central processing of their unique product attributes (MacInnis, Moorman, & Jaworski, 1991).

3.3.2. The Peripheral Route to Persuasion

Alternatively, when the message recipient is either unable or unwilling to process the message centrally, the likelihood of message elaboration is low. However, under such conditions persuasion is still possible through the peripheral route. Due to the number of counter-attitudinal messages to which we are exposed each day, it would not be adaptive to consciously attend to them all because our cognitive capacities are somewhat limited (Eagley & Chaiken, 1984). As a result, we have developed a strategy for dealing with messages that we either cannot understand or to which we are not motivated to allocate cognitive resources.

In these cases, the focus is not on the relevant informational arguments, but rather on other, affective factors. Processing is done through the use of heuristics, hence the similarity between peripheral route processing and Chaiken et al.'s (1989) heuristic processing. The mental focus when in peripheral processing modes is on source-oriented perceptions, rather than message-related cognition (Andrews & Shimp, 1990). Attitude formation or change in these cases occurs without active thought about the attitude object, but through association with positive or negative cues and the use of cognitive short cuts (Bitner & Obermiller, 1985).

In an advertising context, these cues include all of the features of the ad that are not related specifically to the product or its use and can be processed relatively effortlessly. In these instances, direct persuasion is less likely because such consumers may have fewer brand-related beliefs, and thus cannot be appealed to cognitively. However, such consumers may attend to features of the ad that are not expressly related to the product (Peter & Olson, 1996). On such occasions, attitudes

towards the brand or product may be based on the emotions generated by the ad or the brand. Examples can include attractiveness or perceived credibility of the message source; warmth and other positive emotions attributable to the commercial, the entertainment value of the ad, or any other positive experiences attributed to the ad or brand. This may even include affective experiences such as a boost in self-esteem through product use. Consumers in a peripheral processing mode may also use rules of thumb to formulate their opinion, such as the sheer *number* of arguments presented with no consideration for argument *quality*. Typically, persuasion through the peripheral route requires more exposures to the message than persuasion via the central route (Bitner & Obermiller, 1985).

Change in attitudes through the peripheral route to persuasion, then, are not the result of deliberate agreement with the information presented, but arise through the positive affect associated with some presentational cue in the persuasion context (Petty & Cacioppo, 1985) (i.e.: the ad). Peripheral processing is most notably used with low-involvement, routine purchases, where there is little motivation evident to process the ad claims with any effort. In these instances, the emotional component of attitudes is much more important (Batra, 1986). Attitude towards the ad (Aad) is certainly an important factor in central processing (see MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989; Miniard & Barone, 1997; Miniard et al., 1990), since the consumer is processing the product claims communicated through the ad and judging the credibility of the ad. However, it is a prime factor in the case of peripheral route processing. Aad is exactly the sort of heuristic cue that is used to formulate an attitude towards the brand. Peripheral processing leads to an affective-based attitude judgement determined by the content of the advertisement. The feelings and thoughts generated by the peripheral material

can be incorporated to formulate Aad (Stayman & Aaker, 1988). Aad is then used when evaluating a brand as a basis for brand attitudes and purchase intentions (Batra & Ray, 1986; Gardner, 1985a; Holbrook & Batra, 1987; Laczniak & Carlson, 1989; Lutz, MacKenzie, & Belch, 1983; Mitchell, 1986; Mitchell & Olson, 1981; Moore & Hutchinson, 1983; Olney, Holbrook, & Batra, 1991; Shimp, 1981; Stayman & Batra, 1991).

According to the Dual Mediation Hypothesis, Aad affects brand attitudes through both an immediate influence via direct affect transfer, and indirectly through the brand cognitions generated. Brand cognitions may include both the utilitarian and image beliefs about the brand (Mittal, 1990). Aad modifies these cognitions, which of course then influence brand attitudes and ultimately purchase intentions (Walker & Dubitsky, 1994). Through a meta-analysis, Brown and Stayman (1992) indeed provided confirmation for this dual mediation process. The resulting brand attitudes, comprised of both cognitive and affective information, directly impact purchase intentions (Dröge, 1989; Homer, 1990; MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989). However, it appears that in instances of peripheral route persuasion, the consumer is much more significantly influenced by Aad than by message-oriented thoughts or brand cognitions (Andrews & Shimp, 1990). Other researchers have also found support for this process when testing dual mediation directly against other models that map the relationship between brand-related cognitive, affective, and conative responses and ad-related cognitive and affective responses (Homer, 1990; MacKenzie, Lutz, & Belch, 1986; Miniard et al., 1990).

The effect is thought to be stronger in instances of peripheral processing, since it is a more involuntary and less effortful progression (Batra & Ray, 1985; Lutz, 1985; Lutz et al., 1983). This is because affective responses occur without any conscious exertion (Zajonc, 1980). As a result, in instances where involvement with the product is low, and thus motivation to process will be low, a soft sell strategy, which attempts to persuade via the peripheral route, will be the most successful. If appeals such as humour are likely to be met with success at all, it is in these instances. The chapter will address this issue in greater detail later.

3.3.3. Consequences of the Route to Persuasion

The persistence of attitude changes differs depending on the route to persuasion that was taken. Persuasion that occurs via the central route tends to be more enduring and permanent than attitude change that is prompted by the peripheral route (Petty & Cacioppo, 1985; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986a; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986b). Given an equal number of repetitions to a persuasive message with both central and peripheral cues, a group that centrally processes it will develop more stable attitudes than those engaged in peripheral processing. The higher elaboration processes that occur in central route persuasion simply dominate the lower elaboration processes associated with peripheral route persuasion (Greenwald & Leavitt, 1984).

Furthermore, central route attitude changes are more resistant to counter-attitudinal messages than are attitudes formed through the peripheral route. This is primarily due to the fact that central route persuasion involves careful consideration of the message arguments and greater cognitive effort in forging a stable attitude. It is much easier to form an attitude through peripheral cues, and as a result of the greater time and effort

allocated to central processing, the ensuing attitudes are more persistent. The perfunctory quality of peripheral processing tends to inhibit the development of a strong memory linkage between the attitude object and the peripheral cue (Sengupta, Goodstein, & Boninger, 1997). Dissociation of the cue and attitude object may occur under these circumstances, which eventually can result in attitude decay. Alternatively, "When an attitude change is based on an extensive foundation of issue-relevant beliefs, and these beliefs are rehearsed, the attitude change is likely to persist because the issue-relevant beliefs are likely to remain salient" (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984a; 79).

However, this is not to say that attitudes formed by the peripheral route cannot be enduring. Given that most advertising is processed as a low-involvement communication along with the fact that there is typically a delay between ad contact and the buying opportunity (Sengupta et al., 1997), there would be cause for concern if attitudes evoked by the ad did not ever persist. While still not as resilient as attitudes formed under high-involvement conditions, Sengupta et al. (1997) found that attitudes formed through peripheral processing were much more enduring when the peripheral cues were related to the advertising themes and brand concept. This is because the more related the ad cue, the greater the memory trace between the attitude and the cue at the time of later retrieval. This greater cue accessibility leads to longer attitude persistence.

In a similar vein, the attitudes formed through central processing are more predictive of behaviour (Cacioppo, Petty, Kao, & Rodriguez, 1986; Fazio, 1986; MacKenzie & Spreng, 1992; Petty, Cacioppo, & Heesacker, 1984; Petty et al., 1983). Again this is

due to the effort required to form an attitude via the central route, versus the more cognitively passive manner in which peripheral route persuasion occurs (Petty & Cacioppo, 1985). The active processing that occurs in central route persuasion may make the resultant attitudes more salient, allowing individuals to take action (see Fazio & Zanna, 1981). The enduring and predictive nature of attitudes formed via the central route also has to do with the more sophisticated manner in which information is integrated into the individual's schematic knowledge structures and experiences (Cacioppo & Petty, 1989).

Furthermore, people have more faith in attitudes that are based on effortful cognitive processing than those engendered by peripheral cues, which may make them more likely to act on them (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984a). Brand attitudes formed via the peripheral route are established on stimuli that are lacking personal relevance to the audience. Therefore, they may be perceived as being devoid of diagnostic value in meeting decision goals, relative to accessible central decision inputs (Miniard, Sirdeshmukh, & Innis, 1992). An exception to this may be in instances where the available information does not adequately discriminate between various choice alternatives (Miniard et al., 1988). For example, if available brand attribute information in a centrally processed ad is not ample enough for the consumer to make an informed purchase decision between two products, then peripheral cues will be more predictive of the eventual purchase behaviour.

3.3.4. Opposition to the Elaboration Likelihood Model

The Elaboration Likelihood Model has had its share of dissenters, who have contested it both theoretically and empirically. Most important to note is the fact that this model

cannot possibly account for all instances of persuasion (Petty et al., 1983). Categorising circumstances where one form of persuasion will clearly work is not as black and white as this model assumes. However, the model does help to determine the conditions in which one route is more likely to induce attitude change (Bitner & Obermiller, 1985).

While the model is strong and clear in its classification of processing approaches, it fails to include a taxonomy that would organise specific objective message cues by the route in which they would be processed. This is most unfortunate for advertisers, who have control over these cues. Effectiveness of their ads would clearly be markedly enhanced if the ELM was able to forecast how particular cues would be processed under specific conditions (Bitner & Obermiller, 1985). Unfortunately, executional elements cannot be easily categorised as being perpetually *central* or *peripheral*.

The problem stems from the fact that whilst the model can illustrate the form of mental processing that stems from a particular motivational state, it cannot actually predict the motivational status based on the type of cue or appeal that is implemented. A certain individual may not be motivated to process brand information centrally in an ad, and may thus process an affective cue peripherally, such as its humorous content. However, someone else may be motivated to process the brand information centrally, while yet another consumer may actually be motivated to process the peripheral cue centrally in its own right, irrespective of the attitude object. This last scenario may be more likely to occur when there are no central cues available to process (Obermiller, 1985), or when a product offers indulgent or sensory benefits

(Aaker & Stayman, 1989). For example, in a study that examined the ELM through shampoo ads, model attractiveness, which through face validity was thought to be a peripheral cue, was actually processed centrally as an indicator of product performance (Petty & Cacioppo, 1980).

Further problems with the classification of cues result from ads that are more *drama* than *lecture* (see Wells, 1989). In the case of a hard sell ad presented in the form of a lecture, the distinction between peripheral cue and central cue may be obvious. However, with soft sell dramas, the difference is much more muted:

“Instead of presenting facts or product benefits for the audience to learn, ‘drama’ ads deliver a taste or sample of a product’s emotional rewards, offering the audience vicarious experiences and the opportunity to empathise with an ad’s characters and situations. In such cases, the central/peripheral distinction may not be straightforward or even meaningful” (O’Donohoe, 1994; 59).

As a result of these criticisms, the model has been somewhat extended to address this point regarding central and peripheral cues. Cacioppo and Petty (1989) have claimed that affect need not be considered peripheral to the intrinsic value attached to the product. To the contrary, the affective response to an ad may be considered a central cue for indulgent, image- and sensory-based products. In these cases, product beliefs may be subordinate to affective feelings when formulating brand attitudes. With regard to humour appeals specifically, in instances where its competency to act as either a peripheral or central cue may be blurred, it is really only important to debate its potency as a peripheral appeal, which is how it is conventionally viewed. Under circumstances where it could be used as a central cue (e.g.: choosing a comedy album to purchase), its effectiveness as a persuasive *argument* will be solely based on perceived *funniness*. In these cases, the more the merrier both literally and

figuratively! It is really only its ability to be effective as a persuasive peripheral cue that is important to this research, making the above criticism of the ELM somewhat irrelevant.

An additional challenge to this model involves the alleged autonomy of the central and peripheral routes. Despite the fact that the two routes to persuasion are purported to be mutually exclusive, it has been inferred that peripheral processing is responsible for prompting central route processes (Miniard et al., 1988). When consumers are highly involved with the product decision, other researchers have noted the interface between central and peripheral processing (Laczniak & Carlson, 1989; Obermiller, 1985; Petty et al., 1984). Burke and Edell (1989) have also cited the interconnectedness of cognitive and affective components of persuasion. In particular, Aad, traditionally thought of as a peripheral influence on brand attitudes, has been shown to have an impact on brand attitudes in high involvement conditions, when central processing would be expected (Chattopadhyay & Nedungadi, 1992; Gardner, 1985a; Mitchell, 1986; Muehling & Laczniak, 1988; Muehling, Laczniak, & Stoltman, 1991).

Furthermore, evidence for the Dual Mediation Hypothesis also implies an interconnectedness between the central and peripheral routes, given that the theory proposes that Aad affects brand cognitions (see MacKenzie et al., 1986). In response to the arguments that the two routes may be interrelated, Cacioppo (1985) repositioned the standpoint by conceding that perhaps the two routes are actually two points on a single continuum of processing, rather than two independent forms of processing. While this may pacify the challenges that have been expressed regarding

the interconnectedness of the two forms of processing, it has led some theorists, such as O'Donohoe (1994) to question what substance and structure remains of the ELM when the central and peripheral dimensions are muddled.

Nevertheless, the ELM is a useful framework for understanding the processes that occur in attitude formation and attitude change. At the very least, it is flexible in that it does not impose a solitary view of persuasion, but guides research towards an understanding of the conditions under which each route is more plausible. In its current form, the ELM has been described as imparting a useful *anatomy* of persuasion, while failing to provide a *physiology* (see Bitner & Obermiller, 1985). This analogy implies that it is a useful model for describing and pigeonholing the processes that occur when exposed to persuasive discourses, but lacks the detail necessary to supply researchers and practitioners with an underlying explanation. It is also a useful structural framing point in which to discuss the *intended* consequences of an ad appeal or other persuasive message, even if it sometimes falters in its projections.

3.4. HUMOUR APPEALS & SUPPORTING OBJECTIVES

Prior to examining the potential of humour appeals in facilitating the persuasive impact desired by the message sender, this review must first address the more basic communication goals. Although it has been suggested that persuasion is the definitive aim of the advertiser, there are many intervening communication objectives of individual advertisements, some of which are obligatory to the persuasion process. Such objectives include attention to the ad, comprehension and recall of ad content, source credibility, and brand awareness. Without initial awareness, attention,

comprehension, and trust for the message sender followed by recall of content, persuasion may not be as feasible. These more immediate goals have also been highlighted in entire bodies of research. Individual advertisements may address only one of these objectives within the context of a larger, macro-level campaign to ultimately affect purchase behaviours and attitudes. By examining the effectiveness of humour in meeting these goals, a more complete understanding may ensue as to the role of humour in effectively persuading the consumer. It is to these more immediate communicative objectives that the discussion first turns.

3.4.1. Humour Appeals & Attention

Prior to the execution and transmission of any message in an advertisement, the initial priority is to generate attention from the viewer. This is true regardless of the theory of advertising effectiveness supported. Without initially generating attention, the potential impact of the communicative message can never come to fruition. Lacking some executional element to draw in the viewer, the message will never be received by the intended audience, as they will either concentrate on something else during exposure, or engage in behaviours that will prevent message transfer, such as reading, talking, or leaving the room. While consumers have always had ways of evading advertising, technology has given rise to more novel ad avoidance behaviours along with a new set of headaches for marketers. This includes *zapping*, which with the advent of the remote control allows the viewer to easily channel surf during programme breaks; and *zipping*, in which viewers pre-record programmes, permitting them to fast forward through the ads (see Olney, Batra, & Holbrook, 1990). Clearly, this requires advertisers to use more creative tools than ever and to attract and maintain the attention of an increasingly uncooperative viewing audience.

In the case of humour, it has been suggested that the first objective of the appeal is to generate attention, followed up by pleasing cues that are customary of a soft sell (Kelly & Solomon, 1975). Throughout decades of research on humour in advertising, the one most conclusive finding that surfaces repeatedly is that humour is effective in meeting this goal (see Table 3.1). This is the view of the majority of practitioners in industry (Madden & Weinberger, 1984). Most of the executives surveyed by Madden and Weinberger felt that not only was humour proficient in generating attention, but that it was superior to non-humorous advertisements in meeting this intention. This supposition was espoused not only by advertising executives in the US, but also was backed by British practitioners (Weinberger & Spotts, 1989a).

While the practitioners' opinions are undoubtedly valuable given that they scrutinise the effects of their work in the natural marketplace, there is also a wide body of empirical literature to support their claims. Advertising research overwhelmingly points to humour as an effective attention-gainer for a multitude of transmission media. In magazine advertising, Weinberger and Madden (1982) found that humour significantly improved attention measures, particularly for white males in an experiment using spirits advertisements. This finding has been supported in studies on magazine advertising for consumers of other demographic characteristics (Wu, Crocker, & Rogers, 1989). The effectiveness of humour in generating attention for the ad message has also been substantiated in experimental research on the radio medium (Duncan & Nelson, 1985; Weinberger & Campbell, 1991), in a meta-analytical study on television advertising (McCollum/Spielman and Co., 1982; Stewart & Furse, 1986), and in experimental tests of television commercials (Perry et al., 1997b).

The evidence endorsing humour's effect on attention across advertising channels makes these findings even more compelling when considered jointly, because as will be established below, the medium can dictate humour's effectiveness for other communicative goals. However, the effect of humour on attention seems to be durable regardless of the transmission medium. Moreover, the advertising literature is further corroborated with multimedia support from *non-advertising* studies (see Bryant & Zillman, 1989; Gruner, 1970; Powell & Andresen, 1985; Zillman, Williams, Bryant, Boynton, & Wolf, 1980).

The proposed reason why humour attracts attention is fairly straightforward. With the constant barrage of marketing messages that the consumer is bombarded with in their daily activities, the advertiser's goal is to create a message that will stand out from the rest of the marketing *noise* in the environment. Considering that most advertising is seen as mundane to consumers (Belch & Belch, 1984), they will be more likely to focus their attention on what is perceived as interesting (Duncan, 1979). Most consumers are allured by humour because it is a gratifying and important part of our cultural value system (Fugate, 1998). In a comparative study, participants rated light-hearted messages as more interesting than their otherwise similar serious counterparts (Markowicz, 1974), although this only seems applicable when the basic message is perceived as dull (Gruner, 1970). However, as stated, consumers generally consider most advertising to be boring, making this finding more germane to this context.

3.4.2. Humour & Brand Awareness

While these results offer optimistic support for the use of humour in spawning attention, they also have possible implications for other communicative objectives.

This is based on the proposition that if humour can engender attention towards the directed message, then it may be appropriate for new product introductions (Duncan & Nelson, 1985). If its primary strength lies in securing attention, then brand awareness may be a further communicative objective achieved through the use of humour in an advertising message. The grounding for this conjecture is that it is difficult to gain attention for unknown products. If an attention-grabbing stimulus, such as humour can be inserted into the message, then this may perform the surrogate function of acquiring interest and concentration where unknown products are lacking the aptitude.

However, Chattopadhyay and Kunal (1990) found that humour was most effective for brands for which the consumer had a prior positive brand attitude. Since they compared a positive prior attitude to a negative prior attitude, these results may have no bearing on new products. Nevertheless, closer examination should assess the effects of new versus existing products. To date, little research has examined this distinction.

The one stipulation to the use of humour for new product introductions is that there has to be sufficient time in the ad devoted to introducing the brand and connecting it to its relevant product class. Humour takes time to set up, and if the entire ad is devoted to the creative execution of the humorous appeal, then the ad will fail to achieve the marketer's goal of prompting brand awareness and brand attitude formation.

3.4.3. Humour & Ad Liking

Another imperative function of an ad appeal is to generate a positive Aad. When the ad is attempting central and especially peripheral route persuasion, liking is critical to persuading the individual for most products. As such, a creative execution that will facilitate the solidification of a positive Aad is usually necessary. There is nearly unanimous agreement that humour does inspire liking (see Weinberger & Gulas, 1992). Sternthal and Craig (1973) initially made this deduction following an evaluation of the empirical evidence of the earlier two decades. Nearly all of the more recent research further supports this assertion, irrespective of the advertising medium examined (see Table 3.2).

In the television medium, consumers rated liking of the humorous ad and source higher than commercials that did not employ humour (Alden, Mukherjee, & Hoyer, 2000; Belch & Belch, 1984; Chattopadhyay & Basu, 1990; Zhang & Zinkhan, 1991). While the results of Chattopadhyay and Basu (1990) were dependent upon prior positive information on the source, other findings were not contingent on any particular circumstances. Unconditional support was found for radio advertising (Duncan & Nelson, 1985; Gelb & Zinkhan, 1986; Lammers, 1991; Lammers, Liebowitz, Seymour, & Hennessey, 1983), print advertising (Brooker, 1981), and direct mail advertising (Gelb & Pickett, 1983; Scott, Klein, & Bryant, 1990). There is an overwhelming amount of further support in education research (Bryant, Brown, Silverberg, & Elliott, 1981; Bryant, Comisky, Crane, & Zillman, 1980) and other communications studies (see Weinberger & Gulas, 1992) attesting to the positive correlation between humour and liking for the message and source. In fact, not one

single piece of empirical evidence reviewed suggested that humour had a negative impact on source and message liking.

These findings offer critical encouragement for humour in advertising as liking appears to be a critical success factor for advertising effectiveness (Biel & Bridgewater, 1990; Haley & Baldinger, 1991), except for low-involvement/informational products (Rossiter & Percy, 1996). However, as will be clarified below, it has already been established that these types of products are a less suitable class for humorous appeals. This backs the proposition that humour is an effective advertising appeal under the appropriate conditions.

3.4.4. Humour & Source Credibility

The next logical leap in this progression towards ultimately understanding humour's effect on persuasion is whether liking of the source translates to high perceived credibility of the message informant. This construct can be conceptualised as a more cognitive facet of liking, operationalised as perceived expertise of, and trust in the marketer and more specifically the spokesperson (Weinberger & Gulas, 1992). Source credibility can be used as either a central or peripheral cue, and thus is a very important component to persuasion.

While it was originally believed that humour increases source credibility (Sternthal & Craig, 1973), more recent evidence is much less conclusive. While Belch and Belch (1984) found that the use of humour improved perceptions of source credibility in television advertising, other results suggest that the use of humour makes little difference in how credible the message sender is seen to be (Wu et al., 1989). Still

others claim that the use of humour may harm credibility (Bryant et al., 1981) unless a clever pun is used that is somehow related to the product (Sutherland & Middleton, 1983). In introductory textbooks, nonsense humour and inadvertent humour also seemed to reduce credibility (Klein, Bryant, & Zillman, 1982) perhaps because these types make it difficult to take the source seriously.

Because the latter studies employed print media, it seems plausible that the conflicting findings may somehow be related to the medium of message transmission. It is possible that because television is a more intimate medium in which the communicator can be seen and/or heard, the light-hearted style inherent in humorous communications may enhance the intimate nature of that medium. For this reason, humour may only improve the perceived trustworthiness of the communicator in this advertising medium. In fact, in his examination of television ads, Speck (1991) did find that sentimental humour was successful at improving trustworthiness. However, the results of other communications research do not support this view for humour in general. In an examination of public speeches, humour only seemed to enhance the credibility of a speaker giving an otherwise dull speech (Gruner, 1970). Education research revealed a gender difference in credibility perceptions. Humour only enhanced the credibility of male lecturers, and even this effect was minor (Bryant et al., 1980).

Clearly, the results of studies to date are inconclusive regarding the effectiveness of humour in enhancing source credibility (see Table 3.3). The only tentative conclusion that can be drawn at this time is that while it does not seem to significantly harm source credibility, humour is no better than serious appeals at improving credibility.

This is also the view shared by advertising practitioners (Madden & Weinberger, 1984; Weinberger & Spotts, 1989a), who do not specifically employ or avoid humour when addressing this objective.

3.4.5. Humour & Comprehension

A great deal of advertising literature has also examined the effects of humour in enhancing message comprehension. However, the conclusions have been very contradictory (see Table 3.4). Such incongruities have been surfacing in the literature from the beginnings of humour research. Several studies in the 1950s and 1960s found support for humour as a comprehension enhancer (see Sternthal & Craig, 1973), but this effect was not found unless participants were informed prior to message exposure that the communication would be satirical in nature. However, even under these unlikely conditions, humour was still only equivalent to serious messages in comprehensibility.

Through measures of aided and unaided recall, some arguments for a positive effect of humour on comprehension have emerged. Recall and comprehension measures have been found to be highly correlated (Stewart & Furse, 1985), and thus recall and recognition are the standard assessments when the advertising objectives are based on learning and memory. Even so, it has been suggested that a better measure is needed for comprehension, as memory may be constructively different from initial understanding (Markowicz, 1974). In a study by Duncan, Nelson, and Frontczak (1984), aided recall was assessed for several versions of humorous and serious advertising appeals in a radio advertisement. Regardless of where the humour was placed within the ad, the humorous versions resulted in increased recall for the

primary selling propositions of the ad. This effect was found irrespective of whether the participant found the humorous portion to be funny.

Similar results in the radio medium were obtained by Weinberger and Campbell, (1991) with a few caveats. They ascertained that humour that was related to the ad claims was the most effective in augmenting recall and thus comprehension for most product categories. Only for high-involvement/thinking products was the use of a serious appeal at a distinct advantage over related humour. However, it has already been established that this product class is ill-suited for humorous appeals regardless of the communicative objective (see Spotts, Weinberger, & Parsons, 1997).

Humour was also found to be superior to non-humorous appeals in enhancing comprehension in some investigations that examined the television medium (Stewart & Furse, 1986; Zhang & Zinkhan, 1991). Krishnan and Chakravarti (1990) also recognised the mediating effect of humour relevance on comprehension. These researchers also claim that the strength of the humorous response can impinge upon message comprehension. They believe that milder forms of humour focus the consumer on the ad claims, while overly funny executions impair message comprehension by drawing too much attention to the humorous content. This may be overcome by designing ads with intentionally related humour.

However, not all of the empirical evidence is as propitious for humour. In a study on print advertising, Sutherland and Middleton (1983) found that the use of humour can actually impair message comprehension, as measured by unaided recall. However, the researchers only tested a product with which the target group was highly involved

(cameras); and high-involvement product classes are already known to not be suitable for humorous advertising (see Bauerly, 1990). The study was also only an examination of print ads, for which humour is not as effective an appeal (see Madden & Weinberger, 1984). Lastly, they looked only at the use of puns and nonsense humour. Because puns are overly complex and nonsense humour tends to be unrelated to the message claims, they are generally considered the least successful forms of humour (Duncan, 1979; Klein et al., 1982), particularly without an auditory delivery.

However, the radio medium also exposed a somewhat bleak outlook for comprehension and recall responses to humorous appeals. Cantor and Venus (1980) found that comprehension was damaged by humorous executions, but only looked at fictional products. It is uncertain how generalisable findings are that use artificial ads for mock products. Comprehension measures also faltered in response to humour in radio experiments conducted by Lammers (1991) and Lammers et al. (1983). However, they had average consumers rate an industrial, non-consumer product in which they would have no personal interest to begin with. Finally, Gelb and Zinkhan (1986) found humour to adversely affect message comprehension in radio advertisements, but also used mock brands. Furthermore, they employed questionable measures of advertising recall (Nelson, 1987).

The remaining studies that investigated comprehension and recall reported either inconclusive results or found that humour was at least equivalent to serious appeals in meeting this objective (Belch & Belch, 1984; Murphy, Cunningham, & Wilcox, 1979; Wu et al., 1989). Stewart and Furse (1985) found a high correlation between humour

and separate measures of both recall *and* comprehension, although no explicit comparison was made to serious appeals. This empirical work, along with that of Belch and Belch (1984) and Murphy et al. (1979), explored the television medium, which is the most successful medium for humorous advertising. Because this is the avenue where the humour can be conveyed with ad content in the most clear and readily understood fashion, these findings should carry considerable weight. With all of the visual and verbal cues available to the viewer, this is the strongest medium for assessing the comprehension construct.

This evidence is also coupled with innumerable results from non-advertising studies, which also transmitted messages either through television or in a comparable live setting endowed with the same cues (Gruner, 1970; Kaplan & Pascoe, 1977; Weaver, Zillman, & Bryant, 1988; see also Weinberger & Gulas, 1992). While it is difficult to assess how results from a different context apply to an advertising setting, they also suggest that humour is no more effective at facilitating message comprehension than non-humorous appeals except under very specific situational circumstances. It may just be that humour's impact on message comprehension may be moderated by the type of humour used, with highly related humour enhancing comprehension of the message (Perry et al., 1997b).

Table 3.1

The Impact of Humour on Attention

ADVERTISING STUDIES

Author(s) & Date	Type of Study & Subjects	Medium	Finding	Comment
Sternthal & Craig (1973)	Literature review	N/A	+	
Duncan (1979)	Literature review	N/A	Mixed	
McCullum/Spielman (1982)	Study of 500 commercials from data base, target audiences	TV	+	
Madden (1982)	Lab experiment, 326 undergrads	Radio	Mixed	Only related humour effective
Madden & Weinberger (1982)	Data-based study of 148 liquor ads from Starch	Print	+	Humorous ads outperformed non-humorous ads on noted, seen-associated, and read most recall measures
Madden & Weinberger (1984)	Survey of US ad execs, 68 research & 72 creative	N/A	+	
Duncan & Nelson (1985)	Lab experiment, 157 male undergrads	Radio	+	
Stewart & Furse (1986)	Data-based study of 1000 pre-tested ads	TV	+	
Speck (1987)	Lab experiment, 182 undergrads	TV	+	Humour outperforms non-humour on 4 attention measures
Weinberger & Spotts (1989)	Survey of advertising execs, 132 US & 29 UK agencies	N/A	+	
Wu, Crocker, & Rogers (1989)	Lab experiment, 360 undergrads	Print	+	
Weinberger & Campbell (1991)	Data-based study of 2500 pre-tested ads	Radio	+	
Perry et al. (1997b)	Lab experiment, 99 undergrads	TV	+	

NON-ADVERTISING STUDIES

Author(s) & Date	Type of Study & Subjects	Medium	Finding	Comment
Gruner (1970)	Communication experiment	Taped public speech	+	When topic interesting When topic uninteresting
Zillman et al. (1980)	Lab experiment, 70 children ages 5-7 years	TV	+	Studied children's attention to educational TV
Powell & Anderson (1985)	Literature review	N/A	+	Children's attention to classroom instruction
Bryant & Zillman (1989)	Literature review	N/A	+	Conclusion drawn from review of education research

Table 3.2

The Impact of Humour on Source Liking

ADVERTISING STUDIES

Author(s) & Date	Type of Study & Subjects	Medium	Finding	Comment
Sternthal & Craig (1973)	Literature review	N/A	+	Tentative conclusion
Brooker (1981)	Lab experiment, 240 adults	Print	+	Weak effect
Gelb & Pickett (1983)	Mall survey, 383 from target audiences (20% response rate)	Direct mail ad	+	Subjects asked to evaluate either a humorous or non-humorous ad
Lammers et al. (1983)	Lab experiment, 64 undergrads	Radio	+	For males
Belch & Belch (1984)	Lab experiment, 184 undergrads	TV	+	
Duncan & Nelson (1985)	Lab experiment, 157 male undergrads	Radio	+	
Gelb & Zinkhan (1986)	Lab experiment, 120 employed adults & part-time students	Radio	+	
Chattopadhyay & Basu (1989)	Lab experiment, 80 undergrads	TV	Mixed	Liking increased by humorous ad when presented with prior positive info.
Scott, Klein, & Bryant (1990)	Naturalistic experiment, 1173 households in 3 locations	Direct mail	+	
Lammers (1991)	Lab experiment, 111 undergrads	Radio	+	Industrial product
Speck (1991)	Lab experiment, 182 undergrads	TV	+	4 of 5 humour types increased likability significantly more than non-humour
Zhang & Zinkhan (1991)	Lab experiment, 216 undergrads	TV	+	
Alden, Mukherjee, & Hoyer (2000)	Lab experiment, 71 undergrads	TV	+	The more humorous the ad was perceived to be, the more it was liked

NON-ADVERTISING STUDIES

Author(s) & Date	Type of Study & Subjects	Medium	Finding	Comment
Bryant, Comisky, Crane, & Zillman (1980)	Correlational, observation of 49 male & 21 female college instructors	Classroom instruction	+	For males instructors For female instructors, only hostile humour enhanced
Bryant, Brown, Silverberg, & Elliott (1981)	Education experiment, 180 undergrads	Textbook illustrations	+	
Weinberger & Gulas (1992)	Literature review	N/A	+	Review of all non-advertising research

Table 3.3

The Impact of Humour on Source Credibility

ADVERTISING STUDIES

Author(s) & Date	Type of Study & Subjects	Medium	Finding	Comment
Sternthal & Craig (1973)	Literature review	N/A	+	
Madden (1982)	Lab experiment, 326 undergrads	Radio	0	
Sutherland & Middleton (1983)	Lab experiment, 107 undergrads	Print	-	With luggage ad With camera ad
Belch & Belch (1984)	Lab experiment, 184 undergrads	TV	0	
Madden & Weinberger (1984)	Survey of US ad execs, 68 research & 72 creative	N/A	-	
Wu, Crocker, & Rogers (1989)	Lab experiment, 360 undergrads	Print	0	
Weinberger & Spotts (1989)	Survey of ad execs, 132 US & 29 UK agencies	N/A	Mixed	More positive view held by UK executives
Speck (1991)	Lab experiment, 182 undergrads	TV	+	For knowledgeable For trustworthiness - for certain types of humour

NON-ADVERTISING STUDIES

Author(s) & Date	Type of Study & Subjects	Medium	Finding	Comment
Gruner (1970)	Lab experiment, 144 undergrads	Public speech	Mixed	Humour enhances a <i>dull</i> speech but did not enhance an <i>interesting</i> speech
Bryant, Comisky, Crane, & Zillman (1980)	Correlation, observation, 49 male & 21 female college instructors	Classroom instruction	&	Only slight positive effect on male instructors; some negative effects
Bryant, Brown, Silberberg, & Elliott (1981)	Education experiment, 180 undergrads	Textbook illustrations	-	
Klein, Bryant, & Zillman (1982)	Lab Experiment, 180 undergrads	Textbook readings		
Weinberger & Gulas 1992	Literature review	N/A	Mixed	Review of all non-advertising research

Table 3.4

The Impact of Humour on Comprehension

ADVERTISING STUDIES

Author(s) & Date	Type of Study & Subjects	Medium	Finding	Comment
Sternthal & Craig (1973)	Literature review	N/A		
Duncan (1979)	Literature review	N/A	0	
Murphy, Cunningham & Wilcox (1979)	Lab experiment, 115 undergrads	TV	Mixed	Unaided & aided recall of commercial & content
Cantor & Venus (1980)	Lab experiment, 117 undergrads	Radio		Fictional products
Madden (1982)	Lab experiment, 326 undergrads	Radio	Mixed	Only related humour effective, one familiar & one unfamiliar product
Lammers, Liebowitz, Seymour, & Hennessey (1983)	Lab experiment, 64 undergrads Target audiences	Radio		Product uses & benefits
Sutherland & Middleton (1983)	Lab experiment, 107 undergrads	Print	-	Recall unfamiliar industrial products
Belch & Belch (1984)	Lab experiment, 184 undergrads	TV	0	Recall, high involvement, infrequently purchased products
Madden & Weinberger (1984)	Survey of US ad execs, 68 research & 72 creative	N/A	-	Unaided recall
Duncan, Nelson, & Frontczak (1984)	Lab experiment, 157 male undergrads	Radio	+	Mixed but generally negative views
Stewart & Furse (1985)	Data-based study of over 1000 pre-tested ads	TV	+	Even <i>valued</i> (unfamiliar) humour better than a serious ad
Stewart & Furse (1986)	Data-based study of 1000 pre-tested ads	TV		No comparison to non-humorous ads
Gelb & Zinkhan (1986)	Lab experiment, 120 employed adult part-time students	Radio	-	Summed measure of brand and copy recall, fictional product
Nelson (1987)	Re-examination of Gelb & Zinkhan (1986)	N/A	N/A	Claims Gelb & Zinkhan's measure of recall is not valid
Speck (1987)	Lab experiment, 182 undergrads	TV	+	Global effect of humour is positive but some humour ads weaker than some non-humorous ads

Table 3.4 (Continued)

ADVERTISING STUDIES				
Author(s) & Date	Type of Study & Subjects	Medium	Finding	Comment
Wu, Crocker, & Rogers (1989)	Lab experiment, 360 undergrads	Print	Mixed	With high involvement, product humour improved unaided recall
Weinberger & Spotts (1989)	Survey of advertising execs, 132 US & 29 UK agencies	N/A		More negative view of humour or comprehension held by US execs
Krishnan & Chakravarti (1990)	Literature Review	N/A	+	For mild forms of related humour
Zhang & Zinkhan (1991)	Lab experiment, 216 undergrads	TV	-	For overly funny or unrelated humour
Weinberger & Campbell (1991)	Data-based study of over 1600 pre-tested ads	Radio	+	Recall measure, 10 questions about information in ad
Lammers (1991)	Lab experiment, 111 undergrads	Radio	Mixed	Positive effect not found with related humour
Smith (1993)	Literature Review	N/A	-	For an industrial product humour improved product recall, but not brand recall
Perry et al. (1997b)	Lab experiment, 99 undergrads	TV	Mixed	Comprehension improved by related humour
NON-ADVERTISING STUDIES				
Author(s) & Date	Type of Study & Subjects	Medium	Finding	Comment
Gruner (1970)	Communication experiment, 144 undergrads	Public speech	Mixed	Humour enhanced a <i>ditto</i> speech but did not enhance an interesting speech
Kaplan & Paiscoe (1977)	Education quasi-experiment, 508 undergrads	TV instruction	Mixed	Humour enhances attention and enhances but recall after 3 months superior to non-humour for related points
Weaver, Zillman & Bryant (1988)	86 primary 5 & 2 nd year high school students	TV	0	
Weinberger & Gulas (1992)	Literature review	N/A	Mixed	Review of all non-advertising research, comprehension either enhanced or at least comparable to non-humour

All literature tables updated from: Weinberger, M. G., & Gulas, C. S. (1992). The impact of humor in advertising: A review. *Journal of Advertising*, 21(4), 35-60.

Advertising practitioners seem to concur with most of the empirical findings reported to date. Whereas some feel that humour is effective in gaining registration and retention of simple copy points and product name, they are more sceptical of its ability to cultivate comprehension for the more elaborate and finer elements of the communication (Madden & Weinberger, 1984). While the positive effect of humour on attention should improve comprehension, given that improved attention gives rise to more extensive processing (Petty & Cacioppo, 1985), it may be that humour only enhances attention to itself at the expense of the message claims. Roman and Maas echoed this sentiment when in 1976 they wrote that, “Everyone likes funny commercials. Creative people like creating them. Advertisers are pleased to be running them. The consumer enjoys them. The only problem is: People laugh at the joke and forget the product telling it” (cited in Fugate, 1998; 454). Since then, with all of the empirical work that has been carried out, views have tempered to the position that humour may not significantly improve comprehension, but at least it does not harm it. In cross-cultural interviews, UK executives generally were more supportive of humour’s ability to facilitate comprehension than their corresponding American counterparts (Weinberger & Spotts, 1989a).

3.5. THE ROLE OF HUMOUR IN ADVERTISING

At this point, the potential bearing that humour appeals have on the primary support objectives has been thoroughly reviewed. Shortly, the discussion will turn to the direct influence that the use of humour in advertising can have in facilitating attitudinal and behavioural persuasion. At this juncture, it is first necessary to assess the importance of each of these support objectives in the persuasion process by contextualising them within a theoretical schema. Subsequently, the primary theories on how humour operates in advertising will be reviewed and assessed. Through this

breakdown, the importance of the previous findings will become more readily apparent.

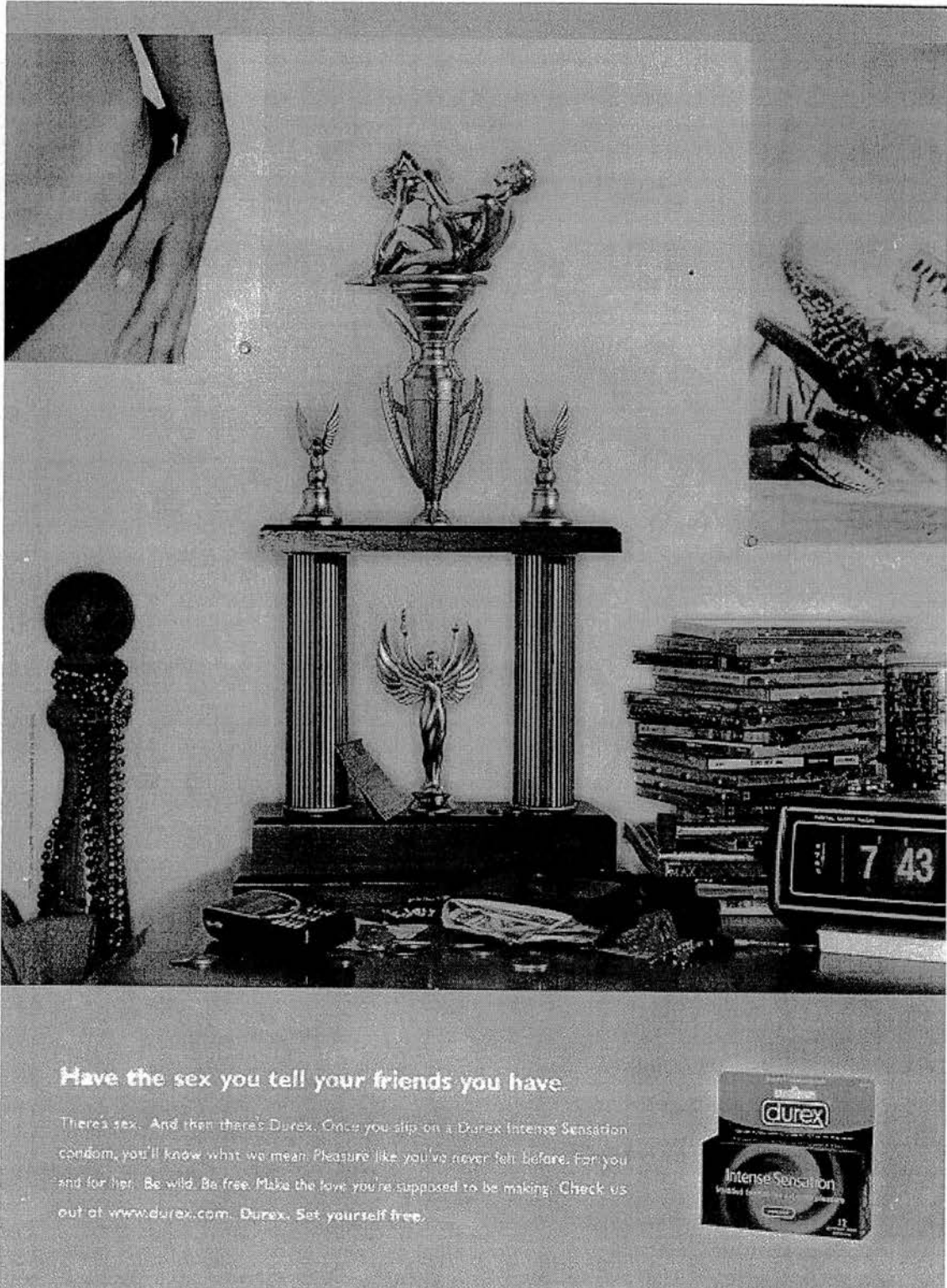
To help illustrate each of these theoretical processes, a satirical ad for *Durex* condoms has been selected (see Figure 3.2). In this ad, an incongruity is presented in the tagline, which reads, “Have the sex you tell your friends you have.” The resolution comes when the reader views the trophy and particularly the headpiece. This permits the viewer to bridge the connection between the tagline and the disparagement aimed at a stereotypical male, who supposedly exaggerates his sexual prowess. This process can also occur in the reverse order, with the image of the trophy on the bedside night table representing the incongruity, while the tagline supplying the resolution to this confusing image. Ad copy follows at the bottom of the ad.

3.5.1. The Information-Processing View

The information-processing view is a simple cognitive theory, which is based on the assumption that consumers are rational beings. The consumer is viewed as an active, systematic learner, who processes information logically (see Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). According to Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), attitudes are based on salient beliefs at the time of judgement. Therefore, changing an attitude is rooted in changing the salient beliefs about the attitude object through a rational approach. This cognitive-oriented, information-processing perspective subsequently maintains that consumer decisions are based on a simple hierarchy of effects model that is comparable to the following Markov chain:


Exposure — Attention — Comprehension — Yielding — Retention — Action
(Lammers et al., 1983).

Figure 3.2 Durex Condoms



Have the sex you tell your friends you have.

There's sex. And then there's Durex. Once you slip on a Durex Intense Sensation condom, you'll know what we mean. Pleasure like you've never felt before. For you and for her. Be wild. Be free. Make the love you're supposed to be making. Check us out at www.durex.com. Durex. Set yourself free.



According to this theory, the only way to stimulate consumer behaviour or an attitude change is by systematic progression through these steps, chronologically. Successful achievement at each stage relies on attainment of the prior step in this model of attitude change. All elements of the communication should facilitate this process. In fact, environmental psychologists would contend that certain forms of humour can facilitate this process by moulding a positive *reception environment* during exposure. In other words, the audience is more amenable to learning because of the positive atmosphere inspired by the humour (Tyebjee, 1978). Depending on the kind of arousal and intensity at which it occurs, humour may produce a stimulus to actively process information (Duncan et al., 1984).

Therefore, humour works by first attracting attention to the ad stimuli because people enjoy humour. If attention is drawn, then the likelihood of advancing through the subsequent steps is increased (Cantor & Venus, 1980). However, according to information-processing theory, the ad content must also generate comprehension and retention. Consumers' attention must be held long enough for them to register the brand name and ascertain a brand claim that can be associated with the name (Krishnan & Chakravarti, 1990). The increased attention endowed by the humorous appeal should engender more extensive processing (Cline & Kellaris, 1999). Once attention has been gained for the advertisement, theorists supporting this view of advertising effectiveness would suggest that the next logical course would be to ensure understanding and comprehension for the ad content (Duncan, 1979). This is achieved through message rehearsal (Chaudhuri & Buck, 1995). Both the humorous and non-humorous content of the ad are responsible for easing this process.

Using the example for *Durex*, either the tagline or the picture catches the eye of the viewer, generating the incongruity. The resolution would come at connecting the two and eliciting a humorous response. Either one alone does not make sense, but together, they form a set-up/punch line combination. This captivates the viewer's interest, since the punch line supposedly orients the audiences' attention to the ad. The information-processing theorists would contend that at this point, the individual tries to grasp and structure the stream of information. Thus, if humour is effective, these theorists would claim that this is because it serves to initiate a central processing set. "Because the joke causes the higher order or central processing to focus on the information in a commercial, recall and comprehension should improve" (Perry et al., 1997b; 22). The attention that has been generated by the pleasurable response created by the humour focuses the viewer to the ad copy. The message is clear: *Durex* condoms make sex more enjoyable, and using them will turn the user into a sexual champion. The integrated nature of the humorous message and the ad claims should facilitate message comprehension. Through this better understanding of the claim, the consumer may come to agree with the message. Finally, the vivid imagery used to transmit the humour should allow the message to be retained in memory, for later retrieval during a purchase opportunity.

The questions surrounding humour's impact on message comprehension is one of several reasons to discount the information-processing perspective. Proponents of information-processing theory would maintain that without successful comprehension of the informational portion of the message, the chain is broken and message adoption is not achievable. If comprehension is potentially harmed by humorous appeals, then they clearly would not serve any persuasive advantage. As will be discussed in the

next section, persuasion is possible using humorous appeals, signifying that this may be an insufficient explanation of both advertising effectiveness and the role that humour appeals *generally* play. Furthermore, it has been suggested that those engaged in rational product information strategies would shun reliance on emotions during processing, as this would distract them from absorbing the logical significance of the message (Chaudhuri & Buck, 1995). Therefore, if all ad processing took this form, humour appeals, which of course do impart an affective response, would be ineffective under all circumstances. This clearly is not the case.

When interpreting the evidence on humour and comprehension, it is imperative to consider the findings from the appropriate perspective. Any examination of how the appeal fosters comprehension assumes that such understanding is an important aspect of the communication. Whether one agrees that comprehension is significant for effective advertising is largely dependent on the theory that is espoused on the role that humorous appeals fulfil. Comprehension only seems to be relevant to the information-processing view of humour effectiveness previously discussed.

While numerous product decisions may occur according to this progression, it is far too simplistic. There is no room for affective variables in the information-processing model. Instead, consumer behaviours are viewed as entirely logical processes in which a series of rational decisions are made based on the systematic processing of product attributes. Ultimately, a sensible selection is made from the available options in this man-as-computer perspective (see Hill & Mazis, 1986). The linear nature of the model also leaves no room for feedback and also does not include behaviours that

may occur out of sequence, such as when a sale or free trial stimulates the first purchase action prior to information exposure.

Furthermore, the theory implies that humorous ads should lead to more extensive processing than non-humorous ads because of its superior effect on attention. However, the questions surrounding the effect of humour appeals on message comprehension, then, are inconsistent with this model. As some have noted, humour may enhance attention but interrupt message comprehension because it draws attention to itself and away from central ad claims (Smith, 1993). Additionally, humour is often used in instances where there are no central ad claims to process (see Figure 2.1 & 2.8). Undoubtedly, there is some other process at work.

3.5.2. The Distraction Hypothesis

A more plausible supposition is one that complies with the findings that humour interferes with comprehension, but argues that in fact that is actually what makes it an effective strategy. The presumption anchoring this so-called *distraction hypothesis* is that when addressed with a persuasive dialogue, the natural response is to fashion counterarguments, particularly when it is discordant with the individual's existing belief system. Proponents have suggested that individuals will not submissively accept a persuasion attempt that is discrepant with their current attitudinal schemas. Rather, they will resist, frequently through cerebral counterargumentation. This may include the generation of rebuttal claims or derision of the message source. The manipulation attempt is defused by successful counterargumentation, leaving attitudes unaffected (Nelson, Duncan, & Frontczak, 1985).

When a humorous appeal is presented with the message claims, it distracts the receiver from producing such counterarguments, thus proliferating the persuasive impact of the message (Baron, Baron, & Miller, 1973). If counterargumentation can be suppressed, the message recipient is more disposed to passively accept the communication. Humour is believed to be a practical and pervasive means of distraction in advertising (Nelson et al., 1985). This theory, therefore, maintains that humour works entirely through peripheral route persuasion by distracting the audience from engaging in central processing. Therefore, if humour is to be effective, it should be used when the advertising arguments are weak.

This process can be illustrated in the example for *Durex*. The picture and tagline are once again responsible for generating a favourable response to the satirical stimulus. The enjoyment derived from this experience distracts the reader when they scan the ad copy and interpret the message. Because of this welcomed distraction, they are unable or unmotivated to counterargue the claim that using *Durex* condoms will improve their sex life, making acceptance of this assertion more probable. Because it is a subjective, unfounded claim, the advertiser is motivated to insert the humour into the ad, realising that passive acceptance is more likely. With message acceptance will come a positive change in attitude towards the *Durex* brand.

While the distraction hypothesis offers a rational, convincing explanation on how humour operates in advertising, it rests on two major assumptions that contest its acceptance. The theory assumes that the consumer is motivated to counterargue the message in the first place, and that they have the capacity to debate the claims of the particular product (Markowicz, 1974). However, humour seems to work best in low-

involvement situations (see below), and is most frequently utilised for such products. In such instances, it is disputable whether these contingencies, particularly the motivational assumption, will have been met (Belch & Belch, 1984).

Furthermore, this hypothesis is unable to account for instances when the message recipient would actually be in agreement with the transmitted communication. As with the information-processing theory, it also cannot account for instances of humour appeals where there are no arguments contained in the ad. Not surprisingly, in an advertising study utilising humour appeals as the distraction stimulus, Nelson et al. (1985) failed to find support for the distraction hypothesis. Through an empirical examination, the distraction stimulus did not reduce counterargumentation of the informational message claims, and attitudinal change was not observed.

3.5.3. Behavioural Theories I: Operant Conditioning

Other theories of advertising response processes have been advanced, which do not position comprehension of product claims as a relevant segment of the model. For some products, it is suggested, affective states and behavioural learning are more the goal of the advertisement, not an understanding of product benefits. Proponents of this perspective would not necessarily deny that humour appeals do not significantly improve comprehension, but they would disagree that this limitation makes it an ineffective strategy.

Humour, it has been suggested, may operate according to learning theory (Duncan, 1979). According to this schema, desired behaviours are reinforced through the advertising message. If viewers attend to the advertisement, they will either embrace

or oppose the selling propositions. Should they agree with the advertisement, they are rewarded at the end with positive affect provided by the humorous content. According to operant conditioning principles, this reward should increase the chances of them performing this behaviour again when exposed to the product information or even the product itself.

Using Figure 3.2 to illustrate, behaviourists would declare that by agreeing with the claim that *Durex* will enhance sexual performance, consumers are rewarded with a joke and favourable accompanying affect. Behaviour, which in this case is cognitive affirmation of the ad claims, is shaped by providing the prospect of humour as incentive to agree. Each time the reward is included, the likelihood of repeating this agreement behaviour strengthens. Finally, this agreement is internalised and can occur without the presence of the reward, for instance, when confronted with the product at the point of purchase. The goal of the advertiser is to generate agreement, eventually shaping attitudes even if comprehension is bypassed.

The obvious limitation to this theory is, once again, instances where there are no ad claims included in the ad. What behaviour is rewarded in this case? In these instances, a behaviourist might speculate that perhaps a positive subsisting brand attitude is rewarded, in which case effectiveness would only be applicable to advertisements where the purpose is to reinforce existing attitudes. Because such soft sell ads can be very limited in the amount of information that they present, the consumer would already have to have some basis on which to be supportive of the brand.

A more fundamental problem lies in the fact that the viewer may disagree with the ad claims professed, but still be rewarded with the humorous content. This may result either in no change in the existing negative attitude, or worse yet, that *that* attitude may become reinforced. Of course, it is possible that the message is designed such that the audience will not *get the joke* unless they agree with the message. This would be the case when humour is used that is related to the message, especially thematically and structurally. As will be discussed, related humour is the most successful, which could be a legitimate defence for this theory.

However, it cannot be overlooked that although it is an affective theory, there still is a heavy reliance upon comprehension and rational processing as central elements of the theory. Comprehension does not seem to be significantly improved with humour. Furthermore, operant conditioning requires several behaviour reinforcement pairings, and affective advertising can be very effective after a single exposure (see Belch & Belch, 1984; Gibson, 1996; Jones, 1995; Kim, Lim, & Bhargava, 1998; Mandese, 1995; Surmanek, 1995). Advertisements without central claims also continue to be a problematic issue with this model.

Consequently, the operant conditioning theory has been revised. Advocates of this premise now believe that the behaviour that is rewarded is attentiveness to the ad content (Duncan et al., 1984). This seems more plausible, because only those engaged in this behaviour would be rewarded, as just the viewers that are attending to the ad would receive the benefit of the humour that is transmitted. As maintained by this hypothesis, this would lead to increased attention in future exposures to that or a different humorous ad. However, this theory only explicates instances of humorous

ad executions where the humour falls at the end of the advertisement, since the incentive must follow the desired behaviour. Furthermore, the reward may only reinforce attention to the humorous content rather than the product claims averred in the message (Cantor & Venus, 1980).

There also, of course, is the issue that attention alone does not generate sales or attitude change. So while this theory in itself is incomplete, it may fit more usefully as a necessary component to a more sufficient information-processing theory on humour effectiveness. While the purpose of the humorous content would then be to generate attention for the ad through these operant conditioning principles, there would be a need for some other non-humorous facet of the advertisement to facilitate comprehension and retention of the important message claims. A final element would then have to stimulate evaluation, attitude reinforcement or change, and purchase behaviour.

This pattern is in accord with the general design of ads, whereby humour is rarely placed in only one part of the ad. In most instances, it is placed in both the beginning and end of the ad to take advantage of both primacy and recency effects emphasised by social psychologists in attitude research (Kelly & Solomon, 1975). Having the humorous cues in the beginning generates the initial attention by transmitting the humorous intent of the ad. This attention is, in turn, rewarded at the end of the ad with the primary punch line. However, additional elements are required in the middle to facilitate the consumer through the remaining steps of the hierarchy. As a result, it seems that the process is unduly complex, requiring too many elements for such a short message. Positive reinforcement may, however, initiate attention to the ad thus facilitating persuasion resulting from other mechanisms.

3.5.4. Behavioural Theories II: Classical Conditioning

There is another theory, in fact, which does not deliberate upon the comprehension construct. This model also would not impugn the conflicting findings found in the comprehension research, but like the latter learning theory, would argue that it is an irrelevant construct in humorous advertising. This is the stance proposed in the classical conditioning model of humour effectiveness. According to this viewpoint, the positively affective feelings resulting from a humour response can become conditioned or associated with the advertised product (Markowicz, 1974).

Classical conditioning processes work in this context through what is referred to as *direct affect transfer* (see Allen & Shimp, 1990; Edell & Burke, 1984; Gorn, 1982; Stuart, Shimp, & Engle, 1987). This process is initiated when an unconditioned stimulus (e.g.: humour) provokes a spontaneous affective response (e.g.: laughter, amusement). Through the systematic pairing of the unconditioned stimulus and a conditioned stimulus (e.g.: brand) in the context of an ad, the affect is transferred to the conditioned stimulus (Allen & Madden, 1985). According to this view, then, the effectiveness of humorous ads is the result of the positive affect associated with the appeal, which is transferred directly to the brand (Brown & Stayman, 1992; Chaudhuri & Buck, 1995; Petty & Cacioppo, 1980; Walker & Dubitsky, 1994). The brand becomes the conditioned stimulus when it stimulates the same affective reaction in the absence of the ad (Edell & Burke, 1984).

This is the most pure form of peripheral route persuasion (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986b), and can be a very powerful means of influencing attitudes and behaviours for simple messages with few or no arguments when repeated over several exposures. In fact, it

has been shown to occur in the complete absence of any systematic processing by the consumer (Gorn, 1982). This is the process by which most low-involvement persuasion is achieved (see Allen & Shimp, 1990; Holbrook & O'Shaughnessy, 1984). Since these are the products for which humour is the most effective (see below), classical conditioning theory corresponds well with the findings on humour. This perspective also is not tarnished by scattered examples in which humour is utilised in the complete absence of ad claims, since they are not compulsory building blocks to advertising success through this method.

Returning to the *Durex* example, the satirical humour generates a pleasurable response in consumers. Because they experience this response when submitted to the brand during ad exposure, this favourable affect transfers directly to their evaluation of the brand, provided that they are not motivated to deliberate over the brand claims centrally. However, this ad really relies on a dual approach, since consumers are likely to have different motivational levels with birth control purchases, based on their previous experience. For those that are more involved with the product, the ad also makes overt claims concerning product benefits. In this case, a more central approach is taken and the role of the humour merely serves a subordinate role of gaining attention to the ad copy. However, in low-involvement situations, when consumers do not have the motivation to process an ad systematically, an attitude towards *Durex* can be achieved through the transfer of affect from the ad to the brand.

Furthermore, the classical conditioning paradigm would explain humour placed not only at the end of the ad, but also embedded throughout other sections, as long as the ensuing affect can be maintained throughout the advertisement, so that it can be

transferred and attributed to the advertised brand. Conventionally, the humour, which is the unconditioned stimulus, should come at the end of the ad after the brand has been introduced. This is because the maximum effect of conditioning is reached through a forward conditioning approach, where the conditioned stimulus precedes the unconditioned stimulus. However, significant attitudinal conditioning effects have been demonstrated through backward conditioning, in which the onset of the unconditioned stimulus occurs before the presentation of the conditioned stimulus (Stuart et al., 1987).

This classical conditioning concept would support the notion that the use of humour has a direct impact on the persuasive power of an advertisement. Rather than meeting one of the immediate goals of attention, comprehension, or retention and relying on the specific message claims to directly persuade the consumer, as the information-processing model maintains, this theory contends that the consumer is persuaded through the peripheral, affectively appealing material inherent in the humour. It is more exclusively a liking for the advertisement and message source that is transferred to a liking for the brand (Shimp, 1981). A likeable ad shapes the affective module of brand attitudes through simple conditioning processes (Biel & Bridgewater, 1990). According to this theory, humour appeals do not guide the consumer through a rational, central processing route, as the information-processing model would maintain. Furthermore, such appeals do not distract the individual from central processing and counterargumentation as the distraction hypothesis asserts, nor do they reward the viewer for performing a desired behaviour or mental process. Rather, humour appeals serve as peripheral cue in which to formulate a positive Aad (O'Sullivan & Kavanagh, 1999).

As reviewed above, there is strong substantiating evidence in the literature that Aad is highly correlated with the subsequent attitude towards the brand (see Batra & Ray, 1986; Gardner, 1985a; Gelb & Pickett, 1983; Homer, 1990; Laczniak & Carlson, 1989; Lutz et al., 1983; MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989; MacKenzie et al., 1986; Mitchell, 1986; Mitchell & Olson, 1981; Moore & Hutchinson, 1983; Olney et al., 1991; Shimp, 1981; Stayman & Batra, 1991), which offers resilient support for the classical conditioning view of humour effects. This is strong evidence for the classical conditioning model, especially considering that some researchers found that Aad only has a significant impact on attitudes and intentions in instances where peripheral processing dominates (Dröge, 1989).

Due to the overwhelming consensus concerning humour's impact on liking, as cited above, it appears that indeed humour does serve in this capacity. Biel and Bridgewater (1990) found that those who had a high degree of liking for an ad were twice as likely to be persuaded by it, as compared to those who felt neutral towards the ad. Some researchers assert that ad liking is the best predictor of brand liking, aside from prior brand attitude (Lutz, 1985; Moore & Hutchinson, 1985; Walker & Dubitsky, 1994). Other researchers have also emphasised the necessity of ad liking to commercial effectiveness (Du Plessis, 1998). The ensuing Aad that is formulated through the gratification afforded by a humorous appeal is used as a peripheral cue to establish an opinion of the brand. Empirical evidence has implicated an effect of humour on brand attitudes, which is routed through Aad (Zhang, 1996a; Zhang, 1996b). McSweeney and Bierley (1984) have noted the importance of classical conditioning in advertising by spotting that, "...commercials cannot be put together solely on the basis of intuition or artistic preference. Instead they should be arranged

very carefully to avoid situations in which conditioning fails to occur” (p. 625). There has also been direct evidence that brand attitudes and subsequent consumer behaviours are vulnerable to classical conditioning (Allen & Janiszewski, 1989; Gorn, 1982; Shimp, Stuart, & Engle, 1991; Stuart et al., 1987). So while learning theory may be able to account for the positive effect of humour on attention to the ad, classical conditioning theory justifies its positive effect on persuasion.

Furthermore, classical conditioning theory asserts that the conditioned relationship be reinforced periodically to prevent extinction (Edell & Burke, 1984). This would explain why marketers of so many mature brands find it necessary to utilise so much reinforcement advertising with humour appeals. At the same time, the Pavlovian concept of *latent inhibition* can likewise explain why significant peripheral route persuasion is not possible for such well-known, mature brands. At this late stage of promotion, advertisers can only really hope to reinforce the attitudes of those maintaining positive attitudes, and try to keep their brand within such consumers’ selection sets. Advertisers may as well abandon hope of converting those consumers to product users who maintain well-established, negative attitudes towards low-involvement or transformational products for mature brands.

If the product is highly involving for the consumer or serves a functional need, an informational strategy grounded on strong arguments may lead a central route assault on such attitudes. However, in the case of mature brand advertising that must rely on peripheral route advertising, such as humour, negative attitudes will probably not change. This is because the individual has been exposed so many times to the conditioned stimulus (i.e.: the brand) without the presence of the unconditioned

stimulus (e.g.: humour appeal), that conditioning effects are obstructed. This *latent inhibition* effect was observed by Machleit and Wilson (1988) in an assessment of affective ads for mature brands, such as *Lee* jeans and *Pepsi*. In general, conditioning of attitudes is more effective when prior knowledge of the attitude object is low (Cacioppo et al., 1992). Therefore, humour is probably the most successful at attitudinal persuasion for unknown brands, assuming that there is enough time for introductory brand information. Likewise, humour appeals should be least effective at changing attitudes (assuming this is the goal of the ad, which it rarely would be) for mature, high profile brands.

3.5.4.1. Challenge to the Classical Conditioning Model?

The one theoretical problem with a classical conditioning paradigm is that traditionally, classical conditioning theory mandates that an association occurs through repeated pairings of the unconditioned stimulus and the conditioned stimulus. As a result, some researchers have suggested that for an emotional ad response to generate a change in brand attitudes, multiple ad exposures are necessary, and a cumulative effect would be observed (Puto & Wells, 1984). However, evidence has shown that advertising in general, and certainly humour appeals can be effective after only a single exposure (see Belch & Belch, 1984; Gibson, 1996; Jones, 1995; Kim et al., 1998; Mandese, 1995; Rosenberg & Blair, 1994; Surmanek, 1995). This evidence brings with it scepticism towards a classical conditioning model.

However, it has been suggested that the bulk of the conditioning occurs during the initial trial of the conditioned and unconditioned stimulus, with smaller quantities of conditioning during succeeding pairings (Domjan & Burkhard, 1985). Stuart et al.

(1987) further supported this notion through a series of brand attitude conditioning studies on advertising. This would match the pattern observed in humour research on wearout, which has found that the persuasive potency of a humorous appeal is strongest after a single trial, with slight increases in total attitude change up to about three trials.

Furthermore, the concept of repeated pairings is really only applicable to simple conditioning of unconscious or physiological responses, such as the case of Pavlov and his famous dogs. This original line of research addressed basic conditioning responses regulated by the autonomic and skeletal nervous systems (Allen & Madden, 1985). The process was conceptualised as a lower order reflexive response, where reactive control is simply transferred from the unconditioned stimulus to the conditioned stimulus. In the case of advertising, what is being conditioned is not a physiological response but a human attitude through accompanying affect. It is not a behavioural response, but an evaluative response (see Allen & Shimp, 1990). Conditioning in these circumstances is really the learning of relationships among events so as to allow the person to generate a more efficient portrayal of their world.

“Pavlovian conditioning is not a stupid process by which the organism willy-nilly forms associations between any two stimuli that happen to co-occur. Rather, the organism is better seen as an information seeker using logical and perceptual relations among events, along with its own preconceptions, to form a sophisticated representation of its world” (Rescorla, 1988; 154).

Under this more current perspective, classical conditioning is believed to require cognitive thought by the actor and a more conscious awareness of the associations between the ad stimuli and the product or brand (Grossman & Till, 1998; Kim, Allen, & Kardes, 1996). The conditioned stimulus indicates to the learner that the

unconditioned stimulus is imminent (Domjan & Burkhard, 1985). In these cases, it has been demonstrated that a single exposure is enough to significantly alter attitudes through classical conditioning processes in which affect is transferred directly to the brand (Allen & Janiszewski, 1989; Kim et al., 1998; Shimp et al., 1991; Stuart et al., 1987). Nevertheless, a multiple exposure treatment would still be optimal.

While Fishbein and Middlestadt (1995) contend that the shaping of attitudes is a cognitive process, Kim et al. (1998) have demonstrated brand attitude formation through classical conditioning processes, by carefully selecting ads that use an entirely affective appeal, without communicating *any* product beliefs. Therefore it appears that, in fact, classical conditioning procedures are at times responsible for moulding attitudes without the intervening influence of conscious reflection about the attitude object (Eagley & Chaiken, 1993).

Conversely, they further demonstrated, along with Kim et al. (1996) that cognitive beliefs could work in concert with affect-transfer in moulding attitudes. In lower exposure situations (when the bulk of the persuasion occurs), individuals rely on peripheral cues such as affect generated by humour appeals, and attitudes are conditioned. Only with higher repetitions, when individuals have more opportunity to process the ad centrally and extract product attribute information, are cognitive beliefs believed to influence attitudes. As is clear from the ELM, an affective or cognitive means of changing attitudes can be initiated, and thus they need not be competing explanations.

This idea is clearly evident in the *Durex* example. At the outset, attitude change is the result of conditioning procedures in which the humorous response generated by the ad is transferred to evaluations of the *Durex* brand. For those with no motivation to process the ad further, their attitudes are entirely the result of this mechanism. However, those with higher processing motivations will expose themselves to the ad for a longer period of time. As a result, they may be additionally influenced by their brand cognitions resulting from the attention given to the ad copy, which more overtly communicates tangible ad claims.

Indeed the Dual Mediation Hypothesis suggests that brand attitudes are the result of both a direct affect transfer influence from Aad as well as relevant brand cognitions. These cognitions are also shaped by Aad through conditioning processes (Mittal, 1990). Janiszewski and Warlop (1993) put attitudinal conditioning in the proper perspective by reminding that, "...one must keep in mind that [conditioning] is a procedure, not a process. As a procedure, it creates a learning environment, but it does not exclude one or another process from operating" (p. 185). While a number of studies did not find evidence for a classical conditioning effect with regard to consumer attitudes (see Allen & Madden, 1985; Gresham & Shimp, 1985), these studies have been repeatedly criticised for their methodological limitations by later research that was able to support a classical conditioning effect (Stuart et al., 1987). Such limitations have included an overemphasis on latently inhibited mature brands and the absence of a control group.

Furthermore, persuasion that is the result of classical conditioning has been found to be persistent over time (Grossman & Till, 1998), unless the association is

intentionally extinguished. As has been addressed, this can be a concern in the case of peripheral persuasion. However, in this modern view, which suggests that conditioning is a more active learning process, the persistence of attitudinal change resulting from the association of a brand with affective cues should come as no surprise. Even after a period of three weeks following exposure, Grossman and Till found that classically conditioned brand attitudes were resilient. This suggests that even an ad campaign of limited duration can positively influence brand attitudes through conditioning processes for a long enough period to impact purchase behaviour.

3.6. HUMOUR APPEALS & PERSUASION

While the issue has been alluded to earlier in discussions of support objectives, the analysis will now turn to the direct effect that humour, as opposed to other appeals, has in persuading consumers. Although the influence of humorous executions on these other, lower-order, communication objectives clearly contributes to its persuasive potency as an appeal, the scope of the assessment thus far has been incomplete. Despite the importance of these other communication goals, it is critical to question the success of humour in advertising until specific evidence on its *persuasiveness* can be identified. While many objectives may be sought in any one advertisement, such as brand awareness or ad liking, the most fundamental goal of a campaign is to persuade the consumer. Consequently, the remainder of this chapter will appraise humour's capacity to generate behavioural and attitudinal persuasion. It will be argued that contrary to the general belief that humour is no more proficient in persuading the consumer than non-humorous appeals, it actually can be, depending on particular executional and audience-associated circumstances.

While there are several communicative objectives within advertising, they ultimately feed into the goal of persuasion. In the end, the advertiser is striving to persuade the consumer (see Chisnall, 1997). This can manifest itself as behavioural persuasion, where the message leads to immediate purchase, or it can be a more cerebral form where a positive brand attitude is shaped or reinforced. This is the most critical type of persuasion because such a positive attitude towards, for example, the product quality is ultimately what fuels repeat purchases. Because so many other variables mediate the persuasiveness of the message, the question of whether humour stimulates persuasion is very convoluted. Many studies have attempted to simplify this question by assessing the persuasive power of humour by measuring attitudes towards the ad, brand attitude change from a pre-test to a post-test, and intentions to purchase. Such measures appear to be accurate approximations of persuasion (see Peter & Olson, 1996).

3.6.1. Generalisations of Humour Appeals and Persuasion

If an unconditional, indiscriminate conclusion had to be made based on the literature up to now, it would be that humour is a persuasive appeal, but probably not any more so than non-humorous appeals (Sternthal & Craig, 1973). While some of the inaugural (see Duncan, 1979; McCollum/Spielman and Co., 1982; O'Quin & Aronoff, 1981) and more recent studies (Perry et al., 1997b) found humour to be more persuasive than serious appeals, others seem to support the claim made in Sternthal and Craig's (1973) still highly influential paper. This was found across the major advertising media, including print (Brooker, 1981), radio (Duncan & Nelson, 1985), and television (Belch & Belch, 1984; Stewart & Furse, 1986). On the other hand, going straight to the source, Custer (1995) surveyed consumers using video

storyboards and nearly two-thirds of those sampled felt that humorous ads were the most influential. In a second poll, Custer reported that 92% of the sample indicated that the use of humour as a promotions tool was at least moderately if not highly effective. Philips (1992) believes that laughter and smiling makes consumers more amenable to the message by relaxing them.

What other empirical research has concluded is that humour can be more persuasive than serious appeals under particular circumstances. Because there are so many communicative, executional, and audience factors operating at once, the persuasive power of humour must be conceptualised as contingency-dependent. This makes drawing any sweeping, general conclusions on the persuasiveness of humour or any other advertising appeal simply unrealistic.

3.6.2. Executional Variables

The main variables affecting the persuasive power of humour appeals can be broken down into two different types of factors. These are executional and audience variants. The executional variables are much more controllable and interconnected to the actual appeal. These are all related to the actual implementation of the ad appeal and advertising message, and will be the building blocks of the media plan. These intervening factors will be discussed first. Following this, the audience-related moderators will be examined. Obviously, these are much more external to the creative execution of the ad, and thus more difficult to control. However, careful segmentation can help marketers factor these variables into their media planning mix, so that they can maximise the effectiveness of their promotional messages.

3.6.2.1. Product Considerations

When interpreting humour's effect on persuasion, it is imperative to respect product differences that may mediate ad effectiveness. While a few different conceptualisations have been used to categorise products, most of the research on humour and persuasion has used the Foote, Cone, & Belding (FCB) grid (Berger, 1986; Ratchford, 1987). The grid will be discussed further in Chapter Six, but it basically characterises products according to the attitudinal response of the potential consumers. The grid plots products across two dimensions. Along one continuum, the FCB charts consumer involvement with the purchase decision (high or low), while the second dimension chronicles a think versus feel quality to the purchase. Involvement, according to the FCB, is measured in terms of the perceived importance of the purchase decision, the cognitive effort necessary to make the choice, and the perceived risk of the purchase (Berger, 1986). The think-feel component of the grid is a distinction between products that serve a utilitarian purpose (think), from those satisfying a more indulgent need (feel) (Ratchford, 1987).

The evidence to date suggests that humour is most suitable for *feeling* products, in particular, *low-involvement/feeling* products. Humour seems to be the least effective for *high-involvement/thinking* products. These assertions are largely buttressed by empirical evidence (Bauerly, 1990; Scott, Klein, & Bryant, 1990; Stewart & Furse, 1986; Weinberger & Campbell, 1991). In a study of magazine ads, Spotts et al. (1997) found comic wit to improve aided recall, initial attention, and held attention scores for *low involvement/feeling* products. Humour had no bearing on attention scores for other products and had either no effect or an adverse impact on recall measures for the other product types. Zhang (1996b) also cited a study that he

conducted with George Zinkhan in which they found that humour was most effective for *low-involvement* products. The results are further supported by practitioners who feel that humour is most adept at promoting *low-involvement* products, particularly, consumer non-durables (Madden & Weinberger, 1984; Weinberger & Campbell, 1991). Content studies have exemplified the industry view as the largest proportion of humour usage has been cited for this product class (Weinberger, Spotts, Campbell, & Parsons, 1995).

