

Come Play Along!

An Exploration of How Advertisers are Using Playful Strategies in Print Advertising

Student Name: Alysa C. Karels

Student Number: 451644

Supervisor: Dr. Teresa De La Hera

Master Media Studies - Media & Creative Industries
Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication
Erasmus University Rotterdam

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ABSTRACT

The fact that people are increasingly eager to seek out playful experiences in their everyday lives is part of a trend known as the ludification of culture. Scholars find that, in a time characterized by information overload, consumers are open and drawn to media products that offer entertainment through playful interaction. Meanwhile, the advertising industry is faced with the quandary of how to stand out and attract consumers' fleeting attention in a landscape that has become highly competitive. Print advertising in particular faces a budget decline and has to compete with digital advertising forms that know richer affordances to appeal to consumers' attention. For this reason, this thesis questions the strategies that print advertising is using in order to stand out from the crowd and appease the demand to provide entertaining playful interaction for consumers. The research problem lies in the intersection of the ludification of culture trend and the advertising industry's competitive attention economy: research on purely playful forms of communication and the declining print advertising sector has been minimal. To this end, this bachelor thesis tackles the following research question: How do advertisers make use of playful communication strategies in print advertisements to stand out in the contemporary attention economy? To gain a comprehensive answer to this research question a qualitative approach was taken. First, a review of applicable research was conducted to ground the study in a theoretical framework of existing concepts and principles related to play and playfulness. Next, methodological choices were made that deemed a textual analysis of print advertisements the ideal method for studying the research question. Using thematic analysis, the units of analysis were analyzed through multiple rounds of coding that eventually resulted in the emergence of four central themes of playful strategies. The main findings of this research are that advertisers are able to stand out by ensuring retention through strategies of pleasurable interactive experiential logic. This is facilitated by the finding that advertisers are able to stand out by harnessing attention through strategies of playful visual design that instills a playful mindset. They furthermore stand out by liberating unspoken topics of a dark, solemn and negative nature in a playful way. And lastly, advertisers are able to stand out by using playful communication strategies with an adequate awareness of the playful risks involved. The conclusions and implications drawn from these findings are impactful theoretically and practically. Regarding the former, contributions to an understanding of interactivity and to negative pleasurable experiences are made, and a need for further inquiry in playification is identified and encouraged. Regarding the latter, the benefit for advertisers to use playful print advertising strategies in their marketing mix is explained and ethical concerns regarding the persuasion of the strategies are expressed. The thesis closes by pointing out directions for future research.

KEYWORDS: *Playful advertising; Print advertising; Playful communication; Playification; Thematic analysis*

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PREFACE

The acknowledgements for this master's thesis are twofold. I want to start by acknowledging and thanking my supervisor Teresa de la Hera for her support and understanding throughout the process of writing this thesis. And secondly, I want to acknowledge and thank my dad who always manages to see the playfulness to life. I couldn't have asked for a better person to brainstorm and share perspectives with.

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1. Introduction



Figure 1.1. Light shines through the newspaper revealing the hidden message. (West Australian Ballet, 2020).

You are reading the newspaper in your local cafe. Navigating the pages dispersed with the pops of color that are advertisements, you focus in on the news articles you want to read. Now suddenly as you turn the page, you are taken out of this trance as *Ballet at the Quarry* now demands your attention. The light that shines through the page has completely illuminated the advertisement differently in your mind and, in verbatim, caused you to “feel something unexpected.” Almost like a child, you might have sat there moving the page wistfully to and fro, chuckling at its cleverness. While you engaged playfully with the advertisement and its delivery and context, the advertisement, or rather the advertisers behind it, have played with your expectation and have ensured both your attention and retention.

This example is telling because it reveals certain truths that you and I are familiar with but perhaps not always aware of. It is telling because it describes our current relationship to the media. While the anecdote described above was hypothetical, it is likely that you were able to relate to the idea of seeking out the interesting things in the newspaper to give out your attention to and to interact with. Within its pages we want to be entertained, we want to read something that intrigues us, that makes us think or question things, something that amazes us. This relates to our innate human longing for play even in our adult lives. We want to experience something pleasurable. So what do we do? We sift through the newspaper in search for those gems that make our media experience worthwhile. An aspect of that anecdote we might be less able to relate to is the part

about reading a newspaper in our local cafe. Perhaps you don't frequent a cafe, and even more likely, you no longer read newspapers. But disregarding the medium for a moment, it is still very likely that you have a similar media experience when you look for worthwhile information as you scroll through a (social) media news feed on your mobile device. If anything, a digital medium has only amplified this experience because there is simply so much more information to sift through. However, another tradeoff is the interactivity digital media provides its users. Conversely, traditional print advertising in newspapers has for the longest time been understood as static and lacking any such interactivity. The advertisement for *Ballet at the Quarry* is exemplary for the influence digital advertising has over print advertising in how it allows for playful interactivity as a source of entertainment. And while to many, advertisements might represent the epitome of unwanted information, precisely ones like the example preceding this thesis can also be entertaining.

What will be explored in this thesis is the reason why this advertisement is able to catch our attention, why the advertisement is more likely to awaken appreciation and why it invoked a child-like sense of playfulness. Simply put, the topic of this thesis is playful advertising; what it is, how it works, and how it is being used to capture attention and to entertain. Having introduced the topic of this study in short, the remainder of the introduction is dedicated to: precisely defining the research problem at hand and formulating the research question (1.1); substantiating this study by explaining its academic relevance (1.2); corroborating the social relevance of studying this topic (1.3); and concluding with a chapter overview for further guidance through the thesis (1.4).

1.1 Research problem and research question

Now, the anecdote described above highlights two central topics that are recurring trends within this study, and the connection of these two trends explain the research problem and the appeal of this master's thesis. These two trends are: the fact that humans have an increasing need to play and be entertained (Raessens, 2014); and, the fact that the advertising industry faces a quandary of competing for consumers' attention (Vinaya Kumar & Mehrotra, 2018). It is necessary to understand each of these trends before we can see how their connection forms the research problem.

To understand the significance of the first trend, we ought to consider the role of play in our lives. The concept of play can be made to be very complex (its intricacies are further explored in chapter two), but in essence, it implies that which is spontaneous and pleasurable and a defining aspect of our human experience (Sicart, 2014). To play is inherently human. It is through play that humans learn how to exist in the world when they are children, and play continues to uphold that same function even for adults (Sicart, 2014). If we were to delve deeply into the subject of play we

would find that it is omnipresent. We would also find that although play has always existed, scholars recently find that people are becoming more aware and more eager to find play and playful experiences as a form of entertainment in their lives, a trend that is referred to as the ludification of culture (Raessens, 2014; Frissen, Lammes, de Lange, de Mul, & Raessens, 2015). The term ludification stems from the root *ludus* meaning 'play'; and so, under the term ludification of culture we can understand a trend wherein culture is becoming more playful both in more structural and less structural ways. Scholars ascribe the uprising of this trend to digital media technologies being introduced in the 21st century (Frissen et al., 2015; Raessens, 2014). For the world of media this means that, now more than ever, people are especially open and receptive to having playful interaction with media products (Raessens, 2014). Majority of the evidence that speaks to this ludic trend lies in the surge of computer games and gamified applications to enrich our lives (Zimmerman & Chaplin, 2013). A good practical example would be the way computer games designed by Pymetrics are being used by recruiters as a way to optimize the job application process and to make it more entertaining for applicants. But the ludification of culture goes far beyond just games. It entails a trend toward a playful attitude that people use to navigate their media experience in search of being entertained, even in less structural ways as the newspaper anecdote illustrates. Consumers have come to expect more from their interaction with media beyond just their functionality; they long for an emotional, playful and pleasurable experience (Sicart, 2014).

Meanwhile, these digital media technologies do not just enhance the ludification of culture, they have also drastically shaped the advertising industry. The second trend that is important to consider is the undeniable reality that the contemporary advertising industry is characterized by a highly competitive attention economy (Davenport & Beck, 2001). With the inception of digital technologies and the internet came an information overload, where various outlets continue to demand the increasingly scarce attention that consumers have left to give. The advertising fatigue experienced by consumers and their literacy to recognize advertising messages and consequently avoid or block them out, keeps advertisers searching for new strategies that ensure standing out from the overcrowded landscape (Vinaya Kumar & Mehrotra, 2018). And perhaps none more than the print advertising sector as they fiercely compete with digital media (Fitzgerald, 2019). Digital media have lent advertisers a toolkit with special affordances that allow them to target and entice consumers' attention in new and different ways. These affordances have in their turn enabled digital advertising to appease, in some capacity, the ludification of culture trend mentioned previously. Print as a medium has been excluded from these affordances and yet, remains a valid part of the advertising landscape today. While print advertising is in decline both practically and academically, its significance ought not to be dismissed (Vinaya Kumar & Mehrotra, 2018). The

competition for attention is not unique to print advertising; it is a quandary that is faced by digital advertising just the same. Even more so, this begs the question of how print advertising has managed to survive thus far in sight of the cutthroat conditions of having to compete with digital media for attention and with minimal affordances having to provide a source of entertainment for consumers. This second trend makes it noteworthy to observe the developments being made in print advertising.

Understanding these two trends grants insight into a situation where on the one hand, consumers are craving and looking for playful and entertaining interaction with the media, and on the other hand, print advertisers are finding it difficult to compete for consumers' attention and have to come up with new ways to guarantee it. The research problem can thus be formulated as a neglect and dismissal of the developments within print advertising as a worthy topic of research, and an overlooking of other appeals to the ludification of culture beyond just digital or gamified forms of entertainment. Yet, the problem seen here is not so much a research problem as it is an opportunity to explore and investigate the intersection and relationship between these two trends. It is for this reason that the focus of this master's thesis is placed on exploring the linkage between the advertising industry and the discourse around playful communication being an aspect of the ludification of culture. This warrants the following exploratory research question for this study:

How do advertisers make use of playful communication strategies in print advertisements to stand out in the contemporary attention economy?

The focus of this research question unearths a plethora of new questions. What are print media doing in order to compete with digital media? Are they borrowing elements from digital media? What advantages do print advertisements have that can help capture attention? Do print advertisements employ unique forms of playfulness to entertain us? What advantages do playful print advertisements have and can they be utilized by digital advertisements as well? These questions and many more will be explored throughout the study. The research opportunity née problem of these two intersecting trends is not just coincidental but academically and socially sound, as the next two sections will come to show.

1.2 Academic relevance

This section will give a brief overview of research that has been previously conducted so as to identify a gap and situate the thesis in a particular academic discourse. To start, it is noteworthy to say that the intersection of the two trends—the competitive advertising industry and the ludification of culture—has been studied in academia before. In the research on these two

intersecting trends, the focus has been heavily placed on digital forms of advertising and the ludification of culture has taken the shape of game-related studies. The combination of games and digital advertising knows different forms that have been adequately studied by scholars:

Advergames, for one, denote digital games designed specifically for advertising purposes (De la Hera, 2019; Vashisht, Royne, & Sreejesh, 2019; Vashisht & Pillai, 2017; Roettl, Waiguny, & Terlutter, 2016); and gamification in advertising denotes a process whereby game-like elements such as badges, levels and leaderboards are used in a non-game context like advertising (Huotari & Hamari, 2012; Deterding & Nacke, 2017; Lucassen & Jansen, 2014; Hamari, Koivisto, & Sarsa, 2014).

However, within the intersection of the advertising industry and the ludification of culture, this study is looking at print advertising and play-related studies in particular. The following has been researched regarding each of these individually. Despite its declining popularity, print advertising continues to be a relevant topic for scholars. Some recent studies in the field of print advertising have looked at the effects of implicit memory in print advertisements (Jones & Perfect, 2019), have tested the effectiveness of QR codes in print advertisements (Trivedi, Teichert, & Hardeck, 2019), and have explored the decoding of visual metaphors in print advertisements in light of culturally driven self-views and thinking styles (Myers & Jung, 2019). A review of print advertising related literature has shown that research into its relation to the ludification of culture, a trend spearheaded by digital technologies, has not yet been made. Next, despite its being seen as synonymous with game-related studies, the concept of playfulness has been studied to some extent by scholars as well. Playfulness as a distinct concept has been studied in relation to human-computer interaction design (Kors, Ferri, van der Spek, Ketel, & Schouten, 2016; Anderson, 2011), in relation to education (Walsh, 2015; Tanis, 2012), and health (Tonkin & Whitaker, 2019; Grainger, 2006). The implementation of playfulness in the world of advertising has not yet been made.

A conclusion to be made from this brief literature overview is that playful communication has not yet been studied in print advertising, constituting a gap in academic literature. It is however not just this fact that makes this study one of academic relevance. By filling the gap the master's thesis intends to extend previous scholarship on the phenomenon of playification (the use of playfulness in non-play contexts) by exploring its use in a new domain (Márquez Segura, Márquez Segura, Waern, & López Recio, 2016; Scott, 2012). This study answers a calling by scholars to explore play and playfulness in an alternative way (Sicart, 2014; Lucero & Arrasvuori, 2013), the results of which are therefore worthy of academic relevance.

1.3 Social relevance

Beyond academic relevance, there are also insights to support that a study of playful communication in print advertising is relevant from a social angle as well. It is interesting to study

playful communication in print advertising because the competition between online digital media and offline print media for consumer's attention has been growing more intense each passing year (Fitzgerald, 2019). The pull of digital advertising over print advertising is for example corroborated by consumers' compulsive gazing at their phones while on the metro, or by the newer generations' continued disregard for magazine and printed newspapers. This empirical observation is also statistically noted with the following budget decreases in print advertising: newspapers (39%), magazines (36%), and outdoor billboards (21%) (Kumar & Gupta, 2016). Digital advertising spending is set to surpass non-digital advertising in many Western markets (Enberg, 2019). In spite of this decline, scholars and practitioners argue for coexistence and collaboration between print and digital formats (He, Lopez, & Liu, 2017). For instance, some sources are noticing how interactive abilities, originally seen more as a digital affordance, are finding their way into non-digital printed formats (Sutcliffe, 2019). Therefore, exploring how playful strategies are used as a way to compete in this competitive attention economy can be very relevant socially and offer a contribution on a practical level.

This thesis does not propose that a study of print advertising is socially relevant simply because there is a supposed unwarranted decline of the medium. It is not the intention of this thesis to argue for a resurgence of the print medium in spite of a digital one. Instead, studying the playful developments in print advertising is socially relevant because a better understanding of contemporary print advertising can help enrich the marketing mix as well as provide insight for how advantageous playful print strategies might be transferable to digital media. The social beneficiaries of the results of this study are therefore twofold: advertisers and consumers. By uncovering the playful strategies present in these print advertisements, advertisers stand to benefit from these insights that can help them stand out and more effectively persuade in an increasingly digitized society. An equally socially relevant counter to this practitioner's view is the ethical considerations of these yet unexplored playful strategies for the everyday consumer. This study will enable a better understanding of these persuasion mechanisms, which in turn will permit reasonable regulations to be made for the sake of susceptible audiences. Seeing such persuasive playful strategies used in advertisements might sensitize members of a society to recognize similar utilizations elsewhere.

1.4 Chapter overview

So far, this introduction chapter has given insight into the topic at hand by relating it to a familiar media experience; has explained the deeper rooted research problem and research question; and has expressed the significance of studying this topic from both an academic and social standpoint. To maintain a good level of structure and clear argumentation throughout, the purpose of this

chapter overview is to grant a glimpse into what can be expected in each chapter ahead. Overall, this thesis follows a five-chapter structure of which this introduction chapter is the first. The second chapter for this study is the theoretical framework which presents a critical account of the theories, concepts and previous studies related to the research question that will guide the understanding and interpretation of the results later on. Through this chapter, this thesis will also develop a firmer stance arguing with which perspectives it stands in agreement and which ones it will challenge or add to. The third chapter is dedicated to addressing all methodological matters important to the thesis. From choices of research design to sampling, collection, operationalization, and analysis — all these aspects are defended and shown to contribute to realizing an appropriate answer to the research question. The fourth chapter presents the results, forming an account of the findings that came forth from the research and are effectively discussed in four central themes. The results chapter introduces valuable new insights, interprets and relates them back to existing theory, and vividly illustrates the findings through the inclusion of numerous examples from the data. The final chapter is the discussion and conclusion of the findings and the thesis overall. The answer to the research question is summarized in this chapter and the findings presented in the results chapter are discussed in the broader context of what their implications are academically and socially. The thesis concludes by detailing the limitations of the study and the directions that future research could explore.

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter of the master's thesis comprises a most essential part of the overall study. It is the chapter in which a framework of theories and concepts is set up from which the phenomenon to be studied can be better understood. Through a critical comprehension and comparison of foregoing academic theory, an argumentative line of reasoning will justify which theoretical perspectives this study will build upon and which it will challenge. Once a firm theoretical stance and definition of relevant concepts is found, they will go on to serve as the lens through which the results are understood, evaluated, and enriched in meaning. It is through a proper understanding of previous theoretical literature that a potential new insight on existing theory has any value. Hence, many a study's referral to this essential chapter as the backbone of their research. This chapter aims to arrive at a holistic framework to serve the research question, *How do advertisers make use of playful communication strategies in print advertisements to stand out in the contemporary attention economy?*, in such a way, that every concept in it is defined and its relevance to the overall study is expressed. This theoretical framework is made up of three main parts. It commences with a contextual discussion of the advertising landscape in relation to print advertising (2.1); then delves into a conceptual discussion where a working definition of Play is found (2.2); and concludes by defining playfulness, its previous applications and its role in playification (2.3)

2.1 The advertising landscape

The research question indicates the intention of this study to explore the theoretically complex notion of playfulness within the current context of the advertising industry. Yet before that is done, this theoretical framework first benefits from an adequate understanding of what today's advertising industry entails. What does the current advertising landscape look like? What is the place of print advertising within it? And how do these conditions relate to the usage of playful communication strategies? This section of the theoretical framework will answer these questions and will provide context to the bigger concept and phenomenon being studied. To do so effectively, a closer look must be had at the attention economy and digital influence, and subsequently at the developments and competitive forces behind print.

2.1.1 *The attention economy and digital's dominance in it*

In the spirit of clarifying all aspects to the research question, let's begin this section by having a closer look at the end of the research question: the contemporary attention economy. Briefly touched upon in the introduction, the attention economy does its nomenclature justice by entailing the setting where attention has become the main commodity that is driving the contemporary

economy when it comes to media exposure. In their book on the attention economy, Davenport and Beck (2001) simply define attention as “focused mental engagement on a particular item of information” (p. 20) and they go on to explain how the notion of attention continues to become more scarce as the amount of information available increases. Attention now being a scarce and valuable commodity in the contemporary economy can be explained by the affordances of the internet and digital information technologies introduced in the late 20th century, dubbing this period until now the Information Age or the Digital Age (Davenport & Beck, 2001). Today, information is widespread, readily accessible, and many would argue, in vast surplus.

