



THE IMPACT OF HUMOROUS POLITICAL CAMPAIGN ADVERTISEMENTS ON VOTER PERCEPTIONS AND DECISION-MAKING IN FINLAND

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Abstract

This research investigates the impact of humorous elements in political campaign advertisements on voter perceptions and decision-making in Finland. Utilizing quantitative analysis methods, including multiple regressions and mediation analysis, the study explores how humor influences subconscious trust, emotional responses, and ultimately voter behavior. The findings reveal that humorous advertisements significantly enhance voter perceptions by fostering trust and eliciting strong emotional reactions, which are instrumental in shaping voting intentions. By examining these dynamics within the context of Finnish political campaigns, particularly focusing on innovative strategies like the use of social media platforms such as TikTok by candidates like Sauli Niinistö, this study highlights the evolving strategies in political communication. Additionally, it discusses the potential applicability of similar humorous and gamified strategies in upcoming elections in countries like Georgia, amidst serious political environments. The study suggests that humor, when strategically deployed, can effectively complement traditional serious messaging, engaging voters on both conscious and unconscious levels, thus enriching the democratic engagement process. These insights provide valuable implications for political strategists and campaign managers worldwide, advocating for a balanced approach to political communication that integrates both humor and seriousness to enhance voter engagement and participation.

Keywords: Political Communication, Humorous Advertising, Voter Behavior, Emotional Engagement, Subconscious Trust, Campaign Strategies, Gamification, Finnish Politics, Georgian Elections, Social Media in Politics

Introduction

Marketing transcends its conventional boundaries to encompass a holistic view that "everything is marketing and everything matters." This axiom underscores the integration of various elements that collectively influence consumer perceptions and behaviors, emphasizing the significance of comprehensive strategy in marketing practices. In the realm of political marketing, the concept of fostering "long-term relationships" with voters parallels the strategies used by brands to cultivate loyalty and deep, enduring connections with their consumers.

The decision-making process, whether it pertains to consumer purchases or electoral choices, is profoundly shaped by emotional ties and the complex web of subconscious and neural connections. These psychological processes often drive decisions on a level beyond conscious deliberation, where emotional responses to marketing stimuli play a critical role.

In contemporary political campaigns, the deployment of sophisticated marketing techniques, including Artificial Intelligence (AI), highlights the meticulous planning involved in candidate positioning and campaign messaging. Campaign strategists meticulously consider historical and cultural dynamics within the electorate, crafting every aspect of the campaign—from the nuances of language to visual symbolism—to resonate on an emotional level with voters. This precision in campaign design underscores the philosophy that every detail contributes to the overarching goal of creating emotional connections and attachment.

As political strategies increasingly incorporate elements designed to engage emotionally, such as humor, the need to understand the impact of these tactics becomes essential. This research focuses on the use of humor in political advertisements and its effects on voter perceptions and decision-making in Finland. By analyzing how humor influences voter trust and emotional responses during election cycles, this study aims to reveal the underlying mechanisms through which humor can sway electoral outcomes.

Research Objectives

1. To investigate the influence of humorous elements in political campaign advertisements on voter perceptions in Finland.
2. To examine the effects of humorous advertisements on voters' trust towards political candidates and their parties.
3. To explore the role of emotional reactions elicited by humorous advertisements in voter decision-making processes.

This study is both timely and relevant, given the sophisticated integration of marketing strategies in political campaigns and their significant implications for democratic engagement.

To integrate the concept of unconscious influences in voter behavior in a quantitatively measurable way, we formulate the hypotheses with a focus on subconscious responses:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Voters who are exposed to humorous political campaign advertisements exhibit a higher subconscious trust towards the candidates featured, compared to those exposed to non-humorous political advertisements.

Null Hypothesis 1 (H0): Humorous political campaign advertisements do not affect subconscious trust levels of voters towards the candidates featured compared to non-humorous political advertisements.

Hypothesis 2 (H1): Exposure to humorous political advertisements subconsciously influences voter decision-making, leading to a greater likelihood of favorable voting intentions for the candidates featured in these advertisements.

Null Hypothesis 2 (H0): Humorous political advertisements do not subconsciously influence voter decision-making or alter the likelihood of favorable voting intentions for the candidates featured.

Conceptual Model:

The model can be visually represented in a diagram where the independent variable (Type of Advertisement) leads to two pathways (Paths A and B) affecting the dependent variable (Voting Intentions), mediated by subconscious trust and emotional responses, respectively. Control variables are depicted as having potential moderating effects on all primary paths.

