

The Effectiveness of Recognized Parodic Advertisements



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We investigated the effectiveness of parodies in advertisements. First, we developed an overview of the types of parodic ads which are frequently used in practice. Second, we investigated the effectiveness of three types of parodic ads: advertisements that parody movie posters, artwork, or gender roles. We recommend to use parody ads only if consumers recognize that something is parodied. They do not need to know the concrete parodied original item or piece of work. In contrast, if consumers do not recognize that something is parodied, the effectiveness of such ads is rather low.

Submitted: 24.04.2020, accepted: 08.07.2020.

Keywords: › parodic advertisements › humor › originality › brand attitudes

1 Introduction

1.1 What is a Parody?

The term “parody” has its origin in the ancient Greek language. It is composed of para (close to) and aoidé (singing) and means a funny imitation of something that is well-known. One of the first parodies, “Margites” (attributed to Homer), can be found in the 6th century BC. Generally, the term parody is used to describe the fact that a famous person or a well-known image, movie, or piece of music is imitated. According to Holman and Harmon (1992), a parody is an imitation with the intent to ridicule someone or something or to criticize. Kreuz and Roberts (1993) add the notion that the perceiver’s familiarity with the original item is a prerequisite of a parody. Similarly, Zinkhan and Johnson (1994) state that “the audience must readily recognize the original work that is being mocked” and “the parody must call to mind the original work”. We do not count mere depictions of famous items or persons in combination with funny

statements to parodies; in this condition, feelings of humor are not based on defamiliarization of the original motif.

1.2 Need for Humorous Mimicry

We surmise that there is a need in humans for humorous mimicry resulting in parodies. Little children imitate adults, e.g., when dressing up as a pirate, bride, or clown. Later, when they are in school, they imitate teachers. As adults, many people like to imitate others. For instance, people take over the role of others in carnival in a funny way. They present themselves on the internet in poses for which celebrities such as Miley Cyrus (sitting on a wrecking ball), Albert Einstein (tongue out), Ariana Grande (cat pose), Kim Kardashian (sexy booty pose), Marilyn Monroe (flying dress in “The seven year itch”) or Katy Perry (Egyptian style) are well-known. Many bloggers on Instagram imitate the profile pictures of other (unknown) persons and display the original image of the other person and the parody image side-by-side. Often, male persons imi-

tate female persons and vice versa. These imitators use the “switcheroo” or cross-dressing technique – a reversal of one’s gender role – for humorous purposes. People also parody artwork (e.g., the Mona Lisa) and commercials (e.g., the “Epic Split” of Jean Claude van Damme for Volvo trucks or the sexy models shown in Carl’s Jr. commercials). Due to the strong interest in humorous mimicry, this behavior even became an own type of art. For instance, “The Great Dictator” of Charlie Chaplin (1940) or “The Life of Brian” of Monty Pythons (1979) and numerous scenes in cartoons (e.g., Asterix) are artful and humorous mimicry.

In generally, needs are individual-difference personality variables (personal traits) which are associated with the motivation (or body energization, respectively) to behave in a certain way. Needs are either learned or innate (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Many researchers utilize the term “need” to describe such urges or desires (e.g., need for cognitive closure, Webster & Kruglanski, 1994; need of uniqueness, Tepper-Tian, Beardon & Hunter, 2001; and need for humor, Cline,

Abstract

Wir untersuchten die Wirksamkeit von Parodien in der Werbung. Zuerst erstellten wir einen Überblick über weit verbreitete Typen von Parodien in der Werbung. Sodann führten wir drei Experimente durch. Im ersten Experiment untersuchten wir, wie Konsumenten reagieren, wenn Unternehmen Filmplakate parodieren. Im zweiten Experiment analysierten wir die Wirksamkeit von Parodien von Kunstwerken in der Werbung. Im dritten Experiment betrachteten wir den Fall, dass Unternehmen Geschlechterrollen parodieren. Wenn Konsumenten glauben, dass sie eine Parodie sehen, ist die Wirkung vergleichsweise gut. Sie müssen nur meinen, dass etwas parodiert wird, aber das parodierte Original nicht unbedingt kennen. Wenn sie nicht erkennen, dass eine Parodie vorliegt, ist die Werbewirkung relativ schlecht.

Schlagworte: › Parodien in der Werbung › Humor › Originalität
› Einstellungen

Altsechs & Kellaris, 2003). In line with this perspective, we consider humorous mimicry as a need. Among humans, mimicry – the imitation of others – mostly serves to provoke humorous responses from others and to entertain oneself.

1.3 Parodies in Advertising

We presume that the need for humorous mimicry had inspired many companies to create parody ads. The use of parodies in advertising is countless. To illustrate the multitude of parodies, we provide a list of the major types of parodies (according to what is parodied) and a small selection of examples in >table 1.

1.4 Prior Research on the Effectiveness of Parodies in Advertising

Despite the widespread use of parody ads, there is little academic research on their effectiveness thus far. To the best of our knowledge, the only experiment that compared a parody ad to a non-parody ad was conducted by Moon and Kwak (2010). The-

se authors used a parodied image of Leonardo da Vinci's "The last supper" and an ad that displayed the original version of this fresco. The authors tested the effect of the parody compared to the non-parody on the evaluations of two products (a cheesecake and an oven) and found a null effect of the parody for the cheesecake and a negative effect for the oven.

In related research, Vanden Bergh, Lee, Quilliam & Hunter (2011) investigated associations that individuals develop when they view consumer-created parodies of brand commercials. Factor analysis revealed that these perceptions can be grouped in four dimensions: humor, mockery, truth, and offensiveness. However, this research does not provide information about how perceivers respond to the brands whose ads have been parodied.

