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CREATING VALUABLE CONTENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA USING HUMOR

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ABSTRACT

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This research has been conducted for Oulu University of Applied Sciences as a bachelor's thesis. The study is part of the HURMOS-project initiated to understand the benefits of using humor in different fields of business. The topic was chosen to expand the understanding of social media as a marketing platform for businesses and the benefits as well as the potential setbacks of using humor to communicate with the followers. The research topic came about from the interest of the author on the use of social media for marketing purposes and the psychological background of humor.

In short this research tried to answer how humor could be utilized for creating valuable content on social media using Facebook as the platform of study. Moreover the research also attempted to find out what role humor plays in popular content and in what ways has social media change the way marketing is conducted. The background research was carried out by using several studies in order to understand the psychology and the effectiveness of humor. The background of social media and the meaning of valuable content were also described and a list of factors that build valuable content was established.

In order to reinforce the theory this research included a number of case studies. The case studies consisted Facebook content from several companies analyzing each one according to the valuable content factors that were presented in the theory. The findings of the case study analysis should allow better understanding of the meaning of valuable content and use of social media. However due to the small case study size the findings should serve as a preliminary study on the topic.

Although there is no specified guide for creating valuable content using humor, there are elements that can make designing the content easier for the companies. Since social media has emerged as a valid marketing platform it has given power to the customers to decide what content is worthy of their attention, which has led to companies fighting for visibility on social media. As long as companies manage to incorporate the elements, which make content valuable, they have a better chance of gaining more audience. Although humor plays a big role in gaining viewer attention, it also has its setbacks if not applied in an appropriate manner.

Keywords: humor, social media, marketing communications, valuable content, HURMOS

CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION.....	5
2	SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS	7
2.1	Communication and value	7
2.2	Facebook.....	10
2.3	Valuable content.....	11
2.4	Humor.....	15
2.4.1	Effectiveness of humor.....	15
2.4.2	Product and brand memory.....	17
2.4.3	Popularity of humoristic content	18
3	CASE ANALYSIS.....	19
3.1	Relevance.....	19
3.2	Entertainment	22
3.3	Authenticity and consistency	28
3.4	Information.....	32
4	CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION.....	35
5	REFERENCES.....	38

1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis is aimed for any company interested in using humor as their marketing tool on social media. The research is meant to shed some light on the evolution of marketing with the emerging of social media and provide information about the way companies can utilize humor in order to create valuable content on social media, which will set them aside from competitors. Humor may play a big role in creating this type of content, which could ultimately develop the company's image as well as connect with potential customers on a new level. Especially small-budget businesses could benefit greatly from this research since many of them use social media to market their products and services there due to the minimum fee that it requires.

This thesis is part of the HURMOS-project of Oulu University and Oulu University of Applied Sciences. "HURMOS project aims to increase awareness and competence of how to utilize humor strategically in Finnish companies with the aim of creating and developing new practices and business opportunities, growth, and internationalization. The research project explores how humor can create value in and around business organizations, to customers, management, employees." (HURMOS, 2014.)

The framework will briefly go through marketing communications and the evolution of media, the role of social media as a marketing channel and the revolution in marketing that social media has caused in order to establish the ground rules for using social media for business purposes. Furthermore this research will also explore what makes the internet content popular and how humor contributes to its popularity. The main emphasis of this research is to find the methods for utilizing humor in marketing on social media channels like Facebook in order to make content that connects with and matters to the customers and has a good possibility for being shared and seen.

Appropriate cases and examples will be used from different book and Internet sources to validate the points mentioned in the theoretical framework of this research and real life examples will be used in order to show how theory works. The information gained from the study will help to understand what kind of content works best in social media and how potential customers react to it. The results will be analyzed and compiled to produce information for companies using social media as one of their marketing channels.

In short this research tries to promote the use of humor in social media marketing as well as educate about the overall proper social media use for business purposes. The thesis will go through theory framework in a methodical step-by-step manner explaining the most basic mistakes made by the companies marketing on social media and use clear examples to demonstrate how those mistakes could be avoided. The following questions will be answered throughout the research:

1. How to create meaningful content on social media using humor for marketing?
2. What role does humor play in popular content?
3. How has the marketing strategy changed with the coming of social media?

2 SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

This chapter shortly explains the role of marketing communications in the 4 P's marketing mix as well as the function of value communication in marketing. This chapter also talks about the content and channel chosen to communicate value to the customers. The goal is to understand the function of Facebook as a marketing channel and identify the potential benefits of using humor to communicate value in order to learn to combine marketing, humor and Facebook practices in an optimal way that will benefit marketing promotion.

In short marketing communications are “coordinated promotional messages delivered through one or more channels such as print, radio, television, direct mail, and personal selling” (Business Dictionary 2015 cited, 02.04.2015). In other words marketing communications is the “promotion” part of the 4 P's marketing mix. Similar to the 4 P's, promotion also has its own marketing mix, where the communications tools work well if they work together. “Their sum is greater than their parts – providing they speak consistently with one voice all the time, every time” (MMC Learning 2015, cited 02.04.2015). Those tools can include print media, social networking, blogs et cetera. As was mentioned before, this thesis will concentrate on a specific social media channel rather than a combination of all the media tools. However different social media platforms have very different functions and even audiences, which means if a company is present on more than one platform, keeping the messages consistent requires planning.

2.1 Communication and value

Communication is a vital part of promotion and connecting to customers. Connecting to customers is the most central theme in marketing on Facebook, hence it is important to understand communication. It is a “two-way process of reaching mutual understanding, in which participants not only exchange (encode-decode) information, news, ideas and feelings but also create and share meaning. In general, communication is a means of connecting people or places” (Business Dictionary 2015, cited 05.04.2015).

Here the main things to consider are the ways we communicate and the way customers process information, to which there are many theories and models to consider. “Simple communications

models show a sender sending a message to a receiver who receives and understands it. Real life is less simple.” (MMC Learning 2015, cited 02.04.2015.) In reality ensuring that the message is understood the way the sender means it to be understood also requires understanding of the needs, emotions, interests and activities of the receivers.

