

## Employ Humorous Marketing Tactics to Enhance Customer Preferences

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**Abstract:** At the beginning of the third millennium, many marketing strategies that used a different approach from the traditional methods product promotion. This promotion does no longer work in the current era as a result of the great technological development, the diversity of goods and services provided, and the high level of marketing culture among members of society. This is reflected negatively on the accepting promotional campaigns presented using traditional methods in addition to the increasing doubt in all that these campaigns contain. So there has become an urgent need to use new, unfamiliar methods that attract attention, including the use of humor directed at creating luxury and breaking the state of stagnation and monotony that has become a characteristic inherent with traditional marketing methods. Thus, humorous marketing appeared as a different approach effectively harnessed in crystallizing and directing the fostering of customer preferences towards the marketing organization and its products. In order to test ways to employ humorous marketing methods to enhance customer preferences, the topic will be addressed through four sections. The first dealt with the research methodology, which included the research problem, the question that the extent to which humorous marketing contributes and through its methods to enhancing customer preferences, as well as the importance and objectives of the research, its hypotheses and indicators for measuring its variables. The second topic reviewed the theoretical framework for the research variables, while the third was devoted to the field framework for research, and the fourth topic was concluded with conclusions and suggestions.

**Keywords:** Humorous Marketing- Customer Preferences

### **Introduction**

In a world in which the comparison between what competitors offer is the final say in deciding the trends and preferences of the customer, and in the midst of the revolution and the increase of promotional campaigns. There is a growing distrust about the advantages of the offered products as a result of the variation and diversity of information accompanying the presentation of these promotional campaigns. There is a contradiction and intersection between that information, which requires taking into account the essential aspects of that information. This would contribute to choosing the appropriate strategy that would affect the customer's preferences. In addition in light of the monotony and boredom

that possesses the contemporary customer, the search for alternatives has turned the customer to a positive case of communicating with the information presented through a method different from that of the current advertising campaigns. Companies have found their goal in humorous marketing, which has proven its effectiveness in directing customer preferences ) Mindrut et.al, 2015 .(

Many experiences have proven the efficacy of this method in directing the customer orientations towards an intended destination(Chang & Chang, 2014).

### **The first topic / research methodology**

#### **First: the research problem**

All organizations, with different activities and positions in the market, seek to win the customers by influencing their convictions, behaviors and the decisions that result from the use of various strategies they possess in their knowledge, materials and humans. As a result of the boring repetition in presenting its contents through methods that do not rise to the level of what raises the interests of the customer, there has become an urgent need to use non-traditional methods to get out of the stereotype and repetition that is no longer useful in attracting the attention of the customer and influencing his preferences, so humorous marketing emerged as an approach through which Changing the monotonous stereotype of promotional activity through its ability to bring about the desired shift in customer preferences(Laroche, Nepomuceno, Huang, & Richard, 2011).

According to the discussion above, the following questions show the problem of the research:

- 1- Does humorous marketing and its methods contribute to enhancing customer preferences?
- 2- Which of the humorous marketing methods has the most influence on customer preferences?

#### **Second, the importance of research**

The importance of the research is reflected in addressing a topic that is gaining great importance in the current stage (humorous marketing). This is because it represents a way out of the impasse in which the traditional methods of marketing activity occurred in promoting goods and services that are no longer able to achieve their goals in directing customer preferences. These preferences represent the end and goal that the company is looking for it.

#### **Third: Research objectives**

- 1- The research aims to test the effect of humorous marketing methods on customer preferences
- 2- According to the opinions of a random sample of customers for a number of shopping centers in the city of Mosul, as well as determining which of those methods are most effective in enhancing customer preferences.

#### **Third: Research hypotheses**

- 1- The methodological construction of research hypotheses requires a reference to previous studies that dealt with the variables of the current research and in the same

research context, and the most prominent of these studies is the study(Warren & McGraw, 2016). This study indicated the contribution of humorous marketing methods to the customer’s choice of a specific brand without others, and in the same context, a study concluded. Spotts, Weinberger, and Parsons (1997)indicated that customers interact positively with promotional campaigns of a humorous nature, which affects their preferences.

