Does Dark Humor Work? An Inspection of Social Media-Based Marketing Strategies

Philip Kim
pkim@walsh.edu

Matthew Bagatta
mbagatta3@walsh.edu

Walsh University
North Canton, OH

Richard Metzer
rlmst26@mail.rmu.edu
Robert Morris University
Moon Township, PA

Abstract

This study explores the effectiveness of dark humor in social media marketing by analyzing consumer sentiment and engagement across YouTube, TikTok, and Facebook. Advertisements from Mint Mobile, Doritos, and Dr. Squatch were examined to compare audience reactions to dark humor versus traditional humor. Sentiment analysis and engagement rate calculations reveal that dark humor generates higher engagement on visually driven platforms like YouTube and TikTok, while traditional humor is better received on Facebook. These findings underscore the importance of aligning humor styles with platform characteristics and audience expectations to enhance marketing impact.

Keywords: Dark humor, Social media marketing, Sentiment analysis, Engagement metrics

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1. INTRODUCTION

Social media has fundamentally reshaped the digital marketing landscape, enabling businesses to communicate directly with consumers through tailored, interactive content. With billions of users across platforms such as TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube, organizations are increasingly shifting from traditional advertising channels to social media to build brand awareness and foster engagement (Atske, 2023; Statista, 2024). Unlike traditional advertising social media content encourages active audience interaction—likes, shares, comments, and reposts—which in turn provides rich, real-time feedback for marketers. Humor has long played a central role in marketing by appealing to emotions, increasing message retention, and creating a sense of brand relatability (Cline et al., 2003; Isaza, 2022). But, a more provocative form—dark humor—has emerged as a notable tactic, particularly among younger demographics. Defined by its use of irony, cynicism, and taboo topics, dark humor reflects a cultural shift in how consumers engage with content that addresses uncomfortable or complex issues through levity (Splitters, 2023). Despite its prevalence in entertainment and viral media, dark humor remains understudied in the context of digital marketing—and virtually absent from information systems (IS) literature.

From an IS perspective, there is a growing need to understand how sentiment and user engagement data, derived from humorous content, can inform platform-specific marketing strategies. While sentiment analysis and natural language processing (NLP) techniques have been adopted to study customer satisfaction and brand perception (Barney, 2023; Poeczea et al., 2018), little attention has been paid to how dark humor affects these outcomes across diverse digital platforms.

This study investigates how dark humor in advertising influences user sentiment and engagement on YouTube, TikTok, and Facebook. By comparing ads from Mint Mobile, Doritos, and Dr. Squatch, the research addresses the gap in IS literature related to content analytics and contributes to the understanding of humor's strategic use in social media environments. Ultimately, the findings aim to equip IS professionals, digital marketers, and analytics researchers with deeper insight into consumer behavior and content strategy optimization.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of humor in marketing has been well-documented across disciplines such as communications, psychology, and business, where it is frequently linked to higher message recall, increased likability, and stronger brand loyalty (Hasanova, 2019; Barry & Graça, 2018). Humor captures attention and fosters emotional engagement—two key variables in influencing consumer behavior. But existing scholarship often generalizes humor, overlooking the nuanced differences between light, satirical, or dark comedic styles.

Humor in Advertising
Advertising scholars have noted that humor can facilitate persuasion by reducing arguments, increasing ad memorability, and enhancing perceived credibility (Cline et al., 2003; Eisend, 2018). The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) provides a theoretical framework to explain this dynamic. Humor, when processed peripherally, can enhance attitudes toward the advertisement or brand without requiring deep cognitive processing. Humor may increase involvement when aligned with message relevance (*Humorous Ads*, 2023; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Humor styles influence engagement differently depending on context (*Affiliative and Aggressive Humor*, 2024; Muntinga, Moorman, & Smit, 2011). Humor is versatile and can be impactful—but its effectiveness hinges on context, audience, and tone.

Light or affiliative humor is the most common style in advertising due to its broad appeal and lower risk of offense (Martin et al., 2003). Humor in social media marketing can boost ad performance significantly (*"Investigate the Impacts,"* 2023). Satirical humor, which critiques social norms or institutions, has gained traction in

purpose-driven marketing. But, dark humor—defined by its use of morbid, taboo, or ironic content for comedic effect—has remained on the margins of advertising practice due to perceived risks of alienating audiences or damaging brand reputation (Napp, 2023; Splitters, 2023).

