



**Utrecht University**

**The Tandem of Humour and Being Moved**

Employing Humour and the Emotion of Being Moved in Narrative Advertising in a  
Commercial Setting

Daniël Venderbosch (1687077)

Master Thesis Social Health and Organisational Psychology  
Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences, Utrecht University

Supervisor: Madelijn Strick

Second Assessor: Ilona Domen

Date: 05.07.2021

Words: 8194 (incl. Abstract and References)

This Manuscript can be made Publicly Accessible

### Abstract

Narrative advertising is an effective marketing strategy that has a high persuasive potential because of its ability to psychologically transport its audience. Two of the most employed elements in narrative advertising are humour and the emotion of being moved, which respectively provide two forms of well-being: pleasure and meaning or *hedonia* and *eudaimonia*. This study uses evaluative conditioning to explore the influence of humorous, moving or both humorous and moving stories on brand attitude towards commercial brands. The experiment ( $N = 214$ ) used a within-subjects design with four levels (humour, moving, humour-moving and neutral) and additionally explored a 2(humour condition: high humour vs low humour) x 2(moving condition: high moving vs low moving) design, also within-subjects. Brand attitude was measured in likeability, appeal and attractiveness. The results showed that stories which contained both humour and the emotion of being moved produced a more positive brand attitude than humorous or moving stories alone, but that humorous or moving stories alone did not produce a more positive brand attitude than neutral stories. It was found that the effect of humour and moving stories combined was mainly due to the humour component. It is suggested that adding the moving element was needed in order to provide a proposed contrast effect between the two. These results suggest that marketers should employ humorous narratives with moving elements in their marketing techniques in order to gain in brand attitude. The findings provide guidance for marketers in the commercial spheres on how to improve their marketing strategies.

*Keywords:* humour, being moved, narrative advertising, evaluative conditioning, hedonia, eudaimonia

The way companies use advertising to sell their products has drastically evolved over the years. Up until the mid 1950's, almost every company's leading marketing strategy was mainly informational (Tungate, 2007). Consumers were provided with factual information about the product, information about how to obtain the product and reasons why the product was one of the best in its kind, often based on "scientific research". In the late 1950's and early 1960's, a lot of brands started adopting a new strategy, which was influenced by the idea that not objective product differences, but brand personality was the main factor that drew consumers to products (Tungate, 2007). Companies started telling stories in order to create this identity (Boller & Olson, 1991). One of the first companies that integrated this idea in their way of advertising was Marlboro, with the introduction of their 'Marlboro man' in 1954. They were one of the first companies to make use of narrative advertising (Starr, 1984). A narrative always involves an actor and an event and often evokes a certain emotion (Chang, 2009). Nowadays, the use of narratives is one of the mainly adopted strategies in advertising. At least a third of the commercials in the United States makes use of narrative appeals (Chang, 2012). This research will explore the role of two of the most used elements in narrative advertising: humour and the emotion of being moved. First, the role of humour and the role of being moved in advertising will be discussed, before presenting the research question of this study. Then, underlying theories will be explored before posing a hypothesis.

### **Theoretical Background**

#### **Humour**

When watching a commercial break on television, chances of companies trying to make you laugh are fairly high. It is estimated that between 30% and 42% of commercials employ humour (Weinberger et al., 1995). Humour works well in narrative contexts, which is illustrated by the following example of a commercial in the Netherlands in an advertisement from insurance company Centraal Beheer: Two young guys visit a car show in their classic American lowrider. They have a hard time finding a parking spot, but because of their low car, they are able find a spot behind a fence under which their car just fits. Satisfied with the situation they find their seats at the monster truck show, only to find their beloved car parked between some car wrecks, waiting to be crushed by the monster truck. At this moment "*Even Apeldoorn bellen*" ("just phone Apeldoorn") appears on the screen (Apeldoorn being the city where Centraal Beheer houses), inferring that Centraal Beheer will take care of the situation when you have an insurance with them (Centraal Beheer, 2012). The commercials from this company have always had a similar storyline and plot for years and are well known and appreciated in the Netherlands.

Humour in advertisements (ads) is a well-studied subject and there are a lot of mixed findings on its effectiveness. Research has shown that humour has positive, but also negative or mixed effects on brand attitude (Cline, 2003), so it is not without reason that Sutherland and Sylvester (2000) argue that humour is one of the least understood elements in advertising. This has to do with the fact that the effectiveness of humour much depends on its context. The combination of what kind of humour is deployed, what kind of product is being advertised and the characteristics of the person processing the ad is crucial to its effectiveness (Cline, 2003). Overall, though, it can be concluded that humour can be considered as an effective tool in advertising (Eisend, 2011).

A meta-analysis by Eisend (2011) shows that several theoretical explanations on the effectiveness of humour in advertising can be categorized into a cognitive and an affective model. The cognitive model firstly highlights humours' capability to attract consumers' attention (Eisend, 2009, 2011; Spotts et al., 1997). Elaboration on the message is increased due to high attention, leading to enhanced cognitive responses (Eisend, 2011). Given that most ads provide positive information, these cognitions are also positive. Secondly, the cognitive model argues that humour can distract consumers from generating counterarguments when they are faced with a persuasion attempt (Eisend, 2011), which is typical behaviour found in experiments on advertising (Krishnan & Chakravarti, 2003). Another cognitive process that is affected by humour, is that humour increases memorability (Strick et al., 2009). People are highly capable of recalling unexpected events, of which a humorous event is a prime example.

Humour also has a more direct effect on evaluations, which is described in the affective model by Eisend (2011). Humour often generates a positive affect and brings people in a good mood (Eisend, 2011; Robert & Wilbanks, 2012). This feeling of positivity may transfer to the brand being advertised through an associative learning mechanism, a process called 'evaluative conditioning' (Eisend, 2011; Hofmann et al., 2010). Evaluative conditioning (EC) is defined as the change in liking of a stimulus by pairing it with another – positive or negative – stimulus (Hofmann et al., 2010). The stimulus to be changed is called the conditioned stimulus (CS, plural: CSi) and the second, positive or negative stimulus is called the unconditioned stimulus (US, plural: USi). Obviously, the CS becomes more positive when it is paired to a positive US and becomes more negative when paired to a negative US. As humour is considered to be a positive emotion (Robert & Wilbanks, 2012), it should have the ability to positively change the liking of a brand.

### **Being moved**

Another extremely successful and effective strategy that is often used in narrative ads is integrating the emotion of ‘being moved’ (Berry, 2019; Panda et al., 2013). Examples of an event that may evoke this emotion are the reunion of two lovers who were separated by war, or an Olympic athlete winning a gold medal at their comeback after a long and tough period of disease. The emotion of being moved is often confused with other emotions like sadness or joy (Cova & Deonna, 2014). This confusion with sadness or joy might in turn sound confusing itself, because sadness and joy are quite opposing. What characterizes the emotion of being moved is the emergence of positivity from negativity. Being moved is defined as an emotional state that elicits human core values like love, willpower and social bonding (Strick & Van Soolingen, 2018), which is often manifested despite certain negative circumstances (Cova & Deonna, 2014). This makes that ‘being moved’ can be considered a positive emotion. It should thus have the same ability as humour to positively change the liking of a brand through EC.

A company that is highly successful in integrating this emotion in their commercials is Nike. In their commercial from July 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic, a lot of different athletes are shown performing their sport, including athletes of colour, homosexuals but also handicapped athletes. Messages like: “No matter how bad it gets, we will always come back stronger” and “When we’re held back, we’ll go farther and harder” are narrated and the video ends with the phrase: “You can’t stop sport, you can’t stop us” (Nike, 2020). The approach of the commercial is clear: motivating people to stay strong and positive during the Covid-19 pandemic, but also to keep moving forward despite all kinds of (societal) issues like being handicapped, black lives matter and deprived women’s and LGBTQ+ rights. Obvious examples of core values like hope, love and willpower are integrated in this commercial and it is a wonderful example of using the emotion of being moved in advertising.

Before continuing to elaborate on underlying theories, the previous information on the use of being moved and humour leads me to draw the research question of this paper: What is the influence of humour, being moved and the combination of both in stories on brand attitude of commercial brands? A positive brand attitude will be used as a measure for success of the advertisement, as this is an important outcome that companies strive for when targeting their audience (Percy & Rossiter, 1992).

### **Narrative persuasion**

The main goal of narrative commercials – and of commercials in general – is persuasion (O’Shaughnessy & O’Shaughnessy, 2003). This is often established by the capability of narratives to psychologically transport their audience (Escalas, 2004). Transportation can be

defined as being 'lost' in a story and being in some way disconnected from the real world, which is often the case with books or movies (Green & Brock, 2000, 2005). This process plays part in persuasion, and thus in advertising, because it produces increased story-consistent beliefs and a more positive evaluation of story characters (Strick et al., 2015). Besides, transportation produces a similar effect as humour, namely that it distracts consumers from producing counter arguments (Strick et al., 2015). Experimental research by Zheng (2014) showed that transportation positively influences affective responses to narrative ads. The more one is transported by a narrative, the greater is the tendency to adopt beliefs embedded in the narrative (Appel & Richter, 2010). This affective process has significant common ground with the process of EC described earlier in this paper. Appel & Richter (2010) argue that, based on the assumption that transportation is usually enjoyable (Green et al., 2004), it can facilitate narrative persuasion via positive mood. When looking back at the commercials of Nike and Centraal Beheer, this makes sense. Whether through attempting to make you feel moved or make you laugh, the obvious goal of both commercials is to put you in a positive mood.

