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Nick Eckman

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Effects of Humor use by Brands and their Parody Accounts on Twitter

Nick Eckman

Thesis submitted
to the Reed College of Media
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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science in
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Julia Daisy Fraustino, Ph.D., Chair
Elizabeth Cohen, Ph.D.
Rita Colistra, Ph.D.
Geah Pressgrove, Ph.D.

Reed College of Media

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ABSTRACT

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Nick Eckman

This study examines the impact of humor use by brands and brand parody accounts on Twitter. Specifically, this research investigates how the type of humorous message and the message source influence perceptions of the brand, behavioral intentions toward the brand, and perceived parasocial interaction with the brand. It also examines the relationship between gender and perceptions of humor. Accordingly, this study uses a 2 (humor: wordplay vs. disparagement) x 2 (source: brand account vs. parody account) between-subjects online experiment to answer these questions. Key results suggest that parody Twitter accounts, particularly those using disparagement-style humor, may be advantageous to the real brand in terms of viewers’ purchase intentions and intentions to spread positive word of mouth about the real brand. Yet, brands’ own use of disparagement-style humor on Twitter could lead to lower purchase intentions in comparison. However, regardless of message source, people tend to perceive disparagement humor as more humorous than wordplay humor.
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Introduction

A commercial begins with a scene of Betty White playing football and getting tackled by a large man. Betty White enters the huddle after the play as her teammates begin calling her Mike and scrutinizing her for her poor play. She then eats a Snickers candy bar and it is revealed Betty White was actually a man named Mike, but he was playing poorly because he was hungry. The tagline for the commercial: “you’re not you when you’re hungry” (Snickers, 2010).

The use of humor is not new to the field of strategic communications. Advertisers have consistently used the appeal, and, according to Beard (2005), one fifth of television ads utilize humor. Humor is not only used by for-profit companies, however. In a 2011 study that examined Twitter use by nonprofits, Waters and Jamal (2011) found that more than 10% of appeals involved humor. This use of humor is not confined to nonprofits, either, as many other brands have taken to this strategy. The Wendy’s Twitter account, for instance, is a pertinent example of a traditional, for-profit brand using humor on Twitter — to the point where one Mashable author dubbed its social media manager “the sass master” (Gallucci, 2017, para. 1).

Although since its inception Twitter has been a fluid social networking site that many go to for trending topics and entertainment (Rosenstiel et. al, 2015), brands traditionally have used it as an extended support service where they could respond to stakeholders online in real time and engage with those who referenced it (Li, Berens, & de Maertelaere, 2013). Brands still use Twitter in this manner, but they also have undertaken new strategies like employing humorous appeals to reach wider markets and engage with various publics. As previously noted, the fast food restaurant Wendy’s, for example, has taken a disparaging tone to tweet jokes at others’ expenses. In one tweet that received more than 16,000 retweets and 64,000 likes, the account responded to a Carl’s Jr. tweet that poked fun at Wendy’s with “yeah, for one, if we were going
to diss another restaurant, we’d have more than zero likes and RTs after 13 hours” (Wendy’s, 2017). For the purposes of this study, Wendy’s style of humor referenced here is defined as disparagement humor, which is when “one protagonist disparages or aggresses against another” (Oppliger & Sherblom, 1992, p. 100).

The Denny’s Twitter account has used humor but taken a different approach that also has been successful at garnering views and engagement. This brand engages more in wordplay-style humor, which can be defined as “a class of jokes depending on words that are similar in sound, but are used in two different meanings” (Taylor & Mazlack, 2004, p. 1315). This style of wordplay humor as used by Denny’s is exemplified in a tweet that has more than 2,400 retweets and 6,600 likes:

  - tired of country fried steak? try
  - top 40 fried steak
  - adult contemporary fried steak
  - noise punk fried steak
  - vaporwave fried steak (Denny’s, 2017).

These tweets clearly generate attention, but research has yet to explore the effects of such tweets regarding how they affect people’s perceptions of the brand, intentions toward the brand, and sense of parasocial interaction (i.e., the sense of connection a person feels with another person or entity whom they have not met; Horton & Wohl, 1956) with the brand.

Humor on Twitter is not a new concept, and humor coming from sources parodying traditional sources have materialized. There is a parody Arby’s Twitter account, for example, called Nihilist Arby’s, which pretends to be Arby’s and tweets messages like:
It's Columbus Day, so we're gonna sail over to McDonald's, beat the shit out of everyone, wreck the place & call it arbys

Enjoy arbys (Nihilist Arby’s, 2017).

That tweet generated more than 23,000 retweets and 71,000 likes. Similar to humor by the brand itself, although these tweets can generate a great deal of attention, research has yet to explore how different types of humor by brand parody accounts affect people’s perceptions of the brand being parodied, intentions toward the brand being parodied, and parasocial interaction with the brand being parodied. Therefore, two of the driving purposes of this work are as follows: the first is to determine how, if it all, the type of humor (disparagement or wordplay) from a brand’s Twitter account influences viewers’ responses, and the second is to determine how if at all, the type of humor (disparagement or wordplay) from a brand’s parody Twitter account influences viewers’ responses to the parody account as well as the actual brand it is paroding.

To provide a foundation for the current experiment’s two overarching questions, the next chapter reviews literature in public relations and humor theory, and how these fields have studied relevant variables. The next chapter also examines how these fields relate to one another.

**Literature Review**

**Public Relations**

This study focuses on the field of public relations and how companies and brands interact and build relationships with their publics. The Public Relations Society of America defines public relations as, “a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics” (2012, para 5). Trying to manage a brand’s image and cultivate its relationships is paramount in taking care of and understanding the brand, and endeavoring to do so, the field of public relations has officially existed for nearly 100
years (SEO-PR, n.d.). Edward Bernays is often credited with creating the field in the 1920s, but the idea of public relations existed well before him. For example, Ivy Lee, who worked for John D. Rockefeller in the early 1900s, is credited with inventing the press release (Kennedy, 2010).

Since its inception, public relations has grown extensively, and as technology has improved, so too have many aspects of public relations. Now public relations scholars study topics as wide ranging as how public relations relates to urban planning (Ashworth & Voogd, 1990), to how it relates to perceptions of renewable energy in the United Kingdom (Cass, Walker, & Devine-Wright, 2010), to how a public relations social media campaign centered on a zombie apocalypse might help the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention influence Americans’ emergency preparedness (Fraustino & Ma, 2015). Most recently, there has been a litany of research involving how new, online media affect public relations, and notably, how social media affect public relations (Wilcox, Ault, & Agee, 2006).

**Public Relations and Online Engagement.** The emergence of internet and Web 2.0 has allowed for increased feedback on online messaging channels, and public relations professionals have focused on how to drive online engagement with their publics (Brown, 2009). Kelleher (2009), for example, found that online engagement has allowed the Red Cross to more easily build relationships with donors, volunteers, and the media. Of particular interest to this study, researchers like Wirtz et. al (2013) have found that online interaction with brands has led to stronger perceived associations with said brands. In fact, Brodie et. al (2013) found that increased online engagement with a brand led to “satisfaction, empowerment, connection, bonding, trust and commitment” (p. 105). In the same study, the authors also found that certain techniques also led to more engagement; for example, they found that information quality was important in driving online brand engagement. The present study builds from this line of
research and examines the role certain humorous messaging techniques might play in facilitating online engagement, specifically on social media.

**Public Relations and Social Media.** As technology has advanced, so too has public relations. With the emergence of social media specifically, professionals have been able to instantly relay their message to mass quantities of people (Ad Week, 2016). Social media has become one of the most widely used tactical tools. A 2010 survey by Curtis et. al found that 404 out of 409 nonprofits used some form of social media. But as with online engagement, social media in public relations is not only contained to nonprofits; Mangold and Faulds (2009) argued that social media should be added to the marketing mix for businesses as well. The authors made clear that developing a social media strategy was important for businesses, and they also made clear that certain strategies that promoted communication between customers were beneficial. The authors described this phenomenon as a type of social media word-of-mouth and argued marketers should take advantage. As mentioned, humorous appeals can generate engagement. Thus the current study examines whether humorous appeals shape consumers’ perceptions of the brand, behavioral intentions toward the brand, purchase intentions for the brand, and perceived parasocial interaction with the brand, as will discussed further in upcoming sections.

**Source**

From whom a member of the public perceives a message is coming plays an important role in how the message itself is interpreted, and the effects of a message’s source has been found to affect many variables (Chaiken & Maheswaran, 1994). Simply put for the purpose of the current research, source can be defined as the sender of a message (Kiousis & Dimitrova 2004). This is relevant to public relations because researchers such as Slater and Rouner (1996) have found that source affected people’s perceptions of the credibility and persuasiveness of a
message. In other words, a message might be identical in terms of language, but people still interpret messages differently based on from whom they perceive the messages to be coming. On top of this, Slater and Rouner (1996) determined that the quality of the message itself played a role in determining the credibility of the source. This is relevant to the current study because persuasiveness is an important aspect of the messages that brands try to develop online; after all, brands are trying to sell their products and services. Not only is the source important in persuading and affecting attitudes and behaviors, but the quality of the content also plays a role in the same process. This study deals with humor in messages, so source could be relevant in determining which type of humor is more effective at changing people’s attitudes and behaviors and if quality content from a brand’s parody account might affect attitudes and behaviors as well.

Similarly, source may be a factor in the perception of humor itself (Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield, & Booth-Butterfield, 1995). As will be later discussed, some scholars, such as Meyer (2000), theorize that humor stems from some sort of incongruity or surprise. Therefore, such theory might suggest that humor coming from an actual brand on Twitter might be more surprising and therefore more humorous than humor coming from a parody account because the humor from the actual brand is more unexpected than humor coming from a parody account. However, while theory may point to humor from an actual brand being perceived as more persuasive and humorous, Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield, and Booth-Butterfield (1995), found the opposite effect; they found that perceiving the source itself as humorous beforehand led to perceiving the message as more humorous. While this is a notable finding that may be relevant to the current study, the authors (1995) explored humor coming from face-to-face human sources. That is, participants had to determine whether the human source in front of them had an
orientation toward humor, and it is difficult to predict whether this will translate to brands and
brand parody accounts on Twitter.