The Communications Process

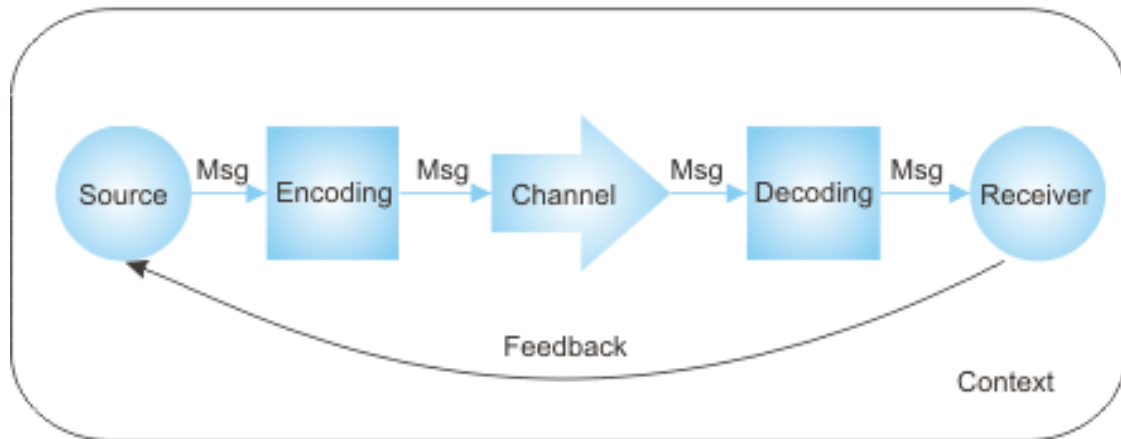


FIGURE 1. The Communication Process (CAPE-Communication Studies 2011, cited 09.12.2015)

In order to cut through the noise of other advertisements and distractions on Facebook, clever encoding can be useful to catch attention of the audience. The audience then decodes the message and the sender may then evaluate the feedback. One example could be a promotional post on the company’s Facebook page with a discount code for one purchase (encoding) which is then received or discovered and then interpreted by the customers (decoding) who decide to either take the opportunity to use the discount or pass on the offer (feedback).

The simplest communication example is the one step model where the receiver gets the message directly from the sender. Many messages, however, are received indirectly for example through friends, blogs, opinion leaders et cetera. “Understanding multiphase communications helps marketers communicate directly through mass media and indirectly through targeting opinion leaders, opinion formers, style leaders, innovators, and other influential people.” (MMC Learning 2015, cited 02.04.2015.)

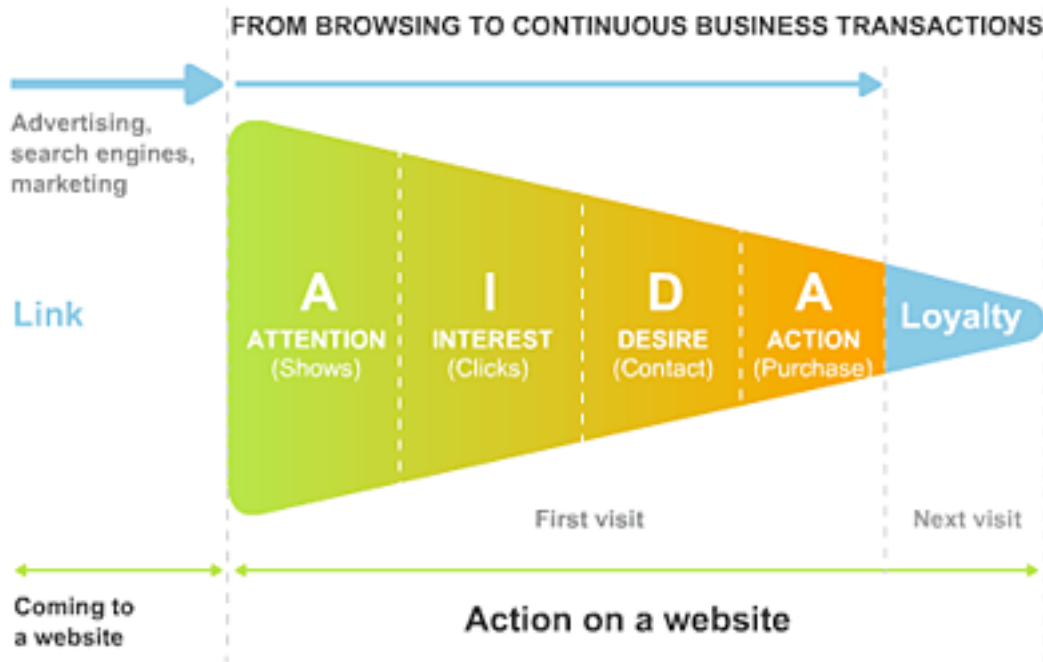


FIGURE 2. AIDA-communication model (Google 2015, cited 09.12.2015)

There are many models to map and explain the way that messages are selected and decoded by the audience. One example message model is AIDA, which attempts to map the stages which lead to the purchase. The stages are Attention, Interest, Desire and Action. This model, like many others, is simplistic and hierarchical, whereas in reality the process is not always so linear and instead marketers should “select communications tools that are most suitable for the stage which the target audience has reached.” (MMC Learning 2015, cited 02.04.2015.)

Value can be defined as “the extent to which a good or service is perceived by its customers to meet his or her needs or wants, measured by customer’s willingness to pay for it. It commonly depends more on the customer’s perception of the worth of the products than on its intrinsic value.” (Business Dictionary 2015, cited 05.04.2015.)

The perception of value is one of the most important elements of promotion marketing. “If customers don’t think they are getting value for money, you have no pricing power” (Harrison 2013, cited 05.04.2015). If there is no pricing power, keeping the existing customers while raising the prices can get increasingly hard. However, if customers believe they are getting value for money, there is a bigger chance they will remain loyal throughout the changes. Value communication plays a big role in that department.

