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Abstract

An organization using humor on social media can potentially engage in dialogue through participatory boundary-work that creates an in-group between themselves and their online user publics. The ability for an organization to use humor to form that in-group, where dialogic communication is achievable, is based on the organization's ability to produce an instance of shared mirth with their online publics. The shared experience of mirth not only determines if the organization reaches shared meaning with their receiver publics, but also indicates who the humor is intended for, and who will be left out of the in-group created. To determine the potential for humor to facilitate organizational-public relationships on social media, this thesis conducted a case study analysis to determine if humor forms affected the dialogic communication between KFC and their online user publics. This study found that KFC leverages the context-collapsed spaces of social media to collaborate on humorous messaging with their online publics, by using humor that was simple, required familiarity with few frameworks of knowledge, and generally related to their core products. These co-created humor messages were facilitated through dialogic tools, demonstrating the potential capacity for humor to affect the presence of dialogic communication within the organizational-public relational context on social media.

Keywords: organizational identification, humor, boundary-work, dialogic communication, affordance theory

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

“Don’t Call Me a Crouton:”

A Case Study on the Use of Humor in Organizational Relationships on Twitter and Facebook

By

Hannah Grinberg

A Master’s Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Montclair State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

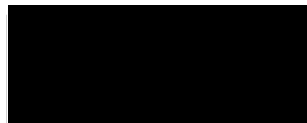
Master of Arts

May 2022

School of Communication and Media

College of the Arts

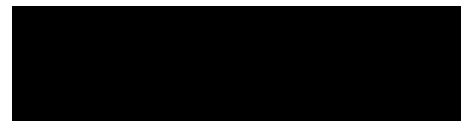
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“DON’T CALL ME A CROUTON:” A CASE STUDY ON THE USE OF HUMOR IN
ORGANIZATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS ON TWITTER AND FACEBOOK

A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts

by
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2022

Acknowledgements

This thesis is dedicated in loving memory of my Abuelo Eduardo Goldfarb, who could find humor in anything.

I would like to acknowledge the following people for supporting me through this laborious but fun process. I would like to express my gratitude for the unwavering support of my thesis committee chair, Dr. Luo, whose consistent encouragement and advice pushed me to believe in my own intellect. I am extremely grateful for the collaboration and guidance of my committee members, Dr. Bakelaar and Dr. Benton who connected ideas for me I did not know needed connecting. Many thanks to the faculty members at the School of Communication and Media who have helped me along the way and for never openly expressing frustration with my constant questioning. I am also thankful for my classmates, who filled me with confidence while challenging me to think more and think different. I would like to also thank my parents who probably could have acted like outside committee members and my siblings (and their significant others) for generally sticking around and providing the support system for which I could rely on to complete this behemoth. Lastly, I'd like to recognize my children, for whom I breathe, and my husband, who sees in me what I wish to see in myself. Thank you for helping me make this paper happen.

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Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the communication between an organization and its online user publics on social media and evaluate if humor use influenced the capacity for an organization to engage in characteristics of dialogue (Chen et al., 2020; Lane, 2020). Users of social media are no strangers to the concept of organizations using humor messages on social media as a method of communication (Fraustino & Ma, 2015; Ge, 2019; Gstalter, 2020; KFC Extra Crispy Sunscreen, 2017; “Wendy’s Nuggs for Carter Case Study,” 2018; Kim, 2016; Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2020; Xiao et al., 2018). Indeed, humor use transcends politics, gender, ethnicity, and even geographical location - everyone experiences humor (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004; Lynch, 2002; Meyer, 2000; Popescu, 2010; Shifman, 2007). Using humor interpersonally is instinctive to people (Martin, 2010; Meyer, 2000; Popescu, 2010) and an attractive concept to study because humor is an extremely powerful relational tool as shared meaning is a requisite to the experience of humor (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004; Gal, 2019; Martin, 2010; Popescu, 2010; Shifman, 2007).

For the participants in the humorous exchange to experience mirth, i.e., for the joke to be considered funny, the participants need to agree on what the humorous message is communicating (Davis et al., 2018; Fraustino & Ma, 2015; Gal, 2019; Ge, 2019; Kim, 2016; Lynch, 2002; Meyer, 2000; Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2020; Shifman, 2007; Simis-Wilkinson et al., 2018; Xiao et al., 2018; Yeo et al., 2020). Whether the humor instance sent from an organization achieves mutual meaning with their publics within their organizational public relationship (OPR), is contingent on that receiver's understanding and agreeing with the message

(Fraustino & Ma, 2015; Gal, 2019; Kim, 2016; Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2020; Simis-Wilkinson et al., 2018).

Organizations adopting humorous messaging are influencing their relationship with the public by purposefully applying different humor messages with different rhetorical functions to achieve an informal control over their relationship with the receivers (Lynch, 2002). Utilizing humor on social media presents an opportunity for organizations looking to raise organizational awareness, source likeability, and engagement on social media posts (Fraustino & Ma, 2015; Gal, 2019; Kim, 2016; Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2020; Simis-Wilkinson et al., 2018). Humor in organizational messaging also can facilitate the process of creating an in-group (Gal, 2019; Ge, 2019) through shared communicators (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Gal, 2019; Meyer, 2000), influencing their relationship with their publics through the boundary work necessary to create that in-group (Popescu, 2010; Shifman, 2007). Therefore, enjoyment of an organizational humor message by the receiver is contingent on shared meaning between the receiver and the organization over where mirth is intended to be experienced within the humorous message (Fraustino & Ma, 2015; Gal, 2019; Kim, 2016; Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2020; Simis-Wilkinson et al., 2018).

The relational process that occurs during the co-creation of humor (Gal, 2019; Meyer, 2000; Shifman, 2007) is similar to that occurs in the co-construction of messages central to dialogic theory (Chen et al., 2020; Zhou & Xu, 2019). Dialogue, like humor, taps into the potential to ethically engage in relationship management on digital media through the organization participating in two-way communication with their publics guided by a holistic positive orientation, based on the principles that include mutuality, risk, empathy, propinquity, and commitment (Chen et al., 2020; Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002; Zhou & Xu, 2019). The

capacity humor has in influencing the organizational-public relationship (Lynch, 2002), and the requisite recognition of shared values, and even co-creation that must occur for a receiver to experience humor, supports the possibility of using humor to facilitate organizational identification (Ashforth et al., 2020; Besharov, 2014; Brickson, 2005; Cooper & Thatcher, 2010; Gioia et al., 2010) and as a way to engage with characteristics of dialogue (Benton & Peterka-Benton, 2020; Chen et al., 2020; Lane, 2020).

When considering the social media landscape for organizations engaging in humorous messaging with their online publics, KFC (Kentucky Fried Chicken) emerges as an example of an organization that frequently uses humor in their organizational messaging (e.g., *KFC Extra Crispy Sunscreen*, 2017). This thesis conducted a case study analyzing KFC's communication on social media surrounding KFC's January 2021 entry into "the chicken wars" (Acreneaux, 2019; Cobe, 2021; Lucas, 2021a; Morona, 2021; Valinsky, 2021) to identify how KFC utilizes humor, and how that affects their communication with their online user publics.

This study identified instances of humor by KFC on Twitter and Facebook, manifested as active participation in boundary-making (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004; Gal, 2019; Popescu, 2010; Shifman, 2007) with their online user publics. KFC communicated humor messages by utilizing common identifiers to determine the in-group/out-group user publics. Such usage demonstrates the presence of favorable platform affordances (Zhou & Xu, 2019) for dialogue (Lane, 2020) when using humor. Furthermore, this study found instances of co-constructed humor (Shifman, 2007) that could be characterized as true Dialogue in the Twitter sample.

This study supports the current literature (e.g., Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Fraustino & Ma, 2015; Gal, 2019; Lynch, 2002; Martin, 2010; Meyer, 2000; Shifman, 2007) that

describes humor on social media as being used to affect perceptions of identification with online users (Davis et al., 2018; Fraustino & Ma, 2015; Ge, 2019; Kim et al., 2016; Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2020; Simis-Wilkinson et al., 2018; Xiao et al., 2018; Yeo et al., 2021; Yeo, Su, et al., 2020). Furthermore, the implications of this study suggest that humor may be a possible mechanism for dialogic communication on social media. To form these conclusions, this study relied on a variety of frameworks, outlined in the literature review in the next chapter. The chapter will first outline how humor functions as both a personal and social phenomenon, then will review the frameworks of identification theory and dialogic theory as they relate to the OPR, and then lastly the chapter will outline the framework of affordance theory, the framework which allows this study to analogize social digitally mediated platforms as naturalistic environments.

Literature Review

Organizations are using humor as part of their social media communication strategy in pursuing a relationship with their publics (Fraustino & Ma, 2015; Ge, 2019; Gstalter, 2020; KFC Extra Crispy Sunscreen, 2017; “Wendy’s Nuggs for Carter Case Study,” 2018; Kim, 2016; Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2020; Xiao et al., 2018). The use of humor on social media by organizations is linked with positive relationship behaviors (Fraustino & Ma, 2015; Gal, 2019; Kim, 2016; Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2020; Simis-Wilkinson et al., 2018; Wendy’s Nuggs for Carter Case Study, 2018) but also misunderstandings and crises (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Gal, 2019; Meyer, 2000; Shifman, 2007; Xiao et al., 2018), and sometimes, at the same time (Lynch, 2002; Meyer, 2000).

The paradoxical (Meyer, 2000) nature of humor is evidenced by the actual experience of humor being both a shared and extremely individual experience simultaneously (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004; Lynch, 2002; Meyer, 2000; Popescu,

2010; Shifman, 2007), while the purpose of sending humor is to achieve an instance of shared meaning between the humor sender and the humor receiver (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Fraustino & Ma, 2015; Gal, 2019; Lynch, 2002; Martin, 2010; Meyer, 2000; Shifman, 2007). However, whether the shared meaning occurs is dependent on whether the humorous communication was conveyed and then interpreted in a way similarly meaningful for both parties (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Martin, 2010; Popescu, 2010; Shifman, 2007).

Typically a sender communicates humor layered with unique frameworks of knowledge and meaning structures to the sender (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Davis et al., 2018; Gal, 2019; Lynch, 2002; Nir & Halperin, 2019), therefore, the potential for the communication to result in a shared meaning depends on whether the recipient of the communication correctly understood it as intended (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Davis et al., 2018; Gal, 2019; Meyer, 2000; Popescu, 2010). Humor thus functions for the sender to either create boundaries around or between themselves and the receiver (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Gal, 2019; Lynch, 2002; Meyer, 2000). In this way, organizations using humor are in a potentially more risky but possibly mutually beneficial position by using humor as a communication strategy to reinforce organizational-public relationships.

Considering again the organizational-public relationship (OPR), organizational communication can support the process of *organizational identification*, the theory that claims individuals forms identification with an organization when they perceive the organization as possessing similar values and goals as their own (Ashforth et al., 2020; Besharov, 2014; Brickson, 2005; Cooper & Thatcher, 2010; Gioia et al., 2010) and *dialogic communication*, the framework for ethical and mutually-beneficial symmetrical organizational-public communication (Chen et al., 2020; Kent & Taylor, 2002; Zhou & Xu, 2019).

An individual can experience *identification* with an organization (Besharov, 2014), viewing that organization as their peer, and making it easier for them to express emotions regarding the organization (Cooper & Thatcher, 2010). If individuals do not perceive the organization as aligning similar values with them, then *dis-identification* can occur (Besharov, 2014). Therefore, it is important to consider how an organization communicates their values and goals to their publics.

One of the most effective forms of communication between organizations and their publics is through dialogic communication, a key component in a two-way symmetrical relationship between an organization and its publics (Kent & Taylor, 1998). Organizations pursue these forms of relationships because dialogue is the way true and complete discourse can occur (Kent & Taylor, 1998). Dialogic communication offers organizations the opportunity to create shared meanings with their publics (Chen et al., 2020; Kent & Taylor, 2002; Zhou & Xu, 2019). To assess whether an organization is engaging in two-way symmetrical communication, Kent and Taylor (1998; 2002) provided five characteristics of a dialogic relationship¹ (2002) and five guidelines for effective organizational communication² (1998) that can be identified through organizational messaging.

While identification theory and dialogic theory provide the framework for analyzing communication between an organization and their online publics, affordance theory presents the opportunity to account for how digitally mediated social platforms impact the way organizations communicate with their online publics on digital media. Therefore, this thesis relies on

¹ The five dialogic characteristics described by Kent and Taylor (2002) are Mutuality, Proximity, Empathy, Risk, and Commitment (p. 25-29)

² The five principles for effective dialogic communication described by Kent and Taylor (1998) are Dialogic loops, Usefulness of information, Generation of return visits, Ease of interface, and Conservation of visitors (p. 326-330)

affordance theory (Bucher & Helmond, 2018; Chen et al., 2020; Zhou & Xu, 2019) to interpret interpersonal relationships on social media.

Affordance Theory (Bucher & Helmond, 2018; Chen et al., 2020; Zhou & Xu, 2019) suggests that digitally mediated spaces are naturalistic communication settings where users' interactions with technologies within those environments illuminate the relationships that exist between the users and between the users and that digital environment (Bucher & Helmond, 2018; Zhou & Xu, 2019). Furthermore, this theory establishes that those relationships that exist are unique to each individual platform and affect the type of communication possible (Bucher & Helmond, 2018; Chen et al., 2020; Zhou & Xu, 2019). Lastly, affordance theory allows the dialogic principles outlined as guidelines (Kent & Taylor, 1998) to be applied to the analysis of dialogic communication occurring on social media (Chen et al., 2020; Zhou & Xu, 2019).

In conjunction, the frameworks that will be detailed in this chapter present the opportunity to analyze organizational humor messaging on social media as occurring deliberately to communicate shared values in a form that is made possible by the affordances of social media (Bucher & Helmond, 2018; Chen et al., 2020; Fraustino & Ma, 2015; Gal, 2019; Ge, 2019; Kim, 2016; Lynch, 2002; Meyer, 2000; Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2020; Xiao et al., 2018; Zhou & Xu, 2019). The following sections will first provide an overview on the status of humorous organizational communication on social media generally, then the chapter will present an analysis on humor as an essential, critical, and complex part of interpersonal communication, followed by an overview of identification theory and dialogic communication to support the analysis from the point of view of the OPR, and finally an overview of affordance theory, which accounts for the platform environment's effect on communication.

Humorous Organizational Communication on Social Media

Patterns of organizations using humor on social media to communicate with their publics to create a positive reputation (Kim et al., 2016, 2016; Xiao et al., 2018) and to increase stakeholder engagement with organizational messaging are well documented (Fraustino & Ma, 2015; Ge, 2019; KFC Extra Crispy Sunscreen, 2017; “Wendy’s Nuggs for Carter Case Study,” 2018; Kim, 2016; Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2020; Xiao et al., 2018). Organizations appear to be using humor in their communication

Humor has been identified as supporting the creation of mutual affiliation between organizations and publics by presenting playful and collaborative content opportunities in the form of engagement (Fraustino & Ma, 2015; Ge, 2019; Kim et al., 2016; Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2020; Xiao et al., 2018). Engagement - characterized as likes, shares, retweets, and comments - is the manifestation of a cognitive and behavioral affiliation and recognition between users on social media (Fraustino & Ma, 2015; Ge, 2019; Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2020). Content that is perceived as humorous is found to have higher engagement than non-humorous content (Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2020). Furthermore, humor can increase communication between audiences regardless of whether the organization typically engages with humorous content (Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2020) and therefore expand the reach of their messaging (Xiao et al., 2018).

