



Customers' Reactions to Employees' Humor Use in Service Encounters

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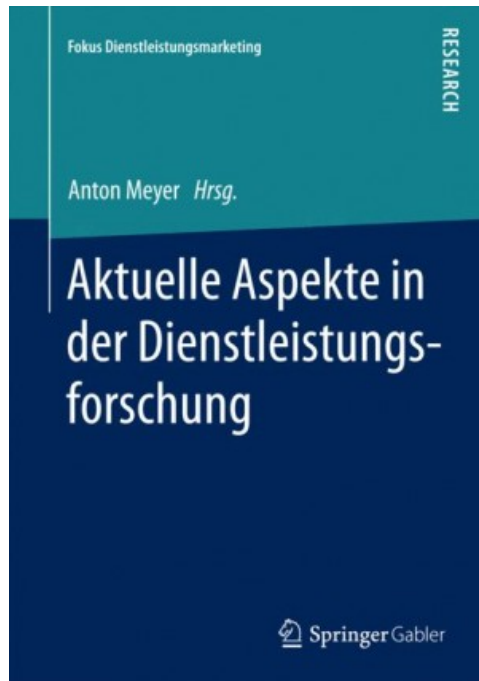
Alexander Pundt,
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Universität Mannheim

„Kundenorientierung, Work Engagement und emotionale Erschöpfung bei Mitarbeitern im Kundenkontakt – Welche Rolle spielen Humor, humorvolle Führung und eine humorvolle Teamatmosphäre?“

First Publications

Humor in Dienstleistungsinteraktionen – Was wir (nicht) wissen

Michael Kleinaltenkamp⁸/Christine Mathies⁹/Sarah Gansky¹⁰



The antecedents and consequences of humour for service

A review and directions for research

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Antecedents
and
consequences
of humour

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Abstract

Purpose – While researchers in other disciplines seek to determine the impact that humour has in personal interactions, studies of humour in service delivery are lacking. The purpose of this paper is to examine whether it is beneficial to deliberately use humour in service encounters.