This attention economy, characterized by an information overload and scarcity of attention, has of course invariably left its mark on the advertising landscape as we know it today. As esteemed advertising models such as AIDA (Van Dyck, 2014) will avouch, consumers’ attention is of integral and immense importance to this industry and its scarcity has taught advertisers to adjust and adapt their advertising strategies to appease this cultural trend. The logic of the attention economy dictates that advertisers want to come to the conclusion of their advertising message as quickly as possible; advertisers have begun to favor easily understandable and uncomplicated delivery because they are only allotted a few seconds to make their point (McStay, 2016). While digital information technologies have contributed to the crowded landscape in the first place, they also have introduced new revolutionary ways for advertisers to manage the competition for attention. Accordingly, it must come as no surprise that digital advertising is the dominant mode of advertising today (McStay, 2016). Understanding what makes digital advertising dominant in today’s landscape helps to put print advertising’s position in perspective.

This dominance is certainly reflected in recent academic literature on the topic of advertising, that likewise is dominated by studies on digital advertising’s affordances, effectiveness and opportunities. Current digital advertising strategies make use of the qualities that are quintessential to digital media in order to compete for attention. Three of these qualities include multimediality, personalization and interactivity (Frissen et al., 2015; Truong, McColl, & Kitchen, 2010). Multimediality refers to the idea that digital media have “a multitude of means of expression” at their disposal including moving as well as still visuals, a variety of soundbites and music, and written text (Frissen et al., 2015, p. 22). When compared to more traditional media forms (such as radio, television, or newspaper) that solely used to focus on one of these features, digital media offers an environment where all these features exist and can be used in combination to strengthen one another in service of richer strategies to capture attention. The second quality of digital media is that it allows for personalization which has transformed the ways in which advertisers are able to reach consumers (Truong et al., 2010). By way of digital cookies, geolocations, and algorithms, advertisers are better able to target consumers that have a

disposition for a particular product and therefore are more inclined to give the advertisement their attention. And thirdly, the quality of interactivity has been heralded for increasing levels of engagement, and by definition, the attention it is able to garner (Frissen et al., 2015). The two-way channel that digital media provide makes it easier for consumers to be active and have a more empowered role as they give feedback, intervene, and contribute to an advertisement and its message, heightening attention overall (Truong et al., 2010). It is this same quality of interactivity that has enabled the strategies of gamification and advergames discussed in the academic relevance (Ming-Sung Cheng, Blankson, Shih-Tse Wang, & Shui-Lien Chen, 2009).

These three qualities and the strategies that advertisers derive from them help to explain the current landscape's leaning towards digital advertising; it allows advertisers to reach consumers in calculated ways that had previously never been done before (Van Dyck, 2014). However, while the acclaim for digital advertising's ability to track and predict consumer insights is not unfounded (Hamilton, 2017; Ming-Sung Cheng et al., 2009), the predictability to digital advertising goes both ways. The level playing field of digital media has in more recent years brought forth monotonous strategies, and consumers are catching on to the predictability of executions, effectively avoiding and experiencing irritation from advertisements (Ming-Sung Cheng et al., 2009). It is interesting to keep in mind here that this is an adverse relation to the ludification of culture trend described earlier. What this inclination of blocking out advertising is telling us is that it thwarts truly engaged attention that leads to interactivity and retention, making it hard to stand out from the crowd. It serves as a prompt to rethink and constantly reinvent digital advertising and perhaps speaks to the need for the marketing mix to remain diversified. Some of the present shortcomings or difficulties faced by digital advertising can be complemented by print advertising, a segment of the landscape holding an unexpected advantageous position.

2.1.2 The competitive developments in print advertising

The discussion of digital advertising's dominance within the current attention economy may leave one wondering where that leaves print advertising within the overall advertising landscape, and may cause one to question its significance in the research question. Simply put, the advancements in digital media have caused print media to take a back seat. Kumar and Gupta (2016) go as far as to describe the developments within the advertising industry as progressing in a linear fashion, "from being restricted to print media and transcending to digital media, followed by revolutionized interactive social media" (p. 302). Other scholars share this perception as they note the offline print traditional media having to compete with online digital new media (Katz, 2017; Vinaya Kumar & Mehrotra, 2018). They see digital advertising increasing to the detriment of print advertising, Kumar and Gupta (2016) listing projected budget decreases for print newspapers (39%), magazines (36%),

and outdoor billboards (21%). The drawbacks of these printed formats are linked to an insufficient ability to fulfill the interactive and entertaining need of a new wave of consumers who are increasingly fond of digital formats (Katz, 2017).

So, why should one still care to study a development in print advertising? While printed formats are experiencing a decline, numerous scholars argue against its dismissal in the academic agenda. Quite the contrary, some researchers argue that while there exists a competitive tension, online and offline forms of advertising should complement rather than substitute one another (Van Dyck, 2014; He et al., 2017; Vinaya Kumar & Mehrotra, 2018). While print media do not have the qualities of multimediality, personalization and interactivity in their traditional sense, the print medium has its own acclaimed advantageous qualities. Print advertisements are known to be able to engage audiences for a longer amount of time (Dooley, 2015), and this facilitates better internalization of the advertisement which is linked to better recall (Newsworks, 2018). Furthermore, the static and oftentimes tangible nature of print advertisements adds to their being perceived as more trustworthy and credible, contributing to their staying power (Katz, 2017). For these reasons, researchers advocate an integrated marketing mix of both modes of distribution, Vinaya Kumar and Mehrotra (2018) adding that inclusion of print advertisements within a diversified campaign helps lend a certain credibility to the content existing in the digital hemisphere. This thought is also shared by more practical voices in the industry (JPI Media Local, 2019; Right Mix Marketing, 2018) encouraging the use of print to activate the digital, for instance through involvement of printed QR codes or augmented reality features known as pervasive games (Deterding, Dixon, Khaled, & Nacke, 2011).

These developments in print advertising can be interpreted in light of the ludification of culture (Raessens, 2014). They suggest that even print media seem to adopt a ludic turn and begin to borrow interactive elements from the digital formats as an answer to society's desire to be entertained in all fronts of their media experience (Raessens, 2014). The idea of a linear progression by Kumar and Gupta (2016) seems to suggest that print media simply lack interactivity and entertaining value when compared to digital alternatives. Additionally, Frissen et al. (2015) determine interactivity to be a quality that is mostly inherent to digital media, and that it is able to afford forms of interactivity that other media such as print cannot. With this thesis I dare to challenge these ideas and explore how aging print media are using playful means to incite the interaction and entertainment that is sought after in today's advertising landscape.

2.2 Conceptualizing play

Having duly established the context in which an exploration of playful communication takes place, the phenomenon itself can be considered. What is play? As is often the case with such a seemingly

simple word as ubiquitous in our daily vocabulary as the word play, its meaning is both familiar and strange to us. It is familiar because every human being, regardless of background or upbringing, will be able to form some mental picture of what play is to them. Yet it is strange to us, because when asked to define it, we may find ourselves struggling to capture the fullness of its meaning. This is a struggle not unknown to academicians who have set out to conceptualize play to its fullest extent, and yet some contention still exists. This section sets out to define and conceptualize the different facets of play by considering the perspectives of prominent thinkers in this field and settling on this paper's working definition.

2.2.1 Huizinga's inaugural definition

The most revolutionary thinker when it comes to the conceptualization of play is Dutch historian and cultural theorist Johan Huizinga. With his book *Homo Ludens*, published in 1938, Huizinga was the first to successfully attempt a thorough conceptualization of the term play, in such a way that no reputable study of play fails to build on his work. Analogous to an anatomical backbone, Huizinga's definition of play can be likened to the atlas vertebra — it is the first of many vertebrae and the one that supports the weight of the skull. Theoretically speaking, Huizinga's work fulfills the same function, being seen as the first and superior academic work that supports the weight of play and game related research. With *Homo Ludens*, Huizinga laid down some of the fundamental characteristics of play and described how it permeates all aspects of culture. In the words of Raessens (2014), "It was Huizinga's ambition to demonstrate that the rise and evolution of culture occurs in and as play" (p. 101). This is not to say that play has assumed a significant part beside the cultural manifestations of civilizations; but rather that play is present in all manners of cultural manifestations ranging from art and poetry to the law and war (Huizinga, 1938/1949). Regarding play as a cultural phenomenon with a historical approach, rather than a biological phenomenon with a scientific approach, Huizinga defines play as follows:

"[...] a free activity standing quite consciously outside 'ordinary life' as being 'not meant', but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings." (Huizinga 1938/1955 as cited in Raessens, 2014, p. 101).

The handful of characteristics of this definition have been dissected and evaluated by scholars numerous times, and it is known to fall short on several accounts. First, in that it is too universalist and essentialist, meaning that his definition is not exhaustive enough to encompass the vast variety

of play (Raessens, 2014). Second, that it treats play as too general a notion, failing to distinguish and classify games from play (Raessens, 2014; Caillois, 1958/2001). And third, that the distinction between play and non-play is too strict (Raessens, 2014). The answers to these points of critique are addressed by Caillois (1958/2001) and Raessens (2014) below and considered for their usefulness in defining play for my research question.

2.2.2 Caillois critique and expansion of play

Where Huizinga's work can be considered the atlas vertebra supporting the weight of the discipline, running with the same analogy of the backbone, Caillois's work is the vertebra that follows it, known as the axis, granting the atlas (Huizinga's main work in this instance) the mobility and rotation. That is to say, Caillois's work expanded on that of Huizinga in such a way to go beyond the general notion of play and instead provide guidance and movement within the broader field of play-related studies. In response to Huizinga's definition, Caillois (1958/2001) first argues for the inclusion of two aspects that were missed: the fact that play can include manners of pretense or make-believe, for example when a child mimics their parents when playing house; and, the fact that play can at times be bound to material interest as is the case for play that involves an element of chance, such as the lottery. Having this in mind, Caillois (1958/2001) redefined play to have six characteristics. He views play as *free*, referring to its all-time voluntary nature; play is *separate*, meaning that it takes place in fixed and predetermined sense of time and space; play is *uncertain*, meaning that the outcome of play nor the path towards it can be known in advance, leaving room for the player's own initiative; play is *unproductive*, in the sense that no new goods or wealth is created but merely allows for an exchange or transformation of existing property. Play is *governed by rules*, which is described rather as conventions that stand in place of ordinary laws throughout the duration of play; and lastly, play is *make-believe*, indicating a consciousness of an alternate reality that exists beside real life (Caillois, 1958/2001).

Failing to grasp the variety of play and its distinction from games, Caillois (1958/2001) went on to conceptualize the broad scope of play by introducing the poles of *Paidia* and *Ludus* which he used to distinguish play from game respectively. The term *paidia* denotes a form of play that is free-from, care-free, improvisational, and may appear as tumultuous and uncontrolled (Caillois, 1958/2001). At the opposite pole, *ludus* is a form of play seen as more structured, contrived, goal-oriented and imbued with strife and competition (Caillois, 1958/2001). These are terms that today are commonly associated with the term 'game' or "the formalized parts of play" (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004 as cited in Raessens, 2014, p. 104). Along this continuum with poles of *paidia* and *ludus* on either end, Caillois introduces four dimensions of play each bearing a central principle. Under the dimension of *lilix* a form of play is understood that creates a self-induced feeling of

disorder or vertigo such as the one experience when riding a rollercoaster (Caillois, 1958/2001). By the dimension of *mimicry* a form of simulation or pretense is understood, as the case of playing house previously illustrated (1958/2001). The dimension of *alea* concerns itself with chance, as is the case for playing roulette (1958/2001). And in the dimension of *agon*, bearing closest proximity to the ludus pole, the role of competition is dominant as is the case for playing chess for example (1958/2001). All forms of play according to Caillois will fall somewhere among these dimensions and can be ranked in progression from paidia to ludus.

Caillois' contributions to the conceptualization of play functions as a necessary literary source for introducing the scope and guidelines of play which is highly beneficial for properly understanding the research question. It is from this vantage point that I can determine which view of play to uphold for this study, for which the work of Raessens (2014) grants valuable insight.

2.2.3 Raessens' view of play in media

At this point one may perceive Caillois's (1958/2001) concept of play as incongruous because on the one hand he seems to suggest a dichotomy of two distinct poles relating to play and game, while on the other hand framing both of those poles under the common term of play. It is worthwhile to mention Raessens' (2014) views here, as in his study of the ludification of culture, he places play in the context of the media, as this study intends to do also. Simply stated, Raessens (2014) perceives play to be an overarching category including both game and non-game forms of play. At the same time, he argues that we ought to pay notice to the ambiguities of play, an intention that was shared by Caillois (1958/2001) in his creation of the continuum of play. Thus, it is not one or the other, but both views that should be upheld in an exploration of play in the media. Just as light is both particle and wave, play is both an encompassing category and the root of games, as well as, its very own sub-category likened to the paidia pole and contrasted to the ludus pole.

Furthermore, while Raessens (2014) stands mostly in accordance with Huizinga and Caillois, he does critique their strictness in defining the overarching concept of play and how it differs from non-play. He argues that while defining play with buildable set of characteristics is valuable, it should not draw too harsh a line between non-play claiming that it is "exclusively situated in the opposite domain of reality, utility, coercion, seriousness" (Raessens, 2014, p. 102). This plays into the line of thinking that respects the ambiguity of play and that shows a possibility for play to exist in realms that might initially been regarded as non-play. For instance, while play is a form of freedom, it can simultaneously be a form of coercion (Raessens, 2014).

A last point of note here is that, when it comes to studying play in a culture saturated with media, Raessens (2014) contends Huizinga's belief that the play element of culture has lost its meaning in the twentieth century, a demise he believes is brought about by technology. Rather,

Raessens' (2014) study of the playful turn in digital media and the ludification of culture adds credence to my study of playfulness in contemporary print advertising media.

2.2.4 Sicart's insights on play

However, before I settle on a final definition for the term play for this study, it is worthwhile to consider the insights brought by one of the newer thinkers in this discipline, Miguel Sicart. In tandem with Raessens' (2014) urge to take heed of the ambiguities of play, Sicart (2014) does not "oppose play to reality, to work, to ritual or sports because it exists in all of them" (p. 3). Yet, where Raessens maintains a Huizingan perspective, Sicart chooses to divert from it almost entirely and proposes his own view on play that is much broader and abstract. His conceptualization of play has focus on it being an innate quality in humans through which we understand, express, construct, destruct and experience the world around us and all that is in it (Sicart, 2014). Moreover, he somewhat disagrees with the notion of the current century being defined by games (Zimmerman & Chaplin, 2013); urging rather, that besides a format of play that is games, we ought to return to the broader picture of play. In his book *Play Matters*, Sicart (2014) quite explicitly contrast the idea shared and emphasized by Huizinga (1938/1955), Caillois (1958/2001), and Raessens (2014) alike, that play is fun and enjoyable. Instead, he argues that play is pleasurable, in a way that can be fun and positive, but also in a way that hurts, offends, challenges and potentially can be dangerous (Sicart, 2014).

As for his definition of play, Sicart enters a whole new set of words into the descriptive lexicon of play. First, he regards play as *contextual*, meaning it relies on context that goes beyond physical space and includes people, objects, negotiations and cultures (Sicart, 2014). Secondly, it is *carnavalesque*, meaning that play is subversive and critical, balancing between creation and destruction based on player satisfaction or "embodied laughter" (Sicart, 2014, p. 11). Play is also *appropriative*, meaning that it usurps the context it exhibits and is not totally predetermined by the context (2014). Next, play is *disruptive*, this being a result of its appropriative nature, it changes or disrupts the current circumstances and assumptions (2014). Seeing play as *autotelic* entails having its own goals and purposes, and its own sense of time and space, that are not rigid but open for negotiation (2014). Lastly, Sicart sees play as *creative* and *personal* as it permits a variety of expression and as the effects of play, even collective play, are internalized in each individual person (2014).

Sicart distinguishes himself from Huizinga, because where the latter views play as a bound entity that creates a separate or alternate world, the former views play as more changing, interactive and connected to the material world. For exploring what *playfulness* is in the material

context of print advertisements and their design, Sicart's perspective is well-suited, hence its inclusion to this framework.

2.2.5 Establishing a working definition of play

Having thoroughly and critically explored the various conceptualization of play by prominent scholars in this discipline, I am now able to come to a working definition of play which is the basis of the playfulness that is inquired after in the research question of this thesis. Naturally, a definition is sought that takes into account the best of all perspectives and the refinements to the concept of play that have been thought up by bright minds over the years.

The starting point of this study's understanding of play is that of Caillois' (1958/2001) identification of the two poles of *paidia* and *ludus*, of play and game respectively. In line with Raessens (2014), while I understand play to be an overarching category that encompasses both play and game and all that exists along its continuum, this master's thesis takes the position of defining play as referring to the more *paidiac* forms of play. While play's nature being on a continuum makes it difficult to draw a definitive line between what is *paidiac* and *ludic*, it is the intention of this research to seek after that which is more free-form, expressive and spontaneous and less structured, competitive and explicitly rule-bound. This decision is taken for reasons substantiated in the academic relevance (section 1.2), namely, an academic calling for an exploration of *paidiac* play in unknown sectors of which the advertising industry is one.

Now when it comes to actually defining play, only so much as a working definition or what Sutton-Smith (1997) calls a rhetoric of studying play, can be given (in Sicart, 2019). This master's thesis does not propose to neglect the six characteristics (free, separate, uncertain, unproductive, governed by rules, make-believe) set down by Caillois (1958/2001) that come from a Huizingan tradition of looking at play which over time have proven reputable; but rather, to keep them in the back of the mind in favour of Sicart's (2014) rhetoric of play that sees play as *contextual, carnivalesque, appropriative, disruptive, autotelic, creative* and *personal*. This choice is made based on three reasons. First, this rhetoric of play acknowledges contemporary insights raised on respecting the ambiguities of play (Sicart, 2014; Raessens, 2014; Henricks, 2015). Second, because of its minimal observable traits it "allows us to see play beyond the domain of games" (Sicart, 2019, p. 522). And third, because this rhetoric of play is suited to study phenomena that bear a connection to the technologies and design of contemporary media culture, as it has previously been used to study phenomena of information and communication technology computation in the information age (Sicart, 2019).

2.3 Playfulness and Playification

The elaborate discussion of the meaning and extent of play that took place above, was a necessary precedent for answering the research question of how advertisers make use of playful communication strategies in print advertising. As was mentioned earlier, the right conceptualization of play is pivotal in how we study what is *playful*. So now that an understanding of play is established, in this section we can commence by understanding and defining what playfulness is. This is first and foremost done through an evaluation of scholar's perceptions of playfulness. Next, an understanding of how to study playfulness is reached. Then, valuable insights are gained from looking how playfulness has been studied in academia in the past. From this, a definition for the broader phenomena studied here is proposed and situated.