In the field of narrative advertising, humour and the emotion of being moved are both well studied subjects, which have proven to be effective. The combination of these, arguably the most frequent used elements in advertising, is lacking scientific research though. The combination of humour and being moved is something that is rarely seen in advertising and research into it is virtually absent. The only field where the emotion of being moved and humour meet is in cabaret. Jokes are combined with personal disclosure and intimacy (Lindfors, 2019), which on the one hand is meant to make people laugh but often also to feel moved. How could this successful formula be of use in other domains, like advertising?

Following the theory on EC, humour and the emotion of being moved could serve as positive USi and increase the liking of a brand. Could the combination of both increase this even more? The theory on EC states that the more positive the US, the more positive the evaluation of the CS (Hofmann et al., 2010). This leaves the question whether a stimulus which is both humorous and moving could be a stronger positive stimulus than a humorous or a moving stimulus alone. In this case there is an interesting process playing part that argues in favour of this proposition. That is the contrast effect between the positivity of humour and the negativity of which the emotion of being moved often emerges. A contrast effect is best described as an inversed relation between the evaluation of a target stimulus and the values of a context stimulus (Herr et al., 1983). Consider the following two stories. These stories were taken from the materials used in the current study.

1. “Francesca got injured during a hockey game and her physiotherapist told her that she will not be able to walk for at least a week. “That’s bad”, she says, “but that also means no taking out the trash for a week!”.”
2. “Francesca suffers from ALS and during a consult, her doctor told her that she will probably not be able to walk anymore within a few months. “That’s terrible”, she says, “but that also means no more taking out the trash!”.”

In general, the humorous, optimistic way in which the actor deals with the situation is perceived more positive in the second story than in the first story, which is also confirmed by experimental research by the author. This might seem odd, as the situation in which the actor finds herself is far more negative in the second story, while the positive element (the way in which the actor deals with the situation) is the same. This is due to a contrast effect. The evaluation of the actor’s way of dealing with the situation (target stimulus) is inversely related to the value of the context stimulus, which is more negative in the second story. This means that the evaluation of the target stimulus becomes more positive and the story is perceived as more positive as well. This can be attributed to the presence of positive core values, which are more obvious in the second story. Because of the negative situation, values like hope and willpower emerge from the actor’s way of coping. The situation has become moving. Positivity has arisen from negativity. Following this line of theory, a stimulus which contains humour and is also moving could be considered a stronger positive stimulus than a humorous or moving stimulus alone. Narrative persuasion attempts could thus be more effective when containing both of these elements than one of them alone.

### **Well-being: Hedonia and eudaimonia**

To further justify why humour and being moved are being discussed in tandem, one needs to be aware of two main goals that people pursue in life and which comprise well-being: pleasure and meaning, or in more academic terms: *hedonia* and *eudaimonia* (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Hedonia is defined as the maximization of positive affect and minimization of negative affect, whereas eudaimonia is defined as the desire for self-growth and personal fulfilment (Carter & Williams, 2017; Deci & Ryan, 2008). People experience hedonia when they engage in pleasurable activities such as going to a concert, tasting a delicious cocktail or making love and this is considered to be a more short-term form of well-being. Eudaimonia is a more long-term form of well-being and is experienced when engaging in activities that provide deep satisfaction and are of great significance like rearing a child, completing a marathon or caring for someone in need. Note how humour can be linked to hedonia as experiencing humour is often a short-term maximization of positive affect while being moved maps onto eudaimonia as it is more

related to long-term well-being and significance with the involvement of core values like love and willpower (Strick, 2021). Hedonia and eudaimonia are considered to be the most widely held goals that people pursue and by which people motivate themselves (Baumeister et al., 2013).

When brands think about strategies to promote their products, the main goal is often to fulfil the desires and needs of consumers (Dailey et al., 2006). Research on consumers' behaviour is mainly focused upon the assumption that consumers pursue optimal well-being or happiness when making choices (Provides, 2017). Lyubomirsky (2007) described happiness as "the experience of joy, contentment, or positive well-being, combined with a sense that one's life is good, meaningful and worthwhile" (p. 32). Obviously, hedonia and eudaimonia can be derived from this description. Marketeers capitalize on humans' chase for these forms of well-being by attaching their brands to humour or being moved.

As it is argued that people pursue both hedonia and eudaimonia, the question arises why brands would not provide consumers with both. Focusing on the combination of two of the most effective elements in advertising – humour and being moved – which both map onto the two most widely held goals that people pursue – hedonia and eudaimonia – could therefore be of great significance to marketers. In this paper, I will further build upon this idea and support this with experimental research.

### **Current research and hypothesis**

The current research will investigate if humour, being moved and the combination of both in stories has an effect on brand attitude of commercial brands. Short stories which are either humorous, moving or both humorous and moving will be paired with mineral water brands to create an evaluative conditioning effect. Earlier research on which this study is based has been done by Strick & Volbeda (2018) and by Berry (2019). Strick and Volbeda did an evaluative conditioning study on the effect of good-ending versus bad-ending stories on brand attitude and found that brand attitude can be manipulated using evaluative conditioning with stories. Berry investigated the role of moving stories on brand attitude of commercial versus non-profit brands and found that commercial brands were rated more positive when associated with moving stories than when associated with non-moving stories. The findings of these studies, the line of theory on evaluative conditioning and the contrast effect between humour and being moved, lead me to draw the following hypothesis: Humour, being moved and the combination of humour and being moved has a positive effect on brand attitude but the combination of both has a greater effect than humour or being moved alone.

## **Method**

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences of Utrecht University (project number 21-1505).

### **Participants and design**

Participants were recruited via the Prolific platform and were rewarded with an amount of two British pounds sterling for completing the experiment. A minimum of 199 participants was needed to achieve a power of .80, which is a level that is generally accepted as a minimal level of power (Cohen, 1988). G\*Power 3.1 was used to calculate this for a dependent t-test comparing any of the experimental conditions (humour, moving, and humour-moving) to the neutral control group with an effect size of .2, using Cohen's *d* and an alpha level of .05. The choice for using a small effect size was based on research by Berry (2019) who conducted a very similar experiment and found an effect size of .183, using Cohen's *d*. The final sample included 214 British participants ( $M = 32.31$  years,  $SD = 11.81$  years, age range 18-72 years; 65 female, 149 male). The study used a within subjects design with four levels (humour, moving, humour-moving, neutral). An additional factorial analysis (see Results) used a 2(humour condition: high humour vs low humour) x 2(moving condition: high moving vs low moving) within subjects design.

### **Materials**

#### **Questionnaire**

The experiment was programmed by the author with Inquisit software (Draine, 1998) and was largely based on the script for Strick and Volbeda's (2018) Experiment 2.

#### **Brands (CSi)**

Four photos of existing foreign mineral water brands were used as brands to be evaluated by the participants. The photos can be found in Appendix A, labelled as Brand 1, 2, 3, 4. These were the same photos that were used in Strick and Volbeda's (2018) experiments and they were pilot tested by Strick and Volbeda to make sure that the brands were unknown to the population and did not elicit extremely positive or negative a priori reactions.

#### **Stories (USi)**

For the current experiment, there were 32 stories, which all had a humour, a moving, a humour-moving and a neutral version. This makes up a total of 128 stories. Initially there were 36 stories times four versions, but four of them were found to be qualitatively too low and were deleted. The stories were generated by the author and by reviewer Madelijn Strick. The stories were between 30 and 60 words and consisted of two segments. The first sentence(s) describe(s) a situation. The last sentence(s) describe(s) how the actor dealt with this situation. This was either

in a humorous, moving, both or neutral way as all stories had four versions. An example of all four versions of a story is provided. All stories can be found in Appendix B.

Humour story:

“Hank is asked by his friend if he ever considered registering for organ donation. “I did”, said Hank, “but after finding out what a kidney yields on the black market, the choice was easily made!”.”

Moving story:

“Hank’s best friend suffers from serious disease and needs a kidney transplantation. Hank is asked if he ever considered donating one of his kidneys. “I did”, said Hank, “I already have an appointment scheduled to check whether we are a match. I will do anything to save my friend’s life”.”

Humour-moving story:

“Hank’s best friend suffers from serious disease and needs a kidney transplantation. Hank is asked if he ever considered donating one of his kidneys. “I did”, said Hank, “I will do anything to save my friend’s life, even after finding out what a kidney yields on the black market!”.”

Neutral story:

“Hank is asked by his friend if he ever considered registering for organ donation. “I did”, said Hank, “I got the registration form in the mail yesterday”.”

The stories were pilot tested by 97 American participants who were recruited via the Amazon M-Turk platform. They were offered three US dollars for participation. The pilot study was created with Qualtrics software (Miller et al., 2020). Participants were asked to rate the stories on a 5-point Likert scale on whether they thought the stories were humorous, moving, positive and engaging (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *a great deal*). The goal of the pilot was to check whether for every type of story, the versions which contained humour were perceived more humorous than the versions which did not contain humour and the versions which contained the emotion of being moved were perceived as more moving than the stories which did not. Besides, it was found useful to check whether the stories were perceived as positive and engaging for exploratory reasons. See Table 1 for the means and standard deviations on humour, moving, positivity and engagingness. The most important criteria for selecting the stimulus materials were the scores on perceived level of humour and moving. The 32 stories (128 versions) were tested by paired samples dependent t-tests. It was found that humour ( $M = 2.18$ ,  $SD = .61$ ) and humour-moving stories ( $M = 2.05$ ,  $SD = .56$ ) were perceived more humorous than moving ( $M = 1.11$ ,  $SD = .36$ ) and neutral stories ( $M = 1.09$ ,  $SD = .32$ ) and that moving ( $M$

= 3.09,  $SD = .89$ ) and humour-moving stories ( $M = 2.27$ ,  $SD = .81$ ) were perceived more moving than humour ( $M = 1.58$ ,  $SD = .59$ ) and neutral stories ( $M = 1.49$ ,  $SD = .66$ ) at  $p < .001$ .

