

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF HUMOROUS ADVERTISEMENT IN ENHANCING BRAND IDENTITY AMONG GENERATION Z IN MALAYSIA

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(Received 30th January 2026; revised 28th February 2026; accepted 08th March 2026)

Abstract. This study examines the effectiveness of humorous advertising in enhancing brand identity among Generation Z in Malaysia. Using a quantitative research design, data were collected from 143 respondents through an online survey that assessed emotional responses, attention levels, brand recall, and consumer-brand connection toward humorous social media advertisements. Descriptive findings show that most respondents felt uplifted, relaxed, and more interested in the brand when exposed to humorous content. Humor was also found to significantly increase attention, memorability, and the likelihood of sharing advertisements with others. Inferential analysis further indicates that humor positively influences consumers across gender and age groups, although the differences were largely insignificant. The study concludes that humor functions not only as a source of entertainment but also as an effective branding strategy that strengthens emotional engagement, cultural resonance, and recognition of a brand's identity. However, limitations include a small sample size, demographic imbalance, and reliance solely on quantitative methods. Overall, the findings highlight humor as a strategic asset for brands seeking to enhance visibility, recall, and loyalty among Malaysian Generation Z consumers.

Keywords: *humor, advertisement, Malaysian Gen Z, brand identity, communication*

Introduction

In Malaysia, the use of humour in advertising grew notably in the late 1990s and early 2000s, especially through festive TV commercials. Brands like Petronas, under the creative direction of the late Yasmin Ahmad, often blended humour with emotion to convey social messages in Merdeka or Hari Raya ads. One of the notable examples is TENAGA Nasional Berhad (TNB), which has consistently produced humorous and heartwarming festive ads that Malaysians eagerly anticipate. In recent years, brands like Mamee Monster have also adopted quirky humour across social media to engage with children and youth, incorporating memes and local slang to remain relevant. In today's digital landscape, humor has become a cornerstone of brand strategy on social media, particularly when engaging younger audiences such as Generation Z. According to a research, 76% of Generation Z users are more likely to interpret social media content including that from brands as comedic in nature. When executed effectively, humor in advertising can transform a campaign into a viral sensation widely shared, positively received, and capable of generating high levels of audience engagement. This participatory dynamic is especially evident in meme marketing, where consumers not only interact with the content but often become active promoters of the brand message. Despite its advantages, humor in advertising also presents notable risks. Humor is

inherently subjective and culturally nuanced; what resonates with one audience may be misinterpreted or even perceived as offensive by another. This can lead to a breakdown in communication between the brand and its consumers, ultimately reducing message effectiveness and damaging brand perception (Lin, 2023). Additionally, the rapid evolution of meme trends and online humor increases the risk of brands appearing outdated or inauthentic, especially if the humor is seen as forced or “cringe.” Moreover, insensitive or poorly timed jokes can spark public backlash, particularly in multicultural contexts where cultural awareness is crucial. While humor has the power to foster emotional connections and enhance short-term consumer loyalty, it must be employed with strategic care. Viral humorous content such as memes and short videos can certainly broaden a brand’s appeal and encourage organic message sharing, but without careful consideration, the same tools can jeopardize a brand’s credibility and long-term reputation (Sewak et al., 2025). Thus, while humor remains a powerful engagement tool in social media advertising, it also poses significant strategic risks that brands must navigate thoughtfully.

Using humour in marketing can be powerful, but when it turns controversial, brands must be cautious to avoid backlash. Strategies to manage this include pre-testing campaigns with diverse audiences to detect red flags early, consulting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) experts to ensure inclusivity, and using satire responsibly by avoiding jokes that target vulnerable groups (Mazzoli et al., 2024). Humour should align with a brand’s identity to maintain authenticity, and brands must be prepared with crisis plans in case content offends. Many find success by using relatable, lighthearted humour that connects with audiences without crossing sensitive boundaries. Although humor in social media advertising can enhance consumer engagement and improve brand relatability, its improper use poses serious challenges. In particular, humor that lacks cultural sensitivity may offend certain communities, leading to public backlash and negative sentiment toward the brand (Akter, 2024). Additionally, messages intended to be humorous may be misinterpreted or misunderstood, especially when the content relies on niche cultural references or trending memes that are unfamiliar to broader audiences. Such misunderstandings can dilute the effectiveness of the advertisement and shift focus away from the intended brand message. Furthermore, repeated missteps in using humor can erode consumer trust and damage the brand’s reputation, ultimately affecting long-term brand equity (Warren and McGraw, 2016). Therefore, there is a need to critically examine the impact of humor in social media advertising, particularly in relation to cultural sensitivity, message clarity, and brand perception in a diverse society. The objectives of study include: (1) to examine the impact of humor in social media advertising in Malaysia; and (2) to evaluate the effectiveness of humorous advertisements in enhancing brand identity.

