Humor as a Social Media Strategy

A mixed-methods research on humor, its types, contingencies, and favorability

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Abstract

Problem: The social media era has forced brands and businesses to adapt to their shifting role with consumers. The interactive nature of platforms and the new social language has presented businesses and brands with new capabilities. Humor as a marketing strategy has proven to be desirable and effective throughout several contexts of marketing, however, its favorability and use as a social media strategy is lacking. The exploration of whether brands and businesses should incorporate humor in their social media strategy is essential, and central to several aspects: consumer communication, engagement, content creation and the attention economy.

Purpose: The purpose of this research is to explore the favorability and appreciation of humor as a social media strategy. The aim is to additionally develop an understanding of the humor types as well as how, when and to whom the incorporation of humor in a social media strategy is appreciated and favorable.

Method: This research adopted a mixed-method approach, a research design that involves more than one research method. A quantitative survey was constructed and completed by 373 individuals internationally, and eight qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted. As a sequential mixed method research design was adopted, a qualitative dominant mixed method data analysis was deemed most appropriate. To interpret the empirical findings and answer the research questions, a thematic analysis was conducted for the qualitative research, and a multiple regression analysis was conducted to analyze the quantitative data, as well as several frequency tables.

Results: The results identify that consumers appreciate a brand’s use of humor, and actively seek out humorous content on social media. Furthermore, personal characteristics such as age, gender, background, and experiences have been identified to aid in the question of to whom humorous content should be curated for. Moreover, seven contingencies to humor were found to influence consumers' appreciation towards humorous content on social media: prior brand evaluation, expectancy, authenticity, relatability and personability, severity and malintent, relevancy, and quality of the joke. Lastly, types of humor were not found significant with regards to perceived consumer appreciation.
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1. Introduction

This section will provide the reader with a background of the social media era, humor as a marketing strategy and a new contextualization. The problem, purpose, perspective, delimitations and research questions will be developed.

1.1 Background

The social media era has transformed and modernized the way businesses and consumers communicate today, ultimately strengthening their relationship (Drummond et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2014). As consumers and recipients of marketing efforts receive increased access to brands and businesses, their expectations continue to grow and their voice develops in both reach and strength (Dijkmans et al., 2015; Hajli, 2014; Killian & McManus, 2015; Rydén et al, 2015). As the role of the consumer changes, so do the challenges and considerably increased capabilities of businesses.

Interacting with consumers on social media platforms has proven to positively impact business reputations (Homburg et al., 2015), as well as become a new standard for practitioners. Furthermore, identifying a brand personality and adopting the right tone of voice can increase overall brand value (Aaker, 1997; Barcelos et al., 2018). The adoption of a specific brand personality as well as tone of voice allows consumers to resonate more with a brand and is influential with regards to relatability (Swaminathan et al., 2009) and purchase intent (Barcelos et al., 2018). Additionally, businesses and brands must acknowledge and account for the observer perspective when engaging with consumers online (Béal & Grégoire, 2021; Javornik et al., 2020; Johnen & Schnittka, 2019; Schaefers & Schamari, 2015; Shin & Larson, 2020). Brands must consider the shift of conversations having moved from the traditional one on one, to the one to many and account for consumers further developing their own beliefs about brands based on online conversations (Javornik et al., 2020; Johnen & Schnittka, 2019; Wang & Chaudhry, 2018).
A universal language that has been developed across platforms through the culture of connectivity are emoticons, emojis, animated stickers and graphic inter-change format (GIF). The use of non-verbals has become common practice and an expected form of communication from brands (Ge & Gretzel, 2018). Adapting to the new language in the social media era can be done in several ways, one of which is humor. Humor increases advertising effectiveness and positively influences the customer-brand relationship (Alden et al., 1993; Chan & Lowe, 2021; Chattopadhyay & Basu, 1990; Duong et al., 2020; McCullough & Taylor, 1993). Although humor is subjective, the incorporation of humor in advertising and communication has shown to be effective for businesses in multiple industries (Chattopadhyay & Basu, 1990; Chiew et al., 2019; Duong et al., 2020). Brands such as Bud Light and Joe Isuzu have generally been praised for their use of humor in advertising campaigns (Alden et al., 1993) and brands such as Tesco Mobile and Wendy’s have become especially known for their use of humor in response to online complaints (Béal & Grégoire, 2021). Humorous content draws more attention (Hsieh et al., 2012), and enhances positive emotions (Chan & Lowe, 2021; Eisend, 2010), which can impact purchase decisions (McCullough & Taylor, 1993). The incorporation of humor, visual symbols, and a human tone of voice allows consumers to perceive brands as more relatable and establish commonality (Béal & Grégoire, 2021; Ge & Gretzel, 2018; Xiao et al., 2017).

1.2 Problem Discussion

The notion that brands must adapt to multiple facets of the social media era, such as marketing mediums, the interactive environment, new platforms, and the generally visual nature of the social language, is well established and agreed upon. Businesses and brands continuously adapt to their shifting role with consumers and constantly seek to understand and engage their audiences (Dijkmans et al., 2015; Hajli, 2014; Killian & McManus, 2015; Rydén et al, 2015; Xiao et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2014). An advertising strategy that has existed for decades, however only recently been introduced as an aspect of the new language mode, is humor. Traditionally, humor has famously been used in television commercials and print but more recently been extended into online brand communities (Duong et al, 2020), influencer marketing (Barry & Graça, 2018),
product placement (Chan & Lowe, 2021), crisis management (Xiao et al., 2017), customer service experiences (Chiew et al., 2019), a response to online complaints (Béal & Grégoire, 2021) and consumer targeted advertising (McCullough & Taylor, 1993). How humor works with regards to its appeals and affective responses has previously been researched, however restricted to the contexts mentioned above. The field of humor as a marketing strategy in social media has not yet been clarified in previous literature. Academics agree on several functionalities of humor, and strongly agree that it is not always appropriate and appreciated (Béal & Grégoire, 2021; Chattopadhyay & Basu, 1990; Cline & Kellaris, 2007). Understanding and exploring whether brands and businesses should incorporate humor in their social media strategy is essential, not only to their marketing strategy but their continued communication and engagement with consumers as well as throughout the adoption of the new social language. Given the interactive nature of social media and customer-brand relationships, the favorability and appreciation of humor from their target market is decisive. Several modern contexts of the use of humor in marketing have proven to be effective and desirable, the question becomes if it is applicable, favorable, and appreciated in the context of social media.

1.3 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore whether the incorporation of humor in a social media strategy consistently proves to be favorable and appreciated. More specifically, the social media era has developed new language modes as well as tones, forcing brands and businesses to adapt (Béal & Grégoire, 2021; Ge & Gretzel, 2018; Javornik et al., 2020; Johnen & Schnittka, 2019; Shin & Larson, 2020; Zhao et al., 2020). As humor is a type of informal language (Béal & Grégoire, 2021), one which has garnered much attention and use over the past couple of decades (Alden et al., 1993; Chan & Lowe, 2021; Chattopadhyay & Basu, 1990; Duong et al., 2020; McCullough & Taylor, 1993; Shin & Larson, 2020), the expectation that brands and businesses should incorporate humor into their social media strategy is reasonable. However, the question of whether the incorporation of humorous content is advantageous for brands, given their target market, remains. When adopting all aspects of the new social language, brands must take their audience, desired outcomes, and potential consequences into consideration. With the initial
purpose of exploring whether the incorporation of humor in a social media strategy is favorable and appreciated, the understanding of how, when and to whom becomes essential.

1.4 Perspective

The perspective taken throughout this research is that of the consumer, target market and audience. As this study aims to measure the favorability and appreciation of humor as a social media strategy, as well as explore the relationship between individual characteristics, types of humor and its use, the most natural direction is to adopt the perspective of those consuming the humorous content. Both the primary qualitative and quantitative data will follow in this nature.

1.5 Delimitations

This study is delimited to the perspective of the consumers and whether humor is favorable and appreciated in the context of social media. This study aims to explore and understand whether humor should be incorporated throughout the social media strategy of brands and not whether it is superior. Furthermore, a limitation to the study is whether it is effective in the context of social media as the purpose is to measure and investigate its favorability and appreciation amongst consumers.

1.6 Research Questions

**RQ #1:** How favorable is the incorporation of humor in a social media strategy?

**RQ #2:** Does the relationship between humor appreciation and individual characteristics depend on the type of humor?

**RQ #3:** Why and under which circumstances is humor as a social media strategy favorable and appreciated by consumers?
2. Frame of Reference

The existing literature is reviewed in this section, which will provide the reader with a deeper understanding of the subject, as well as theories and concepts that are fundamental to this paper. Lastly, this section presents a conceptual model developed by the researchers.

2.1 The Social Media Era

In 2019 it was estimated that approximately 44% of the world’s population used social media, accounting for billions of individuals globally (Wang et al., 2021). Social media has become one of the most significant technologies of this era, and therefore an important communication- and marketing tool for organizations and businesses (Appel et al., 2019; Hajli, 2014). The average social media user spends more than two hours daily on an array of social platforms (Wang et al., 2021).

In the 1990’s a new era emerged as the launch of networking platforms afforded direct communication between businesses and consumers, drastically changing the nature of their relationship as well as the characteristics of their communication (Drummond et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2014). This era is referred to as the social media era (Wang et al., 2021). Social media's increase in popularity can be accredited to the interactive, and inherently social nature of platforms. The interactive nature of platforms allows for both parties to initiate as well as cultivate conversation and ultimately develop deeper relationships (Xiao et al., 2017). Platforms can be perceived as a marketers go-to tool for socialization and information sharing (Zhang et al., 2014). The definitional perception of social media is deliberately broad, however, can be divided into two key aspects; the platform which refers to the technological aspects and the use cases, referring to how individuals and businesses use the technology and for which purpose (Appel et al., 2019). Adopting a practical perspective, social media is simply a software presented as websites and applications providing users with digital settings to send, receive or exchange information, digital content, and creations (Appel et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2021).
The social media era has increased the expectations of consumers and branded communication. Before social networks, brands typically communicated to consumers via television and radio (Killian & McManus, 2015). However, today brands are expected to interact with consumers in accordance with their terms and conditions, such as desired time, content and channel (Dijkmans et al., 2015; Hajli, 2014; Killian & McManus, 2015; Rydén et al., 2015). Furthermore, the social media era has enabled consumers to form their own perceptions as well as unique assumptions of organizations. Before the rise of social media, information was mostly spread via traditional news media, as it played a dominant role in the conception of organization's reputations. Today however, information and reputation construction are mostly developed by consumers and social media users as they have been given a voice and a platform to spread it on (Dijkmans et al., 2015; Etter et al., 2019; Malthouse et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2021).

### 2.2 Engagement and Customer Relations

In contrast to traditional customer relationship management (CRM), which mainly refers to how corporations manage their relationships with customers, the digital era has challenged companies to adopt a convergence of CRM, referred to as social CRM. In traditional CRM, companies gather extensive information regarding their customers, segment their audience and ultimately develop targeted marketing activities. Traditionally, customers adopted a very passive role in the maintenance of the relationship, as their specific characteristics, consumption patterns and purchase behavior were considered value sufficient (Malthouse et al., 2013). Social CRM however, has changed and developed the role of customers. Customers are no longer limited, adopt a passive role, or are perceived as simply data. Social media has increased access to information regarding competitors, given customers the opportunity to filter out advertising, and allowed customers to express opinions to large audiences. Despite these affordances being seemingly negative for firms, the shift of the customer role offers firms the opportunity to listen and engage with consumers, which is crucial as consumers contribute to company growth (Dijkmans et al., 2015; Malthouse et al., 2013).
The role of content engineering has become central for firms in the social media era. The objective is to develop- and produce content that engages a specific targeted group of users and generate activity (Lee et al., 2018). Lee et al. (2018) found that certain types of content increase engagement more than others. For example, content that is brand personality related increases engagement more than informative content. Furthermore, informative content is not necessarily inferior or defective, rather, it possesses the ability to directly influence users to purchase a product or service. Different types of content simply generate different consumer reactions. For example, users are persuaded to share brand personality-influenced content including attributes such as humor and emotions. Whereas informative content such as pricing and product comparisons have a positive impact on click-through rates, especially when special deals and discounts are displayed.

With regards to interactions, firms can similarly adopt either an active or passive role in online conversations. An active role requires engagement through direct interaction, such as, replying to comments, establishing, and maintaining discussion and encouraging general activity. However, consumer engagement is dependent on factors such as communication type, social needs, interests, and segments (Homburg et al., 2015). Moreover, interaction and engagement have become more of a necessity than a choice. Engaging with customers has a positive impact on corporate reputation, particularly among non-customers (Dijkmans et al., 2015).

Killian & McManus (2015) present four consumer-driven categories for social media integration: relationship management, news gathering, creativity and entertainment. Furthermore, Killian & McManus (2015) argue that firms should be consistent in their character and brand image to achieve authenticity. As firms experience complaints and negative comments on their social media channels, they must listen to, and respond to these with caution and a personalized tone. Communication styles differ throughout organizations; Barcelos et al. (2018) present two different tone of voice concepts, both which are significant in initial stages of consumer interaction. Whether organizations choose to adopt a human or corporate tone of voice is an important factor as it bears implications on consumer attitudes and hedonic value of the brand.
2.3 The Observer Perspective

As companies regularly experience negative online communication in the form of reviews and public complaints, they must take into consideration the shift of conversations having moved from the traditional one on one, to the one to many (Béal & Grégoire, 2021; Javornik et al., 2020; Johnen & Schnittka, 2019; Shin & Larson, 2020; Schaefers & Schamari, 2015). The observer perspective refers to those who perceive, observe, and further process online interactions between brands and consumers (Johnen & Schnittka, 2019). Management must now develop new appropriate communication approaches to ensure that their responses are well received by both the initiator and the numerous online observers (Béal & Grégoire, 2021). From the observer perspective, complaints are relatively low risk allowing them to focus on aspects such as fairness, friendliness and the interaction itself, opposed to the formality of the incident (Javornik et al., 2020). The nature of social media and the consumer’s new role has not only heightened velocity, emotionality, and communality (Wang et al., 2021), but forced businesses to redefine the boundaries of their communication. Observers in the virtual audience can consist of former customers, future customers, or just casual onlookers adding value to their understanding. The number of observers to an online communication is naturally greater than just the initiator themselves, thus accounting for more value with regards to overall brand perception (Johnen & Schnittka, 2019). Furthermore, observers in the virtual audience may ultimately decide to partake in the conversation (Schaefers & Schamari, 2015). Responding to online complaints allows the observer to further develop their own conclusion regarding the situation as well as general brand beliefs (Javornik et al., 2020; Johnen & Schnittka, 2019; Wang & Chaudhry, 2018).

Management response strategies consist of two categories: accommodative and defensive. Accommodative responses, ones that include compensation and apologies, have shown to be the most effective strategy; whereas remaining silent, being defensive and rejecting responsibility through excuses and denial is less favorable (Johnen & Schnittka, 2019; Zhao et al., 2020). Recently, businesses have incorporated humor in their communication strategies rather than solely being accommodative. Evidence supports humor being an effective and positive communication strategy, as it has gained popularity and attracted attention on social media. However, the observer perspective introduces an aspect of complexity as a humorous response may be perceived as
inappropriate and a lack of responsibility and joke making (Béal & Grégoire, 2021). The effect of humor in service recovery depends on the type of humor incorporated and the tone of the initiator (Shin & Larson, 2020).

2.4 Emojis, GIFs and Tone of Voice

2.4.1 A New Language Mode

Social media and its interactive nature have created new language forms, unique affordances, a new communication culture and an array of consumer stimulations. The culture of connectivity regularly tests user’s and brand’s social media language proficiency, one of which consists of several modes of expression: animated stickers, graphics inter-change format (GIF), emoticons and emojis. As these new language forms are increasingly utilized on social media and throughout consumer interactions, its adoption is decisive. Recent studies showed that message creation is more impactful than distribution, and the ability to influence consumer purchasing decisions derives from the understanding and use of the new social media language (Ge & Gretzel, 2018). Language and communication styles go beyond the written word to include other elements such as musicality, graphic elements, emoticons, and speaker avatars (Barcelos et al., 2018).

2.4.2 Emojis and Visual Symbols

Ge & Gretzel (2018) describe emojis as a universal language across platforms and cultures as well as a language that has the ability to convey ideas independent of a particular spoken language. Emojis have become an integral aspect of social media marketing as they are multifaceted and multifunctional. Emojis not only convey emotional but factual information, generate small talk, represent speech, connect users, facilitate conversation, as well as strengthen, modify, and trigger engagement. With the desired outcomes of customer engagement, brands and firms must stimulate desirable consumer responses. Ge & Gretzel (2018) further argue that social media is based on an attention economy, where the most valuable resource is attention. Emojis, being visual and graphic
representations of facial expressions, objects, moods etc., have the ability to capture user attention and garner responses. Emojis as well as other visual symbols can be considered attention cues, and therefore truly valuable to firms communicating in the social media era.