Additionally, it is also interesting to see that moving stories ( $M = 2.54$ ,  $SD = .85$ ) were perceived as more positive than humour ( $M = 2.21$ ,  $SD = .69$ ), humour-moving ( $M = 2.18$ ,  $SD = .72$ ) and neutral stories ( $M = 1.90$ ,  $SD = .68$ ) at  $p < .001$ . This interesting finding will be further discussed in the Discussion.

**Table 1**

*Means and Standard Deviations (in Parentheses) on Perceived Level of Humour, Moving, Positivity and Engagingness (Columns) for Every Type of Story (Rows).*

	Humour	Moving	Positivity	Engagingness
Humour	2.18 (.61)	1.58 (.59)	2.21 (.69)	2.16 (.73)
Moving	1.11 (.36)	3.09 (.89)	2.54 (.85)	2.81 (1.06)
Humour-moving	2.05 (.56)	2.27 (.81)	2.18 (.72)	2.46 (.83)
Neutral	1.09 (.32)	1.49 (.66)	1.90 (.68)	1.75 (.68)

## Procedure

Participants completed the experiment online from their homes or from another location of their choice. All instructions, stimuli and measures were provided via their own device. Participants were informed that they would get to read short stories and that brands of mineral water would be shown alongside them. Participants were asked to visualize the stories as good as possible, trying to imagine the scenes in their heads and imagine what it would feel like if they were there. They were asked to attentively look at the stories and brands as they would receive questions about them later.

The participants were presented with 32 conditioning trials, presented in random order. There were four different trials, representing the four levels of the within subjects design. After the subjects received instructions, the conditioning phase started. Participants were presented with a version of a story for 15000 ms, which was replaced with a blanc screen, which was replaced with the photo of a brand for 2000 ms which was replaced by a blanc screen. The choice for presenting a story for 15000 ms was based on results from the pilot study. Three stories with around the same number of words as the stories from the experiment with the highest number of words were conducted to measure reading time. The average median of these three stories was 11305 ms. The choice for 15000 ms was made to give the slowest readers the opportunity to finish every story on time. The stories to measure reading time can be found in

Appendix C. The brand (CS) was shown after presentation of the story (US) because presenting CSi after USi was found to have the greatest effect (Strick & Volbeda, 2018) and to have the least *ad intrusiveness* (Wang & Calder, 2006). The USi were not shown more than once to each participant. Across the 32 trials, each CS was shown eight times and was associated with either humour, moving, humour-moving or neutral stories. The assignment of a CS to a certain type of story was counterbalanced between participants using four counterbalance conditions. The procedure by which this was done is as follows:

The 32 stories were divided into four sets (set A, B, C, D), meaning every set consisted of eight stories times four versions. Participants got to read only one version of each story, meaning that every participant was presented with 32 different stories of which eight humorous, eight moving, eight humour-moving and eight neutral. Every set was paired with one of the four brands (CSi). To provide an example of the procedure, this means that Participant 1 could be presented with the humour version of Story 1 combined with Brand 1, while Participant 2 could be presented with the moving version of Story 1 combined with Brand 1 (see Table 2 for clarification). The reason of the creation of the different versions and the division into sets was to make sure that every brand was not coupled to the same version of a story for every participant, ruling out the effect of irrelevant characteristics of the brand (e.g. colour of the logo) on evaluation.

**Table 2**

*Schematic Overview of the Setup of the Presentation of the Different Brands and Versions (Humour: H, Moving: M, Humour-Moving: HM, Neutral: N) of the Stories to the Participants.*

	Set A – Brand 1	Set B – Brand 2	Set C – Brand 3	Set D – Brand 4
Participant 1	H	M	HM	N
Participant 2	M	HM	N	H
Participant 3	HM	N	H	M
Participant 4	N	H	M	HM
Participant 5	H	M	HM	N
Etc.	...	...	...	...

### **Attitude Measure**

After the conditioning phase, participants were asked to rate each brand. The questions, “How much do you like this brand?”, “How attractive do you find this brand?” and “Does this brand appeal to you?” were asked. Participants rated these items on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *Not at all*, 7 = *Very much*). The final attitude score was calculated by averaging the scores on the three

items. Because of the counterbalance conditions, the scores represented the attitude towards a brand associated with one of the four types of stories. Cronbach's alpha levels for the four types of stories, being humour, moving, humour-moving and neutral, were .94, .95, .96 and .95 respectively.

### **Exit questions**

At the end of the experiment, participants were asked demographic questions and were given the opportunity to give remarks on the study.

### **Analysis**

The data were downloaded from the Prolific platform and were fed into SPSS for analysis. To test the hypothesis, paired samples dependent t-tests were conducted on the influence of one independent variable (story) on averaged attitude score of a brand. Story type consisted of four levels, being humour, moving, humour-moving and neutral. A number of t-tests comparing the experimental conditions (humour, moving, and humour-moving) to the neutral control group were conducted. Besides this, a two-way repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted on the influence of two independent variables (humour, moving) on averaged attitude score of a brand. Both humour (high humour vs low humour) and moving (high moving vs low moving) consisted of two levels. A main effect of humour, a main effect of moving and an interaction effect of humour x moving was tested.

### **Results**

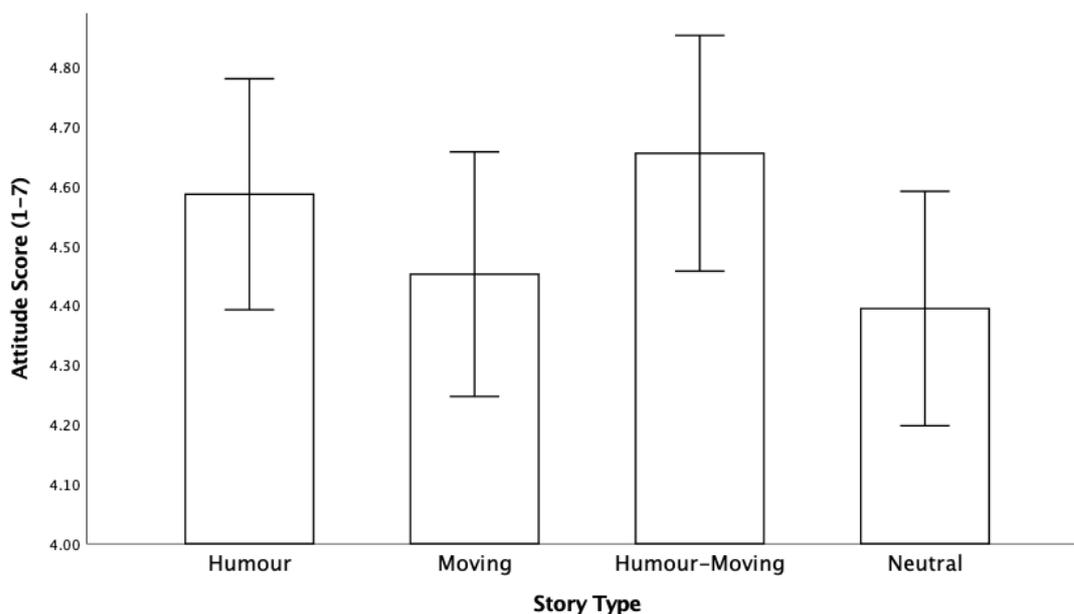
Brand attitude scores as a function of story type are displayed in Figure 1. The paired samples dependent t-test showed that there was a significant effect of story type on brand attitude score when the story was both humorous and moving,  $F(1, 213) = 0.26, p = .034$  with a small effect size of  $d = .146$ . Humour-moving stories ( $M = 4.65, SD = 1.47$ ) produced a higher brand attitude score than neutral stories ( $M = 4.39, SD = 1.46$ ). When the story type was humour, there was no significant effect on brand attitude score,  $F(1, 213) = 0.19, p = .125, d = .105$ , nor was this the case with moving stories,  $F(1, 213) = 0.06, p = .630, d = .033$ . These results indicate – consistent with the hypothesis – that humour-moving stories produced a higher brand attitude than neutral stories and a higher brand attitude than humour or moving stories alone. Humour or moving stories alone did not produce a significantly higher brand attitude than neutral stories. This is in contrast to the hypothesis.

To determine whether the positive effect of humour-moving stories on brand attitude is caused by the humour factor, by the moving factor or by interaction between the two, a 2(humour condition: high humour vs low humour) x 2(moving condition: high moving vs low moving) repeated measures ANOVA was conducted. The ANOVA showed that there was no

main effect of moving  $F(1, 213) = .49, p = .484, \eta^2 = .002$  and also no interaction effect between humour and moving  $F(1, 213) = .004, p = .951, \eta^2 < .001$  but that here was a main effect of humour present  $F(1, 213) = 5.71, p = .018, \eta^2 = .026$ . These results indicate that the effect of humour-moving stories on brand attitude is largely caused by the humour factor. The small and non-significant interaction effect indicates that adding a moving element to a humorous story does not generate a higher brand attitude. However, the fact that the humour-moving condition was the only condition eliciting a marked increase in brand attitude, while the humour condition did not elicit a significant increase in brand attitude, combined with a small and non-significant interaction effect, suggests that adding a moving element to a humorous story does generate a higher brand attitude, but the added value is only small.