Literature review

Overview of advertising

Advertising is defined as a paid, non-personal form of marketing communication strategy used to promote products, services, or brands to a target audience through various media channels. According to Osman and Mei (2024), the purpose of advertising is to inform, persuade, and influence consumer behavior via non-personal communication, typically sponsored and paid for by identifiable entities as part of a broader promotional effort. This strategic communication tool serves multiple key

functions in marketing and brand building. First, advertising informs consumers by providing essential details about a product, service, or brand, such as its features, benefits, price, and availability. It helps consumers to have more knowledge about the product to make an informed decision. Beyond information, advertising also serves as a persuasive tool by shaping consumer attitudes and encouraging preference for a brand over competitors (He and Klein, 2023). Additionally, advertising acts as a reminder that maintains brand awareness and reinforces brand loyalty even when consumers are not actively seeking to purchase. In addition, advertising supports distribution and sales by motivating consumers to take action and directing them to purchase (Borah and Gourish, 2025). Moreover, advertising formats can be classified according to both medium and strategy. Traditional formats include television, print, and outdoor advertising, while digital formats encompass social media advertisement, display banners, and other online channels. Each placement serves as a distinct medium designed to reach specific consumer segments. Regardless of the platform, most advertisements employ emotional appeals such as nostalgia, inspiration, or humor to evoke an emotional response and foster a deeper connection with the audience. In this study, humorous advertising is examined as it is increasingly adopted by advertisers, particularly in digital media contexts. According to Borah and Gourish (2025), humour-based campaigns such as memes, short comedic videos, and character-driven content have proven highly effective in driving consumer engagement and strengthening brand equity, especially among younger demographics.

The role of humour in advertising and consumer engagement

In modern marketing communication, humour functions as more than just a tool for entertainment; it is a strategic device for shaping brand identity and fostering meaningful customer engagement. With the growing dominance of digital media and consumer-generated content, humour has become a relevant and effective means of humanising brands, building personality and encouraging emotional connection and loyalty. Brand identity refers to the unique combination of elements that distinguishes a brand in the minds of consumers. Recent studies suggest that humour can significantly influence this identity when used in alignment with a brand's voice and values. For instance, Hoang et al. (2023) found that different types of humour elicit different perceptions. Incongruity-resolution humour enhances perceived brand competence, while tension-relief humour fosters a sense of warmth. This implies that advertisers can strategically select humour types to reinforce desired brand traits such as reliability, friendliness or creativity. By making a brand more relatable and emotionally engaging, humour also facilitates brand anthropomorphism, where consumers perceive brands as having human-like qualities.

In the Malaysian context, humour tailored to local languages, culture and shared experiences enhances brand memorability and likability. Research highlights that culturally resonant humour significantly improves perceptions of brand likeability, uniqueness and personality among young Malaysian audiences. Humorous advertisements that reflect common Malaysian experiences such as local food habits, slang or multiracial interactions, which tend to feel more authentic and eventually more effective in strengthening brand identity. Furthermore, humour also plays a vital role in customer engagement. Emotional engagement underpins loyalty and advocacy that can be amplified through humour by eliciting positive affective responses. Dobbstein et al. (2025) found that humour-based advertisements led to higher levels of brand interaction

and were more effective at prompting user-generated responses, contributing to a broader brand reach and deeper consumer involvement. These behaviours also contribute to the co-creation of brand meaning as users remix or reinterpret the brand's humorous content.