2.4.3 Tone of Voice

An additional affordance of social media’s interactive nature is the preference for informal language use and a human tone of voice (Xiao et al., 2017). Signaling cues are cues that convey information about a brand that consequently help consumers form opinions and brand attitudes. Two signaling cues explored by Javornik et al. (2020) are tone of voice and length of reply. As both textual and non-textual cues affect consumer judgements, they should both be perceived as valuable. A conversational human voice (CHV) has advantages to the traditional corporate voice. A corporate voice maintains consistency throughout communication and is formal as well as persuasive. A conversational human voice presents as more human-like, is easier to form relationships with, appears friendlier and expresses greater empathy and understanding (Javornik et al., 2020). The tone of voice adopted by a firm can be influential in shaping consumer’s attitudes. Furthermore, a human tone of voice increases purchase intention in a hedonic context (Barcelos et al., 2018). Xiao et al. (2017) explored the effectiveness of humor in crisis response messages on social media. Given the informal and human voice of humor, as well as the interactive and stimulus-seeking nature of social media, the authors expected the characteristics to benefit and amplify one another. Despite varying findings, confidence and attitude were two of the dimensions influenced by consumer perception during a humorous crisis response.

2.5 Humor as a Strategy

2.5.1 Introduction to Humor in Media

Humor has not only become common practice in advertising but has been pronounced as an effective communication and marketing tool for content creators (Chiew et al., 2019; Duong et al.,
With a variation across mediums, approximately 10%-30% of all advertisements use humor (Krishnan & Chakravarti, 2003), and one in five television commercials contain humorous appeals (Eisend, 2010). Humor has continuously been attributed to memorable television commercials as it positively enhances advertising effectiveness (Alden et al., 1993). Brands such as Bud Light and Joe Isuzu have generally been praised for their use of humor in advertising campaigns (Alden et al., 1993) and brands such as Tesco Mobile and Wendy’s have become especially known for their use of humor in response to online complaints (Béal & Grégoire, 2021). Moreover, humor has been adopted and proven successful in multiple and diverse product categories such as wine coolers, cars, fiberglass etc. (Chattopadhyay & Basu, 1990). Furthermore, humor has been adopted throughout an array of marketing mediums, techniques and types, such as product placement (Chan & Lowe, 2021), customer service experiences (Chiew et al., 2019), video content (Barry & Graça, 2018; Hsieh et al., 2012), crisis management (Xiao et al., 2017), influencer marketing (Barry & Graça, 2018), a response to online complaints (Béal & Grégoire, 2021), online brand communities (Duong et al., 2020), consumer targeted advertising (McCullough & Taylor, 1993) as well as traditional mediums such as television commercials and print (Alden et al., 1993; Chattopadhyay & Basu, 1990; Cline & Kellaris, 2007; Eisend, 2010; Krishnan & Chakravarti, 2003). The use of humor as a marketing strategy is prominent and contextual. Brands and corporations acknowledge humor as valuable and as a rich source of potential increase in marketing effectiveness.

2.5.2 How and Why Humor Works

The notion that humor increases advertising effectiveness and/or positively influences an aspect of the customer-brand relationship is explicit (Alden et al., 1993; Chan & Lowe, 2021; Chattopadhyay & Basu, 1990; Duong et al., 2020; McCullough & Taylor, 1993). Humor's ability to cut through the advertising clutter has undoubtedly been one of its strongest attributes (Chan & Lowe, 2021; Krishnan & Chakravarti, 2003). Research regarding humor as a marketing technique and strategy have varied in focus and targeted outcome. The contextualization of prior research within humor and marketing bear great implications on its practicality as humor is individual and subjective from the onset. However, underlying principles, reasons and functionalities of humor remain constant. 1) **Humorous advertisements and content draw more attention.** According to
Hsieh et al. (2012) humorous videos are the most frequently viewed type of content online. Despite differences of beliefs amongst authors in the field, a consensus concerning the notion that humorous ads grab more attention has been declared. Cline & Kellaris (2007) argue that humor enhances initial attention, aids brand recall, and holds attention. Furthermore, the authors argue that advertisements that incorporate humor outperform non-humorous advertisements on the basis of sustained attention. 2) Humor elicits emotion. Generally speaking, advertisements that use humor induce a greater liking. Humor ultimately reduces negative affect and enhances positive affect (Eisend, 2010). Moreover, humor creates a positive emotional response, which consequently has the ability to positively impact purchase intention and decision (McCullough & Taylor, 1993). Regardless of which emotion humor elicits, given that it is individual and subjective, the elicitation of emotion itself strengthens a consumer's reaction. Consumers may be more inclined to share their emotions or content with others, build stronger relationships to the brand or others in the community, influence brand attitude, closer resemble the human voice and therefore lead to greater acceptance or a conversational reaction (Xiao et al., 2017). 3) Humor is a desirable characteristic and a feature likely to induce a good mood. A good sense of humor is considered a “social quality of considerable worth” (Cann & Matson, 2014, p. 176). Moreover, humor captivates audiences and positively influences mood (Chan & Lowe, 2021). 4) Humor is related to interpersonal relationships (Chiew et al., 2019).

The final two underlying principles of humor are notions that are influenced by their contextualisation and therefore lack universal agreement. The statements that 5) Humor influences processing resources and 6) Humor influences brand attitudes can be agreed upon but how is the disputing factor. Chattopadhyay & Basu (1990) argue that despite knowing that humorous advertisements are processed more, the act of processing does not infer anything about consumer judgment impacts. Krishnan & Chakravarti (2003) argue that strong humor attracts processing resources through breaking the advertising clutter, and that if the right balance between humor strength and relevance is not achieved a payoff between attracting processing resources and encoding and retrieval will have to be made. Furthermore, Chan & Lowe (2021) argue that humor in a message most likely activates the controlled process which pushes consumers to pay closer attention and ultimately find the advertisement harder to ignore.
2.6 The Types of Humor

Critical in understanding research regarding humor are the different types of humor. Throughout prior research, three main sets of humor characteristics were identified. Chiew et al. (2019) typifies humor as affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive and self-defeating; this categorization further conceptualizes consumers' perception of humor types into two dimensions: other-directed humor and self-directed humor. The authors created the dimensions of other-directed and self-directed humor as an effort to understand humor from the consumer perspective. In the context of frontline employees and service experiences, Chiew et al. (2019) describes self-directed as humorous remarks an employee makes about themselves and other-directed as targeting others. Chiew et al. (2019) further differentiates between types of humor and having a sense of humor, describing it as a personality trait.

Secondly, McCullough & Taylor (1993) claim that the different types of humor are aggressive, sexual, nonsense, warm and puns. McCullough & Taylor (1993) based their initial dimensions of the humor types on Freud’s identification of “tendencious (aggressive and/or sexual) and nontendencious (nonsense) wit” (McCullough & Taylor, 1993, p. 19).

Lastly, Barry & Graça (2018) claim that there are five different types of humor: comic wit, sentimental, satire, sentimental comedy, and full comedy. The authors base their types of humor on incongruity-resolution, arousal-safety, and humorous disparagement, which are methods used to generate humor. Incongruity, also mentioned by Hsieh et al. (2012) as perhaps the most popular type of humor used in advertising, assumes that processes and cognitive stimuli takes place in the form of an ‘Aha-hah!’ moment. Incongruity is synonymous with the lack of harmony or compatibility, thus as the initial incongruity or contradiction begins to resolve itself, we reward ourselves with clarity and with understanding (Barry & Graça, 2018). As laughter, resolvement and relief are a result of cognitive processing, the generation of humor is dual as it needs resolution.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affiliative</td>
<td>“Targets others in a benign way, usually in everyday situations, and can be used to facilitate relationships and foster engagement, and decrease personal tensions” (Chiew et al., 2019, p. 112).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Enhancing</td>
<td>A “...positive form that relates to the self. People who practice this type of humor exhibit a happy attitude and ability to laugh at little things. It also constitutes a sort of mental defense mechanism and a coping strategy, in that it can help people regulate their emotions” (Chiew et al., 2019, p. 112).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive</td>
<td>Is “…characterised by the use of sarcasm, put-downs, teasing and other such forms, at the expense of others” (Chiew et al., 2019, p. 112).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Defeating</td>
<td>A negative humor type “...but it relates to the self, such that a sender tries to make others happy by putting himself or herself down” (Chiew et al., 2019, p. 112).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive</td>
<td>A humor type that “…is used to achieve or maintain superiority, encourage group morale and cohesion, or deal with uncomfortable topics” (McCullough &amp; Taylor, 1993, p. 19).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual</td>
<td>Humor that “…sublimates or expresses sexual pleasure or disappointment” (McCullough &amp; Taylor, 1993, p. 19).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonsense</td>
<td>“Incongruity or nonsense humor has also been noted in transnational advertising. Some researchers argue that incongruity alone is enough to create humor, while others indicate that humor is a two-step process in which incongruity is perceived and then resolved. The more challenging the incongruity, the more humorous the relief. Such playfulness in humor allows us to become illogical and to escape the bonds of the daily world” (McCullough &amp; Taylor, 1993, p. 19).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warm</td>
<td>Humor that “...appears to be more gentle, loving, and serene [...] warm humor creates empathy in the audience and has been noted in advertising world-wide” (McCullough &amp; Taylor, 1993, p. 20).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puns</td>
<td>A verbal humor that “...is often difficult to extend such humor to other cultures, given its close tie to language” (McCullough &amp; Taylor, 1993, p. 20).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comic Wit</td>
<td>‘‘...is derived from the incongruity-resolution often exemplified in unexpected twists, odd behaviors, unusual settings, or unrealistic exaggerations’’ (Barry &amp; Graça, 2018, p. 163).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentimental</td>
<td>‘‘...is derived from arousal-safety often exemplified through childlike fantasies, naughtiness, or inner secrets’’ (Barry &amp; Graça, 2018, p. 163)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satire</td>
<td>‘‘...combines elements or incongruity-resolution and disparagement’’ (Barry &amp; Graça, 2018, p. 163)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentimental Comedy</td>
<td>‘‘...type of humor is often exemplified through hysteria, belligerence, and other forms of unleashed repression’’ (Barry &amp; Graça, 2018, p. 163)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Comedy</td>
<td>“This rich form of humor is often exemplified through social order deviancy that combines taboos (arousal-safety), disparagement (society satire), and unexpected behaviors (incongruity-resolution)” (Barry &amp; Graça, 2018, p. 163).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.6.1 A Classification of the Humor Types

Although prior research defines the types of humor differently, a theme or classification of sorts becomes clear. Each author and article described 1) a type of humor that required cultural or individual understanding, which can be termed personal and community-based humor for the
purpose of this study. Examples of personal and community-based humor are puns, limericks or jokes that are linguistic, require prior knowledge and/or a deep understanding of the culture the humor was presented in. 2) A type of humor that was self-directed and negative, which can be termed self-deprecating humor for the purpose of this study. 3) A type of humor that involves exaggeration, twists, unusual settings or the resolution of a contradiction, which can be termed wit and one-liners for the purpose of this study. Lastly, 4) a type of humor that was characterized as aggressive and malintentive, which can be termed malicious humor for the purpose of this study.

2.7 The Cons of Humor

Despite the many advantages and unique capabilities of incorporating humor into a marketing strategy, the subjectivity and individuality of humor remains a major weakness; humor is not always perceived and appreciated equally by everyone. Individual differences, backgrounds, experiences, and senses of humor most likely influence a consumer’s receptivity to humorous stimuli (Cline & Kellaris, 2007). Given the intrinsic personal nature of humor, humorous advertisements and marketing efforts are more ambiguous and open to idiosyncratic interpretation. Additionally, humor is simply inappropriate in many situations (Chattopadhyay & Basu, 1990). Furthermore, Chattopadhyay & Basu (1990) argue that it is unreasonable to expect that humorous advertisements are more effective than those that are non-humorous in all conditions. Given this uncertainty, marketers must decide if the payoff between risk and reward is worth the potential benefits associated with humor. Finally, as previously mentioned, humor elicits emotions (Eisend, 2010) which strengthens reactions. If the attempted humorous appeal fails or is perceived incorrectly, the negative reaction will be just as strong as that of the positive would it have been a success.
2.8 Contingencies and Influences of Humor

Eight contingencies to humor were identified throughout the literature review process: prior brand evaluation, expectancy, humor strength and relevance, need for humor, message relatedness and authenticity, actor prominence, level of severity and involvement, and brand personality.

1) **Prior brand evaluation** characterizes a recipient’s brand evaluation prior to consuming content. Recipients maintaining a favorable prior brand evaluation are more likely to be receptive and less critical than those who have a negative prior brand evaluation. Prior evaluation is significant as humorous content has a greater persuasive impact than non-humorous content when the recipient has a positive prior evaluation (Chattopadhyay & Basu, 1990).

2) **Expectancy** encompasses two factors. Expectancy refers to the consumer’s anticipation that humor will be used in the context of the advertisement, i.e., less likely to use humor in a documentary or action program, and therefore grabs more attention and becomes memorable (Chan & Lowe, 2021). Expectancy also refers to the degree to which content differs from expectation of acceptable beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors (Lee & Lim, 2008).

3) **Humor strength and relevancy** is associated with content effectiveness. Humor strength is the content’s “potential for eliciting a humorous response independent of its brand or product context.” (Krishnan & Chakravarti, 2003, p. 231). Humor relevance refers to whether the humorous content is meaningfully linked to brand claims. The effectiveness of content is based on the right balance between the two concepts (Krishnan & Chakravarti, 2003).

4) **Need for humor (NFH)** “is a personality trait that refers to one’s tendency to generate and seek out humor.” (Cline & Kellaris, 2007, p. 57). Perceptions of humor and individual differences are important to take into consideration as what is funny and humorous are not always universal. Individuals with a high NFH are expected to consume humorous stimuli more readily than those that maintain a low NFH (Cline & Kellaris, 2007).

5) **Message relatedness and authenticity** refers to the degree in which the underlying message of the content is linked to the product and sentiment of the brand (Cline & Kellaris, 2007).
Furthermore, authenticity reflects the degree of truth and transparency in the message. The message delivered by the brand or business should be coherent with its general character so a mismatch in the eyes of the consumers does not occur (Wang et al., 2021).

6) Actor prominence refers to the level of visibility of a brand or business. Highly prominent actors typically have larger, more active and a more attached group of followers (Wang et al., 2021).

7) Level of severity and involvement refers to the potential amount of financial, human or environmental damage the humor can cause and ultimately the degree to which the nature of the brand’s and businesses’ products contribute to the appropriateness of humor (Wang et al., 2021).

8) Brand Personality refers to the degree in which the use of humor matches the brands personality and positioning of their brand (Béal & Grégoire, 2021; Shin & Larson, 2020).

2.9 Brand Personality

Brand personality is a common and popular phenomenon throughout marketing literature (Aaker, 1997; Austin et al., 2003; Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003; Béal & Grégoire, 2021; Geuens et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2018; Shin & Larson, 2020; Swaminathan et al., 2009), and is defined as “a set of human characteristics associated with a brand” (Aaker, 1997, p. 347).

Aaker (1997) presents five dimensions of brand personality: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness. Sincerity refers to brands that have genuine, cheerful, and wholesome traits. These types of brands often establish good customer relationships and avoid ambiguities. Excitement refers to brands that are seen as up to date, daring, imaginative and spirited. They can mostly be recognized by their unexpected ways of portraying themselves. The third dimension competence, refers to successful brands that have reliable, responsible, dependable and efficient traits. Sophistication refers to brands who are primarily seen as charming, glamorous, pretentious, and romantic. Such brands are usually classified as expensive and can be found in the
luxury sector. The fifth dimension *ruggedness*, refers to brands with tough, strong, rugged and outdoorsy traits.

Brand personality attributes human-like characteristics to brands and personalizes them at their very nature; ultimately strengthening the brand-customer relationship through a sense of belonging and personalization. More specifically, the five dimensions are used by businesses as a source of differentiation, identification, and association with and for their consumers (Aaker, 1997). The ability of a brand to identify their brand personality is therefore essential for businesses to be able to efficiently resonate and communicate with their consumers (Swaminathan et al., 2009). With regards to the question of communication, decisions such as a correct and precise versus a fun, informal and humorous strategy can be aided with the identification of a personality (Béal & Grégoire, 2021). Moreover, Lee et al. (2018) found that brands who incorporated emotions and humor in their brand personality were associated with greater engagement rates by consumers on social media. Furthermore, Shin & Larson (2020) argued that the use of humor affects the perceived innovativeness and coolness of a brand. As an exemplification of how brands can use their personality to aid and enhance their communication strategy, Béal & Grégoire (2021) argued that sincere brands should use affiliative humor whilst exciting brands would elicit higher purchase intentions with aggressive humor.
2.10 Conclusion

The following conceptual model (Figure 1) is proposed as a reflection of the frame of reference. See Appendix 1 for a list of the concepts and their corresponding authors.

