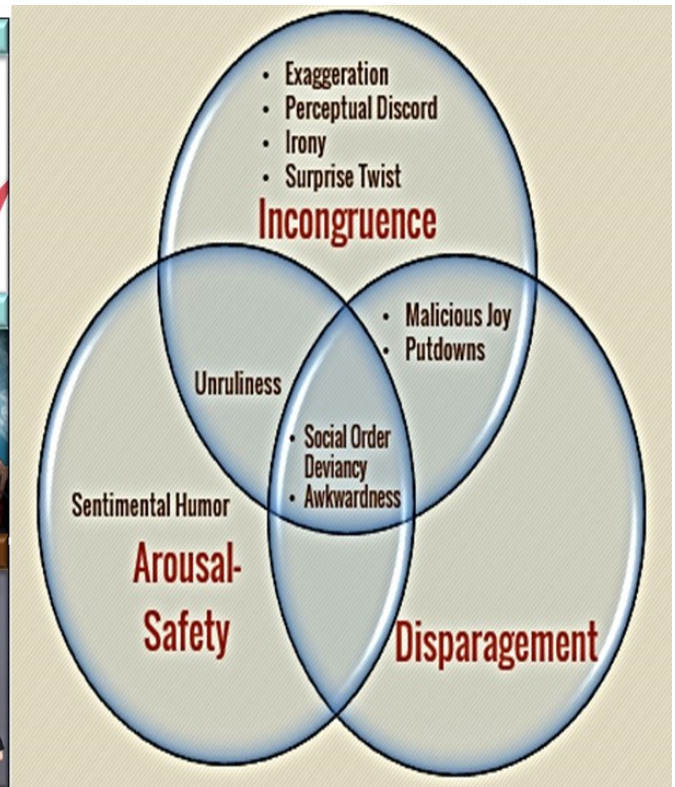


Study Shows 10 Ways Humor Lifts Social Content

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As social content explodes beyond the attention capacity of us all, it's no surprise that entertaining content has taken center stage. Humor, in particular, accounts for a vast majority of social videos reaching over 50,000 views. But many brands are still cautious about using comic devices to attract their target audiences.

Fearing a tarnished image to serious business, offended audiences, or simply a joke gone flat, many opt for inspirational content as an alternative to rousing emotions. But a large scale study (<http://bit.ly/1dg5yex>) of commercials parked on YouTube found a pattern of tasteful comic devices that works well in generating views and engagement.

The following is a countdown of ten types of humor that align well with three theories of humor. In general, we tend to laugh when we:

1. See something out of sorts (**incongruence**)
2. Enjoy others' misfortunes (**disparagement**)
3. Release ourselves from inhibitions or childlike innocence (**arousal-safety**)

#10 Awkwardness

Why we laugh at awkward moments has much to do with the pleasure derived from seeing others fail or suffer misfortune. Rooted in the Theory of Superiority, this disparaging form of humor leads to a feeling of sudden glory when we displace our own histories of embarrassing moments onto others. Among the types of humor that capitalize on awkwardness are remorseful regrets, uncomfortable settings, exercising humility and revealed secrets.

One way to enjoy others' misfortunes is through the depiction of embarrassing situations where victims are left speechless. By displacing own recollection of these embarrassments onto others, we are in effect saying: "I am glad this did not happen to me." Arguably, this laughter increases the more a victim is caught off guard or left with an unsolvable quandary.

#9 Sentimental Humor

Sentimental Humor taps into our emotions through an arousal-safety mechanism. For example, in the first stage or arousal-safety, emotions are aroused with sentimentality, empathy or some form of negative anxiety. As the story-line develops, we then see this heightened arousal state as safe, cute or inconsequential. This shift from high arousal to relief is what creates laughter.

A way to imagine this type of humor is to consider how we laugh. Comic wit, for example, is normally expressed as "Ah Hah." Laughter from disparaging humor (e.g., putdowns) is normally expressed as "Ha, Ha." Sentimental humor would be expressed as "Ahhh." This could happen when we witness someone escaping danger as well as when we experience a child doing something cute.

Among the types of humor that capitalize on this arousal-safety mechanism are those involving false alarms, melodrama or child innocence. Another successful way to get laughter from sentimental humor is through the relief of fear and anxiety.

#8 Malicious Joy

Malicious joy, or *schadenfreude*, refers to the pleasure we derive from seeing others fail or suffer misfortune. Also rooted in the Theory of Superiority, this feeling of sudden glory can occur when we witness bungled behaviors, unanticipated spoilers, unfortunate happenstances, deserved repercussions or the acts of cretins.