2.3.1 Defining playfulness

The difference in perception of play between Huizinga and Sicart is extrapolated to their perception of that which is playful. For instance, playfulness is seen as a fun and desirable experience or a mode of "interaction that goes beyond utilitarian work and task contexts" (Deterding et al., 2011, p. 10) by scholars such as Fontijn and Hoonhout (2007), Gaver et al. (2004), and Morrison, Mitchell, and Brereton (2007) who follow Huizinga's view of play. There are however some scholars (e.g. Costello and Edmonds, 2007) that, more in line with Sicart's (2014) view of play, see playfulness more as a pleasurable experience that is not necessarily fun and that pervades even functional context such as work life. The presence of playfulness in our mundane adult life is reiterated by the idea that, "playfulness in our ludic culture is no longer confined to childhood, but has become a lifelong attitude" (Bauman, 1995 as cited in Raessens, 2014, p. 95).

This leads to an academic discussion of whether playfulness should be regarded as an attitude and mindset that we have toward a certain situation or object, or whether playfulness is an observable behavior or activity in its own right (Deterding et al., 2011). To this end, Sicart (2014) offers resolution as he distinguishes play as an activity and playfulness as an attitude. That is, play is an activity in that it is composed of actions performed for a purpose, while playfulness is an attitude in that it is a psychological, physical or emotional stance towards an activity (Sicart, 2014). This conceptualization for him, and for the purpose of this study, makes all the difference when it comes to studying how we, as adults, interact with the world in contemporary society. As Sicart (2014) plainly states, "What we want is the attitude of play without the activity of play [...] We want play without play. We want playfulness—the capacity to use play outside the context of play" (p. 21).

This of course makes the context of the advertising industry conducive to the implementation of playfulness. This master's thesis chooses to define playfulness as Sicart (2014) does, as follows: "[It] is a way of engaging with particular contexts and objects that is similar to play

but respects the purposes and goals of that object or context. Playfulness is projecting some of the characteristics of play into nonplay activities” (p. 21-22). To gauge how this concept may be utilized in the advertising industry we must revisit the seven characteristics of play introduced by Sicart (2014) and see how they converge with playfulness.

Of the seven characteristics of play — contextual, carnivalesque, appropriative, disruptive, autotelic, creative and personal — playfulness does not abide by two: autotelic and contextual. Play is considered autotelic because the activity carries a purpose in its own right (Sicart, 2014). Play however cannot share that same property by virtue of its being an attitude towards an activity; in order to remain a productive tool, playfulness has to respect and serve the purpose of the non-play activity it is applied to (Sicart, 2014). Sicart (2014) uses the example that even when one is ever so playful in the writing of a book, at the end of the day the activity exercised is that of writing not playing. Logically following this argument, it can be said that playfulness is not contextual in the same way that play is, in the sense that playfulness does not have its own destined context, rather it makes use of other contexts (Sicart, 2014). This leads to the strongest characteristic of play that playfulness *does* embody: appropriation. Playfulness is especially appropriative because it takes over a context or situation it was not intended for and transforms how it is interpreted (Sicart, 2014). For instance, a playful approach to a seemingly only functional activity such as house chores can make it more pleasurable or engaging. In so doing, playfulness can be carnivalesque in the sense that it allows us employ satire and humor, and in that it balances paradoxical tensions of creation and destruction (2014). All the while, playfulness also is disruptive in that it has the capacity to twist things around (2014). And lastly, in agreement with play, playfulness also entails a creative outlook and is personal in its expression (2014). Through these attributes Sicart (2014) finds that “playfulness re-ambiguates the world” (p. 28).

2.3.2 How to study playfulness

Now that the fundamentals behind playfulness are understood, how exactly can they be studied in other contexts? How are we able to study playfulness in any context, let alone advertisements, when it is an attitude or mindset? To understand this, we must approach the discussion of whether playfulness is an observable behavior that was raised earlier from a different angle (Deterding et al. 2011). Sure enough, playfulness is an attitude or mindset with which one can approach a context, activity or particular object. However, at the same time, the creator of that context, activity, or object could have designed it with a playful attitude in mind, so much so that it warrants a playful response and attitude from those who interact with it. Sicart (2014) sees this as objects having the capacity to afford playful behaviors. Similarly, Raessens (2014) brings our attention to this same thought of how two forms of playfulness exist in the relationship between a medium and its user.

Playfulness is something that a media text can have, and something that it in turn enables its user to develop: a playful interpretation of that text (Fiske, 1987 in Raessens, 2014). Placed in the context of advertisements this entails that hypothetically, with a playful mindset, an advertiser can make an advertisement playful in a way that invokes a playful attitude and interpretation with the consumer. It is a provisional supposition that playfulness can be contagious in the same way that a yawn is; people are susceptible to adopt the same playful attitude that was imbued in a text by another human, as appears to be the case when considering meme media culture.

With this playful attitude, Raessens (2014) argues that people can afford different modes of playability. That is, provided they have an understanding of the playfulness present in a text, what is referred to as ludoliteracy or play competence (Zagal, 2010 in Raessens, 2014), they are able to play along or 'appropriate' as Sicart (2014) would call it. When it comes to playability there are four kinds of players. The first is one who at all times complies with the rules or conventions of play (Huizinga 1938/1955 in Raessens, 2014). The second player is a cheater, one who pretends to respect the conventions but doesn't, and crosses them for his own advantage (Huizinga 1938/1955 in Raessens, 2014). The third player is a spoilsport, one who bluntly ignores and crosses the rules and tries to modify them where he can (2014). The fourth player is what they call the outlaw or evolutionary, this is one who doesn't abide by the conventions of play, and rather than modify them, creates them entirely anew beyond the current context of play (2014). Raessens (2014) notes that these modes of playability are especially applicable with modern digital media as they afford great scope for playful interaction. What remains to be seen however, is whether the print medium in the advertising industry aims to allow for such similar modes of playability.

2.3.3 Relevant insights from previous studies of playfulness

In line with the duality of studying playfulness that was alluded in the section above, there is a nuanced difference between the playful affordances that design brings to an object and the playful attitude or experience that a user derives from interacting with that object. This section discusses some relevant insights from studies that have looked at the interplay of design and experience which are useful for analyzing and interpreting the results.

The biggest field in which playfulness has been studied and the field that is the most pertinent to contemporary society and this study is that of Human-Computer Interaction (HCI). In a digitalized society where humans often rely on computers in daily life, the interest for and advances in interaction design have grown as it is a key determining factor of user experience (Babich, 2019). In the context of this thesis this means that when an object or system has been playfully designed to afford a playful interaction, the user experience or resultant attitude is likely a playful one (Cermak-Sassenrath, 2010). In his book called *Seductive Interaction Design*, Anderson (2011)

analyzes elements or design principles that make for playful experiences. He notes how use of contrast, colors, jokes, and wordplay as well as principles of association, unpredictability, surprise, curiosity and mystery are used to draw consumers' attention be it in the physical or digital world. These elements and principles mentioned by Anderson (2011) are befitting this study's exploration of how print advertisements aim to stand out and attract attention in the attention economy.

Relevant insights for playfulness can also be found within the domain of games. A critical review of game-related academic works reveals that several of those studies use the term playful in their study of game because they view play as the overarching category within the study of games. For example, Smith and Just (2009) speak of playful persuasion within their study of advergames. Other studies however speak of a playful attitude as distinct from a gameful attitude that people can tap into and switch between while playing a game (Deterding et al., 2011). A study by Mäyrä (2012) for example found that distinct playful communication is being used in social games on Facebook. In a similar study Kirman (2010) looked at how, when playing a farming computer game, people would sometimes relinquish their gameful attitude of trying to plant virtual flowers in the correct pattern in order to score points, for a playful attitude that was free-form in planting virtual flowers organized in the shape of Elvis Presley's face.

It is coincidentally from the field of games that the most extensive framework of playful experiences to date has been fashioned. Lucero and Arrasvuori (2013) extended an previously existing Pleasure Framework by Costello and Edmonds (2007) through studying the playful experiences people have when playing a game, and introduced the Playful Experiences or PLEX Framework containing 22 distinct playful experiences (see table 1). With this framework set in place, they have looked at how these 22 experiences may be used to design for playfulness beyond the game context, but also how they can be used as an playfulness evaluation tool, tackling both the design and experiential aspects of the study of playfulness (Lucero, Karapanos, Arrasvuori, & Korhonen, 2014). A self-identified critique of the PLEX framework is its bias towards positive experiences, containing only three that have a negative valence (cruelty, subversion, and suffering). I suspect that this likely stems from a Huizingan view of playfulness having a tendency to see playfulness as purely an enjoyable thing. By choosing to view playfulness as Sicart (2014) does (seeing it as something pleasurable that can be either enjoyable or dangerous), this study intends to capture and contribute a fuller range of playful experiences that may happen to have a negative valence.

Finally, an insight may be gained from playfulness' application to the field of health-related studies which was previously mentioned in the academic relevance. A critical finding made by Grainger (2006) in her study of the hospital ward that is worth mentioning is that, as much as playful communication can be enjoyable and alleviate stress or tension, it can also be a form of

social control and a tool for exclusion towards those who do not comprehend playful communication such as joking for instance. This insight, along with the others made in this section, are worthy to keep in mind for considering how playful communication is used by advertisers in print advertisements.

Table 2.1. The Playful Experience PLEX Framework (Lucero and Arrasvuori, 2013)

<i>Experience</i>	Description	<i>Experience</i>	Description
Captivation	Forgetting one’s surroundings	Fellowship	Friendship, communality, or intimacy
Challenge	Testing abilities in a demanding task	Humor	Fun, joy, amusement, jokes, gags
Competition	Contest with oneself or an opponent	Nurture	Taking care of oneself or others
Completion	Finishing a major task, closure	Relaxation	Relief from bodily or mental work
Control	Dominating, commanding, regulating	Sensation	Excitement by stimulating senses
Cruelty	Causing mental or physical pain	Simulation	An imitation of everyday life
Discovery	Finding something new or unknown	Submission	Being part of a larger structure
Eroticism	A sexually arousing experience	Subversion	Breaking social rules and norms
Exploration	Investigating an object or situation	Suffering	Experience of loss, frustration, and anger
Expression	Manifesting oneself creatively	Sympathy	Sharing emotional feelings
Fantasy	An imagined experience	Thrill	Excitement derived from risk and danger

2.3.4 Proposing, defining, and situating playification

With this review of relevant insights, playfulness has been shown to be an attitude that has been applied through forms of design in different fields (communication technologies, games, health) and that this playful attitude has in turn been studied through the interactants with such design. One thing that is characteristic of playful designs and playful communications, regardless of applied field or context, is that they are open to interpretation and suggestive to an audience who are willing to play along, complete them and in so doing make them meaningful (Sicart, 2014). Furthermore, accounts of research show playfulness to exhibit itself in both verbal and visual forms. This master’s thesis proposes to see these forms of playful communication and playful design as tools supporting a broader process known as playification.

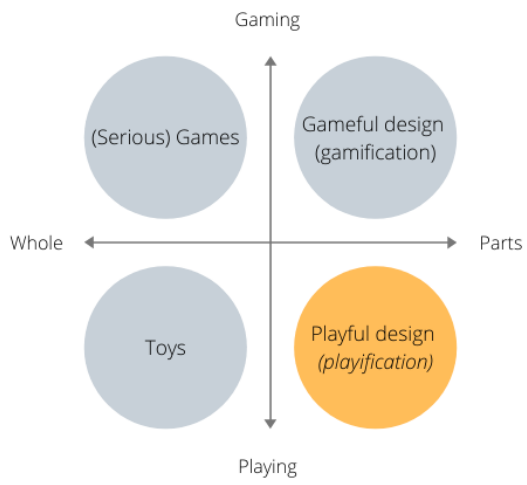
In their studies within the health sector, Márquez Segura et al. (2016) and Scott (2012) already adopt and defend the still relatively uncommon term of playification. In line with Nicholson’s (2012) view on meaningful play, Márquez Segura et al. (2016) see playification as “a form of design that fosters *playful*, rather than *gameful*, behavior” (emphasis in source, p. 377). This distinction is also respected and reflected in an earlier definition of the term playification by

Scott (2012) which this master's thesis chooses to adopt: *"Playification is using engaging play based interaction in situation and non-play contexts to make a product, service, activity, or application more engaging, enjoyable, and motivational"* (p. 2). However, the only adjustment this master's thesis proposes to his definition is that rather than 'enjoyable' I speak of 'pleasurable' to be in line with Sicart's (2014) thinking of play as pleasurable but not always necessarily in an enjoyable way.

Scholars have identified a need to introduce this new term because their findings were not sufficiently captured by the term gamification which has become a popularized term in overarching play-related studies (Márquez Segura et al., 2016; Scott, 2012). Deterding et al. (2011) defines gamification as "the use of design elements characteristic for games in non-game contexts" (p.13). Given this definition Nicholson (2012) argues that the lack of game-like challenges and rules (which are characteristic of the ludus pole) in playful engagement (which is more paidiac) is reason enough to demand its own term. Using Deterding et al.'s (2011) contextual framework (see figure 2.1) to situate playification, this process can be understood as the use of parts or elements of play for playful design, in a way that is parallel to gamification. Given that the 'whole' entities within this framework are called toys, some propose that the process of using some of those elements in another context ought to be called toyification instead. For this study the term playification is preferred over toyification as the latter term implies a material manifestation or an "object-oriented version of gamification" (Thibault & Heljakka, 2018, p. 10); whereas, playification is broader and open to the immaterial.

To conclude, although Sicart (2014) does not refer to the term playification explicitly, throughout his book he does seem to advocate for this process stressing the importance for playfulness to pervade all aspects of our lives so that we resume the agency to make technologies and all manner of our being in the world ours and personal. With this sentiment and the enriched understanding brought about by looking at the advertising landscape, the concept of play, and the study of playfulness in this theoretical framework, we can now turn to the methodology in the next chapter.

Figure 2.1. Model by Deterding et al. (2011), emphasis and italics added



3. Methodology

This master's thesis set out to study an underexplored field in play-related research by looking at the application of playfulness to the advertising industry with the following research question: *How do advertisers make use of playful communication strategies in print advertisements to stand out in the contemporary attention economy?* In this chapter, the manner through which the answer to the research question was realized will be recounted by delving into the methodology behind this study. It is no secret that the methodological chapter of any academic research is perhaps by far the least engaging of all the chapters. One may see it as the chapter where the researcher fulfills their academic obligation to justify and nitpick every decision made for the sake of defending the credibility of their work. And while that statement is by no means meant to undermine the importance of such a practice, other benefits to a well-argued methodology can be observed. Understanding the researcher's practical and critical mindset behind designing the appropriate research design for the study can make the connection between theory and the results chapter clearer and all the more meaningful. Additionally, often enough, through the narrowing decisions that are made in a methodology, other potential avenues for additional research are introduced, that due to a limited scope cannot be realized in the existing study.

Hence, with an engaging discussion, this master's thesis' methodological chapter addresses the following. First, the methodological standpoint and rationale behind the method are discussed as part of the research design (3.1). Second, the decisions behind the sampling and data collection of the research units are elaborated upon (3.2). Next, in the section on operationalization a bridge was built that transforms theory into observable indicators for analysis (3.3). The next section, naturally defends the manner in which data was analyzed and recounts the steps that were taken (3.4), and the methodology chapter concludes with a section devoted to the validity and reliability of this research design (3.5).

3.1 Research design

In any research process, the formulation of one question tends to lead to many more. So when the research question stated above was established, it naturally inspired questions about the origin and nature of the concepts within the research question, but also questions about the practical feasibility. The theoretical chapter addressed the former and this methodology chapter focuses on and addresses the latter: how can an answer to this research question be achieved? What must be done to properly study this? The first step in answering these questions was to establish a methodological perspective and weigh the suitability of possible methods.

When it comes to the research design, an important methodological consideration to make

was whether to approach the subject matter from a qualitative or quantitative angle. The methodological standpoint for embarking on this research was decidedly a qualitative one, as the phrasing of the research question might suggest. For an exploration of playfulness within the new context of advertising, an open vantage point of sense-making and meaning-making was required; hence, the suitability of a qualitative approach (Brennen, 2017). As argued by Brennen (2017) the objective of qualitative research is to reach a clearer and fuller understanding about social phenomena; to interpret them meaningfully rather than test them. Based on the argued affordances of qualitative research alone, the aptness of this approach to the study is evident. This was only further reaffirmed when the suitability of a quantitative approach to the same topic was considered at this stage. While attempting to quantify and measure the effectiveness of playfulness within the advertising context would certainly have posed a worthwhile line of inquiry, such a quantitative approach to the same topic would first have necessitated an adequate qualitative understanding of the manner in which this practice takes shape empirically. For these reasons, the qualitative methodological perspective was deemed appropriate and essential for this study.

Where the methodological standpoint is seen as a perspective from which to approach a topic, the method is regarded as the tool to achieve studying the topic. Within the qualitative perspective, there are a range of tools including the conducting of interviews, focus groups, or some form of textual analysis. The method chosen as most fitting and enlightening for the purpose of this study was a textual analysis of print advertisements. The merit of a textual analysis is that it has a focus on systematically uncovering latent meanings from a media text through a data-driven and iterative process (Schreier, 2013). In other words, analyzing print advertisements permitted the strategies that were sought after in the research question to speak for themselves directly from the form in which the data appears, that is, advertisements. The strength of this method and the enriched data it afforded can be even better understood when contrasted to the alternative of conducting interviews. The possibility of interviewing advertising professionals about their use of strategy in print advertising was considered. Yet, it was deemed that this method could inhibit a fuller understanding, as advertisers likely unwittingly tap into strategies and appeals of playful communication. To frame this reasoning in light of Hall's (1973) Encoding/Decoding model of media texts, one might say this study looked at the way these implicit strategies may be decoded from the standpoint of an informed but objective researcher, with the ultimate purpose to comprehend and simplify. Rather than inquiring how these strategies were or were not intentionally encoded by the advertisers themselves. For this reason, the choice to conduct a textual analysis was chosen as a method over interviews or even focus groups.

3.2 Sampling and Data collection

This next section addresses the units of analysis that were studied, the sampling technique used to obtain them, and the criteria that narrowed down the sample for the process of data collection. Performing a textual analysis calls for a concrete and thought out understanding of what the media text in question is and what it isn't. What exactly is meant by a print advertisement? For this study, the term was understood to refer to those advertisements that have been printed in either newspapers, magazines or on outside billboards that exhibit a static nature (Kumar and Gupta, 2016).