A similar area of research focuses on spoof advertising – the defamiliarization of a well-known motif without intent to make people laugh. To the best of our knowledge, Parguel, Lunardo & Chebat (2012) introduced this term into literature. They created defamiliarizations of well-known ads for the purpose of an anti-smoking campaign and found that

this rhetoric figure could elicit fear. Roehm and Roehm (2014) published findings from a case study about the effectiveness of a parody entitled "\$penditol" that was created by a political group and aimed to affect the allocation of the US budget for health care. Spenditol sounds like the name of a drug and is pronounced as "spend it all." Similarly, Jean (2011) published results from a case study which considered the campaign used by SanDisk to devalue its competitor, the Apple brand. In its "iDon't" campaign, SanDisk insults Apple customers to be iSheeps, iChimps, iPuppets, etc. Both studies showed that the attitudes toward the target of disparagement (the pharmaceutical industry, the Apple brand) were negatively affected. The latter two studies investigated responses to malapropism as a special form of spoof advertising. Berthon and Pitt (2012) provide a classification of spoof advertising. We do not consider spoof advertising in our research. Brand names parodies have also been investigated. This technique is discussed by Petty (2009) and Qiao, Chicotski & Billings (2016).

1.5 Contribution of our Research

There is an obvious reason why parody ads are wide-spread in practice but rarely investigated in academic experimental research thus far: Test participants must understand that the parody ad is an imitation of an original piece of work, i.e., researchers postulate a prerequisite as follows: To call something a parody, the perceiver must be familiar with the original work (Holman & Harmon, 1992; Kreuz & Roberts, 1993; Zinkhan & Johnson, 1994). We surmise that it is highly difficult to find suitable original work that is well-known. Not even Moon and Kwak (2010) who investigated the effect of a parodied vs. a non-parodied version of "The last supper" reported that the participants were familiar with this artwork. Thus, we aim to answer two research questions:

RQ1: Which original works or items are well-known to such an extent that they are suitable for parodies in advertising?

Tab. 1: Examples of ad parodies in practice

Type	Examples
Parodies of movie posters and TV series	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Titanic (Leonardo di Caprio/Kate Winslet pose): Toys "R" Us, Fiat, m&m's (sweets), MailOnline (newspaper), Nordsee (restaurants), Utopia (cinema chain) • Star Wars: Volkswagen (Super-Bowl commercial) • Dirty Dancing (Patrick Swayze/Jennifer Grey dancing pose): Specsavers (glasses), Mercedes Benz • The Graduate (Mrs. Robinson seduction scene): Carl's Jr. ft. Heidi Klum • LaLa Land: Lidl Land • Bauer sucht Frau (Farmer is looking for a wife): Opel Corsa (ad claim: "Autobauer sucht Frau", Car manufacturer is looking for a wife)
Parodies of fine art	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sandro Botticelli's "La nascita di Venere" (1482): Romwe (textiles), Globe (shoes), Kiwiny (beverages), Donna di Fiori (perfume), General (detergent) • Leonardo da Vinci's "Mona Lisa" (1503/04): Koss (headphones), Hyley time (tea), Pizza Hut (pizza restaurant), knowOne.de (dating agency), Allianz (insurance), Nescafe (instant coffee) • Michelangelo Buonarroti's "The last supper" (1495/96): McDonald's (fast food), Doritos (potato chips), Tela (napkins)
Parodies of gender roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ducati's MANI-gale calendar • Male models in ads promoting Dove cosmetics • Heineken parodies commercials which depict enthusiastic female behavior (walk-in refrigerator instead of a walk-in closet) • A man mistakenly used Dove shampoo for women
Parodies of historical sensations and everyday events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neil Armstrong's first step on the moon: Nivea's "Footprint" commercial • Dogs' sounds and movements: Volkswagen's "Dog imitates a Golf 7" commercial
Parodies of religious issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adam and Eve: In a Centraal Beheer Insurance commercial, Adam is not interested in women • Epiphany: In a Mulberry commercial, the Three Holy Kings adore a handbag • Jesus walking on water: Consumption of Red Bull enabled him to do so
Parodies of other company's ads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protein World "Are you beach body ready?"; Carlsberg "Are you beer body ready?" • Audi "Fortschritt durch Technik": Vivil: „Fortschritt durch Lutschen“ (including a parody of the Audi logo) • Axe "Billions": Specsavers (glasses) "The Specs Effect" • Marlboro "Marlboro Country": Electronic Data Systems "Cat Herders"
Ironic parody ads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apple Mac-Book Air commercial: Lenovo X300 commercial

Source: Own depiction.

RQ2: What happens if people think that they recognize a parody vs. if they don't recognize it?

When we classified parody ads as shown in >table 1, we found that parodies of movie posters and TV series, parodies of fine art, and parodies of gender roles are more frequently used in practice than other types. Thus, we focus on investigating these three types in our empirical investigations.

2 Theoretical Background

Obviously, all types of parodic advertisements are designed to elicit feelings of humor. As they are based on the defamiliarization of an original piece of work, perceptions of ad originality on the one hand and immediate negative feelings of irritation on the other hand may also arise. Furthermore, people might like or dislike the fact that something is exploited.