Generation Z's response to humorous advertising in the digital space

Generation Z (Gen Z), born approximately between 1997 and 2012, is a digitally native generation characterized by a high degree of media literacy, short attention spans, and a strong preference for authenticity, relevance, and entertainment in their digital interactions. This cohort engages with advertising differently than previous generations, particularly in response to humor in digital formats. According to Tan (2023), Gen Z exhibits a heightened sensitivity to digital advertising that uses humor, especially when it aligns with their personal values and social consciousness. Humorous advertising that integrates trending cultural elements such as memes, sarcasm, and parody tends to be more engaging for this audience, as long as the humor is perceived as authentic and non-manipulative (Tan, 2023). Humor plays a pivotal role in creating emotional connections between brands and Gen Z consumers. As noted in the study, humor not only increases entertainment value but also improves ad recall and positively influences brand perception when used appropriately in social media advertisements. However, this generation is quick to identify inauthenticity or forced humor, which can result in backlash or brand disengagement. Emerald Insight's qualitative research on Gen Z's digital ad preferences emphasizes that humorous content must be concise, relevant, and easily shareable. Meme-based advertising, in particular, resonates strongly with Gen Z due to its participatory nature and adaptability. However, there is a recurring challenge where humorous content often overshadows the actual brand message, leading to poor brand recall despite high content engagement (Vardeman, 2024). Additionally, a study published in *The International Journal of Educational Studies* highlighted that Gen Z values creative freedom and relatability in digital humor, responding best to content that allows them to engage, comment, and even remix advertisements such as through TikTok trends or meme formats. This generation also exhibits a preference for brands that incorporate social commentary or self-awareness within their humour, which strengthens perceived authenticity (Javorik, 2025). In summary, humorous advertising can be an effective strategy for capturing Gen Z's attention and fostering positive brand engagement, but only when it is culturally relevant, non-intrusive, and emotionally authentic. Brands must strike a careful balance between entertainment and clarity to ensure that humor enhances rather than dilutes their intended message.

Materials and Methods

This study adopts a quantitative research method, the collection of measurable data from a large sample. Quantitative research refers to a systematic approach that involves collecting and analyzing numerical data to identify patterns, relationships, and trends (Kandel, 2020). It enables statistical analysis to identify patterns, relationships, and trends. The quantitative approach is particularly suitable for this research as the aim is to examine the effectiveness of humorous advertisements in enhancing brand identity among Malaysian consumers, specifically Generation Z. By using a quantitative method, it ensures that the findings are objective, reliable, and generalisable to the target population (Ghanad, 2023). The data has been collected through an online questionnaire

created using Google Forms. This platform was chosen due to its accessibility, cost-effectiveness, and ability to reach respondents efficiently across different locations in Malaysia. Online distribution is also suitable for Generation Z, who are highly active on digital platforms and familiar with completing surveys online. The questionnaire is divided into three sections to address the research objectives more effectively. For Section A, it covers demographic information, which collects basic respondent details such as gender, ethnicity, education level, and occupation. These variables are essential for profiling the sample and identifying potential differences in responses among subgroups.

Based on Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table, a population exceeding one million would require a minimum of 385 respondents to achieve a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. This study uses simple random sampling to select Malaysian Generation Z participants, as it ensures every individual has an equal chance of being chosen, reducing bias and increasing generalisability. This method is ideal for broad perception studies and suits Gen Z's high online presence. By distributing the questionnaire via social media platforms, the research ensures accessibility and randomness. The method is justified for its efficiency and fairness, allowing for reliable and diverse insights into how Gen Z in Malaysia responds to humorous advertisements. Therefore, this study aims to collect data from at least 385 Gen Z individuals across Malaysia to ensure the validity of the results. The scope of this research encompasses three key dimensions. Firstly, geographically, the research is confined to the whole of Malaysia, focusing on how local culture, language, and media habits influence audience reception of humorous advertisements. Secondly, the category scope revolves around advertising, specifically humorous advertisements across digital platforms such as social media, which are highly consumed by Generation Z. Lastly, the demographic scope is limited to Malaysian Generation Z, generally defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012, who are between the ages of 13 and 28 in 2025. This group is chosen because of their unique digital behaviour, strong media literacy, and familiarity with online advertising formats, making them an ideal demographic for investigating responses to humour in advertising (Ogbu-Nnachi, 2024).