However, humorous organizational communication can possibly adversely affect organizations employing humor (Fraustino & Ma, 2015; Ge, 2019; Kim et al., 2016; Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2020; Xiao et al., 2018). One way that humor can adversely affect an organization is by increasing the probability for misunderstanding (Fraustino & Ma, 2015; Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2020). For example, message comprehension was found to be

negatively affected when humor content communicated by an organization demonstrated to be too creative for the audience (Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2020) or overly humorous for the subject matter (Fraustino & Ma, 2015). Another way that humor use could adversely affect an organization is through crisis responsibility attribution (Kim et al., 2016; Xiao et al., 2018). Due to the informal and familiar nature of humor, humor content is found to be most beneficial to an organization's reputation when crisis responsibility is ambiguous, the pre-crisis existing public sentiment was positive, and the crisis is emotionally framed, where a more empathetic or humanized voice is appropriate (Kim et al., 2016; Xiao et al., 2018). An organization would be adversely affected by using humor in a crisis if the public did not perceive their sincerity or responsibility to be appropriately framed in the humor content message (Xiao et al., 2018).

Organizations can frame their messaging through humorous communication by using different forms of humor (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004; Ge, 2019, p. 201; Kim, 2016; Martin, 2010; Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2020; Xiao et al., 2018). The form in which the humor message is transmitted from the organization directly affects how the public receiving the humor will understand the message and how that message will influence their relationship with the receiver (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004; Ge, 2019, p. 201; Kim, 2016; Lynch, 2002; Martin, 2010; Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2020; Xiao et al., 2018). Therefore, humor and its forms will be conceptualized in the next section to better understand how humor in organizational communication is manifested.

Humor

The experience of humor is one of the most fundamental social-communicative activities (Lynch, 2002) and serves as a critical part of the shared human experience through our social interactions (Gal, 2019; Lynch, 2002; Martin, 2010; Meyer, 2000; Popescu, 2010). Our earliest

introduction to humor is, ideally, through the act of play with our caregivers as infants in safe environments where the humor receiver trusts the humor sender (Martin, 2010). This results in humor existing in a theoretical play paradigm, where humor can provide a space to safely develop environments, boundaries, and understandings between the humor sender and humor receiver (Martin, 2010), as well as develop cognitive, emotional, and physical attachments between them (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Martin, 2010; Popescu, 2010). This paradigm is extended throughout life, as humor is used as an educational tool to support the knowledge of cultural norms and tensions (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Martin, 2010; Meyer, 2000; Popescu, 2010). The humor paradigm then serves as “an effective way to identify group boundaries, punish deviant behavior, and designate the limits of acceptive conversation” (Simis-Wilkinson et al., 2018, p. 317), and therefore, simultaneously functions to uphold the status quo, or relieve tension surrounding it by uniting or dividing the participants in the humorous exchange (Lynch, 2002; Meyer, 2000).

Humor can serve to support participants' understanding of social and cultural processes (Shifman, 2007) because when the participants agree on the meaning, humor can be a positive physiological experience defined as the creation of mirth, a pleasant feeling of emotional wellbeing (Lynch, 2002; Martin, 2010; Meyer, 2000; Yeo, Anderson, et al., 2020; Yeo et al., 2021; Yeo, Su, et al., 2020). To deconstruct the humor instance to conceptualize the complexity of humor in its communicative social role, the next section will explore the different definitions of humor, review the meta-theories that explain the motivations behind the use of humor, present methods for analyzing humor, and then will explore how humor is affected by digital media before concluding with an overview of humor as a communication function.

Definitions of Humor

The word humor has its roots in the Latin word *humorem*, which means fluid (Martin, 2010) and comes from Hippocrates who believed the fluids (humors) in the body needed to be balanced for good health (Martin, 2010). As of November 2021, Merriam-Webster (n.d.) offers eleven different definitions for humor, including “that quality which appeals to a sense of the ludicrous or absurdly incongruous...the mental faculty of discovering, expressing, or appreciating the ludicrous or absurdly incongruous, the ability to be funny or to be amused by things that are funny...something that is or is designed to be comical or amusing (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Present in most of these definitions is a social or psychological process that demonstrates the complex nature of humor.

Indeed, many definitions argue that humor is a fundamentally social-human phenomenon (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Gal, 2019; Martin, 2010; Meyer, 2000; Popescu, 2010). Popescu (2010) defines humor as, at its essence, a form of communication (Popescu, 2010) and one that is shaped through “specific cultural and historical contexts” (Popescu, 2010, p. 37). According to Meyer (2000), humor is defined as a receiver-centered cognitive experience that involves the receiver of the humorous message redefining a social reality resulting in mirth. Furthermore, Meyer suggested that humor “[focuses] on the intended effect of a message on the hearers” (p. 311). Martin (2010) defined humor as an ever-evolving, fundamentally social communication process that involves “a social context, a cognitive-perceptual process, and an emotional response” (p.5) that could ultimately result in laughter or the vocal expression of mirth. Boxman-Shabtai and Shifman (2014) viewed humor as inherently multiplicitous, as it serves as a popular form of communication and ritual that holds the possibility to unite and build solidarity while simultaneously possibly “[operating] as a mechanism of exclusion” (p.980) as it

may target individuals or groups by turning them into outsiders (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014). Gal (2019) defined humor as the reflection and construction of collective norms and conventions. Gal further identified humor as being a conduit for a given society to illuminate internal tensions and vulnerabilities.

The above definitions clearly reveal that humor is assessed by the perceptions of mirth as an outcome of humorous communication. Although humor seems to be a universal experience, each humor experience is highly individual.

Meta Theories of Humor

There are three generally accepted meta theories³ of humor: relief theory, incongruity theory, and superiority theory (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Gal, 2019; Lynch, 2002; Martin, 2010; Meyer, 2000; Popescu, 2010; Shifman, 2007). These three theories are used to explain why people use humor (Gal, 2019; Lynch, 2002; Martin, 2010; Popescu, 2010; Shifman, 2007).

Relief Theory. Relief theory focuses on the physiological need to release tension (Gal, 2019; Martin, 2010; Popescu, 2010; Shifman, 2007; Yeo, Su, et al., 2020). This theory supposes that humor and laughter can reduce tension and stress (Lynch, 2002). There are two properties that characterize relief humor: *healing humor* and *aggressive humor* (Lynch, 2002). Healing humor allows for built-up tension to be released (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Lynch, 2002; Popescu, 2010). The aggressive property refers to when humor acts as a form of disguised aggression or resistance (Lynch, 2002). This can sometimes be manifested to manage sexual or violent desires (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004).

³ A meta theory is defined by Merriam-Webster as a theory that analysis, investigates, or describes the theory itself, in this case, referring to the study of the theories for humor .

Incongruity Theory. Incongruity theory asserts that humor derives from the identification of non-threatening incongruity between the frameworks used in an instance of humor (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004; Popescu, 2010; Martin, 2010; Meyer, 2000). This theory assumes that a humorous instance takes two distinct frames of reference and combines them in an unexpected way, free from their distinctive interpretative frames (Martin, 2010; Meyer, 2000; Popescu, 2010). Getting the joke, in this instance, would be understanding the relationship between those two frames (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Martin, 2010; Popescu, 2010). This theory emphasizes a more cognitive approach as the receiver needs to be able to understand the distinct frameworks and how they are usually incongruous to feel mirth (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004; Popescu, 2010).

Superiority Theory. Superiority theory is the assumption that mirth is experienced through feelings of superiority or triumph over others (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Lynch, 2002; Popescu, 2010; Shifman, 2007). This theory sees humor as fulfilling an emotional function, where the humor is leveraging the inadequacies of others or oneself (Lynch, 2002). Because humor often leverages the practices and traditions of cultural roles and norms (Gal, 2019), the “butt of the joke” (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014) is usually the target of scorn, and possibly prejudice (Gal, 2019). Ambiguity over whom the humor is directed can lead to higher instances of misunderstandings between groups (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014).

Humor in This Study

In this study, organizational humor use will be conceptualized based on Lynch’s (2002) and Meyer’s (2000) assertion that organizations intentionally utilizing humorous messaging in their communication with their publics are affecting their relationship by either reinforcing the status quo or by releasing tension that has built up within the organizational-public relationship.

However, organizational humor use is complicated by the “dualistic nature of the paradoxes of humor” (Lynch, 2002, p. 424). The paradox of humor refers to “the double-edged sword” (Meyer, 2000) that is the two sets of paradoxical and simultaneous functions of humor in communication: identification and differentiation; control and resistance (Lynch, 2002; Meyer, 2000). This paradox is manifested as a humor message functioning as identification for one group, while it functions as differentiation for another (Meyer, 2000). Therefore, while identification and alignment with the sender can cause boundaries to form if shared meaning is achieved, resistance and multiple meanings are simultaneously happening for others who did not achieve shared meaning with the sender (Lynch, 2002; Meyer, 2000).

Meyer suggested that humor is receiver-centered, as the cognitive experience that is involved in mirth is an internal redefining of their social reality (Meyer, 2000). Humor is evaluated through the individual receiving the humor (Lynch, 2002; Martin, 2010; Meyer, 2000; Yeo, Anderson, et al., 2020; Yeo et al., 2021; Yeo, Su, et al., 2020), and hence what the individual will find humorous is highly dependent on their social and cultural contexts (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Gal, 2019; Shifman, 2007). Levels of mirth can be measured based on examining how and what the humor is composed of. Levels of mirth, comprehension, and engagement were found to be impacted by different types of humor (Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2020; Yeo et al., 2021; Yeo, Su, et al., 2020). This is because the rhetorical construction of the humor message dictates whether the humor will be understood by the receiver or not (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004; Lynch, 2002; Meyer, 2000). Therefore, to understand how the construction of a humor message may affect the receiver’s experience, the following sections will further deconstruct the different components of a humor message.

Humor Typology

Humorous communication is an instance of communication between the sender, receiver(s), and the intended humorous “butt” who may be either the sender, receiver, or a third party (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004; Lynch, 2002; Meyer, 2000). The purpose of communication is to share meaning (Lendingham, 2003). Meaning in humor is built through a composite of frameworks built by the humor sender to be understood by the humor receiver (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004; Martin, 2010; Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2020; Shifman, 2007). Much of these frameworks fit one or a combination of the three metatheories and can be manifested in a multitude of ways (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004; Martin, 2010; Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2020; Shifman, 2007). Regardless of the motivation behind the humor message, the topics that humor is used to explore remain universal (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004; Gal, 2019; Martin, 2010; Popescu, 2010; Shifman, 2007).

Topics that are used in humorous communication can be generally categorized into six main “domains of joking” (Shifman, 2007, p. 189). These domains can generally be categorized as language, sex and gender, politics, ethnicity, religion, and age (Shifman, 2007). These humor categories can be further categorized into either “globally oriented” or “locally oriented” (Shifman, 2007, p. 189). Globally oriented humorous communication will feature topics common to all societies across the world (Shifman, 2007). Locally oriented humorous communication, on the other hand, will rely on local and more culture-specific frames of reference (Shifman, 2007).

Humor is often considered to be both the medium in which a message is communicated and the message itself (Lynch, 2002; Shifman, 2007). Therefore, to study how humorous topics

are transmitted, the form or morphology (i.e., the form or medium in which the humor message is manifested is critical (Shifman, 2007). Shifman suggested that humor on digital media can be further evaluated in the following ways:

Interactivity refers to the process of participants in the humor instance having the potential to be sources and recipients of the humor messages. This form of humor allows users to participate in the humor creation process with other users (Shifman, 2007).

Multimedia. refers to the extent to which there is a convergence of different mediums, or morphologies (e.g., meme, gif, joke, etc.), of humor that make up the full humor message (Shifman, 2007).

Global orientation. This looks at the extent to which a humorous text refers to universal and common phenomena versus more locally oriented humorous texts that would rely more heavily on local cultural categories and patterns, like politics, religion, or ethnicity (Shifman, 2007).

These three characteristics of digital humor communication offer a method to understand the significance of the forms humor takes. It also provides the opportunity to investigate the techniques used in humorous communication, as the use of different humor techniques is related to the topics that the humor message itself is comprised (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004; Ge, 2019; Martin, 2010; Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2020; Yeo, Anderson, et al., 2020).

Humor Categories and Techniques

Different categories of humor elicit different levels of comprehension and reaction (Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2020) and in general, the first step to studying audience perceptions of humor (Yeo, Su, et al., 2020). Humor can be categorized into seven general categories with numerous subcategories in each (Table 1; Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004; Ge,

2019; Martin, 2010; Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2020; Yeo, Anderson, et al., 2020). The categories can largely be categorized, in the following way, listed from the simplest form of humor to the most complex:

[Clownish humor], the simplest category, involves pursuit and vigorous arm and leg movements. *[Surprise]*, equally innocent but cognitively more demanding, involves sudden changes of concepts and images. *[Parody]* is a more complex humor category that requires knowledge of the particular media styles or genres that are parodied. *[Misunderstanding]* is also relatively innocent although it tends more toward victim humor in that it reflects laughing at others, ignorance, or disappointment. *[Slapstick humor]*, a physical pie-in-the-face type of humor, typically has an unfriendly nature and is often accompanied by malicious delight. *[Satire]* and *[irony]* are also often antagonistic but cognitively more demanding than slapstick. *[Irony]* clusters with sarcasm and puns, whereas *[satire]* involves making fun of a well-known person or situation (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004, p. 162).

The categories described and the techniques used within those categories are listed in Table 1.

Table 1

Humor Categories and Techniques

Techniques	Description
Slapstick	
Slapstick	Physical pie-in-the-face humor often involving degradation of someone’s status
Peculiar face	Making a funny face, grimace
Peculiar voice	Funny, unusual voice
Coincidence	A coincidental and unexpected occurrence

Table 1 (cont.)

Clumsiness	Lacking dexterity or grace
Stereotype	Stereotyped or generalized way of depicting members of a certain nation, gender, or other group
Ridicule	Making a fool of someone, verbally or nonverbally
Malicious pleasure	Taking pleasure in other people's misfortune; victim humor
Repartee	Verbal banter, usually in a witty dialogue
Surprise	
Conceptual surprise	Misleading the audience by means of a sudden unexpected change of concept
Transformation	Someone or something takes on another form or undergoes a metamorphosis; before/after
Visual surprise	A sudden unexpected visual/physical change
Exaggeration	Making an exaggeration or overstatement; reacting in an exaggerated way; exaggerating the qualities of a person or product
Irony	
Irony	Saying one thing and meaning something else or exactly the opposite of what you're saying
Sarcasm	Biting remark made with a hostile tone; sarcasm is always a verbal put-down
Embarrassment	An awkward situation in which someone gets a sense of discomfort, uneasiness, or shame
Pun	Playing with the meaning of words
Scale	Very large or small sizes of objects that surpass people's logical expectations
Clownish	
Clownish behavior	Making vigorous arm and leg movements or demonstrating exaggerated irregular physical behavior
Anthropomorphism	Objects or animals with human features
Speed	Talking or moving in very fast or slow motion
Chase	A pursuit or chase of someone or something

Table 1 (Cont.)

Satire	
Irreverent behavior	Lacking proper respect for authority or the prevailing standards
Peculiar music	Funny, unusual music
Outwitting	Outsmarting someone or the establishment by retort, response, or comeback
Misunderstanding	
Misunderstanding	Misinterpreting a situation
Ignorance	Someone acts or behaves in a foolish, naive, gullible, or childish manner
Peculiar sound	Funny sound, unexpected sound, as in cartoons
Disappointment	A situation that leads to (minor) disappointment
Parody	
Parody	Imitating a style or a genre of literature or other media
Bombast	Talking in a high-flown, grandiloquent, or rhetorical manner
Rigidity	Someone who thinks along straight lines, who is conservative and inflexible
Absurdity	Nonsense, a situation that goes against all logical rules
Infantilism	Playing with the sound of words
Other	
Sexual allusion	Making a reference or insinuation to sexual or naughty matters
Imitation	Mimicking or copying someone's appearance or movements while keeping one's own identity at the same time
Impersonation	Taking on the identity of another person, intentionally or unintentionally

These humor techniques can appear alone or as combinations (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004; Martin, 2010), and can be used regardless of the morphology of the humor communication (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004; Shifman, 2007). Furthermore, all these humor techniques are found in daily social interaction and can relate to one or more of the three metatheories (Table 2; Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004; Meyer, 2000).

