

# Master Thesis Business Administration - Marketing

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# Overcoming negative effects of policy change by humor: in the context of genderneutrality in the fashion industry

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## Summary

This study investigates the influence of humor in organizational messages that announce a policy change in the context of norms and values to gender neutrality. Humor might be effective to reduce perceived tension by consumers in order to overcome firestorms on social media, negative attitudes towards the organization and purchase resistance. There is conducted an experimental survey in which participants were shown the original message of a case and a humorous manipulation of that same case. In order to analyze the results, ANOVA's and Partial Least Squares analyses are conducted. It is found that gender plays an important role in the relationships between the variables, but there seems no direct or indirect effect of humor on purchase intentions.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 The struggle of organizations in nonlegitimated social dimensions

Organizations are getting more conscious about their institutional role as an organization (Handelman & Arnold, 1999, p. 34). Organizations mimic the norms and values of society in a way that members of society feel identified by that organization (Handelman & Arnold, 1999, p. 34). So, if the norms and values of society change, organizations have to change their policies as well to make members of society feel identified with the organization. This is not as straight forward as it may sound, because people have their own norms, values and assumptions that give meaning to their daily lives and how they perceive the world around them (Dolbec & Fischer, 2015, p. 1449). These norms and values are shaped by deeply rooted general norms and values by society and affect people's behavior (Dolbec & Fischer, 2015, p. 1449). Over time, there are some changes in society which are different than we are 'used' to, for example: more people choose to divorce and less to get married (Eurostat, 2017), there is an increase in people who feel discriminated (Special Eurobarometer, p. 6), it is possible to change your body to the opposite gender (Gates, 2011, p. 6), refugees are travelling to Western countries (Trouw, 2015), there is an increase in countries who legally approve gay marriage (Waalwijk, 2003, p. 104), and so on.

At the same time, there may not be general legitimation by society as a whole about these changes (Dolbec & Fischer, 2015, p. 1449) based on, for example, religion, ethical or cultural principles (Scott, 1987, p. 499). So, if general social dimensions of society are changing and society as a whole does not legitimate those changes, it is hard for organizations to find a way to reflect those norms and values from society (Scott, 1987, p. 500). For example, generally, gay kissing in public is more tolerated than it was before, but not all individuals in society accept it as normal. The consideration for organizations here is to include gay kissing in their advertising or not, because either way, the organization will exclude potential customers. So, when organizations change their policies they will always reflect on a part of society (Handelman & Arnold, 1999, p. 34).

Consequently, when organizations change their policy, they will communicate this via a message to the general public. These messages might induce tensions to consumers. This is because of a discrepancy between the norms and values of the organization/message and those of the consumers (Meyer, 2005, p. 18). Some consumers therefore try to resist the change (Meyer, 2005, p. 18). For example, HEMA lately announced to get rid of 'boys' and 'girls' labels on their clothes to be more gender neutral. Consumers who cannot identify themselves



with gender neutrality felt tension because they had to adapt their shopping behavior to the new policy. Consequently, these consumers were scared that they could not find the 'right' clothes for their children anymore.

Consumers who feel tensions based on the changing policies of organizations, might raise their voice to critique on the organization openly, for example through social media. Social media is a popular platform where consumers can create and publish content, which can be shared and seen by a lot of people, and is therefore a powerful source to consumers (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). When a lot of consumers are involved in the abrupt unload of large quantities of responses of messages that contain negative counterargumentation and complaint behavior against a company, it is called a firestorm (Pfeffer, Zorbach & Carley, 2014, p. 118). So, the content might go viral very quickly, and as a consequence damage the organization in no-time (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Again the example of HEMA, where consumers started discussions on Twitter (one of the social media platforms) about the changing policy of HEMA. In this case, some consumers experienced tension because of the changed policy and in no-time a lot of people knew about the changing policy due to the discussions on social media. Some consumers evoked to boycott to shop at HEMA, because they did not feel identified by HEMA (anymore). Even though the changing policy is not strictly related to the own personal interests of consumers (Dalli, Romani & Gistri, 2006, p. 88), they might boycott the organization because the policy is perceived as wrong by the general society. As a consequence, it could be harmful for the organization's image if a lot of consumers criticize the changing behavior of the organization.

Based on the problem mentioned, humor could have an influence on the dependent variables in the model (figure 1). As stated before, consumers could feel tension when they perceive that their norms and values are threatened by the organization. Based on literature review, humor could be a good way to relief tensions people perceive (Meyer, 2000, p. 312). This form of humor is also called affective humor and is described as a feeling of release as a consequence of tension or arousal (Spotts, Weinberger & Parsons, 1997, p. 18). When consumers perceive less tension because of the humorous message it will attract attention to the message and it increases persuasion of the message (Meyer, 2000, p. 312). Also, when consumers perceive less tension because of the humorous message it will increase the linking and credibility of the sender, in this case, the organization (Sternthal & Craig, 1973, p. 17; Nabi, Moyer-Gusé & Byrne, 2007, p. 49). The attitude towards the humorous message might also create an increased acceptance of the policy, and therefore the imposed norms and values (Nabi, Moyer-Gusé & Byrne, 2007, p. 32). When consumers accept the policy, they will be less able

to start firestorms on social media. Because of the absence or reduced firestorms, the attitude towards the organization is more positive, than when nonhumorous messages are used (Nezlek & Derks, 2001, p. 396). This in turn might overcome consumers' sales resistance to the organization (Scott, Klein & Bryant, 1990, p. 498).

There are several press releases from organizations analyzed that announce a policy change, and as a consequence provoked discussions and negative responses on social media about those messages (appendix I). Only one of the six messages that are analyzed started with humor (NS, the third message in appendix I). Based on this, it is worth to study if messages that contain humor will be responded on differently by consumers, than messages that lack humor in their content. Therefore, in this study the effectiveness of humor in messages addressing social norms and values is tested (figure 1).

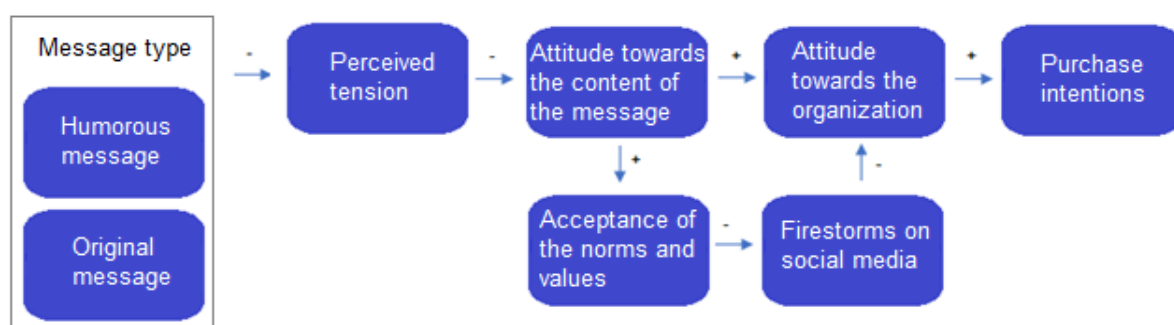


Figure 1: conceptual model

In this paper, there will be investigated how the type of message relates to the dependent variables in figure 1. The research design will be as follows: consumers read a message of an organization that changes their policy based on norms and values, which is made public by the organization via a message. There are two message types, namely one group of consumers will see the original message, and another group will see a manipulated message that contains humor. After both groups have read the message, they shall fill in a survey with questions about their attitude towards the content of the message, in how far they perceive tension, in how far they will accept the norms and values, their intentions to respond (negatively) on the message on social media, their attitude towards the organization, and their intentions to purchase from the organization. In the ideal situation there is a significant difference between the message type on the dependent variables, in which there is a positive relationship between people who have read the humorous message and the influence on the dependent variables.

## 1.2 Problem definition

### 1.2.1 Problem statement

Organizations change their policies that affect socially accepted norms and values and announce these changes via messages to the general public. As stated in the introduction, some people do not like changes and as a consequence resist to it. These consumers might experience tension when they perceive that their deeply rooted norms and values are different than the dominant norms and values of society and they feel that their own norms and values are threatened. As a consequence, consumers criticize the organization on social media, which could have a damaging effect to the organizational image. Therefore, this paper will answer the following research question:

*How can humor be effective in messages that contain changed norms and values to reduce tension consumers perceive in order to overcome (1) firestorms on social media, (2) negative attitudes towards the organization, and (3) purchase resistance?*

To be able to answer this question, humor will be used as a characteristic of the message. Based on literature review, humor could be a good way to relief tensions when people feel that their norms and values are threatened. Therefore, in this study the effectiveness of humor in messages addressing socially accepted norms and values will be investigated.

### 1.2.2 Subquestions

Before answering the research question, there needs to be insight into several important concepts and definitions, by answering the following subquestions:

*1. What types of humor could be used to create a humorous message?*

This subquestion will conceptualize humor, because humor could have ambiguous meanings, it is important that the message is perceived humorous by a broad group of people. In this part, different types of humor will be addressed.

*2. How and why do consumers experience tension when they are exposed to change?*

Consumers are dealing with changes by experiencing tension. In this part, types of tensions consumers could experience are introduced.

*3. How can humor affect consumers' attitudes towards the message?*

This question will address in what way humor could affect the persuasion and the strength of the messages, so that consumers as a consequence could accept the changed norms and values easier and create a positive attitude towards the organization.

*4. How can humor create increased acceptance of the changed norms and values?*

Consumers' acceptance of the norms and values is an important antecedent for preventing firestorms on social media. Therefore, the relationship between humor and the acceptance of the changed norms and values by consumers will be addressed.

*5. How can humor prevent firestorms on social media by consumers?*

Because one of the purposes of this study is to prevent negative responses of consumers on social media about the message and therefore the organization, there needs to be insight to what extent humor could influence the prevention of negative responses on social media and might even support positive ones.

*6. How can humor influence consumers' attitudes towards the organization?*

In order to prevent negative attitudes towards the organization, it is important to chart to what extent humor could affect the credibility and the liking of the organization.

*7. How can humor influence consumers' purchase intentions?*

To prevent consumers' resistance to buy from the organization based on the tension they perceive from the changed policy, it is important to give insight in the relationship between humor and purchase intentions.

## 1.3 Research contribution

### 1.3.1 Theoretical contribution

There is much written about the general concept of humor in organizations, in addition there is little written about humor related to organizational messages that address a changed policy based on norms and values. In advertisements, humor could have an effect on the persuasiveness of the message and even has a positive effect on the liking of the organization (Sternthal and Craig, 1973). Another research about advertisements is written by Spotts, Weinberger and Parsons (1997), in which they investigated the effect of humor on advertisement effectiveness and they take into account the color of the product and the type of humor. Their findings are that humor in advertisements have a greater chance of success if the color of the product is

white or yellow, but they could not find support whether or when different humor types were more effective.

Opposed to the researches mentioned above, this study will investigate messages based on organizational policies, instead of advertisement, and will take into account socially accepted norms and values. This article could contribute to the theory of humor related to organizational messages to give a better overview of the influence of humor on related organizational outcomes, as mentioned in the introduction.

In contrast Nabi, Moyer-Gusé and Byrne (2007) did not investigate organizational messages, but they did take into account social issues in their research. In their article they investigated the persuasive effect of political messages with a social issue that contained humor and found that humorous messages were not more persuasive, than messages that did not contain humor. In contrast, they found that humorous messages could have a discounted effect on the content of the message.

Opposed to our research, the research of Nabi, Moyer-Gusé and Byrne (2007) has a no organizational background, but similarly our research contains social issues in the form of socially accepted norms and values in messages. From that point, our research could contribute to the theory of organizational messages that contain social issues and how humor can play a role in consumers' responses to these messages.

### 1.3.2 Managerial contribution

The practical contribution of this paper comes from helping managers that are dealing with changes in organizational policies that affect norms and values. Due to firestorms of consumers on social media about changing policies of organizations, it is important that the organizational message is described in a way that it will least harm the organizational image and related organizational outcomes. Hence, this paper will offer managerial considerations and suggestions regarding the consequences of messages containing humor and their effect on organizations and the announcement of the policy.

### 1.4 Research outline

This research will be divided in six chapters. Chapter one already introduced the topic of the research. In chapter two, the subquestions will be answered based on a literature study. Chapter three consists of a substantiation of the research method and analysis procedure. Based on our

substantiation in chapter three we will present the results of the experiment in chapter four. The fifth chapter will present the conclusion and discussion part, that also consists of implications of the research and recommendations for further research. In the last chapter, implication and recommendations for managers will be provided.

