



Adding design value to Thai product with humour

Suttichart Sarapaiwanich

College of Design, Rangsit University, Pathum Thani, Thailand

Corresponding author, E-mail: sea_cret@hotmail.com

Abstract

Up until now, most Thai products have focused only on function and mass production, but have never evolved for a long time. As a result, they are unable to compete or differentiate with imported products that have more value with the same function. These imported goods are different due to new designs added through the research and development process. Therefore, this project aims to create unique designs that make Thai products familiar in everyday life. It is highly possible to extract value from Thailand's rich culture and unique traditional products and combine them with modern design to create new products.

From many research in global and Thai products, this project found that humour is one of the powerful design ingredients that have the potential to create a rich experience in the use of everyday products. As the Thai people are well known worldwide for their smiles and a sense of humour, this study hopes to identify the products that might benefit from this value addition. The selected Thai products for a starting point are Thai coffee wares that have maintained the same design for a very long time. By adding incongruous ideas from another Thai product together, the results are a set of new Thai coffee wares with humour as a value-added.

This project found a method of mixing and matching familiar designs together to make the possibility of value-added design to create unique Thai product designs that can potentially compete with imported products and achieve a sustainable export worldwide.

Keywords: *incongruity, humour, product design, familiar product, value-added design*

1. Introduction

Worldwide successful products always have good and unique designs to add value more than the general products with same functions. The unique design can be anything that made people need to pay for an additional cost.

Nick Babich suggested that to succeed in the modern and highly competitive market, companies need to do more than produce a good product or provide reliable service; they need to create a bond with their users. It is possible to create a bond by establishing an emotional connection with users. While designers can use various strategies for this, one of the most effective ways of building a relationship is by adding humour in design (Babich, 2018).

Carroll Noël found out that the word 'humour' came from the Latins, and history of humour research started by many Philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, Pascal, Hobbes, Kant, Hegel, Hazlitt, Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Freud, Bergson, and Koestler. They found five theories that created humour.

1. The superiority theory

It is the oldest theory started by Plato and Aristotle. In this theory, humour is used by placing oneself superior to others. In this theory, Humour is used on a target as a racist joke or poking fun on someone lower or stupid than the audience. So we laugh at fool moron jokes in different cultures. This kind of humour makes the audience feel cleverer than the target.

2. The incongruity theory

Humour from unexpected sources or surprise elements. It always depends on facts or how it should be. Black comedy also falls in this category appealing to the opposite of sentimental emotion. However, this kind of humour is related to knowledge, culture, and perception of the target.

3. The release theory

Humour is used as a tool to discharge of nervous energy. In another word, humour is the tool to present the nature of a free spirit. So Humour is released or released emotions of the target audience. In this



theory, humour transforms expectation to NOTHING that makes it comedy and amusing. An example of this theory is the riddle that gives an absurd or nonsensical answer.

4. *The play theory*

This humour will happen when we play some games with other people. There is a variety of play, like wordplay, action play, and idea play. In the theory of Play as a complement to the life of activity. Some play made humour as the results, but some do not. Playtimes in everyday life is necessary as a remedy of active life. This theory has turned out to be many games, including physical and digital games available today.

5. *The dispositional theory*

Here, humour is created by changing or swapping something to another position and encourage people to find the mistake & make them laugh when they find it out. This theory depends on the knowledge of people to know the reference of the joke.

Carroll Noël suggested that incongruity theory still seems to be the most promising because it offers the most informative approach to locating the structure of the intentional object of comic amusement, which allows us to employ it productively in comic analysis—enabling us to pinpoint and to dissect the designs that give rise to amusement in-jokes, plays, satires, and sitcoms. For example, we can begin to isolate what makes a joke funny by locating the perceived incongruity (or incongruities) to which it compels attention. Perceived incongruity, in other words, gives us a leg up on comprehending humour (Noël, 2014).

Chelsey Delaney decided to utilize incongruity theories for the research because of their focus on interaction. Incongruity theories incorporate the sender and receiver, in a two-way communicative process. The two steps include humour delivery (presenting an incongruity) and humour detection (resolving the incongruity). For example, think again about the computer mouse designed to look like a real mouse. The first step of the exchange is when the designer designs the product and the product is manufactured. The second step is when a user notes the humour in the product and purchases it because he or she has detected the incongruity (the joke), has resolved it and has enjoyed resolving it. Having this product in his or her home or office will also lead others to resolve the same incongruity, establishing a positive familiarity between them (Delaney, 2011).

Klein Sheri found that The major kinds of humour associated with contemporary product design include puns, paradoxes, and irony. Parody and satire are forms of humour that rely on imitation and mocking of and “attention to social norms, standards, morals, and human foibles” All kinds of humour have different functions and methods. The results of humour also vary the effects on people. (Sheri, 2007)

Donald Norman suggested a fundamental idea: attractive products work better. Attractiveness makes the user more tolerant of minor difficulties. However, attractiveness does not mean only beauty—it also means a genuine personality. Furthermore, when it comes to product design, there is one thing that helps us convey a personality—humour used effectively, humour can engage users and increase product stickiness. It can set your experience apart from others in a positive way. “Humour sells; It makes the experience of using your product more memorable” (Norman, 2004).

