

EFFECT OF HUMOUR IN ADVERTISING: A GENDER BASED STUDY IN BENGALORE

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores a gender based analysis of the effect of humour in advertising. The objective of this study is to identify if introduction of humour in advertisements has proved to be beneficial for a brand and to understand the preferred kind of humour men and women have of advertisements which can further help analyse purchase decisions made by consumers. The study aims to analyse the specific type of humour preferred by both genders and whether a humorous advertisement is enough to persuade a consumer to purchase a product. The research problem involves the target audience's misjudgement of the advertisement; element of humour to could be subjective when looked at the same gender. A quantitative methodology is consumed where information is derived from a survey methodology. Theoretical background of the study involves the Incongruity theory (Arthur Schopenhauer) and the Relief theory (Sigmund Freud). Major findings of the study include: men prefer comparison being used in ads where as women prefer the use of silliness more and addition of humour only enhances the quality of the advertisement and is a useful tool to gain consumers attention. Thus the papers recommendations include: exploring other media used for advertisements, using larger samples for a more solid analysis and exploring the relationship between advertisement and the purchase decision of consumers.

Keywords: Advertising, Brand Recognition, Gender, Humour, Purchase Decision.

1. INTRODUCTION

Advertising is considered the easiest forum for selling ideas and products. It ensures acceptance, sale and usage of the product or idea being advertised. Advertising has a great influence on our lives. More than 600\$ billion is spent on worldwide advertising each year (Malefyt, 2018). Being the only element of the promotional mix employed to enhance selling of a product or service, it often takes special prominence in the overall marketing mix design due to its high visibility and persuasiveness (Jumppanen, 2009).

1.1 Definitions of Advertising

Etymologically, the word advertising is derived from the Latin word, 'ad verte', which means to turn to or draw attention. America's Marketing Association (AMA) defines advertising as, 'Any paid form of non-personal presentation of ideas, goods, and services by an identified sponsor'. Frank Jerfkin's definition of advertising is "the means by which we make known what we have to sell or what we want to buy". According to this definition, advertising is all about communicating the products with the sole aim of selling the products (Tyagi & Kumar, 2004).

1.2. Purpose of advertising

Essentially advertising is informing consumers about various products available in the market for consumption. Paid publicity sponsored by the advertiser, advertising is mass communication of messages bearing on goods and services and has several characteristics which includes, being an important element of the marketing mix which consists of 4P's (price, product, promotion and physical distribution) advertising is a part of the promotional activity (Tyagi & Kumar,2004). The basic purpose of advertising is to inform groups of people expected to purchase a product or service.By carrying the message and creating demand, advertising stimulates sales and reaches consumers quickly and effectively.

1.3. Importance of advertising

Advertising is a form of communication informing, persuading and reminding consumers of the qualities of the product (Malefyt, 2018). Advertising creates demand, retains the market for established products and increases the use of the product and image building of the producers. It helps develop the marketing systems and makes new products familiar to customers and helps middlemen increase their profits in the expansion of sales and assesses consumers' needs and wants so that suitable products may be provided for them (Tyagi & Kumar, 2004).

1.4. Origins of advertising in the world

The origins of advertising lie thousands of years in the past. The first advertisement was in the form of stencilled inscriptions bricks prepared by the Babylonians about 3000 years before Christ. Printed advertisements played no big role in advertising up until Johannes Guttenberg invented the printing press in the year 1445 (Tellis & Amber, 2007).

From the 1840's to 1900's the industry expanded, especially in the United States where many commissions and boards were set to regulate advertising. With technological innovations, radio was the new medium adopted to carry out ads. The growing popularity of television as an important media of mass communication and recreation had contributed greatly in bringing about this situation and also provided the much needed momentum to advertising business. With passage of time, advertising assumed an important position as a means of mass communication in industrial societies. It not only generated greater sales but also played an active role in boosting the images of companies (Tyagi & Kumar, 2004).

1.5. Origin of advertising in India

Advertising in India goes back to the Indus Valley civilization where relics of Harappa and Mohenjodaro. In India, the earliest forms of advertising was in the form of propaganda, used for religious purposes where the emperor Ashoka of Kalinga set up rock and pillar edicts all over the Indian Territory between 563 and 232 B.C (Nair, 2013). India newspapers became popular from the year 1780 onwards and print advertisements gained popularity as they were printed in different vernacular languages. Soon the governments started a gazette of their own where all government advertisements in different provincial languages were printed (Tandon, 2018).

Radio was gaining popularity at this point where AIR (All India Radio) started telecasting programmes by the year 1936 to deal collectively with the government agencies and the advertisers (Nair, 2013). Television soon empowered it. India's digital advertising market has grown at a fast pace of 33% annually between 2010 and 2015, while spending as a percentage of total advertising increased to 13 % or nearly US\$ 1 billion in 2015. The rapid growth of social media and the mobile Internet is changing ways that businesses reach out to their customers and even more importantly how customers are influencing and shaping companies and their brands (Tandon, 2018).

1.6 Humour in advertising

Humour is the tendency of particular cognitive experiences to provoke laughter and provide amusement. The term derives from the humoral medicine of the ancient Greeks, which taught that the balance of fluids in the human body, known as the humours, control human health and emotion. Oxford dictionary defines humour as the quality of being amusing or comic, especially as expressed in literature speech. Advertising humour works best with established and commonly purchased products. Humour is used in about 30% of all advertisements these days. The success of humour as an advertising tactic is based on three factors which include the fact that it causes consumers to watch/read, laugh and remember, they most often remember humorous advertisements in recall tests and lastly humour is culture bound and can rarely be internationalized.

1.7 Objectives

1.7.1 General objectives

1.7.1.1. Identifying if humour played a role in the purchase decision of a product for men and women separately.

1.7.1.2. Examining if introduction of humour in ads has proved to be beneficial for an advertisement in general.

1.7.2. Specific objectives

1.8.2.1. To study the preferred kind of humour men and women have of advertisements

1.8.2.2. To validated the application of the seven types of humours as studied by Codruta Catanescu and Gail Tom.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1. Types of Humour

Catenescu, C. & Tom G (2001) studied the types of humour used in television and magazines, helping managers understand when and when to not use humour. The study was set to determine whether the type of humour used in advertising varied by medium. The scholars defined 7 types of humour: **Comparison**- This is putting two or more similar or dissimilar elements together to produce a humorous situation; **Personification**- Attributes human characteristics to animals, plants and objects; **Exaggeration**-Is magnifying or overstating something out of proportion.; **Pun**- Using elements of language to create new meanings from the same word or situation, resulting in humour; **Sarcasm**- Blatant ironic responses to situations; **Silliness**- Ranges from making funny faces to ludicrous situations; **Surprise**- Includes all advertisements where humour arises from unexpected situations.

The results of the study showed that television advertisements use more humour in their commercials than print advertisements. This study improvises on Catenescu's and Tom's study to understand the preferences of various types of humour among both genders.

2.2. Effects of Humour in Advertising

Zhang (1996) conducted a study to investigate the effect of individual differences in need for cognition on humour's influence on persuasion in advertising. The objective was to find out when the need for cognition is low, does the presence of humour in an ad positively influence persuasion and when the need for cognition is high, does humour have less influence on persuasion. The results of the study indicated that the effect of humour in advertising is moderated by levels of audience members' need for cognition. The sample unanimously judged the humorous ads as humorous and thought the manipulation of humour was effective. Results also suggest that the effect of humour on attitude towards the brand can be mediated by attitude towards the ad.

