MASTER'S DISSERTATION

CONSUMER RESPONSES TOWARDS HUMOROUS ADVERTISEMENTS EMPLOYING OPPOSING TYPES OF INCONGRUITY

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ABSTRACT

Advertisements have permeated society to such an extent that marketers are adopting novel ways to elicit more positive consumer responses. One way to achieve this is through the incorporation of humour and incongruity in an advertisement. While the literature is somewhat well-versed on the effects that humour and incongruity individually have on attitudinal and behavioural consumer responses, it is lacking in terms of their effects when these are simultaneously used. Hence, this thesis compares consumer responses towards humorous advertisements which employ opposing types of incongruity — low and high incongruity. Advertisements incorporating humour in the form of wordplay and incongruity between the textual and visual elements of the ad were developed for a fictitious beer brand, so that quantitative data could be collected via a survey where the type of incongruity, attitude towards the ad, attitude towards the brand, purchase intention and word-of-mouth intention were measured.

This study concludes that humorous advertisements with low incongruity led to overall more positive attitudinal and behavioural consumer responses than high-incongruity ones. In addition, a positive impact was supported between attitude towards the ad and attitude towards the brand for humorous advertisements regardless of type of incongruity. Lastly, the study finds that demographic characteristics, like gender and occupation, do not influence

attitude towards the ad for neither the low nor the high-incongruity humorous ad.

Keywords: *humour; incongruity; humorous advertisements; consumer responses; attitudinal responses; behavioural responses*.

RESUMO

A publicidade penetrou a sociedade de tal forma que profissionais de marketing precisam de adotar novas formas de obter respostas mais positivas dos consumidores. Tal pode ser alcançado através do uso de humor e incongruência em um só anúncio. Embora a literatura seja um tanto vasta relativamente aos efeitos, individualmente, do humor e da incongruência nas respostas afetivas e comportamentais dos consumidores, o mesmo não se aplica quando ambos são utilizados em simultâneo. Deste modo, esta tese compara as respostas de consumidores a anúncios com apelo humorístico que incorporam tipos opostos de incongruência — baixa e alta incongruência. Anúncios que incorporam humor através de trocadilhos e incongruência entre o elemento textual e visual do mesmo foram desenvolvidos para uma marca de cerveja fictícia para a recolha de dados quantitativos através um inquérito, onde tipo de incongruência, atitude em relação ao anúncio, atitude em relação à marca, intenção de compra e intenção de recomendação boca-a-boca foram avaliadas.

Em conclusão, anúncios com apelo humorístico que incorporam baixa incongruência levaram a respostas de teor afetivo e comportamental mais positivas nos consumidores do que os que incorporam alta incongruência. Além disso, foi comprovado um impacto positiva entre atitude em relação ao anúncio e atitude em relação à marca para anúncios com apelo humorístico que incorporem tanto baixa como alta incongruência. Por fim, este estudo demonstra que características demográficas, tais como género ou atividade exercida, não

influenciam atitudes em relação a anúncios de apelo humorístico de baixa ou alta incongruência.

Palavras-chave: *humor; incongruência; anúncios com apelo humorístico; respostas de consumidor; respostas afetivas; respostas comportamentais*.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