Table 2
Metatheories and Related Humor Category

Relief Theory	Incongruity Theory	Superiority Theory
Slapstick	Clownish	Satire
Surprise	Surprise	Irony
	Misunderstanding	Slapstick
	Slapstick	

Note: this table is related to Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004

The humor that occurs in our daily social interactions can be categorized into three forms of humor instances (Martin, 2010). Those three forms of humorous instances are *jokes*, *spontaneous conversational humor*, and *accidental or unintentional humor* (Martin, 2010).

Jokes. A joke refers to a short and amusing story that consists of a setup and ends with some sort of punchline (Martin, 2010; Shifman, 2007). The setup can be long, or short, but it is context-free and self-contained (Martin, 2010). All the necessary information for understanding and enjoying the joke are used as part of the joke setup (Martin, 2010).

Spontaneous conversational humor. Spontaneous conversational humor is characterized by being context-dependent (Martin, 2010). Spontaneous conversational humor instances can be related to the humor types that occur in naturalistic conversations (Martin, 2010).

Unintentional or accidental humor. Accidental humor occurs because of an incongruous or surprising incident occurring and is usually physical or linguistic (Martin, 2010). In these humorous instances, the sender may not have meant to be humorous.

An individual may be psychologically and socially motivated to use humor (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004; Lynch, 2002; Meyer, 2000; Popescu, 2010; Shifman, 2007; Yeo et al., 2021). Psychologically, humor may be motivated by the need

for relief in a tense situation or to feel superior over someone else to boost one's own self-image (Popescu, 2010; Martin, 2010). Socially, humor may be motivated by the need to create an in-group, or an out-group, and to create boundaries around those groups (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004; Meyer, 2000; Popescu, 2010; Shifman, 2007; Yeo et al., 2021). The motivations behind a particular humor instance can be understood through the examination of the metatheories and the employment of a variety of humor techniques used in the humor message (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004; Lynch, 2002; Meyer, 2000; Popescu, 2010; Shifman, 2007; Yeo et al., 2021). Regardless of the motivation behind the humor, however, digitally mediated humor messages are characterized by their interactivity, their morphology, and their global orientation. These three characteristics are informed by the universal topics and motivations the humor messages engage with.

Humor on Digital Media

As explored in the previous section, humor on digital media can facilitate participatory boundary-making and intragroup dialogue (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Gal, 2019; Shifman, 2007). However, humor on digital media is complicated by the disembodied nature of digital media (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Gal, 2019; Shifman, 2007). Because social media is a context-collapsed space (Gal, 2019) and there exists the potential for intergroup communication because of the higher possibility of incidentally seeing in-group humor (Gal, 2019; Simis-Wilkinson et al., 2018), there is significant potential for multiple interpretations, or *polysemy*, in digitally mediated humorous communication (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Gal, 2019; Shifman, 2007). Digital media provides open spaces for the discursive effort to offer boundary work to happen because of its capacity for many meanings to exist and be shared (Gal, 2019). Boundary work refers to collective social efforts to promote bonding between and

segregation from groups (Gal, 2019), thus the creation of an “in” group and an “out” group (Gal, 2019).

Humor frequently enforces group norms (Gal, 2019; Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2020; Popescu, 2010; Simis-Wilkinson et al., 2018; Yeo, Anderson, et al., 2020; Yeo et al., 2021) providing the potential for aggressive humor towards those in the out-group (Gal, 2019; Martin, 2010; Popescu, 2010; Shifman, 2007), and thus creating stronger feelings of “us” versus “them” (Gal, 2019), and amplifying the homogeneity of opinion in the group. As a result, humor on digital media can ultimately function to bring people together and divide them (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Gal, 2019; Shifman et al., 2014; Simis-Wilkinson et al., 2018).

When considering the capacity for humor to create shared meaning or division, the opportunity exists for organizations to use humor to relate to their publics. The organizational use of humor has been documented to positively impact organizations if the humor is perceived as being appropriately used by the organization by their intended audience (Ge, 2019; Kim et al., 2016; Simis-Wilkinson et al., 2018; Xiao et al., 2018; Yeo et al., 2021; Yeo, Su, et al., 2020) and potentially devastating if it’s not (Ge, 2019; Kim et al., 2016; Simis-Wilkinson et al., 2018; Xiao et al., 2018; Yeo et al., 2021; Yeo, Su, et al., 2020).

If humorous digital communication is perceived by the receiver as appropriately symbolic and the frames of reference are comprehensible to the “in-group” created by the humor message, then organizations can achieve mutual meaning with the receivers of their humorous communication (Davis et al., 2018; Fraustino & Ma, 2015; Ge, 2019; Kim et al., 2016; Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2020; Simis-Wilkinson et al., 2018; Xiao et al., 2018; Yeo et al., 2021; Yeo, Su, et al., 2020). This can result in increased engagement (e.g., increased likes, comments, and shares on a post) (Fraustino & Ma, 2015; Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2020; Yeo, Su, et al.,

2020), serve as “emotional nourishment” (Ge, 2019, p. 22), decrease crisis attribution (e.g., deeming an organization as less responsible in a crisis) (Kim et al., 2016; Xiao et al., 2018), and act as a vehicle for meaningful participatory community making in digitally mediated environments (Davis et al., 2018; Ge, 2019; Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2020; Simis-Wilkinson et al., 2018; Yeo, Anderson, et al., 2020).

However, if humorous digital communication is perceived as somehow inappropriate for the audience to whom the humorous message is directed, then messaging is at a higher risk of being misunderstood and even damaging the sender’s reputation (Fraustino & Ma, 2015; Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2020; Simis-Wilkinson et al., 2018; Xiao et al., 2018). Humor that is perceived as incongruous with the organization’s pre-crisis reputation, for example, higher perceptions of crisis attribution (Xiao et al., 2018). Furthermore, humor use has been tied to lower public behavioral intentions to act on the information provided in a crisis (Fraustino & Ma, 2015).

Although there are ample opportunities for humor to function to bring people together, there is also tremendous evidence that it can divide, leading to social exclusion (Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2020; Simis-Wilkinson et al., 2018; Xiao et al., 2018), and reduced trust in the system that the receiver perceives the sender to represent (Simis-Wilkinson et al., 2018). This makes humor an inherently risky organizational communication method.

As a form of communication, humor provides senders the opportunity to participate and engage with publics in a meaningful way by conveying mutuality with publics (Ge, 2019), empathy (Xiao et al., 2018), and commitment to their organizational public relationship (Kim, 2016) by deliberately employing various techniques and forms that communicate unification over division (Lynch, 2002; Meyer, 2000). In those ways, organizational humor use can be

perceived as a highly effective tool for the organization to affect the relationship between themselves and their publics (Lynch, 2002), especially in its capacity to enforce or uphold the status quo or relieve pressure to reduce tensions between the organizations and their publics (Lynch, 2002).

Humor Forms as Communicative Functions

Humor, as a form of communication, can be potentially impactful in either creating or deteriorating relationships between groups. Meyer (2000) claimed that humor is inherently social because the experience is the result of an interaction between two entities, and its ability to create an in-group and an out-group (Lynch, 2002, Meyer, 2000). The functions of humor are directly related to the motivations for sending humor, in that the motivation for humor indicates the dynamics used to form those groups (Lynch, 2002; Meyer, 2000). For example, humor motivated by superiority theory suggests that the in-group uses humor to distinguish themselves from the outgroup (Lynch, 2002; Meyer, 2000), and incongruity theory provides the opportunity to establish values or ideologies that can be negotiated within the group (Lynch, 2002). Relief theory accounts for the need to reduce the tension that generally exists between people (Lynch, 2002; Meyer, 2000). Therefore, Meyer (2000) argues that understanding why humor is communicated and how it affects requires examining the effect that humor messages have in communication. Meyer (2000) identifies four communicative forms of humor that inform how a receiver will interpret the function a humor message has; those forms are *identification*, *clarification*, *enforcement*, and *differentiation*.

Identification. Identification is the process that enhances the sender's credibility and builds group cohesiveness by communicating identifying markers between the sender and audience (Meyer, 2000). This humor stems from the desire for the message receiver to

identify with the message sender to create perceptions of safety between them (Meyer, 2000). This safe relationship is often conducive to reducing tension or encouraging superiority in that the receiver feels superior because of their perceived identification with the humor sender (Meyer, 2000).

Clarification. Clarification can happen when the humor is used to “encapsulate [a communicator's] views into memorable phrases or short anecdotes, resulting in the clarification of issues or positions” (Meyer, 2000, p. 319). This form of communication promotes recall and attention (Meyer, 2000). This function can be tied to *incongruity theory*⁴ (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004; Popescu, 2010; Martin, 2010; Meyer, 2000). as such communication often serves to “clarify social norms or perceptions” (Meyer, 2000, p. 320). The humor in these messages originates from what is likely a small violation of what is expected. The humorous message focuses on the expected norm instead of the violation (Meyer, 2000).

Enforcement. Enforcement occurs when a communicator uses criticism while maintaining perceptions of identification with the receiver (Meyer, 2000). This form of humor teaches and enforces social norms (Meyer, 2000). Mirth is experienced at the illumination of a violation of a specific norm or standard. In this case, humor is used to discipline those who are not perceived to be following the accepted norms or rules of the group (Meyer, 2000). The norms that are illuminated within this type of communication are usually ones that the receiver knows (Meyer, 2000). That discrepancy can point to the

⁴ Incongruity theory refers to the metatheory that explains that humor is created when two or more distinct frames of reference are combined in an unexpected way, free from their distinctive interpretative frames, and understanding the joke is understanding how those distinct frames of reference relate.

need for enforcement or correction while ridiculing the person responsible for the initial humorous violation (Meyer, 2000).

Differentiation. Differentiation is often used to deliberately separate and contrast the communicator from others (Meyer, 2000). “Humor is invoked to make both alliances and distinctions” (Meyer, 2000, p. 321). This use of humor can be used to “transcend the immediate situation and objectify it” (Meyer, 2000, p. 322). By objectifying the situation, humor promotes reason (Meyer, 2000). This humor is considered to be the harshest as it does not consider the opposing group (Meyer, 2000). Furthermore, there is also some level of identification possible in these types of communication for those who agree with the communicator (Meyer, 2000).

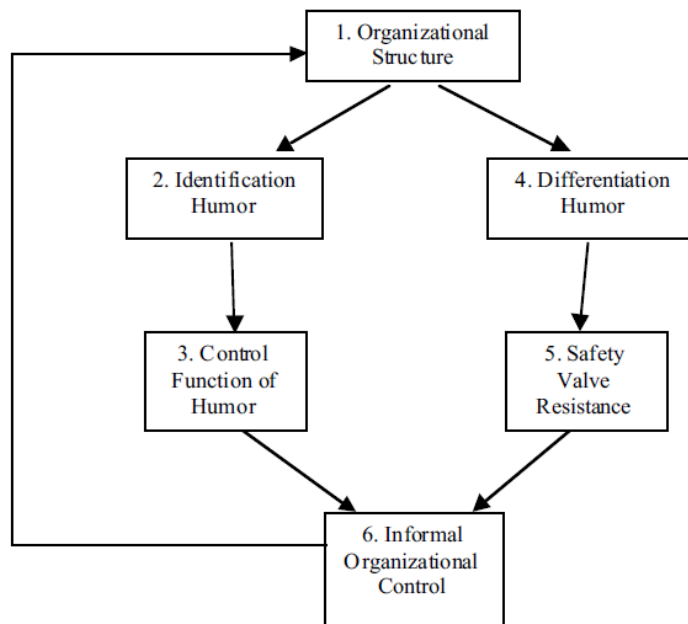
These four functions, as Meyer (2000) noted, form a *double-edged sword*, a paradoxical situation in which humor both unifies and divides communicators simultaneously. Furthermore, Meyer (2000) explained that this paradox is experienced by the receiver on a spectrum, with identification with the humor sender and differentiation from the humor sender as the anchor points, and the communicative function of a particular humor message falling along with that spectrum. The implication, therefore, is that an organization or entity that employs the aforementioned rhetorical humor techniques is willing the message to strategically ally themselves with or against participants in the humor instance (Meyer, 2000).

In an organizational context, Lynch (2002) suggested that the analysis of the organization’s application of humor can be used to provide insight into how humor messaging may influence the various relationships with the message receivers. Lynch (2002) asserted that the purposeful utilization of identification or differentiation rhetorical humor strategies by organizations impacts the manner in which the organization is able to uphold the status quo, as

depicted in Figure 1 (Lynch, 2002). While reduced to a dualistic representation of organizational humor communication (Lynch, 2002), Figure 1 outlines the cyclical nature of humor in maintaining organizational culture.

Figure 1

Lynch's 2002 Model of Humor in Organizations



The following explains the features of Figure 1 (p. 437).

1. Organizational structures: an individual reacts to a humorous organizational communication and relates it to the organization's structures, reputations, and incongruities, both past, and present (Lynch, 2002).
2. Identification: this represents the degree to which an individual's beliefs are reflected in the organization, and therefore, the degree to which that individual identifies as aligned with the organization in the humorous communication (Lynch, 2002).
3. Control function of humor: Lynch (2002) argues that the sender of a humorous communication gains control over the receiver because of identification humor.

Therefore, if the humorous organizational message yields identification, the control function of humor is triggered (Lynch, 2002).

4. Differentiation: this represents the degree to which the individual feels “othered” by the organization because of the humorous communication (Lynch, 2002). Humor that is purposeful in its differentiation may have the sender work to unify in differentiation (Lynch, 2002).
5. Safety valve resistance humor: Lynch (2002) argues that the consequence of differentiation humor communication is that it can trigger a resistance consequence in the individual receiving the message (Lynch, 2002). The use of this kind of humor can alleviate some of the tension that may build between an organization and an individual (Lynch, 2002). However, if that is the intention, the humor is really functioning as identification (Lynch, 2002).
6. Informal organizational control: this refers to any humor that is used to uphold the social structure and goals of the organization (Lynch, 2002) and is the possible outcome of both organizational identification and differentiation humor messages (Lynch, 2002).

Lynch’s (2002) model of organizational humor communication demonstrates how the humor process generally manifests to control and uphold the cultural norms that the organization wishes to uphold.

Humor, therefore, is understood to be a strategic form of communication for organizations (Fraustino & Ma, 2015; Ge, 2019; Gstalter, 2020; KFC Extra Crispy Sunscreen, 2017; “Wendy’s Nuggs for Carter Case Study,” 2018; Kim, 2016; Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2020; Xiao et al., 2018) that can potentially reinforce or weaken the relational bond among the

participants involved the organization's humor instances (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004; Lynch, 2002; Meyer, 2000).

As demonstrated through this section, humorous organizational communications function as a mechanism in which organizational values can be communicated. The shared experience of mirth invites publics to align themselves with the organization. Publics' alignment with an organization does not only result in stronger relationships between them but could also trigger the process of organizational identification, which is outlined in the next section.

Identification Theory

The result of a process in which publics perceive an alignment between their personal values or goals with those of an organization is referred to as *organizational identification* (Ashforth et al., 2020; Besharov, 2014; Brickson, 2005; Cooper & Thatcher, 2010; Gioia et al., 2010). According to organizational identification, organizations should provide a framework in which individuals within the organization can align and therefore, identify, with the organization as having shared values (Besharov, 2014). Organizational identification typically refers to when individuals within an organization perceive the organization as reflecting their own self-concepts (Ashforth et al., 2020; Besharov, 2014; Brickson, 2005; Cooper & Thatcher, 2010; Gioia et al., 2010). However, for the purposes of this thesis, the concept of organizational identification will be applied broadly to receivers of an organization's communication. The reason for this conceptual shift is because identification is possible with both internal publics and external publics as well (Ashforth et al., 2020).