In order to gather these units of analysis an appropriate and effective sampling technique was sought. The desired sampling technique for a qualitative study like this one is one that is based on purpose, rather than convenience (Flick, 2018). The ultimate goal of the sampling procedure known as purposive sampling is to compile a corpus of texts that rather than being randomized, is well crafted and suited to the exact phenomenon being studied (Flick, 2018). In other words, the eventual sample needed to be composed with a purpose in mind, yet be obtained in a way that is objective and formal. For this study, it was essential to solely analyze those which are deemed to exhibit or encourage signs of playfulness, so naturally this was the purpose that guided every step of the sampling procedure.

In the spirit of objectivity, the decision was made to retrieve the sample from an advertisement archive accessible online. The ideal catalogue from which the print advertisements were sourced was from the website known as Ads of the World (<https://www.adsoftheworld.com/>). Ads of the World was chosen over other potential advertisement collection sites for their reputation in the industry, for their international scope, and for their convenient categorization tools over their large body of texts. This website posed a reputable source highlighting significant advertisements from prominent agencies originating from countries all over the world. Founded in 2005, the Ads of the World archive is part of the Clío Awards Network that has been hosting international award competitions for the creative business since 1959 (<https://clios.com/awards>). Since the archive's inception, it has amassed over 100,000 advertisements ranging from a variety of mediums, industries and countries. From this point on, certain exclusion criteria were established to narrow down the sample.

3.2.1 Exclusion criteria

As was noted above, the Ads of the World website contains three categorizations — industry, country, and medium — that enabled an efficient way to narrow down the focus of the sample. In light of the fact that playfulness had been previously unexplored in the world of advertising, there

was nothing to suggest that a focus ought to be placed on a particular industry or country for being more prone to usage of playification. Therefore, there was no significant reason to exclude advertisements from the first two categories. It was concluded however that the filter option of the medium categorization did prove effective for a narrower focus in line with the research question. Ads of the World makes a distinction between 11 different mediums — film, print, digital, direct, outdoor, ambient, audio, content, experiential, integrated, and design. The selected medium for this study was the *print* category, which was not just chosen based on name alone. Ads of the World does not provide a description of the mediums nor do they grant insight in how advertisements are categorized exactly. Hence, the medium categories were examined by the researcher. The category that was perhaps the most overlapping with print was the *outdoor* category, given that the units of analysis of print advertisements were earlier defined to include printed outdoor billboards. However, upon inspection the *outdoor* category on the Ads of the World catalogue was excluded for containing more elaborate outdoor sculptural installations or digital LED screens that permit movement; unlike billboards that solely have a static or ‘printed’ nature. This filter option therefore effectively led to the exclusion of ten categories to the overall corpus.

Another noteworthy exclusion sampling criterion was that of language. The sample thus far was made to include advertisements from countries all over the world allowing for a broad international scope which is fitting considering the universality of a concept like playfulness. However, this imposed some linguistic difficulties. As the researcher’s comprehension of languages is limited to English and Dutch, advertisements of a different language were excluded from the definitive sample, unless the foreign language phrase accompanying the advertisement was not considered an integral part to understanding and comprehending the playfulness in the advertisements imagery and communication. As Ads of the World does not provide a tool for filtering the language requirements, the exclusion of foreign languages was done manually by the researcher once a narrow enough workable sample was found through the data collection process.

3.2.2 Process of data collection

Now that certain sampling parameters had been set, the original catalogue of over 100,000 advertisements had been considerably reduced. Yet, the *print* category on Ads of the World still contained well over 58,000 advertisements which was by no means a workable amount of data. The methodological guidelines for this master’s thesis indicate a desired sample size of 100 advertisements to allow for sufficient depth of analysis. To work towards this number, timeframe considerations and informed projections were key in the process of data collection.

To respect the context of the contemporary attention economy in the research question,

the ideal time frame of these print advertisements had to be considered. Early in 2019, eMarketer expected digital advertising spending to surpass non-digital advertising in the U.S. market that same year (Fitzgerald, 2019). This development in the U.S. market, which is expected to extrapolate to other Western national markets (Enberg, 2019), emphasizes the competition for attention between print and digital advertising and marks the significance of the current time period for print advertising. It is for this reason that the data collection started with the most recent advertisements from 2020 and worked its way backwards through 2019 on the Ads of the World catalogue which is naturally archived chronologically. The data for the sample was collected starting with 09/04/2020 being the date of the most recent advertisement.

The collection of data was based on the operationalization of the concept of playfulness (see section 3.3) through an iterative process that enabled an informed estimation to be made regarding the size of a workable data sample. Based on this operationalization, an initial exploration of the database showed that of 60 surveyed advertisements, 10 were considered playful. Based on this insight, a projection was made that around 600 needed to be surveyed in order to arrive at approximately 100 playful advertisements. Of the workable sample of 600 advertisements that were surveyed, 114 advertisements were considered playful. Of the resultant 114 advertisements the definitive sample of 100 advertisements was chosen based on the principle of maximal variation. This principle entails that of all the differing playful cases that were found, the ones that displayed the widest range of playful strategies were chosen in order to capture as much differentiation in the field as possible (Patton, 2015 in Flick, 2018). This extensive process of sampling and data collection is summarized and shown in figure 3.1. A complete overview of the data sample can be found in appendix A.

Figure 3.1. Process of data collection



3.3 Operationalization

As was previously stated, purpose was fundamental throughout the sampling procedure and leading in the collection of data. To ensure that the underlying purpose of playfulness was represented throughout all the advertisements of the final sample, a process of operationalization was set up that is explained in further detail in this section. Commonly, operationalization is a term

associated with quantitative research where variables are defined and quantified in a manner that allows for measurement (Brennen, 2017). Because this study is a qualitative one, the leading 'variable', in this case the concept of playfulness, was not quantified for measurement, but rather expressed in the form of indicators of playfulness that ought to be noticeable in the advertisements. In doing so, the somewhat abstract notion of playfulness was made more tangible and practical in deciding what data got collected and what not. Playfulness was operationalized in light of academic theory. In line with the perspective taken in the theoretical framework, the preferred sensitizing concepts chosen were Sicart's (2014) five characteristics of playfulness introduced in section 2.3.1. *Appropriative, disruptive, carnivalesque, personal, and creative* — these five descriptors were translated into indicators to guide the selection of print advertisements in the following way. For each descriptor a set of questions were established to capture a different nature of playfulness.

In order to exhibit the quality of *appropriation*, the advertisement needed to resonate with the questions 'does the playful element in the advertisement significantly transform how you interpret it?' and 'does the essence of the advertisement go from purely functional and informative to pleasurable and/or emotionally engaging?' In order to be *appropriative*, it was considered likely that some sort of conclusion or interpretation is reached through active reception of the advertisement, whereupon the product or the main message is seen in a different light.

Another indicator of playfulness was whether the advertisement could be deemed *disruptive*. To determine this, questions were asked such as 'does the advertisement cause a disruption of taken for granted assumptions or expectations?' and 'does the advertisement significantly disrupt your train of thought and cause you to ponder afterward?' Use of unusual and unexpected imagery or associations were deemed likely indicators of disruption, yet in order to remain playful rather than a play activity, these disruptive elements would have to be used in the advertisement in a productive way. Sicart (2014) stipulates that playfulness demands that the goal of the host context (i.e. the advertisement) not be lost, and thus disruption ought always to be productive rather than destructive.

Under the indicator *carnivalesque* the following was understood in terms of questions: 'does the advertisement subvert or liberate a dominant atmosphere or authority with humor, satire, and/or critique?' and 'does it make use of mockery or mischievous tactics to reach embodied laughter' (Sicart, 2014). Sicart's understanding of the term suggests that some creation or destruction of a new alternate reality might be at play within the advertisement that likely may be politically charged.

The fourth operationalized indicator of playfulness is the quality of being *personal*. To capture the fullness of personalization three questions were considered. 'Does the advertisement

attempt to reach you or address you personally despite being collective in addressing the masses?'; 'Do you experience or learn something about yourself in your unique interpretation of the advertisement?'; and, 'Does the advertisement require your personal input in the form of creativity or prior knowledge to make sense of the advertisement?'

The last indicator of playfulness an advertisement can exhibit is *creativity*. Despite being a somewhat convoluted term, the quality of being creative centers on creation and expression that is part of that creation. Accordingly, two questions were considered for this indicator, 'Does the advertisement allow or afford different degrees of expression and interpretation?' and 'does the advertisement rely on the receiver to be active and creative in finding and reaching the conclusion?' Creativity was deemed likely to take shape by leaving essential parts of the advertisement (signs or punchline) hidden or incomplete, to be reliant on the audience's creative imagination to find or complete it.

In order to be selected for data collection, the advertisement had to exhibit at least one of these five indicators of playfulness. Throughout the process of data collection it became evident that some advertisements would exhibit one particular indicator more clearly or more strongly than some of the others. This was indeed sufficient enough to qualify them, yet upon further reflection during the analysis most, if not all, of the advertisements could be seen to exhibit multiple indicators to varying degrees.

3.4 Data analysis

Now that the way the data sample was obtained is accounted for in detail, the methodology chapter benefits from an explanation of how this data was analyzed, as is done in this section. The research method of textual analysis in turn relies on a particular form of data analysis to be paired with. Among possible contenders such as grounded theory, rhetorical, narrative, semiotic, discourse and thematic analysis, the last one was deemed the most suitable and was chosen for this study. According to Braun and Clarke (2006) the benefit of conducting a thematic analysis is the formation of themes that "capture something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represent some level of patterned response meaning within the data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). The idea of generating a patterned response of recurring themes was central here as this helped to identify, describe and illustrate the strategies that were sought after in the research question for this thesis so that they might contribute to a broader understanding of the topic of playfulness.

While a good understanding of all the other contending analytical methods is self-sufficient in disqualifying them from being suitable, semiotic analysis did at first appear as a possibility. Therefore, I cannot help but to address and defend why a semiotic approach was avoided in the

end. To start, the study of semiotics knows a history of its implementation in qualitative advertising studies (Beasley & Danesi, 2002). Advertisements being a mostly visual medium, they lend themselves to inquiry about the signs within them and what they symbolize in order to persuade its audience. It is not the intention of this study to delve deeply into the meanings of particular signs, but rather to explore the strategies and trends used by advertisers behind these signs (or the distortion or absence of them).

To instantiate, Mäyrä (2012) touches on this idea that the communication of game play can be done through either meaning-making that is based on symbolism known as *semiosis* (e.g. “I know to move upward in the game because I’ve learned to make this association with the sign of an arrow”); or meaning-making based on playful action *ludosis* (“I know to move upward in the game because through playing around the screen I’ve learned from other cues that this is the right direction despite the absence of the arrow”). Even a combination of these two forms of meaning-making are possible. Provided that this communicative mode of games can be extrapolated to contexts where playfulness is encouraged, this study looked at the way meaning-making through *ludosis* was done and encouraged by advertisers. It looked at how advertisers persuade consumers to decipher and take action by exhibiting a playful attitude towards the signs in the advertisement rather than just interpreting them in a traditional sense. And for the recognition of these persuasive playful strategies, it was judged that a thematic analysis would be more fitting than a semiotic analysis.

3.4.1 The steps of thematic analysis

When carrying out the thematic analysis, the steps as set down by Braun and Clarke (2006) were adhered to. In their extensive approach to thematic analysis consisting of six steps, emphasis is placed on the active recursive role of the researcher in handling the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). And while the six steps of their approach were initially established to suit studies of psychology, they were found to be just as useful and applicable to thesis’ study of playfulness, as the concept at times manifests itself as appealing to psychological responses as well. While Braun and Clarke (2006) differentiate strongly between either a deductive or an inductive approach throughout the analysis, this study employed a combination of both of those approaches as suggested by Schreier (2013) within the six steps. Moving between deductive and inductive reasoning throughout the analysis permitted the use of sensitizing concepts of playfulness to guide the analysis in a deductive way, while also leaving ample room for data-driven or inductive findings that are unique to the field of advertising to which the idea of playification is newly applied.

During the first step of thematic analysis a familiarity with the material was established (partly during the data collection process) and the first initial ideas of possible patterns were

realized (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The second step called for the creation of initial codes which could be seen as descriptive labels given to playful aspects within the data, not unlike what in grounded theory research are referred to as open codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This step generated a total of 93 unique codes, some of which were recurring across advertisements, that during the third step were the basis for the generation of potential themes. During this third step of searching for possible themes, the initial codes were accumulated into congruous groupings, a practice otherwise known as axial coding (2006). After conducting the third step, 9 of such groupings or potential themes were generated. The fourth step was dedicated to reviewing the groupings or sub-themes that had been created thus far. During this evaluation phase it was ensured that both the sub-themes were internally homogeneous and thus well suited to the codes that comprised them; and that all the sub-themes were mutually exclusive from one another yet all together exhaustive or fully comprehensive in representing the overall dataset (2006). Especially to ensure the latter standard, this called for a merging of some of the groupings under a new, more analytical name that does justice to the overall theme it represents. This was mainly achieved during the fifth step known for refining of the final themes or selective codes that build up and logically contribute to the overall line of reasoning within the analysis (2006). As is seen in the results chapter of this thesis, the 9 groupings were compiled as sub-themes into 4 final themes that make up the coherent answer to the research question. The sixth and last step of analysis as laid down by Braun and Clarke (2006) was that of analyzing how best to report on the key findings, relate them back to the research question and relevant literature, and to include illustrative extracts that altogether make for a well-argued results chapter. The code tree detailing the three main coding steps can be found in appendix B.

As a final remark on the practicality of carrying out this thematic analysis, it must be noted that for the initial coding the software Atlas.ti was used. Using this software for the most labor intensive step of the process allowed the researcher to maintain a proper overview of the many codes that were generated at this stage. The following steps three through five or grouping and forming themes were mostly carried out manually in an external document.

3.5 Validity and reliability

In this concluding section of the methodology chapter, several matters pertaining to the validity and reliability of this study's research design will be discussed. Validity and reliability are words not typically associated with qualitative research and instead are more prevalent to its quantitative counterpart. Nonetheless, scholars such as Silverman (2014) and Brennen (2017) are of the mind that these same terms may be used to refer to similar standards to uphold the academic rigour that

qualitative research demands. At the hand of certain measures, this study was ensured to be sound in both validity and reliability.

To begin by addressing the quality of validity, it helps to know that in quantitative studies it refers to the extent to which findings correspond to the subject matter being studied, and how well those findings relate to similar studies on the topic (Brennen, 2017). In other words, one may regard research as valid when it gives an accurate account of the phenomenon it is said to describe (Silverman, 2014). When considering validity, a researcher must question the authenticity of what is being studied or the “truthfulness of findings” (Altheide & Johnson, 1994 as cited in Silverman, 2014, p. 83). Guaranteeing the validity of this study meant ensuring that the findings regarding playful strategies used by advertisers were indeed based on data exhibiting playfulness and exemplifying the phenomenon of playification being studied. Hence, the interpretations of the findings in the results chapter are repeatedly linked back to academic literature and accompanied by data extracts throughout the text to illustrate and strengthen the arguments made. What is further indicative of the accuracy with which the concept of playfulness was studied is the fact that the findings show a strong alignment with similar practical studies of playfulness such as the PLEX framework by Lucero and Arrasvuori (2013). Additionally, Silverman notes factors such as the researcher’s values and his impact on the setting to be of importance to overall validity. To this end, it can be said that the researcher adopted a self-reflexive attitude and an active, yet unobtrusive role to the analysis setting.

The quality of reliability in turn also finds its basis in quantitative research where it refers to the extent to which the study and its findings can be reproduced by another researcher (Brennen, 2017). Should this be the case, then one can speak of a reliable study that is objective and consistent warranting a “stability of findings” (Altheide & Johnson, 1994 as cited in Silverman, 2014, p. 83). To ensure reliability in qualitative studies, several measures of transparency can be taken. First and foremost, the texts gathered as data for this study were retrieved from an open source; the Ads of the World archive is accessible to all and an unfiltered resource which by default is often already regarded as more reliable than qualitative studies based on self-acquired observations (Silverman, 2014). Second, as urged by Silverman (2014), theoretical transparency was also maintained to uphold reliability. That is, the theoretical stance that informed the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data was explicitly stated and incorporated throughout the method. This is very well seen in the third marker of reliability-ensuring transparency, namely the transparency in describing the research strategy or operationalization (Silverman, 2014). Careful thought went into designing a good operationalization structure with clearly defined indicators that deliberately stayed very close (often in verbatim) to the essence of Sicart’s (2014) theoretical concepts. This was all done to safeguard that another researcher would arrive at the same

categorizations and production of findings given said indicators.

Having elaborately touched upon all matters relevant to this study's research methodology, the following chapter delves into the fruits that the careful labor of a well-crafted methodology brought forth: the results.

4. Results

This master's thesis has set out to explore the relation between two occurring media-related trends in contemporary society: the competitive advertising landscape's pursuit of attention, and the increasing demand of consumers seeking out entertaining and playful interactions with media products as part of the ludification of culture (Vinaya Kumar & Mehrotra, 2018; Raessens, 2014). All in all, these two trends place a tall order on the advertising industry tackling information overload in the digital age. This feat and the ludic strategies implemented by advertisers to attain it, have thus far only ever been approached from the angle of digital media. With print media sporting a decline in mainstream attention by a newer generation and consequently a decline in advertising budget (Kumar & Gupta, 2016), it was questioned how that segment of the industry attempts to catch up and appease these trends with the following research question: *How do advertisers make use of playful communication strategies in print advertisements to stand out in the contemporary attention economy?* In this chapter, the results of the analysis will be presented in four themes that together comprise a comprehensive answer to this question. The first theme delves into the workings of playful strategies to ensure retention and appreciation of the advertisement (4.1). The second theme discusses the playful strategies used to harness the attention of consumers (4.2). In the third theme, manners are discussed in which print advertisements are strategically playful in liberating unspoken topics in unconventional ways (4.3). And the fourth and concluding theme elaborates on an awareness of playful risks advertisers ought to have when employing playful strategies (4.4).

4.1 Ensuring Retention

The first theme emerging from the data uncovers the mechanics behind a playful strategy and the essence of what makes it a powerful tool for retention. Normally, once a few seconds of attention are given, the instinct of most modern advertising is to come to the conclusion as quickly as possible. As fleeting as attention is in the current landscape of the attention economy, advertisers have learned to bring across the message of the advertisement in a manner that is as uncomplicated as possible and therefore easily understandable (McStay, 2016). Yet, when consumers encounter hundreds of such swift and frank advertising messages a day, one may question whether the message is retained, or whether the argument goes out through the other ear as quickly as it entered the first.