**Figure 1**

*Brand Attitude Scores as a Function of Story Type. Error Bars Represent 95% Confidence Intervals.*



The results from the experiment partly confirm the expectation that humorous and moving stories would generate a higher brand attitude than neutral stories, but that humour-moving stories would generate the highest attitude. The findings show that humour-moving stories indeed have the greatest effect, but that purely humorous or moving stories do not generate an effect by themselves. Further analysis showed that the effect caused by humour-moving stories is largely due to the humour element. This leaves the question why humour alone did not show to have an effect on brand attitude. This finding and more will be revisited in the Discussion section.

### Discussion

The current study examined if embedding humour, being moved or the combination of both in stories would influence the way people rated an associated commercial brand. Humour was supposed to elicit hedonic feelings, while being moved was supposed to elicit feeling of eudaimonia, which are the two factors that comprise well-being and are considered to be the most widely held goals that people pursue (Baumeister et al., 2013).

The results of this study show that stories which contained both humour and the emotion of being moved produced a more positive brand attitude when comparing this to humorous or moving stories alone. This is in line with the literature on evaluative conditioning (Eisend, 2011; Hoffman et al., 2010), transportation (Appel & Richter, 2010; Escalas, 2004; Green & Brock, 2000, 2005; Zheng, 2014) and a proposed contrast effect (Herr et al., 1983) between humour and being moved. Following the same line of theory, it was proposed that humour or moving stories alone would also produce a more positive brand attitude when comparing this to neutral stories. However, this effect was not found in this study. Humorous stories tended to cause a small increase in brand attitude, but this result was not significant. The failure to generate an effect by humour and moving stories alone does not mean that the proposed theoretical framework is not valid, given the fact that there was a significant effect of stories which were both humorous and moving of which the proposed theoretical mechanism was the same. The only difference between humorous or moving stories alone with the combination of humour and being moved, was that with the latter a contrast effect came into play. This might have accounted for making the stimulus strong enough to produce a significant effect on brand attitude. Not having found an effect of humorous and moving stories alone might be explained by the following limitations of this research.

Firstly, the stories were not related to the brands. This might have accounted for a weaker effect. Narratives are able to produce transportation (Escalas, 2004) and this causes an increased adoption of beliefs embedded in the story (Appel & Richter, 2010; Strick et al., 2015). Given the fact that these beliefs had no direct link to the brands because the story's content was not brand related, this positive effect of transportation might have had a small or non-existing effect on brand attitude. This argumentation is also backed up by Weinberger et al. (2015) who state that humour works best if the humour is related to the brand. Of course, this argument also applies to the stories containing both humour and being moved, of which a positive effect was found. This effect might have been larger when the stories were related to the brand. However, it can be argued that this limitation not just applies to the current research. Flaherty et al. (2004) state that brand-unrelated humour is the most prevalent form of humour used in advertising. It

is therefore valid to infer that the non-relatedness of the humour to the brands is a limitation of the use of humour in advertising in general, rather than just a limitation of the current research. Further research on brand related versus non-related narratives would be needed to provide more clarity on this topic.

Secondly, the potential effect that the emotion of being moved could generate on brand attitude might be eclipsed by the fact that humour was also present in the experiment. Humour is known to have a high capability of attracting consumers' attention (Eisend, 2009, 2011; Spotts et al., 1997). Besides, humour has the capability to distract from processing other factors: the so called *vampire effect* (Eisend, 2011). Because of the within-participant design, participants were faced with all the different kinds of stories. Humour might therefore have overshadowed the emotion of being moved. Although it is true that in the moving stories there was no humorous element present, people could still have been distracted from processing other elements because they have just read something humorous. Being faced with humorous content every few trials might have accounted for distraction from the moving content. This explanation is also supported by the findings of Berry (2019). In contrast to the current research, Berry (2019) did find an effect of moving stories on brand attitude of commercial brands but she did not include humour in her study. This indicates that the vampire effect of humour might have played a role in the current research. If further research on humour and being moved is conducted, it might be wise to use a between-participants design to rule out this effect. Note that for marketers, this effect of humour is not necessarily a bad thing and could even be beneficial. When looking at a commercial block on television for example, companies want to stand out with their commercials. The fact that humour has a capability of overshadowing other things can make this possible.

The possibility of the presence of a vampire effect by humour is also confirmed by the factorial analysis which showed that the positive effect of stories which were both humorous and moving is largely caused by the humour factor, while the pilot study showed large potential for the effect of the moving factor. The pilot showed that the moving stories were rated as most positive, indicating that these stories should be able to elicit most positive feelings and thus generate a large effect through evaluative conditioning. This remarkable result implies that the potential impact of being moved could indeed have been overshadowed by the vampire effect of humour. Note that the pilot study was also a mix of humorous and moving stories but that apparently no vampire effect occurred there. This is probably because for every story, it was explicitly asked whether the participants thought the story was humorous, moving, positive and engaging. This made that the participants consciously thought about each story, without letting

them be influenced by the other stories. In the main experiment, the effect of the stories was more unconscious.

Another relevant topic to discuss is the ecological validity of this research. In this research, people were not tested in a controlled environment – that is, they went through the experiment from home, using their own device and not being bound to a certain time when participating. One could argue that this is actually comparable to real-life situations of being confronted with commercial advertising. People mostly view ads when scrolling through the web on their smartphones or computers (Arantes et al., 2018). Most ads are typically not watched attentively, like would be the case with movies for example. The average consumer often even actively avoids advertisements (Onișor & Ioniță, 2021). On the one hand, it could therefore be argued that when participating in this research, attention might be higher when comparing this to real-life situations when one would be confronted with ads. On the other hand, the average ‘real’ ad has a much higher capability of attracting attention than the stimuli in the current research, which were just black coloured texts on a white background. Assuming that, following this argumentation, people spend a similar amount of attention to the stimuli in this research and actual advertisements, it can be concluded that the ecological validity of this research is fairly high.

### **Conclusion**

In the current research, humour had a great share in generating a positive brand attitude for commercial brands, but was still not capable of generating an effect of its own. Combining humour with the emotion of being moved was needed in order to achieve this. Although humour seems to partly overshadow the impact of being moved, the addition of moving appeal facilitates a contrast effect, enlarging the emotionality of the content. Capitalizing on feelings of hedonia elicited by humour is a great way to gain a more positive attitude for brands. Although the current study does not show the same impact of eudaimonia elicited by the emotion of being moved, it does not mean that in general these feelings are of less importance to people. The abundance of literature on hedonia and eudaimonia confirms that both these factors of well-being are of great significance (Baumeister et al., 2013; Carter & Williams, 2017; Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2001). What can be stated as the most important conclusion from the current study, is that using humour for commercial purposes is most effective when combining it with the emotion of being moved.

The results of this study are based on narrative content in the form of stories, read by the audience. If the same conclusions can be made for other forms of advertising, like tv commercials, can only be confirmed by further research. Yet, these results already offer an

indication that the combination of humour and being moved might also work with other forms of advertising. This could offer important guidance for advertisers in the commercial spheres on how to make use of humour and the emotion of being moved in their marketing techniques. The field of narrative advertising benefits most from these implications. Companies who make use of tv commercials, ads on social media or advertisement texts in magazines which employ a narrative form and use humour combined with moving elements like love, willpower or social bonding, are building a solid foundation in order to gain a positive brand attitude as perceived by consumers.

### References

- Appel, M., & Richter, T. (2010). Transportation and need for affect in narrative persuasion: A mediated moderation model. *Media Psychology, 13*(2), 101-135. DOI: 10.1080/15213261003799847
- Arantes, M., Figueiredo, F., Almeida, J. M., & Prates, R. O. (2018). An investigation of user actions and experiences when exposed to YouTube video ads. *In Proceedings of the 24th Brazilian Symposium on Multimedia and the Web* (pp. 283-290). DOI: 10.1145/3243082.3243107
- Baumeister, R. F., Vohs, K. D., Aaker, J. L., & Garbinsky, E. N. (2013). Some key differences between a happy life and a meaningful life. *The journal of positive psychology, 8*(6), 505-516. DOI: 10.1080/17439760.2013.830764
- Berry, F. (2019). *Capitalising on Consumers' Feelings*. [Master thesis, Universiteit Utrecht]. Scriptiearchief Universiteit Utrecht.
- Boller, G. W., & Olson, J. C. (1991). Experiencing ad meanings: Crucial aspects of narrative/drama processing. *NA – Advances in Consumer Research, 18*, 164-171.
- Carter, E. P., & Williams, L. (2017). Meaningful Consumption Provides Long Lasting Benefits At a High Cost. *NA – Advances in Consumer Research, 45*, 63-67.
- Centraal Beheer (2012). *Commercial Birdie (2012) - Even Apeldoorn bellen - Centraal Beheer*. [Video]. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQfZY5rvXX0>
- Cline, T. W., Altsech, M. B., & Kellaris, J. J. (2003). When does humour enhance or inhibit ad responses?-the moderating role of the need for humour. *Journal of Advertising, 32*(3), 31-45. DOI: 10.1080/00913367.2003.10639134
- Chang, C. (2009). " Being Hooked" By Editorial Content: The Implications for Processing Narrative Advertising. *Journal of Advertising, 38*(1), 21-34. DOI: 10.2753/JOA0091-3367380102
- Chang, C. (2012). How people tell an ad story: Western vs. Asian styles. *Asian journal of communication, 22*(3), 235-252. DOI: 10.1080/01292986.2012.681662
- Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical power analysis for the behavior sciences (2nd ed.)*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Assoc.
- Cova, F., & Deonna, J. A. (2014). Being moved. *Philosophical Studies, 169*(3), 447-466. DOI: 10.1007/s11098-013-0192-9
- Dailey, L., Anderson, M., Ingenito, C., Duffy, D., Krimm, P., & Thomson, S. (2006). Understanding MBA consumer needs and the development of marketing