**Humor**

*Types of Humor.* Types of humor have been categorized and named differently by
various scholars, and there is no generally recognized taxonomy of humor (Gruner, 1991).
However, when scholars attempt to identify the contexts in which humor is created, they
typically fall into three or four categories. According to Spotts, Weinberger, and Parsons (1997),
for example, there are three generally accepted humor mechanisms: affective mechanisms,
interpersonal mechanisms, and cognitive mechanisms. Affective mechanisms suggest humor can
be derived from straying from the norm and doing the unexpected, interpersonal mechanisms
involve the settings in which humor occurs, and cognitive mechanisms involve the structure of
the message from which humor is interpreted. For the purposes of this study, affective
mechanisms are particularly relevant in understanding disparagement humor, and cognitive
mechanisms are particularly relevant in understanding wordplay humor. This thinking offers that
disparagement humor is more connected with appealing to one’s feelings, while wordplay humor
is more connected to appealing to one’s intellect. Because Twitter is where the humor is taking
place for this study, the interpersonal mechanisms are relevant to both types.

Similarly, while Spotts et. al (1997) put forth three humor mechanisms, Neuendorf
(2010) employed the use of four: disparagement, incongruity, arousal, and social currency.
Disparagement suggests that humor comes from a sense of superiority and originates from
malice, and Neuendorf argued that “putdown humor, satire, sarcasm, self-deprecation, and the
display of stupid behaviors” (p. 1) can be examples of this style of humor. Incongruity is
juxtaposing inconsistencies and is related closely to the incongruity theory of humor, which is
one of the most widely recurring theories and will be discussed more fully later in the literature review. Arousal, which is closely related to the relief theory of humor, comes from a relief in tension. And finally, social currency suggests humor comes from playful interactions and maintaining relationships, and Neuendorf includes parody as social currency. Once again, for the purposes of this study, the types of humor examined will be confined to disparagement and wordplay humor, as these are two of the most popular techniques used by brands on Twitter. As such, disparagement, social currency, and incongruity are of particular relevance. Arousal could be relevant if dealing with a brand that is typically serious or if a brand is trying to engage in a more serious topic from a different angle. This sort of arousal humor would be similar to the Nihilist Arby’s tweet mentioned in the introduction, but exploring this style of humor extensively is beyond the scope of this study.

**Theories of Humor.** Although there are many humor theories, one of the most salient is the incongruity theory of humor, which suggests that humor is derived from taking a rationally learned pattern and violating it in some way (Meyer, 2000). This theory that humor can come from incongruity has been tested, for example, by researchers who explored how people process incongruity by looking at their brains through an MRI (Chan et. al, 2013). They found that certain parts of the brain picked up on the incongruity, which provided evidence for how the brain processed jokes. In many jokes, this can be seen in the punchline; take the following joke, for example: “it’s always hard to explain puns to kleptomaniacs because they’re always taking things literally.” In these sorts of jokes, one does not know where it is going until the punchline. It makes an innocuous, if somewhat confusing, statement that kleptomaniacs do not understand puns, but it is not until the punchline until the reader realizes the joke resides in the definition of
what kleptomaniacs do; the humor comes from the incongruity between the setup and the punchline.

The incongruity theory is not only relevant to traditional punchlines, but it is relevant in many forms of humor. Satire, for example, aims to point out absurdities, which satirists see as incongruous with other logic. In the instance of this study, incongruity is seen in the wordplay humor, such as in the joke about kleptomaniacs and in the Denny’s tweet referenced in the introduction, but incongruity is also created more subtly through defying expectations of what a brand would typically tweet. In this thinking, seeing a brand such as Wendy’s disparage another brand is unexpected, and the incongruity theory suggests that is where some of the humor is derived.

The incongruity theory is one of the most widely used theories in humor research (Martin, 2010), and it is the most relevant theory for the purposes of this study, but there are other prominent theories that could also be relevant. The relief theory, for example, stems from a release in tension, and it is important in disparagement humor because there is typically some sort of friction that leads to the disparagement (Meyer, 2000). In the aforementioned Wendy’s tweet, the friction was between competing fast-food brands, and Wendy’s addressed this by disparaging Carl’s Jr. By calling out this awkward situation and addressing it in a tone that accepts Carl’s Jr. and Wendy’s are competitors. The relief theory suggests the humor was derived from the perception that tension was broken.

**Influences of Public Relations and Humor**

Many factors might influence the effectiveness of humorous techniques in public relations, and humor is undoubtedly used in public relations efforts, but there is surprisingly little research the role humor has in public relations. Motion and Weaver (2005) found that humor,
specifically wordplay humor, might lead to confusion and miscommunication in some contexts, but the depth of contexts in which humor has been studied in public relations is limited. For the purposes of this study as it relates to the use of disparagement and wordplay humor by brands and their parody accounts on Twitter, five potential outcomes factoring into these uses of humor are considered.

**Perceived Humor.** While the two types of humor that are used in this study have been defined by other researchers, humor is a subjective tool, and it is difficult to predict what people will find funny (Martin, 2010). As such, researchers like Duncan, Nelson, and Frontczak (1984) have studied how people perceive humor. By including measures in their research that gauge people’s reactions to humor, they have been able to determine how well humor was received. According to Alden, Mukherjee, and Hoyer (2000), surprise is a “necessary but not sufficient condition for humor” (p. 1). From surprise, a person can have a wide range of reactions, and humor is simply one possible reaction. Surprise as it relates to humor is salient to the current study, as it aims to account for how people perceived humor in tweets, and this is the reason for hypothesis one predicting humor from an actual brand account will be perceived as more humorous than humor from a brand’s parody account. However, this study examines how people react to humor, so assuring that it is perceived as such is crucial. Because of the incongruity theory and the importance of source and breaking expectations, it is predicted that:

**H1:** Regardless of the type of humor used, humor from an actual brand will be perceived as more humorous than humor coming from a brand’s parody account.

In addition to surprise affecting humor, researchers have found that demographics such as sex or gender can predict how people perceive humor differently (Hay, 2000), and results from the current study will contribute to such literature. In fact, many researchers have examined how
gender affects people’s perceptions of humor, finding, for example, that men were more attracted to aggressive, disparagement-style humor (Crawford, 2003) while women were more drawn to nuanced collaborative humor (Holmes, 2006). However, how gender affects the perceptions of humor in tweets has not been extensively studied, and the current work could provide insights for how brands could target men and women differently using either disparagement or wordplay humor. Because of the literature referenced on previous pages, which pointed to men being more drawn to aggressive styles of humor and women being drawn to more collaborative styles of humor that do not disparage others, this study predicts that:

**H2a:** Regardless of message source, men will find disparagement humor more humorous than will women.

**H2b:** Regardless of message source, women will find wordplay humor more humorous than will men.

**Attitudes Toward the Brand.** Researchers often have been interested in understanding how various stimuli affect people’s attitudes toward a brand and how people’s attitudes toward a brand affect various other dependent variables. Lafferty and Goldsmith (2005) studied how a brand partnering with charities and social causes affected people’s attitudes toward the brand, for example, and Dick and Basu (1994) examined how brand loyalty was built through building beneficial attitudes toward a brand. Similarly, Ajzen (1985) theorized that changing attitudes was one of the first steps in changing behaviors. Studying how brands are affected and affect different variables is important to this study because the current study examines how humorous messages affect brands and how source affects the interpretation of humorous messages.

Researchers have studied attitudes toward the brand in many contexts including attitudes toward store brands (Collins-Dodd & Lindley, 2003), how sponsors affect attitudes toward a
brand (Ruth & Simonin, 2003), and how product placement in popular culture affects college student’s attitudes toward brands (Sung & De Gregorio, 2008), to name a few. Gelb and Pickett (1983) examined how humorous appeals in advertisements affected people’s perceptions of a brand, and they found that humor made people more likely to enjoy the advertisement, but they could not directly link that to other variables. While there have been a multitude of studies involving attitudes toward brands, and some such as the aforementioned Gelb and Pickett (1983) study that explored how humor use in advertising affected attitudes toward the brand, few studies have examined how humor use on social media affects people’s attitudes toward brands.

Although humor has not been studied extensively in the context of an online Twitter environment with brands, as exemplified by Gelb and Picket (1983), researchers have had a difficult time linking the use of humor to people’s attitudes toward the brand. It has been done, however, as Eisend (2011) found that an affective model of humor (i.e., humor that appeals to one’s feelings) ultimately translate into altered perceptions of a brand. Therefore, this study hypothesizes that:

**H3:** The use of disparagement humor by an actual brand will lead to the strongest positive attitudes toward that brand, as compared to attitudes from wordplay humor by an actual brand and both disparagement and wordplay humor from a parody account.

**Purchase Intentions.** In public relations, oftentimes campaign goals are related to influencing publics’ behaviors, either in attempts change behaviors or maintain existing behaviors (Grunig, 2013). Similarly, especially in regard to advertising efforts, a brand’s direct goal is often for the advertisement to drive sales, and, as such, many researchers have explored how different messaging techniques and strategies have influenced people’s purchase intentions. For instance, Goldsmith, Lafferty, and Newell (2000) studied how a celebrity endorser’s
credibility affected people’s purchase intentions, and Spears and Singh (2004) directly explored how people’s attitudes toward a brand affected their purchase intentions. As with attitudes toward the brand, research has delved into how humorous appeals in advertising affected the variable, and Smith (1993) discovered that the use of humor disrupted the viewer’s processing and made the ad less effective than when a viewer did not perceive an ad as humorous. However, while Moyer-Gusé, Mahood, and Brookes (2011) found that humor might trivialize important topics, they also found that the use of humor enhanced persuasiveness. Once again, humor as it relates to intentions has not been studied as extensively in terms of public relations communication, and it has not been examined extensively in the context of brands on social media. This study intends to explore the use of humor in non-serious situations, and theory and previous research indicate disparagement humor is more tied to people’s feelings, which suggests that, as discussed in the previous section, disparagement humor is more likely to lead to stronger attitudes toward a brand. This study anticipates the stronger attitudes toward the brand will ultimately lead to higher purchase intentions. Therefore:

**H4:** The use of disparagement humor by an actual brand will lead to the strongest purchase intentions, as compared to purchase intentions from wordplay humor by an actual brand and both disparagement and wordplay humor from a parody account.