2.3. Responses to Humorous Ads

George M Zinkhan and Yong Zhang (2006) conducted a study to understand the responses to humour and whether or not the audience involvement matters. The argument is that, for the success of advertising humour, what is crucial is the knowledge of what function humour plays and the process through which humour may influence advertising persuasion. It was found that the effect of humour on attitude towards the brand is mediated by attitude towards the ad when humour serves as a peripheral cue under low involvement. Results from this study also indicate that humour is indirectly persuasive in influencing the attitude of a brand.

2.4. Humour and Memorability

The research by Hansen, Strick, Hooghuis, Wigboldus and Barren (2009) was designed to address how humour influences memory by conducting three different studies.

2.4.1. Study 1: The scholars conducted a test to see if humour in actual advertisements leads to better memory for the advertisements themselves (which were humour-related) but reduces memory for products (which were humour-unrelated) on a cued recall measure. The results support the hypothesis but it doesn't give a solid conclusion because the humorous and control advertisements differed on both humour and the promoted products.

2.4.2. Study 2: In this study, the Stroop task according to MacLeod (Hansen, Strick, Hooghuis, Wigboldus and Barren, 2009), was the tool to measure the accessibility of brand names in memory. This study was conducted to provide first evidence that humour might interfere with accessibility of product names in a Stroop task. As expected the brand names that had been presented in humorous advertisements were less accessible in memory than brand names that had been presented in control advertisements.

2.4.3. Study 3: This study involved the scholars to measure conscious recognition and unconscious familiarity of previously presented brand names independently of each other by using an adaptation of Jacoby's theory (Hansen, Strick, Hooghuis, Wigboldus and Barren, 2009, p.141), process-dissociation procedure, which is crucial to separate conscious and unconscious memory processes when testing the impact of humour on these components. The results suggest that humour distracts consumers from consciously, but not unconsciously,

remembering the brand names. Strong humour produced interfered with memory whereas moderate humour did not.

2.5. Impact of Humour in Advertising

Weinberger & Gulas (1992) studied about humour and attention, humour and comprehension, humour and persuasion, humour and source credibility and humour and liking in this study and provide several new facts: 1) Humour does not harm comprehension. 2) The nature of product affects the appropriateness of a humour treatment. 3) Humour does not enhance source credibility. 4) Humour enhances liking. 5) Related humour is superior to unrelated humour. 6) Audience factors affect humour response. 7) The nature of the product affects the appropriateness of a humour treatment. Though humour is used with many types of products, it's use is more successful with existing rather than new products.

2.6. Working with Humour

Riecken & Hensel (2012) studied the themes that fall under this category which include the impact of humour on advertising objectives, relatability to audience characteristics. The purpose of this study was to analyse the response to humorous advertising in relation to advertising audience characteristics, specifically their humour orientation and gender, and to determine whether a pattern, where differences emerge, exists. Results of all the hypothesis concluded that those with a greater humour appreciation found the commercials more humorous and those with the lowest humour appreciation found them the least humorous. It was found that men prefer and relate to humour in advertisements more than women.

2.7. Theories of Humour

Raskin's theories (1985) on humour seek to understand what made a humour ad, humours, which included the Incongruity theory, Incongruity- Resolution theory and a Script based semantic theory.

2.7.1. Incongruity Theory: This theory helps understand the element which elicits humour is, incongruity, which is incompatibility or inappropriateness.

2.7.2. Incongruity-Resolution Theory: The theory points out to the fact that when perceivers met with an incongruity, they are motivated to resolve it either by regaining information in the joke or from their own information.

2.7.3. Script-Based Semantic Theory: This theory assumes that "humour can be set up to match the intuitive ability people have to distinguish between funny and unfunny text." Results of this study suggested that message content in humorous advertising may vary along different product dimensions. Implications through these findings showed humour to be the most popular element in television advertisements and that humour is most often used for low involvement/ feeling products.

2.8. Dimensions of humour

According to Fugate(1998), the frequency with which humour appears and the enthusiasm of its supports is not always justified by empirical measurement of results. He concludes that sense of humour is multidimensional and that it contains at least the following six dimensions, which include, humour production, a sense of playfulness, the ability to use humour to achieve social goals, personal recognition of humour, appreciation of humour and use of humour as an adaptive mechanism.

3. METHODOLOGY

The primary data is collected through structured questionnaire from a sample of 100 respondents (50 male and 50 female) from Bangalore. The secondary data is collected from various research articles, journals and books.

3.1. Theoretical Framework

The theory used for this research is the incongruity theory which suggests that humour arises when things that do not normally go together, replace logic and familiarity. Another theory is the relief theory, where laughter is shown as relieving an accumulation of nervous energy.

3.2. Hypothesis

The study will be focused on proving the following hypothesis by conducting a research with an accurate method.

3.2.1. Men and women prefer a certain kind of humour in advertising

3.2.2. Introduction of humour in ads has proved to be beneficial for a brand

3.2.3. Humour has influenced the purchase decision of men and women separately.

3.3. Method

The questionnaire is divided into four parts where first you have the respondents' details, second is about humorous advertisements, third is the individual brand study and fourth, is to analyse the preference of humour of each gender.

3.4 Data Collection

The quantitative data sample selected consisted of 100 individual responses. The sample size was based on the individuals of Bangalore. An online questionnaire was made on Google forms and the link was passed on through the medium of Whatsapp. Stratified sampling is used for the study, as the strata included recognition of gender and the questionnaire was sent out to people aged 15-40.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

4.1. Discussion and Findings

4.1.1 Gender of the respondents

One of the major focus was to have equal number of male and female responses. 50 respondents of each gender that is, male and female have been combined to show the total number of responses in the chart.



Chart 1: Gender

4.1.2 Age of the respondents

Age	Male Responses	Female Responses
18-24	41	40
25-32	9	9
33-40	Nil	1
Grand Total	50	50

Table 1: Age

The above table shows us that the highest male and female responses are aged between the years 18-25 followed by the age group of 25-32.

4.1.3 Profession of the respondents

Profession	Male	Female	Grand Total
Brand Manager	3	2	5
Digital Marketer	2	2	4
Copy Writer	5	4	9
Student	40	39	79
Home Maker	Nil	1	1
Interior Designer	Nil	1	1
Assistant Manager	Nil	1	1
Grand Total	50	50	100

Table 2: Profession

The combined information of the profession of the respondents show that highest number of responses are students with 79 out of 100.

4.1.4 Do you prefer humour in advertisements?

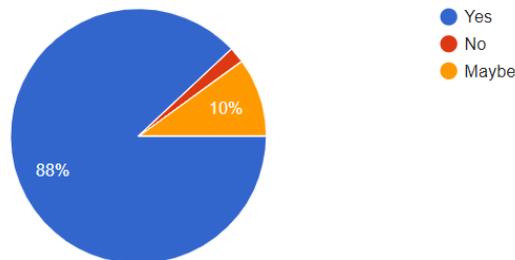


Chart 2: Female Responses

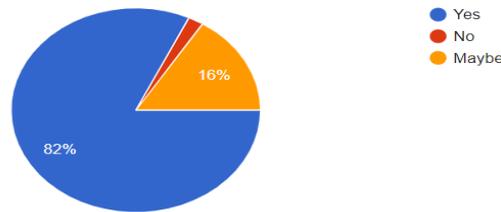


Chart 3: Male Responses

Men (82%) and women (88%) both prefer introduction of humour in advertisements

4.1.5 Brand Recognition and Purchase decision

4.1.5.1. Snickers

a) Are you familiar with the brand?