2.2 Facebook

This chapter talks about the channel that was chosen to communicate value to the customers. Social media is “primarily internet or cellular phone based applications and tools to share information among people. It involves blogging and forums and any aspect of an interactive presence which allows individuals ability to engage in conversations with one another, often as a discussion over a particular blog post, news article, or event.” (Business Dictionary 2015, cited 08.04.2015.) Social media platforms are the most affordable places for a company to market their products and more importantly to develop their image. It also happens to be a great way to connect with your customers on the most personal level, which can be both convenient and dangerous depending on the way the marketing is executed.

“Facebook is popular free social networking website that allows registered users to create profiles, upload photos and video, send messages and keep in touch with friends, family and colleagues. According to statistics from Nielsen Group, Internet users within the United States spend more time on Facebook than any other website.” (TechTarget 2015, cited 08.04.2015.) It is one of the most known social media platforms, offering companies a very targeted audience to market to as well as a wide range of analytical tools and is the platform with the most diverse uses.

For a while now Facebook has presented great opportunity for companies to market themselves. However not many have invested enough resources or effort to explore the potential of that platform and mainly the function it has in a customer’s everyday life. Companies mainly ignore the reasons why Facebook is so popular, which considering the history of marketing is understandable. “Until recently, traditional marketing was nothing but a one-sided boxing match, with businesses slamming right hooks onto the same three or four platforms – radio, television, print, outdoor, and then later, the Internet – as fast and as often as possible” (Vaynerchuck 2013, 6). These “right hooks” consisted of discounts, offers and such, which customers had to take because they had nowhere else to go to consume their media. The emerging of social media changed the situation. Now the customers have the advantage to demand more time and resources from the companies, making them pay more attention to their customers, their wants and needs and letting customers voice their own opinions before giving companies a chance to sell their produce. “From now on, marketers have to spend a lot more time jabbing at their consumer before landing their right hook” (Vaynerchuck 2013, 7).

Ultimately the very same thing that gave the companies an opportunity to tell their story to a wide range of potential customers while engaging with them directly has also made it a lot more difficult for them to reach those customers effectively to make a sale. This is because very few of those companies that engage on Facebook actually respect the platform and understand the things that make it interesting to their customers. In the past, big companies could simply create a campaign and plaster it on as a wide area as the budget has planned and sit back to see the results, starting over every six months. Today, however companies have to create meaningful content every day. Compared to the old days the amount of work the marketers have to do has grown exponentially, because unlike then companies cannot just take old material created for one platform and throw it to the rest of them. Companies are expected to tell a story in a way that will compel their viewers to follow and eventually buy the product. The way Gary Vaynerchuk explains the process is in “jabs” and “right hooks”, where jabs are the pieces of content that connect to the customers with humor, a good story, a game, meaningful message - the content viewers want to follow to escape their lives for a while; right hooks are the ultimate calls to action that conclude in a sale. The problem is that most of the companies invest a lot of time and energy into the right hooks while completely ignoring the jabs! When talking about marketing on Facebook this thesis will mainly consider the jabs – how to communicate and connect with the audience via the platforms effectively.

2.3 Valuable content

This chapter will attempt to explain the so called valuable content defining the concept as well as explaining the components that structure it. This will ultimately explain how content can increase the perception of product or company value and thus why it should be considered to be used on Facebook. At the end the chapter will also define whether humoristic content can be valuable.

To Facebook valuable content means something that is relevant, interesting and useful; a piece of content that the viewer does not find annoying or pointless, otherwise they will abandon the site. Naturally people’s interests change over a long period of time and that can be evident in an average Facebook user’s account. According to statistics of Social Times, the amount of pages liked by an average Facebook user went up to 70 pages per year in 2013 (Lafferty 2013, cited 06.07.2015). With that vast amount of pages that grows bigger overtime it is hard to remember

exactly what they all are. “As those bygone interests fade from our consciousness, we expect them to fade from our pages and News Feeds, too” (Vaynerchuk 2013, 31). Unlike before, when Facebook’s user base was small and the News Feeds were organized chronologically, with today’s vast user base a new algorithm had to be settled in order to prevent the users’ streams from being flooded with information they would deem boring and useless. With EdgeRank algorithm every interaction a person has with any Facebook post is channeled into news stream along with other similar content that Facebook considers would interest the user.

The problem for the companies that use Facebook for marketing is that the platform does not consider click-through rates nor any other activity that leads to sales an engagement that affects visibility. The activities that Facebook considers worthwhile are likes, shares, clicks and comments. Thus if a company wants to maximize their visibility on Facebook it is not the sales that they have to push through but rather the engagement with their content. However, because it is not entirely clear which action shows more interest – comments, shares or likes – Facebook also shakes things up with an algorithm, giving more importance to likes one day and to shares on another. Thus in order to create truly valuable content that is visible companies need to invent well designed content that attracts engagement.

“The social media revolution wrenched the keys to the cultural kingdom away from pundits and gatekeepers, giving ordinary people a voice. But the sound of so many people talking at the same time – not to mention opining, debating, entertaining, instructing, and doing all the other things people do to make their views known online – is overwhelming.” (Vaynerchuk 2013, 15) With more and more people joining Facebook every day and close to a billion active daily users, this makes it increasingly hard for companies to make their content to be seen and heard. In an attempt to increase their visibility in that ocean of voices many companies post their content daily. The problem is that they do not pay attention to the quality of the content as much as to the quantity of their posts or in other words they fail to produce content that presents any value to the viewers. “Content for the sake of content is pointless... Only outstanding content can cut through the noise.” (Vaynerchuk 2013, 16.) However there are some guidelines for creating valuable content, which has to be relevant to the target audience, entertaining, authentic, informative and consistent.