INC-RES – Incongruity-Resolution

A_{ad} – Attitude towards the ad

A_{br} – Attitude towards the brand

P_{int} – Purchase Intention

WOM_{int} – Word-of-mouth intention

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the years, marketing and advertising have kept pace with the advent of new technologies, always remaining a constant in the ever-evolving lives of consumers (American Marketing Association, 2020). When strategically employed, advertising — a component of marketing — can improve overall consumer perceptions, attract new customers, retain existing ones, drive sales and more (American Marketing Association, 2020). From billboards, newspapers and magazines, radio and television, websites, apps, social media, podcasts, streaming services and videos, the variety of ways in which ads can be displayed to consumers keeps growing. Therefore, in the current age, advertising and marketing are everywhere (American Marketing Association, 2020), with the ordinary consumer seeing up to ten thousand advertisements per day (Carr, 2021). Nevertheless, consumers can become annoyed and have lower ad recall for advertisements considered lacking in personalisation or disruptive to a certain experience (Mazumder et al., 2021). In fact, the modern consumer can go out of their way to avoid ads, be it through the download of ad-blocking extensions on their browser or by subscribing to more expensive ad-free media subscription plans (Insider Intelligence, 2022). Faced with this reality and knowing that attention is a scarce resource, advertisers have long shown interest in different ways of capturing consumers' attention (Lee & Schumann, 2004). Attracting the modern consumer's attention through the use of advertisements, and consequently influence consumer

responses, can be achieved through the manipulation of the elements that compose the ad itself. For example, the usage of creative media (Rauwers et al., 2018), playing with humour (e.g., Solomon et al., 2013; Weinberger & Gulas, 1992) or incongruity (Lee & Schumann, 2004), the use of influencers to reach specific audiences (Michaelsen et al., 2022), among others, are all means which can encourage consumers to invest attention and effort on a certain product and brand, generating more positive consumer responses.

Taking this into consideration, the following research chooses to, through the use of a survey, explore the use of humour and incongruity in advertisements and the responses elicited in consumers. The choice to study humour and incongruity in specific comes from the fact that both are found to be successful in attracting consumer's attention (Lee & Schumann, 2004; Weinberger & Gulas, 2019). Moreover, only attitudinal and behavioural consumer responses are studied given that the literature does not provide as much consensus and sources regarding these in comparison to cognitive responses. Finally, despite extant literature revealing that most studies in the topics of consumer responses, incongruity and humorous ads are quantitative in nature, because very few mention all three topics simultaneously, this study also aims to fill this gap, specifically through the use of a survey.

Therefore, the central objective of this research is to compare consumer responses towards humorous advertisements which employ opposing (low or

high) types of incongruity. To comprehensively complete this objective, the same was divided into the seven specific objectives:

(1) Compare consumers' attitude towards the ad according to the type of incongruity present the humorous advertisement;

(2) Compare consumers' attitude towards the brand according to the type of incongruity present in the humorous advertisement;

(3) Compare consumers' purchase intention according to the type of incongruity present in the humorous advertisement;

(4) Compare consumers' word-of-mouth intention according to the type of incongruity present in the humorous advertisement;

(5) Understand whether attitude towards the ad impacts attitude towards the brand in humorous advertisements, under opposing types of incongruity;

(6) Assess whether attitude towards the ad differs according to gender, under opposing types of incongruity in a humorous advertisement, and,

(7) Assess whether attitude towards the ad differs according to occupation, under opposing types of incongruity in a humorous advertisement.

This study is relevant to academia since it expands on the current knowledge regarding consumer responses, humour and incongruity separately but in combination as well. Moreover, it adds to existing research by contributing insights into consumer responses towards humorous

advertisements employing low or high incongruity, a topic not yet well-represented in extant literature. In terms of practical implications, this study provides concrete data that can support and help validate managers, marketers or advertisers' decision-making when it comes to incorporating humour with incongruity in marketing communication campaigns and the reactions that can be expected from consumers.

This study is divided into five chapters, namely the Literature Review, Methodology, Findings, Results Discussion and Conclusions, Limitations and Future Research. Following the final chapter, the reader can find the references and appendices sections, which can be referred to at any time.

1. Literature Review

This chapter provides a detailed insight into the concepts at the core of this research, namely the use of humour, incongruity and consumer responses in advertising. This was achieved by highlighting relevant findings and sources from extant literature on those same topics. The chapter concludes with a list of the hypotheses that define the empirical path of the study, complemented by a research model representing how these relate to the studied concepts.