2.1 Feelings of Humor

In general, humorous responses are likely based on the resolution of incongruity (Suls, 1983). The incongruity-resolution theory is a two-step model that explains why individuals develop feelings of humor. Within the incongruity-resolution process, the first step is the detection of incongruence. An incongruent stimulus deviates from familiar patterns and thus from the expectations of the perceivers (Mandler, 1982). The second step is the resolution of the incongruence in another sphere of life. In order to understand the intention of providing a deviating stimulus, the perceivers can transform the incon-

gruent fact into a funny, congruent one. This latter step requires effort for cognitive problem solving. If the recipients of an incongruent stimulus can identify the reason for the deviation from the expected in another area of life, the humorous intent of the stimulus and its source, respectively, becomes obvious. Raskin (1985, p. 100) illustrates humor resulting from the deviation of expectations and the meaningfulness of the deviation in another sphere of life by providing the following joke: “‘Is the doctor at home?’ the patient asked in his bronchial whisper. ‘No,’ the doctor’s young and pretty wife whispered in reply. ‘Come right in’”. The perceiver expects that the wife combines “No” with “He is absent. Please come later.” “No, come right in” is an unexpected answer that can be understood (i.e., resolved) from the viewpoint of a different sphere in life (erotic sphere).

According to Roehm and Roehm (2014), parodies in advertising aim to elicit the mental state of “playful humor” in their perceivers. In the first step, recipients have to notice the subtle deviations of the ad parody from the original piece of work. In the second step, the resolution of incongruences in another sphere of life must happen. If the resolution is successful, feelings of humor are evoked. These feelings can best be denoted as amusement, pleasure, entertainment, or laughter (Suls, 1983; Jean, 2011; Vanden Bergh et al., 2011; Roehm & Roehm, 2014). This affective response is presumed to affect the attitude toward the parody (Jean, 2011; Shabbir & Thwaites, 2007) and the promoted brand. We test:

H1: Compared to unrecognized parody ads, recognized parody ads elicit stronger feelings of humor.

2.2 Perceptions of Ad Originality

In general, creativity enables originality in advertising (Smith & Yang, 2004). Originality exists when a piece of work “contains elements that are novel, different, or unusual” (which is denoted as divergence) and when these “elements are rare, surprising, or move away from the obvious and commonplace” (then, the divergence is considered as

original). These definitions were adopted from Smith, Chen, and Yang (2008, p. 48), Yang and Smith (2009, p. 936), and Pieters, Warlop, and Wedel (2002, p. 767). An example for a creative advertising strategy to develop advertising with high originality is “borrowing a foreign idea” by, for example, recombining others’ ideas in a unique or unexpected way.

Because a parody is regarded as a work that largely mimics the ideas of others, it can be regarded as a kind of “borrowing a foreign idea” (Zinkhan & Johnson, 1994) and thus perceived as being high in originality. Pieces of work being high in originality likely are the source of amazement and astonishment which spill over onto brand evaluations. We hypothesize:

H2: Compared to unrecognized parody ads, recognized parody ads elicit higher perceptions of originality.

2.3 Feelings of Irritation

In general, irritation is a negative feeling that results from non-understanding information (Pelsmacker & Vanden Bergh, 1999) or exists when the information is regarded as exaggerated, highly unrealistic, provoking, offensive, or inappropriate. According to Aaker and Bruzzone (1985), an irritating advertisement is “provoking, causing displeasure and momentary impatience”. Moreover, irritation is experienced as an unpleasant surprise.

If recipients do not recognize the parody in the parodic ad, the advertising message remains incomprehensible and feelings of irritation likely occur. In extreme conditions, this fact can result in the recipients’ feelings to be insulted or even attacked (Zinkhan & Johnson, 1994). Consumer beliefs that the parody ad aims to parody something likely reduce the feelings of irritation. We expect:

H3: Compared to unrecognized parody ads, recognized parody ads elicit less feelings of irritation.

2.4 Perceptions that Something is Exploited

In general, if a brand aims to profit from the fame of events (e.g., Olympic games without sponsorship, Christmas, Munich Oktoberfest), consumers could perceive such attempts as a form of freerider marketing or ambush marketing. If the viewer develops thoughts about whether it is legally or morally correct to exploit something, negative attitudes are likely to occur (Meenaghan, 1998; Shani & Sandler, 1998).

Consumers who notice a parody as an element in an advertisement might scrutinize the reason why it is used and then interpret it as a kind of exploitation. The advertiser probably has no right for this type of advertising. Recipients could interpret it as an attempt by the advertiser to associate the brand with something else with the intention to benefit from the popularity of that subject or object. We predict:

H4: Compared to unrecognized parody ads, recognized parody ads elicit stronger perceptions that something is exploited.

3 Study 1: Ad Parodies of Movie Posters

3.1 Pretest to Identify Well-Known Movie Posters which are Suitable for Parodies

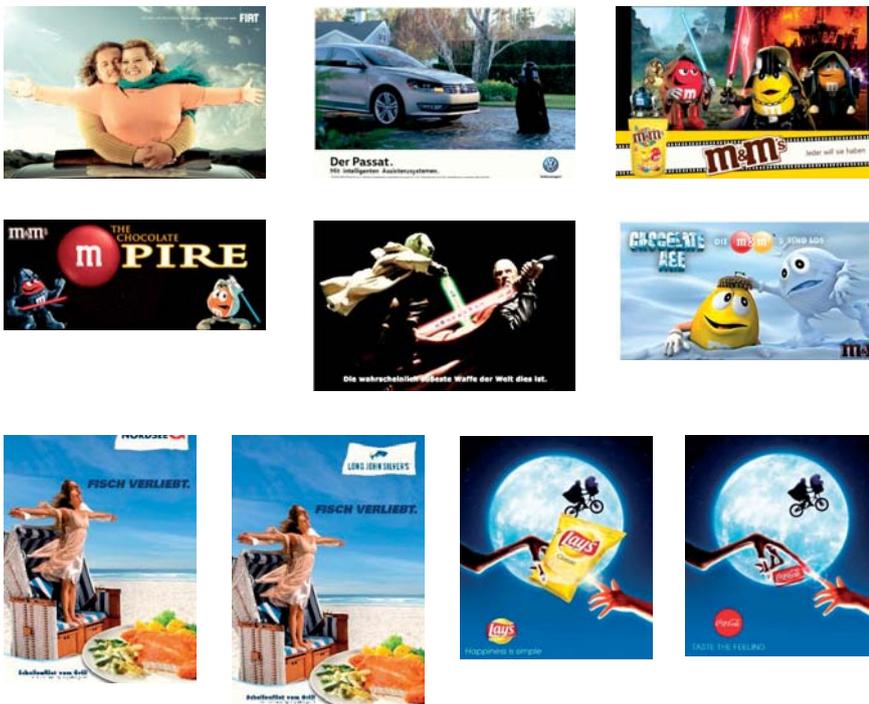
We started with a pretest to identify movie posters/scenes which are well-known. Only for well-known movie posters/scenes, consumers who watch an ad parody would recognize the parody. We used movie posters/scenes of Titanic, E.T., Star Wars, and Ice Age as test stimuli. We selected these images because, in many advertisements, they serve as a basis of parodies (see >figure 1, upper part). We blanked out the title of the movies and exposed these stimuli to 267 young persons who were met at the campus of a University in 2017 (73 percent students, 51 percent females, mean age = 24.6 years). Each person viewed only one image and indicated whether s/he knows the movie with which the image is associated; s/he had