In order to be “relevant” the company needs to know their target audience: their wants, needs and pain points. To be able to create content that fits the audience will require a lot of research,

analyzing and listening to your surroundings and more importantly it will require learning on mistakes. However “content is king, but context is God” (Vaynerchuck 2013, 17). In other words even the star content can fail on Facebook if that content is not native to the platform. Although some platforms may have similar functions to Facebook it does not mean that the content created for example to suit Twitter will work on Facebook. Each social media platform has its own unique style, language and culture, which is something that most companies ignore merely because they are in social media to sell. However, the consumers are there for value, which can take many forms. “Sometimes it’s in a few minutes’ respite from the stress of a busy day. Sometimes it’s in the form of entertainment, information, news, celebrity gossip, friendship, a sense of connection, a chance to feel popular, or an opportunity to brag.” (Vaynerchuck 2013, 17.) Good native content blends in with the platform as well as tells a story that connects with the audience. Eventually it is all about good storytelling so much so that though the content is posted by a company it still looks and feels like something a person would post. “When native content is skillfully delivered, a person will consume it with the same interest as he would anyone else’s” (Vaynerchuck 2013, 19).

Marketers today still produce same type of advertisements as they have decades ago: something that makes consumers feel and act on that feeling. Although the main function of advertising hasn’t changed much what should change is the way advertisements affect the consumer’s media experience. On TV advertisements interrupt the viewers’ media experience all the time in the middle of movies and talk-shows. On Facebook, however, marketers do not have to and should not intrude. In order to be entertaining the companies should create content that becomes audience’s entertainment instead of interrupting it. The Facebook content does not need to be designed to sell something every time, but rather to connect to potential customers on an emotional level. That way when the sales pitch comes the viewer may more likely buy from the company that they believe represents them than if they would have no emotional connection with.

In order to be authentic the marketer must prove that they are a human being for example by injecting some of their own personality into the Facebook content or better yet include all the characteristics that are enjoyed in other people. While the sales pitches are something that is valuable to a marketer and the company, the content in between the sales pitches should contain something that is valuable to the viewers. In turn what matters to the viewers can be speculated from the most popular media and app categories that they use. According to Business Insider the ten most popular apps in 2014 included various social media platforms with Facebook taking the

first place, different entertainment apps for games, videos and music as well as utility apps like maps and search engines (Tweedie 2014, cited 24.04.2015). This indicates that people are interested in other people and they value entertainment and service. The company's Facebook content should fall into one of the trending categories. This way the company does not demand from their viewers all the time giving a more enjoyable experience that the viewers are more likely to share.

To be informative demands research on the trending topics of culture today. People of all ages are consuming their culture via phones, tablets and lap-tops on a daily basis, be it music, movies or books. The point is in order to prove that the company really understands their viewers they have to show that they are interested in the same things that their viewers are and occasionally create content that demonstrates their understanding of pop culture.

In order to be consistent it is vital for the company to consider how each action that they make on Facebook contributes to their identity. Much like a real person, the company can choose to tell a story in different styles, use different vocabulary, but the core of the story must stay constant. Every bit of content should be like a piece of puzzle that reveals the company's identity little by little, inviting people to find out more about it. "Though your business's micro-content will vary wildly every day, it must consistently answer the question "Who are we?" (Vaynerchuck 2013, 28).

Humoristic content can be valuable if it is used in the right way. It can be relevant when applied according to Facebook in a native way, it can most certainly be entertaining if the company recognizes the preferences of their target audience. "The goal is to choose topics that are close to the hearts of fans and related to products or services a brand offers, and then present them in a manner that would be appreciated the most by each audience" (Padley 2013, cited 01.05.2015). Humor can also be applied to informative posts that recognize pop culture. In that case, however, timing is especially important on the social media. "Jokes about things that happened several months ago are not usually nearly as noticeable as ones that deal with something happening today. Just as importantly, brands should be careful not to jump on the bandwagon of a hot meme, only to be caught with it red handed after it dies and becomes unpopular or, even worse, uncool." (Padley 2013, cited 01.05.2015.) Lastly, as long as the company has a clear picture of their image they can apply humor to their Facebook content with a tone that is consistent with the company image.

2.4 Humor

This chapter will focus on the content that was chosen to communicate with the audience. The main points are the why and how humor works, looking into several studies on humor in marketing that will help to define the psychology behind humor.

Humor is anything that is funny, witty, or amusing with the capacity to make people laugh. It has a variety of forms and categories, all of which have a different audience. Some example categories are parody, sarcasm, analogy and so on. The use of humor can be at times problematic for “what is funny to one person may be offensive or incomprehensible to another” (Solomon, Bamossy & Askegaard 2002, 175). One humor category may appeal to one culture or country better than to the other. Ultimately decided by personal taste, the extent to which a person finds something funny depends on a large variety of factors. Due to this companies should find out about the audience they are aiming to target and choose the type of humor they want to use based on the preferences of the audience.

However this study will not focus on what types of humor fit what audience, which is something that each company rather investigates individually, but the research will go into what makes humor effective and how does humor contribute to virality of published content.

2.4.1 Effectiveness of humor

The topic of effectiveness of humor has been covered more extensively in another study: *Humor as a Marketing Communications Tool* by Marc Järvinen, using a Finnish e-retailer Varusteleka as an example. The thesis covered the ways humor could be utilized to benefit the company's marketing communications and the things that affect the quality of humor in an international context. A questionnaire was conducted that involved a humorous video advertisement of Varusteleka, which sells military clothes and equipment. The main conclusion of the study was that “humor is very context specific, if the target audience of the joke is unknown it is impossible to evaluate the outcome of the joke” (Järvinen 2013, 42). According to the findings foreigners have ranked the advertisement higher than Finns but compared to Finns have failed to interpret the message or understand what the advertisement is trying to sell.