**Communicative Behavioral Intentions.** Purchase intentions are a type of behavioral intention, and there are an abundant number of behavioral intentions one could study. For instance, Cronin, Brady, and Hult (2000) measured intentions to recommend and/or repurchase a brand, Morgan and Miller (2002) studied behavioral intentions to donate an organ, and Cunningham and Kwon (2003) explored intentions to attend a sporting event, for a few examples. One of the reasons behavioral intentions are so widely studied is because of their
variability and their overall role in predicting behavior. Behavioral intentions have been described as “the immediate antecedent of behavior” (Ajzen, 1985, p. 1).

According to the theory of planned behavior, “attitude toward the behavior, subjective norm, and perception of behavioral control” all lead to the formation of behavioral intentions (Ajzen, 1985, p. 1). Behavioral intention is not perfect at predicting if a behavior will occur, however, as there are many outside factors that might interrupt the behavior from transpiring (Ajzen, 1985). That said, the theory is not perfect at determining exactly how people will act, but it shows that intentions are excellent predictors, especially for this cross-sectional study, which is not able to investigate people’s actual behavior and actions outside of the context of the questionnaire.

The current study explores people’s communicative behavioral intentions. Specifically, it measures people’s intentions to like a tweet, retweet a tweet, and follow a Twitter account. It also measures people’s intention to spread either positive or negative word of mouth, all popular key performance indicators for social media efforts in public relations (Curtis et. al, 2010). Given the attention the use of humor has garnered for tweets such as those mentioned in the literature review and theory discussed thus far, this study predicts that humor from an actual brand’s account will lead to higher behavioral intentions, and that the use of disparagement humor by an actual brand will lead to the highest levels of behavioral intentions. This prediction is supported by research from scholars such as Pornpitakpan (2004), who found that a relevant message coming from an organization was given more weight than a similar message coming from a third-party source. Thus:
**H5a:** Regardless of humor type, source will influence communicative behavioral intentions such that messages from the actual brand will produce stronger behavioral intentions than will messages from the parody brand.

**H5b:** The use of disparagement humor by a brand will most strongly influence communicative behavioral intentions such that messages from a brand with disparagement humor will produce stronger behavioral intentions than will messages with wordplay humor from a brand or messages with either type of humor from a brand’s parody account.

**Parasocial Interaction.** While behavioral intentions and attitudes toward the brand may indirectly gauge how people feel about a brand, parasocial interactions delves more deeply into this phenomenon. Parasocial interactions refer to “the relationships that media users form with various media personas” (Frederick et. al, 2012, p. 482). This concept has been studied extensively with how people relate to celebrities. For example, Horton and Wohl (1956) introduced the concept in regard to how television viewers perceived relationships with television personas, and more recently, Frederick et. al (2012) explored how Twitter users perceived relationships with celebrity athletes on Twitter. Cohen (2010) also explored how parasocial interactions with media figures were affected by expectancy violations, finding that social and trust violations were more detrimental to the relationship than moral violations.

As discussed in the humor sections of this manuscript, humor involves violating some sort of expectation, and while this study does not predict this sort of cognitive violation will result in harmed parasocial interactions, it still may be relevant to the study. This study does not involve parasocial interactions with physical humans, so, especially applicable for this study, scholars have found consumers can perceive relationships with brands, and some of the latest
research, such as that done by Labrecque (2014), has explored the idea of examining parasocial interaction as it relates to consumers and brands. Labrecque (2014) found that relationships with brands, especially on social media, could go beyond simple interactions to create parasocial interaction and foster better relationship outcomes. Continuing with these findings, this study examines the roles disparagement and wordplay humor might have in forming such parasocial interaction.

As discussed in the humor section of this literature review, disparagement humor is more of an affective form of humor, meaning it appeals more to one’s feelings, while wordplay humor is more cognitive, meaning it appeals more to one’s intellect. Because parasocial interactions strongly involve affective connections one feels with another entity, this study predicts that, regardless of source, the use of disparagement humor will lead to the highest levels of parasocial interaction because of the affective nature of disparagement humor. This study also predicts that, because of the credibility of source and the relevant humor theory as it relates to source, disparagement humor by an actual brand will lead to the highest levels of parasocial interactions. So:

**H6a:** Regardless of source, participants exposed to disparagement humor will report a stronger sense of parasocial interaction than will participants exposed to wordplay humor.

**H6b,c:** Participants exposed to disparagement humor from an actual brand will report stronger senses of parasocial interaction than will (b) participants exposed to wordplay humor from an actual brand, and (c) participants exposed to either wordplay or disparagement humor from a brand’s parody account.

In summary, this study examines how a brand’s use of wordplay and disparagement humor on Twitter affects people’s attitudes toward the brand, purchase intentions,
communicative behavioral intentions, and parasocial interactions. This study also examines how a brand’s parody account’s use of disparagement and wordplay humor affects these same variables. And finally, this study examines how gender influences perceptions of humor in relation to the aforementioned outcome variables. It predicts that, overall, disparagement humor will more likely influence people’s purchase intentions, communicative behavioral intentions, and parasocial interactions. This study also hypothesizes that the use of humor coming from the brand itself will tend to be more effective than when it comes from a brand’s parody account, based on credibility and humor theory associated with source. Also, as has been noted in literature regarding humor, this study also expects to find differences between genders, which will be of use to public relations practitioners. Namely, this study predicts wordplay humor will be more effective when targeting females and disparagement humor will be more effective when targeting males.

Method

To test the proposed hypotheses, this study examined how the independent variables (message source and humor type) affected the dependent variables (people’s attitudes toward the brand, their purchase and communicative behavioral intentions, their perceptions of message humor, and their perceived parasocial interaction with the brand). This applied study used a 2 (humor: disparagement or wordplay) x 2 (source: brand account or brand’s parody account) between-subjects factorial design online experiment. The source variable was operationalized as the family chain restaurant Applebee’s or a fictional Applebee’s parody account named Faux Applebee’s. Applebee’s and Faux Applebee’s were easily distinguishable to participants by the accounts’ names, handles, picture, and the instance, or lack thereof, of a verified checkmark. The humor variable included either wordplay or disparagement. To reiterate the definitions of the
types of humor explored in this study, wordplay humor was defined as, “a class of jokes depending on words that are similar in sound, but are used in two different meanings” (Taylor & Mazlack, 2004, p. 1315), and disparagement humor was defined as when “one protagonist disparages or aggresses against another” (Oppliger & Sherblom, 1992, p. 100).

Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions by the Qualtrics randomizer feature, and the copy for the tweets used in the study was taken verbatim from tweets of established brands in food service such as Wendy’s and Denny’s. Each condition consisted of viewing five tweets. In summation and to emphasize for the sake of clarity, participants were randomly assigned to view one of four conditions: (1) five wordplay tweets from Applebee’s, (2) five disparagement tweets from Applebee’s, (3) five wordplay tweets from Faux Applebee’s, or (4) five disparagement tweets from Faux Applebee’s.

Participants & Procedures

The sample originally included 184 participants recruited through Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (mTurk). Of the 184 respondents, 136 were valid and constituted the final N used for analysis. Specifically, 48 respondents finished the experiment in less than 3 minutes and 20 seconds. This was a justified cutoff for exclusion given there were 1,500 words in the questionnaire section alone (not including stimuli) and the average adult reads only 250 words per minute (Thomas, 2010). This meant it would have taken average participants at least six minutes to complete reading the questionnaire. Of course, some read more quickly; college students read at an average of 450 words per minute (Nelson, 2012), which meant they would have completed the questionnaire in 3 minutes and 20 seconds, hence the cutoff. Also noteworthy, participants were supposed to read stimuli and contemplate their responses, and deciding on and clicking question responses would require additional time as well, so it should
have taken participants longer to complete the experiment than how long it would have taken them to read 1,500 words.

All respondents were 18 years of age or older, resided in the United States, and were Twitter account holders. The average age was 38.24 years ($SD = 10.92$, range = $22 – 79$). With regard to background, 98 respondents identified as white (71.0%), 14 identified as African American (10.1%), 10 identified as Asian (7.2%), 10 identified as Hispanic (7.2%), 3 identified themselves as Native American (2.2%); and 3 identified as other (2.2%). The slight majority, $n = 76$, identified as male (53.6%), and 64 identified as female.

The mTurk service used for this study to recruits participants by providing them incentives for their time and effort. It is often used to recruit people for other tasks, but mTurk has become increasingly popular for academic researchers (Paolacci, Chandler, & Ipeirotis, 2010). Amazon keeps both the people who perform the work and the people who request the work anonymous, but the company keeps data regarding the unique worker IDs. Also, the requester of the work is able to self-disclose his/her identity if he or she wishes (e.g., Paolacci et al., 2010). To ensure IRB compliance, the current study chose to disclose the researchers’ identities. Participants (i.e., mTurk workers) also have the choice in which tasks they would like to accomplish, meaning participation in the study remained voluntary (Paolacci et al., 2010).

This study made use of an online experiment, and as such, the participants were recruited online—fitting for external validity, given that Twitter is an online platform that people access from a variety of locations around the clock. The sample was more diverse than a traditional convenience sample taken from college students; it was more evenly split between men and women, recruited a more diverse age group and ethnicity group, and included participants from a
wider variety of U.S.-based geographical areas as well as educational backgrounds. Respondents were provided a small monetary incentive ($0.50) for their participation.