Results and Discussion

Based on *Table 1*, most respondents reported feeling happy or uplifted (69.2%) and relaxed (51%), showing that humor is effective in creating a light-hearted and enjoyable viewing experience. This suggests that humor serves as an emotional enhancer, building positive associations with the brand. A smaller proportion felt annoyed or distracted (8.4%) or neutral (16.8%), highlighting that humor may not resonate equally with all audiences. Interestingly, 23.8% of participants expressed an interest in learning more about the product or brand, which implies that humor not only entertains but can also stimulate curiosity and deeper brand engagement. Similar findings were observed by Prajogo and Purwanto (2020), who reported that humorous advertising on digital platforms increases consumer curiosity and brand interaction. Results based on *Table 1* further confirm humor's effectiveness as an attention-grabbing tool. A substantial majority of respondents either strongly agreed (37.1%) or agreed (47.6%) that humorous advertisements are more likely to capture their attention, with very few expressing disagreement. This shows that humor increases ad salience and strengthens message recall by standing out in cluttered media environments. Prior studies support

this outcome, showing that humor enhances attention and positive attitudes across cultural contexts and is particularly effective in engaging younger audiences (Kaur et al., 2022). The Chi-Square test from *Table 2* shows no significant association between gender and whether humorous advertisements are more likely to grab attention compared to non-humorous advertisements ($\chi^2 = 9.971$, $p = .126$). This suggests that both male and female respondents generally perceive humorous advertisements as equally attention-grabbing. In other words, gender does not appear to strongly influence how individuals respond to humor in terms of initial attention.

Table 1. *The descriptive analysis of humorous advertisement.*

Category	%
Humorous advertisement and feel	
How do humorous advertisements usually make you feel?	
Happy/uplifted	69.2
Relax	51
Annoyed/ Distracted	8.4
Neutral	16.8
Interested to learn more about the product/ brand	23.8
Humorous advertisements and attention-grabbing	
Humorous advertisements are more likely to grab my attention compared to non-humorous advertisements	
Strongly agree	37.1
Agree	47.6
Neutral	12.6
Disagree	2.1
Strongly disagree	0.7
Humorous advertisement and mood	
A humorous advertisement can improve my mood even if I'm not interested in the product	
Strongly agree	30.1
Agree	50.3
Neutral	14.7
Disagree	3.50
Strongly disagree	1.40
Humorous advertisement and memorable impact	
I find humorous advertisements more memorable	
Strongly agree	11.9
Agree	40.6
Neutral	21
Disagree	5.6
Strongly disagree	21
Humorous advertisement and sharing around	
I actively share or talk about humorous advertisements with friends or family	
Strongly agree	14.7
Agree	37.1
Neutral	32.2
Disagree	13.3
Strongly disagree	2.8
Humorous advertisement and branding	
Do humorous advertisements help you remember the brand better?	
Strongly agree	30.8
Agree	55.9
Neutral	11.9
Disagree	0.7
Strongly disagree	0.7
Humorous advertisement and recall	
Have you ever remembered a brand for a long time because of a humorous advertisement or meme they shared?	
Yes, many times	28.7
Yes, sometimes	51.0
Not sure	16.1
No, not really	3.5
No, never	0.7
Humorous advertisement and emotional connection	
Humor in advertising helps me form an emotional connection with the brand.	
Strongly agree	17.5
Agree	53.1
Neutral	28.0
Disagree	0.7
Humorous advertisement and identity	

When a brand consistently uses humor in its advertisement, I can easily recognise its style and identity	
Strongly agree	18.2
Agree	60.1
Neutral	16.8
Disagree	4.2
Strongly disagree	0.7

Table 2. Chi-Square test.

Category	Value	df	Asymptotic significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-square	9.971 ^a	6	.126
Likelihood ratio	11.175	6	.083
Linear-by-linear association	5.910	1	.015
N of valid cases	143		

Note: a. 6 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .08.