“Humour is more likely to be effective when the brand is clearly identified and the funny material does not swamp the message. This danger is similar to that of beautiful models diverting attention from important points.” (Solomon, Bamossy & Askegaard 2002, 175.) The main risk is that the humor is too dominating in which case it has a negative effect on how the message is comprehended failing to communicate product benefits just like in the Varusteleka example. On the other hand, the test subjects who knew the brand before seeing the advertisement found it easier to understand the context and interpret the message. Since Varusteleka aims to promote its products to Finnish people who already know the brand, the function of humoristic content in the video may serve to increase the word-of-mouth. In that case the company has done its research well and the advertisement has been effective considering that the viewing rate of that particular advertisement on YouTube is one of the highest among their videos.

According to Henry Assael there are three main factors that contribute towards the effectiveness of an advertisement. “First, humor is more effective in gaining message acceptance when consumers are not involved” (Assael 1995, 732). Since humor often does not relate to the message, it is likely to influence the audience that does not know about the product – a detail that was also found true in Varusteleka example. “Second, humor is more effective for existing products” (Assael 1995, 732). Advertising a product for the first time needs an introduction, and although the introduction may be conveyed with humor there is a risk that main points might be missed by the audience. “Third, humor is more effective when consumers have a positive attitude toward the brand to begin with” (Assael 1995, 732). It is unlikely to reverse negative feelings that the customers have experienced about the product with humor.

According to a 2013 study of Milward Brown about half of all advertisements around the world involve humor to some extent. Also over 60 per cent of humoristic advertisements have a great impact on the audience, which makes them most memorable. “And the funnier an ad is, the more memorable it is likely to be” (Milward Brown 2015, cited 01.05.2015). However branding has little to no direct relationship with humor. “In general, in ads where both branding and humor are strong, the humor tends to be related to the brand. In humorous ads where branding is weak, the humor is often unrelated to the brand.” (Milward Brown 2015, cited 01.05.2015.)

2.4.2 Product and brand memory

The 2009 study “Exploring Memory for Product Names Advertised with Humor” supported the finding about humor enabling advertisements to be more memorable to the viewers. “Indeed, 83 per cent of the creative executives interviewed by Madden and Weinberger (1984) thought that humorous ads gain more attention than nonhumorous ones. In addition, 53 per cent also disclaimed the statement that humour in advertisements harms recall.” (Hansen, Strick, van Baaren, Hooghuis, Wigboldus 2009, 1.) On the other hand, even though the humorous advertisement may be well remembered, it does not insure that the company brand nor product will be. Throughout the three studies that included different memory measures the research concluded that humor in advertising tends to reduce the memory of the subjects for the brand names and sometimes the products that the commercials have advertised. “Whereas humour boosted ad recall, it harmed product recall” (Hansen, Strick, van Baaren, Hooghuis, Wigboldus 2009, 1)

Despite that the research concludes that it is definitely not the reason to not use humor in advertisements. Humor enhances the effectiveness of an advertisement by increasing the attention paid to it by viewers. It has also been found that humor does not affect the unconscious memory of the viewers, thus not harming attitudes toward brand and product names. Moreover “although humor reduces product memory, it enhances affective and behavioral responses to products.” (Hansen, Strick, van Baaren, Hooghuis, Wigboldus 2009, 2.) Because humor harms only the conscious memory for brands and products, it is best to utilize humor when conscious recollection for brand or product is not important.

In addition an earlier research of Krishnan and Chakravarti investigated the effects of humor in advertisements on memory for brand claims through two studies. Study one compared the non-humorous and highly humorous advertisements finding that commercials of moderate humor help the encoding of the claims as well as their retrieval. However Study two has shown that brand claims memory can be significantly improved even in highly humorous advertisements when the humor is made more relevant to the claims and less spontaneous or random. “The results show that although strong humor inhibits the processing received by the brand claims, enhancing its claims relevance can compensate for such inhibition” (Krishnan, Chakravarti 2003, 1).

2.4.3 Popularity of humoristic content

In a research paper by R. E. Guadagno, D. M. Rempala, S. Murphy and B. M. Okdie they have studied how does the reaction to specific videos affect its chance for being shared. This research concentrates on why the content spreads and what kind of content has a better chance to do so from person to person. According to the study emotional contagion is one reason why people tend to share content. Emotional contagion can be defined as “the tendency to feel and express emotions similar to and influenced by those of others” (Dictionary 2015, cited 12.04.2015). While shared emotions can be produced directly, sharing content can also produce the same effect. “That is, when people watch Internet video clips, they may experience the same emotions as the people in the clip, and by forwarding that clip, they anticipate that the receiver will experience similar emotions” (Guadagno, Rempala, Murphy, Okdie 2013, 1). Another reason according to the research is social validation which can be explained as “a psychological phenomenon where one or more passive individuals follow or conform to the actions of others within a group. In a psychological context, one or more people set an example of behavior, and their experience leads a second group of one or more people to follow suit.” (Forbes 2015, cited 20.04.2015.) More simply, if content was shared by someone in the office it serves as a signal that it is appropriate to forward to the next person.

The research on emotional contagion conducted two studies. Study one showed different types of videos that were most likely to evoke different feelings: laughter, disgust, anger, disinterest as well as included videos that were considered “cute”. Study two showed the most popular videos with the intent to test how if the source of the video had an effect on its likelihood to be shared. The research findings were that videos with emotionally charged content are more likely to be shared. Source of the video, whether it is a friend, relative, a media or stranger, did not impact the subject’s desire to share the video. But more importantly the research found that videos considered to be funny were the most likely to be shared than any other category included in the studies.

3 CASE ANALYSIS

This part of the study will look at some real life cases and set some examples of how different companies use Facebook. Each chapter presents a few Facebook posts from different companies which are analyzed based on the criteria for creating valuable social media content that was previously mentioned. The criteria included five factors: the relevance of chosen content to the Facebook platform and the audience, whether the content is entertaining, authentic, informative and whether it is consistent to the company image. Every chapter is going to handle one of these factors defining which Facebook post fulfills that criteria well and which ones do it poorly.