1.1. The use of humour in advertising

One of the themes at the core of this study is humour, a concept well-known for being complex, subjective and difficult to define. Simply put, humour is "an attempt by one party to create mirth in another party, which may or may not succeed" (Weinberger & Gulas, 2019, p. 914). The reasons behind whether the creation of mirth in the receiver of humour is successful or not are several — such as audience characteristics, ad context and optimal stimulation levels — and will be discussed in further detail later in the chapter. Nonetheless, despite its nonconvergent nature, Speck's humour taxonomy stands out in the literature as a standard of categorising the different kinds of humour (e. g. in Eisend, 2009; Gregory et al., 2019; Huang, 2020; Mayer et al., 2019; Weinberger & Gulas, 1992, 2019). The author describes humour as a multidimensional

construct defined by three underlying humour processes: arousal-safety, disparagement, and incongruity resolution (hereinafter INC-RES) (Speck, 1991). Responses to the arousal-safety process generally involve an empathetic bonding with someone warm, friendly or familiar who avoids disaster (Speck, 1991). The disparagement process implies a triadic relationship between the joke-teller, the joke-hearer and the victim such as in situations of satire, self-deprecating humour and sexist humour (Speck, 1991). And, finally, the INC-RES process involves one's interpretation of a humorous text through cognitively reconciling puns, punchlines, humorous comparisons, comic irony, understatements and exaggerations (Speck, 1991). From these three basic humour processes, Speck (1991) combined them to differentiate between five humour types, as seen in Table 1. For example, comic wit, the only humour type solely underlined by the INC-RES process can be conveyed through puns, ironic juxtaposition, exaggeration, among others (Speck, 1991), with puns having long been a popular tool in humorous advertising (Weinberger & Gulas, 2019). Indeed, throughout the years, INC-RES has proven to be the humour process that dominates advertising (Gregory et al., 2019; Hatzithomas et al., 2009, 2011; Spotts et al., 1997). This could imply that humour types underlined by the INC-RES process like comic wit, satire, sentimental comedy and full comedy are could also have a higher presence in advertising in comparison to sentimental humour or satire.

Humour process / Humour type	Arousal-safety	Disparagement	Incongruity-resolution
Comic wit			X
Sentimental humour	X		
Satire		X	X
Sentimental comedy	X		X
Full comedy	X	X	X

Table 1 – Speck's five humour types.
Source: Own elaboration, based on Speck (1991).

Irrespective of humour processes and types, the use of humour for advertising purposes has a long-standing history in the different types of media. Because humour can elevate brands to competitive advantage, it can also become more relevant to consumers (Warren et al., 2019). This could aid in attracting consumers, especially considering they are constantly bombarded by messages persuading them to change attitudes (Solomon et al., 2013). In other words, the modern consumer is knowledgeable, experienced and even sceptical of marketing promotion techniques (Eisend, 2009). For this reason, different types of message appeals, such as humorous ones, emerge aspiring to challenge such mistrust (Solomon et al., 2013). Indeed, a recent meta-analysis outlines how the usage of humorous appeals as an executional advertising tactic has increased in outdoors, radio and TV from the 1920s to 2010 (Weinberger & Gulas, 2019). While humour holds a universal appeal (Gregory et al., 2019; Solomon et al., 2013) and is a common goal in communication tactics (Warren et al., 2019), humorous ads are expected to result in more than

high levels of perceived humour, that is mirth or laughter, in consumers (Mayer et al., 2019). Hence, the outcomes of a humorous ad should aid the advertised brand and product achieve the goals of its respective marketing campaign and not just generate a few laughs.

As with any type of advertising message, the humorous stimulus should be optimised by marketers to result in positive, tangible outcomes among consumers. Mayer et al. (2019), for example, found that sexual humour in advertising in fact generates attitudes, negative or positive, towards the ad and the brand, as well as influence the recipients' behaviour as consumers. Moreover, humorous ads in general are recognised as an effective way to attract consumers' attention — an established finding in the literature over the years (e.g., Eisend, 2009; Madden & Weinberger, 1984; Solomon et al., 2013; Speck, 1991; Weinberger et al., 1995; Weinberger & Gulas, 1992, 2019). As an attention-grabbing device, humour can be especially useful for marketers' communication tactics, especially considering that ads permeate society. More on the topic of consumer responses is explored in section 1.3. of the present chapter.