## Chapter 2: Theoretical background

This chapter will contribute to this thesis by clarifying the relations between important constructs that are engaged in the problem. Each paragraph contains the answering of a subquestion and the hypotheses are provided.

### 2.1 Humor in messages

To measure the influence of humor in contrast to the absence of humor, it is important to understand the definition of humor. Because the definition of humor is widespread, these are some characteristics of humor from which a lot of theorists agree: (1) the consequence of humor is pleasure (Madden & Weinberger, 1984, p. 23), (2) humor is the tendency to laugh (Martin, 2004, p. 3), (3) the objective of humor is to amuse others (Martin, 2004, p. 3). From these characteristics humor is defined in this paper as *a situation that causes laugh*.

In order to create a humorous message, several strategies could be used to make people laugh. (1) Incongruities, are ideas that do not match with each other. For example, reversed gender stereotypes could create laughter, when people see a picture of a man doing the household and a women who is working fulltime (Eisend, Plagemann and Sollwedel, 2014). (2) Ironical juxtapositioning is the placement of contrasts. For example, when a commercial says “boat”, but you see a huge oceanliner (Speck, 1991, p. 12). Because the text and the visual representation are not in line, it could be perceived as funny. (3) Displacement, this is the judgement to people who actually have nothing to do with the judgement or have no influence on a specific situation (Speck, 1991, p. 12). For example, blaming children that they do not cook for themselves (Speck, 1991, p. 12), which is an unusual assumption and therefore might create laughter. (4) Sentimental humor could be used by creating sympathy. For example a little girl who wants to show her report to her grandmother through the telephone, which is ofcourse not possible (unless you are facetimeing) and as a consequence might create sympathy for the enthusiastic little girl (Speck, 1991, p. 12). (5) Puns are the creative use of words, like words that have several meanings. For example, a commercial of Fanta when someone is sailing on a sea of Fanta with the text “Is it real life, or is it Fanta see”, where ‘Fanta see’ is based on the word fantasy. The creative use of these words might be perceived as humorous. (6) Depreciation of oneself, could be defined as making yourself (as the joker) ridiculous in front of other people (Martin, 2004, p. 3). For example, by telling people you accidentely went to work with your slippers on. The audience could imagine how that would look like and as a consequence it might

create laughter.

The (combined) use of these strategies could create laughter and therefore have a positive influence on the message receiver. Which in turn might reduce tension that some people perceive from reading the message. To test whether the humorous message is perceived as humorous compared to the original message, we will conduct a manipulation check to confirm this. Now there are provided several humor strategies that could be used in messages, we will give insight in the relation of the dependent variables to the concept of humor in the next paragraphs.

## 2.2 Consumers' perceived tension

As stated in the introduction, some people do not like change and as a consequence they experience a form of tension. Because people do not like the feeling of tension, they will try to resist changes in their environment. The definition of tension is very context specific but could be defined as: an ambivalent attitude (Priester & Pett, 2001, p. 19), the worry and anger someone perceives based on a situation (Holte et al., 2003, p. 131), dissonance people experience after sensing incompatible and undesirable thoughts and actions (Meyer, 2000, p. 312), a state of change from which a person experiences a negative feeling, in which sensation could be seen as a positive feeling of change (James, 1884, p. 192). Based on these characteristics of tension, in this study tension is described as *an ambivalent and undesirable attitude towards a change that causes a feeling of worry and anger to a person*. Based on this, there are several theories that explain why people experience tension and how they deal with it, which will be explained with an example from the case of HEMA.

People feel a *loss of control* over their lives, when new norms and values are imposed by others, rather than by themselves (Oreg, 2003, p. 680). This can cause consumers to feel that their own norms and values are threatened (Meyer, 2005, p. 18), and they therefore worry about losing their own norms and values. For example, in the case of HEMA when consumers feel they lose control over their shopping behavior if they experience that HEMA imposes them indirectly to buy gender neutral clothes for their children.

Another antecedent of consumers' perceived tension is that *consumers are dogmatic*, in a way that they are closed-minded and inert to change (Pardo del Val & Martínez Fuentes, 2003, p. 5), and they "therefore might be less willing and able to adjust to new situations" (Oreg, 2003, p. 681). In the example of HEMA, it could be the case that some consumers do not have any experience with gender neutrality or do not know people in their close environment who



are dealing with gender neutrality. These consumers have ambivalent norms and values in contrast to HEMA and as a consequence could feel that the policy of HEMA is unnecessary and they therefore do not want to adjust to the change.

A *lack of psychological resilience* is another antecedent of perceived tension. People with ambivalent norms and values than imposed, could feel self-betrayal because they have to admit that their past behavior was deficient. Therefore, these consumers prefer sticking to their own beliefs (Oreg, 2003, p. 681), so that they will not be confronted with their deficiencies. For example, when a consumer always bought girls' clothes for her baby girl, this consumer was not thinking about how people who are dealing with gender neutrality bought their clothes. By making children clothes gender neutral, HEMA indirectly points out that the shopping behavior of the consumer was 'wrong'. Therefore, the consumer does not want to admit that he or she did something 'wrong' and wants to prove that by continuing his or her shopping behavior, even though the change is consonant with the own interest of the consumer (Oreg, 2003, p. 680).

Resistance to change can also be explained by *intolerance of adjustments or reluctance to give up old habits*. This contains that consumers have to adjust or completely change their behavior, which takes time and might create anger or stress in contrast to continuing their existing behavioral routines (Oreg, 2003, p. 681). This also relates to the theory of Schwartz (2012) where consumers could be very conservative or in contrast very open to change, this should be seen on a continuous scale. The extent of openness to change depends on how consumers deal with the tension that is accompanied with the change. In the example of HEMA, consumers have to adjust their shopping behavior, because after the new policy consumers cannot automatically walk to the girls or boys department in the shop. Instead, they have to think about which clothes contribute to the identity of their child. So consumers might choose not to shop at HEMA anymore to overcome difficulty or they have to adapt their behavior, which might create anger and stress in the short-run. This resistance does not incorporate specific products or services of the organization, but is related to the corporate brand level (Dalli, Romani & Gistri, 2006, p. 92).

In summary, consumers might perceive tensions when they feel that they have to adjust their behavior or when they sense that they have to give up their norms and values (as in the example of HEMA). People want to avoid the feeling of anger, worry and/or stress that is accompanied with the tension and therefore they will elude the change. In order to deal with the perceived tension, relief theory states that humor and laugh could help to overcome or reduce these tensions (Meyer, 2000, p. 312). This theory is grounded by Plato and Aristotle

from which tension is perceived as a negative emotion, and humor as a positive emotion that together comprise the relief theory (Perks, 2012, p. 124). So, humor can be effective to deal with tensions (Nezlek & Derks, 2001, p. 395).

Therefore, we expect a negative relationship between humor and tension, in which more humor will create less tension.

*Hypothesis I: humor has a negative effect on perceived tension.*

### 2.3 Humor in messages

In this paragraph we will elaborate on the effect of humor in messages.

Starting a message with a joke seems a strategic choice, because (1) it creates attention to the message and people therefore will continue reading (Nabi, Moyer-Gusé & Byrne, 2007, p. 32; Spotts, Weinberger & Parsons, 1997, p. 29; Sternthal & Craig, 1973, p. 13; Madden & Weinberger, 1984, p. 23). (2) It can minimize the consumer's bias of the subject of the message, which in turn can enhance the strength of the message (Nabi, Moyer-Gusé & Byrne, 2007, p. 49). (3) It defuses a potentially tense situation (Meyer, 2000, p. 312). The effect of starting the message with a joke can be supported by the following example: *'People feeling threatened by budget cuts in their organization, for instance, laugh with relief at a joke told at the start of a luncheon meeting on the budget to the effect that, "Well, it turns out we still can afford to have lunch-but I don't think the cook is accepting complaints"'* (Meyer, 2000, p. 312). The purpose of this joke is to reduce the tension people might experience when they know that they will talk about budgetcuts. When consumers experience humor and laugh, it will reduce tension about the topic of the message (Meyer, 2005, p. 312), which results in "a reduction in counterargumentation and an increase in persuasion" of the message (Sternthal & Craig, 1973, p. 17). The boundary condition is that the persuasive effect of the humorous appeal is at best no greater than that of the serious appeals (Madden & Weinberger, 1984, p. 23), otherwise the purpose of the message will fade.

In summary, humor seems an effective way to create attention, to increase the strength and persuasiveness of the message, and to reduce tension. When we refer to our conceptual model, then low perceived tension should create a higher (more positive) attitude towards the content of the message.

*Hypothesis II: tension has a negative effect on the consumer's attitude towards the content of the message.*

## 2.4 Acceptance of norms and values

The objective of this paragraph is to relate the concept of humorous messages to the acceptance of the imposed norms and values.

A study on advertisement effectiveness found that “the humorous message is more likely to be discounted”, than a message that does not contain humor (Nabi, Moyer-Gusé & Byrne, 2007, p. 49). This means that the content of a message that contains humor will be rather accepted by consumers. From that same study, “the positive affect and laughter associated with humor evocation may compromise a person’s ability to process” the message more carefully (Nabi, Moyer-Gusé & Byrne, 2007, p. 32) and might therefore increase the memorability of the message (Scott, Klein & Bryant, 1990, p. 498). This memorability, as a consequence, might cause the consumer to start thinking about the message and may affect the comprehension of the situation and the subject (Madden & Weinberger, 1984, p. 23). In short, it seems that humor might have a positive effect on consumer’s acceptance of the imposed norms and values.

Therefore, we expect that the attitude towards the content of the message has a positive effect on the acceptance of the norms and values. The higher (more positive) the attitude towards the message, the greater the chance that consumers will accept the imposed norms and values.

*Hypothesis III: the attitude towards the content of the message has a positive effect on the consumer’s acceptance of the norms and values.*

The acceptance of the norms and values might not only be due to humor. A person’s ability to accept the imposed norms and values, might also be dependent on environmental aspects (Terry & Hogg 1996, p. 783). For example, when someone has a friend who perceives himself as gender neutral, it would be more likely for that person to accept gender neutrality because he/she sees how difficult it is for his/her friend to deal with it in society. So, there will be a manipulation check conducted for environmental influences in the study.

## 2.5 Firestorms on social media

This paragraph will give insight in how humor and the acceptance of norms and values relate to consumers’ firestorms on the message on social media.

Companies, but also for example influencers, are complaining about the negative

responses of consumers. It seems that people provide their opinion and complaints without any constraint on social media. Take the following example: “*McDonald’s asked its customers to share their positive stories about the company on Twitter, making use of the hashtag #McDStories. After only 2 h, McDonald’s had to withdraw the promotion because the company had suddenly been exposed to a massive amount of negative word-of-mouth (WOM). People had used the #McDStories hashtag to share negative customer experiences and to insult McDonald’s*” (Pfeffer, Zorbach & Carley, 2014, p. 117). These firestorms could be defined as an abrupt unload of large quantities of responses of messages that contain negative counterargumentation and complaint behavior against, in this case, a company (Pfeffer, Zorbach & Carley, 2014, p. 118).

As stated in the previous paragraph, humor might reduce the gravity of the message, from which consumers could process the loaded topic more easily. This in turn would create acceptance for the issue addressed in the message and in turn might reduce negative responses of consumers on social media (Nabi, Moyer-Gusé & Byrne, 2007, p. 32). This is because, when consumers experience humor, causing them to laugh, it will reduce tension about the topic of the message (Meyer, 2005, p. 312). In turn, this results in “a reduction of counterargumentation and an increase in persuasion” of the message (Sternthal & Craig, 1973, p. 17; Alden, Hoyer & Lee, 1993, p. 64).

Therefore, we expect that humor reduces firestorms of consumers on social media. Based on our conceptual model, the acceptance of the norms and values might relate to firestorms on social media. When there is a greater acceptance of the norms and values, we expect that firestorms on social media will reduce or be less negative.

*Hypothesis IV: the acceptance of norms and values has a negative effect on firestorms on social media.*

## 2.6 Attitude towards the organization

In this paragraph, the relationship between humor and consumers’ attitude towards the organizations will be described.