Identification is a highly involved process that happens over the course of time between the organization and public (Gioia et al., 2010). The identification process is one that is based on how individuals perceive themselves and their relationship to the organization (Gioia et al.,

2010). The notions of self-concept and self-identification are critical components of an individual's ability to perceive the orientation of an organization's values as aligning with their own (Ashforth et al., 2020; Cooper & Thatcher, 2010; Gioia et al., 2010). The notion of self-concept (Brickson, 2005; Cooper & Thatcher, 2010) is described as the way an individual may think of themselves in terms of their own individual characteristics, role relationships, or group memberships (Cooper & Thatcher, 2010). Individuals' self-concept orientations (Brickson, 2005; Cooper & Thatcher, 2010) are self-identified but, generally, individuals can self-characterize into one of three broad groups - individualists, relationists, and collectivists (Brickson, 2005; Cooper & Thatcher, 2010).

Not only is the self-identification of self-concept by publics helpful for organizations to understand the values of their publics, but self-concept identification by individuals can also guide organizational communication (Ashforth et al., 2020). Communications that anthropomorphize or assign human characteristics to a non-human entity such as an organization, can result in organizational members relating to the organization as a peer (Ashforth et al., 2020). Furthermore, humanizing the organization allows the organization to take on interpersonal behaviors, emotions, and accountability as well as enables relationships to form through social, relational, and personal identification (Ashforth et al., 2020).

Individuals identify with an organization when shared values with an organization are enacted (Besharov, 2014). When the perception is that shared values are not being enacted, however, dis-identification can occur (Besharov, 2014). Dis-identification is the process in which individuals experience disillusionment and ultimately perceive the organization as having opposing values or goals as their own (Besharov, 2014). When dis-identification occurs, an individual experiencing it will look to distance themselves from the organization (Besharov,

2014). Therefore, an organization looking for publics to ally themselves with them, the organization will look to communicate its values and goals to the public as effectively as possible. Existing research (Chen et al., 2020; Kent & Taylor, 2002; Ki & Nekmat, 2015; Ledingham, 2003; Zhou & Xu, 2019) has revealed that two-way symmetrical communication between an organization and their publics based on dialogic tenets (Kent & Taylor, 1998; 2002) is an effective model of communication between organizations and their publics. When engaging in such symmetrical communication, organizations can effectively foster meaningful discourse by demonstrating a commitment to their publics and empowering their publics to make impactful decisions, for example (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Therefore, the following section will provide an overview of dialogic communication.

Dialogic Communication

An organization-public relationship (OPR) forms naturally between an organization and its various publics (Chen et al., 2020; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002; Lane, 2020; Ledingham, 2003). That relationship is informed by the communication activities that an organization engages in (Benton & Peterka-Benton, 2020). Scholarship within this relational framework asserts that two-way symmetrical communication not only fosters the exchange of ideas and information in a way that potentially enhances the OPR (Benton & Peterka-Benton, 2020; Chen et al., 2020; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002; Lane, 2020), but it also provides the opportunity to adapt organizational identity to align with their publics' values and beliefs (Benton & Peterka-Benton, 2020; Lane, 2020). Organizations may be motivated to participate in a conversation with their publics to exchange information, express or deliberate, collaborate, or co-create value (Chen et al., 2020). These behaviors are often considered in public relations to be a dialogue (Chen et al., 2020; Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002; Lane, 2020)

Two schools of thought exist around what defines organization-public dialogue (Chen et al., 2020; Lane, 2020). The first school of thought understands dialogue as the deliberative ongoing engagement between organizations and publics (Chen et al., 2020; Lane, 2020). The second school of thought, however, is based on Kent and Taylor's (1998;2002) conceptualization of the specific characteristics that define dialogic communication as the positively oriented holistic co-construction of meaning and decision making an organization pursues, encompassing two-way symmetrical communication activities as one of its defining characteristics (Benton & Peterka-Benton. 2020; Chen et al., 2020; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002; Lane, 2020; Zhou & Xu, 2019). The following sections will first introduce the concepts developed by Kent & Taylor (1998; 2002) on which much of dialogic theory and this thesis is based and then provide a broad overview of the current discourse surrounding dialogic theory, including a brief introduction to the concept of the dialogic ladder in Lane (2020).

Dialogic Principles

Kent and Taylor's (1998; 2002) defined organization-public dialogue as a specific two-way interaction, in which the participants are guided by the principles of *mutuality*, *propinquity*, *empathy*, *risk*, and *commitment*.

Mutuality refers to an acknowledgment of creating a spirit of mutual equality and being inclusive and collaboratively oriented in decision making (Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002; Zhou & Xu, 2019). Mutuality is characterized by *collaboration* and *spirit of mutual equality* (Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002; Zhou & Xu, 2019). *Collaboration* emphasizes intersubjectivity (Kent & Taylor, 2002), and acknowledging of the other (Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002; Zhou & Xu, 2019). *Spirit of mutual equality* strives to have participants in dialogue view each other as equals while avoiding feelings of superiority (Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002).

Propinquity relates to the spontaneity and immediacy of dialogic communication and decision-making (Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002; Zhou & Xu, 2019). Propinquity is characterized by *immediacy of presence*, *temporal flow*, and *engagement* (Kent & Taylor, 2002). *Immediacy of presence* is characterized as an ongoing, immediate conversation between an organization and its publics where all parties involved are communicating about issues that are relevant in the immediate present as opposed to after a decision has been made (Kent & Taylor, 2002). *Temporal flow* refers to a “deliberative” (Kent & Taylor, 2002, p. 26) form of communication that works to create a shared, equitable, and acceptable future for all parties (Kent & Taylor, 2002). *Engagement* is achieved when the participants are willing to devote themselves entirely to the conversation (Kent & Taylor, 2002).

Empathy refers to an organization’s “atmosphere of support and trust” (Zhou & Xu, 2019, p.2) that needs to exist for dialogue to be achieved (Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002; Zhou & Xu, 2019). Empathy, sometimes referred to as sympathy, is characterized by *supportiveness*, *communal orientation*, and *confirmation* (Kent & Taylor, 2002). *Supportiveness* is demonstrated through the deliberate facilitation of participation in the OPR (Kent & Taylor, 2002). *Communal orientation* is the commitment to forming real local relationships to create local and global communities (Kent & Taylor, 2002). *Confirmation*, or acknowledgment, is the recognition of the importance of the voices of others and of their values (Kent & Taylor, 2002).

Risk is an inherent part of a dialogic relationship between an organization and its publics (Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002; Zhou & Xu, 2019). Risk is characterized by *vulnerability*, *unanticipated consequences*, and *recognition of strange otherness* (Kent & Taylor, 2002). *Vulnerability* refers to the potential manipulation of active participants in sharing information, beliefs, and desires that naturally occur when opening oneself to others (Kent & Taylor, 2002).

Unanticipated consequences are the result of the spontaneous quality of dialogic communication (Kent & Taylor, 2002, p.28) Because of its spontaneity, it cannot be scripted. Hence unanticipated consequences are sometimes inevitable (Kent & Taylor, 2002). *Recognizing the strange otherness* refers to being conscious of the individuality of all participants and accepting each individual as unique and valuable because of the perspective they bring to the relationship (Kent & Taylor, 2002).

Commitment is the demonstration of a commitment to building the OPR, engaging in conversations, and adjusting interpretations when necessary (Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002; Zhou & Xu, 2019). Commitment is characterized by *genuineness*, *commitment to the conversation*, and *commitment to interpretation* (Kent & Taylor, 2002). *Genuineness* refers to authentic representations regardless of whether sharing that representation is valuable or not (Kent & Taylor, 2002). *Genuineness* also reflects the desire to place the good of the relationship over the good of the organization (Kent & Taylor, 2002). *Commitment to the conversation* is the facilitation of purposeful conversations to achieve mutually beneficial positions (Kent & Taylor, 2002). *Commitment to interpretation* refers to the need for participants in dialogue to be committed to interpreting and understanding all parties' perspectives (Kent & Taylor, 2002).

For an organization to embody the five features of dialogic communication, Kent and Taylor (1998) provided five communicative mechanisms to achieve dialogic communication: *dialogic loops*, *usefulness of information*, *generating return visits*, *ease of interface*, and *the rule of conservation of visitors*.

Dialogic loops are feedback loops in which the organization actively engages with and responds to their public in a complete communication (Kent & Taylor, 1998). *Usefulness of information* refers to the need for organizational communication to have general value to their

public (Kent & Taylor, 1998). *Generating return visits* suggests that organizations need to find ways to actively encourage repeated visits to content (Kent & Taylor, 1998). *Ease of access* refers to the level at which publics can intuitively and easily interact with the communication content produced by an organization (Kent & Taylor, 1998). Lastly, *the rule of conservation of visitors* requires that organizations should guide the publics to the valuable content and not as a funnel for other communication tactics by providing them with all the information necessary to remain on the page (Kent & Taylor, 1998). These five principles not only serve as a guide for organizations to create an optimal environment for dialogue to occur in their digitally mediated communication (Kent & Taylor, 1998) but also represent as valuable metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of dialogic communication. Since these foundational descriptions of dialogue were established, dialogue has evolved in academic discourse (Benton & Peterka-Benton, 2020; Chen et al., 2020; Lane, 2020; Zhou & Xu, 2019).

Contemporary Discourse in Dialogic Theory

An organization exchanging information or socializing with their online publics may not be fully able to fulfill all of Kent and Taylor's (2002) principles in every situation (Chen et al., 2020). Therefore, while two schools of thought may generally exist around what constitutes dialogue (Chen et al., 2020; Lane, 2020), organizations communicating on social media are engaged to a certain degree in two-way communication (Benton & Peterka-Benton, 2020; Chen et al., 2020; Lane, 2020).

To account for the various forms of organization-public dialogue, Lane (2020) presents the concept of a dialogic ladder, where an organization's use of two-way communication can be categorized by its rung on the ladder (p. 6). The lowest rungs, according to Lane (2020), are dialogue in name only, they can be characterized in the mechanisms of "closing the loop" or

“shallow dialogue” (p.6). The top of the ladder is characterized, however, as true Dialogue (Lane, 2020), either in that the organization demonstrates some or many characteristics of the principles of dialogic communication (Lane, 2020) as defined by Kent and Taylor (2002). This framework supports recognizing the different understandings of dialogue while reinforcing the aspirational positive holistic orientation that maintains the co-construction of meaning as the ideal form of organization-public dialogue (Lane, 2020). Furthermore, this framework accounts for the current reality of web 2.0 and that regardless of whether an organization pursues dialogue, the force of publicly negotiated meaning will affect the organization (Benton & Peterka-Benton, 2020).

The two-way communication possible between an organization and public, is affected by the organic and interactive nature of the digital platform environment that presents organizations with ample exposure to publics, while also exposing them to a space where they lack the ability to fully control the meaning of their messaging and which publics engages with it (Benton & Peterka-Benton, 2020; Chen et al., 2020; Lane, 2020). Because organizational identity is co-created on social media, organizations are at risk of the public defining the public perception of the organization, without the input of the organization (Benton & Peterka-Benton, 2020). The forms of co-creation that are possible on social media affect the organization’s ability to manage perceptions of organizational identity (Benton & Peterka-Benton, 2020; Chen et al., 2020; Lane, 2020).

The challenges of maintaining ownership of brand identity on social media can be attributed to the environmental requirements that dictate the manner a message is manifested for the public to receive (Bucher & Helmond, 2018; Chen et al., 2020; Jaidka et al., 2019; Khazraee & Novak, 2018; Zhou & Xu, 2019). Therefore, the study of digital platforms as interactive social

environments can offer insights on how to understand the impact of the environment on the interactions possible and provide a way to evaluate for dialogic characteristics (Bucher & Helmond, 2018; Chen et al., 2020; Zhou & Xu, 2019). The following section will explore affordance theory and how it enriches the understanding of the digital communication space.

Affordance Theory

Affordance theory explores how environments are constructed to enable users to execute functions through the technological capabilities of that environment (Bucher & Helmond, 2018; Chen et al., 2020; Jaidka et al., 2019; Khazraee & Novak, 2018; Zhou & Xu, 2019). This theory allows for the conceptualization of digitally mediated social platforms as unique naturalistic environments with distinct opportunities and limitations that affect behaviors within that environment (Bucher & Helmond, 2018; Chen et al., 2020; Jaidka et al., 2019; Khazraee & Novak, 2018; Zhou & Xu, 2019). The conceptualization of dynamic digital environments aids the analysis of humor and dialogue in organizational communications in that it provides a framework of analysis to understand interpersonal behaviors on different social media platforms (Bucher & Helmond, 2018; Chen et al., 2020; Jaidka et al., 2019; Khazraee & Novak, 2018; Zhou & Xu, 2019). Each social media environment provides the opportunity for organizations to use platform technologies that support communication for the purposes of relationship building (Bucher & Helmond, 2018; Jaidka et al., 2019; Khazraee & Novak, 2018; Zhou & Xu, 2019). Furthermore, digitally mediated environments are often distinct from one another in technology, affording opportunities for interpersonal communication to be manifested or constrained differently too (Bucher & Helmond, 2018; Jaidka et al., 2019; Khazraee & Novak, 2018; Zhou & Xu, 2019). The different opportunities, or restrictions, that the technology to communicate within an environment contains impact the way an organization can achieve dialogue or communicate

humor (Bucher & Helmond, 2018; Jaidka et al., 2019; Khazraee & Novak, 2018; Zhou & Xu, 2019). Therefore, this section will first establish a basic understanding of affordance theory, followed by the application of this framework in analyzing dialogic communication on digital media.

Affordance Theory

Affordance theory asks what an environment, physical or digital, offers the user (i.e., person, animal, organization) in terms of possibilities for action and what the environment provides (i.e., technologies) that user to interact within that environment (Bucher & Helmond, 2018). When applied to digital environments, affordance theory suggests that interaction within a digitally mediated environment is dictated by the developers of the platform, the technologies within the environment, and the individuals using the technologies within the platform (Bucher & Helmond, 2018; Jaidka et al., 2019; Khazraee & Novak, 2018; Zhou & Xu, 2019). A digital environment may offer users the opportunity to interact with other users ((Bucher & Helmond, 2018; Chen et al., 2020; Jaidka et al., 2019; Khazraee & Novak, 2018; Zhou & Xu, 2019), to share stories and ask for help (Jaidka et al., 2019), and even to engage in political discourse (Jaidka et al., 2019; Khazraee & Novak, 2018).

The user learns what the environment offers them in terms of actions within the environment through their perceptions of the uses of the technologies that exist within that environment (Bucher & Helmond, 2018; Chen et al., 2020; Jaidka et al., 2019; Khazraee & Novak, 2018; Zhou & Xu, 2019). In digital environments, technologies are the result of a series of choices by the developers of the platform (Jaidka et al., 2019), but the use of the technology is informed by the users' perceptions of the action the technologies allow (Bucher & Helmond, 2018). This can sometimes lead to technologies being used or adapted from their original design

to serve an individual or environment's needs (Bucher & Helmond, 2018; Khazraee & Novak, 2018). As the environment is interacted with, the affordances of the environment are made clear and the constraints of that environment are too (Bucher & Helmond, 2018; Jaidka et al., 2019).