- 2- Based on the foregoing, the researcher decided to complete those cognitive efforts and prove the causal relationship between the research variables in the Iraqi environment (an intentional sample of customers visiting some shopping centers in the city of Mosul), and accordingly the researcher adopted the following hypotheses:
  - A. There is no significant correlation between humorous marketing and customer preferences in the field studied.
  - B. Humorous marketing methods do not affect the customer's preferences in the field studied.
  - C. The effect of humorous marketing methods on customer preferences in the field studied does not vary.

**Fourth: Indicators for measuring research variables**

The researcher used a set of researches that dealt with the current research variables to complete the theoretical framework, as well as using the questionnaire (Appendix 1) to collect the necessary information to accomplish the field aspect of the research. This corresponds to a large extent with the current research directions, based on studies related to the topic of research and the adoption of the Likert five-scale in Determining the answer levels. Table (1) shows the researched concepts and the approved measurement indicators.

Table (1) Researched Concepts and Measurement Indicators

N o	The investigated variables	the sub-dimensions	the measurement indicators	the measurement indicators	the procedural concept
1	general data	Data related to demographic variables of the sample			
2	Humorous Marketing		Philip Kotler )Gustafsson( )Woltman Elpers, Mukherjee, & Hoyer, 2004(	One of the most widely used emotional solicitation in marketing activities, specifically in the field of	One of the most widely used marketing activity tools in the field

				advertising	of advertising
		convergence humor	)Mathies, Chiew, & Kleinaltenkamp, 2016(	Customers share their personal experiences and funny situations	A promotional style that deepens the relationship with the customer by provoking funny situations
		Humor Self Enhancement	)Zhang & Zinkhan, 2006(	Using the style of humor aimed at getting the individual out of a state of depression and anger and giving him a moral charge	A method that aims to enhance the customer's self-confidence and get him out of frustration in a comic, endearing manner
		Self-deprecating humor	)Woltman Elpers et al., 2004(	The use of sarcasm and unintentional irony, which unintentionally contribute to sowing frustration in the individual	Resorting to the use of a sarcastic and vulgar method to convey an idea that sometimes contributes to generating a state of frustration among the

					customer
		aggressive humor	)Limbu, Huhmann, & Peterson, 2012(	Using humor in a way that degrades the value of the customer	The use of inappropriate and sometimes contrary to public taste phrases in the promotion
	Costumers prefernces		)Voicu, 2007(	An emotionally positive motive for a service or good	They are personal tastes that are measured according to the amount of benefit achieved
		aims	Teodeorescu,2004	The personal goals and objectives that stand behind the customer's choice of a commodity over others	What does the customer want to achieve when he buys a particular commodity?
		situations	Brigden and Häubl,2012	Individual attitudes, trends, and personal convictions of the customer	The extent to which the customer is affected by his firm convictions about a commodity or a brand
		Income level	Venkatraman,2012	The financial ability of the customer to	The customer's financial

				obtain the commodity	capabilities enable him to choose what he wants to buy
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**The second topic / theoretical framework**

**First, humorous marketing**

In 1902, the British philosopher James Sully described humor as: “The most difficult word to define for something familiar across all languages. Three areas should be present: emotional (experiencing a positive feeling of experience), cognitive (appreciating something funny), and behavioral” (Warren & McGraw, 2016).

While Kotler and Armstrong (2008) formulated the concept of humor within his discussion of the concept of humorous marketing as a group of marketing activities and more specifically in the advertising activity that includes the use of methods of satire, jokes, clowning, irony, and contradictions.