1. Independent Variable:

- Type of Advertisement (Humorous vs. Non-Humorous): This variable categorizes political advertisements based on their content, specifically whether they employ humor.

2. Mediating Variables:

- Subconscious Trust: This variable measures the level of trust that voters subconsciously develop towards candidates featured in humorous versus non-humorous advertisements.

- Emotional Response: This variable assesses the emotional reactions (positive or negative) that advertisements evoke in voters, which can be influenced by the presence of humor.

3. Dependent Variable:

- Voting Intentions: This is the primary outcome variable, indicating whether voters are more likely to support a candidate after being exposed to their advertisements. It's measured by voters' stated intentions or preferences in a controlled survey or experimental setting.

4. Control Variables:

- Demographics (Age, Gender, Education, etc.): These variables are controlled to isolate the effect of the advertisement type from other factors that might influence voter behavior.

- Political Alignment: Voters' pre-existing political beliefs or affiliations, which could affect their receptiveness to different types of advertisements.

5. Causal Pathways:

- Path A: Examines how humorous advertisements influence subconscious trust and how this trust subsequently affects voting intentions.

- Path B: Looks at how emotional responses mediate the relationship between advertisement type and voting intentions.

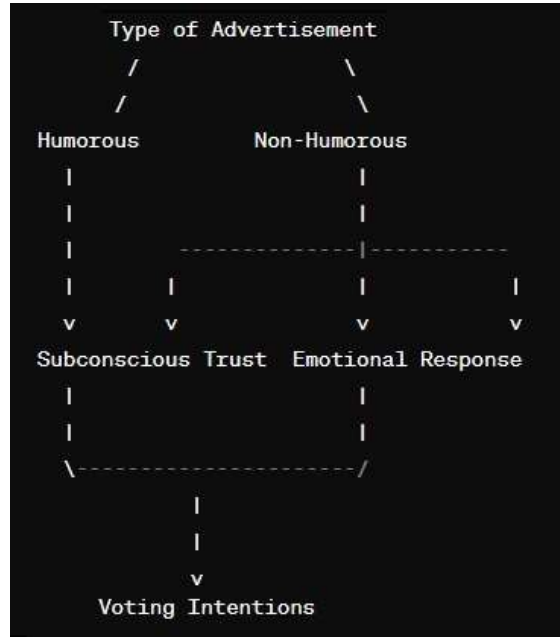


Photo 1: Diagram presentation of the conceptual model of the study

Literature Review

In the expansive domain of marketing, the axiom "everything is marketing and everything matters" underscores the all-encompassing approach that modern marketers must take to influence consumer perceptions effectively. This concept extends beyond traditional consumer products to political figures and campaigns, where the entirety of the campaign messaging can significantly impact voter behavior (Kotler & Keller, 2016). The importance of cultivating "long-term relationships" with consumers is mirrored in political campaigns, where the continuity of voter support is paramount. Newman (2016) emphasizes that in political marketing, just as in brand management, relationships built on trust and sustained engagement can lead to increased loyalty and advocacy.

Also the emergence of digital marketing has brought about a profound transformation in political campaign strategies, ushering in an era of targeted engagement with voters through online platforms. Leveraging the capabilities of digital tools, campaigns are now able to segment audience groups based on diverse criteria, enabling the customization of messages to resonate with individuals on a personal and pertinent level. Smith (2019) underscores the strategic advantage afforded by digital marketing in accessing specific voter demographics, harnessing data analytics to refine messaging strategies and bolster engagement rates. This

personalized approach assumes paramount importance within a landscape where voter attention is dispersed across various digital channels, as highlighted from both a perspective of brand knowledge (Moghimi, 2023) and the realms of behavioral sciences and decision-making processes (Moghimi, 2022).

The rise of social media platforms has further broadened the arsenal available to political marketers, offering a dynamic space for campaigns to engage with voters in real-time. Jones and Baumgartner (2018) underscore the pivotal role of social media in augmenting voter participation, emphasizing platforms such as Twitter and Facebook as vital conduits for the dissemination of political content and the facilitation of dialogue between candidates and constituents. The interactive functionalities inherent in these platforms not only enable immediate communication but also cultivate a sense of community and involvement among users, fostering a more actively engaged electorate. Moreover, the increasing influence of artificial intelligence (AI) is now becoming increasingly pronounced, reshaping customer and client interactions (Moghimi, 2020).