**Stimuli**

Adapting real-world tweets from established brands’ Twitter accounts to create stimuli appearing to come from Applebee’s Twitter account, this study showed participants tweets fitting the definition of either disparagement or wordplay humor. In either instance, respondents viewed five total tweets. Similarly, this study mocked up the same chosen tweets from the brand and posed them as originating from a fake Applebee’s parody account that was created for the purpose of this study. The specific tweets used can be found in Appendix B. Besides the source of information and the type of humor portrayed, the conditions remained constant to capitalize on the internal validity that experiments provide.

**Measures**

The study measured how message source (Applebee’s official Twitter account or an Applebee’s parody Twitter account) and type of humor (wordplay or disparagement) affected people’s attitudes toward the Applebee’s brand, their purchase and communicative behavioral intentions, their perceived humor, and their perceived parasocial interaction with the Applebee’s brand. Demographics such as age, gender, ethnicity, and education level were also collected. Manipulation checks, attention checks, and technology issue checks were included as well. The full instrument can be found in Appendix C.

**Manipulation Checks.** Source and type of humor were manipulated independent variables. Participants were asked to answer which Twitter account posted the tweets they saw with the multiple-choice response options of “Applebee’s (@Applebees),” “Faux Applebee’s (@FauxApplebee’s),” “Chili’s (@Chilis),” and “Faux Chili’s (@FauxChilis).” A Chi-square test
was used to examine the source manipulation, $\chi^2 (6) = 78.71, p < .001$. When participants were exposed to wordplay tweets from Applebee’s, 31 answered the tweets were from Applebee’s (93.9%); when exposed to disparagement tweets from Applebee’s, 31 answered the tweets were from Applebee’s (86.1%); when exposed to wordplay tweets from Faux Applebee’s, 24 answered the tweets were from Faux Applebee’s (70.6%); and when exposed to disparagement tweets from Faux Applebee’s, 32 answered the tweets were from Faux Applebee’s (91.4%). Thus, the manipulation was deemed successful.

To gauge type of humor, participants responded to the statement, “the tweets I saw mostly used humor at the expense of someone/something else” on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). An independent sample t-test was used to examine the humor manipulation, $t(2,136) = -3.74, p < .001$. Participants were asked the degree to which they agreed the tweets they saw used disparagement humor, and those exposed to the disparagement humor scored significantly higher ($M = 5.25, SD = 1.71$) than those exposed to wordplay humor ($M = 4.10, SD = 1.90$). Thus, the manipulation was successful. However, as a limitation to the current study, ideally, there would have been a second manipulation check specifically for wordplay humor that mirrored the manipulation check for disparagement humor.

**Attitudes Toward the (Real-world) Brand.** This was measured with three items on a seven-point semantic differential scale ($M = 4.95, SD = 1.44, \alpha = .99$). The items asked for people’s feeling towards the real-world brand (Applebee’s) from good to bad, positive to negative, and favorable to unfavorable (Lafferty & Goldsmith, 2005).

**Purchase Intentions.** The purchase intentions measure was adapted from Taylor and Baker (1994). There were two items on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7) ($M = 3.88, SD = 1.79, \alpha = .96$). The items included, “The next time I need
the services of a restaurant, I will choose Applebee’s,” and “In the next year, if I need the services of a restaurant, I will select Applebee’s” (p. 174).

**Communicative Behavioral Intentions.** First, behavioral intentions on Twitter were measured with four single-measure items on a seven-point Likert scale asking for intentions to like one or more of the tweets ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 2.12$), retweet one or more of the tweets ($M = 3.19$, $SD = 2.08$), reply to one or more of the tweets ($M = 2.54$, $SD = 1.78$), and follow the account ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 2.14$). These items were adapted from Alhabash and McAlister (2015), who asked similar questions regarding intentions on Facebook.

Secondly, intention to engage in positive word-of-mouth was adapted from Hartline and Jones (1996) and was measured with one item on a five-point Likert scale ranging from not at all likely (1) to extremely likely (5). This item asked participants how likely they would be to recommend Applebee’s to a friend ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 1.68$).

Finally, intention to engage in negative word-of-mouth was adapted from Coombs and Holladay (2008) and was measured with three items on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7) ($M = 2.56$, $SD = 1.60$, $\alpha = .91$) The first item asked if the respondent would encourage friends or relatives not to buy from Applebee’s, the second item asked if the respondent would say negative things about Applebee’s to other people, and the third asked if a participant would recommend Applebee’s if someone asked for advice (Coombs & Holladay, 2008).

**Perceived Humor.** Duncan et. al (1984) used three items to measure perceived humor on a 9-point Likert-type scale. The items were adapted to the current study’s context and included: “the tweets I read were funny,” “the tweets I read were more serious than they were funny,” and “most people would find the tweets I read funny” ($M = 5.17$, $SD = 1.25$, $\alpha = .73$). The responses
to these items were used to determine how, if at all, the perceived funniness of a tweet, regardless of humor type, might relate to other variables, as well as whether viewers perceived one of the humor types as funnier than the other.

**Parasocial Interaction.** This measure was adopted from Rubin, Perse, and Powell (1985) and adapted for use on Twitter similarly to how Frederick et. al (2012) adapted it. The original scale included 20 items on 5-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree that assessed people’s parasocial interaction with newscasters, but Frederick and colleagues were able to trim the scale to 12 to ask about people’s parasocial interaction with athletes on Twitter. These items were adapted to use for this study and included the statements, “Twitter shows me what Applebee’s is like,” “When Applebee’s shows me how they feel about food services, it helps me make up my own mind about food services,” “I feel sorry for Applebee’s when they make a mistake,” “I like to compare my ideas with what Applebee’s says,” “Applebee’s makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with a friend,” “I see Applebee’s like a natural, down-to-earth person,” “I look forward to reading Applebee’s tweets,” “If Applebee’s appeared on a TV program, I would watch that program,” “If there were a story about Applebee’s in a newspaper or magazine, I would read it,” “If Applebee’s were a person, I would like to Applebee’s in person,” “I am not satisfied when I get food service information from a restaurant other than Applebee’s,” and “When Applebee’s tweets, they seem to understand the things I want to know,” ($M = 2.65, SD = 1.31, \alpha = .92$).

**Results**

Data analysis for hypothesis testing included \( t \)-tests and analysis of variance (ANOVA) as relevant, all with alpha set at .05. All data were screened to ensure compliance with test assumptions.
**H1: Source and Perceived Humor**

The first hypothesis predicted that source would impact the perceived humor of a tweet, and namely, it predicted that humor coming from an actual brand would be perceived as more humorous than humor coming from a parody account. The hypothesis was explored by conducting a $t$-test and found that there was no significant relationship between source and the perceived humor of a tweet in the context of this study, $t(2,136) = -1.51, p = .07$. Whether the tweets came from Applebee’s ($M = 5.01, SD = 1.34$) or Faux Applebee’s ($M = 5.33, SD = 1.14$), did not significantly affect how humorous people perceived the tweets. Thus, the null was not rejected for hypothesis 1.

**H2a/b: Gender, Type of Humor, and Perceived Humor**

The second hypotheses predicted that a respondent’s gender and the humor condition to which he or she was assigned would affect how humorous he or she perceived the tweets. More specifically, this study predicted that men would find disparagement humor more humorous than would women (H2a), and it predicted that women would find wordplay humor more humorous than would men (H2b). This hypothesis was explored by conducting a two-way ANOVA. It found no interaction effect between which gender found either style of humor more humorous, $F(3,134) = .83, p = .77$. Men who were exposed to disparagement humor ($M = 5.30, SD = 1.17$) did not find it significantly more humorous than did women ($M = 5.57, SD = 1.29$), and women exposed to wordplay humor ($M = 4.98, SD = 1.01$) found it no funnier than did men ($M = 4.83, SD = 1.34$). Although there was no significant interaction effect of humor and gender on perceptions of message humor, it should be noted that analysis discovered a main effect of humor type on perceptions of humorousness. Specifically, regardless of source or gender, across the board, participants preferred disparagement humor ($M = 5.44, SD = 1.23$) to wordplay humor.
(M = 4.89, SD = 1.21) in terms of which they found more humorous, F(1,134) = 6.32, p = .01, par. \( \eta^2 = .05 \). H2 was not supported.

H3: Type of Humor, Source, and Attitudes Toward the Brand

The third hypothesis predicted that the type of humor and source would affect participants’ attitudes toward the brand. Specifically, it predicted that disparagement humor by a brand would lead to the strongest positive attitudes toward the brand when compared to attitudes from wordplay humor by a brand and both wordplay and disparagement humor by a parody account. After conducting a two-way ANOVA, no interaction effect between humor type and source was detected, F(3,134) = 3.18, p = .08. That is, there was no significant difference in attitudes toward the brand between tweets that used disparagement humor from an actual brand (M = 4.61, SD = 1.55), tweets that used wordplay humor from an actual brand (M = 5.09, SD = 1.13), tweets that used disparagement humor from a brand’s parody account (M = 5.34, SD = 1.39), and tweets that used wordplay humor from a brand’s parody account (M = 4.96, SD = 1.55). Thus, H3 was not supported.

H4: Type of Humor, Source, Purchase Intentions

The fourth hypothesis predicted that source and type of humor would affect participants’ purchase intentions towards the brand. Namely, it predicted that the use of disparagement humor by a brand would lead to the highest purchase intentions when compared to the use of wordplay humor by a brand and both wordplay and disparagement humor by a brand’s parody account. While the hypothesis was not supported, the two-way ANOVA nonetheless discovered an interaction effect between humor and source in regards to purchase intentions, F(3,134) = 5.32, p = .02, par. \( \eta^2 = .04 \). The results indicated that disparagement humor from the parody account led to the highest purchase intentions (M = 4.44, SD = 1.65), followed by wordplay humor from an
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actual brand \((M = 3.91, SD = 1.46)\), wordplay humor by a parody account \((M = 3.65, SD = 1.50)\), and disparagement humor by an actual brand \((M = 3.53, SD = 1.65)\). The pairwise analysis of the variables indicated a crossover effect that was mainly attributed the mean differences between disparagement and wordplay humor from a parody account \((I - J = .80, p = .03)\).

