Table of Contents

Figures

Tables

1 Introduction

The introductory chapter aims at providing the reader with a background to the subject at hand, as well as explain why the particular topic is relevant. Subsequently, the problem is defined and the chapter is then concluded with the purpose and related research questions.

1.1 Background

In today's society, consumers are constantly exposed to a large amount of advertisements. According to a study conducted by SIFO the average person in Sweden can be exposed to at least 1,500 advertising messages per day (TNS SIFO, 2008). Other existing statistics within this field indicate even higher figures, claiming that a person can be exposed to over 5,000 advertising messages per day depending on where they live (Johnson, 2009). When being exposed to advertisement in this bombarding manner it is referred to as clutter. Clutter can also be defined in a subjective sense of measurement, by referring to consumers' evaluation of the amount of advertising (Elliot & Speck, 1998). Moreover, this implies that the presence of clutter may reduce the effectiveness of individual advertisements since consumers become unable to separate them from the mass (Ha & McCann, 2008). Consumers' inability to separate advertisements apart requires marketers to act creatively and employ strategies that differentiate their advertisement from competitors and even more importantly, to grab attention. A commonly used strategy for this purpose is to employ certain appeals in order to connect the product with a particular emotion, thus making it more distinguishable. In general, these appeals range from fear, sex, security and humour (de Mooij, 2010).

Among these appeals, humour remains as one of the most extensive communication strategies employed in advertising today (Shabbir & Thwaites, 2007). Humour in advertising is particularly useful for grabbing the viewer's attention and further increases the likelihood of message acceptance. Fugate (1998) continues by describing humour in advertising as the prospect in achieving a positive response such as laughter and recognition among the target audience when one or others are portrayed in a playful manner. Moreover, the ability to make fun of and play with the brand or company is suggested to make it appear as more cool and unique (Solomon, Bambossy, Askegaard, & Hogg, 2010).

Another way to break through the clutter is the use of taboo appeals (Dahl, Frankenberger & Manchanda, 2003). These appeals challenge the sense of "right and wrong" in society by

challenging societal and cultural taboos (Pope, Voges, & Brown, 2004). Although taboos have been an alternative used in marketing campaigns over the last thirty years, it was not until the late nineties that such appeals were employed as a deliberate communication strategy (Vezina & Paul, 1997). The fashion industry serves as one of the most dedicated users, where taboo themes have been widely applied. Well-known examples derive from Benetton's strong political messages to Sisley and Diesel playing with associations of sex and death (Andersson, Hedelin, Nilsson & Welander, 2004). This controversial method for gaining attention is however today also found within other commercial industries and even non-profit organizations are relying on increasingly provocative appeals to shock the audience. Dahl et al., (2003) further suggest that taboo themes in advertising should be particularly appealing among the young audience, as a result of their search for challenges and rebellion behavior. They are also argued to more likely appreciate these types of appeals as cool, unique and relevant to their modern approach to the norms of society. This reasoning corresponds to Solomon et al., (2010) description of the generation Y and how they are turned off by commercial content that takes itself too seriously, and rather appreciate advertising as a form of entertainment.

Combining taboo topics such as death and sex with humour is one area that has not been widely researched (Manceau & Tissier-Desbordes, 2006). When humour is used in conjunction with taboo appeals, such as death, violence or discrimination, it is often referred to as dark humour. This can more properly be defined as 'A humorous way of looking at or treating something that is serious or sad' (Cambridge Dictionary, 2013). Marketers use this kind of strategy in order to mitigate any potential negative associations evoked by the sole use of a taboo appeal (Sabri, 2012). Humour then serves as a tool for utilizing shock in order to receive laughs or positive responses to otherwise serious subjects.

A company that received attention by the use of this strategy was the Ford Motor Corporation, who used this tactic in their marketing communication for the Ford Ka. When publishing a viral commercial illustrating how a cat peering into a car's open sunroof suddenly gets guillotined in front of the viewers' eyes when the panel closes, reactions were immediately strong. While the company claimed it to be an innocent viral marketing tactic, the audience did not hesitate to criticize it in public forums. What is interesting though is that the same company also broadcasted a similar commercial, illustrating how a pigeon was catapulted to its death by a bonnet springing open. The audience did however not react as strongly to this advert compared to the former since it was not viewed as offending to the

same degree. It is therefore questionable how these types of appeals in advertising are being perceived, and further what opinions and emotions that emerge among the audience causing reactions to vary.

Marketers' attempts to break through the clutter have become increasingly controversial as suggested by the earlier example by Ford. When using these appeals, there is however a subtle line between what is considered a successful campaign and what is rather seen as distasteful regarding marketers' strivings to gain the audience attention.

1.2   Problem definition

Considering the increasing amount of clutter that consumers are constantly being exposed to, the audience has consequently become harder to reach. Marketers therefore need to be aware of how to distinguish from competitors towards their specific target group. The background section described how advertising appeals have been adopted as a frequently used strategy for gaining attention, where humour was mentioned as a tool for differentiating from the crowd. Marketers have lately come to stretch this practice further by playing with norms and incorporating increasingly taboo themes such as sex or death in their otherwise humorous campaigns. This practice was referred to as dark humour (Sabri, 2012). Since taboo themes are challenging what is considered appropriate in terms of public conversation by playing with associations deliberately for creating debate, it has also been considered as an efficient strategy specifically for the young audience (Dahl et al., 2003). Nevertheless, while organizations are applying these types of appeals to break through the clutter as was exemplified in the case of Ford, there simultaneously appears to be a limit to peoples' acceptance of the application of dark humour. The question is then how dark humour is perceived by consumers, specifically belonging to the young audience.

Previous research has covered the aspects of sex and death as taboo themes in general, whereas less attention has been focused on the use of humour in conjunction with otherwise serious or taboo topics (Manceau & Tissier-Desbordes, 2006). It is therefore a need to investigate this perspective further and whether the concept of dark humour could be mitigating the controversy intended by the taboo theme itself or rather serve as offending as a result of its ironic appearance. Sabri (2012) has measured the effectiveness of taboo themes and humour, whose results contend that attention as well as recall is improved by the treatment of these two appeals used in conjunction. What as far as the authors' knowledge is left unknown though, is an in-depth investigation regarding how generation Y perceives

dark humour in commercial settings, and whether it could be applied as a sufficient strategy in advertising. This is an important question, as it would have an impact for the organization and its image in society.

1.3   Purpose and research questions

The problem discussion implicates that previous research is lacking within the area of provocative advertising exploring the effect of humour as an additional element. Moreover, there is an existing gap in the literature regarding young peoples' responses to marketers' strivings for their attention by employing increasingly drastic appeals.

The purpose of the study is therefore to understand and describe how generation Y perceive the use of dark humour in advertising.

Based on the problem discussion and the main purpose of the thesis the following research questions will be considered among generation Y:

- *How is the concept of dark humour generally understood?*
- *How is dark humour perceived in commercial settings?*
- *Could dark humour be used within high-risk product categories?*

1.4   Delimitations

In order to better comprehend the content of this thesis, the authors would like to emphasize that although humour as a construct and related theories will be treated, it still does not serve as the main focus. What is primarily associated with humour in advertising is generally amusement, laughter and playfulness, which are all appeals aiming to leave the audience with a positive feeling of joyfulness. The authors intention is however not to examine this kind of carefree humour in depth, but rather to concentrate on its darker features. This implies advertisements that use humour in conjunction with controversial topics that boarder on offending the audience. The ultimate attention of this thesis is therefore directed on dark humour and how it is perceived in society.

Within previous sections, the terms young audience, young people, and generation Y have been used interchangeably. In order to avoid confusion in forthcoming chapters the authors will treat the former concepts as a cohort group of generation Y, and keep consistent by solely referring to this term throughout the thesis. Moreover, focus will remain exclusively on Swedish residents as an attempt to avoid cultural issues that otherwise could es-

tablish additional considerations. This is also motivated by the fact that the authors intend to use mainly international advertisements in the study, in order to decrease the risk of having participants already being exposed to them. Generation Y is of particular interest for this investigation since they represent an attractive group holding strong opinions and typically associate advertisement as a form of entertainment, while being influenced by fashion, popular culture and politics (Solomon et al., 2010). The study will therefore be lacking in its ability to generalize to a wider population consisting of more mature generations also reflecting cultural differences.

1.5   Contribution

The concept of dark humour is a relatively unexplored phenomenon that has not yet been examined in-depth within current research. As a result, the effect of this construct as a strategy applied within commercial settings remains unknown. By the use of the study on hand, the authors therefore aim to provide insight in how dark humour is perceived by a particular target group while being exposed to it in practice. In addition, due to the existing gap in the literature, no sufficient definition has yet been provided explaining the implication of this strategy. The authors are therefore seeking to review presented theories and research within this field in order to subsequently arrive at their own definition of this concept.

The findings provided within this study would be of practical use for organizations seeking to encounter the commercial clutter by a strategy that challenges existing practices in the market. In addition, the theoretical contribution will serve as a valuable point of reference motivating future academics to explore additional angles within this field.

1.6   Definitions

- *Advertising*: Advertising is the presentation and promotion of a service or good by using mass media such as magazines, television and radio where the intention of the message is to inform, persuade and remind the target audience of the brand, product or service (Kotler & Keller, 2009).

- *Clutter:* When a number of advertisements surround a given advertisement it is referred to as clutter, which restrains the audience ability to perceive the given advertisement (Zhao, 1997).

-Advertising appeals: Advertising appeal is the basis of a persuasive message employed to evoke certain emotions among the target audience such as happiness, love, joy and fear in order to motivate a purchase (Solomon et al., 2010; Um, 2008).

- Humour: According to the Oxford Dictionary (2013) humour can be defined as 'the quality of being amusing or comic, especially as expressed in literature speech'.

- Dark humour: Topics and events that are generally considered as taboo, specifically those related to death or violence are treated in an unusually humorous or ridiculing manner while retaining their seriousness. The intention of dark humour is thus for the viewer to experience both laughter and offense, frequently simultaneously (Section 2.8).

-Provocative advertising: Provocative advertising is characterized by a deliberate attempt to offend the audience. This is accomplished by violating norms and challenging social, cultural and moral codes in order to gain attention through shock (Pope et al., 2004).

-Taboo advertising: Taboo refers to a verbal act or forbidden behavior that is considered inappropriate in public conversations or within certain social settings. Common examples of taboo themes derive from sex or death whereas taboo advertising is the use of such images, words or settings aiming to offend the audience by transgressing norms or trigger emotional ambivalence (Sabri, 2012).

-Perception: Kotler and Keller (2009, p. 203) define perception as the 'process by which we select, organize, and interpret information inputs to create a meaningful picture of the world'.

- Generation Y: Individuals born between 1978 and 1994 are referred to as generation Y, recognized as a cohort group due to their similar values and beliefs (Petroulas, Brown & Sundin, 2010).

2   Frame of Reference

The aim of this chapter is to present the reader to existing theories and models relevant for the purpose of the study. The chapter starts by providing an introduction to the marketing communication process and its related features. Subsequently, theories and models linked to the construct of humour are examined, followed by an overview of its darker features and potential connection to taboo themes. Finally, main findings are summarized and presented in a suggested framework, which is further applied in the analysis.

2.1   Introduction

The introductory chapter discussed the subject of advertising clutter as an apparent issue in society where marketers' attempt to tackle this issue has resulted in increasingly daring strategies. The topic of dark humour was mentioned as one of these strategies, and the ultimate focus of the investigation within this thesis. The frame of reference therefore seeks to provide a theoretical base of the origin of humour in order to explore the building blocks of dark humour and finally arrive at a sufficient definition of this concept. The authors have chosen to approach this topic by beginning with the marketing communication process where an organization's transmitting of a message and its related features will be described next.

2.2   The marketing communication process

Marketing communication can be defined as the way in which an organization present itself to the target audience, with the goal of encouraging a dialogue that will lead to a more profitable commercial or other relationships (Egan, 2007). Several models have been proposed to illustrate the marketing communication process while the authors of this thesis have decided to use a model originally developed by Wilbur Schramm (1954) since it is accepted as the basic model of mass communication (Ouwersloot & Duncan, 2008; Egan 2007). In order to better fit with the approach of this thesis, the model has been modified and reconstructed by excluding some components not considered necessary for this purpose (Figure 2.1).
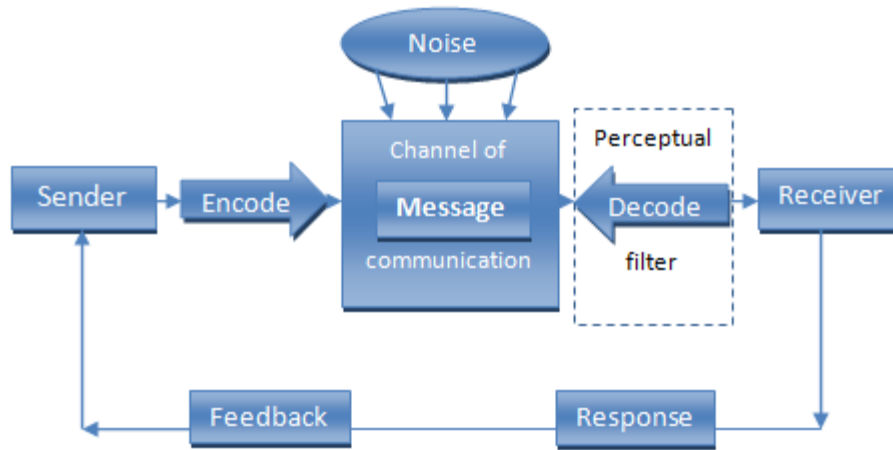
Figure 2.1 The communication process

Source: Adapted from Wilbur Schram's basic model of mass communication (in Ouwersloot & Duncan, 2008; Egan 2007).

The basic communication model encompasses two major parties that are involved in the process, the sender and the receiver (Ouwersloot & Duncan, 2008; Egan 2007). The sender, generally an organization, identifies a need to transmit a message that is encoded into a format by using symbols such as words, pictures or music. Illustrated in figure 2.1 is also the choice of medium, or media channel, which is the means used by the sender to carry the message to the receiver (Schultz, Tannenbaum & Lauterborn, 1993).

A message consists of several different features in order to attract the audiences' attention and separate from the mass, one of them being advertising appeals (Koekemoer, 2004). In marketing communications the most commonly used appeals are emotional, rational, repetition, fear and humour (Koekemoer, 2004). The purpose of using these appeals is to link a product or service with a particular emotion which makes an advertisement more distinguishable. Among earlier mentioned appeals, humour remains as one of the most extensively used communication strategies employed in advertising (Shabbir & Thwaites, 2007). This widespread usage could partly be explained by its playful approach that evokes laughter and other positive responses among the audience such as making an organization appear as more unique (Fugate, 1998; Solomon et al., 2010).

If the receiver accepts the advertising appeal the message is decoded, which involves the audience ability to recognize and comprehend the meaning presented by the appeal into an understandable concept (Ouwersloot & Duncan, 2008; Egan 2007). Throughout this process the message is frequently exposed to different types of noise that in some way interfere with the message, such as advertising clutter (Egan 2007; Schultz et al. 1992). Noise

can lead to bad quality and ineffective communication of the message, which ultimately affects how the audience perceives the message. Research suggests that the receiver encompasses a perceptual filter, which facilitates when selecting what messages to focus the attention towards (Pickton & Broderick 2001). The perceptual filter consequently corresponds to the process of how individuals reduce the number of messages that they daily are being exposed to in favor for messages containing stimulus that distinguish from the mass.

Kotler and Keller (2009, p. 203) defines perception as the 'process by which we select, organize, and interpret information inputs to create a meaningful picture of the world'. A comparable definition is further presented by Solomon et al. (2010, p. 118); 'perception is the process by which stimuli are selected, organized and interpreted'. These two definitions of perception allow people to differentiate their interpretation of a message, meaning that the receivers not necessarily need to share a common view of the appeals featured in the message (Pickton & Broderick, 2001). Solomon et al. (2010) further argue that the study of perception focuses on people's tendencies to add or reduce from the different stimuli presented as they in an involuntary manner assign meaning to them. This statement is further elaborated by Kotler and Keller (2009) claiming that people's perception is affected by the surrounding field and on conditions within each person. A customer in a shop might for example perceive a fast talking salesperson as aggressive and obtrusive while another customer perceives the same salesperson as helpful and skilled. Kotler and Keller (2009) explain this phenomenon of people emerging at different perceptions of the same object by proposing three different perceptual processes:

- Selective attention: The selection of only some advertising messages to further process among those the audience is daily being exposed to. It remains impossible to attend to them all and the challenge for marketers therefore implies to attract consumers to notice their specific advertisement.

- Selective distortion: The tendency when people interpret information in a way that fits with their preconceptions. Consumers tend to perceive information based on previous brand or product beliefs and expectations.

- Selective retention: Refers to the process of how people tend to absorb and retain information that is connected to or supported by their personal attitudes and beliefs.

The last step in the model illustrates feedback which serves as verification that the message is understood by the target audience and has the desired effect (Egan 2007; Dahlen, Lange & Smith, 2010). The feedback is affected by the reactions and responses that emerge when people are being exposed to a given message, either positive or negative (Egan, 2007). Consumers' reactions to a particular product are to a large extent influenced by their perception regarding its advertising, meaning that the evaluation of a product is related to how it is portrayed in marketing communications. Solomon et al., (2010) further argues that viewers' perception of an advertisement has an effect on the mood evoked and the degree to which the advertisement affects the viewers' arousal levels. The same authors also contend that several emotional responses are formed by an advertisement, and that three specific types of feelings can be generated.

- Upbeat feelings: amused, delighted, playful
- Warm feelings: affectionate, contemplative, hopeful
- Negative feelings: critical, defiant, offended

2.3   Product type and audience

Relating back to the practice of employing humour as an advertising appeal, some additional factors are connected to the suitability of using this strategy. Two of these factors are the type of product being advertised, whether it is a high-risk or low-risk product, and what kind of audience it is aimed for (Belch & Belch, 2004). In order to determine whether a product belongs to a high- or low-risk product category the level of product involvement as a function of different related factors needs to be evaluated (Antil, 1984). These factors require a certain effort from the consumer, ranging from interest in product, perceived similarity among alternatives, cost, interpurchase time and previous experience to name a few. Characterizing a low-risk product is that there exist several essentially similar product options of relatively low cost, personal importance remains low and there is little or no benefit in more extensive interaction with the product. Conversely, high-risk products are associated with little previous experience and consumers spend more substantial concern for the product, leading to higher interaction (Antil, 1984). The different levels of involvement

within these two product categories therefore serve as an important variable in the choice and design of an appropriate advertising strategy (Geuens, De Pelsmacker & Faseur, 2011).

Previous research within this field suggests that advertisers as well as consumers regard some products more suitable than others to be advertised in combination with humorous elements. Particularly products included in the category of low-risk, or non-durable, consumer goods are believed to be most appropriate when using this type of appeal (Gulas & Weinberger, 1996). Bauerly (1990) conducted a study where consumers were asked about the appropriateness of certain products with humorous advertising, and found that taboo-related and high-risk products such as feminine care products, condoms, cemetery monuments, higher education and financial and medical services were generally considered ill-suited (in Gulas & Weinberger, 1996). Conversely, products viewed as more appropriate were soft drinks, beers, restaurants, and snack foods among others. Belch and Belch (2004) argue that durable, or high-risk goods, are considered less appropriate by advertising researchers in combination with humorous appeals, as they are generally linked to more consideration and high involvement by the consumer. This implies that the presence of humour could illustrate a risk by connecting the product with a sense of frivolity, leading to an unserious impression on the corporate image.

The risk of using humour as an advertising appeal could also be more or less sufficient depending on the type of audience at stake. This implies that a humorous element could in fact function as a suitable approach within high-risk products if the target audience belongs to a younger segment more accepting to the use of humour appeals in these kinds of categories (Freitas, 2008). Particularly, an increased openness toward products like cars or computers indicate on a more accepting view than previously expected (Gulas & Weinberger, 1996). This view corresponds to Solomon et al., (2010) description of generation Y and how they are turned off by advertising that takes itself too seriously, and rather appreciate it as a form of entertainment. Manceau & Tissier-Desbordes (2006) state that this generation shares common experiences in terms of popular culture, politics and world events which have shaped this group to possess relatively similar values believed to make them less affected by provocation in marketing. Still, the use of humour in advertising also bears the potential to backfire, especially through its risk to offend certain groups that come to identify themselves as the "butt of the joke" (Freitas, 2008). The target audience therefore plays a major role when deciding on the particular type of humour to use in an advertisement, or, whether to include this appeal at all (Belch & Belch, 2004).

Whereas the discussion regarding suitability of product category depending on type of audience here refers to humorous advertising in general, its relevance for dark humour approaches remains unknown. This area will therefore be further examined in forthcoming chapters of the thesis, where the authors attempt to investigate whether Freitas' (2008) suggestion that a young audience should be more accepting towards humour in high-risk product categories applies specifically in the case of dark humour.

2.4 Theories of humour

Despite extensive attention in previous research, much controversy surrounds humorous advertising. Researchers have found it hard to agree upon a general definition of what humour is and which mechanisms characterizes its construct. Past attempts to define humour do not explain all different types, and have been focused on single theories while leaving other features unexplained. The Oxford Dictionary (2013) defines humour as 'the quality of being amusing or comic, especially as expressed in literature speech'. Still, Weinberger and Gulas suggest that 'an all-encompassing, generally accepted definition of humour does not exist' (1992, p.49). While there is no fully integrated or universally accepted definition of humour, three broad mechanisms are however suggested to govern or drive its construct (Cho, 1995; Spotts, Weinberger & Parsons, 1997, Gulas et al., 1996). These mechanisms of humour may be labeled somewhat different depending on the researcher but typically contains the same content and serve to explain what motivates humour among individuals.

2.4.1 Mechanisms of humour

The first mechanism, *affective*, is characterized by a release of energy and pleasure derived from violation of social standards. This is connected to Freud's relief theory where humour is appreciated as a healthy adaptive behavior (Spotts et al., 1997). The affective mechanism is further suggested to be linked to tension-release theory and arousal theory, which are both followed by a release from initial tensions or arousal (Spotts et al., 1997). These theories primarily study humour's physiological features by proposing that an optimal arousal level or drive to arrive at homeostasis is also the driving force of humour (Cho, 1995).

The second, *interpersonal* mechanism describes humour by connecting to the social and interpersonal context where it occurs (Cho, 1995). Superiority theory, where jokes are typically used in order to be superior to others is mentioned as one of the earliest theories of humour (Spotts et al., 1997). This refers to a biased comparison to other people in order to satisfy the own ego-defensive need (Cho, 1995). Moreover, disparagement and disposition

theory are viewed as additional elements that contribute to this type of humorous effect. Disparagement theory suggests that humour serves as a socially justified construct of aggressiveness or hostility that is being exposed to other people without any feelings of guilt, whereas disposition theory rather emphasizes upon group intimacy and shared values as distinctive dimensions for perceived humour (Cho, 1995).

Finally, there is the *cognitive* mechanism, which is linked to the structure of the message. This mechanism is dominated by the incongruity theory where surprises or inconsistencies are suggested elements for arriving at humour (Spotts et al., 1997). While incongruity theory and surprise theory stresses a lack of consistency and unexpectedness as vital conditions to generate humour, other more complex cognitive theories rather propose that people first need to resolve the incongruous parts if they are to be perceived as humorous (Cho, 1995). Speck (1991) divides incongruity into two separate roles of incongruity. One-stage incongruity theories refer to perceptual contrast and playful confusion whereas incongruity-then-resolution theories rather emphasize on understanding and discovery of meaning in order for the incongruity to seem humorous.

Summary mechanisms

Although approaching the construct through different perspectives, these theories treat the motivational drive of humour, and a combination of them are achievable and even serve as complementary (Freitas, 2008). Incongruity theories make a statement regarding the stimulus, superiority theories describe the attitudes or relations that develop between the speaker and listener, and the affective theories touch upon the psychology of the listener (Raskin, 1985, in Freitas, 2008). A summary of these mechanisms is provided in table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Mechanisms summarized

Source: Adapted from Spotts et al 1997; Speck 1991; Cho 1995.

Mechanisms:	What motivates and drives humour:
Affective	A physiological relief where humour is used to escape from tension and arrive at an optimal arousal level.
Interpersonal	A social context of humour, where jokes are used to evoke feelings of superiority to other people.
Cognitive	Pleasure derived from incongruity through divergence from expectations.

2.4.2   Speck's taxonomy of humour

Speck (1991) used these mechanisms, by referring to them as processes, within an empirical framework to build a taxonomy of humour. These processes consist of arousal-safety, in-congruity, and disparagement, which can be understood by their names are related to the affective, interpersonal and cognitive mechanisms described earlier. In addition to these, five different types of humour were identified where each type represents a distinct combination of the basic humour processes. By this, Speck (1991) proposed humour as a multi-dimensional construct, where each type is aiming for different communication effects. The content of each of these humour types will be described briefly next.