This makes sense, because as the classical conditioning theory maintains, humour works directly as a peripheral cue. Peripheral processing is most likely when making low-involvement product decisions. Conditioning has been found to only work in such low-involvement circumstances (Lutz, 1985; Machleit & Wilson, 1988; Shimp, 1981). In these instances, the advertiser is likely to want the consumer to engage in peripheral processing, which is why a humour appeal is chosen. For many routine purchases, such as crisps or soft drinks, the advertiser may be unable to make credible unique selling propositions or communicate other product attributes that offer an advantage over a competitor. This is because in many such scenarios, the products are either exceedingly similar, or the advertiser knows that the consumer will not care anyway (Peter & Olson, 1996). In such instances, the marketer will want to generate a positive brand image, which can be easily achieved through peripheral processing and the reliance on Aad. Furthermore, humour may interfere with message comprehension because of the attention that it draws to itself (see Smith, 1993), and thus when the ad either can or should rely on strong arguments, humour should be avoided (Cline & Kellaris, 1999).

Along the think-feel dimension, peripheral processing is also more likely for hedonistic or sensory-based products, rather than more cognitive, utilitarian products. Like low-involvement products, successful advertising of *transformational* products should be affect-based, with a reliance on peripheral cues. Central ad claims may be inappropriate in these instances, as they usually are immaterial for these types of products, and therefore may undermine the affect spawned by the humour. An image-oriented product that is dependent on a strong peripheral cue, such as humour, does not need to use sound arguments that communicate product benefits.

Through empirical enquiry, it has been shown that inclusion of both central ad claims in addition to humour for a low risk, indulgent product can actually have an adverse effect on persuasion, perhaps because it may convey a discrepancy on the nature of the product (Cline & Kellaris, 1999). Because this again is one area where there seems to be considerable agreement within the literature, research should primarily focus on the low-involvement, hedonistic product cell. It is really within this cell that humour is the most proficient, and thus where all of the uncertainties related to the other factors arise.

3.6.2.2. Humour Type

An additional dynamic that seems to moderate humour's effectiveness in advertising is the style of humour employed within the ad. Few studies thus far have looked at the effect that different humour types may have on persuasion in advertising, but recent evidence suggests that this may be part of the basis for the inconclusive results. The foremost obstruction to research in this area is that there is no one accepted classification of humour (Weinberger & Gulas, 1992). Notwithstanding, arguments

were raised in the last chapter for the acceptance of Speck's Humorous Message Taxonomy (1991) in advertising research. As was discussed, this classification system looks at discrete, fundamental processes that operate either in isolation or in conjunction with one another to form a rich typology of humour. The full nomenclature was submitted in the previous chapter.

In one study that utilised this categorisation, three of the five humour classes were superior to non-humour on behavioural intentions and perceived product quality measures of persuasion (Speck, 1987). This included comic wit, satire, and full comedy, or those that did not employ arousal-safety mechanisms. Additionally, Spotts et al. (1997) found incongruity-resolution processes to be the primary humorous mechanism used in a study of humorous magazine ads. Overall they found comic wit to be the most commonly executed form of humour (82%). Satire was the next most frequently used type (8% overall or 10% for low-involvement/feel products). Sentimental humour, sentimental comedy, and full comedy were utilised much more moderately. No other work has examined the effects of the different humour types (Weinberger & Gulas, 1992), and even Spotts et al. merely looked at the concentration of usage, with no empirical assessment of effectiveness. Clearly this is an area that warrants further research.

With regard to incongruity-resolution processes, some researchers, when evaluating perceived humour responses to advertising, have examined the type of contrast used from a psycholinguistic perspective. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Raskin (1985) developed a semantic typology of incongruities. He believes that the contrasts found in humour can be categorised as follows: 1. actual/existing and non-actual/non-

existing; 2. normal/expected and abnormal/unexpected; 3. possible/plausible and impossible/implausible. Alden and Hoyer (1993) and Alden et al. (2000) found through a content analysis with independent judges that the expected/unexpected contrast, which is the form of most incongruity-resolution, was the most successful at eliciting a humour response in advertising. It seems that people are more amused by contrasts between everyday events and the unexpected, rather than everyday events and the impossible or non-existent. However, this was merely an assessment of perceived humour by a limited number of judges, and did not say anything specifically pertaining to advertising effectiveness. On the other hand, perceived funniness *is* correlated with ad liking, which is a critical factor especially in peripheral route persuasion.

3.6.2.3. Strength of the Humorous Response

The level of perceived humorousness, or how funny the ad is thought to be from the viewer's perspective, really could be seen as an audience variable. An individual humour response is a very subjective reaction that may, in many cases, be out of the marketer's control. However, it is known that certain types of humour, such as disparaging humour, tend to generate a more humorous response from the audience. Furthermore, the marketer has the ability to pre-test certain executions at many stages of the ad design, so in many ways, this is a predictable executional variable. Interestingly, this moderator has been given very little attention in the literature.

Krishnan and Chakravarti (1990) have suggested that a mild form of humour is optimal for improving learning and comprehension measures of advertising response, because overly funny executions may detract attention away from the central ad

claims and directly to the humorous material. However, it has been contended here that humour is not appropriate for a centrally argued ad. Rather its purpose lies within the classical conditioning paradigm, as a peripheral cue for low-involvement/expressive products. Given that humour perception is a pleasurable affective response, the funnier executions would certainly function better in their capacity as a peripheral cue. What is novel in marketing is what does well in marketing. Likewise, a humorous attempt is funny because it is original. Therefore, for low-involvement/feel products, the more successful ads are likely to be those that are considered by the consumer to be the funniest.

Indeed, in a television advertising study, Perry et al. (1997b) found that brand attitude and behavioural intentions measures were significantly higher for those exposed to *high-humour* commercials as opposed to *low-humour* ads. Furthermore, by fully integrating the humour in with the message, there should be no concern about registration of the brand name and subordinate copy points. Perry et al. also found brand, product, and ad recall measures to improve in the *high-humour* condition. Alden et al. (2000) found that the more humorous an ad was perceived to be, the more favourable the Aad. Aad has been argued to be a prime factor in peripheral route, brand attitude change.

3.6.2.4. Relatedness of Appeal to the Advertising Message

Another analogous factor that bears examination is the relatedness of the humour to the communicated message. As was reviewed in Chapter Two, Speck considers relatedness a part of the classification of humour because of the significance of humour relatedness in an advertising context. The relationship of humorous elements

to other message components in an ad may critically influence the effectiveness of that message. Therefore, it has been important to consider how the relatedness of the humorous content impacts the overall persuasive effectiveness of the ad.

Speck considers three specific types of relatedness, depending on whether the humorous elements are related to the intentions, themes, or structure of the ad. Intentional relatedness was reviewed in the last chapter, and basically refers to how the humorous content relates to the message type and how it guides processing of the advertisement. If the message is *humour dominant*, the humour plays a central role in message comprehension. When humour is used in *message dominant* ads, the humour serves in a secondary role and can be removed without changing the meaning of the message. Thematic or semantic relatedness refers to the affiliation between the humour and the product-related themes communicated in the advertisement. Structural relatedness is similar to thematic relatedness and signifies the "...syntactical function of humor within message-dominant ads and of product information within humor-dominant ads" (Speck, 1991; 18). Basically this denotes the degree of integration between the secondary message elements and the humorous content in humour dominant ads. In a message dominant ad, this refers to the placement of the humour within the ad. If they are highly related, then the product information must be processed to comprehend the humour.

It could be argued, however, that relatedness on all three levels leads to a higher appreciation of the humorous content when the ad claims are also processed. As mentioned in the previous chapter, consideration beyond intentional relatedness has not really been given attention in the literature that has examined the impact on

relatedness (for example, see Spotts et al., 1997; Weinberger & Spotts, 1989a; Weinberger & Spotts, 1993). Not even Speck demonstrated the superiority of thematically or structurally related ads over their unrelated counterparts. These specific types of relatedness are probably impractical considerations that go beyond the necessary specificity of any empirical inquiry into *advertising* effects. They delve more appropriately into semiotic and literary theory. In the context of advertising, there does not even appear to be much difference between the different levels of relatedness. The definitions do not seem to categorise mutually exclusive levels of relation between humour and message content at least within an advertising setting. When distinguishing between related and unrelated humour, the most important concept is whether the message would remain intact if the humour was removed. If the message would become incomprehensible with the removal of the humorous components, then the humour is said to be intentionally related. As a result, the relatedness literature only examines the difference between intentionally related, humour dominant ads from unrelated, or message dominant appeals.

All of the comparative humour studies suggest that related humour transcends unrelated humour in meeting the various communicative goals of the advertiser (Kaplan & Pascoe, 1977; Klein et al., 1982; Madden, 1982; Weinberger & Campbell, 1991). A number of authors found further support for related humour's positive effects (Chapman & Crompton, 1978; Scott et al., 1990; Ziv, 1988), although no direct comparisons were made with unrelated humour. Recall from above that Sengupta et al. (1997) also found that the relatedness of ad cues in general, with regard to their fit, relevance, and appropriateness in the ad directly impact the persistence of attitudes that are formed as a result of the advertisement. The more

highly related and integrated the cues were to the brand concept and ad themes, the more likely that attitude change would endure. Content analyses have shown that practitioners would concur with the empirical research as humorous ads relied primarily on intentionally related humour in both magazine (Spotts et al., 1997) and television broadcast formats (Speck, 1991).

3.6.2.5. The Effect of the Advertising Medium

There are other, more general execution factors, which warrant deliberation when contemplating the use of a humorous appeal. Its effectiveness may also be restrained by the medium of the advertisement. While little empirical evidence has compared media directly to verify whether humour is differentially affected, industry experts believe that it is best suited for the broadcasting means of television and radio, and least appropriate for print media (Madden & Weinberger, 1984; Weinberger & Spotts, 1989a). Indeed, a number of content analyses have shown that humour is executed in a much larger proportion of broadcast advertisements (Weinberger & Campbell, 1991; Weinberger et al., 1995; Weinberger & Spotts, 1993).

It seems logical that humour would be best communicated through a broadcasting channel where an audio element is present to transmit the humour with the indispensable delivery element. There is a primary, deep-seated difference in print media that may make it less adept to humour and other emotional appeals (see Puto & Wells, 1984; Zinkhan & Gelb) and thus probably more appropriate for conveying straightforward informational strategies. Broadcast media (in addition to increasing the number of executional variables available) allow the full potential of the execution to be reached with the addition of sound and/or motion. As a result, the audience

receives information from a broadcast medium in a much more reflexive state than those exposed to print media (Stewart & Furse, 1985).

“The speculation is that the devices to execute humor in print are more limited and the fundamental philosophy of using print may be different. Print is reader-paced, allowing more message detail and explanation, while radio and TV are media-paced, passively received by audiences waiting to be entertained. Humor, of course, is an important tool in the entertainment arsenal” (Weinberger et al., 1995; 51).

Even within broadcast media, it seems that the experts have the most faith in television. Through this channel, both aural *and* visual components are transmitted to most clearly communicate both the subtle cues of humorous intent, as well as resolutions to the incongruous scripts that form the means of most humour elicitation (Berger, 1987; Wicker et al., 1981). Additionally, the audience can more closely identify with the comedic characters on a much more personal level when they can be seen and heard (Brown & Bryant, 1983).

Clearly, more empirical evidence is needed to support these views, although the main challenge facing researchers is to design ads within different media that contain exactly the same humorous and non-humorous content. This has been a major impediment as it is virtually impossible to communicate exactly the same information through these disparate media. The humorous content is particularly obstinate because the same comical cues cannot be accessed in all of these incongruent media.

3.6.2.6. Number Of Exposures to the Humorous Message

Not only is the medium an important dynamic that affects the persuasive power and overall effectiveness of the appeal, but so too is the number of exposures to the specific advertisement. This is crucial because most advertising in the market is repeated over a period of time to reinforce its message, increasing the chances that an

individual consumer will see the same ad more than once. Furthermore, many experimental studies on advertising effectiveness, in an attempt to preserve mundane realism, utilise real advertisements to which the participants may have already been exposed. Thus, previous viewing is a significant factor not only when assessing the effects of humour in advertising, but also when interpreting experimental results.

Many examinations of repeated exposure have been conducted to empirically examine its effect on the persuasive power of the ad. Originally, it was thought that humorous ads wear out more quickly than their serious counterparts (Gelb & Zinkhan, 1985; McCollum/Spielman and Co., 1982), possibly because more attention is required for humorous ads (Zinkhan & Gelb, 1990). The rationale was that perhaps it was previous presentations to a now worn out humorous ad that was precluding its effectiveness. This seems like a plausible construal because humour generally becomes less appealing after subsequent exposures, once the surprise element has been removed (Weinberger & Gulas, 1992).

Cacioppo and Petty (1979) have argued that message repetition provides more occasions in which to elaborate upon the message via central processing and assess the validity of the arguments. In a later study, they indeed found that higher frequencies of exposure led to a greater attitudinal shift when the message arguments were strong, while messages containing weak arguments became less persuasive over increased repetitions (Cacioppo & Petty, 1980). Conceivably, an appeal that relies entirely on amusing the audience with humour could be considered a weak argument.

However, their study was not conducted in an advertising context, and assumes that the message recipient is both motivated and able to process the message. The

motivation condition is unlikely to have been met in most instances of low-involvement product advertising, which as cited above, is both where humour appeals are the most proficient and most frequently used. They further concluded that a novel message became more persuasive after repeated exposures at least up to a moderate repetition threshold, at which point persuasion measures declined. While one could argue that successful humour is considered a novel approach, it is uncertain how this data would translate to humorous appeals and an advertising context, especially given the amount of humour used in advertising today.

Other researchers have suggested that humorous and non-humorous ads do not wear out at significantly different rates (Belch & Belch, 1984). This would explain the numerous results that suggest that neither execution is considerably more persuasive. Recent authors have taken a more extreme position by reporting that certain factors may delay the wearout of humorous ads such that increased repetitions may bolster their persuasive power over serious ads. The popular social influences within society can account for this effect. An anticipatory effect of what is to come preserves the humorous appeal and prolongs wearout of the advertisement. As can be seen in many examples, "...certain television commercials appear to become 'funnier' over time as their punch lines enter the language of popular culture and are repeated by professional comedians, as well as the general public" (Zinkhan & Gelb, 1990; 440). Typical instances of this can be seen in the *Budweiser* 'Wazzup?' campaigns in the US and UK and the *Guinness* 'Black & White' ads broadcast in Ireland and Britain.

Further evidence has corroborated these findings, claiming that supplementary viewing, at least in group settings increase the persuasive power of humorous appeals (Zhang & Zinkhan, 1991). A number of researchers have also found that soft sell ads,

which utilise primarily affective appeals, are indeed superior to cognitively based hard sell ads on recall and persuasion measures in single exposure designs (Aaker, Stayman, & Hagerty, 1986; Edell & Burke, 1987; Holbrook & Batra, 1987). These findings led Hitchon and Thorson (1995) to speculate that these findings would extend to multiple exposures, because an affective ad can provoke a pleasurable emotional experience repeatedly, which is gratifying to the audience. This, they believe, makes affective-based ads less susceptible to wearout than unemotional ads.

Indeed they demonstrated that non-affective ads wore out at a faster rate than their emotionally based counterparts when the contact level was set to between two and four exposures. Between four and twelve viewings, there were no significant differences in wearout, although the emotional ads still generated a significantly higher Aad. Furthermore, this research did not examine humour appeals, but other forms of affective ads. Unfortunately, much of the work on multiple exposures has examined the effect of repetitions in a single sitting or over a very short time period. A greater examination of repetition is needed over the course of a few weeks or months, which would more closely approximate natural exposure to an advertising campaign.

3.6.3. Audience Variables

Not only is the effect of humour on persuasion contingent upon these controllable execution factors, but it is also largely dependent on the less governable audience variables. Such variables require much more careful media planning on the part of the marketer to ensure that the ad is appropriately targeted to the market segment that will be the most responsive to a humorous appeal. The research to date has

underscored several key viewer characteristics that may help to disentangle some of the conflicting findings.

3.6.3.1. Prior Brand Attitude

In the case of more recognised brands, the pre-existing brand attitude held by the consumer may be a decisive audience variable intervening in the effectiveness of humour on persuasion. Research on this construct evolved from the mixed results found on prior brand *familiarity*. While some research has suggested that Aad is only influential for unknown brands (Fazio & Zanna, 1981), most studies have demonstrated an effect also for more established brands (for example, see Batra & Ray, 1985; Edell & Burke, 1986). This has led some researchers to conclude that the mediating variable responsible was really prior brand attitude (Machleit & Wilson, 1988).

The foundation underlying this is that humorous ads result in superior cognitive elaboration of message claims due to their attention-gaining quality. Obviously, this discussion is rooted in an information-processing model and may thus only be applicable to more highly involving products. While enhanced attention has been shown to result in greater mental processing (see Petty & Cacioppo, 1985), the valence of the cognitive elaboration is more difficult to regulate in humorous message executions because they are more susceptible than other appeals to subjective interpretation by the message receiver (Hershkowitz, 1977). Therefore, humorous approaches are more vulnerable to individual viewer attributes that will bias the directionality of the evaluation.

Prior brand evaluation does, in fact, appear to be a condition, which affects such information-processing (see Cacioppo & Petty, 1979), thus making it moderate the effects of humorous advertising appeals on persuasion in instances of central processing. When a positive pre-existing brand attitude is held, a humorous application seems to reinforce this and have a greater positive impact on persuasion than non-humorous appeals. However, when the viewer maintains a negative brand attitude, the humorous execution appears to adversely influence persuasion by fortifying *this* attitude (Chattopadhyay & Basu, 1990).

Therefore, when consumers are highly involved with a product class, humour may actually be appropriate for mature, pre-established products (McCollum/Spielman and Co., 1982; Stewart & Furse, 1986) for target audiences brandishing a positive attitude. Bear in mind that this discussion is in the context of mature brands. Under these circumstances, the objective tends not to be attitude change or persuasion but attitude reinforcement and brand prompting. Consequently, *advertising effectiveness* in this situation carries a much different meaning. Notwithstanding, the use of humour, in these cases, may bolster positive brand attitudes "...and reinforce their loyalty, thereby reducing the likelihood of trying a competitor's brand" (Chattopadhyay & Basu, 1990; 475). Alternatively, humour may not be persuasive for target markets that sustain negative pre-existing attitudes.

3.6.3.2. Gender of Message Recipient

Gender also appears to be an influential audience variable mediating humour's capacity to generate persuasion. Although this claim has not received unanimous support (see O'Quin & Aronoff, 1981), most of the evidence conveys a sharp gender disparity in humour reactions. This is an important mediator to consider in

advertising research since markets are frequently segmented by gender (Perry et al., 1997b). While little recent research has examined the underlying processes behind this gender difference, it has been revealed that humour differentially affects males and females in their assessments (Cupchick & Leventhal, 1974), their responsiveness (McGhee, 1976), and their attitudes towards advertisements utilising humour (Shama & Coughlin, 1979). In an examination of humorous and serious appeals, Lammers et al. (1983) reconfirmed these beliefs and found support for this gender variance. In an advertising experiment, they found that humour improved attitudes in males by reducing counterargumentation to message claims, but negatively influenced persuasion in females by fostering such counterargumentation. While this work examined the radio medium, Weinberger and Madden (1982) found that men were more receptive to humorous print ads. Other researchers also noted a male partiality towards humorous ad appreciation (Gelb & Zinkhan, 1986; Madden, 1988).

Some research has also suggested that different types of humour are favoured more by one gender or the other. Empirical work has demonstrated that aggressive and sexual humour is better received by males than females (see Derks, 1992; Haig, 1988; Whipple & Courtney, 1981), although Haig asserted that women were more appreciative of humour overall. Whipple and Courtney (1981) revealed a female propensity towards nonsense humour. Sippitt and Fowler (1999) believe that the male appreciation of aggressive, derogatory humour is rooted in traditional masculine characteristics, including assertiveness, self-sovereignty, and a lack of emotional sensitivity. However, Gallivan (1991) found that when the orator of sexual humour is a female and the target is a male, the gender bias favoured a greater appreciation by women. It seems that the observed effects are not so much related to gender

differences, but rather, they represent an in-group/out-group effect, which is dependent on the target and origin of the humorous material (Weinberger & Gulas, 1992). Sippitt and Fowler (1999) also acknowledge the female appreciation of aggressive humour targeted at men intended to "...puncture male egos" (p.16). One would think that these conclusions may be fluid in light of an always evolving society. The lack of gender effects found in education research on humour (see Weaver et al., 1988; Zillman & Bryant, 1980; Ziv, 1988) at least demonstrate that the differences are not absolute. Furthermore, the in-group/out-group effect may be more indicative of the importance of not targeting the humorous content at the intended audience of the ad.

3.6.3.3. Group Dynamic of the Exposure Audience

A further mediating audience feature that bears consideration when assessing persuasion in humorous advertising is the social dynamics within the contact audience. The effect of humour is markedly different when a viewer is exposed to the message in solitary versus group surroundings. There seems to be a robust social contagion variable associated with humour (Zhang & Zinkhan, 1991; Zinkhan & Gelb, 1990) where humour has been noted to be enjoyed more in social settings (Brown, Dixon, & Hudson, 1982), particularly larger group settings (Alello, Thompson, & Brodzinsky, 1983; Butcher & Whissell, 1984). Furthermore, there may be differences in enjoyment when exposed to the humorous treatment with strangers rather than friends and relatives (Zhang & Zinkhan, 1991). This is consequential because consumers exposed to ads in naturalistic social settings are less likely to view the ad with strangers as they do in experimental venues. This may prevent laboratory results from being generalised to genuine advertising conditions. Future research

should consider these group dynamics when considering both the internal and external validity of such designs.

3.6.3.4. Mood State During Ad Exposure

Mood state during ad exposure is another potential mediator of the persuasive power of humour appeals. Disparate affective states have been shown to have an effect on cognitive processing in both advertising and more general contexts (Ellis, Seibert, & Herbert, 1990; Gardner, 1985b; Gardner & Hill, 1988). This is critical to television advertising as programmes have been shown to be powerful mood manipulators (Goldberg & Gorn, 1987; Singh & Churchill Jr., 1987). While a positive mood is likely to reduce systematic processing, a negative mood tends to increase central route processing, but only towards the source of the mood (e.g.: the programme). Clearly this may have an impact on responses to appeals through the peripheral route, such as humour. While there have been no direct investigations of the effect of programme-induced *mood states* on humorous advertising effectiveness at the time of submission, Perry et al. (1997b) did find that more humorous programmes can reduce the impact of embedded ads that rely on humour appeals. The potential moderating effect of positive and negative programme-induced mood states is a primary element in this investigation and will be given a thorough review in Chapter Four.

3.6.3.5. Need For Cognition & Humour Effectiveness

A final audience variable that has received recent attention in the wake of all the research examining audience influences on humour and persuasion in advertising is a personality attribute. This factor is the consumer's intrinsic need for cognition (NFC). The NFC construct can be conceptualised as an individual's inherent pleasure and partiality towards engaging in assiduous, cognitive thought (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982).

Preliminary investigation has verified that NFC may strongly influence attitude formation (Cacioppo et al., 1986). It is necessary now to determine whether this personality trait is a mediating factor in the way different people are likely to be persuaded into changing their attitudes.

It may be that those with a high NFC are likely to form their attitudes through detailed, systematic processing of the arguments contained in the message. Central route persuasion is likely to be the primary means of influencing these individuals, even for advertising messages. Those with a low NFC, in contrast, are less likely to be appealed to through strong, detailed arguments, and thus are more liable to be persuaded through more trivial cues, such as ad liking. Specific research on this variable and how it can potentially alter the impact of humour appeals will be reserved to Chapter Five.

3.7. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Undoubtedly, addressing the effect of humorous advertising on consumer persuasion inevitably means attending to many other executional and audience-related variables. Persuasion is a convoluted and multifaceted motive, which makes generalisations problematic. Like all areas of social scientific enquiry, there is no comprehensive answer. Sweeping deductions attesting to the influence that advertising humour has on the contact audience are emphatically naïve and idealistic. Rather, the more credible and pragmatic supposition is that it is dependent on the specifics of the transmitted message as well as the dynamics of the exposure audience. “To be effective in an advertising context, humor must be geared to communication goals,

nature of the product, selected media, target audience, and message complexity” (Duncan et al., 1984; 433).

While the executional factors, such as advertised product, design elements of the humour, transmission medium, and to an extent the number of exposures are chiefly within the marketer’s direct control, the mediating audience variables are much less governable. Whereas vigilant market segmentation may be able to help curtail the effects of gender, programme-induced mood state, NFC, and possibly prior brand evaluation, these influences cannot be entirely abolished. Furthermore, other audience factors, such as social setting, may be completely out of the advertiser’s command. Nevertheless, marketers need to be cognisant of these dynamics when electing a humorous appeal.

Further investigation was recommended for several of the mediating variables that were highlighted. Additionally, auxiliary examination within naturalistic settings is needed for humour in advertising to supplement the experimental and database findings. While a number of studies have attempted this in their explorations of humour appeals (see Cantor & Venus, 1980; Scott, Klein, & Bryant, 1990; Weinberger & Madden, 1982), the results have been plagued with methodological limitations that preclude drawing conclusions on humour effects in a truly *natural* environment. This external validity hindrance is not restricted to advertising research, but resurfaces incessantly in all social science research. Though it may never be resolved fully, social scientists should continually attempt to approach compatible research questions through a complementary synthesis of quantitative and qualitative techniques in experimental and natural settings.

What can be concluded overall in this review of humour in advertising? Well, as with all social research, there are more questions than answers. It is safe to deduce, though, that humour appeals do generate attention and ad liking. Because humour is liked, it reinforces attention to the ad. Because humour generates ad liking, it functions best in a persuasive capacity as an affective, peripheral cue within the classical conditioning paradigm. Like similar feeling-based appeals, it can work through a single exposure or across quite a few viewings prior to wearout.

Contrary to the general credence that humour is no more proficient in persuading the consumer than non-humorous appeals, it actually can be depending on particular executional and audience-related conditions. Humour appeals are the most effective for selling low-risk, sensory or image-based products for new to moderately familiar brands. Broadcast media, particularly television or video, are the most suitable for humorous advertising appeals. When executed, the ad should be humour dominant with the humour being highly integrated into the message. Incongruity-based humour is most frequently met with success, and there is no reason to dilute humour to inhibit the humorous response. On the contrary, what makes the appeal novel and thus successful, is its ability to spawn a strong humorous reaction from the audience. Source credibility is, at best, not helped through the use of humour while comprehension is probably at least unharmed using humour. However, when used appropriately, these objectives are not usually mandatory success factors for humorous appeals. Before examining humour in advertising empirically, the literature on mood state and NFC will first be reviewed in the next two chapters.

Chapter Four

Mood Effects on Persuasion & Advertising Implications

“...we cannot truly understand how advertising works unless we treat television viewing as a series of interdependent program segments and advertising messages” (Singh & Hitchon, 1989; 2).

4.1. PREAMBLE

In this chapter, the mediating effects of mood states during ad exposure will be discussed. Mood states have a potent effect on how information is received, analysed, and evaluated. This has relevance to the responses to all persuasive communications, and thus is applicable to advertising effectiveness. In an advertising capacity, this is especially pertinent because of the context in which ads are placed. All advertising, no matter what the medium, subsists within a context (Gardner, 1994). Television is a particularly relevant domain because viewers are exposed to ads while involved in programmes that may have a compelling influence over their mood states. As a result, literature will be reviewed examining mood effects on the response to persuasive communications. Specifically, the findings will be applied to an advertising context.

A great deal of research has focused on how the affect generated by the ad itself affects advertising response. While this is also a critical issue, the explicit effects of a specific affective appeal (i.e.: humour) was addressed in the previous chapter. Since this thesis focuses on the interactive effects of ad and context, this chapter will focus primarily on research regarding contextual mood effects on advertising response. After all, advertising response is at least partially a function of the information communicated through the ad and the viewer's affective state during exposure (Srull, 1990). Specifically, in this examination, the relevant elements of consumers' affective states include the interaction between humorous (or serious) ad appeals and the affective tone of the programme. The last chapter addressed the response to the affect generated in the ad, while this chapter will detail the mood induced by the programme.

Initially, the discussions will contextualise the literature that will be reviewed, so that its relevance to this thesis will be evident. The effects of mood state during advertising exposure will be considered, as will the lack of attention that it is given in the industry. Mood itself will be defined as a concept and distinguished from other, often synonymously used terms, such as emotion. Finally, seven specific theories will be reviewed, along with relevant findings. The theories are grouped into two major classes. One set of theories positions mood state as a peripheral cue, while the other group posits mood as a mediator of information-processing. The peripheral cue theories include *learning theory* and the *mood as information* hypothesis. The information-processing theories consist of *mood congruency* theory, the *change in criteria* theory, an updated *mood as information* theory, the *motivational* hypothesis, and the *cognitive capacity* theory. The theories will be applied to an advertising

context and appropriate criticisms will be highlighted. From this discussion, relevant predictions for this current research will be made through a synthesis of the existing literature.

4.2. THE CONSEQUENCES OF MOOD IN ADVERTISING

As was introduced in the last chapter, an individual's mood states can have a profound effect on decision making and attitude formation in both consumer and broader contexts. While rational factors obviously play a role in decision-making and behaviour, affective elements also contribute (Zajonc, 1980). Mood states have repeatedly been shown to have a dramatic consequence on the perceivers' cognition and conation (Ellis, Seibert, & Herbert, 1990; Gardner & Hill, 1988). These include memory processes and evaluations (Gardner, 1985b). This is apparent from the fact that altering someone's mood often precedes attempts to persuade an individual in everyday circumstances, such as paying a compliment before asking for a favour (Schwarz, Bless, & Bohner, 1991). This is crucial in a marketing context because persons are constantly experiencing some type of general affective state that may have an effect on their response to persuasive communications. As a result, consumer decision making and behaviours can be significantly altered through the influence that even mild affective states have on cognitive processes (Isen, 1989).

More directly, mood state is a critical factor to consider in television advertising because commercials are embedded in emotionally stimulating programmes, which can have a profound effect on viewers' mood state (Goldberg & Gorn, 1987; Singh & Churchill, Jr., 1987). As evidence has shown, the mood generated by these programmes can strongly influence their response to persuasive advertising messages

(for example, see Edell & Burke, 1987; Srull, 1983). Clearly, television has a noticeable affective impact on its audience, as is observable from the fact that consumers of television report that they watch TV specifically because of the affective benefits that it rouses (Zillman, 1982). Context is a fundamental element of affective experiences (Clark & Isen, 1982), and thus the manner in which an advertising message is processed is influenced greatly by the mood state afforded by the programming environment (Gardner, 1985b; MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989).

As was discussed previously, attitude towards the ad is an important construct in shaping brand attitudes (see Homer, 1990; Laczniak & Carlson, 1989; MacKenzie, Lutz, & Belch, 1986; Mitchell & Olson, 1981), and ad liking seems to be critical to the success of television commercials (Walker & Dubitsky, 1994) for most types of products. Furthermore, it has been established that a person's affective state at the time of exposure to a message has a substantial impact on the attitude towards the object or subject of the message (Batra & Stayman, 1990; Isen, Shalke, Clark, & Karp, 1978), including advertised brands (Batra & Ray, 1986; Edell & Burke, 1987; Holbrook & Batra, 1987). This may include consumer attitude formation or change that may, in turn, shape brand selection decisions.

Behaviours can be drastically affected by mood state, a point that has been evidenced through examinations of both positive and negative moods. Inducing a positive mood by arranging for subjects to find a dime in a phone booth or engendering a negative mood by making subjects feel responsible for breaking an experimenter's camera fostered helping behaviours in empirical examinations (Cunningham, Steinberg, & Grev, 1980). Positive affect has also been associated with other positive behaviours,

such as increases in generosity, sociability, and friendliness (Isen, 1989). Conceivably, then, mood state may have a similar effect on attitude towards a persuasive message in itself (Aylesworth & MacKensie, 1998), including advertising communications.

As was mentioned in the introductory chapter, television is among the highest use products in the US (Shrum, Wyer, & O'Guinn, 1998). Consideration of how reactions to these often affectively appealing ads are altered by the mood provoked by television programmes is critical to understanding the potential effectiveness of an advertisement. Typically, television is not viewed for the sake of consuming advertising messages. Rather, the focus is on the programme and how it satisfies underlying needs. Therefore, the efficacy of the advertising message cannot be merely dependent on its own autonomous merit, but also on the viewers' response(s) to the actual programme (Park & McClung, 1986). To fully understand the psychological responses to television advertising, the co-dependent relationship between programme context and commercial messages must be acknowledged and properly addressed (Thorson, Reeves, Schleuder, Lang, & Rothschild, 1985).

4.3. IMPLICATIONS FOR MEDIA PLANNING

Often, advertising practitioners base media placement decisions on cost efficiency analyses and programme ratings. While the objective is to access the greatest number of consumers in the target market per dollar of advertising disbursement, this form of prioritising discounts the likelihood that the programme environment can colour the audiences' perception of the commercials and consequently their effectiveness (Mathur & Chattopadhyay, 1991). Over time, marketers have begun to recognise the

importance of contextual, communications features that influence advertising response, but the mood brought on by the programme environment has largely been neglected. For example, copy testing rarely considers the programme context when pre-testing ad response (Lloyd & Clancy, 1991).

Considering marketers pay out millions of pounds to place their products next to and even within television programme and film content (Karrh, 1995), the affective tone of the programme deserves greater attention. It is simply unrealistic to suppose that we can fully grasp the way in which advertising works in the television medium unless commercial messages and sequences of programme segments are viewed as interdependent (Thorson et al., 1985). If contextually induced mood states were more readily understood, it may be possible for advertisers to focus airtime sponsorship decisions to some extent on the anticipated affective influence of the television programme on their target audience (Pavelchak, Antil, & Munch, 1988).

Economically, it is important for managers to understand the interactive effects of context-induced mood states on differing types of advertising appeals. With this awareness, ads can be developed that are more versatile in that they are appropriate in a variety of programme contexts. In other words, it would be less desirable to have an ad that is only effective when placed within a certain type of programme. Rather, ads should be designed that can be scheduled in wide-ranging media contexts that evoke differing mood states (Gardner, 1994). Even for such ads, research can determine what mood states are *most* conducive to facilitating a positive response to the ad. Obviously this also has implications for copy testing within different contexts.

Advertisers seem to have some appreciation for the potential effects that the programme context may have, as is verified by some company policies with regard to programmes with potentially negative affective material. No one wants their product associated with any potentially negative sentiments. For example, Coca Cola has a policy of not advertising during news programmes because of the amount of depressing material that is presented during the news (see Mathur & Chattopadhyay, 1991). H.J. Heinz avoids advertising during violent programmes, because of the negative feelings that may be aroused. Advertising practitioners are also vigilant about placing ads in depressing feature shows, due to their apprehension over affect transfer from the programme to their brand (Singh & Hitchon, 1989).

So while advertisers are aware of the contextual effects of the programmes in which their ads are embedded, more empirical research is necessary to substantiate these media planning trends. Additionally, advertisers seem to focus only on avoidance of potentially harmful affective programming effects, while ignoring the possible benefits that may be received by taking advantage of the affective tone of the programme when planning media penetration. This chapter will show that the effectiveness of ad appeals, such as humour, may be enhanced by the programming environment.

Finally, this natural tendency to avoid negatively charged programmes ignores the possibility that programmes with negative affective material may actually benefit the advertiser, depending on the type of message that is contained in the ad. For example, some research has demonstrated a *consistency effect*, where ads using an emotional appeal were most successful when the affective tone of the programme matched the

affective tone of the ad (Kamins, Marks, & Skinner, 1991). So when using a sad appeal, such as might be the case with serious public service announcements, a sad programme context facilitated attitude change.

4.4. DEFINING MOOD STATES

The concept of mood and its accompanying affect has been described in a number of ways, although there are several common themes. Most authors view mood as a phenomenological experience, subjective in nature (Gardner & Hill, 1988). Moods are a specific class of *feeling states*, which are both general and pervasive affective states (Clark & Isen, 1982; Gardner, 1985b; Isen, 1984b; Morris, 1989). Because of their universal, undirected characteristic, moods affect all aspects of an individual's experience, yet are not consciously targeted at any one thing in particular (Fiske, 1981). This is distinct from more focused feelings, such as the affective element of attitudes. Rather than explicitly affecting the person's response to a specific object or actor that is attributable to the affect, moods embody a "...predisposition to react in the same way to the world at large" (Holbrook & O'Shaughnessy, 1984; 49). Mood is also a transitory or acute state, and thus can be distinguished from more stable and durable conditions (Peterson & Sauber, 1983), such as personality attributes (e.g.: insecurity, temperament) (Pieters & van Raaij, 1988) or enduring global attitudes (Gardner, 1985b). Despite their transitory qualities, the effects of induced mood states can be observed for at least 15 to 20 minutes after induction (Isen, Clark, & Schwartz, 1976), which is why the affect induced by the television programming environment is so critical when examining advertising effectiveness.

It is also important to note that moods are reactive, meaning they are a response to a stimulus. Ordinarily, moods are externally caused by an environmental stimulus (e.g.: TV programme), rather than drives, which are internally rooted and more goal-oriented (Aylesworth & MacKensie, 1998). The exception, of course would be chemically induced affective states. Their transient quality means that moods are easy to manipulate through very trivial stimuli (Isen, 1984b; Schwarz & Clore, 1983; Srull, 1983), such as adjustments in the physical environment. This can lead to temperamental changes at the point of purchase (Gardner, 1985b), if for example, a sales person smiles or there are long lines at checkout. Critical to this discussion is how slight alterations in communication style may influence message recipients' mood states when exposed to advertising communications.

Most importantly, moods must be discriminated from emotions. Emotions are more intense and evocative affective states, which can be attached to a specific cause and to explicit behaviours (Aylesworth & MacKensie, 1998; Clark & Isen, 1982; Cohen & Areni, 1991; Holbrook & O'Shaughnessy, 1984). Consequently, emotions have a sudden, abrupt rise time due to this specific causal nature (Schwarz & Bless, 1991). Moods are relatively mild and subtle affective states (Batra & Stayman, 1990), generally associated with lower arousal levels. They may arise from a collection of favourable or unfavourable events, which single-handedly may not be adequately intense enough to generate a specific emotion, but jointly may predispose one to a more generalised positive or negative affective state (Schwarz & Bless, 1991). Emotions can also be much more specifically identified (e.g.: anger, elation) than moods, which tend to be more general and bipolar (e.g.: positive and negative or good and bad) (Hill & Ward, 1989). "This is reflected in our use of language that implies

specific references for emotions but not for global moods. Thus, we say that we are afraid 'of' something and angry 'about' something, but that we are 'in' a happy or sad mood" (Schwarz & Bless, 1991; 58).

Nevertheless, moods can vary in strength and valence (Gardner & Wilhelm, 1987), although the intensity of moods is always moderate compared to emotions. Due to the strength and more identifiable nature of emotions, individuals tend to be more consciously aware of their emotions and the effect that it has on them. Because of this inevitability, emotions absorb attention and focus the individual onto the source of the affect, thereby disrupting concentration and ongoing behaviour. On the other hand, moods seldom interrupt behaviour that is in progress (Gardner, 1985b), regardless of whether the actor is aware of their mood or its cause.

However, moods can have an effect on attentional processes and influence behaviour (Clark & Isen, 1982), which is why the construct is under investigation. Despite the fact that they are unfocused, precursory conditions, positive or negative mood states may be induced at any time, and thus are likely to be present when exposed to an advertisement (Burke & Edell, 1989). In fact, global moods may influence a broader assortment of evaluations, because information afforded by specific, identifiable emotions tends to be more precise and detailed. As a result, emotions are narrower in the variety of judgements that they affect, which tend to be restricted to information relevant to its cause (Schwarz & Bless, 1991). In the next sections, the discussion will turn to the specific effects that mood has on thought, decision-making, attitudes, and behaviour in the persuasion process.

4.5. MOOD & THE PERSUASION PROCESS

Several theories have arisen as to how specifically mood mediates the response to persuasive communication. Originally, most of the research focused on demonstrating the potent and reliable effects of mood on memory (see Bower, 1981), although currently these effects have been extended to the realm of judgement and persuasion (see Srull, 1990). All of the present theories describe mood effects in the context of the Elaboration Likelihood Model of Persuasion (ELM) discussed in Chapter Three, or a comparable derivative (for example, see Chaiken, 1987). The mood state afforded by the programming environment has a bearing on the manner in which the ad is processed (Gardner, 1985b; MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989). Because of the effect of mood state on attitudes towards the content of a persuasive message, coupled with the known influence of attitude towards the ad on brand attitudes, mood state during ad exposure is believed to be a substantial mediator of advertising effectiveness. The recipient's affective state during exposure to a commercial is thought to affect message acceptance and brand attitudes through its direct influence on attitude towards the ad. The exact manner in which this occurs has been debated and scrutinised repeatedly.

Different moods are said to either enhance systematic processing, and thus improve attempts to persuade via the central route, or serve as a heuristic cue, improving peripheral route persuasion attempts. Alternatively, mood states may discourage either systematic or heuristic processing of information. If one form of processing has been inhibited by the mood state, this would make the opposing route to persuasion more likely to operate. Which route the message sender would like the receiver to use depends on the strength of the arguments contained in the persuasive communication.

The mood state that is induced can affect the audiences' ability and motivation to process the message. Depending on the type and quality of the message that is to be transmitted to the audience, this can be used to the persuader's advantage.

The specific ways in which mood can affect processing will now be outlined. The primary theories that have been brought forward will be reviewed and dissected. They will be discussed both within and beyond an advertising context. Positive and negative mood states appear to operate in very different ways, which are not always symmetrical. Therefore, the effect of each feeling state will often be described separately.

4.6. THEORIES FOR MOOD EFFECTS ON PERSUASION

Compiled into this review are seven theories on the moderating effect that mood has on responses to persuasive communications. These seven theories fall into two primary classes. One set of theories posits that mood states are utilised as peripheral cues, while the other class maintains that mood states mediate information-processing systems for various reasons. The peripheral cue theories include *learning theory* and the *mood as information* hypothesis. These theories conceptualise mood state as a peripheral cue and examine how mood enhances peripheral route persuasion processes. The two theories propose that a television programme that is being viewed prior to ad exposure makes a particular affective state salient through its content, which in turn is utilised by the viewer as a peripheral cue when assessing an unrelated advertisement (Aylesworth & MacKensie, 1998).

Table 4.1

Summary Table of Mood Theories

THE PERIPHERAL CUE THEORIES

Theory	Major Premise	Relevant Literature	Advertising Implications	Comment
Learning Theory	The mood of the message receiver becomes associated directly with the object of the attitude or the message source through classical conditioning processes.	Forgas & Bower (1987); Gorn (1982); Mackie & Worth (1991); Petty & Cacioppo (1986b); Schwarz et al. (1991); Singh & Hitchon (1989); Zanna & Rempel (1988)	Ads should be placed within positively toned programmes under all circumstances; Mood effect only when ad is processed peripherally	Demand characteristics in research; Research did not assess the effect of mood on higher order processing of persuasive communications (attitudes)
Mood as Information	To simplify complex decisions, people use a <i>how do I feel about it?</i> heuristic in which they use their affective response to the attitude object as information about it. Residual affect from some previously encountered stimulus may be erroneously used in evaluations.	Perry et al. (1997a); Petty et al. (1993); Schwarz (1990); Schwarz et al. (1991); Schwarz & Clore (1983); (1988);	Ads should be placed within positively toned programmes under all circumstances; Mood effect only when ad is processed peripherally	No effect when mood state is recognised as a source of the evaluation; Persuasion is not always favourably influenced by a positive mood and vice versa; No effect for attitude change; Does not reveal when peripheral processing will occur or any mood effects in a central processing capacity

THE INFORMATION-PROCESSING THEORIES

Theory	Major Premise	Relevant Literature	Advertising Implications	Comment
Mood Congruency Theory	Mood states stimulate mood-consistent knowledge structures, facilitating processing of other related information due to greater accessibility of similar affective material. Judgements and evaluations are consistent with the mood state at the time of appraisal.	Bower (1981); Gardner (1985b); Goldberg & Gorn (1987); Isen (1984b); Isen (1989); Isen et al. (1978); Kamins et al. (1991); Mackie & Worth (1989); Mathur & Chattopadhyay (1991); Murry, Jr. et al. (1992); Pavelehak et al. (1988); Schwarz & Clore 1988; Singh & Hitchon (1989); Srull (1983); Srull (1990); Worth & Mackie (1987)	Ads should be placed within positively toned programmes under all circumstances; Effect is held even when the programme is known to be the source of the mood	Effect was not found when an informational or dramatic ad was used; Theory does not hold up in instances of negative moods; Moods are too general and broad to apply network models and spreading activation; Preponderance of the evidence does not suggest that those in a good mood centrally process and those in a bad mood peripherally process
Change in Criteria Theory	Relative to those in a good mood, message recipients in a bad mood are more critical as a result of employing harsher standards when appraising a persuasive message.	Bless et al. (1990); Schwarz et al. (1991)	Ads should be placed within positively toned programmes when the ad claims are weak, but in negatively toned programmes when the ad claims are strong	Theory justifies the basic information-processing changes that occur as a result of mood but does not give an explanation as to why it occurs; Evidence suggests that those in a bad mood process more <i>intently</i> not necessarily more <i>critically</i> .

THE INFORMATION-PROCESSING THEORIES (Cont.)

Theory	Major Premise	Relevant Literature	Advertising Implications	Comment
Modern Mood as Information	Mood indicates to individuals the degree to which simple heuristics and intuition are reliable ways to analyse incoming information or whether the current circumstances require systematic processing and problem-solving behaviour.	Aylesworth & MacKenzie (1998); Clore & Parrott (1991); Fiedler (1988); Forgas & Bower (1987); Frijda (1988); Isen (1987); Isen & Means (1983); Schwarz (1990); Schwarz & Bless (1991); Schwarz & Clore (1988)	Programmes that are both positively and negatively toned lead to peripheral processing of the ad. A negative mood facilitates central processing, but only for the source of the mood. Ads during a negative programme may thus require appeals that generate more attention	Strong evidence to support this theory
Motivational Theory	When in a good mood, people are motivated to maintain it. They avoid analytical processing because this may disrupt their affective state. When in a bad mood, people are motivated to improve it. They engage in central processing in an effort to soothe the poor mood	Aylesworth & MacKenzie (1998), Batra & Stayman (1990); Bless et al. (1990); Bless et al. (1992); Gardner (1994); Gardner & Hill (1988); Gardner & Scott (1990); Goodstein (1994); Hadjimarcon & Marks (1994); Hill & Stephens (1990); Isen (1984b); Isen (1985); Isen (1987); Kuykendall & Keating (1990); Mackie & Worth (1991); Mano (1990); Mano (1992); Mahur & Chattopadhyay (1991); Murry & Dacin (1996); Murry, Jr. et al. (1992); Oaksford et al. (1996); Schwarz (1990); Schwarz & Bless (1991); Smith & Shaffer (1991); Soldow & Princepe (1981); Zillman (1988b)	Programmes that are both positively and negatively toned lead to peripheral processing of the ad. A negative mood facilitates central processing, but only for the source of the mood. Ads during a negative programme may thus require appeals that generate more attention. Affective appeals, such as humour, will be particularly effective when in a good mood as it helps to maintain the favourable state	Strong evidence to support this theory
Cognitive Capacity Theory	Different mood states disrupt systematic processing by taking up cognitive resources. A good mood may do this because positive material is supposedly richer and more highly integrated. Alternatively, bad mood may do this by inciting a search to justify the negative state. The conflict has led to a focus on mood intensity instead.	Bless et al. (1990); Bless et al. (1996); Clark & Isen (1982); Ellis & Ashbrook (1989); Ellis et al. (1990); Isen et al. (1987); Isen & Means (1983); Mackie & Worth (1989); Schwarz & Clore (1983); Schwarz et al. (1991); Smith & Shaffer (1991); Worth & Mackie (1987)	Programmes that are capable of eliciting strong affective states lead to peripheral processing of ads. If the ad contains strong arguments, it should not be placed in an emotionally stimulating programme. If it contains weak arguments, it should be placed in such a programme.	Capacity deficits may not be applicable to moods generated by television viewing due to their less intense quality. In studies comparing cognitive capacity to motivational theory, the results suggested that motivation, not cognitive capacity, was the determining factor

The theories that follow focus more on central route persuasion. According to these perspectives, a particular mood state either enhances or impedes an individual's motivation or ability to process a message centrally. *Mood as information* has been recently revised, and the contemporary version now accounts for the more complex information-processing effects. The other information-processing theories include *mood congruency* theory, the *change in criteria* hypothesis, the *motivational* hypothesis, and the *cognitive capacity* theory. These seven different theories will be appraised, along with how each can be utilised to make predictions concerning human responses to persuasive communications, such as advertising. This will be buttressed by supporting and countering evidence for the individual theory, which will help to establish a context for this current research. The theories with the most problems and the least support will be described initially.

4.7. THE PERIPHERAL CUE THEORIES

“A useful point of view is that the very concept of program context effects is a violation of the traditional perspective of the consumer as a rational information processor, since it assumes that an unrelated stimulus (the program) can influence the viewer's responses to the focal stimulus (the commercial). Therefore, it seems appropriate to emphasize...those program characteristics that might impact viewers' thoughts about the commercial via a peripheral route to persuasion” (Singh & Hitchon, 1989; 21).

The peripheral cue theories are the oldest and most rudimentary conjectures on the persuasive impact of context-induced mood states. Two similar conceptualisations have been forwarded that collectively comprise this peripheral cue perspective. This includes the *learning theory* or classical conditioning approach and the *mood as information* hypothesis. These theories predict a main effect of mood state on attitudes. It is a positive main effect in that the affective state is directly used as a peripheral cue when heuristic processing is utilised, although mood does not

supposedly influence the type of processing that is used. Therefore, a positive mood is always predicted to favourably influence attitudes, while a negative mood purportedly has a detrimental effect on persuasive communications. No interactions are expected with the peripheral cue theories. Moreover, no mood effects are forecasted when persuasive messages are processed centrally. These simple theories are only applicable when there is no chance of any message elaboration (Wegener, Petty, & Klein, 1994). Each theory will be outlined, followed by the relevant criticisms that have emerged. For a summary of all of the theories reviewed, please refer to Table 4.1.

4.7.1. Mood States & Learning Theory

In this simplest conception of mood effects, the affect that is felt in itself is employed straightforwardly as a peripheral cue. The theory predicts that the feeling state of the message receiver can become associated directly with the object of the attitude or the message source (Schwarz et al., 1991). This view comes directly from a learning theory of attitude change, where classical conditioning mechanisms are responsible for tying the unrelated affect to the attitude object. Such perceptions of people and objects are coloured by the mood state, which is used as a peripheral cue (Forgas & Bower, 1987). Arousal generated by an unrelated stimuli (e.g.: TV programme), may endure beyond its own exposure time and affect the response to a subsequent stimulus (e.g.: commercials) (Singh & Hitchon, 1989). *Excitation Transfer* theorists believe that communications produce arousal, which energises affective states that occur following exposure. Because mood states are so natural in that they are reasonably easy to induce and to manage, they are believed by some academics to be an instinctive peripheral cue (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986b). In studies testing this effect,

participants repeatedly conveyed more positive (negative) attitudes towards whatever object or idea was paired with a positive (negative) stimulus (see Mackie & Worth, 1991). As a result, this theory would predict a main effect for mood state, attributing the persuasive advantage to a positive feeling state under all circumstances.

Gorn (1982) manipulated mood by playing different types of music and found that it directly influenced the preference for different pens that were paired with the music. When subjects were exposed to a picture of a blue or beige pen while listening to happy or sad music, they generally preferred the pen colour that was paired with the pleasant music to the one paired with the disagreeable music. The effect was expunged in favour of a central decision strategy when personal relevance increased (by informing subjects before the study that they would be given the pen of their choice). Gorn attributed this effect to a classical conditioning effect of mood state to ad stimulus.

4.7.1.1. Criticisms of Learning Theory

Most of this work, however, was based on pairing lower order concepts, such as nonsense words with either agreeable or objectionable stimuli, such as music, food, or odours (Schwarz et al., 1991). The empirical research did not assess the effect of mood on higher order processing (e.g.: concepts, opinions) of persuasive communications. Many critics also cited the potential intrusion of demand characteristics into these studies. Flashing simple words or nonsense syllables on a screen and pairing presentation with overtly positive and negative stimuli that it entirely unrelated probably cued participants into the nature of the study when they were asked to give their opinions both before and after presentation.

However, more rigorous studies did confirm the associationist effect for words, short catch phrases, and objects (see Mackie & Worth, 1991). So while it appears that attitudes towards simple verbal word associations can be formed through this process, this theory has not held up to investigations within a persuasion context (e.g.: advertising), where significant message content is concerned. As will be clear when the patterns that have emerged within examinations on the other theories that will be discussed, it does not appear that simple conditioning procedures are sufficient in changing attitudes when a compound message is delivered while the audience is in a positive or negative mood state. Furthermore, this process of *excitation transfer* is applicable in instances where the individual cannot distinguish between the portions of arousal specifically attributable to the prior (i.e.: TV show) and current (i.e.: Ad) stimuli (Singh & Hitchon, 1989). In the case of TV viewing, most individuals are aware that their affective state is a result of the show to which they are exposed.

Regardless, this theory predicts that a positive mood state is always superior to a negative mood in facilitating persuasion. It is clear from the research that this is not the case, as will be illustrated through the analysis of the other theoretical perspectives. The existing evidence detailed below will reveal an interactive pattern that has been observed with mood states in persuasion research, which does not support the basic premise of this model. The theory does not make any provisions for mood effects when the individual processes information centrally. A number of mediating circumstances, such as argument strength have led researchers to search for a more complex explanatory effect for affective state. Furthermore, the attitude objects in the examinations that provided substantiation for the classical conditioning effect were previously neutral stimuli (e.g.: nonsense syllables). Objects for which a

prior attitude was held, on the other hand, were unaltered by mood state (Zanna & Rempel, 1988). In an advertising context, this *at the very least* eliminates mood effects for any ad for which a previously existing brand is promoted.

4.7.2. Mood as Information Hypothesis

Correspondingly, it has been suggested that a *mood as information* (Schwarz & Clore, 1983) hypothesis may account for a possible peripheral cue effect. This view posits a more conscious, complex conceptualisation of the mood serving in a peripheral cue capacity. In attempts to abridge complicated decision-making tasks, people sometimes use what is referred to as a *how do I feel about it?* heuristic. This is accomplished by using their affective response to the object of judgement as information about it. Individuals use their feeling states directly to determine their view on the current state of their environment. However, because of the carryover effect of moods, which can endure over a period of time, individuals may have difficulty discriminating between their affective reaction to the attitude object and the residual mood state lingering from some previously encountered stimulus. As a result, this pre-existing mood state may be erroneously attributed to the persuasive message (Schwarz, 1990; Schwarz et al., 1991; Schwarz & Clore, 1988):

“Since physiological responses to excitation decays [sic] at a much slower rate than does one’s cognitive response to excitation, when a person views a commercial in an aroused state, that person’s evaluation of the ad is likely to be intensified without the viewer realizing the correct source of the intensified response. He is more likely to attribute his response solely to the commercial than to realize it was influenced by the program” (Perry, Jenzowsky, Hester, King, & Yi, 1997; 391).

When induced into a good mood, this may bring about a more favourable appraisal, while a negative mood should produce a less favourable evaluation than would normally occur.

Like the *learning theory*, the *mood as information* account predicts a positive main effect for mood state on persuasion when the peripheral route to persuasion is traversed, but it is ineffective when the information is processed centrally. The effect that it predicts is applicable only to heuristic or peripheral route processing. Both theories presume that a positive mood serves as a peripheral cue, enhancing the effect of peripheral route persuasion, while a negative mood always discourages persuasion. Therefore, when a television programme induces a positive mood, the ensuing ads should be more effective than if they were placed into a sad or sombre programme.

4.7.2.1. Criticisms of the Mood as Information Hypothesis

This mood as cue effect has been observed, particularly for positive moods, but only in the absence of other peripheral cues (see Petty, Schumann, Richman, & Strathman, 1993). Furthermore, the effect is diminished when the mood state is recognised as a potential source of the evaluation. For example, participants in one study estimated their life's satisfaction as significantly higher when in a good mood (sunny day) than when in a bad mood (rainy day). Despite the fact that the operationalisation in the study was questionable, the effect was abolished when the researcher called attention to the weather, permitting respondents to consider it as a prospective basis of the mood state (Schwarz & Clore, 1983). So the diagnostic value of one's current mood state may only be relevant when the informational significance of the affective state has not been contested.

Furthermore, as the supporting evidence for the more complex and comprehensive theories will show, persuasion is not always favourably influenced by a positive mood and adversely affected by a negative mood. Additionally, these models do not

prescribe the circumstances under which peripheral route processing will occur, and do not stipulate any mood effects in a central processing capacity. Neither theory considers the strength of message arguments and neither makes predictions of mood effects on recall or message-related cognitive thoughts (for example, see Schwarz et al., 1991). Furthermore, there is no support for these theories in addressing attitude *change*, as all of the support comes from attitude *formation* research. This is clearly a major limitation to the peripheral cue theories.

4.8. THE INFORMATION-PROCESSING THEORIES

A more thorough class of theories has been developed to explain the effect of context-induced mood states on communication response. These models are more robust in that they are not primarily focused on one form of processing. Rather than conceptualising mood as a cue that is peripherally processed, these theories suggest that the mood of an individual when processing a message can have a drastic effect on the actual strategy used to process the message. Accordingly, mood is not seen as a direct arbitrator of message response, but alternatively, these views posit that mood states merely influence the dominant processing style elected, which may in turn indirectly affect persuasive response.

As a result, mood effects can have a much more conditional effect on reactions to persuasive communications, mediated by such things as argument strength. Therefore, context induced mood can be a very crucial factor to consider depending on the type of message that is communicated to the audience. The theories contend that the feeling state of the message recipient can shape the strategy used to process the message. In particular, the mood effects predicted by these models are relevant in

instances where the message recipient is undecided as to whether the message is worthy of elaborate processing (Wegener et al., 1994). This describes the circumstances surrounding most advertising exposure, and thus is very applicable to these circumstances.

Therefore, advertisers may want their target audience in a particular mood state when exposed to their commercials, depending on the content and type of argument that is conveyed. This is very relevant to the objectives of this thesis because certain ad appeals are utilised with different processing styles in mind. Humour is used as a primary appeal in advertising with the intention that the ad is processed peripherally, while a straightforward informational approach relies on stronger arguments in the hope that the ad is processed at least to some degree via the central route. While it is clear that no ad appeal is universally emotional or informational (see Calder & Gruder, 1989; Wells, 1989), and nothing is processed entirely by way of one route to persuasion, this is more a matter of dominant processing tendencies that the advertiser expects to find in their target market.

Several theories have been developed to account for the effect that mood states have on information-processing. *Mood congruency* theory will be outlined first, because this concept makes very different predictions from the other models. This conjecture, like the peripheral cue hypotheses, predicts a positive main effect for mood state on persuasive response. Good moods are believed to enhance persuasion attempts while bad moods are thought to diminish the persuasive potency of a message. However, rather than envisioning mood states in a heuristic cue capacity, mood congruency theorists propose a model in which the affective state mediates processing style.

Specifically, a good mood is believed to foster a central processing style, while a bad mood is thought to inhibit it.

The more commonly held view that has been buttressed by much more empirical support is that *bad moods* encourage systematic or central route processing, while *good moods* suppress it (Batra & Stayman, 1990; Bless, Bohner, Schwartz, & Strack, 1990; Bless, Mackie, & Schwartz, 1992; Gardner & Hill, 1988; Howard & Barry, 1994; Innes & Ahrens, 1991; Kuykendall & Keating, 1990; Mackie & Worth, 1989; Mackie & Worth, 1991; Schwarz & Bless, 1991; Sinclair & Mark, 1992; Worth & Mackie, 1987). The specific reason that this occurs has been debated, leading to the development of the other four information-processing theories. These include the *change in criteria* hypothesis, the revised *mood as information* theory, *motivational* theory, and *cognitive capacity* theory. While the theories maintain similar predictions, a number of carefully planned studies have been developed and carried out to test competing theories. The findings help refute the theories that have gone amiss and further authenticate the most likely models.

4.8.1. Mood Congruency Theory

The mood congruency theory is the most basic of the information-processing theories. Its premise is that evaluations, judgements, and behaviours can all be altered by mood state, and that this happens in a manner that matches the current mood state. In other words, those in a positive mood will undergo positive conversions in their assessments, outlooks, and conduct, while those in a negative mood will experience comparable negative changes (see Kamins et al., 1991). For a positive mood, mood congruency takes the position of the old cliché that happy people *see the world*

through rose-tinted glasses. As a result of their optimism, they should act accordingly (Isen et al., 1978), while sad people always *see the glass as half empty.*

The rationale behind the mood congruency effect is that a stimulated mood state galvanises mood-consistent knowledge structures. This, in turn, facilitates processing for other mood-consistent information (Mathur & Chattopadhyay, 1991), due to greater accessibility of corresponding affective material stored in memory (Isen, 1984b; Isen et al., 1978). As a result, mood state creates a biasing effect, where judgements and evaluations are consistent with the mood state at the time of judgement (Gardner, 1985b). The evaluations are based on the material that is retrieved, which has an affective tone that is consistent with the current mood state (Singh & Hitchon, 1989). This effect is based on network models of memory that are prevalent in cognitive psychology. These models will now be discussed in detail.

4.8.1.1. Network Models & Spreading Activation

Network models are based on the assumption that memory is organised with packets of information stored as nodes, which are linked together by pathways that differ in strength depending on how closely associated the information is to one another. Activation of one node prompts others that are interconnected in the network to be triggered through a current of stimulation that spreads outward from the most highly associated pathways. The chances of one node being stimulated by another in this *spreading activation* process depends on the strength of the pathway, which is based on the relatedness of the information contained in each node (Bower, 1981).

Mood information is stored in this way, such that mood-consistent information is interconnected and can be accessed through spreading activation processes. Such mood-related information is interconnected with a collection of constructs and experiences stowed away in memory (Gardner, 1985b). With this system of organisation in the mind, recall is influenced by a consumer's affective state either when encoding or retrieving the message information; or through a correspondence between moods at the time of exposure and subsequent encoding at the time of retrieval (Isen, 1984b). Stimuli such as a television programme may activate nodes that store mood information. Once the mood is provoked, it may influence information-processing and perception. When exposed to a persuasive message, the current mood state may influence what information is recollected by facilitating the retrieval of mood-congruent material. This is probably a result of more detailed and systematic elaboration of mood-consistent matter when exposed to the message (Bower, 1981).

Therefore, when in a happy mood, happy and positively charged material is prone to be more richly processed. This positive material is therefore more robust in that memory is stronger for the information and elaboration is greater, leading to a more intricate network of knowledge. Thus judgements are swayed by the thoughts that are primed and most readily retrieved (Isen, 1989). This effect is allegedly magnified in the case of happy moods, because such moods are said to increase information-processing efficiency (Isen, 1984b). The belief by Isen is that information is organised differently when stored while the individual is subjected to a favourable affective state. The categories of information tend to be broader and more highly integrated when encoding or retrieving positively valenced material. In terms of the

network model, this means that the nodes contain more information, and there is a more highly interconnected network system between categories.

Perhaps this is due to a natural tendency to spend more time thinking about and focusing upon positive experiences as some sort of adaptation mechanism. In any event, evidence has shown that when engaged in miscellaneous listing tasks, subjects tend to list favoured items first and they record more pleasant than unpleasant items (see Mathur & Chattopadhyay, 1991). Furthermore, in word association games, people typically generate more positive than negative associations. This increased processing efficiency extends to all incoming material that is positively valenced, because the incoming information can be more easily bound to existing information stored in memory (Goldberg & Gorn, 1987). In contrast to the broader and highly integrated organisational structure of positive material, negatively valenced material tends to be smaller, narrower, less interconnected, and more situation-specific (Isen, 1989). A positive mood, therefore, should facilitate central route processing, and persuasion should be the result of more readily available positive cognitions.

4.8.1.2. Predictions for Mood Congruency

The predictions in this theory are based on the idea that mood-consistent information will be more readily processed and more tightly integrated with primed knowledge structures. A main effect is predicted for mood state on attitude change. So when in a good mood prior to exposure, that affect will carry over into the ads. Subsequently, more positive information will be noticed and there will be an increase in positive thoughts. Persuasion, then, is more likely when the individual is in a good mood

because more positive thoughts are accessible to a central processor and more positive peripheral cues are readily available in the case of heuristic processing.

This in itself is suggested to benefit persuasion attempts on happy message recipients, as more positive cognitions are available when processing the persuasive message (e.g.: advertisements). Attitude assessments are biased by mood congruent memory (Bower, 1981), and therefore recipients in a good mood are likely to be more persuaded simply because they form more positive associations (Bless et al., 1990). Quite simply, a positive feeling state generated by the programme should, according to this theory, positively distort ad evaluations by increasing the probability that viewers will recall other positive product experiences during ad exposure (Murry, Jr., Lastovicka, & Singh, 1992).

The opposite can be said of people induced into a sad mood, as the theory posits an assimilative effect. When processing centrally while in a bad mood, people may have more negative thoughts at their disposal. Alternatively, while there would be an increase in negative cognitions due to their greater accessibility, these negatively valenced thoughts may actually disrupt task relevant processing (Ellis et al., 1990). The negative affective state may, in effect, impede central processing through negative thought enhancement, which generates disruptions in thought processes that distract the message recipient (Mayer, 1986). As a result, a negative mood, according to mood congruency, may make peripheral route processing more likely. This theory suggests that persuasion attempts are foiled by an adverse mood by making more negative peripheral cues accessible to the message recipient, who cannot process centrally due to the distractions spawned by negative cognitions.

Overall, these mood effects result in distinctive cognitive elaboration that are coloured by the prevailing mood state, which lead to greater recall of the affectively biased information. Happy moods beget positive responses and sad moods beget negative responses, because people tend to focus more on experiences and circumstances that correspond with their current mood state (Bower, 1981). However, recall that cognitive congruency predicts that the valence of the thoughts affect processing differentially. As a result of the added focus on the positive material when in a good mood, the mood congruency hypothesis forecasts a higher level of persuasion when a positive mood is induced prior to message exposure, as the number of positive thoughts increase, while negative associations are reduced (Goldberg & Gorn, 1987; Mackie & Worth, 1989; Worth & Mackie, 1987). The opposite pattern would be predicted in the case of negative moods, since the cognitive responses that would be triggered by such a mood would include a higher generation of thoughts and associations that have a high negative valence.

In an advertising context, the mood generated by the programme is likely to have an effect on the affectively charged material contained in the ad. This effect provides a distinct persuasive advantage for consumers placed into a positive mood, since it would lead to greater elaboration of the positive material contained in the ad. Given that most advertisers of consumer products utilise positively valenced affect in their appeals and present their brand in a positive manner (with the exception of some products intended to reduce adverse consequences), the mood congruency effect will provide a stronger positive response when ads are placed into positive programmes (Singh & Hitchon, 1989).

While it is similar to the peripheral cue theories, in that mood congruency always predicts more persuasion when in a good mood; it differs in that this theory maintains that the effect of mood on persuasive communications is preserved regardless of the basis to which the recipient accredits their affect (Schwarz & Clore, 1988). So even if the recipient does not believe that the message source or content is the cause of the mood, the effect will still be observed. This is because it is not a matter of utilising the affect as information. Rather, the mood state merely makes the positive (negative) knowledge structures more accessible when in a good (bad) mood. The advertising implications are, thus, obvious. The theory advocates implanting commercials in upbeat, cheery programmes under all circumstances, regardless of the commercial message itself. According to mood congruency, the mood generated by the programme will activate positive mood nodes. These associations will carry over into the ad and brand evaluations regardless of the tone of the commercial (Goldberg & Gorn, 1987). This will augment advertising effectiveness through the process of spreading activation of positive mood networks.

4.8.1.3. The Evidence

There has been some empirical work that has supported this standpoint. In an advertising study, Goldberg and Gorn (1987) placed television advertisements within either happy or sad television programmes. They found that more of the participants in the positive programme group had favourable relevant cognitions than those in the negative programme condition. Apparently, the mood generated by the TV show carried over into ad evaluations, as viewers' perceived mood during the ads matched the affective tone of the programme. As a result, the ads embedded into a happy programme were perceived as more effective. However, there were several

confounds in the study, including the fact that the participants knew prior to exposure that they were going to be rating advertisements, which may have generated demand characteristics. Participants were told up front that they were involved in a study that would assess their reaction to television commercials and the programmes in which they are embedded. Highlighting the two crucial aspects of the study may have clued subjects into the intent of the research, especially when explicitly happy and sad programmes were used in the experiments.

In a similar print advertising study, the brands were rated more positively when subjects were induced into a positive, rather than negative mood (Srull, 1983), although the mood induction procedures were not realistic to an advertising context. Furthermore, in both of these studies, the positive main effect was really only pronounced for affective ad appeals (Kamins et al., 1991). When informational appeals were used, the mood state was not a significant factor in altering persuasive potency. This interaction, which was not investigated by these researchers, suggests that perhaps individuals in the different mood states are processing differently, since when in a good mood they are more responsive to peripheral cues (i.e.: emotional ad appeal), rather than central processing cues (i.e.: informational ad appeals). It could further be argued that emotional appeals were not effective for those in a bad mood, because such appeals rely on peripheral cues, and thus have a weaker argument strength for these individuals who are in a central processing mode. This is the more commonly found pattern, which is justified by a number of theories below. It appears then, that mood congruency support has only been found because the ads used in the experiments attempted a peripheral route to persuasion, which masked the actual interaction that occurs.

A number of additional studies equally did not find support for mood congruency. Kamins et al. (1991) tested the congruency model by placing happy and sad ads within either a happy or sad programme. No support was found for the congruency model, as a happy programme-induced mood led to less favourable responses to dramatic ads than a sad programme-induced mood. According to their results, there are circumstances when a sad or depressing programme may generate a more positive persuasive response. They explained the results in terms of the Mood Management perspective, which falls under the motivational theory (see below).

In a naturalistic study, Pavelchak et al. (1988) examined the emotional impact of a television programme on ad recall. In this case, the affect-inducing programme was the *Super Bowl*, the championship game of American football's NFL, and the perennial top rated television event on American television. This programme was selected as an example of a single programme that can have a significantly fluctuating emotional impact, dependent on its viewers. In this case, the mediating variable in the target audience was whether they were drawn from the winning city, the losing city, or a neutral metropolis. They found no support for the so-called processing-efficiency principle, which is the basic premise behind mood congruency. They felt that in order to validate the mood congruency theory, consumers from the winning cities should have recalled the most pleasant ads, while those from the losing city should recall the most unpleasant ads. This is because the respective affect generated by each was the most complementary to their own context-induced internal state. However, they did not find support for mood congruency, and in fact found that the most predictable effect of the programme on ad recall was emotional *intensity* or involvement.

While emotional intensity may be a critical mediating variable, it may not be a practical variable to examine. This is because it is likely that in a natural setting, most programmes that a consumer chooses to view will be those with which they are involved. Aside from unrealistic lab conditions, in which forced exposure to a disliked programme may be incited, consumers are not likely to watch TV shows that they do not like (Murry, Jr. et al., 1992). This is especially the case with modern communications, which permit greater access to a variety of stimuli over which consumers exert greater control. This is no more apparent than in television viewing, where there are such a multitude and variety of programmes and messages available to tune into both literally and mentally:

“Individuals no longer have to move themselves to chosen environments; they *move environments* to their own particular positions instead. At any given moment, message consumers can choose from a vast array of stimulus environments. The flip of a dial or the push of a button gives instant access to an environment, and the same trivial motor activity ends exposure and brings on another environment. Message consumers can sample environments with the greatest of ease, reject those that ‘don’t feel right,’ and keep on trying until they find something to their liking...” (Zillman, 1988a; 330).

A number of studies have also found that while there is some evidence for a mood congruency effect with positive affective states, the theory fails to hold up to circumstances involving negative affect. A smattering of empirical research found that a good mood facilitated recall for positive matter, but that an adverse feeling state did not facilitate recall of negative material (see Isen, 1989). According to this theory, the effects of positive and negative moods should be symmetrical. However, as will be clear from the preponderance of the evidence cited below, this is not the case (Isen, 1984a).

Furthermore, there are some logical problems to applying a network activation model to mood effects on processing and evaluation. According to this theory, activation of one node spreads through all networks that are associated with it. For semantic concepts, this is acceptable, but general mood nodes would be much too broad for this process to operate with any efficiency. With a *feel good* or *feel bad* node, the number of connections to related nodes would become astonishingly large. When confronted with any object, an evaluation process is triggered because it is such an important facet to comprehension (Zajonc, 1980). “To the extent that this is true, or anything even approximating it is true, the ‘feel good’ and ‘feel bad’ nodes will be connected to the representation of roughly half the experiences in our life! What this means is that the amount of activation spreading to any single node will be minuscule” (Srull, 1990; 38).

Therefore, it seems unlikely that affect-based information retrieval can be explained in this manner since the likelihood of a particular node being activated would be so minute (Mitchell, 1986b). Furthermore, mood theorists maintain that mood states are easily altered by external circumstances. If this is the case, and evaluations were so directly impacted by mood states as claimed by this model, then decisions and evaluation would be shifting incessantly. However, there is little evidence that this is the case (Srull, 1990). This suggests that a more complex process is operating in the case of context-induced mood states.

Finally, most of the research does not support the pattern prescribed by mood congruency theory. Numerous studies cited below found evidence for the more commonly found relationship between mood state and information-processing.

Specifically, the majority of the evidence suggests that a positive mood suppresses central processing, while a negative mood encourages it. Gardner and Hill (1988) specifically examined processing patterns under positive and negative affective states. Their findings did not support the notion that those in a favourable mood process information centrally, while those in a negative state process peripherally. Consistent with the more popular pattern, they found that individuals in a positive state use experiential or heuristic processing, while those in a negative mood process centrally. This, along with all of the other complementary evidence that will be highlighted below preclude acceptance of the mood congruency theory. This is a perfect transition into the next set of theories, which by differing rationales, support the relationship between mood states and processing style found here.