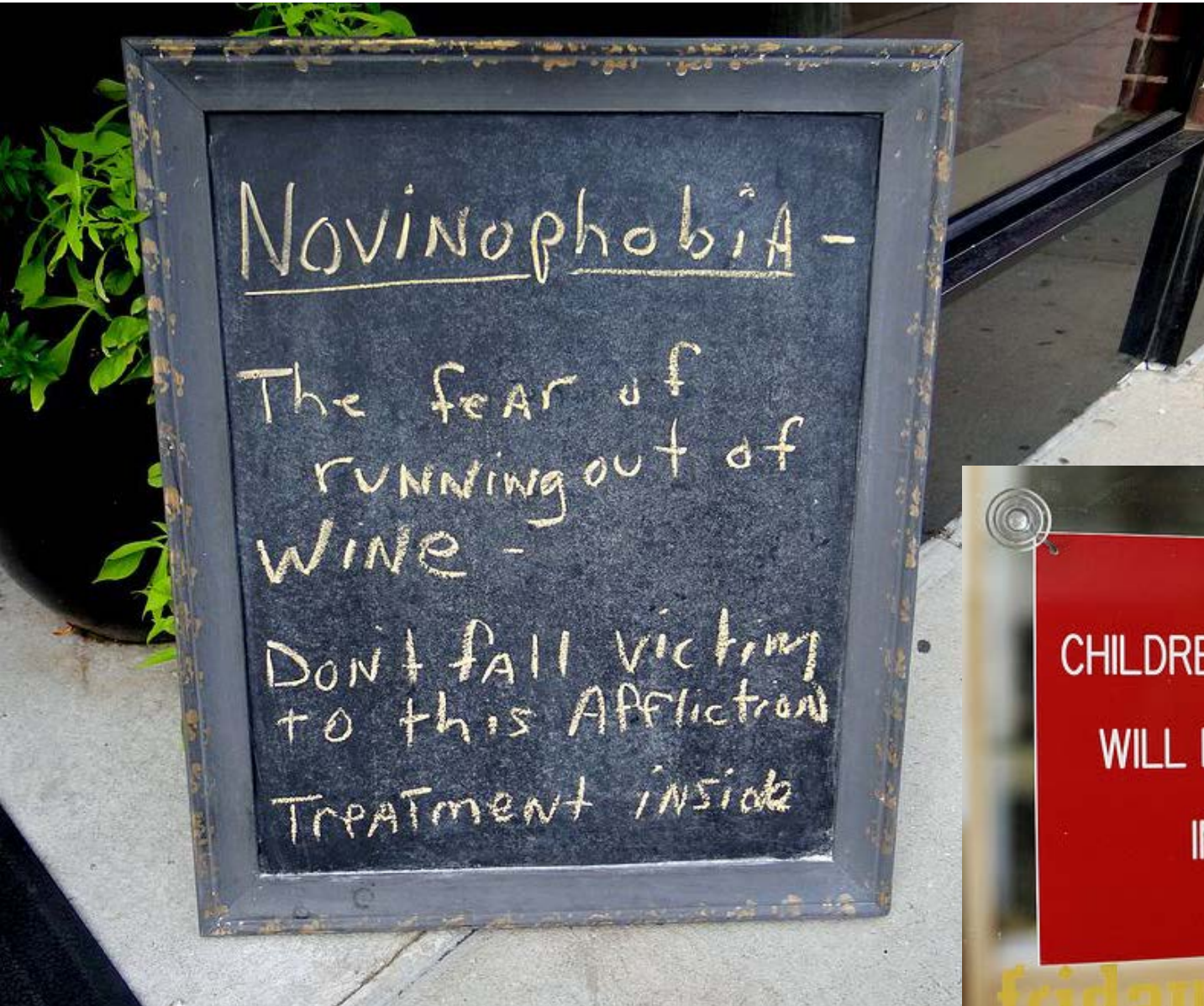
Design/methodology/approach – This paper provides a comprehensive review of humour research in multiple disciplines to assess the applicability of their key findings to the service domain. By establishing the antecedents, types, and consequences of humour, the authors build a framework and propositions to help service researchers uncover the potential of injecting humour into service interactions.

Findings – The authors find that using humour in service encounters is an ingenious affiliative behaviour which strengthens rapport between service employees and their customers. Humour also permits frontline service employees to better cope with the emotional challenges of their work, thus promising to reduce emotional labour and increase well-being. The effectiveness of service recovery efforts may also grow if employees use humour successfully to soften unpleasant emotional reactions and accept responsibility.

Originality/value – The authors explore cross-disciplinary humour research to apply the findings to the use of humour in service encounters. The authors also attempt to identify situations in which humour usage is most promising or beneficial, as well as its main beneficiaries.

Keywords Coping, Service recovery, Humour, Service encounters, Frontline service employees

Paper type Conceptual paper



Twitter Campaign of BVG


Milena Glimbovski @MilenaGlim · 14. Feb.
 Werd das Gefühl nicht los, die bvg finanziere #weilwirdichlieben durch ihre Schwarzfahrer_innen. Werde drei mal tägl. kontrolliert.


 5
  9
 


Weil wir dich lieben
 @BVG_Kampagne

@MilenaGlim Klaro. Neuer Hashtag ist übrigens: #weilwirdichkriegen






RETWEETS 4 FAVORITEN 13




alf frommer @siegstyle · 5. März
 Befinde mich gerade zwischen Jürgen aus Steglitz und Frank aus Marzahn.
 #weilwirdichlieben



 3
 


Weil wir dich lieben
 @BVG_Kampagne

@siegstyle Berghain oder U2?







FAVORIT 1



Twitter Campaign of BVG


AfD Berlin @AfDBerlin · 1 Std.
 Mit diesem schrägen Plakat will die biedere #BVG ihr Image verbessern
 #weilwirdichlieben So eine Kampagne kostet... fb.me/413kPzsz5


Weil wir dich lieben
 @BVG_Kampagne

.@AfDBerlin Okay, wir verzichten auf Plakate – wenn ihr das auch macht.






