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**HUMOR ON THE WEBSITES OF THE ORGANIZATIONS PARTISIPATING IN  
THE HURMOS PROJECT**

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THE HURMOS PROJECT**

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## ABSTRACT

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This study focuses on examining the usage of humor on websites. The client organization is HURMOS project of Oulu University of Applied Sciences and University of Oulu. The project aims to advance the utilization of the strategic use of humor in Finnish companies by increasing the awareness and competence of humor usage. The objective of this thesis is to examine the quantity and the quality of humor on the websites of nine organizations taking part in the HURMOS project.

The work is divided into the theoretical background and the empirical part. The theoretical background contains a brief summary on marketing communications and advertising. Furthermore the concept of humor and the theoretical background of it are introduced. The humor that was discovered on the webpages is analyzed by using the discourse analysis as a method. The humor cases are categorized on the basis of the ways of constructing humor. In addition the context and the amount of humor is analyzed.

All websites did not contain humor, altogether there were nineteen humor cases in the material. Most commonly humor was found on the descriptions of the services or products. The means of the humor were versatile even in such a small sample: altogether there were eight different ways to produce humor. Incongruity and surprise, and word play were the most common ways of constructing humor on websites in this material. Humor was constructed fourteen times by linguistic means and it appeared ten times in descriptive way. Some interesting research questions arose for the future research, such as humor usage in other means of marketing communication or on the websites of organizations from the same field.

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Keywords: humor research, discourse analysis, website

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this thesis is to examine the quantity and the quality of humor on the websites of the organizations taking part in the HURMOS project (later, HURMOS organizations). There are nine organizations involved in HURMOS project. One of the organizations has five websites so altogether thirteen websites were examined. In broader scope, the thesis belongs to the study of marketing communications.

All websites of the HURMOS organizations were studied and all humor that could be found was documented. In general, there was not much humor found, nevertheless the amount was sufficient for executing a deep analysis by the means of discourse analysis. Altogether, there were nineteen cases in the material that could be conceived to be humorous.

The work is divided into the theoretical background and the empirical part. In the theoretical background there is a short summary about marketing communications and advertising. Furthermore, the concept and the theoretical background of humor will be unfolded. Also the impacts of humor in advertising will be clarified.

The used research method was discourse analysis. It will be used to analyze the humor examples found on the organizations' websites and to examine which means are used to create humor. The cases will be categorized based on the analysis.

## 1.1 Commissioner and the companies

This thesis is commissioned by HURMOS project of Oulu University of Applied Sciences and University of Oulu. In the HURMOS research plan it is stated that the project aims to increase awareness and competence of how to utilize humor strategically in Finnish companies. The project intends to result in creating and developing new practices and business opportunities, growth and internationalization. The project is multidisciplinary and combines the approaches of international business management, education, marketing and international business communication. The potential and limitations of the uses of humor are examined and on the basis of this examination the measures are identified and developed. (HURMOS project plan 2014, 3.)

HURMOS project is divided into three work packages and in the first one, the objective is to identify current state humor usage in Finnish companies and industries. This is pursued by focusing on tools and ways of using humor in companies at present. In the first work package the aim is also to understand how humor is applied in corporate communications as well as in product and service management. (HURMOS project plan 2014, 19.) My study examines the current state of humor usage in the websites of HURMOS organizations and is thereby well connected to the objectives of the project.

In this thesis the websites of the HURMOS organizations were analysed. The organizations are Kaleva Oy, motiMind Oy, Oulu City Theatre, Oulu Museum and Science Center Luuppi, Ponsse Oyj, Power Park, Ranua Zoo, Siivittäjä and Virtaavain. There are five separate organizations belonging to Luuppi, and all their websites are studied. Next there are brief presentations on the HURMOS organizations.

Kaleva Oy publishes newspapers and city magazines, produces a variety of electronic services, as well as provides the printing and distribution services. Central feature in the publication activities of Kaleva is a multi-channel approach. The company's main product is the newspaper Kaleva, which appears in print and online facsimile. Kaleva is a Northern Finland's largest and Finland's fourth largest newspaper which is issued every day. Kaleva.fi is one of the Finland's most popular online magazines. The company also publishes Forum24-city papers. (Kaleva Oy 2015. Cited 21.10.2015.)

motiMind Oy is an expert company in personnel and customer experience management. The company specializes in the collection of continuous-time personnel and customer experience, as well as its utilization in business development. (motiMind Oy 2015. Cited 21.10.2015.)

Oulu City Theatre is a municipal theatre in Oulu. Each year about 80 000 spectators visit its performances. It was founded in 1931 as an amateur theatre and was municipalized in 1965. Every year Oulu City Theatre has about 8 premieres and 350 - 400 performances, visited by about 80 000 spectators. (Oulu City Theatre 2015. Cited 21.10.2015, Wikipedia 2015. Oulun kaupungin teatteri. Cited 21.10.2015.)

Under the supervision of Oulu Museum and Science Center Luuppi there are five museums and a Sciences Centre. They are Northern Ostrobothnia Museum, the Art Museum of Oulu, Kierikki Stone Age Center, Turkansaari Open-Air Museum and Tietomaa Science Centre. The core activities of the organizations are exhibition and event production, as well as actions with collections and cultural heritage. Luuppi provides expert services regionally as a provincial museum and a regional art museum. (Oulu Museum of Art 2015. Cited 21.10.2015.)

Ponsse Oyj is an industrial group, headquartered in Vieremä and listed in stock market. The company specializes in the sale-to-length method forest machines, production, maintenance and technology. The Group has about 800 employees and operates in 40 countries. The Group includes the parent company Ponsse Oyj in addition to a number of its wholly-owned subsidiaries. (Kauppalehti 2015. Cited 21.10.2015.)

Power Park is a multi-purpose park, and one of its activities is an amusement park. Power Park is located in South Ostrobothnia, Kauhava. The size of the region is about 160 hectares. Power Park began to take shape in 2000, when Mika Salo bearing the name of an outdoor go-kart track was opened. (Wikipedia 2015. Power Park. Cited 21.10.2015.)