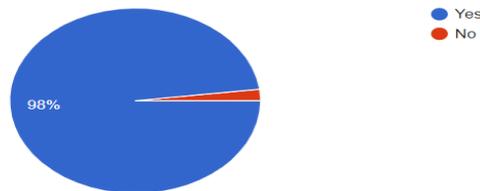


Chart 4: Female response

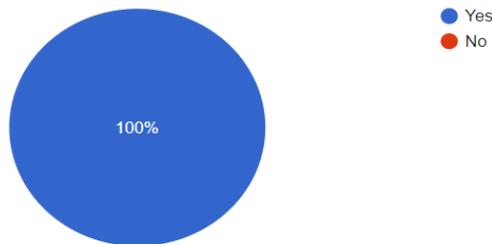


Chart 5: Male response

If yes, the reason being

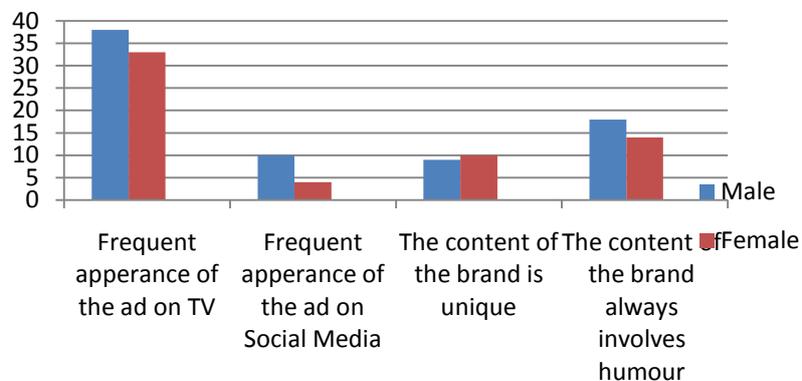


Figure 1: Reason for familiarity

Out of all 100 respondents 99 of them are familiar with the brand snickers and the reason why they are familiar with is mostly because of its appearance on television and the fact that the ads of the brand always involve humour.

b) Do you like the advertisement?

71 out of the 100 respondents like the advertisement.

	Male	Female	Total
Yes	35	36	71
No	15	14	29
Total	50	50	100

Table 3: Likability

If, Yes

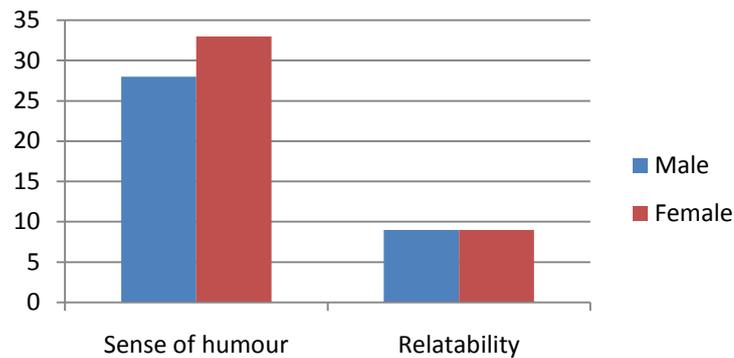


Figure 2: Reason for Likability

If, No

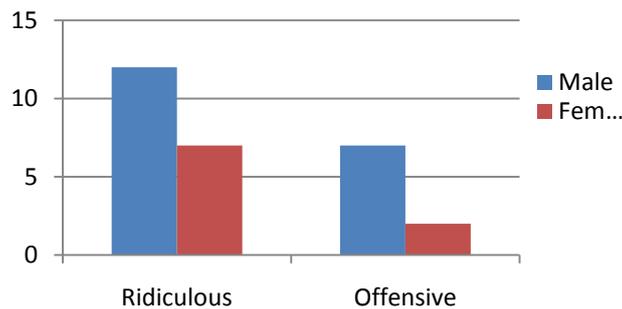


Figure 3: Reason for Disliking

79 respondents liked the advertisement because it involved a sense of humour where as the remaining 21 did not like the advertisement because they found it to be ridiculous. It is observed that women like the ad more than men as 42 out of 50 female respondents like the advertisement.

c) Has the advertisement made you interested in the product?

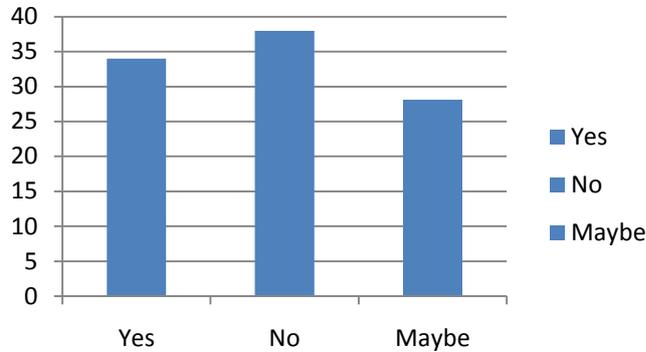


Figure 4: Interest in the product

Inclusive of male and female responses, 34% show interest, 38% do not and 28% are half minded.

d) Has the advertisement influenced you to buy the product? Why?

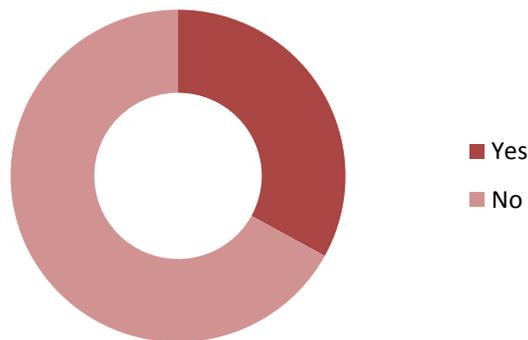


Chart 6: Purchase Decision

It is observed that only 33 out of the 100 respondents are willing to purchase this product by looking at this advertisement.

4.1.5.2. Imperial Blue

a) Are you familiar with the brand?