(Yang et al.) classified humorous advertisements according to specific mechanisms, which are:

(1) Emotion-oriented: Humor is a mechanism for letting go of pent-up emotions. Thus, emotion-oriented humorous ads tend to provide some contentiousness at first and then end in a nice, relaxed way that helps relieve the nervous audience.

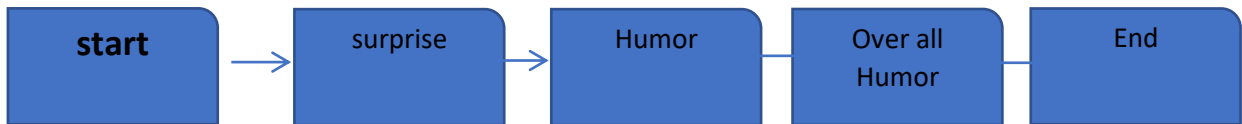
(2) Cognitive orientation: Humor refers to awareness, which is a mechanism derived from the process of dealing with paradoxes or perceiving contradictions.

When addressing the concept of humorous marketing, the concept of humor should be known. If the entire marketing activity seeks to create knowledge paths to familiarize the public with the company’s products and to arouse interest in the various promotional campaigns it offers and by using multiple means, the marketing activity did not overlook what humor represents as an effective incentive that contributes to Arousing interest and making the target audience fun. Gustafsson concluded that the use of humor in advertisements leads to more positive attitudes towards advertising and brand, leading to a change the customer interests towards the advertised commodity.

In this regard, Kelly and Solomon (1975) suggested specific mechanisms that can be used in humorous marketing represented by buzzwords, understatement/exaggeration, irony, absurdity, comics, and games).

Through these mechanisms, the customer can be persuaded by inciting a sense of humor in marketing practices that would influence the customer’s feelings and decisions.

The use of humor in marketing is certainly not new at the level of marketing activity, however, the need for expertise to know how to use it in the right way is crucial. Woltman Elpers et al. (2004) showed the basic steps for the success of the process of using humor in advertisements, and Figure (1) illustrates this



**Figure (1) Steps to the success of using humor in advertisements** (Woltman Elpers et al., 2004)

Woltman Elpers et al. (2004) explained the need for marketers to understand the importance of reaching the atmosphere of the moment of surprise so that the advertisement becomes more effective through the use of humor, bearing in mind that the moment of surprise precedes the amount of humor that is displayed in the advertisement

Humor is one of the most widely used marketing tools in advertising and is the most popular in the world. Zhang and Zinkhan (2006) indicated that 20% of all ads contain a certain degree of humor, and some of those ads achieved success and created brand awareness by evoking many funny situations and using humor in advertising. It was also proven that humor advertising is extremely important for companies looking to expand into new international markets, as it contributes to increasing customer attention and a sense of positivity and enhances their buying intention, but it can reduce the company's credibility when humor is used in a way contrary to public taste, or in an unacceptable way (Zhang & Zinkhan, 2006)

It is important for humor to be clearly understood in order to achieve positive effects by increasing pleasure and enhancing creativity and support to help the individual who deals with the difficult matters of negative life events and who is in dire need of humor that raises some positive aspects and exits from the negative aspects and thus achieves the positive effect of using humor in advertising. In contrast, rejection and social isolation are possible outcomes of failed attempts to employ humor

Woltman Elpers et al. (2004) identified three basic elements that should be present in the humorous advertisement:

- 1 -The atmosphere connected to the highest level of perceived humor so that there is more chance of impressing the likes than at any other time
- 2 -The last moment associated with the end
- 3 -Linear direction to the first tangible sense of humor.

### **Types of humorous marketing**

Hidden marketing has many forms, but many researchers agree that it is represented by the following types:

- 1 -Comic marketing, as the element of surprise is relied upon
- 2 -Emotional humorous marketing, as the element of excitement is relied on
- 3 -Humorous marketing, as the element of order is relied on in preparing the advertising scenario
- 4 -Emotional humorous marketing, as the element of surprise and excitement is also relied upon

5 -The complete comic marketing, as it relies on all the aforementioned elements (excitement, arrangement and surprise).