- strategy. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 16(1), 143-158. DOI: 10.1300/J050v16n01\_07
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2008). Hedonia, eudaimonia, and well-being: An introduction. *Journal of happiness studies*, 9(1), 1-11. DOI: 10.1007/s10902-006-9018-1
- Draine, S. (1998). *Inquisit [Computer software]*. Seattle, WA: Millisecond Software.
- Eisend, M. (2009). A meta-analysis of humour in advertising. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 37(2), 191-203. DOI: 10.1007/s11747-008-0096-y
- Eisend, M. (2011). How humour in advertising works: A meta-analytic test of alternative models. *Marketing letters*, 22(2), 115-132. DOI: 10.1007/s11002-010-9116-z
- Escalas, J. E. (2004). Imagine yourself in the product: Mental simulation, narrative transportation, and persuasion. *Journal of advertising*, 33(2), 37-48. DOI: 10.1080/00913367.2004.10639163
- Flaherty, K., Weinberger, M. G., & Gulas, C. S. (2004). The impact of perceived humor, product type, and humor style in radio advertising. *Journal of Current Issues & Research in Advertising*, 26(1), 25-36. DOI: 10.1080/10641734.2004.10505154
- Green, M. C., & Brock, T. C. (2000). The role of transportation in the persuasiveness of public narratives. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 79, 701-721. DOI: 10.1037/0022-3514.79.5.701
- Green, M. C., & Brock, T. C. (2005). Persuasiveness of narratives. In T. C. Brock & M. C. Green (Eds.), *Persuasion: Psychological insights and perspectives*, 2, 117-142. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Green, M. C., Brock, T. C., & Kaufman, G. F. (2004). Understanding media enjoyment: The role of transportation into narrative worlds. *Communication Theory*, 14, 311-327. DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-2885.2004.tb00317.x
- Herr, P. M., Sherman, S. J., & Fazio, R. H. (1983). On the consequences of priming: Assimilation and contrast effects. *Journal of experimental social psychology*, 19(4), 323-340. DOI: 10.1016/0022-1031(83)90026-4
- Hofmann, W., De Houwer, J., Perugini, M., Baeyens, F., & Crombez, G. (2010). Evaluative conditioning in humans: a meta-analysis. *Psychological bulletin*, 136(3), 390. DOI: 10.1037/a0018916
- Krishnan, H. S., & Chakravarti, D. (2003). A process analysis of the effects of humorous advertising executions on brand claims memory. *Journal of consumer psychology*, 13(3), 230-245. DOI: 10.1207/S15327663JCP1303\_05

- Lindfors, A. (2019). Cultivating participation and the varieties of reflexivity in stand-up comedy. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 29(3), 276-293. DOI: 10.1111/jola.12223
- Lyubomirsky, S. (2007). *The how of happiness: A scientific approach to getting the life you want*. New York, NY:
- Miller, C. A., Guidry, J. P., Dahman, B., & Thomson, M. D. (2020). A tale of two diverse Qualtrics samples: information for online survey researchers. *Cancer Epidemiol Biomarkers Prev*, 29(4). DOI: 10.1158/1055-9965.EPI-19-0846
- Nike (2020). *You Can't Stop Us | Nike*. [Video]. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WA4dDs0T7sM>
- Onișor, L. F., & Ioniță, D. (2021). How advertising avoidance affects visual attention and memory of advertisements. *Journal of Business Economics and Management*, 22(3), 656-674. DOI: 10.3846/jbem.2021.14546
- O'Shaughnessy, J., & O'Shaughnessy, N. (2003). *Persuasion in advertising*. Routledge.
- Panda, T. K., Panda, T. K., & Mishra, K. (2013). Does emotional appeal work in advertising? The rationality behind using emotional appeal to create favorable brand attitude. *IUP Journal of Brand Management*, 10(2), 7.
- Percy, L., & Rossiter, J. R. (1992). A model of brand awareness and brand attitude advertising strategies. *Psychology & Marketing*, 9(4), 263-274. DOI: 10.1002/mar.4220090402
- Provides, M. C. (2017). *Improving Consumer Well-Being Through Meaning vs Happiness*. ACR 2017 SAN DIEGO, 45, 63.
- Robert, C., & Wilbanks, J. E. (2012). The wheel model of humour: Humour events and affect in organizations. *Human Relations*, 65(9), 1071-1099. DOI: 10.1177/0018726711433133
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2001). On happiness and human potentials: A review of research on hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. *Annual review of psychology*, 52(1), 141-166. DOI: 10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.141
- Starr, M. E. (1984). The Marlboro man: Cigarette smoking and masculinity in America. *Journal of Popular Culture*, 17(4), 45.
- Spotts, H. E., Weinberger, M. G., & Parsons, A. L. (1997). Assessing the use and impact of humour on advertising effectiveness: A contingency approach. *Journal of advertising*, 26(3), 17-32. DOI: 10.1080/00913367.1997.10673526
- Strick, M. (2021). Funny and meaningful: media messages that are humorous and moving provide optimal consolation in corona times. *HUMOR*, 34(2), 155-176. DOI: 10.1515/humor-2021-0017

- Strick, M., de Bruin, H. L., de Ruiter, L. C., & Jonkers, W. (2015). Striking the right chord: Moving music increases psychological transportation and behavioral intentions. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied*, 21(1), 57. DOI: 10.1037/xap0000034
- Strick, M., Holland, R. W., Van Baaren, R., & Van Knippenberg, A. (2009). Humour in the eye tracker: Attention capture and distraction from context cues. *The Journal of General Psychology: Experimental, Psychological, and Comparative Psychology*, 137(1), 37-48. DOI: 10.1080/00221300903293055
- Strick, M., & Van Soolingen, J. (2018). Against the odds: Human values arising in unfavourable circumstances elicit the feeling of being moved. *Cognition and Emotion*, 32(6), 1231-1246. DOI: 10.1080/02699931.2017.1395729
- Strick, M., & Volbeda, M. (2018). When the valence of unconditioned stimuli evolves over time: Evaluative conditioning with good-ending and bad-ending stories. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 74, 50-55. DOI: 10.1016/j.jesp.2017.08.006
- Sutherland, M., & A. K. Sylvester (2000). *Advertising and the Mind of the Consumer*. Sydney, NSW, Australia: Allen and Unwin.
- Tungate, M. (2007). *Adland: a global history of advertising*. Kogan Page Publishers.
- Wang, J., & Calder, B. J. (2006). Media transportation and advertising. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 33(2), 151-162. DOI: 10.1086/506296
- Weinberger, M. G., Spotts, H. E., Campbell, L., & Parsons, A. L. (1995). The use of humour in different advertising media. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 35, 44 –56.
- Zheng, L. (2014). Narrative transportation in radio advertising: A study of the effects of dispositional traits on mental transportation. *Journal of Radio & Audio Media*, 21(1), 36-50. DOI: 10.1080/19376529.2014.891213

## Appendix A

### Photos of brands used as CSi

Brand 1



Brand 2



Brand 3



Brand 4



## **Appendix B**

### **Humour, moving, humour-moving and neutral stories used as USi**

Set A

1.

#### **Humour**

Because it was fashionable, Lisa had decided to shave off all her hair. When she went out for a walk today, she pinned a button on her jacket saying: "I'm too sexy for my hair".

#### **Moving**

Due to antidepressant treatment, Lisa had lost all her hair. When she went out for a walk today, she pinned a button on her jacket saying: "Don't worry, I will recover".

#### **Humour-moving**

Due to antidepressant treatment, Lisa had lost all her hair. When she went out for a walk today, she pinned a button on her jacket saying: "I'm too sexy for my hair".

#### **Neutral**

Because it was fashionable, Lisa had decided to shave off all her hair. When she went out for a walk today, she pinned a button on her jacket saying: "Hello!".

2.

#### **Humour**

The nurse showed Gina a list of things she should not do because of her temporary antibiotics treatment: no sugar; no alcohol; no driving, etc. Gina asked the nurse: "Can you add: 'No vacuuming'?"

#### **Moving**

The nurse showed Gina a list of things she should not do because of her terminal cancer treatment: no sugar; no alcohol; no driving, etc. Gina told the nurse: "I will enjoy my time nonetheless".

#### **Humour-moving**

The nurse showed Gina a list of things she should not do because of her terminal cancer treatment: no sugar; no alcohol; no driving, etc. Gina asked the nurse: "Can you add: 'No vacuuming'?"

#### **Neutral**

The nurse showed Gina a list of things she should not do because of her temporary antibiotics treatment: no sugar; no alcohol; no driving, etc. Gina told the nurse: "Thank you for the information!".

3.

**Humour**

To reduce her headache caused by adjusting to her new glasses, Rose was taking heavy painkillers, causing her to feel nauseous and sick. When I visited her she said: “Why are there never any good side effects? Just once I’d like to read a medication bottle that says, ‘May cause extreme sexiness.’”.