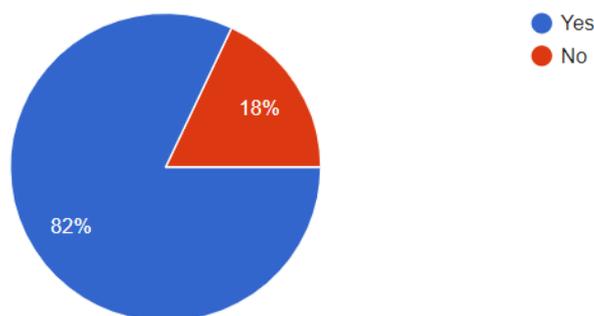


Chart 7: Female response

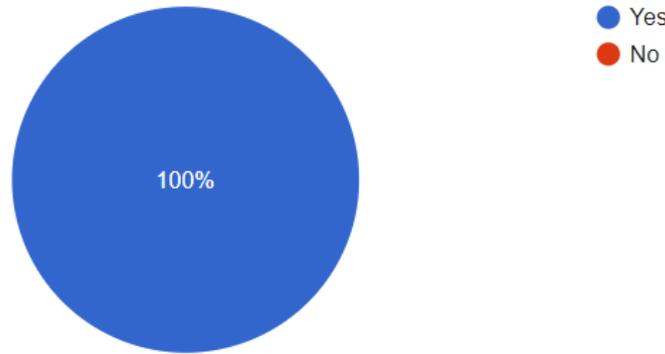


Chart 8: Male response

If, yes, the reason being

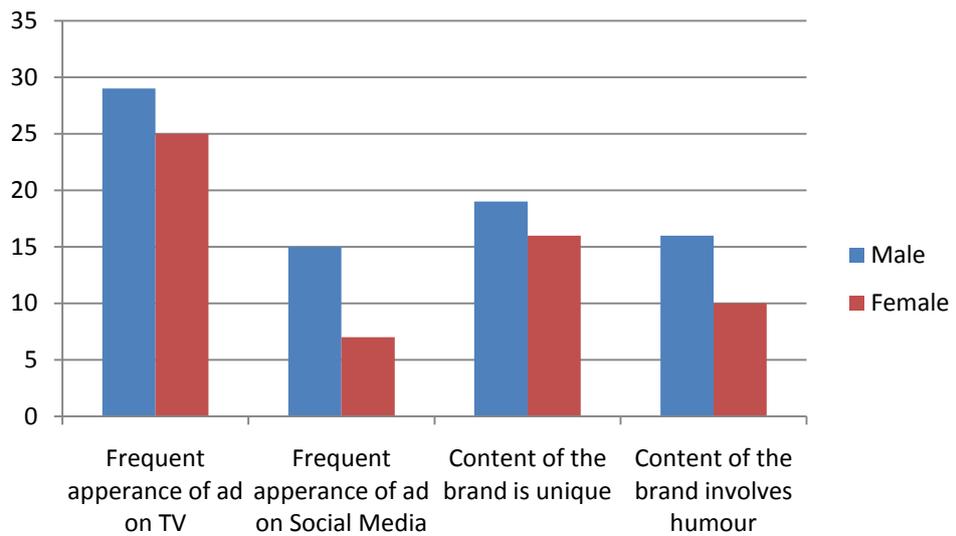


Figure 5: Reason for familiarity

Out of 100 respondents over 90% of them are familiar with the brand because the ad frequently appeared on television and the fact that the ads of the brand are always unique including with humour.

b) Do you like the advertisement?

70% of the population likes the advertisement

	Male	Female	Total
Yes	39	31	70
No	11	19	30
Total	50	50	100

Table 4: Likability

If Yes,

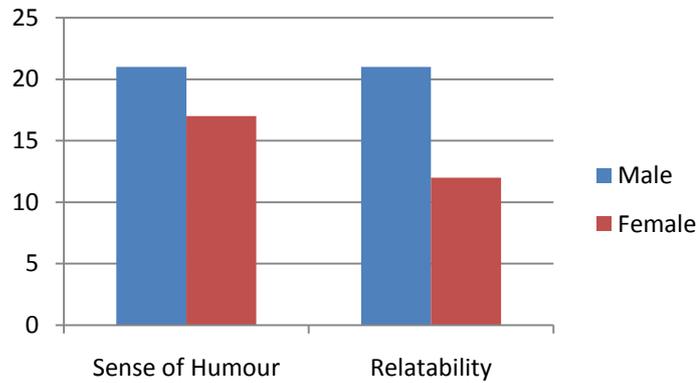


Figure 6: Reason for Likability

If No,

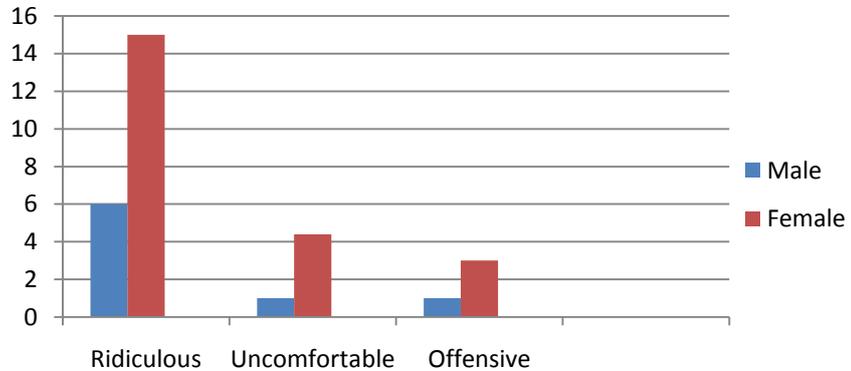


Figure 7: Reason for Disliking

72 respondents liked the advertisement because it involved a sense of humour where as the remaining 28 did not because they found it to be ridiculous, uncomfortable and offensive. It is observed that men like the ad more than women as 42 out of 50 male respondents like the advertisement.

c) Has the advertisement made you interested in the product?

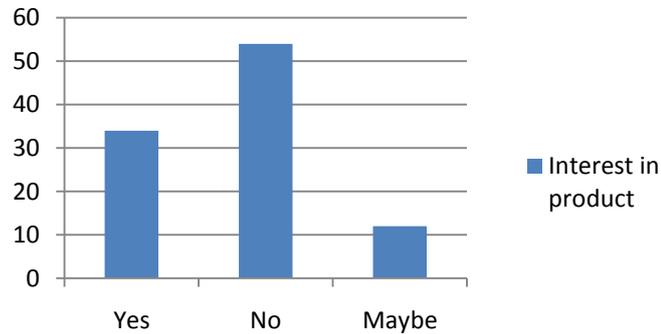


Figure 8: Interest in the product

34% of the combined population shows interest in purchasing the product, 54% do not and 12% are half minded.

d) Has the advertisement influenced you to buy the product? Why?

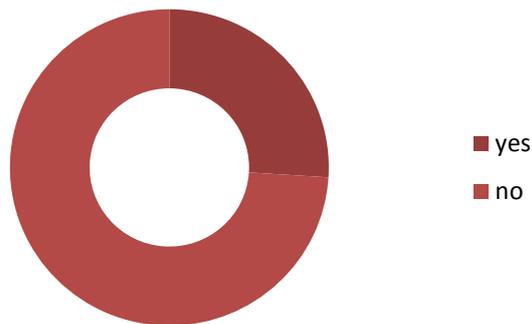


Chart 9: Purchase Decision

Only 26 out of the 100 respondents are willing to purchase this product by looking at this advertisement.

4.1.5.3. Sprite

a) Are you familiar with the brand?

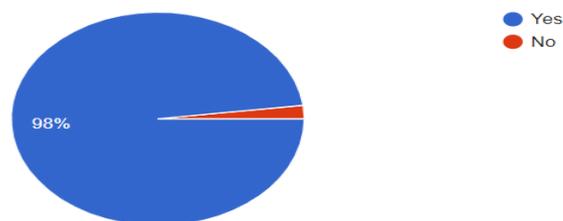


Chart 10: Male Response

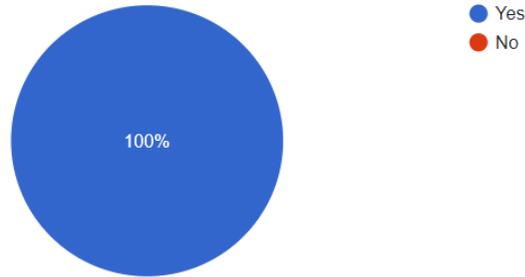


Chart 11: Female Response

If yes, the reason being

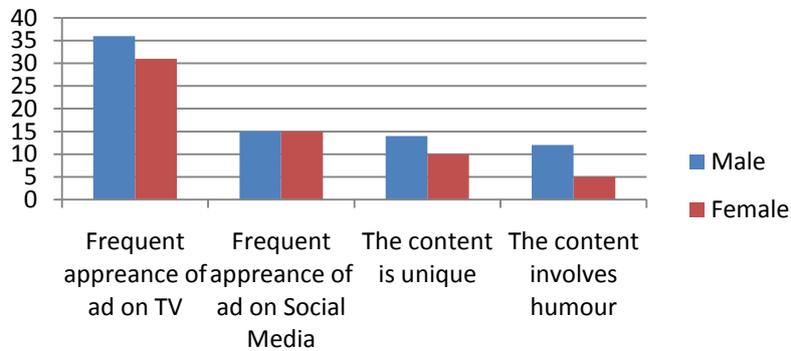


Figure 9: Reason for familiarity

Most of the sample is familiar with the brand Sprite and the reason for familiarity is because of its appearance on television and social media.

b) Do you like the advertisement?