### **Humorous marketing methods**

Many researchers have addressed the subject of humorous marketing from many angles to clarify the methods that are used. Yet, the most comprehensive model presented by (Mathies et al. 2003) is the most acceptable and comprehensive, which dealt with the following methods: (Mathies et al., 2016):

#### 1- Affiliate Humor

Convergence humor contributes to providing value to customers through its ability to build sober relationships between the company and its customers.

#### 2-Self-Enhancing Humor

The individual is often depressed, angry and psychological tensioned as a result of work inconveniences. Therefore, it is an urgent need of everything that would relieve the state of tension, and the self-enhancement strategy plays an important role in this regard by using the style of humor aimed at getting the individual out of the state of depression and anger and giving a spiritual encouragement. This encouragement contributes to enhancing the individual's self-confidence.

#### 3- Self-Defeating Humor

Marketing people sometimes resort to using the method of sarcasm and unintentional irony, which unintentionally contributes to planting a state of frustration in the individual. It is one of the negative aspects of using humorous marketing in an unthoughtful manner.

#### 4-Aggressive Humor

Humor is used in a way that degrades the value of the customer and in an uncivilized manner using inappropriate and sometimes contrary to public taste. So international companies seek to take into account many factors such as the level of civilization and culture, values and traditions prevailing in society when they use humorous method in marketing. This use helps to avoid reaching to the aforementioned negative results.

### **Second, customer preferences**

The customer is the cornerstone that determines the success of the company or not, and in order to achieve this goal. All companies seek to accurately identify the preferences that determine the compass of his directions and the path of his decisions.

The customer's preferences are represented by his tastes that differ from one individual to another and between one society and another according to the cultural and educational level, etc.

Customer preferences are defined as personal tastes that are measured according to the amount of benefit achieved. They are a positive motive expressed emotionally towards a service or commodity (Voicu, 2007).

Preference is closely related to choice, but they are fundamentally different, considering that preference is a state of mind resulting from a long-term relationship between an individual and a particular brand. However, the choice represents a positive action as a

result of deeply rooted emotional suggestion about that relationship (Teodeorescu, 2004,22).

**The importance of identifying and knowing customer preferences**

The importance of determining customer preferences is represented in the following aspects(Novemsky, Dhar, Schwarz, & Simonson, 2007).

- 1- By knowing the customer's preferences, it is possible to reach a comprehensive understanding of the choices that consumers make. This happens when they decide to choose a particular offer over another, or even when they decide to continue the relationship with the offer in a timely manner.
- 2- It is possible to identify the advantages related to the physical content of the offered commodity (shape, size, taste, color, etc.) from the elements that arouse the customer’s preferences.
- 3- Different aspects of choices are highlighted, as the consumer focuses on several considerations that lead to inconsistent decisions.
- 4- The customer's weaknesses and what are the most interesting aspects of his interests are identified, which would enable him to gain the customer's trust.

**The basic principles of studying customer preferences**

Rational choice theory provides a holistic understanding and interpretation through a model that contributes to a better understanding of the way. In this way, the customer preferences are formed and the means to research and predict the evolution of customer