The statement from *Table 1*, “A humorous advertisement can improve my mood even if I’m not interested in the product,” received the highest percentage of agreement at 50.3%, while only 1.4% strongly disagreed. This overwhelming agreement suggests that humor in advertising possesses a strong emotional appeal among Generation Z in Malaysia, capable of positively affecting mood even in the absence of product interest. This aligns with the understanding that humor functions as a powerful emotional trigger, creating an affective bond between the viewer and the brand. For Gen Z, a group known for valuing emotional connection, authenticity, and relatability in marketing, this emotional uplift can serve as a gateway to enhanced brand perception. Even if the product itself does not appeal to them initially, the ability of humor to generate a positive emotional response can lay the groundwork for future engagement, brand familiarity, and eventually, loyalty. As such, humorous advertisements not only entertain but also act as a strategic branding tool that positions the brand in a favorable light. Referring to *Table 1*, for the statement of, “I find humorous advertisements more memorable,” the highest response was “Agree” at 40.6%, while the lowest was “Strongly Agree” at just 11.9%. Although the majority still leaned toward agreeing with the memorability of humorous ads, the lower intensity of agreement compared to the first statement suggests that while humor aids recall, it may not always guarantee strong brand retention unless executed meaningfully. This observation aligns with existing literature that humor, though effective in capturing attention, must be congruent with the brand message to truly enhance brand identity (Eisend, 2011). For Generation Z, who are heavily engaged in meme culture and social media interactions, humor needs to be authentic, relatable, and well-integrated with brand values to be truly memorable and effective in strengthening brand identity.

For the statement “I actively share or talk about humorous advertisements with friends or family”, the highest response was “Agree” at 37.1%, while the lowest was “Strongly Disagree” at just 2.8%. This indicates that Generation Z respondents are likely to engage in interpersonal communication about humorous advertisements. Given that this demographic is highly connected through both online and offline networks, the ability of humorous content to spark dialogue enhances brand visibility and embeds the brand within social interactions. Previous studies affirm that humor increases social bonding and strengthens brand associations when audiences share or discuss ads with their peers. In the Malaysian context, where meme culture and short-form content dominate platforms like TikTok, humor is particularly effective in creating “talkability,” which not only amplifies brand reach but also fosters a sense of community and relatability (Anas and Ishaq, 2022). Overall, the results highlight that humorous advertising not only entertains but also drives earned media through word-of-mouth, an

important factor in building brand identity among Generation Z (*Table 1*). Moving to the next statement, “Do humorous advertisements help you remember the brand better?”, with 30.8% answering “Yes, very much” and 55.9% answering “Yes, somewhat.” Together, this accounts for 86.7% of participants, clearly highlighting humor’s effectiveness in aiding brand memory. Only 11.9% were uncertain, and less than 1% (0.7%) felt that humor does not improve their recall. These results suggest that humor is a powerful mnemonic device for Generation Z, helping the advertised brand stand out in crowded media environments. Humor works by creating emotional arousal and distinctiveness, which makes advertisements easier to remember compared to non-humorous counterparts. Overall, the findings highlight that humorous advertisements are not only entertaining but also strategically enhance brand salience and recall, making them a valuable tool for building and sustaining brand identity in the Gen Z market (*Table 1*).