Figure 1: The Researcher’s Conceptual Model- A Reflection of the Literature
3. Methodology & Method

This section will first present the methodology of this research, which includes the research strategy, research philosophy and research approach. Secondly, the method of this research will be explained, including the sampling method, data collection and the data analysis. Lastly, the ethics and trustworthiness implemented throughout this research will be presented.

3.1 Methodology

3.1.1 Research Strategy

Traditionally, one of the first determinations made with regards to constructing research is the decision of either a quantitative or qualitative study. The main differentiation between qualitative and quantitative lies in the subject of measurement (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Understanding the ramifications, strengths, and weaknesses of both types of research strategies, as well as the purpose of this study, the decision to adopt a sequential explanatory mixed methods strategy throughout this paper has been made.

A mixed methods strategy “involves a research design that uses multiple methods—more than one research method or more than one worldview” (Venkatesh et al., 2013, p. 23) in a single research inquiry. Literature broadly identifies two main types of multiple methods research: mixed methods research and multimethod research, where the conceptual distinction lies in the adoption of either a singular or multiple worldviews. Multimethod research employs two or more research methods, however, does not require the research to be restricted to a single worldview. Simply put, multimethod research uses multiple methods of the same type, either quantitative or qualitative (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). Venkatesh et al. (2013) exemplifies a multimethod study with the combination of two quantitative methods, a field study, and an experiment. This specific combination of a field study and experiment has earlier been adopted by Johnen & Schnittka
(2019) who explored the effectiveness of brand responses to social media complaints. Béal & Grégoire (2021) similarly conducted both a field study and two main scenario-based experiments to examine the way in which consumers react when companies use humor to address online public complaints. Additionally, Chan & Lowe (2021) combined an experimental study with content analysis and Barry & Graça (2018) conducted a survey as well as a content analysis.

Mixed method research, on the other hand, incorporates two or more worldviews (i.e., qualitative, and quantitative research approaches) in a single research inquiry (Venkatesh et al., 2013). The use of qualitative and quantitative research methods can either be conducted concurrently or sequentially. Saunders et al. (2019) expand upon different mixed methods research design characteristics and define sequential mixed methods research as involving “more than one phase of data collection and analysis” (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 182). More specifically, a differentiation between a sequential exploratory and a sequential explanatory research design is made. In a sequential explanatory research design, the qualitative is followed by the quantitative (i.e., first quantitative, then qualitative) to allow for further explanation or elaboration on the initial, quantitative, findings. Adopting a sequential research design highlights the iterative and interactive nature of a mixed methods research strategy (Saunders et al., 2019). Furthermore, Venkatesh et al. (2013) introduces the concept of bridging, which aids in providing a developed or expanded view of a phenomenon. Bridging is particularly suited for a sequential research design as well as suits the purpose of this study. Bridging will be further explained in the data analysis section of this paper.

Despite mixed methods not being amongst the most commonly adopted research designs and strategies, its use has received much attention in past decades. As both quantitative and qualitative studies have their limitations, qualitative being weak on generalization and quantitative being weak on explaining the why, mixed methods research designs have a unique advantage (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018, p. 138). A mixed method research design bears great strength with regards to “understanding and explaining complex organizational and social phenomenas” (Venkatesh et al., 2013, p. 22). The use of a mixed methods research design allows for flexibility when tackling complex analytical and interpretative phenomena (Johnson & Hesse-Biber, 2015). Moreover, mixed methods research increases validity, generalizability, and the potential for a theoretical contribution (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018).
The choice to adopt a mixed methods strategy for this research was threefold and based on the following factors: 1) the multimethod research adopted by Johnen & Schnittka (2019), Béal & Grégoire (2021), Chan & Lowe (2021) and Barry & Graça (2018), 2) the complex and subjective nature of the research questions and 3) the encouragement provided by Etter et al., (2019) to supplement and elaborate their quantitative study with a qualitative study. In conclusion to their study, centered on how evaluative judgements on organizations are produced and disseminated in the public domain, Etter et al. (2019) encouraged future research to conduct a qualitative study. This encouragement stemmed from a need to better examine in-depth the multiple factors affecting evaluative judgements on social media as well as to better understand the dynamism that social media has introduced. Despite this research inquiry not directly following the call to action of further exploring evaluative judgements, the nature, complexity, and dynamism of social media bears similar resemblance in the question of how humor is perceived by the public on social media in today’s environment.

Furthermore, the purpose of adopting a partially quantitative method in this research is to measure consumer’s attitude and favorability towards brands adopting humor as a social media strategy. Literature has expanded upon several aspects with regards to how humor works, why it works and its contingencies but continuously acknowledges the subjectivity and contextuality of incorporating humor in marketing strategies. The quantitative aspect of this research seeks to test the general appreciation and favorability of humor amongst the sample population. Knowing whether humor is largely appreciated or rather met with skepticism is central to this study. The incorporation of a quantitative strategy allows for a larger sample to be tested.

Simultaneously, the purpose of adopting a partially qualitative method is to further explain and elaborate upon the quantitative data as well as understand the preferences and perceptions of a representative portion of the sample. As humor is subjective, complex, and contextual, a qualitative study can provide practitioners with richer and clearer implications with regards to the relationship between humor, individual characteristics, appreciation, and the different humor types. Acknowledging that consumers of content on social media is generally a very broad market, the in-depth, interpretative, and explanatory nature of a sequential explanatory mixed methods research design allows for rich insight and theory development.
3.1.2 Research Philosophy

Throughout this research the following philosophy will be adopted: an intersubjective epistemology, critical realist ontology and value-conscious axiology.

Ontology, epistemology, and axiology are the three primary assumptions of a research philosophy. Ontology represents the views and basic assumptions that researchers make with regards to the nature of reality (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). Epistemology regards the most appropriate way of enquiring into the nature of the world (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). Lastly, axiology concerns the extent of the role of values (Johnson & Hesse-Biber, 2015). In summary, axiology concerns ethics, ontology reality and epistemology knowledge (Johnson & Hesse-Biber, 2015).

As a mixed methods research strategy has been adopted, an ontology of critical realism has been deemed most appropriate (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018; Johnson & Hesse-Biber, 2015; Maxwell & Mittapalli, 2010; Saunders et al., 2019; Venkatesh et al., 2013). Critical realism is a unique research philosophy as it is rooted in a realist ontology and subjective epistemology; it is defined as “an approach to social research with an explicit ontological position, which combines features of both positivism and constructionism” (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018, p. 138). Critical realism does not recognize an absolute truth or reality (Venkatesh et al., 2013), rather, it provides a contextualized understanding of social processes through both regularities of empirical observational patterns and context-driven mechanisms (Johnson & Hesse-Biber, 2015). The context-driven mechanisms are people’s constructions of their experiences and observations. Saunders et al. (2019) explains critical realism through two phases, first the sensations and events we experience and secondly the mental processing after the experience has taken place. Furthermore, critical realism presents the idea of a structured ontology which differentiates between three levels: the empirical domain, the actual domain, and the real domain (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018; Saunders et al., 2019). The empirical domain refers to the experiences and perceptions people have, the actual domain refers to events that take place regardless of if they were observed and the real domain comprises “causal powers and mechanisms that cannot be detected directly, but that have real consequences for people and society” (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018, p. 138).
A critical realist perspective is the most suitable for a mixed methods research strategy as it recognizes that the objective truth is unattainable yet aims at developing well-confirmed beliefs whilst acknowledging the dynamism and complexity of social and human life. Critical realism simultaneously uses empirical data and representations of the observable (Johnson & Hesse-Biber, 2015). Conclusively, critical realism is an ideal paradigm for mixed methods research as it “accepts the existence of different types of objects of knowledge—namely, physical, social, and conceptual—that have different ontological and epistemological characteristics and meaning” (Venkatesh et al., 2013, p. 37). Furthermore, as the critical realist’s position maintains that the social world is constantly changing, it is highly relevant for business and management research that aims to understand or recommend change itself.

3.1.3 Research Approach

With regards to the development of theory, three major approaches present themselves: deduction, induction, and abduction (Saunders et al., 2019). The difference between the approaches is derived from the research purpose or goal. A deductive approach is recommended for theory testing, namely verification and falsification and an inductive approach is adopted for theory construction and generation. An inductive approach allows for meaning to emerge from data; with the purpose of data collection being to identity patterns, relationships and ultimately theory building (Saunders, et al., 2019). An inductive approach was deemed most suitable for the purpose of this study.

Moreover, the adoption of a mixed methods strategy calls for meta-inferences to be developed throughout the data analysis process. Meta-inferences are defined as “theoretical statements, narratives, or a story inferred from an integration of findings from quantitative and qualitative strands of mixed methods research” (Venkatesh et al., 2013, p. 38). Furthermore, as meta-inferences are essentially theoretical statements derived from the process of theory development from observations, they are inductive by nature (Venkatesh et al., 2013).

As the purpose of this study is to measure the favorability and appreciation of humor as a social media strategy as well as explore the relationship between humor, humor types, individual
characteristics, and appreciation; an inductive approach allows for the identification of themes and patterns within a phenomenon that already exists, humor as a marketing strategy. Furthermore, as the induction process builds theory from observations and findings, it is well suited for the sequential explanatory mixed methods research design adopted throughout this study.

3.2 Method

3.2.1 Sampling Method

3.2.1.1 Probability Sampling

In order to express and conduct the purpose of this study, the identification of relevant and representative samples for the survey and interviews was crucial. Saunders et al. (2019) presents two types of sampling techniques: probability sampling and non-probability sampling. Probability sampling refers to a random selection of individuals in a group and is mainly used for quantitative studies. Non-probability sampling refers to a non-random selection of individuals, based on different criteria which is mainly used in qualitative studies. Which sampling technique to apply is dependent on the research question. As a mixed methods research design was adopted throughout this study, both probability sampling and non-probability sampling techniques were adopted. The incorporation of probability sampling was applied for the quantitative research, a survey, and non-probability sampling for the qualitative research, the interviews.

With regards to probability sampling, there are four main techniques: simple random, systematic random, stratified random and cluster (Saunders et al., 2019). As the aim with the survey was to collect data from a variety of individuals with different genders, ages and residencies, with the criteria of having an active social media account, a simple random technique was deemed most appropriate, as it entails selecting participants at random. See Table 2 for a brief overview of the survey respondents.
As seen in Table 2, the following age categories were assembled for survey respondents: 18-24, 25-34, 35-49 and 50+. The age categories were established based on purchasing power and level of social activity per age group. Adults, individuals 18 years or older, maintain a degree of purchasing power that adolescents and children do not, and were therefore deemed most relevant for the purpose of this research; despite adolescents being an active population on social media. Furthermore, the decision to categorize remaining adults into the category of 50+ was due to the general decline of social media activity starting at the age of 50 and further declining at 65+ (Pew Research Center, 2021; Statista, 2020).

All of the respondents were social media users, as it was one of the criteria for conducting the survey. The respondents consisted of 373 individuals, with their residencies spread across six continents: Europe, North America, South America, Africa, Asia, and Oceania. See Table 5 for a full list of the respondent’s residencies.

### 3.2.1.2 Non-Probability Sampling

Non-probability sampling consists of four sampling techniques: quota sampling, purposive sampling, volunteer sampling and haphazard sampling. As the participant criteria for the interviews was international social media users, both male and female within four different age
categories, haphazard sampling, also known as convenience sampling, was deemed most appropriate.

Furthermore, each interview participant has been assigned a number for the purpose of anonymity. Table 3 presents information regarding the interview participants and is assembled in chronological order as to when the interviews took place. Moreover, participants will be referred to as their assigned number for the remainder of this paper, both in quotes and written statements.

Table 3: Interview Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Country of Residence</th>
<th>Interview Type</th>
<th>Interview Length</th>
<th>Date of Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>Video-chat</td>
<td>46 mins</td>
<td>20-04-2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>Video-chat</td>
<td>50 mins</td>
<td>20-04-2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>53 mins</td>
<td>20-04-2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>52 mins</td>
<td>21-04-2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>Video-chat</td>
<td>48 mins</td>
<td>22-04-2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>46 mins</td>
<td>27-04-2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>Video-chat</td>
<td>61 mins</td>
<td>29-04-2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 8</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>35 mins</td>
<td>04-05-2022</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2.2 Data collection

Both primary- and secondary data were collected throughout this study. The primary data will be generated and represented through empirical studies, the quantitative survey, and the qualitative interviews. The secondary data referred to throughout this study is comprised of literature, such as books, academic articles, and news articles from credible sources.
Existing literature on how humor works, its appeals and its general effectiveness is well articulated and has been expanded into several contexts. However, how humor works and its favorability in the context of a social media strategy is rather lacking. Once the topic of research was established, the search for secondary data and the most relevant literature was initiated and conducted through databases such as Primo (Jönköping University Library), Google Scholar, Scopus, and Web of Science. In order to gather appropriate data, the process of search for literature began by establishing relevant keywords such as humor, funny, social media, digital language, brand attitude, marketing, and digital marketing. These keywords were chosen to ensure that the literature retrieved was relevant, as well as broad, to subsequently narrow down and categorize the data. The aim was to include relevant and trustworthy literature, which was based on a variation of criteria and careful evaluation once they had been retrieved. The criteria consisted of peer-reviewed articles and all except four articles were mentioned on the list of Association of Business Schools (ABS). Out of the maximum of four, the majority of selected articles were graded three or higher. Additionally, the four articles that did not appear on the ABS list were deemed relevant as they were collected through snowball sampling. To confirm the credibility of these articles, their impact factor was confirmed through the Web of Science. Only articles with an impact factor between three and seven were included.

As the literature was analyzed and categorized, the following seven core concepts were identified and found significant: the social media era, engagement and customer relations, the observer perspective, emojis, GIFs and tone of voice, humor as a strategy, contingencies and influences of humor and brand personality.

3.2.3 Survey Construction

The aim of the survey was to test and measure the favorability and appreciation of humor as a social media strategy as well as explore the relationship between individual characteristics, humor types and appreciation. The survey was constructed in Google Forms and its web link was spread via Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, word-of-mouth and several email lists. Furthermore, the survey was published and available for three weeks.
Before publishing the survey, a pilot test was conducted and shared amongst a pilot group consisting of men and women who were active social media users within the four selected age categories, in total eight individuals. According to Saunders et al. (2019), a survey should be pilot tested by individuals similar to the actual respondents before collecting data, in order to thereafter refine the survey if necessary. The pilot test allowed for feedback regarding the clarity of instructions, questions, overall survey construction and ensured that no misinterpretations would occur. The pilot process reinforces validity, reliability as well as suitability to the context of the survey and the corresponding participants (Saunders et al., 2019).

As an introduction to the survey, the respondents were provided with information regarding the purpose of the study as well as ethical considerations. The survey questions were based on the frame of reference and were divided into five parts. The first part consisted of introductory questions such as age, gender, country of residence, and which social media platforms the respondent maintained. The second part consisted of questions related to social media habits to provide insight into what types of accounts the respondents follow on social media, at what frequency they engage with brands as well as what possible influences affect their behavior. Part three of the survey consisted of humorous content which included memes, comments and posts that had been shared by brands on social media. The content that was included in the survey were based on the four identified types of humor in the frame of reference, with the aim of identifying which type of humor is more likely to be appreciated. The fourth part of the survey consisted of questions related to humor as a strategy to identify if a brand's use of humor is appreciated on social media and what effects it is most likely to generate. The last part of the survey consisted of questions related to brand personality to identify whether a clear personality influenced the respondents and increased their likelihood resonating with a brand. The final questions of the survey explored whether the respondents thought that all companies potentially benefit from the incorporation of humor in their social media strategies. See Appendix 2 for full survey construction.
3.2.4 Interview Construction

Saunders et al. (2019) presents three different forms of interviews: structured interviews, semi-structured interviews, and unstructured interviews. The interview format adopted ultimately depends on the purpose and objective of the study. The interviews in this research adopted a semi-structured technique allowing for open discussions to derive from the key, predetermined questions (Saunders et al., 2019). Furthermore, implementing a semi-structure to the interviews allows for new ideas, the emergence of patterns and themes as well as the examination of individuality and subjectivity (Collis & Hussey, 2014). The notion of individuality and subjectivity, as well as identifying themes underlines the purpose of the qualitative method in the adopted sequential mixed methods research design. As the aim with the quantitative research is to test and measure the favorability of humor, the qualitative aim is to deeper understand the new and dynamic context of social media as well as the subjective and individual appreciation for humor.

All eight interviews were conducted in English, with a combination of interview types: face-to-face and video-chat. The decision to conduct interviews both in person and through video chat was based on both the current restrictions of the ongoing pandemic as well as, and primarily, the international residence of the participants. Participant 1 resided in Romania, participant 2 in the Netherlands, participant 3 in the United States, participant 4 in Sweden, participant 5 in South Africa, participant 6 in Luxembourg, participant 7 in the United Kingdom and participant 8 in Singapore. Moreover, as demonstrated in Table 3, the interviewees consisted of two individuals in each age group. The aim was to include different demographics among the respondents to reflect the current demographic of social media users.