Dark Humor's Cultural Function
Recent research suggests that dark humor resonates deeply with certain demographics, particularly younger audiences such as Generation Z. This cohort, raised amid global crises, political polarization, and hyper-digital culture, often uses dark humor as a mechanism for self-expression, identity formation, and psychological coping (Jacob, 2023). Studies in media psychology highlight that humor helps individuals regulate emotions and build resilience, especially during high-stress events such as the COVID-19 pandemic (McGraw & Warren, 2010). For example, Jordanian Facebook users during the pandemic adopted dark humor to satirize government policies and make light of existential anxieties (*Jordanian Social Media*, n.d.).

In this sense, dark humor may not merely be a provocative tool, but a culturally adaptive one. It offers catharsis, solidarity, and meaning in environments perceived as unstable or absurd. These insights challenge the assumption that dark humor is inherently alienating and suggest that it may foster authenticity and relatability—two increasingly valued brand traits in the digital age (Isaza, 2022).

Platform-Specific Norms
The platform itself is a crucial variable in determining how humor is received. Research shows that content norms vary significantly across social media sites (Thomas et al., 2019; Voorveld, 2019). TikTok, with its short-form, trend-driven culture, favors fast-paced, visual humor, often with absurd or unexpected elements. YouTube supports longer-form storytelling, allowing for more nuanced comedic arcs. Facebook, increasingly skewed toward older users, tends to reward more conventional, narrative-based humor styles (Taecharungroj & Nueangjamnong, 2015). These platform characteristics shape not only what content gets shared, but how users interpret and engage with humor.

As Barry and Graça (2018) argue, user engagement with humor varies significantly across video-based platforms, depending on audience expectations and content format. Yet, little research has explored how dark humor performs across these digital ecosystems, especially in terms of interaction stats like comments, shares, and sentiment polarity.

Gaps in IS Literature
While humor in advertising has been studied in communication and psychology, it remains underexplored in the field of information systems. Within IS, research on digital marketing tends to focus on technical optimization, performance metrics, and user behavior, rather than content tone or emotional strategies. Sentiment analysis—a key IS method—has typically been applied to customer reviews, satisfaction studies, or general brand perception (Barney, 2023). These analyses often rely on polarity detection (positive, neutral, negative), without accounting for emotional nuance, sarcasm, or humor subtypes.

This creates a methodological blind spot. Humor, and especially dark humor, is deeply context-dependent and difficult for automated systems to interpret correctly. For example, sarcasm detection is still an emerging area in natural language processing (NLP), and even state-of-the-art models struggle with culturally coded humor or irony (Liu et al., 2019). So, applying sentiment analysis tools to humorous content—without accounting for these limitations—may yield misleading results.

Srivastava's (2015) comparative study of humorous versus emotional advertising provides an exception within IS-related scholarship, showing that humor can outperform emotional appeals in generating favorable consumer attitudes. But, the study did not differentiate between humor styles or assess variation across digital platforms. Likewise, Poeczea et al. (2018) examined influencer marketing performance using sentiment and interaction stats but did not consider tone as a variable in their analysis. This leaves open questions about how humor affects interaction dynamics, particularly in comment sections, where brand perception is actively negotiated by users.

3. METHODOLOGY

To evaluate the effectiveness of dark humor in social media advertising, this study adopted a mixed-methods research design integrating both qualitative and quantitative analysis. This approach was selected to provide a more holistic view of audience responses, combining sentiment insights derived from natural language processing (NLP) tools with platform interaction stats. The research approach was grounded in prior literature on humor theory, digital marketing

strategy, and sentiment analysis practices within the information systems (IS) domain (Barney, 2023; Barry & Graça, 2018; Hasanova, 2019).

The research began with a comprehensive literature review to identify foundational theories related to humor in marketing and its potential effects on consumer engagement. Emphasis was placed on the emotional dimensions of advertising, the emergence of dark humor in generational subcultures, and the expanding use of sentiment analysis tools in brand perception studies (Thomas & Fowler 2021; Warren, Brannon, & Kopel, 2019). This foundational stage informed the design of the research questions and guided the selection of analytical methods, helping to align the study with both marketing communication theory and IS evaluation tools.