4.8.2. Change in Criteria Theory

The change in criteria theory supports the notion that a bad mood increases information-processing efforts, while a good mood curtails such efforts. However, for this very reason, this theory supports the propositions of the previous theories that indicate that a positive mood state in the message recipient results in more persuasion than a negative mood. This model differs in that its proponents believe that mood's influence is on the criteria used to assess the quality of the persuasive communication. It has been suggested under the umbrella of this model that message recipients in a bad mood are more critical as a result of employing harsher standards when appraising a persuasive message (Bless et al., 1990). This rationale would still explain the same patterns that would be expected from the previous theories, where less attitude change occurs when presented with a message when in a bad mood than

when in a good mood. The message is less favourably evaluated as a result of the harsher criteria used to judge the credibility of the message.

4.8.2.1. Predictions for Change in Criteria Theory

Therefore, the same main effect is predicted under this theory for mood effects on attitude change and cognitive responses (in the form of support claims and counterarguments) when message quality is not considered (Schwarz et al., 1991). In its original inception, really, message quality was not considered anyway. The harsher criteria led to a main effect of mood state, such that a negative mood led to less persuasion under all circumstances. In other words, the overly critical nature of those in a bad mood was not predicted to be offset by a strong, compelling message. This theory, in general, has not been supported by the literature (Schwarz et al., 1991), which led to the proposal that an interaction between message strength and mood state may be possible.

To accurately account for the majority of the research on mood, an interaction effect must be predicted under this theory that actually considers how mood co-operates with message quality to generate a more unique and realistic persuasive response. In the prior theories that were introduced, message quality was not believed to have a mediating influence on mood effects. Really, message quality was not originally thought to have an impact in this theory either. Proponents of this theory technically believed that those in a negative mood are less influenced by persuasive messages because of their critical disposition.

However, this theory essentially says that this fault-finding nature of those in a bad mood is correlated with central processing. Therefore, a negative mood may only lead to less persuasion when weak arguments are presented because of the harsher criteria used to assess the message. On the other hand, when strong, convincing messages are presented, the harsher criteria should not be a factor and a high level of persuasion should be likely for both good and bad moods. Because individuals in a good mood have a lower threshold of acceptability for the messages, a high degree of peripheral route persuasion is likely regardless of message quality. So for the first time, it has been proposed that there are circumstances where inducing a negative mood in the audience may be advantageous. This addresses mood *incongruency* effects that have been observed, where a negative mood led to a more positive response. Even though a good mood can result in a high level of persuasion, if the sender is confident that the message is based on sound well-founded arguments, then a negative mood may result in more enduring attitude change. This is simply because an individual in a negative mood will process the message centrally, which if the message contains strong arguments, central route persuasion is a more fundamental and durable form of persuasion.

4.8.2.2. Criticisms of Change in Criteria Theory

While this theory is compatible in its predictions with the preponderance of the empirical literature, it is not a well-justified and fully developed theory. Bless et al. (1990) did not find support that those in a bad mood necessarily evaluated messages more *harshly* than those in a favourable mood, just that they analysed the message more *intently*. Additionally, the theory was not developed enough in and of itself to justify the specific rationale behind such changes in criteria. While it is not an

autonomous theory, it does explain a basic change that occurs in information-processing under differing moods. However, the motivational and cognitive capacity theories below are the more developed theories that explain *why* this change occurs. As will be illustrated, this is primarily due to differences in strategies used when processing messages under different moods. This notion of a change in criteria is a useful starting point for these theories, but is not as full and valid a theory as those described below.

However, before discussing those theories, the revised mood as information theory must first be addressed. Originally, this theory travelled under the heading of *motivational theories* as conceptualised by Schwarz (1990). However, his motivational hypothesis really encompassed two distinct theories. This included what is conventionally considered a motivational theory along with a derivative of mood as information. As a result, they have been separated and relabelled recently by Aylesworth and MacKenzie (1998). Motivational theory will be discussed below after this modern, information-processing version of mood as information is reviewed.

4.8.3. Contemporary View of Mood as Information Theory

The mood as information view in its original inception was far too simplistic and focused only on the peripheral processing aspect of mood effects. This idea has been more recently expanded upon in a way that examines the full potential of mood as an informational cue. In its current form, it fits in with the contemporary belief that good moods decrease central processing while bad moods increase such cognitive elaboration. This revamped version of the mood as information theory is based on the original concept, but broadens the scope and has more explanatory power. This

hypothesis is based on the postulation that "...emotions exist for the sake of signaling states of the world that have to be responded to, or that no longer need response and action" (Frijda, 1988; 354).

Similar to the original proposition in the mood as information hypothesis, people use their affective states to inform them (see Clore & Parrott, 1991; Schwarz & Bless, 1991; Schwarz & Clore, 1988). However, it appears to be a more complex process than simply using the mood to make a judgement directly based on feeling states. What the mood indicates to individuals is how they should be processing information about their environment or the circumstances around them. A positive mood notifies the actor that their current set of circumstances is harmless. Because they sense that there is no impending trouble, individuals in a good mood utilise heuristic processing because there is less risk attached to erroneous decision-making. There is no need for persons in a good mood to scrutinise their environment or reassess their decisions and circumstances because they are currently content with the world. Naturally no one would like to make an erroneous decision. However, their mood informs them that simple heuristics and intuition should be reliable under the current circumstances, and thus this *loosening* effect is observed in their thought process (Fiedler, 1988).

On the contrary, negative moods tell the individual that their current set of circumstances is problematic and meticulous attention is required. Such an appraisal may initiate a more analytical processing style to carefully assess the circumstances and respond accordingly. Incoming information is therefore processed centrally so that the individual can circumvent any careless, flawed decision making in this situation that has already been regarded as problematic (see Schwarz, 1990). The

actors in this situation do not want to aggravate their adverse state by making flawed decisions that could potentially be avoided through careful systematic processing. They hope to improve their affective state through extensive elaboration, which is usually adaptive at managing adverse conditions. At the very least, they would like to avoid exacerbating their feeling state (Aylesworth & MacKensie, 1998). Consequently, individuals undergo a *tightening* in their cognitive processing (Fiedler, 1988).

4.8.3.1. Predictions for the Contemporary Mood as Information Theory

One feature of the mood as information theory is that predictions are made with the possibility that the basis for the affective state may be known to the actor (Schwarz, 1990). The individual in a negative mood will systematically process information relevant to the source of the mood. This is especially pertinent in the setting of television viewing and advertising exposure. If the poor mood is accredited to something other than the commercial (e.g.: the television programme), then information related to this source will be elaborated upon centrally, rather than the ad. As a result, while the consumer in a bad mood is expected to process centrally, the ad itself may only be allocated superficial processing resources. Most theories suppose that a negative affective state leads to an autonomic response to centrally process. However, this perspective acknowledges the effect of limited processing capacity, such that if something besides the commercial is systematically processed, then ad processing will be limited. Thus, a poor mood may actually trigger peripheral processing strategies of ad content similarly to a positive mood (Aylesworth & MacKensie, 1998).

4.8.3.2. The Evidence

Research has indeed shown that positive, mild mood states sometimes encourage simplification of complicated tasks (Isen, 1987). This may include information-processing and the use of heuristics when making decisions when in a positive affective state. Indeed, the use of heuristical processing strategies has been correlated with a happy mood state in previous research (Forgas & Bower, 1987). Additionally, a good mood has been associated with quicker decision making and the use of less information in conducting such evaluations (Isen & Means, 1983).

Due to these findings, those in a good mood are not predicted to process centrally and should be more receptive to peripheral persuasion cues. While this view is consistent with the position that a negative mood fosters systematic processing, it is unique in that central processing will be encouraged towards the mood source. While the source may not always be known in the distinctive instance of television viewing, viewers should be aware of the basis for their mood state (see Coulter, 1998). As a result, central processing will be correctly focused on the television programme, leaving only peripheral processing capacities available for the ad. Consequently, a negative mood may also lead to greater receptivity to ads utilising peripheral cues, according to this standpoint.

4.8.4. Motivational Theory

Other researchers agree with the pattern of behaviour ascribed by the modern mood as information proponents, but put forth a different rationale. Different moods may, in fact, influence the amount of message elaboration that takes place, but this may be a result of the recipient's motivation to process. Like all of the information-processing

theories, this perspective contends that the mood state alters the processing approach of the recipient. The motivational theorists also agree that when a good mood is induced, individuals are more likely to process information peripherally, applying heuristic processing, while bad moods compel people to use more effortful, analytic strategies (Isen, 1987; Mackie & Worth, 1991; Schwarz, 1990; Schwarz & Bless, 1991; also see above). However, the motivational rationale is that this processing pattern is based on the fundamental premise that behaviours that lead to positive outcomes are likely to be initiated, while those behaviours that lead to negative consequences will be restrained (Gardner & Scott, 1990).

4.8.4.1. Predictions for the Motivational Theory

When experiencing a good mood, people are motivated to do whatever is possible to maintain that elation. They do not wish to systematically process in a way that may hamper their efforts to sustain their agreeable mood. In general, individuals in a good mood subsequently are inclined to simplify analytic processing tasks (see Bless et al., 1992; Isen, 1987; Mackie & Worth, 1991; Oaksford, Morris, Grainger, & Williams, 1996; Schwarz, 1990). They may not, therefore, listen intently to a persuasive message, as this may destabilise their good mood (Smith & Shaffer, 1991). As a result, there is a lack of logical reliability and less diligence heeded with regard to detail (Schwarz & Bless, 1991). This effect should be particularly pronounced in the case of most advertising, where such cognitive callisthenics may be perceived as expendable. “Because detailed cognitive processing requires effort, it disrupts positive moods; therefore, ‘mood protection’ tendencies should lead to reduced effort in the cognitive processing of ads...” (Batra & Stayman, 1990; 204). Instead, when the programme induces a good mood, viewers will process the ad in a more heuristic

manner, and will devote less overall attention to the ad that follows the more affectively involving programme (Soldow & Principe, 1981).

While *any* systematic processing can be a distraction from mood maintenance, the effect is even more pronounced in the case of negative thoughts, such as counterarguments. Such negative cognitions can be particularly detrimental to the positive mood, and will thus be avoided. This leads to *biased evaluation* (Batra & Stayman, 1990). As a result, weak messages are more favourably evaluated than they would otherwise be, since message recipients use less elaboration to assess the message in an attempt to reduce the number of negative counterarguments. The motivation is lacking for consumers in a positive mood, which precedes processing of persuasive stimuli (Goodstein, 1994). Rather, their motivation is focused on maintaining their positive mood state. Consequently, any ad that helps to extend their favourable mood will be better received than one that interrupts that state (Hill & Stephens, 1990). Therefore, one that utilises an appeal that is based on positive affect, such as humour, will be more effective than one that uses an informational approach, which requires central processing.

On the other hand, when in a bad mood, individuals are motivated to improve or *repair* their mood because of the unpleasant feelings associated with such an affective state (Isen, 1984b; Isen, 1985). Systematic processing is one way to accomplish this objective, because it distracts the actor by diverting their attention away from the mood and onto a more cognitive task (Bless et al., 1990). In a marketing context, the hope is that consumers will be so motivated to curtail their negative affective state, that they will centrally process ad content, believing that focusing their attention on

the ad content may recuperate their mood (Goodstein, 1994). As a result, a more favourable evaluation should result when in a negative mood, assuming the ad can raise a strong argument.

Like the change in criteria hypothesis and the modern mood as information approach, then, an interaction is predicted for persuasion across the mood and argument strength variables. When exposed to the message, message elaboration will be higher for recipients in a bad mood and lower for recipients in a good mood. As a result, argument quality will be relevant only to those in an unfavourable mood. Message strength is not a factor for those in a good mood because they do not elaborate the message centrally to begin with (Bless et al., 1990; Innes & Ahrens, 1991; Mackie & Worth, 1989; Schwarz et al., 1991; Worth & Mackie, 1987). Peripheral cues are more crucial when in a good mood. Again this pattern emerges where those in a bad mood are more persuaded than their good mood counterparts when message quality is high. When exposed to weak arguments, however, those in a good mood will be more persuaded than those in a bad mood (all other things equal), as they engage in less information-processing that may interfere with their favourable mental state.

4.8.4.2. The Evidence

Kuykendall and Keating (1990) found support for this postulate in their assessment of motivational theories. Neutral and negative moods led to more favourable attitudes following strong, but not weak arguments; while positive feeling states led to positive persuasion regardless of message strength. Participants who were feeling good were apparently motivated to maintain their positive mood or were at least content with their current state, and thus did not distract themselves through information-

processing. However, those in a negative state were more motivated to terminate their current affect (Zillman, 1988b), which endowed them with the drive to systematically process the communication. "If media serves as a vehicle for mood regulation, messages following positive mood will be scrutinized only to the extent that such messages enhance or maintain experienced positive states. Conversely, messages following negative states should be scrutinized when scrutiny can disrupt undesired, negative states" (Kuykendall & Keating, 1990; 8).

Support for this pattern has been observed in several other studies (Bless et al., 1990; Bless et al., 1992; Gardner, 1994; Gardner & Hill, 1988; Kamins et al., 1991; Kuykendall & Keating, 1990; Mackie & Worth, 1991; see also Mackie & Worth, 1989; Worth & Mackie, 1987). Mackie and Worth (1991) found that those in a positive pre-processing mood were not differentially influenced by argument strength, but were influenced by whether the source of the message was introduced as an expert or nonexpert. They were more impressed by an expert's message than a nonexpert, regardless of the strength of the arguments contained in the speech. On the other hand, individuals in neutral moods were more influenced by the strength of the argument, regardless of their perception of the source's expertise. This indicates that those in a positive mood engage in less central and more heuristic processing of persuasive messages. As the ELM exemplifies, those that are not motivated to process the message centrally will use simple decision rules, such as the perceived expertise of the message sender.

Gardner and Hill (1988) found that a negative pre-processing mood state led individuals to use central processing strategies. They reasoned that an informational strategy shifts attention from feelings to thoughts, which may include material that is unrelated to the self-schema. Such a processing state may deflect attention from the negative affect, and thus is utilised by those in such adverse moods. They indeed found that not only was this the strategy used by people induced into a negative mood, but systematic processing significantly improved the mood of individuals who adopted this strategy, and more so than those who did not. The cognitive rehearsal that is required to preserve the mood state is suspended by systematic processing of the communication. Mood management responses trigger the individual to attenuate negative affect by seeking out engrossing and engaging communications, and perpetuate positive affect by avoiding such communications (Kuykendall & Keating, 1990).

Why then, do message recipients select commercials to process systematically as their distracter? It seems plausible, given the importance of various consumer products to people's lives that consumption of such products would be frequently used to cope with adverse mood states (Gardner & Hill, 1988). It has been assumed that consumers, whether aware or not, use the buying process to manage their moods (Hill & Gardner, 1987). Thus the search for affective stimulation is a chief motive when choosing goods to consume (Hill & Stephens, 1990). Pleasure may be associated with the purchase and consumption of some products, which may help to regulate bad moods (Gardner, 1994). Consumers have been known to increase products search behaviour, purchases, and product consumption in order to enhance adverse mood states (see O'Guinn & Faber, 1989). As a result, central processing may be applied to

advertising messages for products when exposed to them on television. By focusing on the ad content, they may alleviate their negative feeling state, and thus commercial performance may be enhanced (Murry, Jr. et al., 1992). Support for this comes from Hadjimarcou and Marks (1994), who found that ad and product evaluations were higher when in a negative mood, especially for *feel-good* products, which help to elevate mood.

The only seemingly confounding evidence comes from clinical psychology studies, which have found that acute depression can be associated with diminished motivation (Peterson & Seligman, 1984). This in turn should accompany reduced processing, due to task-irrelevant thoughts, such as a focus on one's sad state (for a review see Ellis & Ashbrook, 1989; Sullivan & Conway, 1989). However, instances of clinical depression obviously fall outside the spectrum of typical moods, and as extreme instances of mental states, the accompanying affect does not follow the normal patterns. The moods that are induced through television programming (which of course is what is of interest here) are not as severe as diagnosable depression, nor is the affect induced in experiments that are designed to investigate these types of marketing scenarios.

4.8.4.3. Alternative Stance for Negative Programme-Induced Moods

In instances where the message or message source is not the cause of the mood state, a different pattern may emerge. There is a difference between pre-processing, general dispositional mood, and mood generated as a response during a stimulus exposure (Goodstein, 1994). As detailed in the revised mood as information theory, those in a negative mood will centrally process mood-related information pertinent to the origin

of the feeling state. There is no reason, when viewed in the context of a motivational schema, to process anything systematically beyond the mood source in an attempt to solve the *problem* that causes the distress (Aylesworth & MacKensie, 1998). The analytical processing style is activated, as supported by other theories. However, it is directed towards information related to the cause. In the case of television advertising for consumer goods, this will rarely be the ad. The exception may be the cases of some types of products that utilise, for example, fear appeals (e.g.: sun block, TV licence). In most situations, though, consumer goods use positive appeals. Specifically, where humour or other positive affective appeals are used, this will not be the source of the adverse mood.

On the other hand, the television programme could very well be. So while the motivation is in place to process the TV show, it is not there to process the commercial. Furthermore, their processing capacity limitations may not permit them to process the ad centrally, since that effort is being exerted elsewhere. So while this theory is in line with the others in that a negative mood leads to systematic processing, in the case of advertising and other stimuli that are not perceived to be responsible for the mood state, peripheral processing may result since the effortful systematic thought is focused elsewhere. This corresponds with the ELM, in that “...people in a context-induced negative mood are both motivated and able to process *the program* centrally but are neither motivated nor able to process *the ad* centrally” (Aylesworth & MacKensie, 1998; 21).

In the instance of a context-induced *positive* mood, however, central processing is not initiated by the mood state generated by the television programme. There is no *problematic* mood to improve, and thus processing capacity and attentional resources are not occupied by the TV show. In this case, individuals would be *able* to elaborate upon the commercial message extensively. The question is whether they would be motivated to do so. According to this motivational model, they will not. Although in the case of ads that use affective appeals, such as humour, the positive affect generated will be congruent with the viewer's positive mood state. Attending closely to the ad will help to maintain the mood. As a result, those in a positive mood may be motivated to process these types of ads.

Despite this rationale, many studies have found that the ad is actually processed systematically when a negative affective state is induced. Recall, however, in the section defining mood states that they are not necessarily attributable to a direct cause. Therefore, it is possible that the cause of the mood may not have been identified when the ad message was processed. In an attempt to *solve* the negative state, people in a bad mood are likely to systematically process whatever is most salient in their current experience when they are unaware of the specific cause of their mood state (Aylesworth & MacKensie, 1998).

In many of the studies that examined mood effects on processing, the researchers intentionally attempted to create circumstances where the source of the mood would be unknown to the message respondent to reduce the potential for demand characteristics. This has been done by a *two studies* design (for example, see Batra & Stayman, 1990; Bless et al., 1990; Gardner & Hill, 1988; Mackie & Worth, 1989;

Worth & Mackie, 1987). Often researchers would have participants recall emotional events or have them read stories about such events, and then expose them to a message that was seemingly part of a different study. Alternatively, researchers would give them positive or negative feedback on a task that was supposedly unrelated to the actual study. Consequently, subjects may not have attributed their affective state to the mood manipulation circumstances, but rather to the general experimental environment. Because of their belief that they are really participating in two separate studies, they try to put their affect aside following the 'first' study. As a result, the most salient feature in the environment is now the ad. This is then processed systematically when in a negative mood because they are still in an analytical processing set.

Television viewing and other natural mood stimulants may cause people to behave differently. For one, people seem to be more consciously aware of the emotional aesthetic quality of television programmes. In fact, some researchers have maintained that often people watch TV explicitly in an attempt to change their current mood (Zillman, 1988b). Furthermore, during natural television exposure, there is no *second study* diverting one's attention and cognitive effort. For these reasons, people in this type of environment are likely to know the specific cause of their moods, and appropriately attribute it to the television programme. When the cause of the mood is clear, those in a bad mood have no reason to process anything else besides that which is related to the origin of the mood. While central route processing will be initiated, it will be directed at the root of the feeling state. In most of these instances, this will be the television show.

So while the programme will be processed systematically due to participants motivation to improve their mood, the ad will not because there is no motive to do so (Aylesworth & MacKenzie, 1998). Several studies have reported findings consistent with this pattern (Mano, 1990; Mano, 1992; Mathur & Chattopadhyay, 1991; Smith & Shaffer, 1991). Furthermore, participants may not be able to process the ad centrally anyway due to the processing capacity strain triggered by the programme. Aylesworth and MacKenzie (1998) tested this theory and found support for the results. In a television advertising study, participants in a negative mood (induced by viewing a negatively valenced programme) produced more cognitions on the programme than did those in a positive mood manipulation. Subjects also generated fewer thoughts about the ads when in a negative mood, indicating that the programme processing sacrificed central processing of the ads. The results implied that the increased systematic processing of the programme led to peripheral processing of the ads. Murry and Dacin (1996) reported the same findings in a similar study. It seems that a negative mood does, in fact, provoke more detailed central processing, but for the mood inducing stimulus at least when the source is clear.

Those in a good mood will be *able* to process the ads centrally, because their concentration will not be focused elsewhere. Whether there is a motivation to process the ad centrally remains to be seen because processing the positive programme systematically would help to maintain that mood state (the same studies cited above support this claim). In Aylesworth and MacKenzie's (1998) study, they did find that participants in a positive mood generated more positive (but not negative) ad cognitions for the ad content.

4.8.5. Cognitive Capacity Theory

According to the cognitive capacity hypothesis, the effect that mood has on information-processing is not an influence on motivation to process, but rather on ability. Recall from the ELM, that individuals will process a message centrally when they are both willing *and* able to do so. While the motivational theory address the willingness issue, the capacity theory focuses on the ability to process. According to this viewpoint, information-processing capacity may be limited once a particular *level* of affect is reached, as mood-related cognitions occupy the mind and hamper the message recipient's ability to elaborate the message.

There is some debate surrounding this particular theory, which precludes its adoption. At this point, the effect of mood on processing capacity, according to this theory, has been conceived of in terms of the *intensity* rather than the *valence* of the affect, because research has been inconclusive as to whether good or bad moods are responsible for this potential interference. First the two conflicting perspectives will be explained. Following this, the issue of mood intensity will be revisited.

4.8.5.1. Predictions for Cognitive Capacity Theory

As was conveyed in the mood congruency section, positive material is reportedly more extensive and much more tightly interconnected in memory (Isen, 1984b). A positive mood may make this information more available. The cognitive links between the positively valenced material are much stronger, which may yield a condition where a substantial amount of material is activated. As a result, a good mood is likely to yield a multitude of positive thoughts that are superfluous to the message. These may congest processing space, diverting attention and reducing the

capacity available to process the message (Mackie & Worth, 1989; Schwarz et al., 1991). This leads to decreased elaboration of the message content, triggering a heuristic processing style (Worth & Mackie, 1987). Consequently, when the message recipient is in a good mood, a message that exploits the peripheral route to persuasion should be more successful at persuading than one based on strong arguments. For advertisers, this of course means that appeals such as humour would be best placed in a positively valenced programme, while commercials containing strong product-related claims should be reserved to sad programmes, when cognitive capacity is not strained.

4.8.5.2. The Evidence

Support for this theory comes from research that found that participants in a decision-making task made decisions faster, acquired less relevant information in the process, reviewed less information a second time, and ignored more attributes deemed unimportant when in a good mood (Isen & Means, 1983). However, this study equally supports the motivational approach. Mackie and Worth (1989), along with Worth and Mackie (1987) also found support for the cognitive capacity theory, although they did not contrast positive mood effects with negative moods. They found that relative to a neutral mood, participants in a positive mood processed a persuasive message to a lesser extent. However, it is unlikely that participants were motivated to attend to the messages, given that the topics (gun control & acid rain) were not particularly pertinent, interesting, nor even pleasant to the student participants; and by and large the messages were negatively toned and counter-attitudinal (Smith & Shaffer, 1991). Furthermore, the motivational theorists would also point out that participants in a positive mood would be even less motivated to

attend to the message, which would provide an alternative explanation for the findings.

4.8.5.3. Alternative Rationale & Predictions

Additionally, a *negative* mood state has been accused of causing capacity strains through what is known as a *resource allocation model*. In this case, negative moods and the experiences that cause them are liable to rouse a mental search to justify them (Schwarz & Clore, 1983). The sad individual becomes absorbed into the likely source of their bad mood. This also is likely to divert attention and occupy processing space, and thus reduce the capacity to elaborate upon persuasive arguments. In the case of television viewing and subsequent advertising, the root in many instances may be the programme. As a result, attentional resources are apportioned away from the ad content and towards the television programme. This leaves only peripheral processing, at best, available for the ads. This is contrasted with a positive mood effect, where individuals are less occupied with the root of their favourable mood, leaving them more responsive to environmental elements (Clark & Isen, 1982), such as the ad content. This logic has contradictory implications for advertisers and the types of programmes that are most suitable for affective and informational advertising appeals.

4.8.5.4. The Evidence for the Alternative

Support for this interference effect with negative moods comes from studies on depression, which have found that such states can limit cognitive capacity (Ellis et al., 1990). This is said to be through the interference effect that negative self-thoughts have on memory and cognitions, which occupy cognitive capacity and disrupt

cognitive tasks (see Ellis & Ashbrook, 1989). These more disruptive affective states regulate the cognitive resources that can be allocated to cognitive tasks. When the affective states are particularly strong, such as in depression, and the criterion task is demanding, more capacity is utilised. Accordingly, the mood effect is more potent (Ellis et al., 1990). Once again, however, the external validity of studies on depression is questionable. This is especially the case when trying to apply them to a television viewing context, which is likely to elicit much more moderate affective states.

4.8.5.5. The Common Ground

Following either rationale, a similar interaction effect is predicted between the affective state and message strength. When an affective state is induced that is strong enough to disrupt processing through the cognitive capacity effect, strong arguments will be less persuasive, while weak arguments will be more persuasive than for recipients whose cognitive capacity is unaffected by their mood state. This is evident not only through persuasion measures of attitude change, but also on cognitive response measures. The cognitive response measures demonstrate the capacity deficits that are reflected through this perspective (Schwarz et al., 1991). The primary dispute, however, rests on whether a good mood, bad mood, or both cause these capacity problems.

While both moods may have the potential to affect processing capacity, it may come down to which mood permits more efficient processing, such that capabilities are less affected by the overloaded mental work space. It has been argued that positive moods do actually enhance processing efficiency, while negative ones stall processing

abilities. Researchers have buttressed this claim with examinations that exercised measures of cued recall after a positive or negative mood was induced (Goldberg & Gorn, 1987). As previously discussed, this may be because the knowledge structures affiliated with positive affect are more extensive and more highly unified. This greater organisation permits more effective and economical information-processing (Isen, 1984b). Retrieval is eased because information is encoded more elaborately (Mathur & Chattopadhyay, 1991).

4.8.5.6. The Resolution for Capacity Theory: Intensity not Valence

In the case of capacity deficits, though, it appears to not be a matter of affective *valence* but rather arousal *intensity*. This would explain the conflicting findings. Research has shown that mild affective states do not demand significant cognitive resources (Isen, Daubman, & Gorgoglione, 1987). Nevertheless, there is currently support for both positive and negative moods causing capacity problems. However, the influential factor may be emotional intensity rather than valence. It has been suggested that high levels of emotional arousal may bring about a narrower span of attention. This may lead to greater stimulus selectivity, which results in less deliberation, focus on less relevant information, and disregard for more decision-related attributes (Mano, 1990). This is certainly supported by the depression studies, which would unquestionably represent a circumstance of high levels of affect-related arousal.

It may be that there is a threshold arousal level that, up to which, arousal facilitates processing. Until this limit is reached, increased arousal may help the message recipient maintain interest and attention. Beyond this point, capacity deficits may

arise, which would trigger a peripheral processing style. However, this threshold is unlikely to be reached in the case of television viewing, where moods are unlikely to be as potent as in real life scenarios. Murry, Lastovicka and Singh (1992) suggest that people respond less intensely to feelings evoked by television than those that occur in *real life*. Accordingly, the cognitive capacity theory may not be relevant to an advertising context. If it was, then the advertising studies would indicate that systematic processing was impaired during both positive *and* negative mood states (Kuykendall & Keating, 1990). However, as was indicated by the motivational research and mood as information studies, only positive mood seems to reduce information-processing. Therefore, it is unlikely that cognitive deficits account for systematic processing reductions in such instances.

4.8.6. Capacity vs. Motivation: The Evidence & Verdict

To further scrutinise the cognitive capacity theory, it was tested directly against the more empirically flourishing motivational approach. According to the one position submitted by capacity theorists, positive mood interferes with central processing, which has been supported by the motivational viewpoint. As a result, it was important for researchers to distinguish between the two theories in an attempt to validate one and eliminate the other as a valid explanatory variable with regard to mood effects.

In a study by Bless et al. (1990), they examined the differential effects of happy and sad moods on a persuasive message that was counter-attitudinal to their original attitude. In the first experiment, they found the pattern that has been reported in repeated mood studies. Specifically, they learned that participants induced into a

positive mood were less likely to elaborate the message, and thus were unaffected by message strength. On the other hand, subjects in a negative mood produced more favourable cognitive responses, fewer unfavourable responses, and demonstrated greater attitude change when they were presented with a message containing strong, rather than weak arguments. This indicates the typical pattern found that a bad mood leads to more systematic processing, while a good mood results in a peripheral processing strategy.

However, by instructing participants in a good mood to focus on the message, the effect of mood was eliminated. With this instruction, the responses of subjects in a good mood resembled that of participants in a bad mood. These findings do not bode well for the cognitive capacity hypothesis. If a positive mood limits processing capacity, then a simple instruction should not abolish the mood effect. Consequently, these results support a motivational notion, which contends that the recipients' mood states moderate not their ability to process information, but rather their motivation to engage in effortful, detail-oriented processing of message content (Bless et al., 1990).

In another study, subjects in a good mood performed well on a secondary concentration task (Bless et al., 1996). Assuming the lab setting provided participants with the motivation to perform well on what was perceived as a cognitively challenging task, their strong performance indicates that their mood did not afford them processing capacity deficits. Further support for the motivational over capacity theory comes from Smith and Shaffer (1991). They argued that when in a positive mood, people will only sacrifice effortful central route processing when the message is irrelevant or inconsequential. In these instances, they wish to maintain their

positive affective state, and have no motive to risk altering their pleasant condition by processing an unimportant message. They, along with the motivational hypothesis, purport that motivation is enhanced by a relevant message topic. Therefore, mood maintenance will play an inferior role to central message processing and attitude formation in these cases. If the positive mood reduced cognitive capacity, then a more relevant or interesting topic should not make any difference.

They supported this contention as well as the motivational hypothesis by manipulating message relevance. In a study with university students, they measured students' responses to a message arguing the importance of instituting comprehensive fourth-year exams at the university in which the study took place. In the high relevance condition, they indicated that implementation of the plan would occur within one year, while the low relevance specified a timeframe of five years, after the students would have graduated. When relevance was low, the typical pattern was reported, which makes distinguishing between capacity and motivational theories impossible. Those in a positive mood did not engage in systematic processing (i.e.: their message-related thoughts did not correlate with post-message attitude, message recall was lower, and argument strength was not a factor). However, when message relevance was high, participants processed the message systematically when in a good mood, which signifies a motivational process at hand, rather than an overburdened mind. These results are simply not consistent with a capacity deficit view.

Smith and Shaffer (1991) also corroborated the motivational view, while further discrediting the capacity theory in two additional experiments. In one experiment they reduced subjects concerns about disrupting their positive mood. Some

participants were administered a placebo that they were told would preserve their positive mood state. Because this would not affect the subjects' *ability* to process, this should not have affected processing from the capacity perspective. However, in this condition, those in a positive mood now processed the message centrally, indicating that they no longer were motivated to maintain their mood. Presumably, they felt that their mood was not under any duress, and thus they were free to process the persuasive message. It seems clear that when in a positive mood, processing is inhibited by individuals' desire not to disrupt their mood state. When message relevance is high, heuristic cues are unavailable, and when mood maintenance is less of a concern, people in a positive mood will tend to process the message centrally (Smith & Shaffer, 1991). Consequently, this research did not provide evidence for a mood effect on cognitive aptitudes.

4.9. SYNTHESIS

The current findings indicate that there is room for both a motivational and contemporary mood as information standpoint in theorising the effect of context-induced mood states on persuasion in advertising. The arguments presented here, however, do not necessarily dismiss a capacity deficit effect as a potential mood mediating effect. It may be possible that highly intense affective states strain cognitive capacity resources, preventing central processing efforts to be exerted on incoming communications. However, such intense feeling states are extreme instances, which are not relevant to the types of moods induced by television exposure.

During television viewing, the likely process that occurs is something that probably resembles an amalgamation of the motivational and mood as information hypotheses. They maintain the same predictions, but offer a more complete theory when taken together. As attested by the motivational approach, people in a positive mood state are likely to engage in behaviour that will prolong their favourable feeling state, and avoid behaviours that will disrupt or nullify that affective state. Often, those in a positive mood will process information experientially (Gardner & Hill, 1988). In other words, they use heuristics and peripheral cues related to their feeling states and consequential expectations in a manner congruent with the mood as information approach. Their feeling state *informs* them that peripheral processing is sufficient, so they engage only in simple, heuristic processing because of their *motivation* to maintain that positive mood state.

So while it may be true that they use their mood in an informative manner, the reason that they do this is motivational in nature. Using affect as information and processing peripherally using one's feeling states involves using material related to one's current self-schema. Processing material that is conjoined to the actor's own internal states requires less attention, and is thus less likely to disrupt the positive mood state that the individual is motivated to maintain. Consequently, such individuals should be more readily appealed to using ad appeals that rely on affect and other peripheral cues. Similarly, when in a negative mood, the feeling state *informs* them that central processing is necessary if they hope to improve their current state. Again, while they use their affect in this informational capacity, the central processing that is initiated is due to their *motivation* to stymie their adverse feeling state. In this way, it is clear

how the contemporary mood as information approach and the motivational theory are related. Both theories interact to support the same predictions.

While it is clear that the contemporary mood as information approach, coupled with the motivational hypothesis, seems to collectively account for mood effects in the context of television viewing, there has been one drawback. There is some evidence that those in a good mood may process more effectively than those in a bad mood. In creativity and problem-solving tasks, those in a good mood have been found to outperform those in a bad mood (see Isen, 1987; Schwarz & Bless, 1991). This could be an indication that those in a good mood actually process information more centrally under certain circumstances, which would be inconsistent with the mood as information and motivational theories.

However, this may be the case in circumstances where an incorrect response does not carry significant personal consequences. In such instances, general knowledge structures based on simple top-down processing may be relied upon because there is less concern over making a mistake. Using general knowledge may be a type of cognitive shortcut, which helps the individual skip over more effortful, cognitive thought. So in reality, greater efficiency in 'processing' is not due to an ease in and greater dependence on *central* processing when in a good mood, but in fact a greater reliance on cognitive heuristics. In other words, *efficiency* in processing and a stronger performance on these forms of problem-solving tasks does not insinuate that those in a good mood engage in more detailed processing.

Quite to the contrary, this is in accordance with both motivational and mood as information approaches. The current mood *informs* them that the current situation is benign and does not require a problem-solving mode. As a result, individuals do not engage in further processing because they do not have the *motivation* to engage in effortful processing. Instead, they *are motivated* to maintain their positive state without interruption. Those in a good mood, therefore, are more confident that general knowledge structures pertinent to the task at hand may be relied on under the current circumstances. However, when in a bad mood, the affective state *informs* the individual that their current circumstance is problematic and requires careful thought and scrutiny. They are therefore less efficient because they do not have the same confidence to rely on general knowledge structures. They use more effortful, bottom-up central processing resources because they are *motivated* to try and improve their mood and the current circumstances. Hence, they are more tentative and slow in their processing, but are less apt to cognitive errors and hasty decision-making.

Indeed, current research supports this notion. In a series of experiments, Bless et al. (1996) found that happy individuals were more likely to rely on scripts and schemas, which are forms of heuristic general knowledge structures, than are their sad counterparts. When asked to recall details of a story that was presented about going out to eat, those in a happy mood were more likely to erroneously identify elements of the story that are part of a typical *going out to dinner* script, which were not actually part of the story. These intrusion errors were found much more frequently in those in a positive mood, suggesting their reliance on general knowledge and other heuristics. Sad individuals, on the other hand engaged in more careful, systematic processing and thus did not make comparable errors.

4.10. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Mood and its implications for persuasion attempts were the topic of discussion in this chapter. The concept was defined and the main theories were presented. The marketing consequences of context-induced mood states were considered. The evidence suggests that a combination of motivational theory and the contemporary mood as information theory provide the most probable rationale for the effect of mood states, especially in an advertising context. How they apply to the use of humour in advertising will be addressed in the methodology section of this thesis when the research objectives are reviewed. At this point, the literature review will now turn to need for cognition and its implications for advertising effectiveness.

Chapter Five

The Need for Cognition & Advertising Implications

“There seems to be a general ethic among most advertising practitioners that before advertising development begins, one must understand the customer. Knowing the customer allows the creative person to create ads that are more appealing and more relevant to the customer; thus advertising has a better chance of being effective” (Cafferata, 1989; 393, 395).

5.1. PREAMBLE

While the previous chapter addressed an affective factor and its impact on advertising effectiveness, this chapter is devoted to a cognitive-rooted moderator. In effect, both variables address an individual's motivation to engage in information processing, which, as is now clear, is a prime factor in the analytical attention devoted to persuasive messages. While mood state is a fluctuating variable that is influenced by such stimuli as the programming environment, need for cognition is essentially a personality trait. So while it cannot be controlled for directly by the advertiser, if it does prove to be an important mediator, it may be accommodated for in television advertising similar to the manner in which consumer mood state can be managed. This is simply through careful heeding of airtime purchase decisions on the type of programme broadcast in that time slot.

In the remainder of this chapter, the need for cognition will be examined. The concept will be initially defined. It will be conveyed as a *motivational* construct and distinguished from mental aptitudes. Existing research will demonstrate exactly how this individual difference affects the manner in which different people process incoming information. The discussion will then turn to communications research and the impact that need for cognition has on persuasive responsiveness. Because the arguments revolve around information-processing mechanisms and elaboration likelihood, the interactive effects of need for cognition and context-induced mood states will be addressed. The applicability of all of this to an advertising framework is obviously what is of critical importance in this thesis. Accordingly, advertising research will be considered, with specific attention on how this motivational moderator influences the effectiveness of humorous appeals. The chapter will close with a consideration of the practical implications for ad planning.

5.2. THE NEED FOR COGNITION CONSTRUCT

In the wake of all the research examining audience influences on persuasion in advertising, recent attention has highlighted a further audience variable. This factor is the consumer's intrinsic need for cognition (NFC). While it received significant attention in the literature during the 1940s and 1950s (see Cacioppo & Petty, 1984), NFC research was largely marooned until the early to mid-1980s in favour of cognitive consistency theories. Its rendering was somewhat different in the pioneering work, but the original scales were never published (see Haugtvedt, Petty, & Cacioppo, 1992). The NFC construct is currently conceptualised as an individual's inherent pleasure in and partiality towards engaging in assiduous, cognitive thought (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982). It is not a transitory state, but rather an unremitting, chronic element of personality (see Lassiter, Briggs, & Bowman, 1991; Petty &

Cacioppo, 1986b). A number of studies have further demonstrated that it is not a gender-specific personality variable (Olson, Camp, & Fuller, 1984; Sadowski, 1993; Tolentino, Curry, & Leak, 1990; Waters & Zakrajsek, 1990), but rather a universally variant aspect of personality.

5.2.1. Differences in Processing Preferences

Theorists have submitted that a personality trait, such as the inherent NFC, can be a strong moderator of consumer involvement due to its motivational quality (Zhang & Buda, 1999). It has been suggested that those with a high NFC are more likely to engage in central processing, focusing on the fundamental elements of a mental task, instead of reacting to the peripheral cues involved with the task. These *chronic cognizers* (Cacioppo, Petty, Feinstein, & Jarvis, 1996) are reputed to have a highly intuitive and pensive cognitive style (Claxton & McIntyre, 1994). Those with a low NFC are characterised as *cognitive misers* (see Cacioppo, Petty, Kao, & Rodriguez, 1986), and are more prone to relying on peripheral signals (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982). This is due to their varying partiality towards demanding mental tasks. High NFC persons revel in critical, issue-relevant thinking in and of itself, while those with a low NFC prefer an uncomplicated conclusion and not the actual process of thinking. Recall from research on the ELM that those who are both *motivated* and able to systematically process incoming information will do so. NFC represents a major determination of their motivation to process information centrally. While high and low NFC individuals both have a mutual need to structure and understand their world,

“...they tend to derive meaning, adopt positions, and solve problems by somewhat different means. Individuals high in need for cognition were proposed to naturally tend to seek, acquire, think about, and reflect back on information to make sense of stimuli, relationships, and events in their world. Individuals low in need for cognition, in contrast, were characterized as more likely to rely on others (e.g., celebrities and experts), cognitive heuristics, or social comparison processes to provide this structure” (Cacioppo et al., 1996; 198).

The high NFC is characterised by satisfaction in critical thinking for its own sake even without any reinforcement in the way of performance feedback (Petty & Cacioppo, 1985). In epitomising this construct, some have likened effortful cognition to strenuous exercise. Some find it pleasurable and invigorating (high NFC), while others find it disagreeable and draining (low NFC) (Cacioppo & Petty, 1984).

In fact, when presented with either a simple or mentally challenging number circling task in an empirical investigation, participants high in NFC found the simple task to be more objectionable than the more complex task. Those low in NFC, alternatively, were more put off by the complicated task (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982). Other research has also supported the idea that more cognitively complex tasks that demand reasoning and intricate problem solving are preferred by those with a high NFC, while those with a low NFC favour effortless mental activities (Condra, 1992; Petty, Cacioppo, & Kasmer, 1988; Tolentino et al., 1990).

In another clear illustration of these motivational differences, Petty, Cacioppo, and Kasmer (1985) looked at the phenomenon of *social loafing* (see Cacioppo et al., 1986). This is a common trend observed in group settings, where associates tend to put less work into tasks when there is a diffusion of responsibility between group members than when they believe that their individual efforts can be gauged. However, this study revealed that while both high and low NFC individuals socially loafed on a physical task, only low NFC persons loafed on the cognitive task. Specifically, when asked to perform a cognitive brainstorming task, those with a low NFC produced fewer ideas when they were in a group setting, while high NFC participants generated as many ideas in both the group and individual conditions.

However, on a physical task, both personality types tended to work less when they believed that their individual efforts could be masked by the group setting. This study demonstrates not only the motivational disparity between different NFC types, but also that the increased motivation of high NFC individuals only applies to cognitive endeavours. While providing rewards incentives can augment the processing motivation of those with a low NFC, the motivation of high NFC persons is entirely intrinsic (Thompson, Chaiken, & Hazlewood, 1993).

5.2.2. Discriminating Between NFC & Intelligence

The NFC construct must be differentiated from overall intelligence. Intelligence embodies a cognitive capability, whereas NFC signifies a motivational tendency (see Cacioppo et al., 1996). Just because someone enjoys the process of critical thinking does not necessarily mean that they are of superior intelligence. Likewise, someone who does not have a high NFC may in fact be very intellectually gifted. So while the two constructs must be distinguished, as one would expect, they do correlate somewhat with one another. This is partly because more intelligent individuals have probably had more reinforcing success with complicated problem solving tasks, and thus find it more rewarding. Likewise, those that are more cognitively motivated probably seek out and absorb more knowledge (Verplanken, Hazenberg, & Palenewen, 1992). Because of this high correlation between curiosity and NFC (Olson et al., 1984), NFC may have an indirect influence on general knowledge.

NFC has been, in fact, shown to influence the types of information to which individuals selectively attend (Perse, 1992), and their desire for new encounters that incite critical thought (Venkatraman, Marlino, Kardes, & Sklar, 1990). NFC was also

found to correlate negatively with closed-mindedness (Cacioppo & Petty, 1984; Petty & Jarvis, 1996) and positively with open-mindedness (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982). This means that low NFC individuals may not be as receptive to incoming information that may influence their intelligence. In addition, these same researchers found that it correlated moderately with American College Test (ACT) scores ($r = .39$, $n = 104$, and $r = .30$, $n = 498$), which are standardised university entrance exams. Others found a similar correlation (Olson et al., 1984; Waters & Zakrajsek, 1990; see also Cacioppo et al., 1996). Those with a high NFC also may have more extensive problem-solving experience (Cacioppo & Petty, 1984; Cacioppo, Petty, & Morris, 1983).

Research has also demonstrated a significant positive correlation between education level and NFC (Spotts, 1994), although the direction of causality is unclear. Uncertain at this point is whether individuals with a high NFC are more likely to take up higher education or whether academic success, which no doubt demands critical thinking skills, breeds intrinsic gratification and a higher NFC (Cacioppo et al., 1996). Alternatively, the relationship may be attributed to some third factor that has resulted in a spurious correlation.

At the same time, people of similar intelligence levels are likely to have had very different experiences with analytical thinking (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982), which may differentially affect their development of NFC. Consequently, Cacioppo et al. (1983) do not believe that differences observed between high and low NFC individuals are the result of intelligence. As will be discussed further below, they found that when exposed to a message, individuals with a high NFC are more influenced by systematic, issue-relevant arguments. Despite the discrepancy between high and low

NFC participants in their reliance on such central information, there was no difference in comprehension of the messages. This indicates that a systematic difference in intelligence is not the mediating factor between these groups.

Consistent with this deduction, Cacioppo and Petty (1984) found an insignificant correlation between NFC and high school grade point average ($r = .14$, $n = 525$, $p > .05$), which is an American educational standard used to rank student achievement. They also found no relationship between NFC and abstract reasoning ability ($r = -.03$, $n = 131$, $p > .05$) and verbal ability ($r = .15$, $n = 132$, $p > .05$), both measured using the Shipley-Hartford scale. Rather it is a motivation-based personality trait, centred on an inherent appreciation of thinking. As a result, those with a high tendency to cognate allocate more undivided attention to cognitive tasks (Osberg, 1987), and apply more judicious deliberations based on relevant empirical support when forming an evaluation (Leary, Sheppard, McNeil, Jenkins, & Barnes, 1986), coming to a decision, or solving a problem (Berzonsky & Sullivan, 1992). Additionally, when making decisions, people with a high NFC do a more extensive information search than those with a low NFC (Verplanken et al., 1992).

5.3. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NFC & PERSUASION

Now that the NFC construct is understood, its relevance to persuasive communications will be analysed. The research will be tied directly to the ELM. The way in which this individual difference affects the manner by which different people receive and process messages with persuasive intent will be analysed. It will be established that those who differ in NFC can be appealed to by different means.

5.3.1. Individual Differences in Persuasive Response

Continuing from the discussions above, it follows that if the degree of NFC moderates information-processing motivation, then this construct will have an impact on the manner in which individuals address persuasive communications. Those with a high NFC will be more likely to base their attitudes on their elaboration and analysis of the central arguments contained in the message. Similar to the way in which a highly involved message recipient responds, those with a high NFC should be more significantly inspired by central message quality (Petty, Cacioppo, & Heesacker, 1984). However, if all other things are equal, those without this high NFC will be more likely to base their attitudes on the peripheral cues contained in the message. Such individuals will attempt to formulate an opinion on the topic utilising peripheral cues in an attempt to minimise the cognitive resources allocated to the task (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981). As the ELM hypothesises, when argument scrutiny is diminished, persuasion is more likely to be governed by peripheral cues.

Numerous investigations have verified that NFC may strongly influence attitude formation by impacting the way in which individuals process the persuasive messages (see Cacioppo et al., 1996). When exposed to persuasive messages with either strong or weak arguments, low NFC participants were not as influenced by message quality in their evaluations (Cacioppo et al., 1986; Cacioppo et al., 1983; Haugtvedt et al., 1992; Petty, Schumann, Richman, & Strathman, 1993; Priester & Petty, 1995; Smith & Levin, 1996). While overall, all participants demonstrated a stronger positive attitude following strong arguments, argument quality was less of a factor for the low NFC individuals, and in some of these studies, they often reported exerting less cognitive effort in their deliberations of the message claims. Other studies explicitly

measured cognitive effort and came to the same conclusion (Sadowski, 1993). This was attributed to their apathy towards strenuous cognitive analysis. Individuals who are low in NFC may be *able* to discriminate between fallacious and convincing arguments, but they do not typically rely on coherent arguments when making evaluations because they choose to circumvent strenuous cognitive efforts (Haugtvedt et al., 1992).

As an example, Cacioppo et al. (1983) compared the responses to persuasive messages between those high and low in NFC on an issue for which their prior attitude was constant. When faced with an issue of high personal relevance, those that measured highly on the NFC scale were more heavily influenced by the strength of the arguments contained in the message. Additionally, high NFC subjects exercised more cognitive effort and had greater recall for the message arguments, irrespective of argument quality. They replicated these studies across two important topics to the students: the potential for instituting comprehensive examinations for graduating students at their university, and the possibility of inflating university tuition.

Greater recall of the central arguments presented in the message by those with a high NFC was found in over 20 other studies (see Cacioppo et al., 1996). This clearly demonstrates the greater central processing attentiveness that is marked by a high NFC. Additional studies have measured the number of issue-relevant thoughts by having participants engage in a thought-listing activity following message exposure. All have confirmed that high relative to low NFC participants list more thoughts that are directly pertinent to the primary arguments presented in the message (Lassiter et al., 1991; Priester & Petty, 1995; Smith & Shaffer, 1991; Verplanken et al., 1992).

This is not to say that those with a low NFC were not persuaded by message exposure. In similar studies, those high in NFC were influenced most strongly by argument quality, while the attitudes of the low NFC participants were affected most by peripheral cues, such as attractiveness of the source (see Cacioppo & Petty, 1984), the alleged number of people embracing the advocated position (Haugtvedt, Petty, & Cacioppo, 1986), or the manner in which the same message was framed (Smith & Levin, 1996). When a message comprised of the same contentions was framed more positively, subjects with a low NFC were more significantly swayed by the message. Framing biases had no effect on high NFC individuals. Additionally, research has shown that, when exposed to a persuasive message, those with a low NFC have more thoughts relevant to the peripheral information presented with the message (Haugtvedt & Petty, 1992). Others found that low NFC persons only relied on peripheral cues when the topic was of low personal relevance, but high NFC people will base their attitudes on the central arguments regardless of the relevance of the message (Axsom, Yates, & Chaiken, 1987). In other words, in order to process a persuasive discourse centrally, those with a low NFC require added motivational incentive that is inherent in the personalities of high NFC individuals.

5.3.2. Consequences of Processing Differences

As would be expected of these different processing styles, the attitudes of the high NFC groups, which were largely based on central arguments, were found to be more predictive of eventual behaviour than the attitudes of low NFC individuals (Cacioppo et al., 1986; Pieters & Verplanken, 1995). This was established in both studies through an examination of voting behaviour. The researchers looked at the congruency between voting and pre-tested attitudes as well as the cues used to form

such attitudes. This difference in attitude-behaviour consistency may be due to differences in the conviction by which these personality types hold their attitudes. Due to the more active thought that goes into their evaluations, and the more spontaneous reflection that they have on such evaluations when openly expressed, once persuasion has been achieved, those high in NFC tend to maintain more resilient, polarised attitudes (Lassiter & Apple, 1998). Over a period of 14-months following exposure to a message that resulted in an attitudinal shift, participants with a high NFC demonstrated greater attitudinal persistence than their low NFC counterparts (Verplanken, 1991). Unless given an explicit instruction to re-evaluate their attitudes, those with a high NFC do not tend to see a reason to re-examine an attitude, which was formed through careful analysis of issue-relevant arguments (Lassiter, Apple, & Slaw, 1996). Consequently, they rely on the single-schema that they formulated to encompass their intently scrutinised attitude, rather than integrating further information.

However, it has also been suggested that although those with a high NFC may be more supportive of strong arguments and more critical of weak arguments, they may also maintain lucid counterarguments. Such individuals may have already used the substance of these counterarguments when forming their existing attitude. As a result, they may be more resistant to attitude change via *any* route to persuasion, relative to their low NFC counterparts. However, this pattern has not emerged in the empirical literature. Those who are high in NFC are not resistant to persuasion attempts, especially when it is based on sound, cogent arguments. In such cases, those with a high NFC will differentiate between strong and weak arguments when evaluating message quality, formulate an impression of the communicator and their credibility,

and recall more arguments from the message when developing their attitudes (Cacioppo et al., 1986).

This conclusion led these same researchers to wonder whether the propensity of high NFC individuals to heed meticulous attention to the message content and extract and assimilate the relevant information when forming their attitudes would also apply to instances where peripheral route persuasion is salient (e.g.: low-involvement circumstances). In other words, does their motivated nature when attending to persuasive stimuli apply to their processing of peripheral cues as well? If so, then those with a high NFC may be more amenable to *all* forms of persuasion. They tested this possibility by measuring responses to a message concerning the possibility of instituting comprehensive exams for graduating students. They held message quality constant but varied an irrelevant source factor, which was physical attractiveness of the speaker. While both high and low NFC participants had similar perceptions of attractiveness in both conditions, only the low NFC subjects were affected by source attractiveness. Those with a low NFC were significantly influenced by attractiveness in their credibility ratings and their recall of the message, with a more attractive speaker leading to better recall and a greater attribution of trustworthiness. Those with a high NFC did not differ in either of these ratings, and as expected, their recall was higher than those low in NFC regardless of the condition. They generated more thoughts about the message in both conditions and had a more favourable response to the strong arguments.

The problem with this study is that the message contained central arguments in addition to the peripheral cues. The question posed was whether the higher intrinsic

processing motivation of high NFC individuals was only applicable to central processing, or if it also could result in greater attentiveness to peripheral stimuli and ultimately a stronger attitudinal shift from peripheral route persuasion. It is already known that given the choice, high NFC individuals will base their attitudes on issue-relevant arguments, while low NFC persons will rely on peripheral cues. All this study revealed was that even for a topic of high personal relevance, those with a low NFC will be more affected by cursory cues. This point has already been made in much research. To address whether those with a high NFC, due to increased attentiveness, will be more receptive to peripheral route persuasion than low NFC individuals, really the message presentation must rely solely on peripheral appeals in the complete absence of central arguments.

Nevertheless, Petty et al. (1993, Experiment 1) actually did find attitudes of high NFC individuals to be heavily influenced by a peripheral cue even when central arguments were present. However, it was on a topic of such low relevance (changing a foster care programme to match that of a neighbouring state) that not even the high NFC individuals were likely to be motivated to process the message. Furthermore, the cue actually worked in conjunction with their issue-relevant thoughts, while those with a low NFC only were influenced by the cue alone. Therefore, it appears that their motivational tendencies apply to central routes to persuasion, as originally purported, while peripheral cues have a more potent influence on individuals with a low NFC. It is possible for people low and high in NFC to form the same attitude, but it is likely to result from different processes. Therefore, a message would require both central and peripheral cues of comparable potency for a similar attitude to result. However, it is uncertain what differences would emerge between individuals differing in NFC in

their response to persuasive communications when there are no central arguments contained in the message.

5.4. RELATIONSHIP OF NFC TO THE MOOD LITERATURE

Recall that when in a good mood, the motivational theory predicts that individuals will not engage in effortful cognitive processing, because it may threaten to diminish their positive mood. Their feeling state informs them that their current circumstances are such that systematic processing is not necessary, so it is avoided in favour of mood maintenance. Research has suggested that this effect may be weakened in proportion to the degree to which they inherently take pleasure from intellectual pursuits (Smith & Shaffer, 1991). Therefore, high NFC individuals should not necessarily avoid critical thinking when in a good mood because it does not threaten to diminish their positive mood. Because they intrinsically enjoy issue-relevant thinking, they are not motivated to avoid it even when in a good mood. While they may be influenced by both central and peripheral cues, particularly when the central arguments are not entirely sufficient for them to base their evaluation, they will opt for a more central strategy that is merely enhanced but not dependent on peripheral cues (Schwarz, Bless, & Bohner, 1991).

Therefore, the NFC effect should be most pronounced when people are in good moods, with its influence waning as the mood decreases. The effect of NFC should lessen the more negative the mood becomes, up to the point where its impact is indiscernible. At this point, everyone is motivated to improve their mood, and will respond with organised, effortful thinking in an effort to reveal the root of their mood, to solve their problems, or distract them from experiencing the affect. This is in line

with the logic that those with a low NFC do possess the ability to centrally process, but they require motivational incentive that is an intrinsic aspect of the personalities of high NFC individuals. Of course, this pattern would not apply to extreme negative states, such as depression, which would interfere with the individual's ability to think coherently.

Naturally, the question is how this applies to persuasive communications. Because of their reliance on peripheral processing, a weak message that relies on likeable cues should still be effective for low NFC individuals in a good mood. However, an interaction is predicted between mood and NFC, with such a message being relatively ineffective for those in a good mood with a high NFC. These individuals should be influenced more by argument strength regardless of their moods. Only if context-induced mood states affected people in the way that the capacity theory purports would high NFC individuals be primarily influenced by peripheral message cues. This is because mood states might interfere with their ability to process information. Recall that the capacity theory claims that mood states interfere with the ability to process because the mood state strains processing capabilities. If their ability to process was impaired, then their motivation would be irrelevant and no interaction would be evident. Mood state would simply result in a main effect.

However, evidence favours the motivational theory, and motivational deficits are not an issue for high NFC message recipients. Empirical research corresponds with the contention that context-induced moods are not a factor in the persuasion process for high NFC individuals (Batra & Stayman, 1990). These findings do, however, show that when in a good mood, those with a low NFC follow the expected pattern and are

influenced not by arguments, but by peripheral cues. Alternatively, when an individual with a low NFC is in a bad mood, their motivation to process centrally is more in line with that of high NFC persons due to their adverse affective state. When in a bad mood, then, NFC should not be a mediating factor and both personality types should rely more on argument quality when changing their attitudes.

5.5. IMPLICATIONS FOR ADVERTISING EFFECTIVENESS

Now that the basic premises underlying the NFC construct have been reviewed, along with how this individual difference affects responses to persuasive communication, the discussion will turn to the context of advertising communications. As will be conveyed, much of the general literature will be applicable to advertising messages since it is merely another form of communication that is intended to persuade its audience. However, there are some differences between the types of messages used in the general research and consumer product advertising, necessitating a specific examination of advertising communications.

5.5.1. Processing of Ad Content

Since advertising is a form of persuasive communication, the expectations generated through the general persuasive literature should hold for advertising response. In spite of this, findings drawn directly from an advertising context must be examined, as some of the preliminary work that was reviewed was conducted in very different settings. Much of the earlier work looked at longer messages than would typically be found in advertising, using several arguments on situationally relevant and counter-attitudinal topics. For example, in Cacioppo et al.'s (1983) study, participants were exposed to three- to five-minute messages concerning tuition raises or additional

exams at their university. Advertising messages are likely to be significantly shorter with less information (Haugtvedt et al., 1992) and less topic importance.

However, assuming equal levels of involvement with the product and message, NFC theory would indicate that high NFC consumers are likely to be persuaded through product-driven, central route arguments, while low NFC individuals will be more heavily influenced by simple ad cues. Compared to consumers with a low NFC, those high in their NFC have been shown to seek out more brand attribute information for new products (Verplanken et al., 1992). Recall from Chapter Three, that when situational motivation is high, consumers are likely to form their brand attitudes based on the product claims presented in the ad. Those lacking this motivation use ad cues, such as the celebrity status of a product endorser (Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983). NFC is simply a variable that directly affects this situational motivation:

“It is argued that individuals who are intrinsically interested in analyzing and processing discrete pieces of information and enjoy thinking about product-related informational cues are likely to form their attitude about the product based on the relevance and the strength of the product-related arguments contained in the ad. In contrast, individuals who enjoy the outcome rather than the process of thinking and prefer to think only as hard as necessary will be less motivated to analyze the arguments presented in the ad” (Zhang, 1996a; 533).

Cognitively unmotivated consumers, it is contended, will base their assessment of the product on peripheral cues, such as the superficial information that comprise the creative execution of the ad. For example, Haugtvedt et al. (1992) examined the effect of peripheral ad cues on consumers differing in NFC. They held the product attribute information constant and varied endorser attractiveness. This is basically an extension of the Cacioppo and Petty (1984) study to an advertising context. When

exposed to one of the two variations of an ad for typewriters, a greater positive attitude change was observed in the low NFC participants when the endorser was attractive. Those with a high NFC were not differentially affected by endorser attractiveness.

Zhang and Buda (1999) looked at NFC as a mediator of advertising effectiveness with message framing as a potential peripheral cue. This study was an extension of Smith and Levin (1996) to an advertising context, and the product used was a stereo receiver. Assuming the same information is communicated, message framing should not make a difference to those that process an ad centrally. However, the manner in which a message is framed may be utilised as a peripheral cue by those that are not motivated to attend actively to the ad. For example, the positive framing of the claim, "Nine out of ten doctors recommend this product" should not have an advantage over a negative framing of the same message, such as, "Only one out of ten doctors did not recommend this product" provided the consumer processes the ad with methodical cognitive effort. However, those that are not motivated to process the ad with meticulous care may form an attitude using a peripheral cue that reduces the necessary effort, such as the tone of the message. In such a case, the former message may be simply interpreted as, "Doctors recommend this product", while the latter is processed as, "Doctors did not recommend this product."

Zhang and Buda (1999) did, in fact, find that message framing was a mediator of advertising effectiveness for low NFC consumers, with a positively framed advertisement being more persuasive than a negatively framed alternative. This was attributed to their motivational processing deficits, which led to less deliberate,

peripheral route processing. Alternatively, those with a high NFC did not differ in their response to either ad treatment because they processed the product information tirelessly, and thus recognised the equivalence of the two message styles.

NFC has also been shown to influence consumers' response to central ad cues in advertising. Batra and Stayman (1990) found an Argument Quality by NFC interaction in their advertising study. As an extension of some of the earlier studies on argument quality, they found that high but not low NFC participants based their attitudes on the quality of the product claims communicated in the ad. However, all participants were instructed to attend to and actively process the ad. This is an instruction that they are not likely to be given in a natural setting.

In a replication, Haugtvedt et al. (1992) also revealed an Argument Strength by NFC interaction using ads for a calculator. They did not include the instruction prior to exposure. Again it was found that high NFC persons were more positively influenced by strong ad claims, while those low in NFC were not differentially affected by message quality. High NFC consumers based their attitudes on the elaboration of product attributes. This was shown by the data, which revealed that high NFC subjects produced more negative thoughts in response to weak arguments, while the thoughts of low NFC persons were not influenced by message strength. The one area where this study differed from non-advertising research was that message recall was not differentially affected by NFC. This may reflect the shorter length of the ads, which eases recall efforts for both high and low NFC individuals.

They replicated these findings in a further study that used a typewriter as the test product. In this variation they added filler ads to increase the ad clutter, so as to replicate a natural ad environment. Additionally, they shortened exposure time, to force a less reader-paced viewing. This methodological variation may offer findings that may be more relevant to television advertising. Compared to the audience-paced format of print advertising, the television medium forces an exposure tempo that is out of the direct control of the consumer. While these two studies do demonstrate the greater tendency for high NFC to attend to central arguments in an advertising context, they did not assess the tendency of low NFC consumers to rely on peripheral ad cues. In a third study, however, they verified this greater propensity in low NFC individuals, due to their lack of motivation, to attend to ad cues unrelated to the merits of the product when evaluating product quality. Endorser attractiveness had an impact on the brand attitudes of low NFC consumers, but had no effect on those with a high NFC.

5.5.2. Strength of Ensuing Brand Attitudes

As implied by the research on the ELM (see Chapter Three) and by general studies of NFC cited above, once persuaded, those with a high NFC would be expected to have a more enduring, resilient attitude towards the brand than those with a low NFC. They tend to maintain more extreme attitudes to which they have greater access (Areni, Ferrell, & Wilcox, 1999). This is due to the higher message elaboration that is executed by the high NFC individual. When exposed to the ad, such individuals access issue-relevant schema when processing the information and engage in greater message rehearsal, thereby fortifying the cognitive links between the various attitudinal components and the thoughts and associations that sustain them. As a

result, their attitudes are more accessible, coherent, stable and resilient than those who elaborate upon the message with less effort.

Particularly in an advertising context, which tends to be viewed as a low relevance context, those with low NFC are more likely to form their attitudes through a simple association generated by the ad. As a result, their attitudes are more prone to decay and counter-attitudinal intrusion. Haugtvedt and Petty (1992) tested this supposition through an examination of brand attitudes formed across individuals varying in NFC. Following exposure to an ad for a fictitious brand of answering machine, individuals held comparable attitudes towards the brand regardless of their NFC. However, when reassessed two days later, the attitudes of those with high NFC decayed less than the attitudes of low NFC subjects did.

They submitted that those with a high NFC might require fewer subsequent exposures to promotional materials than those with a low NFC do. This is simply because of their higher motivation to centrally process the ad claims and formulate a more compelling attitude. Unlike those with a high NFC, the attitudes of the low NFC subjects were not correlated with brand cognitions, indicating that peripheral route processing was operating in their case. High NFC subjects apparently had a significant number of issue-relevant thoughts focused on specific product features to defend their attitudes. Alternatively, the low NFC participants concentrated on simple decision rules, such as the sheer number of product features presented, with no evaluation of content. Other researchers also contend that those with a high NFC tend to craft more inferences when making an assessment of an advertisement (Stayman & Kardes, 1992).

In a second experiment, they also found high NFC subjects to be more resistant to counter-attitudinal messages. Consistent with the ELM, the high NFC individuals are better prepared to naturally defend their attitudes because they formulated their original attitude through careful and detailed issue-relevant cognitive processing. Those with a low NFC, alternatively, are less equipped to protect their attitudes from an attack. As a result, their attitudes are less resistant to change by a latter conflicting message. These studies used fictitious products, which means that there was no pre-existing brand attitude. They demonstrated that, once a high NFC individual formed a brand attitude, they resisted counter-attitudinal attempts. Therefore, their findings indicate that it may be more difficult for advertisers to persuade those with a high NFC holding a negative brand attitude for an existing product. Likewise, it may be a wasted effort for competitors of a brand for which such consumers have a favourable attitude to attempt to induce brand switching. Perhaps their attitudes are as rigid and unyielding for moderately familiar brands as a low NFC consumer's attitude would be for a highly mature brand. Because all of the existing research has utilised fictitious brands in their studies, there is not yet any empirical research to support or refute this theory.

5.5.3. Caveats to Advertising Response Patterns

These studies assume that a comparable attitude has been formed by each group using the form of processing that is *most likely* under the circumstances. While low NFC individuals usually would be expected to use peripheral processing to form their attitudes, their motivation could be enhanced by their involvement with the message. As a result, they could develop an enduring attitude comparable to an attitude formed by *typically* more motivated, high NFC individuals. Alternatively, a message may not

present an adequate amount of information for the high NFC individual to formulate a structured attitude, or there may not be enough time for a proper product evaluation. In these instances, someone with a high NFC may form an attitude using peripheral cues that is comparable to a low NFC response (Haugtvedt & Petty, 1992). These circumstances are particularly relevant to advertising in which presentation times are brief and product information is sometimes scarce. Attitudinal persistence, of course, is still possible through repeated pairings of the cue with the brand (Edell & Burke, 1984) and using peripheral cues that are related to the primary message claims (Sengupta, Goodstein, & Boninger, 1997). However, this point highlights a gap in the literature on NFC. How do high NFC individuals formulate their attitudes when presented with advertising for low-involvement products, which frequently communicate few central claims? This point will be returned to later in the chapter.

5.6. THE IMPACT ON HUMOUR APPEALS

As stated above, those with a low NFC, because of their disaffection towards strenuous cognitive activity, try to avoid centrally processing messages that are of little relevance. For most advertising, then, they simply will not be motivated to attend to and evaluate the arguments expressed in the ad. Consequently, they are more amenable to peripheral route persuasion and would be more heavily influenced by cursory ad cues. This may include such superficial information as the likability of the ad. Since humour is known to improve ad and source liking (see Chapter Three), then it may be an effective appeal for low NFC consumers.

This belief is rooted in the Elaboration Likelihood Model, where NFC functions as a motivational catalyst that triggers either central or peripheral route persuasion

depending on the viewer's intrinsic NFC threshold. It may be that some of the discrepancies in the literature on humour and advertising effectiveness may be disentangled by this personality variable. Perhaps humour, because it is a superficial appeal that works through simple conditioning processes in most advertising, is only effective for those consumers who are not motivated to process relevant product claims. Those with greater processing motivation would probably prefer to scrupulously analyse the central claims made by the advertiser, and thus should not be differentially persuaded through the use of amusing humorous appeals.

Although humour research is just starting to examine the effects of the NFC variable, there is strong support thus far that this individual difference can moderate the persuasiveness of humorous appeals. In a study using print ads for a high performance 35-mm camera, Zhang (1996a; 1996b) compared an ad using comic wit to one that did not employ a humorous appeal. He further manipulated argument strength and compared persuasive response across NFC levels. The differing processing styles of the two groups of participants had an impact on the cues that they used to form their attitudes towards the ad and brand as well as their intention to purchase. Those high in NFC were influenced by the cogency of the arguments in the ad, and were not affected by the presence or absence of humorous appeals. Alternatively, argument strength did not have an impact on those with a low NFC. However, their attitudes were positively swayed by the presence of humour.

It appears that humour works best for low NFC individuals, who are less likely to scrutinise and counterargue the ad claims, and are more likely to be influenced by affective, peripheral content (Zhang, 1996a; Zhang, 1996b). Such results may help to

explain the inconsistencies in humorous advertising research as the three measures of persuasion- attitude towards the ad, attitude towards the brand, and purchase intentions- may all be moderated through the influence NFC has on the processing of the ad. These findings are in concordance with the ELM and with studies on the effects of consumer involvement level on ad processing.

5.7. REMAINING ISSUES FOR NFC

While research has shown that under a variety of circumstances, individual differences in consumer's NFC can mediate advertising effectiveness, there are still several issues that need to be addressed. Particularly in the instance of humour appeals in advertising, the existing literature is scarce. The findings that have been forwarded only present new areas for empirical enquiry. It is to these questions that remain in the literature that the discussion now turns.

5.7.1. The Advertising Medium

There are several points that must be addressed concerning the apparent mediating effect of NFC on the effectiveness of humour in advertising. First, research on NFC has yet to address television advertising, which is where humour appeals thrive. Thus far, the research on NFC as a mediator in advertising effectiveness has focused entirely on print ads, which already is known to be a less suitable medium for such appeals. As a brief aside, perhaps humour is not as unsuitable an appeal for print advertising as originally alleged. It is possible that the lack of support for the use of humour in print advertising is partially accounted for by NFC. Some researchers have found that high NFC people view a great deal more print media, while low NFC people consume more television and radio (see Haugtvedt, Petty, Cacioppo, &

Steidley, 1988). It may be that the lack of effectiveness in print media and the relative success in broadcast media is more a function of the NFC level of the respective audiences.

5.7.2. The Advertised Product

Returning to the more predominant issue of research objectives, the products utilised in these previous studies also raise some questions. Thus far, the research on NFC and advertising has focused on either higher priced, and therefore higher risk products such as state of the art stereo receivers (Zhang & Buda, 1999) and high performance cameras (Zhang, 1996a; Zhang, 1996b); or on practical, informational products such as typewriters (Haugtvedt et al., 1992), calculators (Haugtvedt et al., 1992), and telephone answering machines (Haugtvedt & Petty, 1992). This even includes the one study that looked specifically at humour as the peripheral appeal.

Unfortunately, humour is already known to be a questionable means of persuading consumers for these types of products. For such products, this personality attribute may well help to resolve some of the conflicting findings on humour in advertising. Indeed, it may certainly be that NFC is a significant moderator in the likely success that humour appeals will have when advertising these product types. It is very likely that when evaluating brands for high risk or functional products, high NFC consumers will prefer to deliberate upon issue-relevant arguments and derive a carefully scrutinised attitude founded on sound product claims. Furthermore, based on the available evidence, it appears that those who do not take pleasure in such cognitive callisthenics will prefer to take cognitive shortcuts and base their attitudes and ultimate purchases on simple decision rules (e.g.: the sheer number of arguments

presented) or on other peripheral cues (e.g.: ad and source liking) for products in these classes. Even though such product decisions should be based on an analysis of product attributes, they may choose to circumvent such demanding mental tasks in favour of a less informed, but more effortless decision.

However, what about the products for which humour is known to be an influential appeal: low-involvement/indulgent products? Will people with a high NFC still be persuaded only by product claims for salad dressing? How about frozen pizza or other low risk groceries? Are they really motivated to listen to arguments raised by the advertiser on the tangible advantages to purchasing their brand of discount clothing? With the influx of promotional messages to which people are exposed, they quite possibly may not be motivated to centrally process the ads for what is seemingly such an impulse product purchase (or at least *instinctive* brand selection). Instead, they may choose to follow suit from their low NFC contemporaries and rely on elusive qualities, such as brand image and ad liking. In many such cases, legitimate arguments of product uniqueness may not even exist.

The problem with the current NFC research in advertising is that it may underestimate the power of peripheral appeals such as humour for advertising the products that it is influential in promoting. NFC may not be a trait that necessarily mediates the persuasive potency of humour appeals for such *instinct* products. Until now, the literature has not addressed such a possibility. The potential for high NFC persons to have such a low level of involvement with a topic that even they are not motivated to process a relevant message centrally has been discussed in contexts outside of advertising:

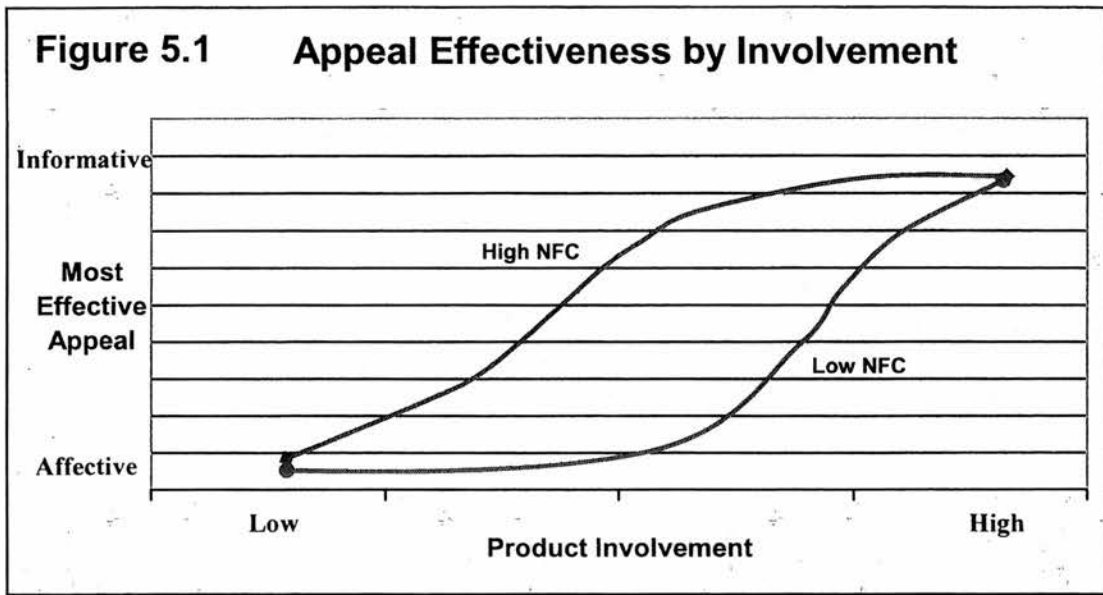
“It is only reasonable that lowering issue involvement would reduce the elaboration likelihood of both individuals high and those low in need for cognition, though at any given level of issue involvement it is individuals high in need for cognition who should think more about an issue. However, exceptions to this principle should include appeals...that are so unimportant that neither group would think about them” (Cacioppo et al., 1983; 816).