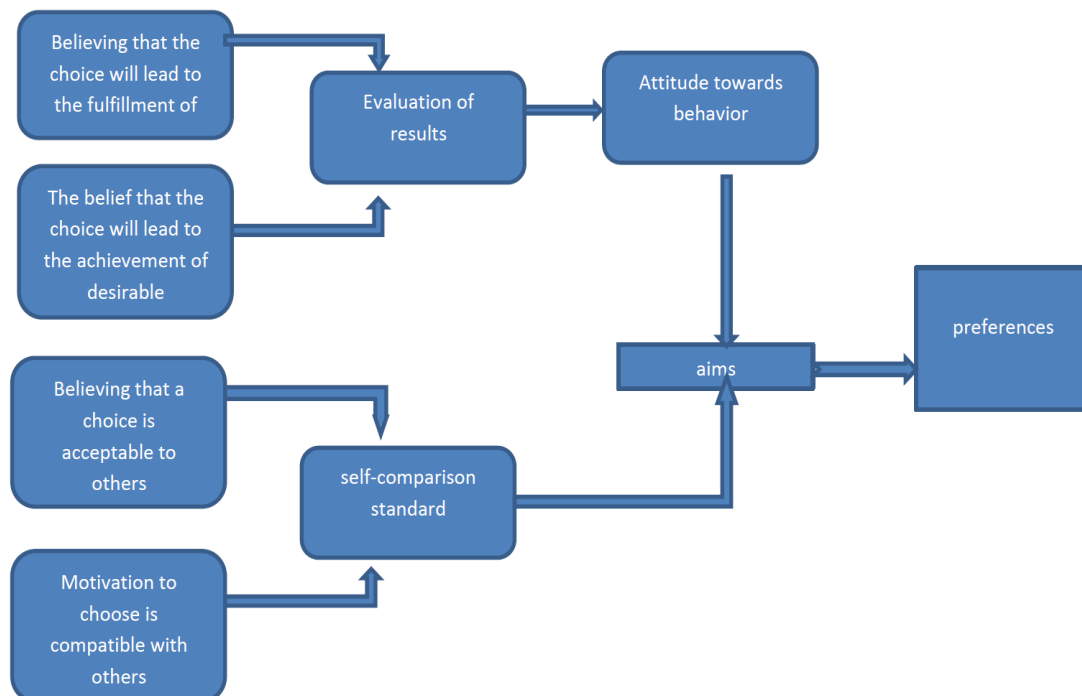


Figure (2) The rational choice model of how to achieve customer preferences("Developing Customer Insight: The Determination of Customer Preference, International ")

[www.icrsurvey.com/docs/Customer%20Preference%20Formation\\_1205.doc,128](http://www.icrsurvey.com/docs/Customer%20Preference%20Formation_1205.doc,128).

As the model assumes that individuals make purchases in some cases, the act of thinking can be minimal when the purchase of a good or service is repetitive.

While the act of thinking can extend over a longer period of time, each item is carefully processed before making a purchase.

The rational choice theory also takes into account the consequences of the actions performed, as the customer may prefer a good or a service as suiting their needs or performance requirements. This happens along with emotional requirements that are judged through comparison. Then the process can be evaluated and the purchasing process explained.

**Customer preference indicators**

Many researchers and those interested in studying customer preferences agree that the indicators that measure this are divided into two types: (Cătălin & Andreea, 2014) Venkatraman et.al, 2012(Kotler & Armstrong, 2008),

The first type / indicators related to the product

The indicators of product quality, price, after-sales services and brand reputation. As the customer seeks to obtain the product of high quality, which represents an important pillar of the customer's preferences.

The price of the product represents a decisive criterion in many aspects, especially in societies where most members of the community are below the poverty line. While some customers focus on after-sales services and consider it crucial in their purchasing preferences, the brand and how well it is rooted in the mind of the customer is crucial in many cases.

**The second type/customer-related indicators**

Attitudes and income levels are:

1- Objectives/ Sometimes the customer's preferences are related to the primary goal of the purchase process. This varies from one individual to another depending on the cultural, social and scientific level, as what is essential in the daily life of some individuals is secondary or unjustified.

2-Attitudes / The individual attitudes and attitudes and the personal convictions of the customer lead the customer's preferences towards a specific destination.

3-Income level/ The individual's income level represents a determining criterion in directing the preferences of the customer, who may give up many of the previous criteria in the event that his income level does not help him in choosing the best of the offered goods and services.