**Moving**

To slow down her terminal pancreatic cancer, Rose was taking different types of heavy medicine, causing her to feel nauseous and sick. When I visited her she said: “There are never any good side effects, but if one of these pills gives me an extra week or month to live with my family, it is all worth it”.

**Humour-moving**

To slow down her terminal pancreatic cancer, Rose was taking different types of heavy medicine, causing her to feel nauseous and sick. When I visited her she said: “Why are there never any good side effects? Just once I’d like to read a medication bottle that says, ‘May cause extreme sexiness.’”.

**Neutral**

To reduce her headache caused by adjusting to her new glasses, Rose was taking heavy painkillers, causing her to feel nauseous and sick. When I visited her she said: “I hope this feeling will not last longer than a few days”.

4.

**Humour**

Trent went on a sabbatical from work. When his friend asked him what he was most looking forward to, he said: “Not having to fill in my tax returns this year!”.

**Moving**

Trent unexpectedly lost his job and is getting in serious financial trouble. When his wife asked him how he was doing, he said: “As long as I’m with you, I think we’ll be okay”.

**Humour-moving**

Trent unexpectedly lost his job and is getting in serious financial trouble. When his friend asked him how he was doing, he said: “At least I don’t have to worry about filling in my tax returns now!”.

**Neutral**

Trent went on a sabbatical from work. When his friend asked him what he was most looking forward to, he said: “I don’t know, I haven’t thought about it yet”.

5.

**Humour**

Elisabeth and her friend were late night cooking, when all of a sudden the power went out and the kitchen turned completely dark. Her friend turned to Elisabeth and said: “Oh no, what now?” Elisabeth responded with: “Always look on the bright side of life!”.

**Moving**

Elisabeth is suffering from illness which will result in complete blindness soon. When her friend asked her how she is holding up, she said: “It’s difficult, but I’m glad I was able to see my children grow up”.

**Humour-moving**

Elisabeth is suffering from illness which will result in complete blindness soon. When her friend asked her how she is holding up, she said: “Always look on the bright side of life!”.

**Neutral**

Elisabeth and her friend were late night cooking, when all of a sudden the power went out and the kitchen turned completely dark. Elisabeth turned to her friend and said: “I hope the power will turn back on, so we can continue cooking”.

6.

**Humour**

Luke and Alex are identical twins. Alex got the news from the company he works for that he can work abroad for a year. When Alex told his mother the news, he ended with: “Don’t worry mom, at least there will still be one of us around!”

**Moving**

Luke and Alex are identical twins. Alex found out that he suffers from a chronic disease, which will lead to his death. When Alex told his mother the sad news, he ended with: “Please take good care of Luke, mom”.

**Humour-moving**

Luke and Alex are identical twins. Alex found out that he suffers from a chronic disease, which will lead to his death. When Alex told his mother the sad news, he ended with: “Don’t worry mom, at least there will still be one of us around!”.

**Neutral**

Luke and Alex are identical twins. Alex got the news from the company he works for that he can work abroad for a year. When Alex told his mother the news, he ended with: “I hope I will like it out there”.

7.

**Humour**

Katie works at a hospital and agreed to work a double shift today because one of her colleagues called in sick. She looks in the mirror and says with a grin: “Bye bye to my night of wining & dining”.

**Moving**

Although it is very demanding, Katie manages to work two jobs to have enough to eat. She smiles and says: “I want my children to have the opportunities I never had, even if it means dedicating my whole life to them”.

**Humour-moving**

Although it is very demanding, Katie manages to work two jobs to have enough to eat. She looks in the mirror and says with a grin: “I want my children to have the opportunities I never had. So bye bye to my night of wining & dining”.

**Neutral**

Katie works at a hospital and agreed to work a double shift today because one of her colleagues called in sick. “I don’t mind working some extra hours now and then”, she says.

8.

**Humour**

Hank is asked by his friend if he ever considered registering for organ donation. “I did”, said Hank, “but after finding out what a kidney yields on the black market, the choice was easily made!”.

**Moving**

Hank’s best friend suffers from serious disease and needs a kidney transplantation. Hank is asked if he ever considered donating one of his kidneys. “I did”, said Hank, “I already have an appointment scheduled to check whether we are a match. I will do anything to save my friend’s life”.

**Humour-moving**

Hank’s best friend suffers from serious disease and needs a kidney transplantation. Hank is asked if he ever considered donating one of his kidneys. “I did”, said Hank, “I will do anything to save my friend’s life, even after finding out what a kidney yields on the black market!”.

**Neutral**

Hank is asked by his friend if he ever considered registering for organ donation. “I did”, said Hank, “I got the registration form in the mail yesterday”.

Set B

9.

**Humour**

One day, Jermaine heard that his house contains asbestos and that it will take a week of construction work to make his place liveable again. When his friend asks him where he is going to live during that week, he answers: “I don’t know yet, but I heard the coffee at the homeless shelter is actually pretty good!”.

**Moving**

After years of hard work, Jermaine was finally able to buy his dream house. One day the house catches fire and is completely destroyed. Jermaine must look for a new place. When his friend asks him what he is going to do, he answers: “I don’t know yet, but I’ll find a way. Even though this breaks my heart, I know I will be okay”.

**Humour-moving**

After years of hard work, Jermaine was finally able to buy his dream house. One day the house catches fire and is completely destroyed. Jermaine must look for a new place. When his friend asks him what he is going to do, he answers: “I don’t know yet, but I heard the coffee at the homeless shelter is actually pretty good!”.

**Neutral**

One day, Jermaine heard that his house contains asbestos and that it will take a week of construction work to make his place liveable again. When his friend asks him where he is going to live during that week, he answers: “I don’t know yet, but I’ll ask my father for advice”.

10.

**Humour**

Francesca got injured during a hockey game and her physiotherapist told her that she will not be able to walk for at least a week. “That’s bad”, she says, “but that also means no taking out the trash for a week!”.

**Moving**

Francesca suffers from ALS and during a consult, her doctor told her that she will probably not be able to walk anymore within a few months. “That’s terrible”, she says, “but I’m gonna make the best use of my legs in the few months that I have left”.

**Humour-moving**

Francesca suffers from ALS and during a consult, her doctor told her that she will probably not be able to walk anymore within a few months. “That’s terrible”, she says, “but that also means no more taking out the trash!”.

**Neutral**

Francesca got injured during a hockey game and her physiotherapist told her that she will not be able to walk for at least a week. “That’s bad”, she says, “thank you for your help”.

11.

**Humour**

Joey got in an accident where he broke a few of his fingers. “Will I be able to play the piano?” he asks his doctor. “Yes, in a few weeks should be able to” the doctor answered. “Sweet!”, joey said with a grin, “I have never been able to do that!”.

**Moving**

Joey suffers from an incurable disease in which he is slowly losing the ability to move his hands and fingers. “Will I be able to play the piano?” he asks his doctor. “Probably not, I’m afraid”, the doctor answered. “Playing the piano was my big passion”, Joey said, “but the good memories will last forever”.

**Humour-moving**

Joey suffers from an incurable disease in which he is slowly losing the ability to move his hands and fingers. “Will I be able to play the piano?” he asks his doctor. “Probably not, I’m afraid”, the doctor answered. “Well that’s okay”, Joey said with a grin, “I have never been able to do that anyway”.

**Neutral**

Joey got in an accident where he broke a few of his fingers. “Will I be able to play the piano?”, he asks his doctor. “Yes, in a few weeks should be able to” the doctor answered. “Thank you doctor”, Joey said.

12.

**Humour**

Frank is a retired doctor, who has mostly worked with cancer patients during his career. “What do you think of people who make jokes about cancer?”, Frank’s wife asks him. “It depends, but they definitely have a weird sense of tumour”, Frank responded.

**Moving**

Frank recovered from testicular cancer, having lost one of his testicles during treatment. “Do you think the process of being ill changed you?”, his wife asked him. Frank responded: “I may have lost one of my testicles, but I’m glad I survived. I think I will appreciate life with you and the kids even more now”.

**Humour-moving**

Frank recovered from testicular cancer, having lost one of his testicles during treatment. “Do you think the process of being ill changed you?” his wife asked him. “Yes and no”, Frank responded “I may have lost one of my testicles, but I have not lost my sense of tumour!”.

**Neutral**

Franks is a retired doctor, who has mostly worked with cancer patients during his career. “What do you think of people who make jokes about cancer?” Frank’s wife asks him. “It depends, but you should always be careful on this subject”, Frank responded.

13.

**Humour**

As Kenny is getting into his forties, his hair starts to get thinner and thinner. One day, he decides it’s time to shave it all off, to be ahead of his hair falling out naturally. His friend Peter visits and says: “That’s a bald move man!”.

**Moving**

Kenny suffers from lung cancer and will go into chemotherapy soon. Because he knows what’s coming, he decides to shave off his hair already before chemo starts. His friend Peter visits and says: “To support you during this difficult time, I will also shave off my hair. You’ll get through this buddy!”.

**Humour-moving**

Kenny suffers from lung cancer and will go into chemotherapy soon. Because he knows what’s coming, he decides to shave off his hair already before chemo starts. His friend Peter visits and says: “That’s a bald move man!”.

**Neutral**

As Kenny is getting into his forties, his hair starts to get thinner and thinner. One day, he decides it’s time to shave it all off, to be ahead of his hair falling out naturally. His friend Peter visits and says: “That looks okay on you”.