This possibility could certainly be valid in the advertising of low-involvement/expressive products, but it has been neither tested nor considered amongst advertising researchers. Given the lack of attention that NFC research has been provided with regard to humour appeals, clearly it has not been addressed within this specific framework either.

On the other hand, some researchers have found that when message relevance is very high, NFC is not a significant predictor of processing or attitude change because elaboration likelihood is high and the motivation is evident for everyone to process information centrally (see Haugtvedt et al., 1986). Applied to an advertising context, this may suggest that NFC is not a crucial moderator of advertising effectiveness for products of extremely high-involvement, as *everyone* is likely to scrutinise the attribute information highly. However, given the types of relatively important issues for which low NFC use peripheral cues and heuristics to make decisions (e.g.: instituting comprehensive exams at their university), such consumers would have to have a considerably high level of product involvement. In such cases, humour is unlikely to be an effective appeal for any consumers, regardless of their appreciation of issue-relevant thinking. Everyone, under these circumstances takes their purchase decisions too seriously for an advertiser to rely on humour appeals to influence brand attitudes.

Taken together, these findings suggest that NFC is mostly a mediator of advertising effectiveness for moderate to somewhat high product involvement and for functional products. Under such circumstances, high NFC consumers are likely to prefer product-relevant appeals containing attribute information, while low NFC consumers will rely on affective cues, such as ad liking. For routine, *instinct* purchases, no personality types will be mentally stimulated enough to attend to informational cues, and will base attitudes and decisions on feelings generated by the ad and brand. When the product importance or risks are at their apex, all consumers will possess the motivation to process relevant product information and will only be persuaded accordingly. This relationship is represented in Figure 5.1, adapted from Cacioppo et al. (1996) to represent an advertising effectiveness context. While they depicted the general relationship between extent of thinking across situational demand, this figure represents the disparity between appeal effectiveness for different NFC types in relation to product involvement. At the extremes there is no difference, with both preferring an affective appeal when involvement is low, and both an informational appeal when involvement is exceptionally high.

With only one published study on NFC that expressly examines humour appeals, research on this construct is obviously relatively young. Empirical work needs to be conducted on the types of products for which this appeal is appropriate to see if it is still a relevant mediator. It is likely that NFC will not moderate the effectiveness of



humour for low-involvement/expressive products, with humour having an advantage over non-humour. Further examination is also needed over a wider breadth of advertising media, especially television advertising. This is the most appropriate domain for humour appeals, so NFC should be assessed within this promotional channel.

5.7.3. The Creative Execution of the Humour Appeal

It is also necessary to test additional humour types. Zhang (1996a; 1996b) only assessed comic wit in the test ads. For high involvement and informational products, supplementary studies might examine whether more complex forms of humour that require greater cognitive effort will still only be effective in persuading low NFC individuals, or if the increased complexity will reverse the effect. Furthermore, studies should seek to establish whether humour is actually detrimental to persuading high NFC individuals. It is possible that high NFC individuals will react contemptuously towards such an ad, which may interfere with their processing of relevant message claims.

Additionally, while individual differences in NFC may not dictate whether humour is effective or ineffective for instinctive, low-involvement/indulgent purchases, it may be a mediator on the *types* of humour that may be the most appropriate. While humour overall may be a successful appeal in which to promote such products to consumers both high and low in NFC, those with a high NFC may be more responsive to more cerebral forms of humour that include irony, puns, and other witticisms. On the other hand, low NFC consumers may find simpler forms of humour, such as slapstick comedy and simple jokes to be more engaging since such humour would not demand extensive cognitive resources.

5.8. MEDIA PLANNING

There are implications for marketing, as this individual difference in consumers appears to mediate advertising effectiveness. While all circumstances are different, there seem to be times when practitioners should carefully consider this factor when designing their media plans. Certainly, it is more difficult to control for than other variables due to the practical problem of measuring individual members of the target market prior to exposure. However, knowing the consumer is the first step to improving advertising effectiveness, and careful planning may permit the advertiser to reach the correct consumers with regard to NFC level. Specific segmentation of the market across this personality trait is a definite possibility.

The question is how ad reach can be designed around often unpredictable personality types within the target market. NFC is a somewhat ambiguous construct that is difficult to control. There is no sure way to estimate a target market's average NFC level prior to placing advertisements in the promotional mix. However, it has been suggested that people who differ in the NFC variable are likely to vary in their media

habits (Zhang & Buda, 1999). Both Zhang and Haugtvedt et al. (1988) acknowledge that those with a higher NFC and people with a low need are likely to attend to different types of media. Overall, high NFC individuals have reported watching less television (see Claxton & McIntyre, 1994). These individuals may seek out and view more technical types of publications. High NFC individuals apparently follow current events through newspapers and magazines rather than television and radio, and in general, they more frequently utilise the media for functional information gathering (Condra, 1992). Findings suggest that those who differ on this personality trait are likely to attend to different types of television programmes. This may be a useful manner in which to base media planning decisions and target marketing.

5.9. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The evidence surrounding the presence and effect of NFC is surprisingly stable. Clearly it has an impact on the manner in which different people structure their world and attend to persuasive stimuli. On the other hand, while it certainly is a mediating factor in persuasive response, it by no means is the only or most important factor. It characterises a motivational propensity, a contributory rather than a compulsory or adequate cause for elaboration likelihood (Cacioppo et al., 1983).

What is known is that those with a low NFC may be more favourably disposed to a peripheral cue, such as humour, in ads for particular products. Furthermore, they may have a need for greater repetition before the ad generates its maximum persuasive effect. High NFC individuals, on the other hand, may not command as many repetitions, but may require longer ads that rest on more product-relevant arguments (Haugtvedt et al., 1988). The exceptions appear to be when product involvement is very low or extremely high. For routine purchases, and especially those that are

positively reinforcing, all consumers, irrespective of their NFC, should be more significantly effected by affective appeals, such as humour. The suggestion that NFC is a moderator under these circumstances may underestimate the power of such ad appeals.

For high-risk products of great personal significance, both types of consumers are equally motivated to scrutinise message arguments and process product attribute information. In such cases, a direct appeal should be most successful regardless of NFC. Future research should attempt to demonstrate what products and under what circumstances processing motivation is ample for all consumers. Depending on just how low an individual's NFC is, it is likely to be only products such as private health insurance, which may literally be a matter of life and death, that may provide the sufficient processing motivation for consumers with such aversion towards organised processing.

At this point, all of the theoretical issues related to this study have been addressed. This project seeks to provide greater insight into the effectiveness of humour in advertising. In Chapter Two, the concept of humour was examined to construct a better understanding of humorous discourse and the reason that it is so appealing. Chapter Three focused on advertising effectiveness and the use of humour appeals. The ability of humour appeals to persuade, as well as meet intermediary advertising objectives was explored. A number of mediating variables were discussed, and Chapters Four and Five provided a detailed analysis of two additional potential moderators. In the next two chapters, the primary research will be detailed. This will begin with an analysis of television advertising patterns in Chapter Six, followed by a review of the experimental study in Chapter Seven.

Section III

The Primary Research

Chapter Six

Methodology I: Content Analysis

6.1. PREAMBLE

The next two chapters of this thesis will review the full methodology employed in the collection of data for this research. As was introduced in Chapter One, the principal research conducted for this thesis was an experimental study on television advertising. In the next chapter, the methodology relevant to the primary empirical research will be reviewed. In this first chapter of the methodology section, an analysis that was conducted on American television media will be discussed.

The research for this thesis was conducted entirely in the United States. There were several reasons for this decision. The United States is considered the icon of consumption culture, which makes it a fascinating location in which to conduct such research. The 1600 advertising messages to which Americans are exposed each day are proof of this ("Overview", 1993). The US has about US\$886 per capita spending on advertising (Coen's, 2001), which is by far the highest in the world. To put this in perspective, the United Kingdom spends just US\$250 per person (www.adageglobal.com). The UK also only has about 60 million citizens, compared to 275 million in the United States.

US advertising has been a heavy influence not only on its own domestic culture, but also on the advertising practices abroad. The US is considered to be the advertising capital of the world (Baudot, 1989), with its own expenditures constituting well over half of the world's total advertising spending (Agency report, 2001). Financially speaking, more is at stake in *getting it right* in the US probably more than anywhere else, as the annual trillion-dollar figure above can verify. Additionally, five of the top ten international advertising agencies are headquartered in the United States, while all ten have subsidiaries in the US (Agency report, 2001). It is therefore imperative to determine what advertising can be imported into this critical marketplace. In other words, because so many foreign goods and services are marketed within the US, advertisers and researchers from other countries have a great vested interest in determining what advertising is effective on American consumers.

A further motive for the setting is that a pronounced proportion of the published research is carried out on American consumers. They are likely to behave in a manner that differs from consumers in other cultures. With so much of the advertising literature conducted on American samples, more direct comparisons can be made with prior research by carrying out this study in the United States.

Additionally, the television medium was selected for this study. For one, less research in general has been conducted within television advertising, so it represented a better fit with regard to making solid contributions to the literature. Considering a quarter of all annual ad expenditures in the US (approx. US\$60 billion) are allocated to this medium (Coen's, 2001) further research in this medium is certainly warranted. Additionally, as was shown in Chapter Three, one of the few conclusive findings is

that this is the most suitable medium for humour appeals. This much has already been determined, so it should be within this medium that other potential mediators are assessed. Furthermore, television is one of the most heavily consumed products in America (Shrum, Wyer, & O'Guinn, 1998). Therefore, a better understanding is required of advertising through this channel, since it potentially has the greatest ad reach.

The chief objective of this content analysis was to ensure that the primary experimental research was as externally valid as possible. Most vital to this study on humour in advertising was to determine the forms of humour most frequently used in American television advertising. This information ensured that the design simulated the genuine American advertising atmosphere. While some previous researchers have suggested that comic wit is the primary type of humour used in advertising (Spotts, Weinberger, & Parsons, 1997), their study only examined print media. Furthermore, it was essential to identify other commonly used executional elements in American advertising, so that the experimental design closely replicated a true exposure environment. Determining what other creative executional elements are utilised as standards in television advertising when carrying out a humour appeal was a necessity.

As a result, a content analysis was conducted on primetime American advertising in preparation for the experimental research. Through this analysis, a greater understanding was developed of current television advertising patterns in the US. This knowledge was utilised in the design of the primary empirical work and thus afforded greater control and validity to the experimental research. Finally, the commercials

recorded for the content analysis were then used as a sample pool from which to draw the experimental ads. The logic behind using real television ads will be addressed in the next chapter. At this point the methodological steps that were followed for the content analysis portion of the research will be reviewed. The sampling method will be recounted, and the coding instructions outlined. Finally, the results will be detailed and a discussion of the limitations will help to add perspective to the findings.

6.2. EXAMINATION OF AMERICAN MEDIA

Because there are so many different types of humour, and even ways to classify humour, a tightly controlled study cannot be designed without consideration of the type of humour being used in the investigation. Due to the subjective nature of humour, it is quite possible that an appeal can have a different effect depending on the type of humour executed. On the other hand, with so many goals involved in this research, it is not practical to assess every single form of humour, especially if some are extremely rare or non-existent in advertising. Not only is the effect of humour in advertising under examination, but so too is the effect of context-induced mood states generated by the programming environment, and how these two variables interact with personality attributes of the consumer (i.e.: their NFC). To ensure the best compromise between breadth and depth, the study was restricted to examining the most frequently used humour types. It was undesirable to report upon research that was limited to only one particular type of humour, as this would severely confine the external validity of the study. However, with these other objectives in mind, it was felt that a focus on extraneous types of humour that are rarely if ever used would detract from the more critical and practical issues surrounding this research.

Consequently, it was important to initially reveal the forms of humour that are relied upon most habitually in American advertising. This ensures a more externally valid study because this data could then be utilised to design it around the most frequently employed humour types in American advertising. To appropriately extract the required data, a technique was needed that could directly compare the content of the sampled advertisements. Specifically, the procedure had to be sensitive enough to objectively measure the use of humour, and classify such usage within Speck's taxonomy.

Furthermore, it was compulsory to be able to evaluate hard sell and soft sell executional tactics. It was important to determine what creative elements were needed to transmit humour in a commercial. Furthermore, as will be discussed in detail in the next chapter, the ads analysed in this content analysis would become the sample pool from which to draw the experimental exposure ads. Therefore, it was critical to code as many content-related elements as possible, so that the ads selected best represented the majority of ads on American television with regard to length and creative execution. Coding of the various hard and soft sell tactics used was absolutely critical so that the researcher could be certain that the ads eventually selected for the study did not rely on any tactics beyond what was absolutely necessary to carry out the humorous or informational appeals. Ads that made use of multiple appeals would confound the data if used in the experiments.

The methodology also had to be able to quantify less concrete data. On occasion, it had to be capable of identifying those appeals that are not as easily classifiable from the overt, superficial content of the ads, such as brand image. This

sort of appeal is not simple to identify using tangible content, because the coder is required to infer the advertiser's intentions based on the symbolism used in the ads. Furthermore, when obtaining information regarding the type of humour that was employed, a similar method was necessary that could unveil the less superficial, underlying humour processes that comprise Speck's (1991) taxonomy. This required a more analytical method that could delve beyond the superficial, and into the symbolic level of the advertisements.

6.3. CONTENT ANALYSIS

Content analysis was the methodology nominated to examine television advertising in the US. Although specific definitions slightly differ, traditionally content analysis has been defined as "a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (Berelson, 1952; 18). Content analysis is a widely employed strategy that has the ability to examine mass amounts of information to reveal descriptive patterns in many communicative media. It is often criticised for its limitation to surface-level information that overplays the significance of repetition within the discourse it analyses (see Krippendorff, 1980). However, if exercised correctly, the technique does provide impartial, replicable information that can be triangulated with other methods to uncover more causal links. This is precisely how it is being used in the context of this research. Content analysis has the unique ability to use rigorous quantitative procedures to reveal rich, qualitative information from a sizeable amount of data. The procedure must have scientific precision at least if reliability and replicability are sought in a quantitative design. Content analysis does afford this scrupulous structure whereby both the classification and units recorded are both exhaustive (Holsti, 1969) and mutually exclusive (Weber, 1990).

When utilising this procedure on a communication such as advertising, a great deal of data may be lost if the coding is restricted to discrete, superficial content. Advertising communicates deliberately on so many strata and so it is valuable to unearth some of the more latent communicative elements. Particularly when probing into image-based appeals, the much more symbolic facets would be impossible to dissect using conventional content analysis techniques. This is especially relevant to television advertising where ambiguity continues to mount not only through the substantial use of visuals, but also because of the interactive relationships presented that communicate specific values. These interactions that occur between ad characters communicate critical information that may only be classified through symbolic interpretation of the relationships. This valuable data would be obscured if the method used to extrapolate ad content merely classified superficial elements.

While the method must possess objectivity and scientific rigour, it also must be receptive to the entrenched meanings that can only be decoded through interpretation. As a result, modern content analysis fuses a balance between objective and interpretative capacities. A strict categorisation is still exercised in which the incidence of individual units of content denote particular meanings.

“We are firmly convinced that whatever methodology is adopted for the study of advertising must be rigorous and systematic while also being sensitive to the multiple levels of meaning and the multiple codes that ads employ. In other words, our ‘middle-range’ option must try to combine both qualitative and quantitative strategies” (Leiss, Kline, & Jhally, 1990; 225).

This modern treatment of content analysis has been implemented not only by these researchers but in many other published studies (for example, see Frith & Wesson, 1991). This was an ideal methodology for this analysis. It yielded an objective

system whereby data was coded using the observable content of the ad, while also sanctioning the analysis of the content that may only be extracted through interpretation.

6.4. SAMPLING

Initially, a sampling frame had to be developed for the analysis. The study was restricted to primetime advertising. While it can be argued that the findings are not generalisable to other time periods, focusing on the hours with the highest viewership made for the best possible conciliation. Furthermore, in a number of studies that examined different day-parts, no significant differences were noted in advertising executions between those day-parts (Burnett, Fisk, & Lunsford, 1987; Cantor, 1976). Consequently, it may not be crucial what timeslots are sampled. Unfortunately, there are no agreements as to what constitutes *primetime*, so naturally this construct had to be defined. Following discussions with networks in the US, it was decided that the hours of 8:00 PM to 11:00 PM could be treated as primetime.

The three primary American networks (ABC, CBS, NBC) were selected for the study. This was the best means of standardising the analysis. These channels have the highest and most representative exposure audiences across the nation (<http://tv.zap2it.com/news/ratings/>). Cable channels and strictly regional networks were excluded because viewerships fluctuate between different regions.

To acquire a sufficiently representative sample of ads, each channel was sampled on every day of the week. Random sampling techniques were used. The time slots between 8:00 and 11:00 were divided into discrete 30-minute segments according to

conventional television scheduling, beginning and ending on the hour and half-hour. Using a random number table (www.rand.org/publications/classics/randomdigits/), all of the time slots were randomly assigned (see Table 6.1).

The sampling was carried out over a two-week period in mid-April 1999. This time frame was selected because it is an archetypal time of year, where atypical seasonal variations in advertising (e.g.: Christmas, back-to-school) could be circumvented. Ads for which the primary intention was to disclose a promotional offer were excluded because predominantly, the message merely describes the promotion. Furthermore, previews for films and television programmes were also disqualified as they also have more irregular content. Finally public service announcements were barred from the analysis, as they are not messages for consumer products. The sample yielded a total of 268 ads.

Table 6.1 Sampled Time Slots			
	ABC	NBC	CBS
Sunday	9:30pm-10:00pm	8:00pm-8:30pm	9:30pm-10:00pm
Monday	10:00pm-10:30pm	10:30pm-11:00pm	10:30pm-11:00pm
Tuesday	10:30pm-11:00pm	9:00pm-9:30pm	10:00pm-10:30pm
Wednesday	9:00pm-9:30pm	8:30pm-9:00pm	9:30pm-10:00pm
Thursday	8:00pm-8:30pm	10:00pm-10:30pm	9:00pm-9:30pm
Friday	10:00pm-10:30pm	9:00pm-9:30pm	8:30pm-9:00pm
Saturday	8:30pm-9:00pm	9:30pm-10:00pm	9:30pm-10:00pm

6.5. CATEGORISATION & CODING INSTRUCTIONS

Once the sampling was completed, the coding scheme had to be developed (see Appendix A). This demanded not only the development of exhaustive and mutually exclusive categories, but also stringent coding instructions that allowed the data to be evaluated objectively.

6.5.1. Sponsored Television Programme

The first coding category created was for the television show within which the ad was broadcast. As one of the major postulates of this thesis contends, advertisers should consider the influence of the programme that they are sponsoring when purchasing airtime. Consequently, it was necessary to sample a variety of programme types. If all major programme types were included, then it is more likely that a representative cross section of ads would also be sampled. A classification of programmes was therefore adapted from taxonomies designed by Cantor (1976) and Katz and Lee (1992) (see Table 6.2).

Several modifications were made to guarantee that the data was rich enough to provide meaningful comparisons, but was not excessively meticulous so as to lose practicality. Overly sensitive category divisions may nullify the functional value of the classification. The News-Information grouping used by Cantor (1976) was split into several categories. Documentaries, current event programmes, and the news are all very common types of programmes, which often contain dissimilar affective material.

This can have serious advertising implications, so they were included as discrete classes. Furthermore, politics, interviews, and information all appeared to fall under current events, so they were collapsed into this solitary category. 'Educational programmes except those intended strictly for children' was dropped as this is not notably distinct from a documentary. Children's shows, soap operas, and religious programmes were eliminated because they are not broadcast during primetime in the United States and are thus irrelevant to this analysis. Katz and Lee's (1992) action-adventure class was also expelled, as it is not really an exclusive grouping. Game shows, variety shows, films, dramas, and current event programmes can all contain action-adventure, making this an inadequate distinction. Finally, pre-testing determined the need for a new category, which was entitled specialty programmes.

6.5.2. Humour Appeals

As the primary focus of this stage of the research, the use of humour was examined. Due to the inherent subjectivity of humour responses, the *attempt* to employ humour was logged rather than perceived funniness. This is the standard practice in all humour research (see Weinberger & Gulas, 1992). Furthermore, the intentional relatedness of the humour, placement within the ad, and target of the humour were all recorded. Finally, humour type was coded according to Speck's (1991) taxonomy, as discussed in Chapter Two. Ad length was also coded because it may be a potential mediator for humour type (more complex forms of humour may require extended set-up time). If the sample included more 15-second short versions of ads, they may rely more heavily on the simpler styles of humour.

Table 6.2 Programme Classification	
News Programmes	Programmes covering factual events of regional, national, and international scopes intended for informational purposes to keep the audience abreast of daily events.
Current Events Programmes	Programmes intended to be factual that may or may not contain partial narratives. They are primarily intended for entertainment with political propaganda and educational by-products resulting (e.g.: Sixty Minutes).
Documentaries	Programmes intended for education and entertainment that accurately exhibit and narrate true-life events, including amongst others, celebrity profiles, animal behaviour, cultural studies, and travel.
Situation Comedies	Regular series involving engaging characters amid primarily humorous circumstances.
Drama Series	Regular weekly series involving engaging characters in primarily dramatic, precarious, or adventurous situations where a conflict is presented and resolved with a climax.
Game Shows	Audience-participation competitions and games involving celebrities and non-celebrities.
Variety Shows	Regular series involving some mixture of music, interviews, routines, and comic sketches mostly with entertainment personalities (e.g.: TFI Friday).
Films	Cinema releases, made-for-TV and made-for-video movies, and feature length plays not part of a continuous series.
Sports	Single sporting events and regularly broadcast sports programmes.
Specialty Programmes	Onetime programmes or limited entertainment series, which may include contests, magic, special talents, concerts, etc.

Adapted from: Cantor, J. (1976). Humor on television: A content analysis. *Journal of Broadcasting*, 20(Fall), 501-510; Katz, H., & Lee, W. N. (1992). Oceans apart: An initial exploration of social communication differences in US and UK prime-time television advertising. *International Journal of Advertising*, 11, 69-82.

6.5.3. Hard & Soft Sell Executional Elements

As explained, critical to the intent of this study was an investigation of the hard and soft sell treatments. There are so many definitions and conceptualisations of these constructs that content analysing them has become problematic. The most manageable approach seems to be through a direct inspection of the number of hard sell and soft sell presentations employed in the ads. Each hard or soft sell execution style is a discrete, meaningful, and readily observable facet of communication. Using these specific presentations in the analysis is far more objective and systematic than a subjective impression of these abstract hard and soft sell concepts. The classification utilised was one tailored from Bradley (1990) and Ramaprasad and Hasegawa (1992) (see Table 6.3). Pre-testing demonstrated the need to add additional presentations to the original taxonomy to secure a more comprehensive analysis (e.g.: expert testimonial, vivid imagery).

Table 6.3 Execution Styles	
Hard Sell Presentations	
Comparative	These messages show or overtly refer to competing brands, and the general crux of the ad must be on comparison with other brands.
Unique Selling Proposition (USP)	These ads make explicit assertions of distinctiveness concerning a product feature or benefit-in-use, which can be proven.
Pre-emptive	While there is no claim of uniqueness or allusion to competing brands, the brand is still positioned as superior. The defining characteristic is that claims are factually based and testable.
Hyperbole	These messages are similar to pre-emptive messages in that they <i>appear</i> to be centred on fact. However, the claims made are untestable and actually have exaggerated and extravagant foundations.
Expert Testimonial	These messages also appear to be factually based declarations of superiority. The defining quality is that the claims are either expressed directly as an endorsement or through survey results involving the opinions of relevant experts.
Generic-Informational	These ads are predominantly informational as they focus more on a product class generally.

Soft Sell Presentations	
User Image	The focus is on consumers of the brand and their lifestyles.
Brand Image	These ads concentrate on creating an aura of the brand in an attempt to express a brand persona.
Use Occasion	The experience of using the brand is articulated, as well as circumstances where use of the brand is most suitable.
Celebrity Endorser	In these ads a famous person expresses an explicit liking for the brand.
Spokesperson	In these ads, a celebrity presents a sales message that is more overtly scripted. Contrary to celebrity endorser presentations, the celebrity does not offer a candid testimonial where liking is expressed.
Typical Person Endorser	In these ads, a character perceived as an ordinary person to whom the audience can directly relate expresses an explicit liking for the brand.
Atypical Endorser-Personality	The concentration in these ads is on an individual who is not explicitly endorsing the product or acting as a spokesperson. The character is undoubtedly the focus of attention.
Narration	In this presentation, the message is primarily narrated with no dramatisation.
Demonstration	In this presentation, the message is predominantly based on product demonstration.
Product Display	A product is displayed, but product use is not really demonstrated.
Drama	In these presentations, the characters in the commercials are involved in a fictional plot and appear at least partially unaware of the audience's presence.
Fantasy	This presentation includes use of imaginative and unnatural plot and/or characterisation. It can include animation, dreams, and talking animals.
Vivid imagery	The brand image or product is enhanced in this presentation and made to look more appealing through graphical visual metaphors.

Adapted from: Bradley, S. L. (1990). *Hard sell vs. soft sell: A content analysis of American and British primetime television advertisements*. Unpublished master's dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI; Ramaprasad, J., & Hasegawa, K. (1992). Creative strategies in American and Japanese TV commercials: A comparison. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 32(January/February), 59-67.

6.5.4. Product Classification

Commercials are designed around the product. As a result, this also had to be logged to control for the major product dimensions, allowing the results to be compared by product type. Not only does this provide a reliable control when interpreting the findings, but it can also be determined to what degree and in what way product groups may affect executional decisions.

Of the greatest importance here was also to reaffirm that humour appeals are found in the highest concentrations in the low-involvement/transformational product cell, where the previous literature suggests it is the most proficient. Furthermore, it was important to determine what were the necessary and most common appeals in executing a straight informational ad for this same product cell. Clearly, the product information was going to be presented using some sort of hard sell approach, along with a basic soft sell approach (e.g.: product display). In today's highly congested marketing universe, an advertisement will not be completely void of creative executional elements. Imagine anyone paying attention to an advertisement without audio and visual elements. So even in the case of an informational appeal, there will be creative elements, such as demonstration, narrative, brand image, product display, etc. It was critical to determine, therefore, which of these elements (which would of course have to be a necessary part to the informational appeal) were the most frequently employed when executing an informational approach for these routine, indulgent products. This was a further reason to collect data on the product positioning for comparison across executional styles.

Initially, the specific product type was coded. Devising a system that is both exhaustive and mutually exclusive is challenging when it comes down to exact product classes. The consumption culture of today's society has resulted in a flooded, vastly differentiated consumer product market that makes comprehensive product classifications not only unmanageable but also not really practical for analysis. In this analysis, it is probably sufficient to group classes of products more collectively. This is the best compromise of an economic, yet precise taxonomy that will yield revealing comparisons.

Accordingly, a slightly adapted version of the official classification developed by The Advertising Association in their annual statistics yearbook was used (Advertising Association, 1998). Domestic appliances and electronics were divorced into separate groupings as they are quite distinct. Smoking products were deleted as regulations in the US prohibit advertising such goods on television. A few additions were appended to classes where certain significant products were excluded (see Appendix B).

More importantly, the products were grouped according to the attitudinal response of the potential consumers. Several similar product positioning models have been developed, but two of the more prominent frameworks are the Foote, Cone, & Belding (FCB) grid (or the *product colour matrix*) and the Rossiter-Percy grid. Both models plot products along two dimensions. The FCB grid looks at consumer involvement with the purchase decision (high or low), and a think-feel dimension of the purchase. The think-feel component of the grid is a distinction between products that serve a utilitarian purpose (think), from those that satisfy a more indulgent need (feel) (Ratchford, 1987). In the Rossiter-Percy grid, products are mapped against a

similar dichotomous involvement construct, but are also modelled along a motivational concept. Products can be either transformational (positively reinforcing) or informational (negatively reinforcing). For example, a sports car probably serves a hedonistic or expressive desire that is positively reinforcing (or transformational), while a refrigerator meets a more functional need. This is an informational product because it removes the risk of a negative consequence (in this case, rotten food), and is thus negatively reinforcing. Research has supported the legitimacy of this form of product gridding (Ratchford, 1987; Zaichkowsky, 1987) and it has been directly applied to many studies of advertising effectiveness (see Spotts et al., 1997; Weinberger & Campbell, 1991; Weinberger & Spotts 1989; 1993).

In this study a combination of the FCB grid and the Rossiter-Percy grid was implemented. The first dimension considered in both of these models is consumer involvement with the product. According to the FCB grid, involvement is an amalgamation of the perceived importance of the purchase decision, the cognitive effort necessary to make the choice, and the perceived risk of the purchase (Berger, 1986). The FCB conceptualisation of involvement was employed partly because it is more detailed than the Rossiter-Percy definition, which only considers perceived risk. This lack of sensitivity may lead to an inaccurate appraisal of a consumer decision process.

Consider the purchase of an expensive new stereo by a music lover. Perhaps the consumer, through prior experience with a familiar brand, perceives it as trustworthy. The consumer may limit their search to models for that brand. However, due to the importance of the purchase, the consumer heavily researches the different models, and

expends a high amount of cognitive energy making the purchase decision. Despite these efforts, the consumer may not identify the choice as *risky* per se, since they know the brand is trustworthy, and ultimately they will be satisfied. However, few would argue that this is a routine, low-involvement purchase.

Furthermore, the FCB involvement construct results in a less subjective coding. The Rossiter-Percy grid is receptive to involvement distinctions across different brands, whereas the FCB grid only considers product class differences (Rossiter, Percy, & Donovan, 1991). While Rossiter and Percy's conceptualisation is probably truer to genuine consumer perceptions, in this type of research the results would be more highly biased by the coder's prior experience with specific brands. Furthermore, the FCB grid has already been used in many research studies to position products along their involvement construct. This allows some of the subjectivity to be removed from the ratings, since the previous research can be used as a guide in the ratings.

The second product dimension analysed was the motivation to purchase. This is part of the Rossiter-Percy model whereby products are positioned dichotomously according to the underlying reason for purchase (Rossiter et al., 1991). This is a better conceptualisation than the FCB think-feel dimension for this analysis. The motivational aspect tends to be more objective than the more nebulous think-feel dimension, which considers a multitude of constructs. Although the basic concepts are comparable, the Rossiter-Percy dimension is a more concrete measurement conducive to coding. The feel component of the FCB is broken into the satisfaction of ego gratification, sensory, and social acceptance needs, which can cause complications to an objective rating.

Due to the fact that this product classification is based on potential consumer's attitudes, there is an issue of subjectivity with these ratings. It is unrealistic to expect the rater to act as a consumer by proxy for hundreds of different products. Different consumers find different product decisions involving. For example, someone throwing a dinner party is going to be more involved with food products than someone simply making a meal for him or herself. While it is not possible to remove all amount of subjectivity, this was minimised by basing the current ratings on previous product ratings conducted by a sample of consumers. Ratchford (1987) surveyed 1792 consumers, who rated 254 products along the two dimensions. While there was some disparity that remained, it was simply used as a guide to curtail subjectivity in the ratings.

6.6. CODING

Initially the coding scheme was piloted on a sample of twenty ads to test the design and ensure that the evaluator was proficient with the instructions. Adjustments were made to the instructions and categorisations as was necessary. Following pre-testing, the analysis was performed on the ads. As an assessment of test-retest reliability, the rating was completed twice. A three-week layover period was maintained between codings to ensure that the evaluator was not prejudiced by the preceding trial. Discrepancies in the coding were resolved through a third reappraisal, where necessary. This was necessary in approximately 3% of the observations.

As is the standard in content analyses, duplicate ads were removed from the sample. Typically, repetitions are deleted to prevent redundancies from distorting the findings (Stern & Resnick, 1991). What has been suggested is that at the time of sampling,

some brands may be involved in a more aggressive campaign that may skew the results. It is argued that what should be sought in a content analysis is an impression of the *different* ads currently circulating, rather than a sense of the overall exposure environment. However, there is a counterargument that maintains that by only analysing the results without the duplications, valuable data may be lost. Because a content analysis should investigate the proportions of certain ad types within a particular environment, repeats should perhaps carry equal weight. Whether or not they have been shown before does not change the fact that they command a certain amount of airtime as a part of the overall proportion of advertising. While the former method reveals notions of practitioners' overall application of the different execution styles, the latter ensures accurate conclusions regarding the proportion of ad styles to which an audience is exposed in the marketing environment.

Part of the problem in an analysis with the duplications, is that little past research has used such a procedure. As a result, there is not a theoretical milieu in which to anchor the current findings. Furthermore, drawing conclusions from essentially two data sets (one with and one without duplicates) would hinder a coherent discussion that lucidly extracts from the results. Such a procedure is simply beyond the scope of a single piece of empirical work, unless such a comparison of results was the primary objective of the research. Here the only objective was to view a sample of current advertising practices to better understand the American television advertising environment. This stage was only an aid to be used in the design of the primary stage of the research. Consequently, it was decided to only examine the results without the recurring ads, but data on the duplicates was collected and retained for use in the future.

6.7. RESULTS OF THE CONTENT ANALYSIS

This section will review the results obtained by the content analysis. First the reliability of the coding procedures will be reported. Following this, issues related to the representativeness of the sample will be reviewed. Finally, various issues related to the use of humour in the ads will be addressed.

6.7.1. Assessment of Reliability

At the outset, the reliability of the coding procedure had to be established. A measure of test-retest reliability was taken to assess the stability of the rating system. The two rating trials were compared and a Cronbach's alpha correlation coefficient calculated. The coding procedure was found to be highly reliable, $\alpha = .97$. This coefficient far exceeds the threshold of .85 established by Kassirjian (1977), which has become the baseline for reliability measures in content analysis.

6.7.2. Sample Representativeness

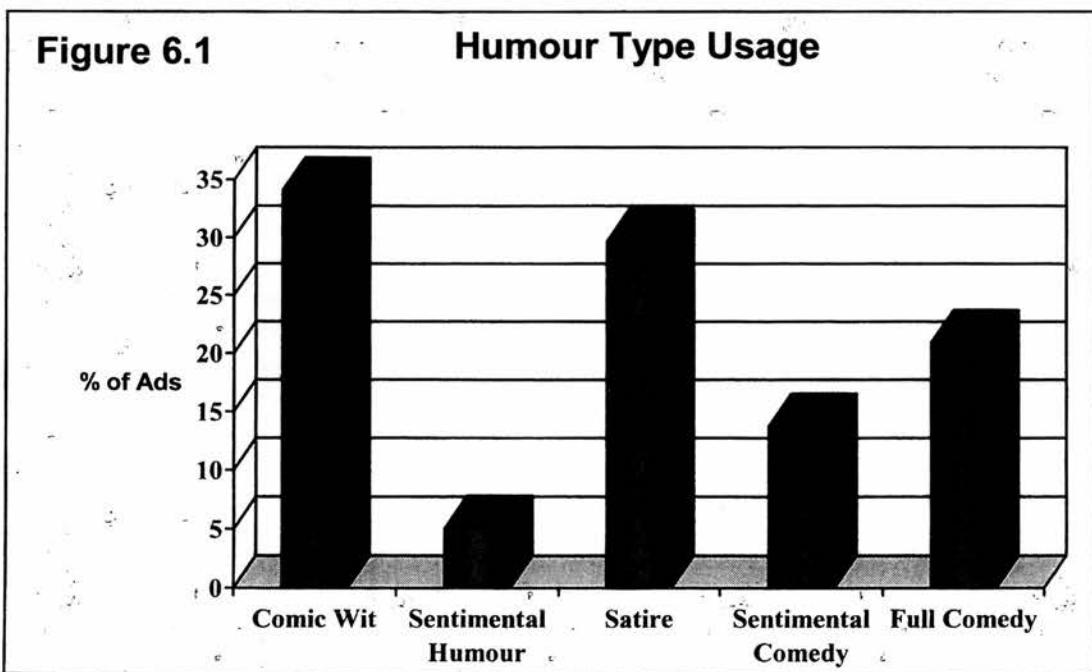
As expected, the data collection yielded a well-balanced sample on all levels. As explained, each channel was sampled equivalently for one half hour on each day of the week. As can be seen in Appendix C, the random sample was distributed normally throughout all the primetime slots, yielded ads for the full variety of primetime programme types, and delivered a representative sample of ads in which to analyse the primetime American advertising strategies.

6.7.3. Humour Types Usage

The content analysis revealed that, as expected, the two most commonly utilised forms of humour in American advertising were comic wit (34%) and satire (30%) (see Figure 6.1). There were several reasons to believe that comic wit would be utilised

the most frequently. Foremost, Speck (1991) content analysed commercials using this classification and found comic wit (31%) to be executed more often in television advertising than any other humour type, while Spotts et al. (1997) found it to be most utilised in magazine ads (82%). There is a logical reason why comic wit would be most frequently employed. As has been explained, incongruity-resolution is the most commonly found process underlying all humour, irrespective of culture. It has been observed transnationally and cross-culturally in both advertising contexts and beyond (Alden, Hoyer, & Lee, 1993; Alden & Martin, 1995; Berger, 1987; Fry, 1987; Suls, 1983).

Whilst incongruity-resolution appears in most humour types, comic wit is a simple yet successful form of incongruity-resolution humour. Therefore, it is executed most often in commercials because there is less leeway for misinterpretation by the audience, which is safer for the advertisers. Furthermore, it is a more innocuous form of humour. People tend to be a bit more fickle in their appreciation of humour that



contains disparagement and sentimentality processes. Especially in the case of sentimentality, many people do not take pleasure in humour that has sappy nuances that overshadow the humorous content. Moreover, because comic wit is so elementary, there is less ad time required to set up this form of humour. Consequently, a greater proportion of the ad can be devoted to product-related information and brand image structuring, which is why this basic form of humour is so suitable for advertising.

Additionally, comic wit is found more frequently than satire because it is much less precarious than satirical forms of humour. Disparagement humour risks offending viewers who may be members of the targeted out-group. Nevertheless, this form of humour is much more prevalent in American culture, which is why it is a runner-up to comic wit in advertising use. Clearly with the amount of satirical sitcoms that supremely reign over primetime television in the US, the growing popularity of disparagement humour is obvious. This is probably partly a result of the high interactivity between British and American cultures. With the number of films, television programmes and music, amongst other things, that these two cultures share, there is no doubt that elements of each distinct culture are clearly apparent in the other. The distinct British sense of humour, focused on sardonic wit (Honomichl, 1989), is much more prevalent in American culture today. This is no doubt a result of this reciprocal influence that these cultures have over one another (Donnelly III, 1999).

Incongruity-resolution provides an important element that is cognitively gratifying. As a result, most forms of humour worldwide include this process. This is also why, as expected, sentimental humour was the least executed form of humour in the

sample. With no cognitive component, sentimental humour represents the only purely affective form of humour. Arousal-safety processes result in a mild, less universally predictable type of humour. Consequently, it is probably less successful and memorable, so it is infrequently practised. Most advertisers will almost certainly try to incorporate more robust varieties of humour that will consistently elicit a higher comedic response, such as those that utilise incongruity-resolution.

6.7.4. Intentional Relatedness of Humour to Message

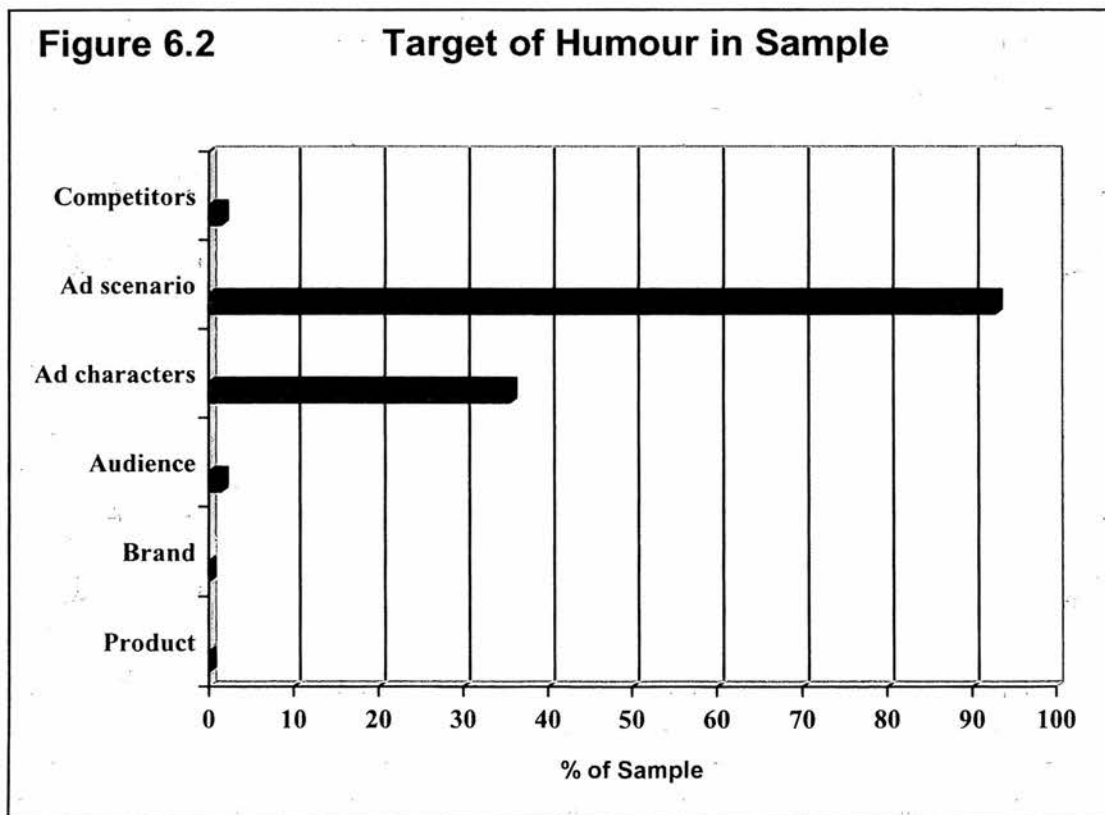
Furthermore, of the ads utilising a humorous appeal, the humour was almost always related to the advertising messages (96.4%). This was the expectation based on the common belief amongst practitioners and researchers that humour-dominant ads are much more successful in meeting the goals of the advertiser than ads in which the humour is incidental (see Chapter Three).

6.7.5. Target of Humorous Content

As anticipated, neither the product nor the brand was the target of humour in *any* of the ads analysed (see Figure 6.2). How the humour in a playful ad is directed can have a substantial effect on consumer perceptions. Targeting the brand or product could facilitate the fabrication of a negative attitude by the consumers. If consumers see the advertisers attacking their own product, they will most likely believe the self-deprecating assertions and assume a dejected view of the product. Undoubtedly the reaction would be negative towards any target of humour that belittles, since the audience must agree with the disparagement on some level just to *get the joke*. However in the case self-deprecation of the product or brand, this would be even more profound as the audience would speculate as to why an advertiser would highlight a negative facet of their product or company if it were not veritable.

Similarly, the American advertisers avoided the other dangerous targets. Only two ads ridiculed the intended audience and a further two targeted the advertiser's competitors. While audience deprecation can be an effective form of humour if executed correctly, the risk is always high for irritating and even offending the audience. "People like ads they can empathise with, which show them how they would like to be. This is the opposite of ads that alienate them, talk down to them or mock them or their values" (Du Plessis, 1998; 36). The ultimate objective of the ad is not simply to entertain, so even a good joke will be avoided if there is any possibility of putting off the audience. The stakes are simply too high in competitive advertising to chance insulting the potential buyers.

With regard to competitor targeting, it may be unclear why this would be labelled a dangerous target. Rationally, this seems like a very obvious target for deprecating



humour, especially in the US where comparative advertising is very common. In fact, it is true that the US is traditionally known for comparative advertising. In this sample alone, the advertisers used hard sell comparatives in over 10% of their ads. However, when making a comparison and emphasising superiority, advertisers would like the message to be taken seriously. By placing the comparative in a humorous context, the advertisers may be concerned that the message will be interpreted playfully, and thus will not have a proactive effect. With the cost of television advertising in the States, this is clearly not an advisable risk. Therefore, American advertisers may only target competitors in their more serious communications to ensure that the message is branded as genuine.

Conversely, the ad scenario was the most normally used target of the humorous content. This is commonsensical, because the scenario is *always* the target when no disparagement is incorporated. When there is denigration, the scenario can still often be the target, making it logically the most utilised target of humour. Thus, as would be expected, an overwhelming 91% of the humorous ads innocuously targeted the ad scenario. The second most common target of the humour was the ad characters with 33% of the humorous ads employing such a target. This roughly accounts for the satirical ads, which as a requirement, must disparage some other party. This is a much safer option than targeting the audience, which may offend viewers. It is also wiser than targeting competitors because a humorous ad is not based on sound arguments. Therefore, the defamation of rival brands through unfounded insults in this context may lead the audience to question the credibility of the source.

6.7.6. Placement of Humorous Content Within the Ad

A further set of findings on the use of humour relates to the placement of the humour within the ad. This is an important criterion to examine, because differences in placement says something about how American practitioners view the function that humour fulfils in advertising. As can be seen in Figure 6.3, the ads sampled in the content analysis used humour significantly in all the major parts of the ads.

6.7.7. Humour Usage by Product Cell

Through this analysis, it was also possible to confirm that, as the literature recommends, humour is used most frequently in the low-involvement/transformational product quadrant (see Figure 6.4). This is further corroborating evidence that this study is examining the appropriate product categories. However, if the distribution of humour usage is appraised across each

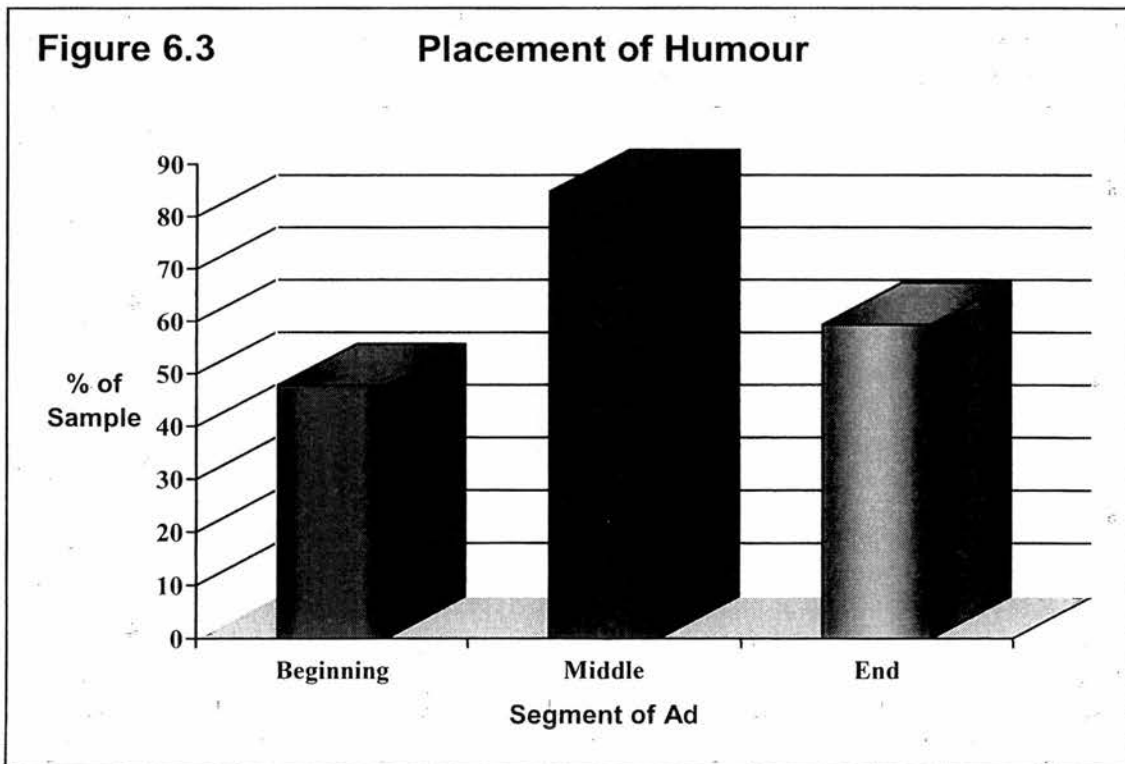
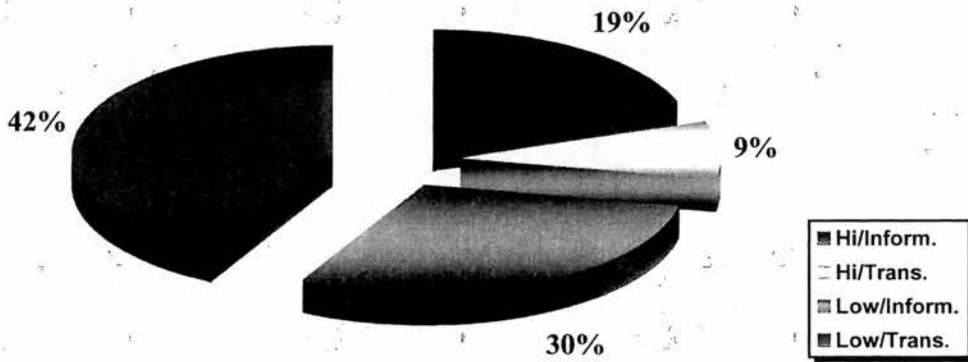


Figure 6.4 Use of Humour Appeals by Product Cell

dimension separately, it appears that, while the low-involvement/transformational products are clearly the targeted product cell for humour appeals, really the involvement dimension is more predictive than the motivational dimension. As can be seen in Table 6.4, the advertisers used humour equivalently across the motivational dichotomy, despite the recommendations by researchers that this sort of advertising be relinquished to transformational products (Rossiter & Percy, 1996). Some previous research using similar models, such as the FCB think-feel dimension, also have found that humour should be restricted to such products (Weinberger & Campbell, 1991).

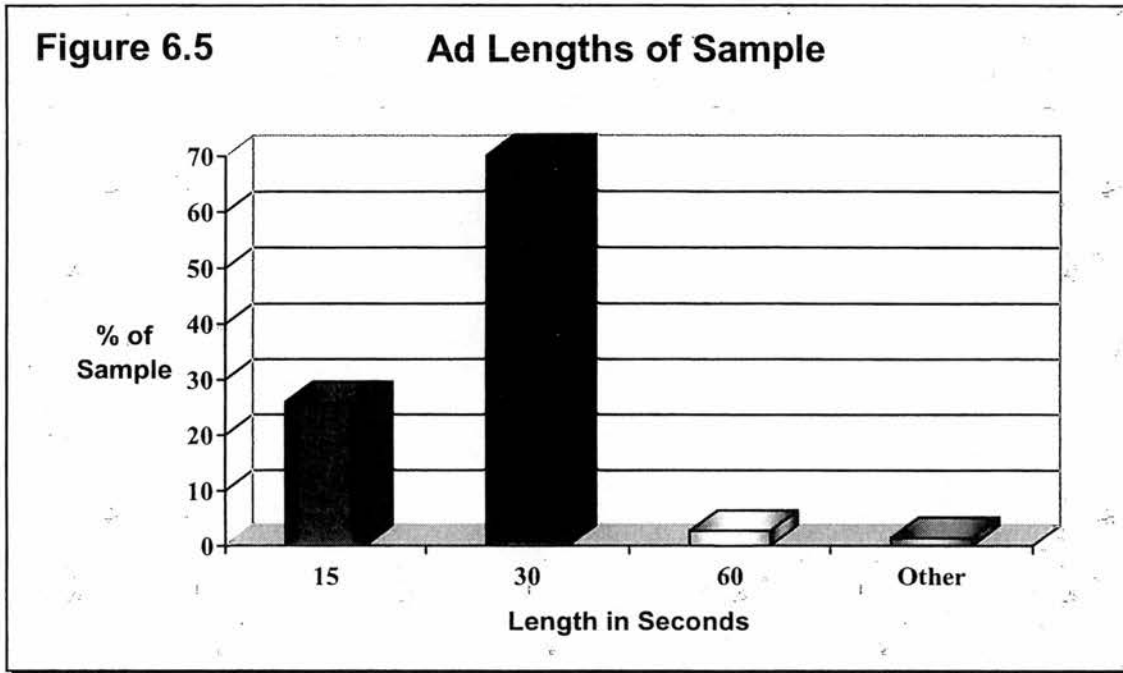
However, according to this data, this dimension is not really taken into consideration as fastidiously as the involvement dimension. Practitioners used considerably more humour in advertisements for low versus high-involvement products, while they were split evenly across the motivational dimension. This follows from the overwhelming

Involvement		Motivation	
High	Low	Informational	Transformational
28.26%	71.74%	49.28%	50.72%

consensus that humour is more suitable and more universally drawn upon for low-involvement product advertising (Madden & Weinberger, 1984; Rossiter & Percy, 1996; Weinberger & Campbell, 1991; Weinberger & Spotts, 1989a; Weinberger, Spotts, Campbell, & Parsons, 1995). So while advertisers unmistakably directed their humour appeals towards the low-involvement/transformational products, this had more to do with their concentration on the low-involvement feature (72% of the humorous ads) than the transformational aspect (51% of the humorous ads) of the products.

6.7.8. Ad Length

A final set of relevant findings from the content analysis was ad length. This was a critical factor in designing the main study, which is why this was relevant at this preliminary stage. Only one ad length could be chosen for the study, as the strength of various ads' capabilities in altering consumer views is obviously dependent on the length of the ad. Unsurprisingly, the most commonly used ad length was chosen as the best compromise of internal and external validity. As is clear from Figure 6.5, 30-second ads are the most common in American advertising, commanding approximately 70% of the ads observed. While 15-second ads still comprised about $\frac{1}{4}$ of the sample, most appeared to be *boosters*, which were originally 30-seconds in length. This issue will be discussed further in the next chapter.



6.8. LIMITATIONS OF THE CONTENT ANALYSIS

When interpreting the results revealed here, it is indispensable to consider them in their appropriate perspective. Consequently, this analysis would remain incomplete without a discussion of the inevitable limitations. Basically, the limitations can be grouped into problems of reliability, internal validity, and external validity.

6.8.1. Reliability Issues

The reliability issue relates to the coding procedures. Kassirjian (1977) has outlined strict procedures for content analysis that are still currently drawn upon in current consumer research. According to his rules, content analysis studies should employ two or more independent raters to assess the reproducibility, or inter-coder agreement with the coding scheme. However in this analysis, only one rater was utilised in the coding. Rather than the typical inter-rater reliability measure, this analysis was designed with a measure of consistency, or test-retest reliability whereby the coder performed the ratings twice for comparison.

However, this preliminary study was carried out under both time and resource constraints. Nevertheless, some content analysis guidelines argue that test-retest reliability is a legitimate reliability assessment (Weber, 1990). Furthermore, most analyses only re-code a small fraction of the ads regardless of the type of reliability safeguards incorporated. In this study, all of the ads were coded twice as a thorough measure of the stability of the procedure. Additionally, the codings were separated by a three-week period to ensure that the initial trial would not bias the second rating.

6.8.2. External Validity Considerations

As with all empirical work, the results can not be interpreted without considering their extendibility. For one, this analysis focused exclusively on primetime advertising. While examining the most highly viewed time periods was appropriate to the objectives of the study, future research should examine other time parts. Similarly, cable channels should also be assessed in subsequent research.

Furthermore, the ads were sampled in the Greater Philadelphia area, and it is uncertain how far beyond that region the results would generalise. Advertisers tend to segment by broadcasting region, and while this is a fairly typical cross-section of the US, there are many other ethnic areas that may have very different advertising. This is a problem with all research in the US and other large, multicultural countries. For this very reason, replication in other areas is so critical.

6.8.3. Internal Validity Matters

Along with these external validity issues are some internal validity questions. For one, the researcher served as the lone coder. Since he will have had his own expectations and hypotheses, this could have resulted in biases in the coding. Again, the budget, time constraints, and context of this study must be reiterated. The constructs under investigation are extremely complex, and a great deal of experience with them is needed to be able to accurately identify them in ads. There was not enough time available to tutor and prepare another coder sufficiently. The primary stage of this research demanded much more time in planning and implementation. Sacrifices were made at this stage due to the limited information that was sought from this piece of the research. However, the coding instructions were designed carefully, based on prior research with the intention that coding remained as objective as possible. Furthermore, they were pre-tested and revised until the researcher felt comfortable to proceed without risking subjectivity.

6.9. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This analysis allowed the American television advertising environment to be better understood. In the next chapter, the design for the primary study will be reviewed. As will be clear, the first critical stage was to select the ads for the experimental research. Because so many conclusions would eventually be made from this study, which could only incorporate a limited number of ads, it was critical that they at least represent the most common executions in American TV advertising.

Before the study could be focused on low-involvement/transformational products, it was necessary to verify that this is, in fact, the product cell where most humour

appeals are used. It was not enough to simply accept that because the literature claims that this is where humour is suitable, that this is where it is primarily applied. It was important to design this study around what is most relevant to the practitioner. Similarly, it was critical to determine the most frequently used humour types, where humour is commonly placed within the ad, and at what entity the humorous content tends to be targeted. The most common ad lengths were also an important consideration. All of these constructs needed to be standardised in the final study. This was absolutely imperative to the internal validity of this research.

To wit, it is critical to know *exactly* what it is that is being measured. Solid conclusions cannot be made by comparing, for example, a 15-second ad that uses sentimental humour targeting the high-involvement product that it is promoting to a 30-second slot for a routine purchase that disparages the audience through satire. However, with precision comes a sacrifice to external validity. Generalisability is also desirable if any practical inferences are to be made. This content analysis permits the primary research to be designed around the most commonly embraced creative elements relevant to humour appeals. Where *precision* is necessary, the study may as well be designed *precisely* around what is used, so that relevant deductions can be made. Such a design is the best possible balance between internal and external validity.

Furthermore, this sample would eventually be used as a pool from which to draw the experimental ads. This also made it important to assess other appeals. It was crucial that the ads selected did not use any other hard or soft sell elements, beyond what was connected directly to the execution of the humour appeals. This is why it was so

important to assess hard and soft sell tactics in this analysis. Again, accurate conclusions cannot be made by comparing an ad that uses only humour to sell the product to one that used humour *in conjunction with* a celebrity endorser who noted the product's USPs. The results would clearly be confounded, as it could not be determined whether it was the humorous content or one of these other appeals that led to persuasion. As a result, this information was analysed for each ad as well. In the next chapter, the design of the primary study will be reviewed. How all of this information was used to select the experimental ads will be illustrated. It will be demonstrated that this preliminary study permitted the best balance between internal and external validity to be achieved.

Chapter Seven

Methodology II: Experimental Design

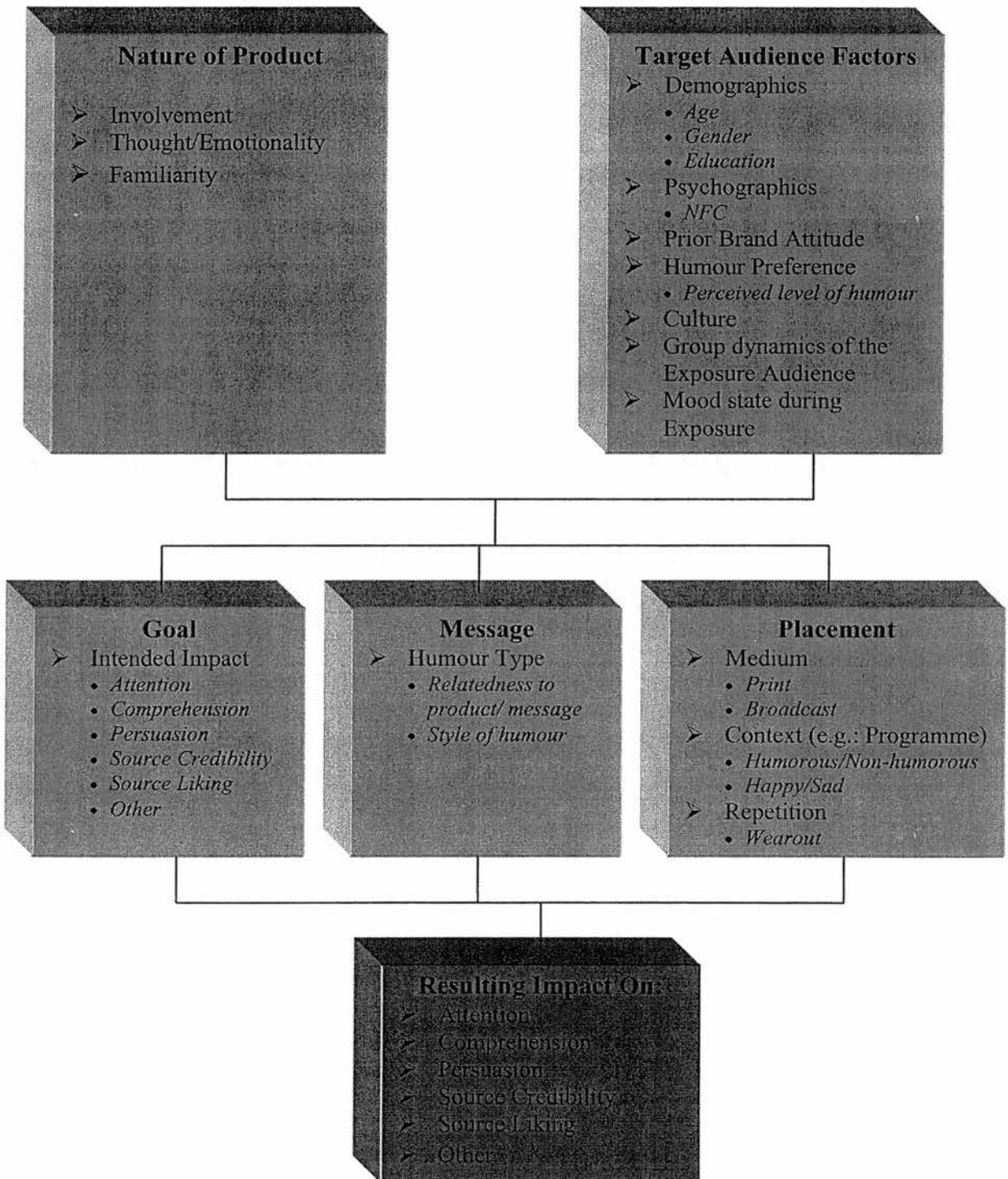
7.1. PREAMBLE

In this chapter, all stages of the empirical research methods will be reviewed in detail. Initially, the objectives of this research will be expounded. Once the hypotheses of the research are revealed, the experimental method will be defended and the general design of the study will be described. The process involved in the selection of the test ads and programmes will be recounted. The experimental conditions that were devised will be detailed, as will the process of participant recruitment. Critical information regarding the final sample of subjects will be reported, and the precise experimental procedures that were carried out will be outlined. This will include a comprehensive analysis of the questionnaire design. Throughout all sections, justifications will be furnished for the methodological decisions that were resolved.

To help provide a framework for the objectives and the various methodological decisions that had to be made, please refer to Figure 7.1. This model helps to draw together the main themes from the literature review to remind the reader of the general context of this study. It presents the major executional and audience-related variables that demand attention not only when employing humour appeals in a promotional message, but also when designing a study on humour in advertising. Consequently, it should be used as a reference in this chapter.

Figure 7.1 Tactical Considerations for Humour in Advertising

BACKGROUND FACTORS



Adapted from: Weinberger, M. G., & Gulas, C. S. (1992). The impact of humor in advertising: A review. *Journal of Advertising*, 21(4), 35-60.

7.2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES & HYPOTHESES

The primary objective of this research was to assess the persuasive power of humour appeals in advertising, and the extent to which this may be mediated by the mood of the audience as generated by the programming environment. An additional aim was to determine, through collaboration with the earlier literature, the limits to which viewers' need for cognition (NFC) moderates the effectiveness of humour appeals. Initially, it was important to establish that the relationship between attitude towards the ad (Aad), attitude towards the brand, and purchase intentions that would be expected was evident in this research. Crucial to this is the belief that Aad is related to brand attitude, which in turn is correlated with purchase intentions (see Gardner, 1985a; Gelb & Pickett, 1983; Homer, 1990; Lacznik & Carlson, 1989; MacKenzie, Lutz, & Belch, 1986; Mitchell, 1986; Mitchell & Olson, 1981; Olney, Holbrook, & Batra, 1991; Shimp, 1981; Stayman & Batra, 1991). Thus:

H1: Aad will be positively correlated with post-test brand attitude ratings.

H2: Brand attitude ratings will be positively correlated with behavioural intentions.

The remaining findings will be based on the preliminary assumption that higher perceived humour ratings will be afforded to the humour type that uses two humorous processes (incongruity-resolution and disparagement) rather than one (incongruity-resolution) or none. As a design check, it will be shown that:

H3: The ads that utilised *satire* [*Target* (1) & *DiGiorno*] will be given higher perceived humour ratings than those ads employing *comic wit* [*Target* (2) & *Wishbone*], which in turn will be given higher ratings than the purely *informational* ads [*Burlington Coat Factory* & *Hidden Valley*].

Prior to examining the persuasive effects of humour, it is important to confirm that the appeals operate in a manner consistent with the literature in meeting the more

incremental goals to persuasion. Crucial to being persuasive no matter which route is chosen is initially generating attention. Once attention has been solicited, ad liking is often required to alter brand liking, especially when the ad is seeking persuasion via the peripheral route to persuasion. It is believed that the level of perceived humour will be positively correlated with the recall and liking scores. As a result, this research predicts that:

H4: Due to the increased attention afforded, ads utilising humour will be better recalled (as indicated through participant judgement) than ads not utilising humour. The ads with the highest level of recall will be those ads employing *satire* [*Target* (1) & *DiGiorno*], followed by those using *comic wit* [*Target* (2) & *Wishbone*]. The *informational* ads [*Burlington Coat Factory* & *Hidden Valley*] will have the lowest recall scores.

H5: Ads utilising humour will be better liked (as indicated through Aad ratings) than ads that did not employ humour. Those ads using *satire* [*Target* (1) & *DiGiorno*] will be given the highest Aad ratings, followed by those using *comic wit* [*Target* (2) & *Wishbone*]. The *informational* ads [*Burlington Coat Factory* & *Hidden Valley*] will be given the lowest Aad ratings.

Following the above predictions, it stands that for the low-involvement/transformational products that are the focus of this study, Aad should be correlated with brand attitudes and purchase intentions. Because humour appeals are predicted to have a positive influence on ad attitudes, it stands that there should be a main effect for humour appeals on measures of persuasion. On the other hand, those that rely on product attribute information will not be persuasive for these types of *instinctive* purchases because consumers are less concerned with product advantages, and probably do not devote the attentional resources necessary to process product claims. Specifically:

H6: Ads that use humorous appeals will lead to a positive brand attitude and brand interest change, and a positive behavioural intention change, as measured from pre-test to post-test scores. The effect will be more pronounced in ads that employ *satire* [*Target* (1) & *DiGiorno*] followed by those that draw on *comic wit* [*Target* (2) & *Wishbone*]. There will be no significant persuasive changes resulting from exposure to the *informational* ads used in this study [*Burlington Coat Factory* & *Hidden Valley*].

The programming environment is expected to moderate the persuasive impact of the commercials. Recall from Chapter Four that individuals' mood state affects their motivation to centrally process incoming information regarding the source of that feeling state. This in turn influences their processing of other information. In this context, mild moods generated by the programming environment affect information processing, which in turn, alter responses to advertising. This will also have an impact on the viewers' reactions to peripheral advertising appeals, such as humour. Individuals experiencing both positive and negative context-induced mood states will still respond positively to humorous appeals, but the effect will be more pronounced for those in a good mood.

Because the positive affect indicates to individuals that their situation is safe, they are merely motivated to maintain their mood state and not process centrally. As a result, they will be more responsive to persuasive communications that utilise peripheral cues in their appeals. Not only does their mood leave them more responsive to peripheral appeals, but their motivation, in particular, makes them more susceptible to persuasion via appeals that utilise positive affect, such as humour. Such appeals may help assist in their mood maintenance efforts, and thus will be more effective in generating persuasion. Consequently, humorous appeals should be more effective in generating attitude changes than serious appeals that rely on argument strength. This relationship should be in direct correspondence with the level of perceived humour.

On the other hand, a negative mood state leads to more systematic processing strategies. The mood informs the individual that action is necessary under the current circumstances in order to improve the current feeling state. Because individuals are motivated to improve their adverse moods, they engage in central processing to

improve their mood. As has been shown through empirical evidence, people will systematically process whatever is most salient at the time, as the specific cause of their mood states may be unknown.

The case of natural television viewing, however, may present a unique set of circumstances to context-induced mood effects where the cause of the mood may be apparent to the viewer. In these instances where the adverse mood state is attributable to the television programme, individuals may only process the programme centrally, leaving the ads susceptible to peripheral processing strategies. Because viewers are aware that the ads are not relevant to the cause of the mood state, they will not be motivated to process the commercials centrally. In fact, viewers in these circumstances may see systematic processing of the ads as a distraction to their mood-improving task. Due to the fact that they are exerting their central processing competencies on the programme, the ads are likely to be processed peripherally. However, a humour appeal may not be as effective a way to peripherally persuade consumers watching a serious or sombre programme, because they may see such ad appeals as inappropriate or even distasteful. Therefore:

H7: In the positive mood conditions, the humorous ads will result in a significantly greater positive brand attitude change and a greater positive behavioural intention change, as measured by pre-test to post-test ratings, than their counterparts in the negative mood condition. This effect will be higher for the satirical ads than it will be for those ads utilising comic wit. There will be no significant effect of mood on attitudes towards brands or purchase intentions for the ads that used an informational appeal in this study.

NFC can be an important mediator of advertising effectiveness for functional products of moderate to high involvement. Those high in NFC are more amenable to a product-driven appeal, which focuses on sound arguments and hard sell tactics. On the other hand, those low in NFC are more likely to rely on peripheral cues, such as

ad liking. The low NFC consumers appreciate the outcome of making a decision more than the process of thinking. As a result, they are more agreeable to appeals that cater to less effortful peripheral route persuasion, such as humour. High NFC individuals find peripheral appeals, such as humour, more distracting to the process of making what they perceive to be important product decisions. Subsequently, they are not as responsive to humorous appeals.

However, for more instinctive product decisions, such as those examined here, consumers are unlikely to be motivated to process product information regardless of their level of NFC. For these types of products, which are believed to be the most appropriate for humour appeals, the suggestion that NFC is a crucial moderator only underestimates the proficiency of such appeals. In collaboration with earlier research findings, this current study hopefully will show that the effect of NFC on humour appeals is moderated by product type. Specifically for low-involvement/transformational products:

H8: There will be no effect of NFC on advertising response. Humour appeals will be equally more effective than non-humorous appeals for consumers both high and low in NFC.

It is also important to recognise the importance of previously held brand attitude. Recall from Chattopadhyay and Basu (1990) that those who like the product prior to ad exposure will be more responsive to humour appeals. Those with a negative pre-existing attitude may find such appeals irritating, and will respond accordingly to ad and brand attitude measures. Thus:

H9: Humour will be more effective when a previously positive brand attitude exists than when a negative attitude exists. When such conditions exist, a positive brand attitude and behavioural intentions shift will be observed for the humorous ads. No effect will be noted for informational ads. When a negative pre-existing brand attitude is held, a negative shift may occur in brand attitude and purchase intentions after exposure to humorous ads. Aad will be significantly higher for those with higher pre-test brand attitude scores.

Finally, in an attempt to provide more generalisable findings, two different product types were assessed [routine grocery items & discount retail clothing]. With regard to all testing, there should not be any significant differences between responses to ads for either product type, assuming that they are both perceived to be low-involvement/transformational items. In other words:

H10: *Assuming participants perceive both products as low-involvement/transformational*, no significant differences should be noted in any of the findings. This should provide evidence of external validity.

7.3. DESIGN

This study is primarily an investigation of causality. Fundamentally, this research is uncovering components to more effective television advertising. What affects the capacity of humour to work as an effective appeal? As a result an experimental pre-test/post-test design was selected, as this positivist framework is the best method for addressing issues of causality in this context. While survey designs can be effective in uncovering causal links (although it is more effective in descriptive research), it would not be an appropriate design in this context. The two options with a survey design would be to survey advertising executives or consumers. Surveying ad executives would tend to only impart descriptive data (assuming they are responding as ad executives rather than consumers themselves) because they are merely offering opinions as to what they believe works on other people. Furthermore, the main drive behind this research is the point that humour seems to be poorly understood within the

industry, and the affective tone of the programme environment requires greater attention. Subsequently, what really could be gained by surveying advertising executives?

Surveying consumers also would be inappropriate in this context. For one, no one likes to admit being influenced by advertising in an irrational manner, as the industry generally is viewed with scepticism (Fullerton & Nevett, 1986; Mittal, 1994). Although some believe that this view has tempered (Shavitt, Lowrey, & Haefner, 1998), people do not usually like to concede that they can be swayed by persuasive stimuli on a somewhat unconscious level. A common reaction to hearing the nature of this research has been that individuals do not believe that advertising influences them, personally. This prominent attitude is personified by the consumer who proudly declares, "I don't drink *Guinness* because of the clever advertising, I drink it because it's good for me!"

Experiments offer the advantage that data collection may be carried out without divulging the full intent of the research to participants. This permits the elicitation of more accurate and natural responses by removing the focus of the study from advertising effectiveness and persuasion. Likewise, because people are sometimes unaware of these effects, a simple survey is an ineffective way of examining this research question. Focus groups may be able to shed light on experimental findings. This qualitative method may offer explanatory power to experimental data, where cause and effect is inferred from either theoretical expectations being met or the development of ad hoc theories when they are not met. However, focus groups are better suited when the researcher is first armed with experimental findings that may channel the discussions. Alternatively, qualitative research may precede quantitative

research in exploratory investigations. At this point, an experimental design is appropriate given the general framework developed through related research.