The main finding that represents this first theme is that playful print advertisements tend not to abide by that logic, and instead are able to flip the time-crunch on its head, not just ensuring understanding of the advertisement's message but also retention of the message. It seems logical enough that the more time a consumer spends looking at an advertisement the better he is able to

remember it. But beyond just looking at an advertisement for an extended amount of time, it is the interaction that occurs during that increased amount of time that determines retention being ensured. What playful strategies in print advertising do is provide a pleasurable interpretive experience that is memorable. This resonates with and is interpreted in light of the duality of playfulness between a medium and its user being expressed through both design and experience (Fiske, 1987 in Raessens, 2014). Advertisers are able to make print advertisements stand out by being able to ensure retention through pleasurable experiential logic.

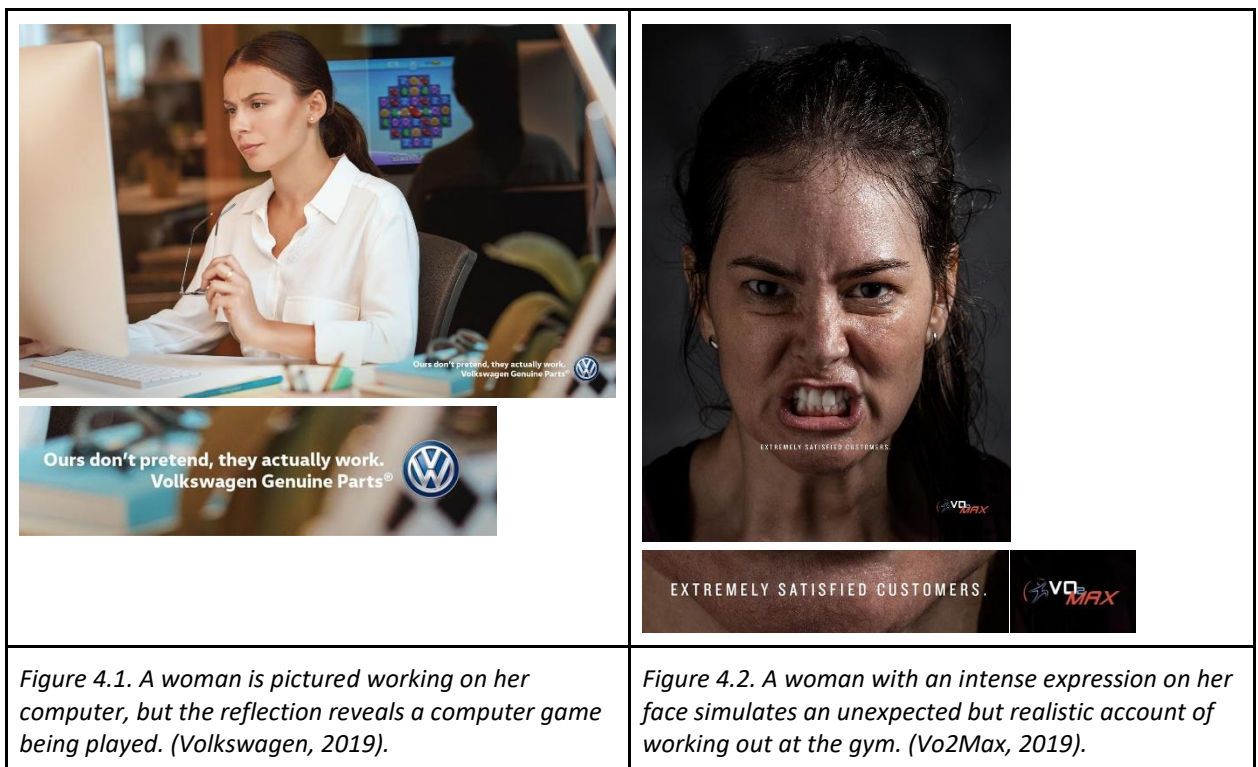
This finding suggests that playfulness is infectious and demands repeated reciprocation; it entices people to pick up on its playfulness and play along within the context it appropriates. This is somewhat different in reading a non-playful advertisement where a consumer is asked to give it the time of day in order to tell the consumer its conclusion or argument. Playful advertisements instead rely on more active engagement where something valuable is offered — an opportunity to feel playful— and an implied request is made on the consumer to subconsciously return the favor — prolonged attention and retention. From the data emerged two different practical implementations of this strategy, that of a delayed punchline and that of an implied punchline, which illustrate how playfulness is experienced to allow for retention.

4.1.1 Delayed Punchline

When it comes to playful advertisements, in many instances, intrigue is sparked from a confusion and curiosity about what is depicted in the advertisement. Contrary to modern advertising logic, a few seconds' glance at a playful advertisement would often not suffice in bringing across the message or even provide clarity on what is being sold. Many of the advertisements were playfully designed to leave its audience wondering “what am I looking at?” or “what are they trying to tell me?” Through this intrigue, audiences become invested and are enticed to follow up on their own curiosity to decipher and figure out the punchline. The strategy of a delayed punchline which requires the audience's active engagement in connecting the dots to arrive at the conclusion was a common sub-theme in the data. This strategy can be interpreted in light of playfulness having the quality of being creative (Sicart, 2014). The creative nature of playfulness allows for different degrees of expression and interpretation and makes use of the audience's creativity in achieving its goal. This creative experiential journey of connecting the dots and arriving at the punchline resonates very closely to three pleasurable experiences from the PLEX framework, namely exploration, discovery, and completion that often work sequentially (Lucero & Arrasvuori, 2013).

Exploration according to Lucero and Arrasvuori (2013) is a playful and pleasurable experience gained from “investigating an object or situation” (p. 24). This experience can be prompted by a visual as well as a textual cue nodding to the audience that a more thorough or deep

exploration of the advertisement is needed in order to understand it. At times, the advertisements contain unexpected visuals that prompt further exploration to uncover the reason for unconventional scenes. In some cases however, very common visuals can also prompt further exploration of an advertisement simply because they are too common or mundane simulations of everyday life that leave an audience eager to explore what is special about its mention in this context. At first glance, the woman portrayed in figure 4.1 appears not unlike any modern day business woman looking at her work on her computer. However its an audience’s exploration of this scene that reveals the real cause of her preoccupation. This “imitation of everyday life” also coincidentally appeals to another pleasurable experience in the PLEX framework known as simulation (Lucero & Arrasvuori, 2013, p. 24) and the concept of mimicry or make-believe (Caillois, 1958/2001). Simulations are often used in advertising to create a favorable pretense around the usage of a product or service. The gym advertisement in figure 4.2 challenges the unrealistic imitation of what people at the gym often look like in gym advertisements in a fun way by showing a more realistic simulation.



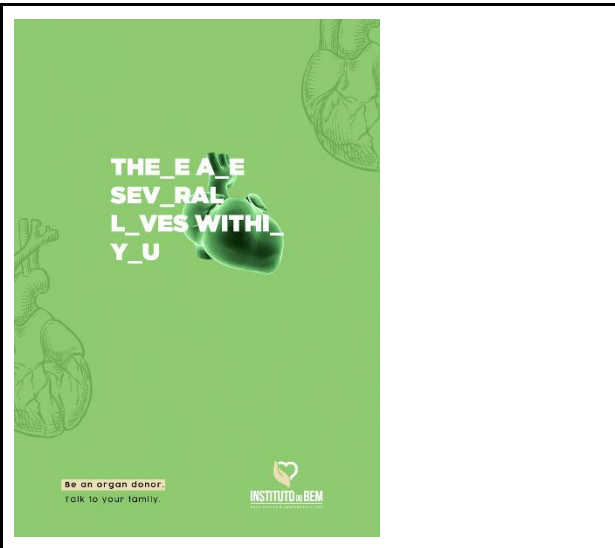
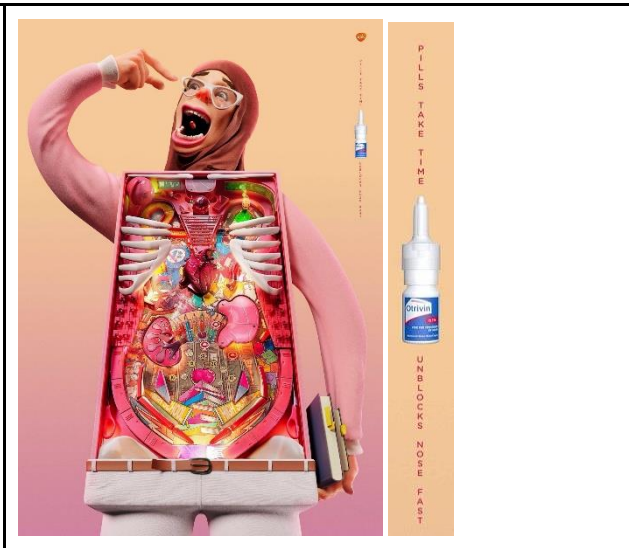
Within the experiential journey of a delayed punchline another common pleasurable experience is that of discovery. Simply defined as “finding something new or unknown” it is easily understood that this playful experience in the PLEX framework operates under the principle of surprise (Lucero & Arrasvuori, 2013, p. 24; Anderson, 2011). Sometimes, through exploration, a discovery is made that is somewhat unexpected and purely a result of exploration, as is the case for

the computer game discovered in the reflection in figure 4.1. But other times, the pleasurable experience of discovery is more explicitly prompted through a call to action or instructive text that informs the audience that there is something to be found that is hidden or missing. For example, the text in the advertisement in figure 4.3 is suggestive of an element contrary to the peaceful green leaves one observes at first glance, and prompts the audience to discover the hidden crocodile among the foliage. In some cases the discovery is realized within a few seconds, while in other cases, instructive text may really challenge the audience to seek out elements that may take a while to be discovered. The advertisement in figure 4.4 for the Olympic Park illustrates this well, the text inviting audiences to find various characters such as a family of singers, the pope and many more, within its captivating design reminiscent of popular ‘where is waldo?’ posters.



The concluding pleasurable experience in an audience’s experiential journey towards understanding a playful advertisement with a delayed punchline is that of completion. Described as “finishing a major task, [or gaining] closure” completion represents a proper or richer understanding of the advertisement’s message through having found or understood the punchline (Lucero & Arrasvuori, 2013, p. 24). At times completion was achieved in quite a literal sense in the case of figure 4.5 where insertion of the correct letters would complete both the puzzle and the message advertised. More frequently however, the fulfilling emotion of completion was reached through some supplementary text delivering the punchline at last, often in a small font size. The

advertisement in figure 4.6 serves as an example where the caption delivers crucial information for making sense of the visual. To some, this completion may come across as quite humorous. Given that the punchline of a joke is also delivered after some time, it comes as no surprise that the PLEX experience humor or “fun, joy, amusement, jokes, gags” was a recurring playful experience associated with completion (Lucero & Arrasvuori, 2013, p. 24). The strategy of a delayed punchline comes to show that through prolonged playful attention for exploration, discovery and completion, advertisers are able to deliver a playful experiential journey that is bound to increase retention. The fact that the core message is not just served up on a silver platter but rather arrived at through creative effort by the audience, strengthens the staying power of that message in the consumer’s mind.

	
<p><i>Figure 4.5. A sentence is seen with letters omitted which when completed spell out “There are several lives within you”. (Instituto do Bem, 2019).</i></p>	<p><i>Figure 4.6. A woman swallowing a pill is pictured with a pinball machine for a stomach to indicate the medication’s inefficiency. (Otrivin, 2020).</i></p>

4.1.2 Implied punchline

The second strategy with which advertisers are able to ensure retention through offering playful experiences is that of an implied punchline. Much like the strategy of a delayed punchline, the use of an implied punchline similarly starts with curiosity and intrigue and follows the same journey through exploration, discovery and completion (Lucero & Arrasvuori, 2013). The difference between these two strategies is noticed in how the punchline is experienced by the consumer; the strategy of an implied punchline is more advanced because the resolution is not just delayed but implied. The fact that the punchline is withheld leaves audiences to their own devices, often lacking confirmation of having deduced the advertisement’s message correctly and instead facing completion that is implicit.

Findings show that advertisements of this kind would often employ the use of negative space or imagery that could be described as conceptually void with no particular element taking the foreground. Additionally, these advertisements would either display a complete lack of text with possibly only a logo featured, or contain minimal text that is not supplementary or revealing of the punchline, leaving it implied. An example of such minimal design is seen in the McDonald's advertisement in figure 4.7 where a clean kitchen void of any food is pictured alongside the restaurant logo and the word "McDelivery". These elements alone do not make an explicit argument; it is the audience's implied understanding that ordering food through the restaurant's delivery service saves them the hassle of having to clean up dirty dishes in the kitchen that completes the argument being made. Through this strategy, the characteristics of playfulness as being personal and creative can be seen at work (Sicart, 2014). It requires the audience to connect the dots themselves, relying on their personal knowledge and lived experiences as well as their creative deductive skills in order to achieve its goal. This experiential journey giving audiences the pleasurable experience of not just having completed but being a crucial part of the argumentation is especially favorable to retention. Theory on engagement suggests that audiences remember a message better when they have an active part in shaping that message (Frissen et al., 2015). With this strategy, advertisers involve their audience and offer them the satisfaction of being the missing piece whose knowledge completes the puzzle.



Figure 4.7. A sparkly clean kitchen sink is pictured alongside the suggestive McDelivery logo. (McDonald's, 2019).

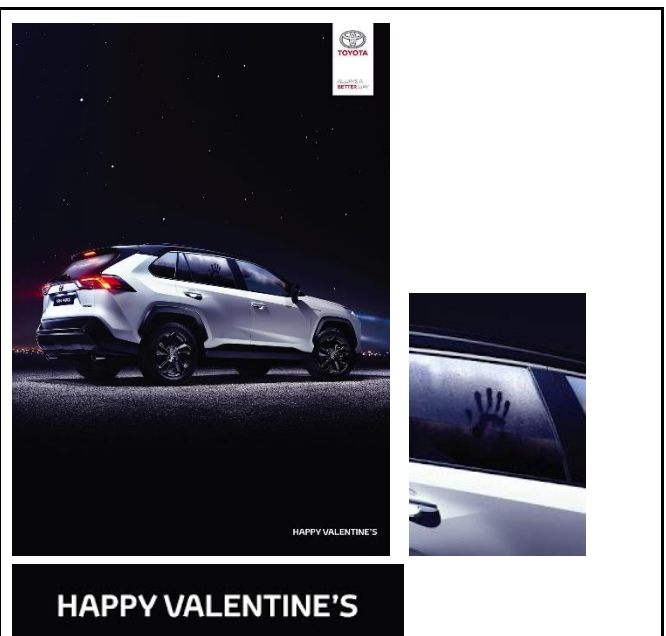


Figure 4.8. Inspection of the car pictured leads to the discovery of the handprint carrying an implied meaning. (Toyota, 2020).

Another good example of an advertisement with an implied punchline is by Toyota for Valentine's day seen in figure 4.8. Exploration of the scene and discovery of the handprint alone do not explicitly convey the message. Again, it is the audience's implied understanding of the eroticism in this scene that lands the hidden message. It plays into the personal knowledge of an adult, who unlike a child, is made to feel like they are in on the joke. These examples speak to several points. The first being that they show the strategy of an implied punchline to exhibit core qualities of paidiac playfulness. These advertisements are free-form, improvisational, and uncontrolled, leaving freedom to the audience to creatively deduce multiple interpretations (Caillois, 1958/2001). The second, is that due to this free form and reliance on personal knowledge and creative ludoliteracy some individuals are excluded from understanding (Zagal, 2010 in Raessens, 2014) (see section 4.4 for elaboration on the risks of playful strategies). And third, the double entendre seen in these advertisements allude to different modes of playability that a playful attitude towards print can afford (Huizinga 1938/1955 in Raessens, 2014). In light of the ludification trend of people seeking out interactivity with media products, the print medium does not immediately strike as affording a great deal of interaction, especially when compared to digital counterparts. Yet, while print advertisements cannot be said to afford all four modes of playability mentioned by Huizinga (1938/1955), they do appear to borrow such affordances from digital media to allow for levels of playful appropriation, playability and interaction within the static text. All in all, the strategies of delayed and implied punchlines reveal how a playful mindset and active experiential role instilled by advertisers, lets consumers have a real stake in deciphering the advertisement contributing to retention of its message.

4.2 Harnessing attention

Now that the mechanics behind playful experiential strategies are better understood, one might presumably question how the prolonged attention necessary for that playful interaction to occur is obtained in the first place. The second theme that emerged from the data addresses the crucial step that advertisers need to engage in first, in order to make sure those experiential strategies live up to their potential in an already saturated market: getting attention. The research question inquires after the attention economy landscape, one in which consumer's attention has become a scarce commodity and where consumers have attuned themselves to the ploys used by advertisers to secure it (Davenport & Beck, 2001; Ming-Sung Cheng et al., 2009). As previously noted, the print industry has been competing for attention with the digital industry, and print as a medium has earned itself a supposed disadvantaged position in relation to its digital counterparts when it comes to affordances. In comparison to digital formats, print appears not to lend itself as rich affordances

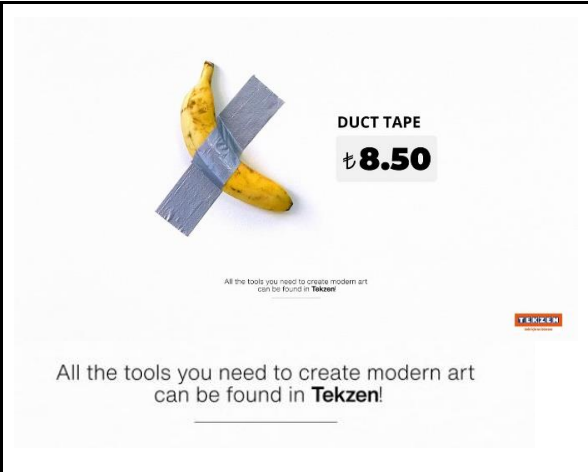

as its competitor, print having the inability to include audio or moving visuals as are the norm for video or interactive banners or stories. Indeed, flashing banner advertisements with movable elements fading in and out of screen have been effective attention-grabbing strategies used by advertisers; yet, one may argue they have become predictable to an audience who have learned to block them out.

The findings in the data challenge the misconception of print being static and boring, and instead show it to excel in playful design that is dynamic despite print's immovable nature. A main finding of this study is that print, being a medium that tends to rely solely on the visual, sports design as its key attention-grabbing affordance. This again refers back to the concept of duality of playfulness being exhibited through both design and experience (Fiske, 1987 in Raessens, 2014). Employing the characteristics of playfulness within its design enabled the advertisements in this study's sample not just to grasp the audience's attention but to harness it. Any good graphic design is aesthetically speaking bound to lure in eyeballs; playful design however doesn't just lure in attention but also attempts to control and instill a playful attitude or mindset in the consumer by exuding an air of playfulness itself. Playful print advertisements are able to appropriate time by instilling a playful attitude and mindset in consumers through its playful design, and setting them up for having the memorable pleasurable experience described in the first theme. It is the quality of being able to harness consumer's ludoliteracy and playful attention and carry it over into strategies of playability and retention that sets playful design apart (Zagal, 2010 in Raessens, 2014). Harnessing consumer's playful attention directly plays into the Ludification trend of consumers looking to be entertained and wanting "the attitude of play without the activity of play" (Raessens, 2014; Sicart, 2014, p.21). Going forth, the following three sub-themes of topical and personal imagery, eye-catching imagery, and disruptive imagery show practical and creative ways in which playful attention was harnessed through design that was informed by playful theories.