**The third topic / field framework**

**First: Describe the researched field and the research sample**

Table (2) shows a description of the field of study that was approved as commercial centers witnessing a wide turnout by customers and for which questionnaire forms were distributed. Also, great cooperation is shown by those commercial centers with the researcher

Table (2) Description of the field investigation

No.	Your shopping mall name	Location	The number of forms distributed
1	International Mall	Mohandessin District	100

2	Mall 1-10	Andalusia neighborhood	100
3	Golden Mall	Flowers neighborhood	100

Three hundred questionnaire forms were distributed to a random sample of visitors to these centers during the time period from 1/9/2021 to 1/10/202. They were given the freedom to choose the appropriate answer, and (260) forms were retrieved from them and (10) were excluded. Forms for their lack of suitability for analysis, as (250) forms for statistical analysis were adopted. The questionnaire was previously presented to a group of professors of the Faculty of Administration and Economics to arbitrate the form and indicate its credibility (79%). This indicates the consistency and coherence of the questionnaire statements.

Table (3) shows the description of the respondents according to some demographic variables, as follows which is the SPSS program used in this work shows:

Sex			Age			Educational level		
Category	Frequency	percentage	type	Frequency	Percentage	type	Frequency	percentage
Male	150	%60	30-20	80	%32	medium	60	%24
Female	100	%40	40-31	100	%40	middle school	50	%20
			50-41	70	%28	Bachelor of	110	%44
						Master's Degree	30	%12
Total	250	%100		250	%100		250	100%

Third: Testing the research hypotheses

This section deals with testing the research hypotheses according to the following path:

1- Testing the first hypothesis, which states (there is no significant correlation between humorous marketing and customer preferences in the field studied), as Table (4) presents

The results of the analysis of the correlation between the research variables  
**Table (4) The correlation between humorous marketing indicators and customer preferences**

<b>Independent variable</b>	humorous marketing
<b>Dependent variable</b>	<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>
<b>Customer preferences</b>	<b>**0.720</b>

P ≤ 0.05

N = 250

Table (4) The correlation between humorous marketing indicators and customer preferences

Independent variable Dependent variable		Customer preferences				
		0β	1β	R <sup>2</sup>	F	
					counted	tabular
humorous marketing	convergence humor	1.229 (2.610)*	0.152 (4.542)*	0.251	20.633	3.936
	Self-promoting humor	0.208 (2.020)*	0.255 (8.510)*	0.402	72.428	3.936
	Self-deprecating humor	2.403 (4.410)*	0.170 (3.726)*	0.070	12.979	3.936
	aggressive humor	2.256 (4.783)*	0.181 (2.294)*	0.047	5.262	3.936

(\*) indicates the value of T P ≤ 0.05 df = (7, 242) N = 250

The data of Table (5) indicate that there is a significant effect of the humorous marketing methods (affinity humor, self-enhancing humor, self-depressing humor, aggressive humor) on customer preferences. The calculated (F) value reached (20.633) for affinity humor and (72.428) for the humor of self-promotion (12.979) for the frustrating humor of the self and (5.262) for the aggressive humor, which is greater than its tabular value of (3.936) at two degrees of freedom (7.242) and a mean level (0.05). The value of the coefficient of determination of the model in general was (0.251, 0.402), (0.070, 0.047), and this reinforces the value of the regression coefficient (B1), which amounted to (0.152, 0.255, 0.170, 0.181) for all indicators. This is supported by the calculated (T) value (4.542, 8.510, 3.726, 2.294), which is greater than its tabular value of (1.672) at the level of significance (0.05), and based on the results achieved, the second hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted, which refers to the influence of humorous marketing methods on customer preferences in the field studied.