Observational research could be another potential option. In this instance, the effects of advertising in a naturalistic setting could be measured, for example, by assessing sales changes during a particular campaign. However, due to the dynamic nature of the market place, an experimental method was elected over naturalistic observation as the primary design. A highly controllable method was necessary because it is an examination of specific creative ad executions, contextual effects, and personality traits within the target market. Control was crucial in this study to be sure that the research was actually examining what it purported to assess. What was required was a method where specific variables could be easily manipulated, such that the effect of those changes could be observed on other variables. At the same time, all other factors had to be held constant. Because it is simply unrealistic to attempt to control for the many operations of companies marketing the product of interest, competitors' outside activities, or even the actions of the individual consumers in a natural environment (see McDaniel & Gates, 1996), the experimental method was clearly the best design for the research questions under investigation. Although experimental designs are criticised for being set in too sterile an environment that can often misrepresent a natural advertising context (see Chisnall, 1997), there does not seem to be any feasible way to control for the audience's affective state or the ads to which they are exposed in a naturalistic setting. Additionally, there has been a high correlation found between ad effects obtained in experimental, forced exposure settings and ordinary naturalistic environments (Gibson, 1996).

7.3.1. Independent Variables

The basic design is a 2 x 3 x 2 factorial design, with mood-state, ad-types, and need for cognition (NFC) as between-subjects variables. A further two-level, within-subjects product condition was added for greater generalisability, extending the full study to a 2 x 3 x 2 x 2 design. The two levels of mood were positive and negative. Humorous and informational ads were the two levels for advertisement type, with the humorous condition further partitioned into comic wit and satire. Comic wit and satire were used for the humorous ads because the content analysis revealed that these were the two most popular forms of humour used in American advertising (see Chapter Six). High and low represented the two levels of the NFC personality variable. The two product conditions included routine food groceries and discount clothing. Random assignment was used for the mood and ad type conditions. NFC could not be randomly assigned, since it is a personality attribute. Theoretically, with random assignment to the other two independent variables, approximately equal numbers should be obtained for both NFC levels throughout the four other conditions (see Ray, 1997). Because product type was a within-subjects variable, random assignment was obviously unnecessary.

7.3.2. Dependent Variables

The dependent variables were mean changes in brand attitude, brand interest and purchase intentions. Aad and ad recall were additional measures. While there are several other communicative goals tested in advertising research (e.g.: comprehension of content, source credibility, etc.), brand attitudes, brand interest, and purchase intentions seem to be the most relevant. Although these other objectives are important contributors to persuasion, ultimately the marketer is aiming for a purchase (Grossman & Till, 1998), followed by repeat buying. The best measure of a likely

behaviour is the actor's intention to engage in such behaviour (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Consequently, the most compelling predictor of purchase behaviour is intention to purchase. Furthermore, for repeat buying of most products to occur, the consumer must retain a positive brand attitude for, and hopefully interest in, the product. So while effects such as high source credibility or liking for the ad may certainly facilitate these main objectives, they are merely incremental goals to the more crucial ends of generating a purchase behaviour and a positive brand attitude (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989).

7.3.3. Product Cell Focus

Low involvement/positively reinforcing "feeling" products were the only products selected for analysis as this is generally accepted to be the product cell where humour (and all soft sell appeals) are the most widespread and proficient. Recall from Chapter Six that nearly half of the humorous ads sampled were promoting products from this quadrant. While one could argue that by not examining the 3 other product cells the results are not generalisable, this is actually the primary cell where the main disagreements within the literature lie. It has already been agreed that the other product types are not as suitable for humour (see Weinberger & Gulas, 1992). It is mostly within this cell that the circumstances where humour can be a more persuasive appeal must be determined.

7.3.4. Use of Real Television Commercials

The advertisements to be used in the study had to be carefully selected. Real television commercials were used to preserve *mundane realism*¹. While a greater

¹ Mundane realism is the extent to which the events in the laboratory setting emulate occurrences in the real world (see Aronson, Ellsworth, Carlsmith, and Gonzales, 1990).

degree of control can be exerted with regards to content and length by producing mock commercials for artificial products, they typically fail to alter viewers' perceptions of products because of their synthetic quality. While the advantage is that no participants go into the study with pre-existing brand attitudes, participants often know that the ads were produced only for the purpose of the study. Consequently, the ads tend to stand out awkwardly from the rest of the television exposure, and results cannot be generalised to a genuine advertising context. Furthermore, if the study's intent must be withheld, artificial commercials clue the participant in to the true nature of the problem under investigation. Subsequently mock ads have the potential of generating *demand characteristics*² in the participants.

Finally, the effectiveness of humour appeals on brand attitude formation was not the objective of this research. After all, to a research participant, a fictional brand is no different from a new or unknown brand, whereby initial advertising leads to a process of brand attitude formation. Forming a positive attitude for a low-involvement product through the use of affective appeals such as humour is probably easier than changing an existing attitude. In the case of brand attitude change, the ad appeal must overshadow previous associations that have been formed through prior exposure to the ad and brand. As a result, examining brand attitude *change* is probably a stronger estimate of the persuasive potency of humorous appeals in advertising.

² Demand characteristics are aspects in an experiment that provoke a participant to respond in a particular way. Usually it involves the participant behaving or responding either consistently or in opposition to how they think the experimenter wants them to react (see Ray, 1997).

7.4. SELECTION OF THE EXPERIMENTAL ADS

Selection of the experimental ads required some of the more rigorous and time-consuming steps. The ads used in the study had to be carefully controlled with regard to content that was considered extraneous to the appeals under investigation. The ad lengths and type of humour used for the ad conditions also had to be held constant. This data was provided through the content analysis.

7.4.1. Database of Television Ads

All of the ads sampled in the content analysis were used as a database of potential exposure ads for the primary experiments. Cataloguing all of the attributes of each ad afforded the researcher the ability to screen all potential ads. This allowed the study to be more tightly controlled and as internally valid as possible in a number of ways. First, it could be determined precisely which styles of humour were being employed in the potential ads. This included not only the type of humour, but also other critical elements of humour appeals such as the intentional relatedness of the humour to the ad message, the placement timing of the humour within the ad, and the target of the humorous content. Such elements as ad length and product positioning were logged for all of the ads to be sure that the commercials ultimately used were held as constant as possible with regard to these peripheral elements.

However, the content analysis also revealed patterns in primetime television advertising in the US. This meant that that each of these decisions over what specific creative elements the study should be restricted to could be made based on what is most frequently used in American television advertising. This has important implications for the generalisability of the research findings. With a study that is restricted to a limited number of ads, there are concerns over how externally valid the

conclusions are to the majority of consumer advertising in the United States. If the ads implemented into the study are representative of the most common creative executions currently circulating in the ad environment, then at least there is less trepidation over the research providing practical results.

Secondly, for both the humorous and informational ads, it was critical to verify that the ad did not combine any other primary appeals in its execution, because this could confound the results. In the content analysis, all of the hard and soft sell creative elements were recorded for each commercial. This information was used here to ensure that no extraneous variables leaked into the experiments. Each ad eventually used in the experimental investigation had to employ the appeal of interest (i.e.: comic wit, satire, or non-humour/informational) in its purest sense, and only use executional tactics that are both necessary and sufficient components to the creative implementation of the appeal in question. With information on hard and soft sell appeals, ads that relied on multiple appeals could be easily eliminated from the study.

7.4.2. Wearout Considerations

The results of the content analysis played a critical role in the research design because the findings provided data on the television advertising environment. Selecting ads that are representative of typical advertising ensures that the data obtained from the experimental ads selected can be as generalisable as possible. Taking these results into consideration, the sample of ads collected was screened for potential ads for the main study. This not only served as a convenient database that was large enough to search for ads with specific qualities, but the sampling was also done more than a year prior to any experimental data collection.

Because it is impossible to control for previous exposures to real television ads, some participants may have already experienced wearout effects, while others may have been viewing the ad for the first time. Still other participants may have been somewhere in between these extremes. Using ads that were broadcast at least a year prior to the study meant that they were still current enough that the exposure had a realistic, undated feel, whilst the effects of differing prior exposure could be minimised. Wearout effects seem to be somewhat reversible when a sufficient layover period exists between exposures (Aaker, Stayman, & Hagerty, 1986; Belch & Belch, 1984). Other studies have found that even with a period as short as six months off the air, prior awareness and familiarity with the stimulus ads are reduced to low or non-existent levels. In this investigation, an even more conservative period was used (with taping 1–1½ years before the trials) in case any of the recorded ads were at the beginning of their broadcasting life at the time of sampling. So by utilising ads that were sampled over a year in advance, potential confounds from systematic differences in prior exposure between participants should have been avoided.

7.4.3. The Ad Screening Process

The total sample was reviewed and potential ads for the product cell of interest (low involvement-transformational) that utilised comic wit, satire, or informative appeals were considered. All of the prospective ads were listed under their appropriate ad type (i.e.: comic wit, satire, informational). At this point, every attribute assessed in the content analysis was itemised underneath the brand name. This allowed all of the remaining ads to be examined along the relevant components of the creative execution. In particular, a strict examination was conducted on the use of various hard and soft sell executions, and how humour was executed in the humorous ads.

To control as rigorously as possible for other influences on audiences' evaluations, only those communicative elements that were absolutely necessary to carry out the appeal under investigation were permissible for ads to remain in the pool. For example, for an ad to execute a humorous appeal, there is no need to include a unique selling proposition, or any other informative appeal. Such an ad would be considered to be using a combined approach, and it is impossible with this design to detect which feature of the ad is correlated with any observed change. Similarly, to select an ad to measure the effect of its informational approach, it cannot also utilise drama. Celebrity endorsers and spokespersons are two other critical soft sell approaches that can be particularly problematic. When an idolised celebrity role model delivers the message, it is far too difficult to disentangle the effect of the message and creative execution from that of the message sender. Far too frequently with these appeals, the association of the famous person with the product is what causes any positive effect, and not the supporting executional elements that are used to supplement the endorser appeal. As a result, any ad using either of these appeals was eliminated.

On the other hand, in order to execute a satirical ad, it really also *must* employ drama. To use this type of humour, someone must be disparaged. As was shown by the content analysis data, almost unanimously in advertising this is the ad character. Therefore, to set up satire, drama must also be used as an integrated part of this appeal. A fictional scene must be presented with some degree of plot in which the character can be disparaged. Similarly, in the case of disparagement of an odd and quirky character, an atypical endorser appeal is an incorporated element (recall from Table 6.3 that in these appeals, the character is not overtly endorsing the product, but is a persona that is the focus of the ad).

Likewise, an informational approach may utilise some elements that are conventionally considered soft sell. For example, in order to communicate the information, a narrative approach may be used, and almost always product displays are included. There are simply going to be elements used in nearly all hard sell ads (despite their traditionally soft sell classification) because in today's cluttered marketing environment, some degree of creative execution needs to be used. A product cannot survive by advertising on television without anything but a blank screen with printed words and total silence. Consequently, there are certain creative elements that are simply taken for granted because they are necessary components of the informational execution.

Similarly, brand image was not necessarily excluded in the humorous ads. Brand image is not achieved through a set, absolute formula. Where brand image was an appeal attempted by the advertiser, but was communicated through the use of humour, the ad was not necessarily excluded. Here, brand image is directly related to the humorous appeal, so such ads could be included as potential test ads since humour is the primary appeal executed. Subsequently, each hard and soft sell execution had to be considered separately. It was critical to determine which creative elements were a necessary component of the experimental appeals under examination, and which were extraneous.

7.4.3.1. Identifying Potential Humorous Ads

Only ads that relied exclusively on one of the three appeals in question (comic wit humour, satirical humour, informative) could be considered for the study. While many advertisers do use a combined approach to tweak the effectiveness of the ad, the objective here is to examine these three appeals in isolation, to tease out their individual proficiencies. A similar benchmark was also observed for the varying humour types. Within the two different humorous appeals, it was imperative that each ad executed one specific type of humour in isolation. Frequently, different forms of humour are combined in the creative execution to further enhance their effectiveness. This is certainly something that warrants consideration. However, the goal in this research is to examine which type of humour is superior. From this data, either the effect of combining these popular types of humour can be further speculated upon, or this research may be used as a springboard for future investigations that may empirically examine the collective effect of comic wit and satire, or any other appeal for that matter. For now, it is important to first extricate these appeals and understand their effect in solitude.

Furthermore, the relatedness, placement, and target of the humour were also taken into account by using data from the content analysis. Only ads with humour that was intentionally related to the advertised product or message claims were considered because of the nearly unanimous support in the literature that verifies that related humour is what is used and what works. However, this study did not delve beyond intentional relatedness. It was important to focus on humour dominant ads, in which the ad is reliant upon the humorous content to transmit the message. However, whether the humour relates by serving a syntactical function or creating a semantic

relationship is probably irrelevant, which is most likely why it has received such little attention in the literature. What is important is that the humour is integrally entwined with the product or message claims.

Moreover, the target of the humorous content was a factor that required attention. For the ads contending for the comic wit condition, the only acceptable target was the ad scenario. This was not exactly a challenging prerequisite to fulfil because all comic wit targets the scenario. No disparagement is involved in this form of humour, so naturally it can only be the witty circumstances expressed in the ad that are the source of the humour. For the satirical ads, the ad characters was the necessary target condition. As the data has shown, this is the prevalent target for the disparaging element of satire. The ad scenario was also a supplementary target that was permissible because it really tends to occur in tandem with the character denigration, as an expression of the incongruity-resolution facet of the satire.

Humour placement was a further deliberation for the final ads in this condition. This is an important criterion to examine, because differences in placement say something about how the American practitioners view the function that humour fulfils in advertising. Because the American advertisers use humour so considerably in the middle and end of the ad, they most likely see the role of humour as either a distracter or reinforcement conditioner. While the Americans also have a high placement in the middle and end of the ad, they also place humour in the beginning of nearly half of their humorous ads. To construct a highly generalisable investigation that builds on the findings of this content analysis, ads were sought for the primary study that used

humour throughout all three ad parts. This in turn emulates the majority of humorous advertising on American television.

Therefore, the only ads that were considered were those that placed the humorous executions throughout the beginning, middle, and end of the ad, since there was a pronounced use of the humour placed throughout all parts of the ads examined in the content analysis (recall Figure 6.3). While the primary punch line may have only appeared in one segment of the ad, the other parts were responsible for setting up the humorous conditions, and indicating to the audience that there was a humorous intent. This is the situation where the dominant punch line falls in the middle or end. Alternatively, where the main humorous content is delivered right from the start of the ad in an effort to grab the viewers' attention, typically residual humour tends to fall throughout the rest of the ad to follow-up and validate the humour in the beginning. Regardless, the result is that often this leaves a humorous ad with humorous content placed throughout all ad parts. Therefore, this scenario, which is more generalisable to actual advertising trends, was examined in this study.

7.4.3.2. Identifying Potential Informational Ads

For the informational condition, all ads with minimal use of soft sell appeals that primarily employed straight informational approaches within the target product cell were selected for further review. For this treatment, hard sell was the key. Chiefly, the ad had to focus on product attribute information. As discussed above, all advertising uses some form of soft sell creative execution, so avoiding soft sell strategies entirely is unavoidable. However, the soft sell tactics had to be

supplementary in nature to the hard sell strategy, taking a back seat to the predominantly information-based approach.

7.4.3.3. Ad Length Considerations

Of the potential ads remaining, the next to be eliminated were those that were not 30-seconds in length. Only one ad length could be chosen for the study, as the strength of various ads' capabilities in altering consumer views is dependent on the length of the ad. Naturally, the most efficient and commonly used ad length would be chosen as the best compromise of internal and external validity. As can be recalled from Figure 6.5, 30-seconds is overwhelmingly the choice length for the sample of American ads examined in the content analysis (70%). While there are 60-second ads, these are much more rare, especially on terrestrial stations (Adweek, 1994). As most advertisers are aware, beyond 30-seconds the marginal benefit to the communicative goals is far exceeded by the increase in price (Rossiter & Percy, 1996). Furthermore, most of the longer ads are eventually cut to a 30-second version.

7.4.3.4. Brand Familiarity

With the remaining ads, it was necessary to estimate the prior brand familiarity that the eventual sample would have with the potential test ads before making the final selections for the experiments. This was an important control to consider, as different levels of brand familiarity will affect consumers' response to the ads. It was important to eliminate any brands with such a high level of familiarity that consumers would have had rigid, well-established attitudes. In these instances, advertising has neither the same intent nor same effect as a *typical* exposure. Where the brand attitude is essentially locked into the consumer's repertoire, further advertising has the modest goal of serving as a reminder for the consumer to maintain that brand within

their selection set through entertainment (Machleit & Wilson, 1988). Preserving consumer interest is the primary goal of advertising for the mature brand (Machleit, Allen, & Madden, 1993). Where consumers have a negative attitude towards a well-established brand for a routine purchase, there is not a lot an advertiser can do other than to sustain positive attitudes amongst any potential reference groups and hope that attitude change can occur through word of mouth promotion. Particularly for the products examined in this study, reference group influence can be a very powerful motivator. “Social interactions with reference groups and family are often direct and face to face, which can have immediate influences on consumers’ cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses to marketing strategies” (Peter & Olson, 1996; 447).

Alternatively, brand familiarity had to be predicted before the test ads were selected to ensure that no *unknown* brands were selected. This study is on persuasion, via *changes* in brand interest, brand attitudes, and behavioural intentions. Therefore, how the independent variables affect attitude and interest *formation* was not relevant. Although this would be a warranted research investigation, it was beyond the scope of this inquiry.

So while neither unknown nor mature brands were desired in the study, it was necessary to estimate the likely brand familiarity of the target demographic group prior to selecting the test ads. Ads with familiarity somewhere in the mid-range were needed so as to avoid the extremes discussed above. Furthermore, since it was an unavoidable consequence that different brands would be used in the ad conditions, brands were required that were as similar as possible to one another in terms of brand familiarity.

In an ideal scenario, three different ads would be used for the same exact brand, with all the creative elements held constant aside from the humorous and informational elements under investigation. However, it is an impractical and unrealistic expectation to suppose that such perfect conditions would even exist. When running a campaign, advertisers attempt to create a coherent theme. No sense of consistency could be maintained by launching a campaign with both straight informational and humorous ads running side by side. This point is even more pronounced with routine purchases that depend on creating and maintaining a brand personality. With such low-involvement products, it would be challenging to even find such contrary appeals utilised by one brand over a long-term period. Finding such diverse executions in a relatively current sample for the same brand was not a realistic option.

However, this really was of no concern anyway since the dependent variable was the amount of *change* in the measures from the pre-test to the post-test, rather than a single measure, baseline comparison of these constructs between advertisements. As long as the product classes, brands, and ads were as similar as possible to one another aside from the constructs of interest, then the precise brands used was irrelevant. Meticulous care was exerted to ensure that this was the case, thus minimising the risk of any confounds caused by either objective differences or consumer-based perceptions. Prior brand familiarity was one such consumer-based perception that was absolutely necessary to standardise as much as possible.

Consequently, a survey was administered to a small convenience sample of approximately 20 people of roughly the same age and educational attainment as the eventual sample. The questionnaire examined brand familiarity for the remaining potential test ads (see Appendix D). The survey used a single seven-point semantic differential item (anchored with *not at all familiar* and *extremely familiar*) as a predictive assessment of brand familiarity. While familiarity would be assessed in the experimental group, this was just a simple diagnostic screening to further narrow down the prospective pool of experimental ads.

It is also important to acknowledge at this point that the familiarity items administered to the actual sample would in fact include a full three-item survey (familiar, experienced, knowledgeable). However, this pilot questionnaire solicited familiarity responses for 46 different brands. With so many brand items containing the same exact rating, respondent *fatigue*³ was a concern. Due to the number of items and the monotony of response, the pilot survey was reduced in length to ensure accurate responses from alert participants. Besides, this pilot was simply intended to procure a general sense of brand experience for the target sample demographic group.

7.4.3.5. Product Class Condition

Those brands in the midrange with regard to consumer familiarity were then used as the final sample in which to draw the experimental ads. The final bank consisted of 12 potential ads (3 comic wit, 7 satirical, and 2 informational ads). The last step in

³ Participant fatigue is a form of the *maturation effect*, whereby it becomes difficult to interpret the true effects of the independent variables due to changes in the participants over the course of the research study (see Aronson, Ellsworth, Carlsmith, & Gonzales, 1990). In this instance, the participant change results in their becoming tired, bored, and frustrated with the procedure, which can cause complications in obtaining accurate responses from the participants.

the selection of experimental ads was critical. It was important to have ads in the different conditions for products as closely related as possible. Any differences that emerged could cause potential problems with the accurate assessment of the constructs in question. Based on how strictly screened the ads were in previous steps, it was unlikely that the remaining sample would yield similar enough products between the ad type conditions. Fortunately, a handful of the remaining ads clustered conveniently into two different product sectors within the low-involvement/transformational quadrant. By testing two very different types of routine purchases, the findings could be considered more externally valid.

Originally, the plan was to have three ad conditions, with one experimental ad (i.e.: comic wit, satire, informational) in each pod. To produce a natural ad break, three fillers would have accompanied each experimental ad. This would have yielded a completely between-subjects design. However, there was no reason to waste all of the additional ad slots on fillers when the extendability of the research could be greatly improved by including more experimental ads in a partially within-subjects design. As a result, the product variable was added into the design to boost the external validity of the study. By comparing the differences between comic wit, satire, and informational appeals across two very different products within the same product cell, the results would clearly be more generalisable. If the study only examined ads from one specific type of product, the findings would have to be considered less extendable. This also prevented the design from relying on one single punch line to represent each humour type, which also would have produced extremely limited research findings. By only examining one ad for each humour type, an awful lot would rest upon one specific instance of humour. At least with the product

dimension added, there are two different executions tested for each ad type. The final brands selected for each ad condition, along with the specific product that each represents can be seen in Table 7.1.

7.5. PRE-TEST OF AD CONDITIONS

A final precaution was exerted on the ad conditions. Because the researcher selected the ads, it was important to procure the opinions of independent judges on the humour and informational ad types as an assessment of validity. While design checks would be included in the questionnaires, this extra pre-test safety step was included in the design to ensure that the ads were valid representatives of the appropriate ad types. Three independent judges, similar to the test audience, were selected to assess the use or lack of humour in the experimental ads, their alternates, and the filler (see Appendix E). The judges were similar with regard to age and educational attainment, which are the two demographic features that carry the greatest influence over attitudes and attitude processes (Sears, 1986). Following a training session, the judges were shown each potential ad and were required to indicate whether they thought

Brand Name	Product	Appeal Condition
Hidden Valley	Salad Dressing	No Humour
Wishbone	Salad Dressing	Comic Wit
DiGiorno	Frozen Pizza	Satire
Burlington Coat Factory	Discount Clothing	No Humour
Target	Discount Clothing	Comic Wit
Target	Discount Clothing	Satire

that there was an intent to use humour, along with the style (if applicable) of humour they felt was executed. The panel then rated the level of perceived humour, and finally whether they thought that the level of humour that they perceived was average, below average, or above average compared to their everyday advertising experience. The ads were presented in random order, and no leading information was provided.

The panel yielded unanimous support for the ads chosen. All of the independent judges interpreted the purportedly humorous ads as having a humorous intent, and they all labelled the type of humour presented in the ad consistently with the researcher. Furthermore, none of the evaluators perceived a humorous intent in the informative ads or the filler. Additionally, of the humorous ads, all were given mild to moderate humour level ratings, with the satirical ads engendering the higher ratings. This is consistent with the hypotheses on humour perception. Finally, all of the judges decided that the level of perceived humour in the chosen ads was about average to their daily experience with humorous advertising. Assuming that the ratings were similar to those of the experimental group, this study should yield results on the effects of mild use of humour that is representative of typical, everyday campaigns.

This last conclusion can be viewed as both a strength and a limitation. While the results of this study will be useful for an average humorous appeal, they will not be indicative of an exceptional, fully realised humour appeal. Investigating the full potential of this appeal by examining its truly unique and most brilliantly successful specimens is an attractive proposal, but at this point it may be of more limited use. There are very few extraordinary campaigns out there that rival, for example, the very popular *Bacardi* or *Tennent's* ads that keep consumers talking around their respective

water coolers. Such success stories do not come along often. At this point, it may be of greater interest to look at the average, mild forms of humour that is much more common in typical advertising. After all, more money and time is being invested into the average, since this is the most common output. Again, this makes the findings much more generalisable. Once it has been determined under which circumstances humorous appeals are the most appropriate, future research can then focus on revealing the full potential of the most successful campaigns.

Clearly a very meticulous, stringent screening process was implemented to ensure that the ads were pure in their execution of the construct of interest, and they were as similar as possible to one another in every possible way aside from the independent variable examined. To give an example of the output that resulted from this process, the ads for the comic wit condition will be illustrated. The two ads for the comic wit treatment had to be as close to one another on several dimensions, while only deviating on the product class construct.

The retail clothing ad was for *Target*, while the routine food item was for *Wishbone* salad dressing (see Video Appendix). However, not only did they have to be similar to one another, their inherent likeness to one another also had to be generalisable to everyday advertising. As can be seen in Table 7.2, this standard was achieved. Neither employed any hard sell executions, and only implemented those soft sell strategies that were absolutely necessary to carry out their humorous intentions. Both primarily used the popular comic wit, which has been interpreted as a mild form of humour, just as would be expected. The advertisers were wise to apply the prominent related humour, executed throughout all parts of the ad, while merely targeting the safe ad scenario. Neither ad used a voiceover, although it was not important to

employ ads with or without voiceovers. All that really mattered was that the gender of voiceovers was held constant. Voiceover gender was held constant due to the effect that this could have had an impact on ad perceptions. Finally, both ads were of the popular 30-second length. While both fell into the same product positioning of interest, they were two different types of products. So as can be seen from this example, the diligence paid off. The two ads representing comic wit are as similar as possible to one another, as identical as possible to average, everyday ad conditions, and differ only along the test dimension (in this instance, product class). The same standard was held for all of the other ads in the study.

Table 7.2 Ad Comparison Example

Ad Feature	Advertisement	
	Target	Wishbone
Hard Sell Appeals	None	None
Soft Sell Appeals	Brand image; Fantasy	Brand image; Fantasy
Humorous Intent	Yes	Yes
Type of Humour	Comic wit	Comic wit
Estimated Humour Perceived	Mild	Mild
Relatedness of Humour	Intentionally Related	Intentionally Related
Placement of Humour	Beginning; Middle; End	Beginning; Middle; End
Target of Humour	Ad scenario	Ad scenario
Product Position	Cell 4 (Low/Trans)	Cell 4 (Low/Trans)
Product Class	Discount Clothing	Routine Food
Estimated Brand Familiarity	Moderate	Moderate
Use of Voiceover	None	None
Ad Length	30-seconds	30-seconds

7.6. THE FINAL EXPERIMENTAL PODS

The two product sectors used in the study were routine grocery purchases (foodstuffs), and discount retail clothing. There were a total of six test ads (3 ads x 2 products) that were broken into two test pods (see Video Appendix). The composition of the pods will be reviewed in this section.

7.6.1. Mundane Realism of the Pods

The ad type conditions were criss-crossed across the two conditions (see Table 7.3). With this design, the exposures were not divided into humorous and non-humorous conditions, but rather were mixed such that each condition had two humorous and two non-humorous ads. This was a better design because it was much more realistic to a genuine advertising break. Very rarely would a pod appear with either all humorous or all informational ads. Looking at the more recent content analyses, it seems that about half of television ads contain humour (Burnett, Fisk, & Lunsford, 1987; Markowicz, 1974; Speck, 1991). Data from the content analysis conducted for this study showed humour to be found in nearly 63% of the sample. Consequently, the pods had very typical and realistic make-ups, giving the experiment a more naturalistic effect. With all humour and all non-humour conditions, the ad breaks would have conveyed a very unrealistic, lack of contrast from ad to ad. Advertisers are constantly attempting to design executions that stand out from the competing communications. By unnaturally placing similar executions side by side for this study, this normal contrast would be lost. This would greatly convolute interpretation of the findings and generalisation to the true advertising context.

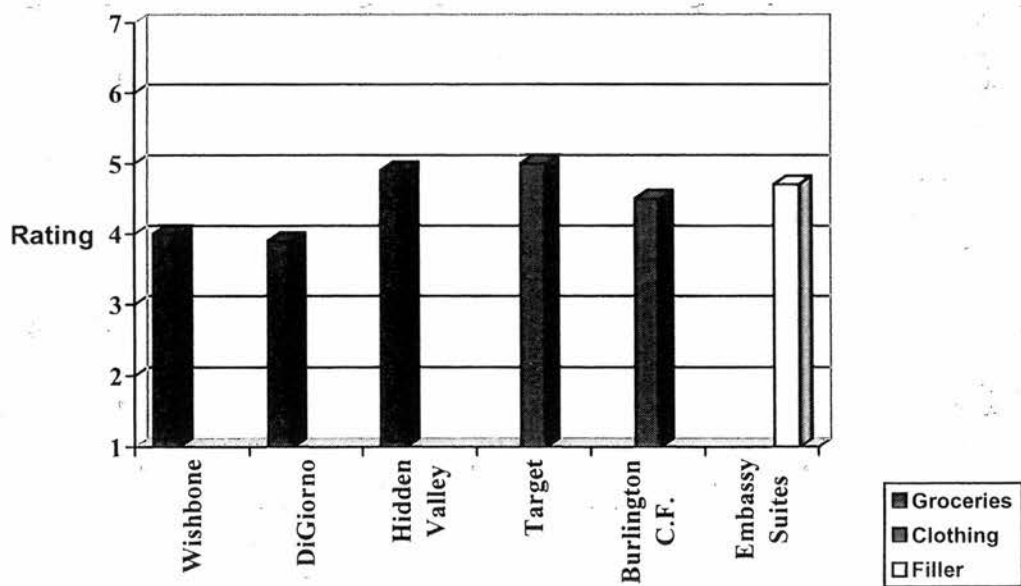
Table 7.3 Ad Pod Conditions		
Brand	Ad Condition 1	Ad Condition 2
Wishbone	Comic Wit/Routine Grocery	---
Burlington Coat Factory	Informational/Discount Clothes	---
Target	Satire/Discount Clothes	Comic Wit/Discount Clothes
Embassy Suites	Filler	Filler
Hidden Valley	---	Informational/Routine Grocery
DiGiorno	---	Satire/Routine Grocery

7.6.2. Consistency Between Pod Conditions

The two conditions were designed as similarly as possible not only to a real American ad pod, but also to one another. There were four ads in each pod, two humorous (one of each target humour type) and two non-humorous. Typical American ad breaks also contain four consumer ads, and the work cited in Chapter Three confirms that about 50% of the ads contain humour. Each pod consisted of three test ads and one filler. The filler was held constant across the two conditions and was for an unrelated product (hotel accommodation), from a different product sector and product cell altogether. It utilised neither humorous nor informational appeals, and relied primarily on a brand image appeal. It was the same standard 30-second length as all of the other ads. As can be seen in Figure 7.2, the preliminary data suggests that all of the brands selected were in the ideal range of prior familiarity. The moderate familiarity range stretches from 3-5, and all of the brands are clustered right around the midpoint of 4. This is true even of the filler ad, which while insignificant in itself, will at least help the ad blend in with the others.

Furthermore, no competitors were placed within the same pod. With three experimental ads from only two different product classes in each pod, this could have been a potential confound. However, the conditions were set up to avoid this problem. In the foodstuff conditions, there were two brands of salad dressing, but they have been placed into different conditions to avoid any effects resulting from conflicting competitor communications. One condition does have two routine grocery products; but as can be seen in Table 7.3, it is a salad dressing (*Hidden Valley*) and a frozen pizza (*DiGiorno*). Placing them in the same group of ads should not cause any interaction due to their lack of direct relatedness. In the other set of ads, two discount retail clothing ads fell into the same pod. However, this also does not present any validity threats, because their niche is very different. While *Target* sells primarily indoor casual wear, *Burlington Coat Factory* focuses on outdoor casual and formal wear, suits, and dressier attire.

Figure 7.2 Preliminary Brand Familiarity Data



7.7. MOOD CONDITION

Now that the ad treatments have been reviewed, the discussion turns to the mood state conditions. This will include an examination of the use of television programmes and a defence for the programme genre selected. There will also be a review of the procedure used to select segments along with a description of the shows chosen. Finally, the pre-testing of the mood conditions will be recounted.

7.7.1. Use of Television Segments

Mood was manipulated through short documentaries on happy or sad topics. Therefore, the programmes also had to be selected for the mood conditions. There were two main reasons for using television segments to influence mood. The most obvious reason is that this procedure is the most naturalistic means to influence mood in a television advertising context. If one is interested in the effect of temporary context-induced mood states when exposed to television advertising, what more natural method is there than using films or television segments? The effect of the television programming tone is partly what is under investigation in this thesis. Advertisements are embedded into typically affect-laden programming. Anticipating such programming is the only way that advertisers can conduct media planning projections based on the mood of the consumer. What the actual mood of the consumer will be during exposure can only be speculated based on the programming. Like all forms of target marketing, it is an imperfect science since mood can be influenced by so many other biological and environmental factors external to the television programming. Nevertheless, it is the only mood-influencing factor that the advertiser can predict with some degree of consistency.

Fortunately, television segments are a compelling means of influencing mood states, which means that they can be used to make predictions with an adequate amount of confidence. Films and television segments have been shown to be the most potent way to influence mood in affective studies. Westermann, Spies, Stahl, & Hesse (1996) examined the validity and effectiveness of eleven commonly used mood induction procedures in a meta-analysis of 250 studies. Film and television segments were the most effective means of inducing both positive and negative mood states. Specifically, film segments have been shown to be successful at inducing the desired mood in between 75% (Martin, 1990) and 95% (Gerrards-Hesse, Spies, & Hesse, 1994) of participants, which demonstrates an extremely high success rate. Other common induction procedures, such as influencing subjects' facial expressions to induce mood states associated with that expression or the *Velten*⁴ procedure are only successful for between one-third and half of the subjects (Martin, 1990).

Other common procedures include thinking about emotionally stimulating events (real or imaginary), being given positive or negative performance feedback on a previously administered test, being given an unexpected gift (positive mood only), engaging in positive or negative social interactions, empathic behaviour elicitation, and listening to mood-suggestive music. However, some of these have been cited as problematic in terms of construct validity in that they may influence constructs other than mood state. For example, performance feedback or reward manipulations may also

⁴ The Velten technique is the most commonly used mood induction procedure in experimental research. Participants are required to read a number of statements that are positively or negatively valenced self-referent declarations (e.g.: 'I've doubted that I'm a worthwhile person') or feeling states (e.g.: 'I feel rather sluggish now'). Participants are directed to enter the mood encompassed by the statements (see Clark, 1983; Velten, 1968).

influence self-efficacy, which may have a prominent and deviating impact on decision-making (Hill & Ward, 1989).

Because moods are frequently evoked by dynamic visual and audio stimuli that are external to the actor, film and television segments also offer a high level of ecological validity (Gross & Levenson, 1995), even if the study was not specifically examining television viewing. Regardless, the viewing of film and television segments is the most successful and indeed the most realistic in the context of this research. While the effect of the film is even stronger when participants are specifically instructed to enter the desired mood state, this may be the result of demand characteristics and is not at all naturalistic to true television viewing. No one ever requests that a consumer enters a mood that is congruent with the TV show before the ad break.

7.7.2. Selection of Programme Genre

The next issue in the mood induction has to do with why documentaries were chosen. Documentaries may not be as popular by the general viewing audience as, say dramas and situation comedies. The drawback to those programmes, however, is that participants would bring different levels of involvement and prior exposure to the programmes into the study. Some participants may watch the programmes regularly, be more familiar with the characters, more emotionally involved with the stories, and maintain a higher level of involvement. This may, in turn, lead to a more intense emotional reaction. Alternatively, these more highly involved participant may have already had one or more exposures to the specific episode, and know how the story line played out in latter episodes. This could subsequently result in a far *weaker* affective reaction than otherwise unfamiliar participants would have.

In an attempt to standardise the affective valence of the condition, documentaries were chosen as an alternative. A single episode programme was required that participants were very unlikely to have viewed previously. It had to be a self-contained programme. This means that it was not part of a series that required previous viewing to stir interest from the participants. Any show that is part of an ongoing series may be frustrating for the test audience to follow if they are unfamiliar with previous episodes that are mandatory viewing.

Furthermore, the segment had to draw participants into the programme immediately, and involve them highly in the characters and plot. It was important for them to be involved with the programme, because that is how television viewing occurs in a natural environment. TV viewers normally watch not only what interests them, but also that with which they feel involved. Television viewing can be as emotionally stimulating as any other art form. So while popular dramas and sitcoms were avoided due to the unpredictable involvement and previous exposure of the subject pool, emotional involvement was still sought from the participants, as this is what occurs in a naturalistic viewing environment. A viewing environment was desired that could simulate this sort of emotional involvement, but keep the level standardised between participants. Furthermore, this had to occur within the short 15-minute segment to which they would be exposed. The 15-minute length has been recommended by researchers who specifically examined procedural issues related to the induction of mood in social research (Martin, 1990). Furthermore, there was not enough time to expose participants to the entire show. This was an issue of practicality and will be given further comment in the Section 7.12.

7.7.3. Search Criteria & Selection of Documentaries

The selection of television programmes was a process of trial and error. During a seven week period, the TV Guide® was searched online (www.tvguide.com) and descriptions were read of any documentary that appeared to have all of the following qualities: interesting, emotionally involving, self-contained, high affective valence (positive or negative). All potential candidates were videotaped, and reviewed.

These qualities had to be evident within two segments (one viewed before and one after the commercial break). Additionally, the coherent story line had to be properly summarised within the two parts. Time restraints prevented the incorporation of an entire programme into the test exposures. Nevertheless, the viewing experience had to be as natural as possible, and this included exposure to a TV show that was seemingly complete. Participants cannot be quickly drawn into a programme where they feel that important parts were skipped or that in some way the show is incomplete or unnatural. While due to the irregular length, it may have been obvious to viewers that parts were skipped, it should at least be a seemingly coherent piece that would not cause them to react abnormally or negatively. Within the two full segments, there had to be a fully developed story with an introduction, inciting incident, rising and falling action, and climax, all summarised through a chronological, natural progression. If the two segments did not occur in immediate succession in the full programme, they had to appear to do so in the study.

7.7.3.1. The Positive Mood-Inducing Programme

For the positive mood induction, the programme selected was *A Wedding Story* (see Video Appendix). This is a documentary that introduces the viewers to a couple engaged to be married. It is an extremely warm programme through which the couple discusses how they met, their courtship, through to their inevitable engagement. The programme then documents the final days before the wedding, climaxing with the wedding itself. Emotionally, this programme has the ability to generate an extremely positive affective reaction.

7.7.3.2. The Negative Mood-Inducing Programme

Clearly, a very different type of programme was needed for the negative mood induction. The documentary that was selected was called *U.S.S. Indianapolis: Tragedy at Sea* (see Video Appendix). This programme documents the notorious sinking of a US battleship by the Japanese during World War II. A miscommunication resulted in over a thousand sailors being stranded in the Pacific Ocean for five days. Over the course of these arduous days, the crew struggled for their lives, bobbing in the sea without drinking water or food. They endured sweltering hot days and frigidly cold nights with nothing around them but literally hundreds of man-eating sharks. Few survived the taxing affair. The programme is a very touching piece that recreates the sinking and evacuation of the ship, and the days that succeeded. Some of the survivors recount the experience, still brought to tears 55-years later. They discuss the experiences of their fear, panic and hopelessness. They recount their pain and horror at seeing some of their closest friends be eaten, lose sanity, starve, or dehydrate. They describe what they were forced to undergo both physically and emotionally.

7.7.4. Pre-Testing of Programmes

While pre-testing of the ad type conditions involved a closed-ended questionnaire, pre-testing of the mood induction was carried out using unstructured interviews. Two independent judges, who were demographically similar (by age & education) to the eventual experimental sample were exposed to the programme treatments. The independent judges were not informed of the intent of the study before their opinions were garnered. The judges provided unanimous support for the programmes selected. They agreed that both were interesting and engaging, while affording the proper emotional valence. Again it is important to emphasise that the questionnaire utilised in the main study included design checks on the mood induction (as well as the ad types). This was simply another safety check built into the procedure to help prevent validity problems from setting back the study once data collection commenced.

7.8. EXPERIMENTAL TEST CONDITIONS

The two experimental pods were placed within the two experimental programmes, yielding four different conditions. The ads were then counterbalanced in the four conditions to control for order effects, yielding a grand total of 8 experimental conditions (see Table 7.4). Due to the relatively high number of ad conditions, an incomplete counterbalance was appropriate. In this instance, the counterbalancing was intended to counteract primacy and recency effects in particular. A primacy effect is a social psychology and learning phenomenon whereby material that is introduced first is more memorable and has a more pronounced effect on attitude change than material presented later (especially compared to material presented in the middle of the sequence). On the other hand, the recency effect is a similar phenomenon whereby the most recent material presented supposedly is more easily

recalled and more influential than information introduced earlier (especially compared to material introduced in the middle of the sequence) (see Sutherland, 1995). Furthermore, some studies have noted that the perceived funniness of an ad can differ depending on whether a humorous or non-humorous ad precedes it (Aaker et al., 1986). The counterbalance was also implemented to neutralise this effect.

As a result, the ads were counterbalanced. In other words, for each experimental condition, there was an identical counterpart with only the order of the ads changed. The counterbalance was set up so that each ad was in both a dominant (positions one and four) and inferior position (positions two and three) with regard to attention, recall, and attitude change. Accordingly, when the data is analysed across the counterbalance, any persuasive benefits that should really be attributed to order effects should even out. NFC was not randomly assigned as it is a subject variable. As a result, this factor obviously was not built into the assigned conditions, but was simply measured (see Section 7.15). The product condition was a within subjects variable, meaning each participant received both product treatments. This in turn made it unnecessary to include the product variable into the assigned condition schedule.

Table 7.4 Experimental Conditions

Condition	Order	Programme	Advertisements
1a	Standard	<i>A Wedding Story</i>	Wishbone
1b			Target (1)
2a			Burlington Coat Factory Embassy Suites
2b			Wishbone
1a	Standard	<i>USS Indianapolis: Tragedy at Sea</i>	Target (1)
1b			Burlington Coat Factory Embassy Suites
2a			Hidden Valley
2b			DiGiorno
1a	Standard	<i>A Wedding Story</i>	Target (2)
1b			Embassy Suites
2a			Hidden Valley
2b			DiGiorno
1a	Counterbalanced	<i>USS Indianapolis: Tragedy at Sea</i>	Target (2)
1b			Embassy Suites
2a			Hidden Valley
2b			Embassy Suites
1a	Counterbalanced	<i>A Wedding Story</i>	Embassy Suites
1b			Wishbone
2a			Target (1)
2b			Target (2)
1a	Counterbalanced	<i>USS Indianapolis: Tragedy at Sea</i>	Embassy Suites
1b			Hidden Valley
2a			DiGiorno
2b			Target (2)
1a	Counterbalanced	<i>A Wedding Story</i>	Embassy Suites
1b			Hidden Valley
2a			DiGiorno
2b			Target (2)

7.9. PRE-TESTING OF PROCEDRES

Once the questionnaires were developed and the methodology was set, all of the procedures were pre-tested. A small convenience sample of 10 participants, demographically similar (by age & education) to those who would actually participate were exposed to the full trial, exactly as the procedure required. Through a semi-structured interview, potential problems with the procedures and questionnaires were identified. Based on these interviews, the necessary adjustments were made accordingly. Specific examples of modifications will be highlighted below in the Sections 7.12 and 7.15.

7.10. PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT

Because the research was conducted in the US, participant recruitment presented a new challenge. Furthermore, no funding was available to pay subjects or a recruitment agency. However, it is very common in the US for university-based researchers to utilise student participant pools to conduct social and behavioural research. To keep research costs down, students are typically granted extra credit in a relevant course as compensation for research participation. While the study could be criticised for relying on a somewhat narrow, university-educated sample, this does not necessarily invalidate the generalisability of the findings. There is an overwhelming use of university students in sociopsychological research due to its economic advantages. The general consensus is that the phenomena explored in social research are so widespread and universal that any adult participants will offer generalisable findings (Sears, 1986). Due to the fiscal restraints, university students were sought. The primary obstacle was that the researcher had no affiliation with universities in the United States.

Accordingly, universities in the Greater Philadelphia area were contacted during the late months of 1999 to request permission to draw subjects from their student populations. This is a particularly dense area with regard to colleges and universities. At the outset, a list was created of all colleges and universities in southeastern Pennsylvania and the surrounding tri-state area, including Delaware and New Jersey. In all, the inventory was comprised of 38 institutions, including 26 in Pennsylvania, 3 in Delaware, and 9 in New Jersey. Really, the contact list was significantly longer because all public state-run universities have several autonomous branch campuses throughout the region. There were several such institutions on this list, so relevant departments at nearby satellite campuses were also contacted. Some institutions were eliminated immediately due to the specialised demographics of their student body (i.e.: African American and female colleges), which could greatly skew the results by generating an unrepresentative sample. Others were deleted from the list once it was determined that they had university-wide policies prohibiting external researchers.

Once a record of educational institutions was produced, it was crucial to determine what appropriate departments were available that may be interested in the study. Departments within a relevant field would be more likely to grant access to their student population. Due to the cross-disciplinary nature of the research, Business and Marketing departments were contacted, as well as Psychology, Communications, Sociology and Anthropology departments.

Furthermore, contact people were needed in each department. This information was acquired through college and university websites. Since the Head of Department would ultimately be making the decision over whether permission would be granted,

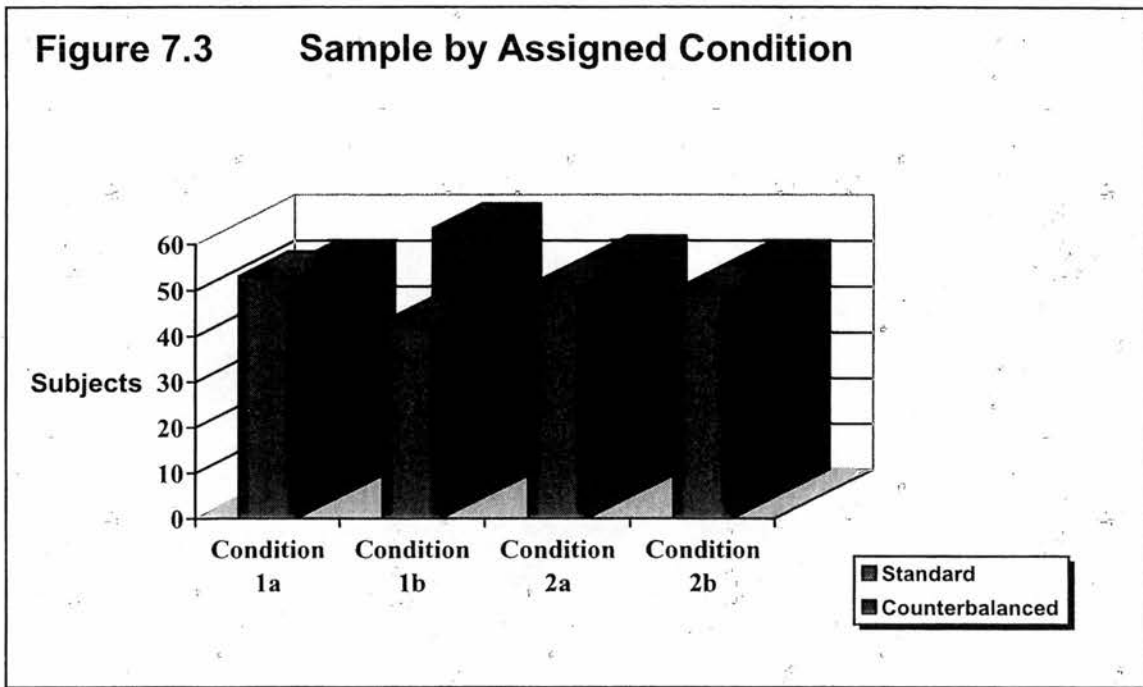
this was initially the logical contact person. However, this proved to be a fruitless effort unless the Department Head had a relevant research interest, which was rarely the case. Due to university policies, federal regulations, and internal departmental need for participants, securing co-operation from the departments was often difficult. Any chance of success rested on someone in the department either having an interest in the project or an applicable use in their lectures. If there was such an individual in the department, then they could speak to the Head of Department on behalf of the project.

Consequently, the faculty pages on the departmental websites were perused and the research interests of the faculty members were noted. The faculty members with the most relevant research interests were then approached as a more appropriate alternative to Department Heads. All departments were contacted via email, so that the message could be standardised. The requests, along with a description of the study, were catered such that they emphasised whatever facet of the project would be of the most interest to them (see Appendix F). In exchange for access to students, several possible incentives were offered, including a guest lecture, volunteering as a research assistant, offering to do data collection in Scotland for those involved in international research, etc.

7.11. PARTICIPANT SAMPLE

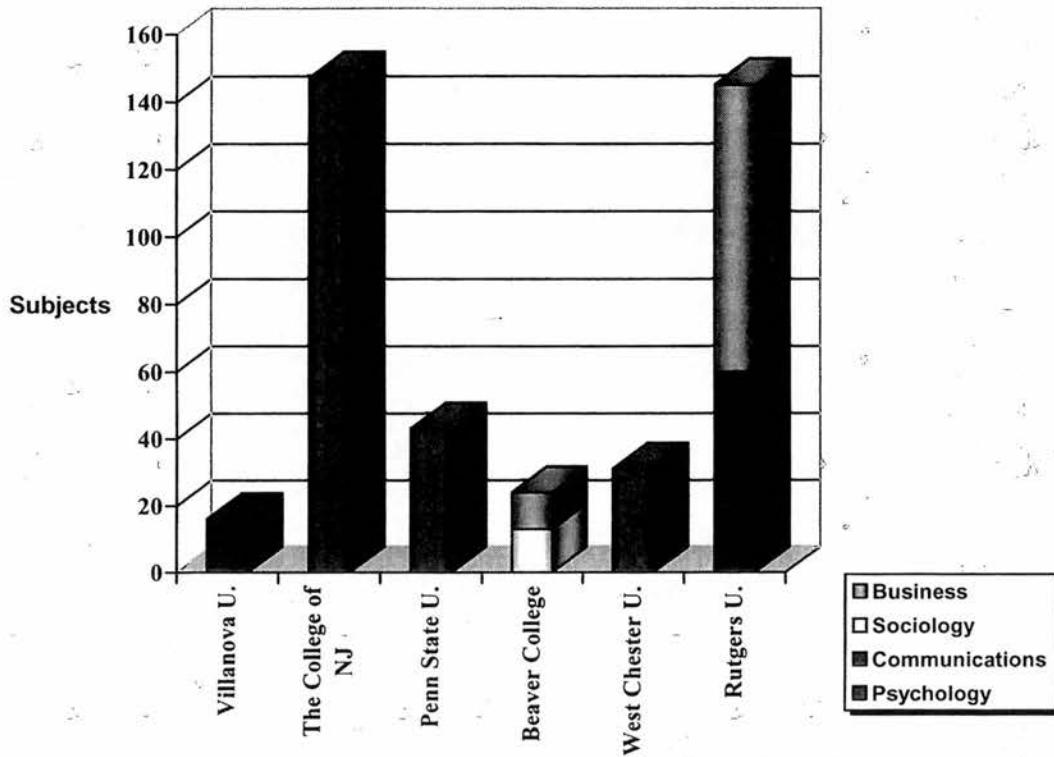
The target number for the subjects was 100 per assigned condition (or 50 per condition if NFC is included). In the end, this target was met and the recruitment process provided a very diverse, albeit all university student, population. The total useable sample totalled 406 participants. This included 103 in Condition 1a, 101 in Condition 1b, 102 in Condition 2a, and 100 in Condition 2b. For each of these conditions, approximately half in each received the standard treatment, while the other half were exposed to the counterbalanced trial (see Figure 7.3).

In reality, the gross sample consisted of 582 participants. However, there were several reasons for various eliminations and reductions to the final sample. Most notably, some recruited participants did not attend the pre-test and/or post-test session. A further 38 had to be removed from the analysis because their questionnaires were incomplete. The remaining 439 represented the primary sample. However, several had to be purged from the analysis because of demographic mismatches, such as age and nationality. Others had to be eliminated because their open-ended responses indicated that they had some idea as to the intent of the study, and thus they represented a threat to the validity of the research. Fortunately, there were enough participants to have up to 39 of these eliminations and still meet the target of 400 subjects. In other words, up to about ten participants in each of the four main exposures (not including counterbalances) could be removed so that the target of 100 in each assigned condition (or 50 including the NFC variable) could be met.

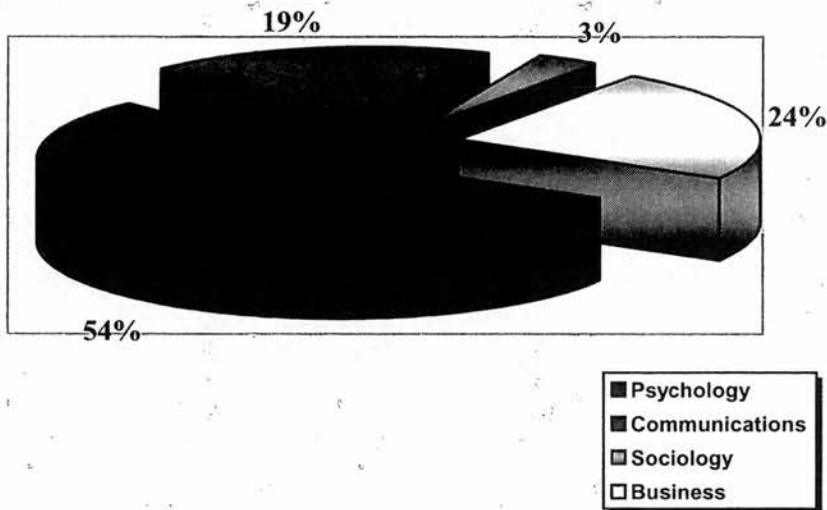


7.11.1. Demographics of the Sample

Advertising response, and especially appreciation of humour in advertising, is culturally specified (see Alden & Martin, 1995). To avert cultural confounds, the study was restricted to American citizens who at least lived most of their lives in the United States. The sample secured was drawn from a very varied group of colleges and universities, including large state-funded universities to small, private liberal arts colleges. Some of the universities are highly competitive educational institutions of national prestige, while others are less so. More importantly, the participants in the sample were drawn from a wide variety of disciplines. To provide some general information on the breakdown of the sample, it was drawn from eight academic departments at six institutions of higher education, including Business, Marketing, Psychology, Communications, and Sociology Departments (see Figures 7.4 & 7.5).

Figure 7.4 Sample by Institution & Department

However, almost exclusively, they came from introductory level courses, which draws students from an even greater variety of educational fields. American universities have general education requirements, which require students to take introductory level classes outside of their major course of study in *all* major disciplines (e.g.: natural sciences, social sciences, maths, humanities, etc.). Consequently, drawing from these lower-level classes afforded a diverse student sample with regard to academic discipline (see Appendix G). This was especially the case with the introductory psychology and sociology classes, which are popular general education electives for social science requirements.

Figure 7.5 Academic Departments Sampled

Where students were drawn from marketing classes, only introductory level courses were used. Students in introductory level classes would not have taken a course in advertising and many were not even majoring in marketing. This precaution was taken so as to avoid arousing suspicion from students who are more informed and sensitised to studies in advertising and consumer behaviour. Such students would have been much more likely to generate demand characteristics. As will be explained below, the combination of avoiding these high-risk students and implementing a plausible cover story proved successful in camouflaging the investigation's true intent.

To sketch a clearer picture of the participant pool, about 72% of the sample were drawn from institutions in the state of New Jersey, while the remaining 28% were recruited from Pennsylvania. The mean age of the participants was 20.8 years, with a

median age of 20 years. The range in age stretched from age 18 to 34. Although this is a fairly wide range, this is viewed by media planners as a single demographic group (see Weiner, 2000). Furthermore, it is considered to be the group most coveted by advertisers due to their buying power. Approximately one-third of the sample was male, while two-thirds was female. This overemphasis on female participants was an unfortunate side effect of who signed up for the study and actually attended their assigned sessions. This inequality was corrected for as much as possible through selective sampling during later stages, but unfortunately, some degree of gender bias still remains. Information was obtained on participants' town and state of origin. The state from which participants originally hail is depicted in Figure 7.6.

7.12. EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURE

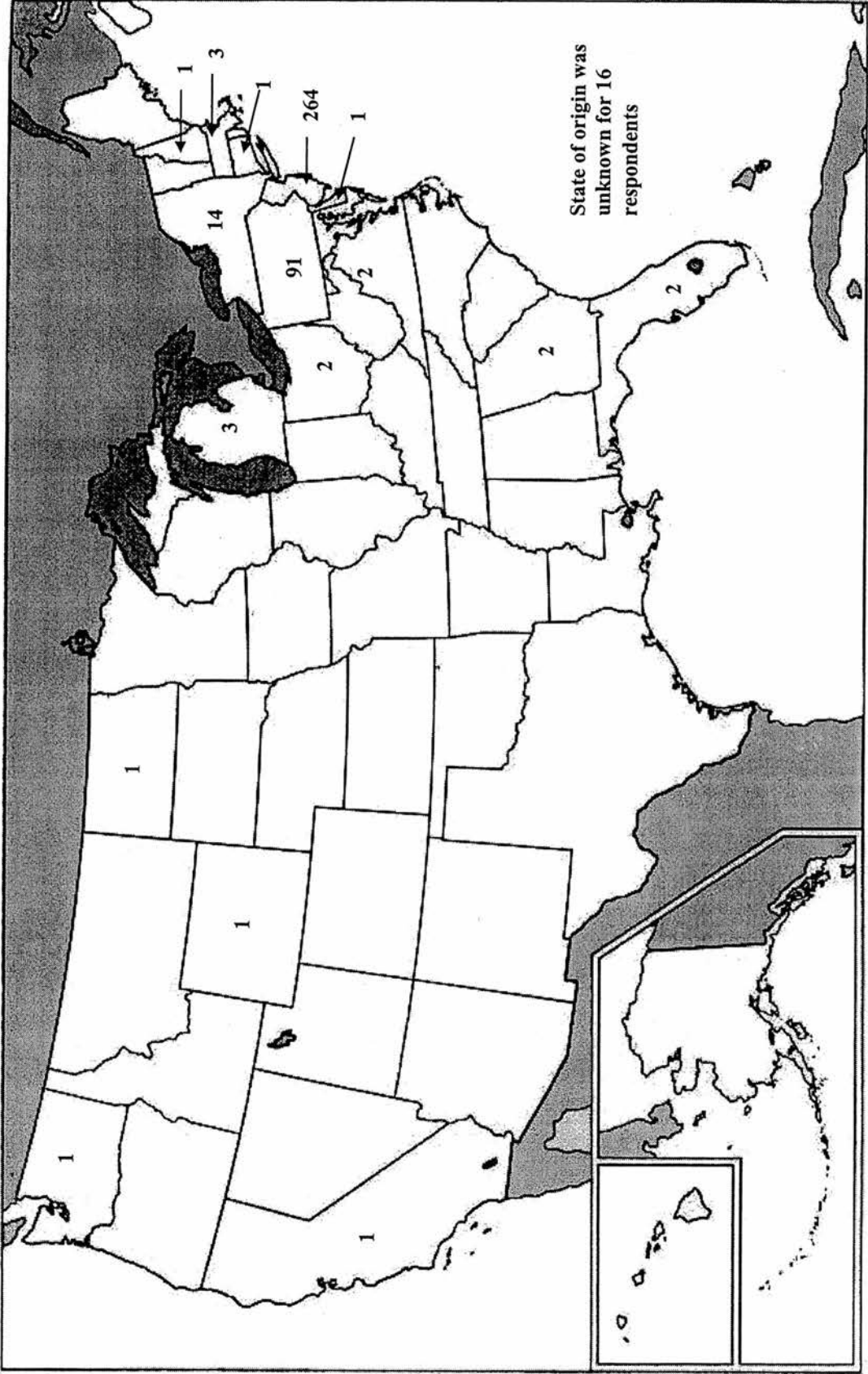
This section will detail the procedures used in the study. Included will be arguments for the various methodological decisions made. Issues related to the use of a single exposure design, separate pre-test and post-test sessions, restrictions on the number of participants per trial, and the use of a cover story will all be discussed. The exact trial procedures will also be reviewed.

7.12.1. Single Exposure Decisions

Ideally, the procedures would have entailed three exposures over a two-week time period. Although most advertising experiments only use single exposure designs, this is far from realistic to natural television advertising exposure. Furthermore, it seems that the maximum effects of television advertising are reached after three exposures (see Belch, 1982; Zinkhan & Gelb, 1990). Therefore, such a design would allow the effects of ideal conditions to be tested. It also may have revealed potential wearout differences between the ad types.

Figure 7.6

Experimental Sample by State of Origin



However, because the procedures were conducted at other universities often during other lecturer's class time, compromises had to be made to secure approval. There were a number of complications involved in securing access to the participant pool. When gauging interest with lecturers, it was apparent that they would be more amenable to a self-contained study, and one that would not disrupt class over a prolonged period. In order to be granted approval, the study had to be restricted to a single exposure.

Nevertheless, there is a lot of literature that attests to the power of a single exposure. Not only is a single exposure capable of persuading its audience, but the initial exposure seems to have the most potent impact on the consumer (Jones, 1995a). A number of studies have attested to the persuasive influence of a single exposure to the ad (Gibson, 1996; Jones, 1995b; Kim, Lim, & Bhargava, 1998; Mandese, 1995), especially in the case of routine, low-involvement products (Surmanek, 1995). Belch (1982) found no significant differences in neither attitudinal nor behavioural measures of persuasion between a single ad exposure and either three or five exposures. However, the only ad appeal under investigation was a hard sell, comparative versus non-comparative appeal. On the other hand, Rosenberg and Blair (1994) examined research, which found that a single exposure to an emotional ad was just as persuasive as multiple exposures (although recall was improved through multiple exposures). Additionally, with a single exposure format, at least this made the study more easily comparable to virtually all of the previous work, which also employed single-exposure designs. Without this format, there would be no relevant context in which to place this research.

7.12.2. Pre-Test/Post-Test Sessions

Permission was granted to run the trials in two sessions, provided that the first session did not last longer than 10-15 minutes. As a result, the pre-test was run in a separate trial that occurred within one week of the main trial. This was done to minimise any *testing*⁵ biases. If the television exposure and post-test immediately followed the pre-test, not only would participants be more readily alerted to the test ads, but their post-test responses could have been much more significantly influenced by the pre-test. While the objective was to cleanse their memory of the specific items contained in the pre-test and their exact responses to them, too long a layover was also unattractive. The longer the period between measurements, the higher the probability of maturation threats. Maturation could result from natural exposure to advertisements and product use of either the test brand or that of a competitor between the measurements. The best possible compromise was struck by minimising this period to a maximum of one week, with an average of two days between sessions.

7.12.3. Trial Sizes & Group Dynamics

The experimental conditions were randomly assigned for each trial. As the subject quota for each condition was met, it was removed from the random selection process. All of the trials were run with between 10 and 20 students. On average, there were 12 participants per session. This was the best compromise of economy of time and the preservation of an intimate group dynamic. In other words, with such a large sample size, it was preferential to administer each trial to a reasonable number of participants,

⁵ Testing problems are the result of the use of repeated measures in research (see Ray, 1997). In the case of questionnaire-based research, if the subjects can recall their responses to individual pre-test items, then responses given during the post-test may be influenced by the answers given during the pre-test. This is a threat to internal validity.

so that data collection could be stretched across fewer trials. However, in natural settings, people generally know one another well when watching TV together. They feel comfortable showing emotion and interacting during the viewing. This group dynamic is particularly important in the case of humour appreciation (Alello, Thompson, & Brodzinsky, 1983; Brown, Dixon, & Hudson, 1982; Butcher & Whissell, 1984; Zhang & Zinkhan, 1991; Zinkhan & Gelb, 1990), and thus it was critical to attempt to create as natural an exposure environment as possible with regard to social interaction. As a result, the numbers were restricted to an audience of less than 20 per session and friends were given the opportunity to attend together.

7.12.4. Cover Story

The first step of the procedure was to present participants with a cover story, so that they were not aware that they were involved in a study on advertising effectiveness. This was done by first introducing them to a faux study and indicating the relevance to their own course work. Basically, the cover story indicated that the study was on learning and memory during passive activity. This information was standardised through a script that the investigator learned well enough to present casually and naturally (see Appendix H). Participants were briefed on the procedures, and the research implications to the alleged study were explained.

While the purpose of the cover story was to remove the subjects' attention from the ads, preventing participants from detecting the true intent of the study, the fact that commercials would be shown in the study was not completely side-stepped in the introduction. With much of the questionnaire focused on ad and brand content and a sudden commercial break inserted into the television segment, the cover story may

have seemed a bit transparent if no prior warning was given. The advertising facet of the study would have stood out much more blatantly if it was completely avoided in the introduction.

On the other hand, it was also undesirable to highlight the fact that ads would be viewed because too much unnatural attention would have been drawn to the commercials. Instead, it was briefly mentioned that they would be viewing a *typical* television segment just as they would in a *natural setting*. As the script shows, there was brief mention that an ad break would be included. It was then stated that it was set up this way because it was important to make the segment as natural as possible and to collect data on everything that was viewed. Despite the fact that the cover story was informative (even if misleadingly so), the introduction used some technical jargon on memory encoding to leave the participants somewhat confused. If they were completely clear on the purpose of the study, then they may begin to question the legitimacy of the cover story. However, by being somewhat vague, they were less likely to question such things as why it was important to collect information on the brands and ads in addition to the programme.

7.12.5. Administration of Treatments

This section will include a review of the treatments that were administered following the presentation of the cover story. Included will be a discussion of the informed consent and ethical issues, a general overview of the pre-test materials, and the basic procedures involved in the post-test session.

7.12.5.1. Informed Consent

Following the introduction to the study, students read and signed an informed consent, which US federal law requires for the ethical treatment of research participants. This form reinforced the cover story, and included sections on the rights of the participant and to what exactly the participants were giving their consent (see Appendix I). There are ethical concerns with deceiving participants on the research objectives when obtaining their consent. However, in some circumstances, it is considered more acceptable. As long as they are not misled on anything that would influence their agreement to participate, such as physical or psychological risks or discomfort, the Ethical Guidelines of the American Psychological Association (APA) permit deception provided that there are not alternative data collection methods available that are of equal effectiveness (see Ray 1997).

These criteria were met in this current research. Participants were not deceived on any aspects of the study that would affect their willingness to participate. The misleading information was not used to dupe subjects into participating, but rather to ensure impartial responses. The only potential discomfort would include exposure to the programme with a negative tone, but this risk was no greater than would be encountered in normal television viewing. Furthermore, participants were aware that they could leave the room for any reason. They were advised that their opinions would be solicited as part of the data collection, that they were free to withhold answers to any items and to stop participating at any time without penalty. Subjects were also notified on the consent form that they may not have been provided with the intent of the study. Further precautions were taken during the debriefing (see below).

7.12.5.2. Pre-test

Following the informed consent, students completed the paper and pencil pre-test that assessed prior experience and familiarity with the test brands, brand interest, brand attitudes, and purchase intentions (see Appendix K). This occurred within one week of the experimental trial. As mentioned above, on average, the pre-test was administered approximately two days before the experimental session.

7.12.5.3. Television Exposure & Post-Test

On the day of the post-test trial, the cover story was reintroduced via the introductory script (see Appendix H). To further solidify the cover story, a second copy of the informed consent was administered for completion. Most American university regulations on the ethical treatment of research subjects mandate that both the researcher and participant retain a copy of the informed consent. Rather than completing both of these forms at the same time, one was dispensed before each session, so that the information received by the participant before each test was identical. Following this reorientation, participants were exposed to the television segment, and then post-tested on Aad, brand interest, brand attitudes, and purchase intentions. Changes in these latter three items represent the measure of persuasion (see Holbrook & Batra, 1987). A NFC scale was also administered to assess this personality attribute (see below). Careful design checks on the mood and ad type variables were included as well. Additionally there were several other necessary procedural items on the questionnaire (e.g.: prior exposure to the ad, recall, demographics, etc). There were also items mixed in with both tests that served as filler items to maintain the cover story.

7.13. DEBRIEFING

After the questionnaire administration, participants were thoroughly debriefed. A debriefing sheet with a description of the study was given to the participants, which was explained in laymen's terms (see Appendix J). The true intent of the study was revealed and students were taken through the rationale of the study and its objectives. Questions were encouraged. Once the valid rationale behind the research was divulged, subjects were told why the cover story was necessary. The Ethical Guidelines of the APA mandate that any necessary deception be explained to participants as soon as possible following participation. Special attention was given to ensuring that no participants held any animosity towards the misleading cover story. At this point, participants were asked not to discuss the study with anyone who had not participated. The importance of the cover story was emphasised, and they were told that it was critical to the validity of the study that no one enters the laboratory with pre-existing knowledge as to the intent of the experiments.

7.14. QUALITATIVE DISCUSSION

Following questionnaire administration and debriefing, the session was run as a discussion, so that some qualitative data could be obtained. As themes began to develop, subjects were questioned on topics such as how they felt about the ads and the influence that they had on them. This made it necessary to review open-ended answers as they came in, so that the participants could be thoroughly probed. Most of the information gathered during these sessions had to do with potential validity threats, such as whether their attention to the programme and ads was natural or how comfortable they were during the sessions. These issues and the relevant information gathered during these qualitative sessions will be discussed in greater detail in the

Limitations section of Chapter Ten, when the methodology is further defended. Some information was also obtained relevant to the actual findings. This will be revealed in the *Abstraction of Findings* section of Chapter Nine. This qualitative information will help to justify the rationale for the quantitative data that was collected as the primary piece to this research.

7.15. QUESTIONNAIRES

A number of very important decisions were necessary with regard to the questionnaires. These decisions can be grouped according to length, content, and order. For all issues with regard to the questionnaires, please refer to the sample pre-test (Appendix K) and post-test questionnaire (Appendix L).

7.15.1. General Format

As with all questionnaire-based studies, it was crucial to achieve the appropriate balance of economy of space and detailed data extraction. While it is critical to collect information on as much as possible, participant fatigue and maturation are concerns with lengthy questionnaires. The questionnaire items were not numbered intentionally to further protect against fatigue effects. While it would have made analysis easier in that specific items could be referred to by number, numbering the items could potentially remind participants how many they have already done and how many they have remaining.

Throughout both the pre-tests and post-tests, the format was kept very consistent. The programme and test brands were addressed with the same questions. Clearly, questionnaires are an unnatural and possibly uncomfortable way for a person to reveal

and express their attitudes. By maintaining a standardised format that is consistent all the way through, participants hopefully felt at ease with the process and were better able to express their attitudes as painlessly and unobtrusively as possible. Another reason that the same questions were posed for the television programme in exactly the same format was to maintain the cover story. Participants would probably have become more suspicious of the importance of the advertised brands and their opinions of the ads and brands if they were the only subject of the pre-test.

As will be revealed, most of the questionnaire utilised seven-point scales instead of the more frequently used five-point scales. The exceptions are the NFC scale, which already has a set scoring system established, and the three checks in the beginning of each brand assessment (recall, prior exposure, humour rating), where additional permutation were unnecessary. For these measures, five-point scales were sufficient. This was done to generate greater sensitivity to participants' opinions to more accurately represent the degree to which they held their convictions. In the open-ended item (see below), those that were more experienced with social research participation indicated that they appreciated having more freedom to accurately represent their attitudes. They felt less forced to choose a response and better equipped to indicate their true feelings on this questionnaire.

Furthermore, on the attitude and interest items that were included on both the pre- and post-tests, the longer seven-point scales containing more intermediate levels of opinion made it less likely that respondents would remember their exact response to the pre-test item. Consequently, there was less chance that their post-test responses would have been influenced by pre-test responses. For example, they may have

recalled that they liked the brand, but probably not to what degree. With a five-point scale, they cannot designate as many shades of their opinion and thus may be able to more readily recall previous responses.

7.15.2. Pre-Test Format

This section includes a more detailed discussion of the pre-test questionnaire. It will include an evaluation of specific content decisions and a review of specific items, such as brand familiarity, brand interest, brand attitude, and purchase intentions. It will also detail ordering considerations, a rationale on items that were omitted, and a discussion of the scales.

7.15.2.1. Content Decisions

All demographic information on the participants was collected in the pre-test so as to not disrupt programme and ad effects during post-test administration. The pre-test also assessed brand familiarity, since this rating was needed prior to ad exposure. Familiarity with the television programme was also measured to conceal the study's intent. These items were drawn from research conducted by Machleit et al. (1993), Machleit, Madden, and Allen (1990), and Machleit and Wilson (1988). Brand familiarity items included three seven-point semantic differential scales (anchored by *Familiar*, *Experienced*, and *Knowledgeable*). Finally, brand interest, brand attitude, and behavioural intentions were assessed for each brand and for the TV programme.

7.15.2.2. Brand Interest Items

The brand interest items were taken from the work by Machleit et al. (1993) and Machleit et al. (1990), which attempt to measure more subtle changes in consumers' opinions than does brand attitude. The scale was developed to measure changes in

consumers' opinions for mature brands in which a moderate to high degree of familiarity exists. For such brands, Machleit et al. believe that attitudes are more rigid, but advertising may cause subtle changes in consumers' opinions that are not perceivable through standard attitude measures. Thus they have developed this more sensitive measure, which was incorporated into this study.

“To illustrate this, consider a consumer exposed to an affect-evoking commercial for a mature brand. We would not expect the consumer's brand attitude to change; however, the commercial could lead him or her to reconsider a brand, ‘think twice,’ or stimulate an ‘approach’ response to the brand. This response, in turn, may lead to outcomes such as an elevation of the brand's status in the consideration set or a ‘re-trial’ purchase. It is the nonevaluative ‘approachability’ that the individual has for the brand that we refer to as brand interest” (Machleit et al., 1993; 73).

Their scale included the following four statements, in which respondents indicate their agreement on seven-point Likert scales:

I am intrigued by *Brand X*.

I'd like to know more about *Brand X*

Learning more about *Brand X* would be useless.

I'm a little curious about *Brand X*.

However, these statements are extremely redundant (even Machleit et al. (1993) admit to their resemblance). It appears that all four were included to boost their reliability measures. Pre-testing in this current research demonstrated that answering all four items aggravated participants, who did not see the point in responding to essentially the same question four times for each brand in such a long questionnaire. As a result, the first two were dropped. The items retained included two seven-point Likert scales in response to the last two statements. The first item was reversed scored.

7.15.2.3. Brand Attitude & Purchase Intention Measures

The brand attitude items were a bit more complex, because it was important to include cognitive, affective, and conative components. Homer and Yoon (1992), along with others, have verified the importance of including both cognitive and affective measures in attitude research. Clearly, a behavioural element is also necessary, as a positive brand attitude is of little use to a marketer if it does not translate into a purchase. Thus, the brand attitude scale included four items, all on seven-point semantic differential scales. The attitude items were taken directly from attitude research, which has become the standard practice in persuasion research. The affective feature of the attitude was assessed with scales anchored with, *Like Very Much-Dislike Very Much*, and *Very Desirable-Very Undesirable*. The cognitive part of the attitude was assessed with scales anchored with *Very Good-Very Bad*, and *Very Good Quality-Very Poor Quality*.