3.1 Relevance

Relevance measures compatibility of the chosen content with the characteristics of the platform it was posted on. Ultimately the content that has been molded well for the chosen platform has a better chance of succeeding there. For this chapter it is important to know the main characteristics of Facebook and what are the main factors that set it aside from other platforms in the world of social media.

Different social media platforms have very different characteristics that set them aside from each other. For example Twitter focuses on text and information that is transformed into small posts with the most important points, which is great to draw viewers to a certain blog or web-page. Pinterest is more about visual content, consisting of pictures and preferably short description, which is also good for directing viewers to blogs and internet shopping pages. YouTube is a platform consisting of videos ranging from brand and product advertisements to compilations, video blogs and other homemade videos. Facebook includes all of these properties, where one can post content that gives importance to either or both text and visual content and includes a possibility to post videos, though not as advanced as YouTube. However, since Facebook does not limit the amount of text or the size of pictures that can be posted as much as Twitter and Pinterest do, it is very easy for a company to create content that is not very appealing to the viewer and could be easily ignored. However these mild limitations can also become a possibility for companies that know how to design their content well.

Creating content that is native to Facebook is something that Asap Science is doing well. Starting as a YouTube blog channel in 2012, the creators have made sure to blend into Facebook environment with ease. Their main blog is focused on explaining science in fun and simple ways involving cartoons and narration in their videos tapping into curious topics, for example “What if you stopped sleeping?” and “What happens if all the bees die?”



FIGURE 3. Will this hypnotize you? (Asap Science 2015, cited 09.12.2015)

The content above can be considered as a great example of what a basic Facebook post should look like. It is as native as a Facebook post can get. The picture is big enough to catch your attention and captures the most important point of their video. The text is also short enough not to bore the viewer and does not repeat what is already mentioned on the image. Moreover the link takes the viewer to the right video, which is quite important considering the amount of content that Asap Science has on its blog.

With the range of content posted by companies every day it is sometimes considered to be easier to just recycle content from one media platform to another. This, however, often leads to very poor quality content, much like the following one from Costa Coffee.

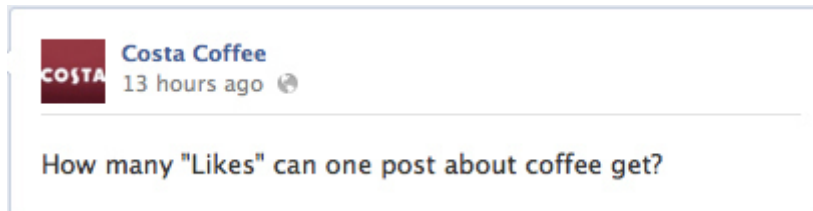


FIGURE 4. Costa Coffee (Buzz Feed 2013, cited 09.12.2015)

One would expect more from the second largest coffee house chain in the world. This kind of post might have more success on a platform like Twitter, although even there it is questionable for several reasons. The main reason is that the post puts Costa Coffee in a “Like Beggar” category, which is as bad as it sounds. The post is clearly lacking creativity and is just begging for attention, which does not attract people to engage.

The next picture is a shining example of how to design a post that will be successfully ignored by majority of the viewers. McDonald’s seems to lack the ability to make Facebook content that is compelling or entertaining. Combined with their poor reputation it is safe to mention that their Facebook popularity is just as unfortunate. Having over 60 million likes on their official Facebook page none of their posts seem to get much attention and rather attract more negative comments.

 **McDonald's** shared McDonald's photo.
9 October 2012 · 🌐

Ah, Argentina...what a tasty, delectable treat!



McDonald's with Cande Luchi and Aylu Ariadna.
9 October 2012 · 🌐

¡Nuevos Maxi Macarons! ¡Una nueva tentación de McCafé! Con la compra de un Macaron y mostrando esta imagen en McCafé, recibí otro de regalo ¡McDonald's invita! 😊

[See translation](#)

[Like Page](#)

[Like](#) [Comment](#) [Share](#)

FIGURE 5. Maxi Macarons (McDonald's 2012, cited 09.12.2015)

Considering the amount of followers their content should attract a larger number of viewers. However this post is a fair example why McDonald's fails in that area. For one the post is burdened with too much text, most of which is barely visible and most importantly it is in Spanish. Since the official language of the page is English and that at least half of their fans do not speak the language, it does not make much sense posting content in that language. McDonald's also has Facebook pages created for different countries where main languages vary depending on the location. In this case the content might have done a little better on a page for McDonald's Argentina or Latin America. It makes even less sense considering that the product in the picture was sold only in Argentina. All in all the content is not visually compelling and could have done better with a few adjustments.

3.2 Entertainment

This chapter will look into examples of how some company Facebook content that contains humor can be viewers' entertainment and how some content rather interrupts the entertainment.

This chapter will present several examples showing how the interruption may lead to low visibility of the content which the viewers rather ignore. This requires some set definition of what is considered entertaining and what interrupting considering Facebook content.

This is where humor as well as native content play the ultimate role. Companies all over the world use humor on social media utilizing memes, puns and word play among other popular internet humor genres in order to get viewers' attention and to get them to interact with their content. It is also important to remember that entertaining content is also the one that is native, is easy to go through and is not overloaded with unnecessary text or unpleasant content.

Old Spice has mastered their technique over the past few years, starting with some powerful video marketing through YouTube. Their first popular videos seemed to be going for random wicked humor, but in truth they were focused on women, who were buying their products for their sons, husbands, boyfriends et cetera. With a kind of seductive charm the videos were able to give the sense that their products can give a man all the characteristics that women are looking for. Later on Old Spice has also focused their marketing on their male buyers, aiming for ridiculously masculine characteristics. Combined with humor, their marketing techniques have translated well on Facebook as well.