1. **Comic Wit** – Irony, perceptual displacement and exaggeration that are related to incongruity-resolution. Practical examples could be how comedians like Ben Stiller, Adam Sandler or Jim Carrey use this type of humour within their characters.

2. **Sentimental Humour** – Empathy, warmth and happy endings that are related to arousal-safety. Tele 2's TV commercial about the little sheep Frances could be linked to this type of humour by inducing warm and empathic feelings among the viewers.

3. **Satire** – Ridicule and attack related to humorous disparagement, exaggeration and irony relying on incongruity-resolution. Typically involves a target that is being laughed at rather

than with. Adult animated sitcoms like South Park or Family Guy often rely on this type of ridiculing humour directed towards an exposed object.

4. **Sentimental Comedy** – Affective pleasure related to arousal-safety and cognitive pleasure related to incongruity-resolution. Also involves irony rather than warmth humour that characterizes sentimental humour. The ironic appearance that is oftentimes used among the characters within ICA's TV commercials could be used to exemplify sentimental comedy.

5. **Full Comedy** – Unlike sentimental comedy, full comedy involves aggression related to humorous disparagement. Unlike satire, it offsets negative affect with positive sentiment related to arousal safety. Full comedy therefore provides a combination of aggressive and ridiculing elements, yet with a positive twist. The comedian Bill Burr serves as an example using this type of humour by joking about tragic events.

2.4.3   Stern's taxonomy of humour

Stern (1996) argues that much of previous researchers' definition of the phenomenon as "humour" makes the term unclear by confusing the formal aspects of the advertising stimulus with the response aspects by consumers. The same author therefore proposes a restart in the formulation of a definition and moreover a change in the terminology from "humour" to "comedy". In this regard, the terms comic, comedic or comical refers to the stimulus, whereas the terms laughter, laughing or laughable rather refers to the responses evoked by consumers. Through the use of this type of relabeling, Stern (1996) intended to avoid confusion that has previously problematized the construct of a sufficient definition. Stern (1996) further suggests that Speck (1991) taxonomy of humour is far too complicated. As a response, besides from changing terminology, Stern (1996) also proposed a change in taxonomic structure. Based on the French philosopher Henri Bergson's theory of comedy and laughter, a taxonomy of advertising comedy was constructed by dividing it into four bipolar types – verbal/physical and romantic/satire (Figure 2.2).
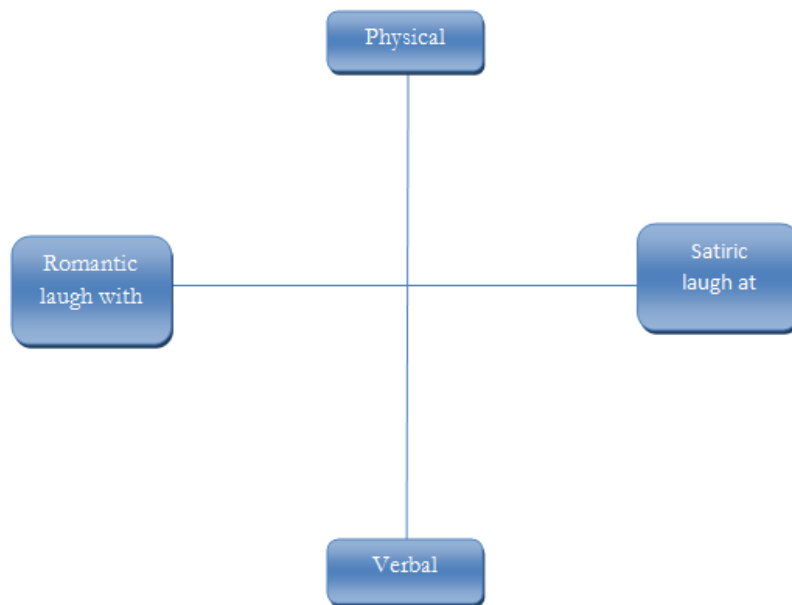
Figure 2.2 Stern's taxonomy of humour

Source: Stern, 1996.

The vertical continuum showing physical on one end and verbal on the other, utilizes a traditional distinction between the physical comedy of action and the verbal comedy of wordplay (Stern, 1996). The horizontal continuum showing romantic on one end, and satiric on the other differentiates between audience responses. This means responses of laughter *with* the characters in the former, and laughter *at* the characters in the latter. The usefulness of this taxonomy in terms of advertising lies in its ability to differentiate between types of comedy in order for researchers to more accurately postulate consumer responses to a specific comic stimulus (Stern, 1996).

Physical comedy – 'When the emphasis is on action, the comedy is physical' (Speck, 1991, p.42). This type of comedy in advertising is best suited for television since these tricks and devices are better represented in medias adapted for showing movement. The kind of humour illustrated by Mr. Bean provides a relevant example of physical comedy as the viewer has to visually observe the content in order to grasp its funny properties.

Verbal comedy – 'In contrast, verbal comedy emphasizes speaking – language is the key element' (Speck, 1991, p.45) Verbal comedy, also known as "wit" is created by language and represents a special comedic genre since comedic verbiage such as puns and irony are the basis of comedic effects (Stern, 1990, in Stern, 1996). To fully comprehend verbal comedy, which is often referred to "the theatre of mind" cognitive processing is required

19
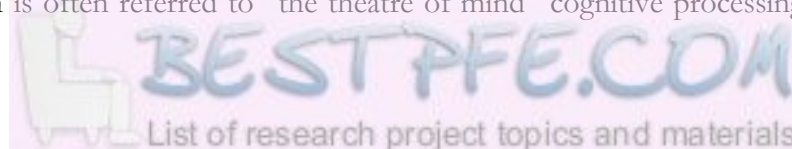
(Stern, 1996). A sitcom where the characteristic verbiage, puns and irony can be identified is Seinfeld.

Romantic comedy – 'The guiding spirit of romantic comedy is playfulness' (Stern, 1991, p.48). This is often referred to as "ludicrous", comedy aiming for shared pleasure, or "harmless wit", laugh or smiles without spitefulness (Stern, 1991). The sitcom Friends serves as an example of romantic comedy by using harmless and playful jokes.

Satiric comedy – 'When the happy ending occurs, not because of the characters but in spite of them, comedy moves from romantic geniality and good spirits to satiric castigation of folly – laughter as a corrective' (Stern, 1991, p.51). This type of comedy seeks to attack the disorders of society by exposing its social norms as hypocritical or foolish (Abrams, 1988, in Stern, 1991). This type of comedy can be identified in the sitcom South Park where they attack and make fun of social norms.

Summary theories of humour

The previous section describes how different researchers have been approaching the concept of humour through theories regarding the mechanisms that drives its construct; affective, interpersonal and cognitive. Taxonomies or classifications were thereafter presented in order to finally arrive at different types of humour. Among these types, Speck (1991) suggested five different variations ranging from Comic Wit, illustrating warmth, empathy and happy ending – kind of humour to Full Comedy, involving aggression related to humorous disparagement and irony. Stern (1996) rather created a continuum of humour types within a taxonomy with the bipolar endings romantic laugh with, aiming for shared pleasure or harmless wit, and satiric laugh at where the comedy seeks to attack the norms of society as being foolish. A summation of this process is illustrated in figure 2.3. Although providing a sufficient theoretical base of humour and its range from warm and playful to the more ridiculing types, there is still a lack of research in terms of the more negative or darker side of this construct. In order to provide a more comprehensive view of previous framework, forthcoming sections identify additional topics that could be related to this aspect. The chapter is subsequently concluded by an attempt to understand and map out the concept of dark humour, in order to finally arrive at a sufficient definition of this concept.
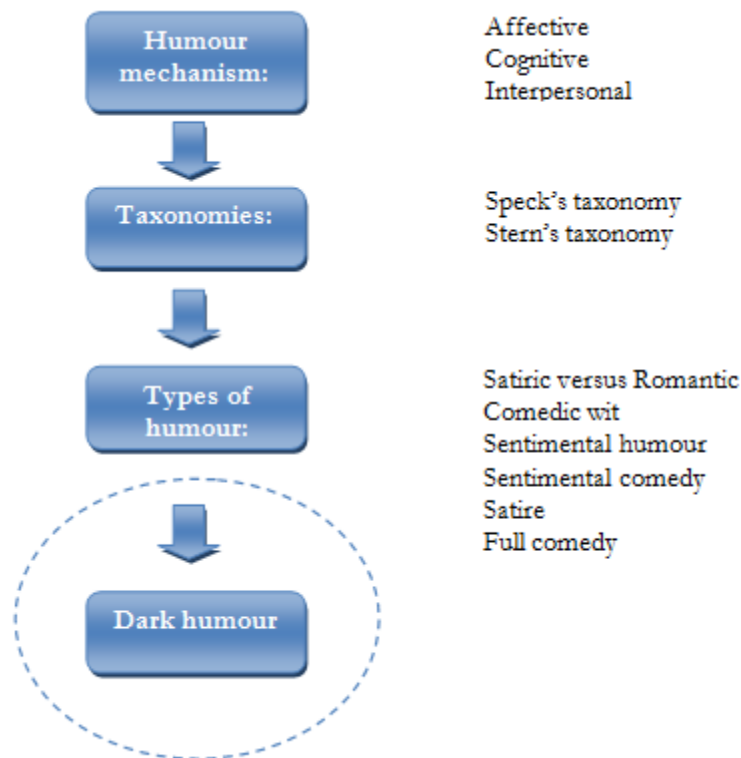
Figure 2.3 The process towards dark humour

Source: Adapted from Cho, 1995; Speck, 1991; Stern 1996.

2.5   Aggressive humour and comedic violence

Speck (1991) outlined five types of humour described earlier. Two of them, satire and full comedy, both include the theory of disparagement involving superiority. As a result of these theories connection to physical or psychological put-down, they have consequently been used with caution by advertisers to avoid offending an audience who could easily misinterpret the content or associate themselves as the target of this type of humour (Gulas, McKeage & Weinberger, 2010). Rapp (1951) traced the evolution of humour involving disparagement from physical battles of triumph, which today is rather substituted by ridiculing attempts in advertising settings (in Gulas et al., 2010). This means that within disparagement humour types there is frequently an object serving as the "butt of the joke", which could correspond to celebrities or politicians as well as anonymous individuals. Gulas et al. (2010) further suggest that when humour types involving disparagement appears in conjunction with physical or psychological violence it is referred to as aggressive humour. Empirical evidence shows that this type of humour currently emerges within media, especially

within television advertisements. In a study of 4,000 television advertisements in the U.S it was found that over fifty percent of the advertisements containing aggression were also combining humour as an additional element (Scharrer, 2001).

Comedic violence serves as a subgroup of aggressive humour, which is referred to intentions to ridicule, deprecate and injure in ways that are humorous (Hetherington & Wray 1966, in Brown et al., 2010). Marketers use this strategy in order to deliberately gain attention by offending the audience in a provocative manner (Gustavsson & Yssel, 1994; Venkat & Abi-Hanna, 1995 in Brown et al., 2010). In the case of high intensity comedic violence, where the execution could be perceived as provocative as a result of transgression of social norms, Brown et al., (2010) also anticipate that recall would be improved. What distinguishes comedic violence from aggressive humour then, is that the presences of actual or threatened physical violence or harm are crucial for its humorous properties. While being deemed as more extreme than what is generally featured in traditional media, comedic violence is oftentimes found within viral advertising through the Internet (Stone, 2006). This is defined as 'unpaid peer-to-peer communication of provocative content originated from an identified sponsor using the Internet to persuade or influence an audience to pass along the content to others' (Porter & Golan, 2005, p.29). The same authors suggest that considerably more viral advertisements rely on violence as an advertising appeal than television. Two viral advertisements suggested to be linked to comedic violence that flourished on the web are Ford Sport Ka where a cat gets guillotined by a car and Dodge Nitro where a dog gets executed through an electric shock. Although campaigns like these that are broadcasted through the Internet may be difficult to control, they could also result in even more attention as a result of violence being considered as an offensive advertising appeal (Brown et al., 2010).

Furthermore, Brown et al., (2010) suggest three key issues to be of importance in how the audience responds to media violence. Firstly, the severity or intensity of the violent content seems to have a strong influence on how the audience reacts. Secondly, how serious the viewer perceives the consequences of the violent act, such as a victim's expressions of pain or suffering, should have an impact. Thirdly, when violence is illustrated in an inappropriate or unjustified manner the audience would also be more affected. The same authors found support for the conceptualization of comedic violence involving distinct intensity and consequence severity elements, and further that how these are illustrated affects attitudes, behaviour and memory for advertisements as well as brands. It was also found that

comedic violence including these elements appears to induce increased involvement with the advertising message. Regarding the key issue of unjustified violence it was found that violence that is regarded as justified or legitimate is more positively perceived compared to violence that is entirely unprovoked. Therefore, comedic violence is suggested as an appropriate approach in order to generate interest, more favorable attitudes, and greater brand memorability. In addition, the provocative nature of these advertisements is argued as a key driver for passing on material to third-party viewers through viral sources. (Brown et al., 2010).

2.6   Provocative advertising using taboo themes

The use of controversial themes in order for marketers to raise attention is commonly referred to as taboo or provocative advertising, which are two concepts with slightly different meanings. Whereas provocation is a strategy applied to fulfill the purpose of shocking the audience, taboo is the theme used to arrive at this effect (Manceau & Tissier-Desbordes, 2006). This reasoning is supported by Vezina and Paul (1997) who describe provocative advertising as a strategy where the intention is to shock consumers by transgressing societal and cultural norms or taboos. The construction of a taboo can in general be expressed as a prohibition that outlines a person's daily actions (Sabri, 2012). Those prohibitions serve as foundations of behavioral norms, integrated by society's values, which determine the degree of the taboo. Walter (1991) further elaborated this approach by including verbal actions as an additional aspect, meaning that some things are not to be mentioned in a public conversation due to decency, morality and religiosity (in Sabri, 2012). Although religion is no longer considered as an extremely sensitive area, at least within the western society, dirty words and bad language are still proficient ways of causing strong offence (Freitas, 2008). A taboo can therefore be defined as a behavior or verbal act that based on societal and cultural norms are considered to be publicly prohibited (Sabri, 2012; Manceau & Tissier-Desbordes, 2006). Among exploited taboos, death and sex are considered as the most frequently displayed taboos in advertising, moreover, it is suggested that their treatment is increasingly used along with humour tactics (Manceau & Tissier-Desbordes, 2006). The process of provocative advertising using taboo themes is illustrated in figure 2.4.

In a study by Vezina and Paul (1997) three components are proposed as essential for an advertisement to be perceived as provocative; distinctiveness, ambiguity and transgression of norms and taboos. Distinctiveness is suggested to be of relevance for any type of adver-

tisement, regardless content, since an advertisement similar to others would lose the effect of being provocative. The second element, ambiguity, enhances the provocative dimension as it opens up for altered interpretation among the audience, aiming to make them question the message of the advertisement. The last element stated is the transgression of norms or taboos, which is considered to be the most significant component of provocative advertisement. An advertisement consisting of a theme perceived as taboo among its viewers is more likely to be interpreted as provocative. By violating social norms and challenge cultural boundaries this controversial strategy is applied in order to attract viewers and obtain attention (Vezina & Paul, 1997). In addition, this strategy is suggested to be most appropriate when the target audience is young since this group tend to be less offended compared to the older audience when being exposed to provocative advertisement (Vezina & Paul, 1997; Dahl et al. 2003).

The widespread usage of provocative advertising is motivated by marketers due to its favorable effect in terms of gaining attention, increase recognition and generate extra publicity (Waller, 2005; Pope et al., 2004). The risk involved by applying such a strategy lies in its offensive approach and that negative associations established to the advertisement could transfer to the brand, which ultimately can result in a damaging effect on the corporate image (Sabri, 2012).
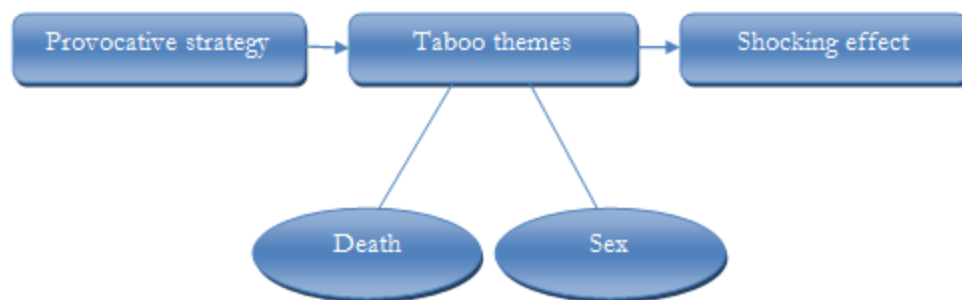
Figure 2.4 The components of a provocative strategy

Source: Adapted from Manceau & Tissier-Desbordes, 2006; Vezina & Paul, 1997; Sabri 2012.

Summary: aggressive humour, comedic violence and taboo themes

The previous section has been focused around an additional concept of the darker side of the humour spectrum – aggressive humour and its sub-group comedic violence. Whereas aggressive humour refers to humour in conjunction with physical and psychological violence, comedic violence was argued to solely rely on the physical component to arrive at

the humorous effect. It was also suggested that Speck's (1991) humour types satire and full comedy are related to the broader concept of aggressive humour through their mutual linkages to disparagement theory. Taboo themes in advertising were introduced as a perhaps not obvious component relating to previously mentioned concepts, but through its offensive nature and playful approach to the norms of society it still becomes a relevant factor to consider. The following section seeks to provide a link between the use of humour and taboo appeals in advertising through the practice of masking.

2.7   Masking

Shabir and Thwaites (2007) propose an additional function of humour in advertising by claiming that it can be applied as a masking device. Masking occurs when 'the processing of a stimulus is interrupted by the subsequent immediate presentation of a second, different stimulus. The second stimulus acts retroactively to obscure the former one' (Moore, 1988, p.302, in Shabir & Thwaites, 2007). This implies that the second stimulus decreases the visibility or awareness of the primary stimulus, thus working as a masking appeal. The strategy of masking can therefore be used in order to generate a positive perception of a stimulus that is otherwise perceived in a negative manner, or the other way around (Shabir & Thwaites, 2007). Although not explicitly referred to as masking, similar tendencies can be found in other studies. Brown et al., (2010) examination of comedic violence implies that the combination of these stimulus make the audience less observant towards the violent component. By including humour as a second stimulus potential offending perceptions of an advertisement could thus be mitigated. Sabri (2012) notes that previous research in psychology, sociology and marketing confirms that taboo issues that are generally not discussed in public are often treated in conjunction with humour to broach these sensitive topics. The same effect has been recognized by Manceau and Tissier-Desbordes (2006) in that strongly taboo-challenging stimulus are subject to suppression, and that humour is frequently added in advertising campaigns that arouse taboos with the intention of mitigating those effects. Graby (2001) further argues that taboo evoking topics such as sex and death are increasingly treated with dark humour in advertising, which was exemplified by an advertisement for the insecticide Raid that plays with associations of suicide by illustrating a mosquito that hangs itself rather than suffer the deadly spray (in Sabri, 2012). This finding was also supported by Sabri (2012) who stressed the effectiveness of adding an element of humour in a taboo-evoking strategy, and further that dark humour would be especially sufficient in reducing the perceived level of tabooness in advertising.

2.8   Dark humour – its construct and proposed definition

In previous sections an attempt has been made to provide an overview of the negative sides of the humour construct. By the use of the different concepts introduced, the authors are hereby aiming to describe how they converge in order to ultimately arrive at a potential explanation of dark humour, as well as mapping out the position of this concept.

Although providing their own content and contribution, some factors tend to integrate the previously discussed concepts full comedy, satire, aggressive humour, comedic violence and provocative advertising using taboo themes. Besides from the obvious notion that they all include features that distinguish from the more positive and careless types that are often-times referred to as humour, the authors managed to identify four evident key terms that unite these concepts further. Firstly, there is *disparagement theory*, which was explained by Cho (1995) as "humour that serves as a socially justified construct of aggressiveness or hostility exposed to other people without any feelings of guilt". This theory is specifically linked to Speck's (1991) humour types satire and full comedy through their connection to physical and psychological put down (Gulas et al., 2010). In addition, it was proposed that disparagement humour appearing with physical and psychological violence in this manner is in fact referred to as aggressive humour. As a result, aggressive humour and its subgroups full comedy and satire have been used with caution by marketers to avoid offending an audience who could easily misinterpret or identify themselves as the target of this type of humour (Gulas et al., 2010). The second key term naturally follows *offensiveness*, which also can be linked to some of the other concepts. Comedic violence was for instance argued by Brown et al., (2010) to be used deliberately by marketers to gain attention by offending the audience in a provocative manner. Moreover, Sabri (2012) described provocative advertising using taboo themes as a particularly offensive approach that could cause a damaging effect on the corporate image if not handled carefully. The third key term identified is *ridicule*, which is an evident element in Speck (1991) humour type satire by its intention to "ridicule and attack" the audience or disorders of society. The section regarding aggressive humour discusses this concept further, where an evolution of disparagement humour was suggested from physical battles of triumph to rather involve ridiculing attempts in commercial settings (Gulas et al, 2010). In addition, comedic violence was described in Brown et al., (2010) as "intentions to ridicule, deprecate and injure in ways that are humorous". The ridiculing element must therefore be argued as an evident factor uniting these concepts further. Finally, the last key term identified is connected to the *transgression of social norms*. In

this regard, provocative advertising using taboo themes was suggested as a strategy specifically intended to shock consumers by transgressing societal and cultural norms (Vezina & Paul, 1997). Moreover, high intensity comedic violence, where the execution could be perceived as provocative as a result of the transgression of social norms, was anticipated as a factor improving recall according to Brown et al., (2010). A summary of these four key terms is presented in table 2.2.

Table 2.2 Intergrating the key terms

Source: Adapted from Cho, 1995; Speck, 1991; Brown et al., 2010; Sabri, 2012; Gulas et al., 2010; Vezina & Paul, 1997.

Integrating key terms: uniting the negative sides of the humour construct

Disparagement theory:	Offensiveness:	Ridicule:	Transgression of social norms:
Satire	Comedic violence	Satire	Taboo
Full comedy	Taboo	Aggressive	Comedic violence
Aggressive humour		Comedic violence	

By the use of this discussion, the authors propose that the key terms disparagement, offensiveness, ridicule, and transgression of social norms serve as integrating factors that characterize the negative sides of the humour construct. What still remains unknown though is a clear and consistent definition of what dark humour actually refers to.

Whereas Cambridge Dictionary defines it as 'a humorous way of looking at or treating something that is serious or sad', Oxford Dictionary rather proposes dark humour as 'characterized by an abnormal and unhealthy interest in disturbing and unpleasant subjects especially death and disease'. The authors of the thesis however find these definitions indeterminate and vague and therefore propose an alternative explanation of dark humour based on the findings derived when examining the concepts throughout the study. After reviewing previous research, strong links are apparent among the concepts aggressive humour, comedic violence, satire, and full comedy discussed earlier. Moreover, the section about masking provided a link between taboo and humour appeals by describing how these elements could be used in conjunction to generate a positive perception of a stimulus that is otherwise perceived in a negative manner. Graby (2001) specifically argued that taboo

evoking topics such as sex and death are increasingly treated with dark humour in advertising, which was also supported by Sabri (2012) who stressed that dark humour could be especially sufficient for reducing the perceived level of tabooness. However, within the content of this study, the authors find it defensible to exclude the link to sex, as a greater body of research indicates on the sole link between dark humour and death regarding its connection to taboo themes. This is supported by the key terms identified as well as other common denominators such as terms like violence, harm, injure, aggression, ridicule and attack among others. A conclusion of this reasoning is provided in figure 2.5.
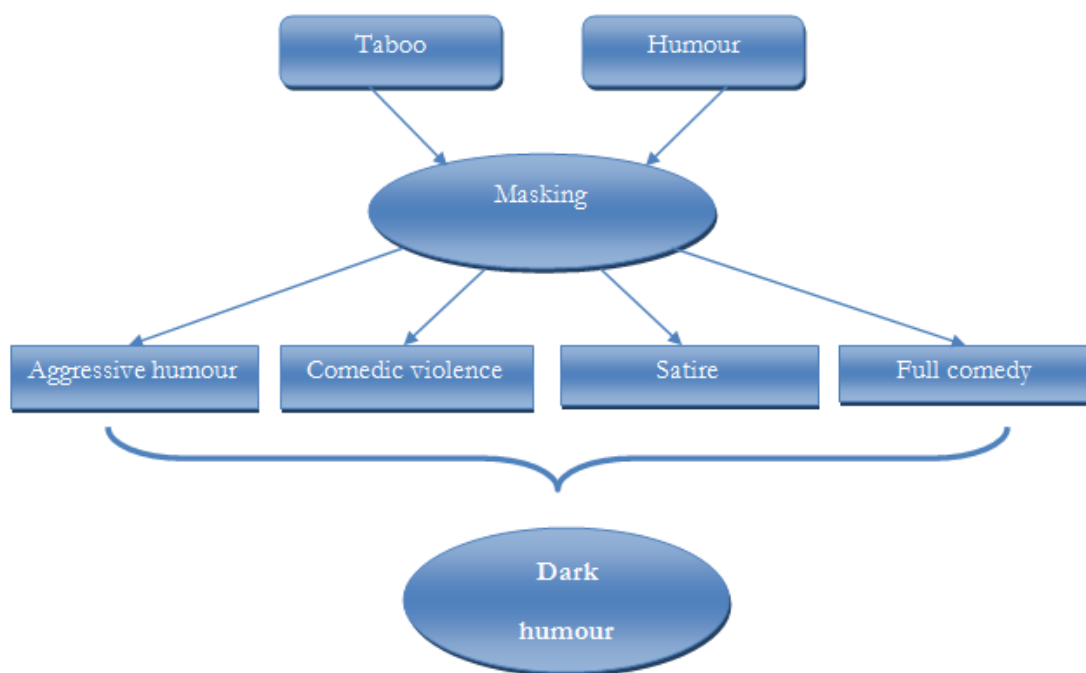
Figure 2.5 The framework of dark humour

Source: Adapted from Sabri, 2012; Manceau & Tissier-Desbordes, 2006; Shabir & Thwaites, 2007; Gulas et al., 2010; Brown et al., 2010; Speck, 1991.