The advantage of humor is that it can create and strengthen the relationship between consumers and the organization (Nezlek & Derks, 2001, p. 396). This is because humor creates openness to talk about social norms and values which otherwise might be blocked. This in turn might create group cohesiveness, enhances the organization’s credibility (Meyer, 2005, p. 321)

and organizational liking (Madden & Weinberger, 1984, p. 23). Therefore, humor is an appropriate strategy to reduce mutual uncertainty and create equal relationships between the organization and consumers (Meyer, 2005, p. 321), instead of the organization being seen as an authority. Based on this, humor could enhance the credibility and liking of the organization (Sternthal & Craig, 1973, p. 17; Nabi, Moyer-Gusé & Byrne, 2007, p. 49). Another research found that the effect of humor on consumers' attitude towards the organization enhances the affect towards the brand and the organization (Alden, Hoyer, & Lee, 1993, p. 64). In the case of HEMA, the brand and the organization are the same, because HEMA does only sell their own brand.

Based on the previous findings, humor might have a positive effect on the consumer's attitude towards the organization. Therefore, we expect that a higher (more positive) attitude towards the content of the message leads to a higher (more positive) attitude towards the organization.

*Hypothesis V: the attitude towards the content of the message has a positive effect on the consumer's attitude towards the organization.*

As stated in the introduction and as seen in the conceptual model, firestorms on social media might also have an influence on the attitude towards the organization. Because firestorms on social media could impact the organizational image, it might change consumers' attitudes towards the organization. Therefore, we expect that the lower or less negative the firestorms on social media, the higher (more positive) the attitude towards the organization will be.

*Hypothesis VI: firestorms on social media have a negative effect on the consumer's attitude towards the organization.*

From another perspective, there is found that prior brand evaluations might have an effect in the relation between humor and attitude towards the organization, "*humorous messages are likely to have a greater persuasive impact than nonhumorous messages when the consumer has a favorable prior brand evaluation. Conversely, nonhumorous messages are likely to be more persuasive than humorous messages when the message recipient has an unfavorable prior brand evaluation*" (Chattopadhyay & Basu, 1990, p. 467). Therefore, in this study we will check for prior brand evaluation by asking the participants about their opinion and experiences with the company beforehand.

## 2.7 Purchase intentions

This paragraph will contribute to this study by providing the relationship between humor and consumers' intentions to buy from the organization.

As stated in the introduction, if consumers do not agree with the changing policy of the organization, it is possible that consumers will boycott the organization. This means that consumers will not purchase products or services from that organization (anymore). As far as we know, there is in existing studies no direct relationship between humorous messages and purchase intentions found. But according to advertising literature, purchase intention is an important consequence of consumers' attitude towards the organization (Newell & Goldsmith, 2001, p. 242; Spears & Singh, 2004, p. 56; Brown & Stayman, 1992, p. 42). These studies suggest that purchase intentions are different from attitudes and are better described as "an individual's conscious plan to make an effort to purchase a brand" (Spears & Singh, 2004, p. 56). Thereby, humor might have the advantage to overcome sales resistance by consumers (Scott, Klein & Bryant, 1990, p. 498).

Based on our conceptual model, we expect that consumers' attitudes towards the organization have a positive relationship with purchase intentions. The higher (more positive) the attitude towards the organization, the higher consumers' purchase intentions will be.

*Hypothesis VII: attitude towards the organization has a positive effect on the consumer's purchase intentions.*

## Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter will contribute to this paper by providing insight in the applied method, the data gathering procedure and the data analysis procedure.

### 3.1 Method

The purpose of this research is to test if humorous framed messages have an influence on how the content of the message is accepted, how these messages affect the attitude towards the organization and in what way consumers will openly criticize the organization. To test this, we will conduct an experimental survey, which is a quantitative method. First, the participants respond on questions about their past purchase intentions and their attitude towards the organization, to measure the prior brand evaluation (Chattopadhyay & Basu, 1990, p. 472). Then, one group is offered the original press release and the other group is shown a message that is manipulated with humorous content. We will then be able to compare the two groups. After consumers have read the message they will fill in a survey, which are the same questions for both groups. The survey contains questions to measure how the participants perceived the humor in the message, their perceived tension, their attitude towards the message, the acceptance of the norms and values, their intentions to start firestorms on social media, their attitude towards the organization and their purchase intentions. After the data is analyzed, we can also compare the results to existing literature, which is used in the previous chapter, to compare relevant findings.

### 3.2 Participants

The experimental survey will be spread under Dutch consumers. Because one of the purposes of this study is to prevent negative consumer responses on social media about the organization, it is a logical step to share the survey on social media. So, only consumers that have a social media account will be able to fill in the survey. The survey will be shared on Facebook and LinkedIn, because these platforms are most frequently used (van der Veer, 2017) and provide the opportunity to share content in the form of a survey. In order to compare the two consumer groups in the experiment, the general rule of at least 50 participants per group is used.

### 3.3 Pre-test

Before sharing the official survey with participants, there is a pre-test conducted with the purpose of testing if the humorous message differs from the original message. The original message is slightly changed to H&M instead of HEMA and the changes are marked yellow. Because the press release of HEMA got a lot of commotion, it is a good example for the consequences we want to avoid with introducing the message. In contrast, a lot of people are familiar with the case of HEMA, which makes it less reliable. Based on that, we have determined to change the name of HEMA to H&M, so participants will be less prejudiced. H&M is a popular shop under Dutch consumers and they do also sell children clothes, just like HEMA. Comparing H&M to an unknown brand, it is easier for participants to empathize with the case and we are able to ask the participants for a brand evaluation and their attitude towards the brand/organization. Which would be harder when we would chose an unknown brand. So the original message of HEMA is slightly changed to the context of H&M, which is presented as the neutral message. Based on the neutral message, we have created a second message which is a manipulation of the original message in a humorous way, which is based on the literature in table 1.

Because the research is about Dutch consumers, the messages are manipulated from a Dutch perspective, which might not be able to directly translate to English based on interpretation differences.

Persbericht H&M (17-01-2018)

**H&M** wil graag kinderen in staat stellen te zijn wie ze willen zijn. Van stoere meisjes, lieve jongens, echte prinsessen en astronauten in de dop. In de afgelopen twee jaar hebben wij van onze klanten veel verzoeken gekregen om onze kindercollectie zo te maken dat jongens- en meisjeskleding meer uitwisselbaar is. **Wij willen dat iedereen zich fijn voelt in onze kleding.** Het resultaat is dat we een deel van de labels van onze kinderkleding hebben aangepast. De labels zullen voortaan aangeven dat het om kinderkleding gaat en niet meer of het voor een jongen of een meisje is. Klanten kunnen op die manier zelf bepalen of zij een bepaald kledingstuk bij hun kind vinden passen. De labels zullen in een deel van de aankomende **zomer**collectie te vinden zijn en we gaan dat uitbreiden in toekomstige collecties.

Figure 2: Pre-test original message



To create the humorous message the study of Eisend, Plagemann and Sollwedel (2014) is used. In this study advertising effectiveness is researched by combining humor and gender stereotypes, like women doing the household work and men that are working. Based on the study of Speck (1991), puns are used to make the message funnier. So incongruities and puns are used in the manipulated message, from which the manipulated sentences are shown in table 1. The changes are marked yellow in the message below in figure 3.

Theory	Applied humor	Source
Incongruities	Broadcasting message: "Dear customers, all the dresses in the boys department are discounted today". For some this sounds a bit strange.	Eisend et al., 2014
Puns	... without putting a label on the children.	Speck, 1991, p. 12
	The only booths H&M will continue using are the dressingrooms.	Speck, 1991, p. 12

Table 1: Pre-test humorous message

<p>Persbericht H&amp;M (17-01-2018)</p> <p><b>Omroepbericht: "Beste klanten, alle jurkjes op de jongensafdeling zijn vandaag afgeprijsd".</b></p> <p><b>Voor sommigen klinkt dit toch wat vreemd.</b> H&amp;M wil graag kinderen in staat stellen te zijn wie ze willen zijn. Van stoere meisjes, lieve jongens, echte prinsessen en astronauten in de dop. In de afgelopen twee jaar hebben wij van onze klanten veel verzoeken gekregen om onze kindercollectie zo te maken dat jongens- en meisjeskleding meer uitwisselbaar is. Wij willen dat iedereen zich fijn voelt in onze kleding. Het resultaat is dat we een deel van de labels van onze kinderkleding hebben aangepast. De labels zullen voortaan aangeven dat het om kinderkleding gaat en niet meer of het voor een jongen of een meisje is. Klanten kunnen op die manier zelf bepalen of zij een bepaald kledingstuk bij hun kind vinden passen, <b>zonder een label op de kinderen te plakken.</b> De labels zullen in een deel van de aankomende zomercollectie te vinden zijn en we gaan dat uitbreiden in toekomstige collecties. <b>De enige hokjes die H&amp;M nog hanteert zijn de pashokjes.</b></p>
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Figure 3: Pre-test humorous message

Thirty participants filled in the survey from the pre-test, from which 15 participants were shown the humorous message and the other 15 participants the original message. After the participants read the message, they were asked how humorous the message was to them. This was measured on a 5-point Likert-scale (totally not humorous – totally humorous). The group with the original message had a mean of 2.17 and the group with the humorous message had a mean of 3.14, which is a non-significant ( $p = .194 > .05$ ) difference between the groups.

After that question, the participants had the opportunity to leave a comment, to see what opinion the participants have about the subject (gender neutrality). In order to avoid pushing the participants, above the text space stood 'You can leave a comment here', so the participants were free to voice their opinion about the topic. As a consequence, some consumers left their opinion about gender neutrality in the text space, which was against expectations. This could indicate that these participants would rather start a discussion on social media, than participants who did not leave a comment (about gender neutrality). Based on this, in the official survey there will be a text space too, so this phenomenon could be further investigated.

Based on the pre-test, the humorous message will be changed based on the literature of Eisend et al. (2014) and Speck (1991). These studies were already used, but it was not applied in detail. Now, a funny picture will be used to strengthen the message (Eisend et al., 2014, p. 47). To compare the original and the humorous message equally, there will also be added a picture to the original message.

#### Persbericht H&M (17-01-2018)

H&M wil graag kinderen in staat stellen te zijn wie ze willen zijn. Van stoere meisjes, lieve jongens, echte prinsessen en astronauten in de dop. In de afgelopen twee jaar hebben wij van onze klanten veel verzoeken gekregen om onze kindercollectie zo te maken dat jongens- en meisjeskleding meer uitwisselbaar is. Wij willen dat iedereen zich fijn voelt in onze kleding. Het resultaat is dat we een deel van de labels van onze kinderkleding hebben aangepast. De labels zullen voortaan aangeven dat het om kinderkleding gaat en niet meer of het voor een jongen of een meisje is. Klanten kunnen op die manier zelf bepalen of zij een bepaald kledingstuk bij hun kind vinden passen. De labels zullen in een deel van de aankomende zomercollectie te vinden zijn en we gaan dat uitbreiden in toekomstige collecties.”

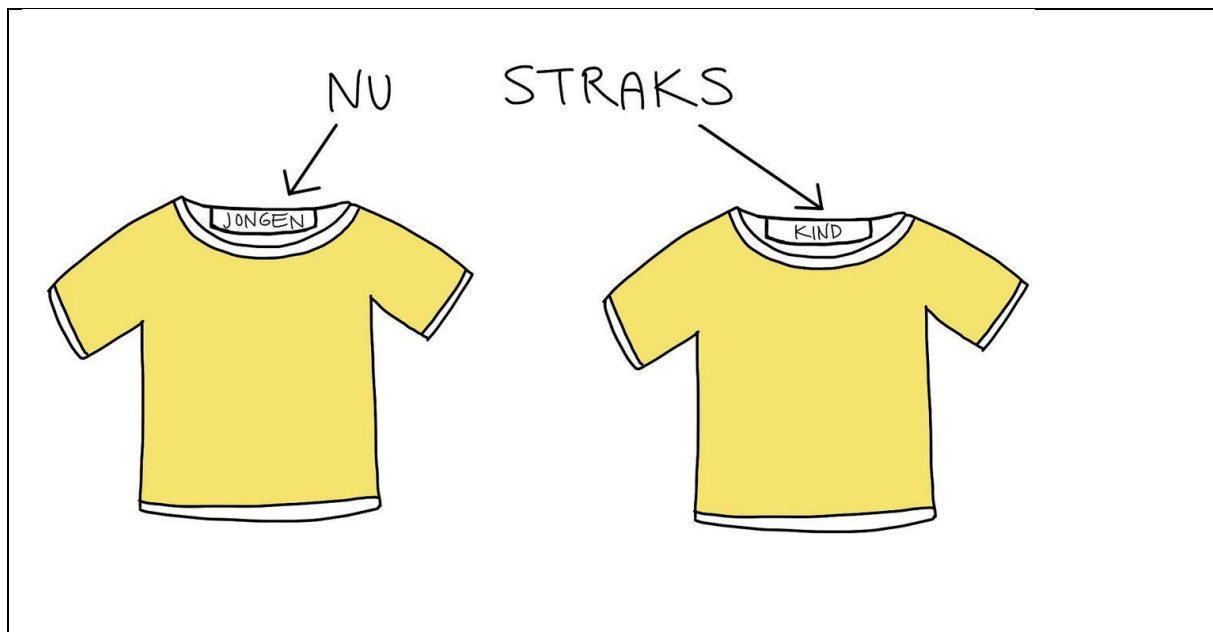


Figure 4: Original message

Other changes are the use of (1) ironic juxtapositioning, in which a picture of a boy in a skirt is shown with a description that we tell people that the purpose is not to put skirts on for all the boys, (2) displacement, this creates humor by judging people that they are not gender neutral already, which is nonsense, because it used to be the standard norm to be a man or a woman, (3) incongruities, this statement contains exaggerated opposite gender stereotypes and was already used in the pre-test, (4) puns, this humorous statement was already applied in the pre-test (Speck, 1991).