Fig. 1: Test stimuli (Study 1)

Parodied movie posters/scenes



Ad parodies



Source: Images of the movie posters were taken from the Internet. For (1), (2), (6), (7), and (9) [for the numbers, see Section 3.3], the parody ads were used in practice and taken from the Internet. The other versions were created for the purpose of this experiment.

not to name the title of the movie. The percentages of persons indicating to know the movie or who were even able to name the title of the movie were as following: 72 percent Titanic, 49 percent Star Wars, 9 percent E.T., and 91 percent Ice Age. We should add the information that significantly more male participants reported to know the Star Wars movie.

3.2 Experimental Design

From the pretest results, we have to admit that it is difficult to find generally highly known movie poster/scenes (with the exception of the Ice Age scene) which is already used in advertising practice for the purpose of a parody. Thus, to test the effect of parodies in advertising, we cannot simply compare a non-parody ad to a movie-based parody ad. We manipulated the parody factor by presenting or not presenting the original movie image (including the movie title) to test participants prior to the contact to the

parody ad. In the condition in which we presented the movie image, the participants know that the ad is indeed a parody ad. In the condition in which the original poster/scene was not shown previously, we classified the participants according to whether they believed to recognize that the ad is based on a movie poster/scene or not. Thus, we have three levels of the parody factor:

- (1) People who viewed the parodic ad and stated not to know the image (non-recognized parody),
- (2) people who viewed the parodic ad and believed to know the image (subjectively-recognized parody), and
- (3) people who viewed the parodic ad after having seen the corresponding original movie poster/scene (objectively-recognized parody).

We created these three conditions for ten ads. Thus, we used a 3 (ad perceptions: non-recognized parody, subjectively-recognized parody, objectively-recognized parody) × 10 (brand) experimental between-subjects design. The brand only served as a replication factor.

3.3 Test Stimuli

In >figure 1 (lower part), we present the test stimuli: (1) Fiat's parody of the Titanic movie poster, (2) Volkswagen/Star Wars, (3) m&m's/Star Wars, (4) additional m&m's/Star Wars combination, (5) Duplo chocolate/Star Wars, (6) m&m's/Ice Age, (7) Nordsee restaurant/Titanic, (8) Long John Silver's restaurants/Titanic, (9) Lay's chips/E.T., and (10) Coca Cola/E.T.

3.4 Sample

In total, 788 persons participated in the experiment (78 percent students, 52 percent females, mean age = 24.7 years). Data collection took place at a campus of a university located in Germany between 2017 and 2018.

3.5 Procedure

One part of the participants was directly exposed to a parody ad and filled in a questionnaire. After completing this task, they were asked to indicate whether they believed to know the original image. If they stated not to know this image, they were assigned to the non-recognized-parody condition. If they answered this question in the affirmative, they were assigned to the subjectively-recognized-parody condition. Another part of the participants first viewed an original movie poster/scene (including the movie title) and then watched the ad which parodied this image, followed by the request to fill in the questionnaire. These persons were assigned to the objectively-recognized-parody condition.

3.6 Measures

The test participants were asked to write down “all thoughts and feelings which come into mind when viewing the images”. Subsequently, we asked the participants to indicate their attitude toward the brand by agreement or disagreement to the following: “The brand is appealing,” “interesting,” “attractive,” and “good” ($\alpha = .899$). Subsequently, variables that likely mediate the relationship between the recognition of the parody and brand attitude were assessed. *First*, feelings of humor were measured by asking for agreement or disagreement to the statements: “The ad is very humorous,” “amusing,” and “funny” ($\alpha = .962$, statements were adopted from Vanden Bergh et al., 2011). *Second*, perceptions of the ad’s originality were assessed by asking for agreement to the statements: “The ad is very original,” “creative,” and “extraordinary” ($\alpha = .920$, the statements were adopted from Smith, Chen & Young, 2008, and Yang & Smith, 2009). *Third*, we measured feelings of irritation due to the used motif in the ad by asking for agreement to the statements: “I feel irritated,” “I feel confused,” and “I have difficulties to comprehend the ad” ($\alpha = .921$, statements adopted from Pelsmacker & Vanden Bergh, 1999). *Fourth*, beliefs that the advertiser exploits something were measured by asking for agreement to: “Somebody is using the idea

of someone else to promote something,” “I believe that the idea underlying this ad motif does not stem from the advertiser itself,” and “To create this ad, someone has exploited the work of others” ($\alpha = .938$, statements based on Shani and Sandler, 1998). The test persons reported data about brand awareness and consumption frequency or interest in the product category. These variables served to check whether the subsamples were homogeneous (what was confirmed). Finally, age, gender, and student status were assessed. After completing the questionnaire, the persons were thanked (e.g., received a package of sweets) and the purpose of the experiment was revealed. All variables (except demographic data and brand awareness) were assessed on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 = totally disagree to 7 = totally agree.