As a conclusion of the main findings drawn in previous discussion, the authors propose the following definition to describe the concept of dark humour;

"Topics and events that are generally considered as *taboo*, specifically those related to *death* or *violence* are treated in an unusually *humorous* or *ridiculing* manner while retaining their seriousness. The intention of dark humour is thus for the viewer to experience both *laughter and offense*, frequently simultaneously".

2.9   Product type and dark humour

In order to provide a visual overview of how this definition can be linked to earlier presented theories, Stern's (1996) taxonomy (Figure 2.3) has been modified to illustrate a framework (Figure 2.6) where dark humour is being mapped along with Speck's (1991) humour types. The horizontal axes were changed from romantic to light humour, illustrating the positive and careless types, and from satiric to dark humour illustrating the negative and offensive types. In addition, to connect to the earlier discussion (Section 2.3) regarding the suitability of humour according to different product categories, the vertical axes were also changed from physical and verbal to high-risk and low-risk. By this, the authors attempt to investigate whether Freitas' (2008) suggestion that there is an increased openness towards humour within high-risk product categories than previously expected applies specifically in the case of dark humour. The function of this figure is therefore mainly for use as a point of departure and tool within the empirical chapter.
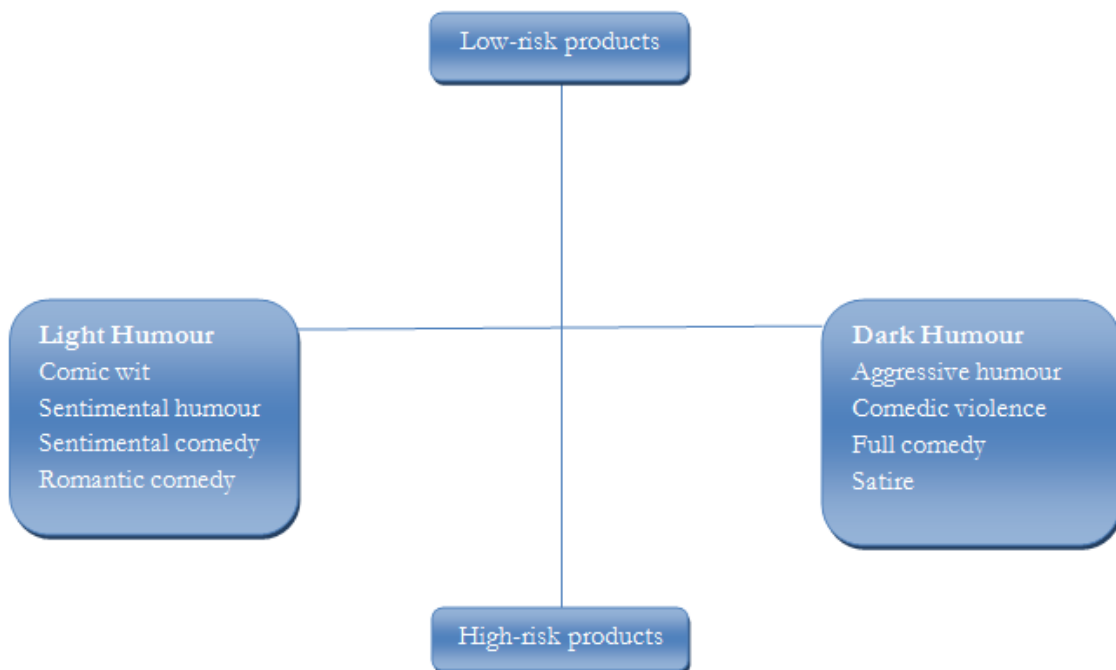
Figure 2.6 Dark humour and its related components
Source: Adapted from Speck, 1991; Stern 1996.

3 Method

This chapter introduces the methodology and provides arguments for the choice of research design and method for the gathering of primary data. Additionally, the process of data collection is described and the chapter ends by explaining how the data will be analyzed.

3.1 Thesis approach

The purpose of this study is to *understand* and *describe* how generation Y perceives the use of dark humour in advertising. Since this proposition is treating perceptions by investigating the consumers' opinions, feelings and thoughts, it is motivated to examine the problem from a consumer point of view. To understand the consumers' perspective implies to obtain further knowledge of how they process advertisement in terms of perceiving, judging and responding to it. The meaning of these concepts is vital to consider as they lay the foundation of the research design. A research design is then the framework used for conducting the marketing project, that specifies what information is needed and how to go about when collecting it (Malhotra, Birks & Wills, 2012; Creswell 2009). This will be discussed further in forthcoming sections.

3.2 Motivations for the choice of overall design

A research design can be classified into two main approaches, exploratory and conclusive. Whereas the exploratory design aims to provide insights, explore and understand a phenomenon that is hard to measure, a conclusive design is rather used to describe a specific phenomenon and test hypothesis (Malhotra et al., 2012). This means that the information needed is clearly defined and the process is more structured within the latter approach. A flexible process is on the other hand characterized by an exploratory approach, where further insights are needed in order to properly define the problem (Malhotra et al, 2012; Creswell, 2009). Due to the nature of a conclusive approach, where the aim is to gather data by measuring and testing hypothesis, this makes it suitable for quantitative explorations using large representative samples. An exploratory approach is considered more appropriate when the researcher is seeking to understand behavior patterns, beliefs, opinions, attitudes and perceptions using smaller samples (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews, focus groups and observations are therefore recommended when collecting this type of data (Malhotra, et al., 2012; Creswell, 2009).

Referring back to the thesis approach, emphasis was addressed upon understanding consumers' perceptions in a setting where limited prior information is available. This means that data have to be collected through a rather unstructured process, in order to obtain insights and understanding through the progression of the study. Moreover, to fully comprehend how beliefs, feelings and opinions are being formed, an exploratory approach should be considered appropriate in order to sufficiently arrive at these findings.

As mentioned earlier, a qualitative research method is primarily used when employing this approach, which is defined as; 'An unstructured, primarily exploratory design based on small samples, intended to provide depth, insight and understanding.' (Malhotra et al., 2012, p.187). Based on this definition, a qualitative research method is motivated since the purpose of this thesis is to understand and describe rather than measure or construct hypothesis regarding consumers' perceptions. The authors have moreover chosen to use focus groups within the empirical investigation, which will be discussed next.

3.3   Focus group

In order to encourage a dynamic discussion where different ideas and viewpoints are being exposed, a focus group should represent an efficient method for arriving at these purposes. A focus group is defined as 'a discussion conducted by a trained moderator in a non-structured and natural manner with a small group of participants.' (Malhotra et al., 2012, p.182). The ideal size of a focus group is 5-10 members in order to create dynamics to deliver a rewarding discussion, while not being too many which could result in the creation of sub-groups (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Kitzinger (1995) however suggests that 4-8 members are enough when constructing a focus group since smaller groups tend to have a positive effect in the establishment of a relaxing atmosphere. In addition, to avoid unnecessary interactions or conflicts on side issues the composition should correspond to a homogenous group in terms of demographic and socio-economic characteristics (Stewart, Shamdasani & Rook, 2007). The atmosphere where the focus group is carried out is moreover of importance, and should correrespond to an informal and relaxed setting that helps participants forget about the fact that they are being observed (Malhotra et al., 2012; Stewart et al., 2007). The main advantage of adopting this method compared to in-depth interviews is that a broader set of data can be accomplished as a result of the interactions that are induced among the participants (Malhotra et al., 2012). These interactions can moreover encourage spontaneous responses to other participants' comments, and ultimately reveal per-

spectives that perhaps would not have been considered in an in-depth interview setting (Hornig Priest, 2010; Stewart et al., 2007). This corresponds to Malhotra et al., (2012) description of the value of using focus groups by discovering unexpected findings through a free-flowing discussion. A focus group also serves as a suitable method for presenting visual stimuli such as advertising, storyboards or physical products to examine (Malhotra et al., 2012). What is distinctive regarding all focus groups are then that they contain some sort of collective activity, whether it is to examine visual stimuli or to discuss a set of questions given by the moderator (Barbour & Kitzinger, 2001).

When adopting focus groups as a method for collecting primary data, researchers should also be aware of its drawbacks, and how to act according to these. One of the most apparent limitations involves the risk of moderation bias, since the direction of questioning as well as interpretation of final results are dependent on the moderator itself. Although factors like chemistry of the group composition can result in some sessions being harder to moderate than others, the quality of results ultimately depends on how well the discussion was managed by the moderator (Malhotra et al., 2012; Stewart et al., 2007). The results derived by using a focus group further corresponds to a specific target group, meaning that any attempts trying to generalize to much wider groups by the same means as within quantitative studies could end up very misleading (Malhotra et al., 2012).

As a result of its appearance of being non-structured and natural, a focus group should function as a motivated method for studies aiming for trustworthy results characterized by nearness to reality. Since the authors of the thesis are seeking to collect data which results could be applied by organizations in society, the emphasis on these attributes make the method relevant for this purpose. By using groups instead of one-to-one interviews, the authors are further aiming to create interactions to arrive at a better understanding of the motivations, thoughts and feelings that lead to different views among participants. Moreover, in order to ensure that participants fully understand the concept of dark humour, presentations of visual stimuli should facilitate this process and provides them with a common point of departure to build further discussions upon.

3.3.1   Selection of sample and sample composition

The sampling design begins when the researcher specifies the target population, which is the collection of participants obtaining the desired information (Malhotra et al., 2012). Within the delimitations of this thesis it was argued that the focus of the empirical study

remain on individuals that belong to the generation Y. More specifically, this refers to individuals born between 1978 and 1994, recognized as a cohort group as a result of their similar values and beliefs (Petroulas, Brown & Sundin, 2010). The reason for using this particular sample is motivated by the fact that they represent an attractive group holding strong opinions while being influenced by popular culture, fashion and politics (Solomon et al., 2010). This group has also been argued to particularly appreciate advertising as a form of entertainment and thus serve as a sufficient target for the purpose of the investigation in this thesis. Moreover, as the purpose is not to generalize results to any broad population, the sample will consist of Swedish residents in order to avoid any potential cultural issues that could establish additional considerations. Regarding the aspect of gender, the authors have decided to include both males and females, mainly to obtain a more realistic representation of the sample and to detect potential distinctions in reactions between sexes. This means that the target group of the empirical investigation consists of Swedish residents, men and women, between the ages of 18-35. Moreover, students were selected as a sufficient representation of the sample since they typically derive from different areas in Sweden and serve as a convenient group to reach.

Furthermore, the authors have decided to adopt non-probability sampling within this study. This technique is used within exploratory research and relies on the personal judgment of the researcher rather than chance when selecting participants to be included in the final sample (Malhotra et al., 2012; Neuman, 2006). These estimates are however not statistically projectable to any defined population as there is no way of determining the probability of selecting any particular element. A probability sampling technique would therefore be favorable if the aim was to secure a representative sample containing a homogenous population, which is not of relevance according to the purpose of this study. The sample process selected for reaching the target audience was therefore judgmental sampling, which refers to one of the non-probability techniques. This means that the researcher selects the objects to be included in the sample, as these are believed to be particularly representative of the population of interest. However, one should bear in mind that this technique is rather subjective as the value of the results depends entirely on the researcher's judgment and expertise (Neuman, 2006). The positive aspects are that it is an inexpensive and quick method, particularly useful when broad population inferences are not required (Malhotra et al., 2012).

Accordingly, the authors screened the characteristics of potential participants before they were invited to the focus group based on the conditions described earlier. Furthermore, the final groups selected all included individuals that the authors believed would contribute to a dynamic and multi-perspective discussion. In order to sufficiently reach the desired target group, an event was created through the social media platform Facebook where selected participants were invited to attend the focus group. Subsequently, the authors constructed four groups containing an appropriate mixture of people in terms of gender, age and personal characteristics.

3.3.2 Choice of questions

A vital part in the design of a successful focus group is the formulation of the questions as they will serve as the agenda of the discussion and substantially elicit in the interaction among the participants (Stewart et al., 2007). Based on the purpose of the thesis and the research questions formulated, the authors have constructed a set of questions (Appendix 9.1) intended to work as a topic guide for the focus group sessions. The aim of these questions was to encourage participants to engage in the discussion regarding the use of dark humour in advertising, by focusing on how they perceive this approach. The topic guide has been divided into three separate sections, where the first section serves to provide a general overview of humour and thereafter dark humour. According to the framework of the thesis, dark humour was described as a concept difficult to define explicitly. Therefore, the authors intend the first section of the topic guide to motivate the participants to express their own thoughts and suggestions of what it might be. The first questions within the general discussion can therefore be linked to research question number 1; *How is the concept of dark humour generally understood?* Here participants are encouraged to freely discuss how and what they refer to the concept of dark humour, as well as what implications it might have on advertising today. The authors would like to emphasize that there were no right or wrong answers within this discussion, the aim of this section was rather to understand how the participants interpret the concept as well as prepare them for the upcoming section.

After the general discussion has been conducted, the participants were exposed to four different advertisements treating the concept of dark humour. The questions in section two of the topic guide were established on the basis of the first two research questions, but with primarily focus on the second; *How is dark humour perceived in commercial settings?*. The authors would like to highlight the importance of this part of the research since it is closely linked to the main purpose of this study; *To understand and describe how generation Y perceives the use of*

dark humour in advertising. In order to sufficiently answer the research questions the participants were asked about their spontaneous reactions after viewing each advertisement. Forthcoming questions encouraged the participants to express their emotions, feelings and thoughts evoked by the different advertisements.

The last section of the topic guide aimed at providing an answer to research question three; *Could dark humour be used within high-risk product categories?* In section 2.3 it was suggested that non-durable or low-risk goods are generally considered appropriate with humorous appeals in advertising. Still, an increased openness toward products like cars and computers indicate an increased acceptance in the case of high-risk products specifically when targeting a young audience. The questions designed for the last section of the topic guide therefore seeks to investigate whether this latter proposition correspond to the findings derived from the focus groups.

3.3.3   Pre-test

In order to eliminate possible drawbacks within the focus groups such as confusion and misunderstanding regarding certain questions, a pre-test was conducted to improve the execution. According to Malhotra et al. (2012) a pre-test, or pilot study, is the process of testing the research instrument to ensure that the questions are well constructed and provide relevant information without requiring too much of an effort for the participants. It is therefore important that the sample selected for the pre-test represent potential respondents and that it is carried out under similar circumstances as the planned focus group is intended to be (Malhotra et al., 2012; Stewart et al., 2007). A group of four students from Jönköping International Business School were therefore selected to participate in order to improve the execution of the focus group and to possibly modify some of the questions. This group composition corresponds to Kitzinger (1995) suggestion that a focus group could consist of 4-8 participants.

Throughout the pre-test it became evident that the participants got confused since some of the questions tended to generate in similar responses. This primarily concerned the questions connected to section two of the topic guide (Appendix 9.1), where participants were asked to describe thoughts and emotions after watching each of the advertisements. Consequently, some of these questions were grouped into one, or reformulated in order to avoid potential irritation as a result of repetition of certain questions. In addition, the last three questions designed for this section are not exclusively related to any of the single ad-

vertisements but rather concern the general ideas of dark humour as a strategy, and could therefore be asked as a conclusion of section two. Furthermore, the authors realized that the participants had difficulties in grasping the advertisements after only viewing them once. A last improvement was therefore made to present the advertisements twice and encourage careful listening in order to fully comprehend the content of the videos.

3.3.4   Ethical considerations

In order to make sure that all information gained during the focus sessions was captured properly an iPhone was used as a recorder. Beforehand the participants were informed that a recorder would be used during the sessions and that the material gained would be treated confidentially by the researchers, solely for the purpose of the study on hand. Furthermore, the participants were also guaranteed total anonymity, which is why the respondents names used within this thesis are fictional and changed to capital letters. This decision goes in line with Malhotra et al. (2012) description of how the participants' anonymity should be treated confidentially.

3.3.5   Execution of the focus groups

When conducting a focus group it is of importance to carefully consider the location where it will take place, as it according to (Malhotra et al., 2012; Stewart 2007) should provide a relaxing atmosphere and be of convenience for all of the participants. Accordingly, the authors aspired the respondents to feel comfortable while expressing their opinions and hopefully forget that they were participating in an organized focus group. Refreshments were therefore offered and the moderators encouraged small talk before the sessions began. The four different focus groups all took place at the same venue, namely at JIBS in order to increase the convenience for the participants that all were students at the same university. Additionally, it was decided to hold the focus group in Swedish since all of the participants were Swedish residents, and the authors believed them to feel most comfortable speaking their native language. The findings from the sessions were afterwards translated into English by the researchers.

The authors aimed to encourage the participants to express their opinions freely, without risking them to become affected by suggested theories or to limit themselves to specific concepts and definitions. Therefore, in the execution of the focus groups the purpose of the study was not revealed until after the first section of the topic guide had been conducted. This decision corresponds to Malhotra et al., (2012) who states that the researchers can

decide whether they want to disclose the purpose of the study in the beginning or wait until during or after the session.

All sessions started identically by the moderators providing a brief introduction of the study as well as informing the participants of how the process of the session would continue. Subsequently, questions were asked for the entire group to answer, followed by more specific questions connected in line with the technique of probing (Stewart, 2007). This was done both to fully comprehend the given answers and to make sure everyone was participating actively. The moderators also emphasized the importance of the respondents being open and respectful in order to keep a friendly atmosphere and to make everyone part of the interaction. Next part of the session implied presenting the advertisements one at the time, with questions and discussions following in between each of them. The final part of the session involved discussing the last section of the topic guide, and if possible the participants were encouraged to complement with additional thoughts, ideas and opinions on the topic.

3.3.6   Netnography: choice of advertisements

For the purpose of this study focus will remain solely on viral video based advertisements that are broadcasted through the Internet. As was mentioned earlier, when using offensive themes, viral advertising can be defined as 'unpaid peer-to-peer communication of provocative content originated from an identified sponsor using the Internet to persuade an audience to pass along the content to others' (Porter & Golan, 2005, p.29). Moreover, it was argued that comedic violence is oftentimes found through this channel and that considerably more viral ads rely on violence as an advertising appeal than what is generally featured within television. The authors therefore used this type of medium within the empirical investigation, mainly as it facilitates the search of relevant advertisements in line with the purpose of the study. Moreover, since videos, as opposed to printed advertisements, contain images, sounds and movements this makes them more dynamic and consequently more interesting to study according to the authors' opinion. Vernon (1962) further argues that movements have a great impact on the human being, who instinctively tends to react fast on elements in motion (in Dahlen, Lange, & Gylldorff, 2003). Within this study, four viral advertisements were selected.

The final sample was chosen based on netnography, which implies to observe and analyse how individuals behave in online environments (Malhotra et al., 2012). According to

Kozinets (2002), netnography is an adaption of the ethnography research technique aiming to study the culture and communities emerging through online communications, involving a passive process of observing conversation and interactions online. These communities derive from chat rooms, newsgroups, forums and personal World Wide Web pages (Kozinets, 2002). Netnography is moreover argued to be a sufficient method when the aim is to obtain information in a natural and unprovoked manner as it is an unelicited process, meaning that the participants not necessarily need to be aware of that they are being observed. However, that also serves as the major disadvantage when using this technique since it is argued to have apparent implications for privacy as well as ethical considerations regarding public domains (Malhotra et al., 2012).

The authors of this thesis employed this research method in order to evaluate and ultimately select four appropriate advertisements corresponding to their description and definition of dark humour. Viewers' comments regarding videos in different forums and media platforms have been examined in order to ensure that they obtain the potential to evoke reactions among the audience. The final four videos all treat the subject of death, violence or suicide in line with the authors' description and definition of dark humour. Moreover, the products featured in the advertisements are all linked to the durable or high risk category of goods discussed earlier, more specifically cars. While it was suggested in section 2.3 that humour generally should be avoided in this category of goods by its risk of inducing an unserious impression on the corporate image, Freitas (2008) still argued that this could be bypassed when targeting a young audience obtaining a more accepting view. As a result, the authors attempt to investigate whether the suggestion that younger age groups are more accepting towards the use of humour within high-risk categories is supported by the study on hand, where dark humour is specifically focused upon.

3.3.7   Description of advertisements

1.   Bridgestone

The advertisement features a dog that caught his girlfriend with another dog. A close-up follows on the betrayed dog's miserable eyes, while he starts running towards a highway. During this sequence, memories are popping up from the incident, and the dog is suffering to the extent that he is capable of committing suicide. Cars are passing by rapidly while he suddenly jumps towards the middle of the highway. In the last scene a car jams on the breaks, which happens to save the dog's life.

Throughout this commercial a sad song is enhancing the viewers' emotional connection and empathy for the dog. The subject of suicide that is treated within this video increases the seriousness of the situation, while keeping it unrealistic and funny by illustrating a drama containing dogs. Comments found regarding the content of this advertisement follows; *"This made me laugh"*, *"This video is funny"* or *"Hahaha"* in contrast to *"That's so sad, not a great car commercial"* and *"This is not something that should be joked about"*.

Source: YouTube, 2013

2.   Dodge Ram Trucks

This advertisement illustrates how an outdoorsman camping in the woods gets woken up by a dog's barking. After a few seconds of thought, the man walks to his truck, grabs a bow and discharges an arrow towards the wood. The noise disappears and the viewer implicitly understands that the dog was killed. In the background, the voice of a narrator is subsequently evident; *"Where the outdoors man goes to extremes, a truck built to do the same"*. The man walks back to his camp to get back to sleep, while there is suddenly a sound of a baby crying. A close-up on the man's face follows, and by the look in his eyes the viewer gets an indication that he may be capable of using the bow again.

The atmosphere in this commercial is mysterious, dull and uncomfortable. In other words, the environment instantly informs the viewer that this is not pleasant place to be around. It is also evident that something bad is about to happen, which is strengthened by the use of these features. The comments made in different forums regarding this advertisement showed mixed responses. Whereas some people think it is *"Hilarious"*, *"Pretty funny"* or *"Best ad ever"* others did not appreciate the humorous aspect by comments like *"That's terrible"*, *"Horrified"* and *"This is sick"*.

Source: YouTube, 2013

39

3. Ford Ka

This advertisement illustrates a quiet and peaceful neighborhood, where the focus is directed towards a car that is parked in front of a house. Suddenly a cat jumps up on the bonnet of the car and peers into the open sunroof. In the next scene the sunroof abruptly closes, and the cat gets guillotined in front of the viewers' eyes. The line "Ford Sport Ka – the Ka's evil twin" is then featured on the screen before ending.

The commercial treats the subject of death in brutal sense, by featuring an innocent cat that

is being killed in a distasteful manner. As a result, reactions among viewers were strong and mainly negative; "*That is disgusting*", "*How the hell is this good advertising*" and "*I don't even like cats, but I still think this is too much*". Others however identified a humorous aspect by expressing opinions such as; "*This is sick but funny*" or "*It is just humour*".