Theory	Applied humor	Source
Picture	A picture of a boy in a skirt. See appendix III	Eisend et al., 2014, p. 47
Ironic juxtapositioning	We really do not call you to put on a skirt for all boys.	Speck, 1991, p. 12
Displacement	...if everybody was gender neutral already, it would save a lot of time.	Speck, 1991, p. 12
Gender stereotypes	Broadcasting message: "Dear customers, all the dresses in the boys	Eisend et al., 2014

	department are discounted today". For some this sounds a bit strange.	
Puns	...this way we leave the boxes thinking out of the store, although the fitting rooms will certainly not disappear.	Speck, 1991, p. 12

Table 2: Humorous message

### Humorous message

“Persbericht H&M (17-01-2018)

Omroepbericht: “Beste klanten, alle jurkjes op de jongensafdeling zijn vandaag afgeprijsd”. Voor sommigen klinkt dit toch wat vreemd. H&M wil graag kinderen in staat stellen te zijn wie ze willen zijn en dat iedereen zich fijn voelt in onze kleding. Het resultaat is dat we een deel van de labels van onze kinderkleding hebben aangepast, **hoef jij nooit meer te bedenken welk kledingstuk ‘goed’ of ‘fout’ is.** Dat betreft aan onze kant echter wel wat aanpassingen, **als iedereen nou altijd al genderneutraal was, scheelde dat een hoop tijd!** De labels zullen voortaan aangeven dat het om kinderkleding gaat en niet meer of het voor een jongen of een meisje is, **hierdoor laten we het hokjes denken uit de winkel, al zullen de pashokjes zeker niet verdwijnen.** De labels zullen in een deel van de aankomende zomercollectie te vinden zijn en we gaan dat uitbreiden in toekomstige collecties.

**We roepen je écht niet op alle jongetjes een rokje aan te trekken.”**



Figure 5: Humorous message

### 3.4 Design

The procedure is that the two groups of participants are asked about their past purchases at H&M and their attitude towards H&M, after that, one group of participants will see the neutral message and the second group of participants will be exposed to the manipulated message. After both groups have read the message, they will come to a page with statements to answer (table 4 and appendix IV). These statements can be answered on a 5-point Likertscale. The answering options on the Likertscale are: strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and strongly agree.

In the survey we will conduct four manipulation checks (table 3). As we have stated in the previous chapter we will check for humor, prior brand evaluation and social influences. We will also check if the participants have read the message that is placed in the questionnaire by asking what the message is about in the form of multiple answer possibilities. The participants can choose between eight options from which they can check a maximum of three options. The options are: (1) gender neutrality, (2) exchangeable children's clothing, (3) adjustment of labels, (4) the new summer collection of H&M, (5) improved quality, (6) increased pricing, (7) harmful cosmetics, (8) shoppingbehavior in Rotterdam. Options 1-3 are the best options, option 4 is not the core subjects, but is mentioned in the message and options 4-8 do not have anything to do

with the message. We will check if at least one of the options 1-3 is checked by the participant in order to indicate that they have read the message.

<b>Manipulation check</b>	<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>References</b>
Prior brand evaluation	Attitude towards the organization	I am common with H&M	Spears & Singh, 2004, p. 62
		The concept of H&M is appealing to me	
		I have good experiences with H&M	Newell & Goldsmith, 2001, p. 237
	Purchase intentions	I buy clothes at H&M	MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989, p. 50
Humor	Laughter	The message makes me smile	Spears & Singh, 2004, p. 62
		To me, the message is formally stated	Martin, 2004, p. 3
	Positive feeling	I get a positive feeling from the message	Wu, 1999, p. 67
Understanding of the message		The message is about...	Madden & Weinberger, 1984, p. 23
Social influences	Others	People in my environment deal with gender neutrality	Chattopadhyay & Basu, 1990, p. 472
		Most of my friends think about gender neutrality in the same way as I do	
	Own	I would classify myself as gender neutral	

Table 3: Manipulation check

<b>Dependent variable</b>	<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Reference</b>
Perceived tension	Loss of control	By the changing policy of H&M, I have got the feeling something is imposed to me	Oreg, 2003, p. 681
	Dogmatism	I do not see the utility of the new policy of H&M	
	Psychological resilience	H&M gives me the idea that I was shopping in a 'wrong' way all the time	
	Adjustments/hold habits	I am not going to adjust my shopping behavior to the new policy of H&M	
Attitude towards the message	Strength	To me, the statement of the message is clear	Nabi, Moyer-Gusé & Byrne, 2007, p. 49
	Persuasion	The message of H&M convinced me about their change	Sternthal & Craig, 1973, p. 17
		The message makes me think about the subject	Scott, Klein & Bryant, 1990, p. 498
Acceptance of norms and values	Empathizing	People who classify themselves as gender neutral are overreacting	Nabi, Moyer-Gusé & Byrne, 2007, p. 32
		I think it is important that people classify themselves as a man or a woman	
		Gender neutrality is nonsense	
		I can empathize myself with people who classify themselves as gender neutral	
	Adjustment	I would adjust my behavior to people who are gender neutral	Madden & Weinberger, 1984, p. 23

Firestorms on social media	Past responses	When I do not agree with something on social media, I leave a comment	Nabi, Moyer-Gusé & Byrne, 2007, p. 32
		When I do agree with something on social media, I leave a comment	
		I respond to social media posts of companies	
	Intention to respond	When the message of H&M would be on social media, I would leave a comment	Sternthal & Craig, 1973, p. 17
		If you would leave a comment, how would that comment look like?	
Attitude towards the organization	Liking	I like the brand H&M	Spears & Singh, 2004, p. 62
		I think shopping at H&M is pleasant	
		H&M is one of my favorite shops	
	Credibility	I think H&M does good for society	Newell & Goldsmith, 2001, p. 237
Purchase intentions	Overcome sales resistance	I would buy products from H&M	Brown & Stayman, 1992, p. 42 Newell & Goldsmith, 2001, p. 242 Spears & Singh, 2004, p. 62



		I am not interested to buy products from H&M	Spears & Singh, 2004, p. 62
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Table 4: Questionnaire items

After the participants have answered the statements, they will come to a page where they are asked to fill in their demographics (table 5 and appendix II).

<i>Gender</i>	Man, woman, none
<i>Age in years</i>	18-25, 25-35, 35-45, 45-55, 55+
<i>Marital status</i>	Single, relationship, married, widower, no comment
<i>Education</i>	MBO, HBO, university, different/none
<i>Sexuality</i>	Hetero, gay, bisexual, panseksual, no comment

Table 5: Demographics

Sexuality is not one of the standard demographics what is used to ask in a survey. Based on the topic of the survey, participants who are hetero, might have another perception about gender neutrality than gay sexual participants (Herek, 2000, p. 7). Therefore, there will be controlled for sexuality.

### 3.5 Ethics

In order to get reliable results, it is important that the participants of the experiment have trust in the researcher. Therefore, the survey is shared by an anonymous link, so the participants are not traceable and any personal data cannot be shared with third parties. Before participants take part of the experiment, their anonymity and the confidential processing of the data is emphasized. The purpose of the research will be framed as ‘measuring consumers’ attitudes towards gender neutrality’, to exclude biased results. The participants can stop the experiment any moment by just clicking away the survey, so the answers will not be saved. At the last page of the survey, participants are able to fill in their email adress to give them insights in the results of the research afterwards.

## Chapter 4: Analyses

In the previous chapter, the hypotheses for this study were introduced. In this chapter we will elaborate on this by analyzing the data in order to test the hypotheses in the next chapter. First, we will give insight in the execution of the data gathering process, followed by the general results from the analysis and the reliability and assumptions that are checked.

### 4.1 Execution

The survey is, as intended, spread among Dutch consumers via Facebook and LinkedIn. There were 134 participants who filled in the survey, from which 21 participants had missing answers. These 21 participants opened the survey and clicked it away without filling in any answer, so these participants were deleted from the analysis. In total there were 113 participants with valid answers to analyze. From the 113 participants, 57 of them have read the original message in contrast to 56 participants that have read the humorous message. The intention was to have at least 50 participants per group, so that is achieved.

Based on Cronbach's alpha, the reliability of the items that together form a variable, five items are deleted from the analysis (1) I buy clothes at H&M, (2) children may wear what they want to, (3) I can empathize myself with people who classify themselves as gender neutral, (4) most of my friends think about gender neutrality in the same way as I do, (5) if the message of H&M was on social media, would you respond to it by a comment. Because the function of these items was to support other items, their absence will harm the internal validity least. We will summarize the items from the analysis (table 3 and 4) into the accounted variable to predict this variable. The values for Cronbach's alpha per variable are displayed in table 6.

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Cronbach's alpha</b>
Prior brand evaluation	,710
Perceived tension	,716
Attitude towards the content of the message	,611
Acceptance of norms and values	,711
Social influences	,740

Firestorms on social media	,750
Attitude towards the organization	,888
Purchase intentions	,772

Table 6: Cronbach's alpha

All values of Cronbach's alpha are sufficient in order to conduct the analysis. Only the variable attitude towards the content of the message has a values that lies between the critial values of .60 and .70. This should be taken into account by analysing the results.

We have also checked for the assumption of normality. The normality was evaluated by Q-Q plots, histograms and descriptives for skewness and kurtosis. The skewness is corrected for prior brand evaluation, purchase intentions, attitude towards the message and perceived tension by transforming the data. As a consequence the data is normally distributed.

The assumption of multicollinearity was tested by a correlationmatrix. The attitude towards the organization and purchase intentions have a correlation of .736 ( $p = .000$ ). The collinearity statistics indicate a tolerance value of .515 and VIF value of 1.941, which is reasonable.

The data is also checked for homoscedasticity by using a scatterplot, and there are no odd structures found.

## 4.2 Manipulation check

As stated in the previous chapter, we have conducted a manipulation check to test wether the participants have read the message and understood the message well. Based on the results, none of the participants chose the options that had nothing to do with the message. This means that the participants have read the message and understood at least the subject of the message.

Second, we conducted an analysis of variance (ANOVA) because the groups are categorical and the dependent variables are scaled. By conducting an ANOVA, it is directly visible what the differences are between and within the groups, also the p-values are the same as within a t-test. We found a significant difference ( $F(1, 111) = 15.648, p = .000 < .05$ ) between the groups on how humorous the message was evaluated by the participants, by doing an ANOVA. The group that was provided the original message evaluated the message less funny ( $M = 2.26$ ), than the group that was provided with the humorous message ( $M = 3.11$ ) (appendix 5.1). Furthermore, there were no differences of gender ( $F(1, 111) = .437, p = .510$ ), age ( $F(4,$

108) = .960,  $p = .433$ ) and marital status ( $F(2, 110) = .493$ ,  $p = .612$ ) on how humorous the messages were perceived. In contrast, the different education groups differ in how funny the messages are perceived ( $F(3, 109) = 3.039$ ,  $p = .032$ ). Participants with an MBO education level perceive the message funnier ( $M = 3.07$ ,  $SD = .696$ ), than people with a Bachelor ( $M = 2.72$ ,  $SD = .731$ ), Master ( $M = 2.78$ ,  $SD = .637$ ) or no/different ( $M = 3.29$ ,  $SD = .656$ ) education level.