Table 1 for the statement, ‘Have you ever remembered a brand for a long time because of a humorous advertisement or meme they shared?’ received the highest response was ‘Yes, sometimes’ at 51%, while the lowest response was ‘No, never’ at 0.7%. This indicates that humorous advertisements and memes are effective in leaving a lasting impression on consumers. The small proportion of respondents who chose ‘No, never’ suggests that the majority have recalled a brand through humorous content on certain occasions. This highlights that humor serves as a powerful tool to strengthen brand recall among audiences after initial exposure. The result aligns with the study conducted by Mussa and Ibrahim (2021), who found that humor enhances brand recall by drawing audience attention and facilitating clearer interpretation of advertising content. Brigaud et al. (2021) argue that humor works by creating distinctive and novel experiences that stand out in consumers’ minds, which can increase both short-term attention and long-term recall. Overall, this suggests that humor in advertising is not only a source of entertainment but a strategic mechanism that enhances consumer recall and strengthens brand identity over time. Referring to *Table 1*, “Humor in advertising helps me form an emotional connection with the brand.” This statement received the highest percentage of agreement at 53.1% while the lowest responses were ‘Disagree’ and ‘Strongly Disagree’, each accounted for 0.7%. This suggests that humor is widely viewed as a facilitator of emotional bonds between consumers and brands, with only a small proportion of respondents rejecting this idea. Emotional connection is crucial as it goes beyond functional product features to build trust, attachment, and loyalty (Chebab and Boukerch, 2025). Supporting this, Strick et al. (2012) pointed out that humor generates positive emotions, which transfer to the brand through affective conditioning. This emotional transfer not only enhances immediate likability but also encourages long-term attachment. Moreover, humorous advertisements encourage consumers to engage with the brand on social media, such as liking, sharing, or commenting, which further strengthens the emotional bond. In turn, these positive interactions contribute to a stronger brand identity, as consumers begin to associate the brand with enjoyment, relatability, and trustworthiness (Yusof et al., 2025).

Moving to the next statement, which is “When a brand consistently uses humor in its advertisement, I can easily recognise its style and identity”, the highest response recorded was ‘Agree’ at 60.1%, while the lowest was ‘Strongly Disagree’ at 0.7%. This indicates that humor, when applied consistently, contributes to brand differentiation and fosters a recognizable brand personality. Humor contributes to distinctiveness by helping audiences link advertising content with the brand’s values, tone, and persona.

Accordingly, humor in advertising is an effective tool for enhancing brand recall and creating positive brand associations, as it builds a distinct communication style that audiences can easily identify. By using humor consistently, a brand develops a recognizable narrative voice, which makes it easier for consumers to identify and distinguish in a saturated advertising landscape. Similarly, Strick et al. (2012) highlight that humor not only captures attention but also aids in the encoding of brand-related information, making the brand more memorable and distinguishable in competitive markets (*Table 1*).

Conclusion

This study provides an in-depth analysis of the role of humour in social media advertising and its influence on brand identity among Malaysian Generation Z. As a cohort that has grown up immersed in digital media, Gen Z exhibits unique expectations when it comes to advertising content, they demand relevance, authenticity, and entertainment, all of which are often encapsulated through humorous communication. This research not only highlights the effectiveness of humour as a tool for emotional and cognitive engagement but also investigates how it can be strategically leveraged to foster stronger brand loyalty and recognition. From the survey results, it was evident that humour significantly enhances advertising outcomes. A large percentage of respondents reported that humorous advertisements made them feel uplifted, relaxed, and more interested in the advertised product or brand. More importantly, humour increased memorability, attention, and shareability. Humour, therefore, serves not just to amuse but to create meaningful emotional bonds between the consumer and the brand. The study also uncovered that not all humorous content is universally well-received. When humour is forced, outdated, or crosses cultural or social boundaries, it may backfire, leading to negative perceptions of the brand, reduced trust, or even public backlash. This underscores the importance of cultural sensitivity and audience alignment when developing humour-based content. In a multicultural society like Malaysia, where humour can vary significantly across ethnic and cultural groups, advertisers must be especially cautious and considerate. Therefore, humour in social media advertising must be strategically crafted. It should align with the brand's voice, reflect the values of the target audience, and be mindful of cultural nuances. Brands that consistently use humour respectfully and authentically are more likely to build a recognisable and emotionally resonant brand identity. Such brands not only stand out in a saturated digital landscape but also foster consumer loyalty, trust, and long-term engagement. In conclusion, this research reaffirms that humour is more than a marketing gimmick, it is a strategic asset. For Malaysian brands targeting Generation Z, humour offers a pathway to emotional connection, cultural relevance, and brand differentiation. When applied thoughtfully, humour can transform passive viewers into engaged brand advocates, ensuring both immediate impact and sustained brand loyalty. The insights derived from this study serve as a valuable resource for marketers, advertisers, and businesses seeking to develop content that truly resonates with a digitally native and culturally diverse audience.

Acknowledgement

This research is self-funded.

Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involved with any parties in this research study.

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