3.7 Results

Because we did not find remarkable differences across the promoted brands, we aggregated the data across the brands. In >table 2, we report the findings. They show that brand attitude is highest in the subjectively-recognized-parody condition. The same patterns of results were found for feelings of humor and perceptions of ad originality. Perceptions that something is exploited were highest in the objectively-recog-

nized-parody condition. Feelings of irritation were not contingent on the parody factor. To test the hypotheses, we compared the mean values of the non-recognized-parody condition to means values of the subjectively-recognized-parody condition and found support for H1 and H2. We additionally estimated a mediation model (Hayes, 2012, model 4). We included data from two subsamples and calculated a binary independent variable as follows: $X = 0$, if the ad was not recognized as a parody, $X = 1$, if the ad was a subjectively recognized parody. As mediating variables, we included feelings of humor, perceptions of ad originality, feelings of irritation, and perceptions that something is exploited. We used brand attitude as the dependent variable. We estimated a positive indirect effect via feelings of humor ($a_{X \rightarrow \text{humor}} \times b_{\text{humor} \rightarrow \text{attitude}} = .75 \times .19$, .95 CI = (.07; .26)) and a positive indirect effect via perceptions of ad originality ($a_{X \rightarrow \text{originality}} \times b_{\text{originality} \rightarrow \text{attitude}} = 1.37 \times .15$, .95 CI = (.07; .38)). The other two mediating variables did not have an indirect effect.

Tab. 2: Results of Study 1

	Non-recognized parody ad (N = 190)	Subjectively recognized parody (N = 209)	Objectively recognized parody (N = 389)	ANOVA F(2; 785)
Brand attitude	3.18 (1.44) _a	4.27 (1.68) _c	3.82 (1.51) _b	25.137***
Feelings of humor	3.81 (1.67) _a	4.56 (1.88) _b	3.96 (1.92) _a	9.758***
Perceptions of ad originality	3.13 (1.63) _a	4.51 (1.62) _c	4.00 (1.61) _b	36.892***
Feelings of irritation	3.23 (1.89) _a	3.15 (1.78) _a	3.19 (1.85) _a	.100 ^{ns}
Perceptions that something is exploited	2.95 (1.63) _a	3.31 (2.12) _{a,b}	3.56 (1.98) _{b,c}	6.008**

Notes. The scale ranges from 1 (negative, low) to 7 (positive, high). Standard deviations in parentheses. Mean values with different subscripts are different at the .05 level (Scheffé-Test). *** p < .001, ** p < .01. Source: Own depiction.

4 Study 2: Ad Parodies of Fine Art

4.1 Pretest to Identify Well-Known Pictures of Fine Art

We used the keyword “most famous paintings of all time” for a search on the Internet and, based on the results, chose three artworks of Renaissance artists from Florence and Rome: Sandro Botticelli’s “The birth of Venus,” Leonardo da Vinci’s “Mona Lisa,” and Michelangelo’s “The Creation of Adam.” Additionally, we included a modern painting into our pretest: Edvard Munch’s “The Scream” (see >figure 2, upper part).

We analyzed whether students are familiar with such paintings. We exposed 162 students of management, economics, law, informatics, or education science from a university located in the South of Germany to these artworks. In an online-survey, we asked them to indicate all thoughts and feelings while viewing the image and whether they can tell us something about the motif. Six of 30 students (20 percent) who were exposed to Botticelli’s painting were able to indicate the name of the painter and/or mentioned “Venus” or “Aphrodite.” For the “Mona Lisa,” 14 of 45 (32 percent) knew the painter’s name and/or the painting’s title. 13 of 86 (14 percent) knew Michelangelo and/or the title, Adam (the biblical figure), and 1 of 35 was able to indicate “The Scream” (nobody knew the name of its painter). When we analyzed the reported thoughts, we examined whether the test persons indicated something like “artwork” or “painting”. We found such keywords for 11 of 30 persons (Birth of Venus), 7 of 45 persons (Mona Lisa), 7 of 86 persons (Creation of Adam), and 0 of 35 (The Scream). We concluded that only a small portion of students is familiar with such paintings.

4.2 Experimental Design

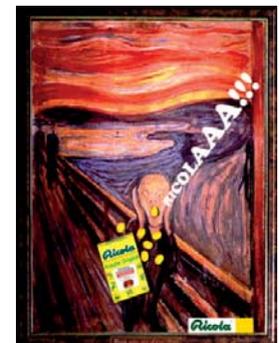
Thus, we were faced with the same difficulties as for the movie-based parodies. We hardly find consumers who are familiar with fine-art paintings. If we had used art-history students, the findings might be dif-

Fig. 2: Test stimuli (Study 2)

Parodied artworks



Ad parodies



Source: Images of the artworks were taken from the Internet. The parody-ad versions were adopted from the social platform Pinterest.

ferent. As we used test participants with higher education, we expect that the proportion of people with lower education who are able to provide meaningful associations with the selected paintings would be even lower. Thus, we adopted the procedure of Study 1 to define levels of the parody factor. We created parody ads for five brands. Thus, we used a 3 (ad perceptions: non-recognized parody, subjectively-recognized parody, objectively-recognized parody) × 5

(brand) experimental between-subjects design.

4.3 Test Stimuli

The ads promoted a Braun hair dryer, a Vidal Sassoon hair dryer, Lay’s potato chips, Frosch detergents, and Ricola sweets. The test stimuli are depicted in >figure 2 (lower part).