The interplay between what a particular platform affords or constraints in terms of different actions for users, not only affects how the users interact with the environment but also is what defines the kind of environment that exists within a particular platform (Bucher & Helmond, 2018; Chen et al., 2020; Jaidka et al., 2019; Khazraee & Novak, 2018; Zhou & Xu, 2019). The technological affordances or constraints in an environment can affect the type of communication possible within that environment. For example, one study found that the increase in Twitter characters allowed in a Tweet resulted in more civilized political discourse on the platform as compared to before the change in character limit (Jaidka et al., 2019). The result indicates that the constraint of a character limit can impact the level of civility found within an environment (Jaidka et al., 2019). The environment is also defined by the technological affordances of that platform (Bucher & Helmond, 2018; Jaidka et al., 2019). For example, Twitter can be defined by its character limits in Tweets and the ability to Retweet (Jaidka et al., 2019), while Facebook may be defined by its groups or status and wall updates (Khazraee & Novak, 2018). The result of the interplay, therefore, indicates that different platforms attract different publics as users (Jaidka et al., 2019; Khazraee & Novak, 2018; Zhou & Xu, 2019).

Organizations are also affected by the affordances or constraints of the technologies they need to use to communicate with their public on social media (Chen et al., 2020; Zhou & Xu, 2019). Considering again the potential benefit of engaging in dialogic communication with their publics, organizations (Chen et al., 2020; Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002; Zhou & Xu, 2019), the evaluation of the users' use of a platform's technological affordances from a dialogic perspective

can support the analysis of dialogic communication on social media platforms (Chen et al., 2020; Zhou & Xu, 2019).

Dialogic Communication and Affordance Theory

Social media is a dramatically changing landscape that demands public relations scholars to continuously evaluate the role of this new digital space in communication. From the perspective of affordance theory, the dialogic principles can provide insights into the dialogic relationships on social media. The evaluation of the specific mechanisms that support dialogic communication (Benton & Peterka-Benton, 2020; Chen et al., 2020; Lane, 2020; Zhou & Xu, 2019) could be viewed as suggestions to help enact genuine dialogue on social media (Zhou & Xu, 2019). Combining dialogic principles with those of affordance theory provides a new opportunity for assessing social platforms for the affordances and constraints that exist for users on a platform that could affect dialogic outcomes (Chen et al., 2020; Zhou & Xu, 2019).

Evaluating a platform for *favorable affordances*, affordances that are conducive to the creation of dialogic relationships, is a conceptual update for web 2.0 and 3.0 by Zhuo and Xu (2019) to Kent and Taylor's (1998) dialogic principle of ease of interface (Zhuo & Xu, 2019). Zhuo and Xu (2019) suggest *favorable affordances*, as opposed to ease of interface, will provide public relations practitioners the lens to evaluate what technologies exist on a platform that afford dialogic communication, so that favorable affordances are the precursor for the presence of the other dialogic principles - dialogic loops, useful information, return visit generation, visitor conservation (Zhuo & Xu, 2019) - and therefore, also for dialogic communication.

The Case for KFC and the “Chicken Wars”

Humor is prevalent on all social media platforms, and its uses range from creating political humor to enabling meaningful discourse (Davis et al., 2018) to creating trending

hashtags that build levity among colleagues (Simis-Wilkinson et al., 2018). The Center for Disease Control in the United States even deliberately used humor as part of risk messaging for crisis preparedness by playfully referring to a zombie apocalypse (Fraustino & Ma, 2015). Organizations' frequently get attention for humorous posts like when Weetabix went viral after Tweeting a picture of their cereal covered in baked beans that garnered a good deal of public attention (Harrington, 2021) and like Wendy's who has been awarded for campaigns that engage humorously with online user publics ("Wendy's Nuggs for Carter Case Study," 2018). Indeed, humor is a common device on social media to build relationships and a frequent feature in trending topics (Fraustino & Ma, 2015; Ge, 2019; KFC Extra Crispy Sunscreen, 2017; "Wendy's Nuggs for Carter Case Study," 2018; Kim, 2016; Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2020; Xiao et al., 2018).

That is why in the summer of 2019 Popeye's "the chicken wars" campaign on social media became a fast media frenzy ripe with humorous messaging being used by users across platforms (Acreneaux, 2019; Cobe, 2021; Lucas, 2021a; Morona, 2021; Valinsky, 2021). Fast food restaurants in the United States, including Burger King, McDonald's, Chick-Fil-A, KFC, and others, began competing ferociously on social media in order to convince the public that their fried chicken sandwiches were superior to the others, which contributed to more earned media attention around fried chicken sandwiches (Cobe, 2021; Lucas, 2021a, 2021b; Tigg, 2019), including a sketch on the long-running humorous show Saturday Night Live (Tigg, 2019). The campaigns have also been tied to increased profits for these fast-food chain restaurants (Lucas, 2021b; Meisenzahi, 2021).

On January 7, 2021, KFC entered a new sandwich into the chicken wars (Lucas, 2021a; Meisenzahi, 2021; Morona, 2021), launching their "KFC Chicken Sandwich." KFC has a long

history of using humor in their organizational communication. In 2017, KFC was awarded a Silver Anvil Award for their “Extra Crispy Sunscreen” campaign (*KFC Extra Crispy Sunscreen*, 2017). The stated goal of KFC’s campaign was to gain free media exposure by “[breaking] through the news cycle” and increasing media impressions through a deliberately humorous campaign (*KFC Extra Crispy Sunscreen*, 2017). The campaign’s success was attributed to the novelty of chicken-scented sunscreen and obviously its humor.

Indeed, KFC is open about its use of humor as an integral part of its digital media strategies and has credited an increase in profit and followers to its humorous campaigns (Lucas, 2021a). Because of their open acknowledgment of their strategy and the widely recognized success of such humor strategy, KFC serves as a strong example of how an organization integrates humor into strategic organizational communication on social media. Therefore, this study focused on how KFC used humorous organizational communication on Twitter and Facebook surrounding the time before and after their entry into the “chicken wars” where KFC was constantly earning media attention (Lucas, 2021a; Meisenzahi, 2021; Morona, 2021) to gain insight into the relationship between humor and dialogue through answering the following research questions:

RQ1: What forms of humor are utilized by KFC in their organizational communication on social media to influence their relationship with other social media users?

RQ2: How do KFC’s humorous organizational messages affect the dialogic communication with its online publics?

In my next chapter, I will explain the methodology used to answer the research questions.

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to analyze how organizations are using humor in their communication with their online user publics, and if that humor affects the presentation of dialogic communication. As outlined in the previous chapter, organizations are using humor in their communication to form and sustain relationships with their online publics on social media (Fraustino & Ma, 2015; Ge, 2019; Gstalter, 2020; *KFC Extra Crispy Sunscreen*, 2017; “Wendy’s Nuggs for Carter Case Study,” 2018; Kim, 2016; Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2020; Xiao et al., 2018) and are affected by the affordances or constraints of the platform environment (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004; Gal, 2019; Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2020; Shifman et al., 2014; Simis-Wilkinson et al., 2018; Xiao et al., 2018). The way that organizations engage with technologies to communicate with their publics within the social media environment can guide the analysis of organizational relationships (Bucher & Helmond, 2018; Chen et al., 2020; Zhou & Xu, 2019). Therefore, this study conducted a content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Michaelson & Stacks, 2016) using to determine what patterns emerged in KFC’s use of humorous organizational communication on Twitter and Facebook in the four-month period of December 1, 2020, through March 31, 2021, that surrounded KFC’s “entry” into the Chicken Wars. More specifically, this study looked to identify patterns in the forms of humor utilized by KFC and characteristics of dialogic communication presented as the following research questions:

RQ1: What forms of humor are utilized by KFC in their organizational communication on social media to influence their relationship with other social media users?

RQ2: How do KFC’s humorous organizational messages affect the presence of a dialogic relationship?

To answer the questions, data were collected through an online scraping tool developed for this thesis by a computer scientist to compile Twitter and Facebook posts into an excel document. The resulting data set included a total of 63 Twitter messages and 17 Facebook messages that were sent by KFC between December 2020 and March 2021. A mixed manifest and latent message evaluation (Michaelson & Stacks, 2016) was performed through a directed content analysis approach (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) that was designed by the researcher based on the theoretical frameworks introduced in the previous chapter. The codes were defined to identify the presence of humorous messages and characteristics of dialogue and to categorize the various forms of humor and dialogue utilized in the humorous messages. This methodology was used because conducting a content analysis is recommended when a researcher looks to examine a question or extend knowledge through observation in detail while the insights gained can be broadly applied (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Michaelson & Stacks, 2016). This study was conducted independently by the researcher, and therefore, the codebook has low inter-coder reliability.

A preliminary latent (Michaelson & Stacks, 2016) evaluation was first conducted by opening each data point on its native platform to determine which, if any, messages in the sample contained humorous messaging and if the messages in the sample contained features of dialogic communication (Benton & Peterka-Benton, 2020; Chen et al., 2020; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002; Lane, 2020; Zhou & Xu, 2019). A secondary analysis was then conducted on messages found as intended to be humorous and was further categorized by metatheory, humor technique and classification, rhetorical function, dialogic principles, and dialogic tenets. This analysis was achieved through the creation of a codebook based on the research on humor (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004; Gal, 2019; Martin, 2010;

Meyer, 2000; Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2020; Popescu, 2010; Shifman, 2007) and dialogue (Benton & Peterka-Benton, 2020; Chen et al., 2020; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002; Lane, 2020; Zhou & Xu, 2019). Results of the content analysis were recorded on an Excel spreadsheet and saved on the Google cloud. The following methodology chapter is divided into two sections - Sample and Coding Procedure.

Sample

The Chicken Wars, marked as multiple international fast-food chains launching new highly publicized but similar fried chicken sandwich products (Lucas, 2021a) with a remarkable impact on the demand for chicken sandwiches across the United States (Lucas, 2021a; Meisenzahi, 2021; Morona, 2021). KFC, being a restaurant chain that had already been making chicken sandwiches, was considered a late entry into the Chicken Wars, but an incredibly profitable one for KFC (Lucas, 2021a). The ongoing earned media for the fast-food restaurants involved in the war also came with an increase of attention around their social media accounts, as social media is where Popeye's launched the war, and where KFC was one of the restaurant chains to engage with competitors on social media (Acreneaux, 2019; Cobe, 2021; Lucas, 2021a; Morona, 2021; Valinsky, 2021). Because of the significance of social media in the case of the Chicken Wars, and because of KFC's documented use of humor on social media (e.g., *KFC Extra Crispy Sunscreen*, 2017), this study's sample data included time before, during, and after the national rollout of KFC's new sandwich.

KFC entered their new chicken sandwich into the "chicken wars" on January 7, 2021 (Lucas, 2021a; Meisenzahi, 2021; Morona, 2021). This study chose to sample all of KFC's communication on Twitter (n=63) and Facebook (n=17) from one month before KFC launched their new sandwich through three months after, so that all messages KFC communicated from

December 1, 2020, through March 31, 2021, were included in the data set. The data set was compiled by a computer scientist using a Python web scraping program they built for the purpose of this study. The scraping tool was programmed to retrieve all messages KFC communicated on between the dates requested from Twitter and Facebook and output them on an Excel document. This process resulted in a total data set of 63 individual Twitter messages that KFC communicated as Tweets to the public, 17 messages were communicated on Facebook as Facebook Posts. Two sample points were removed from the Twitter sample and one from the Facebook sample because the content had been deleted, totaling 61 Twitter messages for analysis and 16 Facebook posts.

This study organized the collected data in the form of a spreadsheet in Excel to include original media links, the full text of the post, and on Twitter whether the tweet was in reply to another Twitter user. The spreadsheet also recorded the original URLs and saved thumbnails of any media attached to the message and video descriptions. Each message, including any media or audio attached, was hand-coded and categorized using the procedure that is outlined in the next section.

Coding Procedure

This study performed preliminary and secondary evaluations on the collected sample. The preliminary analysis was conducted through a directed message evaluation (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Michaelson & Stacks, 2016) assessing the tone of the messages (Michaelson & Stacks, 2016) for indications that KFC intended for the receiver to experience mirth (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004; Martin, 2010; Meyer, 2000; Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2020; Popescu, 2010; Shifman, 2007). The preliminary analysis also determined whether there were characteristics of dialogic communication present (Benton & Peterka-Benton, 2020; Chen et al.,

2020; Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002; Lane, 2020; Zhou & Xu, 2019). A secondary content analysis was then conducted on the Twitter (n=54) and Facebook (n=13) samples where the researcher determined that humor was present. This analysis further categorized the data by metatheory, humor technique, and humor communication form (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Lynch, 2002; Martin, 2010; Meyer, 2000; Popescu, 2010; Shifman, 2007), and the presence of the principles and mechanisms of dialogic communication (Chen et al., 2020; Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002; Lane, 2020; Zhou & Xu, 2019). The codebook created for the humorous messages to be evaluated is represented in the following categories:

Metatheory

The objective of this category was to evaluate if sample messages on Twitter (incongruous=19, none=7, relief=27, superiority=8) and on Facebook (incongruous=6, none=3, relief=2, superiority=5) could be characterized by one of the three metatheories. The categorization of humor messages by metatheory was done through a latent message analysis (Michaelson & Stacks, 2016) based on the definitions and descriptions of the three metatheories in the research (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004; Gal, 2019; Lynch, 2002; Martin, 2010; Meyer, 2000; Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2020; Shifman, 2007; Shifman et al., 2014; Simis-Wilkinson et al., 2018; Yeo, Anderson, et al., 2020; Yeo et al., 2021). The messages were categorized based on where and whom the researcher identified as the “butt” of the joke, and the relationship between the frames of references used to construct the humor message (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Gal, 2019; Lynch, 2002; Martin, 2010; Meyer, 2000; Popescu, 2010).

Humor technique and classification

The objective of this category was to observe trends in the utilization of specific humor classifications based on the techniques utilized in KFC's humorous messaging. Coding was implemented through a latent message analysis (Michaelson & Stacks, 2016), used to infer which humor techniques outlined in Table 1 and the research conducted in Buijzen and Valkenburg (2004), Martin (2010), Yeo, Anderson, et al. (2020), Yeo et al. (2021), and Yeo, Su, et al. (2020), were utilized by KFC. The analysis was conducted by evaluating the manifest message against each humor technique's description, and categorizing the sample message based on the technique that the researcher determined to best describe the sample messages from Twitter (anthropomorphism=1, chase=2, conceptual surprise=6, exaggeration=2, infantilism=2, malicious pleasure=1, none=7, outwitting=4, parody=2, repartee=31, ridicule=2, transformation=1) and Facebook (chase=1, conceptual surprise=5, exaggeration=1, infantilism=1, malicious pleasure=1, none=3, outwitting=3, ridicule=1).

Humor Communication Form

The objective for this category was to observe the rhetorical humor choices utilized by KFC in the sample collected. The codebook for this category was based on Meyer's (2000) and Lynch's (2002) descriptions of the four rhetorical communicative functions. Further informing the codebook was Lynch's (2002) suggestion that the humor is studied by focusing on the analysis of the expression of humor within the context and setting it is being told. The researcher categorized the sample by evaluating the message against the rhetorical forms defined for both the Twitter sample (clarification=18, differentiation=2, enforcement=12, identification=22, none=7) and the Facebook sample (clarification=3, differentiation=1, enforcement=4, identification=5, none=3).

Dialogic Features

The objective of this category was to identify the frequency in which dialogic features appeared in the sample by forming sub-categories based on nine different descriptions and definitions of the dialogical tenets and principles (Chen et al, 2020; Kent & Taylor, 1998; 2002; Zhou & Xu, 2019). The sub-categories for Twitter and Facebook were *mutuality* (Twitter=43; Facebook=9), *propinquity* (Twitter=38; Facebook=4), *empathy* (Twitter=37; Facebook=7), *risk* (Twitter=38; Facebook=3) and *commitment* (Twitter=37; Facebook=10). The dialogic features were observed by examining each sample message and marking the features that were present. Frequency was determined by comparing the descriptions of each principle from Kent and Taylor (2002) and evaluating if all of the features were present. The other features, based on Kent and Taylor (1998), and further defined in Chen et. al. (2020) and Zhou and Xu (2019) were evaluated:

Dialogic loops. (Twitter=32; Facebook=10): present if the organization completes a circle of communication.