**H5a/b: Type of Humor, Source, Communicative Behavioral Intentions**

The fifth hypotheses predicted that (a) source would affect people’s communicative behavioral intentions and that (b) type of humor and source would affect people’s communicative behavioral intentions. Specifically, these hypotheses predicted that (a) messages coming from an actual brand would lead to higher levels of communicative behavioral intentions than messages from a parody account, and (b) the use of disparagement humor from a brand would lead to the highest levels of communicative behavioral intentions when compared to wordplay humor from a brand and both disparagement and wordplay humor from a parody account. To test these hypotheses, one-way and two-way ANOVAs were used. These analyses did not support the hypotheses, and the full lists of results can be found in Tables 1 and 2.

Although the hypotheses were not fully supported, a main effect was found between source and intention to spread positive word of mouth, \(F(2,134) = 4.45, p = .04\), par. \(\eta^2 = .03\). Further, an interaction effect between type of humor, source, and intention to spread positive word of mouth was also uncovered, \(F(3,134) = 4.25, p = .04\), par. \(\eta^2 = .03\). Regardless of the type of humor, those exposed to tweets from a parody account were more likely to intend to spread positive word of mouth \((M = 4.25, SD = 1.66)\) than those exposed to Tweets from an actual brand \((M = 3.65, SD = 1.65)\). Also, those exposed to disparagement humor from a parody account were most likely to intend to spread positive word of mouth \((M = 4.51, SD = 1.74)\), followed by those exposed to those exposed to wordplay humor by and actual brand \((M = 3.97, SD = 1.74)\).
and those exposed to wordplay humor by a parody account ($M = 3.97, SD = 1.55$), and finally by those exposed to disparagement humor from an actual brand ($M = 3.36, SD = 1.629$). A pairwise comparison of this interaction, however, revealed no significant findings between the brand’s use of disparagement and wordplay humor ($I - J = .61, p = .13$) and between the parody account’s use of disparagement and wordplay humor ($I - J = .54, p = .17$).

**H6a/b/c: Type of Humor, Source, Parasocial Interaction**

The sixth hypotheses predicted that regardless of source, the type of humor to which participants were exposed would affect their parasocial interaction with the brand, and also that the source and type of humor would affect participants’ parasocial interaction with the brand. Specifically, these hypotheses predicted that (a) regardless of source, participants exposed to disparagement humor would report the higher levels of parasocial interaction than those exposed to wordplay humor, and they also predicted that participants exposed to disparagement humor from an actual brand would report stronger senses of parasocial interaction than (b) participants exposed to wordplay humor from an actual brand, and (c) participants exposed to either wordplay or disparagement humor from a brand’s parody account. To probe these hypotheses, one-way and two-way ANOVAs were used. The hypotheses were not supported, as the analyses could not reject the null for source impacting parasocial interaction, $F(1,137) = .13, p = .72$, and it did not find support for the interaction of humor and source to affect parasocial interaction $F(2,136) = 1.05 \ p = .31$. The use of disparagement humor ($M = 2.62, SD = .87$) did not lead to higher levels of parasocial interaction than the use of wordplay humor ($M = 2.67, SD = .85$). Also, participants exposed to disparagement humor from a brand ($M = 2.42, SD = .80$) did not report higher levels of parasocial interaction than did those exposed to wordplay humor from a
brand ($M = 2.62, SD = .81$), disparagement humor from a parody account ($M = 2.83, SD = .91$), or wordplay humor from a parody account ($M = 2.73, SD = .90$).

**Discussion**

The goal of the current study was to explore how a brand’s or a brand’s parody account’s use of wordplay or disparagement humor on Twitter affected attitudes toward the brand, communicative behavioral intentions about the brand, purchase intentions for the brand, how humor was perceived, and parasocial interaction levels with the brand. The study was also interested in examining how gender could predict responses to humorous messages.

Six hypotheses were proposed. The first predicted that, regardless of humor type, humor from an actual brand would be perceived as more humorous than humor from a parody account; the second predicted that, regardless of source, men would perceive disparagement humor as more humorous than would women, and that women would perceive wordplay humor as more humorous than would men; the third predicted disparagement humor from an actual brand would lead to the strongest positive attitudes toward the brand when compared to the other three conditions; the fourth predicted the same outcome as the third hypothesis but with purchase intentions as the dependent variable instead of attitudes toward the brand; the fifth predicted that, regardless of the type of humor, tweets from an actual brand would lead to stronger communicative behavioral intentions than tweets from a parody account, and it more specifically predicted that the use of disparagement humor by a brand would lead to the strongest communicative behavioral intentions when compared to the other three conditions; and finally, the sixth hypothesis predicted that, regardless of source, participants exposed to disparagement humor would report higher levels of parasocial interaction than those exposed to wordplay humor, and it also predicted that the strongest levels of parasocial interaction would be reported
by those who were exposed to disparagement humor from an actual brand when compared to the other three conditions. Analysis revealed that hypotheses were not supported. However, significant findings were discovered for the humor type, purchase intentions, and positive word of mouth.

**Key Findings**

The most noteworthy findings of this study involve perceived humor, purchase intentions, and intentions to spread positive word of mouth. For perceived humor, this study found that, regardless of source or gender, people found disparagement humor more humorous than wordplay humor. For purchase intentions, the current study found that those exposed to disparagement humor from the parody account were the most likely to intend to purchase from the brand. And finally, for intentions to spread positive word of mouth, this study found that those exposed to the parody account were more likely to spread positive word of mouth than those exposed to the brand’s account. More specifically, the study also found that those exposed to disparagement humor from the parody account were the most likely to intend to spread positive word of mouth as compared to the other three conditions. More details regarding these findings can be found the subsections for H2a/b, H4, and H5a/b, respectively.

**Results for Source and Perceived Humor.** The first hypothesis about source and perceived humor was not supported. Results did not find a significant relationship between perceived humor and whether the tweets came from a brand or a brand’s parody account. It should be noted, however, that this finding bordered near significant \( p = .07 \), and the means for perceived humor from a parody account were higher than means for perceived humor from a brand’s account. This possible pattern is contrary to the hypothesis, which may be due to surprise being a “necessary but not sufficient condition for humor” (Alden, Mukherjee, & Hoyer, 2000, p.
1). This hypothesis was predicted, in part, because humor from an actual brand would be more surprising, but as was pointed out, surprise is not always a sufficient condition for humor. In fact, Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield, and Booth-Butterfield (1995) discovered that perceiving the source as humorous before reading the message ultimately resulted in perceiving the message as more humorous, and it is possible this theory could have been a reason for the findings of hypothesis one and why the parody account may have been perceived as more humorous.

**Results for Gender and Perceived Humor.** The second hypotheses about gender and how humor was perceived were not supported. The analyses found no interaction relationship between the type of humor and gender. This is contradictory to other findings, which have shown that men are more attracted to disparagement humor (Crawford, 2003) and women are more drawn to wordplay humor (Holmes, 2006). One rationale for why this hypothesis may not have been supported is because viewing humor in the context of tweets from brands or their parody accounts may be substantially different than perceiving humor from human sources, with different norms and expectations. Speculatively, Twitter as a medium might be inherently different than other contexts, and therefore, perceiving humor on Twitter might be different than perceiving it in person.

First of all, the humor used for this study was solely text-based, meaning people did not have other cues that they would traditionally have in face-to-face contexts (e.g., nonverbal communication). Secondly, the nature of Twitter specifically, which limits users to 280 characters, might cater more to disparagement humor than wordplay, as wordplay humor might require more nuance (and space). And lastly, the homophily effect, which predicts people’s likelihoods to bond and associate with others similar to themselves, might play a role on Twitter, in that messages become popular in a specific subset of the Twitter population, and the current
study did not attempt to identify such populations (Kim & Altmann, 2017). Future research should explore these queries, perhaps particularly using network analysis. In addition, future researchers should consider a larger sample size, as the sample size for the current study might have contributed to being unable to reject the null hypothesis in several instances.

It should be noted, however, that this analysis did uncover which type of humor was perceived as funnier, regardless of gender (and regardless of source). Disparagement humor was perceived as more humorous than wordplay humor. This finding coincides with the applied aspect of this study in that, as discussed in the introduction, in the real-world examples provided, the disparagement style humor appeared to receive more feedback in the form of likes and retweets than wordplay humor. This finding could be relevant for various people and brands using Twitter, as it shows disparagement humor is generally considered funnier than wordplay humor (under certain conditions).

**Results for Source, Type of Humor, and Attitudes Toward the Brand.** The third hypothesis predicted that those exposed to disparagement humor from an actual brand would report the strongest positive attitudes toward the brand, as compared to those exposed to wordplay humor from a brand, those exposed to disparagement humor from a parody account, and those exposed to wordplay humor from a parody account. This hypothesis was not supported; disparagement humor from the brand did not relate more strongly to positive attitudes toward the brand. Once again, this analysis discovered a finding that bordered approaching significance ($p = .08$).

The data trajectory did not align with the hypothesis, however, in that those exposed to disparagement humor reported the least favorable attitudes toward the brand. Although the current study must consider the group means as equal based on the test results, if this study were
to have had a larger sample size, perhaps greater power would have led to detecting a significant difference between the group means. Further, although the manipulation check for humor revealed significant differences between the mean responses of both groups in the expected directions, nonetheless perhaps a stronger manipulation would have been fruitful. If so, and the data pattern continued contrary to predictions, such results build on a history of researchers having difficulty linking the use of humor to other variables (Gelb & Picket, 1983). A possible explanation for this finding, and for this study’s overall trajectory of variables being more strongly associated with humor from the parody account could be due to a reactance effect, in that participants felt that Applebee’s was trying to sell to them, while they did not feel this motivation from a parody account (Edwards, Li, & Lee, 2002). Future research should explore the topic of brands and parody account on Twitter with reactance in mind.