4.4 Sample, Procedure, and Measures

In total, 328 students took part in this experiment. Because we used only female students as test participants for the hair dryers, the proportion of female students in the sample was rather high (72 percent). The average age of the participants was 24.98 years. The procedure was adopted from Study 1 resulting in three levels of the parody factor. Data collection took place in 2017 at a university located in the South of Germany. The measures were adopted from Study 1. The reliability scores were as follows: for attitude toward the brand $\alpha = .895$, for feelings of humor $\alpha = .948$, for perceptions of ad originality $\alpha = .864$, for feelings of irritation $\alpha = .772$, and for perceptions that the advertiser has something exploited $\alpha = .738$.

4.5 Results

The findings were again consistent across the brands. Thus, we aggregated the data across the brands. The mean values of the response variables depending on the experimental condition are shown in >table 3.

The findings of Study 2 are highly similar with those of Study 1. Brand attitude is highest when consumers subjectively recognize a parody. If the ad is not recognized as a parody, attitudes are rather low. Again, feelings of humor and perceptions of ad originality

are relatively higher in the subjectively recognized-parody condition. Perceptions that something is exploited were lowest when the ad was not recognized as a parody. Data support H1, H2, and H4. We replicated the estimation of a mediation model as it has been conducted in Study 1 (Hayes 2012, model 4). We found an indirect effect via feelings of humor ($a_{X \rightarrow \text{HUMOR}} \times b_{\text{HUMOR} \rightarrow \text{attitude}} = .95 \times .21, .95 \text{ CI} = (.08; .40)$) and an indirect effect via perceptions of ad originality ($a_{X \rightarrow \text{originality}} \times b_{\text{originality} \rightarrow \text{attitude}} = .72 \times .38, .95 \text{ CI} = (.12; .45)$).

5 Study 3: Ad Parodies of Gender Roles

5.1 Pretest

We selected a sample of pairs of ads for which we found both a non-parody ad and a parody ad on the internet (see >figure 3, upper part). We considered two brands which are targeting women (Always Ultra sanitary napkin, Gucci lipstick) and two brands which mainly offer products for women (Dove body lotion, and Marc Jacobs accessories). 66 female students were exposed to the non-parody ads promoting Always Ultra and Gucci; the ads were contained in a set of filler ads. The participants were asked to indicate whether they knew the ads. 38 (58 percent) stated to know the Always Ultra ad and 56 (85 percent) indicated to

know the Gucci ad. This procedure was repeated for the non-parody ads promoting Dove and Marc Jacobs. Out of 69 female students, 46 (67 percent) stated to know the Dove ad and 23 (33 percent) indicated that they already had seen the Marc Jacobs ad.

5.2 Experimental Design

From the pretest results, we again have to deal with the difficulty that the stimuli which are parodied are not perfectly known in the targeted segments. For this reason, we adopted the procedures used in Study 1 and 2 and defined three levels of the parody factor plus the original ad for each brand. Thus, our experiment is based on a 4 (ad: non-recognized parody, subjectively-recognized parody, objectively-recognized parody, original ad) \times 4 (brands) experimental between-subjects design.

5.3 Test Stimuli

We have four original ads and corresponding parody ads. To ridicule gender roles, the parody ads substituted the depiction of female persons by male persons (see >figure 3, lower part).

Tab. 3: Results of Study 2

	Non-recognized parody ad (N = 114)	Subjectively recognized parody ad (N = 56)	Objectively recognized parody ad (N = 158)	ANOVA F(2; 325)
Brand attitude	3.47 (.80) _a	4.30 (1.13) _b	3.85 (1.51) _{a,b}	8.489***
Feelings of humor	3.70 (1.72) _a	4.66 (1.18) _b	4.59 (1.79) _b	7.721***
Perceptions of ad originality	4.22 (1.05) _a	4.94 (1.36) _b	4.53 (1.73) _{a,b}	4.777**
Feelings of irritation	3.91 (1.69) _a	3.91 (1.58) _a	3.60 (1.57) _a	1.534 ^{ns}
Perceptions that something is exploited	3.85 (1.51) _a	4.78 (1.35) _b	4.84 (1.15) _b	13.279***

Notes. The scale ranges from 1 (negative, low) to 7 (positive, high). Standard deviations in parentheses. Mean values with different subscripts are different at the .05 level (Scheffé-Test). *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$.