Ranua Zoo is Finland's northernmost zoo, and it has been operating since 1983. The animals of the Arctic region can be observed there in the most natural environment all year round. In the Wildlife Park there are about 50 wild animal species and 200 individuals. In the summer there is also a domestic animal park. Ranua Zoo is a service center that offers many auxiliary services, for example, Safari and accommodation. (Ranuan eläinpuisto 2015. Cited 21.10.2015, Wikipedia 2015. Ranuan eläinpuisto. Cited 21.10.2015)

Siivittäjä offers consulting and coaching services. The core competencies of the company are the employee and the workplace action and wellness, leadership and systematic development work as part of everyday life. The company offers services in different workplaces, SMEs, public authorities and various co-operation networks. (Siivittäjä 2015. Cited 21.10.2015.)

Virtaavain is a small wellness company that has been operating in Oulu for 15 years. The services include laughter yoga, mindfulness, supervision, coaching and education. Working methods are solution-oriented hold which is concentrated on resources and functional working habits. Its operations extend to entire Finland. (Virtaavain 2015. Cited 21.10.2015.)

## 1.2 Research questions and objectives

The main research question is how much humor there can be found on these websites and what is it like. The study attempts to clarify how humor is shown on the organizations' websites. More precisely the study addresses what kind of humor is used on the websites and what are the ways humor is built on the websites. The objective is also to examine, in what kind of contexts humor occurs.

In the theoretical background the goal is first to build understanding about the basis of marketing communications and humor and the usage of humor in advertising. In addition the aim is to examine how humor influences the consumer when it is used in marketing communications and advertising. I also want to research what are the critical factors in humor that should be taken into account when using humor in advertising and on websites. This theory of humor in advertising can be well applied to the humor found on websites since the goal of the humor is the same: to market the products or services of the organizations.

The primary aim of this thesis is to study and analyze the humor that was found on the websites of the HURMOS organizations. What kind of humor there can be found: can it be categorized and are there some general features. How much humor there is and what can be said about that. The aim is also to examine if the context is somehow relevant in the humor usage. I will do some comparisons between the organizations in their humor usage, although no generalizations can not be concluded because the material is narrow and the organizations are so different in size and in their fields.

The research for humor was carried out on English websites of the organizations. The Finnish webpages were examined on those organizations which did not have English websites. I chose to examine the English websites because this thesis is in English. Finnish expressions would be hard to analyze in English. In addition, this work can be understood entirely also by those who can not Finnish. Additionally in translations significant content could disappear from expressions.



### 1.3 Method of research

The method of my study is mainly qualitative in nature. As a tool there is discourse analysis. In a theoretical background first the marketing communications and humor in marketing and advertising is explored. Next there is the analysis of the humor found on the websites using discourse analysis as a method. By analyzing the humor found on the websites my aim is to get a picture of the current state of humor usage on the websites of the HURMOS organizations and the quality of the humor used in them.

When doing discourse analysis the language and its expressions are studied. Discourse is a framework within which things and phenomena are connected to each other from some common point of view. So things are signified in a way that unites all involved in the discourse. (Kangaspunta, cited 26.10.2015.) Suoninen (1999, 18) explains that in discourse analysis the interest is directed to reflecting on how the authors are making matters understandable with their language usage. The starting hypothesis is that the same phenomenon can be made understandable in many justified ways, so the hypothesis of one unequivocal truth is considered incomplete. What is essential in the review is, what kind of descriptions and explanations in different situations and points of discussions are understandable, and what kind of eligible state of affairs or other consequences with those explanations are currently being built.

Discourse is also a special usage of language, speech or expression associated with certain situations. Because the language is used in cultural situations and practices, writing is never free, but it is subject to social expectations and pressures. For example, if we talk about death in the church or in a hospital, in connection with religion or medicine, the meanings change. (Kangaspunta, cited 26.10.2015.)

Furthermore Jokinen and Juhila (1999, 56) highlight the meaning of context. They state that essential in the discourse analysis is context-sensitive construction and constructing of the meanings: the meanings are built in their contexts. Regarding meanings is on the one hand always tied to local processes of producing meanings, for example, for face to face interaction or to textual processes, when the construction of meanings is being viewed at as a function happening here and now. On the other hand the ways of signification are always more or less linked to discursive climate of each era, broader cultural meanings, ways of signification and linguistic practices.

Since there are different kinds of discourse analyses in different disciplines, the way of analysis can be outlined in many different ways. For example as a starting point for discourse analysis there can be the following three aspects: First, discourse as a text can be speech, writing, non-verbal communication, image, advertising, architecture, music, etc. Second, the hierarchy of discourses refers to the way of talking about the world and places in order of precedence. It also needs to be asked who has the right to speak. Third, the internal order of discourse means that they are contradictory and inconsistent. (Kangaspunta, cited 26.10.2015.)

The starting point can also be the three inter-related levels of a discourse analysis represented in principle the traditional sender-message-recipient set-up, but now the basis is the text. The text is examined in order to learn what it says, how and with what references. The production of the text can be examined and asked why it was produced, how and to whom it is directed. In addition the reception of the text which can be seen as the signification of it. It can be asked who receives and what subject positions the text offers. How the text is received, what opportunities for signification there are built in the text and how. What are the critical ingredients and the contradictory elements the text contains. (Kangaspunta, cited 26.10.2015.)

The meaning that is being sought after here refers to something identified as important and experienced as significant. The meaning of the text adds a new issue or phenomenon to the previous experience or the theoretical knowledge. In a way meaning invokes interpreter when the text and the reader encounter. Simply said the objective in the discourse analysis is an interpretation that is based on the systematic analysis. (Kangaspunta, cited 26.10.2015.)

## **2 MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS**

### **2.1 Marketing communications**

Traditionally the components of the marketing communications are personal selling, public relations, publicity and sponsorship, sales promotion and marketing (Juholin 2009: 213). With the help of marketing communications the companies try to make their products and brands known amongst consumers. This can be done directly or indirectly. Marketing communications is a kind of a representation of a "voice" of a company and its brands and a with a help of it a dialogy and relationship can be built with a customer. Marketing communications help companies create a brand image and the consumers recall the brand. Companies can link their brands to other people, places, events, brands, experiences, feelings and things. Marketing communications can support brand equity as well as improve sales and even affect shareholders value. (Kotler & Keller 2009, 510.)