In order to preclude that other factors than humor influence the experiment, there is also tested for the extent of formality in the messages. There is found a significant difference ( $F(1, 111) = 10.158$ ,  $p = .002 < .05$ ) between the message types on formality. The group that was provided the original message evaluated the message more formal ( $M = 3.32$ ), than the group that was provided the humorous message ( $M = 2.75$ ) (appendix 5.2). Although formality and humor hardly go hand in hand, this finding should be taken into account.

Fourth, the influence of prior brand evaluation on the attitude towards the organization is evaluated. We found that prior brand evaluation is a significant ( $F(1, 111) = 92.429$ ,  $p = .000 < .05$ ) predictor of consumers' attitudes towards the organization. This means that the higher the prior brand evaluation, the greater the chance ( $Beta = .674$ ) that the attitude towards the organization is also high after reading the message (appendix 5.3). This could be problematic for the study, because it makes it harder to predict the direct effect of the humorous message on the attitude towards the organization. This same phenomenon counts for the influence of prior brand evaluation on purchase intentions ( $F(1, 111) = 88.277$ ,  $p = .000 < .05$ ). This means that the higher the prior brand evaluation, the greater the chance ( $Beta = .666$ ) that purchase intentions will (still) be high after reading the message (appendix 5.4).

Fifth, as stated in chapter two, it might be possible that people's environment have an influence on the acceptance of the norms and values. For example, when people are gender neutral themselves or they know people in their environment who are gender neutral. Therefore, we have conducted a regression analysis and found that social influence has an effect on the acceptance of gender neutrality ( $F(1, 111) = 4.567$ ,  $p = .035 < .05$ ). The more people are influenced by their environment, the more they will accept gender neutrality ( $Beta = .199$ ), though the explanatory power is low (Adjusted R Square = .031) (appendix 5.5).

So, we found that prior brand evaluation and social influences have a significant influence. Therefore, we will use prior brand evaluation and social influences as control variables. There is also demographical data collected from the survey, namely gender, age, education, marital status and sexuality. These variables will also be controlled for, except for sexuality. All of the participants answered this sensitive question, but we could not test this

variable because almost all the participants ( $N = 111$ ) were heterosexual, compared to one homosexual and one bisexual participant.

### 4.3 Results

Based on the hypotheses, first, the difference between the two message groups will be compared on the dependent variables by ANOVA's. Thereafter partial least squares analysis will be conducted to analyze the relationships between the dependent variables from the sequential conceptual model.

#### 4.3.1 ANOVA

There seems to be a significant difference ( $F(1, 111) = 4.662, p = .033 < .05$ ) between the original message and the humorous message on perceived tension. Levene's statistic is non-significant ( $F(1, 111) = 2.536, p = .114 > .05$ ), which means the variances are equal. Participants who have read the original message perceived more tension ( $M = 2.82, SD = .554$ ), than the participants that read the humorous message ( $M = 2.53, SD = .823$ ). When we control for the variables mentioned in the end of paragraph 4.2, it shows there is found a non-significant influence of the original message and the humorous message on perceived tension ( $F(1, 112) = 3.744, p = .056 > .05$ ). This is mostly due to the significant effect of gender ( $F(1, 112) = 4.621, p = .034 < .05$ ).

There also seems to be a significant difference ( $F(1, 111) = 4.237, p = .042 < .05$ ) between the groups on the attitude towards the message. Levene's statistic is non-significant ( $F(1, 111) = .171, p = .680 > .05$ ), which means the variances are equal. Although the participants who have read the original message had a less positive attitude towards the content of the message ( $M = 3.25, SD = .637$ ), than the participants who read the humorous message ( $M = 3.48, SD = .550$ ). The means are very close to each other and the standard deviations are relatively high, which is not a very convincing difference between the groups. As a consequence, when we add the control variables, the relationship is non-significant ( $F(1, 112) = 1.055, p = .307$ ). This is due to the significant effect of prior brand evaluation ( $F(1, 112) = 7.654, p = .007$ ), gender ( $F(1, 112) = 4.264, p = .041$ ) and education ( $F(1, 112) = 4.571, p = .035$ ) on the attitude towards the message.

The groups had a non-significant influence on all the other dependent variables:

acceptance of the norms and values, firestorms on social media, attitude towards the organization and purchase intentions.

#### 4.3.2 PLS

In order to test the variables from our conceptual model all together, we will conduct a partial least squares (PLS) regression by using PROCESS model 6 in SPSS. In order to execute PLS, dummy variables are created for the categorical variables (message type, gender, age, education and marital status).

The results from the PLS are visualized in figure 7. The red numbers represent the negative relationships between the variables and the green number are the positive relationships between the variables. Based on the results from the PLS, we found that humor has a non-significant influence on tension ( $B = -.262$ ,  $se = .135$ ,  $t = -1.935$ ,  $p = .056$ ). The p-value of this effect is very close to the critical value of .05 and is mostly due by controlling for the variable gender. When we exclude gender as a control variable, then humor has a significant influence on tension ( $B = -.308$ ,  $se = .136$ ,  $t = -2.265$ ,  $p = .026$ ). Which means that when humor is added in the message, the less tension is perceived by consumers, when we do not control for gender. The plot in figure 6 shows that the difference between men ( $M = 2.81$ ,  $SD = .764$ ) and women ( $M = 2.90$ ,  $SD = .689$ ) to the extent of perceived humor is very small. So, men and women experience almost the same level of humor in the message. Although, women experience less tension ( $M = 2.52$ ,  $SD = .610$ ), than do men ( $M = 2.92$ ,  $SD = .794$ ). This is something we need to take into account by rejecting the hypothesis.

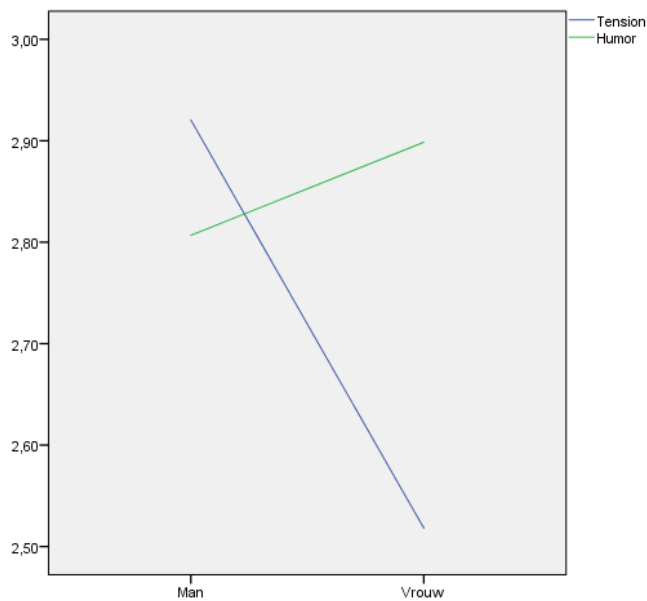


Figure 6: Gender en perceived tension

Second, tension has a significant influence on the attitude towards the content of the message ( $B = -.243$ ,  $se = .077$ ,  $t = -3.148$ ,  $p = .002$ ). The lower the perceived tension, the higher (more positive) consumers' attitude towards the message will be. This is in line with our hypothesis. The attitude towards the message has a non-significant influence on both the attitude towards the organization ( $B = -.072$ ,  $se = .094$ ,  $t = .570$ ,  $p = .570$ ) and the acceptance of the norms and values ( $B = -.086$ ,  $se = .115$ ,  $t = -.751$ ,  $p = .455$ ). The acceptance of the norms and values do not have a significant influence on firestorms on social media ( $B = -.071$ ,  $se = .094$ ,  $t = -.757$ ,  $p = .451$ ). In turn, firestorms on social media also do not have a significant influence on the attitude towards the organization ( $B = -.144$ ,  $se = .083$ ,  $t = -1.733$ ,  $p = .086$ ). In contrast, the attitude towards the organization does have a significant influence on purchase intentions ( $B = 4.242$ ,  $se = .736$ ,  $t = 5.760$ ,  $p = .000$ ). The higher (more positive) the attitude towards the organization, the greater (the higher) purchase intentions will be.

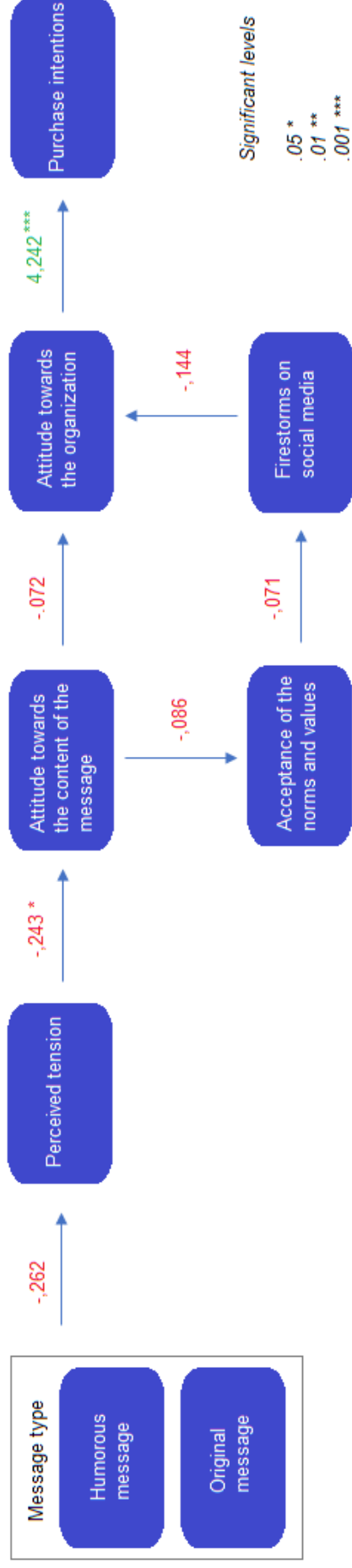


Figure 7: PLS results



The overall results from the total model are visualized in table 7. The total effect (-1.186,  $p = .168$ ) as well as the direct effect (-1.003,  $p = .195$ ) of the type of message on the attitude towards the organization are non-significant. Also, none of the indirect effects are significant.

	<b>Effect</b>	<b>Se</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>LLCI</b>	<b>ULCI</b>
Total effect of X on Y	-1,186	,855	-1,388	,168	-2,881	,508
Direct effect of X on Y	-1,003	,768	-1,305	,195	-2,528	,522

Table 7: PLS outcomes

Based on this, the conceptual model from chapter 1 is not in line with the insights from the analysis. There is discovered a relationship between perceived tension on the attitude towards the content of the message and a second relationship of attitude towards the organization on purchase intentions.

When conducting the PLS, we did find other significant influences between the variables, visualized in figure 8. Again, the red numbers represent the negative relationships between the variables and the green number are the positive relationships between the variables. Based on the analysis, there is a significant influence of tension on the acceptance of the norms and values ( $B = .378$ ,  $se = .095$ ,  $t = 3.978$ ,  $p = .000$ ). This would state that perceived tension is not mediated by the attitude towards the message on the acceptance of the norms and values. In contrast, there seems to be a direct effect of perceived tension on the acceptance of the norms and values. This relationship implies that the more perceived tension there is, the more readily consumers will accept the norms and values. This statement is against the insights of our literature research, from which we would expect that less perceived tension will increase the acceptance of the norms and values. In mind that men perceive more tension than women, men would rather accept the norms and values ( $M = 3.35$ ,  $SD = .711$ ) than do women ( $M = 2.56$ ,  $SD = .690$ ).

We also found a significant influence of the attitude towards the content of the message on firestorms on social media ( $B = -.223$ ,  $se = .110$ ,  $t = -2.022$ ,  $p = .046$ ). This would state that the attitude towards the message has a direct effect on firestorms on social media, instead of mediated by the acceptance of the norms and values. This relationship implies that the more positive the attitude towards the message, the less (or less negative) firestorms there are on social media. As stated in the pre-test, we would further elaborate on the comments the

participants made in the survey about the topic. Only seven participants left a comment, from we could not find a relationship between other variables.