14.

**Humour**

Julia suffers from an appendicitis infection and just got the news that she cannot go home and has to stay in the hospital for the coming days because she needs to be under inspection of a doctor until she is cured. “I would rather go home”, she said, “although room service doesn’t sound bad at all!”

**Moving**

Julia just got admitted to the hospital and got the news that she cannot go home for the coming weeks because her liver cancer is getting worse and worse. “That’s bad news”, she said, “but if that means I can overcome my cancer and survive, it’s all worth it.”

**Humour-moving**

Julia just got admitted to the hospital and got the news that she cannot go home for the coming weeks because her liver cancer is getting worse and worse. “That’s bad news”, she said, “although room service doesn’t sound bad at all!”

**Neutral**

Julia suffers from an appendicitis infection and just got the news that she cannot go home for the coming days because she needs to be under inspection of a doctor until she is cured. “I would rather go home”, she said, “but a few days in the hospital could not be that bad”.

15.

**Humour**

A few years ago, Marie got in a cycling accident where she broke her leg and was wheelchair-bound for two weeks. Her friend asks her what it was like to be in a wheelchair. “It does bring a lot of struggles” Marie says, “but it also has its benefits, like VIP wheelchair seats at concerts!”.

**Moving**

A few years ago, Marie got in a heavy car accident and is paralysed from the hip down. Her friend asks her how being bounded to a wheelchair has changed her life. “It does bring some struggles” Marie says, “but being confined to a wheelchair doesn’t bother me, as my mind is free to roam the universe”.

**Humour-moving**

A few years ago, Marie got in a heavy car accident and is paralysed from the hip down. Her friend asks her how being bounded to a wheelchair has changed her life. “It does bring a lot of struggles” Marie says, “but it also has its benefits, like VIP wheelchair seats at concerts!”.

**Neutral**

A few years ago, Marie got in a cycling accident where she broke her leg and was wheelchair bounded for two weeks. Her friend asks her what it was like to be in a wheelchair. “It does bring a lot of struggles” Marie says, “but luckily it was only for two weeks”.

16.

**Humour**

Robert broke his leg and has to stay in bed for two weeks. His friends visits him to see how he was doing. Robert said with a grin: “Finally I can skip going to the gym without having to feel guilty!”.

**Moving**

Robert suffers from chronic disease and is undergoing heavy medical treatment at the moment. His doctor tells him that he should take it easy and stay in bed for the coming weeks. “It’s so tough doctor”, he says, “but I know all I need is hope and strength”.

**Humour-moving**

Robert suffers from chronic disease and is undergoing heavy medical treatment at the moment. His doctor tells his that he should take it easy and stay in bed for the coming weeks. Robert says with a grin: “Finally I can skip going to the gym without having to feel guilty!”.

**Neutral**

Robert broke his leg and has to stay in bed for two weeks. His friends visits him to see how he was doing. “I hope my leg will recover properly during this period”, Robert says.

Set C

17.

**Humour**

Janice works at an ice cream shop where it is extremely busy on Saturdays. “How do you cope with this?”, her co-worker asks her. Janice responds: “I just keep my head cool!”.

**Moving**

Janice works at an ice cream shop and just manages to feed her new-born twins. When she gets fired, her co-worker asks her how she will hold up. “I don’t know yet”, Janice responds. “My babies have got to eat, so I have to stay strong to get some food on the table”.

**Humour-moving**

Janice works at an ice cream shop and just manages to feed her new-born twins. When she gets fired, her co-worker asks her how she will hold up. “I don’t know yet”, Janice responds, “but I will keep my head cool”.

**Neutral**

Janice works at an ice cream shop where it is extremely busy on Saturdays. “How do you cope with this?”, her co-worker asks her. “I just stay calm”, Janice responds.

18.

### **Humour**

Rupert has an infection in his ears, which temporarily causes him to lose about 80% of his hearing. For this to cure, he has to undergo an antibiotic treatment for a week. His best friend asks him what he thinks of having dinner together after that week, to celebrate his healing. “That sounds like music to my ears”, Rupert said.

### **Moving**

Six months ago, Rupert had an accident at work at which he lost about 80% of his hearing. This got him very depressed and he hasn’t really enjoyed life since the accident. To cheer Rupert up, his best friend asks him what he thinks of going on a skiing trip together. “I would love that”, Rupert said. “I’m so glad to have a friend like you”.

### **Humour-moving**

Six months ago, Rupert had an accident at work at which he lost about 80% of his hearing. This got him very depressed and he hasn’t really enjoyed life since the accident. To cheer Rupert up, his best friend asks him what he thinks of going on a skiing trip together. “That sounds like music to my ears”, Rupert said.

### **Neutral**

Rupert has an infection in his ears, which temporarily causes him to lose about 80% of his hearing. For this to cure, he has to undergo an antibiotic treatment for a week. This is a bit disappointing for him, but he knows this is a temporary setback and he will eventually regain his hearing.

19.

### **Humour**

Sarah has an infection in her arm which makes it necessary that she undergoes a small surgery. Today is the day of the surgery. Before going to the hospital, she draws a dotted line on her arm with a marker and writes next to it: “Cut here”.

### **Moving**

Sarah has a dangerous infection in her arm which makes it necessary that her arm is amputated. Today is the day of the surgery and Sarah realises she’s going to wake up without her left arm in a few hours. Before going to the hospital, she strokes her arm a few times, smiles and says: “Farewell”.

### **Humour-moving**

Sarah has a dangerous infection in her arm which makes it necessary that her arm is amputated. Today is the day of the surgery and Sarah realises she’s going to wake up without her left arm

in a few hours. Before going to the hospital, she draws a dotted line on her arm with a marker and writes next to it: “Cut here”.

### **Neutral**

Sarah has an infection in her arm which makes it necessary that she undergoes a small surgery. Today is the day of the surgery. Before going to the hospital, she drops by her parents to have lunch.

20.

### **Humour**

“I’m afraid I have bad news”, is what the doctor said to Markus. “The scan shows that your leg is broken in two places. From now on you should focus on working less and resting more.” “That’s nasty doctor”, Markus said. “Luckily I have always been very good at those things!”.

### **Moving**

“I’m afraid I have bad news”, is what the doctor said to Markus. “The scan shows that your tumour hasn’t decreased in size. From now on you should focus on working less and resting more.” “That’s awful doctor”, Markus said, “but I know I can overcome this horrible disease”.

### **Humour-moving**

“I’m afraid I have bad news”, is what the doctor said to Markus. “The scan shows that your tumour hasn’t decreased in size. From now on you should focus on working less and resting more.” “That’s awful doctor”, Markus said. “Luckily I have always been very good at those things!”.

### **Neutral**

“I’m afraid I have bad news”, is what the doctor said to Markus. “The scan shows that your leg is broken in two places. From now on you should focus on working less and resting more.” “That’s nasty doctor”, Markus said, “but of course I will take your advice”.

21.

### **Humour**

Rita once in a while looked after the cat of her neighbours, until one day she heard that the cat was very sick and needed to be put down. “I feel bad for my neighbours”, Rita said to her friend, “but I also seriously wonder how that cat spilled her other eight lives.”

### **Moving**

Rita never married nor did she have many friends. She considered her best friend to be her cat, which she’d had for ages. One day, her cat gets very sick and needs to be put down. “I’m gonna miss you so much”, Rita says to the cat, “and no other cat can ever replace you”.

**Humour-moving**

Rita never married nor did she have many friends. She considered her best friend to be her cat, which she'd had for ages. One day, her cat gets very sick and needs to be put down. "I'm gonna miss you so much", Rita says to the cat, "but I also seriously wonder how you spilled your other eight lives".

**Neutral**

Rita once in a while looked after the cat of her neighbours, until one day she heard that the cat was very sick and needed to be put down. "I feel bad for my neighbours", Rita said to her friend, "but I'm sure they'll have a new cat in no time".

22.

**Humour**

Peter had suffered from food poisoning and has been in bed for the past days, feeling very nauseous. When his little son Charlie came up to his bed and asked him: "Why are you so sick daddy?". Peter said: "Being sick is just my body's way of saying I'm way too awesome and I need to slow down so everyone else can catch up!".

**Moving**

Peter is diagnosed with stomach cancer and has been in bed for weeks, feeling really terrible. When his little son Charlie came up to his bed and asked him: "Why are you so sick daddy?". Peter said: "Because there is something really bad in my stomach son. But I try really hard to make it come out".

**Humour-moving**

Peter is diagnosed with stomach cancer and has been in bed for weeks, feeling really terrible. When his little son Charlie came up to his bed and asked him: "Why are you so sick daddy?". Peter said: "Being sick is just my body's way of saying I'm way too awesome and I need to slow down so everyone else can catch up!".

**Neutral**

Peter had suffered from food poisoning and has been in bed for the past days, feeling very nauseous. When his little son Charlie came up to his bed and asked him: "Why are you so sick daddy?". Peter said: "I ate something my stomach could not handle son".

23.

**Humour**

Lois got in an accident where she bruised several fingers on both hands. Her boyfriend asks her how she thinks this will affect her. "I don't really know", Lois answers, "but I do know who will have to do the dishes from now on!".

**Moving**

Lois suffers from a chronic disease in her muscles which has led to a point where she can't move her hands anymore. Her boyfriend asks her how she thinks this will affect their relationship. "I don't know", Lois answers, "but does it matter? Our love is so strong, we can overcome anything"

**Humour-moving**

Lois suffers from a chronic disease in her muscles which has led to a point where she can't move her hands anymore. Her boyfriend asks her how she thinks this will affect their relationship. "I don't know", Lois answers, "but I do know who will have to do the dishes from now on!".