All marketing communications activities must have common and consistent message to achieve the strategic position, and the way these brand associations are created does not matter. (Kotler & Keller 2009: 512.) The content of the message as well as how the message is being expressed define how effective the communications are. Failure in either one of these may be the reason for ineffective communications. (Kotler & Keller 2009: 517 - 518.)

The marketers translate their messages into a particular communication by using creative strategies, which can be classified into informational or transformational appeals. An informational appeal elaborates on product or service feature or benefits. Transformational appeal elaborate on a non-product-related gain or image and often try to motivate purchase by inciting emotions that will motivate purchase. It might reflect the experience that results from using the product or it might reflect what kind of person uses this brand. Communicators can use negative or positive emotional appeals. Negative appeals such as fear, guilt and shame can be used to get people to do things or stop doing things. Positive appeals are such as humor, love, pride and joy. (Kotler & Keller 2009: 517 - 518.)

Kuikka and Juva (2003: 132) define marketing communications with humor: Marketing communications is all verbal and pictorial communication which makes operations and production of a company known. This is where we have come from advertisement when creative invoicing has developed on its current level.

## 2.2 Humor

Humor is not easy to define. Gulas and Weinberger (2006) compare the difficult nature of humor to analyzing sunsets:

In some ways analyzing humor is akin to analyzing sunsets. Was today's more beautiful than yesterday's, or more awe inspiring? Can the beauty of a sunset be captured by meteorological research? Perhaps astronomy, physical geography, optics, physics, or some other discipline would provide a better perspective on the subject. In any case, we are not likely to fully understand the essence of a sunset via science. (Gulas & Weinberger 2006, 139.)

Humor is universal human activity and most people experience it many times a day and in many kinds of social contexts. There is a lot of evidence proposing that humor and laughter have an evolutionary origin. Culture obviously influences essentially on the way humor is used and the situations humor can be used. From psychological point of view, humor is defined as a positive feeling called mirth which is typical of social contexts where through the cognitive evaluation process playfulness and nonserious incongruity are detected which is expressed with laughter. In social interaction humor comes in many forms, for example canned jokes, spontaneous witticisms and unintentionally funny utterances and actions. (Martin 2006, 29)

The incongruity between two elements that the communicator brings together is the essential feature of humor, and humor can be defined as painless incongruity. Because the unison of the two elements is unexpected and unusual the first response from the audience is surprise. The less the audience guesses the upcoming incongruity, the greater is the surprise, and therefore the greater is the humor. (Tellis 2004, 157.)

Different kind of incongruity create different types of humor. Self-deprecatative humor emerges from incongruity between one's own goals or image and achievements, parody arises from incongruity between an original and a new context, satire from incongruity between claims and practice, pun from incongruity of a word with two meanings, and resonance from incongruity be-

tween words and pictures in an ad. The term resonance is used because the play of word and picture creates a multiplication of meaning. Resonance is a form of humor that probably occurs more often in advertising than in literature. Some authors consider resonance to be advertising's unique contribution to literary form. (Tellis 2004, 157.)

Over latest centuries, the ways of viewing humor have dramatically changed. What used to be seen as aggressive and perhaps socially inappropriate can now be viewed as positive, psychologically and physically healthy, and even socially desirable. (Martin 2006, 29)

### **2.3 Humor in advertising**

It can be tricky using humor in advertising. It has been acknowledged for a long time that humor can be an effective tool for drawing people's attention to ads, but there are several factors that can affect the outcome of humorous advertisement. Not everyone sees humor in the same light and the message meant to be delivered might be affected by humor.

Although humor has a long history in advertising, the results of the studies on the effects of humor have often been contradictory. However it can be said relatively reliably that humor constitutes a certain kind of effect chain, where it enhances the attention the ad receives and the positive impact on the liking of an ad and also raises the viewer's emotional reaction. (Unger 1995, 66 -68.)

Humor is widely used in advertising and there are different estimates about the exact amount. Most likely the amount of humor in advertising varies depending on the time and culture. In the early 1900s marketers shunned the use of humor in advertising, because it was considered inappropriate and too frivolous. But due to the changes in society and, on the other hand, due to the increase in the competition, humor is increasingly used to obtain the consumer's attention. (Beard 2005, 54 - 55.) Catanescu ja Tom (2001, 93 - 94 ) estimate humor to occur in about 5 percent of journal advertisements and about 26 per cent of television advertising. It can be stated relatively reliably that on the American television commercials about 20 to 25 per cent contain humor (Beard 2005).

The primary reason advertisers employ humor is not the pleasure and amusement an audience gets for viewing or hearing a humorous ad. The type of humor may have an important interaction with its impact on how well a message communicates. The communication goal set for the message is important in feasibility of different types of humor. (Gulas & Weinberger 2006, 102–103.)

One major concern with the research of humor in advertising is the lack of agreement on a humor typology (Riecken & Hensel, 27.) Parsons, Harlan and Weinberger indicate that since the underlying nature of humor is not yet resolved it does not surprise that no general theory of humor has arisen. Instead more of a collection of proposed theories has compounded. (1997, 18.)

Parsons, Harlan and Weinberger (1997, 18) cite McGhee and Wicker, Barron and Willis to explain the mechanisms that regulate humor. They can be grouped into three broad categories: affective, cognitive and interpersonal. Affective mechanisms provide a safety valve for forbidden feelings so that humor is seen as a healthy adaptive behavior. Cognitive mechanisms are related to message structure. Things such as incongruity, rhetorical irony, mere surprise or inconsistency can provoke humor. Interpersonal humor reflects the social context in which humor occurs. Humor, for example, may be the result of feeling superior to others; for example jokes and puns are used to evoke such a feeling. Disparagement and sympathy are other examples.

In a research conducted in the United States and the United Kingdom among researchers and creative executives about their views on what could be achieved with humor. Groups from both countries agreed that with humor gaining attention, registering brand names, and enhancing mood are more effective than when not using humor. The U.S. group was more cautious and denoted that humor could harm comprehension and recall and is not advisable to use for complex messages or for gaining persuasion. (Weinberger & Spotts 1989, 41-42.)

Advertisers believe that the humorous advertising is more suitable for certain types of products than others. Evidence of this is the prevalence of humor in advertising of products indicating low risk and the lack of humor in advertising of products indicating high risk. (Beard 2008: 125–126).