Additionally, it is evident that target audience characteristics, such as culture, nationality, gender, occupation, age, among others, must be considered when developing new campaigns, an insight which also applies to the use of humorous advertisements. For example, when it comes to nationality and

culture, even though “culture alone is a poor predictor of ad effectiveness” (Gregory et al., 2019, p.971), it is argued that people from different backgrounds can produce different responses to humour even if language barriers are removed (Weinberger & Gulas, 1992). Some studies outline that individualistic cultures (e.g., the United States) tend to employ aggressive and self-enhancing humour tactics in their ads (Gregory et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2019), while collectivist cultures (e.g., the People’s Republic of China) do not tend to differentiate as much between humour tactics in advertisements (Wang et al., 2019). Others explore differences from regional perspectives, such as from Europe. The British, for example, tend to rely more on humorous devices for advertising purposes than Germany and France (Solomon et al., 2013). And others incorporate both perspectives. More individualistic European cultures that rank low in the uncertainty avoidance dimension, like the UK, tend to incorporate sentimental and disparaging humour in advertisements, while collectivist cultures, like the Greek, tend to incorporate cognitive humorous appeals as a way to provide credible information to this uncertainty-avoiding target audience (Hatzithomas et al., 2011). Nevertheless, despite regional differences emerging in cross-cultural studies, Gregory et al. (2019) suggest that advertising at the national level is not automatically aligned to audience reaction at the individual level, suggesting that companies align their ads to the values of their target audience rather than to broader societal values. This agrees with a customer-centred view of marketing in that the qualities and needs of the target audience, not the whole market, should be considered when developing a strategy. Hence, the shared point of view between the creator and

the target audience of a humorous ad can play an important role in ad effectiveness, given that humour is closely tied with the not only the culture, but also the experiences and reference points between the two (Weinberger & Gulas, 1992) . It is thus fair to argue that when developing humorous advertising tactics practitioners should pay special attention to the defining characteristics of their intended target audience, while not entirely discarding cultural factors. Moreover, recent literature reveals a gap when researching humorous ads and their effectiveness in terms of consumer responses with their target audience, regardless of culture or nationality.

The matters of gender, age and occupation and their effect on consumer responses to humorous advertisements are unclear in the literature. In the case of gender, the idea of overarching gender-based differences in humour remains contentious (Mayer et al., 2019). Advertising literature generally supports the belief that humorous ads are better suited for an audience of well-educated young males (Madden & Weinberger, 1984; Weinberger & Gulas, 1992, 2019). However, a recent study challenges this belief by finding that both male and female audiences enjoy humour at the same level (Mayer et al., 2019). Additionally, in a study evaluating the impact of three different humour types on perceived humour and attitude towards the ad (hereinafter A_{ad}), no gender-specific differences were found towards the ad containing comic wit (Schwarz et al., 2015). Men, nevertheless, showed a more positive evaluation of the ad containing satire, while women favoured the ad containing sentimental comedy

(Schwarz et al., 2015). This is corroborated by Weinberger and Gulas' (2019) meta-analysis, where these differing findings are described to stem from the different types of humour used in advertisements. In the case of age and occupation, it is proposed that the use of students to gather data enhances the effects of humour in terms of A_{ad}, since they represent young and well-educated consumers with cognitive abilities that favour an easier understanding of humour (Eisend, 2009). Thus, it is proposed that the comprehension of humour requires cognitive abilities that vary according to age and occupation alike (Eisend, 2009). In summary, even though the literature tends to argue that humour works best for younger, well-educated male consumers, these notions are challenged in recent literature by authors opting to explore different types of humour and their effects on wider, more heterogeneous audiences, not just mostly male student samples.