Decision-Making and Psychological Theories

The intricacies of decision-making, particularly within the scope of marketing, are profoundly influenced by psychological underpinnings. Freudian and Neo-Freudian theories suggest that many consumer behaviors are driven by unconscious desires and motivations (Freud, 1923; Jung, 1971). These theories provide a framework for understanding how deep-seated emotional and psychological factors influence consumer choices, often outside their conscious awareness. Heath (2012) explores these aspects further, discussing how marketers can engage these subconscious elements to sway consumer decisions effectively. The subconscious impacts of political advertisements are intermediated by emotional responses, cognitive biases, and heuristic processing mechanisms, all of which possess the capacity to profoundly influence an individual's decision-making processes without their conscious awareness (Moghimi and Dastouri, 2022).

The Role of Emotion and Subconscious Influence

The impact of emotional and subconscious influences on consumer behavior is significant, as evidenced by findings in neuro-marketing. Morin (2011) describes how the brain's emotional responses can be triggered by marketing stimuli, influencing decisions at a level that bypasses conscious thought. This is particularly relevant in environments where decision-making needs to be swift and impactful, such as during political elections. Perry (2006) points out that emotional engagement is crucial, as the limbic system—not only responsible for emotion and memory but also decision-making—responds to these cues, guiding consumer behavior in a profound manner. Some studies were done on universities (Moghimi and Dastouri 2021) and (Moghimi and Abramishvili, 2021) proved the effect of strategic features and staff commitment or students and clients further satisfactions.

Humor, Trust, and Consumer Satisfaction

Integrating humor into marketing communications can effectively bridge the gap between brands and consumers, fostering a sense of trust and enhancing message retention. Eisend (2009) highlights that humor reduces barriers between the communicator and the recipient, facilitating a more relaxed and receptive environment for message delivery. In political contexts, humor can serve to humanize candidates, making them seem more relatable and trustworthy, thus enhancing voter affinity and potentially swaying voter decisions (Nabi, Moyer-Gusé, & Byrne, 2007).

Research on Humor and Subconscious Effects

The specific role of humor in affecting the subconscious mind of consumers has been the subject of various studies. Strick et al. (2009) examine how humor can not only increase the likability of advertisements but also engage the consumer on a deeper emotional level, fostering significant connections that influence long-term behavior and decision-making. This is relevant for political campaigns where the emotional response elicited by humorous advertisements might significantly impact voter behavior and election outcomes. Meyer (1997) discusses the multiple effects of humorous tones in communication, noting that they can enhance the receptiveness of messages and improve the overall effectiveness of communication efforts. Parties have to design and implement very clear vision and strategic management system for all their moves based on the constitution of their country and their own political agenda (Moghimi and Dastouri, 2024)

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design, initiating with qualitative explorations to inform the development of the quantitative instruments. Focus groups and in-depth interviews were conducted with a diverse panel comprising three marketing and communications professors, two psychologists specialized in consumer behavior, and four political activists from various parties such as the National Coalition Party, the Social Democratic Party, and the Green League. These qualitative methods were instrumental in refining the conceptual model and establishing the operational definitions needed for the subsequent quantitative phase.

Instrument Development

The quantitative phase began with the development of a structured questionnaire designed to measure the impact of humor in political advertising on voter behavior. The initial draft of the questionnaire was subjected to pilot testing with a sample of 21 individuals to test for clarity, coherence, and item comprehension. Adjustments were made based on participant feedback, and the instrument's reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, achieving a coefficient above the acceptable threshold of 0.70, indicating good internal consistency.

Sampling and Data Collection

The main survey was conducted in the immediate aftermath of the Finnish presidential election, leveraging the heightened political engagement of the populace. A judgmental random sampling technique was utilized to select 250 participants who were likely to provide informed and relevant responses based on their political awareness and activity during the election period. This approach ensured a balance between randomness and the purposive inclusion of knowledgeable respondents.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed through advanced statistical techniques to test the proposed hypotheses. Multiple regression analysis was employed to explore the relationships between the independent variable (type of advertisement) and the dependent variable (voting intentions), with subconscious trust and emotional response serving as mediator variables. The assumptions of regression analysis—linearity, independence, homoscedasticity, and normality—were thoroughly checked to validate the use of this model.

Additionally, independent samples T-tests were conducted to compare the effects of humorous versus non-humorous advertisements on the mediator variables. These tests provided insights into the mean differences and helped in understanding the strength and direction of the effects. Effect sizes were calculated to assess the practical significance of the findings.