FIGURE 6. *Bearglove, Swagger or Timber (Old Spice 2015, cited 09.12.2015)*

This is one example, where Old Spice posts content that advertises their products without making the viewer feel like they are pushed into buying it. Sticking to their over the top masculinity stereotype portrayals and humoristic settings, they rather distract the viewer from the marketing part of the content and focusing more on the entertainment. The names of the products are mentioned only in the hashtags after the text, which are also categorized in a rather entertaining way with “team bear glove”, “team swagger” and “team timber”, making it more of a game than an official advertisement. As a result of the good design of the content it received a relatively good amount of interaction from the viewers, getting about 1173 likes and 187 shares, which can be considered quite successful for a regular Facebook post.

Another good example for creating entertaining content is a blog called Asap Science. Although their main blog is on YouTube, they market themselves well, posting a consistent stream of content on Facebook often containing humor.



FIGURE 7. The concept of soap (Asap Science 2015, cited 09.12.2015)

Their type of humor is often the “smart type” meaning that it requires some prior knowledge to understand the joke. This may make some viewers stop and ponder on the text and often gives the eureka feeling when the joke is understood. The best thing is that the content includes only the things that are really necessary for compelling content, nothing more, which also does not interrupt the native platform experience and thus does not interrupt entertainment. As a result this post went an extra mile concerning visibility reaching up to 10,215 likes and 842 shares, which can be considered exceptionally good.

However in a certain context humor can be distracting and often develop negative feelings if the background research is not executed properly or not executed at all. This is the case in the following post that comes from London Luton Airport, the fourth largest airport in United Kingdom.



FIGURE 8. London Luton Airport (Feloni, R. 2013, cited 09.12.2015)

Although the full story of this photograph may not be known to many, it is still questionable for any company to post content involving a plane crash in a humorous way. Going into the context of the photo, not only did London Luton use a picture of an incident of another flight company in Chicago while boasting about its own safety measures, but the incident in question also involved the death of a six-year-old child. That being known, the person responsible for this post clearly did not research the background of this photograph nor recognized the insensitivity of using content with a plane crash in general. Although this post did receive a lot of engagement from the viewers making the content go viral, the attention was understandably not positive. In the end it rather harmed the reputation of the company and considerably reduced the amount of followers.

The next post is not designed to be humorous, but nonetheless is included in order to show that a content that is not native to the platform can really distract the entertainment experience. McDonald's seems to be the company that achieves that in the majority of its content.



FIGURE 9. Kellogg's corn flakes (McDonald's 2012, cited 09.12.2015)

It is already easy to see from the first look why this post may distract the Facebook experience. It is basically a poster/magazine advertisement transferred to Facebook content, which clearly does not fit to the platform. The only advantage that McDonald's has is that food is the product that sells itself. This post presents the same faults as previously mentioned content of McDonald's in FIGURE 5, there is too much text, most of which is incredibly hard to read. Also the product portrayed in the post is only sold in Malaysia, which does not make much sense to promote on a Facebook page where most followers are not from Malaysia. This kind of content is very easily

scrolled past and ignored, which is evident in the fact that out of 60 million followers the post received likes from merely 61 of them and only 3 shares.

3.3 Authenticity and consistency

Authenticity measures the character of the content and what sets the company's character aside from all others that use Facebook. This chapter will go through examples of two companies in order to see how they keep up the continuity of their character. Every company has a different customer base, thus every company's characters should be different. Each one has to do research in order to decide on what its own characteristics should be. The following content is just an example how other companies portray themselves.

The characteristics and authenticity of the company may be portrayed best through the content that is not trying to advertise anything, in other words the jabs the company makes in between the right hooks. This is where companies connect to people.



FIGURE 10. Some dream about it (Old Spice 2015, cited 09.12.2015)

Once again Old Spice takes the prize for their ability to create a great company character and stick to it. They portray their character well and clearly in every content, like in the post above. Since the first viral videos their main focus in every advertisement was portraying everything that represents strength and masculinity while still being ridiculously humorous about it all. This post has those characteristics paired with one of their silly minded motivational texts.

However Old Spice does not always publish the overly masculine humorous advertisements and posts, bringing some other humor to diversify its jokes, while still keeping their own character.



FIGURE 11. Fired (Old Spice 2015, cited 09.12.2015)

For example this content stands out, because it has absolutely nothing to do with Old Spice brand nor any of their products but they still manage to include their character with the way the text is written. The post still has that silly sense of humor that is present in the rest of their posts and most importantly if this post would be published anonymously, it would really seem like a regular person has written it. This is what the company character should feel like to the viewers, like another person that the viewers follow.

Unlike in Old Spice, Asap Science has the two known public figures who are the creators of the blog. They draw, write, narrate and sometimes act in each one of their videos. Despite that they still have to keep the set character of Asap Science and despite their small staff size they manage to post a continuous stream of content, with each post portraying their character in a consistent manner.



FIGURE 12. Drop the base (Asap Science 2015, cited 09.12.2015)

Their sense of character can be described as curious and passionate with a geeky and often awkward sense of humor that most of the time requires at least basic knowledge in science. The post above certainly portrays those characteristics. Though they do not create most of their Facebook content themselves but often forward from other sources, they succeed in building their character post by post.



FIGURE 13. Don't forget (Asap Science 2015, cited 09.12.2015)

For those who do not know the back-story for this picture may not understand the awkward humor behind it. A 14-year-old boy in the picture was arrested for bringing a homemade clock for the project to his school in Dallas, US. After showing the teacher his project the boy was arrested for suspicion of making a possible bomb. Of course the boy was released with no charges, afterwards getting support from worldwide figures such as Barack Obama and Mark Zuckerberg as well as getting a full scholarship.

This post was published in a humoristic context already after the boy's story had a happy ending. Although it was quite a touchy content to post, Asap Science has already established such a

strong character and customer base attracted by the type of humor the blog uses, the content was received well among their viewers.

3.4 Information

This chapter looks at how companies use their pop-culture knowledge on Facebook. Using pop-culture can be tricky because of timing and context a particular pop-culture event is used in. The piece of information should not be too outdated and still relevant to the viewers. This requires investigation and keeping track of the current events as well as your viewers' interests. This is something that Popchips is doing particularly well.