Yet another factor to consider in the assessment of the effects of a humorous advertisement is the product category with which humour is paired with. Weinberger and Gulas (1992) argue that the nature of a product impacts the appropriateness of a humorous stimulus, even though a more recent meta-analysis by the same authors highlights a trend of employing humour with a broader range of categories, including otherwise serious topics such as disease and politics (Weinberger & Gulas, 2019). Notwithstanding, several studies corroborate that certain product categories are more suitable for the use of humour than others (e.g., Eisend, 2009; Madden & Weinberger, 1984; Weinberger et al., 1995; Weinberger & Gulas, 1992). For example, Madden and

Weinberger (1984) long noticed that the products most frequently mentioned as being best suited with humour were, in order, soft drinks, food, alcohol, snacks, candy, restaurants, health, beauty, toys and games. Nevertheless, to better understand which product categories best pair with humour, it is first crucial to understand how product categories are distinguished. Although there are slight variances in terms of semantics, a product matrix defined by two dimensions which combine into four main product categories defined by colours, emerged in the literature — this is called the Product Colour Matrix (Eisend, 2009; Weinberger et al., 1995). The defining dimensions are involvement and/or perceived risk, and functionality (Eisend, 2009; Weinberger et al., 1995). Involvement — whether advertising information is worth processing — is understood as an outcome of perceived risk, and functionality distinguishes between functional (i.e., informational) and hedonic (i.e., emotional) value products (Eisend, 2009). Table 2 provides a visual depiction of the Product Colour Matrix, as well as examples of products that fit into each of the four colours.

	Functional Value	Hedonic Value
High involvement/ perceived risk	White Goods *e.g., large appliances, cars, insurance & loans, business services & equipment*	Red Goods *e.g., sports car, motorcycle, clothing & accessories, jewellery, cosmetics, fragrances*
Low involvement/ perceived risk	Blue Goods *e.g., toothpaste, feminine hygiene, deodorant, cleaning products, medicine, vitamins, gas*	Yellow Goods *e.g., snack foods, fast foods, desserts, alcoholic beverages, soda, tobacco*

Table 2 – Product Colour Matrix.
Source: Own elaboration, based on Eisend (2009) and Weinberger et al. (1995).

Weinberger and Gulas (1992) found that humour seems better suited for low involvement and feeling-oriented products, placing them in the yellow section of the Product Colour Matrix. A few years later, further evidence detected that low involvement/risk products should see a greater use of humour than their high involvement/risk counterparts, with yellow goods being the best suited for humour and red goods the least (Weinberger et al., 1995). Interestingly, more recently Eisend (2009) found that humour is appropriate for both yellow and red goods, as well as for white goods, although only if the humour is related to the good. It is thus reasonable to infer that yellow, low involvement/risk, hedonic products are consistently considered to be the best type of product to pair with humour in advertising, although other product types also seem to occasionally work well with humour.

Lastly, it is crucial to address that use of humour in ads also interacts with the target audience's prior brand attitudes, which is affected by pre-existing brand-related biases. Such notion concerns the question of existing versus fictitious brands and the concept of prior brand attitude. For example, positive prior brand attitude leads to a more effective humorous ad than a non-humorous one, while negative prior brand attitude leads to a more effective non-humorous ad than its humorous counterpart (Chattopadhyay & Basu, 1990). Hence, like Weinberger and Gulas (1992), this study also assumes that the concept of prior brand attitude must be taken into account as an important audience factor when creating, disseminating and advertising humorous stimuli, even if this topic is not vastly represented in humour research.

1.2. INCONGRUITY AND HUMOUR

Now that a background on the notion of humour and its standing within marketing communication and the extant literature is established, section 1.2 focuses on the understanding of incongruity, another core concept in this study.