**Testing the third hypothesis, which states (the effect of humorous marketing indicators on customer preferences does not vary)**

The statistical analysis is to test this hypothesis required the use of a one-way analysis of variance. It is based on the analysis of the mean variance of the repetitions obtained by the humorous marketing methods to determine the extent of their impact in directing customer preferences, the results of which are shown in Table.(6)

The results of the table show that there are differences in the extent of the impact of humorous marketing methods in terms of their contribution to customer preferences, in terms of the calculated value of 2 x, amounting to (34.90). It is significant at the level (0.00000), which is much lower than the level of significance for research, which is (0.05)

Table (6) analysis of variance for indicators of humorous marketing

source	Total scores	average score	freedom degrees	x 2 calculated value	Mean level
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	S.S	M.S	D.F		
The arithmetic mean variance between the search indicators	<b>32.94</b>	<b>0.84</b>	<b>7.242</b>	<b>34.90</b>	<b>0.000</b>
Arithmetic mean variance within each indicator	<b>62.19</b>	<b>0.34</b>	<b>200</b>		
overall contrast	<b>95.13</b>	<b>1.18</b>	<b>239</b>		

In order to identify the effectiveness of each of the humorous marketing methods in diagnosing its role in the customer’s preferences, the Guttman test was used. This test is characterized by its ability to arrange the humorous marketing methods in terms of their ability to influence the customer’s preferences by comparing the (Lambda) coefficients calculated for the marketing methods. The comic and the results are shown in Table.(7) The table shows that the convergence humor style ranked first in terms of its ability to influence the customer's preferences, in terms of the value of the (Lambda) coefficient (0.274) which is the lowest compared to the rest of the methods. It is followed by effectiveness by the humor style. Aggressive humor had the highest value of the Lambda coefficient, which reached.(0.827)

Table (7) Guttman test results.

N o	Humorous Marketing Indicators	parameter value (Lambda)	calculated f value	Significance level	Freed om degrees	Significance order
1	convergence humor	0.274	11.92	0.000	5	1
2	Self-promoting humor	0.355			244	4
3	Self-deprecating humor	0.544				3
4	aggressive humor	0.827				1

Source / prepared by the researcher based on the outputs of the statistical program Based on the achieved results, the third research hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted, which is (the effect of humorous marketing methods on customer preferences varies).

**The fourth topic / conclusions and suggestions**

**First: the conclusions**

This the conclusions in the research are derived through the theoretical and applied frameworks, according to the following:

- 1-Humorous marketing represents an effective method in promoting the organization's products if it is used well in line with the society's culture and orientations.
- 2-The customer's convictions are no longer fixed at the present time towards a specific product or brand in light of the great diversity of goods and services that invade the markets, which is reflected in the customer's preferences greatly.
- 3-The results of the correlation analysis showed the existence of a positive significant correlation between humorous marketing and customer preferences. This indicates that humorous marketing is an effective tool in directing the compass of customer interests and preferences towards a specific destination.
- 4-The results of the regression analysis showed that there is a significant effect of humorous marketing methods on customer preferences. This entails that humorous marketing methods enhance customer preferences in choosing a specific commodity.
- 5- The results of the analysis of variance showed that the most influential style in customer preferences is the convergence humor style. It is followed by the self-enhancing humor style, and then self-frustrating humor. The final is the aggressive humor style, which reflects the customer's interests in the type of popular comedy in the promotional activity that would contribute to direct the customer's preferences towards a specific destination.

### **Secondly: suggestions**

In light of the previous conclusions, the researcher adopted the following suggestions:

- 1- The need for organizations to know the level of cultural and social awareness of the target market segments will contribute to choosing the style of humor that has the most impact on customer preferences.
- 2- Humorous marketing methods consolidate the personal aspects of the contemporary customer by adopting the language of rapprochement aimed at enhancing the customer's culture in choosing the best commodity.
- 3- It is better to avoid methods that contribute to undermining the individual's self-confidence through aggressive methods, or self-frustrating methods, which are among the methods of humorous marketing.
- 4-It is better not to repeat humorous marketing methods, as many studies, (Mathies et al., 2016), have shown that what is considered acceptable and a cause for laughter and acceptance in a certain period of time is considered reprehensible and boring in later time periods.

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