3.2.5 Interview Questions

The interview questions derived from the quantitative study of this paper and were based on the contingencies and types of humor that had been developed in the frame of reference.
The interview questions were divided into three parts: introduction, general humor and contingencies to humor. The introduction part began with questions regarding the participants such as and their social media usage and habits, what types of accounts they mainly follow on social media and if and how often they engage with brands on social media, as well as their communication approach in social media. The second part of the interview consisted of questions regarding brands that use humor as a strategy in social media, as well as content related to the different types of humor that were developed in this study, with the aim of identifying which types of humor are appreciated. The third part of the interview questions were related to the eight contingencies to humor that were identified in the frame of reference of this study: prior brand evaluation, expectancy, humor strength and relevance, need for humor, message relatedness and authenticity, actor prominence, level of severity and involvement, and brand personality. See Appendix 3 for the interview questions.

3.2.6 Data Analysis

As a sequential mixed methods research design was chosen for this study, a qualitative-dominant mixed methods data analysis was conducted.

Traditionally, data analysis in mixed methods research consists of analyzing within respective traditions i.e., quantitative data using quantitative methods and qualitative data using qualitative methods (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018; Onwuegbuzie & Combs, 2011; Venkatesh et al., 2013). Nonetheless, given the iterative and unique nature of a mixed methods research strategy, the data analysis approach may vary depending on the research design and purpose. To help guide mixed methods researchers, Onwuegbuzie & Combs (2011) compiled the five most common decision criteria; to aid in the reasoning of the choice of a qualitative-dominant mixed methods data analysis, a description of the decision criteria will be presented below.

1) **Rationale/purpose for conducting the mixed analysis.** With regards to the first decision criteria, development was identified. A development rationale incorporates two stages, data being collected sequentially as well as the findings from one analysis type being used to inform the data collection process and analysis using the other analysis type (Caracelli & Greene, 1993; Onwuegbuzie &
Combs, 2011). Venkatesh et al. (2013) similarly describes the developmental purpose of a mixed methods research as question(s) from one strand emerging from the inferences of a previous strand.

2) **Number of data types that will be analyzed**, consists of three main methods: the traditional, quantizing and qualitizing (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018; Onwuegbuzie & Combs, 2011; Saunders et al., 2019). The traditional method of analyzing mixed methods data, as previously mentioned, is within the respective tradition. Furthermore, Caracelli & Greene (1993) developed a conceptual framework for mixed methods evaluation designs and initially grouped data analysis and interpretation/reporting approaches into the following four categories: a) no integration, b) separate analyses but some integration during interpretation, c) integration during both analyses and interpretation and d) procedures not reported. For the purpose of this study, a traditional method will be applied. Meaning that the quantitative data will be analyzed using quantitative methods, and thereafter qualitative data will be analyzed using qualitative methods.

3) **Time sequence of the mixed analysis.** Sequencing refers to whether or not methods are used in a discernible order, where either collection and analysis can be conducted concurrently or sequentially (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). A sequential quantitative-qualitative analysis has been identified for the purpose of this study. A sequential quantitative-qualitative analysis is when “the quantitative analysis component is conducted first, which then drives or informs the subsequent qualitative analysis component” (Onwuegbuzie & Combs, 2011, p. 4). Therefore, the data collection process of this research began with a survey, which was analyzed in order to inform the construction of the interviews. The interviews were conducted, analyzed and lastly meta-inferences were drawn between the two methods.

4) **Priority of analytical components.** When conducting mixed methods analyses, an important aspect is to decide whether components should receive equal status or for one to receive dominant status; the choice to conduct a qualitative-dominant research has been made. Adopting a qualitative-dominant stance, highlights the importance of understanding the underlying phenomenon whilst simultaneously acknowledging that quantitative capabilities increase the likelihood of richer data and interpretations (Onwuegbuzie & Combs, 2011). The prioritization of the qualitative method can further be explained by the nature of this research, the inductive research approach taken throughout this research (Saunders et al., 2019) and the use of meta-
inferences throughout this mixed methods research. The purpose of this paper is to primarily test and measure the favorability and appreciation of humor as a social media strategy and comprehensively develop and explore the relationship of how, when and to whom humor is preferred, hence a focus on theory generation and development.

5) Number of analytical phases. The following analysis path has been identified for the purpose of this paper: quantitative findings, qualitative findings, and thereafter meta-inferences. More explicitly, 1) quantitative data collection, 2) quantitative data analysis and inferences, 3) qualitative data construction, 4) qualitative data collection, 5) qualitative data analysis, 6) bridging and 7) meta-inferences. As previously mentioned, meta-inferences are inferred from an integration of findings of mixed methods research and are in essence the very objective of mixed methods research (Venkatesh et al., 2013). Bridging is the process of finding a consensus between the two types of methods and is particularly suitable for sequential studies (Venkatesh et al., 2013). Bridging aids in the understanding of transitions and boundary conditions and procedurally helps in the theory development process (Venkatesh et al., 2013).

3.2.7 Quantitative Data Analysis

The quantitative data of this research was represented by the results of the survey. The survey was analyzed through five multiple regression models as well as several charts and tables to display distribution of variables and respondent’s answers.

3.2.7.1 Multiple Regression Analysis

A multiple regression model is defined as “a multivariate method that includes a single dependent variable measured on a continuous scale and a set of predictor variables that may be measured on continuous or category scales” (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018, p. 521). Five multiple regression models and analyses were conducted, one for the totality of the respondent’s appreciation of humor (model 1) and one for each type of humor: personal and community based (model 2), self-
deprecating (model 3), wit and one-liners (model 4) and malicious humor (model 5). For each regression, the dependent variable was the appreciation of humor, and the independent variables were age and gender. As three categories for gender were provided on the survey, when coding the data in preparation for the regression model, dummy variables were used for male and female. With regards to age, the four age categories presented on the survey were coded into four different values; value one consisted of ages 18-24, value two consisted of ages 25-34, value three consisted of ages 35-49 and value four consisted of ages 50+.

For the dependent variable, the totality of the respondent’s appreciation for humor (model 1), the respondent’s answers were coded zero to seven to represent how many of the examples provided on the survey were appreciated. If the respondent answered yes to the question, do you think this is funny twice, they received a value of two, for three counts of appreciation they received a value of three, so on and so forth.

For the dependent variable, whether the type of humor was appreciated (models 2, 3, 4 & 5), the respondent’s answers were coded into zero, one and two to represent how many of the examples provided on the survey were appreciated. As an example, if a respondent answered yes to the question, do you think this is funny, for both examples of the same type of humor they received a value of two. If a respondent only thought one of the examples was funny, they received a value of one and ultimately if they did not think that any of the examples were funny for that humor type they received a value of zero. In total, seven examples of humorous content posted by brands were presented in the survey, each belonging to one of the four humor types.

For personal and community-based humor two examples were presented: Taco Bell (Appendix 2.1) and Netflix (Appendix 2.2). For self-deprecating humor one example was presented, Moosejaw (Appendix 2.3). For the humor type wit and one-liners, two examples were presented: Old Spice (Appendix 2.4) and Charmin (Appendix 2.5). Lastly, for the malicious humor type, two examples were presented: Virgin Trains (Appendix 2.6) and Burger King (Appendix 2.7).
Table 4: Variables for Regression Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Variable Type</th>
<th>Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of Appreciation</td>
<td>Dependent Scale</td>
<td>0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Independent Ordinal</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Independent Dichotomous</td>
<td>Dummies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The purpose of conducting a regression analysis was to examine the possible influences of the respondent’s appreciation or lack thereof, for a specific humor type as well as humor in general. Conducting a multiple regression analysis allows for the measurement of influence as well as possible prediction of a variable by one or more other variables (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018).

3.2.7.2 Other Data & Variables

Quantitative data can be divided into two categories: numerical data and categorical data (Saunders et al., 2019). Numerical data refers to data which is numerically measurable and can further be subdivided into: interval or ratio or into continuous or discrete data. Continuous data refers to data which can hypothetically take any value such as the temperature, delivery distance and length of a service, whereas discrete data refers to data which can be measured precisely, such as the amount of people at an event, or the number of phones manufactured (Saunders et al., 2019). Categorical data refers to data which can either be categorized based on its characteristics or positioned in rank order, as its value is not numerically measurable. This type of data is known as descriptive data and nominal data (Saunders et al., 2019).

Both numerical and categorical data were collected from the survey. In order to analyze the categorical data, a process of coding was conducted. The process of coding categorical data included establishing categories and ultimately subcategories to easier compare and analyze the data. Furthermore, two types of frequency diagrams were constructed throughout the quantitative analysis: bar charts and pie charts. Frequency tables are the “simplest way of summarising data for
individual variables so that specific amounts can be read” (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 583) and were therefore used to present several categories and respondent answers.

3.2.8 Qualitative Data Analysis

A thematic analysis was conducted for the qualitative study of this paper. The purpose of the thematic analysis was to identify patterns and themes that derived from the collected data (Saunders et al., 2019), in this case interviews. The process of conducting the thematic analysis consisted of four elements: becoming familiar with the data collected, coding, searching for patterns and themes, and refining the identified themes.

The process of data familiarization consisted of reading and re-reading the data, as well as transcribing the interviews to allow for a deeper understanding (Saunders et al., 2019). Moreover, the familiarization phase required curiosity, observance, and engagement with regards to the data (Terry et al., 2017). After the familiarization phase, the process of coding was initiated. Coding is a systematic process that requires sense-making of the data as well as a thorough segmentation of it (Terry et al., 2017). The purpose of coding was to better understand, rearrange and manage the data to thereafter categorize similar units of the data under relevant codes. The codes consisted of both words and phrases (Saunders et al., 2019; Terry et al., 2017). After the process of coding, a search for patterns and themes related to the research questions throughout the coded data was initiated. The process required relating codes and phrases to each other, ultimately clustering them (Terry et al., 2017) and constructing themes (Saunders et al., 2019). The final step of analyzing the qualitative data through the thematic approach was to refine the identified themes, meaning that the codes and themes were revised and reorganized. This step additionally consisted of identifying patterns and relationships between the themes (Saunders et al., 2019), and in general making sure that the codes and themes made sense to the original data set (Terry et al., 2017).
### 3.3 Ethics

To avoid engagement in unethical behavior, ethical considerations are vital to implement throughout any research study. Ethical criteria consists of several factors such as the researcher’s behavior when structuring participant interactions as well as their actual engagement (Saunders et al., 2019. Collis & Hussey (2014) develop the rights of participants as the most important principle, incorporating the aspect of voluntary participation. Several ethical considerations were therefore implemented throughout the quantitative and qualitative phases of this study.

With regards to participant rights, all participants of the qualitative interviews were informed of the nature of the conversation and the circumstances of the interviews before they began. Questions such as the consent to record and transcribe the interviews were discussed and the participants signed consent forms. The consent forms consisted of information regarding, the availability of transcripts, the possibility to end the interview at any point, confidentiality, anonymity and preservation of the recordings and personal data (see Appendix 4). Additional information such as interview length, conditions and usage of the recorded material were likewise provided to the participants. Furthermore, with regards to ethical measures that were taken into consideration for the survey, the respondents were informed of the purpose of the research, anonymity and how their data would be stored and used. Moreover, the respondents received access to the researchers, so that any possible questions or inquiries could be resolved.

### 3.4 Trustworthiness

Korstjens & Moser (2018) present four main criteria regarding the quality of a qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The decision to focus on the quality criteria for qualitative research, despite this paper adopting a mixed methods research design, was due to the qualitative dominance.
Credibility concerns the aspect of truth-value of the research. It refers to whether the findings of the research are correctly interpreted from the original views of the participants. To ensure the credibility of a qualitative research there are four strategies that could be taken into consideration: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulations, and member check. To increase the credibility of this paper, the technique of *method triangulation* which refers to using multiple methods for data collection, and *investigator triangulation* which refers to using more than one researcher for interpretation decisions were applied, both are a part of the triangulation technique.

The second criteria regarding the quality of a study is transferability, which concerns the generalizability of the findings, meaning that if the same research was conducted, would the findings be identical (Collis & Hussey, 2014). The strategy to ensure the transferability of the study is called *thick description* and refers to describing the context of behavior and experiences so that they become meaningful (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Dependability refers to the involvement of the participants of the study to evaluate the interpretations and findings of the study. The confirmability of a study concerns the extent of which other researchers could confirm the finding of the study, to make sure that the findings derived from the actual data and not one's own interpretation of it. The strategy to ensure the dependability and confirmability of a study is called *audit trail* and refers to transparently describing all steps which were included throughout the research (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).
4. Empirical Findings

In this section, the findings from the survey and semi-structured interviews will be presented. The findings provide the reader with an understanding of what was uncovered throughout the multiple phases of the data collection processes. Quotes and opinions from the quantitative and qualitative data collection are included and will lay a foundation for the analysis.

4.1 Quantitative Data

4.1.2 The Survey Respondents

As demonstrated in Table 2, the survey was completed by 373 respondents, 55.8% female, 43.7% male and 0.5% unspecified, all of them social media users. The largest age group was 25-34 which constituted 37% of the total respondents, followed by the age group 18-24 which constituted 26% of the respondents. The age group 35-49 constituted 19.6% of the total respondents and the 50+ age group constituted 17.4% of the survey respondents.

As demonstrated in Table 5, the survey respondent’s residencies were international. The data was first coded and categorized into six continents: Europe, North America, South America, Africa, Asia, and Oceania, and thereafter 37 subcategories were established based on country of residence. 287 respondents resided in Europe, in 22 different countries, making Europe the dominant continent. Moreover, approximately 50% of the respondents resided in Sweden, making Sweden the dominant country. The Netherlands accounted for the second largest country in Europe, followed by Germany and the United Kingdom. The second largest continent was North America where 48 respondents resided, 46 in the United States and two in Canada. 17 respondents resided in Africa, where South Africa was the dominant country, followed by Ghana and Tanzania. 10 respondents resided in Asia, and the majority of them in the United Arab Emirates. Eight respondents were located in Oceania, seven of them in Australia and three respondents were
residents of South America, in Columbia, Ecuador and Panama. See Table 5 for a list of all residencies.

Table 5: Survey Respondents Countries of Residence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Continents</th>
<th>Countries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Europe (287)</td>
<td>Belgium (5), Croatia (2), Denmark (4), Finland (4), France (2), Germany (16), Greece (1), Hungary (2), Italy (4), Luxembourg (3), Norway (6), Poland (2), Portugal (2), Romania (2), Serbia (1), Slovenia (1), Spain (3), Sweden (187), Switzerland (3), The Netherlands (22), The United Kingdom (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America (48)</td>
<td>Canada (2), The United States of America (46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South America (3)</td>
<td>Columbia (1), Ecuador (1), Panama (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa (17)</td>
<td>Ghana (2), South Africa (14), Tanzania (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia (10)</td>
<td>Iran (2), Philippines (1), Singapore (1), United Arab Emirates (5), Yemen (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oceania (8)</td>
<td>Australia (7), New Zealand (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.3 Social Media Habits

The most popular social media platform among the survey respondents was Instagram with 89.3% (333 respondents) having an active account, followed by Facebook with 85.5% (319 respondents), YouTube with 75.3% (281 respondents) and LinkedIn with 62.7% (234 respondents). Moreover, the respondents were active on the following platforms: Snapchat, TikTok, Pinterest and Twitter. Finally, 5.1% (19 respondents) reported activity on other social media platforms. See Appendix 5.

When asked which of the following types of accounts the respondents followed on social media 94.4% answered friends and family, 55% answered brands and companies, 49.1% answered public figures and 15.5% answered that they follow other accounts. When asked the question of how many brands they follow on social media, the majority, 55.8%, answered that they follow 1-10 brands on social media, 19.6% answered that they follow 11-20 brands, 6.7% answered that they
follow 21-30 brands, 7% follow more than 30 brands, and controversially 10.7% answered that they do not follow any brands on social media. Furthermore, when asked how often they engage with brands on social media as many as 58.4% of the respondents answered sometimes, 33.8% answered never and 7.8% answered that they often engage with brands on social media. Engaging in this context refers to liking, commenting, sharing or direct messaging. Lastly, when asked which of the following influences their engagement with brands, 72% answered the type of content, 55.6% answered how much they like the brand, 25.8% answered the brand’s communication style, 19.6% answered the platform that they are on and 17.8% answered that they are influenced to engage with brands on social media by the desire to express their opinion through leaving a review or feedback. See Appendix 6.

4.1.4 Brand Communication

The participants were asked to share their opinion on how much they appreciate and enjoy content when brands incorporate emojis, GIFs, animated stickers etc. On a scale from 1-5, where one referred to it not making a difference and five referred to really appreciating a brand’s use, 26.5% gave a neutral score of 3, 25.1% answered 4 and 11.1% answered 5, favoring a brand’s use. Alternately 24.3% answered 1 and 13% answered 2, opposing a brands use of emojis, GIFs, animated stickers etc. Furthermore, as many as 84.3% answered they resonate more with and/or feel closer to a brand that uses a human tone of voice opposed to a corporate tone of voice.