Three major social media platforms—YouTube, TikTok, and Facebook—were chosen as the sites of analysis. These platforms were selected for their diverse user bases, global reach, and unique content structures. YouTube supports long-form video content and often attracts engaged audiences seeking entertainment or information. TikTok, known for short-form, viral-oriented content, emphasizes trend-based participation and rapid engagement. Facebook, in contrast, offers a more traditional social media experience with mixed media formats and an older demographic skew (Sheikh, 2025). The use of these platforms enabled cross-comparative insights into how dark humor performs in varied digital environments.

The sample included advertisements posted between 2016 and 2024, a time frame representing the exponential rise of social media marketing and growing cultural acceptance of edgier humor styles. Ads were selected from three consumer brands—Mint Mobile, Doritos, and Dr. Squatch—based on their consistent use of humor in digital campaigns and their cultural relevance among online audiences. These brands operate in different industries (telecommunications, food/snacks, and personal hygiene), allowing for diverse content styles and humor executions.

Two advertisements per brand were selected, resulting in a total of six ads under study. Each brand contributed one advertisement categorized as using "dark humor" and another considered more traditional or light-hearted in tone. The categorization was based on definitions established in prior humor literature, with dark humor involving elements of morbidity, irony, taboo subjects, or socially transgressive content

(Splitters, 2023; Napp, 2023). Traditional humor relied more on relatability, celebrity appeal, or mild absurdity. The comparative structure ensured that the analysis remained balanced, avoiding bias toward a specific brand or content style.

Audience sentiment was analyzed through 100 top-level user comments per advertisement per platform, for a total of 1,800 comments across the six ads and three platforms. This sampling strategy aligns with recommendations from Google Cloud and previous sentiment research, which suggest that a minimum of 100 documents per category offers a reliable baseline for natural language analysis (Google Cloud, 2024; Rashid & Huang, 2018). To reduce sampling bias, comments were selected based on chronological order of appearance and filtered to ensure they were unique, relevant to the advertisement, and free from automated bot language.

The sentiment analysis was conducted using the Text2Data plugin for Google Sheets, a cloud-based NLP tool capable of scoring textual data based on polarity and emotional tone. Each comment was assigned a sentiment score on a continuous scale from -1 (strongly negative) to +1 (strongly positive), with values near zero representing neutral sentiment. The tool also categorized each comment as positive, neutral, or negative based on its internal thresholds. By analyzing a large and diverse comment set, we aimed to average out anomalies and obtain a reliable sentiment profile for each ad. The system uses NLP algorithms that identify positive or negative sentiment based on keywords, phrase structure, and contextual cues.

One of the challenges of using such tools is a limited capacity to interpret tone or sarcasm. For example, a comment like "Wow, what a great ad 🙄" with an eye roll emoji may be interpreted as positive due to the words "wow" and "great," despite being clearly sarcastic. This underscores the need for sentiment classifiers that are trained on humorous and context-rich datasets—an area where IS research and machine learning innovation could help.

Descriptive statistics were applied to the sentiment data to calculate mean, median, and confidence intervals for each advertisement's sentiment distribution. These values helped quantify the overall emotional tone of audience reactions and allowed for direct comparison between humor styles and platforms.

In addition to sentiment analysis, behavioral engagement was assessed using an engagement rate ratio. This metric was calculated by dividing the sum of public interactions (likes, shares, comments) by the total number of followers or subscribers on the brand's account, then multiplying by 100 to yield a percentage. This rate offers a normalized measure of how effectively each advertisement stimulated audience participation, adjusting for differences in brand size and reach. Engagement data were extracted from public platform statistics and verified through manual sampling.

This methodology allows for an exploration of how humor tone influences sentiment and engagement across platform environments. It also provides a replicable framework for future IS research examining emotional content strategies, platform-user dynamics, or NLP applications in digital marketing contexts.

4. RESULTS

YouTube	Results1
Mean	0.15195
Standard Error	0.0525582
Median	0.1595
Mode	1
Standard Deviation	0.5255819
Sample Variance	0.2762363
Kurtosis	-1.1749234
Skewness	-0.2307057
Range	1.684
Minimum	-0.684
Maximum	1
Sum	15.195
Count	100
Confidence Level(95%)	0.1042868

Table 1: Mint Mobile Sentiment Analysis results for Dark Humor Ad on Youtube

Mint Mobile
The sentiment analysis for Mint Mobile revealed platform-specific variations in audience reception to humor styles. On YouTube, the dark humor advertisement yielded a mean sentiment score of 0.152, indicating a largely neutral reception. The non-dark humor ad performed slightly better at 0.167, suggesting a marginally more favorable

response. This indicates that YouTube users appreciated both ads but leaned slightly toward the lighter tone. The modest gap may reflect YouTube's tolerance for offbeat or edgy humor, while still rewarding clearer messaging or nostalgic appeal.