On the other hand, humorous advertising seems to have a positive impact after the purchase as well. It looks like the traditional testing of advertising and other communication done before a

consumer has purchased the goods misses this important effect. For example humor might affect positively those who have already used the product so that the image of a product experience is transformed to more positive than it actually was. If we only measure the impact of humor before purchase we may falsely infer that humor had no effect. (Gulas & Weinberger 2006, 106.)

### **2.3.1 Liking of an ad and the effect on the mood**

Many earlier and recent studies have showed evidence that humor has strong impact on liking the ad and on the affect of an ad and that they are linked directly with an impact on sales. The review of Gulas and Weinberger indicates that nine out of ten studies show a positive connection between humor and source liking. The recent studies have shown that humor enhances liking of the ad, source and brand. (Gulas & Weinberger 2006, 103 – 112.)

Humor may also affect by uplifting consumers' moods. Kahn and Isen have been demonstrating that even a minor positive affect can lead to a variety seeking behavior as measured by more switching or alternating among brands. When there is no introduction of negative features in the choice task, positive effect influences subjects to organize cognitive material more broadly, notice more different features, allow more acceptable items in their choice sets, and spend more time in evaluating choices. (1993, 266–268.)

### **2.3.2 Recollection**

When humor contains constraints or incongruity it supports the memory and the advertisement is more likely to be remembered. In a study with puns Summerfelt, Lippman and Hyman found out that the constraint aided retrieval and accurate reconstruction. When humor with incongruity was rare in the test material the items with puns were recalled better than the non-pun items. But when the majority of the studied items were humorous, the puns were not more likely to be remembered than non-pun items. In this distinctiveness sense incongruity does not completely drive the memory effects of humor. When there was as much humorous and non-humorous items in the test material the humorous items were more likely to be remembered. They also found that rehearsal of humorous material does not cause any memory effects. (2010, 390–392.)

Summerfelt, Lippman and Hyman also suggest that any attempts to improve memory by using humor should integrate the humor as closely as possible within the information to be remembered, so that memory of the humor will conduct reconstruction of the relevant information and improve memory for that material as well. (2010, 392.)

### **2.3.3 Attention and comprehension**

Several kinds of attention measures are able to consistently detect a positive effect of humor as well. The fact that humor enhances attention is well supported by the available empirical evidence. At gaining attention, humor directly connected to the product or issue being promoted seems to be more successful than unrelated humor. (Gulas & Weinberger 2006, 112.)

The literature is mixed on the effect that humor has on comprehension. The studies are difficult to compare and there is a debate about the measures used. On the other hand, several studies of those attempting to measure it, do incline toward the possibility of humor to enhance comprehension. Humor type may be an important determinant in comprehension effects. (Gulas & Weinberger 2006, 112 – 114)

### **2.3.4 Credibility and persuasion**

Humor does not seem to harm persuasion, at least the risk seems small. There are relatively few studies that have looked at humor and persuasion, but the evidence seems to lean more toward the view that humor can help persuasion than the view that it neither harms nor helps. (Gulas & Weinberger 2006, 115.)

There are a few advertising studies that have examined the effect of humor on source credibility. The results of these studies can be best described as mixed. All in all, there are indications that it is unlikely that source credibility is consistently enhanced with the use of humor. There is some evidence that humor may even harm it. (Gulas & Weinberger 2006, 117.)



### **2.3.5 Effect of humor strength**

It has been stated that if a consumer focuses on the humor in the ad, the information may be missed. Smith suggests that contrary to the popular notion that humorous ads enhance attention, the assumption does not always apply. Those who perceived the ad as more humorous were less sensitive to the strength of the ad claims than were the subjects who perceived the ad as less humorous. In other words the perception of humor in the advertisements led subjects to be relatively uninfluenced by the strength of ad claims. And while perceptions of humorousness tended to enhance both ad and brand evaluations, this enhancement only appeared in the case of weak ad claims. (1993, 158.)

The ability of humor to ease the remembering of brand claims depends on humor strength. Krishan and Chakravarti found in their research on unrelated humor that relative nonhumor or moderate humor even if low in claims relevance may ease the advertisement message to go through by persuading more resources into the processing of the advertisement. This might help to remember brand claims and perhaps other advertisement components. On the other hand, high-strength humor, especially if low in relevance, might draw attention away from brand claims and they will not be that easily remembered. (2003, 241–242.) In some studies the ads with the highest levels of perceived humor performed worst on message comprehension. They also did poorly on source trust and knowledge. (Gulas & Weinberger 2006, 119.)

Humor that is meaningfully linked to the brand claims may enhance its comprehension and memory. It appears evident that using relevant humor leads to effective humorous utilizations. Advertisers often embed the brand claims in relevant humor and hope it will help comprehend and remember the brand claims. In practice, however, these goals may be at odds with each other. Strong humor that attracts processing resources to the advertisement may also absorb most of these resources and reduce processing of the claims. (Krishnan & Dipankar 2003, 231.)

### **2.3.6 Effect of individuals**

Several factors impact the individuals response to humor in ads. The research of Cline, Altsech and Kellaris (2003) suggests that the influence of humor on the attitude toward the ad may depend on the individual's orientation for humor. Both the person characteristics and the ad

characteristics shape the response to the ad, but individual's need for humor may play a significant role. Individuals with higher levels of need for humor respond more favorably to humorous ads though they may be repulsed by dilute and weak humor. Individuals that are rated low in the need for humor scale may be impassive toward the humor in ad. Knowledge of the common characteristics of target group may suggest whether or not to use humor in advertising. (Cline & all. 2003, 35, 42.)

A very interesting fact is that failed humor is connected with some important negative features such as annoying, bad brand, and ad not useful. Failed humor means that an ad was intended to be humorous but was not perceived that way. This reminds us that simply creating what one thinks is humorous is not sufficient because humor is quite individual. There appears to be a significant risk that because humor may not be appropriate and could have unwanted and unforeseen effects because of individual taste, product, or circumstance. (Gulas & Weinberger 2006, 118–119.)

Riecken and Hensel examined the relation between humor and humor orientation, humor and gender and humor and age. Their study showed mixed results when considering the relation between humor evaluation and humor orientation. There seems to be at least some connection between them. The results were mixed also when examining the relation between gender and humor but males seemed to find ads humorous more often than females. Based on this study only age does not seem to have connection in humor evaluation. (2012, 30, 34–35.)