4.1.5 Humorous Content

Seven different examples of humorous content such as funny comments, memes and posts shared by brands on different social media platforms were presented in the survey. The examples were retrieved and based on the classification and four humor types identified in the frame of reference: personal and community-based humor, self-deprecating humor, wit and one-liners and malicious humor.
4.1.5.1 Personal and Community Based Humor

With regards to personal and community-based humor, two different examples were presented: Taco Bell (Appendix 7) and Netflix (Appendix 8). 61.9% (231) of respondents expressed that they did not think the tweet shared by Taco Bell was funny, where they responded to a quote shared by a Mean Girls movie account. Taco Bell adopted the nature of the line and characters in the movie by calling one of them, Karen, stupid. Of the 38.1% (142) of respondents that found the tweet funny, 119 of the respondents belonged to age categories one and two. Moreover, with regards to the respondents that did not find the tweet by Taco Bell funny, the biggest discrepancy was found between genders; 134 respondents were female, and 94 respondents were male. See Appendix 7.

In the second example presented, 51.9% (193) of the survey respondents expressed that they did not think that the meme shared by Netflix was funny, whereas 48.1% (179) did. The meme was created from a series streamed by Netflix, You, and made light of expectations and life plans before and after the Covid-19 pandemic. Of the 48.1% (179 respondents) that found the tweet funny, 139 of the respondents belonged to age categories one and two. Moreover, with regards to the respondents that did not find the meme by Netflix funny, the biggest discrepancy was found between genders; 116 respondents were female, and 75 respondents were male. See Appendix 8.

*Figure 2: Taco Bell Survey Appreciation*
4.1.5.2 Self-deprecating Humor

The example presented for the self-deprecating humor classification consisted of a screenshot of Moosejaw’s Twitter biography where they had presented the company as “The most fun outdoor retailer on the planet.”. The biography continued on with a humorous/self-disparaging dig saying, “Customer service issues please reach out to our live chat team on our website, they don’t trust me with that” (Appendix 9). 52.2% (194) of the respondents did not find the biography funny, whereas 47.8% (178) did. Amongst the survey respondents that found the Twitter biography funny, 118 respondents belonged to age categories one and two, despite a more equal distribution than in previous examples. However, the discrepancy between male and female respondents who did not find the biography funny was larger, 123 females and 69 males. See Appendix 9.
4.1.5.3 Malicious Humor

The malicious humor type consisted of two examples: Virgin Trains (Appendix 10) and Burger King (Appendix 11). Virgin Trains responded to a tweet from an editor and writer by the name of Josh Barrie who tweeted that he thinks that the Virgin Trains look pretty basic. Virgin Trains responded saying “I think you look pretty basic Josh...IMO^MS”. 62.9% (234) of the survey respondents did not find this funny and 37.1% (138) did. Once again, age categories one and two represented the majority respondents that found the tweet funny, 109 respondents. Moreover, with regards to the respondents that did not find the tweet by Virgin Trains funny, the biggest discrepancy was found between genders; 143 respondents were female, and 90 respondents were male. See Appendix 10.

With regards to the second malicious humor type example, Burger King likewise responded to a tweet. Kanye West tweeted that McDonalds was his favorite restaurant and Burger King responded, “that explains a lot”. 65.7% (254) of the survey respondents found the comment from Burger King funny. Of the 254 respondents that found the tweet funny, 178 respondents belonged to age categories one and two. Moreover, with regards to the respondents that did not find the tweet by Burger King funny, 34.4% (128 respondents), the biggest discrepancy was found between genders; 90 respondents were female, and 37 respondents were male. See Appendix 10.
4.1.5.4 Wit and One-liners Humor

With regards to the humor type wit and one-liners, two examples were presented: Old Spice (Appendix 12) and Charmin (Appendix 13). The Old Spice example consisted of a picture shared by the brand as an advertisement for their deodorant. The advertisement depicted a man rubbing spaghetti and meatballs in his armpits and writing “There aren’t many positive attributes you can
gain by smearing stuff in your armpits, but Old Spice is the exception to the rule.”. As many as 77.7% (290) respondents expressed that they did not find the post funny. The results were evenly distributed. See Appendix 12.

The Charmin example consisted of a meme, showing the Charmin bear taking selfies for different social media platforms: LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. 58% (215) of the survey respondents found the Charmin meme funny. Once again, age categories one and two represented the majority respondents that found the tweet funny, 142 respondents. See Appendix 13.

Figure 7: Old Spice Survey Appreciation

Figure 8: Charmin Survey Appreciation
4.1.6 Brands Use of Humor

In response to if the surveyees could think of a brand that produced funny content on social media, 63.3% answered yes and 36.7% answered no. Moreover, when the survey respondents were asked whether they could think of a brand that tried to be funny or produce humorous content on social media however in their opinion failed, 52.3% answered yes and 47.7% answered no.

In attempts to further realize the respondent’s liking and/or recognition of humor as a social media strategy the question “do you appreciate brand’s use of humor on social media” was posed, with the options of answering either yes, no or I don’t care. A majority of the respondents answered yes with 80.4% and 15.8% answered that they do not care.

As a closing question for the third section of the survey, the respondents were asked which type of brand they prefer on social media with the following options: a) more serious, correct, and formal brands, b) more funny, informal and relatable brands and c) brands that do both. 63.7% answered brands that do both, 25.5% opted for more funny, informal, and relatable brands and 10.8% of the respondents favored a more serious, correct and formal brand.

4.1.7 Contingencies to Humor

The first question of the final section of the survey focused on the contingency, brand personality. The respondents were initially provided with a short description of brand personality. The respondents were then asked if they feel more connected to a brand that has a clear personality. Understanding the potential limitations of the definition as well as the lack of interactivity of the survey format, the following answers were provided as options: yes, no and I’m not sure. The vast majority, 72.7% of survey respondents answered yes, whereas 20.9% answered I’m not sure and the remaining 6.4% answered no.

Further using the identified contingencies to humor, the respondents were asked if they think that the following factors impact how funny a brand is on social media and were asked to select all that apply: prior beliefs and opinions about the brand, prior brands experiences and the industry the
brand operates within. 60.3% of all of the respondents selected prior beliefs and opinions about the brand, 52.5% selected the industry the brand operates within and 47.8% of the respondents selected prior brands experiences. See Appendix 14.

4.1.8 Industries, Brands, and Humor

As one of the final, and all encompassing questions of the survey, the respondents were asked whether they believed that all brands should use humor as a part of their social media strategy. 68% of the participants answered no and 32% answered yes.

The final question of the survey was dependent on the respondent's previous answer, the question was the following: “if no, can you give an example of a brand or industry that should not use humor?” As the data collected was categorical, the answers were coded and classified based on industry and occurrences, followed by a subcategorization of the specific examples given by the respondents. The following industries emerged: non-profit organizations, government entities, healthcare, finance, and miscellaneous. 161 respondents answered the question, with 50 participants providing more than one example, either within the same industry or across industries and brands. Furthermore, 11 respondents submitted a non-brand or industry specific answer and rather gave their opinion to more general situations. In totality, the answers submitted by the respondents amounted to 228 coded answers, including 217 answers that easily fell into one of the aforementioned categories. See Table 6.

Presented below are three examples of respondent’s answers that submitted general thoughts or insights on the topic of what industries or brands should not incorporate humor in their social media strategy:

“I think it's rather about how or what humor is used. E.g., a bank could use relatable humor but should be careful to not come off as unserious. For me that type of rationale could be applied to all brands that care for things that are important to us as individuals (funeral agencies, insurances, etc.).”
“If the marketing team or whoever is responsible for the social media strategy is not able to make funny posts but it gets awkward or embarrassing, I think it’s better to waive it. Humor is personal - but something really unfunny would also create an opposite image for me (e.g., embarrassing, uncool, weird, cringe).”

“If they can’t do it well they shouldn’t.”

Table 6: Industries to Not Adopt Humor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-profit Organizations</th>
<th>Government Entities</th>
<th>Healthcare</th>
<th>Financial</th>
<th>Miscellaneous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charities (24),</td>
<td>Agencies:</td>
<td>Healthcare/ Medical Industry:</td>
<td>Finance (6),</td>
<td>Consumer goods:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>churches (2),</td>
<td>Government (7),</td>
<td>Healthcare/medical industry(29),</td>
<td>banks (12),</td>
<td>Cars (1), interior design (1),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGOs (5)</td>
<td>tax authorities (2)</td>
<td>healthcare products (8), pharmaceutical companies (17),</td>
<td>insurance (4),</td>
<td>personal products (3),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>disease and illness (5), funeral services (13), hospitals (10), elderly homes (2)</td>
<td>investments (3)</td>
<td>clothing and cosmetics (3),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Politics:</td>
<td>Mental Health:</td>
<td>Other:</td>
<td>accessories (4),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Politics (3)</td>
<td>Mental health (2), drugs (4), addiction (3), tobacco (3), alcohol (4), gambling (1)</td>
<td>News/ journalism (6), education (1), B2B brands (2), oil and gas (3), sensitive information (3), travel (1), Auschwitz museum (1), environment (1)</td>
<td>fast food chains (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Law:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Law firms/ lawyers (4), courts and law enforcement (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Military:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Military (3), weapons (4), security (4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.1.9 Multiple Regression Analysis

Five multiple regression analyses (MRA) were conducted, one for the totality of the respondent’s appreciation of humor and one for each type of humor: personal and community based, self-deprecating, wit and one-liners and malicious humor. The results from the MRA are presented in Tables 7 and 8. See complete model outputs in Appendix (15, 16, 17, 18 & 19).

The overall quality of the model is measured by the squared multiple correlation ($R^2$). $R^2$ presents the percentage of variance of the dependent variable that is explained by the independent variables. Having used the software STATA, the F value and associated p value were additionally provided as outputs. F value represents the mean square model divided by the mean square residual (Chen et al., 2003). The F value and associated p value are used to express the reliability at which the independent variables predict the dependent variable, with the p value being compared to the alpha level at the five percent level (0.05).

All of the models were found statistically significant. Model 1 showed an $R^2$ of 0.2038 with a p value (<.001), well below the significance value of 0.05, proving the quality and significance of the model. As an interpretation of the $R^2$, it can be stated that 20.38% of the variance in the survey respondent's appreciation for humor can be explained by the factors in the model. Model 2 showed an $R^2$ of 0.1598 with a p value (<.001), well below the significance value of 0.05, proving the quality and significance of the model. Model 3 showed an $R^2$ of 0.0503 with a p value (0.003), well below the significance value of 0.05. Model 4 showed an $R^2$ of 0.2039 with a p value (<.001), well below the significance value of 0.05. Lastly, Model 5 showed an $R^2$ of 0.0279 with a p value (0.015), below the significance value of 0.05.
With regards to the predictors, only one factor consistently emerged to be significantly influencing the survey respondent’s appreciation for humor: age, as seen in Table 8. The multiple regression for the totality of the respondent’s appreciation of humor (model 1), showed that age negatively influences the general appreciation for humor ($\beta=-0.7426628$, $t=-8.53$, $p<0.001$). As an interpretation of the beta coefficient, a one unit increase in age, results in a 0.7426628 unit decrease in appreciation for humor. As the independent variable age was coded into four different values, each prescribing to the different age categories, an increase from one age category to the next will result in a 0.7426628 unit decrease in appreciation for humor. Furthermore, the multiple regression for the personal and community-based humor type showed that age negatively influences the appreciation for humor ($\beta=-0.3335621$, $t=-9.30$, $p<0.001$). Similarly, the multiple regression for the self-deprecating humor type showed that age negatively influences the appreciation for humor ($\beta=-0.0620954$, $t=-2.50$, $p=0.013$). Likewise, the multiple regression for the wit and one-liners humor type showed that age negatively influences the appreciation for humor ($\beta=-0.087278$, $t=-2.47$, $p=0.014$). Lastly, the multiple regression for the malicious humor type showed that age negatively influences the appreciation for humor ($\beta=-0.2597273$, $t=-7.1$, $p<0.001$).
Despite age being the only factor consistently emerging as statistically significant at the five percent level, five instances of either the male or female factors emerge as statistically significant at the ten percent level and once instance at the five percent level.

Table 9: Instances of Predictors at the Ten Percent Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Beta Coefficient</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2.168594</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>0.076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2.666593</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>0.029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.94241</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>0.061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0.9836583</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>0.051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.43161</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>0.216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0.5816395</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>0.096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.7986387</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>0.107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0.8658565</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>0.081</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-0.0040643</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0.2354384</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.646</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The predictor male emerged statistically significant at the five percent level (0.05) in model one, the totality of the respondent’s appreciation of humor ($\beta=2.666593$, $t=2.19$, $p=0.029$). Additionally, the predictor male emerged statistically significant at the ten percent level ($p<0.10$), throughout three of the regression models: model 2, the personal and community-based humor type ($\beta=0.9836583$, $t=1.96$, $p=0.051$), model 3, the self-deprecating humor type ($\beta=0.5816395$, $t=1.67$, $p=0.096$) and model 4, the wit and one-liners humor type ($\beta=0.8658565$, $t=1.75$, $p=0.081$).

The multiple regression for the aforementioned four models showed that the factor male positively influences the appreciation for humor. Moreover, the predictor female emerged statistically significant at the ten percent level ($p<0.10$), for model 1, the totality of the respondent’s appreciation of humor ($\beta=0.94241$, $t=1.88$, $p=0.061$) and 2, the personal and community-based humor type ($\beta=2.168594$, $t=1.78$, $p=0.076$).

4.2 Qualitative Data

As demonstrated in Table 3, the interview participants consisted of eight individuals, four male and four female, two in each of the four age categories equally divided between genders.

The participants and their statements will be referenced in-text in the form of a number, either as ‘participant #’ or (#), corresponding to that presented in Table 3. Formulating expressions in such a manner allows for statements to be grouped together, highlighting differences and similarities.
4.2.1 Humorous Content

Table 10: Interview Answers for Humorous Content Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not really</td>
<td>Not really</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Kind of</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Kind of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Kind of</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Kind of</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Kind of</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Kind of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Kind of</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants were presented with four different examples of humorous content, such as memes, comments and posts that have been shared by brands on social media. The content was based on the four humor types identified in the frame of reference: wit and one-liners, personal and community-based humor, malicious humor, and self-deprecating humor.

4.2.1.1 Wit and One-liners

The first example (see Appendix 3.1) consisted of tweets between Taco Bell and Old Spice, where Old Spice tweeted “Why is it that ‘fire sauce’ isn’t made with any real fire? Seems like false advertising”, and Taco Bell replied to the comment with “Is your deodorant made with really old spices?”. As demonstrated in Table 10, five participants (1, 2, 4, 5 & 6) appreciated the tweets between the two companies of which two participants (1 & 5) answered yes and three participants (2, 4 & 6) answered kind of. The remaining three participants (3, 7 & 8) did not find the tweets funny, all of them answering no to the question, do you think this is funny.
“I think it's funny because it's two brands engaging with each other and it's something that's not easily done. And the one-liners are pretty cool.” (5)

4.2.1.2 Personal and Community Based Humor

The second example consisted of a tweet shared by Netflix (see Appendix 3.2), saying “Going out tonight? LOL! No you’re not. Come join us, loser.”. As demonstrated in Table 10, five participants (2, 4, 5, 6 & 7) appreciated the content, and three participants (1, 3 & 8) did not, consisting of one participant (1) answering not really, and two participants (3 & 8) no. All participants who found the tweet funny expressed that they appreciated the content due to the fact that it was relatable.

“...they know us well enough to know that we'll be sitting at home doing it.” (5)

Two of the participants who did not find the tweet by Netflix funny stated that they perceived the tweet as “childish” (1), and that it is negative to call consumers “losers” (3).

4.2.1.3 Malicious Humor

The third example (see Appendix 3.3) consisted of a tweet by BBC News antagonizing tennis player, Novak Djokovic, saying “I’m not anti-vax but will sacrifice trophies if told to get the jab.” The jab refers to the Covid-19 vaccine which Novak Djokovic refused to take during the Australian open, ultimately leading to his deportation. RyanAir retweeted to the post saying, “We’re not an airline but we do fly planes #Djokovic”. Four of the participants (2, 4, 6 & 7) appreciated the tweets, whereas four participants (1, 3, 5 & 8) did not, one of which answering not really (1). The participants who did not find the content funny agreed that vaccinations and a pandemic are not a topic that should be commented on with humor. An interesting note to make is the personal stance
of two participants. Participant 6, who identifies as a “pro-vaxxer” found the exchange between brands especially funny, where controversially, participant 1 who stated that they are not positive towards the Covid-19 vaccine did not appreciate the joke.