RETWEETS 5 FAVORITEN 6




the_peppermint @the_peppermint · 27. Feb.
 #weilwirdichlieben gibt es Zieharmonikagedudel unterbrochen von Ansagen Udo Lindbergs. In welchem Musikantenstadel bin ich gelandet? #U2


Weil wir dich lieben
 @BVG_Kampagne

@the_peppermint Erwartest du in einer Linie, die U2 heißt, ernsthaft gute Musik?






RETWEETS 3 FAVORITEN 11



What happened on May 30, 2016 ...



Polzeireporter

@PolReporter

Folgen

#weilwirdichlieben = #weilwirdichschieben, Stromlos
=Handarbeit 🙄🙄🙄 @BVG_Tram @BVG_Kampagne

04:22 - 31 Mai 2016

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Example Southwest Airlines

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A-HED

Humor Has Returned To Southwest Airlines

After Sept. 11 Hiatus, Flight Attendants Revive Their Efforts to Amuse Passengers

By RON SUSKIND Special to The Wall Street Journal

Updated Jan. 13, 2003 7:42 p.m. ET

"OK, people, it's open seating, just like at church -- saints up front, sinners in back," Yvonne LeMaster said into the flight attendant's microphone, as chuckling passengers filed from the ramp past the cockpit and tiny galley kitchen. "Remember, this isn't a furniture store. You're only renting this seat for an hour."




You can cultivate an environment focused on Safety and high performance, but it may not be a fun place to work.

Likewise, you can focus on having a fun place to work, but that won't last if the company is not achieving results.


Southwest Airlines is pretty special because our culture really developed in tandem [...].

Gary Kelly, President and CEO

Southwest Airlines Attendants on YouTube








flight attendant southwest airlines




Etwa 91.300 Ergebnisse

Filter ▾


DAS BESTE AUF YOUTUBE

-  Sport
-  Gaming
-  Nachrichten
-  Live
-  360°-Video


 Kanäle finden

Melde dich an, um deine Kanäle und Empfehlungen anzusehen.


Anmelden



Hilarious Southwest Flight Attendant
 Marty Cobb Smile High Club
 vor 2 Jahren • 22.435.274 Aufrufe
 Southwest flight attendant delivers hilarious PA.