The quality scale also included a further choice, which was *Do not know enough to assess quality*, in case participants were too unfamiliar with the brand to give an opinion of quality. On the first three scales, respondents can check the neutral point in the event that they do not hold a strong opinion one way or the other. This might be the case if, for example, their familiarity with the brand is low (e.g.: *Neither like nor dislike*). However, on the quality scale the midpoint is, *Of Average Quality*, which is still demanding a cognitive assessment on the part of the subject that they may not be prepared to make. Therefore, by adding the additional item, *Do not know enough to assess quality*, respondents can indicate a neutral opinion. This is just yet another example of how this questionnaire was designed to avoid confounds while at the same time making the process as user friendly to the participants as possible.

Finally the conative facet of attitude was represented in the purchase intention item, which was a seven-point scale, anchored with *Likely-Unlikely*.

7.15.2.4. Ordering Decisions

The order of the interest, attitude, and intention items was intentional. They were arranged to mimic a natural progression through attitude solidification and intention to buy. Again, in an attempt to be as natural and unobtrusive about this process as possible, items were organised in a way that they would be used in forming or changing an attitude and making a purchase decision. Specifically, in this context where the brand is already known (rather than a context where an initial product trial precedes attitude formation), consumers go through a process whereby interest or lack of interest generated by an ad would stimulate attitude formation, change, or solidification, which would in turn lead to a behavioural decision.

There is an argument that perhaps by scrambling the questions throughout, the results will be more independent, where participants do not get into a routine and allow previous responses on one set of items to influence later responses. However, that is not really an issue in this case because consumer's responses *should* be interrelated, and well-established attitude models indicate that there is a natural progression of hierarchical influence that does occur naturally. Attitude towards the ad *does* have an effect on attitude towards the brand, which in turn influences purchase intentions. Intentions, in turn, are indicative of eventual behaviour. In the lab, there was a delay between ad exposure and response. Therefore, when soliciting this information from consumers, it was important to make the previous link in the chain salient before assessing the latter part to extract attitude information as naturally as it occurs outside of the laboratory during regular television exposure. Subsequently, this natural order

was maintained so that the attitude progression occurred as naturally as it would according to established consumer models (i.e.: ad attitude-brand attitude-purchase intention).

Furthermore, assessing interest before attitudes and intentions also had a more utilitarian function. There were concerns that participant interest in the topic could wane over the course of a long questionnaire, especially when the topic was as potentially mundane to the consumer as a routine product. Brand attitude is likely to remain more static throughout the questionnaire activity, but interest may decline throughout a tedious questionnaire that assesses every facet of a brand. By the time they finish, they may not be interested in the product or anything else! As a result, interest was assessed prior to the other items to at least attempt to offset some of the potential tedium.

7.15.2.5. Length Considerations & Product Involvement

Initially, product involvement was going to be assessed during the pre-test, since this is a very fluid, subjective construct that is largely based on the opinion of the sample. However, there was the recurring issue of length with regard to the questionnaires. Mostly the concerns were based on participant fatigue. However, there were also practical considerations with regard to pre-test length. The pre-test was administered during lecturers' scheduled class time. In some instances, this was a class period that was disrupted *in addition* to the actual trial. The course instructors were promised that administration of the pre-test would not take longer than ten minutes. A short pre-test was also desirable because it was important not to prejudice participants by turning them off to the study through a long, tedious pre-test. Not only could a

lengthy pre-test have contributed to a higher mortality rate, but it would also have shortened the attention span of the remaining participants for the experimental trial.

Of all the information that was sought, involvement level with the brand was the most expendable. While it is a very subjective construct, there has been research published that positions the products selected in this study along the two product dimensions. As discussed in the previous chapter, Ratchford (1987) surveyed 1792 participants along the two dimensions of the FCB grid. The work is based on Americans in the same age range as the participants utilised in this study. The products used in this study were included in their analysis. All were found to be low-involvement/feel products. Due to the agreement in the literature as to the importance placed on these types of product decisions, the best compromise was to sacrifice these items and rely on previous research. In doing so, there was less concern over participant fatigue that may adversely affect the validity of the more uncertain research items that comprise the research questions.

Certainly in the case of the food products, the low-involvement, transformational nature of the product is intuitively apparent. In the case of clothing, it is possible that this age group may view such products as higher involvement decisions. However, the brands from this study primarily sell discounted items that are basic staples of the wardrobe. In other words, they sell clothing items that are not necessarily brand-driven. For example, *Target* would sell plain coloured t-shirts used to accessorise, while *Burlington Coat Factory* would sell gloves, hats, and other outerwear. It was hoped that, indeed, participants were moderately involved, and that they perceived these brands in this way. This issue was addressed during the debriefing discussions.

7.15.2.6. Length Considerations & Attitude Towards the Research

Another set of items that were deleted from the original questionnaire consisted of attitude towards the research. These were included to reveal any potential confounds related to participants' feelings towards the research. The items would have included interest in the research, perceived importance of the findings, and how seriously subjects were treating their participation. Again, length was the primary concern. During pre-testing, respondents were finding the longer test tedious and repetitive. In particular, they were bothered by any extemporaneous questions that did not seem to fulfil an obvious role in the research. While it would be desirable to obtain information on participants' attitudes towards the research, it was more critical to keep the research to a more manageable length, thus not actually having an adverse effect on their attitudes towards it. If a negative attitude towards the research could be avoided by not obtaining this extra information in the questionnaire, then that is a good compromise. Furthermore, this sort of information could be obtained orally during the debriefing discussions.

Besides, with regard to whether participants are taking the study seriously, when they are not, then chances are they are not going to provide accurate data on this or any information anyway. The hope was that by going out of their way to attend and participate, and by being provided with an explanation (even if only a cover story) of the study and its importance, that participants were all taking it seriously anyway. Debriefing sessions showed that this was in fact the case. Even though only a cover story was given initially, it was still relevant enough to the types of classes for which the study was run that most students were rather interested. Furthermore, a study requiring students to watch television was probably more desirable than the other

studies with which they have been involved, and overall the response was positive. As a result, items assessing the attitude towards the research seemed extraneous.

7.15.2.7. Length Considerations & Scale Combinations

A further method to maintain a manageable length of test, while at the same time extracting equivalent information, was to combine certain scales that contained dichotomous opposites, but lengthening the full scale from five to seven points to maintain the sensitivity of the scales. The descriptives actually used to assess the various constructs (e.g.: brand attitude, ad attitude) were drawn from all of the relevant research reviewed. A comprehensive list was made of the various scales used in previous attitudinal research. Scales containing opposite descriptives were combined into a single scale. Including both would have been redundant and would have unnecessarily lengthened the questionnaires. For example, two scales that have been used in assessing Aad include five-point semantic differentials anchored with *Very Interesting* and *Not at all Interesting*; and *Very Dull* and *Not at all Dull*. While these were probably included to help boost the reliability of the test, they can much more concisely be combined into a single scale, anchored by *Very Dull* and *Very Interesting*, with a midpoint of *Neither Dull nor Interesting*. This midpoint was essentially an anchor for both of the other scales, so the two are merely being combined. The scales were all extended to seven points to maintain some sensitivity and give respondents a bit more receptiveness to represent the strength of their attitudes.

7.15.3. Post-Test Format

This section details the post-test questionnaire items. This will include information regarding items not already included in the pre-test discussions above. Specifically, items related to mood state measures, design checks, Aad, NFC, fillers, and the open-ended items will be reviewed.

7.15.3.1. Mood State Design Check

In the post-test, mood state was assessed first as a design check. The four-item assessment was drawn from the Mood Short Form Scale devised by Peterson and Sauber (1983). It has been tested against longer versions and has been shown to accurately represent a person's current mood state as sensitively as longer tests. Through Peterson and Sauber's assessment, the scale was deemed to have adequate reliability (longitudinal stability & internal consistency) and validity. This shorter version is much more practical and thus has been adopted for use in basically all of the current mood research that has been conducted (see Chapter Four) both within and beyond the advertising realm. The Mood Short Form Scale measures current mood state, using four seven-point Likert scales that assess agreement with the following four statements (the latter two are reversed scored):

Currently I am in a good mood.

As I answer these questions I feel very cheerful.

For some reason I am not very comfortable right now.

At this moment I feel "edgy" or irritable.

7.15.3.2. Positioning of the Mood Short Form

This was the first set of items on the post-tests for several reasons. Firstly, mood states are transitory. It was important to assess mood before it began to change to be sure that the mood reported was as close as possible to the actual mood when the ads originally (and more naturally, meaning not with a paper and pencil, forced choice test) were evaluated. Therefore, it was necessary to assess mood state prior to the other items to be sure that the mood created was maintained and kept salient throughout the rest of the questionnaire. It otherwise would be impossible to assess the effect of mood on attitudes towards the ads and brands if attempts to keep it salient were not implemented. By placing the mood items first, hopefully the mood when actually *reporting* attitudes and interest in the brand was as closely replicable as possible to the mood during the actual *exposure*, when these constructs were naturally affected by the ads and mood was first altered by the programme.

7.15.3.3. Positioning of Programme-Related Items

For similar reasons, the corresponding questions on the programme were placed ahead of the ad and brand questions. Again, this helped to solidify the mood state and the effect of the programme on the ads. By making the programme content salient prior to ad and brand assessment, this mimics the process that actually occurs during exposure, when the programme is at the forefront of the audiences' mind when the process of attitude formation or change over the brands and ads actually occurs. In a natural viewing environment, consumers simply do not hold off conscious or unconscious evaluation of the advertised brands by forming their opinions after the entire programme and advertising exposures are finished. However, the questionnaire

process extracts information in this way; and therefore the mood and programme are kept salient to attempt to replicate the more natural process.

A further argument for placing the mood and programme questions before the brand items was to assess longer-term changes in brand attitude. Particularly with soft sell strategies that utilise peripheral route persuasion, attitude changes can be very short-lived. Most other advertising experiments (if they actually consider the programming environment at all) will expose the audience to a short segment followed by the ads. As soon as participants are exposed to the ads, most research immediately measures brand attitudes. However, consumers may need to access brand attitudes formed during ad exposure from memory at a later time when they are at the point of purchase (Muehling & Laczniak, 1988).

While it is important to know the immediate impact of advertising, this is hardly realistic to natural exposure. Practically speaking, when does a consumer ever watch a piece from a television show, then following an ad break, skip the rest of the programme and are immediately at the point of sale justifying their attitudes and making a purchase decision? While those in the marketing field like to believe that their ads are effective, commercials do not tend to move consumers to such dramatic action! Obviously this is an extreme stance taken to demonstrate a point since really what is being assessed is the effect of a single exposure in the context of a long-running campaign or repeated exposure. However, it is in some sense more pragmatic to look at the residual effect, if any, that a single exposure can have after at least some layover. Surely, this should include at least some time to watch the rest of the

programme. This is why (in addition to keeping the mood of participants salient) a further segment from the programme was shown after the ad pods.

Following the rest of the programme, it made sense to include other questions before actually assessing the brand attitude change. This allowed the participants to focus their attention elsewhere while any long-term effects of the ad were incubating. Some research has suggested that even an period as short as 13-minutes following exposure can project any longer term change in attitude (see Lammers, Liebowitz, Seymour, & Hennessey, 1983). It is important to briefly mention that the order in which the information on each brand was collected was counterbalanced to control for order effects. So while the questions related to the programme were always included first for the reasons cited above, the order of the brands was switched throughout the sessions.

7.15.3.4. Other Design Checks

Prior to assessing the attitude and interest constructs for each brand, certain checks were initially made on the exposure. First, a subjective recall measure was included asking participants to rate, in their opinion, how well they recalled the ad. This was assessed via a single-item, five-point semantic differential scale, anchored with *Not at All* and *Recall the Ad Very Well*. This may help to clarify any obscure findings that arise during analysis. For example, if certain participants produced outlying data, it may be attributable to their low level of recall for the ad. Furthermore, while it was a less stringent, subjective assessment of recall, it may be interesting to see how the different ad types vary on the recall measure, and how this may affect the attitude ratings.

Following the recall item, a single item assessed the number of prior exposures to the ad that participants had in the previous year. This was added as a design check to ensure that the participants had not been overly exposed to the test ads in the past year. Recall that test ads were selected that would not threaten the findings with confounds due to any potential wearout effects. This check was included to ensure that appropriate ads were, indeed, selected that had not worn out. The rating was a four-level forced choice item, which encompassed the following ranges: **0, 1-2, 3-4, 5+**. Zero represents a unique circumstance because this would be the first exposure. One to two viewings is still within the safe range. Three to four is at the threshold of wearout, while five or more exposures is indicative of potential wearout. As stated in Section 7.4.2, evidence indicates that wearout effects are reversible after a period of six-months between exposure. However, the item in this questionnaire measured exposures over the previous year as a more conservative estimate of wearout.

Finally, a check was included on the humour conditions. This was a one-item, five-point semantic differential scale, anchored with *Not at All Humorous* and *Hilarious*. *Slightly*, *Moderately*, and *Very Humorous* marked the other midpoints. This item, along with the Aad items, included a further choice, which was *Do not recall enough to make an assessment*. Previous research tended to force a choice on such attitude items, where such a selection may not necessarily be made. Data can be confounded if participants are obliged to make a selection that does not really account for their attitude. This point was brought out in both the piloting of the procedures and during actual debriefing sessions. Subjects who participated in similar research before appreciated having such options. They felt that their responses were more accurate in that they did not have to express an attitude to any item that they could not recall. In

addition to this issue of validity, having this selection also reinforced the cover story, which indicated that the study was assessing memory processes. This was also further reinforced through the items on general recall and recollection of previous exposure. As always, these items were also included in the questions on the programme to maintain a standardised format. This helped to remove the focus of the questionnaire from the ads and brands, which was part of the effort to mask the study's intent.

7.15.3.5. Attitude Towards the Ad

The Aad items included global attitude assessments that are standard in advertising research. They incorporated four seven-point semantic differential scales, anchored with *Like-Dislike*, *Pleasant-Irritating*, *Good-Bad*, and *Interesting-Dull*. The items were drawn from Mitchell and Olson (1981), who found that these were the four items that loaded the most heavily on ad attitude measures. Other similar items that have been used include, *Wise-Unwise*, *Offensive-Inoffensive*, *Positive-Negative*, and *Favourable-Unfavourable*. However, length and tedium were once again concerns and these additional semantic differentials really would not contribute any significant attitudinal information that is not obtained by the four items that were used. Furthermore, these four are the most commonly used in research that measures Aad. The post-test measures of brand interest, brand attitude, and purchase intentions followed the Aad items.

7.15.3.6. Need for Cognition

Following the ad and brand assessments, the Need for Cognition Scale was administered. The scale was developed by Cacioppo and Petty (1982), and originally included 34-items (half of which are reverse scored) designed to measure individuals on this personality trait. They produced and revised a series of opinion statements to

which participants would indicate their level of agreement. The statements covered a broad array of circumstances in which strenuous thinking would be required. Typical examples of the scale include statements such as, **I really enjoy a task that involves coming up with new solutions to problems**, and **I like tasks that require little thought once I've learned them** (reverse scored). Participants indicate their level of agreement with the statement by checking a point on a Likert scale, anchored with *Strongly agree-Strongly disagree*. They found these items to load on one dominant factor.

Cacioppo and Petty (1982) assessed the reliability and validity of the scale and found that it did, indeed, accurately forecast the approach that people take towards mental tasks and processing social information. The scale was given further support in specific test of its validity (Cacioppo, Petty, & Morris, 1983). Cacioppo, Petty, and Kao (1984) later revised the scale into a shortened 18-item version, to make it a more efficient and practical instrument for research. They have found that the scale was as reliable (Cronbach's alpha coefficient of +.90 versus +.91 for the 34-item scale) and as valid an assessment of the construct (convergent validity score of $r = .95$) as the 34-item scale. Waters and Zakrajsek (1990) also found the 18-item scale to correlate highly with the longer version, and found it to have high internal consistency.

The 18-item version of the NFC scale has been further evaluated through additional testing, and support for the scale has come from tests that have confirmed that it is a stable scale with high internal consistency and test-retest reliability. Sadowski and Gulgoz (1992) obtained figures nearly identical to those obtained by Cacioppo et al., (1984), with a seven-week period between measurement. The scale has also been

found to be a substantially valid measurement instrument of this personality trait (Forsterlee & Ho, 1999; Heesacker, 1985; Lassiter, Briggs, & Bowman, 1991; Perri & Wolfgang, 1988; Tolentino, Curry, & Leak, 1990). Nearly 30 other studies have assessed the reliability and validity of the scale, obtaining comparable results (see Cacioppo, Petty, Feinstein, & Jarvis, 1996). Due to all of the convincing support, this scale has become the standard used in all social research that examines the NFC attribute. Because of the credibility given to the 18-item scale and the efficiency advantage it holds over the 34-item scale, this version was adopted for this study (see Appendix L).

There are some concerns that due to the transparent nature of the scale's intent, respondents may choose answers that are socially desirable. Our culture values critical thinking, and it is somewhat obvious from the items that this is a measure of satisfaction derived from such efforts. This could be a confound to its measurement of NFC if respondents who were really lower in NFC chose to indicate a higher liking for critical thought because of its social appeal and their need for positive self-presentation. However, Cacioppo and Petty (1982) did not find a significant correlation ($r = .08$) between NFC and a measure of social desirability, indicating that the transparent nature of the scale did not lead subjects to bias their responses in favour of a flattering self-impression. They concluded that this was due to the unidentifiable nature of their responses, and recommended that such anonymity be emphasised to participants when measures of NFC are to be taken. In the data collection sessions conducted for this study, the researcher emphasised that their responses would be anonymous both verbally and textually in the informed consent

(see Appendix I), which was distributed to each participant prior to questionnaire administration.

7.15.3.7. Additional Filler Items & Open-Ended Questions

The last page of the questionnaire lists 68 words and asks participants to check those that appeared in the segment that they viewed. It was supposed to resemble an aided recall task, but really was only included to maintain the cover story. Finally, an open-ended thought-listing activity was included to protect the validity of the study (see Appendix L). Participants were asked to write down any thoughts that they had during the session in a free stream-of-consciousness format. They were asked to include anything regarding any part of the exposure, procedures, and questionnaires. In particular, they were asked how anything related to their own life. This was done primarily as a validity check to determine that there were no recurring comprehension problems in the procedures or questionnaires (such as interpreting a scale or fatigue issues) that would preclude the drawing of accurate conclusions.

This item also made it possible to interpret unexpected findings. It was important to determine if any of their thoughts could have confounded their data. For example, if a participant whose parents were recently divorced was in the positive mood condition, the programme (*A Wedding Story*) may have had an unintended effect on their mood. If their results did not fall into the expected pattern, this information could be used to explain outlying data.

Additionally, any thoughts that they listed on the ads or brands may have provided qualitative data that could be used to either support the hypotheses, or explain

alternate results. Such ad and brand-related thoughts could then be used to guide the discussions. This activity also further upheld the cover story, since it was a free recall task.

Finally, subjects were asked to indicate what they believed to be the true intent of the study. This was included as one last protection against demand characteristics. Those who had an idea as to the intent of the study may not have provided impartial data. Consequently they would have represented major validity threats. With this information, such problematic subjects could be eliminated from the analysis. The results of these experiments will be the focus of the analysis reported in the next chapter.

Section IV

Results & Conclusions

Chapter Eight

Data Analysis & Findings

8.1. PREAMBLE

Through quantitative analysis, conclusions were drawn from the experimental data that were collected. This chapter will simply report the findings obtained, and is intended to be used as a basis for the discussion that follows in the next chapter. Consequently, elaboration on the findings will be minimal in this chapter. Initially, it assesses the validity of the design to ensure that the independent variables were properly controlled. Following this, the results of the specific hypothesis testing will be detailed. In the final two chapters, the results will be discussed in greater depth and related to the current research on advertising.

8.2. CHECKING THE DESIGN

The scientific approach would suggest that experiments should be designed to explore the hypotheses under investigation. The primary way to achieve this would be by collecting data and using appropriate quantitative analysis. The design of the analysis is a vital step. There is a need to ensure that the appropriate evidence can be obtained to accurately address the research objectives. In some sense, the design conditions the research and hence the analysis carried out. By acknowledging this, it is possible to assess the likely impact on the analysis and results achieved. It is also possible to evaluate whether the design has succeeded in achieving its desired goals.

Prior to hypothesis testing, therefore, it is pertinent to investigate certain areas to certify that the initial assumptions of the design have been controlled as predicted. There were relevant design issues with regard to the brands, ads, and programmes. With respect to the brands, it was critical that indeed the brands utilised were of moderate familiarity to the participants. For the ads, it was important to ensure that the level of perceived humour matched that which would be expected of the particular ad type. Additionally, it was imperative to make an assessment of potential wearout effects that may have confounded the study. Finally, it was necessary to be sure that the programmes produced the desired context-induced mood state.

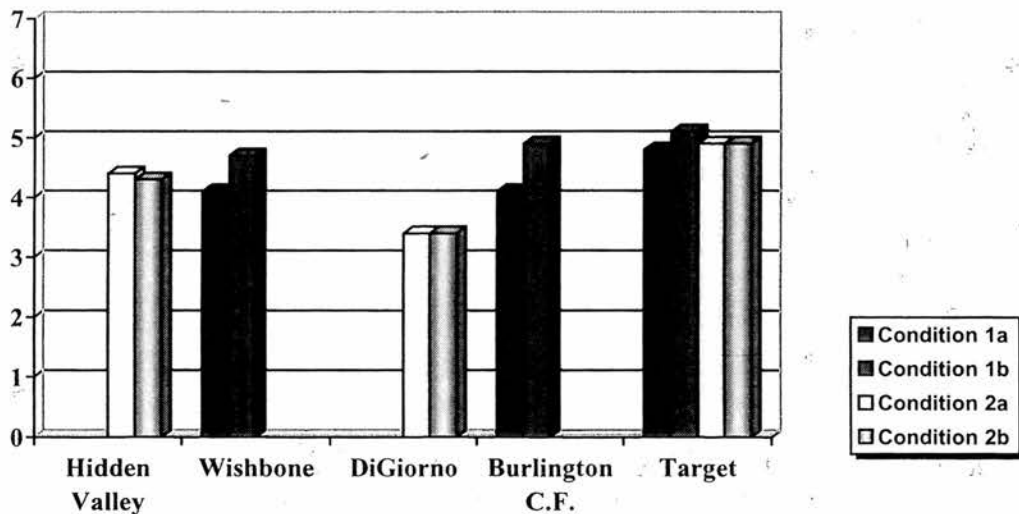
8.2.1. Brand Familiarity Check

Recall that this was a study of *average* brands. Implicit in that is that no unknown brands were utilised, since this was not a study on brand attitude formation. Additionally, it was important that no high profile brands, such as *McDonald's* or *Nike* were used. Most attitudes for these types of brands are rather rigid and solidified, which means that advertising for such brands has neither persuasive intent nor effect.

To ensure that familiarity for the brands in this study was in the moderate range, data from the three-item brand familiarity inventory was analysed. The three items for each participant were averaged, and descriptive statistics were run on these figures. The analysis was run separately for each condition, to provide greater sensitivity. As can be seen in Table 8.1 and Figure 8.1, all of the brands resembled one another with regard to familiarity, which was within the safe range of between 3 and 5 (on a scale from 1-7) for every brand. Thus the pilot study was predictive of brand familiarity for the test brands, and appropriate brands were chosen.

	Participant Familiarity With Brands				
	Brands				
	Hidden Valley	Wishbone	DiGiorno	Burlington Coat Factory	Target
	Condition 1a				
Mean	---	4.1	---	4.1	4.8
Median	---	4.0	---	4.0	5.0
SD	---	1.6	---	1.5	1.5
	Condition 1b				
Mean	---	4.7	---	4.9	5.1
Median	---	5.0	---	5.0	5.3
SD	---	1.6	---	1.4	1.5
	Condition 2a				
Mean	4.4	---	3.4	---	4.9
Median	4.2	---	3.3	---	5.2
SD	1.4	---	1.5	---	1.6
	Condition 2b				
Mean	4.3	---	3.4	---	4.9
Median	4.3	---	3.3	---	5.0
SD	1.7	---	1.7	---	1.6

Figure 8.1 Average Brand Familiarity



8.2.2. Prior Ad Exposure Check

Additionally, it was crucial to ensure that the ads that were used in the study were not high exposure ads for the participants. Had they been viewed more than three or more times over the previous year, their true impact could not be determined through experimentation, because of potential wearout effects. As a result, a descriptive analysis was run on the self-report item that required participants to indicate the number of times that they had seen the ad over the previous year. Again, the data was examined across conditions to provide greater sensitivity.

As can be noted in Table 8.2, all of the ads are within the safe range with regard to prior exposure. None approached the three-exposure threshold. The highest figures were for the *DiGiorno* ad, which on average yielded 2.4 exposures and 1.8 exposures prior to the experiments in Conditions 2a and 2b, respectively. However, this is still below the point where wearout should be a concern. Regardless, as will be shown below, this was the most successful ad with regard to humour appreciation and ad liking, leaving no indication of wearout effects. Wearout confounds should not be considered a concern for any of the ads used in this study. Despite the fact that the figures are low, prior exposure may actually be overstated. Participants may recall having seen the ad a few times. However, this may have occurred prior to the previous year of interest. While it may be easy to recall having seen the ads, it may be difficult for participants to remember how long it has been since they were exposed. Remember that prior exposure effects are reversible, and it appears that any adverse effects in this study were minimal.

Table 8.2 Previous Exposure to Test Ads						
	Ads					
	Informational		Comic Wit		Satire	
	Hidden Valley	Burlington C.F.	Wishbone	Target (2)	DiGiorno	Target (1)
Condition 1a						
Mean	---	1.2	0.6	---	---	1.7
Median	---	0	0	---	---	1.5
SD	---	1.5	1.0	---	---	2.0
Condition 1b						
Mean	---	1.4	1.0	---	---	2.1
Median	---	1.5	0	---	---	1.5
SD	---	1.4	1.5	---	---	2.1
Condition 2a						
Mean	1.2	---	---	0.5	2.4	---
Median	0	---	---	0	1.5	---
SD	1.6	---	---	1.2	1.9	---
Condition 2b						
Mean	1.6	---	---	0.6	1.8	---
Median	1.5	---	---	0	1.5	---
SD	1.8	---	---	1.4	2.1	---

8.2.3. Ad Type Check

Additionally, it was necessary to assess the appreciation of humour within the ads, to ensure that the assigned ads were perceived as predicted. The prediction from H3 (see p. 277) was that satirical ads would be received with the highest humour rating, whereas those that utilised comic wit would be viewed as a more modest form of humour. Obviously the non-humorous ads were predicted to be rated the lowest with regard to perceived humour. As can be seen in Table 8.3, the ad appeals were perceived with the appropriate level of expected humour. On a scale from 1 to 5, the informational ads were not viewed to have any humour. Those that used comic wit were perceived to have slight amounts of humour, while those using satire were given moderate humour ratings. This data is represented visually in Figure 8.2.

The differences observed in the humour ratings for the different ad types were statistically significant. A regression was run on the perceived humour ratings, which strongly indicated a trend in humour perception. The regression was highly significant, $F(3) = 193.82$ at a significance level of .05 (Significance $F = 1.1 \text{ E-}102$). This trend in humour perception was highly influenced by ad type, $t = 23.94$, $p < .05$, indicating the statistical significance between the ad type conditions. These findings in conjunction with the descriptive statistics indicate that the ad types were perceived as predicted. The full results of the regression can be seen in Table 8.4. To further assess the strength of the humour type conditions, the mood condition was also included in the model. As can be seen in Table 8.4, this factor did not impact the perceived humorousness rating of the ad execution. This is also evident in Table 8.3, as the ratings given to each individual ad were virtually identical between programme conditions, indicating that mood state did not influence level of perceived humour. Therefore, differences in the level of perceived humour between those in a good mood and those in a bad mood did not confound any mood effects.

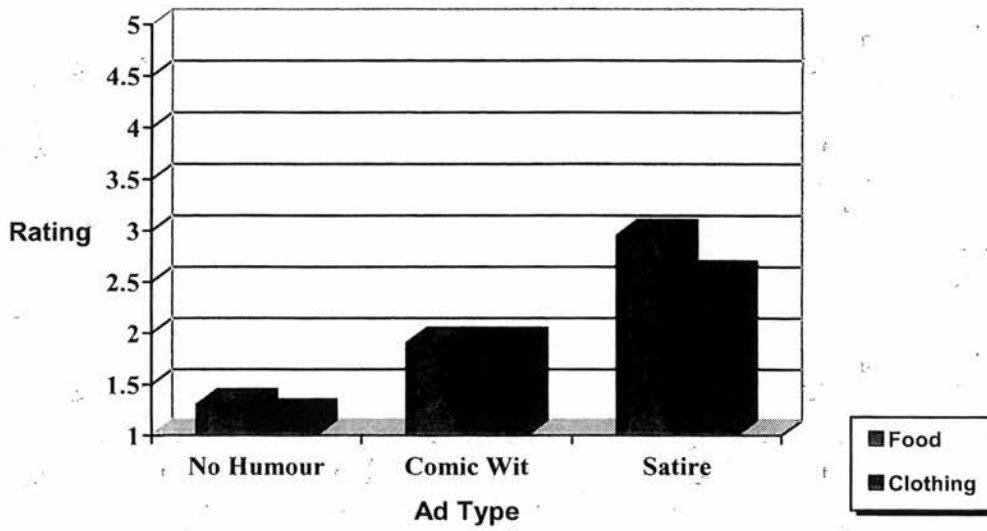
It is also important to note that the ads were given modest ratings, showing that they were indeed, average with regard to perceived humour. Clearly the participants were amused by the ads that used humour, without finding them extremely funny or even hilarious. This study was meant to examine *everyday*, average use of humour, rather than the *best* and *brightest* standouts, which are much more rarely produced. This was an examination of how consumers are *likely* to respond to typical applications of humour appeals, not a case study on success stories. The best applications of humour or any appeal are expected to be met with success. Clearly, this data shows that these results are more applicable to the less certain, everyday instances of humour usage in advertising.

Table 8.3 Perceived Humorousness of Ads						
	Ads					
	Informational		Comic Wit		Satire	
	Hidden Valley	Burlington C.F.	Wishbone	Target (2)	DiGiorno	Target (1)
Condition 1a						
Mean	---	1.2	1.7	---	---	2.5
Median	---	1	1	---	---	3
SD	---	0.5	0.8	---	---	0.9
Condition 1b						
Mean	---	1.2	2.1	---	---	2.6
Median	---	1	2	---	---	3
SD	---	0.5	0.9	---	---	1.0
Condition 2a						
Mean	1.3	---	---	1.9	2.9	---
Median	1	---	---	2	3	---
SD	0.7	---	---	1.0	1.0	---
Condition 2b						
Mean	1.3	---	---	1.9	3.0	---
Median	1	---	---	2	3	---
SD	0.6	---	---	0.9	1.1	---

Table 8.4 Regression for Humour Perception Statistics	
Regression Statistics	
Multiple R	0.60
R Square	0.32
Adjusted R Square	0.32
Standard Error	0.91
Observations	1218

ANOVA					
	df	SS	MS	F	Sig. F
Regression	5	483.19	161.06	193.82	1.1E-102
Residual	1214	1008.83	0.83		
Total	1217	1492.02			

	Coefficient	Standard Error	t Stat	p-Value	Significant?
Intercept	1.08	0.06	19.47	1.1E-73	Yes
Ad Type	0.77	0.03	23.94	4.3E-104	Yes
Mood	-0.08	0.05	-1.46	0.14	No
Product	0.13	0.05	2.44	0.01	Yes

Figure 8.2 Mean Perceived Humour Ratings

8.2.4. Context-Induced Mood Check

Finally, it was necessary to ensure that the programmes selected for the study had the desired effect on participants' mood. As a result, the four items from the Mood Short Form were summed to create a single composite mood rating. The latter two items were reverse-scored. A one-tailed, two-sample t-test, assuming unequal variance was conducted on the data between the two mood conditions. Using this statistic, it could be determined whether the observed discrepancies between the two samples were statistically equal, or meaningfully different. In this instance, the two groups that were compared were those who were assigned to different mood conditions. A one-tailed test was conducted because the statistical difference between the groups occurred in a predicted direction (those in the positive mood condition would have a mood rating higher than those in a negative mood condition).

From a strict viewpoint, there might be difficulties in applying tests such as z-test, t-test, and analysis of variance (ANOVA) to ordinal data. However, it has become

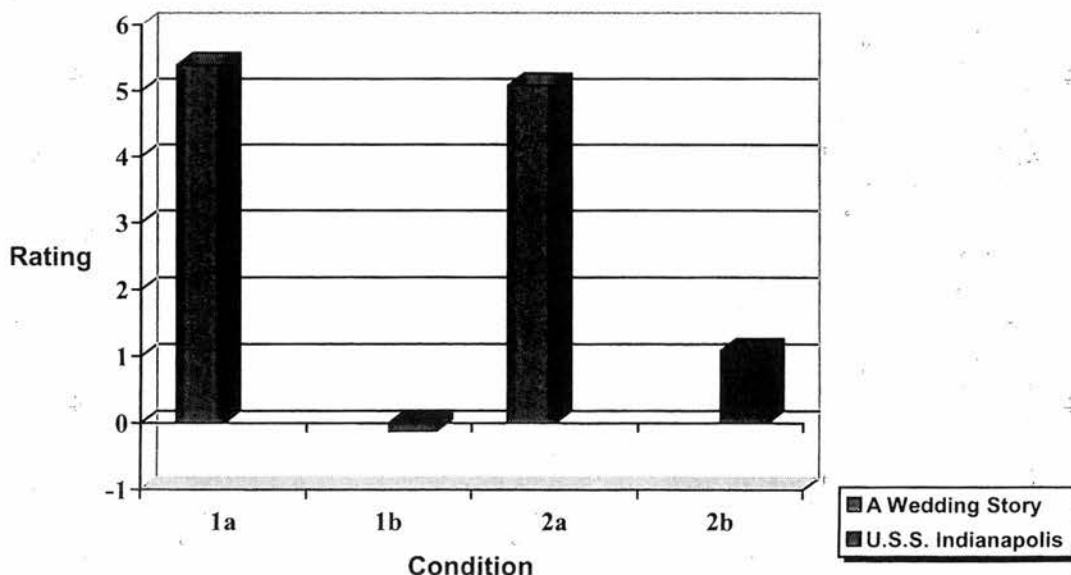
normal practice in marketing and in some social sciences. There are two concerns that arise. Firstly, there is the disquiet arising from the use of a scale where there is no guarantee that the intervals are equal between the points on the scale. Attitudinal Likert scales provide respondents with a way of representing their *relative* agreement or disagreement with the statements. Similarly, semantic differentials represent a relative degree of attitudinal emphasis. This means that the difference between the points is subjective. On the other hand, it would be impossible to proceed if each individual scale was considered to be distinct. This would leave researchers contemplating the less practical particulars of the individual rather than the overall impression of the collective. Hence in marketing and social science, generally researchers have tended to aggregate to get *mean* values (see Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The assumption is that individuals interpret the scales similarly. Still, they may not be entirely equivalent. It may be possible to analyse the data on an ordinal scale but the added benefit would not justify the increase in complexity to the analysis. In the past, authors have found that the difference between non-parametric testing and parametric testing with sufficiently large samples is relatively unimportant (see Traylor, 1983). If the sample sizes here had been smaller, there certainly would have been less reliance on a metric analysis.

The second point might be over the distributions and assumptions about variance. For large samples, the data would have to be pathological for the means not to be normal. This is because the central limit theorem applies as long as the variance of the population is finite. Also, the sample size possibly guards to some extent against the necessity for equality of variance throughout. Provided the variances are not too dispersed, the tests are likely to be adequate.

The two ad conditions (Conditions 1 & 2) were analysed separately for greater sensitivity. As can be seen in Table 8.5 and Figure 8.3, those participants who were exposed to *A Wedding Story* (Conditions 1a & 2a) had a much more positive mood state when assessing the ads than those exposed to *U.S.S. Indianapolis: Tragedy at Sea* (Conditions 1b & 2b). These differences were statistically significant for both ad conditions, $t(190) = 8.63, p < .05$ and $t(198) = 6.04, p < .05$, respectively. The full results of the mood checks are listed in Table 8.5. It is clear from these results that the context-induced mood variable was successfully integrated into the design.

Condition	Mood Test for Conditions 1		Mood Test for Conditions 2	
	1a	1b	2a	2b
Mean	5.39	-0.12	5.08	1.08
Variance	15.86	25.69	20.39	23.77
Observations	103	101	102	100
t-Test Results				
df	190		198	
t-test statistic	8.63		6.04	
p (one-tail)	1.24E-15		3.67E-09	
t critical one-tail	1.65		1.65	
At 5% α level	Significant		Significant	

Figure 8.3 Mean Mood Ratings By Condition



8.3. HYPOTHESIS TESTING

Now that the basic design elements have been established, the remainder of the chapter will be devoted to hypothesis testing. **H3** has already been established as it was a major part of the design and was thus included as a design check. First, the correlation between the different attitude measures will be established (**H1** & **H2**). The analysis will then examine the memorability of the different ad types (**H4**). Next, the data will show how attitudes differed towards the different ad types (**H5**). Whether this translated into increased persuasion for the humorous ads (**H6**) will be the focus of the section that follows. The analysis will then shift to establishing whether any of the other variables mediated this effect, including context-induced mood state (**H7**), need for cognition (NFC) (**H8**), or pre-existing brand attitude (**H9**). Through this testing, it will then be possible to conclude whether the findings generalised to both product types (**H10**).

8.3.1. Correlation between Attitude Measures

H1 and **H2** (see p. 277) were concerned with correlation between attitude towards the ad (Aad), brand attitudes (Attb), and purchase intentions (PI). **H1** predicted a positive correlation between Aad and Attb. Overall, Pearson's correlation between Aad and post-test Attb for the six test brands was .34. Use of this correlation is intended for metric data, so again, there is an assumption of normality being made. This indicates a positive but somewhat weak correlation between the two constructs following a single ad exposure. There was a stronger correlation between Aad and brand attitudes for the food products. The post-test Attb and PI measures were much more strongly correlated. Overall, for the six test brands the correlation between the attitude towards the brand and their likelihood of purchasing the brand was .77. The individual correlation coefficients for each test brand can be seen in Table 8.6. Based on these findings, **H1** and **H2** are supported by the data.

Brand	Aad & Attb Coefficient	Attb & PI Coefficient
Hidden Valley	.38	.68
Burlington C.F.	.29	.80
Wishbone	.41	.75
Target (2)	.29	.73

8.3.2. Recall of Ads

H4 focused on the memorability of the ads (see p. 278). The belief was that humorous ads would generate greater attention to the ad (see Chapter Three), and as a result, they would be better recalled. Recall was measured through subjective responses of the participants on a scale from 1 to 5. A one-way ANOVA was conducted on the recall data, and the results are displayed in Table 8.7. This test was significant $F(5) = 26.75, p < .05$. Therefore, the recall data supports the predicted pattern. Brands are grouped in the table by the ad appeal executed. The informational ads were recalled with much less certainty than the humorous ads. The funnier satirical ads were given the highest recall ratings.

This data was further buttressed by responses given during the debriefing discussions. One of the most common questions asked by respondents was whether the items concerning the informational ads were merely included as fillers to maintain the cover story, which related the study to an investigation of memory. The reason that they believed this was because many did not have any recollection of being exposed to the non-humorous ads. This theme developed in both ad conditions, whether the ad was for *Hidden Valley* or *Burlington Coat Factory*. These comments were found irrespective of the placement of the non-humorous ads within the pod. This along with the experimental findings supports **H4**.

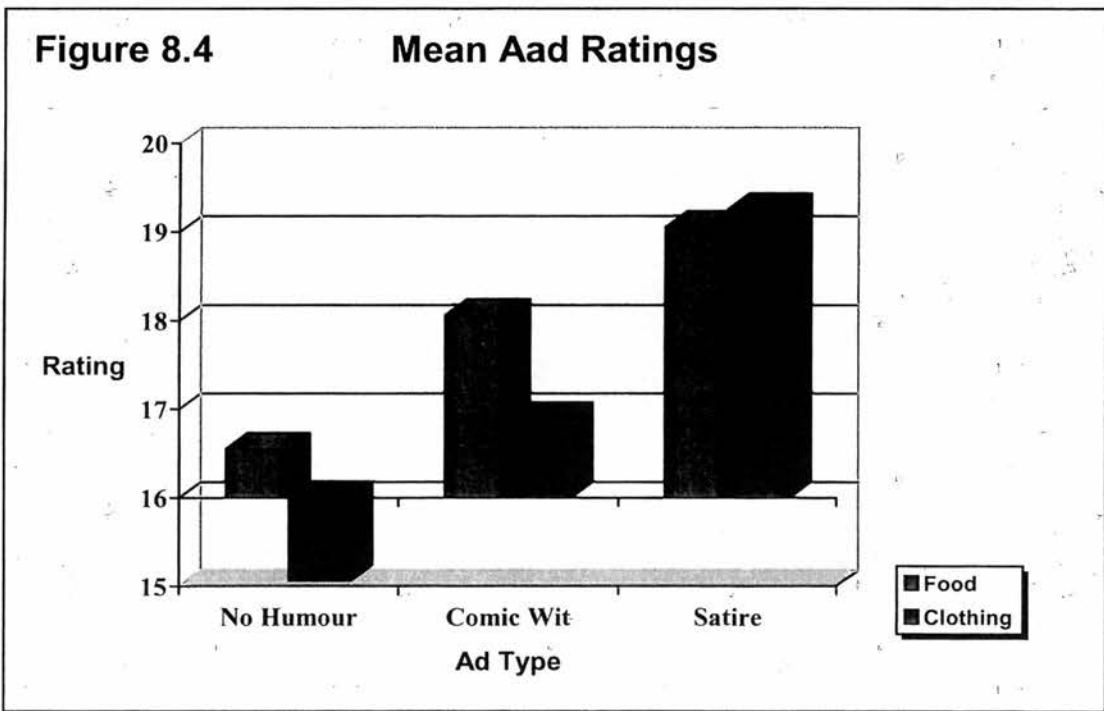
Table 8.7 Analysis of Ad Recall					
Brand		Mean Recall		Variance	
Hidden Valley		3.52		0.87	
Burlington C.F.		3.84		0.86	
Wishbone		4.10		0.43	
Target (2)		3.98		0.90	
ANOVA					
SS	df	MS	F	p-value	F critical
88.44	5	17.69	26.75	1.04E-25	2.22

8.3.3. Ad Liking

The reason that recall is improved for the humorous ads is related to **H5** (see p. 278). The humorous ads should be better recalled because they are better liked and therefore given more attention. To assess ad liking, the four Aad measures were summed into a single composite score. The range in ad liking runs from 4 (Strongly disliked) to 28 (Strongly liked). The mean Aad ratings are listed in Table 8.8 and visually represented in Figure 8.4. A one-way ANOVA revealed that these differences are significant. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected and **H5** is supported. There may be a slight concern about the variance that more than doubles from the *Hidden Valley* ad to the others, which casts doubt on the validity of the assumption of constant variance. However, the result should be reliable given the large sample size. Again, the table grouped brands that used the same appeal. Participants had more or less indifferent attitudes towards the informational ads. The *Hidden Valley* ad was, on average, given a neutral rating, while the *Burlington Coat Factory* ad was slightly disliked. The ads that used comic wit (*Wishbone* & *Target (2)*) were given stronger ratings, while the satirical ads (*DiGiorno* & *Target (1)*), which were perceived to be funnier, were liked the best. Therefore, **H5** is supported by the data.

Brand	Mean Aad	Variance
Hidden Valley	16.55	7.55
Burlington C.F.	15.06	13.33
Wishbone	18.06	16.11
Target (2)	16.89	15.38
DiGiorno	19.05	16.81
Target (1)	19.25	19.72

ANOVA					
SS	df	MS	F	p-value	F critical
2623.67	5	524.73	35.42	6.89E-34	2.22



8.3.4. Persuasiveness of the Ads

H6 (see p. 278) was focused on the persuasive impact of the ad types. Specifically, it was predicted that those ads that employed humour appeals would lead to a positive change in brand attitude, brand interest, and purchase intentions. The funnier humorous executions (i.e.: satire) would lead to the strongest positive persuasive shift, while the non-humorous ads would not be at all persuasive. To test this hypothesis, the four brand attitude scales were summed to derive a composite attitude rating that

incorporated cognitive, affective, and global attitude dimensions. Because each scale ranged from 1 to 7, the composite ranged from 4 to 28, with four being a strong negative attitude and 28 being a strong favourable attitude. A set of one-tailed, two sample t-tests for means was conducted on the pre- and post-test ratings for each brand.

As can be seen in Table 8.9, the data for the food products supports **H6**. There was no significant attitudinal shift as a result of exposure to the non-humorous, product-driven ad for *Hidden Valley*. Exposure to an ad for *Wishbone* that used comic wit led to a moderate and positive change in brand attitudes. The more humorous satirical ad for *DiGiorno* was correlated with an even stronger positive shift in brand attitudes. For the clothing ads, none of the ads positively persuaded consumers. In fact, ad exposure actually had a detrimental effect on brand attitudes for all three ads. In the case of the funniest, satirical ad, this was not a significant difference, so using successful humour helped to reduce this effect. Based on this initial finding, there appears to be some difference in the perception of the different product types. This issue will be readdressed later.

	Mean Pre-Test Rating	Mean Post-Test Rating	t-Test Statistic	Significance (at 5% α level)
Hidden Valley	18.26	19.24	0.13	Not Significant
Burlington C.F.	18.55	18.09	-2.23	Significant
Wishbone	17.09	18.12	2.33	Significant
Target (2)	17.56	17.07	-2.32	Significant
DiGiorno	18.23	19.44	3.69	Significant
Target (1)	17.44	17.32	-0.56	Not Significant

As an additional assessment of **H6**, the PI data was analysed using one-tailed, two sample t-tests for means. This construct represented the conative aspect of attitudes and the data ranged from 1 (*not at all likely to purchase*) to 7 (*very likely to purchase*). The results of these tests are displayed in Table 8.10. For the food products, the presence of humour in the ad significantly improved intention to purchase the product, while a non-humorous product-focused ad actually *impaired* purchase likelihood significantly. For the clothing products, the use of humour in the ads neither enhanced nor tarnished purchase intent, but the straightforward approach *did* significantly harm purchase likelihood ratings.

Table 8.10 Analysis of Purchase Intention Data				
	Mean Pre-Test Rating	Mean Post-Test Rating	t-Test Statistic	Significance (at 5% α level)
Burlington C.F.	4.84	4.22	-2.41	Significant
Target (2)	3.74	3.69	-0.48	Not Significant
Target (1)	4.02	4.00	-0.29	Not Significant

A final assessment of persuasion was conducted on the brand interest data. The two interest items were summed to create a composite brand interest score. The first item was reverse scored, so the interest data ranged between -6 (extreme lack of interest) to +6 (extreme interest). A set of t-tests was conducted, which compared pre-test to post-test scores. The data is summarised in Table 8.11. The use of humour for the food products helps to maintain a comparable level of interest in the brands. There is no interest in the brand before advertising and no interest after advertising. Given that

the brand attitudes and purchase intentions are favourably affected by humour appeals, this sets the stage for an interesting discussion in the next chapter. The use of a straightforward appeal for food products harmed interest. Like the brands that used a humorous appeal, there was a lack of interest in the brand prior to ad exposure. This interest degenerated further as a result of employing a serious appeal.

The discount clothing products present a different picture. The data suggest that for the sample utilised in this study, there was positive interest in the brands prior to ad exposure. However, all three ad treatments significantly damaged the respondents' interest in the brands. Regardless of the appeal executed, participants, who initially had a positive interest in the brand, expressed a lack of interest in the brands following advertising exposure. These results, in conjunction with the other test results for **H6** suggest that participants find these products more involving than was originally proposed (and dually more involving than the food products). This theme will be discussed at length in the next chapter. However, because of the differences observed between the product conditions, **H6** is only partially supported.

	Mean Pre-Test Rating	Mean Post-Test Rating	t-Test Statistic	Significance (at 5% α level)
Britain Valley	0.96	-1.46	-2.87	Significant
Burlington C.F.	0.25	-0.72	-6.26	Significant
W. Blaine	0.7	-1.94	-1.49	Not Significant
Target (2)	1.03	0.57	-2.49	Significant
DiChorno	0.1	0.03	0.57	Not Significant
Target (1)	1.20	0.28	-6.53	Significant

8.3.5. The Effect of Context-Induced Mood State

To assess the effect of context-induced mood states on the response to the ads (H7, see p. 280), two sample t-tests for means were conducted on the attitude change data across the mood condition. The change in attitude was measured simply by taking the difference between the pre-test composite attitude score and the post-test score. By examining the change in attitudes across the mood conditions, it could be determined whether the context-induced mood state of the participants influenced their attitude towards the brands. The results of these tests are shown in Table 8.12.

As can be seen, the effect of the mood state on brand attitudes is only significant for the *Wishbone* ad. In this case, brand attitudes were favourably affected by a positively toned programme context, and adversely influenced by a negatively toned programme. In the case of the informational ads, no effect was predicted for mood state. The satirical food ad (*DiGiorno*) was also in line with the predicted trend. Brand attitudes were more positively influenced by a positive programme, but the effect was not significant, at least after a single exposure. The observed difference is close to the significance level, which could possibly become significant following repeated pairings of the respective programme tone with the ads. No effects were observed for the clothing products, which again indicates a fundamental difference in the way that the products were perceived. The programme context does not appear to significantly alter brand perceptions for discount clothing products.

Mood Condition	Mean Attitude Change		t-Test Statistic	Significance (at 5% α level)
	Positive	Negative		
<i>Hidden Valley</i>	-0.50	-0.35	0.31	Not Significant
<i>Burlington C.F.</i>	-0.60	-0.33	0.61	Not Significant
<i>Wishbone</i>	-0.60	-0.21	0.71	Significant
Target (2)	-0.65	-0.31	0.79	Not Significant
<i>DiGiorno</i>	-0.40	0.14	0.90	Not Significant
Target (1)	-0.40	0.14	1.19	Not Significant

As a further test of the effect of mood state, the change in intention to purchase was also analysed across the mood condition using t-tests. The results are displayed in Table 8.13. Again there are no significant differences between the mood conditions in responses to any of the clothing brands. The food products reveal the same trend above. Responses to the brand that used a comic wit appeal in its ad (*Wishbone*) are positively influenced by the programme tone. The trend is also noted for the brand using a satirical ad (*DiGiorno*), but again, the effect is not significant. For the purchase intention measures, however, a significant positive effect of programme tone was also noted for the brand that used an informational ad (*Hidden Valley*). As a result, it appears that the mood generated by the programme may lead to a main effect, rather than an interaction with ad type. Also, after a single pairing of the informational ad with a context-induced mood state, the desire to purchase the product is negatively influenced by a sombre programme without actually affecting brand attitude.

Mood Condition	Mean Change in Intentions		t-Test Statistic	Significance (at 5% α level)
	Positive	Negative		
Burlington C.F.	-1.02	-0.25	1.47	Not Significant
Target (2)	0.09	-0.16	-1.33	Not Significant
Target (1)	-0.05	0.01	0.40	Not Significant

While the effect may not have been strong enough to significantly influence attitudes for all of the brands following a single exposure, the context-induced mood states may have altered interest in the brands. To test this possibility, a set of t-tests was conducted on the change in brand interest data, across the mood conditions. The results are displayed in Table 8.14. Clearly, there is a greater degree of significance. Exposure to the ad within the context of a positively valenced programme leaves interest in the brand relatively unchanged. Interest is favourably affected slightly for the food products and unfavourably affected slightly for the clothing products, but interest changes for both products are near the midpoint. On the other hand, when exposed to an ad set within a negatively valenced programme, interest in the brand is significantly harmed. The only exception to this is the ad for *Burlington Coat Factory*. However, the post-test ratings for *Burlington Coat Factory* were so poor following exposure to the ad that it was probably not possible for mood state to be a mediating factor. Taken together with the attitudinal data, the results only partially support H7.

Mood Condition	Mean Change in Intentions		t-Test Statistic	Significance (at 5% α level)
	Positive	Negative		
Burlington C.F.	-1.07	-0.88	0.62	Not Significant
Target (2)	-0.11	-0.77	-1.68	Significant
Target (1)	-0.68	-1.14	-1.69	Significant

8.3.6. Results of the NFC & Prior Brand Attitude Data

Testing **H8** and **H9** (see p. 281 & p. 282, respectively) were a bit trickier because neither NFC nor pre-existing brand attitude were assigned conditions. In the case of prior brand attitude, it is not even a construct that can be conveniently divided into separate groups, since attitude ratings fall over a range. The data cannot be sorted and compartmentalised as neatly. As a result, these hypotheses were examined using regression. Models were created, which analysed trends in participants' responses. Along with the NFC and prior brand attitude data, the other significant variables were included in the model. Through regression analysis, it could be determined which variables accounted for a significant amount of variance in the participants' brand attitudes, purchase intentions, and brand interest.

Additionally, regression allowed the models to structure the ad conditions not only by assigned ad types (no humour, comic wit, and satire) but also perceived humorousness. As established above, these two variables are highly related. However, loading perceived humorousness into the model allowed the data to be analysed specifically by the pure perception of humour. This way, it is easier to see

that it is the use of *humour* specifically rather than some other confounding feature of the creative execution that makes a difference in the ad's effectiveness. Examining the data across ad conditions cannot conclusively show how responses are influenced by the subjective perception of humour. Regression models that load humour perception can determine what influence the ad has on someone who did not find a particular ad funny versus someone who thought that it was hilarious.

It has already been established that the measures of persuasion were significantly affected by the ad conditions for the food products, but not the clothing products. It has also been shown that perceived humour was highly correlated in the predicted direction with whether the ad used a non-humorous, witty, or satirical appeal. Therefore, the regressions reported in this section will only include the models that were loaded with perceived humour. However, because the ad type design was effective, the significance of the results did not differ regardless of whether the humour construct was loaded as an independent variable (assigned ad type) or a dependent variable (perceived humorousness).

As per standard practice, NFC was divided into high and low conditions using a median split. The analysis of NFC was intended to establish that for these products, NFC was not a mediating factor in advertising effectiveness. However, if there was an effect, the previous literature would suggest that it would be in the form of an interaction with ad type, where the use of humour is significantly effective for those low in NFC, but not for those high in NFC. To determine that this effect did *not* operate here, a NFC by perceived humour interaction was included in the model.

Table 8.15 shows the results of the regression on the Aad data. As should be obvious at this point from the analysis reported above, the regression is highly significant, meaning that the distribution of the Aad data shows a significant trend that is not likely to be due to chance. The significant variables in this model that account for the variance in the Aad measures include the perceived humorousness of the ad, the advertised product, and prior attitude towards the brand. Specifically, the data confirms a positive relationship between Aad and perceived humour, $t = 13.44$, $p < .05$. In other words, the funnier the ad is perceived to be, the more favourable the attitude towards the ad. Furthermore, the higher the consumers' attitude towards the brand prior to ad exposure, the more likely they were to have a favourable Aad, $t = 4.68$, $p < .05$. This finding provisionally supports **H9**. NFC did not significantly account for the variance observed in Aad. It appears that consumer's NFC is not a significant mediator of ad appreciation, which supports **H8**. Participants also had a more favourable attitude towards the food ads than the clothing ads, $t = 2.21$, $p < .05$.

Regression Statistics	
Multiple R	0.52
R Square	0.27
Adjusted R Square	0.26
Standard Error	3.55
Observations	1218

	df	SS	MS	F	Sig. F
Regression	6	5518.29	919.72	42.98	9.06E-78
Residual	1211	15262.14	12.60		
Total	1217	20780.43			

	Coefficient	Standard Error	t Stat	p-Value	Significant?
Intercept	12.10	0.56	21.74	9.52E-89	Yes
Humor	1.06	0.27	3.92	1.76E-38	Yes
Mood	-0.17	0.20	-0.83	0.41	No
Product	0.45	0.21	2.21	0.03	Yes
NFC	-0.78	0.40	-1.93	0.06	No
NFC x Hum	0.35	0.19	1.88	0.06	No
Prior Attb	0.12	0.03	4.68	3.12E-06	Yes

Table 8.16 reveals the regression data for the Attb analysis. Again, in line with the earlier analysis, there is a significant trend in the distribution of the Attb data, $F(6) = 42.66$, $p < .05$. As shown above, the ad appeal is positively related to changes in brand attitudes. The funnier the ad is perceived to be, the greater the positive change in brand attitudes, $t = 3.92$, $p < .05$. For the current hypotheses, NFC was again not shown to have a significant influence on the data. Those high and low in NFC did not systematically differ in their attitudinal responses to the brands, which provides further support for **H8**.

As with the Aad data, prior Attb significantly influenced the ensuing brand attitude change, $t = -13.76$, $p < .05$. However, in this case, a *negative* pre-existing attitude was

related to a greater change in Attb. This is in contrast to the Aad data and in contrast to the predictions. However, this finding is likely to be the result of a *ceiling effect*. The attitudinal data is distributed within a limited range. There is a maximum value that could be reached in expressing a positive attitude (28). Because the regression model examined *change* in brand attitude, those who previously expressed a strong positive attitude have little room for improvement. There is more space for upward mobility on the attitude scale when a negative attitude was previously expressed. Therefore, when those with a negative pre-existing attitude are compared to those with a positive pre-existing attitude, it appears that those with the less favourable prior Attb have been persuaded more by the humorous ads.

As a result of this ceiling effect, the Aad data should be given greater consideration for **H9**. A ceiling effect does not occur there because the regression examines a trend in Aad that is not based on an attitudinal *change*. There is only a single measurement of Aad, and prior Attb accounts for a significant amount of variance found in Aad. A more positive prior Attb is correlated with a higher attitude towards the subsequent ad. This indicates that those with a positive prior Attb are more persuaded by the humorous ads than those with a less favourable prior Attb, because Aad has been shown to significantly influence Attb. In fact, when Aad was included in this regression model, there was a significant positive relationship between it and the Attb change data, $t = 10.93$, $p < .05$. Furthermore, inclusion of Aad in the model improved the amount of variance accounted for in the regression from the relatively low $R^2 = .17$ to a more respectable $R^2 = .25$. However, Aad was left out of the model shown in Table 8.16 because there was obvious collinearity between Aad and perceived humour (it has been shown that the funnier the ad is perceived to be, the more it is liked). Because of this collinearity, the perceived humour data was distorted when

Aad was included in the model. Finally, the advertised product influenced the brand attitude change data, $t = 7.47$, $p < .05$. Congruent with the earlier findings, a greater attitudinal change was observed for the food products.

Regression Statistics	
Multiple R	0.42
R Square	0.17
Adjusted R Square	0.17
Standard Error	2.65
Observations	1218

	df	SS	MS	F	Sig. F
Regression	6	1803.87	300.65	42.66	2.13E-47
Residual	1211	8533.75	7.05		
Total	1217	10337.62			

	Coefficient	Standard Error	t Stat	p-Value	Significant?
Intercept	3.79	0.42	9.10	3.67E-19	Yes
Humour	0.36	0.09	3.92	9.22E-05	Yes
Mood	0.04	0.15	0.24	0.81	No
Product	1.15	0.15	7.47	1.57E-13	Yes
NFC	-0.32	0.30	-1.05	0.29	No
NFC x Hum	-0.09	0.14	-0.66	0.51	No
Prior Attb	-0.27	0.02	-13.76	3.91E-40	Yes

The regression model for the purchase intention data was also highly significant, $F(6) = 5.71$, $p < .05$ (Significance $F = 7.26 \text{ E-}06$). However, there is a high degree of variance unaccounted for, $R^2 = .03$. Including Aad and Attb change in the model helped to account for a greater degree of variance, $R^2 = .08$, but again the issue of collinearity expressed above was a concern. Despite the low R^2 , the findings fall in line with the earlier analysis, as perceived ad humour is positively related to change in purchase intentions, $t = 3.31$, $p < .05$. NFC does not significantly account for the

variance observed between the pre- and post-test purchase intention data as neither a main effect nor interaction with humour perception. Prior Attb does significantly contribute to the observed changes in purchase intentions, $t = -3.35$, $p < .05$, although it appears again that a ceiling effect may have influenced the data. The recommendation is once again that the Aad regression model provides a more accurate representation of the relationship between prior Attb and persuasion. Like the previous models, the advertised product significantly influenced the data, $t = 3.08$, $p < .05$.

Table 8.17 Regression for Purchase Intention Change

Regression Statistics	
Multiple R	0.17
R Square	0.03
Adjusted R Square	0.02
Standard Error	1.19
Observations	1218

ANOVA					
	df	SS	MS	F	Sig. F
Regression	6	1109.59	18.326	1.529	.726E-06
Residual	1211	3874.71	3.20		
Total	1217	4984.29			

	Coefficient	Standard Error	T Stat	p-Value	Significant?
Intercept	0.17	0.28	0.59	0.55	No
Humour	0.21	0.03	3.31	9.53E-04	Yes
Mood	0.04	0.10	0.38	0.70	No
Product	0.32	0.10	3.08	2.10E-03	Yes
NFC	0.10	0.20	0.47	0.64	No
NFC x Hum	-0.07	0.09	-0.70	0.48	No
Prior Attb	-0.04	0.01	-3.35	8.34E-04	Yes

Finally, regression was performed on the brand interest change data. At the 5% significance level, it was highly significant, $F(6) = 7.15$ (Significance $F = 1.65 \text{ E-}07$). While a lot of variance is unaccounted for by the current model, $R^2 = .03$, a number of significant influences are noted. Perceived humour is positively related to brand interest changes, $t = 2.97$, $p < .05$. NFC does not significantly account for the change in brand interest variance, which further supports **H8**. Mood state is a significant influence in the regression model, $t = 4.04$, $p < .05$. The positive relationship found here is in line with the t-tests above, which found mood to significantly impact interest across the majority of the brands. Finally, the food products are associated with a more positive change in brand interest, $t = 3.54$, $p < .05$.

Table 8.18 Regression for Brand Interest Change

Regression Statistics	
Multiple R	0.18
R Square	0.03
Adjusted R Square	0.03
Standard Error	2.35
Observations	1218

ANOVA

	df	SS	MS	F	Sig. F
Regression	6	237.84	39.64	7.15	1.65E-07
Residual	1211	6712.38	5.54		
Total	1217	6950.22			

	Coefficient	Standard Error	t Stat	p-Value	Significant?
Intercept	-1.20	0.37	-3.25	1.19E-03	Yes
Humour	0.13	0.06	2.97	3.05E-03	Yes
Mood	0.55	0.14	4.04	5.77E-05	Yes
Product	0.48	0.14	3.54	4.22E-04	Yes
NFC	-0.35	0.27	-1.30	0.19	No
NFC x Hum	0.05	0.12	0.39	0.69	No
Prior Attb	-1.79E-03	0.02	-0.10	0.92	No

8.3.7. Product Issues

This study was initially conducted across two different product types believed to be from the same product quadrant in an attempt to show resiliency in the findings across two different types of products. As should be clear at this point, the data demonstrated that the same results do not generalise across the two products. This finding has recurred throughout this chapter. Generally, the predicted patterns were observed for the food products, but not for the clothing products. The regressions have further confirmed that the product advertised significantly accounted for variance observed in the measures of persuasion. It appears that the clothing products were perceived by the sample differently than anticipated. This is a theme that will be further developed in the next chapter. For now, it will be concluded that the findings were dependent on the product that was advertised. As a result, **H10** has not been supported.

8.4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter reported the results of the statistical analysis on the experimental data. Initially a number of design checks were carried out to ensure that the integrity of the design had been maintained. The remainder of the chapter was focused on hypothesis testing. A summary of the findings can be seen in Table 8.19. While the statistical methods and results were reported, detailed commentary on the results has been reserved for the next chapter. Following the discussion of the findings in Chapter Nine, Chapter Ten will examine the limitations of the research, and its implications to both theory and practice.

Table 8.19 Summary Table of Hypotheses		
Hypothesis	Synopsis	Finding
H1	Positive relationship between Aad & Attb	Supported
H2	Positive relationship between Attb & PI	Supported
H3	Perceived Humorousness of ads (satire > wit > no humour)	Supported
H4	Ad recall greater for (more) humorous ads	Supported
H5	Ad liking greater for (more) humorous ads	Supported
H6	(More) humorous ads are more persuasive	Supported for food products Not supported for clothing
H7	Persuasiveness enhanced by positive mood	Partially supported
H8	No differences between low & high NFC	Supported
H9	Persuasiveness enhanced by positive prior Attb	Supported
H10	No differences across product dimension	Not Supported

Chapter Nine

Discussion

"The pure and simple truth is rarely pure and never simple." - Oscar Wilde

9.1. PREAMBLE

In the previous chapter, the results of the data analysis were reviewed. The chapter was restricted to reporting the results of the statistical analysis and how well the data supported the hypotheses. In this chapter, the interpretation of the results will be discussed in detail. The chapter will include a summary and discussion of the results reported in the previous chapter. In the final chapter, the theoretical and managerial implications will be discussed, as well as a discussion of the limitations to the research. At this point, however, a detailed account will be given for the results provided in Chapter Eight.

9.2. ABSTRACTION OF THE FINDINGS

In this section, the justification will be provided for the findings. An account will be given, which will explain why some hypotheses were supported, while other predictions were not fully corroborated. The data will also be tied back into the literature. The discussion will be structured in the same order that the results were reported.

9.2.1. Relationship Between Aad, Attb, & PI

The first set of hypotheses was related to the nature of the ad effects on attitudes. Central to all of the findings is the belief that attitude towards the ad (Aad) influences brand attitude (Attb), which in turn, affect purchase intention (PI). The correlation between these constructs was calculated, to see if there was a positive relationship. There was a positive but weak correlation between Aad and Attb. The predicted relationship was evident, although it was not a strong correlation. There are a couple of issues that may help to explain this.

The products used in this study were indulgent products, and as a result, Aad should heavily influence Attb via classical conditioning mechanisms. As will be discussed later, ad liking did significantly affect brand attitudes. First, however, the correlation between the measures was calculated. The correlation between ad attitude and brand attitude was not particularly strong. Then again, this was only after a single exposure to the ad. While single exposure studies have demonstrated a significant effect (see Chapter Seven), the optimal effects of peripheral route persuasion require multiple exposures (see Belch, 1982; Zinkhan & Gelb, 1990). Upon repeated exposure to the test ads, the correlation between Aad and brand attitudes is likely to strengthen as the impact of the ad on brand attitudes also becomes more potent. Despite this low correlation, it appears that Aad significantly influenced Attb as evident from the fact that pre-test brand attitudes and Aad do not correlate nearly as well as Aad and post-test brand attitude. If Aad exerted no influence on brand attitudes (or if brand attitude influenced Aad), then there should be no difference between the correlations. As can be seen in Table 9.1, the Aad correlates much more strongly with post-test brand attitudes, indicating a significant effect.

Brand	Aad & Pre-Attb	Aad & Post-Attb	Difference
Hidden Valley	.17	.38	+ .21
Burlington C.F.	.06	.29	+ .23
Wishbone	.16	.41	+ .25
Target (2)	.14	.29	+ .15

Additionally, it is interesting to note that the correlation between Aad and brand attitudes is stronger for the funnier ads. This is particularly notable for the food products, where the other hypotheses were the most strongly supported. The correlations for the food products were .38, .41, and .49 for the non-humour, comic wit, and satire conditions, respectively. This is likely to be due to the fact that a single exposure to a humorous ad may start to exert a stronger positive influence on brand attitudes.

As would be expected, brand attitudes and purchase intentions were very strongly correlated. Purchase intentions represent the conative aspect of attitudes. Purchase decisions should be strongly related to the attitude towards the brand. This effect was observed here as can be recalled from Table 8.6.

9.2.2. Humour Appreciation

The analysis on the various ad type manipulations revealed that, as expected, satire was the most appreciated form of humour. Some research has suggested that comic wit is the most universally appreciated type of humour because it is simple and readily understood (Zhang, 1996b). Furthermore, it does not rely on sentimentality, which some people may find too maudlin or corny nor does it use disparagement, which some may find offensive. The evidence here suggests that at least this sample

really enjoyed the combination of incongruity-resolution and aggressive humour. As a result, they experienced a stronger humorous response from the satirical ads. Regardless of the mood condition, satirical humour was the most appreciated form of humour examined in this study.

Due to the greater perceived humour in the satirical ads, they were recalled the best and indeed liked best. Ad liking was positively related to the perceived humorousness of the ad. Therefore, the ads that used a comic wit appeal were given the second highest Aad rating, while the non-humour ads were given the lowest ratings. The ad for *Hidden Valley* was given a neutral rating, on average, while the *Burlington Coat Factory Ad* was given a slightly negative rating on average. This directly translated to ad recall. The well-liked, funny, satirical ads were recalled the best, followed by the ads using comic wit, while the non-humorous ads were not recalled as well.

9.2.3. Persuasive Consequences of Humour in Advertising

Perceived humour and ad liking do not really mean much from a marketing standpoint if the ads do not produce results. There were a number of tests conducted to assess the belief that humour appeals would persuade consumers more than non-humorous appeals for the products under investigation. A large portion of the discussion will focus on this issue.

9.2.3.1. The Food Products

For the food products, the hypothesised relationship was found. Even after a single exposure, the use of humour in advertising significantly facilitates persuasion. These findings were found for both cognitive and affective as well as conative measures of

attitudinal persuasion. In other words, not only did the use of humour have a positive influence on consumers' brand attitudes, but it also made them want to buy the product more.

Furthermore, the results suggest that the more humorous the ad is perceived to be, the more effective it is in persuading the consumer. The satirical *DiGiorno* ad was the most effective, while the witty *Wishbone* ad was more moderately persuasive. The non-humorous *Hidden Valley* ad did not impair brand attitudes, but consumers had less desire to purchase the product following ad viewing. It has been suggested that attitudes for these products are classically conditioned. There is nothing about the non-humorous ads that would serve as an adverse conditioning stimulus, so there is no reason to believe that attitudes would become negative. However, the findings indicate that relying on an appeal that focuses on attribute information for a product that consumers do not really care about adversely affects consumers' desire to purchase the product due to its effect on their interest in the brand.

The results suggest that the funnier the ad is perceived to be, the greater the likelihood of it having a persuasive impact. This does not support the view of Krishnan and Chakravarti (1990), who believe that moderate humour is the most effective. Their contention is that overly funny appeals can impair message comprehension. However, for the products under investigation, it has been argued that a classical conditioning approach is the most effective, in which case comprehension is not a necessary communicative goal in persuading consumers.

It could be noted that the ads that were used in this study generally elicited a moderate humorous response. Recall that the objective of this research was to

investigate *average*, everyday appeals rather than the most successful applications. If that is the case, then really it cannot be claimed that the positive relationship between persuasion and perceived humour would be sustained for extremely funny ads. Krishnan and Chakravarti (1990) alleged that moderate appeals work best, and if the *funniest* ads used in this study were really only perceived to be moderately funny, then these findings would not contest theirs.

However, in addition to analysing the data by the ad type condition, the regression was rerun loading the perceived humorousness rating, irrespective of the ad type condition (and in fact these were the results reported in Chapter Eight). The findings did not significantly differ regardless of how the model was created, because the relationship between ad type and humorous response was in the predicted direction (with no humour generating the lowest perceived humour rating and satire the highest). Notwithstanding, the models were loaded with a perceived funniness variable because some viewers were likely to perceive more humour than were others. Accordingly, it was crucial to determine that observed ad effects were due to the perception of humour rather than some other aspect of the ad.

The persuasive influence of humour was even stronger when the analysis was conducted in this way. The impact of the ad on brand attitudes and purchase intentions was most strongly influenced by the level of humour perceived in the ad. This suggests that the funnier the ad, the more persuasive it will be. By analysing the data by perceived humour, the analysis was not restricted to the ad type conditions, which were, on average, given moderate perceived humour ratings. This allowed the data to be examined across the full distribution of perceived humour ratings ranging

from *not at all humorous* to *hilarious*. The funnier the ad was perceived to be, the more effective it was in changing attitudes and intentions. This finding is in agreement with the study conducted by Perry et al. (1997b), which found that a *high humour* ad was more effective than a *low humour* ad at changing brand attitudes and purchase intentions.

With regard to brand interest, the findings were not exactly as predicted, but they do demonstrate an advantage of a humorous appeal for low-involvement/transformational products and fit in with this current line of thinking. Re-evaluation of the concept of brand interest helps to position these findings within the context of the other measures of persuasion. Brand interest was originally included as a more sensitive measure of persuasion in case a single exposure to low-involvement advertising was not enough to significantly alter brand attitudes and the likelihood of purchase. It was believed that an ad that was thought to be more persuasive (i.e.: a humorous ad) would improve interest in the brand in the same way as it can improve brand attitudes. However, the food products examined here are what have been referred to in this thesis as *instinctual* brand selections. They embody low-involvement, routine purchases. Therefore, interest in the brand may not precede a positive attitude.

The attitude towards such brands is likely to be created peripherally and based on an affective appeal, exactly because there is not enough interest in the brand to exert cognitive effort into the maintenance of brand attitudes. When advertising for such products, the use of a likeable humorous appeal does not *improve* interest in the brand, but merely helps *maintain* a neutral level of consumer interest in the brand.

The data showed that there was little interest in the brands prior to advertising. The pre-test scores ranged from a neutral rating to an emphatic lack of interest in the food products. This makes sense because these are routine, low-involvement products. By not deteriorating interest any further, at least attention towards the ad can be held so that the positive feeling resulting from the humorous response can be associated with the brand. Through this process, the resulting attitude towards the brand and towards purchasing the brand can be improved peripherally.

This strengthens the belief that consumers of these products are generally not motivated to process product attribute information and prefer to base their decisions on peripheral cues, such as ad liking. The use of humour appeals significantly improved brand attitudes and even the likelihood of purchasing the product while leaving the level of interest (or really *disinterest*) in the brand completely unaffected. The *Hidden Valley* ad did not use humour, preferring to rely on a product-driven appeal. The disinterest in the brand was further exacerbated by the less liked ad appeal. Perhaps these types of purchases are already seen as bland. Brand interest will not be generated even through a pleasurable ad appeal. However, positive attitudes and ultimately purchase behaviour can be conditioned through the association of positive affect with the brand. This lack of interest, however, indicates that not enough effortful processing will be allocated to incoming product information to change attitudes through a central strategy. Such an appeal only further degenerated brand interest. While it may not harm brand attitudes, significantly diminishing the already limited interest in the brand may reduce attention to further advertising intended to boost brand attitudes and generate a purchase. This further damage to interest in the brand appeared to have an effect on purchase intentions.