4.2.1 Topical and personal imagery

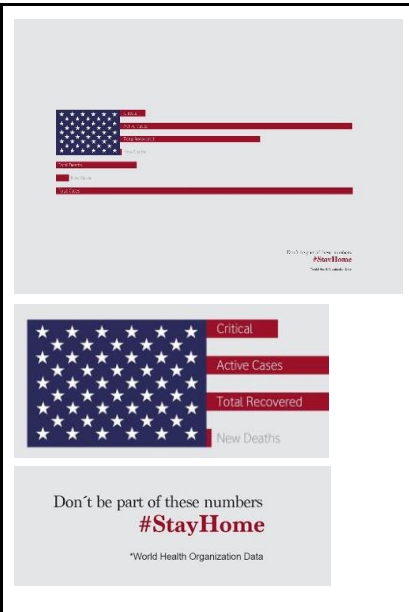
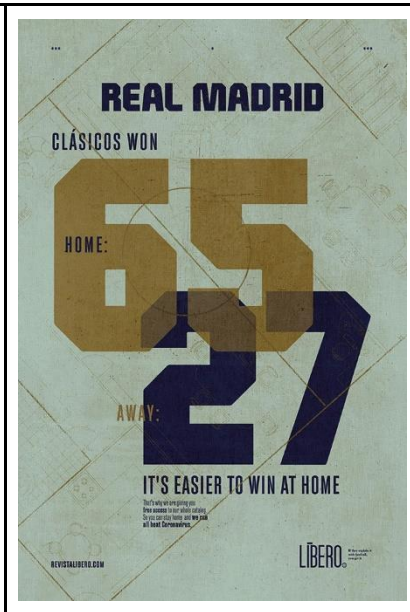

The first sub-theme of playful strategies used by advertisers to harness the attention of consumers through design has to do with employing references that are topical and personal. It is a classic ploy within the advertising and marketing industry to be attention-worthy by making clever appeals to current topical events or situations. Attention and relevance go hand in hand which is why advertisers often make use of such topical appeals that trigger attention on a current issue which is subconsciously at the top of consumers' minds. This is the logic that dictates trends where many brands make advertisements referencing national holidays or events like valentine's day or pride parades. This was also the case for many advertisements in the sample, where in particular advertisements relating to the coronavirus pandemic stood out several times. A critical note here is

that topical appeals can quickly become superfluous, which has become the case for the worldwide pandemic. Hence, the key is to make sure that it goes beyond a reference and creates a playful interpretation of the topical matter so that the audience will likely recognize and adopt a similar playful stance towards the brand or product. One advertisement that executed this particularly well for a less superfluous but very current topic in the news is seen in figure 4.9. DIY store Tekzen makes a reference to the art scandal involving a man eating a banana duct taped to a wall that was an expensive art installation. To those who recognize this topical imagery, the reference comes across as playful and personal. Other topical references made in the sample related to the use of recognizable symbols, popular persons and social media symbols. The usage of references to social media symbols was interesting to see, as in some cases it seemed to give a subtle nod and make a statement about the current digital society as is the case in an advertisement by Global Issue Evening referencing in the form of a symbol, person and topical situation of Facebook (see figure 4.10).

	
<p><i>Figure 4.9. Topical imagery of a banana duct-taped to wall in reference to Maurizio Cattelan’s artwork ‘The Comedian’. (Tekzen, 2019).</i></p>	<p><i>Figure 4.10. Popular social media “like” symbol and wordplay of Mark Zuckerberg’s name are used to make a statement about Facebook. (World Affairs Council, 2020).</i></p>

In the same way that topical events and references of popular individuals or social media symbols require our personal knowledge, there were additional ways in which personal identification was triggered as a form of harnessing attention. These strategies are guided by the underlying characteristic of playfulness being personal (Sicart, 2014). That personal aspect is the key to the playful attention that is harnessed for the sake of ensuring retention through experience. Because the advertisement has made an effect to relate to us personally, we in turn feel playfully engaged to relate and reciprocate with attention. In playful design this meant that many of the advertisements in the sample made reference to a particular lifestyle or hobby that individuals are able to identify with on a personal level. Another particularly powerful attention-grabbing trigger

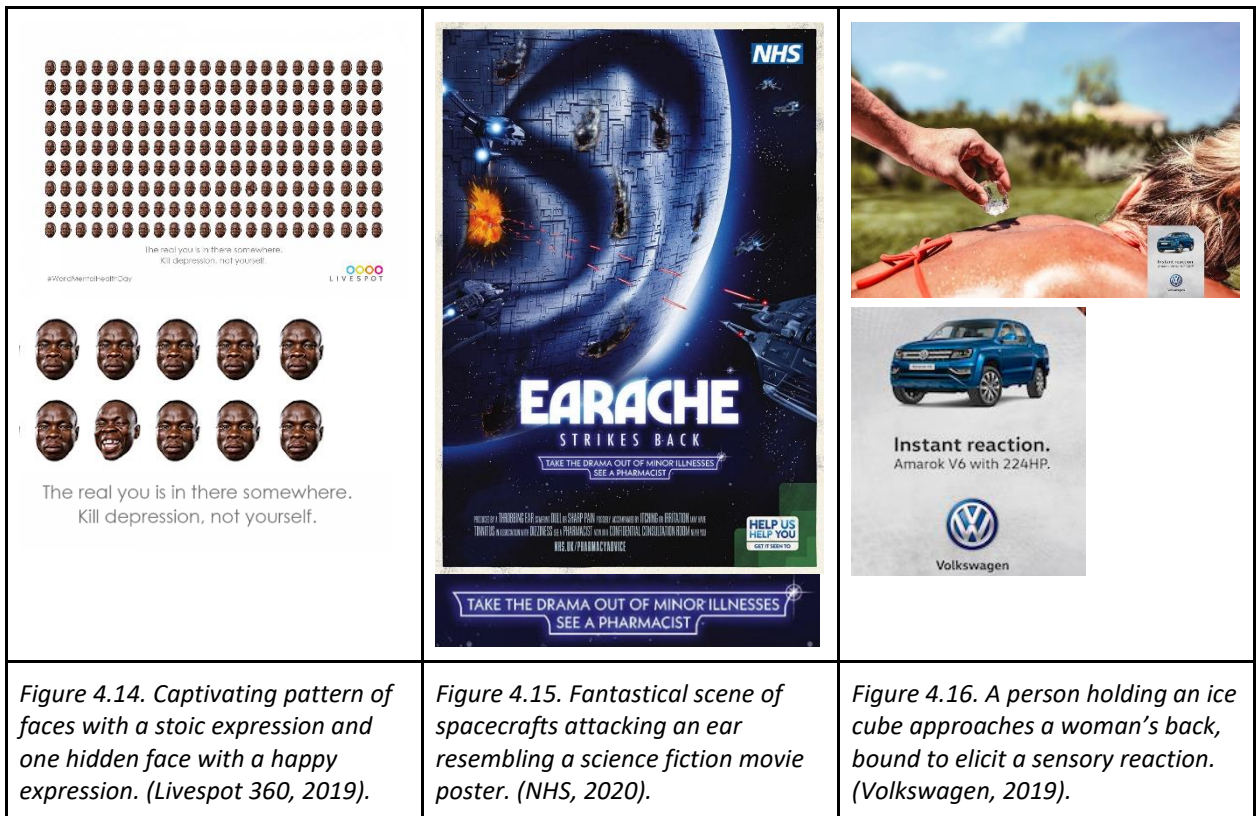
was that of national symbolism. Nationalistic symbols are an effective playful tactic to engage people’s attention; a sense of pride and patriotism makes audiences especially acute and receptive to the message being conveyed out of a curiosity to see whether they identify with it or not. This relates to the pleasurable experience within the PLEX framework known as fellowship referring to “friendship, communality, or intimacy” (Lucero & Arrasvuori, 2013, p. 24). This personal connection can be seen in figures 4.11 and 4.12 where personal references are made to the United States and football team Real Madrid respectively to make the connection to coronavirus spread personal. Unlike digital advertising where personal references are frequently made with advertisements being tailored based on one’s cookies, playful personal references in print media that target many people collectively, feel more special. Lastly, another kind of personal reference that was used is one that involves wordplay, slang, accents or speaking style (Anderson, 2011; Grainger, 2006). Wordplay is for example seen in the term ‘Zucked’ making reference to Mark Zuckerberg in figure 4.10, and usage of slang is seen in an advertisement for world cancer day where the Nigerian colloquial slang term ‘efiwe’ referring to brilliant students is used to give a personal delivery that cancer does not discriminate (figure 4.13).

		
<p>Figure 4.11. The stripes in the American flag are distorted to represent a graph of coronavirus cases. (Wunderman Thompson, 2020).</p>	<p>Figure 4.12. Football team Real Madrid’s at-home statistics in typical football jersey font used to make a statement for the coronavirus pandemic. (Libero, 2020).</p>	<p>Figure 4.13. Nigerian slang term “efiwe” meaning brilliant students used to make personal delivery. (Airtel, 2020).</p>

4.2.2 Eye-catching imagery

Another sub-theme and set of strategies through which advertisers harness attention is that of eye-catching imagery. As alluded to by the name, these strategies involve design that is not just eye-catching but eye-catching in a way that encourages a playful mindset or experience. Yet, first and foremost, the playful print advertisements in this study's dataset contained some common eye-catching design characteristics that are shared with other advertisements that are non-playful. After all, all forms of advertising aim to capture attention. Many of the advertisements within the sample were coded as having colorful and whimsical designs that stand out. Furthermore, the composition of colors when it comes to contrast and negative space also contributed to eye-catching quality (Anderson, 2011). Conversely, at times dark colors were also considered to be eye-catching for conveying a sense of mystery or danger that intrigues and stands out.

Now the manner in which strategies of eye-catching design become playful is by introducing a pleasurable experience. This is where playful design shows its appropriative qualities in that it goes beyond being functional in achieving attention and instead harnesses pleasurable attention (Sicart, 2014). In accordance with the PLEX framework by Lucero and Arrasvuori (2013), strategies of eye-catching imagery appealed mostly to the pleasurable experiences of captivation, fantasy, and sensation. Captivation refers to the pleasurable playful experience of "forgetting one's surroundings" and the advertisements that employed this as a strategy contained designs that are best described as 'busy' and full of things going on all around (Lucero & Arrasvuori, 2013, p. 24). The idea is that it invites audiences to inspect the advertisement on a deeper level. An example of such a strategy is seen in figure 4.14 where close inspection of the busy pattern may momentarily captivate the audience possibly to the extent of forgetting their surroundings. This playful quality of captivation often resonates with tumultuous paidiac qualities and the dimension of ilinx where a sense of disorder or vertigo is induced (Caillois, 1958/2001). Similarly, the playful pleasurable experience of fantasy is interpreted into an eye-catching dreamlike escapist design that transports its audience into "an imagined experience" (Lucero & Arrasvuori, 2013, p. 24). Figure 4.15 illustrates how an informative message of healthcare habits is appropriated into a pleasurable and emotionally engaging experience. Lastly, the playful pleasurable experience known in the PLEX framework as sensation denotes "excitement by stimulating senses", in this case beyond that of just sight (Lucero & Arrasvuori, 2013, p. 24). The advertisement by Volkswagen in figure 4.16 presents eye-catching imagery that evokes a visceral sensation of touch that audiences are all familiar with.

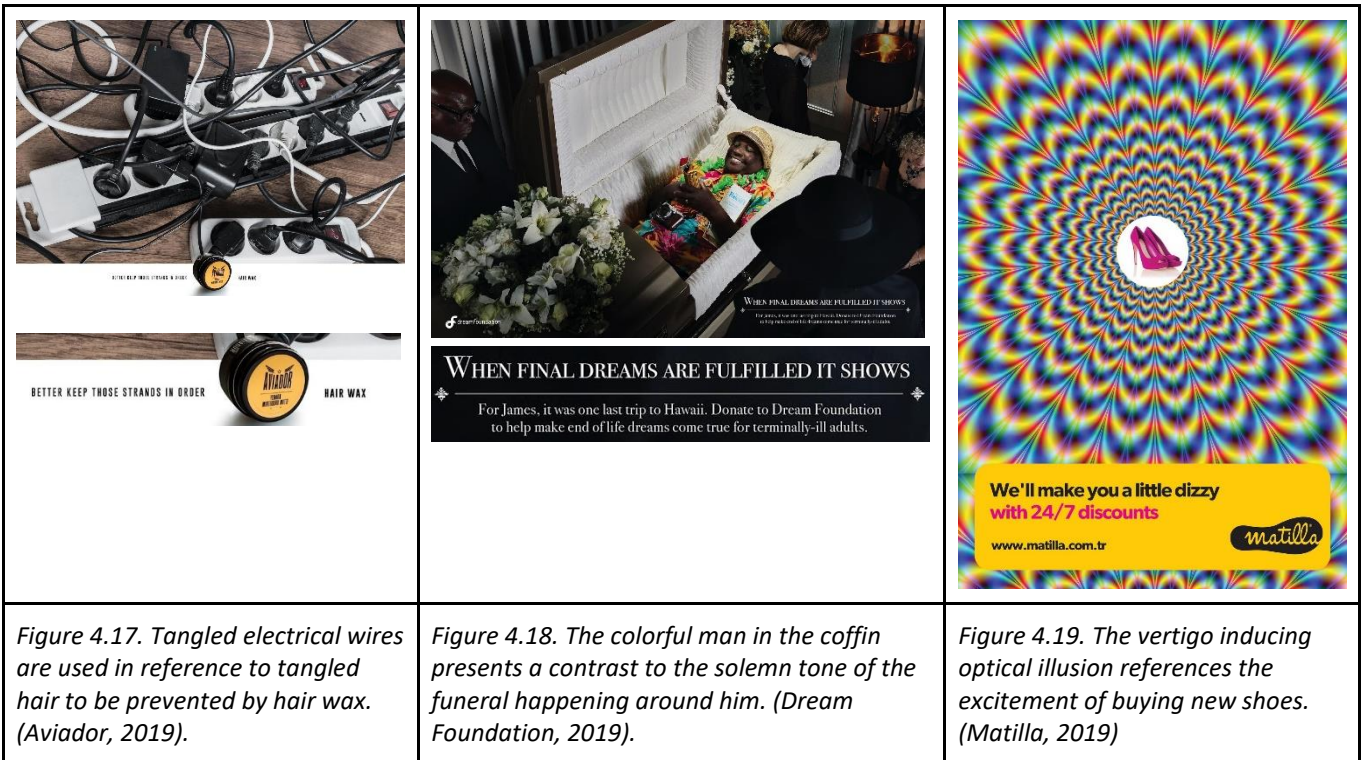


4.2.3 Disruptive imagery

The third sub-theme of harnessing playful attention is that of disruptive imagery used in design. These strategies relate strongly to the playfulness characteristic of disruption (Sicart, 2014). Going beyond taken for granted assumptions and expectations, and flaunting unusual imagery are the indicators that embody this quality and this was observed in the sample in various ways. The first manner of disruption is that of unexpected imagery especially when it comes to the congruence of associations between the visual and the brand. Advertisements that embody this strategy for harnessing attention lead with a visual that is not at all familiar or expected for the brand or product whose advertisement it serves. Rather, it appears as though the message of the advertisement is masking as something else. A good example of this strategy is seen in figure 4.17 where a bundle of electrical wires alluding to a technological product being sold are instead used as a visual for selling hair wax. When it comes to grabbing attention, doing it in this disruptive playful way can pay off through introducing an element of surprise and unpredictability (Anderson, 2011); yet, it may also introduce some risks (see section 4.4 for elaboration on this risk). Another form of attention harnessing disruption is evident in advertisements that display unusual or contrasting imagery. In this case, the overall visual does match the cause of the brand or product advertised, but something in that familiar imagery doesn't look quite right. It could be the case that a familiar object looks distorted, or that two objects are somehow combined for some odd reason. The advertisement in figure 4.18 shows expected imagery of a coffin to relay Dream Foundation's

message of granting a last wish before death, but the broadly smiling, colorfully clad gentleman in the coffin is best described as unusual in light of the scenery. This disruptive strategy grabs playful attention and evokes a sense of curiosity and mystery and prompts inquiry for the unusual imagery's explanation (Anderson, 2011). This is the intrigue described in the first theme that awakens purposeful attention while leaving just enough uncovered to pull the consumer into a playful experiential journey.

The third and final form of disruption in playful design that came forth from the analysis is quite different from the two described above. This kind of attention-grabbing disruption is one that is disruptive or transcendental to the medium of print itself. Advertisements making use of this strategy would disrupt the taken for granted assumption that print advertisements are static and limited spatially. They transcend the spatial boundaries that the print medium has, often require some physical action or movement from the audience, or engage the senses in a way that is uncommon for print. A prime example of this kind of disruptive design was already seen preceding the introduction chapter of this thesis in the newspaper advertisement for *Ballet at the Quarry* (figure 1.1). In print's fight against decline in a digital-dominated market, appropriation of this tangible medium provides an opportunity that it can excel in. Another good example that illustrates the harnessing of attention is seen by the ilinx-underpinned optical illusion simulating movement in the shoe advertisement in figure 4.19 (Caillois, 1958/2001). While cases of this strategy were few and far between, they do form a testament of what playful print advertisements can do, and make a nod to pervasive playfulness. Ending this theme with transcendental disruption that bridges both playful design and experience is a fitting conclusion to the first two themes, as the third theme's strategies will take a quite different, more focused direction.



4.3 Liberating the unspoken

The first two themes thus far have shown how through strategies of playful design and playful experiences advertisers are able to make print advertisements stand out by ensuring retention through harnessing attention. Thus far, the majority of the strategies have been depicted in advertisements that tend to be colorful, lighthearted, and positive. However, the third dominant theme that arose from the data, perhaps to the surprise of some, was the utility of playful strategies for topics of a dark, serious, and at times negative nature.

Rooted in the Huizingan tradition of viewing play and playfulness as existing in the opposite realm of that which is serious, it is a common misconception that serious or dark topics do not bear a connection to playfulness. Sicart (2014) in particular has been quite vocal about seeing play and playfulness not just as something that is fun and enjoyable, but rather as something that is pleasurable. Now, while the conventional view of pleasurable content is that which makes us feel happy and warm inside, this study, in line with Sicart (2014), has come to find that playfulness can also be pleasurable in a darker or more solemn fashion. Pleasurable human emotions are much more complex than one might think, because we as humans like to feel tense, cheeky, endangered, and even agony in some capacity in certain situations. This alternative perspective to a pleasurable experience relates to the concept of dark play and dark playfulness (Sicart, 2014).