Source: YouTube, 2013

4. Audi A7

The advertisement features an Audi entering an empty car park. A man steps out of the car with a bag from where he pulls out a hose that he connects to the tailpipe. The man then gets back into the car with the hose through the window and starts the car. It is apparent to the viewer that the man is about to commit suicide. The attempt fails which is explained by a line with the text "Clean diesel technology. Good for the environment, good for you"

The atmosphere in this video is dark and dull. The background music enhances this impression through a simple piano piece. The connections to suicide are evident from the beginning, which leaves the viewer affected until the line appears on the screen. The comedic aspect of this advertisement is then constituted by the use of an environmental friendly car

for this specific purpose. Some comments found regarding this advertisement follows;" *Audi is committing corporate suicide with this advertising*" compared to "*You may think it's horrible, but to me that's smart marketing*".

3.4   Data analysis

Source: YouTube, 2013

Regarding the process of analyzing the collected data there exist several methods suggesting how this can be conducted. Malhotra et al., (2012) recommend four steps that should

be followed when analyzing the gathered data. These are assembling, reducing, displaying and verifying. The authors of the thesis find the content of this structure sufficient to work with and have therefore chosen to follow this approach. The last step, verifying the data, has however been excluded in favor for another methodology typically involving the same content, which will be examined in section 3.5. A description of the first three steps for analyzing the data, and their relevance to the study on hand will be described next.

3.4.1   Data assembly

The first step involves the collection of data from a variety of sources. This means the gathering of reflections made by the researchers, drawings or diagrams, visual images, notes taken during focus groups or interviews, recordings among others (Malhotra et al., 2012). According to the study on hand, the assembly consisted mainly of the authors' notes during the focus groups, recordings, and transcripts.

3.4.2   Data reduction

The second step involves handling the data, which more specifically refers to the structuring of the qualitative data and also to dispose some (Malhotra et al., 2012). The transcripts serve as the primary data source for most qualitative studies, meaning that effort should be taken in transcribing them carefully. Since all information covered may not be of relevance the researchers also have to reduce the data in order to only retrieve the most meaningful parts. This process is referred to as coding, which means breaking down the data into different categories or chunks and attaching some kind of reference to these (Malhotra et al., 2012).

Since all focus groups held for the purpose of the study were conducted in Swedish, careful transcribing had to be done to ensure that the translation to English provided the participants' words with the same inherent meaning. After the transcribing process was finished, where the recordings were converted into written documents, the authors started the work of reducing the data. In order to break down the data further, three different categories were created; negative, confused and positive (Appendix 9.6). These were essentially based on the participants' perceptions identified while being exposed to and discussing dark humour in advertising during the focus groups

3.4.3   Data display

The third step contains summarizing and presenting the information retrieved in the last two sections. This also allows a more public view of how the researchers have made connections among the different categories created in the coding phase. Some suggested methods for displaying the data are the construction of a matrix or a spreadsheet (Malhotra et al., 2012). Details from respective interview or focus group can then be inserted into different cells by pasting extracts from the transcripts. By presenting the data visually, comparisons can more easily be made across different columns when the researcher is searching for connections. Accordingly, the authors of the thesis constructed a spreadsheet (Table 3.1) where the coding categories, positive, confused and negative, created from the focus groups were inserted (Appendix 9.6). The usefulness of this is mainly as a tool when analyzing the data, as well as showing the reader visually how connections are being made across these groups.

Table 3.1 Spreadsheet

Spreadsheet of respondents perception of dark humour:			
Negative towards the strategy:	**Confused/ Mixed feelings:**		**Positive towards the strategy:**
	Positive:	**Negative:**	
- Mature/ older part of gen Y	- Social media	- Ethical values	- Younger part of gen Y
- Strong opinions	- Attention	- Identifies a limit	- Not easily affected emotionally
- Women			- Mainly men
- Political views			- Need for a change

3.5   Assesing the quality

Within any study, the researchers should be able to justify their results and demonstrate that they have established a rationale for the study as well as consistent description of the data collection procedures and interpretation of results (Nutt, Williams & Morrow, 2009). This obligation holds true regardless of whether qualitative or quantitative approaches have been used, whereas the specific strategies for arriving at validity or trustworthiness may be

different. The same authors suggest that there exist three broad groups of trustworthiness which qualitative studies should attend to. These are integrity of data, balance between reflexivity and subjectivity, and lastly, clear communications of findings. Accordingly, each of these categories will be described, and their specific application for the study on hand will be examined.

3.5.1 Integrity of the data

The integrity of the data refers to the dependability of the collected data, which is related to whether replication of the study is possible by other researchers. Connecting this concept to the purpose of this thesis, the authors are seeking to facilitate replication of the study by including careful descriptions of advertisements used, as well as transcripts from respective focus group in the appendix 9.2-5. Besides from this, the methodology chapter also describes the different steps of how the analysis of this material was carried out.

An additional aspect of integrity of the data suggests that researchers should present some evidence that quality of the data has been met. This corresponds to considerations of different perspectives such as using a sample containing diversity in terms of demographics or viewpoints. Relating to the study on hand, the authors used judgmental sampling in order to secure a multi-perspective sample in terms of psychological and personal characteristics of the participants. In addition, both males and females were included in the sample. A potential drawback according to this perspective could be that the study is limited to Swedish residents and people between the ages 18-35, which decrease the diversity considerably. In addition to quality, the quantity of data refers to reaching the point where no new information is gained by the inclusion of additional data. This can be exemplified by the authors attempt to conduct additional focus groups until no new insight was provided.

Finally, the last criterion to establish integrity of the data argues that some evidence should be presented regarding the fit between interpretations and the data. One method for doing this could be to include direct quotes to exemplify the participants' contributions and how these fit according to the interpretations made (Nutt et al., 2009). Linking this aspect to the study on hand, quotations have been used to demonstrate the individuals' contribution within the analysis, along with the authors' interpretations of the data.

3.5.2　　Balance between subjectivity and reflexivity

Another aspect related to the trustworthiness of a study is the balance between what the participants say and how the researcher interprets the meaning of those words. As a result, there is a need to balance between the concepts of subjectivity and reflexivity. One method for arriving at the desired balance of reflexivity could be to ask participants or others for feedback during the interpretation process (Nutt et al., 2009).

The authors of the study aimed for this balance during the focus groups by encouraging the participants to explain any vague answers more in depth or to provide own examples of what they meant. In addition, in cases where the authors became unsure after the sessions, certain participants were asked to read through the findings to identify any inaccurate interpretation of their views. This aspect was particularly important since the authors had to translate the material from the focus group from Swedish to English, meaning that careful interpretation of words had to be done in order to secure that the participants' true viewpoints were obtained.

3.5.3　　Clear communication of findings

Finally, Nutt et al., (2009) suggest that in order for a study to be considered trustworthy, the researcher have to be able to clearly communicate what was found and why this matters. This means that the reader should easily be able to understand interpretations made and evidence such as participants' quotes should be available to support these findings. Moreover, the researcher must show that the research questions presented at the start have also been answered appropriately. A final recommendation concerns a discussion of current theory and practice and to tie the results of the study to existing literature within the specific area of focus, which relates to Malhotra et al., (2012) step regarding verification of data.

Throughout this study, short summaries and tables have been provided to emphasize linkages and to facilitate the reader's understandings and ability to follow complex theories and other presented material. In addition, the topic guide used within the focus groups was constructed into three sections based on the research questions. Subsequently, these questions are further discussed within the analysis and then answered within the conclusion of the thesis. Regarding the connection of the results of the study to existing literature, the authors are using the theories presented in section chapter 2 when analyzing the findings derived from the focus groups in order to verify the data.

4 Findings from the focus groups

In the following chapter the empirical findings from each focus group are presented. Firstly, the findings from the general discussion are presented, followed by the results from the discussion of the four viral advertisements and the relevance of the strategy according to high risk product categories. The results function as a basis for the following analysis.

4.1 Focus group 1

The first focus group consisted of five people, two females, L and U, and three males, R, M and D, in the ages 22-26. The session lasted for 1 hour and 12 minutes.

General Discussion

During the general discussion the participants were encouraged to define and describe what humour means to them. This could refer to simple synonyms like; *"Irony"* – D, *"Playful, childish"* – M, or brief examples like *"It can also be different types of humour like subtle humour or raw humour"* – M. Continuing with the question of what they understand by dark humour, responses were mixed. While the majority of the participants seemed relatively unfamiliar to the concept, others managed to come up with a few associations. *"Mean and hurtful humour that crosses the line."* – U, and *"Also like tragic comedy to some extent"*. The participants were agreeing on that the implication of crossing the line depends on the individual at stake but oftentimes refers to upsetting jokes that becomes personal or real life situations. *"When people start to take it personal, such as joking about ethnicity or real life situations that has occurred"* – U.

Responses were quite vague regarding examples of dark humour in commercial settings. One of the participants argued that this could be due to the fact that jokes of this kind would not have been accepted in Sweden. The overall impression was that the group was relatively inexperienced within the topic.

Advertisement 1 – Bridgestone

The majority of the group laughed during the presentation of the advertisement, males as well as females. *"I think it was funny! Very un-Swedish!"* – D. One of the girls rather seemed to be surprised by the content; *"That was a bit sick"* – U. The entire group was agreeing on that this advertisement corresponds to what they refer to as dark humour. U suggested; *"It reminds me of Family Guy where they joke about dark stuff that you're not suppose to make fun of. Such as a man in a wheelchair, they do it in a way that it becomes ok to laugh. But when I think about it is actually terrible to laugh at such a thing"*.

Regarding the connections to suicide, one of the females argued that it is terrible to joke about this topic, but still admitted that she actually laughed about it. U fills in that it could serve as a mitigating factor that animals are featured, rather than human beings. When elaborating further, she also caught herself saying "*When I think of the commercial again I do not find it funny*". The males agreed on that it is a tragic story, but however suggested that it is constructed in a way that makes it funny. D argued; "*They do succeed in grabbing the viewer's attention since you wonder what is going to happen next*". The group overall agreed on the fact that the advertisement evokes laughter, but when it comes to liking responses were mixed. Some participants suggested that as long as it manages to grab attention and establish reactions, those factors are more important than whether it contributes to positive or negative opinions. The males were particularly arguing that attention is more important than the audience liking or opinions, whereas the females obtained a more negative view towards the inclusion of suicide within commercial settings.

Advertisement 2 – Dodge Ram Trucks

The males were laughing during the presentation of the advertisement whereas the females were determined on the fact that it was not funny. D thought that it was not that bad; "*It was definitely worse than the previous one, it was kind of raw but still funny. I do see the humorous aspect in it, it is a commercial and obviously he is not going to kill the baby!*" The moderators continued by asking what kind of emotions the advertisement evoked among the group, where the main part suggested that they did not become provoked by watching it. Rather, it was described as a very unusual commercial that manages to surprise you. The fact that the viewer does not know for sure if the baby was killed, but instead plays with associations makes it a bit softer according to M. The entire group agreed upon that the advertisement corresponds to their definition of dark humour, and most of them viewed it as somewhat rougher than the former. Moreover, it was mentioned that this type of appeal in adverting is very "un-Swedish" and different from what most of the participants had seen before in commercial settings.

Advertisement 3 – Ford KA

While some of the participants became surprised by the content of this advertisement, laughter was still evident when the video ended. "*This one was funny, I laughed so much more at this one compared to the two previous!*" – R. The group believed that this advertisement belongs to the concept of dark humour, and the moderators asked how they felt about this video compared to the others. M argued that the Ford Ka commercial was raw and distasteful as

you actually get to see the cat's head fall off. The males however seemed to appreciate this particular scene as humorous rather than distasteful; "*I think it is the fact that you actually see him die, with the head and everything*" - D. L further argued; "*I think you react stronger the closer you are to the animal, I wouldn't have laughed if it was a dog*".

Advertisement 4 – Audi

There was no laughing among the group while the advertisement was presented, however one of the participants suggested that it was kind of smart. *"It is kind of sick. On the positive side it at least had a point with the slogan and all"* - L. When discussing the content and whether it was funny or not, the participants were not too sure about this one. Whereas R argued, *"If he actually would have died it would have been really offensive and not fun at all",* U identified a dangerous aspect by including appeals like suicide; *"It is offensive towards people who suffer from psychological issues".* Everyone agreed on the fact that the viewer gets to follow the procedure of arranging for a suicide might be too extreme but the closing scene provides a "happy ending", which mitigates the offensive appearance.

The moderators closed the second section by asking some general questions regarding death and suicide in commercial settings, and to what extent this is acceptable. The group suggested that jokes about tragic situations or peoples' destinies are actually not a particularly attractive strategy in advertising. L argued; *If my friend just committed suicide I would probably become extremely offended by this, it depends on the person and their history. If you can relate to the situation or have experience of something similar it would definitely have been worse".* M however contended that their generation is actually used to these types of appeals; *"When you think about it we see this everywhere, in movies, sit comes and so on"* . Other topics mentioned as unacceptable in humorous settings were real life events and the inclusion of children, which should have a greater affect on you.

The moderators explained that humour has been suggested as particularly sufficient for reaching young people, and asked the group whether they agree or rather believe that they have "seen it all". U argued; "*We are more open towards this kind of approach, but I still think that it is possible to shock us*" Other participants agreed and believed that their generation is probably more tolerant compared to how their parents would react to these appeals. U continued; *"We can still react in a positive way even though it is a commercial treating dark humour or other offending things".* Another participant stressed the fact that young people are not used to these advertisements in Sweden, which makes them a favorable audience as they actually react.

The entire group suggested that they would like to see more of dark humour in advertising. R closed; *"It would have been fun to see something new, perhaps that would have stopped me form zapping around during the commercial break."*

Dark humour and different product categories

The moderators started the last section by asking if the participants noticed the product featured within the advertisements, which they all did. One of the girls further argued that she felt that this strategy is probably aimed for males rather than females. D agrees; *"True, when commercials are aimed for men it is usually sex or violence. I think we are more tolerant and attracted to this kind of humour".* Another participant suggested that she would have a hard time to illustrate this strategy with typical feminine products like make-up. R believed that guys are generally more raw and macho than girls, and perhaps do not become affected to the same degree by these appeals.

The moderators continued the discussion by asking what the group thought about dark humour in combination with high-risk product categories, which involves more time, money and engagement. Regarding this aspects, the group suggested that the quality of the advertisement and the message or slogan are more important than the actual product. *"Even though the last commercial was offensive it also was the most professional, which make me more accepting towards it"* – M. D closed by stating that as long as the commercial is catchy, the type of product featured is less important.

4.2 Focus group 2

The second focus group consisted of six people, four females, V, B, Z, and Q and two males, R and S in the ages of 23-28. The session lasted for 1 hour and 15 minutes.

General discussion

The focus group started by the general question of how the participants understand the concept of humour, and what different types they could identify. Examples provided were irony, satire, and malice humour among others. Regarding the aspect of dark humour the group appeared to obtain some associations towards this concept; *"When people joke about things that are usually not considered okay to joke about"* – Q, or *"Provocative humour"* – V. Examples provided were real life events but also social or political issues. V further argued; *"Both different happenings around the world and personal horrible situations like sickness or death".* Overall,

the group appeared to possess a general idea of dark humour and what this concept corresponds to.

Advertisement 1 – Bridgestone

The group was laughing during the presentation of the advertisement, and the majority argued that they appreciated it. B however disagreed; *"I think I would become really offended if I would have known anyone committing suicide because then you can relate to it in another way"*. The other members suggested the fact that a dog was featured instead of a human being mitigates its offensive appearance. Z argued; *"It is definitely a commercial that you will remember, yet not be offended by. I would not judge the company negatively"*. Moreover, the group argued that the fact that the dog actually survived made them less negatively affected. Conversely, if someone had a relative that got killed in the same way, this would probably have an impact. The participants were doubtful whether they would consider this advertisement as dark humour and argued that it was not provocative enough.

Advertisement 2 – Dodge Ram

Different opinions were being raised regarding this advertisement, and how the group perceived it. Whereas Q argued that this commercial was definitely worse, R held a different view; *"I have to admit that I found this advert a little bit funnier than the previous. But, it is also more offensive. I bet this is an American company and with everything happening over there, school massacres etc., of course it would be more offensive to them, I just cannot relate to it"*. Other members agreed, particularly regarding the fact that they cannot relate to it. The participants also found it hard to identify connections between the advertisement and their definition of dark humour. *"I just feel that they are aiming for publicity"* – B. V further suggested; *"Perhaps this would be good PR for them, I think I would remember the advertisement straight away when seeing their logo, connecting the brand to the commercial"*. R argued that these types of appeals in commercial settings also serves as a targeting device; *"I think this commercial rather excludes a certain segment that definitely will not purchase the car than attracting several people. I think this commercial is more dark humour than the other, and because of that it will narrow down its target considerably"*.

Advertisement 3 – Ford KA

The group laughed during the presentation of the advertisement, still comments like *"That is quite brutal"* – S, were evident. While some of the participants argued that the commercial was weird and made no point or connection to the product, others believed that it was rather funny. *"It is hard to grasp this commercial and the humour, it is just weird"* – Q, and *"I think it*

was a bit humorous though…It was too unrealistic that it became funny "- V. R suggested that the advertisement would have a more offensive approach if babies, or even dogs, were featured compared to animals that people usually do not care that much about. Z took it one step further by arguing that overall, one should be careful to play with associations of death and murder in commercial settings. The group was also convinced that marketers are well aware of the offending capacity of these appeals, and therefore use animals and other features in order to make the content less realistic and funny. *"I am sure it is a well planned marketing strategy to use animals in these situations, it makes it less realistic"* – V. S further argued that the raw appearance narrow down the target group considerably, and moreover that it was probably aimed for young men.

Advertisement 4 – Audi

There was not much laughter during the presentation of the advertisement, one participant however mentioned that she could clearly grasp the funny aspect of it. Another member of the group explained that he had relatives that committed suicide by the same procedure, and therefore did not appreciate the funny aspect of the advertisement at all. He continued, *"For me this becomes real and I can relate to it, therefore I also get upset".* The rest of the group agreed upon that this commercial was too brutal as a result of its closeness to reality, however it managed to make a point by the slogan regarding the environmental aspect. *"It had some sort of purpose with the slogan that made it funny, even though it was raw"* – V. Overall, the connection to dark humour was obvious within this advertisement according to the group, which was enhanced by the fact that a human being was featured with the topics of death and suicide.

The moderators continued the discussion by explaining that taboo themes and humour have been suggested as particularly sufficient for reaching the younger audience, and asked how the group responds to this. The participants believed that they would pay attention to these types of appeals, since they are generally not featured in Sweden *"I think that we get shocked since we have not seen this in advertisements that much yet, mainly in movies"* – R. The group also discussed the fact that this type of advertisement definitely raises attention among the viewers, as well as publicity as people will probably talk about it. *"I think they succeed in gaining attention and publicity since I notice and remember the brand but I am not sure about the next step, the purchase phase. So if the aim is publicity, yes. Next step regarding the purchase, I am not too sure"* – R.

Dark humour and different product categories

Regarding the discussion of whether dark humour in advertising would be more suitable in certain product categories than others, S argued that it should be particularly applicable for high-risk product categories. He provided an example linked to the Ford Ka advertisement; *"So let's say that I go to a car dealer, if I see the car I will probably remember the commercial, get curious and want to try it. Compared to for example laundry powder, which is very simple product demanding no reflection, only a yes or no. A car demands further research, therefore marketers first of all need to make you aware of that the car exist. This particular commercial makes me notice the car".* The other members agreed that they usually pick low-risk products randomly, whereas high-risk products requires further information, meaning that an attention gaining strategy is useful for remembering a particular brand among others. V explained; *"If I do not like the advertisement, I will not like the product. Since laundry powder pretty much contains the same ingredients and performs the same I would rather just choose another brand".* With high-risk products this is not the case since you still have to collect further information before dismissing one brand in favor for another. *"Generally, the higher price of the product, the more space there is to make extravagant jokes"* – R. The moderators asked the group if the combination of dark humour and high-risk products such as insurances or stocks could possibly make the company appear as less serious. S suggested that it rather depend on how the advertisement is constructed, and the quality it convey. *"I think the reactions depends a lot on how the commercial is made, if it looks professional or not. The Audi commercial looked very professional which made me okay with it".* Other members suggested that it also depends on the target group, and that their generation is probably more accepting towards these types of appeals in advertising overall, including high-risk categories. Some participants further mentioned that dark humour appeals to men rather than women. R closes *"Yeah, I do not know many women who are interested in a Dodge Ram car with an arrow next to it".*

4.3   Focus group 3

The third focus group consisted of five people in the ages 21-26, two females, N and X and three males H, T and P. The duration of the session was 1 hour and 5 minutes.

General Discussion

Overall, the participants suggested a variation of thoughts of what humour means to them. They proposed ideas such as; *"Sarcasm or difficult humour hard to grasp"* – N, *"Sarcasm, careless and playful humour"* – T, and *"Forbidden humour when joking about disable, sex, diseases and ethnici-*

51

ty" – X. They all agreed on that there is a subtle line in today's society of what is and what is not considered acceptable to joke about, and further emphasized the importance of not taking advantage of anyone's vulnerable situation in favor for a joke. A clarified; *"As long as you do not expose a person it is still funny"*. Even if the concept dark humour was unfamiliar to some of the participants others suggested that it might be linked to provocation, discrimination and again, playing with the forbidden. Examples of this was real life situations as one of the participants stated; *"Joking about nine eleven, Breivik or topics like that do not belong in commercial contexts"* – N. None of the participants had however been exposed to dark humour before or could provide any specific examples of it.

Advertisement 1 – Bridgestone

This advertisement more or less evoked laughter among all of the participants, males and females, inducing spontaneous reactions such as; *"It was funny, at least I laughed at this ad"* – N and *"There is a kind of playfulness in the ad that mitigates the aspect of suicide"* – H. These reactions however seemed to change for some of the participants after discussing the actual content of the advertisement more thoroughly. One participant argued that she at first did not become offended by the advertisement but after considering the aspect of suicide illustrated she developed rather negative feelings towards it. Though, the fact that the commercial was featuring animals in what could have been a human situation seemed to alleviate the negative feelings among the participants; *"Also, it would probably be worse if human beings were featured in the commercial instead of dogs"* – N. The participants agreed on that even though this advertisement evoked laughter it should also be classified as dark humour.

Advertisement 2 – Dodge Ram

During this advertisement the participants all remained silent and appeared to be rather surprised by the abrupt end of the story. When asking about their thoughts X immediately stated that this advertisement was much worse than the previous one and got backed up by the other participants; *"This commercial led to more negative feelings"* – P and *"I agree, the baby was too much"* – N. It became evident that the open end created confusing feelings among the participants in how to interpret the advertisement, and in contrast to previous sessions they did not see the humorous aspect of the crying baby. Based on that, the entire group agreed on that this advertisement provides an example of dark humour and was further suggested as an efficient strategy when aiming for attention; *"It differentiates from the crowd and makes the viewer curious"* – P.

Advertisement 3 – Ford Ka

After viewing this advertisement the participants' opinions distinguished in the sense of how they perceived the humorous aspect of it. While some of the participants laughed and made comments such as*; "Oh my god, who made this commercial?!"* – T and *"I thought it was funny"* – X, another participant was obviously more offended by the content; *"To me this was too much. It is not even funny"* – H. It was moreover argued that this advertisement probably would result in a lot of buzz, or word of mouth among the audience as suggested by N. This brought the participants to discourse whether all attention should be considered as positive, or if the company or brand could risk being damaged. In general the participants agreed on that it takes more than an offensive advertisement for them to establish a negative attitude towards the company or to develop a negative brand image; *"I do not think that a brand becomes affected to that degree"* – X. N was the only one arguing that she might not want to be associated with a brand that has an unfavorable reputation in oppose to T who believed that; *"If I have a good relationship to the brand I can probably disregard the fact that they broadcasted a commercial like this"*. The participants lastly concluded that this type of strategy succeeds in establishing debate which might be necessary for companies in order to distinguish from competitors by claiming; *"It reaches a lot of people that an ordinary ad would not do. Maybe it is necessary to play with emotions to get to that point"* – H, supported by N; *"I agree, companies have to stretch boundaries to distinguish from the crowd. The audience has seen the most today, in order to gain attention companies have to stretch boundaries"*.

Advertisement 4 – Audi A7

The last advertisement divided the participants into two separate groups based on their emotions, where some of the participants strongly argued that it is unacceptable to play with associations of suicide and particularly in a commercial context; *"Suicide is not something that should be joked about. This is too dark in my opinion"* – P. Remaining participants agreed on this argument to some extent but further stated that the advertisement still was amusing, mainly due to the catchy slogan that appeared afterwards which also succeeded in connecting the product to the message. Moreover, the participants agreed on that it is a jeopardous strategy to apply since suicide tends to evoke strong emotions due to its provocative approach, as N explained*;" You have to choose between gaining attention and the risk of offending people, and the price of that to your company"*.