“This can be humorous, but I think it’s unprofessional, because it’s taking a side.” (1)

“...but it’s like sarcastic so it’s hilarious. It just is”. (2)

“...it’s kind of cool that they’re getting involved in really current events.” (7)

4.2.1.4 Self-deprecating Humor

The fourth and final example consisted of a meme shared by RyanAir (see Appendix 2.4), depicting a cat who is taking up a lot of space laying in a doll-house next to a barbie doll with a text saying, “How it feels flying with my bestie, who is wearing their entire weekend wardrobe and no carry-on.”. All participants appreciated the meme to some extent. Five participants (1, 2, 4, 5 & 6) answered yes, and three participants (3, 7 & 8) answered kind of. Two of the biggest reasons as to why the content was appreciated was due to its relatability (1, 2, 5 & 6) and/or the fact that RyanAir is making fun of themselves (1, 2, 4, 6 & 7).

“It's so funny. Because it's so true. Wow. They're genius, I like. But obviously there's an issue here, which they are very much aware of.” (6)
4.2.2 Thematic Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Description of Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes Towards Humor</td>
<td>Need for humor, appreciation, smile, laugh, funny, relatable, search and activity, personal values, seriousness</td>
<td>This theme describes the consumer’s attitudes towards humor both in a general, and a social media context. Furthermore, the consumer’s preferences of humor, need for humor, definition of humor and their search for humor are developed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media Usage</td>
<td>Platforms, brands, activity, presence, usage and type of accounts</td>
<td>This theme describes the consumer’s general social media usage with regards to their presence and activity on platforms, types of accounts they follow and their daily consumption of content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement and Influences</td>
<td>Type of content, communication style, liking, frequency, why users engage</td>
<td>This theme describes the consumer’s engagement patterns and the influences that exist on social media platforms. Engagement with regards to brands in general, specific functionalities of platforms, and purposes of engagement are developed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effects of the Social Media Era</td>
<td>Emojis, tone of voice, social media behavior, human vs corporate, personalisation, connectivity</td>
<td>This theme describes the consumer’s attitudes and adoption of the new social language. Communication styles, use of non-verbals, as well as brand relatability and personability are developed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contingencies to Humor</td>
<td>Prior brand evaluation, expectancy, authenticity, relatability, personability, severity, intent, relevance and quality</td>
<td>This theme describes the contingencies to the incorporation of humor as a social media strategy. Several contextualizations and preferences were developed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2.3 Attitude Towards Humor

4.2.3.1 Developed Humor Definition

Given the variation of definitions in prior literature, as well as the humor types classification provided in the frame of reference, the notion that humor is expressed and appreciated differently is explicit. The participants were therefore asked to define humor and to explain what it personally means to them. The majority of participants (3, 4, 6, 7 & 8) related humor to a positive feeling and something that makes them laugh. The participants further noted that humor does not necessarily have to contribute to “huge belly laughs but rather lighten your mood in any kind of way” (4), “it doesn’t even have to be a laugh or smile, it can just be a little chuckle” (7) and “it can be a remark, wimps or added effect” (8). Furthermore, participant 7 expressed that humor regards something that people have in common and can relate to, it is simply presented through a new perspective. Moreover, participant 7 elaborated upon humor in a social media context, expressing that an “oh, wow” feeling is sufficient to be humorous and attract attention.

4.2.3.2 Need for Humor

With the objective of better understanding the participant’s relationship to humor in a general context, they were asked if they have a need for humor (NFH). The contingency NFH was identified in the frame of reference and is associated with a personality trait and tendency that generates as well as seeks out humor. All interview participants stated that they have a need for humor. Five participants (3, 4, 5, 6 & 7) expressed that they have a very high need for humor and actively search for humorous content. In the context of social media, participant 7 commented; “If an ad campaign wants to really attract my attention, it really has to be funny. Whereas if it were on a bus station billboard I’m standing there while I have time to look at it. So it’s easier to attract my attention without being funny. But on social media, you really have to be like snappy and attract my attention quicker and more effectively.”. All participants mentioned TikTok and Instagram as the main social media platforms for humorous content.
“...when I’m on TikTok, I won’t shut it down until I see something funny. And I only use TikTok when I’m looking for something funny” (3)

4.2.3.3 Self-Identified Contingencies

Eight contingencies and influences to humor were identified in the frame reference, highlighting the eventuality of how and when to use humor in a social media context. Therefore, knowing whether the participants had any personal contingencies to humor in a social media context, during the initial stages of the third part of the interview, was pivotal. The interviewees were asked if they think of any personal and potential contingencies to when they appreciated humorous content on social media. Three participants (3, 7 & 8) expressed that making fun of other people is never funny and never acceptable. Participant 3 added that regardless of their liking for a group or individual, mean, and derogatory jokes are never funny. Furthermore, participant 1 expressed that the seriousness of the context would affect the content's humorous appeal and participant 4 stated that corporate and well planned humor is always negative. Moreover, participant 6 commented that jokes that go against their values are never funny.

4.2.4 Social Media Usage

Table 12: Interviewees Social Media Platforms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Facebook</th>
<th>Instagram</th>
<th>TikTok</th>
<th>Snapchat</th>
<th>Twitter</th>
<th>LinkedIn</th>
<th>Pinterest</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As demonstrated in Table 12, the participants were active on several social media platforms: Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, and others such as YouTube, Reddit and Tinder. The two most popular platforms were Facebook and Instagram, where all participants were active. When asked what type of accounts they mainly follow on social media, the majority of participants answered that it depends on the platform. However, the majority answered friends and family followed by public figures, brands, and educators.

The participants reported spending an average of two to three hours per day on social media. The largest variations of time came from participant 8 who only spent less than an hour a day, and participant 2 who spent up to seven hours a day.

4.2.5 Engagement and Influence

The participants were asked if they engage with brands on social media, and if so, how they engage and what influences them to engage with brands. All participants answered that they sometimes engage with brands on social media, and five of the participants (1, 2, 3, 4 & 7) expressed that they mostly engage by liking. Only one participant (5) expressed that they additionally engage by commenting and sharing. Five participants (2, 5, 6, 7 & 8) expressed that they engage with brands on social media out of personal interest, meaning that they have an interest for the brand and their product/service and/or the type of content, followed by reasons such as being able to share with friends (6 & 7) and to support the brand (4 & 8).

“I have a higher tendency to like things which are personal and a bit out of the ordinary. If I follow a person, and she were to have a kid or get married for example, I would probably like that photo, but I would not like her normal everyday posts. The same thing is if I follow a brand and they post a collaboration with charity, I would probably like that, but not like their regular content.” (6)
The participants were asked to rank three different factors that would most likely influence them to engage with a brand: the type of content, the brand’s communications style and how much they like the brand. Four participants (1, 4, 7 & 8) answered that the type of content would most likely influence them to engage with a brand, and four participants (2, 3, 5 & 6) answered that the brand’s communication style would most likely influence them to engage with the brand. With regards to the next largest influence, four participants (4, 6, 7 & 8) who answered how much they like the brand.

4.2.6 Effects of the Social Media Era

When the participants were asked if they use emojis when communicating on social media, five participants (1, 3, 4, 6 & 7) answered they do, two (5 & 8) answered that they do not, and one (2) answered that they only use them for sarcastic purposes, and not in serious contexts.

“Emojis, I use more and more, but I find it very difficult to scroll through the emojis to find the one that I like. I often use the same 3-4 but I rarely use them with people that I don’t know.” (3)

“Yes, I do, basically in every comment or text.” (4)

“No, I'm not a part of that generation” (5)

The participants were further asked to give their opinion on brands who use emojis when communicating, to identify whether it is appreciated or not. Four participants agreed that the use of emojis by brands makes content more personable. Three participants (2, 4 & 7) expressed that they do appreciate it, as it makes them more attractive, approachable, and less formal. Five participants (1, 3, 5, 6 & 8) answered that it depends, and thereafter gave their personal opinion. Participant 1 expressed that it is appreciated from small companies and startups as the use of emojis makes it more personable and relatable, but not from large and serious businesses as they would lose credibility. Participant 5 expressed that one or two emojis are okay, but if it is listed with
emojis, they would immediately become disinterested because they would assume that it is aimed at a younger generation.

“Emojis for me are a way of personalizing things on a more intimate level and that would be close friends and family. I don’t think emojis make your product more appealing for my sake.”

(3)

When asked if they prefer companies who use a human tone of voice or a corporate tone of voice, five participants (2, 4, 6, 7 & 8) answered that they prefer a human tone of voice, as it makes them resonate more with the brand and three participants (1, 5 & 7) answered that they prefer a corporate tone of voice over a human one.

“It just feels like it's a person tweeting and instagramming more than a business.” (4)

4.2.7 Contingencies to Humor

With the objective of further understanding the participants' attitudes towards humor, within a strictly social media context, the participants were asked whether certain factors would affect and influence how much they enjoyed humorous content posted by a brand. The factors were introduced to the participants as contingencies and were identified in the frame of reference. As the identified contingencies were found significant in other contexts of marketing, their influence is meaningful to humor as a social media strategy.

The following contingencies were identified throughout the interviews: prior brand evaluation, expectancy, authenticity, relatability and personability, severity and malintent, relevancy, and quality of the joke. The contingencies were either a) identical to a contingency developed in the frame of reference, b) similar to a contingency identified in the frame of reference however bears different implications and/or connotations, or c) a novel contingency.
Table 13: Developed Contingencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contingency</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prior Brand Evaluation</td>
<td>Characterizes a participant’s brand evaluation prior to consuming content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectancy</td>
<td>Refers to the consumer’s anticipation that humor will be used,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>given the context, the nature of the brand and/or the product and service itself.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Authenticity</td>
<td>Reflects the degree of truth and transparency with regards to</td>
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<td></td>
<td>both the brand and the humorous content.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relatability and Personability</td>
<td>Refers to the degree to which the consumer’s can relate to the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>humorous content as well as find it personable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severity and Malintent</td>
<td>Refers to the potential amount of financial, human or personal damage the humor can cause, with the significance of intention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevancy</td>
<td>Refers to whether the humorous content is meaningfully linked to brand claims.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of the Joke</td>
<td>Refers to the character, composition and delivery of the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>humorous content itself.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

4.2.7.1 Prior Brand Evaluation

Prior brand evaluation characterizes a participant’s brand evaluation prior to consuming content. Seven participants (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7 & 8), expressed that their evaluation of a brand would influence their reception and favorability of humorous content. Three of the participants (4, 7 & 8) expressed that a negative evaluation would negatively impact their reception, not commenting on the influence of a positive evaluation. Moreover, three of the participants (2, 4 & 8) emphasized that they could still appreciate the humor, however not the brand itself. Participant 2 highlighted self-deprecating humor when maintaining a negative brand evaluation and stated that “it also really depends on the joke. Because if it’s like from the previous example, one of these self-deprecating jokes, I can appreciate it more even if I've had a bad experience.”. Furthermore, two factors to prior brand evaluation were identified: time and severity. Time refers to the time, length and
additional experiences between the bad experience and the consumption of the content. Severity refers to how bad the experience and/or evaluation of the brand was prior to consuming content.

“...if I had had any other experience to counter that negative experience. Then that could change my mind.” (7)

4.2.7.2 Expectancy

Expectancy refers to the consumer’s anticipation that humor will be used, given the context, the nature of the brand and/or the product and service itself. Six participants (1, 2, 4, 5, 6 & 7) expressed that humorous content coming from an unexpected brand or context is funnier than when expected. One participant (8) stated that it varied depending on the context and actual joke, and one participant (3) expressed that expectancy has no implication on the level of humor. Exemplifying the Ukrainian Twitter account, and taking into consideration the current circumstances, participant 2 provided an interesting and plausible explanation as to why the unexpected humor is more appreciated:

“Which is funny because you wouldn't expect the Ukrainian Twitter to be funny right now. But here they are making jokes, but it's also jokes mixed with serious posts. Which makes the message come across really good. I think for us as people who don’t live in Ukraine, we appreciate it more because it makes the situation more comprehensible. Because what's happening there is of course, very horrible, and it's hard to grasp. But these jokes make it easier to comprehend the situation. And I think the same applies for companies using jokes, or funny posts in contexts where you wouldn't expect it to be funny. They don't always have to be situations that are horrible, but it makes it more comprehensible and relatable.” (2)

Moreover, three factors to expectancy have been identified: risk, the context, product and brand category as well as actor prominence. Risk refers to the perceived risk, on the brand's behalf, of making the joke. Seven participants (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 & 7) acknowledged the general risk in creating humorous content and four participants (1, 2, 4 & 7) expressed that the risk enhanced the potential
of the content and that they would be more impressed by brands when the humorous content is risky. Additionally, two participants (5 & 6) shared the same feeling, however not as strongly and enthusiastically to that risk always enhances the humorous content.

“Because it's just about commitment in a way like they would have to really risk and put themselves out there and be sure about this joke to make it happen and because it's more surprising, then that makes the joke funnier.” (7)

“Even when the risk really kicks in, like because sometimes football players make jokes and they get fined like 20,000 pounds. And then it's really really funny.” (4)

The context, product and brand category refers to the degree to which content differs from general expectations of communication and marketing for the specific product, context, or brand category. Four participants (1, 3, 5 & 8) mentioned that the match between expectancy and the context, product and brand category is important.

“It's up to the brand to figure out if it's worth it or not [...] but yeah, the safest route is to be authentic to your brand and maintain the humor in that realm.” (1)

Actor prominence refers to the level of visibility of a brand or business. Highly prominent actors typically have larger, more active and a more attached group of followers. Three participants (4, 6 & 7) expressed that humorous content coming from a bigger brand is ‘funnier’ simply due to the fact that it is less expected.

“I guess it's going back to “when you least expect it”. So if it's a really big brand, they're maybe not as prone to use humor. So when they do it's more funny.” (6)

Furthermore, participant 8 expressed an interesting sentiment with regards to brands maintaining their tone of voice both online and offline; “But if they are using humor I would have different expectations of their services in real life.” (8).
4.2.7.3 Authenticity

Authenticity reflects the degree of truth and transparency with regards to both the brand and the humorous content. The message delivered by the brand or business should be coherent with its general character so a mismatch in the eyes of the consumers does not occur. Seven participants (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 & 7) expressed that the perceived authenticity of a brand and their communication influences whether the humorous content has the desired outcome. Three factors to authenticity have been identified: the authenticity of the brand itself, consistency, and spontaneity. The authenticity of the brand itself refers to whether the humorous content and context within the content is true and legitimate to the brand.

“It's always good for brands to be transparent but if they make a joke about something that they do, but I as a consumer don't perceive the brand, in the way that they formulated themselves in the joke or in their content, then I'd find it less funny. Because it's like, what are these guys talking about?” (2)

Consistency refers to the compatibility and frequency at which brands produce their humorous content. Four participants (1, 3, 5 & 7) exemplified consistency as an aspect to authenticity. Three types of consistency have been identified: being consistent to your audience, consistent to your humor and consistent throughout campaigns and strategies.

“Because if they deviate for the change from being a humorous brand [...] then I start to think maybe I'm not the audience anymore. Are they looking for someone else?” (5)

“So if you make a bad joke one day but nine times out of ten you make a good joke, and nine times out of ten I laugh, then I am not going to walk away.” (3)

Spontaneity refers to the perceived genuity and spontaneity of the joke. Three participants (2, 4 & 6) expressed that the more perceived spontaneity of a joke the higher the likelihood to find it funny.
“When they have like a dialogue with their customers and they are funny in their comments, I think that that's like the most hilarious thing. Because that feels very quick, spontaneous, and not like a huge team thinking very carefully about it. You actually feel like the company is funny. And not trying to be funny.” (6)

4.2.7.4 Relatability and Personability

Relatability and personability refers to the degree to which the consumers can relate to the humorous content as well as find it personable. Seven participants (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 & 7) described content as being funny or more enjoyable when they were able to relate to the messaging.

“The humor that I enjoy is more like experiences that I've had myself where I can relate to somebody else's situation.” (3)

Five participants (1, 4, 5, 6, & 7) expressed the importance of brands and/or their humorous content being influenced by their personability. Brands that are personal or create humorous content that makes them appear more personable, are more desirable.

…and they're speaking to me like my friend would.” (5)

“If you get the feeling that a big company’s social media is just run by this one dude or girl. And the content itself just feels spontaneous and just has some good timing to it, you know, it feels personal then it's funnier.” (4)

4.2.7.5 Severity and Malintent

Severity and malintent refers to the potential amount of financial, human or personal damage the humor can cause, with the significance of intention. Throughout the interviews an underlying negative sentiment towards mean, harmful, ostracizing, and offensive jokes was clear. However,
the negative sentiment was contextualized. Six of the participants (2, 4, 5, 6, 7 & 8) expressed that the higher the severity or sensitivity of the humorous content, the higher the potential for the content to be appreciated. Three of the participants (2, 4 & 7) in this case felt strongly that the more sensitive the subject the funnier the joke if executed successfully and three participants (5, 6 & 8) expressed the same feelings however emphasized the dependency on context. One participant (3) felt strongly that jokes are not to be made about people as well as regarding sensitive and serious subjects. Three factors to severity and malintent have been identified: who is making the joke, what they are making the joke about and the intention. Who is making the joke refers to who the humorous content is targeted towards. Generally, brands are either making fun of themselves or others. All of the participants felt that self-deprecating humor was appreciated, however, the combination of serious and sensitive subjects and making fun of others was largely unappreciated.