**Results for Source, Type of Humor, and Purchase Intentions.** The fourth hypothesis predicted the use of disparagement humor by a brand would lead to the strongest purchase intentions when compared to purchase intentions from wordplay humor by a brand, purchase intentions from disparagement humor by a parody account, and purchase intentions from wordplay humor by a parody account. This hypothesis was not supported, but the analysis discovered a significant interaction between the humor and source conditions as they related to purchase intentions. Namely, the study found the strongest purchase intentions were associated with disparagement humor coming from the parody account, followed by wordplay humor from the brand account, wordplay humor from the parody account, and finally, disparagement humor from the brand account.

This finding of a crossover effect provides practical implications for how brands should deal with parody accounts. Specifically, the finding shows that a parody account that uses
disparagement humor increases purchase intentions for the actual brand, suggesting that brands should not attempt to interfere with parody accounts that utilize disparagement humor, as they increase purchase intentions for the actual brand. Wordplay humor from a parody account, however, did not significantly increase purchase intentions. Contrarily, wordplay humor from a brand was more likely to increase purchase intentions than disparagement humor from a brand, which suggests professionals who manage brand accounts should utilize wordplay humor over disparagement if their goal is to increase purchase intentions. A rationale for this finding may be due to humor disrupting the respondent’s processing, as Smith (1993) discovered. In other words, this disrupted processing may have distracted participants who viewed tweets from the brand from focusing on purchasing from the brand. Similarly, as mentioned in the discussion for hypothesis 3, reactance might have played an effect in this finding, as participants were less suspicious of the parody account’s motives (Edwards, Li, & Lee, 2002).

**Results for Source, Communicative Behavioral Intentions, and Type of Humor.** The fifth hypotheses predicted that, regardless of the type of humor, messages from a brand’s account would lead to stronger communicative behavioral intentions than messages from a brand’s parody account, and they predicted that the use of disparagement humor by a brand would lead to the strongest levels of communicative behavioral intentions when compared to those exposed to wordplay humor by a brand, disparagement humor by a brand’s parody account, and wordplay humor by a brand’s parody account. These hypotheses were not supported, but the analyses found that participants were more likely to intend to spread positive word of mouth about a brand after being exposed to tweets from a brand’s parody account, and they found a significant interaction between the humor and source conditions in regard to positive word of mouth. Namely, the analysis showed those exposed to disparagement humor by a brand’s parody
account were the most likely to intend to spread positive word of mouth, followed by both wordplay from a brand or its parody account, and finally disparagement humor by a brand. Similar to hypothesis four, these findings indicate that brands should not discourage parody accounts from using disparagement humor, as a parody account using disparagement humor may make people more likely to intend to spread positive word of mouth about an actual brand. This finding does not coincide with past research that indicated people would give more weight to information coming directly from the source, which in the case of this study would have been the real brand instead of the parody, or fake, one. (Pornpitakpan, 2004). A possible explanation for this finding, however, includes that humor on Twitter might be inherently different from other media in which source has been studied. Also, participants might have been wary of the motives of the brand, similar to reactance as discussed above, whereas they were not wary of the motives of the parody account.

**Results for Type of Humor, Parasocial Interaction, and Source.** The final hypotheses predicted that, regardless of source, those exposed to disparagement humor would report a stronger sense of parasocial interaction than would those exposed to wordplay humor, and they predicted that participants exposed to disparagement humor from a brand would report the highest levels of parasocial interaction when compared to those exposed to wordplay humor by a brand, disparagement humor by a brand’s parody account, and wordplay humor by a brand’s parody account. These hypotheses were not supported. While small sample size could have contributed to lacking the power to detect relationships with small effect sizes, they also could have been found because of the nature of the study. The concept of parasocial interaction was introduced to study how television viewers perceived relationships with television personas (Horton & Wohl, 1956), and the concept is more extensively studied in how people perceive
relationships with human media personas (et. Frederick, 2016; Cohen 2010). While parasocial interaction has been studied in the contexts of brands (Labrecque, 2014), it is possible the current study, a cross-sectional experiment exposing participants merely to five tweets, did not delve deep enough to uncover any sort of parasocial interaction with the brand, or that its stimuli were not strong enough to create such an interaction. Likewise, it is possible to speculate that it might be more difficult for brands to create parasocial interactions. At the end of the questionnaire, the study asked if participants had any comments, and one responded, “I like Applebee's and I think I'm similar to people who go there but I don't think anyone really thinks of themselves as belonging in a ‘club’ with them, that seems a bit much.” This comment could give credence to the idea that people have a more difficult time perceiving these interactions and relationships with brands than they do people.

Study Conclusions, Limitations, and Future Directions

Although not one of this study’s hypotheses was supported, it nevertheless allows for several noteworthy conclusions. First of all, this study showed that a brand’s parody account’s use of disparagement or wordplay humor did not negatively affect people’s attitudes toward the actual brand, their purchase intentions for the brand, their communicative behavioral intentions toward the brand, or their parasocial interactions with the brand. In fact, in regard to purchase intentions and the intention to spread positive word of mouth, the use of humor by a parody account, especially disparagement humor, was beneficial for the real-life brand. As mentioned in the previous section, these findings suggest that real brands should not necessarily work to dissuade or eliminate their parody accounts, as the parody accounts do not always negatively affect the brand. In fact, in regard to a few variables, parody accounts can be advantageous for the brand.
Also noteworthy, this research revealed that, regardless of viewer gender or message source, people tend to perceive disparagement humor from a restaurant brand on Twitter as more humorous than wordplay humor. From an applied perspective, if one would like to be perceived as more humorous, it could be advantageous to use disparagement humor as opposed to wordplay humor. Practically, for instance, one can see that tweets from brands that used disparagement humor in the introduction section of this study received more likes and retweets than brands that used wordplay humor; a disparagement tweet from Wendy’s received more than 16,000 retweets and 64,000 likes (Wendy’s, 2017), while a wordplay tweet from Denny’s received only 2,400 retweets and 6,600 likes in comparison (Denny’s, 2017).

Finally, this study might give merit to the findings of Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield, and Booth-Butterfield (1995) in the scope of an online Twitter environment. The authors discovered that perceiving a source as humorous before interpreting a message affected how humorous the message itself was perceived. Although the current study does not definitively support the findings of Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield, and Booth-Butterfield, a recommendation for future researchers would be to explore this concept of humor and source more in-depth within an online environment.

Besides the modest sample size for communications research, which might have explained why some findings were only bordering on significant, other limitations to the current study include its applied nature and its experimental design. Both limited the study in some way. First, mTurk provides a convenience sample, and although it was more diverse than using college students, results from this sample are not generalizable to the United States. Future researchers should replicate and expand this research with a representative sample. Similarly, the sample used in this study was taken from residents of the United States and did not account for
other cultures. Future researchers should consider exploring the topic of this study in different cultures, as these cultures’ perceptions of humor and/or brands might be substantially different.

Second, by using Applebee’s, the results might not be the same as if future researchers explore a brand in a different industry or field. The nature of the food-service industry may be inherently different than, for example, the health insurance industry, and as such, the use of humor by a health insurance provider may provide substantially different responses, especially given research that shows humor may trivialize important topics (Moyer-Gusé, Mahood, & Brookes, 2011). Therefore, a recommendation for future researchers would be to conduct similar studies with different industries. And because this was an applied study, another recommendation for future research would be to try to create a more theoretical groundwork for a brand’s use of humor on Twitter. There is not a great deal of theory on this matter, and this is partially why the current study was literature-based applied research. More theoretical groundwork might have helped create more precise and accurate hypotheses.

Third, the controlled nature of the experimental design made it difficult to explore variables that were not included in the experiment. The only variables that could be examined were those chosen for the experiment, and while the choices were rooted in past research and literature, it might be beneficial for future researchers to examine this and similar topics qualitatively to more deeply identify possible effects of humor use by brands and their parody accounts on Twitter and in other environments. This sort of exploratory research could help build a theoretical framework of humor by brands on Twitter, which would be invaluable to researchers interested in conducting studies similar to the current one. Specifically, this study recommends that future research take a grounded theory methodological approach, where
researchers are able to explore the topic qualitatively and parse out important variables and takeaways that may help build future theories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

Finally, as it relates to the experimental design that was used for the current study, another limitation to the current study was that the humor manipulation could be improved. Although the manipulation check revealed a significant relationship between the condition and the perceptions of humor type (i.e., disparagement vs. wordplay), the means were not as different as would be ideal. Those exposed to the disparagement humor condition rated the humor as using more disparagement than those exposed to wordplay humor, but the means indicate the difference between disparagement and wordplay humor for participants was not profound. This might have affected some results, as several findings were nearly significant. If participants could identify the types of humor more clearly, the study might have been able to uncover more significant results. Future researchers should address this by attempting to create stimuli with more differentiated means in response to the humor type. This complication might be difficult to overcome, however, as scholars have had difficulty defining and identifying types of humor (Gruner, 1991).

In conclusion, the current study revealed few significant differences between how humor from a brand’s Twitter account and how humor from a brand’s parody account affected perceived humor, attitudes toward the brand, purchase intentions for the brand, communicative behavioral intentions toward the brand, and parasocial interaction with the brand. The study also found no significant differences in how genders perceive types of humor. However, the study did find that people, regardless of gender or source, preferred disparagement humor to wordplay humor; that disparagement humor from a parody account led to the highest levels of purchase intentions; and that humorous tweets from a parody account, especially those that use
disparagement humor, led to people being most likely to spread positive word of mouth.