Flight Attendant RAPPING the Safety Briefing! South West Airlines!
 EDY
 vor 6 Jahren • 1.555.823 Aufrufe
 A Pre Flight Safety RAP?! Now that's something you don't see everyday
 ~~~~~ Checkout: "The Notorious B.I.G - Juicy ...



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Kleinaltenkamp/Mathies/Chiew/Patterson: Customers' Reactions to Employees' Humor Use in Service Encounters

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## Virgin Active Mission Statement

"To challenge the norm, shake up the fitness industry, and restore average gym offerings with the revolutionary concept of a 'life centre'.

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VIRGIN ACTIVE  
HEALTH CLUBS



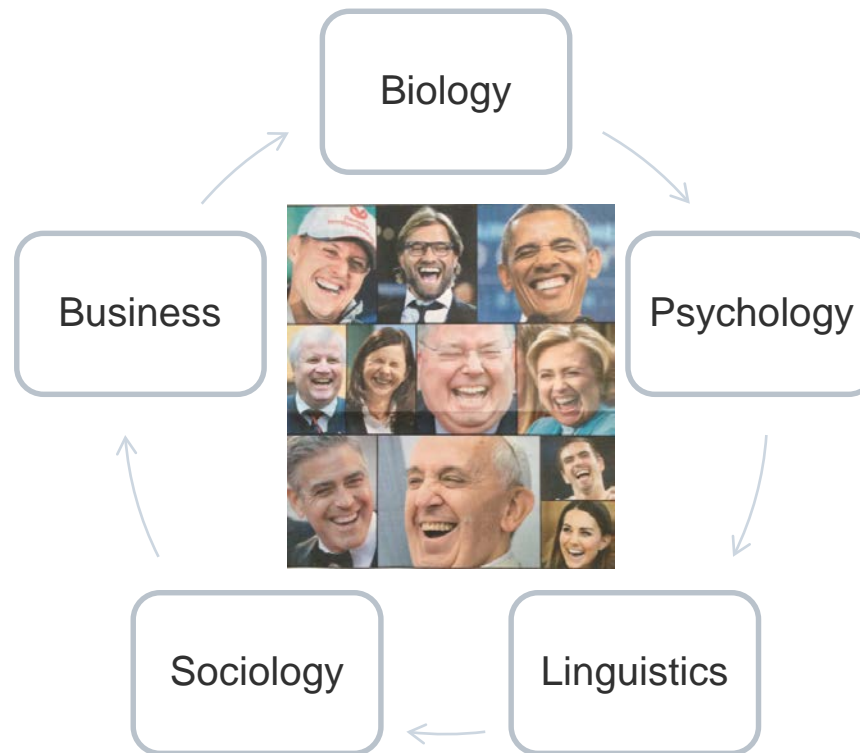
## Humour in Service Encounters

- Very little humor research in services, particularly in light of the central role of the service encounter.
- Service encounter = interpersonal interactions between customers and employees (Solomon et al., 1985; Shostack, 1985; Bitner et al. 1990).
- Service encounter “first and foremost social exchange between individuals” (Czepiel, 1990).
- Social exchange involves interpersonal communication.
- Humour is a distinct communication tool.

# Humor is a Multi-Disciplinary Field of Research

„Undoubtedly humor and laughing are essential parts of what it is to be human.”

(Lynch 2002, p. 423)





# What is Humour?

- **Humour**

= *All statements or actions of a sender being perceived as amusing by an addressee* (Martin 2006, p. 5).

→ Elicits positive cognitive or affective response

- **Sense of Humour**

= *“A way of looking at the world”* (Thorson & Powell, 2000, p.13)

Dimensions:

Humour Production, Coping With Humour, Humour Appreciation, Attitudes toward Humour

- **Need for Humour**

= *tendency to be funny & seek funny people and stories + appeal of humorous remarks* (Cline et al, 2003)

## Causes and Functions of Humour – Basic Theories

- **Incongruity theory** (e.g. Schopenhauer 1819)
  - humor primarily occurs where contradictions between ideal and reality are perceived as humorous
  - focuses on the cognitive processes involved in creating humor
- **Relief theory** (e.g. Freud 1940)
  - views humor as the relief of mental energies, which would otherwise be used to suppress feelings related taboo topics.
  - jokes are a tool to overcome restrained emotions
- **Superiority theory** (e.g., Gruner 1997)
  - traces humor back to a person viewed as superior
  - based on the belief that interpersonal interactions are daily competitions with winners and losers.



## What is Humour? (cont.)

- **Humour Types**

= distinctive form of humour, resulting from the sender's intention and behaviour