“You can't ostracize or call out a group, even if it is not a group that I like, it is still not okay to ostracize them to win over, or make somebody else laugh. It is just wrong.” (3)

“He's mocking himself. And that makes it funny.” (8)

However, participant 3 expressed an interesting contextualization of when making fun of others was acceptable:

“Especially if it's not punching down. Because if you have McDonald's making fun of your local burger joint it would be horrible. But on the other hand, if you're punching up, so if your local burger joint makes fun of McDonald's, maybe that's fine. But as long as it's like on the same level, and you're in the same business, yeah. And both of them kind of have a humorous tone of voice.” (4)

What they are making the joke about regards the combination of humor and the subject matter. The subject matter adds a degree to the complexity of crafting humorous content. The participants often expressed that the determination of whether content was appreciated or not depended on the subject matter. However, when asked, they referred to the quality of the joke.
“Yeah, I feel like humor is difficult in that way. Because a lot of humor is based on really inappropriate topics, like some of the most funny jokes are that. So it’s difficult to say that anything is off limits, but the only thing I can imagine is like I said in the beginning, a brand that’s trying to raise money for dying kids or something. They shouldn’t be joking at all. But apart from that, maybe if a company has like a headline news tragedy story, then they shouldn’t joke about it.” (7)

Intent refers to a brand’s intention in creating humorous content. All of the participants shared a negative sentiment towards malintent.

“So I assume they’re not being mean intentionally.” (5)

4.2.7.6 Relevancy

Relevancy refers to whether the humorous content is meaningfully linked to brand claims. Five participants (1, 2, 5, 6 & 7) expressed that the humorous content is enhanced when relevantly linked to the product or brand, one participant (8) answered that it depends and two of the participants (3 & 4) expressed that the claims a brand makes does not have to be meaningfully linked to the brand or product in order to be appreciated. Furthermore, brand claims can be deconstructed into three categories: meaningfully linked to the nature of the brand, product context and target market. Four of the participants (1, 5, 6 & 7) expressed the importance of the humor being meaningfully linked to the nature of the brand, five participants expressed (2, 3, 4, 7 & 8) the importance of the humor being meaningfully linked to the product context and two participants (1 & 5) expressed the importance of the humor being meaningfully linked to the target audience.

“I think it has an impact. I think if it's not relevant to the brand, then I can follow a comic page or something. But I mean, I follow the brand and all I see about that brand should be related.” (6)
“So building the humor in your lane, to your target audience, I think is most important.” (1)

4.2.7.7 Quality of the Joke

The contingency, quality of the joke, refers to the character, composition, and delivery of the humorous content itself. Throughout an aspect of the interview, five participants (3, 4, 5, 6 & 8) implied that the decisive factor for successful humorous content was the construction of the ‘joke’.

“... but to be able to use it effectively to a point where it makes a point and people enjoy it, kind of takes a gift.” (3)

“... but then it has to be a certain, you know, level of craftsmanship behind the joke.” (4)

“As long as it's done with taste”. (5)

Given the complexity and contextuality of humor, each participant had personal qualifiers to what made for a good joke. When asked about the previously identified contingencies in the frame of reference, all of the participants expressed “it depends” and/or “it depends on the joke” at least once. Participant 4 specifically stated that “as long as it is a good joke, it will always hit.”. Participant 8 did not share the same notion and stated: “Good joke is a good joke, but you know, it's like how it was delivered and everything. But not regardless.”.
5. Analysis

In this section, the insight gained from the empirical findings will be analyzed. Furthermore, this section presents rich insights and a deeper understanding of how the empirical findings complement the concepts presented in the frame of reference.

The following figure (Figure 9) complements the researcher’s conceptual model through presenting the empirical findings. The major concepts contributing to humor as a social media strategy are developed throughout the analysis.
Figure 9: The Researchers Revised and Developed Conceptual Model

Social Capabilities
- Social Platforms
- Engagement
- Customer Relationships
- New Language Modes
- Tone of Voice
- Interactivity
- Effectivity
- Attention
- Emotion
- Types of Humor
- Contingencies
- Subjectivity
- Appropriateness

Modern Communication
- Meaningful source of connectivity
- Essential and regular communication tool
- Consumer’s resonate with a human tone of voice
- Consumer’s prefer a language mode that mirrors their own
- Human tone of voice increases brand relatability and personality
- Attention in the form of unexpected humorous content
- Humor is related to interpersonal relationships
- Humor influences brand attitudes
- Humor elicits emotion

Existing Strategies

Seven contingencies: prior brand evaluation, expectancy, authenticity, relatability and personality, severity and malintent, relevancy and quality of the joke.

Humor as a Social Media Strategy
- Individual characteristics effect humor appreciation (age and gender)
- Influence of background and personal experiences

Contextuality
5.1 Social and Interactive Platforms

The social media era was described by literature as the most significant technology, and an important communication and marketing tool for businesses (Appel et al., 2019; Hajli, 2014). The results from both the qualitative and quantitative data demonstrate that social media is not only a meaningful source of connectivity (Ge & Gretzel, 2018) for respondents and participants, but an essential and regular source of communication. The second largest type of account followed by the respondents on social media was brands and companies with 55%. A majority of the respondents stated that they follow between 1-10 and 11-20 brands on social media. Furthermore, 58.4% of the survey respondents answered that they sometimes interact with brands on social media, and 7.8% answered that they often engage, in the form of liking, commenting, sharing or direct messaging. Xiao et al. (2017) accredited the increase in popularity of social media to the interactive and of course social nature of the platforms. Participant 4 commented on what could be termed a social media behavior:

"... because that's just what you do when you see something you like, just like it." (4)

According to Wang et al. (2021), the average social media user spends more than two hours on social media daily. All interview participants except for one (8), expressed that they spend at least two hours on social media daily, with an average of three hours. Additionally, all of the participants were active on at least four different social media platforms (see Table 13), with the most common being Facebook and Instagram.

Furthermore, the social media era has changed the nature of the relationship and communication between brands and consumers (Drummond et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2014). Platforms can be perceived as a marketers go-to tool for socialization and information sharing (Zhang et al., 2014). The interactive nature and new language that has been developed throughout the rise of social media has increased brand capabilities (Ge & Gretzel, 2018). Moreover, the new social language consists of several modes of expression, such as animated stickers, graphics interchange format (GIF), emoticons and emojis (Ge & Gretzel, 2018). Although the incorporation of emojis in brand’s communication was not favored by the majority, rather evenly distributed, a
relationship between the respondents and participants personal use and desired brand use was found. Generally, the respondents and participants preferred brand communication that mirrored their own. However, despite emojis being one of the modes of expression in the new social language, the majority of respondents and participants preferred an alternative aspect to the language, a human tone of voice.

5.2 A Human Tone of Voice

A human tone of voice is an affordance of social media’s interactive nature (Xiao et al., 2017), and one of the many aspects of the new social language. A human tone of voice presents as more human-like, is easier to form relationships with, appears friendlier and expresses greater empathy and understanding (Javornik et al., 2020). Moreover, interaction on platforms between brands and consumers allows for both parties to initiate as well as cultivate conversation and ultimately develop deeper relationships (Xiao et al., 2017). 84.3% of the survey respondents stated that they resonate more with and feel closer to a brand that communicates in a more human-like tone. Furthermore, seven interview participants (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 & 7) described content as being funny or more enjoyable when they were able to relate to the messaging and five participants (1, 4, 5, 6, & 7) expressed the importance of brands and/or their humorous content being influenced by their personability. Relatable and personable humorous content on social media is ultimately more desirable than a corporate persona.

“...and they're speaking to me like my friend would.” (5)

5.3 Humor Favorability

The notion that humor increases advertising effectiveness and/or positively influences an aspect of the customer-brand relationship is explicit (Alden et al., 1993; Chan & Lowe, 2021; Chattopadhyay & Basu, 1990; Duong et al., 2020; McCullough & Taylor, 1993). Furthermore, humor has been proven to be effective for several product categories (Chattopadhyay & Basu, 1990) and continuously been attributed to memorable marketing efforts (Alden et al., 1993). It has
been identified that 80.4% of the survey respondents appreciate a brand’s use of humor on social media and as many as 32% of the survey respondents believed that all brands should use humor as a part of their social media strategy. Furthermore, 63.3% of the survey respondents exemplified a brand that uses humor in the context of social media and all of the interview participants expressed that they have a need for humor (NFH), with five participants claiming a very high NFH in their everyday lives. NFH is a trait that refers to one’s tendency to generate and seek out humor (Cline & Kellaris, 2007), of which five participants actively do on social media. TikTok and Instagram were identified as the go-to platforms for humorous content and participant 3 stated that when seeking out humorous content, they do not exit the platform until something funny is found. The favorability of the incorporation of humor as a social media strategy is clear; consumers simply appreciate humorous content.

5.4 Humor Types

The favorability of the incorporation of humor as a social media strategy is clear. However, the adoption of a particular humor type by brands is more complex. The humorous content shared with the survey respondents and the interviewees was based on the four humor types identified in the frame of reference. The aim was to identify whether a particular type of humor was more appreciated and therefore more effective to incorporate by brands. When analyzing the perception of the humorous content shared by brands on social media, no humor type was found more significant than another, as the expression of appreciation for humorous content differed without any pattern. With regards to the malicious humor type, one example was appreciated by respondents of the survey whilst the other was not and with regards to the interviews, four participants appreciated the content and four did not. Furthermore, the humor type that was found marginally significant was self-depreciating humor as all of the interview participants appreciated the meme shared by RyanAir (Appendix 3.4), however to different extents. Chiew et al. (2019) conceptualized consumer’s perceptions of humor types into two dimensions: other-directed humor and self-directed humor. Focusing broadly on the two dimensions provided by Chiew et al. (2019), and not their specific typification, consumer preferences can be identified. Given that self-depreciating humor was found marginally significant, an appreciation for self-directed humor can
be considered reliable for brands and businesses. Conclusively, a specific type of humor is not more effective than another, but is rather dependent on the actual content, context, contingencies and ultimately whether it is self-directed or other-directed.

5.5 Contingencies and Contextuality

The notion that humor increases advertising effectiveness and/or positively influences an aspect of the customer-brand relationship is explicit (Alden et al., 1993; Chan & Lowe, 2021; Chattopadhyay & Basu, 1990; Duong et al., 2020; McCullough & Taylor, 1993). The determination that social media is a meaningful source of connectivity (Ge & Gretzel, 2018) as well as an essential and regular source of communication for consumers has been established. Furthermore, the results of both the quantitative and qualitative study support the favorability of the incorporation of humor in social media strategies. As the context of social media with regards to the use of humor is confirmable, the question of application becomes when and how. Humor is naturally individual and subjective from the onset, however, both underlying principles and contingencies have been developed for the context of social media. The following seven contingencies were developed throughout this study: prior brand evaluation, expectancy, authenticity, relatability and personability, severity and malintent, relevancy and quality of the joke (see Table 12). The following underlying principles were described and developed in the frame of reference: 1) humorous advertisements and content draw more attention, 2) humor elicits emotion, 3) humor is a desirable characteristic and a feature likely to induce a good mood, 4) humor is related to interpersonal relationships, 5) humor influences processing resources and 6) humor influences brand attitudes.

The contingencies expectancy and severity and malintent, can to a degree be described by the first principle, humorous advertisements and content draw more attention. Relevancy is dependent on anticipation and severity and involvement is dependent on what is generally, and socially, acceptable. A consensus in literature concerning the notion that humorous ads grab more attention has been established and Cline & Kellaris (2007) argue that humor enhances initial attention, aids brand recall, and holds attention. With regards to the two contingencies expectancy and severity
and malintent, a surprise element is present. Six participants (1, 2, 4, 5, 6 & 7) expressed that humorous content coming from an unexpected brand or context is funnier than when expected, and six participants (2, 4, 5, 6, 7 & 8) expressed that the higher the severity or sensitivity of the humorous content, the higher the potential for the content to be appreciated. Although the contingencies are dependent on the humorous content being positively appreciated, unexpectancy and the untraditional arguably attract more attention than the expected and traditional.

“So if an ad campaign wants to really attract my attention, it really has to be funny. Whereas if it were on a bus station billboard, I'm standing there while I have time to look at it. So it's easier to attract my attention without being funny. But on social media, you really have to be like snappy and attract my attention quicker and more effectively, which I think humor is such a good way to do.” (7)

The contingency relatability and personability can be explained by the underlying principle that humor is related to interpersonal relationships (Chiew et al., 2019). Seven participants (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 & 7) described content as being funny or more enjoyable when they were able to relate to the messaging. Five participants (1, 4, 5, 6, & 7) expressed the importance of brands and/or their humorous content being influenced by their personability. Brands that are humorous and personal, both by nature and their communication, are more desirable than those that are not. Cann & Matson (2014) expressed that a good sense of humor is a social quality of considerable worth. Considering the consumer preference for a human tone of voice, relatable and personable brands, as well as their social media connectivity, humorous and human-like brands seem to maintain an advantage.

“...and they're speaking to me like my friend would.” (5)

Moreover, the contingency relevancy can be strengthened by the principal humor influences brand attitudes. Despite the lack of agreement on exactly how humor influences brand attitudes in literature, the notion that it does has been concurred. Krishnan & Chakravarti (2003) argue that strong humor initially attracts processing resources through breaking the advertising clutter and that sequentially the right balance between humor strength and relevance must be achieved. Five participants (1, 2, 5, 6 & 7) expressed that humorous content is enhanced when relevantly linked
to the product or brand and one participant (8) answered that it depends. The contingency of relevancy was further categorized into three aspects: meaningfully linked to the nature of the brand, product context and target market. Relevancy becomes especially significant in the context of social media as the creators of contents are brands and they, assumingly so, have goals beyond follower count and engagement.

“I think it has an impact. I think if it's not relevant to the brand, then I can follow a comic page or something. But I mean, I follow the brand and all I see about that brand should be related.”

(6)

The remaining three contingencies prior brand evaluation, authenticity and quality of the joke can be supported by the underlying principle that humor elicits emotion. Regardless of which emotion humor elicits, given that it is individual and subjective, the elicitation of emotion itself strengthens a consumer’s reaction. Consumers may be more inclined to share their emotions or content with others, build stronger relationships to the brand or others in the community, influence brand attitude, closer resemble the human voice and therefore lead to greater acceptance or a conversational reaction (Xiao et al., 2017).

Humor and the appreciation of humorous content is often dependent on its contextualization. The aforementioned contingencies are general recommendations for when and how to use humor; however, the concept of in reference to what, or what to make light of is complex. The phrase “it depends”, or the word “depends” was used a total of 35 times amongst the participants throughout the interviews. Moreover, three participants (1, 3 & 4) contradicted themselves during the interviews and ultimately retracted their statement or provided further contextualization and dependencies to their answers. Chattopadhyay & Basu (1990) expressed that humor is simply inappropriate in many situations and argued that it is unreasonable to expect that humorous advertisements are more effective than those that are non-humorous in all conditions. 68% of the survey respondents did not believe that absolutely all brands should use humor as a social media strategy and exemplified industries such as non-profit organizations, government entities, healthcare, financial, consumer goods and others as industries that should be cautious of adoption.
Given this uncertainty, marketers must decide if the payoff between risk and reward is worth the potential benefits associated with humor.

## 5.6 Influence of Age and Gender

### 5.6.1 Age and the Social Media Context

Despite many advantages and capabilities to the incorporation of humor in a social media strategy, subjectivity and individuality remain two major weaknesses. Having established that humor is favorable amongst both the respondents of the survey and participants of the interviews, the desire to understand for whom humor works in the context of social media prevails. Cline & Kellaris (2007) described that individual’s differences, backgrounds, experiences, and sense of humor, most likely influence a consumer’s receptivity to humorous stimuli. Using the most fundamental differentiators as well as predictors of the respondents and participants, their age and gender allowed for interesting results from the regression analysis and qualitative themes to arise. The results of the regression analysis show that an increase in age results in a negative influence on whether humorous content is appreciated. Following a sequential mixed-methods research design, the notion of age bearing negative implications on ‘how funny something is’ was further explored in the qualitative phase of the study. As shown in Table 10, with two participants in each of the four age groups, age category one (18-24) answered yes or kind of to the question “do you think this is funny” eight times and category four (50+) only answered yes or kind of twice. Meaning that the youngest participants appreciated all of the humorous content presented to them and the oldest participants only appreciated one piece of content each. Given the context of social media, personal habits and experiences must be taken into consideration. Participant 3 expressed the following with regards to saving posts on Instagram and TikTok:

"You know what, I've actually thought about doing that but I just really don't know how. There have been a few things like a recipe the other day, there was a woman that did a recipe for Mexican flour tortillas and I had to play it about 14 times. Because I didn't know how to save it."
The social media era and the adoption of a new social language has undoubtedly led to implications for brands and industries (Ge & Gretzel, 2018). The culture of connectivity regularly tests users' and brand’s social media language proficiency (Ge & Gretzel, 2018); although brands may be passing the proficiency test, the consumers they maintained before the new era may not. As both participants (3 & 8) belonging to the oldest age category expressed either difficulty in understanding the appropriateness and correct use of emojis or hesitancy of incorporating them in their personal communication; a boundary to appreciation of humorous content may be clear. It seems as if the culture of connectivity and the social media era have implications for its users belonging to the ages 50 and above as well.