Many products use humour in design processes to added value and different experiences to users or consumers. The famous humour design like Alessi’s Juicy Salif citrus squeezer that became the iconic design icon from 1990. Designer Philippe Starck uses the different forms of ordinary kitchen tools to some kind of sculpture-like octopus or spaceship in sci-fi novels. This product makes people laugh after they realize what it is, or its intended function is. This product design used the incongruity theory by combined two different things together (Watson-Smyth, 2010).

Another example of humour in product design is Chindogu. Chindogu is the weird idea of products from Japan. Kenji Kawakami, the founder of Chindogu Design, described “They are not useful, but they are not completely useless either.” Michael Richey founded that Chindogu started from Kawakami’s column (1995) in a mail-order magazine that presents some weird design just for a gimmick, but it became popular by the reader. Kenji expanded his column to small businesses. However, the person who made Chindogu hit worldwide is Dan Papia by writing the article in English and collaborated with Kawakami on English language book 101 Unuseless Japanese Inventions: The Art of Chindogu (Richey, 2016).

Nevertheless, one of the Chindogu designs created by Kawakami in 1983 is a Self-Shutter stick for his film camera, and Minolta started to produce to market, but it failed at that time. However, in 2006



Canadian maker Wayne Fromm created selfie stick for use with smartphones and succeeded worldwide before he has known about Kawakami product. This case study is a good example of how useless design may become useful in another time and context.

Another humour product is Gashapon, that is a little toy in a round capsule case with lottery experiences. The buyer does not know the exact piece when they buy. Tim Hornyak founded the interesting case of the value of nonsense, or absurd design is “The Koppo no Fujiko” the set of Gachapon in series of Office Lady named Fujiko that can pose on the edge of things around like the lip of the cup. Now Fujiko has appeared in more than 1,500 versions and has sold over 20 million units (Hornyak, 2017).

2. Objectives

1. Research on successful product design worldwide
2. Research nonsense and humour theories
3. Use humour theories to adding value to familiar products in Thailand

3. Materials and Methods

The methods of design processes started with an analysis of the sense of humour used in successful products. The next step uses the information from humour analysis to sketch many concepts of familiar product designs to the new product by digital photo retouch technic in the Adobe Photoshop program. All of the retouched new products will be collected to create a presentation to the experienced designer for their comments to develop further.

4. Results

From the research about humour in the design area like products, advertising, design contents, this project found that the number of humour in each one is varied. Some design using just one humour but some use many. The next process focuses on the charts that analyse which theories or types of humour used in selected designs.

The following analysis chart uses the research of Chelsey Delaney that separates humour in design into two categories; referential and verbal; 3 theories; the superiority theory, the incongruity theory, and the release theory; and five types of humour; puns, paradox, irony, parody, and satire (Delaney, 2011).



Figure 1 Whistling Bird Teakettle

Table 1 Whistling Bird Teakettle Humour Analysis

Verbal	Referential	Incongruity	Superiority	Release	Puns	Paradox	Irony	Parody	Satire
	X	X						X	



Figure 2 Pint table

Table 2 Pint table Humour Analysis

Verbal	Referential	Incongruity	Superiority	Release	Puns	Paradox	Irony	Parody	Satire
		X		X		X		X	



Figure 3 Brasil Yoga Center Advertisement

Table 3 Brasil Yoga Center Advertisement Humour Analysis

Verbal	Referential	Incongruity	Superiority	Release	Puns	Paradox	Irony	Parody	Satire
	X	X				X		X	



Figure 4 Cheeky Butt Advertisement

Table 4 Cheeky Butt Advertisement Humour Analysis

Verbal	Referential	Incongruity	Superiority	Release	Puns	Paradox	Irony	Parody	Satire
	X	X	X					X	X



Figure 5 Toilet Paper Wipe Out Terrorism

Table 5 Humour Analysis

Verbal	Referential	Incongruity	Superiority	Release	Puns	Paradox	Irony	Parody	Satire
X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

After analysed these charts, it was found that the relationship between humour quantity and the type of design matter a lot. For example, consumer products, have incorporated 1 to 3 senses of humour in their design because too much humour tends to offend consumers in some ways. 4 to 6 senses of humour, were found in advertising or entertainment content that carefully targeted on a selected and proper group of consumers. However, more than seven levels of humour when added turned the design into the domain of art like Critical Design, Design Art or Conceptual art.

Table 6 Humour Quantities Analyse

Humour Quantity	Results
1-3	Consumer Products
4-7	Advertising, Entertainment, Content
8-10	Art, Critical Design, Design Art



Based on the research information, this project has finally chosen to focus on a consumer product that gives a delightful moment to people every time they use it because humour has a short life after the initial trigger of a laugh and depends quite a lot on each person, on their experience and prior references.

This project uses the incongruity theory as the main design concept to redesign familiar products from everyday life. The first process was to identify products in Thailand that has not changed for a long time as the starting point of this research project and selected the Thai traditional coffee wares to create the new delightful and modern products.