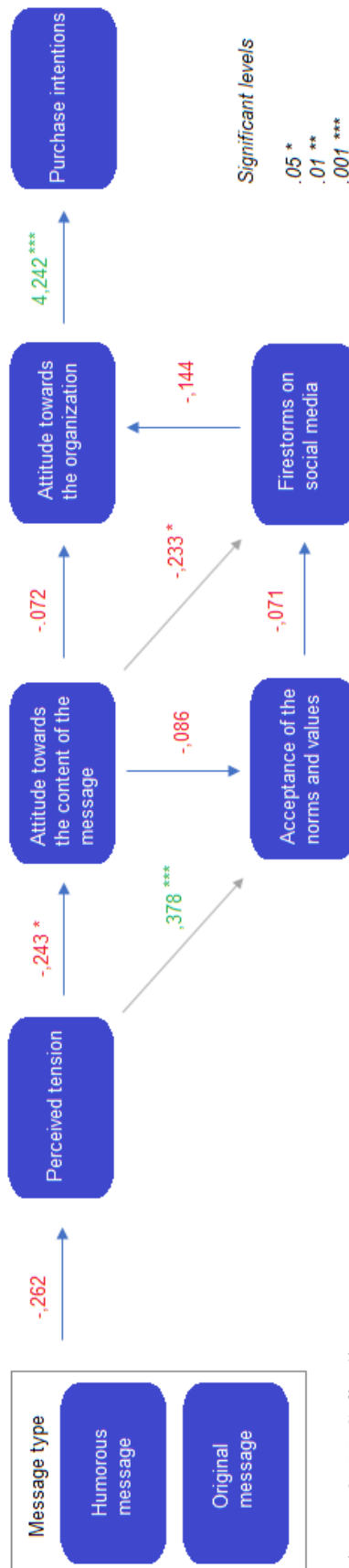


Figure 8: PLS findings

*Hypothesis I: humor has a negative effect on perceived tension.*

This relationship is tested by PLS analysis, where humor is the independent variable and perceived tension the dependent variable. We found that humor has a non-significant influence on tension ( $B = -.262$ ,  $se = .135$ ,  $t = -1.935$ ,  $p = .056$ ). Therefore, this hypothesis is rejected.

*Hypothesis II: tension has a negative effect on the consumer's attitude towards the content of the message.*

This relationship is tested by PLS analysis, where perceived tension is the independent variable and attitude towards the content of the organization the dependent variable. We found that perceived tension has a significant influence on the attitude towards the content of the message ( $B = -.243$ ,  $se = .077$ ,  $t = -3.148$ ,  $p = .002$ ). The lower the perceived tension, the higher (more positive) consumers' attitude towards the message will be. Therefore, this hypothesis is confirmed.

*Hypothesis III: the attitude towards the message has a positive effect on the consumer's acceptance of the norms and values.*

This relationship is tested by PLS analysis, where attitude towards the content of the message is the independent variable and the acceptance of the norms and values the dependent variable. We found that the attitude towards the content of the message has a non-significant influence on the acceptance of the norms and values ( $B = -.086$ ,  $se = .115$ ,  $t = -.751$ ,  $p = .455$ ). Therefore, this hypothesis is rejected.

*Hypothesis IV: the acceptance of norms and values has a negative effect on firestorms on social media.*

This relationship is tested by PLS analysis, where acceptance of norms and values is the independent variable and firestorms on social media is the dependent variable. We found that the acceptance of norms and values has a non-significant influence on firestorms on social media ( $B = -.071$ ,  $se = .094$ ,  $t = -.757$ ,  $p = .451$ ). Therefore, this hypothesis is rejected.

*Hypothesis V: the attitude towards the message has a positive effect on the consumer's attitude towards the organization.*

This relationship is tested by PLS analysis, where attitude towards the content of the message is the independent variable and the attitude towards the organization is the dependent variable. We found that the attitude towards the content of the message has a non-significant influence

on the attitude towards the organization ( $B = -.072$ ,  $se = .094$ ,  $t = .570$ ,  $p = .570$ ). Therefore, this hypothesis is rejected.

*Hypothesis VI: firestorms on social media have a negative effect on the consumer's attitude towards the organization.*

This relationship is tested by PLS analysis, where firestorms on social media is the independent variable and the attitude towards the organization is the dependent variable. We found that humor has a non-significant influence on tension ( $B = -.144$ ,  $se = .083$ ,  $t = -1.733$ ,  $p = .086$ ). Therefore, this hypothesis is rejected.

*Hypothesis VII: attitude towards the organization has a positive effect on the consumer's purchase intentions.*

This relationship is tested by PLS analysis, where attitude towards the organization is the independent variable and purchase intention is the dependent variable. We found that attitude towards the organization has a significant influence on purchase intentions ( $B = 4.242$ ,  $se = .736$ ,  $t = 5.760$ ,  $p = .000$ ). The higher (more positive) the attitude towards the organization, the greater the higher purchase intentions will be. Therefore, this hypothesis is confirmed.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion and discussion

In the previous chapter, the results based on the data were analyzed. In this chapter, the research question is answered and the findings are discussed. At the end of the chapter, recommendations for further research are provided. The research question was described as follows:

*How can humor be effective in messages that contain changed norms and values to reduce tension consumers perceive in order to overcome (1) firestorms on social media, (2) negative attitudes towards the organization, and (3) purchase resistance?*

### 5.1 Conclusion

In the analysis, the experiment was tested by two different message types, an original message and a humorous message. The ANOVA's show that perceived tension and the attitude towards the content of the message differed between these message types, but only when the control variables were absent. When the control variables were included there was no significant difference of perceived tension on the message types. This same phenomenon holds for the attitude towards the content of the message on the message types. All the other variables also had a non-significant difference on the message types, even when control variables were absent.

The relationships from the conceptual model were also tested in the analysis. Based on the analysis, we found that humor has a non-significant influence on tension. When we exclude gender as a control variable, then humor has a significant influence on tension. It turns out that humor in this experiment releases tension for women. In contrast, tension has a significant relationship with attitude towards the content of the message. The lower the perceived tension, the higher (more positive) consumers' attitude towards the message will be. Therefore, hypothesis II was confirmed. Another significant relationship found is that of the attitude towards the organization on purchase intentions. The higher (more positive) the attitude towards the organization, the greater the higher purchase intentions will be. Therefore, hypothesis VII was also confirmed. All the other hypotheses were rejected.

Based on this, we can only conclude that the conceptual model from chapter 1 is not in line with the insights from the analysis. But we did find a relationship between perceived tension on the attitude towards the content of the message and a second relationship of attitude towards the organization on purchase intentions. Thereby, there was no significant direct or indirect relation between the independent variable humor and the dependent variable purchase intentions.

## 5.2 Discussion

In this part the quality of the results will be discussed. First, the validity of the data is evaluated. Second, possible explanations of the results are discussed and compared to the expectation beforehand. Third, the limitations of the research will be discussed.

### 5.2.1 Validity

In order to meet validity, a literature study is conducted (chapter 2). From existing studies, there are only researches conducted of humor and advertisement, or advertisements and norms and values, or humor and norms and values in a political setting. Therefore, it could be that the problem statement of this research in its context does not fit the outcomes from those studies precisely.

Based on the literature about humor in messages and the related constructs, items were operationalized to test in the survey. After the data was collected, Cronbach's alpha was used to determine the degree of internal consistency between the constructs. The values for Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.611 till 0.888, from which 0.60 is the critical value.

In order to test the validity, manipulation checks are conducted. There is tested to which extent the participants understood the message from the experiment. None of the participants chose the options that had nothing to do with the message. Therefore, there is assumed that the participants read the message and understood the subject of the message.

There is also tested how humorous the message was evaluated by the participants. The original message was evaluated less funny than the humorous message, which was necessary to conduct the analysis. In contrast, participants with an MBO educationlevel perceived the message funnier than people with a Bachelor's degree, Master's degree or no/different educationlevel. This could subvert the validity.

The extent of formality of the messages could also subvert the validity of the study. This is because the original message and humorous message differed to the extent of formality. On the one hand, this can be found logical because humor and formality could be perceived as contradictories. On the other hand, this means that the message types did not only differ on the extent of humor, but also on formality. This could undermine the results.

In order to exclude other factors that could influence the study, there is controlled for prior brand evaluation, social influences and demographical values. In summary, there is controlled for a lot of factors that could undermine the validity of this study. But the validity

could be critical, based on the differed extent of formality in the messages. Therefore, the validity could be valued tolerable, but we have to be caution about our statements.

### 5.2.2 Results

In this study, there is found a non-significant influence of the humorous message on tension, in contradiction of our expectations. A possible explanation is that the existing studies of humor and tension are conducted in different contexts. These studies are based on humor for political (Meyer, 2005; Nabi, Moyer-Gusé and Byrne, 2007) and advertisement (Sternthal and Craig, 1973; Spotts, Weinberger and Parsons, 1997) purposes. Therefore, our findings could be contradicting to existing studies. Another explanation is that this study controlled for prior brand evaluation, social influences and demographics. As far as we know, none of the related studies controlled for all of these variables. Thereby, gender has a great influence on the relationship between the humorous message and tension. When gender is excluded as a control variable, the relationship is found significant. In contrast, other studies did not control for gender (Sternthal and Craig, 1973; Meyer, 2000; Meyer, 2005; Newell & Goldsmith, 2001; Spears & Singh, 2004). This study contributes to theory in that women experience less tension than men when humor is used in the message. We do also need to state that the p-value of the relationship between humor and tension (including gender as a control variable) is very close to the critical value of 0.05 (.056). Therefore, the results are disputable.

The second relationship that was tested is the influence of perceived tension on the attitude towards the content of the message. The results show a significant negative influence of tension on the attitude towards the content of the message. It is found that, the lower (or higher) the perceived tension, the higher/more positive (or lower/more negative) the attitude towards the content of the message. So, when humor is used in messages, consumers' perceived tension will be reduced and as a consequence consumers have a more positive attitude towards the content of the message, than when consumers read a message that does not contain humor.

The influence of the attitude towards the content of the message was tested on the attitude towards the organization and the acceptance of the norms and values. The attitude towards the content of the message has a non-significant influence on the attitude towards the organization. This finding is not in line with our expectations based on existing studies. Because the attitude towards the content of the message has no influence on the attitude towards the organization, it might be possible that there are variables that have an influence on the attitude

towards the organization that we did not incorporate. For example, we did not measure the hedonic and utilitarian values of consumers thoroughly, which might have an influence on the attitude towards the organization according to literature we have not been aware of (Voss, Spangenberg & Grohmann, 2003). When comparing the findings of the literature study, it could also be that this relationship does not hold for messages with policy announcements. This needs to be further investigated.

Thereby, the attitude towards the content of the message has also a non-significant influence on the acceptance of the norms and values. This finding is not in line with our expectations based on existing studies. Thereby, the message type did not differ on the acceptance of the norms and values. So, participants who have read the original message differed not extremely on the acceptance of the norms and values from the participants that have read the humorous message. A possible explanation is that the persuasive effect of the humorous appeals is greater than that of the serious appeals. Therefore, the purpose of the message might have been faded (Madden & Weinberger, 1984). Further research should be aware that the humor in the message does not overrule the objective of the message, because it might undermine that consumers accept the norms and values. In contrast, we did find an unexpected influence of perceived tension on the acceptance of the norms and values. This relationship implies that the more perceived tension, the rather consumers will accept the norms and values. So, it could be that consumers would rather accept the norms and values when it is urgent, they are scared or it is imposed by a great authority.

The relationship between the acceptance of the norms and values and firestorms on social media is also found non-significant. Thereby, the message type did not differ on the firestorms on social media. So, participants who have read the original message differed not to the extent to which they would respond on the topic on social media from the participants that read the humorous message. In contrast, there is found a significant relationship between the attitude towards the content of the message and firestorms on social media. The higher/more positive (lower/more negative) the attitude towards the message, the lower/less negative (higher/less positive) the firestorms on social media. This may imply that the norms and values do not need to be accepted in order to reduce the negative firestorms.

Consequently, firestorms on social media has a non-significant influence on the attitude towards the organization. As stated, it could be that there are other variables that have influence on the attitude towards the organization, that are not incorporated in this study.

In contrast, there is found a significant relationship between the attitude towards the organization and purchase intentions. This relationship is tested widespread in literature and is



also confirmed in this study. There is a positive influence of the attitude towards the organization on purchase intentions. This implies that the higher/more positive (lower/more negative) the attitude towards the organization, the higher (lower) the purchase intentions will be.

In conclusion, there was no significant direct or indirect relation between the independent variable humor and the dependent variable purchase intentions. The reason could be that purchase intentions are for a big part a consequence of the attitude towards the organization (Newell & Goldsmith, 2001; Spears & Singh, 2004; Brown & Stayman, 1992). In turn, there is no influence of the humorous message on the attitude towards the organization.