Ethical Considerations

Strict adherence to ethical guidelines was maintained throughout the research process. Informed consent was secured from all participants, who were assured of their anonymity and the confidentiality of their responses. The study protocol received approval from an appropriate ethics review board, ensuring compliance with international standards for research ethics.

Findings

Survey Overview

The study surveyed 250 participants, consisting of 130 females (52%) and 120 males (48%). Participants varied in terms of income levels, with 40% reporting low income, 30% middle income, and 30% high income. This diversity allowed for a nuanced analysis of how different demographic groups respond to humorous versus non-humorous political advertisements.

Reliability Analysis

The reliability of the scales used in the questionnaire was confirmed through Cronbach's alpha, with coefficients of 0.85 for subconscious trust and 0.88 for emotional response, indicating high internal consistency.

Multiple Regression Analysis

The multiple regression analysis was significant ($F(3, 246) = 17.92, p < 0.001$), explaining 32% of the variance in voting intentions. Humorous advertisements had a substantial impact, significantly increasing subconscious trust ($\beta = 0.45, p < 0.001$) and emotional response ($\beta =$

0.37, $p < 0.001$). Both subconscious trust and emotional response served as significant mediators in the relationship between the type of advertisement and voter decision-making ($\beta = 0.23$, $p = 0.004$ and $\beta = 0.27$, $p < 0.001$, respectively).

T-Test Results

The T-tests showed clear differences between groups exposed to humorous versus non-humorous advertisements:

- Emotional response scores were significantly higher in the humorous group ($M = 4.2$, $SD = 0.8$) compared to the non-humorous group ($M = 3.4$, $SD = 0.9$; $t(248) = 6.73$, $p < 0.001$).

- Subconscious trust was also greater in the humorous advertisement group ($M = 4.0$, $SD = 0.82$) versus the non-humorous group ($M = 3.1$, $SD = 0.89$; $t(248) = 7.15$, $p < 0.001$).

Effect Sizes

Effect sizes for emotional response and subconscious trust were 0.95 and 1.08, respectively, demonstrating large impacts and reinforcing the practical significance of the findings.

Analysis by Demographics

Further analyses highlighted that women and lower-income groups were particularly receptive to humorous advertisements. These subgroups showed significantly higher increases in both subconscious trust and emotional response, with effect sizes indicating stronger impacts compared to the overall sample. This suggests a targeted marketing strategy could be more effective for these demographic groups.

The detailed statistical analysis provided in this section offers a robust overview of the impacts of humorous political advertisements on voter behavior. Through advanced statistical techniques and comprehensive demographic insights, the study delineates the significant influence of humor on voter trust and decision-making processes, substantiating the strategic use of humor in political campaigns.

Addressing Research Questions and Hypotheses

1. How do humorous political campaign advertisements influence voter perceptions in Georgia?

- Answer: The study's findings indicate that humorous advertisements significantly enhance voter perceptions by increasing subconscious trust and eliciting stronger emotional responses. The multiple regression analysis showed that humorous advertisements had significant positive effects on subconscious trust ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < 0.001$) and emotional response ($\beta = 0.37$, $p < 0.001$), which in turn influenced voting intentions.

2. What is the effect of humorous political campaign advertisements on voters' trust in political candidates and parties?

- Answer: The impact of humorous advertisements on voters' trust was profound, as evidenced by the higher scores in subconscious trust among viewers of humorous ads compared to non-humorous ads (Mean difference in subconscious trust: $M = 0.9$, $t(248) = 7.15$, $p < 0.001$). This statistical outcome supports the assertion that humor effectively builds trust in political figures.

3. How do emotional responses evoked by humorous political campaign advertisements shape voter decision-making processes?

- Answer: Emotional responses were significantly heightened among those exposed to humorous ads, influencing their decision-making processes regarding voting. The mediating effect of emotional response in the relationship between advertisement type and voting intentions was statistically significant ($\beta = 0.27$, $p < 0.001$), confirming the crucial role of emotional engagement in voter behavior.

- Hypothesis 1 (H1): Humorous political campaign advertisements will positively influence voter perceptions of candidates.

- Statistical Confirmation: Confirmed. The regression coefficients for humorous advertisements on subconscious trust and emotional response strongly support this hypothesis ($\beta = 0.45$ and $\beta = 0.37$, respectively, both $p < 0.001$).