The moderators continued the discussion on revolting topics by asking whether it is acceptable to make jokes about everything, or if the group could describe if there is a poten-

tial limit? T and N argued that children should be left out of this approach, especially in conjunction with suffering or death. H concluded that the twist with dark humour is that it can have a mitigating effect on the offensive appearance; *"When you get the relieving feeling that a person did not die etc. and it becomes funny, that is when the advertising works"*. Moreover, the participants argued that this type of approach is probably necessary in order for companies to distinguish from their competitors. Regarding the suitability for their generation the group agreed that it would most likely be an efficient strategy, mainly since they all obtain tendencies to share information through social media, in other words free publicity. T suggested; *"Just imagine, with a click I can share it with 500 friends on Facebook while my mum might not even tell her colleague"*. In addition, it was stated that youths overall are not as likely to become offended by provocative themes in comparison to the older population;*" We have a higher acceptance level and do not become offended that easily"* – X and H continued; *"We have seen death, suicide and war in movies, on the web etc and are used to it"*. The entire group confirmed interest in seeing more of this approach, as N concluded; *"It gets so boring if everyone is doing the same thing. Someone have to challenge existing strategies"*.

Dark humour and different product categories

The participants noticed that all of the advertisements featured cars, a high-risk product. In addition, they proposed that this strategy is applicable on high-risk products and could even induce a favorable outcome when targeting young people. P stated; *"If you become curious by these advertisements in the first place, then you probably want to learn more about the product if it is a more expensive product"*. The group did not believe that dark humour could result in an unserious impression of the company. T described a car as an important investment, and the buyer would therefore most likely go beyond the advertisement in their reflection of the company and when searching for information. H agreed;*" When you search for additional information you will probably notice whether it is an unreliable company or not. I do not think that the advertisement affects that"*. In addition, N suggested that dark humour might be more suitable for targeting men;*" I have a hard time to see how dark humour would work within make up or fragrance industries, which are typically associated to softer, less daring appeals"*.

4.4   Focus group 4

The last focus group consisted of four women, J, A, K, S and one man, P, in the ages of 26-32. The session lasted for 1 hour and 9 minutes.

General discussion

The participants were encouraged to be spontaneous, and provided examples of humour such as*; "Mean humour"* – K and *"Spitefulness is another kind of humour"* – S. The participants further described mean humour as attacking and often at the expense of another person's feelings. P particularly emphasized the difference in laughing with someone versus laughing at someone. An additional example of mean humour was provided by J*;"To make fun of different ethnic groups or tragic world events is to cross the line"* which was supported by A*;" Like when people made fun of the World Trade Centre tragedy, it was not okay since a lot of people were actually hurt both physical and mentally"*. Regarding their familiarity to dark humour, the participants did not recognize it from previous experiences but suggested that it might be linked to mean humor. S suggested that it probably could upset people*;"Well like what we talked about previously, tragic events or happenings that in some way come to affect people"*.

Advertisement 1 – Bridgestone

The group remained silent during the presentation and did not seem to appreciate it, one of the participants concluded; *"Rather awful"* – A. Even though the participants could understand the humorous aspect they agreed on that it was not particularly amusing to watch. The moderators continued the discussion by asking if anyone in the group could identify a link between this advertisement and dark humour. J argued that she could, by stating that the advertisement treated the subject of suicide, and received support by S who mentioned that infidelity also belongs to that category. It was further argued that this type of advertisement could offend several viewers*;"If someone knows anyone committing suicide I believe they would have been very offended by this"* – J, and; *"I do not think everyone think of those people that are actually hurt by seeing this"* – A. It was however suggested that this advertisement might be perceived as less offensive if it was broadcasted over the Internet; *"If it would just be a "funny viral ad" perhaps I would be laughing"* – K.

Advertisement 2 – Dodge Ram

This advertisement evoked similar reactions among the main group, whereas P was the only participant finding it amusing by saying; *"I still think it is a bit fun and especially when hearing the baby because that is when the company takes it too far"*. J agreed to some extent meaning that the crying baby made the situation ridiculous and absurd. She however thought it became too extreme when shooting the dog, which to her was to cross the line. This was supported by A*;"I think that was awful and I do not understand why it would be humorous to shoot an animal"*. Overall the participants found the advertisement poor in its execution by arguing that a

Swedish person would never bring a weapon when camping. This is in contrast to the USA where the advertisement probably would have been perceived as more provocative as J declared;*"I also think this could be provocative in the USA because I think this could actually happen over there as they allow weapons"*. When the moderator questioned whether this advertisement could be categorized as dark humour the entire group agreed and K closed the discussion by stating; *"Yes, they actually killed someone here even if it was an innocent dog"*.

Advertisement 3 – Ford Ka

The participants laughed during the presentation of the advertisement, but simultaneously made comments such as; *"Oh my god!"* – S, and *"What! That is not even fun"* – J. A explained her spontaneous reaction of laughter as being a nervous rather than a joyful laugh since the advertisement appeared as very surrealistic. Overall the participants considered the advertisement brutal and raw with no clear connection to the product; *"It is a very weird way of promoting a car, I have never seen anything like this actually, but there is always people finding the most bizarre things funny"* – P. Another participant got surprised and shocked by the fact that the cat did not survive. The main part of the group did find the advertisement provocative, mainly due to its repulsive approach; *"We could even see the cat struggling for his life"* – A and *"I would react if watching this one on TV, it is gross and offensive"* – K. The fact that Ford claimed this advertisement to be a publicity tactic evoked different emotions among the participants. P considered it to be a clever idea since he believed that all publicity is positive for the company, but received resistance from J and K; *"Definitely not! I am still annoyed by this advertisement. I would not even consider this brand"* – J and *"Today it exist millions of different brands and as a consumer we have so many options that it is easy to change if we for some reason decide not to like a brand anymore"* – K. The entire group did however agree on that this advertisement definitely could serve as an example of dark humour and some of the participants found it being the worst so far; *"Even worse than the previous two since the first one was focused on a happy ending, the second was so unrealistic that it became fun. This one is just disgusting"* – A.

Advertisement 4 – Audi A7

After viewing this advertisement the participants immediately shared their reactions which were mainly negative; *"This is again taking it too far"* – S and; *"Several people have relatives committing suicide in this way, I think it is disrespectful to joke about it"* – K. The discussion followed regarding the ethical issue of making fun of a serious topics such as suicide, where some participants admitted that they were extremely offended by this approach; *"I think I would even switch channel when seeing this, I just find it so offensive"* – J. P remained the only one appreciating

the humorous slogan appearing towards the end of the advertisement even though the other participants understood the message. The moderators continued the discussion by asking for other topics that could be perceived as offensive and not belonging within the humorous context. Violence overall was argued to be irresponsible to apply in any humorous situation; *"Children should not be familiar with these terms as well as violent people or criminals, you never know what ideas they get"* – A. Once again, It was argued that this strategy would be more acceptable if broadcasted through the Internet as a viral advertisement, meaning that the audience can decide whether they want to be exposed to it or not.

The discussion continued about the suitability of this strategy when aiming to reach younger people. K and P agreed on that their generation is more understanding towards this type of approach compared to their parent's generation. Another argument proposed was that younger people are more likely to spread an advertisement due to the access to Internet and social media; *"Even if we do not like a commercial we still talk about it and post it to our friends. My mum would probably only tell her co-worker during their coffee break, if even that"* – P. Moreover, the females in the group suggested this strategy to be even more efficient when targeting men; *"Overall boys do not take it so seriously, but a common jargon is also that if one of them laughs then they all have to do so"* – J .

Dark humour and different product categories

The participants at first suggested that since most companies want to distinguish from their competitors the strategy of dark humour should be appropriate to all product categories. However, after introducing high-risk products the participants changed their minds; *"Actually I think it could be a bit risky for their reputation of being serious and professional"* – J and; *"I think it would most likely hurt the company, I would not appreciate my bank promoting a commercial featuring suicide"* – P. S countered by suggesting that their generation still would be more tolerant towards this strategy with high-risk products than their parents. It was moreover suggested that this strategy would be most suitable when targeting younger people and promoting low-risk products. None of the participants were however interested in seeing more of this strategy, as it appeared to be too obvious in its striving for publicity. A closed the discussion by stating; *"Yes, keep it viral so that people can chose if they want to watch it"*.

Table 4.1 Summary of empirical findings

Summary of empirical findings:

General:	
Identified humour types.	Playful, irony, childish, satire, raw and malice humour.
Associations to dark humour.	Playing with the forbidden such as real life events, mean humour that crosses the line, exposing someone in favor for the joke and transgression of social norms. Dark humour can have a mitigating effect on the offensive appearance of an advertisement.
In-depth:	
Are we allowed to joke about everything?	Children should be left out when using dark humour and especially in conjunction with suffering or death. Real life events and peoples' tragic destinies should not be joked about.
Dark humour as a suitable strategy among generation Y.	Yes, generation Y have seen death and suicide through the Internet, movies and computer games and are thus less likely to become offended. Still, this is a relatively new approach in commercial settings that manages to surprise them. Additionally, generation Y can be considered as a suitable target group since they are likely to spread the advertisement through social media.
Product category:	
Is dark humour applicable on high-risk product categories?	The participants generally found dark humour applicable on high-risk product categories since these products would benefit from an attention getting strategy, motivating additional collection of information. In addition, it was argued that the corporate image will not suffer from this strategy.

5 Analysis

In the following section the findings from the focus groups are discussed and compared to theories presented earlier in the thesis. The analysis starts by discussing the data generated from the general discussion, in order to answer the first research question. Subsequently, the participants' perceptions regarding the presented material are reviewed, and the chapter ends by discussing the product category suggested as most appropriate with dark humour, and whether this corresponds to theory. The ultimate aim of the analysis is then to provide sufficient insight to fulfill the purpose of the thesis.

5.1 How is the concept of dark humour generally understood?

In order to answer the first research question, an overall understanding of what the participants comprehend by humour in general is required. Therefore, the following section will treat the findings from the empirical investigation by connecting it to earlier presented theories in chapter 2. Subsequently, the participants' familiarity to dark humour will be examined and compared to previous research within this field.

5.1.1 The nature of humour

During the focus groups it was found that the participants understand humour as a multi-dimensional construct, meaning that it involves many diverse types that are being used for arriving at different purposes and effects. This could be to evoke a carefree and amusing atmosphere or a playful setting by the use of funny characters. Another type identified was spitefulness, where humour was rather described as a tool for objectifying an individual that becomes exposed to the joke, by being laughed at rather than with. As stated by one participant *"I think humour often aims to put someone in an uncomfortable situation, or talk bad about someone."* - A. P continued; *"... I like the fact that we laugh with and not at that someone"* regarding the carefree humour type. Other frequently mentioned types were irony, satire or even raw humour. By this broad perspective provided during the focus groups, including types of humour ranging from kind and joyful laugh with to nasty and unpleasant laugh at, it was found that the participants are well aware of the capability of humour as an approach for arriving at different purposes. Connecting these findings to Speck (1991), where five different humour types were proposed, there are evident links between this theory and what was suggested during the focus groups. This can be exemplified by Speck's sentimental humour aiming for empathy, warmth and happy endings, which could correspond to the carefree and amusing types identified by the participants. Speck further describes satire as a ridiculing type of humour where a target is being laughed at rather than with, which was also

mentioned during the focus groups. Moreover, Stern (1996) developed a continuum where romantic laugh with humour types aiming for shared pleasure and playfulness were plotted against satiric laugh at where the humour is more attacking and ridiculing. Both Stern's (1996) continuum of humour and Speck's (1991) humour types would therefore be arguable to correspond to the empirical data identified, where humour was understood and described as a multidimensional construct aiming for different effects.

5.1.2 The nature of dark humour

Continuing with dark humour, which appeared as a relatively unfamiliar concept to the target group regarding their previous experience within this field. While none of the participants were able to identify a clear definition or example of what this concept might correspond to, some ideas and associations were still provided. The general idea that was suggested within the majority of the focus groups was that dark humour should be linked to provocation, crossing the line and playing with the forbidden. The provocative aspect was exemplified by jokes about real life events or situations that people easily can relate to, or might even have experienced themselves. As suggested by S; "*Probably issues that in some way could upset people, such as tragic events or happenings that in some way have come to affect people around the world*". Moreover, this was argued to play with the forbidden "*When people joke about things that are usually not considered okay to joke about*" - L. While the implication of crossing the line depends on the individual, the participants agreed on that it refers to jokes that become too personal or real life situations described earlier. When arriving at these outcomes, it was described by the participants as "mean humour" meaning attempts to attack the audience, often at the expense of another person's feelings. Moreover, topics like sickness and death were associated terms in their attempt to define dark humour.

Connecting the material from the focus groups regarding the participants' general understanding of dark humour to the theoretical framework, some evident links can be identified. Particularly, the participants' description of the concept as related to terms like playing with the forbidden, provocation and crossing the line, could be linked to Sabri's (2012) description of a taboo, defined as a behavior or verbal act considered publicly prohibited as a result of societal norms. In this regard, sex and death were suggested as the most commonly used taboo themes in advertising. Relating to the empirical material, crossing the line could here refer to the transgression of societal norms or taboos, whereas the participants mainly referred to sickness or death when describing their associations to dark humour. In addition, the participants' associations of dark humour as related to what they referred to as

"mean humour" by attempts to attack the audience could be connected to Speck (1991) and Stern's (1996) description of satire. This means that the participants generally understand dark humour as a concept involving the ridiculing elements that also characterizes the satirical humour type.

Summary

Overall, when connecting the empirical material derived during the focus groups to presented theories regarding what is generally understood by the concept of dark humour, some links were found. Particularly, the participants' associations to playing with the forbidden, provocation, and crossing the line are all elements that can be found within provocative advertising using taboo themes. Although suicide or violence was not spontaneously mentioned as topics related to dark humour, the participants' associations to terms like sickness and death should still belong to the same category of affective topics when crossing the line of what is acceptable to joke about. The connection to "mean humour" involving jokes at the expense of another person could be linked to the satirical humour type, often involving an object or target serving as the "butt of the joke". Moreover, the topics of taboo, death and satire are all evident elements discussed by the authors as vital components when deriving their own definition of dark humour; "Topics and events that are generally considered as *taboo*, specifically those related to *death* or *violence* are treated in an unusually *humorous* or *ridiculing* manner while retaining their seriousness…".

5.2 How is the concept of dark humour perceived in commercial settings?

In order to answer the second research question, the authors were seeking to make the participants familiar to the concept of dark humour by presenting how it can be used in commercial settings. Four viral advertisements were therefore presented during the focus groups (Section 3.3.7), with the aim of identifying how these were perceived by looking at reactions, feelings and opinions raised among the participants while being exposed to dark humour in practice. The following section aims to compare these findings to related theories within this field. In addition, the analysis provided would receive particular attention as it relates closely to the main purpose of the thesis.

5.2.1 Emotional responses

During the presentation of the viral advertisements that all included elements connected to dark humour, different reactions could be identified. Whereas some participants expressed

that this strategy; *"Succeeds in grabbing the viewers' attention since you wonder what is going to happen next"* - D, and opinions like; *"It is definitely a commercial that you will remember, yet not be offended by. I would not judge the company negatively"* - Z, others respondents held a different view; *"That is quite brutal"* - S, and "*I think I would even change channel when seeing this, I just find it so offensive"* - J. Among those participants obtaining a positive view towards dark humour in advertising, spontaneous reactions were curiosity and excitement while being surprised by the content. Relating this to Solomon et al., (2010) description of the emotional responses that are formed by an advertisement (Section 2.2), this should refer to upbeat feelings, characterized by amusement and playfulness. Conversely, the participants holding a more skeptical or even negative view towards dark humour tended to react by becoming offended, showing empathy as well as getting personally affected by the content. According to Solomon et al., (2010), this should correspond to the emotional response of negative feelings including criticism and offensiveness. Among the focus groups conducted, other participants remained confused by showing tendencies of amusement while still being critical to the topics featured within the advertisements. As described by N; *"Topics like suicide does not belong in commercial contexts. But I still found it funny, so I am confused"*. In addition, these participants tended to first react spontaneously with laughter and excitement, while changing their minds when elaborating further in topics like death and suicide and what they actually imply. U was one of those who laughed during the presentation of the advertisements, but later proposed; *"When I think of the commercial again I do not find it funny"*, when discussing the content more in depth. As a result, the participants that remained confused regarding dark humour in commercial settings obtained feelings belonging both to the upbeat and negative responses described earlier. A visual illustration of the positive, negative and confused groups is further described in appendix 9.6.

5.2.2   Responses to media violence: three key issues

According to Brown et al., (2010) three key issues are of importance in how an audience responds to media violence (Section 2.5), including the intensity of the violent content, how serious the viewer perceives the consequences of the violent act and whether the violent act is perceived as justified or not. The relevance of analyzing these key issues to the study on hand is then motivated by the fact that when being affected by them, the audience is suggested to obtain more favorable attitudes and greater brand memorability. Relating this aspect to the empirical material in how the participants reacted to the violent component of the presented advertisement, certain connections can be derived.

- Regarding the intensity of the violent content, Brown et al., (2010) argued that it should have a strong influence on how the audience reacts. This statement was supported by the fact that as the violent component increased within the presented material during the focus groups, the viewers' reactions were consequently stronger. This was most evident within the Ford Ka commercial, where the audience was exposed to a detailed execution of a cat, and the Audi commercial where the procedure of a suicide was being illustrated. Particularly, laughter was evident among the majority of the focus groups during the presentation of the first two advertisements, Bridgestone and Dodge Ram, whereas this reaction declined or was substituted against silence during the two latter advertisements including more raw features. Comments supporting this follows; *"It was funny, at least I laughed at this ad"* – N, regarding Bridgestone, and *"I have to admit that I found this advert a little bit funnier than the previous"* - R, regarding Dodge Ram. This is in contrast to; *"For me this becomes real and I can relate to it, therefore I also get upset"* - R, regarding Audi, and *"I would react if watching this one on TV, it is gross and offending"* - K, about Ford Ka.

- The second key issue, how serious the viewer perceives the consequences of the violent act, could be exemplified by the victim's expression of pain or suffering. Referring this aspect to the presented advertisements, the Ford Ka commercial, where the cat is struggling for its life, provides the most obvious illustration involving suffering. Whereas some participants found this particular scene repulsive by closing their eyes and expressing comments like *"We could even see the cat struggling for his life"* - A, others rather appreciated the illustration; *"I think it is the fact that you actually see him die, with the head and everything"* - D. Overall, the participants held opposing views regarding how serious they perceived the violent act featured within this advertisement. As described by the comments made during the focus groups, some members became offended by the consequence illustrated, meaning that they also were more affected by the advertisement overall as suggested by Brown et al., (2010). However, others were rather entertained while the severity of the consequence of the violent act increased, and thus not affected by the advertisement in sum.

- The last key issue suggests that the audience will be more affected if the violence illustrated is unjustified. Connecting this aspect to the empirical investigation, unjus-

tified violence can be found within the Dodge Ram commercial and The Ford Ka, where innocent animals are being executed unprovoked. While the majority of the participants were upset by the use of violence in an unjustified manner; *"I think that was awful and I did not understand why it would be humorous to shoot an innocent animal"* - A regarding Dodge Ram, others suggested that these features were unrealistic and therefore hard to relate to; *"I think it was a bit humorous though... It was too unrealistic that it became funny"* - V regarding Ford Ka. Brown et al., (2010) argument regarding unjustified violence is therefore only partially supported. This could also be explained by the fact that animals are featured instead of human beings, which makes the appearance less realistic; *"It would probably be worse if human beings were featured in the commercial instead of dogs"* - N.

Summary

Connecting Brown et al. (2010) key issues in how an audience responds to media violence to the investigation on hand, mixed responses were found supporting this theory. Regarding the first issue about the intensity of the violent act, the majority of the participants reacted stronger as the violence increased. However, the consequences of the violent act were perceived either as offensive or rather entertaining depending on the extent to which the participants were affected or not by the particular scene. Unjustified violence, which was suggested to make the audience more affected, was supported to the extent that the content was also perceived as realistic. Conversely, if the content was perceived as rather unrealistic, the last proposition fails according to the study on hand. Overall then, while the results were mixed to a great extent regarding how the participants responded to media violence it certainly appeared to have an impact. However, in order to answer whether this impact induces more positive attitudes or greater brand memorability further research needs to be done. The study on hand provided too vague and indeterminate answers towards this aspect which is why the authors can only conclude that media violence appears to have a strong impact on how the viewer perceives an advertisement.

5.2.3   Masking as a mitigating tool in dark humour

Shabir and Thwaites (2007) discussed the function of humour as a masking device that could be used to generate a positive perception of a stimulus that is otherwise perceived in a negative manner, such as a taboo. Relating this theory to the study on hand, it was oftentimes found that the participants perceived certain humorous elements within the advertisements as having a mitigating effect on the otherwise offensive appearance, which made

them more accepting towards it. As discussed by N regarding the Bridgestone advertisement; *"There is a kind of playfulness in the ad that mitigates the aspect of suicide"*. In this case, the participants particularly suggested the fact that a dog was featured instead of human beings when treating the topic of suicide, as a factor decreasing the seriousness evoked by the advertisement. N stated; *"Also, it would probably be worse if human beings were featured in the commercial instead of dogs"*. Other researchers support the theory of masking, where Brown et al., (2010) suggest that violence in combination with humour tends to make the audience less observant towards the violent component (Section 2.6). In addition, Manceau and Tissier-Desbordes (2006) argue that humour is frequently added within taboo-challenging stimulus with the intention of palliating those effects (Section 2.6). Besides from using animals for arriving at these effects, the participants suggested that "happy endings" within an otherwise dark story could be used. R described the usefulness of a happy ending within the Audi commercial and further stated that "*If he actually would have died it would have been really offensive and not fun at all"*. Moreover, it was argued within the Bridgestone advertisement that the fact that the dog did not die made the participants less negatively affected.

Regarding the connection to dark humour, one of the participants argued that the twist with this strategy is that it should obtain a mitigating effect on the offensive appearance; "*When you get the relieving feeling that a person did not die etc., and it becomes funny, that is when the advertisement works"* - H. Other respondents were convinced that marketers are aware of the offending capacity of dark humor and therefore use animals and other features in order to make the content less realistic and funny. As described by V; "*I am sure it is a well planned marketing strategy to use animals in these situations, it makes it less realistic"*. Sabri's (2012) proposition that dark humour can be especially sufficient in reducing the perceived level of tabooness in advertising is therefore supported by the findings derived from the empirical investigation. In addition, masking was also discussed as a key element within the authors' model illustrating the framework of dark humour (Figure 2.5). The fact that the participants mentioned how humour can be used in combination with serious topics to arrive at a softer appearance therefore supports the authors' reasoning when deriving their definition of dark humour; "…The intention of dark humour is thus for the viewer to experience both *laughter and offense*, frequently simultaneously".

5.2.4 Generation Y as a potential target group

Dahl et al., (2003) suggested that a young audience is more likely to perceive taboo appeals in advertising as cool, unique and relevant to their modern approach to the norms of socie-

ty. In addition, this group was argued to be less offended compared to more mature generations when being exposed to provocative advertising (Vezina & Paul, 1997). The authors therefore found it motivated to investigate whether this proposition correspond to dark humour strategies, that involves similar elements. As Solomon et al., (2010) described generation Y as a group typically turned off by advertising that takes itself too seriously and rather appreciate advertising as a type of entertainment, this further justifies the authors' intention to examine dark humour among this particular target group.

Relating to the empirical investigation, there was congruence among the participants that dark humour in advertising serves as a sufficient strategy for reaching their generation. Moreover, it was suggested that this group is probably more tolerant compared to how their parents would react to these appeals in advertising. As described by U; *"We can still react in a positive way even though it is a commercial treating dark humour or other offending things"*. Although being less easily provoked, it was still argued that it is possible to shock this audience and make them react. This was mainly explained by the fact that dark humour is still a relatively unfamiliar concept in commercial settings in Sweden, while the participants are increasingly exposed to topics like war, suicide and death through movies, computer games and the web. This implies that generation Y have had the time to get used to daring appeals, making them harder to offend. However, since they have not been exposed to it specifically in commercial settings before, they are still likely to react. R elaborated further; *"I think that we get shocked since we have not seen these advertisements that much yet, mainly in movies"*, which was supported by H; *"We have seen death, suicide and war in movies, on the web etc. and are used to it"*. Other participants claimed that marketers need to elaborate and challenge their strategies in order to attract attention. N described; *"It gets so boring if everyone is doing the same thing. Someone have to challenge existing strategies"*. Another aspect brought up was that young people are more likely to spread an advertisement as a result of their frequent usage of the Internet and social media, meaning that they are willing to share commercial content regardless of whether they like it or not. *"Even if we do not like the commercial we still talk about it and post it to our friends. My mum would probably only tell her co-worker during the coffee break, if even that"* - P, or *"Just imagine, with a click I can share it with 500 friends on Facebook"* - T. Considering the opinions raised regarding the tolerance and familiarity of provocative appeals among generation Y, as well as their favorability for sharing content online, dark humour should correspond to an appropriate strategy aiming for this particular audience. This reasoning therefore supports Dahl's et al., (2003) proposition that generation Y should be more ac-

cepting towards taboo appeals in advertising, and Solomon's et al., (2010) statement that this particular target appreciate entertaining content within commercial settings.