Figure 6 Coffee drip cup

Table 7 Humour Analysis

Verbal	Referential	Incongruity	Superiority	Release	Puns	Paradox	Irony	Parody	Satire
	X	X		X					

The first product is the coffee drip cup that uses the concept of Thai Northern-Eastern sticky rice basketry as a dripping part. This conceptual product tries to use two different familiar products in Thailand and combined into a new one. This cup might surprise and delight Thai users due to their references to everyday products.



Figure 7 Granma Double Drip

Table 8 Humour Analysis

Verbal	Referential	Incongruity	Superiority	Release	Puns	Paradox	Irony	Parody	Satire
X	X							X	

The second product is also a coffee dripping tool, but this concept uses the traditional, Thai coffee maker, instead. In the past, until now, Thai coffee uses the fabric bag to filter coffee grinds from hot water. Because of its long-form, this bag has a nickname “grandmother's breast” which is some kind of humour. So this new product uses two traditional coffee bags combined with modern metal stand for dripping double coffee cups. It also looks like a grandmother's breasts as a reference.



Figure 8 Four Dripping Cup

Table 9 Humour Analysis

Verbal	Referential	Incongruity	Superiority	Release	Puns	Paradox	Irony	Parody	Satire
	X	X		X					



The third concept is a four-dripping cup that combines the traditional seasoning holder that found in a street food shop in Thailand. This familiar design in a new function can drip four cups of coffee in once. This cup made by stainless steel coffee filter for reuse and did not need to use a paper filter. We did not wait for the dripping time in each coffee cup because we can change to drip another cup in round direction, so this design can quickly drip four cups than the regular drip process.



Figure 9 Set of Thai Coffee wares

Table 10 Humour Analysis

Verbal	Referential	Incongruity	Superiority	Release	Puns	Paradox	Irony	Parody	Satire
	X	X		X					

The fourth concept is the set of coffee drip wares. The combination of traditional Thai and modern drip kettle turns to be the interesting products with incongruity theory. The coffee cup also uses the Northern-Eastern sticky rice containers as the heat isolation part and basketry dripping cup as a set. We can change the heat isolation part and also design in many directions for sale in different seasons. The heat isolation part production also connects to the Northern-Eastern community to develop business along together. This model of business connection will be adding more value for the coffee shop, community, and country.

5. Discussion

From the four concept designs of coffee ware, this project found the way to adding value to familiar products by added incongruity theory into familiar product designs. These designs can make people laugh from their weird and quirky looks and are memorable to consumers. The concept that combines designs from a familiar product in the past with modern design also connects many generations of people. The new unique product design will hopefully spread out on social media due to their humorous quirks.

For good product design with humour, it is important to keep in mind the quantity and quality of humour selected to use in a design that can be useful and produces more value to familiar products in everyday life.

However, these design processes need the time to research and develop, so the price of the new products will be higher than the familiar and original products. The possible problem is the way to change the perception of Thai people to use new products other than imported ones at the same price.



6. Conclusion

This project found that good ideas for product design can come from nonsense or meaningless humour. These kinds of designs have the potential to attach to our emotions and give a memorable experience to the consumer. They also add value to familiar products found in our everyday life. For good product design with humour, it is important to keep in mind the quantity and quality of humour selected to use in a design that can be useful and produces more value to familiar products in everyday life.

7. Acknowledgement

This project would like to thank you Mr. Sridhar Ryalie for the suggestions and helpful advice during the research for this article and Dr. Warawan Suwannaphati for suggestions and edited advice for this article and all the MFA 2018 classmates for suggestions along with every presentation.

8. References

- Noël C. (2014). *Humour: A Very Short Introduction* (Very Short Introductions), Oxford, Kindle Edition.
- Delaney, C. (2011). *Humour-Centered Design: Using Humour as a Rhetorical Approach*. Political Science [Online]. Retrieved from <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Humour-Centered-Design%3A-Using-Humour-as-a-Rhetorical-Delaney/1b29a24be23c204c46ebf0e9c141cc1eb94995d8#paper-header>
- Norman, D. (2004). *Why We Love (or Hate) Everyday Things*. New York: Basic Books.
- Sheri, K. (2007). *Art and laughter*. London: Tauris Press.
- Watson-Smyth, K. (2010). The Secret History Of Philippe Starck's lemon squeezer. Retrieved from <https://www.independent.co.uk/property/interiors/the-secret-history-of-philippe-starcks-lemon-squeezer-1972849.html>
- Richey, M. (2016). Chindogu: The Unuseless Inventions of Kenji Kawakami [Online]. Retrieve from <https://www.tofugu.com/japan/chindogu-japanese-inventions>
- Babich, N. (2018). Using Humour in Design: Why, When, and How [Online]. Retrieved from <https://www.shopify.com/partners/blog/using-humour-in-design-why-when-and-how>
- Hornyak, T. (2017). Gachapon: Tracing the evolution of Japan's colorful toy capsules [Online]. Retrieved from <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/life/2017/08/19/lifestyle/gachapon-tracing-evolution-japans-colorful-toy-capsules/#.Xh10bi2B1yp>