Useful information. (Twitter=50; Facebook=12): present if the online user would find the information valuable to them.

Return visitor. (Twitter=52; Facebook=10): present if users returned to the conversation with the organization.

Visitor conservation. (Twitter=31; Facebook=11): present if users were given no reason to leave the interaction in the message.

The following chapter will summarize the results of the research performed in the content analysis performed.

Results

Recalling the various frameworks outlined in the literature review, this study conceptualized social media platforms as environments that affect the type of communication possible between users and perceptions users have of other users (Bucher & Helmond, 2018; Chen et al., 2020; Jaidka et al., 2019; Khazraee & Novak, 2018; Zhou & Xu, 2019). The literature further asserted that those affordances and constraints in the platform environment can particularly affect the ability of organizations to communicate with their online user publics (Bucher & Helmond, 2018; Chen et al., 2020; Fraustino & Ma, 2015; Gal, 2019; Ge, 2019; Jaidka et al., 2019; Khazraee & Novak, 2018; Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2020; Xiao et al., 2018; Zhou & Xu, 2019), as the digitally mediated platform democratizes the environment for users (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Gal, 2019; Shifman, 2007) so that when favorable affordances exist (Chen et al., 2020; Zhou & Xu, 2019), dialogic communication (Chen et al., 2020; Zhou & Xu, 2019) and organizational identification (Ashforth et al., 2020; Besharov, 2014; Brickson, 2005; Cooper & Thatcher, 2010; Gioia et al., 2010) are possible.

This thesis found that in the sample analyzed, KFC used humor on social media (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004; Gal, 2019; Popescu, 2010; Shifman, 2007). furthermore, this study found patterns of high levels of dialogic characteristics within the humor messages analyzed. This chapter will first outline the results that led to the above observations by answering the research questions.

Forms of Humor used by KFC on Facebook and Twitter

The preliminary content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Michaelson & Stacks, 2016) indicated that humor was present in the majority of messages collected in the sample (Twitter=54; Facebook=13). This supports that KFC uses humor deliberately as part of their

communication strategies on social media and supports the secondary analysis and categorization of the humor sample. The secondary analysis revealed that a variety of social-psychological motivations could be identified in the sample for KFC sending a humor message and that certain humor techniques and rhetorical functions emerged more frequently in the data. This section will outline the patterns identified by the researcher during the coding process and categorization of humor in the sample, first by describing the results of the metatheory categorization, followed by the results of the humor classification categorization process, and finally the results of the classification of the sample through perceived rhetorical function. This analysis aids the ability to answer the first research question:

RQ1: What forms of humor are utilized by KFC in their organizational communication on social media to influence their relationship with other social media users?

Metatheories in KFC Humor

Humor originates as a relief from tension, to contrast the in-group from the out-group, or to reinforce cultural norms (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Gal, 2019; Lynch, 2002; Martin, 2010; Meyer, 2000; Popescu, 2010; Shifman, 2007). In the sample, a variety of social motivations were observed for the humorous messages on both Twitter and Facebook, as depicted in Table 3.

Table 3

Metatheories in KFC's Humorous Messages

	Incongruity		Relief		Superiority	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Twitter	19	35	27	50	8	15
Facebook	6	46	2	15	5	38

As represented in Table 3, the categorization of the messages by perceived motivation differs between platforms. The following sections outline examples of how the different metatheories were represented in the sample.

Incongruous Humor

Incongruous humor is used to reinforce normalized social behaviors and patterns (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004; Popescu, 2010; Lynch, 2002; Martin, 2010; Meyer, 2000). One example of incongruous humor is around the promotion of a KFC collaboration with Lifetime, a cable television network known for romantic movies⁵, entitled “A Recipe for Seduction” (Figure 2). The messaging surrounding this campaign on social media indicated that KFC was intentionally combining the distinct frames of reference – Mario Lopez, Lifetime holiday romance films, Colonel Sander’s being the anthropomorphized symbol of KFC – to make the message humorous. This humor message is predicated on other users being aware of those frames of references outside of the humor message, and that the receiver would find the combination of them acceptable in its absurdity, in a way that does not threaten the social norms that created those frames of reference in the first place.

Figure 2



⁵ <https://www.mylifetime.com/>

Relief Humor

Relief humor theory describes mirth as being experienced due to the relief of tension being reduced between the sender and receiver that releases nervous energy from a situation that either exists between them or around them (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004; Popescu, 2010; Martin, 2010; Meyer, 2000). Relief humor was observed to release tension around a sociocultural

Figure 3



norm (Meyer, 2000) in which KFC could offer a solution in the sample data from both social media platforms. On Twitter, relief was also observed in messages directed toward other online users. This section will first demonstrate an example of relief humor to reduce tension around an issue, and then will provide an example of how relief was observed on Twitter.

Humor as Relief from Socio-Cultural Tensions

During the classification process, relief humor was observed in messages addressing tensions surrounding socio-cultural tensions, and in

particular, the stress of feeding a family. This is demonstrated in the following example, where the motivation in Figure 3 was identified as being from relief theory. The multimedia and audio message asserts that “there are few problems a bucket of chicken can’t solve,” and a video featuring an animated Colonel Sanders addresses the receiver/user in the first person, suggesting that he, the animated Colonel Sanders, will be making dinner for the receiver of the message “tonight.” The motivation in this example is understood as relief because the mirth is

experienced as a release of tension around family-food planning. Experiencing mirth, in this case, is revealing the possibility that ordering KFC could alleviate the problems experienced generally, but also with the socio-cultural tensions associated with managing a dinner for a family. The exaggerated benefits of fried chicken support the release of tension of a social-norm, a central characteristic of relief theory.

Another example of relief being felt from the tension being released around the social norm of meal planning is seen in Figure 4. In the Facebook post, KFC tells the receiver/user that “Today is a great day to not have to cook” and provides the solution to not having to cook – buying KFC. Mirth is experienced in this example as revealing the suppressed desire to not cook dinner to the receiver. Therefore, this example is a demonstration of a humor message motivated by relief theory to ease tension around the social norm itself, while still upholding the status quo of meal planning in general.

Humor as relief with other users

Relief theory was observed in cases on Twitter in messages like the ones above, but also part of an interactive (Shifman, 2007), humor message, in which KFC is alleviating the tension that may be created when another user uses KFC as a butt of their joke. 32 of KFC’s humorous messages were sent as a response to another user on Twitter and in 24 of those messages, relief

Figure 4



Figure 5

was the primary motivation. The researcher observed relief theory in cases, like Figure 5, where a user used KFC as the butt of their own humorous Tweets, and KFC used relief to reduce tensions around that. In Figure 5, the

first user demonstrates some humorous but disparaging reaction to the watching of “A Recipe for Seduction,” and KFC is the butt of their joke. In these cases, the sample demonstrated a trend of KFC using relief-motivated humor to make themselves part of the joke as an attempt to reduce potential tensions or inhibitions around interacting with KFC on social media.

Superiority Humor

Superiority theory suggests that mirth is experienced through triumph or feelings of superiority over the butt of the joke (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004; Popescu, 2010; Martin, 2010; Meyer, 2000). Superiority humor was observed in cases relating to the chicken sandwich that KFC launched as part of “The Chicken Wars” (Cobe, 2021; Valinsky, 2021). The following table, Table 4, represents all the messages that can be described as motivated by superiority theory:

Table 4.
Humorous Messages Motivated by Superiority Theory

Date Sent	Twitter Message text	Facebook Message text
15-Mar	Why trust a burger joint to do a fried chicken sandwich right? Now that would be darn foolish. Get the all-new Kentucky Fried Chicken Sandwich, the only chicken sandwich that's finger lickin' good, 'cause we make the chicken sandwiches around here. Order today on the KFC App!	Why trust a burger joint to do a fried chicken sandwich right? Now that would be just too darn foolish. Get the all-new Kentucky Fried Chicken Sandwich, the only chicken sandwich that's finger lickin' good, 'cause we make the chicken sandwiches around here. Order today on the KFC App! Prices higher with delivery.
16-Mar	We thought it was just a random street corner ㄨ_(ツ)_/	We thought it was just a random street corner ㄨ_(ツ)_/
17-Mar	However you like your fried chicken sandwiches, you should be getting them from someone with FRIED CHICKEN in their name. Get the new Kentucky Fried Chicken Sandwich from KFC today!	[no corresponding message on Facebook]
	Why go to a burger joint for a chicken sandwich? The new Kentucky Fried Chicken Sandwich is the ONLY fried chicken sandwich that's finger lickin' good. Get yours on the KFC App today!	Why go to a burger joint for a chicken sandwich? The new Kentucky Fried Chicken Sandwich is the ONLY fried chicken sandwich that's finger lickin' good. Get yours on the KFC App today!
	@Wendys @JeffreyJones71 We just wanted to show you what a real chicken sandwich looks like.	[No corresponding message on Facebook]
18-Mar	"What kind of sandwich is it?" Things you will never have to wonder at Kentucky Fried Chicken because the answer is always: chicken.	[No corresponding message on Facebook]
19-Mar	Don't be fooled, the new Kentucky Fried Chicken Sandwich is the ONLY fried chicken sandwich that's finger lickin' good. And for only \$3.99!	Don't be fooled, the new Kentucky Fried Chicken Sandwich is the ONLY fried chicken sandwich that's finger lickin' good. And for only \$3.99!
23-Mar	If you like fried chicken sandwiches, you better get 'em from someone with FRIED CHICKEN in their name. The NEW Kentucky Fried Chicken Sandwich is just \$3.99, in either Classic or Spicy. It's finger lickin'good! Order yours on the KFC App today. https://t.co/HW6XXlyqBw	If you like fried chicken sandwiches, you better get 'em from someone with FRIED CHICKEN in their name. The NEW Kentucky Fried Chicken Sandwich is just \$3.99, in either Classic or Spicy. It's finger lickin'good! Order yours on the KFC App today.

The messages in Table 4 were observed as being motivated by the desire to form strong differentiators between those who would find the message in Figure 6, for example, to be humorous. Figure 6 is a humor message comprised of a humorous Tweet where KFC feigns ignorance on the placement of their new ad campaign launched to bring awareness to their chicken sandwich, and a series of three photos depicting KFC billboards that read “we make the chicken sandwiches around here” in front of or beside competitor fast-food chains who also make chicken sandwiches and are participants in the “chicken wars” (Cobe, 2021; Valinsky, 2021).

Figure 6



Figure 7



stemming from a desire to triumph over and even

laugh at the misfortune of their competitors.

Generally, however, mirth is experienced in KFC’s

humorous messages that are characterized as being

motivated by superiority theory through recognizing

that KFC is claiming superiority over other

competitors, while also correcting behaviors of

those who may be getting their fried chicken

sandwiches from those competitors.

Considering generally where mirth is experienced in KFC's humorous messaging, KFC relies heavily on the combining of distinct but familiar and non-threatening to the receiver, frames of reference in an unexpected way. The humorous relationship between the distinct frames of reference KFC illuminates is communicated through the various techniques that characterize humor messages. Therefore, the next section will outline the various techniques that KFC utilized to form their humor messages.

Humor Techniques in KFC Humor

The researcher categorized each humor by the technique that best described the overall technique utilized in the humor message, one that considered the technological and media elements that composed the humorous message. For example, in Figure 7, the text from the post alone may indicate ridicule or malicious pleasure, but the video included a voice-over that is narrated from the point of view of Colonel Sanders, explaining how he is asked how he feels about "burger places" making chicken sandwiches, to which he replies, "I'd say that's none of my business, just like making fried chicken is none of theirs."⁶ The introduction of an ongoing conversation to which KFC is responding shifts the technique from malicious pleasure to outwitting. While considering the whole message for each message sampled in the data, Table 5 and Table 6 display the frequency of humor techniques observed, categorized by the technique that best described the overall humor message as determined solely by the researcher.

⁶ <https://twitter.com/kfc/status/1371430980523802624>

Table 5

Count of Humor Techniques by Category on Twitter

Technique	Count	Examples of Tweet texts
Anthropomorphism	1	<i>Kentucky Fried Chicken is now serving the NEW Kentucky Fried Chicken Sandwich. KFC Chicken 🐔, meet the #NewKFCSandwich</i>
Chase	2	<i>Hey you! Yeah you! You look hungry for the greatest fried chicken sandwich ever made. So go to http://kfc.com/findthesandwich to see if it's available near you. If it's not, just keep refreshing the page until it is.</i>
Conceptual surprise	6	<i>The NEW Kentucky Fried Chicken Sandwich is like a tenderly gift-wrapped piece of KFC chicken, except this time the gift wrap is made of buttery brioche. This time.</i>
Exaggeration	2	<i>There are few problems a bucket of chicken can't solve, especially when it comes with all the fixins! Get a \$20 Fill Up by ordering ahead at https://t.co/h4LE826rX3. Price & participation vary. Tax extra</i>
Infantilism	2	<i>Ooooh - 11:11! Make a Sandwish. Head to KFC to make your wish come true with the NEW Kentucky Fried Chicken Sandwich. See what we did there?</i>
Malicious pleasure	1	<i>We thought it was just a random street corner "W_(ツ)_J"</i>
Outwitting	4	<i>Why trust a burger joint to do a fried chicken sandwich right? Now that would be darn foolish. Get the all-new Kentucky Fried Chicken Sandwich, the only chicken sandwich that's finger lickin' good, 'cause we make the chicken sandwiches around here. Order today on the KFC App!</i>
Parody	2	<i>If you're waiting for a sign to get a fried chicken sandwich, this is it. Seize the moment and get yourself to KFC for the new Kentucky Fried Chicken Sandwich today!</i>
Repartee	31	<i>@[user] Curiosity is the strongest spice.</i>
Ridicule	2	<i>"What kind of sandwich is it?" Things you will never have to wonder at Kentucky Fried Chicken because the answer is always: chicken.</i>
Transformation	1	<i>NFT means something a little different around here. https://t.co/4eCjcHnT4Z</i>

Table 5 demonstrates the results and provides examples of the sample messages categorized by the researcher's determination of humor technique on Twitter; Table 6 demonstrates the results of this analysis for the Facebook sample.

Table 6

Count of Humor Techniques by Category on Facebook

Technique	Count	Examples of Post texts
Chase	1	<i>Hey you! Yeah you! You look hungry for the greatest fried chicken sandwich ever made. So go to kfc.com/findthesandwich to see if it's available near you. If it's not, just keep refreshing the page until it is.</i>
Conceptual Surprise	6	<i>Every bucket from KFC comes with a special prize at the bottom, something we like to call "the last piece of chicken" or something you could call "all yours" Order ahead with the KFC App and pick up a \$20 Fill Up today. Prices and participation may vary. Tax extra.</i>
Exaggeration	1	<i>There are few problems a bucket of chicken can't solve, especially when it comes with all the fixins! Get a \$20 Fill Up by ordering ahead at https://t.co/h4LE826rX3. Price & participation 05 vary. Tax extra</i>
Infantilism	2	<i>Get yourself to your nearest KFC and try the tangy, smokey-sweet heat of the new KFC Sauce. It's chicken dippin' good!</i>

Table 6 (Cont.)

Malicious Pleasure	1	<i>We thought it was just a random street corner ㄒ_(_)_J</i>
Outwitting	3	<i>Why go to a burger joint for a chicken sandwich? The new Kentucky Fried Chicken Sandwich is the ONLY fried chicken sandwich that's finger lickin' good. Get yours on the KFC App today!</i>
Ridicule	1	<i>Don't be fooled, the new Kentucky Fried Chicken Sandwich is the ONLY fried chicken sandwich that's finger lickin' good. And for only \$3.99!</i>

These tables demonstrate the cases as they were categorized based on what humorous technique was observed in the sample message. Overall, KFC humor messages can generally be described as relying most prominently on techniques found in surprise and slapstick humor.