	Male	Female	Total
Yes	39	40	79
No	11	10	21
	50	50	100

Table 5: Likability

79% of the population likes the advertisement.

If Yes,

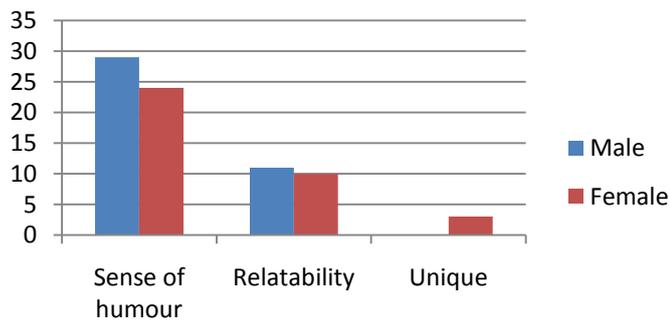


Figure 10: Reason for Likability

If No,

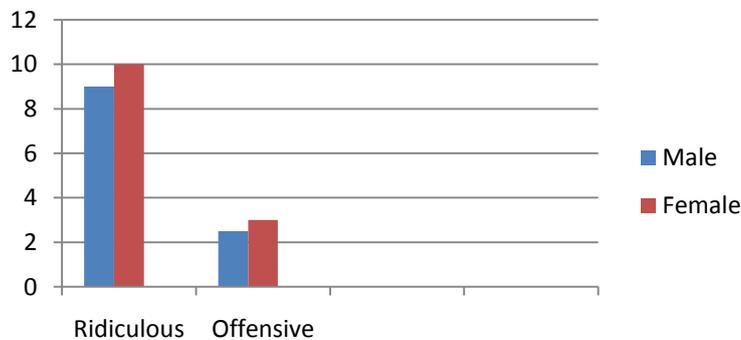


Figure 11: Reason for Disliking

77 liked the advertisement because it involved a sense of humour where as the remaining 23 did not because they found it to be ridiculous and offensive.

c) Has the advertisement made you interested in the product?

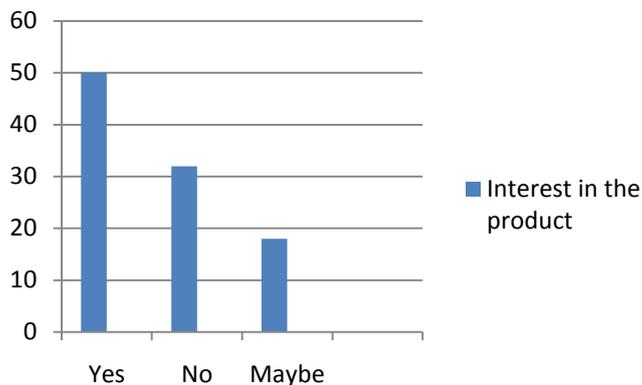


Figure 12: Interest in product

50% of the population shows interest in the product, 32% are not interested and 18% are half minded.

d) Has the advertisement influenced you to buy the product? Why?

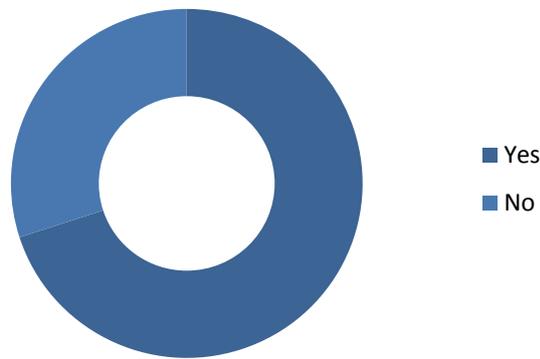


Chart 12: Purchase Decision

70 out of the 100 respondents are willing to purchase this product by looking at this advertisement.

4.1.5.4. Make My Trip

a) Are you familiar with the brand?

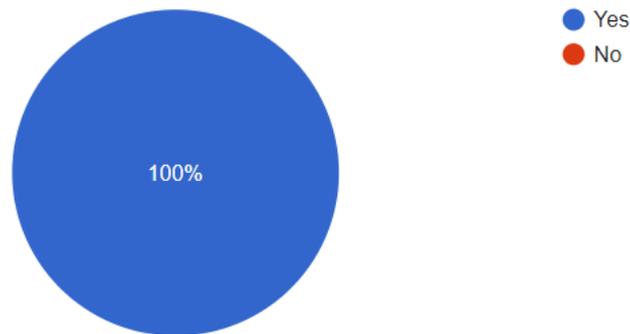


Chart 13: Female response

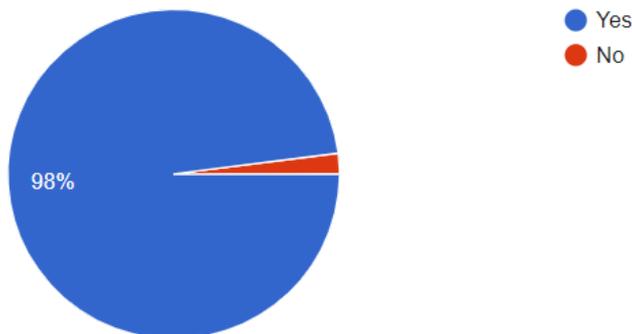


Chart 14: Male response

If yes, the reason being

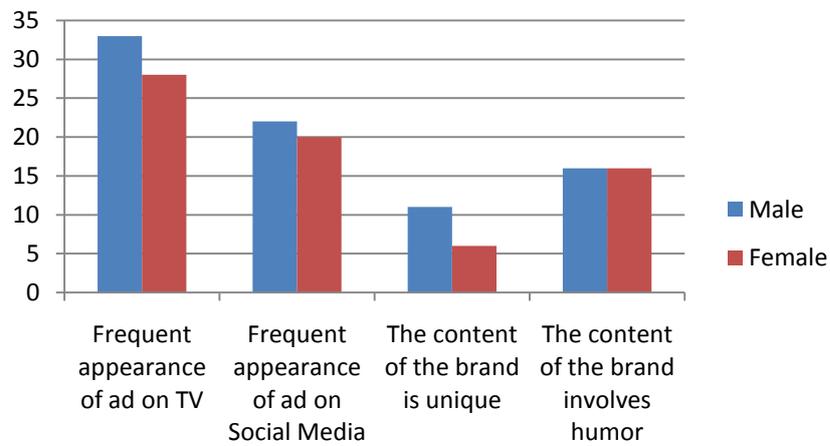


Figure 13: Reason for familiarity

The appearance of the ad on television and the fact that it involves humour is the impression the brand has made on the consumers.

b) Do you like the advertisement?