### 3 EMPIRICAL PART

The websites of the organisations were analysed mainly in April and May 2015. From those organisations which had pages in English, those pages were examined. Kaleva, Siivittäjä and Virtaavain had websites only in Finnish so from their part I went through them.

There was no humor on five researched websites. Those were Kierikki Stone Age Center, MotiMIND, the Northern Ostrobothnia Museum, Turkansaari Open-Air Museum and Virtaavain. On other eight websites there was from one to five humorous textual elements and altogether there was nineteen humor cases in the material.

#### 3.1 Analysis of humor

As regards to **Kaleva Oy** the Finnish websites of Kaleva as a company were surveyed (Kaleva Oy 2015. Kaleva Oy. Cited 13.4.2015). The only humoristic case was the advertisement of Kaleva picturing a man reading Kaleva newspaper on a tablet computer. In this ad a football player is permeating through the screen and as a result the man looks very amazed and his coffee spills out of his mug.



Tilaa eKaleva + tabletti

Tilaa eKaleva ja tabletti yhdessä kätevänä pakettina. Tilauksen pituus on 24 kk.

(Kaleva Oy 2015. Tilaa Kaleva. Cited 13.4.2015.)

In this case the humor is built from an unexpected event and incongruity. Incongruity arises from the game on the tablet computer coming to life, although it is obviously only a picture. The

advertisement strives to create an impression that a tablet is an excellent medium to read the newspaper. As a medium the tablet is so good, that events come to life. Humorous effect is generated by the surprise the man experiences, from the expression on his face, and also from the unusual happening.

The textual element of the ad refers to the picture. The text is translated to English *Follow the world, as you want. Kaleva, strongly present. (Seuraa maailmaa, miten haluat. Kaleva, vahvasti läsnä)*. The picture and the text are in harmony communicating the same message. There is no incongruity between them, on the contrary, they convey the same message and the text emphasizes the message of the picture. So here is no resonance from incongruity between words and pictures in the ad.

On the Kaleva website humor was found also on a webpage reporting about the companionship benefits, but those humor cases referred to the partners of Kaleva and told about their events and were written by the partners. They were not the actual contents of Kaleva websites.

On the website of the Oulu City Theatre, humor was found from the descriptions of the plays. Several descriptions are written in a funny way, especially those describing comedies. All these plays were on stage on spring term 2015. The first example narrates The Addams Family play.

Welcome to enjoy the Addams family! The dad, who collects torture devices, and the mum, who dreams of visiting the sewers of Paris, offer their guests an unforgettable experience in their freaky house. The hair-raising musical comedy tinted with black humour, is filled with energy and passion. --- So, be brave and step in, *this family won't bite you – but you should keep an eye on that zombie butler of theirs.* (Oulu City Theatre 2015. The Addams Family. Cited 1.5.2015.)

The entire description is written in a funny way, but the last sentence is the actual humorous part. *This family won't bite you - but you should keep an eye on that zombie butler of theirs.* In this case humor exists in two positions. The first is a common humorous idiom "something won't bite", which is something that you say in order to tell someone not to be frightened of someone or something. This is followed by the playful warning of the zombie butler, that he actually might bite. Humor is constructed here on the surprise which is followed in the end of the sentence and to the incongruity in the biting of a zombie butler and the family that will not bite.

The second humorous example in the Oulu City Theatre website was found in the description of the play *The Bed*.

The *Bed* consists of seven independent little stories which are very familiar for all of us. The bed plays a big role in our life; in the beginning, middle and in the end of it. The bed is full of life taste! *Welcome to the bed wing!*

Again the last sentence is where the humor lies. *Welcome to the bed wing!* welcomes the spectators to the play by placing the bed into the same position as if it was a whole wing of the house. The hidden meaning is that the bed equals multiple rooms. This is humorous because the bed is not a wing of the building in reality. In this context it cannot only be seen as a place, where one sleeps, but instead it is a place where anything that can happen that can happen in a house. The meanings are played with, so the meanings associated to a wing are now transferred to bed.

On the website of **Oulu Museum of Art** there was three humorous textual elements found. They were all in the descriptions of the exhibitions. This first example is from the description of the exhibition called *Kaisu's choice*.

The stories of this work by the Haapajärvi-based graphic artist and more than eighty other artworks are told in an exhibition featuring a flying archangel, *a man running to Brussels with his head in a bucket and the village dog inaugurating a stack of firewood somewhere in Eastern Estonia* – and much more. (Oulu Museum of Arts 2015. *Kaisu's Choice* – '68, '89 and All the Other Crazy Years Selections from the collections of the Oulu Museum of Art and Kaleva. Cited 23.10.2015.)

In this description the examples of the artworks on exhibition are described in a humorous way. *A man running to Brussels with his head in a bucket and the village dog inaugurating a stack of firewood somewhere in Eastern Estonia* generate a humorous image in the head of the reader. The humor is in the content of these descriptions and in the picture of the events that these descriptions bring about.

The second example is from an exhibition called *Tail Up! Greetings from Cats and Dogs*. Here humor is in the incongruity.

Welcome all friends of pets and contemporary art, *as well as to those allergic to pets!* (Oulu Museum of Art 2015. TAIL UP! Greetings from Cats and Dogs. Cited 23.10.2015.)

In this example the humor is in the wishing the allergic people welcome to the exhibition about pets. Naturally, works of art cannot create an allergic reaction, and that is where the humor lies. Humor is formed of incongruity between the wishing and the reality.

The third example is from the description of the exhibition called Age of the Dinosaur.

*It has been millions of years since dinosaurs were as life-like as they are now!* (Oulu Museum of Art 2015. Past exhibitions. Cited 23.10.2015.)

This text refers to the dinosaurs in the exhibition, and it suggests that they are as life-like as the real dinosaurs and also the liveliest ever exhibited. The Humor lies in the comparison between the dinosaurs on exhibition and the real ones. In this example the humor is created by incongruity. This description is also written in a humoristic way. This appearance is brought about by describing the lifeless as if it was a living thing.

There was several examples of humor on the English websites of **Ponsse corporation**. In the moving banner of the frontpage Ponsse's products are introduced. There was a humorous description about Ponsse Bear, which is a harvester in Ponsse's product range.