To comprehend the concept of incongruity, including how the humour process of INC-RES works, it is first important to grasp how humans store and process information. Drawing upon the definition of schema as mental representations that organise individuals' past experiences, Mandler proposed the Schema Incongruity Theory in 1982 (Mandler, 1982). By relating messages

or advertising stimuli to previously acquired knowledge and experiences, it is such pre-existing schemas that allow consumers to quickly process them (Lange & Dahlén, 2003; Rauwers et al., 2018). This quick processing is due to little cognitive elaboration being demanded (Huang, 2020). In such cases, the received information is congruent with a person's schema. However, when the information does not align with pre-existing schema, more cognitive elaboration is required to process this misalignment (Huang, 2020). Here, schema incongruity occurs. Yoon (2013) provides two hypothetical examples that help illustrate these two scenarios. An advertisement for a diaper brand featuring a baby model is schema-congruent, as the information can be well organised into pre-existing knowledge structures (Yoon, 2013). Conversely, an advertisement for an online stock trading company featuring a baby model (i.e., the process is so easy, even a baby can do it) is schema-incongruent, as the information is not easily organised into pre-existing schema (Yoon, 2013). Even though schema incongruity has often been used in advertising due its potential of increasing interest, memorability and persuasiveness in consumers, the understanding of how and why it works among consumers is still limited (Yoon, 2013). Such gap in the literature could be filled by exploring different perspectives to incongruity, such as its relationship with humour.

The inherent relationship humour has with incongruity can allow for both a deeper understanding of incongruity as a whole, as well as an expansion on the knowledge concerning humour. According to Eisend (2009), humour is based on incongruity which can only be comprehended by: revisiting the

incongruous situation, turning it into a congruous one and, finally, yielding a humorous response. Incongruity humour is recognisable by identifying basic incongruity elements (such as differing levels of expectancy and relevancy) and play cues (such as adult models acting in childish behaviour in an ad) (Yoon, 2013). For example, the INC-RES humour process is a good illustration of how incongruity and humour are related and can be combined. INC-RES relies on the subject's problem-solving skills to result in an "aha moment", given the interplay created between the person's existing schema and the cues in the conveyed message. Speck explains:

> According to incongruity-resolution theory, joke-processing is a special form of information processing, problem-solving, and textual interpretation. In an iterative process, the jokeperceiver tests various semantic, logical, and experimental operators and compares the resulting transformed schema to the incongruous outcome. When correspondence is achieved, the jokeperceiver "gets" the joke. If the necessary rule or operation cannot be found, the incongruity remains unresolved and the joke-perceiver remains puzzled. If, however, the joke is understood, there are two distinct pleasures implied by this theory: the pleasure of playful confusion (a result of phase one) and the pleasure of mastering that confusion (a result of phase two). (Speck, 1991, p. 8)

As seen in Table 1, INC-RES is present in three out of the five proposed humour types and its play cues can include "puns, punchlines, comic reversals, and all forms of humorous comparison, including comic irony, understatement, and exaggeration" (Speck, 1991, p. 7). Regardless of how humour is conveyed, the success of an advertisement based on the INC-RES humour process is nonetheless expected to rely on a consumer's pre-existing schema as well as on their own cognitive abilities (in terms of "understanding the joke").

Extant literature further highlights that incongruity can be manipulated to create various levels of intensity, which can result in different responses from consumers. Building on the notion that optimal stimulation levels lead to overall more positive feelings and higher levels of memory and performance (Hebb, 1945, as cited in Yoon, 2013), Yoon (2013) integrates Schema Incongruity and Optimal Stimulation Level (OSL) theories to expand on the knowledge of incongruity in advertising. OSL Theory was first explored by Berlyne, 1960, and McReynolds, 1971, and consolidated by a number of authors over the years (Helm & Landschulze, 2009). This theory states that every individual seeks to achieve a preferred or optimal level of stimulation, something which remains relatively constant in each person over time (Helm & Landschulze, 2009). Despite individual differences, however, a "group of people that share similar characteristics would be in close proximity to their optimal stimulation when it comes to a given stimuli" (Yoon, 2013, p. 362). This indicates that the different individuals in a brand's target audience would