80% of the population likes the ad

	Male	Female	Total
Yes	37	43	80
No	13	7	20
Total	50	50	100

Table 6: Likability

If yes,

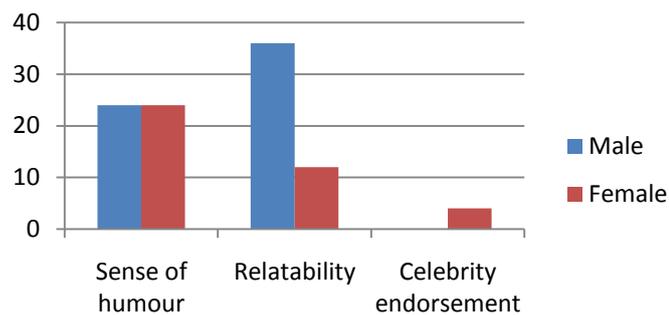


Figure 14: Reason for likeability

If No,

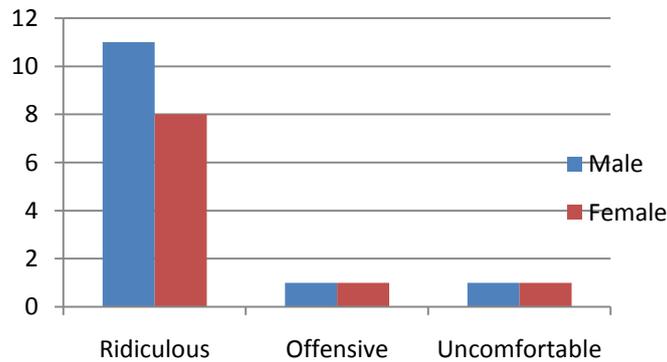


Figure 15: Reason for Disliking

77% of the population prefers the sense of humour introduced the advertisement, 23% find it ridiculous and uncomfortable.

c) Has the advertisement made you interested in the product?

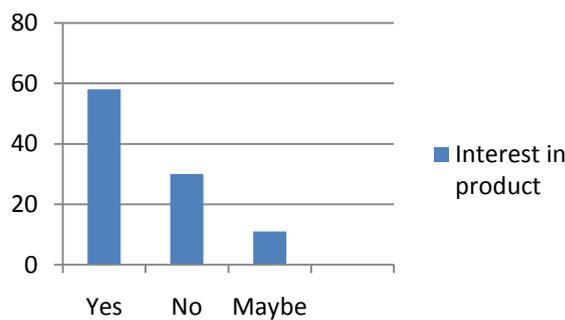


Figure 16: Interest in product

58 respondents showed interest in the product. It is also observed that women show more interest than men in this particular product.

d) Has the advertisement influenced you to buy the product? Why?

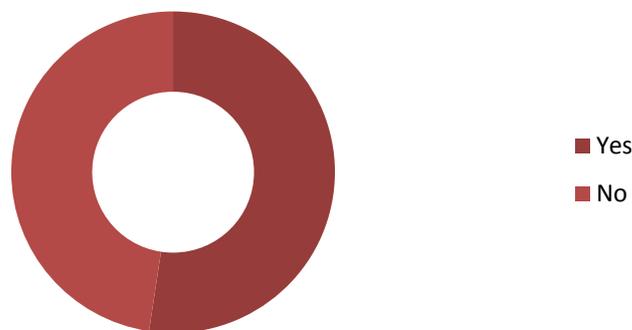


Chart 15: Purchase decision

30% are willing to purchase the product based on the advertisement.

4.1.5.5. 5 Star

a) Are you familiar with the brand?

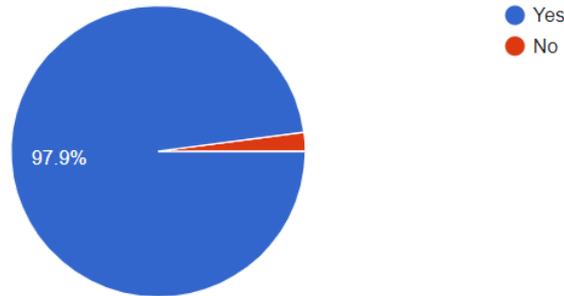


Chart 16: Female response

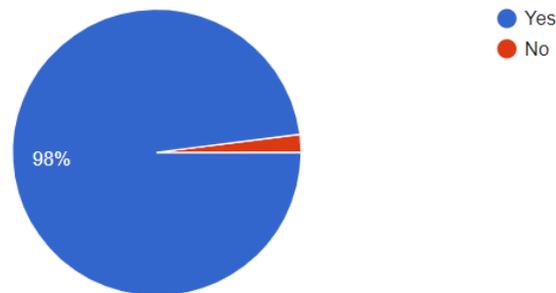


Chart 17: Male response

If yes,

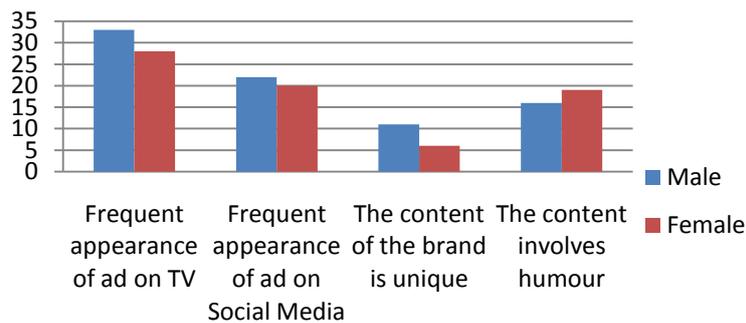


Figure 17: Reason for Familiarity

The respondents are familiar with the advertisement because of its frequent appearance on television and social media.

b) Do you like the advertisement?

80% of the population likes the advertisement

	Male	Female	Total
Yes	37	43	80
No	13	7	20
Total	50	50	100

Table 7: Likability

If yes,

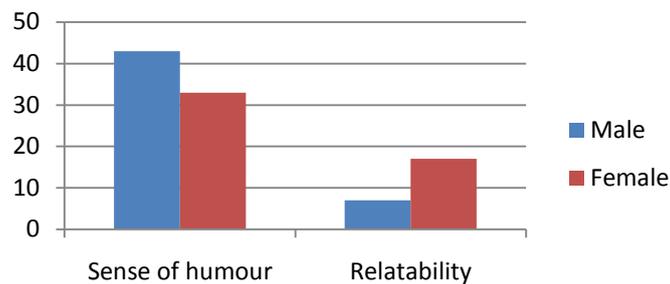


Figure 18: Reason for Likability

If no,

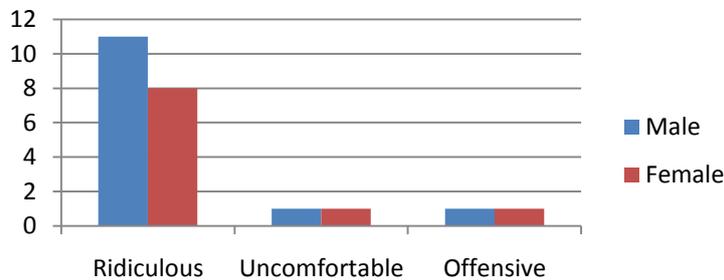


Figure 19: Reason for Disliking

67% of the population likes the ad because of the introduction of sense of humour the remaining 24% think it's ridiculous and uncomfortable.

c) Has the advertisement made you interested in the product?