The main finding of this theme is that advertisers use strategies related to dark playfulness in print advertising in order to stand out by liberating topics or dark truths that are often unspoken

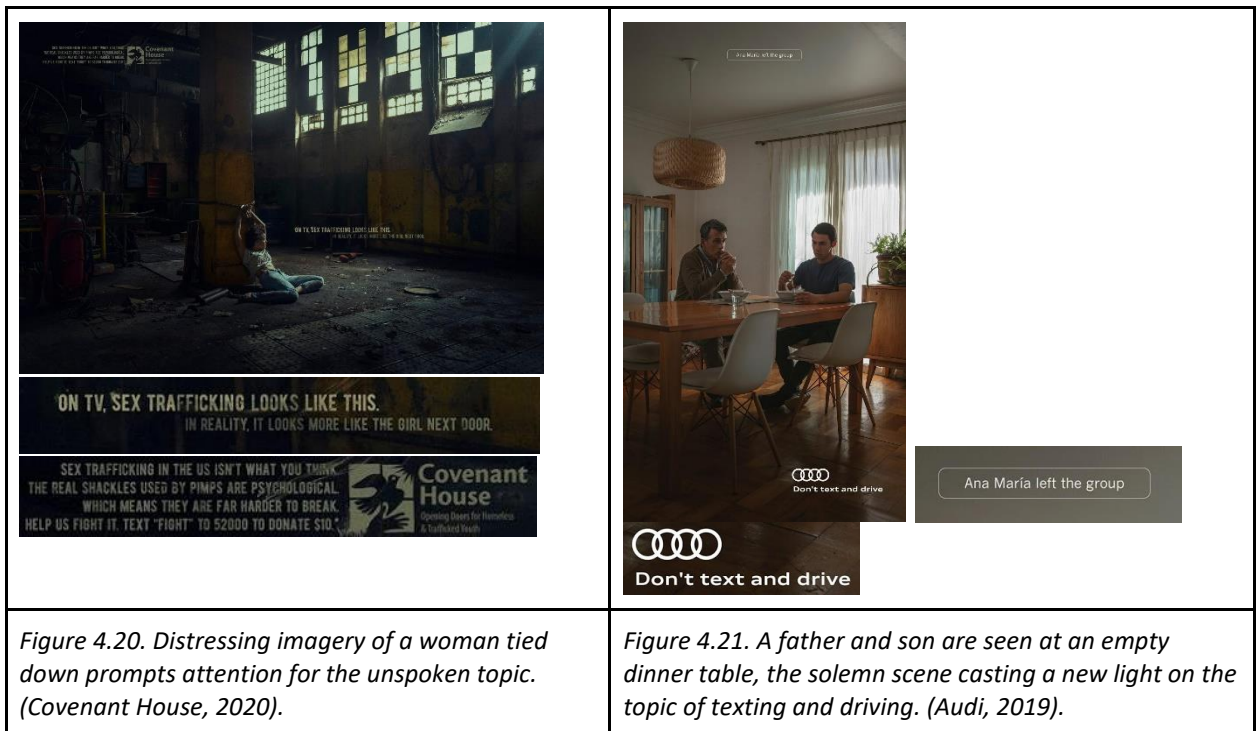
of, or difficult to convey in another format. This is where print advertisements stand out for being perceived as less ostentatious or confrontational and more approachable than other media formats. The analysis of data found that serious and heavy-loaded topics such as homelessness, climate change, or mental health stigma were especially conducive to a playful approach. A first inclination when approaching these topics might be to be over-informative and stress the gravity of the situation or issue in a functional manner. Yet, this likely turns people's attention and interest away from the topic. By virtue of its appropriative nature, playfulness is able to transform this functional approach into one that is pleasurable and emotionally engaging. Hence, the usage of playful strategies to liberate and lighten the mood while getting the same message across in an alternative way. This logic boils down to the idea that people are looking to feel playful and be entertained especially in their adult lives where they are rather not confronted with the gravity of certain issues (Raessens, 2014). The darker side of playfulness as a strategy in service of liberating unspoken topics emerged from the data in two distinct ways: in *negative valence pleasurable experiences*, and in *dark subversive humor*.

4.3.1 *Negative valence pleasurable experiences*

The first sub-theme of dark playfulness used to stand out and liberate the unspoken has to do with inciting negative valence pleasurable experiences to be productive in bringing across a message. Advertisements that employed this kind of strategy were predominantly for health-related organizations and social issue awareness causes of both national and global concern. For these serious causes dark playfulness is used to inflict an emotional response or experience that in isolation is considered negative or painful, but for the purpose of the advertisement becomes pleasurable or productive. Much like the fear experienced by watching a horror movie, it is the simulation of a negative experience in a productive context (such as entertainment) that makes it pleasurable and worthwhile. Many of the advertisements belonging to this category were found to use distressing imagery and dark colors to match the tone of the topic advertised. One may consider this a quite a polarizing choice because on the one hand it can tend to be something that audiences stay away from, but on the other it appeals to a human quality in us that draws us in. In figure 4.20 the advertisement for sex trafficking awareness clearly displays suffering and cruelty, both of which are found to be pleasurable experiences in the PLEX framework (Lucero & Arrasvuori, 2013). This feeling of cruelty and suffering having a negative valence becomes pleasurable and necessary as it pushes the audience to feel the injustice and gravity of the issue of sex trafficking despite the fact that it may visually look different in real life, as the caption reveals. These emotions are pleasurable and productive in so far as they intrigue us to alleviate and care for the troubled state of our fellow humans, corresponding to two more pleasurable experiences in the PLEX

framework, those of sympathy and nurture (Lucero & Arrasvuori, 2013). The contrasting, eye-opening and thought-provoking delivery of such a serious issue is considered playful due to its qualities of being disruptive and carnivalesque in liberating misconceptions (Sicart, 2014).

Another example where emotions with a negative valence are transformed into pleasurable experiences to serve a goal is seen in the advertisement in figure 4.21. Using the strategy of an implied punchline, the familiar and relatively innocent symbol of someone leaving a virtual group chat is juxtaposed against a sombre scene of a family having lost a family member due to texting while driving. Again, suffering or the “experience of loss, frustration and anger” is palpable for the audience as all people are able to relate to and sympathize with losing a loved one (Lucero & Arrasvuori, 2013, p. 24). Another negative valence pleasurable experience felt by the audience that is not included within the PLEX framework is that of guilt or shame for having texted while driving in the past. While such dark emotions might not immediately be pleasurable, they can be productive in the long run when they are used to fuel a positive change in behavior going forth, as is found in a study by Goldsmith, Cho, and Dhar (2012). As Sicart (2014) says, dark playfulness has the ability to “painfully enrich our lives” (p. 4). Now neither of these examples come across as particularly entertaining and are actually rather confrontational. Yet, whether an audience is confronted in a functional manner or a playful and emotionally engaging manner makes all the difference. Audiences are likely already familiar with the functional or informative argument used in advertising for grave topics, but they can appreciate the unique playful manner in which the same topic was brought to their attention in a different light. A simple playful approach can be way more eye-opening than an elaborate dialogue would be, yet advertisers have to be careful not to be insensitive.



4.3.2 Dark subversive humor

The second sub-theme and strategy through which dark playfulness is used to liberate the unspoken is that of dark subversive humor. Where the strategy of using negative valence pleasurable experiences tends to respect the seriousness of the situation, the strategy of dark subversive humor tends to mock it. Advertisements that used this strategy were the best illustrators of the carnivalesque quality of playfulness. Advertisements that are rich in this playful quality tend to offer critique on some form of authority or dominant institution in a humorous, satirical, and mocking fashion (Sicart, 2014). This form of dark playfulness works by making people feel mischievous and cheeky and helps to reveal prejudices, convictions, or subversive opinions that people are normally not very honest or vocal about, in a humorous manner. The inherent carnivalesque quality to dark subversive humor makes it particularly well suited to political topics, which was certainly observed in the data. A first example of this strategy is seen in figure 4.22 where the aging pictures of controversial Zimbabwean politician Robert Mugabe are used to ridicule and mock his dictatorship and uninterrupted rule as a ploy to sell battery energy. The pleasurable experiences from the PLEX framework that are applicable to this example and several others within this category are that of subversion which is a “breaking of social rules and norms”, and thrill which is “excitement derived from risk or danger” (Lucero & Arrasvuori, 2013). The subversion is pleasurable to the audience because it liberates the unspoken yet likely widely shared opinion of the controversial leader. And the thrill the audience feels from cheeky political incorrectness is pleasurable because they can appreciate the risk the advertisers are taking in

making such a statement. By the brand daring to take such a polarizing and subversive stance in an advertisement, it gives audiences the opportunity to share that dark subversive humor by silently agreeing.

Furthermore, dark subversive humor isn't always used to mock others, it can also be used by the brand to take a jab at themselves. The car advertisement in figure 4.23 shows empty roads as a consequence of the coronavirus pandemic and sports the caption that this scene is better off without their product. Through this strategy they subvert the dominant advertising logic that the product is always meant to make a situation better. In doing this, they show themselves to be self-aware and willing to let the audience mock them or laugh at their expense, which in this case amounts more to respect and appreciation for the brand. In conclusion, both strategies can be seen to liberate dark unspoken topics and to invite audiences to take pleasure in subversive unpopular opinions or emotions. The darker strategies discussed in this third theme contribute to a neglected aspect of playfulness and play at large, that has been identified and inquired after by both Lucero et al. (2014) and Sicart (2014). The addition of the pleasurable experience of guilt as described earlier may prove a valuable addition to the PLEX framework which thus far is only known to include three pleasurable experiences with a negative valence (Lucero et al., 2014). Adhering to Sicart's (2014) neutral characteristics of playfulness helped to uncover a fuller scope of playful emotions and experiences and how they can be appropriated to serve a productive goal such as advertising.



4.4 An awareness of playful risks

This results chapter has shown through the first three themes what playful communication strategies are and how they are unique in standing out amongst a crowd of advertising. Be it through playful design that demands attention, playful experiential appeals that ensure retention, or through liberating unspoken topics and emotions in a playful way — each of these themes have shown how playfulness can be used by advertisers to enrich and accelerate the goal of an advertisement. And while these strategies are presented as positive implementations, the risks that lie in employing playful strategies in print advertising ought not to be underestimated. As will be seen through this theme, adopting a playful approach is not a sure-fire way to make an advertisement better or more engaging if not executed well.

The main finding in this concluding theme is that advertisers are able to use playful strategies to make print advertisements stand out in the attention economy purely by taking heed of and having an awareness of the inherent risks of playful strategies. All throughout the first three themes allusions have been made to underlying risks that are evident in these strategies and this fourth theme comes to show how advertisers can still stand out despite these risks only through taking precaution of them. This fourth theme will first explain some of the *risks and missteps of playful strategies* as observed in the data, and then conclude by showing how a *weighing of playful risks and rewards* can be a recipe for success.




4.4.1 The risks of playful strategies

In this section the different kinds of risks that emerged for playful communication strategies will be explained. They can be loosely divided into risks related to visual design, factors of exclusion, and argumentative execution. The fact that playful print advertisements rely heavily on their playful design in order to harness attention raises the stakes for flawless execution. The element of attention and its unfriendly relationship to time provide room for risk when it comes to playful design. For example, a few playful advertisements in the data sample contained elaborate text captions of several sentences. The advertisement by Downy in figure 4.24 presents a worthy example, because despite how disruptive the visual and the core message is, there still exists the risk that audiences will give up on reading the elaborate text. Another risk associated with design is the fact that unexpected imagery with an incongruence of associations between the brand and the visual faces the possibility of confusing the consumer or attracting the wrong kind of consumer. This risk plays a role in the advertisement in figure 4.17 that used a visual of electrical wires to sell their hair product. On the other side of the spectrum, there also lures a risk in using familiar imagery with an unusual twist if this twist is not striking or contrasting enough. Ideally these strategies would meet in the middle to minimize either risk.

Now as discussed, playful strategies are also used as a way to make commentary on polarizing, controversial, and serious issues. This makes them prone to risks related to exclusionary factors. First, there is the risk of coming across as insensitive as a brand. Although grave matters lend themselves to playful appropriation, there will always be those among an audience who cannot appreciate this angle being taken. The same is true for the use of dark subversive humor and moreover, this strategy carries the risk of excluding segments of the audience who do not side with the stance being taken and don't appreciate the authority or dominant institution being mocked or criticized. Lastly, playful communication can be used as a tool of exclusion in any strategy that relies on personal knowledge and prior lived experience (Grainger, 2006). This may be the case for advertisements with an implied punchline where an assumption is made about the personal knowledge and discursive resources the audience carries with them in their interpretation of the advertisement. The advertiser risks the chance that the audience they are targeting is too narrow and consequently exclude a large part of their audience.

The third kind of risks observed in the data are those that play a role in argumentative execution and are most noticeable in advertisements that use a delayed or implied punchline. The paidic qualities of being tumultuous, uncontrolled and improvisational make these advertisements prone to risk (Caillois, 1958/2001). Because the argumentative flow relies on the audience's participation and is open to interpretation there exists a risk of not landing the punchline. This may either be due to lack of knowledge, or lack of ludoliteracy in grasping the visual or textual cues that shape the baseline of the argument. This is apparent in McDonald's advertisement seen in figure 4.25 where the Golden Arches are meant to imply the unruly movements of a child moving around the place leaving their toys lying about until they are pacified by the Happy Meal. This interpretation is quite obscure and likely not one that many would make, hence the risk of not landing the punchline. As a last resort the audience may perhaps fall back on a recognizable logo when they don't really comprehend the intended message. Another form of this flawed argumentative execution that closely related to the previous is one where there is a risk of unfulfilled potential. In this case, there is a setup for playful interaction but the pay-off is not worthwhile or the argumentative cues implemented by the advertisers are too weak. In some advertisements a cue or discovery element is simply too well hidden resulting in the audience's abandonment of the advertisement. In others, the completion element does not feel worthwhile for the effort the audience has invested in deciphering the message. Both of these are evident in figure 4.26 in LG's advertisement flaunting their mobile phone's new camera. While the supplementary text does prompt the audience to take a closer inspection of the Statue of Liberty pictured, they may either not find the hidden element and conclude that the advertisement is just about the clarity of the image; or, discover the hidden man sitting down but be disappointed in

what they have found. Each advertisement could have reduced these risks by introducing a supplementary caption and a clearer and cleverer discoverable element respectively.

 <p>YOU DON'T NEED THAT MANY CLOTHES TO CHANGE THE WORLD.</p> <p>WE PURCHASE 400% MORE CLOTHES TODAY THAN WE DID 20 YEARS AGO. BUT TEXTILES ARE NOT BIODEGRADABLE: A SHIRT CAN SIT IN A LANDFILL FOR 200 YEARS, RELEASING TOXIC GASES INTO THE AIR. SO, INSTEAD OF BUYING SO MANY CLOTHES, WHY DON'T YOU TAKE BETTER CARE OF THE ONES YOU ALREADY HAVE? FABRIC CONDITIONERS NOT ONLY MAKE YOUR CLOTHES SOFT AND PERFUMED; THEY ALSO PROLONG THEIR LIFE. USE THEM AND HELP US CHANGE THE WORLD.</p> <p>Downy</p>		 <p>Spot what others don't.</p> <p>LG G7 ThinQ</p> <p>AI Cam with Super Bright Camera</p>
<p>Figure 4.24. Reference is made to the Dalai Lama by showing his garment to sell fabric conditioner and a sustainable message. (Downy, 2020).</p>	<p>Figure 4.25. The Golden Arches are featured all throughout the garage leading up to the Happy Meal. (McDonald's, 2019).</p>	<p>Figure 4.26. A detailed Statue of Liberty is seen hiding a miniscule hidden character on its pedestal. (LG, 2019).</p>

4.4.2 Weighing risks and rewards of playfulness

To conclude this fourth theme and the entirety of the results chapter, it may be argued that an awareness of playful risks should go paired with a weighing of the risks and rewards of playfulness. Based on five core characteristics —appropriate, disruptive, carnivalesque, creative, personal— playfulness provides a sea of possibilities for advertisers to enhance print advertisements and make them stand out from the crowd (Sicart, 2014). But simultaneously, this may make it harder to choose the right strategy and to execute it well, as the section on risks before this has shown. One may question if certain brands or products are more suited to playful advertisements than others. The most popular brand categories that employed these strategies were those of food and drink, automotive, health, and organizations with social causes. However, the multiplicity of brands found in the data suggest no reason for a particular industry to deter from its usage. Being a less recognizable brand will not necessarily withhold it from executing a playful advertisement well, and neither will being a large and established brand (like McDonald's for instance) guarantee success. It

all comes down to weighing the risks and rewards of a playful approach. Not landing the punchline is a risk advertisers need to be willing to take for the reward of the message being better retained by those who put in the effort and have the ludoliteracy to decipher it. At times, advertisers will find that risking alienating a part of the audience in an attempt to make an implied reference based on personal knowledge is worth the reward of a more engaged consumer.

It may seem counterintuitive to suggest in a time where there is a shortage of and fierce competition for attention that it is a wise move for advertisers to develop print advertisements that require prolonged and often diligent attention in order to understand the message. But then why are advertisers doing it? This answer is twofold. First, while the risks might be bigger in using playful strategies, the rewards can be bigger too, as has been thoroughly explored in this results chapter. As has been argued before, despite the decline of budgeting for print advertising, neither scholars nor advertisers call for a complete dismissal and rather urge a coexistence of print and digital to strengthen one another. This where playful print advertising can provide great value. And second, in doing so, it fulfills the trend of human yearning for entertaining and playful interactions with media products as part of the ludification of culture (Raessens, 2014). With these observations in mind, we can begin to question the broader implications of these findings for the field of advertising and that of academia in the following chapter: discussion and conclusion.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

In the first chapter of this study an anecdote was presented that described our experience with the media and that showcased how seemingly unwanted advertisements still manage to attract attention and to entertain. This prompted an exploration where the intersection of its two underlying trends — the ludification of culture and the competition for attention — was studied with the following research question: *How do advertisers make use of playful communication strategies in print advertisements to stand out in the contemporary attention economy?* Next, desk research was conducted to gain insights from academic theory and an appropriate methodology was fashioned to allow for rich results. By way of a thematic analysis, a four-fold comprehensive answer to the research question was found.