YouTube	Results1
Mean	0.16716
Standard Error	0.0498242
Median	0.174
Mode	0.489
Standard Deviation	0.4982416
Sample Variance	0.2482447
Kurtosis	-1.007735
Skewness	-0.441853
Range	1.726
Minimum	-0.726
Maximum	1
Sum	16.716
Count	100
Confidence Level(95%)	0.0988619

Table 2: Mint Mobile Sentiment Analysis results for Normal Ad on Youtube

On TikTok, the dark humor ad also remained within the neutral range at 0.142, while the non-dark humor ad scored higher at 0.186. This difference suggests that TikTok users responded more positively to lighter humor styles, potentially due to the platform's emphasis on short, accessible entertainment and high visual tempo. TikTok's algorithm tends to favor content that is emotionally clear and quickly digestible, which may explain why dark humor—often requiring a buildup or contextual irony—receives a more subdued reaction despite being stylistically bold.

TikTok	Results2
Mean	0.14176
Standard Error	0.0487939
Median	0.184
Mode	0.7
Standard Deviation	0.4879386
Sample Variance	0.2380841
Kurtosis	-0.8402292
Skewness	-0.4536318
Range	1.873
Minimum	-0.873
Maximum	1
Sum	14.176
Count	100
Confidence Level(95%)	0.0968176

Table 3: Mint Mobile Sentiment Analysis results for Dark Humor Ad on TikTok

TikTok	Results2
Mean	0.18592
Standard Error	0.0488108
Median	0.207
Mode	0.249
Standard Deviation	0.4881076
Sample Variance	0.238249
Kurtosis	-0.740133
Skewness	-0.467313
Range	1.748
Minimum	-0.748
Maximum	1
Sum	18.592
Count	100
Confidence Level(95%)	0.0968511

Table 4: Mint Mobile Sentiment Analysis results for normal ad on TikTok

Facebook presented a notable reversal. The dark humor ad received a mean sentiment score of 0.118, while the non-dark humor ad scored just 0.017, indicating a weaker reception. While both scores remained in the neutral range, the significantly lower rating for the non-dark humor

ad may suggest that Facebook users either found the content dull or failed to connect with the ad's style.

Facebook	Results3
Mean	0.1176139
Standard Error	0.0496397
Median	0.168
Mode	0.205
Standard Deviation	0.4988725
Sample Variance	0.2488738
Kurtosis	-1.0050834
Skewness	-0.2933773
Range	1.996
Minimum	-0.996
Maximum	1
Sum	11.879
Count	100
Confidence Level(95%)	0.0984837

Table 5: Mint Mobile Sentiment Analysis results for Dark Humor Ad on Facebook

Facebook	Results3
Mean	0.0171089
Standard Error	0.0508468
Median	0.128
Mode	-0.134
Standard Deviation	0.511004
Sample Variance	0.2611251
Kurtosis	-1.361985
Skewness	0.0636105
Range	1.742
Minimum	-0.748
Maximum	0.994
Sum	1.728
Count	100
Confidence Level(95%)	0.1008786

Table 6: Mint Mobile Sentiment Analysis results for normal ad on Facebook

The level of interaction supports these findings. The dark humor ad achieved engagement rates of

17% on YouTube and 9% on TikTok, while Facebook lagged significantly at 0.4%. In contrast, non-dark humor ads received lower engagement on all platforms, including 10% on YouTube, 4% on TikTok, and 0.5% on Facebook. These results suggest that, while sentiment remained mostly neutral, dark humor drove stronger interaction on visually rich platforms, particularly when the content was attention-grabbing and well-aligned with brand identity.

Doritos
Doritos advertisements demonstrated stronger overall engagement and more pronounced differences in sentiment compared to Mint Mobile. On YouTube, the dark humor ad achieved a positive sentiment score of 0.301, the highest in the study. This strongly suggests that viewers appreciated the ad's bold narrative and unconventional punchline. The non-dark humor ad scored 0.168, falling within the neutral range. This contrast suggests that YouTube viewers were more responsive to the bolder comedic approach, which aligns with Doritos' history of producing provocative and memorable ads for high-visibility events like the Super Bowl.