Overall then, the majority of the participants, all belonging to the generation Y, obtained a positive or at least curious approach to dark humour strategies in advertising and expressed interest in seeing more of it. However, a distinction was apparent within the last focus group, where certain members rather expressed negative opinions and did not identify themselves as the target for this type of strategy. A potential explanation of this could be that these participants belonged to the older span of generation Y, and found this strategy too obvious in its attempt for publicity. Still, they were agreeing on that dark humour would probably serve as a sufficient strategy for attracting younger age groups, preferably broadcasted through the web where people can choose themselves whether to become exposed to it or not.

5.3 Could dark humour be used within high-risk product categories?

In order to answer the third research question a discussion regarding the suitability of dark humour in conjunction with different product categories was conducted. The following section compare these findings with existing research treating the subject of humour in general as an approach among durable and non-durable goods. Subsequently, the authors aim to analyze whether this theory is further applicable within dark humour based on the findings provided by the empirical investigation.

5.3.1 Previous research

The suitability of employing humour appeals in commercial settings was earlier suggested to be related to the type of product being advertised (Belch & Belch, 2004). Moreover, it was argued that non-durable goods should be considered most appropriate when applying this type of appeal, which was supported by Bauerly's (1990) investigation, where products such as soft drinks and snack food were viewed as particularly sufficient with humorous approaches. In addition, Belch and Belch (2004) argued that durable goods should be considered least appropriate in combination with humour appeals, risking to induce an unserious impression on the corporate image. Freitas (2008) opposed this view by proposing that humour could in fact serve as a suitable approach within high-risk product categories in cases where the target audience belongs to a young segment. The authors of the thesis

therefore found it motivated to investigate whether Freitas' (2008) reasoning correspond to the study on hand, where dark humour specifically is being examined.

5.3.2 The participants' view

Regarding the suitability of this approach within different product categories, the focus groups were introduced to high-risk and low-risk product categories, which should correspond to the durable and non-durable products described earlier. Some participants suggested that as long as the content of the advertisement is professionally designed, this aspect should be more important than the actual product featured. As explained by S; *"I think the reactions depends a lot on how the commercial is made, if it looks professional or not. The Audi commercial looked very professional which made me okay with it"*. M elaborated further; *"Even though the last commercial was offensive, it was also the most professional, which made me more accepting towards it"*. Regarding this aspect it was further suggested that the quality of the advertisement, in conjunction with the message or slogan are more important than the actual product. Other participants rather argued that dark humour should be particularly appropriate within high-risk product categories, which supports Freitas' (2008) reasoning. P explained; *"If you become curious by these advertisements in the first place, then you probably want to learn more about the product if it is a more expensive product"*. The same reasoning was provided by S who argued that a high-risk product demands further research, meaning that marketers benefit by using an attention gaining strategy where the consumer goes beyond potential offending appeals in order to learn more about the product. This is not the case within low-risk products, according to of the some participants, who suggested that they probably would pick another brand if they were offended by the advertisement, since these products are typically substitutable. V described; *"If I do not like the advertisement, I will not like the product. Since laundry powder pretty much contains the same ingredients and performs the same I would rather just chose another brand"*. This is in contrast to high-risk products where the consumer would generally collect further information before dismissing one brand in favour for another.

5.3.3 Effect on corporate image

Regarding the aspect if dark humour could evoke an unserious impression of a company or brand, the majority of the participants did not agree on this proposition. As was suggested by H; *"When you search for additional information you will probably notice whether it is an unreliable company or not. I do not think that the advertisement affects that"*. Other participants suggested that it also depends on the target group, and that their generation is probably more accepting toward these types of appeals in advertising overall, including high-risk product categories.

Conversely, a minority of the participants argued that dark humour could induce an unfavourable impression of the company, and believed that this strategy should mainly be used within low-risk categories and among the young audience. Overall though, the impression was that dark humour should be most favourably applied within high-risk product categories, which contradicts the research described earlier by Belch and Belch (2004) while supporting Freitas (2008). The proposition that humorous elements could actually function as a suitable approach within high-risk products when targeted towards a young audience therefore corresponds to the study on hand. Still, the advertisement presented during the focus groups promoted solely cars, which could explain why the participants reacted in a relatively favourable manner when referring to high-risk products overall within their discussion. However, the authors attempted to prevent any potential subjective perceptions by introducing additional high-risk products such as computers, insurance and stocks in order to broaden the participants' view. As a result, the authors find it defensible to refer to high-risk products overall when concluding that the participants' mainly obtained a favourable perception towards dark humour strategies within this category.

5.3.4   Men as an appropriate target group

Finally, an additional issue being raised by the participants when discussing the suitability of dark humour within different product categories, was the fact that the majority argued that this strategy should be more appropriate when targeted towards men. Particularly, it was believed that men would be less emotionally affected and rather attracted by these types of appeals in commercial settings. As described by D; *"When commercials are aimed for men it is usually sex or violence. I think that we are more tolerant and attracted to this kind of humour".* This was supported by N who argued that she would have a hard time to illustrate dark humour within fragrance or make-up industries, which are typically associated to softer less daring appeals. According to the opinions being raised regarding this aspect then, the participants generally suggested dark humour as a suitable strategy for targeting men rather than women. However, the authors would still like to emphasize the fact that several female members of the focus groups expressed curiosity and excitement while being exposed to these types of appeals during the presentation of the advertisements, indicating that women should not be excluded explicitly.

5.4　The proposition in the study

Relating back to the summarizing model in section 2.7 where light and dark humour were plotted against high and low-risk products, an attempt was made to illustrate how the different humour types should be mapped according to their proposed approach ranging from carefree to offensive, suggested by the theory provided by Speck (1991) and Stern (1996). Connecting the presented model to the empirical findings, the authors found support for this reasoning as humour was described as a multiperspective construct aiming at different effects from laugh with to laugh at. Moreover, the authors positioned dark humour at the offensive, laugh at, end of the continuum, characterized by satirical, violent and taboo elements. While being relatively inexperienced towards dark humour, the empirical investigation still showed that the participants obtained essentially the same understanding of how this concept should be perceived. The authors therefore found additional support for their positioning of dark humour within their constructed framework. Regarding the vertical components, high-risk and low-risk product categories, the empirical investigation proved Freitas' (2008) reasoning within this field by claiming that dark humour should be particularly sufficient within high-risk products. As a result, based on the participants' perception of dark humour in advertising, the authors find it motivated to plot this strategy as illustrated in figure 5.1 within their constructed framework.
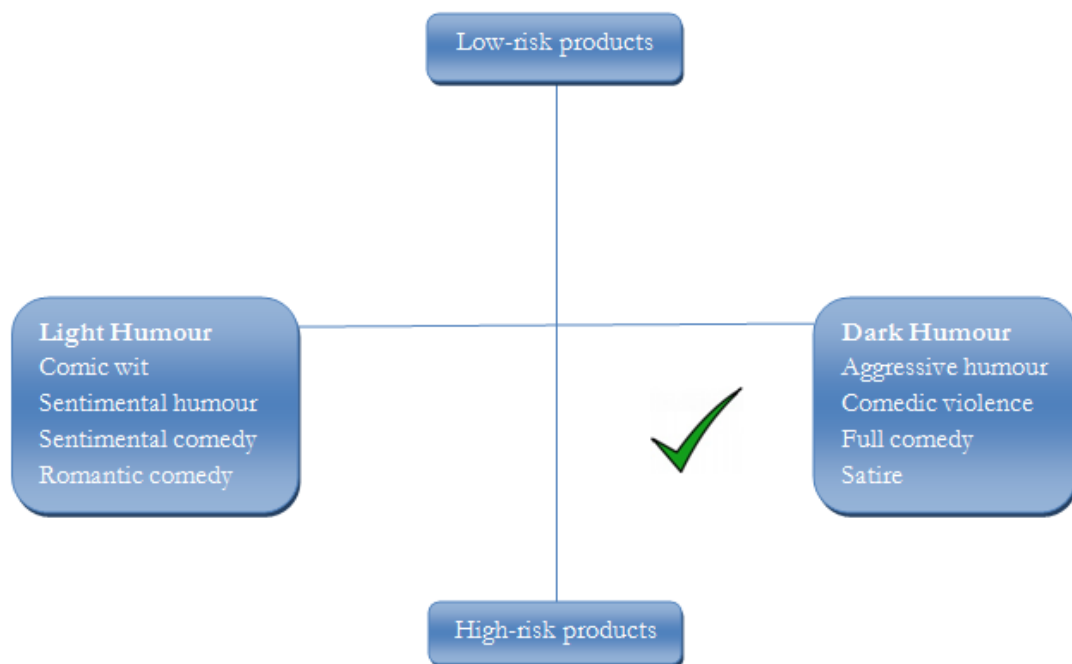

Figure 5.1 The proposition of the study - developed

Source: Adapted from Speck, 1991; Stern 1996.

6   Conclusion

As a means to fulfill the purpose of the thesis, the following chapter attempts to answer the research questions based on the main findings derived from the analysis.

How is the concept of dark humour generally understood?

It can be concluded that the participants understand humour as a multidimensional construct that can be used for arriving at different effects ranging from warm and playful to satiric and attacking. Furthermore, dark humour was perceived as a relatively unfamiliar concept, particularly in commercial settings where the participants have not been exposed to this strategy yet. Still, the use of violence and death in movies, computer games and on the web has contributed to a general idea of what this concept implies. In this regard, the participants described dark humour as being linked to provocation, crossing the line and to play with the forbidden. Specific examples provided were to objectify or expose a person in favour for the joke, real life events or topics like sickness or death. These associations could in large be connected to the earlier presented theories regarding provocative advertising using taboo themes, satirical humour, and death, which further supports the authors' constructed definition of dark humour. As a result, the general understanding of dark humour must be argued to correspond to the proposed theory within this field, essentially characterized by attempts to laugh at rather than with an exposed target.

How is dark humour perceived in commercial settings?

When being exposed to dark humour in commercial settings, three different feelings were discovered. Among the participants obtaining a positive view towards these types of appeals, upbeat feelings such as curiosity, amusement and excitement were identified. This is in contrast to other participants who perceived dark humour in a critical and offensive manner, characterized by negative feelings. A third group expressed confusion towards this approach by showing tendencies of amusement while still remaining critical. This means that dark humour in commercial settings obtains the ability to evoke diverse feelings depending on how it is perceived by the target audience. As a result, marketers need to carefully consider what specific topics and features to include depending on the feelings that are likely to evolve among the consumers, and the resulting perception of the corporate image. This as what is perceived as humorous by one individual might conversely be seen as offensive, leading to negative emotions among others. It is therefore of importance to know the audience at stake when adopting this strategy.

Violence was discussed by the authors as an element characterizing dark humour, where Brown's et al., (2010) key issues were suggested to play a role in how an audience reacts when being exposed to these appeals in media settings. While showing mixed results supporting the proposition that these should leave the audience more affected, it can still be concluded that they have an impact. Particularly, the intensity of the violent content was proved to have a strong influence in how the viewers reacted. This implies that the more severe violence illustrated, the stronger reactions were induced. Whether this leads to positive attitudes as suggested by Brown et al., (2010) or rather negative was inconclusive based on the findings derived from the study at hand. In addition, the consequence of the violent act and unjustified violence both appeared to evoke offensiveness as well as amusement among the participants, meaning that the real implication is hard to analyze. Although it was evident that the inclusion of these appeals had an impact among the participants, reactions remained too diverse in order to draw any further conclusions. Therefore, to be able to analyze Brown's et al., (2010) proposition that these key issues should lead to greater brand memorability and more favourable attitudes, further research concentrating specifically on this aspect must be conducted. Still, it can be concluded that the use of violence in media settings have an impact on the viewer's perception of the advertisement, as supported by the empirical findings.

The most evident factor identified in order for dark humour to succeed in commercial settings was the ability to evoke a mitigating effect on a serious or offensive topic. This aspect was exemplified by the participants as providing happy endings within an otherwise dark story or the inclusion of animals instead of human beings to make the content less realistic and harder to relate to. The implication of this practice, known in theory as masking, is to provide a relieving feeling among the audience by palliating the offensive approach through a humorous twist. When arriving at this effect, the participants concluded that the advertisement succeeds. Moreover, dark humour as a strategy was considered most appropriate when targeted towards the lower segment of generation Y. This was supported by their frequent use of social media and favourability for sharing content online, leading to free publicity for the organization. This particular age group was also suggested to increasingly be exposed to daring appeals which consequently makes them less offended compared to more mature generations. To conclude, marketers need to carefully consider their design of a dark humour strategy, where the inclusion of the right humorous element is vital in order for the offensive approach to be mitigated. In addition, for most favourable outcome, the

authors recommend this strategy towards the lower segment of generation Y, preferably broadcasted through viral sources.

Could dark humour be used within high-risk product categories?

Based on the empirical investigation it can be concluded that dark humour is suggested as particularly applicable within high-risk product categories. This was argued as a result of the attention gaining capability of this strategy, essentially distinguishing from the crowd. In addition, when the product featured demands high involvement and consideration, it was argued to benefit by a provocative strategy that establish awareness and curiosity enough for the consumer to be motivated to collect further information themselves. The offending appearance was thus suggested to be bypassed when featured with a high-risk product. Regarding low-risk products this would not be the case as argued by the participants, since these are generally substitutable and therefore more easily exchanged in favour for other brands when illustrated in combination with a provocative strategy. In addition, it was concluded that this strategy should be most appropriate when promoting products typically used by men. This since men tend to be less emotionally affected and rather attracted by these types of appeals, whereas the female participants suggested that they would have a hard time illustrating dark humour within make up or fragrance industries. Still, the curiosity and excitement expressed during the focus groups indicated that dark humour might be applicable among females as well. However, there is a need to adapt the approach by softening the appeals and more carefully consider potential associations to affective topics. Overall though, based on the study on hand, the authors would recommend this strategy within high-risk product categories, specifically targeted towards men.

7 Discussion

The last part of the thesis discusses how the findings derived from the conducted research can be applied by organizations in society seeking to distinguish from the mass. In addition, the limitations of the study are being discussed and suggestions are made for further research.

7.1 Relevance of the study

Relating back to the problem discussion of this thesis, it was suggested that the increasing amount of commercial clutter prevailing in society has led to an audience being harder to reach. In order to counter this, marketers need to employ strategies that manage to grab attention and distinguish from their competitors. For this purpose, dark humour in advertising has been investigated as a potential strategy for arriving at this effect. On the basis of this study, it was found that the majority of the participants understood a need for marketers to challenge existing strategies and that dark humour serves as a sufficient practice for this purpose. This was supported by its capability of grabbing the viewers' attention, establish publicity and the fact that it has not been observed in commercial settings before. However, dark humour simultaneously implies a risk by treating affective subjects that easily can be misinterpreted when targeted towards an inappropriate audience, leading to a damaging effect on the corporate image. While the inclusion of a humorous element is thus vital in order to succeed when applying this strategy, it still remains evident that it may not be suitable among a mass audience. Therefore, in order to arrive at the favourable outcomes recognized by this strategy, marketers need to carefully consider the qualities characterizing their target audience.

Based on the research provided within the study, this thesis has contributed with a clear definition of dark humour, which was previously characterized by brief attempts in dictionaries not explaining this concept in-depth. In addition, an investigation has been provided of a relatively unexplored advertising strategy in Sweden, and its perception among a specific target group. These findings would be particularly useful for future academics to elaborate further on additional angles within this field. Moreover, there is a practical value for organizations seeking to counter the commercial clutter by a strategy that challenges the mainstream practices used in the market place. The investigation on hand indicates that there is a request for change among the existing strategies used in commercial settings in order to grab the young audience attention. Still, one should be aware of the risks involved when playing with the associations evoked by this approach, as certain people tend to per-

ceive them in a negative manner. As a result, when adopting a dark humour strategy organizations have to manage a subtle line of gaining attention versus the risk of offending people, and the implication of that on the corporate image. The practical value of the study on hand is thus illustrated by its usefulness as a pre-study for organizations regarding consumers' perceptions of an innovative strategy that distinguish from existing practices in the market place.

7.2 Limitations

The study on hand solely investigated how dark humour was being perceived among men and women belonging specifically to generation Y. In addition, the investigation was based on a Swedish perspective, meaning that the feelings, opinions and reactions observed during the focus groups belonged to Swedish residents. No consideration was therefore taken into account for potential cultural differences when discussing the perception of dark humour in commercial settings. The narrow composition of the segment, including Swedish residents belonging to generation Y, therefore illustrates a limitation of the study in its disability to generalize the findings to a wider population.

Moreover, the products featured within the advertisements presented during the focus groups all featured cars as an example of a product belonging to the high-risk category. Although an attempt was made by the authors to broaden the participants' view by referring to additional products such as stocks, computers or insurance, the fact still remains that no visual cues were provided during the sessions. This means that the findings derived from the empirical investigation could imply a biased representation of the high-risk product category, by referring to it overall while solely including one type of product.

7.3 Suggestions for further research

While generation Y was supported as a suitable target group for dark humour in advertising by the study on hand, no attempt was made to examine this proposition from other generations' point of view. The suggestion that more mature generations would become offended by this approach would therefore be treated as an assumption rather than actual fact. In addition, the Swedish perspective within the study means that the usefulness of the findings derived are restricted, and would thus be of limited value in an international context. As a result of the study's lack of generalizability in terms of target group and consideration for cultural differences, there is an opening for further research. In this regard, future academics could investigate dark humour among additional target groups to conclude whether

this strategy could be applied among a wider segment than argued by the study at hand. This would also be relevant since people in more diverse ages are increasingly engaging in social media platforms, where this type of content is typically spread. In addition, a cultural perspective would be motivated when examining this approach as norms, values and beliefs most likely affect how an advertisement is being perceived depending on a person's heritage.

Furthermore, the study on hand suggested that dark humour in advertising would be most appropriate when targeted towards men. While the female participants claimed that they would have a hard time illustrating this strategy within typical female products generally associated with less daring appeals, they still expressed curiosity when being exposed to dark humour in practice. This interest opens up for future research to examine how this strategy could be adapted to better attract the female audience.

Lastly, the advertisements chosen for the empirical investigation were limited to one type of product, with no further intention to compare the perception of dark humour among high and low risk product categories. By including a wider range of products future research could take this aspect into account by examining the impact on the participants' perception of the advertisement, and whether this correspond to existing theory.

8 List of references

Andersson, S., Hedelin, A., Nilsson, A., & Welander, C. (2004). Violent advertising in fashion marketing. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management, 8*(1), 96-112.

Antil, J. H. (1984). Conceptualization and operationalization of involvement. *Advances in Consumer Research, 11*, 203-209.

Advertisement 1: *Bridgestone*, Retrieved 2013 February, 1 from
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=39kHDv3QnQs

Advertisement 2: *Dodge Ram Trucks*, Retrieved 2013 January, 29 from
http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=dodge+ram+silence&oq=dodge&gs_l=youtube.3.0.35i39l2j0l8.5054.5875.0.7275.5.5.0.0.0.0.114.457.4j1.5.0...0.0...1ac.1.l2WMiAfZ9Qc

Advertisement 3: *Ford Ka*, Retrieved 2013 February, 1 from
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5dzi_8Rscfs

Advertisement: *Audi A7*, Retrieved 2013 February, 1 from
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=diCoyoLJ3a8

Barbour, R. S., & Kitzinger, J. (Eds.). (2001). *Developing focus group research*. London/CA/New Delhi: Sage Publications Inc.

Belch, G. E. & Belch, M. A. (2012). *Advertising and promotion*. Singapore: McGraw-Hill.

Blythe, J. (2000). *Marketing communications*. Harlow: Prentice Hall.

Boddewyn, J.J. (1991). Controlling sex and decency in advertising around the world. *Journal of Advertising, 20*(4), 25-35.

Brown, M.R., Bhadury, R.K,. & Pope, N. K. Ll. (2010).The impact of comedic violence on viral advertising effectiveness. *Journal of Advertising, 39*(1), 49-65.

Cataneseu, C., & Tom, G. (2001). Types of humour in television and magazine advertising. *Review of Business, 22*(1), 92-95.

Cho, H. (1995). Humor mechanisms, perceived humor and their relationships to various executional types in advertising. *Consumer Research, 22,* 191-197.

Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method approaches*. USA: Sage Publications Inc.

Dahl, D. W., Frankenberger, K, D., & Manchanda, R. V. (2003). Does it pay to shock? Reactions to shocking and non shocking advertising content among university students. *Journal of Advertising Research, 43*(3), 268-280.

Dahlén, M., Lange, F., & Smith, T. (2010). *Marketing communications: a brand narrative approach*. Chichester: Wiley.

De Mooji, M. (2010). *Global marketing and advertising: understanding cultural paradoxes* (3rd ed.). California: Sage Publications, Inc.

Elliot, M. T., & Speck, P. S. (1998). Consumer perception of advertising clutter and its impact across various media. *Journal of Advertising Research, 38*(1), 29-41.

Freitas, E.S.L. (2008). *Taboo in advertising.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins Pub. Co.

Fugate, D. L. The advertising service: what is an appropriate role for humor? *The Journal of Service Marketing, 12*(6), 453- 472.

Geuens, M., De Pelsmacker, P., & Faseur, T. (2011). Emotional advertising: revisiting the role of product category. *Journal of Business Research, 64*(4), 418-426.

Gulas, C.S., McKeage, K.K., & Weinberger, M.G. (2010). It's just a joke. *Journal of Advertising, 39*(4), 109-120.

Ha, L., & McCann, K. (2008). An integrated model of advertising clutter in offline and online media. *International Journal of Advertising, 27*(4), 569-592.

Hornig Priest, S. (2010). *Doing media research: an introduction (2nd ed.).* California: Sage Publications, Inc.

Johnson, C. A. (2009, February 2). Cutting through advertising clutter. CBSnews. Retrieved February 11, 2013, from http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-3445_162-2015684.html

Kitzinger, J. (1995). Qualitative research: introducing focus groups. *British Medical Journal, 311*(7000), 299-302.

Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2009). *Focus groups: a practical guide for applied research (4th ed).* California: Sage Publications, Inc.

Koekemoer, L. (2004). *Marketing Communications.* Lansdowne: Juta and Co

Kotler, P., & Keller, L. K. (2009). *Marketing Management (13th ed.).* New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall.

Kozinets, R. V. (1997). The field of behind the screen: using the netnography for marketing research in online communities. *Journal of Marketing Research, 25*, 61-72.

Malholtra, N. K., Birks, D. F., & Wills, P. (2012). *Marketing research, an applied approach (4edt).* Essex: Pearson Education Limited.

Manceau, D., & Tissier-Desbordes, E. (2006). Are sex and death taboos in advertising? *International Journal of Advertising, 25*(1), 9-33.

Neuman, W. L. (2006). *Social research methods.* USA: Pearson Education Inc.

Nutt Williams, E., & Morrow, S. L. (2009). Achieving trustworthiness in qualitative research: A pan-paradigmatic perspective. *Psychotherapy research, 19*(4-5), 576-582.

Ouwersloot, H., & Duncan, T. (2008). *Integrated marketing communications*. London: McGraw-Hill Education.

Oxforddictionaries.com. (2013). Oxford University Press. Retrieved February 12, 2013, from http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/humour?q=humour

Oxforddictionaries.com. (2013). Oxford University Press. Retrieved February 12, 2013, from http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/morbid?q=morbid

Petroulas, E., Brown, D., & Sundin, H. (2010) Generational Characteristics and Their Impact on Preference for Management Control Systems. *Australian Accounting Review, 20*(3), 221-240.

Pickton, D., & Broderick, A. (2001). Integrated marketing communication. Essex: Pearson Prentice Hall.

Pope, N. K. L., Voges, K. E., & Brown, M. R. (2004). The effect of provocation in the form if mild erotica on attitude to the ad an corporate image: differences between cause-related and product-based advertising. *Journal of Advertising, 33*(1), 69-82.

Porter, L., & Golan, G.J. (2006). From subservient chickens to brawny men: a comparison of viral advertising to television advertising. *Journal of Interactive Advertising, 6*(2), 30-38.