“Ponsse continues to upgrade its product range and proudly presents a new addition. The fully upgraded PONSSE Bear is the genuine *king of harvesters* in the forest. It represents the best performance, productivity and serviceability available at the moment.” (Ponsse Oyj. Power, productivity and joy of working. Cited 27.4.2015)

Here the humor arises from the fact, that the bear is often called as a king of the forest. Now it is the Ponsse bear, that is called as the king of the harvesters. The properties of the strongest animal are now conveniently transferred to the Ponsse harvester, and this is also used to highlight the product features. At least Finnish people recognize this aspect that compares to the bear. Here the humor is constructed with a pun.

The king of the forest might also link up with the song in the movie The Wizard of Oz, which is called, "If I Were King of the Forest". This comic number is sung by the Cowardly Lion during the

scene at the Emerald City, when the characters of *The Wizard of Oz*: Lion, Dorothy, Toto, Tin Woodsman and Scarecrow are waiting to learn whether the Wizard will grant them an audience. (Wikipedia 2015. *If I Were King of the Forest*. Cited 22.10.2015.) Not everyone recognize this intertextuality, but those will who know well the history of popular culture.

The next humor case was found from Ponsse's corporate presentation. Also in this case the humor is in the play with words.

Our mission is to contribute to our customers' success with productive and reliable Ponsse forest machines and services. It is our promise to be the "*Logger's Best Friend*". (Ponsse Oyj 2015. Ponsse Plc. Cited 27.4.2015.)

*Logger's best friend* includes analogy for the all around the world known saying *The diamonds are girls best friend*. This is the most known use of this idiom, although the saying *to be someone's best friend* is used widely in many kind of contexts. The saying is based on the musical song from the United States "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend". The song was first performed in 1949 in the Broadway-musical "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes". The most known version and the one that made is know worldwide is the one of Marilyn Monroe in a film *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* in 1953. The narrator of a song is a young woman, who tells romance is nice, but the feelings of a man get colder when a woman gets old and you can not pay rent with kisses. The slogan of a song is that the diamonds are there to stay and are the girls best friend. (Wikipedia 2015. *Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend*. Cited 22.10.2015.)

Here the humor is formed by a word play but it is also formed by analogy. Someone might get a humorous impression of the analogy between the diamonds and the forest machines. Ponsse's forest machines may be seen as important to the loggers as the diamonds are for the girls. Girls prefer diamonds over men, and Ponsse gives a promise their machines to be as important to the loggers.

In Ponsse's websites there are also a few funny stories about Ponsse's history. The following example is the first one of them.

## 1974 A TRIP TO GERMANY

Ponsse premieres in the international markets in 1974. A massive storm hits Germany, knocking down trees everywhere, and a large amount of foreign equipment is needed for harvesting the trees felled by the storm. Einari finds this out and hears that the job is well compensated, and goes to check out the logging site with Olavi Kauhanen. Olavi, the loggers and Ponsse travel to Germany. The machine is transported on a pallet to the harbour and by ship to Travemünde, but nobody has remembered to book transportation to the German logging site more than 70 kilometres away. Olli and some other Finnish contractors and their machines wait in the harbour. Because no means of transportation is available, Olli mounts his Ponsse and sets off along the German motorway while the others follow. This is an unusual sight - the forest machines slowly chugging along the edge of the road, one of them actually carrying a Finnish sauna in the load space... (Ponsse Oyj 2015. A trip to germany. Cited 27.4.2015.)

In this case the humor is in the events of this true story. By narrating this story the company shows a capability to laugh at oneself and a sense of humor. It makes the company more easily accessible, when it appears in this very human light. By narrating these kind of stories the company most likely wants to create an image as an easy going and overt company.

This second example is about the 40th anniversary celebration of Ponsse. Also this story is humorously narrated and in addition it includes humorous happenings. *The competition was indeed hairy* is said in a funny way. To describe competition as hairy is a word play, since a competition can not really be hairy. Here *hairy* refers to the competition of the finest sideburns. Additionally the usage of *indeed* highlights the funniness.

"During the party, the winner of the sideburn competition was also selected. The finalists came to the stage and Marita Kelppe, the former hostess of the Ponsse Club, selected the winner. *The competition was indeed hairy*, but in the end Petteri Härkönen's *bushy 'burns* took home first prize." (Ponsse Oyj 2015. 40th anniversary celebrated with 1700 guests. Cited 27.4.2015.)

Bushy 'burns is also expressed in a funny way. The choice of words and a word play makes this, already a funny occasion, a competition of finest sideburns, sound even funnier. It could have been expressed for example: *Härkönen with very hairy sideburns took home first prize*, but using *bushy 'burns* makes it sound funny. There is an alliteration in the words *bushy* and *'burns*, which also gives this pair of words a funny nuance.



On the Power Park's website there was humor in several contexts. First when you enter the page there is a slogan *funland in Finland* which is a pun in nature. It is a pun because word *funland* is formed on the basis of word *Finland* and they differ only by one vowel. Together they rhyme perfectly with each other and make a harmonious coalition and also sound humorous.

Many descriptions about the amusement park rides were written in a funny way, but only two of them were actually humorous. In the first example the humor was in the incongruity of the fact that the tiger is not real although it is referred to as if it was real. It is said about an amusement ride that *If you are brave enough, you can climb on a tiger*. You do not need to be very brave to climb on an artificial tiger. It is possible of course, that a child can be afraid of a play tiger. This is still slightly humorous.

Crazy Horse is a classic of amusement rides. Crazy Horse consists of rotating circular platform with seats for riders. You can choose a gorgeous, white horse or a scary lion. Or go for a ride in a princess wagon. *If you are brave enough, you can climb on a tiger*. Crazy Horse with its colourful details brings traditions to your day at the amusement park.

This next example is slightly funny. To refer to a ride called Jumping star by saying *this is one jumpy experience* is funny because the experience is being described with the same word as is in the name of the ride. Here the humor is in the word play.

*This is one jumpy experience* for the small children. Up to the treetops and then free fall straight down! Jumping Star is a little brother of MegaDrop free fall. This ride will take you up and down, jumping, step by step.

The next example is from the site where Power Park introduces corporate family fun days, ceremonies, marketing meetings etc. In this quote the possibility to privately use the amusement park with a large crowd is expressed in an amusing way. The humor is based on the unpredictable end, as can be seen from the following example.