“But again, I don't understand it [...] Certain emojis mean certain things. If I knew what those were, they might mean more to me, but like there's 5000 different smiley faces. Well, they all mean 5000 things I don't know. So yeah, for me, it doesn't add value.” (3)

5.6.2. The Gender Role

Moreover, both the regression analysis and thematic analysis showed a relationship between gender and humor, specifically male. There were three instances amongst the regression analyses where the predictor male was statistically significant at the ten percent level (p< 0.10) as well as one instance at the five percent level (0.05): model 1, the totality of the respondent’s appreciation of humor, model 2, the personal and community based humor type, model 3, the self-deprecating humor type and model 4, the wit and one-liners humor type. When analyzing the qualitative data, it became apparent that more men than women appreciated malicious humor, and in its totality, more men than women appreciated humorous content; despite more women answering the survey. Men answered yes or kind of to the question “do you think this is funny” a total of twelve times throughout the interviews and women answered yes or kind of ten times.
5.6.3 Background and Experiences

Furthermore, participants 1, 3, 4, 5 & 6 mentioned specific aspects of their personal lives that influenced either their general appreciation or disregard for specific types of humor, or a specific reasoning for one of the examples presented in the interview. With regards to the third example presented in the interview (see Appendix 2.3) participant 6, who identifies as a “pro-vaxxer” found the exchange between brands especially funny, where controversially, participant 1 who stated that they are not positive towards the Covid-19 vaccine did not appreciate the joke. Moreover, participant 3 continuously referred to their nursing background as to why or why not certain subjects were appropriate to be humorous as well as the type of humorous content they seek out on social media. Similarly, participant 4 repeatedly exemplified football scenarios that either were or were not okay and participant 5 referenced their culture when explaining what types of humor were appropriate:

“It's called blackout, embracing black culture. They’re all about positive black culture. And that's what they strive towards in all their posts. About black people laughing, but not in a malicious way. It's just the thing that we have in our culture. So it's not just aimed at a certain geographical audience. And we will all just gather in the comments and laugh about it.”
6. Conclusion

The reader will be provided with a conclusion from the empirical findings, analysis and discussion in this section, by answering the research questions.

The aim of this mixed methods research was to explore and gain a deeper understanding of the favorability and appreciation of humor as a social media strategy. Furthermore, the purpose of this research was to understand the contextuality of the adoption of humor with regards to a brand’s audience, consumers, and target market. More specifically, given a brand’s desired outcomes and the potential consequences, how, when and to whom should humor be incorporated in a social media strategy. Three research questions and a conceptual model (see Figure 1) were developed with the objective of guiding the study. Conclusively, the conceptual model was revised and complemented with findings (see Figure 9).

RQ #1: How favorable is the incorporation of humor in a social media strategy?

The question of favorability with regards to the incorporation of humor in a social media strategy was primarily answered through two sources: the quantitative survey and qualitative interviews. 80.4% of the survey respondents appreciated a brand’s use of humor, 63.3% of the survey respondents exemplified a brand that produces humorous content on social media and a majority of interview participants actively seek out humorous content on social media. The favorability of the incorporation of humor as a social media strategy is clear; consumers simply appreciate humorous content.
RQ #2: Does the relationship between humor appreciation and individual characteristics depend on the type of humor?

With regards to the second research question, a relationship between humor appreciation and individual characteristics was recognized. Inherent characteristics such as age and gender as well as personal characteristics such as background and experiences, influence whether consumers appreciate humorous content on social media. Generally, an increase in age negatively influences the appreciation of humor. Despite the influence of personal characteristics being more contextualized, the notion that a consumer’s background and experiences affect their appreciation of humorous content is clear. The type of humor produced by a brand was found to have no significance on consumer’s perceived appreciation; rather the general direction of the humor, other-directed or self-directed, as well as consumer’s characteristics and the identified contingencies to humor set the ramifications of the adoption of humor.

RQ #3: Why and under which circumstances is humor as a social media strategy favorable and appreciated by consumers?

Lastly, the question of why and under which circumstances humor is a favorable social media strategy can be answered through the seven developed contingencies to humor: prior brand evaluation, expectancy, authenticity, relatability and personability, severity and malintent, relevancy and the quality of the joke. Furthermore, several industries have been exemplified as cautionary and contexts that require further evaluation. Given the individuality and subjectivity of humor, the developed contingencies can be considered an advisory list. As an understanding of one’s target market and perception of their needs is fundamental when engaging on social media, brand’s must secure knowledge of their audience before entertaining the favorability and advantages of humor.
7. Discussion

Practical implications, strengths, limitations, and proposals for future research within the field are presented in this section.

7.1 Practical Implications

Humor has consistently been identified as an appreciated marketing and communication tool as it increases advertising effectiveness and positively influences the customer-brand relationship. Moreover, humor has proven to be a favorable and appreciated source of content in the context of social media. However, given the individuality and contextuality of humor, its adoption should be evaluated through several aspects. Seven contingencies to the use of humor have been identified as an advisory list to the questions of when and how. Furthermore, a preferred characteristic of a brand’s audience, target market and consumers have been identified, namely age. Factors such as brand industry as well as a consumer's gender, background and experiences have been highlighted as influences of consumer perception of humor.

The simple notion that humor is a favorable and appreciated social media strategy is clear however the humorous content in itself is highly complex and contextualized. Brands must secure a thorough understanding of their audience before realizing the benefits of the incorporation of humor.

7.2 Strengths and Limitations

7.2.1 Strengths

Throughout this research, three main strengths were recognized. The first strength was the mixed method research design; which allowed for more than one phase of data collection and analysis to
be conducted and facilitated the investigation and exploration of the complex and dynamic phenomenon, humor as a social media strategy. As a sequential explanatory mixed method research design was adopted, the quantitative data collection and analysis informed the qualitative data collection and analysis allowing for the incorporation of multiple perspectives as well as richer and deeper insights.

The second strength recognized was the diversity of individuals who partook in both the quantitative and the qualitative study. The survey was completed by individuals who resided in 37 countries and six continents. The interviews were conducted by eight individuals including eight different countries. The diversity and broad inclusion of residencies allowed for truly diverse perspectives and insights with regards to culture, ultimately reflecting and validating the population of social media users.

The third strength recognized was the pilot tests conducted for the survey. Eight individuals, both men and women in each category, completed and evaluated the survey before publication. The pilot testing allowed for feedback regarding the interpretation of questions and the overall survey construction, aiding in the process of refinement and ultimately allowing for more reliable and true results.

7.2.2 Limitations

The first limitation of the research was the construction of the survey question: how old are you? The respondents were provided with four age categories to select. Categorizing the respondent’s age, limited the results of the regression analysis. The regression analysis showed a negative influence of age on the appreciation of humor. The unit increase of age, represents the age categories and not the actual age of the respondents themselves. If the respondents were to have provided their actual age and not selected a category, a clear influence of the age predictor could have been made.
The second and third limitation of the research regards the quantity of interviews and residencies of the survey respondents. Only eight interviews were conducted, one male and one female in each age category. As age categories were established in the study, the perspective of a specific age and large variation of ages was not feasible. Additionally, despite the survey being completed by individuals residing in 37 countries, the majority was completed by Swedish residents, approximately 50%, influencing the results.

7.3 Future Research

Based on the findings, several recommendations of future research can be given. Firstly, as this research focused on measuring and exploring the favorability and contextuality of humor as a social media strategy, a measure of humor effectiveness would enrich the body of knowledge and application of humor. Effectiveness with regards to humor in other contexts of marketing have been developed in the frame of reference, however, are lacking in the specific context of social media. Having proved that humor is favorable and appreciated, measuring, and exploring how and to what degree humor is an effective social media strategy would provide clarity with regards to practitioner expectations and reward on investment.

The second recommendation concerns the types of humor. Four types of humor were identified in the frame of reference based on the classification and definitions of previous literature. The findings of this research show no significance with regards to the humor types, besides the general dimension of other-directed and self-directed humor. Understanding whether specific types of humor produce different strengths of consumer appreciation would enhance the body of knowledge. Knowing what type of humorous content, beyond the aspect of how, when and to whom would aid in the success rate of publication.
References


Appendices

Appendix 1: Concepts and their Corresponding Authors

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Appropriateness | Béal & Grégoire, 2021; Chattopadhyay & Basu, 1990; Cline & Kellaris, 2007; Wang et al., 2021

Appendix 2: Survey Questions

Part 1:
1. How old are you? Answer options: 18-24, 25-34, 35-49, 50+
2. What gender do you identify with? Answer options: Female, Male, I’d prefer not to say
3. What is your country of residence?
4. Do you use social media?
5. What social platforms do you use? Select all that apply: Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Snapchat, Pinterest, Twitter, LinkedIn, Other

Part 2:
6. What type of accounts do you mainly follow on social media? Answer options: Brands and companies, friends, family & colleagues, public figures
7. Approximately how many brands do you follow on social media? Answer options: 1-10, 11-20, 21-30, 30+
8. Do you engage with brands on social media? (Like, comment, share or messaging) Answer options: Yes, No, Sometimes
9. If yes, what influences you to engage with these brands? Answer options: The type of content, their communication style, the platform I am on, how much I like the brand, to express my opinion (leave review or feedback)
10. How much more do you appreciate/enjoy content when brands use emojis, GIFs etc.? On a scale 1-5.
11. Do you resonate more with, or feel closer to a brand when they use a more human tone of voice? Answer options: Yes, No
Part 3:
Presentation of Humor Examples

Appendix 2.1: Personal and Community Based Humor Example 1

Appendix 2.2: Personal and Community Based Humor Example 2
Appendix 2.3: Self-Deprecating Humor

Appendix 2.4: Wit and One-Liners Example 1
Appendix 2.5: Wit and One-Liners Example 2

Appendix 2.6: Malicious Humor Example 1

Appendix 2.7: Malicious Humor Example 2
Part 4:
12. Can you think of any other brands that produce funny content on social media? Yes, No
13. Can you think of a brand that tries to be funny on social media, but in your opinion fails? Yes, No
14. Do you like when brands try to be funny (successfully or not) on social media? Yes, No
15. Do you prefer: more serious, correct and formal brands on social media or more funny, informal, and relatable brands?

Part 5:
16. Do you feel more connected to a brand that has a clear personality? Yes, No
17. Do you think that the following factors impact how funny a brand on social media can be? Select all that apply: Prior beliefs and opinions about the brand, prior brand experiences, the industry the brand operates within, the brand’s characteristics.
18. Should all brands use humor as part of their social media strategy? Yes, No
19. If not, can you give an example of a brand that should not use humor?

Appendix 3: Interview Questions

Introductory Questions
1. Do you use social media? If so, what platforms are you on?
2. What type of accounts do you mainly follow on social media? For example, friends and family, brands and companies, public figures etc.
3. How active are you on social media? Approximately how many hours a day?
4. How often would you say that you engage with brands?
5. Why do you engage with brands on social media?
6. Can you rank these three factors on how much you think they influence your engagement: type of content, their communication style, how much you like the brand.
7. Do you use a lot of emojis when communicating on social media?
8. Do you appreciate when brands use them in their communication? If so, why?
9. Does the use of emojis and non-verbals change the way you resonate with a brand?
10. Do you think that brands feel more like people when they talk in the same way you do?

General Humor

11. Do you think that there is a social media trend of brands trying to be funny on social media?
12. Can you think of a brand that uses humor as their social media strategy?
13. Can you think of an example of when brands have tried to be funny but failed?
14. On what social media platform do you usually find content that you think is funny?
15. Are there any specific industries/companies you think would not benefit from using humor in their approach?
16. Do you think these are funny? Why or why not?

Appendix 3.1: Wit and One-Liners
Appendix 3.2: Personal and Community Based Humor

Going out tonight? LOL! No you're not. Come join us, loser.

Appendix 3.3: Malicious Humor

We're not an airline but we do fly planes #Djokovic

Novak Djokovic: I'm not anti-vax but will sacrifice trophies if told to get the jab.
Appendix 3.4: Self-Deprecating Humor

Contingencies to Humor

17. Do you think that there are any contingencies to using humor in social media? Give me an example.
18. Prior brand evaluation: if you have previously had really good or really bad experiences with a brand
19. Expectancy #1: if you expect a brand to be funny or not given their context of advertising, for example that a brand is less likely to use humor when talking about vacuums and cleaning before Christmas, is that a context that you expect to be funny?
20. Expectancy #2: the degree to which content differs from expectation of acceptable beliefs, attitudes and behaviors
21. Humor strength: does the brand add to whether something is funny or not, i.e., knowing that a particular brand said something, does that make it more funny?
22. Humor relevancy: meaningfully linked to the brands claims. How relevant is the joke to the product they’re selling/the brand
23. Need for humor: do you think that you have a need for humor? Do you regularly consume humorous contents of different forms? That can be through other channels such as television, books, games, people you hang out with etc.
24. Message authenticity: transparency of the brand and a mismatch between what they are trying to say and how you actually perceive them
25. Actor prominence: how big the brand is and how large of a a following they have
26. Level of severity and involvement: the severity and risk involved in making the joke/humorous content
27. Brand personality: short explanation of what brand personality is and then the example of a competent brand, trying to be funny or something else
Appendix 4: Consent Form

Interview Consent Form

Title:
Research project title: Humor as a social strategy- how does the incorporation of humor in a brand’s social media strategy affect their overall favorability, effectiveness and consumer perception.

Research investigators: Annika Romell and Rebecca Segedi

Information;
- The interview will take approximately 30-60 minutes; notes will be written during the interview as well as an audio tape recording;
- We don’t anticipate that there are any risks associated with your participation, but you have the right to stop the interview or withdraw from the research at any time;
- The transcript of the interview will be analyzed in numbers and you will remain anonymous as a research participant;
- All parts of the content of your interview may be used.

By signing this form, I agree that;
1. I am voluntarily taking part in this project. I understand that I don’t have to take part, and I can stop the interview at any time;
2. The transcribed interview or extracts from it may be used as described above;
3. I have read the Information sheet;
4. I don’t expect to receive any benefit or payment for my participation;
5. I can request a copy of the transcript of my interview and may make edits I feel necessary to ensure the effectiveness of any agreement made about confidentiality;
6. I have been able to ask questions I might have, and I understand that I am free to contact the researcher with any questions I may have in the future.

Printed Name

Participants Signature Date

Researchers Signature Date
Appendix 5: Survey Answers - Social Media Platforms

Appendix 6: Survey Answers - Influences of Engagement
Appendix 7: Taco Bell Survey Answers

Appendix 8: Netflix Survey Answers
Appendix 9: Moosejaw Survey Answers

![Moosejaw Survey Graph]

Appendix 10: Virgin Trains Survey Answers

![Virgin Trains Survey Graph]
Appendix 11: Burger King Survey Answers

Appendix 12: Old Spice Survey Answers
Appendix 13: Charmin Survey Answers

Appendix 14: Survey Humor Contingencies
### Appendix 15: Regression Outputs Model 1

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<td>-0.1568216 0.0177344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0.7986387</td>
<td>0.4948079</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>0.107</td>
<td>-0.1743583 1.771636</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>0.8658565</td>
<td>0.4952129</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>0.081</td>
<td>-0.107937 1.83965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_cons</td>
<td>0.174556</td>
<td>0.4972508</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.726</td>
<td>-0.8032448 1.152357</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 19: Regression Outputs Model 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>Number of obs = 373</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model</td>
<td>36.3841245</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12.1280415</td>
<td>F(3, 369) = 23.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>191.347779</td>
<td>369</td>
<td>0.518557667</td>
<td>Prob &gt; F = 0.00000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>227.731903</td>
<td>372</td>
<td>0.612182536</td>
<td>R-squared = 0.1598</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Adj R-squared = 0.1529</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Root MSE = 0.72011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Malicious | Coefficient | Std. err. | t     | P>|t| | [95% conf. interval] |
|-----------|-------------|-----------|-------|-----|----------------------|
| AgeGroup  | -0.2597273  | 0.0365872 | -7.1  | 0.000| -0.3316728            |
|           |             |           |       |     | 0.1877817            |
| F         | -0.0040643  | 0.5118979 | -0.01 | 0.994| -1.010667            |
|           |             |           |       |     | 1.002539             |
| M         | 0.2354384   | 0.512317  | 0.46  | 0.646| -0.7719887           |
|           |             |           |       |     | 1.242865             |
| _cons    | 1.519455    | 0.5144252 | 2.95  | 0.003| 0.5078817            |
|           |             |           |       |     | 2.531027             |