One pattern that emerged in the analysis of humor techniques was a higher rate of the use of the technique of repartee. Repartee is defined as witty banter, usually found in dialogue (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004). Repartee was used in over half of KFC's humorous responses on Twitter, and was classified as such because those messages, while sent by KFC, were part of an interactive humor instance with another user's humorous Tweet so that the humor only existed as

an interactive humor instance (Shifman, 2007), in that KFC’s message is a response to another user’s humor instance, and that interaction, the humor would not exist. Other than the use of repartee on Twitter, the distribution of humor techniques utilized was similar.

Communicative Forms of Humor in KFC Messages

This study looked to identify the forms of rhetorical humor that were utilized by KFC by evaluating each humorous message against the descriptions of the four rhetorical communication functions as defined by Lynch (2002) and Meyer (2000). Sample messages were categorized based on the researcher’s understanding of the four humorous rhetorical functions and their function in in-group/out-group negotiation. The frequencies of the different categories are reflected in Table 7.

Table 7.

Count of Different Rhetorical Communicative Functions				
<i>Communicative Function</i>	Twitter		Facebook	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Identification	24	43	6	43
Clarification	18	32	3	21
Enforcement	12	21	4	29
Differentiation	2	4	1	7

As depicted in Table 7, nearly half of KFC’s humorous messaging utilized the rhetorical function of identification. Identification humor is most frequently manifested as KFC making themselves the butt of the joke in their humor messages like in the following examples:

There are four important things you need to know about the new, big delicious Kentucky Fried Chicken Sandwich: New. Big. Delicious. Kentucky Fried Chicken Sandwich. Rollin’ out nationwide. Find out when it’s in your area at <http://kfc.com/findthesandwich>. Wait, that’s a fifth thing.⁷

⁷ <https://twitter.com/kfc/status/1347543579783168002>

In this example, KFC is the butt of the joke because they “miscounted” the important things the receiver needed to know about their sandwich. In this next example, KFC is replying to another organization, and again makes themselves the butt of the joke:

@overtime What if your best friend IS a bucket? That happens to be full of fried chicken? With red and white stripes?? ... I need more friends.⁸

Another example of KFC using identification humor in their messages through positioning themselves as the butt of their own joke is in this message where KFC replies to another Twitter user reinforcing the absurdity of the “A Recipe for Seduction” film:

@Perroni247 Sometimes the heart knows not what it wants, and usually what it wants is a fried chicken-themed romantic mini-movie starring a heartthrob playing a world-famous fried chicken salesman falling in love.⁹

KFC also uses identification humor to implement shared communicators through targeting the receiver’s familiarity (Meyer, 2000) with the frames of reference in the humor message, for example Figures 5 and 6, that both deal with social norms of meal planning. Another example of KFC’s utilization of identification humor based on the receiver’s familiarity with a frame of reference can be found in Figure 2, where previous knowledge is required to experience mirth. If the receiver does not know who Mario Lopez is or that Colonel Sanders usually is depicted as an older white man, with an accent from the South of the United States, the receiver may not fully appreciate the incongruous relationships between the different parts of the message.

The clarification and enforcement forms of humor were both utilized in over 20% of KFC’s humorous communication. Clarification humor, humor that is represented through memorable

⁸ <https://twitter.com/kfc/status/1352353349685796865>

⁹ <https://twitter.com/kfc/status/1336007112090996737>

phrases or anecdotes so that the sender's perspective is clear to the receiver (Meyer, 2000) was most utilized in responding to other users like the ones in the following examples:

@BriRibalta ... and that [god] loves fried chicken¹⁰.

@valerie_kan Curiosity is the strongest spice.¹¹

@MalyndaHale Don't call me crouton.¹²

Enforcement humor, characterized as humor that allows the sender to enforce social norms in a way that is delicate and maintains a level of identification with the receiver. In the sample studied, KFC uses enforcement humor to enforce eating at KFC over their competitors.

Examples of enforcement humor used to encourage eating at KFC include:

However you like your fried chicken sandwiches (sic), you should be getting them from someone with FRIED CHICKEN in their name. Get the new Kentucky Fried Chicken Sandwich from KFC today!¹³

Don't be fooled, the new Kentucky Fried Chicken Sandwich is the ONLY fried chicken sandwich that's finger lickin' good. And for only \$3.99!¹⁴

Some folks take their secrets to the grave, but Colonel Sanders takes his to the deep fryer. Tune in on 12/13 at 12pm ET/PT to watch @MarioLopezViva as the Colonel in the premiere of "A Recipe for Seduction," a KFC and @LifetimeTV Original Mini-Movie.¹⁵

¹⁰ <https://twitter.com/kfc/status/1336004182680080389>

¹¹ <https://twitter.com/kfc/status/1338216384946348033>

¹² <https://twitter.com/kfc/status/1338215709499817985>

¹³ <https://twitter.com/kfc/status/1372231254561619974>

¹⁴ <https://twitter.com/kfc/status/1372925831874371587>

¹⁵ <https://twitter.com/kfc/status/1335947176543916034>

Differentiation humor, humor directed against the out-group (Meyer, 2000) was observed in a couple messages on Twitter and only in one on Facebook with the same message as depicted in Figure 7.

In summation, the analysis of the humor messages in the sample demonstrates a reliance on various humor techniques, and therefore, a pattern of utilizing humor to influence the in-group/out-group perceptions on social media. The next section will present the results of the second research question, looking at how dialogic characteristics were manifested in the humorous message sample and how frequently the dialogic features appeared in different humor categories.

Effects of Humorous Messaging on KFC's Dialogic Communication

Recalling the literature, dialogue is defined as the positively oriented holistic approach to an organization-public relationship that is characterized by a set of specific principles based on an ethical and ongoing two-way symmetrical co-creation of meaning (Benton & Peterka-Benton, 2020; Chen et al., 2020; Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002; Lane, 2020). The purpose of this study was not only to understand how organizations may be using humor in their communication but also to determine if the use of humor can affect the feasibility of organization-public dialogue on social media. To guide this exploration, this thesis asks the following research question:

RQ2: How do KFC's humorous organizational messages affect the dialogic communication with its online publics?

To answer the research question, the results section will first describe how dialogue is apparent in the sample and then show the frequency of dialogic features in the different humor forms categorized from the sample.

Dialogic Characteristics in the Sample

The preliminary content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Michaelson & Stacks, 2016) performed by the researcher indicated that dialogic characteristics (Chen et al, 2020; Kent & Taylor, 1998; 2002; Lane, 2020; Zhou & Xu, 2019) were present in all humor messages collected in the sample (Twitter=54; Facebook=13). Therefore, a secondary analysis was conducted solely by the researcher to better understand the relationship between humor and dialogue. The results of the analysis resulted in multiple dialogic features being present in both the Twitter and Facebook samples as displayed in Table 8 and Table 9. Another trend that emerged during the secondary analysis was that in the Twitter data, there were instances in which all nine dialogic features were present, which is not true for Facebook as depicted in Table 9.

The results of the secondary analysis of humorous messages through counting the frequency of different dialogic features are divided by the dialogic principles as outlined in Kent and Taylor (2002) in Table 8, and the mechanisms that support dialogue, as defined in Kent and Taylor (1998) and reconceptualized in Zhou and Xu (2019) in Table 9.

Table 8.

Frequency of Dialogic Tenets in KFC’s Humorous Messaging

<i>Dialogic Tenet</i>	Twitter		Facebook	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Mutuality	42	78	9	69
Propinquity	39	72	4	31
Empathy	37	69	7	54
Risk	40	74	3	23
Commitment	38	70	10	77

Table 8 depicts high levels of mutuality on Twitter and Commitment on Facebook. Table 9 depicts a high frequency of dialogic characteristics and return visitor on Twitter and useful information on Facebook. High frequency of the characteristic of return visitor in Table 9 was observed in the Twitter sample in examples of KFC engaging directly with other users to co-construct humor messages, like in the example of “#ARecipeForSeduction.”

Table 9.

Frequency of Dialogic Principles in KFC’s Humorous Messaging

<i>Dialogic Principle</i>	Twitter		Facebook	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Dialogic loops	32	59	10	77
Useful information	50	93	13	100
Return visitor	51	94	10	77
Visitor conservation	30	56	11	85

Useful information was found in all the samples on Facebook, emerging, for example, in KFC’s advertising of new consumer promotions, like the message that communicated the launch of their chicken sandwich entry into “the chicken wars”:

There are four important things you need to know about the new, big delicious Kentucky Fried Chicken Sandwich: New. Big. Delicious. Kentucky Fried Chicken Sandwich. Rollin’ out nationwide. Find out when it’s in your area at <http://kfc.com/findthesandwich>. Wait, that’s a fifth thing.

This example provides access to technology that may support the needs of their online user publics, and therefore, demonstrates useful information. Table 10 depicts the count of messages in the sample by the number of dialogic characteristics categorized.

Table 10.

Frequencies of Dialogic Features in Humorous Messages

Count of Dialogic Features	Count of Sample Messages			
	Twitter		Facebook	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
1	2	4	0	0
2	4	8	1	8
3	3	6	0	0
4	5	10	2	15
5	2	4	2	15
6	4	8	2	15
7	2	4	3	23
8	5	10	3	23
9	25	48	0	0

The tables above indicate that dialogic characteristics varied by platform and message, but regardless, demonstrate high levels of dialogic features. The high levels of dialogic characteristics in the sample indicate a pattern of KFC utilizing humor in their messaging not only to provide valuable content to their online user publics but also to influence their relationship with them. The following section will provide an overview of the frequency in which dialogic features were counted in messages in the three categories of humor forms.

Humor and dialogic features

To further understand how humor affects organization-public dialogue, the researcher compared frequencies of categories found in the sample data by humor and dialogic features. This section will present the tables that depict the metatheory, technique, and function categories and the frequencies of dialogic features found within those categories. Tables 11 and 12 demonstrate the frequency of dialogic features observed in the humorous metatheory categories for the Twitter and Facebook samples respectively.

Table 11.

Frequency of Dialogic Features in Twitter Metatheory Categories

Dialogic Feature	Metatheory		
	Incongruity	Relief	Superiority
Mutuality	13	26	3
Propinquity	10	27	2
Empathy	10	26	1
Risk	13	24	3
Commitment	9	26	3
Dialogic Loops	7	24	1
Useful Information	15	27	8
Return Visitor	16	27	8
Visitor Conservation	8	19	3

Table 11 demonstrates that relief theory had higher instances of dialogic features than the other metatheory categories in the Twitter sample. However, Table 12 depicts a higher frequency of dialogic features in the incongruous humor sample on Facebook.

Table 12.

Frequency of Dialogic Features in Twitter Metatheory Categories

Dialogic Feature	Metatheory		
	Incongruous	Relief	Superiority
Mutuality	6	2	5
Propinquity	6	2	5
Empathy	4	2	1
Risk	6	2	5
Commitment	6	2	5
Dialogic Loops	6	2	5
Useful Information	6	2	5
Return Visitor	3	2	5
Visitor Conservation	6	2	3

Tables 11 and 12 illustrate the frequency of in which dialogic features appeared in the sample messages categorized by metatheory. Tables 13 and 14 demonstrate the frequency that different dialogic features appeared in utilizing different humor techniques on Twitter and Facebook respectively.

Table 13.

Frequency of Dialogic Features in Twitter Humor Technique Categories

Humor technique	Dialogic Feature								
	Mut- uality	Propin- quity	Empathy	Risk	Commit -ment	Dialogic Loops	Useful Info.	Return Visitor	Visitor Con.
Anthropomorphism	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Chase	2	1	1	0	0	1	2	1	0
Conceptual Surprise	3	1	3	4	1	0	6	5	1
Exaggeration	2	1	1	0	1	0	1	2	0
Infantilism	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	2	0
Malicious Pleasure	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1
Outwitting	2	1	0	1	2	0	4	4	0
Parody	0	2	0	1	1	0	1	1	0
Repartee	30	31	30	31	30	31	31	31	26
Ridicule	1	0	1	0	1	0	2	2	1
Transformation	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1

Table 13 depicts dialogic features as highly frequent in humorous messages categorized by the researcher as displaying the humor technique repartee characteristics on Twitter. Table 14 reflects the observations of the Facebook sample.

Table 14.
Frequency of Dialogic Features in Facebook Humor Technique Categories

Dialogic Feature	Humor Techniques Found in Facebook Sample						
	Chase	Conceptual Surprise	Exaggeration	Infantilism	Malicious Pleasure	Outwitting	Ridicule
Mutuality	1	5	1	1	1	3	1
Propinquity	1	5	1	1	1	3	1
Empathy	1	4	1	0	0	1	0
Risk	1	5	1	1	1	3	1
Commitment	1	5	1	1	1	3	1
Dialogic loops	1	5	1	1	1	3	1
Useful information	1	5	1	1	1	3	1
Return visitor	0	4	1	0	1	3	1
Visitor conservation	1	5	1	1	0	2	1

Table 14 shows that dialogic features were most frequently present in humor categorized as utilizing the technique of conceptual surprise. Tables 15 and 16 depict the frequency of dialogic features in the categories related to rhetorical function in both the Twitter and Facebook samples.

Table 15.
Frequency of Dialogic Features in Twitter Humor Function Categories

Dialogic Feature	Humor Function Categories Found in Twitter Sample			
	Clarification	Differentiation	Enforcement	Identification
Mutuality	18	0	7	17
Propinquity	18	1	5	15
Empathy	17	0	5	15
Risk	17	2	7	14
Commitment	17	0	7	14
Dialogic Loops	15	1	4	12
Useful Information	18	2	12	18
Return Visitor	17	2	11	21
Visitor Conservation	11	2	5	12

Table 15 depicts higher levels of dialogic features in the sample messages categorized as serving clarification or identification functions on Twitter. Table 16 depicts the frequency in the Facebook sample.

Table 16.

Frequency of Dialogic Features in Facebook Humor Function Categories

Dialogic Feature	Humor Function Categories Found in Facebook Sample			
	Clarification	Differentiation	Enforcement	Identification
Mutuality	3	1	4	5
Propinquity	3	1	4	5
Empathy	2	0	1	4
Risk	3	1	4	5
Commitment	3	1	4	5
Dialogic Loops	3	1	4	5
Useful Information	3	1	4	5
Return Visitor	0	1	4	5
Visitor Conservation	3	0	3	5

The frequency of dialogic features in the messages by their rhetorical function, depicted in Table 16, was most concentrated in humor messages categorized as identification humor on Facebook.

The next chapter will discuss the theoretical and practical implications of this study's results.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the communication between an organization and their publics on social media and evaluate how humor was being used to affect the organization's relationship with their publics. The results of the analysis indicate that humor (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004; Gal, 2019; Popescu, 2010; Shifman, 2007) may be a process for which organization-public dialogue (Chen et al, 2020; Kent & Taylor, 1998; 2002; Lane, 2020) can occur on social media (Ashforth et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2020; Jaidka et al., 2019; Khazraee & Novak, 2018; Zhou & Xu, 2019), and perhaps aid the facilitation of organizational identification (Ashforth et al., 2020; Besharov, 2014; Brickson,

2005; Cooper & Thatcher, 2010; Gioia et al., 2010). This chapter will present both theoretical and practical implications for this insight, as well as address the limitations of this study and areas for future research.

Theoretical Implications

The analysis conducted demonstrated a pattern of KFC using humor as active participation in boundary-making (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004; Gal, 2019; Popescu, 2010; Shifman, 2007). Such utilization of humor suggests that KFC leveraged the favorable technological platform environment (Ashforth et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2020; Jaidka et al., 2019; Khazraee & Novak, 2018; Zhou & Xu, 2019) for dialogic communication (Chen et al, 2020; Kent & Taylor, 1998; 2002; Lane, 2020; Zhou & Xu, 2019). This section will first outline the implications of active organizational participation in boundary-making and then will describe how humor on social media may facilitate dialogue.