Let's plan an unforgettable day for you and your friends, customers, colleagues and *perhaps a few thousand more*.

Quite many of the ride descriptions of the Power Park and also other texts on the website were written in funny way, but they did not actually contain humor. Like the following example:

In 2013 PowerPark will introduce its new super attraction, a complete area with various water attractions. *You can not keep your clothes dry!*

In this example the last sentence *You can not keep your clothes dry!* is funny, but not actually very humorous. Nevertheless it is funny and cheerful.

On the **Ranua Zoo** website there was a couple of textual elements that was found humorous. This first example tells about the mascot polar bear of the Zoo.

Jonne the Polar Bear is an easy-going polar bear character that pads around the park and growls to the visitors in a friendly manner. Jonne is a fellow quick in his moves, and not necessarily always available. Of the four polar bears of Ranua Wildlife Park, *Jonne is the only one allowed to move freely along the park grounds.* The real polar bears spend their time in their large pens!

The entire text is written in a funny way, but the sentence "*Jonne is the only one allowed to move freely along the park grounds.*", can be found humorous. Here the humorous effect is brought about by equating the mascot to the alive polar bears. This is done by describing the lifeless mascot as if it was a living thing and talked about as if it was a living polar bear. The humor consists of incongruity.

The other example is from a page describing the camping area and the wildlife safaris. In the example there is an euphemism used for telling about the reproduction of the polar bears. The humor is in the means of how the text is narrated and in the usage of this kind of funny euphemism.

*During the summer we will also see how well the polar bear lady has charmed Manasse, our male polar bear!* RanuaZoo Camping is an excellent base, whether your intentions are short or longer trips to the wilderness of Ranua or to RanuaZoo.

From **Museum and Science Center Luuppi's** five operators there was humor found on two of their websites, Tietomaa Science Centre and Oulu Museum of Art. On the websites of The Northern Ostrobothnia Museum, Kierikki Stone Age Center and Turkansaari Open-Air Museum there was no humor found.

On the website of **Science Centre Tietomaa** there was one humorous case found in a text describing the exhibitions. The humor is not very strong either in this case, but rather only slightly humorous.

The core of Science Centre Tietomaa consists of versatile and fascinating themed exhibitions that will provide you with *fun mixed with learning or learning mixed with fun*. There are more than 150 exciting exhibits in the exhibitions - just trying them out can easily take a whole day!

In this example humor is created by word play. "*Fun mixed with learning or learning mixed with fun*" includes the thought, that in Tietomaa you can above all have fun and learn, or the other way round. The words of the first claim are turned over to the second claim, which creates humorous impression.

Many descriptions of the actions in the Science Centre Tietomaa were written in a lively way but they were not really humorous. The following example is one of them:

The Illusions exhibition is full of exhibits one stranger than the other. There you can fill your eyes - or even your fingertips - with wonder.

On the website of **Siivittäjä** humor was found in the blog which dealt with gamification (Finnish pelillisuus and pelillistäminen) with a headline *Gamification, what is it?* ("Pelillisuus ja pelillistäminen, mitä se on?") The website of Siivittäjä was only in Finnish.

Pelillisuus ja pelillistäminen, mitä se on?

Oman kokemukseni mukaan juuri annettu aika ja selkeä tavoite ovat hyvä lähtökohta oman työn yhdessä kehittämiseen. Kun työskentelylle luodaan vielä hyvät, innostavat, toiminnalliset puitteet, *homma kyllä pelittää!*" (Siivittäjä 2015. Pelillisuus ja pelillistäminen – mitä se on? Cited 14.4.2015.)

Humor is in this example in the form of a word play. Here is a common Finnish phrase *homma pelittää* used in a context with gamification. In the phrase *pelittää* means the same as *work*, but is ordinary on its tone. (Kotimaisten kielten keskus and Kielikone Oy 2015. Cited 22.10.2015.) It also refers to the topic the blog deals with, the gamification. Humorous appearance arises from the reference of the same word *pelittää* to two things. In addition to the working of something it also refers to the actual subject of the text which is gamification.

### 3.2 Amount and context of humor

Humor could be identified only once on the websites of Kaleva, Siivittäjä and Science Centre Tietomaa. On the websites of Ranua Zoo and Oulu City Theatre humor could be found twice. The websites of Oulu Museum of Art contained humor three times and Power Park four times. Most frequently humor was identified on the websites of Ponsse corporation. No humor could be found from the websites of Kierikki Stone Age Center, MotiMIND, the Northern Ostrobothnia Museum, Turkansaari Open-Air Museum and Virtaavain.

It was expected that there was humor on the websites of Science Centre Tietomaa, Ranua Zoo and Power Park, because one of the aims of these places is to entertain the guests. Also the Oulu Museum of Art websites contained many humor findings which was partly a result of the quantity of the material on the site. There was a lot of past exhibition descriptions on their pages. The other traditional museums did not have humor in their pages at all, which was expected. Ponsse corporation had quite a many humorous parts on their pages considered their field of operation.

The humor was found the most commonly in the descriptions of the services or products. Ten of all nineteen found humor cases were on these kind of descriptions. Two were in Ponsse corporations product descriptions, two in the play descriptions of Oulu City Theatre. Another two was found from the ride descriptions of Power Park. The humor found from the description of the exhibitions was one found from the page of Science Centre Tietomaa and three was found from the website of Oulu museum of Art. One humorous description was about the animals of Ranua Zoo.

In several different kinds of places only one humor case was found. One was found in an actual advertisement on the Kaleva website and one was in a blog text on the website of Siivittäjä. One humor case was in a slogan. Also one was found in the text describing a mascot and one was in a sales text.

The humorous stories found on the website of Ponsse corporation were a speciality of Ponsse in the material. There was three humor parts found from these initially humorous stories. A corporate storytelling of this kind is in my opinion a very good way of influencing to the company image as an easily accessible company and as a company with a sense of humor. Dolan and

Naidu define business storytelling to be like traditional storytelling, it tells a story, but characteristic to business stories is the intention to connect, inspire and engage an audience with the message. Emotions are important in business, and one of the ways emotions can be harnessed to work for business purposes is storytelling. (2013, 1, 19.)