FIGURE 14. Star Wars (Popchips 2015, cited 09.12.2015)

Being a relatively young company, founded in 2007, Popchips is managing their Facebook content well especially the post in *FIGURE 14*. Because of the coming of the newest Star Wars movie in December, many companies are using the chance to advertise their products in the movie's theme and Popchips has seized that opportunity as well. The text of the picture is witty and could be easily understood by the Star Wars fans. Also the hash tags are well related to the content and can also help potential viewers bump into the company Facebook. All in all the timing of this post is very good and the content is all in all positive and cleverly made.



FIGURE 15. The dress (Asap Science 2015, cited 09.12.2015)

The figure above depicts a post by Asap Science. The content depicts the picture of the dress that went viral on the media in February. Part of the people see the dress in colors black and blue while others see it in white and gold. This phenomena took the internet world by storm driving people to look for explanations. The topic could not be more perfect for Asap Science since the phenomena could be explained with science. The creators of the blog have seized the opportunity publishing their explanatory video only a day after the very first post about the dress came out. Such fast reaction has earned their Facebook post alone over 17000 likes and 7000 shares and the official video received over 20 million views on YouTube, which has ultimately raised their popularity.



FIGURE 16. Pepsi Max (Feloni, R. 2013, cited 09.12.2015)

The post above is one of the most famous examples of Facebook marketing gone wrong involving Pepsi and their post concerning the FIFA World Cup. The content was published on their official Swedish Facebook page depicting a voodoo doll of Cristiano Ronaldo tied down to the railroad tracks with a text “We’re going to pass over Portugal” on the day that the Swedish and Portuguese football teams were to compete. This has resulted in numerous angry Ronaldo fans boycotting Pepsi. This has forced Pepsi officials to apologize. It has also caused some embarrassment in the aftermath when Portugal won the match with Ronaldo scoring a hat-trick. While the timing of the post was quite appropriate unfortunately the content was very much the opposite. Not only did they use imagery that implied violence, they have also failed to realize how many of their existing and potential followers they were going to upset.

4 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The research has attempted to handle the topics of social media as a marketing platform for companies and humor as the tool of value communication. The main idea of this research was to specify guidelines for creating valuable content on Facebook as well as explain the role that humor plays in social media marketing. This was done to show companies a more effective way to create Facebook content that would increase their platform visibility and hopefully also the viewer interaction with their content.

This research has attempted to answer the following main questions:

1. How to create meaningful content on social media using humor for marketing?
2. What role does humor play in popular content?
3. How has the marketing strategy changed with the coming of social media?

There is no specific detailed blueprint on how to create valuable content or use humor effectively, every company and every product is different thus the rules apply to them differently as well. Every company has to find their own ground on these topics with trial and error, but there are a number of factors that affect the quality of content. Knowing those factors could help the companies through the process.

As was previously established, the main influencing factors included relevance of the content, whether it creates or interrupts entertainment, the way content creates, promotes and sustains the company character and finally the way content uses pop-culture to its advantage. While one piece of content does not have to fulfill all of the mentioned factors, it should at the very least contain the first two - relevance and entertainment - in order to moderately succeed on Facebook. However mastering all of the factors could truly bring benefits to the company in the long run.

As long as the content is relevant to the platform it already has a chance of succeeding there. Posting regularly but well designed content is important, thus it is vital to plan ahead about the posts. On the other hand content that will entertain the viewers can give the company an extra mile on visibility. Instead of posting a constant stream of calls to action it is better to warm up the audience with other content that has a better chance of being seen. One successful post may make all the difference in raising visibility through likes and shares while posts that are

considered boring, no matter how many are published, may still harm the visibility due to the Facebook algorithm.

This research also established that the more like a person the company behaves on social media, the more eager the viewers will be to follow it. By building a character, the company may achieve that, however the character also has to be consistent, just like one of a regular viewer. By doing that companies are better able to connect with their viewers on a more personal level. Taking advantage from current event, whatever they may be, can also spike interest in viewers as long as the content is well designed and does not possess a demeaning or insulting tone. Combined with humor using pop-culture events can be risky if a large number of viewers are offended by the content. This is why research is crucial on the part of the companies.

Humor plays a big role in viewer engagement. According to several researches used in this study humor is more memorable and can gain more attention than any other category. Moreover it was found that the content considered to be funny was more likely to be shared than any other category, which makes humor a good aid to achieve a level of virality. Although the studies have mentioned that highly humorous advertisements may harm product recall, that does not apply as much to social media marketing as to the older marketing channels. The purpose of humor in the first place is to attract attention and further on connect to the viewer. Thus when the company posts a call to action a certain bond or at least a spark of interest has already been created which hopefully leads to engagement with the content.

Although this research has gone into the topic of popularity of humorous content the topic could be further explored. Viral content and marketing could be a research topic on its own and it certainly should be covered in more detail. That could serve as a valuable tool for companies to better understand the nature of content distribution and the reasons behind it.

Facebook has really changed the ways of marketing strategy by giving more control to the viewers. With algorithms designed to skim out content that the viewers find unworthy of their attention has made companies realize that in order to be seen the content they create has to fit the requirements of the viewers. This involves a lot more research and effort from the companies.

However, unfortunately even the best Facebook marketers have issues with the platform. This is mainly due to the difficulty of making a direct correlation between high levels of engagement with

the content. Because of the Facebook algorithm regularly changing the level of importance on likes and shares it is difficult to know exactly how well has the content performed. An suggestion for a further study could involve an investigation on which action indicates more interest – liking, sharing, commenting or clicking on a picture or video.

The small sample size of the case study may diminish the effectiveness of the results. Further research should be conducted on the same topic using more samples to enforce the findings of this study. Furthermore this research could have benefited from a survey in order to broaden the topic perspective and understand the way study subjects interpret valuable content and respond to it.

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