Advertisers are able to stand out in the contemporary attention economy by *ensuring retention* of the message through delivering a pleasurable interpretive experience in which the consumer plays an active, integral part. The playful communication strategy of ensuring retention of the advertised message is facilitated by way of a delayed or implied punchline. By way of facilitating this, advertisers are able to stand out by using playful visual design in order to *harness attention* that doesn't just attract, but conditions the consumer by instilling a playful mindset. The playful communication strategy of harnessing attention through immovable, yet dynamic design is accomplished in various ways through eye-catching, disruptive, and topical and personal imagery. Thirdly, advertisers are able to stand out in the attention economy by using print advertisements to *liberate unspoken topics* of a dark, solemn and negative nature in a playful way. The print format enabled the conveying of difficult subjects through playful communication strategies of using negative valence pleasurable experience and dark subversive humor. And finally, advertisers are able to stand out by making use of playful communication strategies solely through an *awareness of the playful risks* involved in playful advertising. It is only through an understanding of the inherent risk to playful appeals that advertisers are able to weigh off the risks against the rewards to properly stand out in the crowded advertising landscape.

With this four-fold comprehensive answer the purpose of this master's thesis has been fulfilled and its objectives realized. Namely, a first-time exploration of playification in the advertising industry; an investigation of the developments within the advertising industry, and broadened view of the ludification of culture in how it defines our media experience. Given this answer to the research question, there lies value in a discussion of its theoretical implications and contributions to the academic agenda of play related studies (5.1), a discussion of its practical implications for the field of advertising (5.2); and concluding remarks about the study's limitations and suggestions for further research (5.3).

5.1 Theoretical implications

Needless to say, the findings in this study offer certain theoretical implications and contributions for play-related academia. This master's thesis was an exploratory study of the application of playification to the entirely new context of advertising. Its underlying purpose was to extend the discourse that focuses on play and playfulness that is closer to the *paidia* pole distinguished by Caillois (1958/2001). In this section, the existing theory is re-evaluated in light of the new findings in order to validate, challenge, nuance, or extend it.

There are five theoretical implications particularly worthy of notice. The first has to do with what the findings in this study contribute to the phenomenon of the ludification of culture. The academic discourse surrounding this cultural trend has been explained through and dominated by game-related studies. The fact that appeals of playfulness in print are frequently found in the years 2019-2020 on an award-winning catalogue like *Ads of the World* proves that researchers should continue to look at segments that are seemingly obsolete. The findings extend the phenomenon by showing how ludification also lives in forgotten segments and is not just confined to the digital media outlets this cultural turn was started by. The implication of these play-, rather than game-, centered findings is that it encourages scholars to broaden and reposition the scope of the ludification of culture to be about the overarching category of play of which ludic games and *paidiac* play are two distinct sides worthy of study.

Next, there is an implication to be found in the findings related to interactivity and playability in this study. It has previously been concluded that print appears to borrow forms of interactivity that are thought to be sole attributes of digital formats. Within the typical one-dimensional flow of communication of print advertisements, playful strategies are still able to allow for interaction and participation in their own way (for example through an implied punchline), which grants a playability that comes with play competence that scholars such as Raessens (2014) have thus far only attributed to digital media forms. The fact that forms of interaction and playability are found to be exhibited by mediums that were first thought not to be conducive to them, challenges and adds nuance to these concepts and bears an implication for scholars to explore interactivity and playability beyond digital media.

Another noteworthy finding in this study is how it validates the duality of playfulness between medium and user as existing in both design and experience (Fiske, 1987 in Raessens, 2014). In the advertisements the playful interaction is only experienced if the design invites and awakens the playful attitude necessary for it to take place. And similarly, the design of a print advertisement would be a lot less meaningful if a playful attitude cannot be experienced through it. The interplay between design and experience when it comes to getting across an advertising

message grants the insight of how the former strengthens the latter and how the latter is dependent on the former. This understanding has also recognized good playful design's ability to generate the valuable asset of time for an experience. Within this lies an implication for how playful design in a non-advertising context might be able to warrant the same affordance of time despite seeming counterintuitive to an adult society who feels to lack time. It validates the ludification of culture saying that adult audiences are inclined to make out time for playfulness and entertainment even in their busy lives.

A fourth theoretical implication is found in this study's findings regarding the PLEX framework by Lucero and Arrasvuori (2013). Though initially inspired by the playing of games, the PLEX framework was set up to encourage designing for playful experiences beyond the game context. Through this study's inquiry after playful communication in the field of advertising, the PLEX framework has been newly applied and found meaningful in interpreting the results as impactful forms of paidiaic playfulness. Not only was this study able to validate all 22 playful experiences within the data in some form, it also picked up on the self-identified critique of minimal experience with a negative. The findings of this study regarding dark playfulness offer a contribution in the form of a potential 23rd playful experience of guilt, which has in a different context been found to be a pleasurable affordance as well (Goldsmith et al., 2012). Furthermore, for the 22 existing playful experiences, in addition to suffering, subversion and cruelty, thrill can also be seen as having a negative valence in the study when the excitement is derived from risk or danger that is inflicted upon another person. These findings drive implications for scholars to expand playful experiences to include those that despite having a negative valence are ultimately productive and pleasurable, and to reconsider the darker underlying emotions in playful experiences that might at first appear positive. This would encourage a conceptualization of play as being both enjoyable and dangerous.

The final theoretical implication that the findings in this study bring with them is the expansion of the discourse on playification. This master's thesis has mostly spoken of playfulness and playful strategies, but the recognition of its application in a non-play context like advertising being part of a broader process known as playification, is important to point out. This study was able to arrive at its results by refraining from taking the narrowing scope of a Huizingan view of play that is predisposed to gamefulness, in lieu of Sicart's (2014) more ambiguous scope of play that is more open to the paidiaic forms of playfulness. The implication this holds for scholars is naturally an encouragement to consider Sicart's viewpoint in further studies inquiring after playification.

5.2 Practical implications

Besides the theoretical implications, the analysis of playful print advertisements and the findings that came forth from it also bear practical implications for the advertising industry. The strategies of how playful communication is being used to stand out is a testament to the power that resides in playful appeals. While retention was not a factor explicitly quantitatively tested in this study, the role of active engagement for better remembrance has been shown to be theoretically underpinned. But it is also a practical truth that we know. A playful attitude and playful interaction is what helps children develop their memory; it is the basis of the mnemonic devices we learn in school; and it is a practice encouraged for the elderly to maintain their memory. What differentiates a non-playful advertisement from a playful one is that with the latter an advertiser can not just create an opportunity to sell something to a consumer, but also extend an invitation to the consumer to have a playful interaction and to play along. And given that modern consumers' entertainment-seeking mindset inclines them to oblige, it is easy to see how such appeals can be most persuasive.

Should advertisers want to utilize the playful strategies found in this study, it is important to keep in mind that certain findings bear particular implications. First, while print media appear to have borrowed some interactive elements from digital media, they have made it their own. The qualities, such as being more approachable and being able to demand more time, that make these strategies work for print advertisements are somewhat embedded in print's static nature. Despite this, the playful strategies can be transferred to a digital medium; however, the important implication advertisers ought to keep in mind is to honor the minimal unassuming nature of print. For instance, part of what makes a delayed punchline work is the active exploration and discovery done by the audience; as such, advertisers should refrain from multimedial enhancements that defeat the interactivity needed by the audience. Whether advertisers opt for the toned-down affordances of print used on a digital platform or for the tried and true tangible print medium, the logic of playful print advertising is able to complement their existing marketing mix.

Next, the findings related to the use of dark playfulness in print advertisements present an implication for advertisers that they might not have thought of before. The examples of the strategies used in this study can help guide advertisers to liberate and address difficult topics and it presents print as a medium that is particularly suited due to its unassuming nature. And finally, the broader implication beyond the simple implementation of the strategies that came out of this research is for advertisers to more consciously design their content with paidiac playfulness in mind rather than it being an unintended side effect. An understanding and recognition of the value of free-form, improvisational, and playful interpretive ambiguity will permit advertising appeals that do not become contrived and rather remain persuasive and productive.

There is however also another set of implications pertinent to the persuasive abilities of playful advertising strategies. Where on the one hand the findings of this study offer opportunities for advertisers, on the other hand there are those who might concern themselves with the consequences and ethical considerations of the playful strategies that came forth. The Huizingan view of play as something that is voluntary gives a false sense of security that playing is something we always choose to do. Sicart (2014) questions this saying, “The initial choice [to play] may be followed by playing without the intention of playing” (p. 115). One can see how this similarly would be the case for playfulness that is appropriative in nature. In that sense, many consumers might make a voluntary choice to read the advertisement but find themselves playing or having a playful experience unintentionally. While from the advertiser’s perspective it may appear that they are handing out an invitation for a playful interaction, from the consumer’s perspective it may seem as though they are subconsciously tricked into it, especially because the playful strategies tend to be so implicit and obscure.

The question then becomes whether these persuasion techniques are ethical. A popular ethical consideration of gamification noted by Kim and Werbach (2016) is that of manipulation or the infringement of autonomy. A similar concern could be extrapolated for uses of playification, that unlike its counterpart of gamification, uses much more implicit elements rather than explicit and structured elements that are easily noticeable, like badges or point systems. Consumers might feel that playful strategies used by advertisers are exploiting their innate human inclination towards play. The implication of these findings is that it invites a discussion for minimizing these ethical concerns in designing playful advertisements or for possible regulation for the sake of impressionable audiences. The other side of the debate would indeed argue that it is fair play and that its application in the context of advertising (which is regarded by many to be annoying) would only make it more pleasurable and entertaining. Yet, it remains a valid argument that there are those who might find a pleasurable experience, perhaps one that is initially negative like suffering, in advertising undesirable.

5.3 Limitations and future research

In this concluding section of the thesis, the limitations of the study and recommendations for future research will be pointed out. As a first limitation, one might consider the interpretive nature of the research method a point worthy of notice. The fact that the research in this exploratory master’s thesis is mostly theoretical ultimately accounts for results that came forth from the interpretation of a sole researcher. In order to strengthen the validity and reliability of the results so as to overcome this limitation, a structured theoretical backbone was established, a detailed operationalization and data collection process was fashioned, and a systematic thematic analysis

was conducted according to the steps laid down by Braun and Clarke (2006). What could be regarded as another limitation of this study is the fact that the units of analysis, while inherently being screened for their printed nature, were ultimately only the digitally recorded versions of real printed advertisements. Because the units of analysis were not analyzed in their original format, it remains a possibility that certain relevant details within the print advertisements might be overlooked. After all, the playful strategy in the exemplary advertisement for *Ballet at the Quarry* that preceded this thesis would not have been visible in a flat digital version of the printed advertisement, and strongly relied on its original format being adequately captured. To this end, a similar study could be conducted that analyzes printed advertisements, be it in newspapers or magazines, in their original format.

Furthermore, it has been expressed that the results of this study are strategies that are in essence linked to print advertising forms. A recommendation for future research would be to explore other forms of advertising having alternative affordances and see whether they engage and adopt similar or differing playful communication and design strategies. Next, because this master's thesis was an initial exploration of playfulness in print advertising no distinction was made between different brand, product, or service types. What could prove an interesting direction for further study is to comparatively look at these different factors to observe possible nuances in strategies from one category to another.

Finally, given the multiple distinct qualities of playfulness, future studies could attempt to quantify playfulness and explore whether the additive value of multiple coinciding qualities is more impactful or entertaining.

To conclude this master's thesis, it may be said that a gap in the literature regarding the discipline of play-related studies has been filled and a contribution to understanding the contemporary developments within the advertising industry has been made, while also providing avenues for future research.

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Appendix A: data overview

Below is a data overview of the advertisements that were used in this thesis, listing their respective brands, publications years and countries. Figure 1.1 and figures 4.1 – 4.26 are featured as evidence within the thesis. They can also be found, in addition to figures DS 1 – DS 73 in a separate document of the Complete Data Sample that was provided with the submission of the thesis.

Advertisement	Brand	Year	Country
Figure 1.1	West Australian Ballet	2020	Australia
Figure 4.1	Volkswagen	2019	Turkey
Figure 4.2	Vo2Max	2019	Brazil
Figure 4.3	Janssen Immunology	2019	Egypt
Figure 4.4	Parc Olympique	2019	Canada
Figure 4.5	Instituto do Bem	2019	Brazil
Figure 4.6	Otrivin	2020	United Arab Emirates
Figure 4.7	McDonald's	2019	Austria
Figure 4.8	Toyota	2020	Cyprus
Figure 4.9	Tekzen	2019	Turkey
Figure 4.10	World Affairs Council	2020	United States
Figure 4.11	Wunderman Thompson	2020	International
Figure 4.12	Líbero	2020	Spain
Figure 4.13	Airtel	2020	Nigeria
Figure 4.14	Livespot 360	2019	Nigeria
Figure 4.15	NHS	2020	United Kingdom
Figure 4.16	Volkswagen	2019	Argentina
Figure 4.17	Aviador	2019	Brazil
Figure 4.18	Dream Foundation	2019	United States
Figure 4.19	Matilla	2019	Turkey
Figure 4.20	Covenant House	2020	United States
Figure 4.21	Audi	2019	Chile
Figure 4.22	Icellpower	2020	Nigeria
Figure 4.23	Changan	2020	Chile
Figure 4.24	Downy	2020	Colombia
Figure 4.25	McDonald's	2019	Indonesia
Figure 4.26	LG	2019	India
Figure DS 1	Hogar de Cristo	2020	Chile
Figure DS 2	Noah's Ark	2019	Nigeria
Figure DS 3	Save the Children	2020	Indonesia
Figure DS 4	Ikea	2020	israel
Figure DS 5	Baloto	2020	Colombia
Figure DS 6	Jeep	2020	Peru
Figure DS 7	Sócrates João Oliveira	2020	Brazil
Figure DS 8	Pamonhas do Cezar	2020	Brazil
Figure DS 9	Marumby	2020	Brazil
Figure DS 10	McGuinness Irish Pub	2020	United States
Figure DS 11	MM&M	2020	United States
Figure DS 12	Chupa Chups	2020	Sri Lanka
Figure DS 13	Suave	2020	Puerto Rico
Figure DS 14	Bingo	2020	Turkey
Figure DS 15	Expresso	2020	Portugal
Figure DS 16	Nissan	2020	Finland
Figure DS 17	DillySocks	2019	Switzerland
Figure DS 18	Durex	2019	New Zealand
Figure DS 19	Social-Bee	2019	Germany
Figure DS 20	Jimmy Dean	2019	United States

Figure DS 21	Iberia Express	2019	Spain
Figure DS 22	Viande	2019	Brazil
Figure DS 23	l'Émouleur	2019	Canada
Figure DS 24	Right to Clean Air Platform	2019	Turkey
Figure DS 25	Matilla	2019	Turkey
Figure DS 26	Mintax Matik	2019	Turkey
Figure DS 27	Flex Condom	2019	Nigeria
Figure DS 28	The North Face	2019	El Salvador
Figure DS 29	Autism Forum Switzerland	2019	Switzerland
Figure DS 30	Café Copacabana	2019	Bolivia
Figure DS 31	Duo Condoms	2019	Ecuador
Figure DS 32	GPS Foundation	2019	Brazil
Figure DS 33	Misu	2019	Venezuela
Figure DS 34	Subway	2019	Turkey
Figure DS 35	Lineman	2019	Thailand
Figure DS 36	Casa da Bruxa	2019	Brazil
Figure DS 37	Lectura	2019	Bolivia
Figure DS 38	Smart	2019	Mexico
Figure DS 39	Lexus	2019	South Africa
Figure DS 40	La Guarida	2020	Paraguay
Figure DS 41	Balagan	2019	Israel
Figure DS 42	Global Humanitaria Italia Onlus	2020	Italy
Figure DS 43	Airtel	2020	Nigeria
Figure DS 44	Master Internet	2020	Brazil
Figure DS 45	Leith	2020	United Kingdom
Figure DS 46	Ahmed El Sallab	2020	Egypt
Figure DS 47	Stabilo	2019	Uruguay
Figure DS 48	M Jalil	2020	Ecuador
Figure DS 49	Franham	2020	Canada
Figure DS 50	Ford	2020	Brazil
Figure DS 51	Ogilvy	2020	Greece
Figure DS 52	Bonn	2020	India
Figure DS 53	Greecepeace	2019	Germany
Figure DS 54	The Clinic	2019	Chile
Figure DS 55	Sunstar	2019	Brazil
Figure DS 56	Iaso Children's Hospital	2019	Greece
Figure DS 57	Mozambique Fashion Week	2019	Mozambique
Figure DS 58	Chupa Chups	2019	Hong Kong
Figure DS 59	Save Our Oceans	2019	United Kingdom
Figure DS 60	Top Fit	2019	New Zealand
Figure DS 61	DK12	2019	Costa Rica
Figure DS 62	Coca Cola	2019	Thailand
Figure DS 63	Padma Foundation	2019	India
Figure DS 64	McDonald's	2019	Costa Rica
Figure DS 65	Women's Equality Party	2019	United Kingdom
Figure DS 66	Noah's Ark	2019	Nigeria
Figure DS 67	Prefeitura de Sao Paulo	2019	Brazil
Figure DS 68	Cerveja Rio Carioca	2019	Brazil
Figure DS 69	Ottawa International Animation Festival	2019	Canada
Figure DS 70	Çetaş	2019	Turkey
Figure DS 71	Kit Kat	2019	India
Figure DS 72	McDonald's	2019	Puerto Rico
Figure DS 73	Flex Condoms	2019	Nigeria

Appendix B: code tree

Below is an overview of the coding process from initial codes to the final themes. For each grouping the five most significant initial codes were selected as an example.

Themes	Groupings	Initial codes
Ensuring retention	Delayed punchline	Curiosity/what am I looking at
		Supplementary text
		PLEX: exploration
		PLEX: discovery
		PLEX: completion
	Implied punchline	Implied/connecting the dots
		Relies on prior knowledge
		Lack of text
		Experiential
		S: creative
Harnessing attention	Topical and personal imagery	Current/topical
		National symbolism
		Design
		S: personal
		Wordplay
	Eye-catching imagery	Colorful
		PLEX: fantasy
		PLEX: captivation
		PLEX: sensation
		Negative space
	Disruptive imagery	S: disruptive
		Unexpected imagery
		Unusual/contrast imagery
		Transcendental medium
		Required action
Liberating the unspoken	Negative valence pleasurable experiences	Dark playfulness
		Global issues
		Thought-provoking
		PLEX: suffering
		PLEX: sympathy
	Dark subversive humor	PLEX: subversion
		PLEX: thrill
		Poke fun at self
		ridicule
		S: carnivalesque
An awareness of playful risks	The risks of playful strategies	Elaborate text
		Narrow target
		Risk of not landing
		Risk of unfulfilled potential
		Polarizing
	Weighing risks and rewards	A: automotive
		A: health
		A: social organizations
		A: food & drink
		S: appropriative