Humor as Active Boundary Work

The humor forms that emerged from the analysis indicated a pattern of using humor to affect perceptions of an in-group/outgroup on social media between themselves and their online users so that the boundaries of the group were being clearly communicated by the organization and constantly negotiated. Boundary negotiation was indicated in the sample through the categorization of metatheory, technique, and function (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Gal, 2019; Lynch, 2002; Martin, 2010; Meyer, 2000; Popescu, 2010; Shifman, 2007) and demonstrated that KFC participated in the creation of an in-group in their humor use by sending humor messages that the receiver decoded (Meyer, 2000) as non-threatening (Martin, 2010), based on a shared set of knowledge (Gal, 2019) that avoided multiple meanings (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014).

Boundary work is described as the dialectic process of creating an in-group and an out-group (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Davis et al., 2018; Gal, 2019; Popescu, 2010). Negotiation of boundaries was evidenced in the sample by the utilization of different forms of humor over time, that worked to reinforce the social norms of the in-group. The reliance on a variety of metatheories (Table 11; Table 12) demonstrates using humor to support consumer behaviors and reliance on KFC. Furthermore, KFC utilized humor in the sample that is based on their products or the likeness of their mascot, Colonel Sanders as evidenced in the previous section. By relying on frames of reference that refer to their products or mascot, the only shared knowledge required to experience mirth the sender is required to be aware of is that of KFC's core competencies and mascot. Because the mirth experienced from KFC's humor messages resulted primarily from the absurdity in the relationship between the frames of reference in the humor message, one of them being KFC themselves (e.g., Figure 2), there is little likelihood for multiple meanings to be created (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014). By relying on the incongruity of the relationships of the frameworks in the message, KFC utilized humor informs that created a wide boundary, providing the opportunity for shared meaning to occur between the average social media user and KFC.

The wide boundary created by KFC's humor messaging is further supported by the humor techniques that KFC utilized in the sample. KFC utilized multimedia humor messages using techniques typically associated with early adolescence that remain popular with all ages (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004). The techniques within the categories of *slapstick* and *surprise*, the techniques most frequently utilized by KFC in the sample data, are described as less complex and therefore require less cognitive skill and familiarity with social norms that the receiver may not have yet been exposed to (Martin, 2010).

This study found that KFC primarily relies on the rhetorical functions of humor to reinforce communicators, like those of the humanized colonel and his Southern United States accent, to experience mirth with their online user publics. In particular, this study found that KFC relied most heavily on the rhetorical functions defined in Meyer (2000) as *identification* and *clarification humor* (Table 7). Identification and clarification humor was found in messages used to create and reinforce the understandings of familiar frameworks to create an in-group around KFC's creation of unique identifying humor features. This pattern emerged through KFC's reinforcement of the consistent use of Colonel Sanders likeness, a shared vernacular, like in the examples of "chicken dippin'(sic)" and "tendies," through their interactions specifically with users who had engaged with their special campaigns and products, like in the example of the #RecipeForSeduction campaign, and by having engaged with common social norms, like in the example of Figure 3 that offers a solution to the normative tension around meal planning. Therefore, KFC identification and clarification humor functioned as a mechanism to display and support the status quo (Lynch, 2002).

KFC's utilization of humor forms in their messaging indicates willing and participatory in-group/out-group (Lynch, 2002; Meyer, 2000) negotiations with online user publics to support group identification and cohesiveness (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004; Gal, 2019; Popescu, 2010; Shifman, 2007). Such utilization demonstrates the capacity for organizations to support co-created messaging, clarify organizational values and goals, and reinforce cultural and social norms through common signifiers within an in-group formed by the organization on social media. Furthermore, humor on social media could be used to support the anthropomorphization of the organization for the online user publics within the in-group. Therefore, theoretically, an organization-public in-group could be formed through humor

that not only facilitates the process of organizational identification (Ashforth et al., 2020; Besharov, 2014; Brickson, 2005; Cooper & Thatcher, 2010; Gioia et al., 2010) but also provide a mechanism for dialogic communication (Benton & Peterka-Benton. 2020; Chen et al., 2020; Lane, 2020). The theoretical implications of Twitter and Facebook demonstrating favorable platform affordances (Zhou & Xu, 2019) for dialogic communication (Benton & Peterka-Benton. 2020; Chen et al, 2020; Kent & Taylor, 1998; 2002; Lane, 2020) when using humor will be discussed in the next section.

Dialogic Communication in Humor Messaging

Recalling the literature, organization-public dialogue is the holistic positive orientation toward the co-creation of meaning between an organization and their publics (Benton & Peterka-Benton. 2020; Chen et al, 2020; Kent & Taylor, 1998; 2002; Lane, 2020). Favorable affordances (Zhou & Xu, 2019) for dialogic communication (Benton & Peterka-Benton. 2020; Chen et al, 2020; Kent & Taylor, 1998; 2002; Lane, 2020) are present in a social media platform (Zhou & Xu, 2019) when frequent occurrences of the characteristics of dialogic communication defined by Kent and Taylor (1998; 2002) are present.

The extent to which dialogic characteristics are observed in organizational messaging not only indicates if there are favorable affordances but also indicates whether the organization is achieving dialogue or other forms of two-way communication (Chen et al., 2020; Lane, 2020). As depicted in the previous chapter (e.g., Tables 8-16), this study observed that the frequency of dialogic features was affected by the forms of humor. For example, in the case of relief humor on Facebook (Table 11), like in the example of Figure 3, where KFC demonstrated a commitment to the conversation in trying to obtain mutually beneficial positions, and in co-created humor instances through collaborating with online users through repartee on Twitter (Table 13), KFC

demonstrated a pattern of mutuality. In sample messages where KFC collaborated with random users to create humor instances so that organizational messages appeared as replies to other users, KFC demonstrated acknowledging the user as an individual, their own position as an organization, and the relationship that exists between them. In doing so, KFC attempted to humanize themselves in the eyes of their online user publics, which indicates that organizations using humor are potentially communicating their values with their online user publics in a way that anthropomorphizes the organization and triggers the process of organizational identification (Ashforth et al., 2020; Besharov, 2014; Brickson, 2005; Cooper & Thatcher, 2010; Gioia et al., 2010).

Based on these insights, the utilization of humor on social media by an organization could theoretically be the conduit for organization-public dialogue. This understanding of humor in the context of the OPR adds to the existing conceptualization of humor as a social mechanism that could facilitate the co-construction of organizational identity to align with a public's values and beliefs (Benton & Peterka-Benton, 2020; Lane, 2020). The use of humor, therefore, can be applied by public relations practitioners to support dialogic communication, the practical implications of which will be discussed in the following section.

Practical Implications

The previous section outlined the theoretical conceptualization of humor as a process for organization-public dialogue on social media. The use of humor in this way is possible because, in the sample, humor acted as a participatory in-group/out-group negotiation mechanism for dialogic communication. Humor, as a negotiation mechanism, was leveraged to share KFC's organizational signifiers and maintain social-cultural norms. In doing so, KFC supported the perception of having human characteristics by their online user publics, triggering the process of

organizational identification (Ashforth et al., 2020; Besharov, 2014; Brickson, 2005; Cooper & Thatcher, 2010; Gioia et al., 2010), and potentially co-constructing brand identity to share organizational attributes (Benton & Peterka-Benton, 2020; Chen et al., 2020; Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002; Lane, 2020). These insights have practical implications for public relations practitioners wishing to use humor in pursuing organization-public dialogue.

Organizations cannot control meaning on social media (Benton & Peterka-Benton, 2020), and therefore, one practical implication of this study is a necessary preoccupation with humor construction for organizations wishing to pursue dialogic relationships with their online user publics. This is especially important when considering how organizational humor is constructed within the context of the organization and must account for the receiver's gender, age, socio-economic status, and geographical location (Davis et al., 2018; Ge, 2019; Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2020; Simis-Wilkinson et al., 2018; Yeo, Anderson, et al., 2020).

In the sample, KFC's humor messages were found to be dialogically oriented when the boundaries of the in-group were communicated through frameworks that required little language, education, and familiarity with niche topics to understand (e.g. placing ads near competitors) and when KFC engaged other users in the construction of a humor message (e.g. repartee). The implication for practitioners, therefore, is that humor may be an effective tool to reinforce organizational identity and meaning (Benton & Peterka-Benton, 2020) in a way that allows online user publics some sanctioned control over and relief from the tension that naturally exists in an organization-public relationship (Lynch, 2002). Their choice of humor forms supported the formation of a large in-group, one that reflects the diverse and international reach of KFC. Public relations practitioners should construct humor messages considering how the motivation, technique, and function of the humorous message relates to the frameworks and entities involved

in the humor message (Gal, 2019; Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2020; Popescu, 2010; Simis-Wilkinson et al., 2018; Yeo, Anderson, et al., 2020; Yeo et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the results of the study suggest that the technological platform affordances of Twitter (Bucher & Helmond, 2018; Chen et al., 2020; Jaidka et al., 2019; Khazraee & Novak, 2018; Zhou & Xu, 2019) could better support dialogic communication. The Twitter environment affords users a more participatory role in humor creation. For example, nearly half of KFC's humorous Tweets were in reply to other users, so that the users engaging with KFC were likely to be participants in the humor construction, like in Figure 5. Such utilization demonstrates that organizations can leverage Twitter technologies in particular to collaborate with users on humor messaging. However, while there are indications of such, this study was limited in scope, reliability, and sample size. Therefore, the next section will discuss the limitations of this thesis and areas for future research.

Limitations and Areas for Future Research

Based on the conclusions in the previous sections, the use of humor on social media as part of an organizational communication strategy could be a potentially beneficial tactic to encourage organizational alignment (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004; Gal, 2019; Popescu, 2010; Shifman, 2007), and therefore organizational identification (Ashforth et al., 2020; Besharov, 2014; Brickson, 2005; Cooper & Thatcher, 2010; Gioia et al., 2010) and the positive orientation for dialogic communication to occur (Benton & Peterka-Benton, 2020; Chen et al, 2020; Kent & Taylor, 1998; 2002). However, this study was limited in its scope, reliability, and sample size.

This study was limited in its scope in that the relationship between frequencies of dialogic features and humor categorizations was not explored. This study was limited in it's

reliability due to the subjectivity of the researcher and lack of inter-coder reliability. This was especially evident in the areas of humor categorization, where the possibility for more than one technique being used was not accounted for. Lastly, this study was affected by the small sample size, both generally in that there are many organizations using humor on social media, and that there were not many data points in the four-month period from KFC.

Further exploration should be done to ascertain to what extent these results are replicable and if organizations are similarly constructing humor, despite, perhaps reliance on various frames of reference. Furthermore, while all the humorous messages in this study were intentionally humorous, it is possible for an organization to accidentally share something humorous. The effects of this type of humor instance are not explored within this study. Lastly, this study was limited to studying a corporation in the food industry, further research should explore if favorable affordances exist for humor use on Twitter in other industries as well.

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Appendix

I. Preliminary analysis code book

General Instructions:

Please examine each sample post by opening the url and viewing the entirety of the communication and any accompanying media, including video and audio, in its native platform (i.e. open a facebook sample message on Facebook; a Tweet on Twitter. You are expected to watch the whole video with full audio. If a post has been removed, mark it as invalid on the spreadsheet. Once you have viewed the message, if the answer to any of the questions in the section are yes, then indicate “True” in the humor present and dialogue present columns in the spreadsheet. If there are no affirmative answers for the sample message, then humor or dialogue is not present and is marked as “False.”

Humor

Directions: to determine whether the sample contains messages from the organization that were intended to be humorous, answer the following questions. If the answer to **any** of these questions is yes for the sample message, then humor is present.

- Does the sample message place the organization in a place of superiority or triumph over others?
- Does the message indicate an attempt to relieve tension that may naturally exist between the organization and the user?
- Does the sample message place two distinct frames of reference together in an odd or unexpected way to the user?
- Does the message topic relate to:
 - Language
 - Sex and/or gender
 - Politics
 - Ethnicity
 - Religion
 - Age
- Does the message contain any of the following?
 - Physical pie-in-the-face/involving degradation of someone’s status
 - Making a funny face, grimace
 - Funny, unusual voice
 - A coincidental and unexpected occurrence
 - Lack dexterity or grace
 - Stereotyped or generalized way of depicting members of a certain nation, gender, or other group

- Making a fool of someone, verbally or nonverbally
- Taking pleasure in other people's misfortune; victim humor
- Verbal banter, usually in a witty dialogue
- Misleading the audience by means of a sudden unexpected change of concept
- Someone or something taking on another form or undergoing a metamorphosis; A before/after
- A sudden unexpected visual/physical change
- Making an exaggeration or overstatement; reacting in an exaggerated way; exaggerating the qualities of a person or product
- Saying one thing and meaning something else or exactly the opposite of what you're saying
- Biting remark made with a hostile tone; sarcasm is always a verbal put-down
- An awkward situation in which someone gets a sense of discomfort, uneasiness, or shame
- Playing with the meaning of words
- Very large or small sizes of objects that surpass people's logical expectations
- Making vigorous arm and leg movements or demonstrating exaggerated irregular physical behavior
- Objects or animals with human features
- Talking or moving in very fast or slow motion
- A pursuit or chase of someone or something
- Making a fool of or poking fun at well-known things, situations, or public figures
- Lacking proper respect for authority or the prevailing standards
- Funny, unusual music
- Outsmarting someone or the establishment by retort, response, or comeback
- Does the sample message have any laugh reactions or replies from other users indicating mirth was experienced?

Dialogue

Directions: to determine whether the sample contains messages from the organization that contained characteristics of dialogue, answer the following questions. If the answer to **any** of these questions is yes for the sample message, then dialogue in some form is present.

- Is the purpose of the message to network through a value-added interaction?
- Is the purpose of the message to exchange information?
- Is the purpose of the message to solicit opinions or ask for new ideas?
- Is the purpose of the message to involve stakeholders in crisis or issues?
- Is the purpose of the message to support purchase decisions, compromising or partnering, or for issue or policy advocacy?
- Is the purpose of the message for community building or brand co-creation?
- Is the purpose of the message for sense making or involvement?

- Is the purpose of the message for community or identity building?
- Is the purpose or message to reach consensus or agreement on a big decision?
- Does the message acknowledge the other?
- Do participants in the message view each other as equals while avoiding feelings of superiority?
- Can the message be characterized as an ongoing, immediate conversation between an organization and its publics where all parties involved are communicating about issues that are relevant in the immediate present as opposed to after a decision has been made?
- Does the message work to create a shared, equitable, and acceptable future for all parties?
- Does the organization demonstrate being willing to devote themselves entirely to the conversation in the message?
- Does the message support an atmosphere of support and trust
- Is the message a deliberate facilitation of participation in the OPR
- Is there a commitment to forming real local relationships to create local and global communities in the message?
- Is their recognition of the importance of the voices of others and of their values in the message?
- Does the organization leave itself open to the manipulation of active participants in sharing information, beliefs, and desires that naturally occur when opening oneself to others?
- Were there any unanticipated or negative reactions to the organization in the reactions or replies?
- Does the message appear to be unscripted?
- Does the message demonstrate the organization is conscious of the individuality of users and accepts their input as unique and valuable?
- *Does the message reflect an* authentic representation of the organization regardless of whether sharing that representation is valuable or not?
- Does the message demonstrate a desire to place the good of the relationship over the good of the organization?
- Is there the facilitation of purposeful conversations to achieve mutually beneficial positions in the message?
- Does the organization demonstrate being committed to interpreting and understanding all parties' perspectives?
- Does the organization reply to any users in the comments section, in the message, or otherwise?
- Does the organization give the user a reason to return to the message?
- Does the organization use the message to provide useful information to the user but not for a funnel tactic?