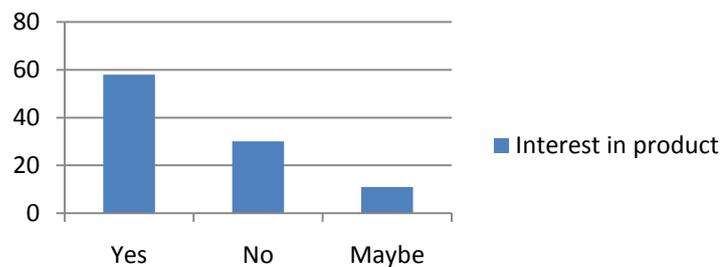


Figure 20: Interest in product

57% out of the 100 respondents seem to be interested in the product, 32 % are not and 14% are still contemplating.

d) Has the advertisement influenced you to buy the product? Why?

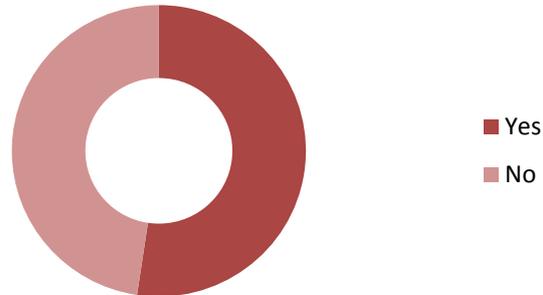


Chart 18: Purchase decision

55% of the population is willing to purchase the product by looking at the advertisement.

4.1.5.6. Virgin Mobile

a) Are you familiar with the brand?

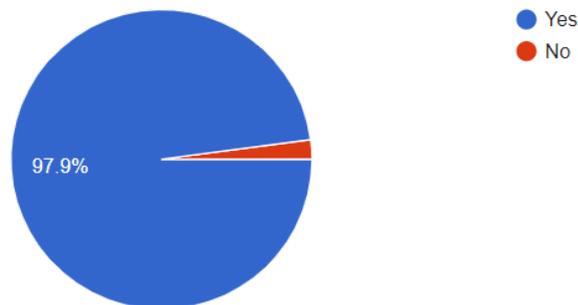


Chart 19: Female response

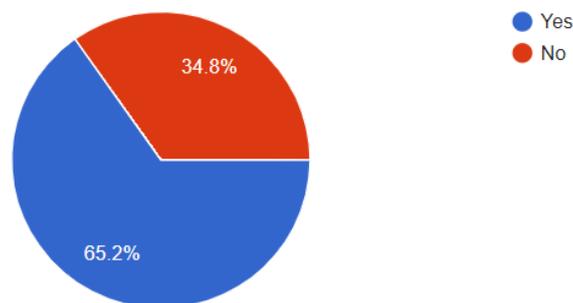


Chart 20: Male responses

If yes, the reason being

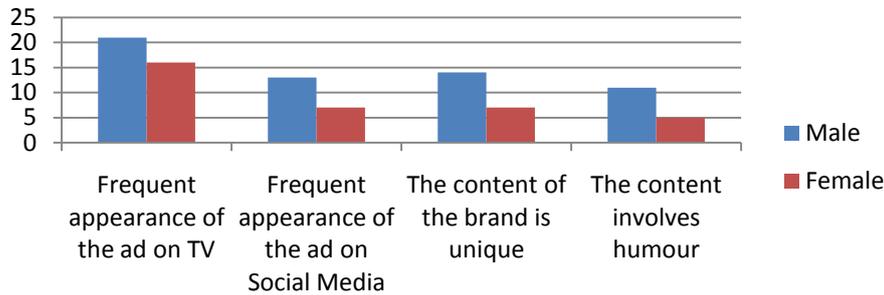


Figure 21: Reason for Familiarity

37 respondents like the ad because of its uniqueness and humours content due to the frequent appearance of the ad on television and other social media platforms.

b) Do you like the advertisement?

Out of 100 respondents 67 like the advertisement

	Male	Female	Total
Yes	34	33	67
No	16	17	33
Total	50	50	100

Table 8: Likability

If No,

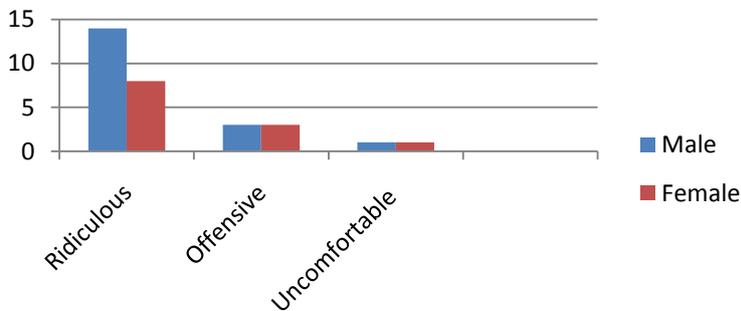


Figure 22: Reason for Disliking

If Yes,

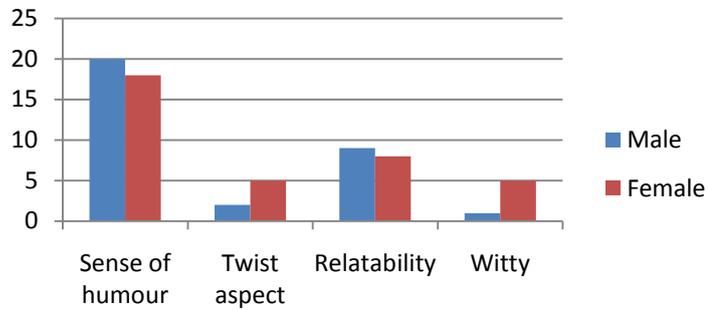


Figure 23: Reason for Likability

66% of respondents seemed to be interested in the product because of the element of surprise and relatability shown in the advertisement.

c) Has the advertisement made you interested in the product?

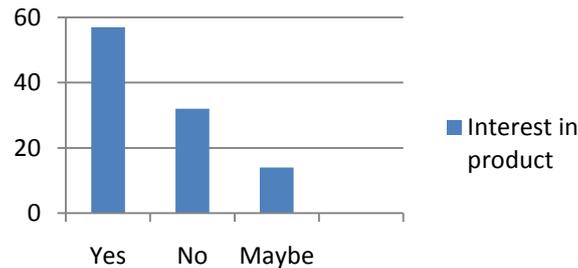


Figure 24: Interest in product

52% of the population is interested in the product because of the element of surprise.

d) Has the advertisement influenced you to buy the product? Why?



Chart 21: Purchase Decision

The advertisement proved to be interesting but only 13% of the population is willing to purchase the product.

4.1.5.7 Durex

a) Are you familiar with the brand?