Source: Own depiction

5.4 Sample, Procedures, and Measures

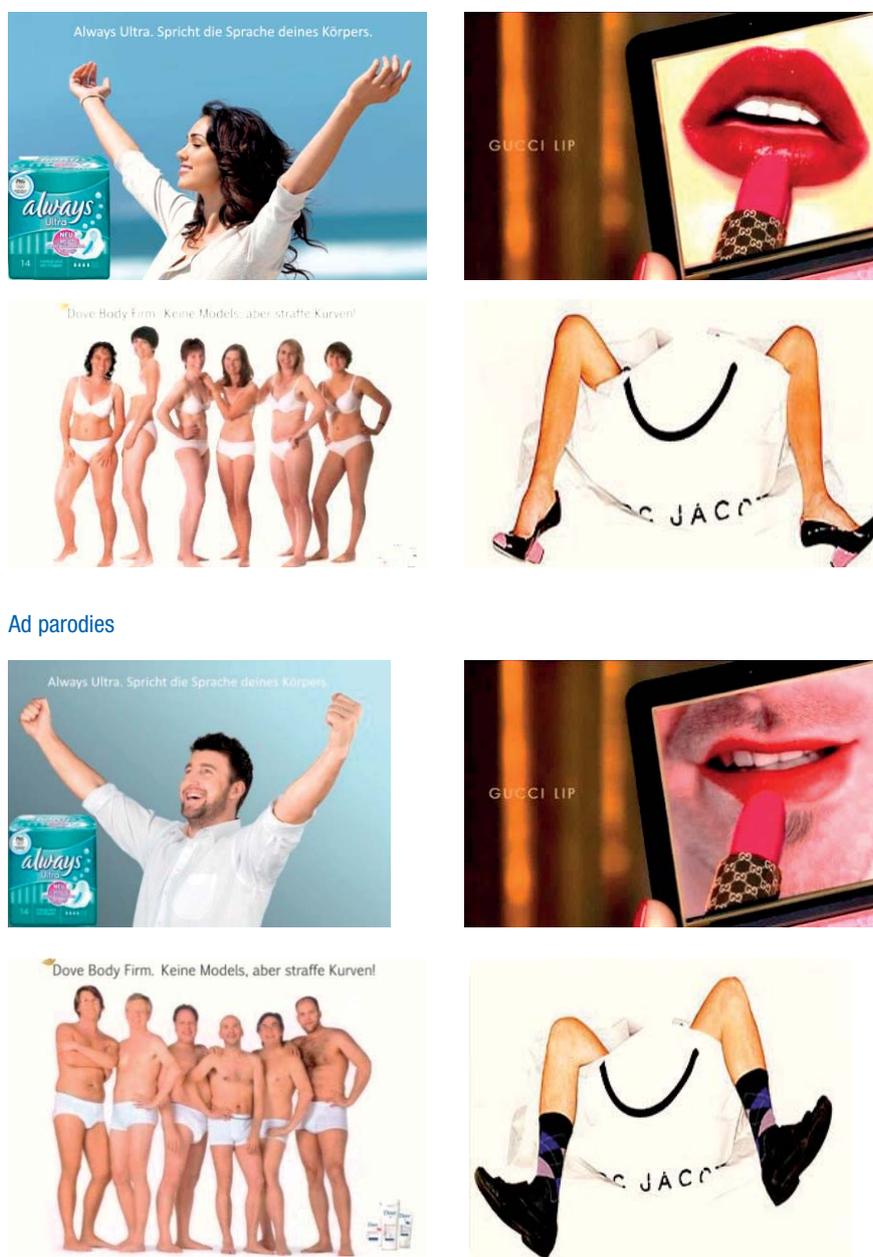
In total, 396 female persons took part in this experiment (95.5 percent students, mean age = 21.71 years). The procedure was adopted from Study 1 and 2 resulting in three levels of the parody ad; additionally, we have a non-parody ad, i.e., the original ad which was parodied. Data were collected in 2016 at a university located in the South of Germany. The measures were adopted from Study 1 and Study 2. The reliability scores were as follows: for attitude toward the brand $\alpha = .837$, for feelings of humor $\alpha = .960$, for perceptions of ad originality $\alpha = .907$, and for feelings of irritation $\alpha = .863$. Statements to assess consumer beliefs that the advertiser has something exploited were not included in this study because the companies seemingly parody their own ads. We want to add the notion that we also investigated the role of vicarious embarrassment in this study (Goffman, 1956; Dahl, Marchanda & Argo, 2001). This feeling exists if other persons violate social etiquette. However, this variable did not differ across the experimental parody conditions.

5.5 Results

Because the findings were rather consistent across the brands, we aggregated the data. In >table 4, the findings from this experiment are summarized. We found that the usage of a parody ad did not result in more favorable brand attitudes than the non-parody ad. If participants did not recognize that the ads that were intended to be parodies of original company ads or knew through our procedure that they were parodies (objectively recognized parody ads), attitudes were comparatively low. If we compare the subjectively-recognized parody ad to the non-recognized-parody, feelings of humor, perceptions of ad originality, and feelings of irritation were higher. These findings provide evidence to H1 and H2 and contradict H3. Compared to the non-parody ad (the original ad), parodies elicit higher feelings of humor and perceptions of ad originality but also induce stronger feelings of irritation. As in Study 1 and Study 2, we tested the effect of the mediating variables. We

Fig. 3: Test stimuli (Study 3)

Parodied advertisements depicting gender roles (original ads)



Ad parodies

Source: Images of the parodied ads were taken from the Internet. The person in the parodic Always Ultra ad was adopted from the website "Men cheering stock pictures." The parody ad used for Dove was created by Ogilvy, Düsseldorf. The parody ad for Marc Jacobs was published and distributed by Lauren Wade to criticize the photographer of the original ad. The parody ad promoting Gucci was created for the purpose of this experiment

again defined a binary independent variable (1 = subjectively recognized parody, 0 = non-recognized parody). We included feelings of humor, perceptions of ad originality, and feelings of irritation as mediating variables. We regressed them on brand atti-

tude. We found an indirect effect via feelings of humor ($a_{x \rightarrow \text{humor}} \times b_{\text{humor} \rightarrow \text{attitude}} = .86 \times .21, .95 \text{ CI} = (.01; .48)$) and an indirect effect via perceptions of ad originality ($a_{x \rightarrow \text{originality}} \times b_{\text{originality} \rightarrow \text{attitude}} = .62 \times .27, .95 \text{ CI} = (.02; .48)$).