YouTube	Results1
Mean	0.30098
Standard Error	0.046321
Median	0.3455
Mode	1
Standard Deviation	0.463214
Sample Variance	0.214567
Kurtosis	-0.446541
Skewness	-0.665477
Range	1.638
Minimum	-0.638
Maximum	1
Sum	30.098
Count	100
Confidence Level(95%)	0.091912

Table 7: Doritos Sentiment Analysis results for Dark Humor Ad on Youtube

YouTube	Results1
Mean	0.1682222
Standard Error	0.0520793
Median	0.171
Mode	1
Standard Deviation	0.5181824
Sam le Variance	0.268513
Kurtosis	-1.0985742
Skewness	-0.312324
Range	1.727
Minimum	-0.727
Maximum	1
Sum	16.654
Count	100
Confidence Level(95%)	0.1033497

Table 8: Doritos Sentiment Analysis results for normal ad on Youtube

TikTok	Results2
Mean	0.054686
Standard Error	0.042187
Median	0.182
Mode	0.247
Standard Deviation	0.426066
Sam leVariance	0.181532
Kurtosis	-0.771776
Skewness	-0.578713
Range	1.659
Minimum	-0.873
Maximum	0.786
Sum	5.578
Count	100
Confidence Level(95%)	0.083687

Table 9: Doritos Sentiment Analysis results for Dark Humor Ad on TikTok

Conversely, on TikTok, the dark humor ad scored only 0.055—still neutral but significantly lower than the non-dark humor ad's 0.226. This reversal reinforces the idea that TikTok users, who favor lighthearted, quick humor and trend-based formats, may be less inclined to engage

with content requiring setup or context. The structured nature of the dark humor ad, which involved a storyline and a punchline about premature birth, may have been too jarring or narratively complex for TikTok's browsing environment.

TikTok	Results2
Mean	0.2264653
Standard Error	0.0495067
Median	0.247
Mode	-0.582
Standard Deviation	0.497536
Sam le Variance	0.2475421
Kurtosis	-0.9557613
Skewness	-0.5737663
Range	1.638
Minimum	-0.638
Maximum	1
Sum	22.873
Count	100
Confidence Level(95%)	0.0982198

Table 10: Doritos Sentiment Analysis results for normal ad on Tiktok

Facebook	Results3
Mean	0.272216
Standard Error	0.050481
Median	0.513
Mode	1
Standard Deviation	0.509836
Sample Variance	0.259933
Kurtosis	-0.821251
Skewness	-0.646819
Range	1.676
Minimum	-0.676
Maximum	1
Sum	27.766
Count	100
Confidence Level(95.0%)	0.100141

Table 11: Doritos Sentiment Analysis results for Dark Humor Ad on Facebook

Facebook sentiment scores once again favored dark humor, with a score of 0.272 compared to the non-dark humor ad's 0.045. This result underscores a surprising trend: although Facebook users are generally older, they may still respond positively to dark humor if the narrative is clear and the brand is trusted. Doritos, as a longstanding and culturally embedded brand, may benefit from nostalgic recognition that softens the perceived risk of dark content.

Facebook	Results3
Mean	0.0447549
Standard Error	0.0400215
Median	0.197
Mode	0.197
Standard Deviation	0.404197
Sam leVariance	0.1633752
Kurtosis	-0.717591
Skewness	-0.5127395
Range	1.497
Minimum	-0.748
Maximum	0.749
Sum	4.565
Count	100
Confidence Level(95%)	0.0793918

Table 12: Doritos Sentiment Analysis results for normal ad on Facebook

But, this sentiment did not translate into behavioral engagement. While the dark humor ad achieved high engagement on YouTube (28%) and TikTok (44%), Facebook recorded a minimal rate of 0.04%, despite relatively positive sentiment. This points to a growing pattern across platforms: Facebook users may feel positively toward dark humor content but are less inclined to interact publicly with it. This divergence between sentiment and engagement could be explained by social visibility norms—users may not want to be seen endorsing content that others might interpret as offensive or inappropriate.

These results suggest that while sentiment and engagement can align—as on YouTube and TikTok—they do not always. Dark humor may trigger appreciation without prompting action, particularly on platforms where user behavior is more passive or where content is consumed silently without social interaction.