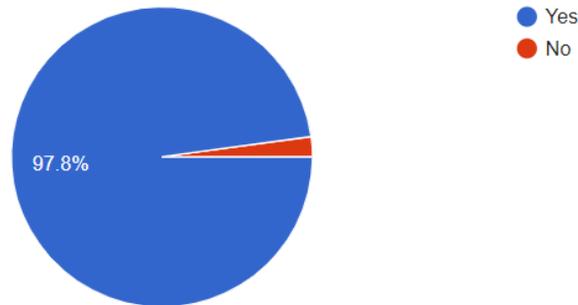


Chart 22: Male Response

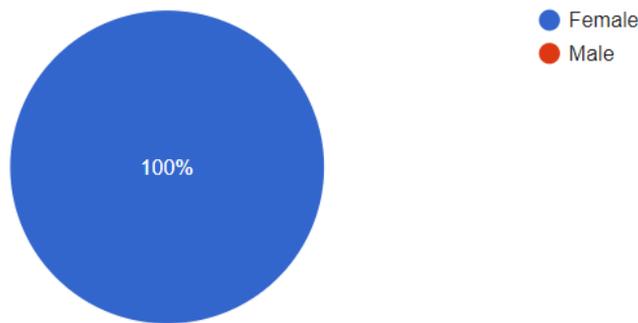


Chart 23: Female Response

If Yes,

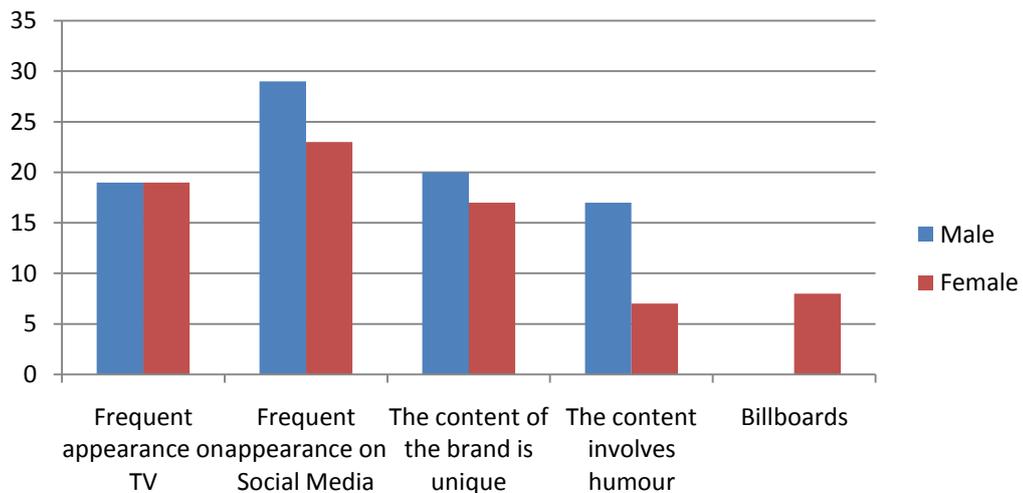


Figure 25: Response to familiarity

Most of the population is familiar with the brand due to their social media pages.

b) Do you like the advertisement?

80% of the respondents like the advertisement

	Male	Female	Total
Yes	42	38	80
No	8	12	20
Total	50	50	100

Table 9: Likability

If Yes,

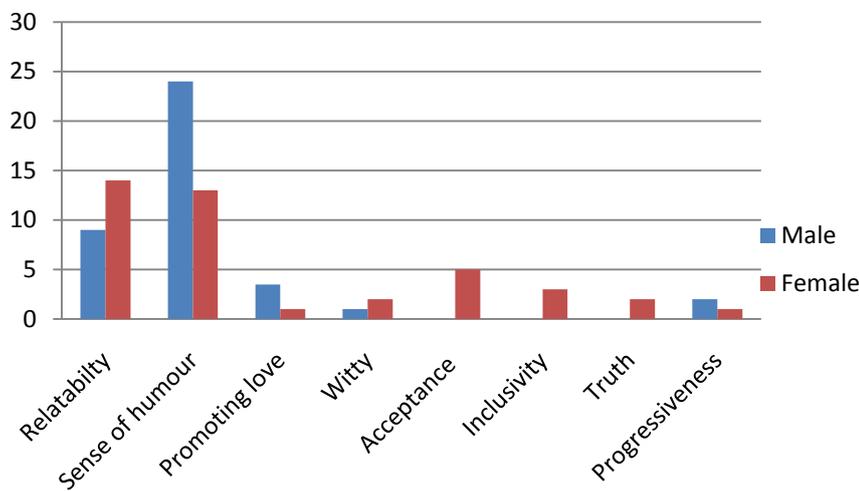


Figure 26: Reason for Likability

If, No

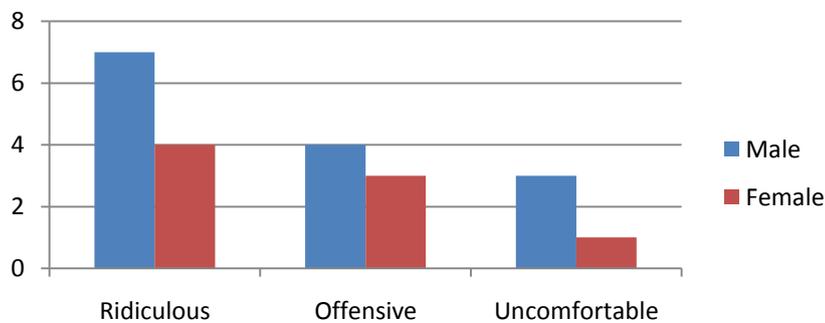


Figure 27: Reason for Disliking

Out of 100 respondents 76% find the advertisement to be full of humour, wittiness and inclusivity.

c) Has the advertisement made you interested in the product?

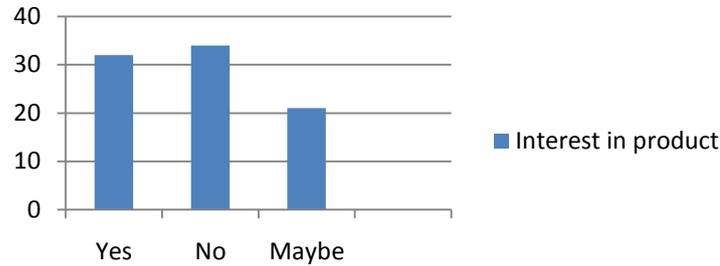


Figure 28: Interest in product

19% of the population is willing to purchase, 52% are not willing to purchase, 15 % have a half mind.

d) Has the advertisement influenced you to buy the product? Why?

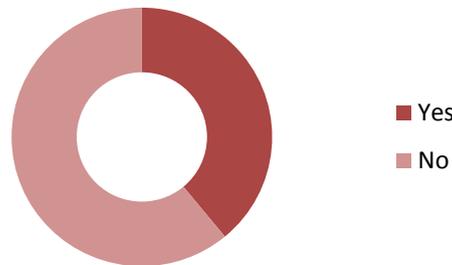


Chart 24: Purchase Decision

Out of the total population 39% is willing to buy the product.

4.1.6. Element of humour - Gender Preference

Brand	Type of Humour	Female (Frequency)	Male (Frequency)
Snickers	Exaggeration	3	4
Imperial Blue	Comparison	4	5
Sprite	Personification	1	2
Make My Trip	Sarcasm	3	2
5 Star	Silliness	6	4
Virgin Mobiles	Surprise	3	1
Durex	Pun	1	2

Table 10: Preference analysis

It can be concluded that the combined sample understands only Exaggeration, Personification, Silliness, Surprise and Pun. When it comes to the preference of humour for each gender it is observed that men prefer comparison and women prefer silliness.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Following are the findings and concluding remarks of the paper

5.1.1 Female respondents prefer silliness the most followed by comparison and exaggeration where as the men prefer comparison the most, after which they seem to prefer exaggeration and silliness as seen in table 12.

5.1.2 Humour is seen to make most of the sample interested in the product. From chart 4 and 5 it can be observed that 88% of the male sample and 82% of the female sample prefer introduction of humour in an advertisement.

5.1.3 30.5% female respondents and 37.4% male respondents are interested in purchasing the product after looking at the advertisement, showing that only 34% of the total sample is influenced to make a purchase.

5.2 Recommendations

5.2.1. Explore new methods of understanding purchase decision of consumers

5.2.3. Other media can be used to determine the objectives of the same study, better.

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