### 5.2.3 Limitations and further research

Although this study engages a lot of variables, it might be possible that if the variables in the model would be expanded or replaced by other variables, there is found a significant model. This study does for example not engage with receivers' characteristics, like mood and personality (Speck, 1991). These characteristics could have an influence on how funny the message is perceived. Thereby, we found unexpected significant relationships of perceived tension and the acceptance of the norms and values, and attitude towards the message and firestorms on social media. Therefore, it might be possible that when the model is revised, it is found significant.

The reader should bear in mind that this study is based on overcoming firestorms on social media and negative organizational image as a consequence of changed policies that contain norms and values. This study was not completely able to confirm that humorous messages could be an appropriate strategy to overcome these consequences. Therefore, it is worth testing other strategies that could help to overcome this problem. For example, the role of cognitive processing in messages or sentiment in messages might increase the acceptance of the norms and values, and therefore reduce firestorms on social media and create a positive attitude towards the organization.

Also, we used several strategies to create a humorous message, but there are a lot of strategies to create a humorous message (Madden & Weinberger, 1984; Speck, 1991). This study was unable to do several experiments with different kind of humor types that could be tested. Therefore, it might be worthwhile to test in which situations, and to what type of receivers a specified humor strategy works best.

This study also found differences in the level of education, to what extent the message

was perceived as funny. Participants with an MBO education level perceived the message as funnier, than people with a Bachelor, Master or no/different education level. Different types of humor could be tested on the level of education to test which strategy works best for what type of education level. This could be worthful in order to adjust marketing activities to particular target groups.

## Chapter 6: Practical implications and recommendations

In the previous chapter the research question is answered and the results are discussed. Practical implications and recommendations are central in this chapter, in order to advise managers.

The results indicate that in the context of organizations that change their policy due to gender neutrality, humor has a negative effect on perceived tension for women, which in turn creates a positive attitude towards the content of the message and reduces firestorms on social media. Managers in the fashion industry that offer products and/or services that are mostly bought by women could use humor in their announcement in order to reduce tension, enhance a positive attitude towards the content of the message and reduce firestorms on social media.

The footnote is that the use of humor in these messages do not grant success, as stated in the discussion chapter. In contrast, there also seem to be no negative effects when humor is used in the message. The only thing is that managers should be aware that the humorous appeals in the message are no greater than the serious appeals, in order to make the objective of the message clear to consumers. From another perspective, the study of Pfeffer, Zorbach and Carley (2014, p. 120, 123) advises organizations not to respond to the firestorms in the first place. Organizations should take advantage over the firestorms by perceiving it as an opportunity to increase the number of fans, due to the publicity. When the firestorms decrease, due to the competition of more recent stories, the organization could announce a message to make the previous message clearer and to stop the discussions.

The results also indicate that humor has no effect on consumers' attitudes towards the organization or purchase intentions. Managers in the fashion industry in the context of organizations that change their policy due to gender neutrality, could conduct A-B tests in order to test what type of message works best for the target group. The study of Marwick and Boyd (2011, p. 123) advises to use polysemy, which is coded communication from which several audiences could identify with, without alienating the opposite audience. For example: "all the labels from children clothes will be removed, isn't that making shopping like fun?". This example could be a strategy to create a message that is effective to men and women together. Because the results of this study indicate that men would rather accept the imposed norms and values when they perceive tension, the first part of the sentence creates this tension. While the second part of the sentence could be perceived humorous, which is more effective to women.

So, in order to test if the polysemy strategy creates positive attitudes towards the organization and purchase intentions, managers could create three message types presented on different social media platforms. For example: a polysemy message on Twitter, a humorous

message on Facebook and a message that induces tension on LinkedIn. This distribution of social media platforms is chosen because Twitter is used by the same percentage of men and women, Facebook is more popular by women than men and LinkedIn is more popular by men than women (Marketingfacts, 2014). After the messages are posted on these social media platforms, managers could compare the consumer responses on the messages. They could also measure consumers' attitudes towards the organization and purchase intentions by using a simple button under the message with the options: I would still buy from the organization versus I am not interested to buy from the organization anymore.

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## Appendices

### Appendix I – Press releases

#### HEMA I

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##### **Persverklaring kinderkleding HEMA**

HEMA wil graag kinderen in staat stellen te zijn wie ze willen zijn. Van stoere meisjes, lieve jongens, echte prinsessen en astronauten in de dop. In de afgelopen twee jaar hebben wij van onze klanten veel verzoeken gekregen om onze kindercollectie zo te maken dat jongens- en meisjeskleding meer uitwisselbaar is. HEMA is er voor iedereen. Het resultaat is dat we een deel van de labels van onze kinderkleding hebben aangepast. De labels zullen voortaan aangeven dat het om kinderkleding gaat en niet meer of het voor een jongen of een meisje is. Klanten kunnen op die manier zelf bepalen of zij een bepaald kledingstuk bij hun kind vinden passen. De labels zullen in een deel van de aankomende wintercollectie te vinden zijn en we gaan dat uitbreiden in toekomstige collecties.

(20-09-2017)

#### HEMA II

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persbericht

##### **HEMA: “Liefde is voor iedereen”**

*HEMA ♥ shirts vanaf morgen te koop in Amsterdam en via hema.nl*

Amsterdam, 20 juli 2017 – **HEMA houdt van iedereen. Zonder vooroordelen. En dat willen we dit**

**jaar tijdens Pride Amsterdam op een bijzondere manier samen uitdragen. Na de iconische t-shirts van vorig jaar, verkoopt HEMA dit jaar de HEMA ♥ shirts, waarvan je van tevoren niet**

**weet welke naam erop staat. En die naam kan dus van iedereen zijn. Allemaal met een hartje**

**ervoor. Want liefde is voor iedereen. De t-shirts zijn vanaf morgen verkrijgbaar in acht Amsterdamse HEMA filialen en via [hema.nl](https://hema.nl). De opbrengst gaat naar het COC. Zie hier de HEMA**

**Pride video:** <https://youtu.be/8Wi9t79Zjo4>

Koop een HEMA ♥ shirt zonder dat je weet welke naam erop staat. Je krijgt een blanco verpakking en

mag alleen de pasvorm en de maat kiezen. De kleur van het t-shirt en de ♥ naam die erop staat, is

een verrassing. En dat is best spannend. Maar liefde uitdragen zonder vooroordelen, is nu misschien

wel belangrijker dan ooit.

**#♥iedereen**

Het t-shirt is verkrijgbaar in twee verschillende pasvormen, regular fit en slim fit, vier verschillende

kleuren, acht verschillende maten en met eindeloos veel verschillende namen. Ze kosten €10,- per

stuk. Je hebt waarschijnlijk nog geen idee van wie de naam op je shirt is. Maar wanneer je het draagt

kan er van alles gebeuren. Een moment van herkenning, trots, blijdschap of ontroering. Wie er ook op

je afkomt, het is de start van iets moois. #♥iedereen.

**COC**

Met de verkoop van deze t-shirts steunt HEMA de GSA's van het COC. Het COC is een belangenorganisatie die zich inzet voor de belangen van lesbiennes, homoseksuelen, biseksuelen,

trans- en intersekse personen (LHBTI's). Van ieder HEMA ♥ shirt gaat de netto winst naar de GSA's

van het COC. GSA staat voor Gender & Sexuality Alliance: een verbond tussen leerlingen en docenten met allerlei seksuele oriëntaties, gender identiteiten en gender expressies. Samen werken

ze aan een school die veilig is voor iedereen, of je nu homo, hetero, lesbisch, bi of in dubio bent.

### **Verkrijgbaar in Amsterdam én online**

De HEMA ♥ shirts zijn vanaf 21 juli 12:00uur in de volgende HEMA filialen verkrijgbaar:  
HEMA

Jodenbree, HEMA Nieuwendijk, HEMA Kalvertoren, HEMA Amsterdam CS, HEMA Kinkerstraat,

HEMA Linnaeusstraat, HEMA Ferdinand Bol, HEMA Haarlemmerplein en in de loop van vrijdag ook

via hema.nl.

Nederlandse Spoorwegen

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# "Beste reizigers..."

28 juli 2017

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## **Samenvatting**

Omroepbericht: „Beste dames en heren, jongens en meisjes, LGBTQIA+’ers en iedereen met een geldig vervoersbewijs.” Wij vonden het wat lang. En toch vinden we het van belang dat iedereen zich bij ons welkom voelt. Daarbij: Is “beste dames en heren” niet wat afstandelijk anno 2017? Daarom kiezen we ervoor om onze reizigers vanaf de nieuwe dienstregeling aan te spreken met ‘beste reizigers’. In onze treinen en in onze correspondentie. Daarnaast stellen we andere ov-vervoerders voor om dit ook op de

stations te gaan doen. Is 'dames en heren' dan in vervolg verboden? Natuurlijk niet. Maar de standaard wordt voor nu 'beste reizigers'.

Roger van Boxtel, president-directeur van NS: „Een kleine wijziging, maar tegelijkertijd is het toch ook heel logisch om onze reizigers aan te spreken met wat ze voor ons zijn? Namelijk beste reizigers. Onze mensen op de trein willen graag dat iedereen zich welkom voelt. In persoonlijke gesprekken is het natuurlijk aan de conducteur zelf hoe hij zijn of haar gastvrijheid invult. Iedere reiziger is ons even lief.”

Dit onderwerp leeft zoals bij velen ook onder onze collega's. De NS-directie kreeg spontaan een video toegestuurd van Ronald van Noorden, medewerker Reisinformatie. In zijn functie staat hij vaak stil bij de manier waarop reizigers geïnformeerd kunnen worden en kwam tot onderstaande omroepetekst:

“

Beste reiziger, dit is een genderneutraal bericht. De trein is beschikbaar voor ieder mens met een geldig vervoerbewijs, ongeacht geslacht en genderidentiteit en of die nu met elkaar in overeenstemming zijn of niet. Of u zich nu mannelijk voelt of vrouwelijk of iets er tussenin, de NS rijdt voor alle mensen. Zoals u weet zijn de toiletten in de trein al jaren genderneutraal. Zo willen wij u voortaan ook aanspreken.

”

Marco Altena is voorzitter van Trainbow, de organisatie die opkomt voor diversiteit bij NS. Hij juicht de aanpassing toe. „De groep openlijke transgenders groeit. Daarom heeft het ook een grote symbolische waarde. Zo voelt iedereen zich aangesproken, ook de reizigers die zich geen vrouw of man voelen.”

Per dag worden er in NS-treinen 24.000 automatisch gegenereerde berichten omgeroepen. Op de verschillende stations in Nederland zijn wekelijks ongeveer 70.000 omroepberichten te horen. In Sprinter-treinen worden teksten vaak automatisch omgeroepen via een computersysteem. Deze teksten worden aangepast, waardoor per 10 december 'beste reizigers' door de luidsprekers van deze treinen schalt. In Intercity's verzorgt het treinpersoneel zelf de omroep. Hen wordt gevraagd om in die omroepetekst 'dames en heren' te vervangen door de nieuwe aanspreekvorm.

PRESS RELEASE

## H&M'S FASHION AGAINST AIDS RAISES AWARENESS WITH UNISEX STYLE

Fashion Against AIDS (FAA) is an extremely important initiative for H&M and this year the collection comes with a new twist. FAA is a campaign designed to raise both funds and awareness, which has so far donated over 41 million Swedish Krona for Designers Against AIDS (DAA) and various other international HIV/AIDS projects.  
17 FEB, 2011 09:00 CET

Because the HIV/AIDS message is as important for young women as much as it is for young men, the sporty unisex collection is for everyone to wear in their own way. The collection is available in H&M's Divided department from 26th April and 25% of sales will be donated to youth HIV/AIDS projects around the world.

"We wanted to create a unisex collection with a sporty vibe. It felt really liberating to think of the cut, the shape and the fabric first before thinking of what gender it should be for. Key pieces are the slogan T-shirts as well as the sports style jacket with zip details, which can be worn in all sorts of ways. FAA is vital because it is so crucial to make young people aware of HIV and AIDS," says Ann-Sofie Johansson, Head of Design at H&M.

"H&M's FAA campaigns are extremely important, as it is essential to spread the message to young people worldwide to take care and have safe sex. The main message is: life is beautiful, so keep it that way and be safe, both for yourself and your partner. HIV is everywhere, not just in Africa, not just in the gay community - HIV concerns us all. If you're old enough and wise enough to make love, you're also old and wise enough to take care," says Ninette Murk, founder and creative director, DAA.