Tab. 4: Results of Study 3

	Non-recognized parody ad (N = 43)	Subjectively recognized parody ad (N = 83)	Objectively recognized parody ad (N = 132)	Non-parody ad (N = 138)	ANOVA F(3;392)
Brand attitude	3.84 (1.57) _{a,b}	4.44 (.87) _b	3.41 (1.55) _a	4.24 (1.40) _b	12.345***
Feelings of humor	3.97 (1.89) _b	4.83 (1.22) _c	4.62 (1.91) _{b,c}	2.80 (1.57) _a	34.213***
Perceptions of ad originality	4.46 (1.67) _a	5.08 (1.00) _b	4.92 (1.61) _b	4.01 (1.75) _a	11.191***
Feelings of irritation	3.56 (1.96) _b	4.66 (1.85) _c	4.44 (2.04) _c	2.59 (1.87) _a	28.191***

Notes: The scale ranges from 1 (negative, low) to 7 (positive, high). Standard deviations in parentheses. Mean values with different subscripts are different at the .05 level (Scheffé-Test). *** p < .001. Source: Own depiction

6 Answers to the research questions

In RQ1, we asked which types of motifs are very well-known and thus suitable to serve as a source of parodies for advertising purposes. We tested movie posters/scenes, artwork, and images depicting gender roles. For this purpose, we compare the number of people in our samples who did not recognize a parody to the number of people who recognized a parody per se (although rarely being able to recognize the concrete parodied original). The relationship between non-recognized and subjectively recognized parody was 190:209 for movie posters/scenes, 114:56 for artwork, and 43:83 for parodies of ads highlighting gender roles. Thus, artwork seems to be less appropriate as motif for ad parodies (although many dozens of brands use this type of advertising). From our pretests, we conclude that there is either an aversion among young consumers against artwork and/or too less education in school and through media to become familiar with pieces of fine art. We found that parodies of movies which were popular some decades ago (e.g., E.T. or Titanic) are less suitable to create parodies as well to target younger consumers. However, our student sample was familiar with Ice Age, likely because they watched these movies in their own childhood. Reversals of gender roles turned out to be mostly recognized as parodies. This is due to the fact that perceivers do not need to know the concrete original item which is parodied to recognize a parody. Therefore, motifs for parodies for which the targeted consumers must not

need to know the concrete parodied motif seem to be advantageous.

In RQ2, we asked whether recognized ad parodies result in more favorable brand attitudes than non-recognized ad parodies. Note that “recognized” means that perceivers notice the fact that something has been parodied but do not necessarily know the concrete parodied motif. By comparing these two conditions (non-recognized parody vs. subjectively recognized parody), we estimated the parody effect. In all experiments, we found that subjectively recognized parodies were superior to non-recognized parodies. Thus, there is a positive parody effect on brand attitudes. Our mediation analysis additionally revealed that this parody effect primarily resulted from higher feelings of humor and stronger perceptions of ad originality. Thus, advertisers can benefit from evoking the *impression* that an ad is a parody.

We also included a condition in which the test participants objectively recognized the parody; in this condition, the persons first saw the original motif and then the ad that parodied that motif. Such side-by-side comparisons exist on social-media platforms where people ridicule other unknown persons or celebrities. In advertising practice, Heineken used this strategy when positioning its “Are you beer body ready?” posters side-by-side to the “Are you beach body ready?” posters of Protein World in the subway stations in London. In our studies, we found that the forced contact to the original is disadvantageous. However, we might have used a highly artificial setting.

In Study 3, we additionally included original ad motifs which correspond to the parodies. When we compare the non-parody ad (the original ad) to the subjectively recognized parody, there was no difference regarding brand attitude. The parody was regarded as more humorous and original, but higher feelings of irritation counterbalanced these positive effects. We believe that the special use of parodies of female gender roles might have irritated the test persons (this sample consisted of young female persons). The motifs might have been provoking or even offensive – although such comments were not made in the thought-listing task.

To conclude, what have we learned from our experiments? It is difficult to compare parodies to non-parodies because often, the concrete original images used to create parodies are not recognized. Reversal of gender roles seem to be better recognized as parodies; for this type of parody, people do not need to be familiar with the original motif. If male models are depicted in a happy pose in advertisements promoting Always Ultra, it is obvious that they do not really feel enjoyment due to using sanitary napkins and thus the parodic intent is overt. However, marketers have to keep in mind that feelings of irritation might be evoked.

7 Limitations

The weakness of our studies is the use of student samples. The knowledge base of these persons might explain why parodies of movies of yore and fine-art paintings are less

suitable to create effective parodies. Moreover, we only focused on three types of parodies in advertising. Furthermore, we did not pay attention to the aspect about whether the brand is highly or less suitable for been advertised by the means of a parody. However, with respect to the latter issue, we want to add the notion that rarely product categories exist in which humorous advertising is absent. We did not include a larger list of mediating variables into our investigations. As mentioned above, we asked the test participants at the beginning of the questionnaire to take part in a thought-listing task. We did not find further aspects that should have been considered. For instance, nobody mentioned that s/he feels manipulated by parodies or humorous advertising in general. Our limitations should be considered as a starting point to analyze the effect of further types of parodic ads on attitudes toward the promoted brands.

8 Recommendations for Advertising Practice

Parodic advertising is a kind of humorous advertising. It targets consumers with a high need for humor, i.e., people who look for pleasure and entertainment in advertising instead of information about product features and benefits. The popularity of cat videos on the Internet indicates that there is a significant portion of people who like to be entertained by funny and original stuff. Thus, in concrete cases, marketers should test the effectiveness of humorous advertisements in general and parodies in particular in pretests. Our key findings are: 1. To induce the impression of a parody, it is not necessary that the consumer knows the concrete original motif. It is sufficient, that s/he believes to recognize that a parody is used. 2. There is a positive parody effect.

Management-Takeaway

Parodies are often used in advertising. We refer to the problem that on the one hand people only speak of parodies when viewers know the original (which is being parody), and on the other hand consumers generally do not know the originals (e.g. original film posters, original paintings). Our studies show that it is sufficient for advertisements if consumers believe that advertising is a parody without knowing the original itself. In the condition of subjectively recognized parody, the advertising impact is comparatively high.

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