Although no hypotheses for the current study were supported, the analyses uncovered interesting results that can be applied to the real world. Brands using wordplay and disparagement humor on Twitter is currently taking place, as is brand parody accounts using these types of humor. Future research should continue exploring the effects of these tweets so that public relations and social media professionals will have a better understanding of how humor affects the brands for which they are cultivating mutually beneficial relationships.
Table 1

*Results from Hypothesis 5a*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>Brand M (SD)</th>
<th>Parody M (SD)</th>
<th>par. η²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intent to like tweet</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>3.68 (2.14)</td>
<td>4.29 (2.08)</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intent to retweet tweet</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>2.99 (2.05)</td>
<td>3.39 (2.10)</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intent to follow account</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>3.23 (2.05)</td>
<td>3.91 (2.18)</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intent to reply to tweet</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>2.38 (1.71)</td>
<td>2.71 (1.86)</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intent to spread positive W.O.M.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.45</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>3.65 (1.65)</td>
<td>4.25 (1.66)</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intent to spread negative W.O.M.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>2.64 (1.63)</td>
<td>2.47 (1.58)</td>
<td>&lt;.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

*Results for Hypothesis 5b*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>Brand wordplay M (SD)</th>
<th>Brand disparagement M (SD)</th>
<th>Parody wordplay M (SD)</th>
<th>Parody Disparagement M (SD)</th>
<th>par. η²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intent to like tweet</td>
<td>3, 134</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>3.33 (2.13)</td>
<td>4.00 (2.13)</td>
<td>3.85 (1.89)</td>
<td>4.71 (2.19)</td>
<td>&lt;.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intent to retweet tweet</td>
<td>3, 134</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>2.76 (1.90)</td>
<td>3.19 (2.19)</td>
<td>2.79 (1.75)</td>
<td>3.97 (2.26)</td>
<td>.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intent to follow account</td>
<td>3, 134</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>3.36 (2.00)</td>
<td>3.11 (2.12)</td>
<td>3.38 (1.99)</td>
<td>4.43 (2.27)</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intent to reply to tweet</td>
<td>3, 134</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>2.61 (1.87)</td>
<td>2.17 (1.54)</td>
<td>2.56 (1.71)</td>
<td>2.86 (2.00)</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intent to spread positive W.O.M.</td>
<td>3, 134</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>3.97 (1.65)</td>
<td>3.36 (1.62)</td>
<td>3.97 (1.55)</td>
<td>4.51 (1.74)</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intent to spread negative W.O.M.</td>
<td>3, 134</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>2.61 (1.47)</td>
<td>2.68 (1.78)</td>
<td>2.76 (1.71)</td>
<td>2.19 (1.40)</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


Nihilist Arby’s. (2017). It's Columbus Day, so we're gonna sail over to McDonald's, beat the shit out of everyone, wreck the place & call it arbys Enjoy arbys. Retrieved October 17, 2017, from https://twitter.com/nihilist_arbys/status/917436055099531265


Wendy’s. (2017, September 13). Yeah, for one, if we were going to diss another restaurant we’d have more than zero likes and RTs after 13 hours. Retrieved October 17, 2017, from https://twitter.com/Wendys/status/907968911240462336


Appendix A

Informed Consent Statement

Thank you for participating in the study. This questionnaire will take about 15 minutes or so to complete. You must use a laptop or desktop computer ONLY to participate in this survey. DO NOT use a tablet or phone.

First, please read the following consent form. Then, if you agree to participate, please choose “I agree” and click on the double arrow below enter the questionnaire.

Principal Investigator             Dr. Julia Daisy Fraustino
Co-Investigator                       Nick Eckman
Department                             Reed College of Media
Protocol Number                        1801955117
Study Title                           Responses to Humor Use on Twitter

Contact Persons
If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about this research, or in the event you experience any side effects or injury related to this research, you should contact Mr. Nick Eckman (616-916-2838 or nbeckman@mix.wvu.edu). Mr. Nick Eckman’s graduate work and this study is under the direct supervision Dr. Julia Daisy Fraustino. For additional information regarding your rights as a research subject, to discuss problems, concerns, or suggestions related to the research, to obtain information, or offer input about the research, you may contact the Office of Research Integrity & Compliance at 304-293-7073.

Introduction
This study is being conducted by Mr. Nick Eckman in the Reed College of Media at West Virginia University as part of his graduate work.

Purpose(s) of the Study
This is an online survey designed to understand how people respond to messages on Twitter. Such research contributes to scholarly knowledge and may provide guidance to communicators to improve relationship building with stakeholders.

Description of Procedures
This study involves filling out a brief online questionnaire after viewing five tweets. This process will take about 15 minutes or so.

Discomforts
There are no known or expected risks from participating in this part of the study, except for any mild frustration associated with answering questions.

Confidentiality
Any information about you that is obtained as a result of your participation in this research will be kept as confidential as legally possible. Your research records and test results, just like hospital records, may be subpoenaed by court order or may be inspected by the study sponsor or
federal regulatory authorities (including the FDA if applicable) without your additional consent. Please note that when the data is downloaded from the study website, there is a small possibility that it can be intercepted.

In addition, there are certain instances where a researcher is legally required to give information to the appropriate authorities. These would include mandatory reporting of infectious diseases, mandatory reporting of information about behavior that is imminently dangerous to your child or to others, such as suicide, child abuse, etc.

In any publications that result from this research, neither your name nor any information from which you might be identified will be published without your consent.

Voluntary Participation
Participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate in this study at any time without penalty. In order to receive payment for this study, you must complete at least 90% of the questionnaire.
In the event new information becomes available that may affect your willingness to participate in this study, this information will be given to you so that you can make an informed decision about whether or not to continue your participation.
By clicking “I agree” below, you confirm that you are 18 years old or older; you consent to all the information above; and you have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the research, and you have received answers concerning areas you did not understand.
If you would like a copy of this form, please contact Mr. Eckman.
- I agree (1)
- I DO NOT agree (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If Thank you for participating in the study. This questionnaire will take about 15 minutes or so to... = I DO NOT agree
Appendix B

Stimuli

Wordplay Humor Tweets:

1. “if there breadsticks does that mean there are bread tress? bread forests?”
2. “you’ve heard of elf on the shelf, now get ready for”
3. “our secret menu is just our normal menu but whispered in your ear”
4. “maybe the food on your plate is touching because its in love”
5. “more like winter hungerland…..where the dang snacks at”

Disparagement Humor Tweets:

1. Tweet: “@Applebees im at chilis what should I do?”
   Reply: “Leave immediately”
2. Tweet: “@Applebees this is on your page, should I follow them

   Who to follow · Refresh · View all
   
   Chili’s Grill & Bar @Chilis
   Follow
   
   Cheesecake Factory
   Follow
   
   Pizza Hut @pizzahut
   Follow

   Reply: “Block em all”
3. “It's apparently #ElectronicGreetingCardDay. I don't know what that means. Are we raising awareness for Electronic Greeting cards? Are we for them? Against them?

   Social media holidays are garbage. Enjoy Applebee’s.”

4. “None of you appreciated me disparaging social media holidays, so I'd like to offer my sincerest apology* for not properly celebrating #ElectronicGreetingCardDay.

   *This apology was brought to you by my boss making me do this. Eat Applebee’s.”

5. 
   a. Tweet : “@Applebees My friend wants to go to Outback, what should I tell him?
      Repy: “Find new friends.”

   b. Tweet : “@FauxApplebees My friend wants to go to Outback, what should I tell him?
      Repy: “Find new friends.”
Appendix C

Instrument

[Note: this document was downloaded from Qualtrics. The presentation for participants was more smooth and intuitive.]

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If you would like a copy of this form, please contact Mr. Eckman.

I agree (1)
I DO NOT agree (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If Thank you for participating in the study. This questionnaire will take about 15 minutes or so to... = I DO NOT agree
Q10 Before viewing five tweets, this section asks you about your thoughts and feelings about Applebee’s restaurant. After viewing the tweets, you will be asked to answer questions about the tweets. Please rate your attitudes toward Applebee's by choosing the option that best reflects your feelings.

Q11 My feelings toward Applebee’s restaurant are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 (1)</th>
<th>2 (2)</th>
<th>3 (3)</th>
<th>4 (4)</th>
<th>5 (5)</th>
<th>6 (6)</th>
<th>7 (7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bad (1)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative (2)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfavorable (3)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

End of Block: Block 15

Start of Block: Block 21

Q4 Please take your time to read and the following tweets. Once you have finished reading the tweets, click the arrow in the bottom right corner to advance to the questionnaire section of the study.

End of Block: Block 21

Start of Block: Block 16

Q77 Please read the following tweets from Applebee's
Q69

Applebee's @Applebees
our secret menu is just our normal menu but whispered in your ear

💬 82  👇 2.8K  💔 12K  💌

Applebee's @Applebees
you've heard of elf on a shelf now get ready for

💬 149  👇 2.2K  💔 5.9K  💌

Applebee's @Applebees
maybe the food on your plate is touching because it's in love...

💬 53  👇 820  💔 4.1K  💌

Applebee's @Applebees
more like winter hungerland.....where the dang snacks at

💬 37  👇 1.0K  💔 3.5K  💌

Applebee's @Applebees
if there are breadsticks does that mean there are bread trees? bread forests?

💬 49  👇 1.3K  💔 4.0K  💌

End of Block: Block 16
Start of Block: Block 20

Q78 Please read the following tweets from Applebee's
Q70

Applebee's 🍔 @Applebees
It's apparently #ElectronicGreetingCardDay. I don't know what that means. Are we raising awareness for Electronic Greeting cards? Are we for them? Against them?

Social media holidays are garbage. Eat Applebee’s.

Applebee's 🍔 @Applebees
None of you appreciated me disparaging social media holidays, so I'd like to offer my sincerest apology* for not properly celebrating #ElectronicGreetingCardDay.

*This apology was brought to you by my boss making me do this. Eat Applebee’s
Q72

Andrew Hamm @AndrewHamm18
@Applebees Im at chiis what should I do?

Applebee's 🍎
@Applebees

Replying to @AndrewHamm18
Leave immediately

6 Retweets 48 Likes

Hexic @iTsHeX1c
@Applebees My friend wants to go Outback what should I tell him?