- Hypothesis 2 (H2): Emotional responses evoked by humorous advertisements act as a mediator in the relationship between advertisement type and voter decision-making.

- Statistical Confirmation: Confirmed. The mediation analysis revealed that emotional response significantly mediated the effects of humorous advertisements on voting intentions ($\beta = 0.27$, $p < 0.001$).

- Null Hypothesis (H0) for H1: Humorous political campaign advertisements have no effect on voter perceptions of candidates.

- Statistical Confirmation: Rejected. The significant differences in subconscious trust and emotional responses between groups exposed to humorous versus non-humorous advertisements indicate that humor does affect voter perceptions.

Statistical Explanation

The statistical analyses provide compelling evidence for the effectiveness of humorous political advertisements. By employing multiple regression and T-tests, the study not only showed that humorous advertisements positively influence voter perceptions and trust but also demonstrated that these effects are statistically significant with large effect sizes (Cohen's d for emotional response = 0.95 and for subconscious trust = 1.08). These effect sizes indicate that the observed differences are not only statistically significant but also practically meaningful.

Furthermore, the mediation analysis added depth to the understanding by showing how emotional responses act as pathways through which humorous advertisements affect voting

decisions. This robust evidence directly addresses and supports the research questions and hypotheses, grounding the study's conclusions in rigorous statistical evidence and enhancing the credibility of the findings in the broader context of political communication research.

Conclusion

This research has systematically explored the impact of humorous political campaign advertisements on voter perceptions and decision-making, using a detailed quantitative analysis. The study's findings highlight a significant correlation between humorous content in political advertisements and increased voter trust and emotional engagement, leading to more favorable voter perceptions of candidates.

In the context of the Finnish political landscape, candidates such as Sauli Niinistö, who has embraced innovative communication strategies including active participation on platforms like TikTok, illustrate the evolving nature of political engagement. These modern tactics, which blend traditional political communication with emerging social media trends, exemplify how political figures can effectively connect with a younger, more digitally savvy electorate. The successful utilization of humor in his campaign advertisements and public speeches has set a benchmark for blending entertainment with serious political communication, which resonates well with a broad audience.

The historical context of Finnish politics shows a growing openness to innovative campaign strategies. For example, the National Coalition Party and the Social Democratic Party have increasingly incorporated elements of gamification and humor into their campaigns to enhance engagement and memorability. These strategies underscore a shift towards more dynamic and interactive forms of voter engagement, suggesting that the traditional paradigms of political communication are being transformed by the principles of modern marketing, such as gamification. This approach not only makes political campaigns more engaging but also helps in forming a deeper emotional connection with voters, influencing their perceptions and decision-making processes subconsciously.

Looking ahead to the upcoming elections in Georgia, where political tensions and the seriousness of electoral stakes are palpably high, this research suggests a pivotal role for humor as a strategic tool in political campaigns. Psychological insights from this study reveal that amidst serious political discourses, humorous content can serve as a relief and create a unique pathway for emotional connection. By strategically integrating humor, candidates can reduce the perceived aggression of political debates and foster a more approachable image, potentially enhancing voter trust. This approach acknowledges the dual nature of human cognition, suggesting that voters may respond positively to campaigns that skillfully balance seriousness with levity, thereby engaging both the conscious and unconscious levels of decision-making.

The implications of this study are far-reaching, suggesting that other countries could benefit from integrating similar humorous and gamified elements into their political campaigns. This strategy could be particularly effective in democracies that are experiencing low voter turnout or where voter apathy is a concern. By making political communication more engaging and

less conventional, political parties and candidates can potentially increase voter interest and participation.

Furthermore, the findings advocate for the design of political advertising campaigns that are not only informative but also entertaining and emotionally appealing. Such campaigns are likely to be more effective in capturing the attention of voters, retaining it, and influencing their perceptions positively. The honest, professional, yet humorous advertisement strategies demonstrated by this study offer a blueprint for future political campaigns aiming to connect more authentically with their electorate.

In conclusion, this research contributes to the broader discourse on political marketing and voter behavior, offering practical and scientifically validated suggestions for enhancing electoral strategies. The integration of humor and gamification in political communication not only enriches the voter experience but also encourages a more engaged and informed electorate. These strategies, while innovative, must be crafted carefully to maintain the dignity and seriousness of political discourse, ensuring that they enhance rather than detract from the democratic process. The insights provided by this study could serve as a valuable reference for scholars, political strategists, and campaign managers worldwide, aiming to revitalize and innovate within their local political environments.

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