9.2.3.2. The Clothing Products

Although the intention was to examine advertising effectiveness across two products believed to be from the same product cell to demonstrate the robustness of the findings, the data did not support such an effort. Instead, the results offer an interesting comparison between products that are positioned differently by the consumers in this study. Rather than perceiving the discount clothing as a low-involvement purchase, it appears that this is a high-involvement product for the university students in this sample. While it seems obvious that young adults would be highly involved in their clothing product decisions, it was believed that because the brands used in this study were discount clothing products, participants would not be as involved. The belief was that the sample respondents would differentiate clothing that is part of their self-definition from basic staples of their wardrobe. For example, *Target* mostly sells items such as t-shirts, socks, underwear, active wear, etc. that are bare essentials, but would hardly be considered the *make or break* clothing items for the image-conscious.

However, it appears that consumers such as those in this study take these types of clothing decisions very seriously as well. This is evident not only in the quantitative data, but also in the qualitative responses. By comparing the brand interest data for clothing to the interest data for food, it is obvious that there was a stronger interest in the clothing products prior to exposure. This shows motivation on the part of the consumer. They were curious about the brands and would have liked to learn more about them. Following exposure to all three ad types, their interest significantly plunges. Additionally, their brand attitudes are damaged by advertising exposure. In the case of the satirical *Target* ad, this is not a significant change, but this may be due

to the fact that it was only a single exposure. The downward trend is still noted by the mean pre- and post-test scores. In the debriefing discussions, participants repeatedly emphasised that they would shop at *Target*, but just not for clothes. When probed, they indicated that they would be embarrassed to say that they bought their clothes at *Target* because it was not the image that they would want.

For all three ad types, advertising had a negative effect on consumers' perceptions and damaged their interest in the brand. It appears that these consumers are involved in *all* types of clothing purchases. Nevertheless, it is still a positively reinforcing, indulgent product, but one that they take very seriously. This is what Weinberger et al. (1994) refer to as *Red Goods* in their Product Colour Matrix because of the passion that consumers feel towards these products. They are expressive products that people use in projecting their self-definition. A brand image appeal would be the most effective for such products.

While most advertising appeals have an effect on brand image, for clothing they should probably communicate an image of chicness, status, beauty, or fashionability rather than silliness and inanity, or sensibility and frugality. As a result of the close relationship between these products and consumers' personalities, humour appears to have an adverse effect on viewer responses possibly because they do not wish to express themselves with products that are not taken seriously. Spotts et al. (1997) alluded to this, although they did not demonstrate the effect empirically. By the same rationale, the straightforward appeal was also ineffective because the overriding brand image presented appeared to be one of thriftiness. The consumers in this study apparently use these products as a means of self-expression. Bargain-hunter may not

be the *look* they are hoping to achieve. The informational approach to the ad transmitted the image of prudence and care when purchasing clothes and even the creative execution seemed to communicate the sense of low budget cheapness. For this target market, an affective appeal is likely to be more effective, as long as it still takes the product seriously.

The results further demonstrate that the lack of effectiveness of a humorous appeal was not the result of participants simply not appreciating the humorousness of these specific ads, but rather how the ads treated the products that they take personally and regard seriously. Recall from Table 8.8 that even the humorous clothing ads were given positive Aad ratings. Table 8.3 showed that they were rated as humorous, and as much so as the food ad in their respective humour type condition. This indicates that it was not some factor concerning the creative execution of the humorous appeal that made it less effective. Rather, it appears that it was due to the product that it was advertising. While the ads were liked and perceived as humorous, Table 9.1 shows a lower correlation between Aad and post-test Attb for the clothing products than it does for the food products. This exemplifies the fact that consumers still enjoyed the humour as they did for the food products, but this enjoyment was not conditioned to their attitudes. This is probably because they more actively rejected the use of the appeal for a product for which they are emotionally involved.

One final note regarding the *Burlington Coat Factory* ad bears mentioning. The ad appeared to be primarily targeting women. The voiceover was female and the images presented were of female models dressed in women's clothing. The ad was still used because *Burlington Coat Factory* is a store that sells both men's and women's

clothing and it was the best available ad based on the criteria outlined in Chapter Seven. In the ad, the voiceover talked about the affordability of their *stunning suits*. While the ad did seem to be targeting female customers, they sell suits for both men and women. Recall also that the sample used in the study was two-thirds female. Finally, responses to the *Burlington Coat Factory* ad between men and women were statistically equivalent. Because the ad best represented the desired qualities, it was used in the study.

9.2.4. Mood State & The Programming Environment

Generally the data obtained for the food products suggests that advertising is more likely to be successful when placed within a positively toned programme. This is not to say, however, that there is no interaction with product or ad appeal. Those in a good mood are motivated to merely maintain their favourable mood state. Their affect informs them that currently there is no need to process information effortfully in a way that may interfere with their positive mood. As a result, they are receptive to attempts to persuade them peripherally by means such as the classical conditioning of attitudes that occur with humour appeals. They should not be amenable to an appeal that requires them to attend to product-related arguments because such central processing may only distract the viewer from enjoying their favourable affective state.

In the case of low-involvement/feel products, such as the food items investigated here, the consumer is only expected to process ads peripherally, anyway. However, when placed into a good mood prior to exposure, the consumer is already in the desired processing set, and likely to be less critical of peripheral route persuasion

attempts in general. The low level of involvement with the product means that peripheral persuasion is likely to be the only way of inducing an attitude change. However, without such a favourable mood state, the consumer may be sceptical of peripheral appeal advertising in general. In other words, regardless of mood state, the consumers should not be motivated to be critical of product attribute arguments for these types of products. However, without the benefit of a positive affective state, consumers may not be as disposed to a peripheral route to persuasion and may be motivated to counterargue the merits of peripheral route appeals generally.

Further support for this view would benefit from future research that assesses the impact of the programming tone on response to ads for high-involvement/informational products. It is possible that while consumers would be expected to systematically process advertising arguments, a positive mood state would make them more amenable to peripheral appeals, such as the use of humour. The programming tone may be a mediating variable to the effectiveness of humour appeals for these products that are not supposedly well-suited for such an appeal. Consumers should be motivated in these circumstances to maintain their positive mood state and thus avoid central processing, which may interfere with their enjoyment of the favourable feeling state. In these circumstances, consumers may be positively influenced by humour appeals, despite the fact that they are highly involved with the product because they choose to peripherally process incoming information. "Because peripheral cues have a greater attitudinal impact under heuristic processing, and message content a greater impact under systematic processing, positive moods can thus be said to moderate the attitudinal effect of these variables through their effect on the amount of cognitive elaboration" (Batra & Stayman, 1990; 204).

When in a negative mood, it has been argued that individuals *are* motivated to centrally process stimuli because they are seeking to improve their mood. Their mood state informs them that all is not right and action is required. Critical analysis may either distract them from the adverse feeling state or may help them to understand the root of their mood and take any action necessary to recuperate a more favourable affective state. Consequently, they focus central processing efforts on information related to the origin of their mood, if known. When a sad television programme is the source of the mood state, the affect from the programme is salient and the programme content will usually be the focus of consumers' attention. So while a programme that induces an adverse mood may increase their likelihood of central processing, it is only for processing of the programme content.

Central processing of the programme content was largely evident in the negative mood conditions. The first question during the debriefing discussions for those in the negative mood condition was nearly always, "What happened to the men?" or "Can we watch the rest?" Apparently they wanted a more tangible resolution than the segment offered. Their open-ended responses also were strongly focused on the programme content, which was not as evident in the positive mood condition. In the positive mood condition, programme thoughts were expressed, but usually just limited to their liking of the show or some surface-level observation. They much more frequently talked about ad content or other aspects of the study. On the other hand, even after completing a lengthy questionnaire covering a variety of topics, those who were in the negative mood condition still centred their attention and central processing efforts on the content of the programme. This is probably because they sought to resolve the mood that it stirred. Typical responses included the following:

“I am now really curious about the ending of the U.S.S. Indianapolis story. I can’t believe the guys of I-58 would just bomb a ship for no apparent reason- especially when it was moving away from them. That’s what is wrong with people today- they don’t always think about others involved...And I can’t believe that people working with the U.S.S. Indianapolis on land and the crew’s families would allow them to be missing for so long. Why not start a search? Better to be safe than sorry.”

“I thought about the soldiers’ sheer terror during that ordeal. I thought about how they would be affected by the sharks and what I’d do in that situation. I respect those soldiers for surviving, the ones that did...and for dying. Also the ones who were locked in the ship were on my mind. I wondered how could this be allowed. And when the captain said, “he wasn’t thinking about going down with the ship,” I wanted to know how many soldiers were lost and how many survived. They were brave men.”

As a result of the programme-centred cognition, only peripheral processing is allocated to ad processing, and thus affective appeals should still be more effective than an informational approach. Participants in the negative mood condition claimed that their thoughts about the programme overlapped into the commercials. However, humour is not as successful an affective appeal because it may be perceived as distasteful, while enjoyment of such humour may be seen as insensitive. This was a common theme that developed in both the debriefing discussions and the open-ended questions. The following are passages from respondents’ open-ended items who were in the negative mood condition:

“When I watched the video, all I could think of was how the men in my family were affected in similar ways. That made me relate it more to myself and made me sadder. Then it just seemed odd about how such an important and emotional topic was being discussed, and the presentation was broken up to talk about something as trivial as salad dressing and pizza.”

“Because the segment was so important and melancholy I felt that the commercials were irrelevant and somewhat too upbeat to be aired during such a serious segment. I thought the commercials were distasteful.”

“The commercial for the pizza especially disturbed me because it followed right after the segment where the men were floating in the water trying to survive.”

The reason for this reaction may have to do with how humour influences behaviours intended to resolve an adverse mood state. One way people are known to improve their moods is by engaging in altruistic behaviour. People supposedly find such behaviour rewarding, which can help to alleviate a negative mood (Cialdini, Schaller, Houlihan, Arps, & Beaman, 1987). In the case of television viewing, often the only altruistic behaviour available is showing empathy towards the characters or people depicted in the programme. Coulter (1998) maintains that viewers tune into sad programmes because they enjoy the feelings of empathy and sadness under circumstances where there is no threat to their personal well being. A recurring theme in the participants' open-ended items was the empathy that they felt towards the sailors. Often respondents even connected the experiences of the men to someone from their own life who is in the armed forces. If the audience subsequently indulges in light, humorous ads during the viewing, their empathic behaviour is disrupted. Consequently, they may not appreciate the advertiser for making them feel insensitive.

So it may not be so much that they do not enjoy humour when in a bad mood, but in the case of viewing sad television programmes, they may find it inappropriately placed. In such an instance, the Aad may not be significantly different than if viewed when in a positive mood, but the brand attitude may be adversely affected since they will hold the advertiser responsible. The data in this study support this claim, as attitudes towards the humorous ad itself were unaffected by mood state, even when a

Mood Condition	Mean Attitude Change		t-Test Statistic	Significance (at 5% α level)
	Positive	Negative		
Wristband	16.9	16.9	0.12	Not Significant
Target (2)	16.9	16.9	0.12	Not Significant
Diffusers	19.1	19.4	0.49	Not Significant
Target (1)	19.1	19.4	0.49	Not Significant

negative mood had an adverse effect on brand attitudes, purchase intentions, and brand interest. Table 9.2 shows that mood did not have a significant effect on Aad. Consequently, the significant effects of mood on brand attitudes, purchase intentions, and most notably brand interest are more likely to be due to the participants' perception of the advertiser for placing humorous ads within a serious programme and the ensuing disruption that is caused. The qualitative data also supports this contention.

This discussion raises an interesting question as to what the response to the ad would be if the sad mood could be at least partially attributed to the ad content. If the ad itself was responsible for generating a significantly negative mood, the central processing would in this case be focused on the ad. Consequently, ad effectiveness would be more heavily dependent on the strength of the arguments, while peripheral elements would not have as strong an impact.

One might ask why an ad would want to generate a negative mood. In addition to public service announcements (e.g.: anti-drunk driving messages), ads for some negatively reinforcing consumer products (e.g.: carbon monoxide detectors) might

use negative affect in their ads to highlight the problem that their product resolves. Such an appeal could be used to increase processing motivation and attention to claims and then through such arguments, the negative affect can be appeased. This is the premise behind the so-called *fear* appeals. If such an appeal is to be used, the advertiser may benefit from a sad programme. As long as the ad is still perceived as a contributory cause of the negative mood, using the programme to help induce the initially negative affect may enhance the effectiveness of the ad.

This belief has been supported through research on the *consistency effects model* (Kamins, Marks, & Skinner, 1991). According to this theory, ads are most effective when the affective tone of the ad matches that of the programme. The data here suggests that humorous ads are more effective during a positively valenced programme. A negative affective ad appeal should then be more persuasive in the context of a negatively valenced programme. From the qualitative responses garnered, there may be some support for the notion that the affective tone of the ads should match that of the programme content.

It is important to note here that the mood effects were very minor. Some of the trends examined were not even significant following a single exposure. The effects discussed apply to the food products, as none of the ad appeals investigated in this research were effective for clothing products. Clothing is a very important product to these consumers, and these appeals did not present the desired image. Mood state apparently did not do anything to mediate that reaction. Within the food products, *Wishbone* demonstrated a significant effect in the predicted direction for attitudes and intentions, while *DiGiorno* followed the pattern, but the effect was just below the

significance level. Increased pairing of the mood states with the ad appeals may enhance this effect. This is very relevant to ad placement, because often advertisers sponsor the same programme over a period of time.

One other potential reason that the attitudinal findings may not have been more dramatic is related to the mood induction. While the mood of those exposed to the negative programme were significantly lower than those exposed to the positive programme, as a group, the participants in the negative condition did not express a strongly *negative* mood *per se*. The mean mood rating in Condition 1b was barely negative, while the mean rating in Condition 2b was actually slightly positive. It could be argued that the manipulation really compared a positive to a neutral mood. This does not seem to be the case, however. It may be that participants in the negative mood condition inflated their self-ratings in an attempt to improve their mood. Alternatively, to alleviate their undesirable mood, participants may have separated the negative affect that they felt from watching the programme from their overall disposition. Either way, the open-ended responses demonstrated that the programme to which they were exposed profoundly affected both the mood and focus of participants. For example, here are excerpts from the open-ended response of participants who rated their mood as neutral:

“I didn’t think I would enjoy the segment at all because documentaries about history usually bore me. But this one was actually interesting. It didn’t really relate to my life in any way, but it made me wonder what it must have been like for those people involved, how horrible it must have been.”

“[I] found it very upsetting to see the men out there with no hope of survival. [It] would have been very upsetting to see my friends in these situations.”

Here is one final excerpt from a participant who indicated that his mood was actually positive. The mood rating of this participant was 10 out of a possible 12:

“I was really captured by the tragedy of the young sailors, who gave up their lives for their countries [sic]. The show is made to appear really real to the viewer, so I felt penetrated into the motion picture. Tragedy, pain, suspense are concepts that are deeply involved in the documentary. Since my father is a Chief Engineer on the cargo ships (supertankers), this story reflects the toughness of the sailor’s profession, just like my father’s job is. The story brings out the amount of fear that I have watching such a horrible disaster.”

These are participants who clearly were very involved with the programme and emotionally connected with the content. Despite this, the respondents indicated that their mood was neutral or in the last example, that it was actually positive. This highlights the fact that the participants were affected as predicted by the programme even if their mood ratings were sometimes inflated. Therefore, the moderation of the data was probably not due to an ineffective mood stimulus.

The brand interest data presented more highly significant findings. Brand interest appears to be adversely affected by a negative mood state. This makes sense from a motivational perspective. When in a sad mood, individuals’ motivation is focused on improving their mood. As a result, their interest in all else wanes. They allocate their attention to the source of the mood and are not concerned with anything else. In the case of television viewing, this would certainly include brands advertised during the viewing for products that they did not care much about to begin with. As a result, brand interest is negatively affected by a bad mood.

In the long term, this may cause major problems for the brand. Losing interest in a brand for a high-involvement product such as clothing can certainly be disastrous for the marketer. Even in the case of the food products, in which brand interest is low

anyway, a turn for the worse may cause problems. There is little interest in the brand and thus attitudes are affected by conditioning processes using affective ad appeals. Serious programme content that unfavourably influences mood states attracts significant concentration from the viewer. If the already indifferent interest in the brand is adversely affected by placing the ad within such programmes, then perhaps very little attention will be allocated to the ad content. Unfortunately, attention is initially needed before any conditioning processes can operate. Without initial attention to the ad content, the affective response is not generated, and therefore cannot then be conditioned to the brand. At least in the case of clothing products, consumers care about the product and might then apportion some attention to the ad (albeit only meagre peripheral processing) even when engrossed in a sad mood generated by a sombre programme. However, with the food products, brand interest is so low that by placing the ad into a situation where it has to further struggle for attentional resources, the consumer may not even allot enough peripheral processing to take in the affective appeal.

9.2.5. The Effect of NFC on Advertising Response

With regard to NFC, the results contribute an important piece to the existing literature. Previous evidence has linked a NFC effect in with advertising effectiveness. Those with a high NFC demand product attribute information to generate an attitudinal change towards a brand. On the other hand, consumers with a low NFC prefer to forego strenuous cognitive activity and make their decisions more effortlessly. They prefer the outcome of decision-making to the actual deliberations itself. Consequently, their attitudes are formed and maintained using simple

heuristics and peripheral cues. They should therefore be more receptive to affective advertising appeals, such as humour.

However, the previous literature only examined this pattern in the context of seemingly high-involvement and/or informational products. The current findings have shown that the belief that NFC is a relevant mediator of advertising effectiveness for all types of products underestimates the persuasive influence of humour appeals. While it would be an *overestimation* to expect humour appeals to persuade under all circumstances, to presume that NFC would compromise its effectiveness within the contexts that it works best (broadcast advertising for low-involvement/indulgent products) would undervalue humorous appeals. Because the risk is so low and the product benefits are purely emotional, NFC is a null issue for these products.

Tying this into the earlier literature, when advertising for higher involvement or functional products, then the effectiveness of humour appeals is indeed compromised by variables such as NFC. In these circumstances, a humour appeal is actually likely to be an effective means of advertising for low NFC individuals. This may help to explain the disagreements that exist in the humorous advertising literature. Even though it is not expected to be effective for these types of products, it actually is when used on the appropriate audience.

However, for purely instinctive products, NFC fails to be an important factor in how effective advertising is achieved. The motivation is low for *all* types of consumers to mentally attend to issue-relevant arguments for these products. With the plethora of promotional arguments to which consumers are exposed, it is more adaptive for

consumers, regardless of their penchant for critical analysis, to respond equally by only peripherally processing ads for such products. Furthermore, such arguments are probably seen as irrelevant to what the product is all about. As a result, they are more responsive to likeable ad cues that may have nothing to do with product use. One of the most well-liked appeals is laughter. People enjoy what is funny, clever, witty, and even what disparages others. Consequently, humour is an effective appeal for all types of consumers exposed to advertising for low-involvement/transformational products.

Another way of mapping the issue is that those with a high NFC do not necessarily defy expectations by engaging in critical thinking when it would *not* otherwise be anticipated (i.e.: when exposed to ads for routine, reward products) so much as those with a low NFC do not critically think when such processing *would* be expected (i.e.: when exposed to ads for high risk/relief products). NFC mediates advertising response in high-involvement/informational situations because those low in NFC are still not motivated to process issue-relevant arguments when such motivation would be normal. In the case of low-involvement/transformational advertising, those with a high NFC do not necessarily possess a motivation to process that would not ordinarily be found in the consumer.

One issue surrounding the NFC findings is the use of university students in the research. While the distinction between intelligence and NFC has been established, the academic path of the test sample would suggest that they may not be representative of the general population with regard to this personality trait. Just because they are university students does not necessarily mean that they were all high

in NFC, but the sample should probably be considered *top-heavy* compared to the population at large. When the participants were then divided by a median split and labelled as *high* or *low* in NFC, some of those considered *low* NFC individuals may actually be above the general mean on this attribute.

However, in addition to running the regressions by loading NFC as a two-level, mutually exclusive personality trait, the models were created using raw NFC scores, which looked for a relationship between persuasion and NFC across the full range of the NFC data. Given that there was a full distribution of scores, this method would have been more sensitive to trends between persuasion and NFC because it did not pigeonhole NFC into two discrete categories. The results remained unaltered by the method used, indicating that there was no effect for NFC on the data.

9.2.6. The Effect of Prior Brand Attitude

The regression data showed that Aad was significantly affected by the pre-existing brand attitude. The results suggest that consumers tend to enjoy ads more for products that they like. The stronger relationship between Aad and post-test brand attitude indicates that this, in turn, may strengthen brand attitudes even further. This insinuates that brand attitude and Aad have a symbiotic relationship. Previous theorists have also noted the bidirectional relationship between Aad and brand attitudes (Heath & Gaeth, 1994). While the brand attitude and purchase intention regressions did not follow the pattern, this was attributed to a ceiling effect. Aad was significantly affected by prior brand attitude in a positive direction. This has clear implications for advertising products to consumers who are brand aware. The use of humour appeals for low-involvement/feel products can be even more persuasive when

the consumers have a pre-existing brand attitude. The use of these appeals may be especially successful at reinforcing positive brand attitudes. Brands with a high market share thus especially benefit from the use of humour appeals and gain even more ground on the competition.

9.3. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter, in conjunction with Chapter Eight, has explained the results of the empirical research for this thesis. Chapter Eight provided the raw evidence, while Chapter Nine rationalised the findings. This chapter sought to justify the anticipated results and account for the results that may have strayed from expectations. Most importantly, the discussion revealed the positive persuasive impact of humour appeals in advertising for low-involvement/feel products, and the ineffectiveness and even adverse effect that such appeals may have on high-involvement/feel products. Despite the relevance of individual differences in NFC for high-involvement products, the persuasive power of humour appeals for routine, indulgent products is not compromised by the personality trait. However, a positively toned programme may further enhance the effectiveness of humorous appeals. In fact, it may even permit humour to be a persuasive appeal for some high-involvement products. Furthermore, when advertising a well-liked brand, the effectiveness of humour appeals may be even more potent.

In the final chapter, the implications of this research will be elucidated. The limitations of the research will be weighed and the contributions to knowledge will be discussed.

Chapter Ten

Conclusions

“It is not the facts that are of chief importance, but the light thrown upon them, the meaning in which they are dressed, the conclusions which are drawn from them, and the judgements delivered upon them.” - Mark Twain

10.1. PREAMBLE

The purpose of this research was to assess the effectiveness of humour in advertising to determine if advertising capital is being wisely spent on appeals that are highly persuasive. This study focused on the products for which humour may be the most useful. The efficacy of humour for low-involvement/feel products has been shown, while its vulnerability in promoting high-involvement/feel products was exposed. A number of potential mediators were examined. This last chapter will step back from the research and consider the contributions that this thesis makes to knowledge. This will first include a discussion of the implications. Following this, an appraisal will be made of the limitations of the study. This will allow the reader to better reflect upon the findings. Recommendations will be made for future research. The specific methodological, managerial, and theoretical contributions will be detailed. The final conclusions of this thesis will follow.

10.2. IMPLICATIONS OF THE CURRENT RESEARCH

In today's consumer-driven world, advertisers are faced with ever increasing challenges to reach potential customers and convince them to purchase their brands. The cluttered promotional environment has made it more difficult to motivate consumers to attend to the message, which of course complicates the ultimate goal of persuading consumers to like the brand and buy the product. According to the ELM, when individuals are both able and motivated to process incoming information, they will do so carefully and systematically. Persuasion, in these circumstances, results from the presentation of strong, issue-relevant arguments. In the case of advertising, when consumers are involved with the product, they are more likely to effortfully attend to promotional messages and will consciously scrutinise the merits of the ad claims. Accordingly, advertising should be product-driven.

On the other hand, the consumer is frequently unmotivated to actively attend to advertising messages. The increasingly cluttered promotional environment has exacerbated this problem. If the consumer is not highly involved with the product, they will not devote the cognitive resources to processing informative advertisements for such brands in which they are not particularly interested. Additionally, for such brands, the advertiser may not even be able to make credible product claims that differentiate their product in a meaningful way to the consumer.

However, the ELM highlights the fact that persuasion is still possible in these instances. Under this set of circumstances, brand attitude change is not the result of deliberate scrutiny of the message claims, but instead occurs through the use of simple decision rules and the association of affective ad cues to the brand. Likeable

affective cues in the ad can be conditioned to the brand. Through simple classical conditioning procedures, attitude change can arise even in those instances when the consumer is unwilling to attend to attribute claims. The challenge is to find a likeable appeal that will generate the desired affect, as well as one that stands out from the competing advertising messages. If it does not capture consumers' attention, then they will absorb neither the affective cue, nor the pairing with the advertised brand.

Humour is highly valued in all known cultures. It serves a variety of social functions and elicits a desirable affective response. As a result, it has become an extremely popular means of persuading consumers via the peripheral route. Effectively, the use of humour in advertising is entertainment sponsored by a particular brand. Following ad exposure, the audience feels positive approval towards the brand because it has supplied the amusement (Sippitt & Fowler, 1999). O'Sullivan and Kavanagh (1999) have recognised the correspondence between ads for products with humorous content, product placement in sitcoms, and the sponsorship of humorous programmes all as a comparable form of joke sponsorship.

The purpose of this thesis was to extend the current knowledge of this affective appeal. Through this study and its integration into the existing literature, it appears that humour can be a very effective appeal in television advertising. This broadcast medium is well-suited for communicating the sometimes subtle cues through the aid of visual and aural expression. Humour is a well-liked appeal and thus it is successful in generating attention through positive reinforcement. When the humorous content is highly integrated with the remainder of the message, ad retention should not suffer and humour may even hold an advantage over non-humorous appeals. While the

appeal may harm source credibility, for the products in which it thrives, this does not seem to matter.

Humour appeals can be very successful in advertising when used to promote low-involvement, sensory-based products. These are what are referred to as *life's little rewards*. They are emotional products, and thus branding is based on how the brand or ad makes you feel. Rational product advantages either do not exist or are of little concern to a consumer, who uses instinct to make a brand selection. As a result, likeable appeals such as humour are effective, because the positive response is associated with the advertised brand. Its effectiveness is observable even after a single exposure, although additional exposures are likely to increase its effect up to some point where it will wear out. Multiple exposures are especially necessary for more familiar brands so that the affect generated by the ad can break through previous brand associations and have a significant impact of their own (see Machleit & Wilson, 1988).

Because humour is used as an affective appeal, the funnier it is perceived to be, the more successful it is likely to be for these types of products. Only if it is simply used to draw attention to an otherwise rational appeal should caution be exerted over making the appeal too funny. In these cases, an extremely funny execution could draw the focus onto the humorous content and away from the ad claims. By intentionally relating the humour to the ad claims, though, this potential problem should be minimised. With regard to executing a humorous appeal, incongruity-resolution is a universally appreciated form of humour. Incongruity-resolution that is

satirical in nature is likely to be the most well-received as long as the disparagement is directed at ad characters and not the intended audience.

Some have suggested that comic wit is the best form of humour to use in advertising because it merely relies on the simple, readily understood incongruity-resolution mechanism. This supposedly makes it more broadly appealing (Zhang, 1996b). There is some truth to the notion that simple forms of humour are likely to be more successful in advertising. Humour works for these low-involvement products because consumers do not have the motivation to allocate cognitive resources to the messages. As a result, individuals are likely to not respond as positively to a humorous ad, which requires them to disentangle complex juxtapositions.

On the other hand, just because comic wit only uses the incongruity-resolution mechanism does not inevitably mean that it is a *simple* form of humour. The data revealed that participants did not like the *Target (2)* ad as much as the other humorous ads and did not find it as funny. In the debriefing discussions, those that did attend to the content found that the puns required too much active thought because they were vague and difficult to interpret. In spite of the perceived complexity, the humour used in this ad was a form of comic wit, so it was not the amalgamation of multiple mechanisms that made for an unduly complex appeal. Rather it was an overly complicated set of incongruities that required too much effort to resolve. Satirical humour, which operates through multiple mechanisms, was the most well-liked and considered to be the most funny. Nevertheless, both satire and comic wit can be very successfully executed, provided that the incongruity is not too difficult to resolve.

The successful use of humour, like all effective advertising, also must communicate to the consumer on a deeper level that the marketer understands them and their principles. This helps the consumer to feel a bond with the brand. By conveying a humorous appeal that *makes sense* and is appreciated as being funny (i.e.: resolution of the incongruity), the advertiser signifies this understanding. Additionally, the advertiser communicates the idea that their brand is worthy of their attention as an intelligent, media-literate viewer (Sippitt & Fowler, 1999).

The tone of the programming environment can also have an effect on advertising response. This is critical to media planning because marketers can purchase airtime based on the programme during which they would like their ads broadcast. It also has implications for ad testing. Viewers become emotionally involved in the programmes that they watch, and consequently their mood state can be altered. This feeling state then may shape the effect of the ads that are embedded into an emotionally stimulating television programme. The programme environment should be considered not only in the actual placement of advertising, but also when pre-testing commercials. Furthermore, programme content not only must be *included* when testing the effectiveness of test ads, but the *nature* of that content should also *match* the type of content specified by the media plan (Aylesworth & MacKensie, 1998).

The advantage of a humorous appeal for these products is facilitated by a positively toned programme. The favourable mood that is generated diminishes their motivation to systematically process, leaving them even more susceptible to an affective, peripheral route appeal. However, when selecting a positively toned programme for a humorous appeal, caution must be exerted. A *humorous* television programme may

not be the most suitable programme to elicit a positive mood. Research has shown that funny programmes reduce the effect of funny ads because the humour response is mitigated by the programme (Perry et al., 1997b). A negative context-induced mood state inhibits the effectiveness of humorous appeals because at that point, the viewer is focused on improving their mood. As a result, the individual is motivated to systematically process information relevant to the source of the mood. Consequently, their interest in anything external to that objective, including brands of low-involvement products, is depleted.

When the consumer is more highly involved with a functional, *relief* product, they are more motivated to process product related information, and thus humorous appeals are less effective attitude enhancers. However, it is possible that by embedding the ads into a television programme that generates a favourable mood, motivation to process can be reduced, which should augment the effectiveness of a humorous appeal. While situational circumstances may permit humorous appeals to be effective for high-involvement/informational products, it does not appear to be a suitable appeal for high-involvement/transformational products. Because these are expressive, emotional products, an affective appeal is effective. However, humour may be detrimental to the advertiser because these products are highly valued as part of the self-definition. Humour does not necessarily present the appropriate image, depending on the nature of the product. Unless humorous expression is an objective of product consumption, it may not be a suitable appeal for these types of goods. While the consumers of these products still enjoy humorous discourse, they do not want it associated with the product because it is not what the product *is all about*.

Personality differences also affect the manner in which individuals process persuasive messages, which include advertising response. NFC is a construct that represents an individual difference in central processing motivation. It has been suggested as a possible mediator of peripheral route advertising appeals, such as humour. High NFC consumers are believed to be more favourably influenced by rational, product-centred appeals, while those low in NFC are thought to be amenable to heuristics and affective appeals.

The issue is not this simple, however, as the effect requires consideration of the advertised product. For low-involvement/indulgent products, NFC is not a meaningful variable for planning advertising executions. Because it is an emotional product that is not associated with a high level of purchase risk, attitudes and purchase decisions are instinctive. Consequently, affective appeals such as humour are effective for all consumers. For higher risk and functional products, NFC is likely to have a greater mediating effect on advertising response. In these cases, the high NFC individuals should be appealed to using a rational appeal. While humour would not ordinarily be recommended for such products, it may be effective for the less cognitively driven, low NFC consumers. Media habits of individuals who vary on this trait are likely to differ. As a result, marketers may be able to segment their markets accordingly using demographic viewership information on the network for which airtime is purchased or the programme during which the ad will be shown.

It is also important to note that the positive effect that humour has on Aad, which influences brand attitude, is not unidirectional. Brand attitude also has an impact on the Aad, which in turn should reinforce brand attitudes. This means that ad appeals,

such as humour, which rely on ad liking, may be even more successful when the consumer already has a positive brand attitude. Therefore, brands with a high market share may especially benefit from the use of humour.

One conundrum to ponder is whether humour's success may lead to its demise. With so many theorists and practitioners advocating the use of humour as a novel appeal, a higher proportion of ads may rely on it. This research was conducted to determine whether humour was an effective appeal. The trap may be that when these research studies show that it works, more creative directors sanction its use, and its overuse leads it to become less effective. Since the purpose of creative advertising is to be conspicuous in a noisy ad environment, do humour appeals become banal as more advertisers subscribe to its high-profile success?

The answer is that it probably will not because the inherent problem is not so much whether funny ads will eventually fail to be novel as much as attempts to be humorous may fail to be funny. Similar to all ad appeals, novelty is what makes humour effective. Humorous ads that are not original are not perceived as funny, and thus will not stand out and be lucrative. This is the case whether 2% of commercials use humour or 92% employ them.

The concern is centred on the idea that humour relies on surprise to elicit a positive response. However, even if a high proportion of ads rely on humour to the point where the consumer comes to expect it, the specific execution of humour is still, by nature, unexpected (Lee & Mason, 1999). The audience expects jokes when watching a sitcom, but they are still entertained because the exact content of the jokes contains

unexpected material. This thesis sought to reveal circumstances where humour can be effective and ways to make it more effective, without trying to provide a set creative blueprint for success. Only when advertisers rely on formulae in the actual creative execution is an appeal at risk of becoming trite. Assuming that advertisers can be creative enough to fashion an ad that is capable of eliciting an amused, comical response from the consumer, it can continue to be successful so long as humour is valued by our culture at large. Given that humour *is* so treasured in society, greater anticipation of the presence of humour in advertising by consumers may only strengthen the attention devoted to advertising on the whole.

10.3. LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

When interpreting the results, it is obligatory to consider them in their appropriate perspective. Consequently, this analysis would remain incomplete without a discussion of the inevitable limitations. Some of these are merely *potential* limitations that the design prevented. The limitations can be grouped into problems of internal and external validity.

10.3.1. Internal Validity Issues

One of the most fundamental validity threats is related to the laboratory setting for the research. Because participants are aware that they are engaged in a research study, they are conscious that there is a reason for items that are included in the questionnaire. The focus on brand information may make the study's intent more transparent. As a result, there are concerns that the effects observed were not true due to potential demand characteristics. However, as Chapter Seven clarified, every possible precaution to reduce the effects of demand characteristics had been taken.

The final open-ended item asked participants to indicate what they believed to be the study's intent. Nearly every participant listed an intent that was in line with the premise of the cover story. Those that had even a slight suspicion as to the study's true objectives were removed from the analysis.

Furthermore, responses given during the thought-listing activity and the debriefing sessions provided further defence for the laboratory setting. Participants expressed that they felt very comfortable during the sessions and that they did not watch the exposures any differently than they would have at home. Many declared that their involvement in the television exposures diminished their awareness of the lab setting, causing them to forget that they were in a study with psychological objectives, at least while watching the television treatments. They were instructed to relax and not to focus more intently or view any differently than they normally would watch television. Responses suggest that that is how the exposures were viewed. Examples of participants' responses were:

"I was relaxing just as I would have been if I were to stay at home and view the programme."

"...I was more concentrated on just watching the show rather than trying to remember or think about what was happening. I did pay attention, however, I did not pay attention to details."

"I thought this experiment was very interesting and a good idea to obtain data in a natural setting. I personally forgot that I was even participating in an experiment and got absorbed by the documentary."

One problem with a forced-exposure is that it is uncertain how well their attention to the exposure and affective reaction to what they see is indicative of their reactions in a natural environment. In a natural setting, TV viewers have the freedom to select their own programme to view. People tend to watch programmes that they like. If they do not like a programme, they simply switch it off. The question is whether the results obtained in this forced exposure can be generalised to such natural television viewing.

	Condition			
	1a	1b	2a	2b
Mean	19.5	19.7	19.9	19.7
Median	20	20	21	20
SD	3.7	3.4	5.6	3.2

In this study, the programmes were generally well-liked. As Table 10.1 shows, on a composite scale from 4 to 28, participants had a positive attitude towards the show. Nevertheless, there were those who inevitably did not like the programme. When programme liking was loaded into the regressions, it did not significantly account for any of the variance in Aad or purchase intentions. However, programme liking was positively associated with brand attitude change ($t = 2.88, p < .05$) and brand interest change ($t = 2.94, p < .05$). While this shows that forced exposure may not be perfectly generalisable to a natural viewing context, the findings imply that in a natural viewing context, where the programme is nearly always liked, the positive changes observed are likely to be even stronger.

One potential pitfall with the cover story was that the indication that this was a study on memory, in which they would be questioned on the entire exposure, might have led to unnatural attention yielded to the television exposure. Additionally, some theorists have suggested that the laboratory setting provokes a cognitive processing set that is not found in consumers who view ads in their home (Lutz, 1985). In the case of the television programme, perhaps the added attention helped to generate the initial attention that they would normally possess when viewing a programme of their own choosing. This appeared to be overcome by a natural interest, as the programmes were highly liked.

Nevertheless, there is still the concern that unnatural attention would have been yielded to the ads. However, the open-ended responses indicated that generally, additional attention was not given to the ads. Specifically, respondents said that they were surprised by the number of post-test items that pertained to the ads. They claimed that they paid attention to the programme, but did not especially focus on the ads since they do not usually pay close attention to advertising. The programme was primarily what was on their mind and they claimed to not take a task-oriented approach to viewing the segments. The differential recall ratings for the various ads, which was directly in relation to their liking of ads, demonstrated that they did not overly attend to the exposure as a whole, but selectively attended to what they liked much as they would do in a natural setting. As one respondent explained:

“I really didn’t think much about anything while watching the TV. I tried to act as natural as possible. I didn’t try to pay extra close attention because I knew I would be asked questions. I actually enjoyed watching it...I noticed my mind did stray during the ads.”

Notwithstanding, there were some potential confounds with the design of the experimental sessions. Anytime multiple sessions with repeated measurements are introduced to an experimental design, there are potential risks (Zhang & Zinkhan, 1991). One possible problem inherent in studies with multiple measurements is *interactive testing effects*. Because brand attitudes are measured twice, responses rendered during the pre-test might affect those afforded in the post-test (see McDaniel & Gates, 1996). By spreading the two measurements out over a period of several days, these interactive testing effects should be properly controlled, as participants will be less likely to recall their precise responses. This is especially the case given the number of questionnaire items to which participants responded. In fact, during the debriefing sessions, participants indicated that they could not remember their exact

responses to the pre-test and did not feel that they were influenced by the previous testing.

While collecting data during multiple sessions decreases the chance of testing biases, it inflates the potential for *history* effects. History effects are external incidents, which occur between assessments not related to the independent variables (see Ray, 1997). In this context, it could be other outside events in the relevant marketplace, such as external advertising, promotions, a bad product experience, etc., which may alter participants' brand attitudes between measurements. Restricting the time period between sessions to an average of two days between sessions helped to minimise this effect.

Maturation and *mortality* were two final concerns with regard to the internal validity of the design. Maturation is the change in the participant over the course of the experiment (see McDaniel & Gates, 1996). This tends to occur as participants grow bored, tired, wiser, etc. during the experiment. The participants may lose interest over the course of the sessions, or just naturally change their attitude towards the test product. Again, the best possible compromise was struck to control for testing effects and these types of biases by holding multiple sessions within a relatively short period of time. Systematic mortality tends to become a problem as the duration of the study extends. If many participants drop out of the study, it becomes difficult to interpret results because of the possibility that only certain personality types remain (see Riecken & Boruch, 1974). Incentives were contingent upon fulfilling the requirements of the study and so mortality was not a very strong factor. However,

there might be something to be said about how those who choose to voluntarily sign up for a social experiment might differ from those who decline the study.

Concerning the dependent measures, some authors have suggested certain methodological limitations in measuring affective responses in general (Holbrook & O'Shaughnessy, 1984), such as the affective component of attitudes. While the verbal measures that were used accurately depict the cognitive labelling of such affective responses, they do not emulate the associated physiological reactions. However, psychophysiological measures have often been shown to be unreliable in distinguishing between specific emotions; and in some extreme instances, even differentiating between positive and negative responses (Watson & Gatchel, 1979). This is based on the belief that physiological arousal is unvalenced and so emotions (and affective responses) are based on the cognitive labelling of the affect (Schachter & Singer, 1962). Furthermore, it must be emphasised that the cognitive and affective systems are in constant communication (Izard, 1984). Consequently, the cognitive labelling of affective responses may be an appropriate measure in this study.

Social researchers maintain that self-report measures do garner accurate responses and are preferable to behavioural and physiological measurement instruments as long as participants do not have any reason to falsify their responses (Mitchell, 1986b). Given the apparent efficacy of the cover story, participants should have had no motive to misrepresent their true feelings. Of course a paper and pencil questionnaire is not the most natural means of obtaining attitudinal responses from consumers. While some did complain of the monotony of the questionnaire, many lauded the user-friendly nature of it. Compared to other questionnaires that they had completed, they

felt that the range of the scales allowed them to accurately indicate their degree of agreement or disagreement, that the “Do not know enough...” options prevented them from forcing an opinion that they did not have, and the standardised nature of the questionnaire allowed them to represent their opinions without overanalysing them. Kirk-Smith (1998) acknowledges that questionnaires can accurately measure attitudes. A problem is that attitudes are not indicative of actual behaviour.

Additionally, the attitude measures were taken relatively close to the time of exposure. Some researchers are wary of extending immediate advertising effects to a normal advertising context (Haugtvedt, 1989), because such studies may overvalue the strength of advertisements on brand attitude change (Laczniak & Carlson, 1989). They criticise experimental research for overemphasising short-term attitude shifts, claiming that it neglects the long-term creative vision that is necessary for brand building in favour of novel stimuli (see Rosenberg & Blair, 1994). As discussed in Chapter Seven, some researchers have suggested that even a brief layover between exposure and subsequent measurement can be indicative of attitude persistence, but it is possible that the changes found from a single ad exposure would not persist over time. Furthermore, research has shown that advertising effectiveness in the long-term is the consequence of a series of immediate, short-range successes (Adams & Blair, 1992).

Bear in mind that advertisers have the opportunity for repeated exposures in the marketplace. The purpose of this study was to demonstrate that minimal exposure to a humorous ad could result in an attitudinal change towards the advertised brand. This objective was met, leaving the increased impact of multiple exposures and the

ensuing effect on attitude persistence for another empirical enquiry. This study did demonstrate that one exposure to a humorous ad is enough to favourably change brand attitudes. The belief is that additional exposures would probably enhance and solidify this effect as the optimal number of exposures is reached. Additionally, there is evidence that attitudes formed through classical conditioning of an affective appeal are persistent even after multiple weeks have passed (Grossman & Till, 1998).

It would be a useful piece of research to examine how increased time between exposure and purchase opportunities and the effect of competitor advertising would interfere with the attitudinal change that can be induced through humorous appeals. However, prior to adding additional variables into the equation, it was necessary first to observe the pure effect that is achievable through a single exposure to a humorous appeal. It is the responsibility of additional research to build upon these findings through the examination of additional variables. Without first uncovering the simple effects of these appeals, the examination of multiple exposures, increased time between measurement, and competitor advertising would only convolute these findings.

Finally, any causal linkages made are based on observing a pattern in the data and making an inference based on how well it matches with existing theory. Like all research, it is impossible to say that any one variable *causes* an effect per se. Rather, all that can be conclusively stated is that there is a relationship between factors such as the presence of humour appeals and a positive change in brand attitude.

10.3.2. External Validity Considerations

What must be remembered is that the high level of control that was exerted in this study to ensure the internal validity of the findings places limitations on the extensiveness to which the results apply. As with all empirical work, the results can not be interpreted without considering their depth and extendability. The most fundamental validity concern relates directly to the laboratory, forced exposure setting for this study. While such a setting generally allows for stronger internal validity due to the high level of control that can be exerted, the sterile environment itself has been criticised as unrepresentative of the marketplace (see McDaniel & Gates, 1996). This presents questions concerning the external validity of these results to a natural environment.

Furthermore, while the findings *may* be generalisable to other ad appeals that rely on peripheral route persuasion and classical conditioning, this was a study on the use of *humour* appeals in advertising. Whilst this may be seen as a generalisability issue, humour is used in about half all advertising on television. This figure indicates that it is one of the more popular soft sell appeals. Billions of pounds are spent selling with jokes. Despite the fact that it is a very important facet of advertising research, caution must be exercised when attempting to extend these results beyond the context of humorous appeals.

Within humorous appeals, this was a study specifically on *comic wit* and *satire*. For the sake of internal validity, it was necessary to examine specific types of humour. The content analysis facilitated the best compromise of internal and external validity by revealing the most commonly used humour types, so that the findings were highly

relevant to a natural advertising context. This study indicated that humour is a valuable appeal, and that the funnier the appeal, the more persuasive the ad will be. However, for the most part, these were relatively moderate appeals with regard to perceived humorousness. This study also focused on the television medium. This medium is believed to be the most appropriate for humorous appeals, and indeed is the medium where humour appeals are most commonly used. Nevertheless, it is uncertain how well these findings would apply to other advertising channels.

Like all advertising research, the experiments focused upon a limited number of ads for only a select group of brands. By using six test ads that represented five different brands, hopefully the findings demonstrated some resiliency for other products in the relevant product classes. Nevertheless, replication using other ads for additional products would be useful. Consider also that this was a study on *feel* products. Additionally, the favourable findings for humour were applicable to low-involvement products, while the unfavourable results were relevant to higher involvement products. None of the current results, however, are valid for *think* products, although the previous literature suggests that humour is not as effective for such products.

This study was also limited in the types of programmes examined as well as the mood states that they elicited. Specifically, the research looked at programmes that generate happy and sad moods. To achieve this goal, the experiments utilised documentaries. It is uncertain how well this would generalise to the effect of other programmes. However, as in all areas of research design, a compromise had to be made. To preserve the internal validity of the study only one *type* of programme

could be used. The arguments presented in Chapter Seven showed that documentaries were the most appropriate.

Furthermore, this was a study on American consumers. How these findings would extend to other cultures is uncertain. Even within the US, this study was conducted on a sample of consumers in the Mid-Atlantic region of the country. The United States is an extremely large and multicultural nation. It is possible that the results would be somewhat different if the study was run elsewhere in the country on a differing demographic group.

However, using census information, Waldrop (1992) has ranked the best test markets in the United States. Using major demographics, such as age, race, and housing value, she has compiled a list of the most *American* places. In other words, the ranking positions American places with regard to how closely they resemble national characteristics. The Philadelphia metropolitan area, comprised of regions in New Jersey and Southeastern Pennsylvania, was rated as the 7th most typically American metropolitan area. While the sampling in this study was not random, at least the convenience sample was selected in a typically American region.

Within the United States, the study was conducted entirely on university students. By restricting the study to university students who were willing to participate in psychological research, the research did not represent the general population in terms of intelligence, personality, age, motivation, etc. Particularly when examining NFC effects, the results may not accurately represent the range in NFC that would be found in the general population. However, a large sample was required to carry out this

study. Additionally, the research had to be implemented within considerable financial constraints. Consequently, it made sense to take advantage of the accessibility to university students, who often need to participate in such studies as part of course requirements in American universities. Moreover, Chapter Seven cited Sears (1986), who contends that the phenomena investigated in social research are so universal that any adult sample will yield representative results.

While demographically the study was restricted to the 18-34 year range, this is the most coveted age group for advertisers. Nevertheless, it is possible that the findings would not be as applicable to other cohorts. Nowhere is this more evident than with the clothing findings. While this group did not differentiate between expressive clothing and more functional attire, it is possible that others would. Older adults, who are generally characterised as more financially responsible, may not be as put off by a thrifty appeal. They may also further differentiate their fashionable clothing from the functional accessories of their wardrobe. If they attach less personal significance to certain types of clothing, then these other groups may be more agreeable to humour appeals.

This was also a study that was carried out in a group setting. There is a social contagion factor that contributes to humour appreciation and thus its effects may differ when measured in a group setting versus a solitary environment. The effectiveness of humour in advertising may not be quite as strong when individual consumers are exposed to advertising on their own. Furthermore, the social dynamic of forced ad exposure in a lab may differ from a group of friends or family in a natural viewing environment (Zhang & Zinkhan, 1991). This was controlled for as

much as possible by keeping the numbers restricted to about 12 participants per session, encouraging friends to attend together, and running sessions with small classes of students that were familiar with one another. The atmosphere was as casual as could be expected and it was common to find groups of participants talking with one another even during the exposure.

10.4. PROPOSALS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Based on the issues of external validity discussed above, there are several areas where the findings would benefit from future research. Extensions could be made by examining other types of humour that elicit greater humorous arousal. Speck's (1991) taxonomy has shed light on the underlying mechanisms that facilitate a humorous reaction. While this helps add some objectivity to humour appreciation, it is still very much a subjective experience. Through additional research, the use of different creative executions that elicit varying levels of perceived humour would be helpful for theorists. This would ensure that the results extend to other humorous executions. In particular, it would be interesting to assess the effectiveness of appeals that induce a higher humour response.

Additional testing may find that more complex incongruities that demand more cognitive resources to resolve (e.g.: riddles, conceptual irony) may be more effective for those with a high NFC, while simpler forms of humour may be appropriate for low NFC consumers. Additional research should also examine other advertising media to determine how well these findings generalise. It is possible that differential effect of the advertising medium on the effectiveness of humour appeals is partially

accounted for by NFC. As discussed in Chapter Five, researchers have found that those who differ on this personality trait are likely to attend to disparate media.

Future research should also focus on the effect of other programme types on mood. It is important to investigate the interactive effect of advertising with other types of context-induced affective states. In particular, it may be useful to see how well humorous ad appeals work when embedded into situation comedies. While such programmes probably generate a positive mood, it is possible that the comical programme content may dilute the attention to and therefore effectiveness of humorous advertising (Perry et al., 1997b). Paying attention to the ad may not be as positively reinforcing if the desired response is available from the programme.

It may also be valuable to look at the affect *intensity* that different programmes elicit, and how this impacts the effect of humorous appeals. Recall from Chapter Four that Pavelchak et al. (1988) found affect intensity elicited by the programme to be a relevant mediator of advertising effectiveness. It was argued that normally consumers would choose to watch programmes with which they are emotionally involved, anyway. However, some researchers have found affect intensity to vary as an individual difference in a way that may influence the effect of emotional advertising appeals (Larsen & Diener, 1987; Larsen, Diener, & Cropanzano, 1987; Moore & Harris, 1996). It would follow that such an individual difference would also mediate the affective response to a television programme, which may in turn influence advertising response.

The current study was conducted in the United States. However, advertisers in the United Kingdom utilise even more humour than their American counterparts (Weinberger & Spotts, 1989a; Weinberger & Spotts, 1993). While these two nations continue to grow closer with the high interactivity of their respective pop cultures, it would still be valuable to conduct this study on a British sample (or another nationality). Conducting this study with consumers of other demographics (e.g.: age) would also be useful since their tastes and product perceptions are likely to differ. Future research should also address other social settings, especially solitary exposure, where the dynamics of television viewing are likely to differ.

Finally, studies on other product quadrants would be useful. While humorous appeals supposedly are unsuccessful at promoting high-involvement/think products, it is possible that certain context-induced mood states may foster their potency in these circumstances. Research has shown that consumers' NFC levels mediate the persuasiveness of affective appeals (such as humour) for high-involvement and/or think products, because it is an individual difference in processing motivation. Specifically, those who have a low NFC will only process ads for such high-involvement/think products peripherally because they are cognitively unmotivated. A positive mood also reduces processing motivation. Thus, future research may be able to demonstrate that humour can be a successful appeal for high-involvement/relief products if placed into the context of a happy programme. However, this effect may be weakened in proportion to the degree to which they inherently enjoy critical thinking (Smith & Shaffer, 1991). Therefore, high NFC individuals should not necessarily peripherally process ads for high involvement products when in a good

mood, because processing ad claims does not threaten to diminish their positive mood.

10.5. CONTRIBUTIONS TO KNOWLEDGE

This research project made a number of contributions to advertising and consumer behaviour theory, research methodology, and practice. These contributions will now be outlined.

10.5.1. Theoretical Contributions

Through this research, the understanding of humour in advertising should now have been broadened. First, the content analysis showed that the emphasis currently placed on humour appeals in American TV advertising is higher than ever. Looking longitudinally at the content analyses that have been conducted on humour in advertising over the past 30 years, an upward trend is noted in the use of humour in television advertising. This current research found some form of humorous appeal in 63% of the ads sampled. This is a marked increase from the earlier research, which found it in 50% at its highest. The content analysis also showed that mostly comic wit and satire are used, that advertisers are appropriately relating the humour to the message, that they are targeting the safer scenario and characters with the humour, and that they are placing humorous content throughout the entire ad.

Some of the information gained in this thesis has been through replication. This in itself is a strong contribution in any social research, which is inevitably limited by the idiosyncrasies of the human spirit. Most importantly, the research fortified the notion that consumers are not always rational beings. They are showered with so many

advertising messages and have so many simple needs that often they do not care to focus on arguments and select a brand using logical decision. However, they are still capable of being persuaded even under these circumstances.

Indeed, this research showed that the use of humour in advertising can be a persuasive appeal when applied to the appropriate circumstances. Through this research, the beliefs that it commands attention and ad liking have also been reinforced. The research confirmed that it works well in the television medium and that it is successful for low-involvement/transformational products. The empirical work also verified that a single exposure to an affective ad can result in a positive attitude change through classical conditioning mechanisms even when the consumer has pre-existing, and possibly conflicting knowledge of the brand. This study showed that for these products, the appeal is more effective the funnier it is perceived to be, and that disparaging humour is the most appreciated in this market. Through examination of retail clothing products, the research also empirically demonstrated the previous suspicion that humour appeals may be detrimental to advertising high-involvement/expressive products.

For the first time, humour appeals were considered alongside the mood of the consumer during exposure. Until now, the affective tone of the programming environment was never examined with the use of humour appeals. The impact of context-induced mood on response to humorous appeals through consumers' motivation to process was empirically demonstrated. The tenacity of the effectiveness of humorous appeals was also shown through examination of the NFC variable. Research in this area has been broadened by considering low-involvement/feel products. Through this research, a better understanding has been

achieved of the circumstances under which this is a relevant moderator of advertising effectiveness.

10.5.2. Methodological Contributions

Methodologically, the implementation of this project highlights some of the weaknesses with earlier research. While the strength of using authentic ads for bonafide brands has been argued often in the literature, more care should be exercised in academic research. Issues such as prior brand familiarity and prior exposure to the test ads need to be addressed and considered based on the objectives of the research. In humour research, awareness of the type of humour used must be given greater attention if results are to be compared across other research. The importance of comparing more than one type of humour in similar research was also emphasised.

The realisation that research on advertising effectiveness is limited by the use of a finite number of ads is not a new breakthrough. However, this research demonstrates that content analysis of the ad environment under investigation can help to partially resolve this by testing the most relevant appeals. This is not a perfect approach as all creative executions are somewhat different. However, the use of existing content analysis data may help researchers to design their studies at least around what is most directly pertinent to current advertising practices. The methodology employed here also highlights the sorts of relevant issues that need to be considered with regard to ad and programme selection, creation of artificial ad pods, experimental trial sizes and group dynamics, and questionnaire design.

10.5.3. Managerial Contributions

This research should allow brand managers to feel comfortable knowing that they have a robust and capable appeal at their disposal as long as they apply it to the correct circumstances. The study can help them to make informed decisions on the adoption or abandonment of a humorous appeal that are correctly based on the product, consumer, programming tone, medium, creative execution, and advertising objectives.

Through examination of consumer non-durables, the research demonstrated that humour is a constructive way of advertising routine, low-involvement products to all types of consumers. The appeals draw attention, lead to higher recall, and effectively persuade. Highly humorous executions should be used, with satirical humour recommended. The incongruities should be relatively simple to resolve. The humour should be highly related to the message and should target neither competitors nor the advertised product. Placing the ads within a positively toned programme enhances the beneficial effects of humour, although, primarily humorous programmes such as sitcoms are not recommended. However, humour may be detrimental to promoting expressive products, such as clothing. Through a detailed analysis of the literature, this thesis suggests that humour may actually be effective for some high-involvement products by either placing the ad within a happy programme or targeting low NFC consumers. Both the literature review and the empirical work suggest that it will be most effective within the television medium. These recommendations should help to guide creative execution decisions without actually providing a strict set of laws for ad design. Ultimately, originality rests with the advertiser with regard to creative decisions, and the creative process should not be subsumed by a set code of practice.

The content analysis, along with the experimental findings, also showed that as successful as it may be in the appropriate circumstances, humour might be overused. While appropriately, it was the lowest use cell, humour was still used in 9% of the high-involvement/transformational products in this sample. Nearly 20% of the high-involvement/informational ads used a humorous appeal. Also, about half of the humorous ads were advertising relief products, which may benefit from playing off of negative affect. Depending on the dominance of the humorous content in those ads, and the nature of the products and target market, this may be a sign that advertisers are not always doing an optimal job.

The exhaustive literature review also helps to provide additional contributions. Specifically, an affective ad appeal is suitable in the context of a negatively toned programme, just not a humorous appeal. Additionally, negative affect should facilitate persuasion in ads for relief products so long as the ad contains strong arguments and the ad appears in a negatively toned programme.

10.6. FINAL REFLECTIONS

As with all advertising strategies, there are supporters and opponents. Advocates claim that when consumers are aware of a humorous intent, they are more likely to attend to the source and message, which is critical in advertising where captive interest is needed over short intervals of time. Attention is the critical first step. As ad gurus Ogilvy and Raphaelson (1982) put it, “You can’t save souls in an empty church” (p. 14). Critics, on the other hand, feel that humour generates attention for the wrong part of the ad and obscures the true message. They further purport that humour detrimentally affects credibility because, as American copywriter Claude Hopkins declared in 1923, “people do not buy from clowns” (see Stewart-Hunter,

1985; 268). Finally, they contend that too much critical time that could be used to communicate product information is expended to set up the punch line in a short ad (Cantor & Venus, 1980).

These are the radical views and cannot be substantiated under all circumstances. Furthermore, the ELM has illustrated that advertising does not simply work through rational, product-driven arguments communicated by a supposedly credible source. Affective appeals have been shown to be successful, and in many circumstances, more so than a rational appeal. This is because consumers themselves are not always rational beings. Selling with comedy can be very effective, but it is critical for the advertiser to discriminate between a number of executional and situational contingencies. The more realistic position is that the effect of humour is conditional upon executional factors, as well as product and audience variables:

“In a conceptual context, it has been suggested that researchers need to ask *when* the use of humor in advertising is effective, rather than the more common question of *whether* humor enhances advertising effectiveness. The former question is more appropriate because it is unreasonable to expect humorous ads to be more effective than non-humorous ads under all conditions” (Chattopadhyay & Basu, 1990; 466-467).

This is the only practical way to draw conclusions about the effectiveness and persuasive power of *any* advertising appeal, which justifies the assortment of strategies used to promote such diverse products and services circulating to an innumerable variety of market segments today. Nevertheless, what this investigation should demonstrate is that funny business is serious business. Implicit in this statement is that when employed in the appropriate circumstances, humour can be a very effective advertising tool. However, without this careful attention, the advertiser is less likely to be met with success.

Section V

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Section VI

Appendices

Appendix A

Coding Form for Content Analysis

General Information:

Advertised brand

Broadcasting Channel

___ ABC

___ CBS

___ NBC

Sampled Date

DD/MM/YY:

Day of Week Sampled

___ Sun

___ Mon

___ Tue

___ Wed

___ Thu

___ Fri

___ Sat

Time Slot Sampled

___ 8:00-8:30 PM

___ 8:30-9:00 PM

___ 9:00-9:30 PM

___ 9:30-10 PM

___ 10-10:30 PM

___ 10:30-11 PM

Type of Programme Sponsored

___ News

___ Current events

___ Documentary

___ Sitcom

___ Drama series

___ Game show

___ Film

___ Variety show

___ Sports

___ Specialty

Target of Humour (Check all that apply)

- Product Intended audience Ad characters
 Ad scenario Competitors

Underlying Humour Processes Present (Check all that apply)

- Arousal-Safety Incongruity-Resolution Humorous Disparagement

Resultant Humour Type

- Comic Wit Sentimental Humour Satire
 Sentimental Comedy Full Comedy

Product:*Product Class*

- Beverages Clothing/Footwear Domestic appliances
 Electronics Food Gambling
 Gardening Household equipment Household stores
 Leisure/Personal Motoring Pharmaceuticals
 Services Toiletries/Cosmetics Travel/Tourism
 Other

Product Positioning

➤ Decision dimension

- High-involvement Low-involvement

➤ Motivation dimension

- Informational Transformational

Other:

Ad Length

___ 10 seconds

___ 15 seconds

___ 20 seconds

___ 30 seconds

___ 40 seconds

___ 45 seconds

___ 60 seconds

___ Other

Comments:

Appendix B

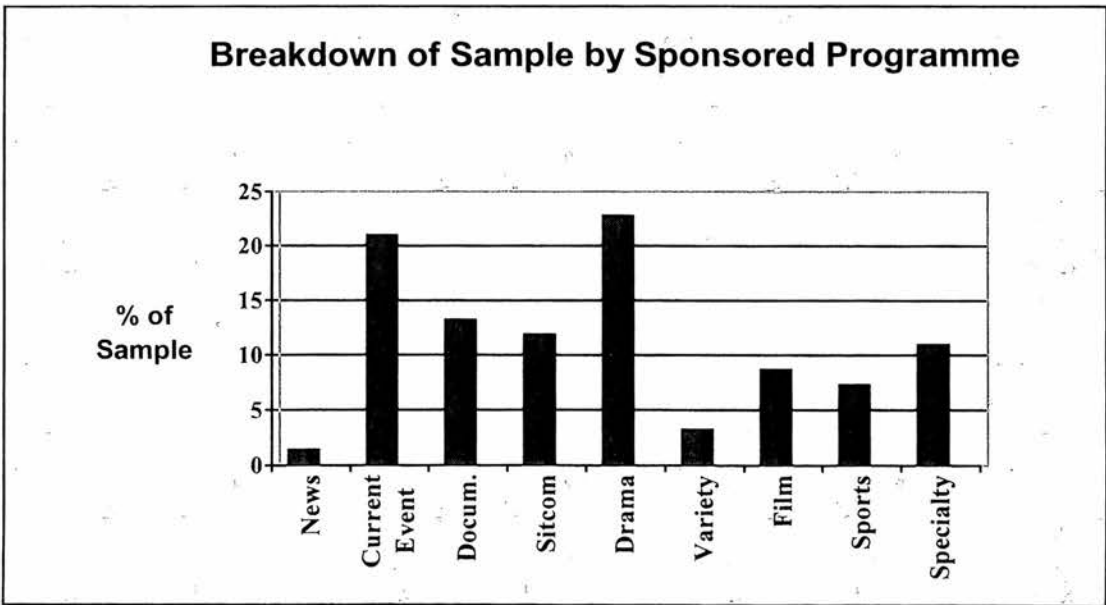
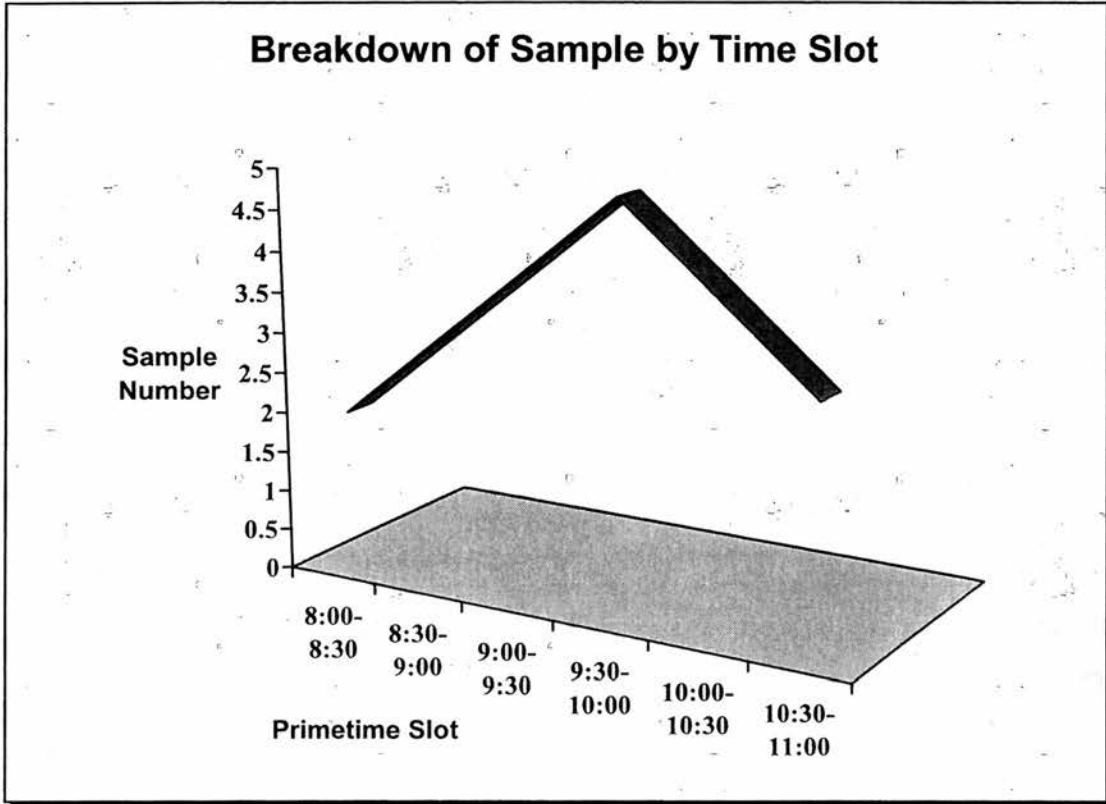
Product Classes Used in Content Analysis

Leisure & Personal		Motoring		Pharmaceuticals	
Books	Photography	Motor cars	Analgesics		
Magazines	Musical instruments	Motorcycles & scooters	Asthma, hay fever products		
Newspapers	Calculators	Petrol & motor engines	Cold treatments		
Cinema	Organisers	In-car entertainment	Condoms		
Pens	Watches	Car hire	Cough remedies		
Recorded Music/speech	Jewellery	Motor insurance	First aid dressings		
Pre-recorded video tapes	Bicycles	Vehicle spares	Indigestion remedies		
Toys & games		AA & RAC subscriptions	Laxatives		
Spectacles		Car batteries, replacement	Vitamins		
Sports equipment					
Services		Toiletries & Cosmetics		Travel & Tourism	
Dry cleaning, laundry		Baby care products	Sanitary protection	Rail travel	
Hairdressing		Denture cleaners/fixatives	Shampoos	Buses	
Fast food/take-away		Deodorants	Shaving soap	Air travel	
Medical insurance payments		Depilatories	Soap, toilet	Sea travel (cruise lines)	
Life insurance payments		Fragrances (male/female)	Suntan products	Hotels	
Financial services		Hair colorants	Tissues, facial	Car rental	
Stockbrokers fees		Hair setting agents	Toothpaste		
Mobile phone service		Hair sprays			
Long distance/domestic phone service		Make-up (eye/lip/nail)			
Medical		Other make-up			
Education		Razors & blades (disposable)			

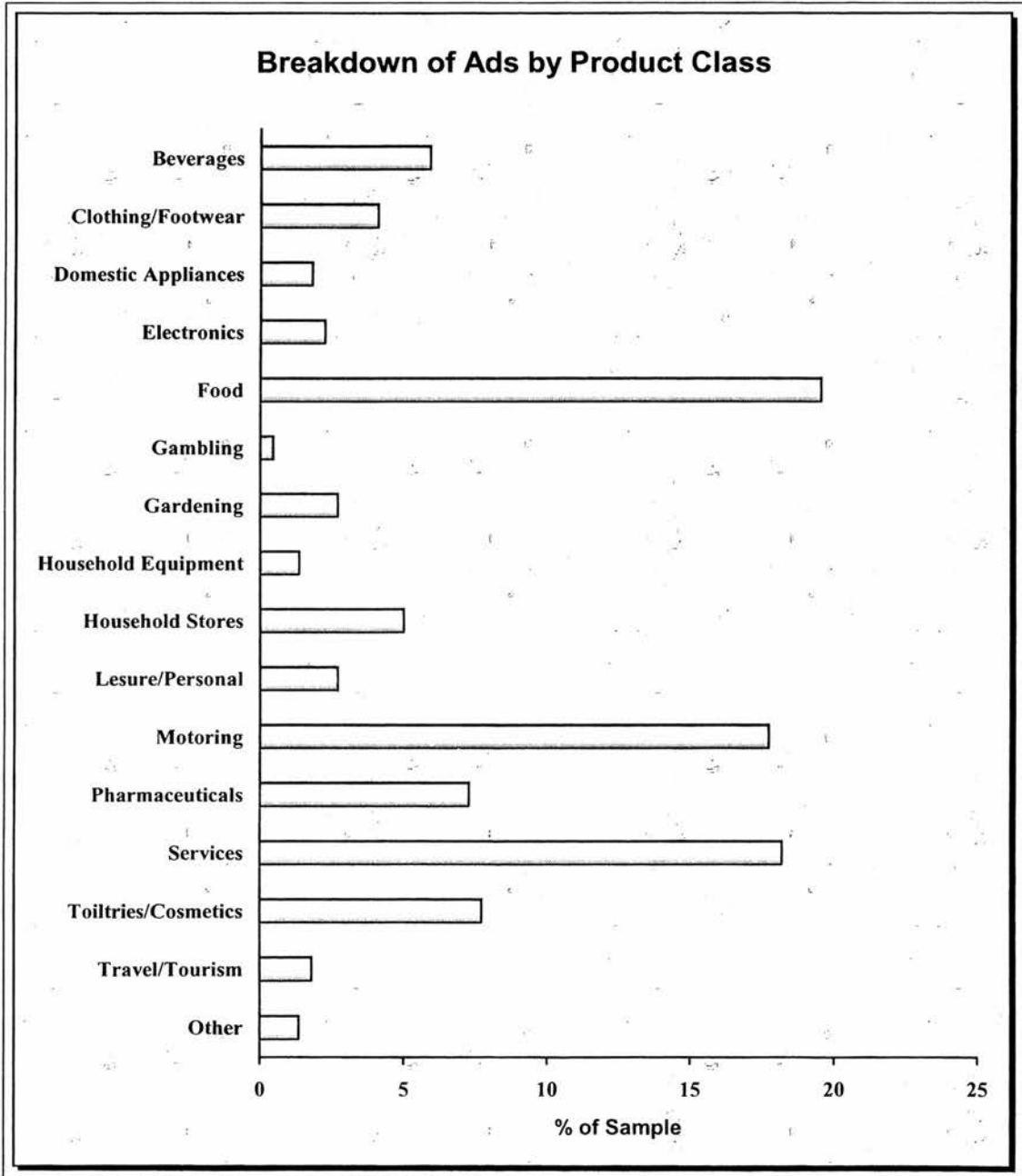
Adapted from: Advertising Association, The. (1998). *Advertising Statistics Yearbook 1998*. (Vol. 16). Henley on Thames, England: NTC Publications, Ltd.

Appendix C

Distributions of Content Analysis Sample



Distributions of Content Analysis Sample
(Continued)



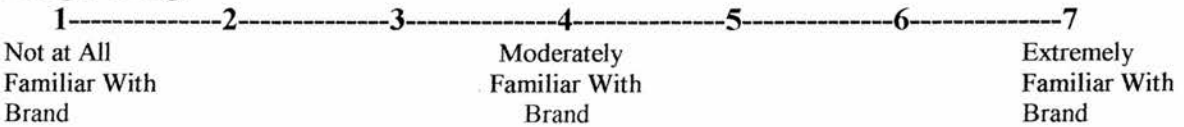
Appendix D

Brand Familiarity Pilot Survey

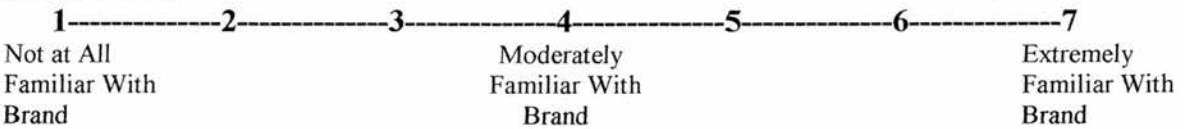
Please indicate your familiarity with the following brands in the listed product categories on the seven-point scale provided. An answer of one would mean that you have not ever heard the brand name. Two would indicate that you have at least heard the name but have very limited knowledge of the brand or product. Seven would indicate that you are so familiar with the brand that you uphold a stable, and strongly held attitude toward the brand (positive or negative). All ratings may be a result of either direct experience with the product, exposure to advertising, or word of mouth testimony.