Applebee's 🍎
@Applebees

Replying to @iTsHeX1c
Find new friends.

49 Retweets 170 Likes
Q71

lukewarmtea @Applebees this is on your page, should I follow them

Chili's Grill & Bar @Chilis

Follow

Pizza Hut @pizzahut

Follow

Applebee's @Applebees

Replying to @LukewarmWolf
Block em all

4 Retweets 24 Likes
Q79 Please read the following tweets from Faux Applebee's, an Applebee's parody Twitter account
Faux Applebee's  @FauxApplebees

our secret menu is just our normal menu but whispered in your ear

82  2.8K  12K  

Faux Applebee's  @FauxApplebees

you've heard of elf on a shelf now get ready for

149  2.2K  5.9K  

Faux Applebee's  @FauxApplebees

maybe the food on your plate is touching because it's in love...

53  820  4.1K  

Faux Applebee's  @FauxApplebees

more like winter hungerland.....where the dang snacks at

37  1.0K  3.5K  

Faux Applebee's  @FauxApplebees

if there are breadsticks does that mean there are bread trees? bread forests?
Q80 Please read the following tweets from Faux Applebee's, an Applebee's parody Twitter account
Q74

**Faux Applebee’s** . @FauxApplebees

It’s apparently #ElectronicGreetingCardDay. I don’t know what that means. Are we raising awareness for Electronic Greeting cards? Are we for them? Against them?

Social media holidays are garbage. Eat Applebee’s

![tweets](image)

**Faux Applebee’s** . @FauxApplebees

None of you appreciated me disparaging social media holidays, so I’d like to offer my sincerest apology* for not properly celebrating #ElectronicGreetingCardDay.

*This apology was brought to you by my boss making me do this. Eat Applebee’s

![tweets](image)
Q75

@FauxApplebees this is on your page, should I follow them

Chili's Grill & Bar @Chilis

Follow

Pizza Hut @pizzahut

Follow

1 Retweets 24 Likes

Faux Applebee's

@FauxApplebees

Replying to @LukewarmWolf

Block em all
EFFECTS OF HUMOR TO BRANDS ON TWITTER

Q76

Andrew Hamm @AndrewHamm18
@FauxApplebees I'm at Chili's what should I do?

Faux Applebee's @FauxApplebees
Replying to @AndrewHamm18
Leave immediately

6 Retweets 48 Likes

Hexic @iTsHeX1c
@FauxApplebees My friend wants to go Outback what should I tell him?

Faux Applebee's @FauxApplebees
Replying to @iTsHeX1c
Find new friends.

49 Retweets 170 Likes
Q6 Please complete the following questionnaire, which will take about 10 minutes.

This section asks you to answer questions about the tweets you just saw.

Q1 1. After reading these tweets, I feel...

- Good (1)
- (2)
- (3)
- Neither Good Nor Bad (4)
- (5)
- (6)
- Bad (7)

Q7 The tweets I read were from ________.

- Applebee's (@Applebees) (1)
- Faux Applebee's (@FauxApplebee's) (2)
- Chili's (@Chilis) (3)
- Faux Chili's (@FauxChilis) (4)
Q8 The tweets I saw mostly used humor at the expense of someone/something else.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat disagree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Agree (6)
- Strongly agree (7)

Q81 My feelings toward Applebee’s restaurant are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 (1)</th>
<th>2 (2)</th>
<th>3 (3)</th>
<th>4 (4)</th>
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<td>Unfavorable (3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Good
- Positive
- Favorable
Q12 Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements.

Q15 In the next year, if I need the services of a restaurant, I will select Applebee’s

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat disagree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Agree (6)
- Strongly agree (7)
Q15 The next time I need the services of a restaurant, I will choose Applebee’s

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat disagree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Agree (6)
- Strongly agree (7)

End of Block: Block 3

Start of Block: Block 5

Q18 Thinking about the tweets you just read, for the questions below, please indicate how likely or unlikely you would be to do the following actions.

Q16 I would like one or more of the tweets I saw

- Extremely unlikely (1)
- Moderately unlikely (2)
- Slightly unlikely (3)
- Neither likely nor unlikely (4)
- Slightly likely (5)
- Moderately likely (6)
- Extremely likely (7)
Q20  I would retweet one or more of the tweets

- Extremely unlikely (1)
- Moderately unlikely (2)
- Slightly unlikely (3)
- Neither likely nor unlikely (4)
- Slightly likely (5)
- Moderately likely (6)
- Extremely likely (7)

Q21  I would follow the Twitter account which sent the tweets

- Extremely unlikely (1)
- Moderately unlikely (2)
- Slightly unlikely (3)
- Neither likely nor unlikely (4)
- Slightly likely (5)
- Moderately likely (6)
- Extremely likely (7)
Q22 I would reply to one or more of the tweets

- Extremely unlikely (1)
- Moderately unlikely (2)
- Slightly unlikely (3)
- Neither likely nor unlikely (4)
- Slightly likely (5)
- Moderately likely (6)
- Extremely likely (7)

End of Block: Block 5

Start of Block: Block 6

Q24 Based on the tweets you just read, please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements.

Q25 I would encourage my friends and/or relatives NOT to buy Applebee’s food/products

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat disagree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Agree (6)
- Strongly agree (7)
Q26 I would say negative things about Applebee’s to other people

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat disagree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Agree (6)
- Strongly agree (7)

Q27 I would recommend Applebee’s if someone asked for my advice

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat disagree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Agree (6)
- Strongly agree (7)
Q29 Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements.

Q30 The tweets I read were funny

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat disagree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Agree (6)
- Strongly agree (7)

Q31 The tweets I read were more serious than they were funny

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat disagree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Agree (6)
- Strongly agree (7)
Q32 Most people would find the tweets I read to be humorous

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat disagree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Agree (6)
- Strongly agree (7)

Start of Block: Block 9

Q33 Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements.

Q34 Applebee’s reflects who I am

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat disagree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Agree (6)
- Strongly agree (7)
Q35  I can identify with Applebee’s

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat disagree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Agree (6)
- Strongly agree (7)

Q36  I feel a personal connection to Applebee’s

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat disagree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Agree (6)
- Strongly agree (7)
Q37 I can use the Applebee’s brand to communicate who I am to other people

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat disagree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Agree (6)
- Strongly agree (7)

Q38 I consider Applebee’s to be “me”

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat disagree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Agree (6)
- Strongly agree (7)

End of Block: Block 9

Start of Block: Block 10

Q39 Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements.
Q40  I really identify with people who go to Applebee’s

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat disagree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Agree (6)
- Strongly agree (7)

Q41  Applebee’s is used by people like me

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat disagree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Agree (6)
- Strongly agree (7)
Q42  
I feel like I almost belong to a club with other users of Applebee’s

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat disagree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Agree (6)
- Strongly agree (7)

Q43  
I feel a deep connection with others who use Applebee’s

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat disagree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Agree (6)
- Strongly agree (7)

End of Block: Block 10

Start of Block: Block 11
Q44 Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements.

Q45 When Applebee’s shows me how they feel about food services, it helps me make up my own mind about food services

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat agree (4)
- Strongly agree (5)

Q46 Twitter shows me what Applebee’s is like

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat agree (4)
- Strongly agree (5)
Q47  I feel sorry for Applebee’s when they make a mistake

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat agree (4)
- Strongly agree (5)

Q48  I like to compare my ideas with what Applebee’s says

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat agree (4)
- Strongly agree (5)

Q49  Applebee’s makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with a friend

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat agree (4)
- Strongly agree (5)
Q50 I see Applebee’s like a natural, down-to-earth person

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat agree (4)
- Strongly agree (5)

Q51 I would look forward to reading Applebee’s tweets

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat agree (4)
- Strongly agree (5)

Q52 If Applebee’s appeared on a TV program, I would watch that program

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat agree (4)
- Strongly agree (5)
Q57 For this question, please choose “Strongly Agree”

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat agree (4)
- Strongly agree (5)

Q53 If there were a story about Applebee’s in a newspaper or magazine, I would read it

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat agree (4)
- Strongly agree (5)
Q54 If Applebee’s were a person, I would like to meet Applebee’s in person

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat agree (4)
- Strongly agree (5)

Q55 I am not satisfied when I get information from a restaurant other than Applebee’s

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat agree (4)
- Strongly agree (5)

Q56 When Applebee’s tweets, they seem to understand the things I want to know

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat agree (4)
- Strongly agree (5)
Q58 The final few questions ask you to provide some information about yourself.

Q59 Please indicate the gender you most closely identify with.

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Other (please indicate) (3) ________________________________________________
- Prefer not to answer (4)

Q60 Please indicate your ethnicity.

- Native American (1)
- Asian (2)
- African American (3)
- Hispanic (4)
- Native Hawaiian (5)
- White (6)
- Other (please indicate) (7) ________________________________________________
Q61 Please indicate your highest level of education received.

- Some high school, no diploma (1)
- High school graduate, diploma or equivalent (for example, GED) (2)
- Some college credit, no degree (3)
- Trade/technical/vocational training (4)
- Associate degree (5)
- Bachelor's degree (6)
- Master's degree (7)
- Professional degree (8)
- Doctorate degree (9)

Q62 What is your age today?

▼ 18 (1) ... 100 (83)

Q63 About how frequently do you go to Applebee’s per year?
Q64 Before you submit the survey, please answer a couple of questions about your experience and any remaining thoughts/opinions.

Q65 Did you experience any technical difficulties while participating in this research? If so, explain.

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

Q66 Do you have any other thoughts or opinions you would like to share with the researcher? If so, expand below.

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

Q67 Please type in your mTurk ID.
Q68 Thank you for your time and effort participating in this research. Please click the double arrow at the bottom right to submit your responses and receive further instructions for accepting your incentive payment via mTurk.

Also, please note that the tweets you saw were created for the purpose of the study and are not actual tweets from Applebee’s. Similarly, the @FauxApplebees account was created for the purposes of this study as well.