### 3.3 Ways of building humor

After the analysis of the humor found on the websites, the occurrences of humor was categorized into eight categories based on the way the humor was built. Categories are incongruity and surprise, word play, pun, humoristic story or happenings, analogy, alliteration, euphemism and the choice of words. The categories were constructed based on the humor found on the material. Some humorous textual elements contained several means to create humor, so the total appearing of the means of humor is greater than the total of occurrences of humor (see Table 1).

	incongruity and surprise	word play	pun	humoristic story or happenings	analogy	alliteration	euphemism	the choice of words
Kaleva	x							
Oulu City Theatre	x	x						
Oulu Museum of Art	xx			X				
Ponsse Oyj		xxx	x	Xx	x	x		xx
Power Park	xx	x	x					
Ranua Zoo	x						x	
Science Centre Tietomaa		x						
Siivittäjä		x						
	7	7	2	3	1	1	1	2

Table 1. Categories of the means of humor.

Most of the ways of constructing humor belong into two categories: incongruity and surprise and word play. Both of these categories occurred seven times in the material. These two categories are preeminently the biggest categories, because approx. 58 per cent of all the found ways of constructing humor belongs to them. These two means of humor were also found from over half

of the organizations under examination, both means could be found from five organizations. On the basis of this material incongruity and surprise and word play seem to be the most common ways of constructing humor on websites (see Figure 1).

The category of humoristic story and happenings is the next most used way of constructing humor in the material appearing three times. Both categories, puns and the choice of words, have two appearances in material. Analogy, alliteration and euphemism were used only ones as a mean of humor in this material.

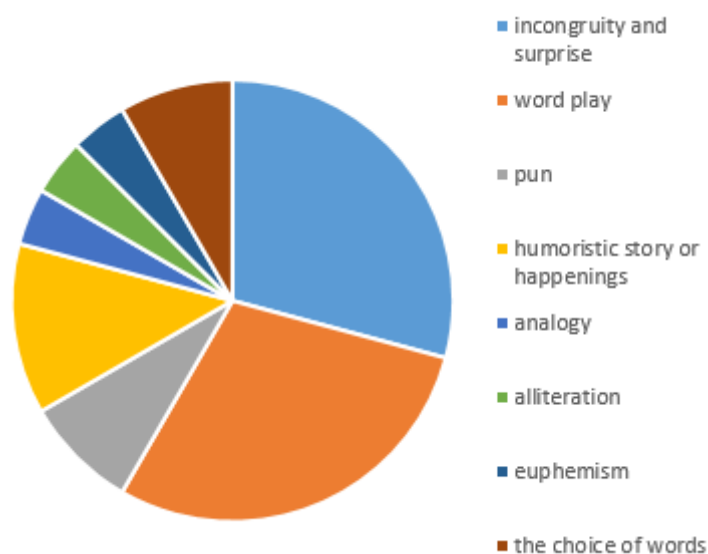


Figure 1. The means of humor

The ways of constructing humor were various and even in this such a small sample there was eight different ways to produce humor. These ways can be divided into two main categories on the basis of whether the humor is constructed by linguistic means or whether it is in the description in the text or a content of a picture. This descriptive class includes incongruity and surprise and the humoristic story and happenings. In the bigger role there was the humor constructed by linguistic means. Word play, puns, choice of words, analogy, alliteration and euphemism, can be counted into this category. Linguistic means were used altogether fourteen times. The humor appearing in the descriptive way could be found ten times which is almost as much as humor constructed by linguistic means.

The most diversely the ways of humor were used on the websites of Ponsse corporation. There were six out of eight means of humor found from the material examined, when the other organizations only had few different ways of humor in use in their website. Some of the ways of constructing humor were used several times on Ponsse's websites, hence altogether different ways occurred ten times. The amount of the humorous textual elements was also biggest on Ponsse's website, there was altogether five cases. The amount of the means of humor and the humorous textual elements on the websites of Ponsse is partly a result of the fact that Ponsse's websites are the most extensive of all of the websites examined.

On Ponsse website there was intertextuality with popular culture in two humorous cases. *King of harvesters in the forest* was connected into the movie *The Wizard of Oz* and *Logger's Best Friend* was connected into musical song *Diamonds Are a Girls Best Friends*. Using intertextuality is a very effective way of transferring the wanted associations into ones own products or services. In addition with the help of it the text might often gain humoristic tones.

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

In this thesis the aim was to examine the quantity and the quality of humor on the websites of the HURMOS organizations. The purpose of this study was to clarify what kind of humor is used on these websites and what are the ways the humor is built on them and in what context humor occurs. Discourse analysis is used as a method in this study. As a background theory there is an outline of the theories about research of humor and humor in advertising.

At first this subject seemed very narrow and broader material or a different manner of an approach was considered. Nevertheless after the analysis it must be noted that this kind of deep analysis was fruitful way of researching the humor in this kind of material. The work was delayed considerably because another way of approaching the subject was searched, even though in the end the work succeeded well carried out like this.

In this study the sampling was small, so the results are not generalized. Though interesting things were discovered such as the most of the ways of humor were built with the help of language. In addition interesting things were discovered about the context humor was used on the websites of the HURMOS organizations. Most humor cases were found on the descriptions of the services or products.

As a subject this study was very interesting and it would have been interesting to do even wider research on the subject. There could have been other means of marketing communication studied as well, such as social media marketing or videos in youtube. It might have been more useful and reasonable to study only organizations from one field or otherwise similar, and therefore comparable organizations. In that case also the results could have been generalized better for the chosen field. Business storytelling would also be a very interesting subject for a future research. What kind of stories there are on company websites, what can be seen as a main purpose of them, and how many of them are humoristic.

It is unlikely that using humor in marketing communications is written on these organizations strategies. It would be interesting to know how intentional the usage of humor on these researched websites is. Most of the time the usage of humor may be just a coincidence and



depending on the writer or his/her skills or intentions in writing - or maybe it depends just of the mood of the writer.

Another interesting question is how companies take stand towards humor in marketing communications, what is their attitude towards it and what do they know about it. This could be researched with a questionnaire. This was what I was already preparing to examine, but since there was a plan to send these same companies another massive questionnaire, the commissioner thought that companies will not answer to two questionnaires almost at the same time. For the future research this could be a very interesting research question.

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