**Neutral**

Lois got in an accident where she bruised several fingers on both hands. Her boyfriend asks her how she thinks this will affect her. "I don't really know", Lois answers, "but it's probably going to be pretty annoying sometimes".

24.

**Humour**

Yasmin just recovered from an infection in her lungs and had to spend three days per week in the hospital for the past two weeks. Her friend asks her what it was like having to be in the hospital so much. Yasmin replied with a big smile: "Well, I still had a four-day weekend left every week, which is more than I was used to!".

**Moving**

Yasmin is terminally ill and has to spend three days per week in the hospital to be under surveillance. Her friend asks her what it's like having to be in the hospital so much. Yasmin replied: "Well, it's hard. But if that means I can spend the other four days with my husband and kids, than it's all worth it".

**Humour-moving**

Yasmin is terminally ill and has to spend three days per week in the hospital to be under surveillance. Her friend asks her what it's like having to be in the hospital so much. Yasmin replied with a big smile: "Well, I still have a four-day weekend left every week, which is more than I was used to!".

**Neutral**

Yasmin just recovered from an infection in her lungs and had to spend three days per week in the hospital for the past two weeks. Her friend asks her what it was like having to be in the hospital so much. "Well, it was necessary, so I was okay with it", Yasmin replied.

Set D

25.

**Humour**

Sandro has an appointment with the dietician to go through a list of foods he should and should not eat because of his new found allergies. As he sits down at the office of the dietician, he smiles and says: “So, what’s on the menu?”.

**Moving**

Sandro has an appointment with the dietician to go through a list of foods he should and should not eat because of his terminal liver cancer. As he sits down at the office of the dietician, he says: “I know your advice will help me live as healthy as possible during my last years, I’m thankful for your help”.

**Humour-moving**

Sandro has an appointment with the dietician to go through a list of foods he should and should not eat because of his terminal liver cancer. As he sits down at the office of the dietician, he smiles and says: “So, what’s on the menu?”.

**Neutral**

Sandro has an appointment with the dietician to go through a list of foods he should and should not eat because of his new found allergies. As he sits down at the office of the dietician, he says: “I’m really curious about what you’re going to tell me”.

26.

**Humour**

Lucas is a professional football player, who is injured at his left leg for three months already. When asked in an interview how he feels about not being able to play football during this time, he smiles and says: “What do you mean? I still have my right leg!”.

**Moving**

Lucas used to be a professional football player, until he lost his left leg from above the knee in a tragic accident. When asked in an interview how he feels about not being able to play football again, he says: “I’m trying to make the best of it. I started doing wheelchair football and I really enjoy it!”.

**Humour-moving**

Lucas used to be a professional football player, until he lost his left leg from above the knee in a tragic accident. When asked in an interview how he feels about not being able to play football again, he smiles and says: “What do you mean? I still have my right leg!”.

**Neutral**

Lucas is a professional football player, who is injured at his left leg for three months already. When asked in an interview how he feels about not being able to play football during this time, he says: “It’s tough, but I’m almost recovered”.

27.

**Humour**

After having heard from two different specialists that a hair transplant will not be possible, Neill grins and asks his wife: “There is no such thing as a third opinion, right?”.

**Moving**

After having heard from two different doctors that his cancer cannot be cured, Neill tells his wife: “I’m gonna have to accept my fate. I will enjoy every last minute I have left with you”.

**Humour-moving**

After having heard from two different doctors that his cancer cannot be cured, Neill grins and asks his wife: “There is no such thing as a third opinion, right?”.

**Neutral**

After having heard from two different specialists that a hair transplant will not be possible, Neill tells his wife: “Well, I guess I’ll have to accept getting older.”

28.

**Humour**

Jason suffers from COVID-19 which has led him to feel quite weak the last couple of days. One day he is watching TV with his wife and she asks him to change the channel. As Jason grabs for the remote, he grins and says: “Why aren’t there such things like light-weight remote controls?”

**Moving**

Jason suffers from an autoimmune disease which causes him to feel weaker every day. One day he is watching TV with his wife and they see a beautiful film. As Jason grabs her hand, he smiles and says: “This disease is demanding for me, but I’m so grateful we can still enjoy a beautiful film together”.

**Humour-moving**

Jason suffers from an autoimmune disease which causes him to feel weaker every day. One day he is watching TV with his wife and she asks him to change the channel. As Jason grabs for the remote, he grins and says: “Why aren’t there such things like light-weight remote controls?”.

**Neutral**

Jason suffers from COVID-19 which has led him to feel quite weak the last couple of days. One day he is watching TV with his wife and she asks him to change the channel. As Jason grabs for the remote, he says: “Let’s check if there is any news about the latest developments in our country”.

29.

**Humour**

Kate works at a company that produces breast prostheses. At her local grocery shop, she sees a table with two pumpkins lying on it. Kate laughs and says to the shopkeeper: “Great you also sell breast prostheses here!”.

**Moving**

Kate suffered from breast cancer and had her breast removed. At her local grocery shop, she sees a table with beautiful fresh vegetables on it. Kate wipes away a tear and says to the shopkeeper: “I think your fresh veggies have kept me alive”.

**Humour-moving**

Kate suffered from breast cancer and had her breasts removed. At her local grocery shop, she sees a table with two pumpkins lying on it. Kate laughs and says to the shopkeeper: “So great you also sell breast prostheses here!”.

**Neutral**

Kate needs to do some quick grocery shopping after work. At her local grocery shop, she sees a table with beautiful fresh vegetables on it. Kate says to the shopkeeper: “You sell many different vegetables in this shop. I don’t even know the names of some of them”.

30.

**Humour**

A famous actor has his bicycle stolen. Surprisingly, the thief took only a part of it. The front wheel is still in the bicycle stand. As the actor is looking at the wheel, a reporter asks him if the event will ruin his day. The actor smiles and says: “Not at all. My favourite saying is: If there's a wheel, there's a way”.

**Moving**

Due to a severe car accident, a famous actor gets paralyzed from the waist down. He has to be in a wheelchair for the rest of his life. A reporter asks him if being in a wheelchair will ruin his career. The actor smiles and says: “I am very hopeful. My favourite saying is: If there's a will, there's a way”.

**Humour-moving**

Due to a severe car accident, a famous actor gets paralyzed from the waist down. He has to be in a wheelchair for the rest of his life. A reporter asks him if being in a wheelchair will ruin his career. The actor smiles and says: “Not at all. My favourite saying is: If there's a wheel, there's a way”.

**Neutral**

A famous actor has his bicycle stolen. As the actor is looking around at the empty bicycle stand, a reporter asks how he is doing. The actor shrugs and says: “I just lost my bicycle. But it is not a big deal. It was an old bike, and I didn't ride it very much anyway. I can probably get a new one soon”.

31.

**Humour**

Leslie is sitting at home, knitting a sweater. Her best friend asks if she ever worries about the future. Leslie smiles and says: “We should not take life too seriously. Nobody gets out of it alive anyway”.

**Moving**

Leslie suffers from a terminal brain disease. Her best friend asks if she worries about the future. Leslie smiles and said: “I take every day as it comes. Nobody has guarantees about the future anyway”.

**Humour-moving**

Leslie suffers from a terminal brain disease. Her best friend asks if she worries about the future. Leslie smiles and said: “We should not take life too seriously. Nobody gets out of it alive anyway”.

**Neutral**

Leslie is sitting at home, knitting a sweater. Her best friend asks what she is making. Leslie says: “This is a sweater I was taught to knit in my art class last year. I may keep it for myself or give it away.”

32.

**Humour**

Chris cares for dementia patients who have trouble recognizing the faces of their family and friends. When somebody asks him how bad the disease is, Chris says: “Well, one good thing for the patients with dementia is that they meet new people every day”.

**Moving**

Chris suffers from severe dementia. He no longer recognizes the faces of his family and friends. One day, the psychologist walks in and asks how he feels. Chris says: “I focus on what I can do, not on what I cannot do. This keeps me happy and grateful every day”.

**Humour-moving**

Chris suffers from severe dementia. He no longer recognizes the faces of his family and friends. One day, the psychologist walks in and asks how he feels. Chris says: “Well. One good thing about having dementia is that I meet new people every day”.

**Neutral**

Chris works in a home where they offer physical care, temporary care, day care, and permanent care for the elderly. When somebody asks him how he experiences his job, Chris says: “The work is tough, and the days are long. But most days, I like my job”.

## Appendix C

### Stories to measure reading time

1.

Harry has set the goal for himself to run the marathon of New York. He has been training a lot for the past months and today is the day. His friend asks him if he's ready. Harry responds: "I feel like I'm ready, but I'm still pretty nervous. I just hope I will make it to the finish in under three and a half hours!"

2.

Pauline is a teacher at an elementary school who very much loves her job. Her friend Denise asks her what's so special about it. Pauline responds: "Being able to teach the kids about life, seeing them grow as a person and to create a special bond with them is a beautiful thing. I wouldn't trade my job for any other job in the world!"

3.

Ranjid is the owner of an Indian restaurant in Boston. He heard of a rumour that a food critique is visiting all of the Indian restaurants in town to write a review. Ranjid says to his staff: "I want you to treat every customer like it's your mother! I have full confidence that, if we do our best, we can get a really good review."