Sabri, O. (2012). Preliminary investigation of the communication effects of "taboo" themes in advertising. *European Journal of Marketing, 46*(1), 215-236.

Sabri, O. (2012). Taboo advertising: can humour help to attract attention and enhance recall? *The Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice, 20*(4), 407-422.

Scharrer, E. (2001). From wise to foolish: the portrayal of the sitcom father, 1950s-1990s. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 45*(1), 23-40.

Schultz, D. E., Tannenbaum, S. I., & Lauterborn, R. F. (1992). *Integrated marketing communications*. Illinois: NTC Business Books.

Shabbir, H., & Thwaites, D. (2007). The use of humour to mask deceptive advertising. *Journal of Advertising, 26*(2), 75-85.

Solomon, M. R., Bambossy, G., Askegaard, S., & Hogg, M. K. (2010).*The consumer behaviour: a European perspective (4th Ed.)*. Essex: Prentice Hall Europe

Speck, P. S. (1991). The humorous message taxonomy: a framework for the study of humorous ads. *Current Issues and Research in Advertising, 13*(1), 1-38.

Stern, B. B. (1996). Advertising comedy in electronic drama: The construct, theory and taxonomy. *European Journal of Marketing, 30*(9), 37-59.

Stewart, D. W., Shamdasani, P. N., & Rook, D. W. (2007). *Focus groups* (2nd ed). California: Sage Publications Inc.

Stone, B. (2006, January 25). Killer ads. *Neewsweek*. Retrieved February 22, 2013, from www.msnbc.com/id/11011419/site/newsweek

Thornson, J. A., & Powell, F. C. (1991). Measurement of sense of humour. *Psychological Reports, 69*, 691-702.

SIFO. (2008). SIFO Research International. Retrieved February 7, 2013, from http://www.tns-sifo.se/media/89146/sifo_reklamundvikande_20081202.pdf

Um, N. H. (2008). Revisit elaboration likelihood model: how advertising appeals work on attitudinal and behavioral brand loyalty centering around low vs. high-involvement product.   *European Journal of Social Sciences, 7*(1), 126-139.

Vezina, R. & Paul. O. (1997). Provocation in advertising: a conceptualization and an empirical assessment. *International Journal of research in Marketing, 14*(2), 177-192.

Weinberger, M. G., & Gulas, C. S. (1992). The impact of humour in advertising: a review. *Journal of Advertising, 21*(4), 35-59.

Zhao, X. (1997). Clutter and serial order redefined and retested. *Journal of Advertising Research*, *37*(5), 57-73.

Zimmerman, A., & Dahlberg, J. (2008). The sexual objectification of women in advertising: A contemporary cultural perspective. *Journal of Advertising Research, 48*(1), 71-79.

9   Appendix

9.1   Topic Guide – Focus Groups

Viral advertisements:
1. Bridgestone tires
2. Dodge ram
3. Ford Ka
4. Audi environmental friendly car

1. General
1. What different types of humour do you know of? Describe them.
2. What comes to your mind when you hear the term "dark humour" in advertising? Brainstorm or provide synonyms.
2. According to your definition of dark humour, how can this be used within advertising?
3. Do you have any examples of dark humour in advertising that you have noticed?

2. In-depth (Question 1-5 are asked in connection to each video)
1. Have anyone seen these advertisements before?
2. Did this particular advertisement correspond to what you understand by the concept of dark humour? Explain
3. How/ do you get affected by these types of advertisements? Describe.
4. Describe your feelings when being exposed to this advertisement. Do you become frustrated? Happy? Disgusted? What attitudes does this contribute to?
5. If you had seen this commercial through television, how would you react?

Following questions (6-8) are asked as a conclusion of section 2, after all videos have been presented.
6. Are we allowed to joke about everything? What themes/subjects/appeals characterize a potential line?
7. Research suggests that humour should be particularly suitable for reaching the youth. What do you think about that regarding dark humour? Is your generation still "shockable"?
8. Does this type of advertisement catch your attention? How? Why? Positively or negatively?

3. Product category
1. Did you notice the product featured within these advertisements?
2. Do you consider this strategy more suitable towards certain product categories than others? Motivate
3. Do you consider high-risk categories demanding more time and money more or less suitable in conjunction with this type of strategy? Describe.

9.2   Transcript – Focus Group 1

Females, 2:
L, U
Males, 3:
 R, D, M
Ages: 22-26

M1= Lisa, moderator

M2= Ida, moderator

Section 1

M1 - We will start to talk about the concept of humour, how do you interpret that word? Feel free to use synonyms or own explanations.
L - Well it makes you laugh, like jokes.
M - It can also be different types of humour like subtle humour or raw humour!
D - Irony.
L - Boring humour like obvious jokes or "dry" and predictable humour.
R - And puns or "funny stories" and even mean humour actually.
M - Playful humour, childish.

M1 - What do you mean by "mean" humour?
R - When you make jokes based on other people expenses.
D - Like roasting.
R - Exactly, like when you make jokes on other peoples expense that border on a fine line of what´s ok and not.
L - Such as making fun of other peoples' personalities that they really cannot help.
U - There is of course also good, "normal" humour that just makes people laugh but I think that it can be very individual. There is not only ironic and nasty humour.

M2 - You mentioned raw humour before, what is that to you?
D - I refer it to mean, nasty humour.
R - Or vulgar, dirty humour! It doesn't really hurt anyone personally but it is still challenging.
L- Vulgar humour is often very raw but it is never hurtful.

M2 - Ok, so continuing to the next section, we are investigating a phenomenon called dark humour. What do you think that implies? What does it make you think of?
U - Mean and hurtful humour that crosses the line.
L - Mean.
D - Also like tragic comedy to some extent.

M2 - What does it imply to you to "cross the line"
D - I think that is very individual.

U - Perhaps not that suitable in social settings or what you would talk to anyone about

R - Something that makes people upset!

U - When people start to take it personal, such as joking about ethnicity or real life situations that has occurred. It was not ok when people made jokes about the little girl (Engla) who got murdered.

Others agree.

L - That was definitely not ok. It was harsh and very insensitive!

M1 - Can you provide any other example you have seen?

U - I can't really remember any.

D - I don't think Sweden would have accepted any of those really harsh jokes!

R - Maybe like pop up boxes on the internet.

Section 2

Advertisement 1: Bridgestone

Laughs.

L - Oh my god, no!

Laughs.

U - That was a bit sick.

D - I think it was funny! Very un-Swedish!

U - In some way it still was humorous since they copy a real life human situation. It gets comedic.

M1 - Does this advertisement go in line with how you consider dark humour?

Everyone agree

U - It reminds me of family guy where the joke about dark stuff that you´re not suppose to make fun of. Such as a man in a wheelchair, they do it in a way that it becomes ok to laugh at it. But when I think about it it's actually terrible to laugh at such a thing.

M1 - They do play with associations to suicide, what do you think about that?

L - It is terrible, still I laugh. But I do think there are other, better ways to grab the viewers' attention then joking about suicide.

M - It is a tragic story that in some way turn into a funny situation, it becomes funny! (Guys agree).

U - I think it becomes different since it is animals, it would have been different if they featured a human being. When I think of the commercial again I do not find it funny.

R - I think it was funny, I mean it is a commercial and not for real but the message regarding Bridgestone's good tires doesn't really make sense until the last scene.

D - I agree, but they do succeed in grabbing the viewer's attention since you wonder what is going to happened next and what the advertisement is made for.

M2 - Would you react differently if you saw this advert on TV where the circumstances were different, meaning you did not pay any thoughts to dark humour.

L - Then I think would have been offended.

U - I agree.

Guys do not agree. Conflict since the participants doesn't agree.

D - I would not have been offended, perhaps surprised to see this on Swedish TV since I have not seen anything like that before.

M2 - So it would grab your attention?

Everyone agrees

M1 - What about your attitude towards this strategy? Positive or negative?

U - Well I wouldn't have bought those tires.

M - In some way they managed to establish a reaction, and when it comes to commercials I think that is good no matter what, positive or negative reaction.

L - Yeah you still remember the product and the brand, especially when seeing the brand you will think back of the commercial.

R - It makes you conscious of the product although I probably wouldn't have gone out and bought it.

Advertisement 2: Dodge Ram

L - That's terrible!! Is he going to shoot the baby?

Guys laugh

M2 - Was this commercial funny?

L and **U** - NO

D - It was definitely worse than the previous one, it was kind of raw but still funny. I do see the humorous aspect, it is a commercial and obviously he is not going to kill the baby!

R - Yeah, they take it to the extreme by adding the sound of a crying baby that it takes it over the edge and makes it funny.

U - Unconsciously you understand that he wants to do the same to the baby, but again that is just me, picturing it in my own head. In that way the previous commercial was worse.

L - No, I think this one was worse

M1 - What emotions does this advert evoke? Do you get happy, angry, provoked, disgusted?

D - I still do not think you get provoked by this, it is a very special commercial but I do not get upset when I see it.

R - Exactly, I do get surprised but it is still kind of funny.

M - If he would shot the baby it would have been totally different, but now they just playing with the illusion of him doing it. It also a weird way to promote a product since the story has pretty much nothing to do with it.

U - I think the commercial with the dog and the tires was more linked to the product in the end compared to this one. This one didn't make any sense.

M1 - Does this advertisement go in line of how you describe dark humour?

Everyone agrees

M1 - Again, if you would have seen this on Swedish TV, do you think you would have reacted differently?

L - Yes, this is not a like anything I have seen before.

D - Yet again, it is very unlike Swedish commercials. It would probably been reported, this is not what you expect to see Friday night with your family.

Everyone agrees

Advertisement 3: Ford Ka

Laughs.

R - Did you see his head fall down!

U - This was a bit more horrifying.

D - Yes, this was a bit disgusting…yet funny.

L - This one was fun, I laughed so much more at this one than at the two previous!

U - I kind of expected something to happen, like an accident or something.

M1 - Some of you think this one was the worst of the three we have shown you?

U - This one was raw and distasteful. You actually get to see the cats head fall off into the car. It doesn't link at all to the car.

M - It kind of did though, referring to the punch line "Evil twin".

M2 - Is this dark humour?

Everyone, yes!

M1 - Is there any positive aspect of this advertisement?

R - Yes.

L - I think so too.

M1 - So what is funny about it?

L - I think it is the fact that you actually see him die, with the head and everything.

R - Exactly, when the head falls off and the cat just hits the ground, totally dead, and by a car!

M1 - Would it be different if there were a child playing on the car?

Everyone agrees.

L - I think you react stronger the closer you are to the animal, like I wouldn't have laughed if it was a dog.

U - Yeah it is a pet that you care about.

M1 - Is all publicity good publicity?

M - To a certain point, not all publicity, some I think can damage the brand.

L - The question is what kind of publicity they are aiming for, if it is to sell the car I think they have failed in this one.

R – Still, I would remember the ad in the long run. I think that can be profitable for the brand. They definitely distinguish from other brands.

M1 - Is it okay to make fun of everything? Like these commercials treating subjects such as murderer and suicide.

U - It becomes evident that they play around with tragic human situations and destinies. It becomes nasty in that sense if someone had a husband who cheated or a mum who committed suicide. That would have been terrible.

D – Or if someone's cat got hit on the highway.

L - If my friend just committed suicide I would probably become extremely offended by this, it depends on the person and their history. If you can relate to the situation or have experience of something similar it would definitely be worse.

Everyone agrees.

M - When you think about it we see this everywhere, in movies, sit comes etc.

U - Yes but these marketers use it in a way not always okay, only to grab our attention.

D - It becomes different if they joke about something that has actually happened, such as Engla.

R - It is a specific situation that I think shocked this entire nation, therefore its very insensitive to make jokes about it.

L - When children are involved it becomes horrifying in a different way, those stories are always very tragic and affect you in a different way.

M2 - According to research humour as a strategy is suggested to be particularly efficient for reaching young people. What do you think about this regarding dark humour? Are you still "shockable" or have you "seen it all"?

U - I think that we are more open towards this kind of approach but I still believe that it is possible to shock us.

L - We are probably more tolerant, I have a hard time seeing my mum laugh at a commercial where a cat gets killed.

D - We see so much more things on the Internet, video games and movies, which probably makes us more used to shocking appeals.

U - We can still react in a positive way even though it is a commercial treating dark humour or other offending subjects. We still think it is funny.

 M - This approach is still different from those commercials we are used to see in Sweden, which makes us react too. It separates form other ads.

M2 - Would you like to see more of this type of advertisement?

L - Yes I think so.

Everyone agrees.

D - Commercials in Sweden are all the same, it would have been fun to see something new, perhaps that would have stopped med form zapping around during the commercial break.

R - Also if media would have been writing about a new provocative advert of course I would like to see it.

Advertisement 4: Audi

R - Actually kind of smart…is it for real?

M1 - The Company claims they have nothing to do with this advert.

L - It looks very professional for being a fake

M - Who could possibly have done this one? I think it´s just a PR trick.

M2 - Was it funny?

U - In the beginning it was, however it's offensive towards people who suffer from psychological issues. On the other hand it provides a "happy ending" since he doesn't die. *Everyone agrees.*

D - It is kind of catchy, but in the beginning it was not.

R - If he actually would have died it would have been really offensive and not fun at all.

L - It is kind of sick. On the positive side it at least had a point with the slogan and all.

Section 3

M1 – Do you consider this type of strategy suitable for all kind of product categories?

U - I think I saw a link, the target group for all of these cars is probably men!

D - True, when commercials are aimed for men it is usually sex or violence. I think we are more tolerant and attracted to this kind of humour.

L - I would have a hard time seeing this work with for example make up, or if a girl tried to kill herself in a feminine car. Moreover, I believe men have to think this type of humour is funny.

R - They try to be macho and it is kind of raw. Perhaps we are not that affected as a girl by seeing a dog get killed.

M2 - Do you think products that involves more elaboration and money would be suitable for this approach? So called high risk products?

D - I think it depends. If the advertisement is well done and look professional I don't think it matters.

Everyone agrees.

R - The quality is extremely important!

U - That is true, even though the last commercial was offensive in some way it was the most professional one too, which make me more acceptant towards it.

M - Also the last one was most closely linked to the product and slogan.

D - As long as the commercial is catchy I do not think it matters what sort of products you promote.

9.3   Transcript – Focus Group 2

Females, 4:
Z, I, V, B
Males, 2:
S, R
Ages: 23-28

M1= Lisa, moderator

M2= Ida, moderator

Section 1

M1 - We will start to talk about the concept of humour, how do you interpret that word? Feel free to use synonyms and own examples.

Z - Funny jokes that make you laugh.
S - Satiric humour.
R - Perhaps not satire but irony…there is a difference.
I - Malice humour.
V - Maybe self-pity or self-perception can serve as a humorous type

M2 - Can you explain the differences between irony and satire?
R - In my opinion satire is rather linked to topics such as politic or the surrounding world, when you make fun of a societal issue or problem by using humour as a weapon to criticize. Irony is…well I think everyone knows how you talk when you are being ironic, when you are kind of opposing what you ac actually mean.

M2 - Okay, so continuing to the next section, we are investigating a phenomenon called dark humour. What do you think that implies? What does it make you think of?
V - Provocative humour
Z - When people make fun of things that are usually not considered okay to joke about.

M1 - So what is not okay to joke about?
X - Like the tsunami a couple of years ago, I remember people making jokes about that.
I - Or the world trade center and other world catastrophes similar to those…world war two.
B- I also think dark humour can correspond to making fun of political or social subjects, s such as differences between men and woman, racism, battering or disable people.
S - And suicide, murderer and so on.
V - Yeah, both happenings around the world and personal horrible situations like sickness or death.

M2 - Have anyone ever seen an advertisement treating this topic?
V - Well I have not seen any recently but I remember Benetton having some weird, disgusting and even sad commercials.
R - I know the Swedish party, Sverige demokraterna, broadcasted a video before the selection a couple of years ago that they eliminated rather quickly afterwards. It was very offensive towards immigrants, showing like 30 women with foreign heritage running with their strollers towards the camera. The implication of this was that "here they come to collect the allowance". I guess the purpose of this video was to make people laugh but it came out too dark. That could perhaps serve as an example of dark humour.
Everyone agrees.

Section 2

Advertisement 1: Bridgestone
Laughs
B - Oh no!!
Z - They are not going to kill him right??

M1 - Was this funny?
S - I think it was.
Z - I think it becomes more acceptable when animals are involved rather than if a person was running out on the high way.
I - Yeah that's probably why they had a dog doing it.
B - I think I would become really offended if I would have known anyone that had committed suicide because then you can relate to it in another way.
R - I agree, but I still think it was a bit funny with the dog and they managed to deliver the message.
Z - It is definitely a commercial that you will remember, yet not be offended by. I would not judge the company in a negative way.

M1 - So none of you are affected in a negative way?
Z - No not me, but for sure if for example my mum or dad would have been run over by a car.
I - Or if the dog would have died, that would have been to cross the line.
Everyone agrees strongly!
S - If we would have been exposed to a dead dog I would definitely be upset and angry.

M2 - Would you react differently if you would had seen this advert on TV where the circumstances were different, meaning you did not pay any thoughts to dark humour.
Everyone agrees.
V- I think it would have distinguished itself from other advertisement because it is different from traditional Swedish commercials. It is a very different approach.

M2 - Does this advertisement go in line with how you describe dark humour?
S - I do not know, it is subtle.
Z - I would not associate it to dark humour.
Everyone agrees.
V - Especially not considering how we just defined it.
B - No, this commercial was not that provocative, if not having any connections to dogs or suicide.

M1 - Do you think it would have been reported?
Everyone- Yes!
S - Probably by some animal protection institution.

Advertisement 2: Dodge Ram

Laughs

I - Sick…did he shot the baby?

M2 - What did you think about this one?

I - This one was definitely worse.

Z - The story had nothing to do with the product. I did not understand the purpose.

V - I think this commercial has a very narrow segment, who can actually associate to this and to the car.

R - I have to admit that I found this advert a little bit funnier than the previous. But, it is also more offensive. I bet this is an American company and with everything happening over there, school massacres of course it would be more offensive to them, I just cannot relate to it.

Everyone agrees.

S - Who would bring an arrow when camping in Sweden? It would never happen, we have no connection and therefore it becomes more humorous.

M2 - Does this advertisement go in line with how you describe dark humour?

Everyone- Not really.

B - I just feel that they are aiming for publicity.

M1 - Is all publicity good publicity? Could the publicity evoked by this advertisement hurt the brand?

R - All publicity is not good publicity but I do not think this could damage Dodges brand.

V - Perhaps this would be rather good PR for them, I think I would remember the advertisement straight away when seeing their logo, connecting the brand to the commercial.

R - I think this commercial rather excludes a certain segment that definitely will not purchase the car than attracting several people. I believe this commercial was more dark humour than the former, and because of that it will narrow down its target considerably.

S - For sure, they could have changed the story to a family camping by showing how much storage the car provides. Then it suddenly becomes a family car instead of a macho man car.

Z - Exactly, instead of an arrow he could have picked up a bottle of gruel or something for the baby.

V – Still, I think the company gets a lot of attention through this kind of commercial even though it attracts a small group of people. You will remember the brand.

R - True, I would have remembered the brand, but still not bought it since it is not aimed for me. It was a little bit too rough for my personal taste.

Advertisement 3: Ford Ka

Laughs

S - Did the head fall down into the car? What!

B - Aha, it is the "evil twin".

S - That is quite brutal.

Z - I think that is a weird commercial, it does not say anything and if I had kids I would

never buy that car.

V - I think it was a bit humorous though…It was too unrealistic that it becomes funny.

I - It is hard to grasp this commercial and the humour, it is just weird.

R - It does not say anything about the car itself, very unlike normal car commercials that only aim to show the benefits of the car.

M2 - What if there was a child playing by the car and something similar happened?

Z - First of all I did think this commercial was horrible, I think it was the worse so far!

R - Well I can agree that it becomes even worse if they would use dogs or babies than an animal that you do not care about, like a bird.

Z - It is just strange to kill anyone in a commercial, it is not okay to do that or play with those associations of death, murder etc.

M1 - Do you believe they have chosen animals within these advertisements deliberately?

V - I am sure it is a well planned marketing strategy to use animals in the illustrated situations, it makes it less realistic.

Z - But I still do not understand why Ford did it this way. In Sweden we promote safety and this advert definitely does not fulfill that purpose. What if your kids head get stuck there?

V - Yeah in Sweden we like safety, but perhaps this would work in England or France where they have a different culture.

M1 - So if you do not find this commercial funny, what is then funny? What is not okay to make fun of? Three of you liked it and the rest did not? Comment!

R - This one was neither fun nor boring. The dodge ram was funny.

V - Exactly, the previous one at least had a purpose, this one does not. Who could be the target group?

S - I think they are aiming for young guys.

Z - So if you were 20 years old you would have enjoyed seeing a cat get guillotined?

S - No, but just like the previous one they narrow down their target group by making this commercial this raw.

Z - But I still think they could have used a different strategy then killing a cat.

S - Yes, but they would probably not gain that much attention in that case.

M1 - According to research humour as a strategy is suggested to be particularly efficient for reaching young people. What do you think about this regarding dark humour? Are you still "shockable" or have you "seen it all"?

I - I still get shocked, they do not show that kind of commercials on TV here.

Z - I Agree.

R -I also think we get shocked since we have not seen this strategy in advertisements that much yet, mainly in movies.

M2 - But would it be an effective strategy, to be different from what other companies do?

S - I would like to believe that I do not get affected but unconsciously I think I do, since I still think about it, so yes.

R - I think they managed to gain attention and publicity since I notice and remember the brand but I am not sure about the next step, the purchase phase. So if the aim is only publicity, yes. Next step regarding the purchase, I am not so sure.

V - Yes, I do not see the link between attention and purchase.

Advertisement 4: Audi

S - This was a good commercial.

V - I could for once understand the funny aspect of it.

M2 - Even though they in fact illustrated the procedure of a suicide?

Z -Yes.

R - I actually have two friends who´s parents committed suicide exactly in this way so I did not appreciate this advertisement at all.

Quiet

R - Referring back to what we talked about previously, for me this becomes real and I can relate to it, therefore I also get upset.

Z - It becomes a real life situation.

V- But I think we all can agree that this commercial compared to the other three was the most professionally made. And it had a purpose with the slogan that made it funny, even though it was raw. Ford Ka on the other hand was just weird, no purpose.

B - I think the PR-people are almost being lazy when using this strategy because it becomes so evident that they only want publicity.

M2 - In this advert they, unlike the other three, featured a real person instead of animals, did that make it different?

Z - It did but still he did not die. It would have been much worse if he had actually died, that would not have been okay. That is dark humour according to me.

I - I agree. This one was also very dull and you got a sad feeling.

V - Yeah I would have noticed this one and it relates to dark humour as it plays with serious topics such as suicide.

Section 3

M1 - Do you consider this strategy more suitable towards certain product categories than others? For example high-risk categories that demands more time and money like cars. Are they more or less suitable in conjunction with this type of strategy?

S - I think they should apply this strategy on so called high-risk products such as cars, because when you think about it the Ford Ka commercial is still in my head. So let's say that I go to a car dealer, if I see the car I will probably remember the commercial, get curious and want to try it. I might as well ask about the car when I am there. Compared to for example laundry powder, that is very simple product demanding no reflection, only a yes or no. But a car demands further research. Therefore marketers first of all need to make you aware of that the car exist, the Ka commercial makes me notice the car!

V - Exactly, laundry powder I just pick one randomly. So let's say that there is a commercial that I do not like or is offended by, that would make me pick another brand.

M1 – But couldn't this strategy be applicable and useful for laundry powder too? Say that you are choosing between ten different brands, if you see one you recognize from the commercial, isn't that an advantage?

V - No, I would think something like "I do not like the advertisement, I will not like the product".

V - Since the laundry powder pretty much always contains the same ingredients and perform the same I would rather chose another one brand because in the end I still get the same result.

R - Of course you can always have negative associations to the car as a result of the advertisement, but it would never be the determining factor whether you will buy the car or not.

S - Exactly, that is the difference between the high and low risk products, with low risk you have more similar products that perform pretty much the same, that simplifies the process of excluding some of them due on external factors like watching a commercial you do not like.

V - I do not see how this strategy can lead to something very positive, only attention.

S - On the other hand, that was probably also their plan, attention.

I - And consciousness of the brand.

Z - I would never go and buy a car just because I saw an advert, which could easily happen if I saw a commercial for a new type of chocolate. However, when I stand there to buy a car I will most likely remember a specific brand due to a commercial that distinguished from competitors.

R - Generally, the higher price of the product, the more space there is to make extravagant jokes.

Everyone agrees.