|                                  | <b>Target: other people<br/>(allo-centric)</b>                                                                                                                       | <b>Target: self<br/>(self-centric)</b>                                                                                 |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Positive<br/>(Benevolent)</b> | <b>Affiliative humour</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Facilitates relationship</li> <li>- Enhances interpersonal cohesiveness and attraction</li> </ul> | <b>Self-enhancing humour</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Regulates emotions</li> </ul>                    |
| <b>Negative<br/>(Harmful)</b>    | <b>Aggressive humour</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Puts down, hurts or alienates others</li> </ul>                                                    | <b>Self-defeating humour</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ingratiates others or avoids problems</li> </ul> |

(Adapted from Martin et al. 2003)



## Definition of Humour in Service Encounters

“**Humour** in a service context is a **form of communication** that **employees** and **customers** use to connect and elicit smile or laughter, with the **ultimate aim of pleasing and delighting the targets**, while also **regulating their own emotions.**”

“**Sense of humour** is a **personality trait** that governs the customer’s and employee’s **ability as both a sender and receiver** to successfully engage in humorous exchanges. It includes the **capacity to gauge a service situation** to appropriately create humour, but also to **perceive, enjoy and reciprocate** humorous remarks.”

# Relevant Findings for Humor Research in Services

## Humor in Social and Communication Research

- Social support, interpersonal affiliation, sense of closeness, coping, job and life satisfaction
- e.g. Curry & Dunbar, 2013; Dyck & Holtzman, 2013; Fraley & Aron, 2004; LaBelle, Booth-Butterfield, & Weber, 2013; Meyer, 2000; Robinson & Smith-Lovin, 2001; Treger, Sprecher, & Erber, 2013):

## Humor in Interpersonal Business Relationships:

- Humor use can be problematic, inappropriate, trivial and irrelevant (Martin 2006; Norrick & Spitz 2008)
- Failed humor can violate integrity and discredit sender's competence (Norrick & Spitz 2008).
- Humour reduces willingness to take risks (Kurtzberg et al. 2009).



## Research Gap

How does the customer-employee dyad pan out in the presence and/or absence of humor on one or both parts?

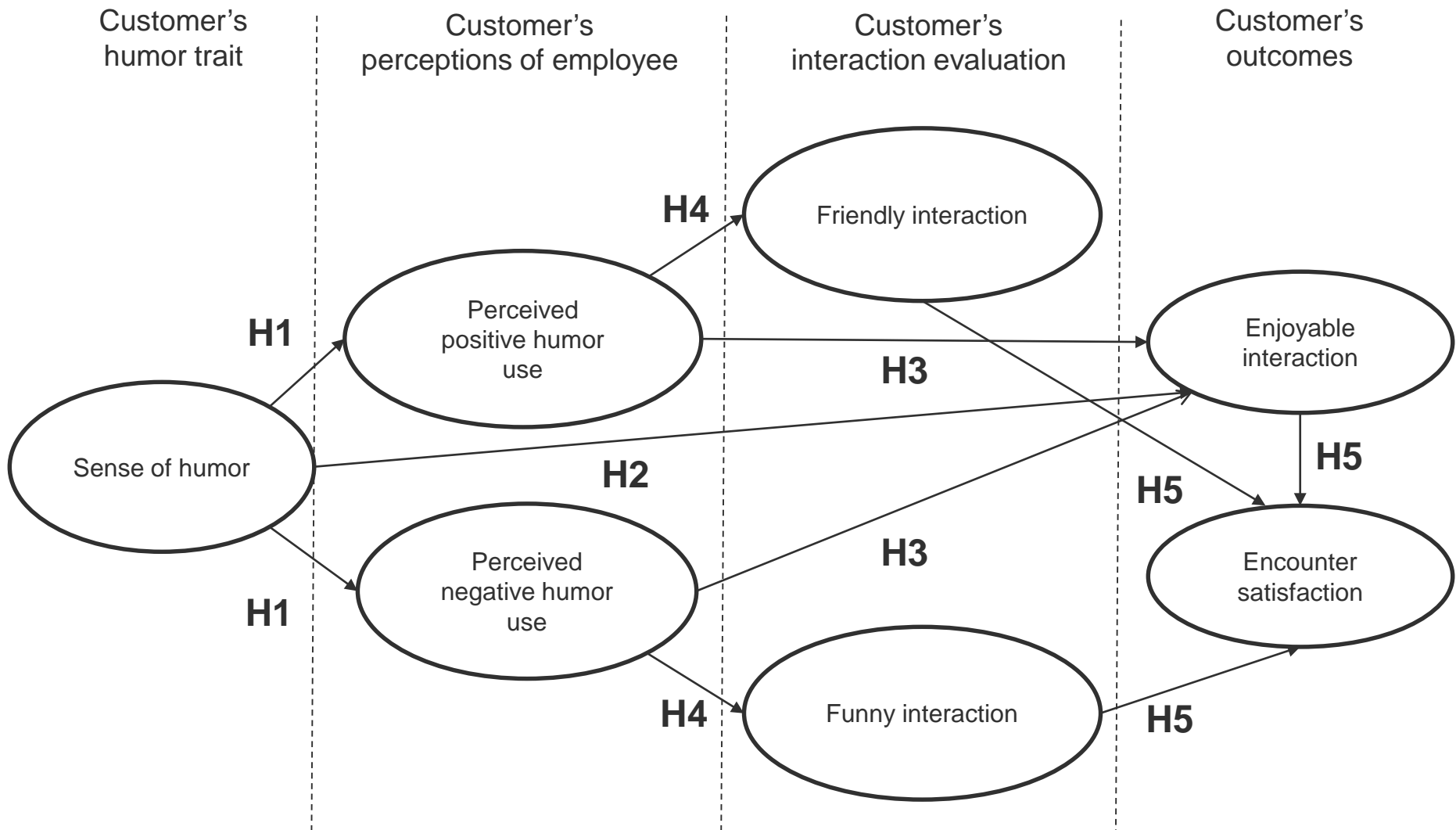
- Homophily theory (e.g., Lazarsfeld and Merton, 1954):  
Positive perceptions between pairs of individuals who are alike.
  - Social balance theory (Heider, 1946, 1958; Lewin, 1956; Newcomb, 1961):  