Many videos of this type are based on characters that are prone to accidents or saying the wrong thing. Another successful way to get laughter from malicious joy is through the portrayal of spoilers. This cause of laughter taps more into our emotional senses where a feeling of superiority is felt over those whose peace or excitement is snatched away.

#7 Social Order Deviancy

The most engaging form of humor in viral videos involves social order deviance or those behaviors that challenge society rules and expectations. Many of us love watching others unleash their innate desire to break the law, enter forbidden territory or simply act out our inhibitions. Most of the viral videos featuring this form of humor involve society irreverence, taboos, offensive behaviors or unleashed mania.

Several viral YouTube videos are based on high society satires, rule breaking and undermining authority. Common to all is the release of tension we experience by unloading on someone's statutes. Witness how this works when we outwit the censorship imposed by honorable judges, pious clergymen or smug professors.

#6 Unruliness

Unruliness refers to outrageous behavior. Consider how Snicker's Mr. T, Nike's Clay Matthews, and Reebok's "Terry Tate Office Linebacker" videos reached millions of views as these icons disrupt peaceful settings.

The Relief Theory contends that laughter is created when we release tension or nervous energy such as when we unleash our suppressed desires. Consequently, we love watching others act out uncontrollably or violate some social order. In effect, we are likely enjoying the observation of others acting out our own inhibitions through hysteria, impulsive outbursts, displaced irritation or exercising improprieties.

A popular technique for entertaining audiences with humor is to show people unleashing their anxiety through uncontrollable screaming and yelling. Another common way to release suppressed desires is to display scenes of wishful naughtiness.

#5 Irony

Irony much like that of any perceptual discord, is characterized by a contrast, between expectations and reality. It makes us laugh by showing the opposite or undesired intentions of someone's actions. Mentally, we are saying to ourselves: "...I did not see that coming..."

An unusual pairing of well-known characters or scenes, for example, make us laugh at the imagined conflict. Other examples of visual irony include the casting of humans as animals or cyborgs as humans. We often laugh over situational irony in which actions have an effect that is contrary to what was expected. This often happens in the case of a coincidental backlash, where the odds of such an unexpected scene spoiler are infinitely low.

#4 Surprise Twist

Surprise twist causes us to laugh as we witness or experience a change in course. Stemming from the Theory of Incongruity, this concept entertains us through a distracting segue. Mentally, we

are asking ourselves: "...Where did this come from?"

This surprise twist can be realized in the form of visual anomalies (e.g., sudden appearances, changes or revelations) or conceptual incongruities (e.g., storyline twists or unexpected responses). In each case, we detect a mismatch with what we expect to occur next. Research suggests that we laugh when our minds anticipate a certain outcome, only to be tricked at the end with a wrong or uneventful answer.

#3 Perceptual Discords

Perceptual Discords come in at number three on the list. Like exaggeration, discords represent a form of comic wit. But instead of showing extremes, they show us something out of touch. Stemming from the Theory of Incongruity, this concept entertains us by contrasting what we see with what is routinely expected. Mentally, we are asking ourselves: "Did I see that correctly?"

This perceptual discord can be realized in the form of visual anomalies like impersonations, eccentric behaviors or bizarre substitutions. In each case, we detect a mismatch with common perceptions. Some of the top viral videos show unconventional routines or unusual settings surrounding the highlighted activity. In other cases, the viral videos make us laugh when we imagine a human depiction of abstract concepts or literal interpretation of idioms.

#2 Putdown Mockery

Mockery comes in at number 2 on our list. This technique capitalizes on our emotional reaction to watching others experience a well-deserved putdown. Stemming from the Theory of Superiority, we often experience sudden glory when dethroning others or elevating ourselves at the expense of others' peculiarities. Of the viral videos featuring putdowns, most include mocked peculiarities, lofty conquests, society satires or stereotyping.

One technique used in putdowns taps into our desire to dethrone the self-righteous, the popular, the pretentious and the hyper-masculine. Some of the top viral videos show scenes of humbled haughtiness featuring those we despise or compete against.

#1: Exaggeration

Hyperbole, is the number one attention getter among all humor techniques used in viral YouTube videos. Dating back centuries as a comic device, it suggests that laughter results from seeing things out of sorts.

Many brands and small companies have capitalized on the visual side of exaggeration. Seeing the visual anomaly, our brains often ask: "can that really be true?" Some of the most popular comic devices used in this form of wit include the display of supernatural performances, motion distortion, exaggerated body reactions and incredible allure.

So have we left anything out? What type of humor do you feel most comfortable using for your audience?

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