Women can work that boyfriend look and men are working with styling more than ever in the way they dress. The starting point is shape and detail, with sporty T-shirts, blousons and parkas that are there to be personalised: sleeves can be rolled up or zipped off, waists can be belted and garments totally adapted from one item into another. Comfort is a key factor and colours are naturals as well as pale pastels which means they can be worn by all. A draped nylon parka looks just right as it is, or its sleeves can be zipped off and its waist accentuated to turn it into a dress for girls. The oversized and asymmetric slogan T-shirts can be worn in so many ways, while the collection is full of the perfect track pants, tanks and shorts perfect for summer.

This is the fourth year of H&M's FAA initiative, which aims to promote safe sex and HIV/AIDS awareness both through the messages found in the collection and through the advocacy of the organisations which benefit from the sales. The money has been divided between Designers Against AIDS (DAA), the NGO who brought the concept of Fashion Against AIDS to H&M and that promotes awareness of HIV/AIDS among the young, investigating new methods of peer group education and campaigning, YouthAids, focusing on its projects in Haiti and Russia

to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS in chronically affected areas, the MTV Staying Alive Foundation and UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund.

## NIKE

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New Jersey-native Ibtihaj Muhammad, a Nike athlete and champion fencer, has been carded for false starting *many* times. “First, I’d get a warning and then a point against me...I can’t tell you how many times that happened,” she says. “And I’d tell the referee, ‘Oh, I’m sorry, I couldn’t hear you.’”

That’s because Muhammad, who earned a bronze medal in Rio in 2016 for Team USA, typically competed in a children’s hijab that was made of a doubled georgette material. “When the material is wet, it gets really heavy and stiff,” she says, describing what it felt like to sweat with her hijab on. “It would completely obstruct my hearing.”

Beyond that, the garment didn’t interact well with her uniform. Her hijab tied in the back, she pinned the front portion under her chin, then she’d tuck the extra fabric under her sports bra straps so it would stay in place under her mask. “I know that’s hard to envision, but that’s what I wore for literally my entire athletic career,” she says.

Needless to say, wearing a traditional hijab for competition was less than ideal. But Muhammad and other athletes haven’t had much of a choice. Finding a hijab that worked well for a particular sport was a major challenge. “I remember I only had a few that I used for training and hadn’t been able to find that particular style anymore,” says Muhammad. On top of that, hijabs weren’t fully understood. “When I was in school, I always had to have a letter from a local imam that said that it was safe for me to wear my religious covering during sport,” she says. “My coaches had to have that with them at all times.”

*When I was in school, I always had to have a letter from a local imam that said that it was*

## *safe for me to wear my religious covering during sport.*

*- Ibtihaj Muhammad*

Muhammad wasn't the only one who experienced hijab struggles. In fact, Nike designers had been having meetings with top athletes who illuminated the many availability and performance problems associated with wearing a traditional hijab for sport over the past couple of years — conversations that put the designers to work to create a sport hijab prototype.

The designers gave that initial prototype to a variety of athletes, including weightlifter Amna Al Haddad and figure skater Zahra Lari, both from the United Arab Emirates, to put the garment to the test in their respective sports. Everyday athletes from around the Middle East, including runners like Manal Rostom, a Nike Run Club Coach in Dubai, and Zeina Nassar, a German boxer, also assessed the hijabs. Nike gathered both the athletes' performance feedback and their reactions to the garment's appearance.

The women came back with a range of input, most of which pointed to the desire for an even lighter, softer and more breathable garment. Nike Pro designers, who are responsible for creating base layers (the layer closest to the skin) for athletes, examined how to make a performance hijab inconspicuous, and crafted more prototypes with this goal in mind.

With that, Nike designers evolved the prototypes and received an enthusiastic response, and a final request to modify the fit to account for a range of head sizes and face shapes. The designers sized the head covering to XS/S and M/L (rather than adding an adjustment mechanism, which would add weight). After further dialing in the details and conducting additional rounds of wear testing the Nike Pro Hijab was complete.

Muhammad first experienced the Nike Pro Hijab shortly after that in August 2017. "It really sunk in how much my previous hijab was

hindering my performance when I tried the Nike Pro Hijab,” says Muhammad. “Suddenly, I could hear, I wasn’t as hot and it felt like my body was able to cool itself down better and faster.”

That’s a long way from having trouble finding a suitable hijab and having to explain and defend herself to officials. “The Nike Pro Hijab will help advance the conversation around hijabs and Muslim women in sports and further make sports an inclusive space,” says Muhammad.

She is not alone in this thought. For many hijabi athletes, the Nike Pro Hijab is so much more than a performance garment. “It inspires me to reach greater heights and to run farther distances,” says Rostom, who recently completed the New York Marathon in the Nike Pro Hijab. “And I believe it’s going to inspire girls worldwide to follow their passion for sport.”

For Lari, the Pro Hijab is a symbol of empowerment. “It’s a reminder to us Muslim women that we can achieve anything in the world,” she says. “What Nike has done for Muslim athletes is a dream that we never thought would happen.”

**DECEMBER 01, 2017**

Barbie

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## Barbie Expands Doll Line, Adding Three New Body Styles

Jan 28, 2016

El Segundo, CA -- January 28, 2016 – Today, Barbie is announcing the expansion of its Fashionistas® line with the addition of three new body types – tall, curvy and petite – and a variety of skin tones, hair styles and outfits. With these additions, girls everywhere will have infinitely more ways to play out their stories and spark their imaginations through Barbie.

“For more than 55 years, Barbie has been a global, cultural icon and a source of inspiration and imagination to millions of girls around the world,” said Richard Dickson, President and Chief Operating Officer of Mattel. “Barbie reflects the world girls see around them. Her ability to evolve and grow with the times, while staying true to her spirit, is central to why Barbie is the number one fashion doll in the world.”

The new 2016 Barbie® Fashionistas® doll line includes four body types (the original and three new bodies), seven skin tones, 22 eye colors, 24 hairstyles and countless on-trend fashions and accessories. Adding more diversity



into the line continues the journey that Barbie started in 2015 when the brand added 23 dolls with new skin tones, hair colors and, most notably, a flat foot.

“Barbie has always given girls choices – from her 180 careers, to inspirational roles, to her countless fashions and accessories,” said Evelyn Mazzocco, Senior Vice President and Global General Manager Barbie. “We are excited to literally be changing the face of the brand – these new dolls represent a line that is more reflective of the world girls see around them – the variety in body type, skin tones and style allows girls to find a doll that speaks to them.”

The new dolls can be viewed on [Barbie.com](http://Barbie.com) and will be available to order on January 28, 2016 on [Shop.Mattel.com](http://Shop.Mattel.com) in the U.S. The collection will be available starting in spring 2016 at major toy retailers worldwide.

“We believe we have a responsibility to girls and parents to reflect a broader view of beauty,” added Mazzocco.

Join the conversation @Barbie #thedollevolves

## Appendix II – experimental survey

Thank you for your interest in conducting this survey. The purpose of this research is to measure consumers' attitudes towards gender neutrality. The survey contains several statements and a short text, which takes about 4-5 minutes in total. The answers you fill in, cannot be right or wrong. Your participation is totally anonymous and your answers will be confidentially processed.

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How do you think about the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
H&M is known to me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The concept of H&M is appealing to me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have good experiences with H&M	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	Often	Regularly	Sometimes	Rarly	Never
I buy clothes at H&M	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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Read the following message:

- The participants are randomly assigned to the original or humorous message (appendix III) -

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Check a maximum of 3 answering options to indicate where the message is about:

☐ Gender neutrality

☐ The new summer collection of H&M

☐ Improved quality

☐ Increased pricing

☐ Exchangeable children's clothing

☐ Harmful cosmetics

☐ Adjustment of labels

☐ Shoppingbehavior in Rotterdam

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
The message made me smile	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The message is formal	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The message gives me a positive feeling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
The changing policy of H&M gives me the feeling that something is imposed to me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I do not see the utility of the new policy of H&M	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
H&M gives me the feeling that I have shopped in the 'wrong' way	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am not going to adjust my shoppingbehavior to the new policy of H&M	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How do you think about the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
The message is clear to me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The message of H&M convinced me about their change	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The message makes me think	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How do you think about the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
People who classify themselves as gender neutral are overreacting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Children may wear what they want to	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gender neutrality is nonsense	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can empathize myself with people who classify themselves as gender neutral	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would classify myself as gender neutral	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think it is important that people classify themselves as a man or a woman	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People in my environment deal with gender neutrality	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Most of my friends think about gender neutrality in the same way as I do	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Often	Regularly	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
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When I do not agree with something on social media, then I leave a comment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I do agree with something on social media, then I leave a comment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I respond to social media posts of companies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

If the message of H&M was on social media, would you respond to it by a comment?

☐ Strongly disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Neutral

☐ Agree

☐ Strongly agree

In case you would leave a comment, what would the comment look like?

How do you think about the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
I like the brand H&M	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think H&M does good for society	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I like shopping at H&M	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
H&M is one of my favorite shops	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How do you think about the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
I would buy products from H&M	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am not interested to buy products from H&M	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

---

You are almost done! Please answer the following questions:

1. What is your gender?

- ☐ Man
- ☐ Woman
- ☐ None

2. What is your age in years?

- ☐ 18 - 25 years
- ☐ 25 - 35 years
- ☐ 35 - 45 years
- ☐ 45 - 55 years
- ☐ 55+ years

3. What is your marital status?

- ☐ Single

- ☐ In a relationship
- ☐ Married
- ☐ Widower
- ☐ No comment

4. What is your highest achieved degree?

- ☐ MBO
- ☐ Bachelor
- ☐ Master
- ☐ Different/none

5. What is your sexuality?

- ☐ Hetero
- ☐ Gay sexual
- ☐ Bisexual
- ☐ Pansexual
- ☐ No comment

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If you are interested in the results of study, you can fill in your email address below:

Thank you for filling in the survey, you have brought me one step further to achieve my master's degree.

## Appendix III – analysis results

### 5.1 ANOVA on humor

	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>Std. Error</b>	
<i>Original</i>	57	2,26	,634	,084	
<i>Humor</i>	56	3,11	,713	,095	
	<b>Sum of squares</b>	<b>Df</b>	<b>Mean square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
<i>Between groups</i>	7,120	1	7,120	15,648	,000
<i>Within groups</i>	50,504	111	,455		
<i>Total</i>	57,624	112			

### 5.2 ANOVA on formality

	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>Std. Error</b>	
<i>Original</i>	57	3,32	,890	,118	
<i>Humor</i>	56	2,75	,995	,133	
	<b>Sum of squares</b>	<b>Df</b>	<b>Mean square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
<i>Between groups</i>	9,043	1	9,043	10,158	,002
<i>Within groups</i>	98,816	111	,890		
<i>Total</i>	107,858	112			

### 5.3 Influence of prior brand evaluation on attitude towards the organization

Model Summary					
<i>R</i>	<i>R Square</i>	<i>Adjusted Square</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>Std. Error of the Estimate</i>	
,684	,468	,463		,452	
ANOVA					
	<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>



Regression	27,804	1	27,804	92,429	,000
Residual	33,390	111	,301		
Total	61,194	112			
<b>Coefficients</b>					
	<i>Unstandardized B</i>	<i>Coefficients Std. Error</i>	<i>Standardized Coefficients Beta</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
(Constant)	1,565	,178		8,783	,000
Prior Brand Evaluation	,104	,011	,674	9,614	,000

#### 5.4 Influence of prior brand evaluation on purchase intentions

Model Summary					
<i>R</i>	<i>R Square</i>	<i>Adjusted R Square</i>	<i>Std. Error of the Estimate</i>		
,666	,443	,438	4,593		
ANOVA					
	<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Regression	1862,619	1	1862,619	88,277	,000
Residual	2342,077	111	21,100		
Total	4204,696	112			
Coefficients					
	<i>Unstandardized B</i>	<i>Coefficients Std. Error</i>	<i>Standardized Coefficients Beta</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
(Constant)	1,625	1,492		1,089	,278
Prior Brand Evaluation	,853	,091	,666	9,396	,000

#### 5.5 Influence of social influence on the acceptance of norms and values

<b>Model Summary</b>			
<i>R</i>	<i>R Square</i>	<i>Adjusted Square</i>	<i>Std. Error of the Estimate</i>
,199	,040	,031	,784

<b>ANOVA</b>					
	<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Regression	2,807	1	2,807	4,567	,035
Residual	68,223	111	,615		
Total	71,030				
<b>Coefficients</b>					
	<i>Unstandardized B</i>	<i>Coefficients Std. Error</i>	<i>Standardized Coefficients Beta</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
(Constant)	1,455	,663		2,193	,030
Social Influence	3,153	1,475	,199	2,137	,035