Structural arrangements between social actors are more stable if the affective ties are balanced, whereas, if arrangements create imbalance, e.g. in the form of ‘tension’ or ‘strain’, actors try to change their social arrangements in order to reduce such imbalance (Hummon & Doreian, 2003).
- Basic assumptions:
- Customers’ sense of humour and their perception of employees’ humour usage are subject to “fit”.
  - Positive/negative humor has the potential to enhance/diminish employee-customer relationships in the short- and long-term.

## Research Questions

1. What is the role of employees' humour use in service encounters?  
Does it really lead to positive outcomes for customers?
2. What is the impact of the customer?  
Are all jokes equal, or does it depend on the customer's humour-relevant personality traits?



# Research Model



## Characteristics of Happy Camper and Grouch

### Happy Camper

- Satisfaction mean = 4.36
- Enjoyable interaction factor mean = .128
- Perceive more humour of any type, especially positive
- Need their humour recognition 'activated' by employees' humour use
- Strong direct effect between positive humour perceptions and enjoyable interaction

### Grouch

- Satisfaction mean = 3.92
- Enjoyable interaction factor mean = -.121
- Positive and negative humour perceptions similar in strengths
- Humour recognition increases enjoyable interaction directly; limited need for activation
- Friendly interaction mediates effect of positive humour on enjoyable interaction
- Less likely to experience interaction as funny

**When**  /  **Meets**  / 

|                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>Grouch meets grouch</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Enjoy. interaction 0.13</li> <li>- Satisfaction 3.67</li> </ul>        | <p><b>Grouch Total</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Enjoy. interaction -0.11</li> <li>- Satisfaction 3.95</li> </ul>      | <p><b>Grouch meets clown</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Enjoy. Interaction -0.23</li> <li>- Satisfaction 4.10</li> </ul>      |
| <p><b>Happy camper meets grouch</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Enjoy. interaction -0.38</li> <li>- Satisfaction 3.71</li> </ul> | <p><b>Happy Camper Total</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Enjoy. interaction 0.17</li> <li>- Satisfaction 4.54</li> </ul> | <p><b>Happy camper meets clown</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Enjoy. interaction 0.24</li> <li>- Satisfaction 4.65</li> </ul> |

- Happy campers are easier to serve, but don't like grouchy staff!
- Grouches don't enjoy humour use, but it does not reduce their satisfaction.
- If enjoyable interaction is the end goal, humour use needs to account for customers' humour recognition
- If encounter satisfaction is most important, humour is a universal weapon

# Thank you!