Dr. Squatch

Dr. Squatch advertisements displayed the most nuanced and arguably most intriguing results. On YouTube, the dark humor ad scored -0.059, indicating a slightly negative response. In contrast, the non-dark humor ad scored 0.143, suggesting that viewers preferred the lighter, product-focused tone. Given that the dark humor ad relied heavily on visual shock and profanity, the slight dip into negative sentiment could indicate viewer discomfort or fatigue with exaggerated masculine branding tropes.

YouTube	Results1
Mean	-0.05947
Standard Error	0.0494906
Median	0.1075
Mode	-0.467
Standard Deviation	0.4949058
Sam leVariance	0.2449318
Kurtosis	-1.3409075
Skewness	0.2521005
Range	1.707
Minimum	-0.707
Maximum	1
Sum	-5.947
Count	100
Confidence Level(95%)	0.0982001

Table 13: Dr. Squatch Sentiment Analysis results for Dark Humor Ad on Youtube

TikTok sentiment scores for both ads were nearly identical—0.100 for dark humor and 0.097 for non-dark—implying neutrality regardless of humor style. These results suggest that TikTok users may be less influenced by humor tone and more by the entertainment value or relatability of the content itself. Dr. Squatch's aesthetic branding and novelty may have driven interaction more than the humor itself, especially on TikTok, where product-feature videos and "oddly satisfying" content often outperform narrative ads.

YOUTUBE	Results1
Mean	0.1434753
Standard Error	0.0439817
Median	0.158
Mode	0.653
Standard Deviation	0.442011
Sample Variance	0.1953738
Kurtosis	-0.9440037
Skewness	-0.4230946
Range	1.632
Minimum	-0.638
Maximum	0.994
Sum	14.491
Count	100
Confidence Level(95%)	0.0872585

Table 14: Dr. Squatch Sentiment Analysis results for normal Ad on Youtube

TikTok	Results2
Mean	0.09992
Standard Error	0.0414423
Median	0.197
Mode	0.247
Standard Deviation	0.4144226
Sam le Variance	0.1717461
Kurtosis	-0.8005902
Skewness	-0.6102802
Range	1.322
Minimum	-0.638
Maximum	0.684
Sum	9.992
Count	100
Confidence Level(95%)	0.0822304

Table 15: Dr. Squatch Sentiment Analysis results for Dark Humor Ad on Tiktok

TIKTOK	Results2
Mean	0.0973824
Standard Error	0.0402182
Median	0.1715
Mode	0.159
Standard Deviation	0.4061839
Sample Variance	0.1649854
Kurtosis	-0.3164259
Skewness	-0.6224305
Range	1.742
Minimum	-0.996
Maximum	0.746
Sum	9.933
Count	100
Confidence Level(95%)	0.0797821

Table 16: Dr. Squatch Sentiment Analysis results for normal Ad on Tiktok

Facebook	Results3
Mean	-0.0198039
Standard Error	0.0501431
Median	0.097
Mode	-0.638
Standard Deviation	0.5064208
Sam leVariance	0.256462
Kurtosis	-1.341169
Skewness	0.1863887
Range	1.696
Minimum	-0.696
Maximum	1
Sum	-2.02
Count	100
Confidence Level(95%)	0.0994705

Table 17: Dr. Squatch Sentiment Analysis results for Dark Humor Ad on Facebook

This trend was echoed on Facebook, where sentiment scores were -0.020 (dark humor) and 0.026 (non-dark). Again, while both scores hovered near neutral, the preference for the milder content implies that Facebook audiences may be more interested in clear value

propositions or aesthetics than comedic edge. This is particularly relevant for a product category like hygiene, where trust and perceived product quality are central to decision-making.

Facebook	Results3
Mean	0.0260294
Standard Error	0.0465995
Median	0.1465
Mode	-0.638
Standard Deviation	0.4706316
Sample Variance	0.2214941
Kurtosis	-1.1821423
Skewness	-0.1397316
Range	1.75
Minimum	-0.75
Maximum	1
Sum	2.655
Count	100
Confidence Level(95%)	0.0924408

Table 18: Dr. Squatch Sentiment Analysis results for normal Ad on Facebook

Engagement data, however, told a different story. The dark humor ad achieved a remarkably high engagement rate of 66% on YouTube and 30% on Facebook. TikTok, by contrast, showed only 0.8%. The engagement rates for the non-dark humor ads were significantly lower across all platforms: YouTube (11%), Facebook (0.5%), and TikTok (0.6%). These numbers illustrate an important divergence: even when sentiment is neutral or slightly negative, dark humor can still drive high engagement.