M2 – Is it possible that a company could be perceived in an unserious way by using this strategy, take for examples insurance companies or stocks?

S - I think the reactions depends a lot of how the commercial is made, if it looks professional or not. The Audi commercial looked very professional which made me okay with it. The Bridgestone in comparison did not look as good.

Everyone agrees.

Z - It also depends on the viewers' personal opinions, how they perceive the commercial. As discussed before, since we are young, we are probably more accepting.

S – I also felt that these commercial were probably aimed towards us, guys.

R - Yeah, I do not know that many women who are interested in a Dodge Ram car with an arrow next to it.

Laughs.

9.4   Transcript – Focus Group 3

Females, 2:
N, X

Males, 3:
H, T , P
Ages: 21-26

M1= Lisa, moderator

M2= Ida, moderator

Section 1

M1 - What do you think about when you hear the term "humour" What different types can you identify?
N - Sarcasm, difficult humour that is hard to grasp.
T - Characters being funny, role-play, sarcasm, careless, playful.
H - Some humour types are funny because they touch upon issues that are not allowed to be laughed about. They are almost bordering on a line of what is in funny or not.
T - Irony or "forbidden" types of humour.
X - Forbidden humour could be to joke about disable, sex, diseases, ethnicity. As long as you do not expose a person it is still funny.
T - I believe that there is a subtle line for companies regarding what they can actually joke about without being associated with it in a negative way. There is a line between what is fun or rather uncomfortable

M2 - What do you think about when you hear the term "dark humour"?
T - Provocation.
H - Playing with the forbidden.

M1 - What do you consider provocative regarding humour?
N - Making fun of people to the extent that people are being discriminated. Then it becomes too dark.

M1 - What do you think about humour in combination with death, suicide or real world events?
N - Joking about Nine Eleven, Breivik or topics like that do not belong in commercial contexts. One should be careful to joke about death since people can easily get offended.

Section 2:

Advertisement 1: Bridgestone
M2 - What do you think about after seeing this advertisement?
T - Betrayal, suffering, suicide
N - It was funny, at least I laughed at this ad.
T - I think that advertisements never should encourage suicide. It can get really wrong.
H - I believe that they have not passed the limit of being too offensive, it is still on the "good" side. There is a kind of playfulness in the ad that mitigates the aspect of suicide.

N - Since the dog actually did not die, it was not that bad. Also, it would probably be worse if human beings were featured in the commercial instead of dogs.

M2 - Are human beings easier to relate to?
N - Yes of course, it becomes so much more brutal. But this video was definitely dark humour to me.

M1 - What kind of feelings did it evoke?
N - At first, I did not become offended, but when I think about the aspect of suicide it is not okay. So yes, I get offended. It is not a positive feeling.
P - I am not offended, to me this was just a commercial, it did not lead to any particular feelings.

M1 - If it were featured on TV how would you react?
X - I would definitely have noticed this one.
N - Yes, it shakes you around. It is different and separates from other commercials.
H - It would probably get banned in Sweden, people are not used to this strategy at all.

Advertising 2: Dodge Ram
M2 - What do you think about after viewing this one?
X - This video was much worse than the former. The atmosphere was dull, the mood was dark. He actually killed a dog, what is he going to do with the baby then? It was uncomfortable.
N - I agree, the baby was too much.
P - This commercial led to more negative feelings. I did not feel like the target of this advertisement. Who is the target of something like this?
H - I did not become offended, rather, the advertisement was not just appropriate. It was not a good commercial.
N - You can create your own conclusions by this commercial; mine are that the guy shoots the dog and killed the baby. That does not generate positive feelings.
H - I think the baby destroyed it.

M2 - Did it capture your attention?
P - Yes, I really wanted to see how it ended. Other group members agree. It differentiates from the crowd and makes the viewer curious.

M1 - Do you think it would be banned in Sweden?
Everyone: Yes, due to the baby.

Advertisement 3: Ford Ka
Laughing
T - Oh my god, who made this commercial?! That is insane!
X - I thought it was funny.

H - It was so bad that it became funny. There is no message, no connection to the product. Just weird. You do not become affected by this advertisement; it was just different and weird.

M2 - In relation to the other advertisements, was this more or less dark humour?
H - To me this was too much. It is not even funny. It is just a cat that gets killed.
P - Really? I thought that the former was much worse. This one was just weird.
N - I agree, it was unnecessary.
H - But I still believe that it can generate a lot of buzz like " have you seen that car commercial with the cat? That's sick… etc.
N - That is true. It would probably lead to a lot of word of mouth.
N - I also believe that the fact that it is illustrated in a bright environment in a calm neighborhood mitigates the offending appearance considerably. Number 2 is still worse.

M1 - Do you consider all attention as good attention?
T - I believe that if I have a good relationship to the brand I can probably disregard the fact that they broadcasted a commercial like this.
N - But if the brand get a bad reputation as a result of a strategy like this, people might don't want to get associated with it.
X - Is that relevant? I do not think that a brand become affected to that degree.
T - This strategy definitely creates debate, which is probably good for the company. It reaches a lot of people that an ordinary ad would not do. Maybe it is necessary to play with emotions to get to that point.
N - I agree, companies have to stretch boundaries to distinguish from the crowd. The audience has seen the most today, in order to gain attention companies have to stretch boundaries. The market is mature enough for this type of strategy.

Advertisement 4: Audi
X - My god. That was strong.
N - It was still funny, when I realized the message.
H - Yes, I became relived when I understood the message.
P - I do not think this is ok. Suicide is not something that should be joked about. This is too dark in my opinion.
N - I agree, suicide does not belong in commercial contexts. But I still thought it was funny so I am confused.
T - I am sure that this advertisement will generate a lot of buzz. The message regarding the environmental car will spread as well.
P - I do not agree, I think that people see the suicide aspect rather than the environmental issue.

M2 - What do think about people that have relatives or friends that have committed suicide, should the company show respect for these people?

N - Yes, we can still laugh about it but it is a risky strategy for sure. You have to choose between gaining attention and the risk of offending people, and the price of that to your company.

M1 - Is it ok to joke about everything? Is there a line?

T - I think that babies should not be included.

N - I think that there is no limit. Companies cannot afford to respect all different people. They have to employ increasingly provocative strategies to make a difference. Someone will always get offended no matter what. I think it is better to do it big than not at all.

H - The thing with dark humour, according to my view, is that there is a twist that mitigates the offending appearance, which leads to a relief that makes it funny. When you get the relief that a person did not die etc. it becomes funny, and that is when the advertising works. When that line is crossed to becomes too dark and fails.

N - But there are still certain subjects that should not be included. In my opinion, everything that involves suffering and death in combination with children becomes too much.

M2 - Do you consider dark humour as a suitable strategy to reach the younger audience?

H - I think that our generation is considerably more accepting to these types of appeals. We are more ready for a change in the advertising area compared to older people.

T - I agree, we have a higher acceptance level and do not become offended that easily. An older person would probably react much stronger to the videos featured today.

H - We have seen death, suicide and war in movies, on the web etc and are used to it. We have grown up with it, so we are not affected by it to the same degree.

P - Our generation is also harder to reach, it takes a bit more to shock us. It is questionable if I would have spread the word about any of these advertisements to my friends, since it is not a big deal. An older person would probably talk about it more.

N - I believe that these types of appeals are more directed to men than women. I think that guys do not take it that seriously and just laugh about it, whereas women become more offended.

H - If there is a good message covered in the advertisement, I think that young people that are usually active in social media etc can spread these types of videos through the web. Just imagine, with a click I can share it with 500 friends on Facebook while my mum simply tell her colleague. Young people have greater penetrating power. A company that wants to create buzz among a large audience therefore benefit my targeting the youth.

N - But that holds true both regarding positive and negative word of mouth though.

H - But it is still attention.

M1 - Would you like to see more of this strategy? Is it positive or negative in your opinion?

N - I want to see more! It gets so boring if everyone is doing the same thing. Someone have to challenge existing strategies.

Section 3

M1 - Is this strategy more or less suitable in conjunction with different product categories?
N - Regarding car brands, this strategy is fine. I associate these kinds of products with a bit rougher appeals. However, I still think that this strategy is more suitable for men. I have a hard time seeing how dark humour could work within make up or fragrance industries, which are typically associated to softer, less daring appeals.
T - As long as it is directed to a younger target, I think it is more applicable to high-risk categories rather than fast moving consumer goods. If you become curious by these advertisements in the first place, then you probably want to learn more about the product if it is a more expensive product. You get aware of that the product exist by the unusual advertisement and then search for additional information yourself. That is probably a good thing for the company. The use of dark humour is just a tool for gaining that first attention and being different from other brands.

M2 - Could dark humour in advertisement lead to a less serious impression toward high-risk products?
H - I still believe that it is mainly a tool for gaining attention. When you search for additional information you will probably notice whether it is an unreliable company or not. I do not think that the advertisement affects that.
T - Since a car for example, is such a big purchase, I think that people go beyond the advertising and thus do not bother if it might appear as unserious.

9.5   Transcript – Focus Group 4

Females, 4:
J, A, K, S
Males, 1:
 P
Ages: 25-31

M1= Lisa, moderator

M2= Ida, moderator

Section 1

M1 - We would like to start by asking how you would define humour in advertisement. Are there any different types? Feel free to use synonyms.
J -There is humour aimed for different target groups, like kids or old people. Also some humour that is connected to a special event in Sweden, therefore only appropriate for Swedish citizens.
S -Spitefulness is another kind of humour that a lot of people appreciate.
A - I think humour often aims to put someone in an uncomfortable situation, or talk bad about someone.

K - Yeah, kind of mean humour.

P - There is also the "normal" kind of humour that just makes you laugh without referring to someone or something.

M2 - How mean is it okay to be in humorous settings, does it exist a border?

J - That is difficult to define. I think when people start making fun of others in a negative way which hurt their feelings.

S -Yes, like personally attacking someone, that is not okay.

P - It also depends if the person in question is okay with it, like the mentally retarded guy in the Ica commercials, I like the fact that we laugh with and not at that someone.

J - Then when people make fun of each other it also becomes fun as long as both parties are okay with it. But to make fun of different ethnic groups or tragic world events is to cross the line.

A - Like when people made fun of the World Trade Centre tragedy, it was not okay since a lot of people were actually hurt both physical and mentally due to the attack. It becomes too emotional.

M1 - So if we should continue. At the moment we are investigating in a phenomenon called dark humour, what does that make you think of?

K - That makes me think of mean or cruel humour.

S - Yes, that in some way also upset people.

M2 - Can you provide an example of what could be upsetting?

S - Well like what we talked about previously, tragic events or happenings that in some way have come to affect people around the world.

M1 - It seems like this is a fairly new concept to you, is that correct?

Everyone agrees.

J - I have heard of black comedy which makes kind of disgusting jokes about socially inappropriate things.

A - Or watching some weird, sick commercials from abroad, usually in a way that we are not used to see commercials in Sweden, often treating sex or being sexist in some way.

J - Yes, that could actually make me annoyed and offended, that a woman becomes an object for example.

M1 - So what we have found connected to dark humour is that it treats subjects considered socially forbidden such as suicide and death but with a humorous twist. Marketers try to make something that normally is considered upsetting or offending okay by lightening up with humour. We will show you some examples of this strategy.

Section 2

Advertisement 1: Bridgestone

A - Okay, so it is a happy ending at least even though they are joking about the dog committing suicide.

M2 - What did you think about this advertisement?
A - I think it was rather awful.
S - I think so too. At first it felt worse but then when you understood the idea and the dog survived I could see the funny aspect of it.
A - But I did not like this commercial.
J and **K** agree.

M1 - Would this advertisement catch your attention when watching TV?
P - No not for me.
J - First I thought it was for dog food or something, it is not that often I focus on an entire commercial.

M2 - Can you see any link between this commercial and dark humour?
J - Well I think so, I mean they are joking about a serious subject, suicide.
S - And infidelity, but by palliating it by using dogs.
J - I think if someone knows anyone that has committed suicide they would have been very offended by this. I do think this commercial is rather disrespectful.
A - I do not believe everyone think of those people that are actually hurt by seeing this.

M2 - So what are your feeling towards this advertisement? Is it laughable?
A - No I do not think so.
K - I am in between, or neutral, I do not laugh but are not offended either.
J - Yes, me too.
K - It is a bit disgusting though with the dog having sex. Also I think the purpose of the commercial is important, I mean if it would just be a "funny viral ad" perhaps I would be laughing but I would not have been laughing if it was broadcasted on TV.
S - It is offensive to the degree that people would have started talk about it or media reporting etc.

Advertisement 2: Dodge Ram
Laughs.
J - That was absurd. It only made me laugh because the sound of the crying baby makes it so ridiculous, but I do not think this is appropriate to broadcast through TV since it basically says that it is okay to shoot someone even though it is just a dog. That is to cross the line.
A - I think that was awful and I do not understand why it would be humorous to shoot an animal.

M1 - But if you did not hear the baby crying, would the advertisement be more distasteful then?
J - Yes I think so.

S - It becomes so unreal because I do not think he would have shot the baby.

P - I still think it is a bit fun and especially when hearing the baby because that is when the company takes it too far.

J - Overall I do not like weapons so I do not think a commercial for cars that has nothing to do with weapons should feature it either.

M1- Is this ad more provocative than the other one?

S- I think so.

K- Also as discussed we are not used to see weapons like that, it is not something we bring when we go out camping, so I do think this one was worse so far.

J- But I also think this could be provocative in the USA because I think this could actually happen over there since they do allow weapons.

M2 - Do anyone understand the humorous aspect of this one?

J - I do when hearing the baby cry, but I still personally did not find it funny.

S - Is it not like I sit and laugh when watching this and I would never buy a car based on this commercial:

K - Agree, it is a bad commercial.

P - I also understand the funny aspect, I did laugh a bit and I can see why people find it fun but it does not say anything about the car and I think when purchasing a car you want some information as well.

M1 - Do you think this is dark humour?

J - Yeah, and this one was definitely worse than before. But I also expected something more violent in this one based on the atmosphere.

K - Yes, they actually killed someone here even if it was a dog.

Everyone agrees.

Advertisement 3: Ford Ka

S - Oh my god!

K - Really!!

J - What! That is not even fun.

Laugh.

M2 -But you do laugh?

J - I do but that is mainly since this make me uncomfortable, I think it is a spontaneous re-action since this was so unexpected.

A - Yes, a nervous laugh, like is this for real.

K - Exactly, do they really think this would sell?

J - Maybe that is their idea with it, to make people think and talk about it.

S - I also do not like when animals get hurt.

M1 - And in this one is it evident that the cat becomes hurt and dies.

K - It is very brutal, or raw when showing all of this.

S - In addition, the sound effect makes it even worse.

P - It is a very weird way of promoting a car, I have never seen anything like this actually, but there is always people finding the most bizarre things funny.

M2 - Is this one more provocative?
A - I definitely think so. We could even see the cat struggling for his life.
J - Yes I agree. I also think this kind of advertisement would become reported by the public, it upsets people and they would most likely get angry.
K - Yeah I would react if watching this one on TV, it is offensive.
S - I think it is very repulsive. Also I have a cat so I think I get even more offended by this since I can imagine how angry and sad I would be if something similar happened to him.

M2 - Is it that offending that you would turn of the TV?
S - Well no, it is really short and I still know it is not for real. I did not react until afterwards.
P - I think people can become a bit curious of how it would end because as we said before, no one expects the cat to die.
K - I would probably turn it off if watching it a second time and together with my niece who adores cats.

M1 - Is this also dark humour?
J - Yet again, I think so.
A – I think so too. Even worse than the previous two since the first one was focused on a happy ending, the second one was so unrealistic that it became fun. This one is just disgusting.
Everyone agrees.

M2 - The background to this advertisement was actually that Ford on purpose promoted this video as a viral tactic in order to get attention. Do you think all publicity is good?
J - Definitely not! I am still annoyed by this advertisement so I would not even consider this brand. Of course it gets publicity but in the end I think it could harm the brand.
P - I think so too. If media start to write negatively about it, along with people being active on social media it could result in a negative effect for the brand.
S – Also, they do not promote anything special or positive about the car.
J - It makes me think of a sexist commercial I saw a couple of months ago, I used to like that brand but after watching their advertisement I changed my mind.
K - I am also like that. I have certain opinions that I stand for and I do not appreciate people joking about them. Today it exist millions of different brands and as a consumer we have so many options that it is easy to change if we for some reason decides to not like a brand anymore.
J - Agree, a commercial like this could easily make me select a competitor's brand instead.

Advertisement 4: Audi A7
Sighs.

A - This feels like a joke commercial…

S - This is again taking it too far.

K - Several of people have relatives killing themselves in this way, I think it is so disrespectful to joke about it.

J - As I said before I do not find it okay to make fun of a serious subject such as suicide.

P - But at least I understand the meaning of it, therefore it makes you smile a bit, with the slogan of the environmental friendly car.

K - Well I can agree with that, the humorous aspect is that the car is so good that you cannot even kill you self.

S - At least they are trying to mediate a message.

J - I understand your point of view but, I think I would have even changed the channel when seeing this, I just find it so offensive. I do not think a person that has lost a parent like this cares if the commercial has a meaning, they would have been horrified.

M2 - Do you get affected in a negative way?

J - Yes, especially in the beginning when he prepared everything.

A - Me too, but afterwards when you understand the meaning it becomes less emotional.

J - Also in this one they started in the opposite way compared to the other once. This one started by shocking and I think that gave us more time to be upset. The other ones instead finished by presenting an upsetting theme.

M1 - What do you think of the fact that this one was featured by a human instead of an animal?

K - I think it is equally worse, the other one was torturing a cat in an awful way. In the one before that one a dog got killed.

S - I agree, it is not okay to put animals or children in a situation like that and make fun of it.

A - Or any person that is not capable to defending themselves.

S - Maybe this is the wrong thing to say but this man makes this decision by himself, but it is not appropriate to show on TV, on Swedish TV at least.

P - Well I also agree on this, but unfortunately I think we have to get used to this strategy. Marketers do anything in order to get attention.

M1 - Is there a line of what is considered appropriate to joke about? Is it okay to joke about suicide and death?

A - In commercial situations like this I think it depends a lot. Some people make funny movies or video clips of terrible things, I know my boyfriend find that fun. But when it comes to an advertisement made by a company I think they have to take some responsibility.

J - Yes, it is one thing to search for viral advertisement like these treating serious subjects because it is your choice to do it. But to show it on TV with the aim to get publicity and increase sales is not okay and it can evoke negative emotions among the viewers.

S - Overall I do not find murder fun.

M2 - Can you name any other topics, like you mentioned murder not being okay to joke about?

S - Anything where people get hurt.

K - As we said before, some people or within politics they make fun and attack each other, that is okay when both parties are fine with it and do it equally.

J - Other topics on the top of my mind is sadly rape. I do not think we have to wait long until someone starts joking about that within commercial sense, if they have not already started.

S - Definitely! I think so many people have experienced this and it would just be horrifying for them to see someone using it within the humorous context aiming for publicity.

P - All those topics such as rape and suicide are well debated in society and a lot of people can unfortunately identify themselves with it. Even if it does not happened a lot of times a lot of people knows someone that this has happened to.

A - Another aspect of it is that I do not like the fact that these advertisements probably trigger some people. Children should not be familiar with these terms as well as violent people or other criminals, you never know what ideas they get. Parents cannot protect their children from being exposed to this compared to a video where they actually can control the content of it.

J - If I had kids I would not want them to see this! Violence in any form is never okay especially since kids often have trouble separating right and wrong.

M1 - According to research humour as a strategy is suggested to be particularly efficient for reaching young people. What do you think about this regarding dark humour? Are you still "shockable" or have you "seen it all"?

P - I can agree with that, we probably see and understand it differently than our parents.

K - I also think we react more favorable towards this strategy.

J - But the question is how we react. I could easily distance myself from the brands featured in the different advertisements, especially when I think it is a PR trick. I think there are better ways to get publicity and media exposure. On the other hand I think we are also more likely to spread the advertisements through Internet.

P - Considering the purpose if getting attention I think we are a more suitable group than older people since we actually want to show each other funny and distasteful advertisements. Even if we do not like the commercial we still talk about it and post it to our friends. My mum would probably only tell her co-worker during their coffee break, if even that.

A - I think a lot of young guys would do this, like my baby brother or boyfriend would probably laugh about the guillotined cat.

M2 - You did mention younger guys being a suitable for this approach why?

S - I definitely think so, they do not have those emphatic feelings like I think we do.

J - I think overall boys do not take it so seriously, but also a jargon among boys is that if one of them laughs all of them have to laugh.

A - Of course we as women also can laugh about not politically correct topics, but I also think there is another way to joke about these topics without hurting someone.

S - I wonder why the companies want to be associated with death and murder?

A - Maybe because all of those advertisements were featuring cars which traditionally is a product more related to men.

M1 - Another aspect is that sometimes the companies claims to have nothing to do with the advertisement like Audi in this case, or that it only was a viral tactic like Ford said.

K - Well, even if they claim that they did not do that commercial I still get irritated with Audi, and Ford.

A - Those people who think it is fun probably do not care about if it is right or wrong, they like it anyway.

M2 - Do you think Audi are responsible for this advertisement?

P - Yes.

J - I want to think they are not, but sadly I think it is just another ugly PR trick.

Everyone agrees.

P - It was very professionally made so why would they spend money on a fake commercial?

Section 3

M2 - Moving on the last section. Do you think this strategy is suitable for all type of product categories? Like, milk, tables or cars for example?

S - I think so, I mean all companies want to distinguish themselves right?

Everyone agrees.

M1 - Also in conjunction with so called high-risk categories, products that normally demand more time and money? Like insurance or as we saw, cars.

J - Actually I think it could be a bit risky for their reputation of being serious and professional.

K - On the other hand I think Audi is a pretty respectable company and they still applied this strategy…however, I still did not like the commercial.

P - I think it would most likely hurt the company, I would not appreciate my bank promoting a commercial featuring suicide.

S - Still I think we would have been more okay with it than our parents because we have seen a lot of these topics through movies and the Internet.

J - I think when marketers use this strategy they have to consider both the service or product and the target group. I think ideally they should aim for young people like us and with not too serious products.

A - I would also lose faith in a bank that used this strategy, when spending a lot of money I expect the company to be professional and serious, not make jokes like these.

M2 - Would you like to see more of this strategy?

S - No I am not that interested.

J - I think they go too far, only aiming to get publicity and attention.

Everyone agrees.

S - I would prefer to see an advertisement that is genuinely funny, without the dark aspect

of humour. I do not like the fact that this strategy and violence overall makes our society more acceptable towards it.

A - Yes, keep it viral so that people can choose if they want to watch it!

9.6   Coding spreadsheet

Negative towards the strategy:	
Mature/older part of gen Y	*"I would prefer to see an advertisement that is genuinely funny, without the dark aspect of humour. I do not like the fact that this strategy and violence overall makes our society more acceptable towards it."*
Strong opinions	*"I have certain opinions that I stand for and I do not appreciate people joking about them."*
Political views	*"It makes me think of a sexist commercial I saw a couple of months ago, I used to like that brand but after watching their advertisement I changed my mind."* *"Yes, that could actually make me annoyed and offended, that a woman becomes an object for example."*

Positive towards the strategy:	
Younger part of gen Y	*"We have a higher acceptance level and do not become offended that easily. An older person would probably react much stronger to the videos featured today."* *"We can still react in a positive way even though it is a commercial treating dark humour or other offending subjects. We still think it is funny."*
Not easily effected emotionally	*"We have seen death, suicide and war in movies, on the web etc and are used to it. We have grown up with it, so we are not affected by it to the same degree."*
Need for a change	*"I want to see more! It gets so boring if everyone is doing the same thing. Someone have to challenge existing strategies."* *"Commercials in Sweden are all the same, it would have been fun to see something new, perhaps that would have stopped med form zapping around during the commercial break."*

Confused or mixed feelings towards the strategy:

Positive	
Social media	*"Young people have greater penetrating power. A company that wants to create buzz among a large audience therefore benefit my targeting the youth."*
	"Just imagine, with a click I can share it with 500 friends on Facebook while my mum simply tell her colleague."
Succeeds in gaining attention	*"I think they managed to gain attention and publicity since I notice and remember the brand but I am not sure about the next step, the purchase phase. So if the aim is publicity, yes."*

Negative	
Ethical values	*"I would like to believe that I do not get affected but unconsciously I think I do, since I still think about it, so yes."*
	"I agree, suicide does not belong in commercial contexts. But I still thought it was funny so I am confused."
Identifies a limit	*"When people start to take it personal, such as joking about ethnicity or real life situations that has occurred".*
	"But there are still certain subjects that should not be included. In my opinion, everything that involves suffering and death in combination with children becomes too much."