Fast food/Restaurants:

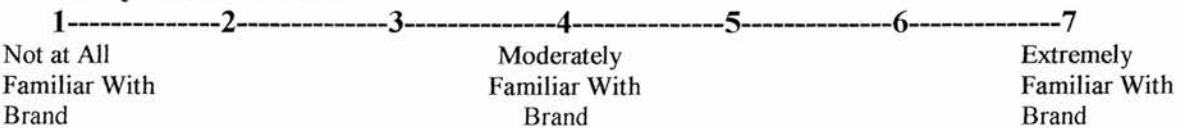
Burger King



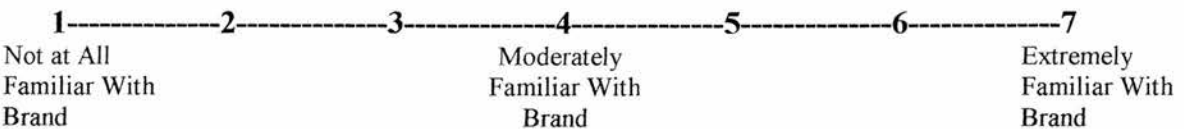
McDonald's



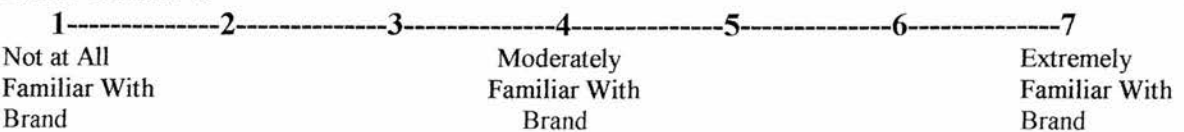
Kentucky Fried Chicken



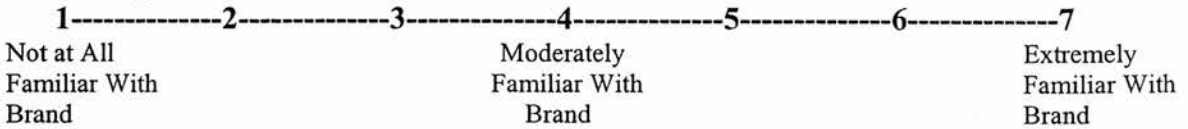
Pizza Hut



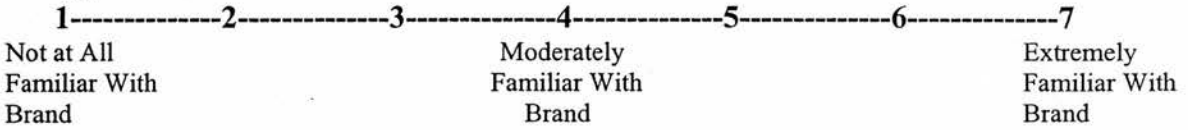
Little Caesar's



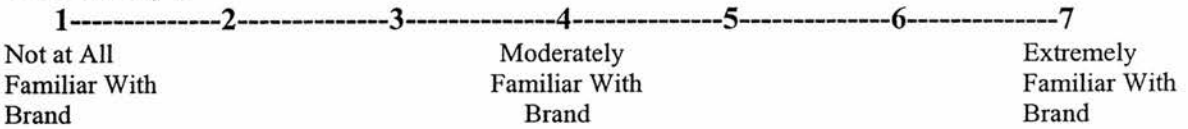
Schlotsky's



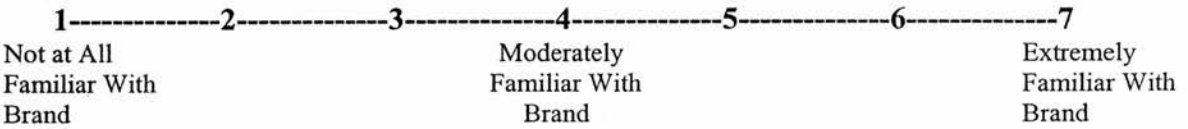
Gregg's



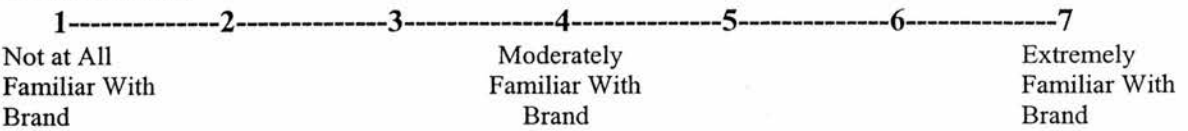
TGI Friday's



Boston Market

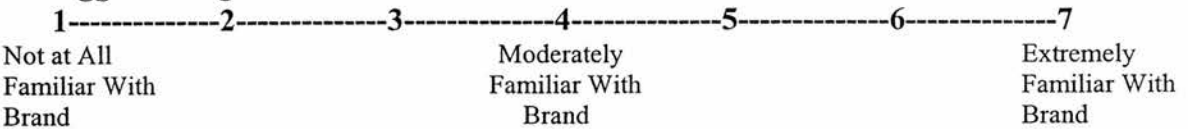


Olive Garden

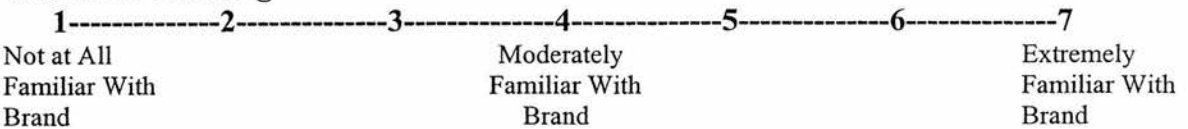


Groceries:

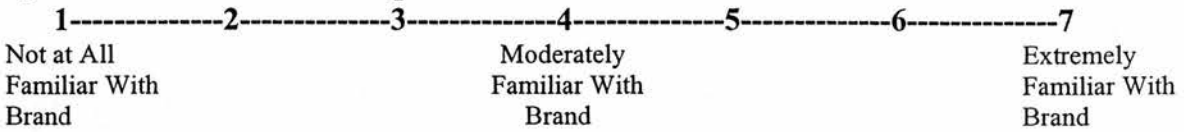
Kellogg's Nutrigrain Bars



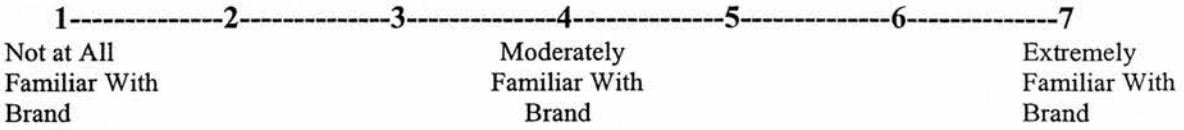
Wishbone Dressing



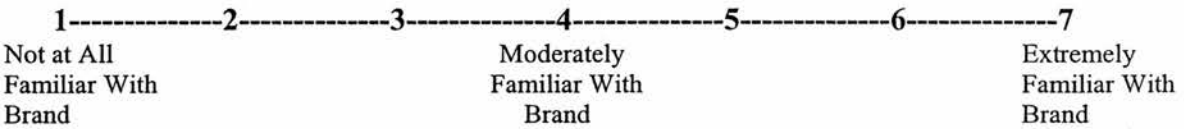
Quaker Toasted Oatmeal Squares



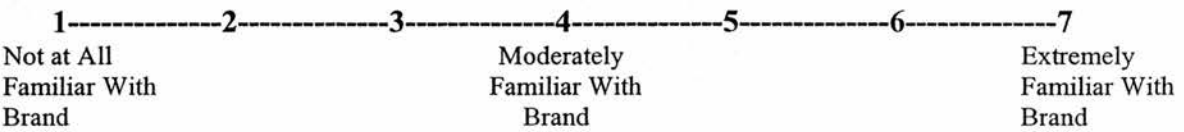
Breckstone's Cottage Cheese



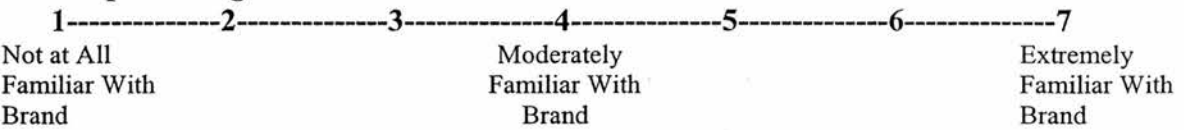
DiGiorno Pizza



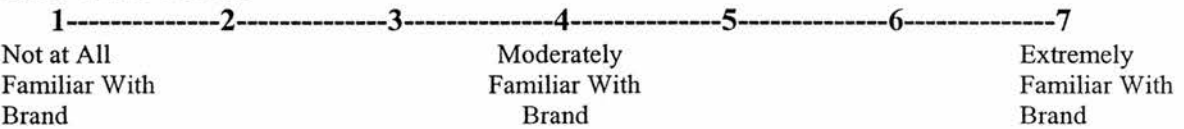
Hatfield Meats



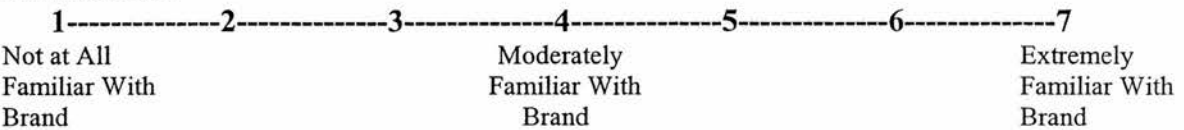
Stovetop Stuffing



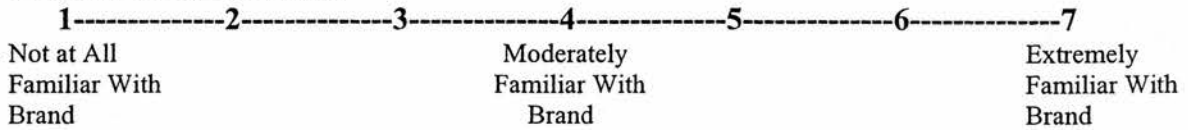
Rice Chex Cereal



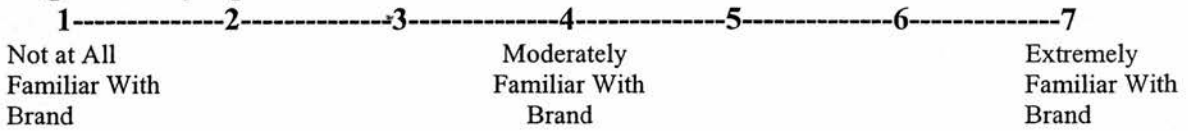
Minute Rice



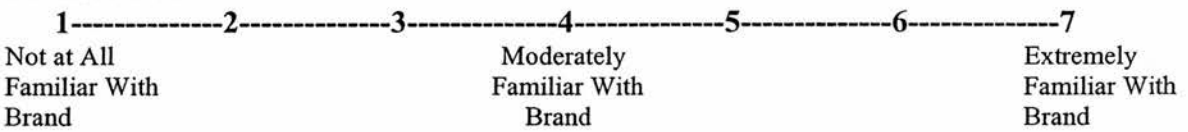
Hidden Valley Dressing



Log Cabin Syrup

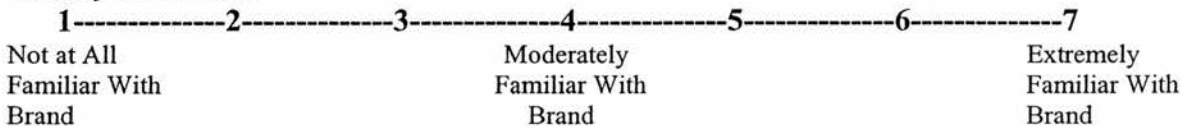


Bernard Matthews Chicken Kiev

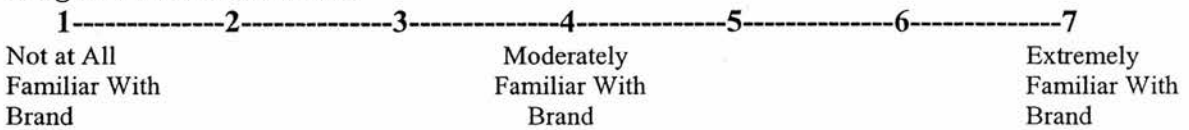


Snacks:

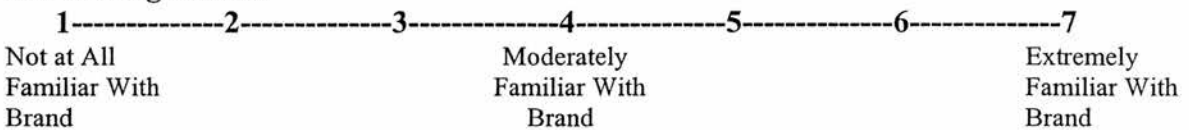
Galaxy Chocolate



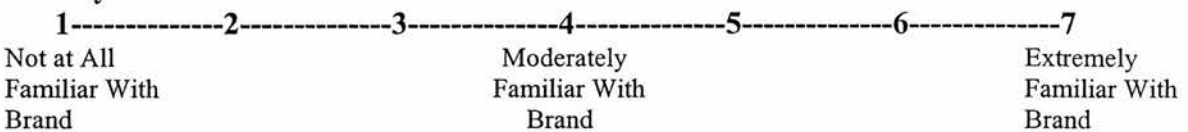
Magnum Ice Cream Bars



Nestle Megatruffle

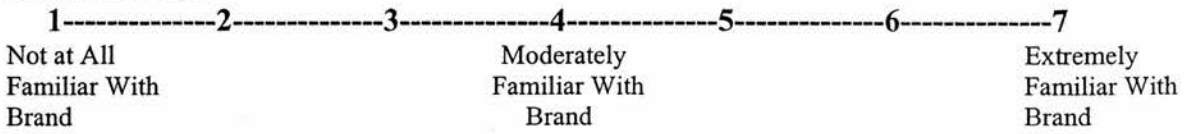


Turkey Hill

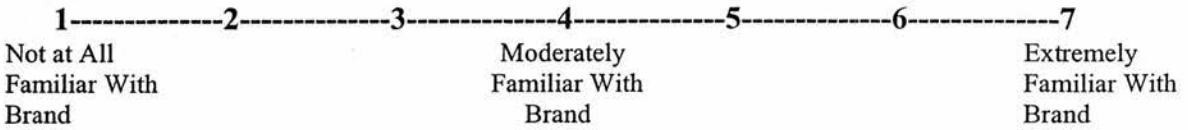


Beverages:

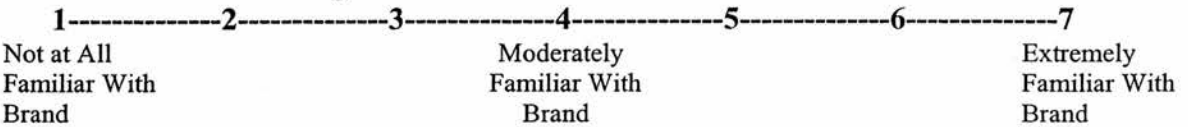
Nambarie Tea



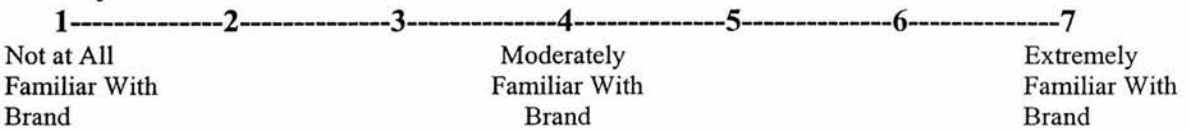
Miller Lite



Florida's Natural Orange Juice

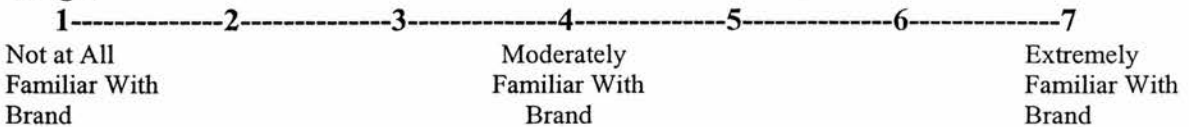


Caffrey's Irish Ale

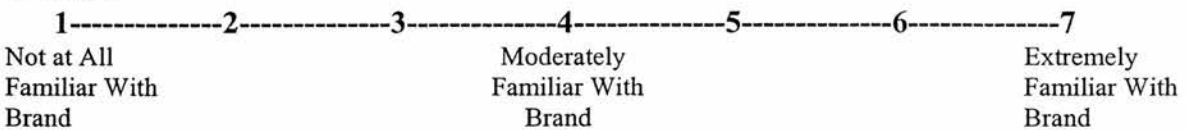


Retail Clothing/All Purpose Department Stores:

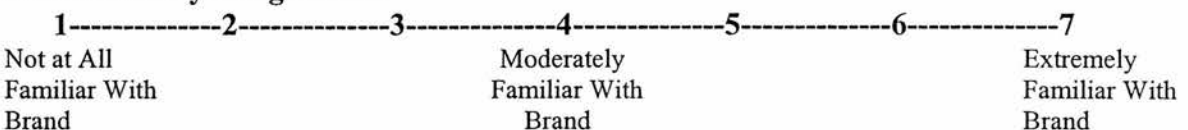
Target



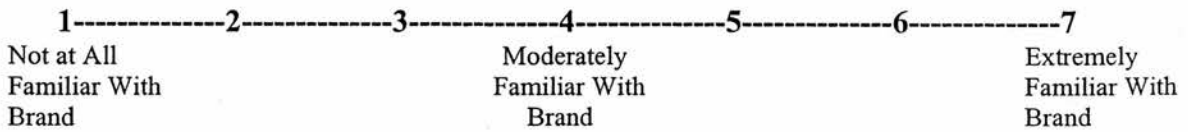
K-Mart



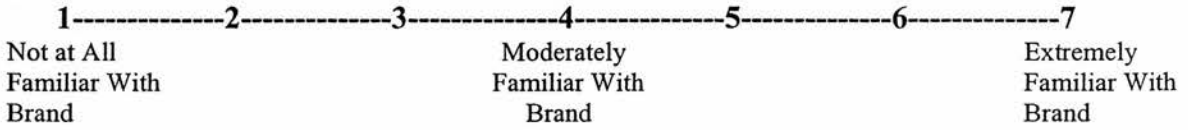
St. John's Bay Cargo Pants



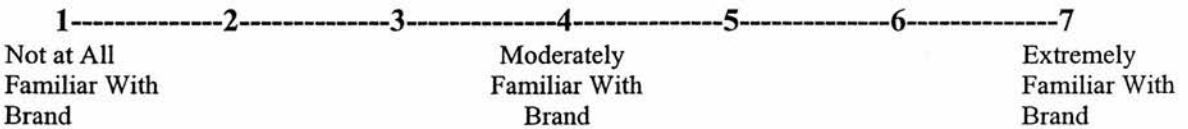
Route 66 Jams



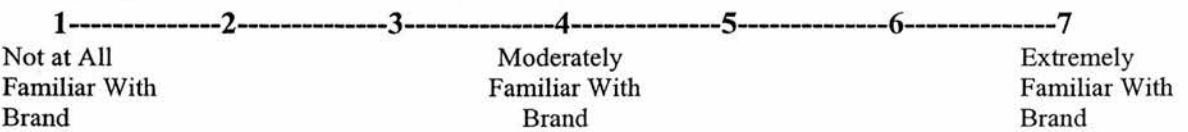
Burlington Coat Factory



Adidas

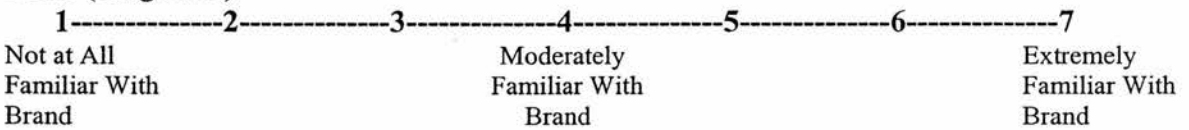


Wal-Mart

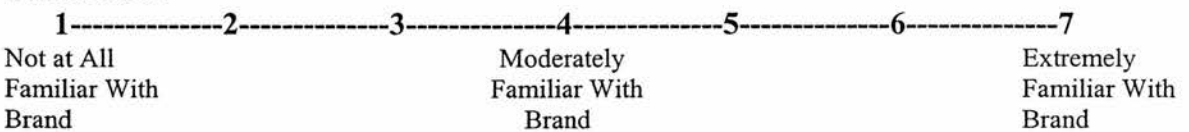


Other:

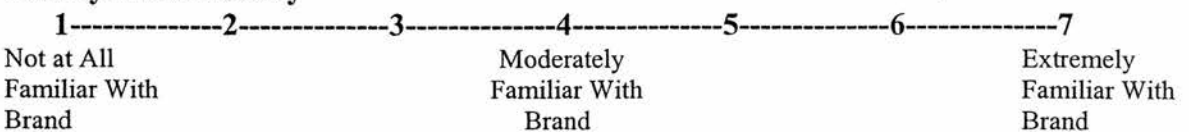
Bella (Magazine)



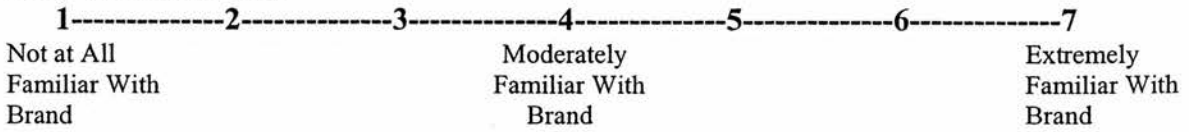
PureTouch



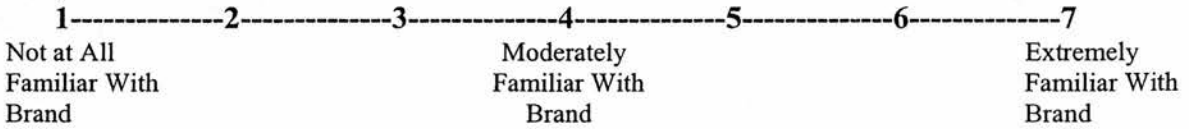
Pennsylvania Lottery



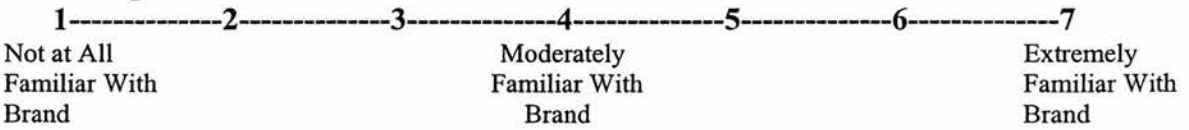
Y100 (Radio station)



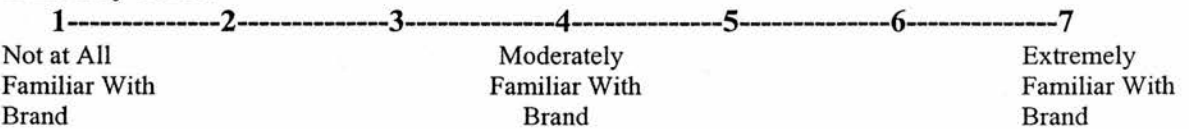
Emporio Armani



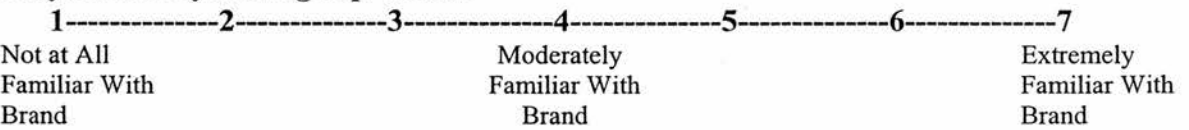
3dfx Graphic Accelerator



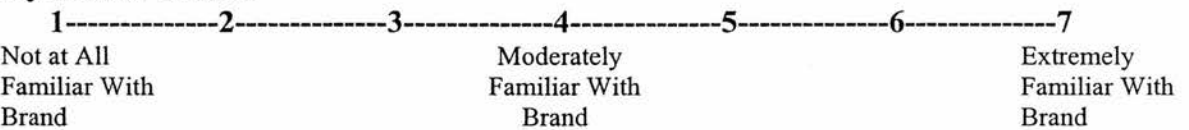
Embassy Suites



Maybelline Hydrating Lip Colour



Hydrience Clairol



Appendix E

Ad Treatments Appraisal

Wishbone

Was there an attempt by the advertiser to use some form of humour?

Yes

No

Please rate the degree to which you found the ad humorous.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
 Not At All Slightly Moderately Very Hilarious
 Humorous Humorous Humorous Humorous

Please indicate which type of humour you think was executed in this ad.

Comic Wit

Sentimental Humour

Satire

Sentimental Comedy

Full Comedy

N/A

Please rate the level of humour that you perceived in this ad compared to your every day experience with humorous advertising.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
 Much Less Slightly Less Average Slightly More Much More
 Humorous Humorous Humour Level Humorous Humorous

Burlington Coat Factory

Was there an attempt by the advertiser to use some form of humour?

Yes

No

Please rate the degree to which you found the ad humorous.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
 Not At All Slightly Moderately Very Hilarious
 Humorous Humorous Humorous Humorous

Target (2)

Was there an attempt by the advertiser to use some form of humour?

Yes

No

Please rate the degree to which you found the ad humorous.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
 Not At All Slightly Moderately Very Hilarious
 Humorous Humorous Humorous Humorous

Please indicate which type of humour you think was executed in this ad.

Comic Wit

Sentimental Humour

Satire

Sentimental Comedy

Full Comedy

N/A

Please rate the level of humour that you perceived in this ad compared to your every day experience with humorous advertising.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
 Much Less Slightly Less Average Slightly More Much More
 Humorous Humorous Humour Level Humorous Humorous

Embassy Suites

Was there an attempt by the advertiser to use some form of humour?

Yes

No

Please rate the degree to which you found the ad humorous.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
 Not At All Slightly Moderately Very Hilarious
 Humorous Humorous Humorous Humorous

Please indicate which type of humour you think was executed in this ad.

Comic Wit

Sentimental Humour

Satire

Sentimental Comedy

Full Comedy

N/A

Please rate the level of humour that you perceived in this ad compared to your every day experience with humorous advertising.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
 Much Less Slightly Less Average Slightly More Much More
 Humorous Humorous Humour Level Humorous Humorous

Breakstone's

Was there an attempt by the advertiser to use some form of humour?

Yes No

Please rate the degree to which you found the ad humorous.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
 Not At All Slightly Moderately Very Hilarious
 Humorous Humorous Humorous Humorous

Please indicate which type of humour you think was executed in this ad.

Comic Wit Sentimental Humour Satire
 Sentimental Comedy Full Comedy N/A

Please rate the level of humour that you perceived in this ad compared to your every day experience with humorous advertising.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
 Much Less Slightly Less Average Slightly More Much More
 Humorous Humorous Humour Level Humorous Humorous

Kraft Shredded Parmesan

Was there an attempt by the advertiser to use some form of humour?

Yes No

Please rate the degree to which you found the ad humorous.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
 Not At All Slightly Moderately Very Hilarious
 Humorous Humorous Humorous Humorous

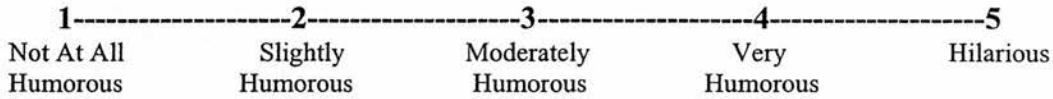
Garden Burger

Was there an attempt by the advertiser to use some form of humour?

Yes

No

Please rate the degree to which you found the ad humorous.



Please indicate which type of humour you think was executed in this ad.

Comic Wit

Sentimental Humour

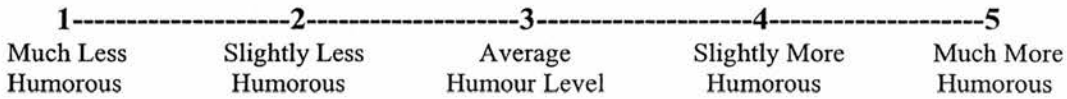
Satire

Sentimental Comedy

Full Comedy

N/A

Please rate the level of humour that you perceived in this ad compared to your every day experience with humorous advertising.



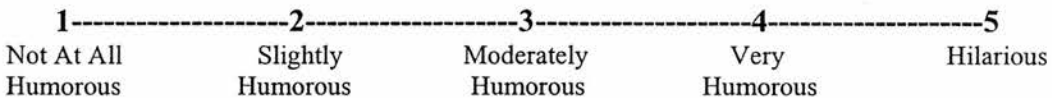
Hidden Valley

Was there an attempt by the advertiser to use some form of humour?

Yes

No

Please rate the degree to which you found the ad humorous.



Please indicate which type of humour you think was executed in this ad.

Comic Wit

Sentimental Humour

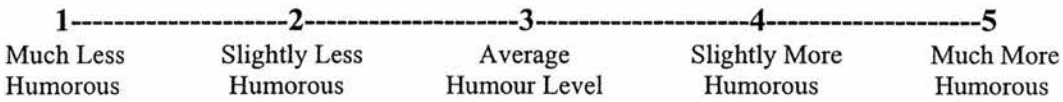
Satire

Sentimental Comedy

Full Comedy

N/A

Please rate the level of humour that you perceived in this ad compared to your every day experience with humorous advertising.

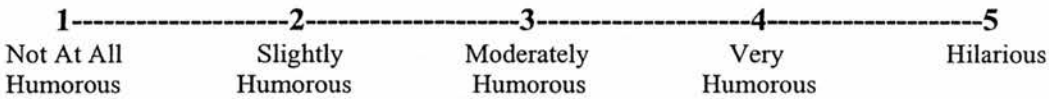


Kellogg's Nutrigrain Twists

Was there an attempt by the advertiser to use some form of humour?

Yes No

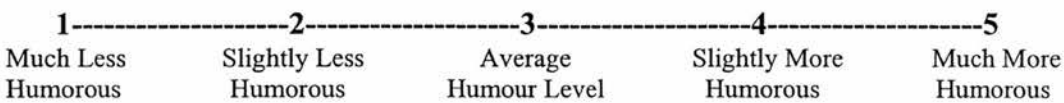
Please rate the degree to which you found the ad humorous.



Please indicate which type of humour you think was executed in this ad.

Comic Wit Sentimental Humour Satire
 Sentimental Comedy Full Comedy N/A

Please rate the level of humour that you perceived in this ad compared to your every day experience with humorous advertising.

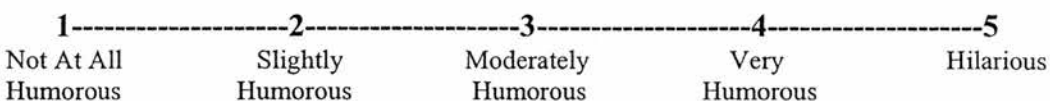


Route 66 Jams

Was there an attempt by the advertiser to use some form of humour?

Yes No

Please rate the degree to which you found the ad humorous.



Appendix F

Sample Request for Participants

Message sent to Dr. L.J. Shrum, Marketing Department, Rutgers University on 10 January 2000:

Dear Dr. Shrum:

I am a second year PhD student in the Department of Business Studies at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland. As part of my PhD study, I am conducting research on advertising effectiveness and brand attitude change in American markets. Specifically, I am examining persuasion through the use of affective advertising appeals, including the omnipresent humor appeal. I am investigating some individual attributes of the exposure audience that may mediate the effectiveness of such appeals. These include the audiences' mood state during ad exposure (as altered by the television program) and their subjective need for cognition.

I will be running experiments in the spring. Obviously, looking at American consumers prevents me from carrying out the trials in Scotland. I am aware of the international alliance between the Rutgers University and the University of Edinburgh through their respective international abroad programs. Based on these ties and assuming that the social research conducted at Rutgers-New Brunswick draws upon student populations, I was wondering if I could be granted permission to run some of the experiments there? I don't know if it is common practice at Rutgers-New Brunswick to use student samples in academic research with extra course credit being offered as incentives. However, if this is the case, then I believe my research may be relevant to the interests in your department. The research has practical implications for current advertising and consumer behavior theory. I also believe that it is more personally relevant not only to your own research, but also (to a lesser extent) to the research interests of Dr. Barbara Stern, Dr. Elizabeth Hirschman, Dr. Harsharanjeet Jagpal, and Dr. Michael Mulvey.

In exchange for your assistance, I would be willing not only to provide a copy of my thesis to your department, but will also volunteer as a research assistant for any work being undertaken in the department. Furthermore, if anyone is interested, I would be happy to guest lecture on any facet of my research. I also just completed a project for my Master's on global marketing, and the potential for standardization of culturally similar regions. The research examined television advertising executions in the US and UK in a cross-cultural study. Specifically, I investigated the use of various hard and soft sell executions and the expression of traditional values in each country's advertising. Furthermore, I looked more in depth at humor appeals and assessed not only the prevalence of the appeal in British and American advertising, but also the types of humor used most frequently. I would be happy to lecture on this topic as well.

If you could, please let me know if there is any way that I may be able to work with your department. I can be contacted at Ted.Donnelly@ed.ac.uk or at the Springfield, Delaware County number listed below. Thank you very much for your time.

Best Wishes,
Ted Donnelly

University of Edinburgh
Department of Business Studies
William Robertson Building
50 George Square
Edinburgh
EH8 9JY Scotland

Appendix G

Breakdown of Participant Sample by Course of Study

Course of Study	Number Majoring in Course
Arts	
Art History	1
Music	1
Business	
Accounting	1
Business Administration	10
Corporate Communication	1
Economics	5
Finance	44
International Business	1
Management	12
Marketing	44
Mgmt Science & Information Systems	12
Communications	
Communications	52
Journalism	4
Linguistics	1
Mass Media	1
Public Relations	2
Speech Communication	1
Telecommunications	1
Education	
Art Education	1
Deaf Education	4
Early Childhood Education	4
Elementary Education	37
Secondary Education	1
Special Education	11

Breakdown of Participant Sample by Course of Study (Continued)¹

Course of Study	Number Majoring in Course
Health Care	
Health Administration	4
Health Development & Exercise Science	2
Health Promotion	1
Nursing	1
Pre-Medicine	3
Pre-Physical Therapy	2
Rehab Services	1
Liberal Arts	
American Studies	4
Clinical Psychology	6
Criminal Justice	5
East Asian Language	1
English	6
French	1
General Liberal Arts	18
General Psychology	117
Industrial/Organisational Psychology	2
Political Science	4
Sociology	21
Spanish	1
Women & Gender Studies	1
Science & Engineering	
Biology	14
Chemical Engineering	1
Computer Science	3
Maths	3
Other	
Undeclared	6
Did Not Respond	1

¹ The course of study figures add up to more than 406 because some participants majored in more than one course.

Appendix H

Introductory Script for Experimental Sessions

Hello. **[If you'll recall]** I am conducting research on memory processes and cognitive activity during leisure activities. Dr. _____ has agreed to allow me to conduct trials with you so that you may gain some experience participating in a social research study. Hopefully through participation, you will have a better understanding of how research is conducted in the social sciences. Because the research **[is psychological in nature/is sociological in nature/related to communications studies]**, Dr. _____ has taken an interest in the study.

The study in which you will be participating is part of research intended to assess the types of stimuli that take priority when encoding information into long term memory. By conducting this study, we hope to gain insight into memory processes and cognitive attentiveness, while engaged in more passive, recreational activities.

You will first fill **[have now filled]** out the pre-test. Because memory encoding and attentiveness to stimuli are greatly affected by your previous experiences and perspectives, you will be **[were]** asked questions regarding your personal experiences with some of the things that you may see in the main study. You will then **[now]** watch one of a number of typical television exposures consisting of a made for TV documentary just as would be seen in a natural setting with an ad break and all. It was necessary to make the exposure as natural as possible, and to collect data on everything that you view. Following the exposure, you will be administered a second questionnaire, which will assess your processing of the television segment and cognitive attentiveness to various features.

Your answers, together with approximately 400 other students, will be used to draw conclusions regarding memory encoding. The research has implications for cognitive psychological theory, educational psychology, and communications studies as we can gain greater perspective on memory, and how individual experiences facilitate cognitive processing.

During post-test session only:

I know that this is not the best setting in which to watch television. However, try not to watch this segment any differently just because you are involved in a research study. So at this time, I'd like to ask you to sit back, relax, and watch the following segment just as you would at home or in any other natural setting.

Appendix I

Informed Consent Form for Research Study

[Name of participating university]

Title of project: Passivity and Memory Processes: Information Processing and Encoding During Normal Television Viewing

Person in charge: Mr. Ted Donnelly
(610) 543-6039
Ted.Donnelly@ed.ac.uk

1. This section provides an explanation of the study in which you will be participating:

- A. The study in which you will be participating is part of research intended to assess the types of stimuli that take priority when encoding information into long term memory. By conducting this study, we hope to gain a better understanding of memory processes while engaged in passive, entertaining activities.
- B. If you agree to take part in this research, you will be asked to watch one of a number of typical television exposures consisting of a made for TV documentary with an actual ad break, just as would be seen in a natural setting. Memory processing can be greatly affected by one's past experience and general attitudes. As a result, prior to this viewing, you will fill in a pencil-and-paper questionnaire to assess your opinions on many of the things that you will see. Following the exposure, you will be administered a second questionnaire which will assess your processing of the television segment. Your answers, together with approximately 400 other students, will be used to draw conclusions regarding memory encoding.
- C. Your participation in this research will take less than one hour and will occur in a single session.

2. This section describes your rights as a research participant:

- A. You may ask any questions about the research procedures, and these questions will be answered. Further questions should be directed to Ted Donnelly.
- B. The information that you provide during the course of this research is completely confidential. In the event of publication of this research, no personally identifying information will be disclosed. To make sure your participation is confidential, only a code number will appear on the answer sheet for your questionnaire. Not even the researcher can match names with code numbers. This number is only used to match the first questionnaire to the second.
- C. Your participation is entirely voluntary. You are free to stop participating in the research at any time, or to decline to answer any specific questions without penalty.
- D. This study involves minimal risk; that is, no risks to your physical or mental health beyond those encountered in the normal course of everyday life.

- E. Because the validity of the results of social research can be affected if the purpose of the study is fully divulged to me prior to participation, I understand that the full rationale behind the study may not be being explained at this time. I understand that in such an event, I will have an opportunity to receive a complete explanation of the study's purpose following participation.

3. This section indicates that you are giving your informed consent to participate in the research:

Participant:

- A. I agree to participate in a scientific investigation of memory, as an authorized part of the education and research program of [Name of participating university].
- B. I understand the information given to me, and I have received answers to any questions I may have had about the research procedures. I understand and agree to the conditions of this study as described.
- C. To the best of my knowledge and belief, I have no physical or mental illness or difficulties that would increase the risk to me of participation in this study.
- D. I understand that I will receive extra course credit as compensation for participating in this study. I also understand that I have alternate means of receiving this credit should I decide not to participate.
- E. I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary, and I may withdraw from this study at any time by notifying the person in charge.
- F. I am 18 years of age or older.

Signature

Date

Researcher:

- A. I certify that the informed consent procedures have been followed, and that I have answered any questions from the participant above as fully as possible.

Signature

Date



Appendix J

Debriefing Form

The study in which you just participated was actually an investigation of advertising effectiveness for different exposure audiences and viewing circumstances. Specifically, the enquiry was comparing emotionally based, indirect, or *soft sell* strategies with direct, information-based, or *hard sell* advertising appeals. The focus on this study was on habitual, low-involvement purchases from two different product sectors (routine food purchases and retail clothing) and concentrated on the abundantly used but often misunderstood humor appeal.

With increased reliance placed onto humorous appeals in advertising, a greater understanding is needed as to their effectiveness in meeting the communicative goals of the advertiser. To date there is little agreement in the literature on the efficacy of humor in advertising. While empirical evidence suggests that it is a superior appeal in generating attention and ad liking, there is far less agreement concerning its effects on other communication objectives, such as source credibility, recall, and persuasion. Persuasion is the ultimate goal as this is what in the end will lead to a purchase and repeat buying. One of the main reasons for the conflicting findings and general dissension is due to the subjective nature of humor. Consequently, the many individual differences within consumers that could mediate the effectiveness of humorous appeals needs further investigation.

Accordingly, the interaction between two audience variables that could potentially have a potent effect on consumer's perceptions to advertising is being analyzed. Specifically, the viewer's mood state during exposure and their intrinsic need for cognition is being examined. In an advertising context, *need for cognition* is simply consumer's compulsion to process product-related information and advertising arguments for all types of products. Because the use of *peripheral-route* or indirect advertising appeals, such as humor, distracts the viewer from processing relevant product information, it is conceivable that this construct could potentially be affecting the persuasive power of humorous ads for certain types of consumers. Similarly, it has been shown that different moods can modify the amount of information people use to assess the validity of a message or argument. Therefore, a less informative, more emotionally stimulating ad may only be persuasive under certain affective conditions. This is highly relevant to purchasing ad time, because marketers are placing ads in between often emotionally stimulating programs.

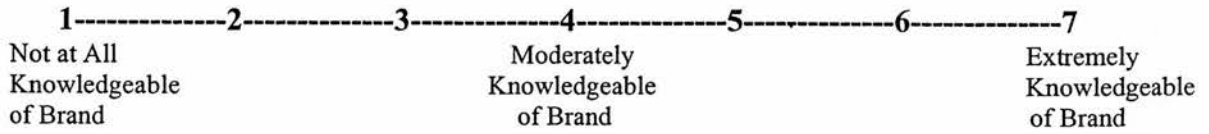
These effects are being explored by controlling mood state and need for cognition and comparing consumer reactions to humorous and strictly informative ad types. For each product sector, half of you viewed primarily humorous advertisements (employing the two most commonly used types of humor in American advertising), while the other half viewed a predominantly informational ad. These ads were placed in a positive mood-inducing program for half of the participants, while the other half viewed a negative mood-laden segment. Need for Cognition is a personality attribute; so while it was measured in each of you, it was not randomly assigned. In addition to this measure, your mood state and perception of humor were assessed to ensure that the variables were properly controlled. As measures of persuasion, changes in brand interest, brand attitude, and purchase intentions were appraised along with some other necessary procedural items. The true intent of the study was not disclosed, as is common in a great deal of social research, because the validity of the study would have otherwise been threatened. The results of this study have important implications for advertisers attempting to target the appropriate consumers (which can be done through the types of programs sponsored), and appeal to them in the most efficient and favorable manner.

The researcher, Ted Donnelly, is a second year PhD student at the University of Edinburgh in the United Kingdom. If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact him by email at Ted.Donnelly@ed.ac.uk, or by telephone at the following Delaware County number: (610) 543-6039.

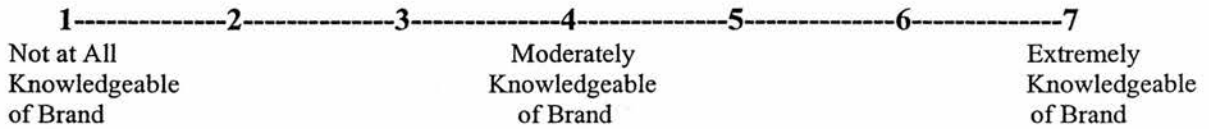
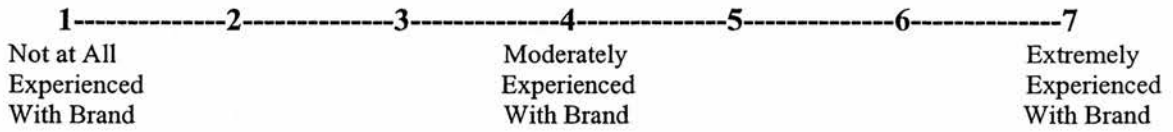
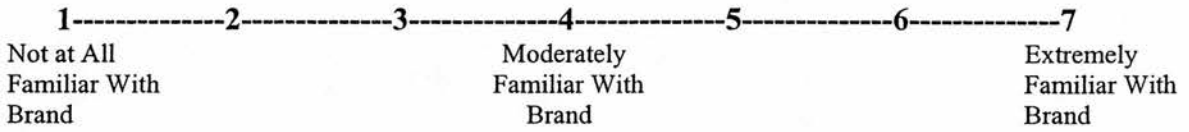
Appendix K

Pre-Test Questionnaire Sample

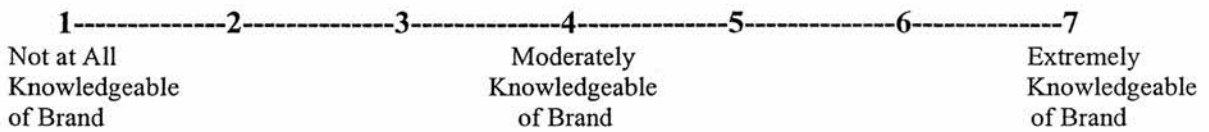
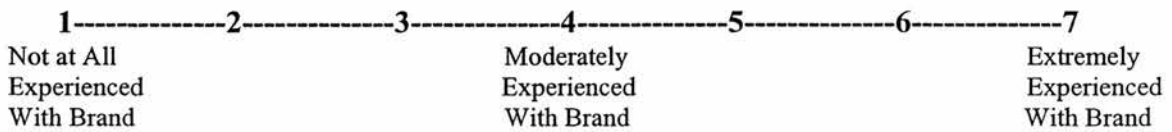
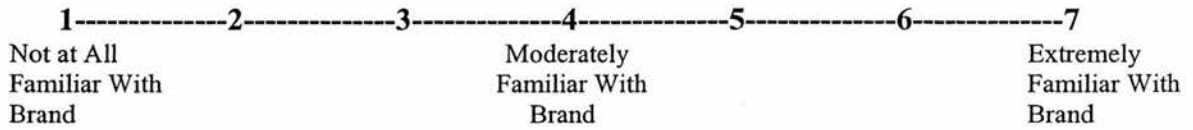
Author's Note: As a sample, the questionnaires from Condition 2a have been included as appendices. In all conditions, the questionnaires were exactly of this same format. While the test ads in Condition 2b were the same, the test ads were different in Conditions 1a & 1b. Therefore, in these conditions, rather than referring to the brands *Hidden Valley*, *Target*, & *DiGiorno*, the questions were substituted with the brands *Wishbone*, *Target*, and *Burlington Coat Factory*, respectively. Furthermore, Condition 2a was part of the positive mood treatment. Therefore, the questions on the programme segment refer to *A Wedding Story*. While Condition 1a also refers to this programme, the negative mood treatments (Conditions 1b & 2b) are substituted with questions about the programme, *U.S.S. Indianapolis: Tragedy at Sea*.



Target

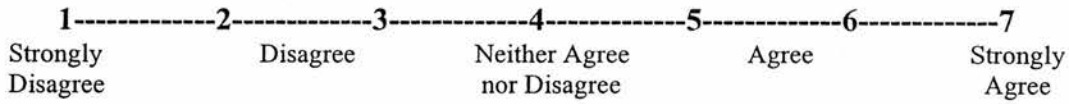


DiGiorno

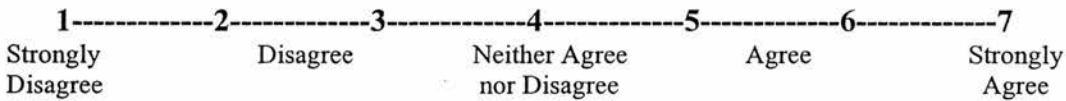


Please rate along the following scale your degree of agreement with the following statements.

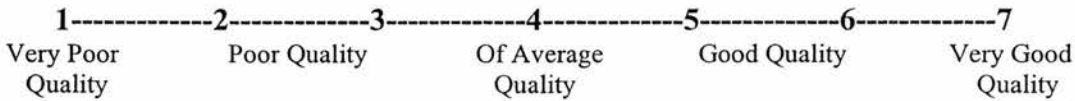
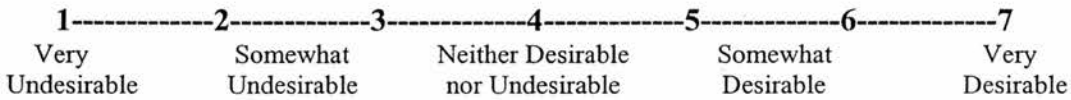
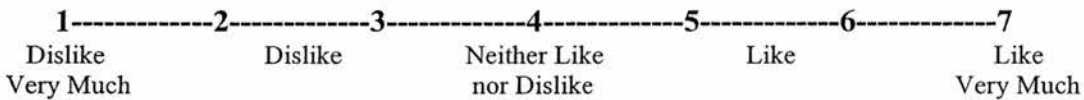
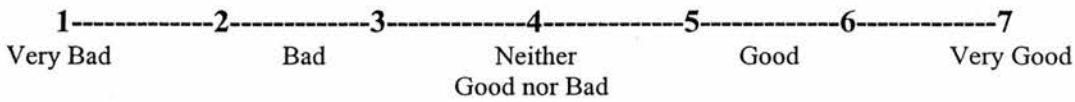
Learning more about the TV program, *A Wedding Story* would be useless.



I'm a little curious about the TV Program, *A Wedding Story*.

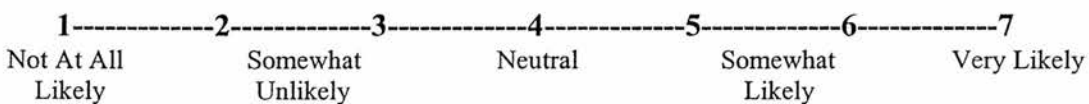


Please rate your general impression of the TV program, *A Wedding Story* along the following dimensions.



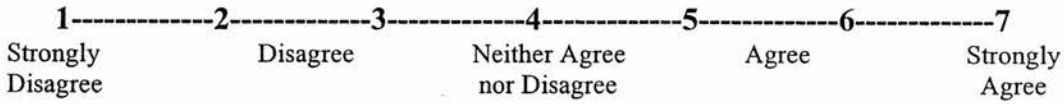
___ Do not know enough to assess quality.

Please rate the likelihood that you would watch the TV program, *A Wedding Story*.

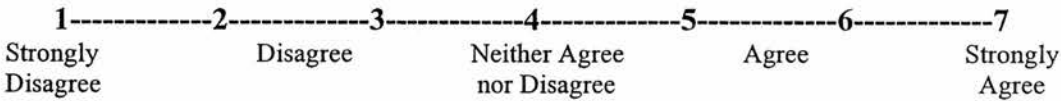


Please rate along the following scale your degree of agreement with the following statements.

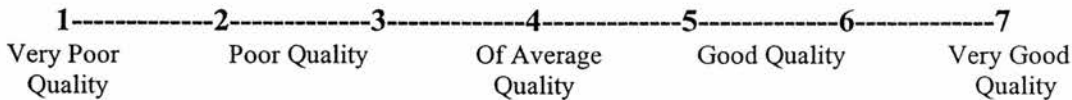
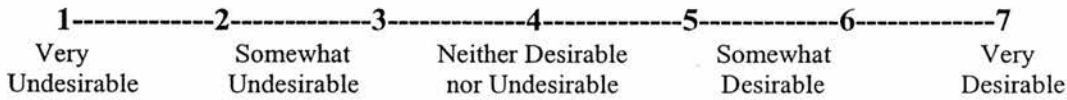
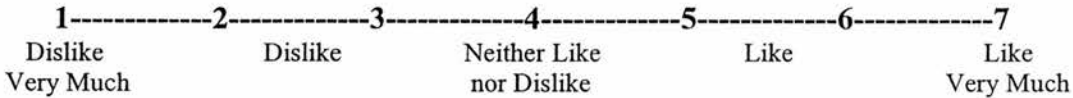
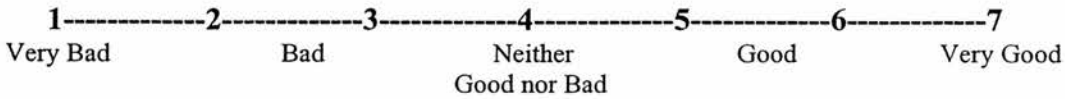
Learning more about *Hidden Valley* salad dressing would be useless.



I'm a little curious about *Hidden Valley* salad dressing.

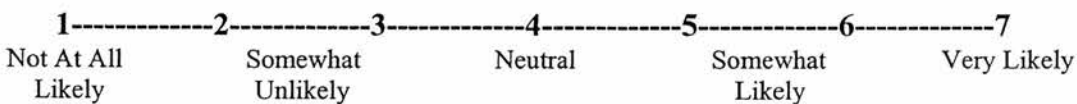


Please rate your general impression of the brand, *Hidden Valley*.



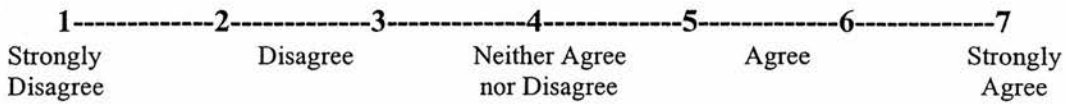
___ Do not know enough to assess quality.

Please rate the likelihood that you would purchase *Hidden Valley* brand salad dressing.

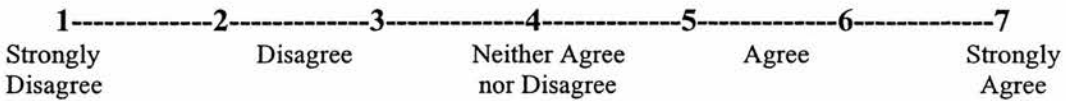


Please rate along the following scale your degree of agreement with the following statements.

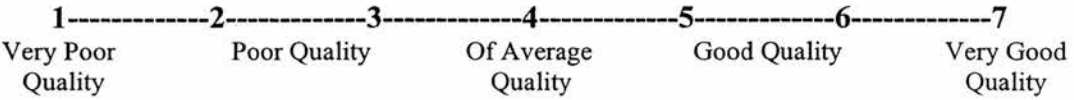
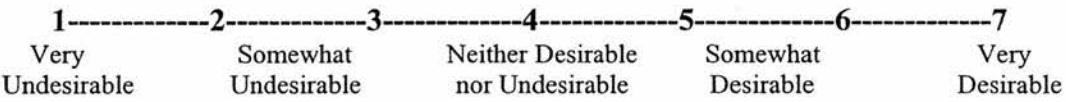
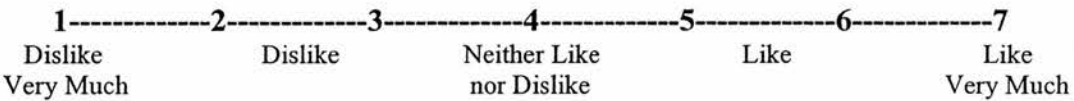
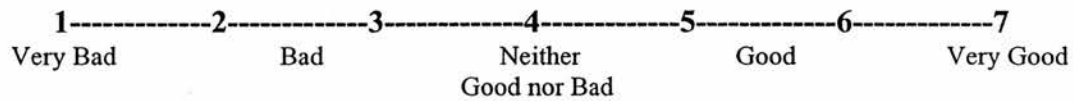
Learning more about *Target* retail stores would be useless.



I'm a little curious about *Target* retail stores.

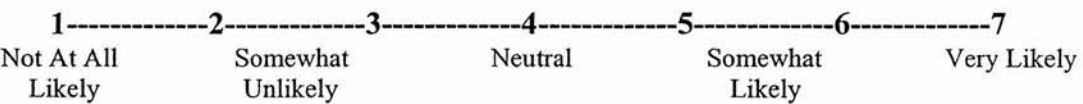


Please rate your general impression of the brand, *Target*, with regard to retail clothing.



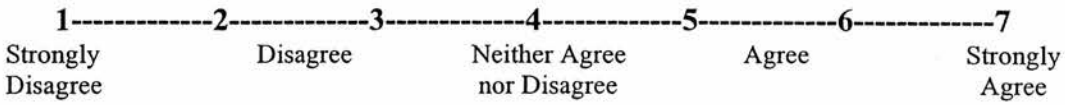
___ Do not know enough to assess quality.

Please rate the likelihood that you would make a clothing purchase from *Target* retail stores.

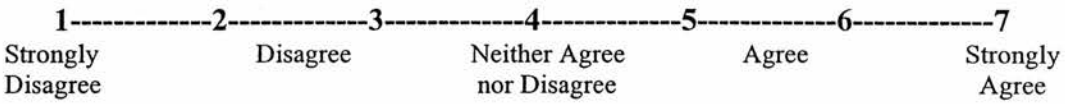


Please rate along the following scale your degree of agreement with the following statements.

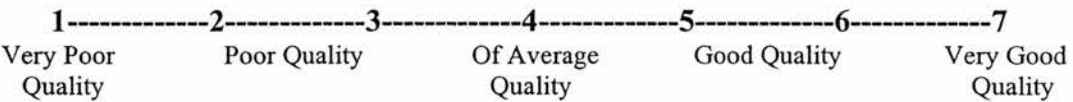
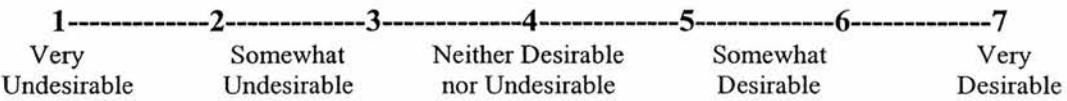
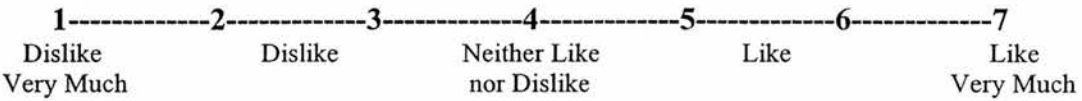
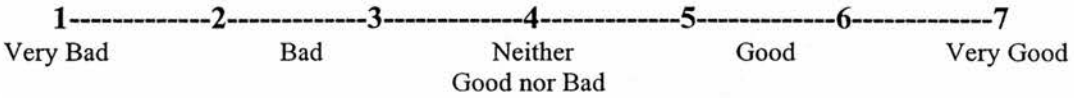
Learning more about *DiGiorno* pizza would be useless.



I'm a little curious about *DiGiorno* pizza.

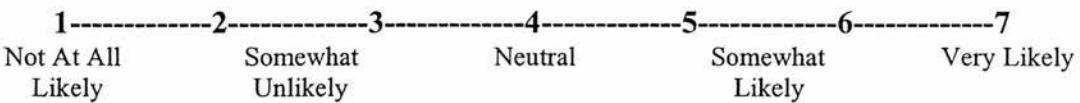


Please rate your general impression of the brand, *DiGiorno*.



___ Do not know enough to assess quality.

Please rate the likelihood that you would purchase *DiGiorno* pizza.

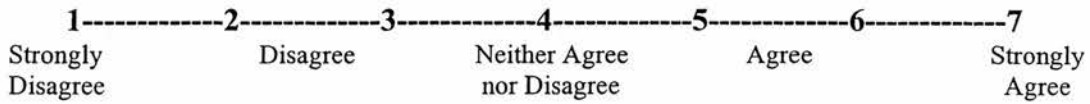


Appendix L

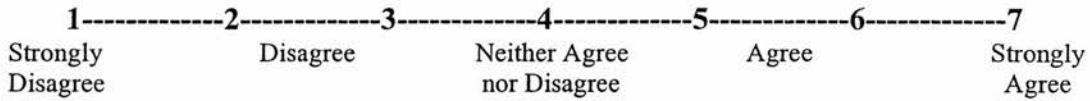
Post-Test Questionnaire Sample

Please rate along the following scale how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding how you currently feel.

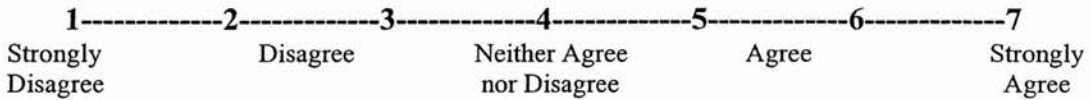
Currently I am in a good mood.



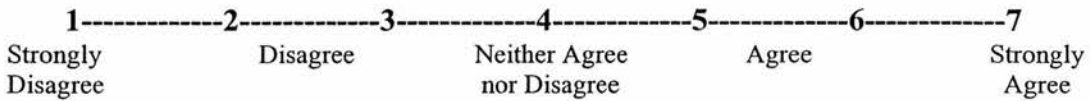
As I answer these questions I feel very cheerful.



For some reason I am not very comfortable right now.

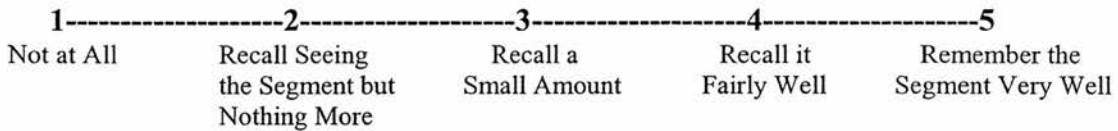


At this moment I feel “edgy” or irritable.



Please answer the following questions regarding the episode that you viewed of *A Wedding Story*.

In general, please rate how well you recall the segment that you viewed from *A Wedding Story*.

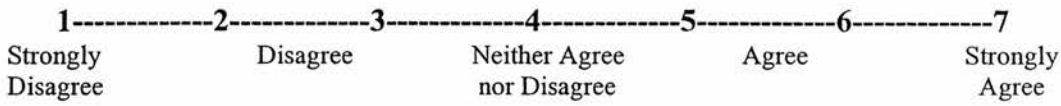


Please indicate the number of times in the past year you recall having seen the same episode of *A Wedding Story*.

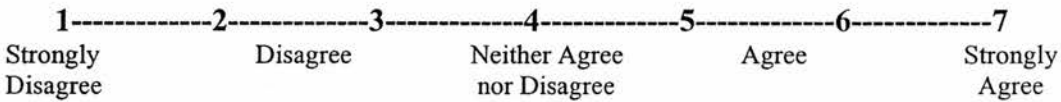
___ 0 ___ 1-2 ___ 3-4 ___ 5 +

Please rate along the following scale your degree of agreement with the following statements.

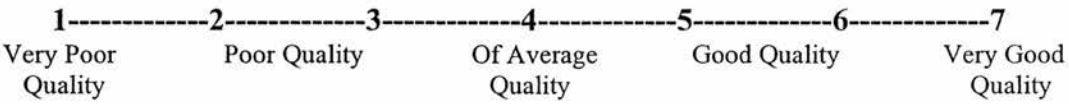
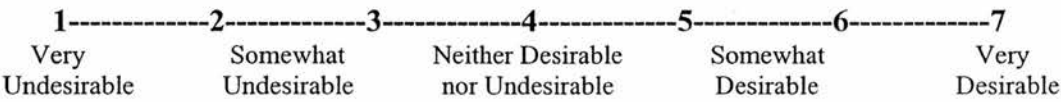
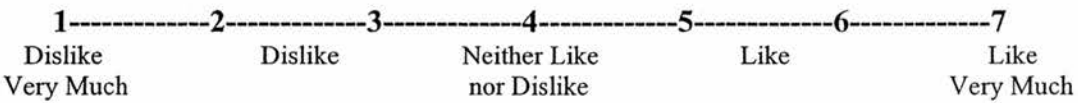
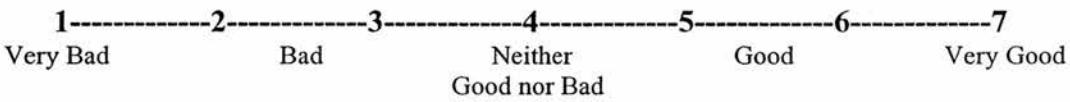
Learning more about the TV program, *A Wedding Story* would be useless.



I'm a little curious about the TV Program, *A Wedding Story*.

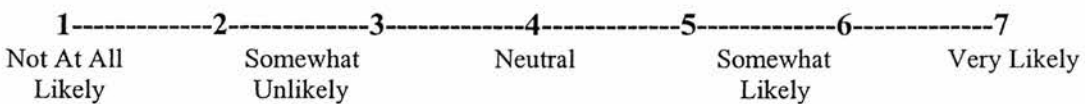


Please rate your impression of the TV program, *A Wedding Story* in general along the following dimensions.



___ Do not know enough to assess quality.

Please rate the likelihood that you would watch the TV program, *A Wedding Story*.



Please answer the following questions regarding the ad for *Hidden Valley* salad dressing.

In general, please rate how well you recall the advertisement for *Hidden Valley* salad dressing.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
 Not At All Recall Seeing Recall a Recall it Remember the
 the Segment but Small Amount Fairly Well Segment Very Well
 Nothing More

Please indicate the number of times in the past year you recall having seen the same advertisement for *Hidden Valley* salad dressing.

__ 0 __ 1-2 __ 3-4 __ 5 +

Please rate the degree to which you found the ad for *Hidden Valley* humorous.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
 Not At All Slightly Moderately Very Hilarious
 Humorous Humorous Humorous Humorous

___ Do not recall enough of the ad to make an assessment.

Please rate your general impression of the ad for *Hidden Valley* salad dressing that you viewed.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7
 Dislike Dislike Neither Like Like Like
 Very Much nor Dislike Very Much

___ Do not recall enough of the ad to make an assessment.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7
 Very Irritating Neither Irritating Pleasant Very
 Irritating nor Pleasant Pleasant

___ Do not recall enough of the ad to make an assessment.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7
 Very Bad Bad Neither Good Very Good
 Good nor Bad

___ Do not recall enough of the ad to make an assessment.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7
 Very Dull Slightly Dull Neither Dull nor Interesting Slightly Interesting Very Interesting

___ Do not recall enough of the ad to make an assessment.

Please rate along the following scale your degree of agreement with the following statements.

Learning more about *Hidden Valley* salad dressing would be useless.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7
 Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

I'm a little curious about *Hidden Valley* salad dressing.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7
 Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

Please rate your general impression of the brand, *Hidden Valley*.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7
 Very Bad Bad Neither Good nor Bad Good Very Good

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7
 Dislike Very Much Dislike Neither Like nor Dislike Like Like Very Much

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7
 Very Undesirable Somewhat Undesirable Neither Desirable nor Undesirable Somewhat Desirable Very Desirable

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7
 Very Poor Quality Poor Quality Of Average Quality Good Quality Very Good Quality

___ Do not know enough to assess quality.

Please rate the likelihood that you would purchase *Hidden Valley* brand salad dressing.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7
 Not At All Somewhat Neutral Somewhat Very Likely
 Likely Unlikely Likely

Please answer the following questions regarding the ad for *Target* retail stores.

In general, please rate how well you recall the advertisement for *Target* retail stores.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
 Not at All Recall Seeing Recall a Recall it Remember the
 the Segment but Small Amount Fairly Well Segment Very Well
 Nothing More

Please indicate the number of times in the past year you recall having seen the same advertisement for *Target* retail stores.

__ 0 __ 1-2 __ 3-4 __ 5 +

Please rate the degree to which you found the ad for *Target* retail stores humorous.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
 Not At All Slightly Moderately Very Hilarious
 Humorous Humorous Humorous Humorous

__ Do not recall enough of the ad to make an assessment.

Please rate your general impression of the ad for *Target* retail stores that you viewed.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7
 Dislike Dislike Neither Like Like Like
 Very Much nor Dislike Very Much

__ Do not recall enough of the ad to make an assessment.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7
 Very Irritating Neither Irritating Pleasant Very
 Irritating nor Pleasant Pleasant Pleasant

__ Do not recall enough of the ad to make an assessment.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7
 Very Undesirable Somewhat Undesirable Neither Desirable nor Undesirable Somewhat Desirable Very Desirable

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7
 Very Poor Quality Poor Quality Of Average Quality Good Quality Very Good Quality

___ Do not know enough to assess quality.

Please rate the likelihood that you would purchase *DiGiorno* pizza.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7
 Not At All Likely Somewhat Unlikely Neutral Somewhat Likely Very Likely

Please rate on the following scale how strongly you agree or disagree with how characteristic the following statements are of you.

I would prefer complex to simple problems.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
 Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

I like to have the responsibility of handling a situation that requires a lot of thinking.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
 Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

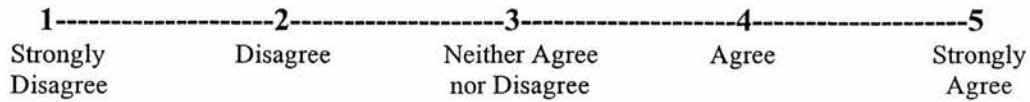
Thinking is not my idea of fun.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
 Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

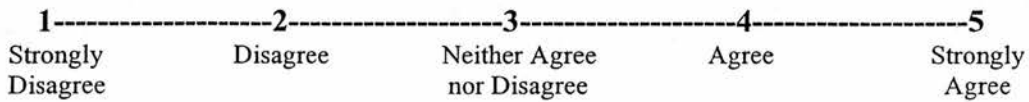
I would rather do something that requires little thought than something that is sure to challenge my thinking abilities.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
 Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

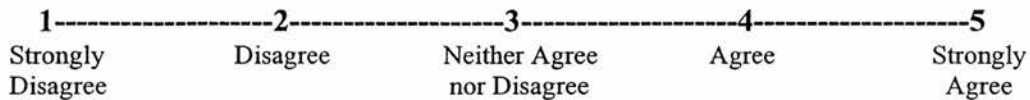
I try to anticipate and avoid situations where there is likely chance I will have to think in depth about something.



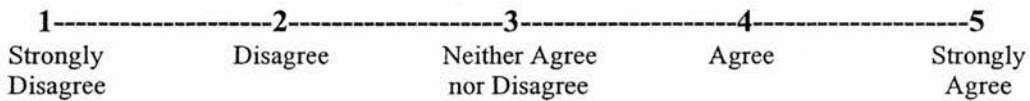
I find satisfaction in deliberating hard and for long hours.



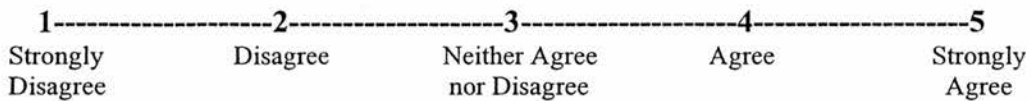
I only think as hard as I have to.



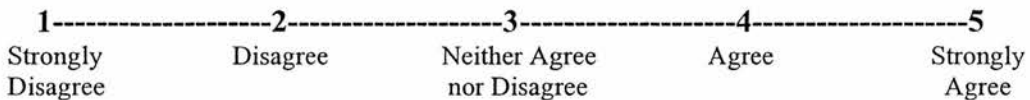
I prefer to think about small, daily projects to long-term ones.



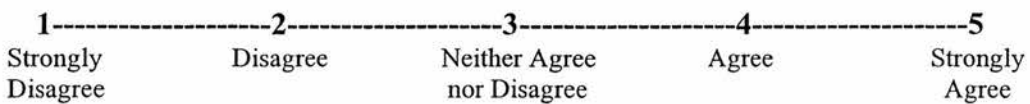
I like tasks that require little thought once I've learned them.



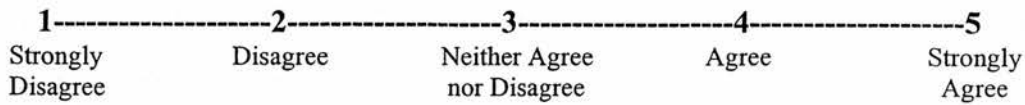
The idea of relying on thought to make my way to the top appeals to me.



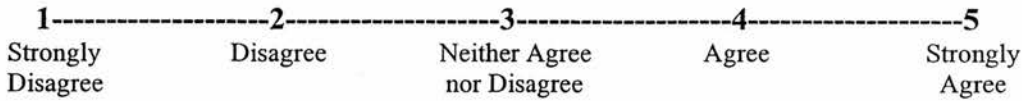
I really enjoy a task that involves coming up with new solutions to problems.



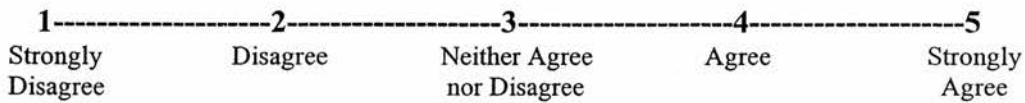
Learning new ways to think doesn't excite me very much.



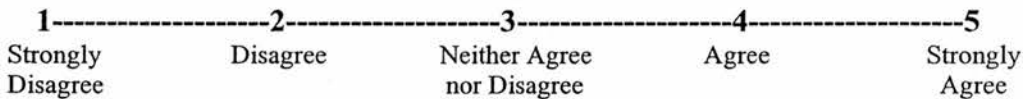
I prefer my life to be filled with puzzles that I must solve.



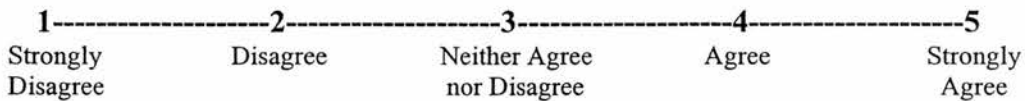
The notion of thinking abstractly is appealing to me.



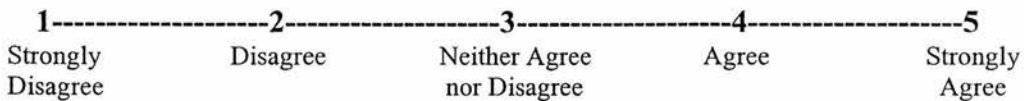
I would prefer a task that is intellectual, difficult, and important to one that is somewhat important but does not require much thought.



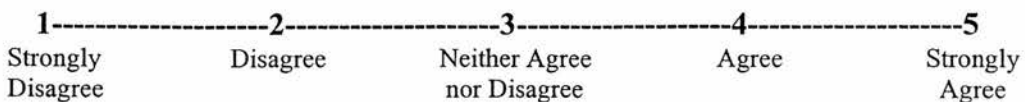
I feel relief rather than satisfaction after completing a task that required a lot of mental effort.



It's enough for me that something gets the job done; I don't care how or why it works.



I usually end up deliberating about issues even when they do not affect me personally.



Please quickly scan through the following items and check all that were mentioned, discussed, or shown during *any* portion of the television segment that you viewed.

- | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dog | <input type="checkbox"/> Airplane | <input type="checkbox"/> Internet | <input type="checkbox"/> Cattle |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Soap | <input type="checkbox"/> Cargo | <input type="checkbox"/> Football | <input type="checkbox"/> Cat |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shark | <input type="checkbox"/> War | <input type="checkbox"/> Ice Cream | <input type="checkbox"/> Hospital |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Celebration | <input type="checkbox"/> Friendship | <input type="checkbox"/> Potato Chips | <input type="checkbox"/> Church |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Divorce | <input type="checkbox"/> Rats | <input type="checkbox"/> Chocolate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> University | <input type="checkbox"/> Cheese | <input type="checkbox"/> Leather Boots | <input type="checkbox"/> Onion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fish | <input type="checkbox"/> Music | <input type="checkbox"/> Jeans | <input type="checkbox"/> Parachute |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dinner | <input type="checkbox"/> Security Guards | <input type="checkbox"/> Red car | <input type="checkbox"/> Computer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Marriage | <input type="checkbox"/> Marines | <input type="checkbox"/> Navy | <input type="checkbox"/> Freezer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Death | <input type="checkbox"/> Water | <input type="checkbox"/> Surgeon | <input type="checkbox"/> Neck tie |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Newspaper | <input type="checkbox"/> Fine Dining | <input type="checkbox"/> Diamond | <input type="checkbox"/> Animation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clothing | <input type="checkbox"/> Home Cooking | <input type="checkbox"/> Invitation | <input type="checkbox"/> Rainbow |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Salad | <input type="checkbox"/> Kilts | <input type="checkbox"/> Cassette | <input type="checkbox"/> Vacation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Museum | <input type="checkbox"/> Trumpet | <input type="checkbox"/> Calendar | <input type="checkbox"/> Pizza |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Calculator | <input type="checkbox"/> Organ | <input type="checkbox"/> Phone book | <input type="checkbox"/> Tennis |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Laundry | <input type="checkbox"/> Cello | <input type="checkbox"/> Alcohol | <input type="checkbox"/> Telephone |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pets | <input type="checkbox"/> Windbreaker | <input type="checkbox"/> Retirement | <input type="checkbox"/> Mop |

Take a few minutes and on the reverse side of this page, write down any thoughts that you had during this session. This activity is a free stream of consciousness, so please write down anything regarding what you viewed, the procedures that you went through, the questions that you answered, and in particular, how anything that you viewed related to your own life. Upon completion of this task, please indicate what you thought was the intent of this study.

Appendix M

Contents of the Video Appendix

A video appendix was submitted with this thesis. Exposure conditions from the experiments were random selected for this appendix to represent both programmes and ad pods used in the study. The contents of this videocassette are listed in the table below.

Condition	Programme	Ads
2b: Counterbalanced	USS Indianapolis: Tragedy at Sea	Target (2)
		Embassy Suites
		Hidden Valley
		DiGiorno
1a: Counterbalanced	A Wedding Story	Burlington Coat Factory
		Embassy Suites
		Wishbone
		Target (1)