For Dr. Squatch, the strategy proved especially effective on platforms where users expect bold, irreverent content, like YouTube. The brand's identity, built on exaggerated masculinity, ruggedness, and anti-mainstream tone, aligns well with the type of humor that shocks or entertains, even if it divides opinion. This suggests that dark humor may function as an amplifier for brands seeking to disrupt established norms or differentiate from conventional messaging.

Overall, these findings highlight how brand identity, platform culture, and humor tone interact in complex ways. Engagement and

sentiment do not always move together—and in the case of Dr. Squatch, they appear to diverge in ways that still benefit brand visibility. This reflects a broader theme in digital marketing: polarizing content may risk alienating some users, but it can also galvanize loyalists and spark conversation. In a crowded digital environment, that trade-off may be worthwhile.

Engagement Rate Formula
Engagement Rate (%) = (Likes + Shares + Comments) / Total Followers × 100

Score Range	Interpretation
+0.20 to +1.00	Positive Sentiment
-0.20 to +0.19	Neutral Sentiment
-1.00 to -0.21	Negative Sentiment

Table 19 – Sentiment Score Categories

Brand	YouTube (%)	TikTok (%)	Facebook (%)
Mint Mobile	17	9	0.4
Doritos	28	44	0.04
Dr. Squatch	66	0.8	30

Table 20 – Engagement Summary by Platform (Dark Humor Ads)

5. CONCLUSION

This study explores the role and effectiveness of dark humor in social media advertising by analyzing sentiment and engagement across three major platforms: TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook. Using a comparative framework involving three brands—Mint Mobile, Doritos, and Dr. Squatch—the research examined how different humor tones performed across varying digital environments and user demographics. we found that while audience sentiment towards dark humor ads often remains neutral or mildly positive, these ads consistently yield higher engagement levels than their non-dark counterparts, especially on visually driven platforms such as YouTube and TikTok.

In particular, brands with strong, irreverent identities—such as Doritos and Dr. Squatch—were able to leverage dark humor effectively to generate attention and interaction. These brands saw significantly higher engagement rates for their edgier content, even in cases where sentiment scores were flat or slightly negative. Mint Mobile presented more variable outcomes, illustrating that platform norms and audience preferences can mediate the effectiveness of a humor strategy. Facebook emerged as an outlier,

with some of the highest sentiment scores for dark humor but the lowest levels of engagement. This suggests that appreciation does not always translate into action, possibly due to the older, more passive user base of the platform or changing norms around public expression on Facebook.

These findings underscore the importance of contextual alignment in digital advertising. Humor—particularly dark humor—is not a one-size-fits-all strategy. Brands should consider not only their own voice and identity but also the platform-specific culture and audience expectations. For marketers and information systems professionals alike, this implies a need to integrate content tone analytics into campaign planning, performance tracking, and platform selection. Dark humor holds considerable promise as a high-engagement marketing tactic. But its success depends on strategic execution—grounded in cultural awareness, platform fluency, and a nuanced understanding of audience dynamics.

Opportunities for IS Research and Integration

The omission of humor typologies in IS research represents a missed opportunity. Integrating emotional tone analysis into platform-specific user analytics could offer deeper insights for marketers, brand strategists, and systems designers. For example, dashboards that distinguish between affiliative, aggressive, and dark humor could help tailor ad delivery in real time. Additionally, incorporating these distinctions into training datasets could improve the accuracy of AI-driven content moderation or sentiment interpretation systems.

Additionally, user-generated reactions to humorous content—especially those that go viral—could serve as high-value data points for understanding digital engagement. Analyzing how humor triggers conversation threads, resharing behavior, or meme generation can inform theories of online influence and virality, which are core concerns in the IS domain.

In sum, we believe that humor is not just entertainment; it is data. And dark humor—often dismissed as risky or fringe—may, in the right contexts, offer powerful advantages in brand differentiation and digital engagement. As IS continues to evolve toward more human-centered and emotionally intelligent systems, the need to understand, measure, and interpret humor is essential.

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