broadly have similar optimal stimulation levels towards a given stimulus. Because Yoon finds that "OSL can explain for the occurrence of different routes during incongruity processing" (2013, p. 362), she combines it with Schema Incongruity Theory as a novel way to explore consumer responses towards incongruous stimuli. For example, when the intensity of a stimulus, such as an advertisement, is lower than an individual's OSL, they would ignore it or be bored by it, while when the intensity of the stimulus is higher it could become overwhelming or less pleasurable (Lee & Schumann, 2004; Yoon, 2013). Optimal levels of incongruity, which will likely result in positive attitudes and behaviour, are found only when there is a thorough understanding of the target audience's schema of the brand and product category, lifestyle, values, group identity and the brand's past campaigns (Heckler & Childers, 1992). Additionally, because incongruity is classified as a type of stimulation (Berlyne, 1960, as cited in Yoon, 2013), it means that such differing responses towards different types of stimulation, especially low and high ones, are mirrored when low and high levels of incongruity are employed, including when incongruity is used in humorous advertisements.

If a marketer or advertiser wishes to play with different types of incongruity in a campaign, it is important to know how to operationalise the construct, so as to have a better grasp of the kind of incongruity being employed. Incongruity is proposed as a two-dimensional concept of relevancy and expectancy (Heckler & Childers, 1992). In detail, relevancy and expectancy

are two independent dimensions of an item's relationship to an overall theme and hypothesised to affect information processing (Goodman, 1980; Heckler & Childers, 1992). Simply put, relevancy and expectancy are related to a stimulus' theme, which is itself defined as "general focus [of a story] to which the subsequent plot adheres" (Thorndyke, 1977, p. 80). Relevancy refers to the degree to which the item/information contained within the stimulus (e.g., a humorous advertisement) contributes to, or detracts from, the clear identification of its theme (Heckler & Childers, 1992). Expectancy refers to the degree to which an item/information falls into a predetermined pattern evoked by the ad's theme, i.e., the probability of an item/information naturally appearing within the theme of the ad (Heckler & Childers, 1992). With these dimensions in mind, the operationalisation of incongruity, leads to four possible types of incongruity, one low, two moderate and one high (Yoon, 2013), as seen in Table 3. Extant literature agrees that low and high incongruity in stimuli lead to specific sensations on an individual, such as the feeling of boredom or overwhelm (Lee & Schumann, 2004; Yoon, 2013), regardless of one's optimal stimulation level. Nevertheless, this is yet to be explored when in combination with humorous advertisements and the varying consumer responses it could elicit.

	Unexpected Information	**Expected Information**
Irrelevant Information	High Incongruity	Moderate Incongruity
Relevant Information	Moderate Incongruity	Low Incongruity

Table 3 – Types of incongruity.
Source: Own elaboration, based on Yoon (2013).

1.3. CONSUMER RESPONSES TO HUMOROUS ADVERTISEMENTS AND INCONGRUITY

The responses that consumers express towards humorous and incongruous ads can be seen as a gateway into how an audience will readjust its schemas in relation to an advertised product or brand, be it an established or a new brand, and consequently their own responses as consumers.

In the literature, several studies analyse cognitive consumer responses elicited from humorous and incongruous advertisements, which include the attraction of attention, ad recall, ad recognition, brand recall and brand recognition. For instance, it is well-established that consumers' attention is attracted through the use of incongruity (Lee & Schumann, 2004; Yoon, 2013) and humour (e.g., Eisend, 2009; Madden & Weinberger, 1984; Solomon et al., 2013; Speck, 1991; Weinberger et al., 1995; Weinberger & Gulas, 1992, 2019). Moreover, Lange and Dahlén (2003) determine that brand memorability is higher for incongruent ads than for congruent ads, while ad memorability is higher for congruent rather than incongruent ads. For unfamiliar brands, however, there is no difference in ad memorability between congruent and incongruent ads (Lange & Dahlén, 2003). Additionally, Madden and Weinberger (1984) found that humour may aid name retention and simpler copy registration and may harm complex copy registration. The effects of humorous advertisements on recall and recognition are further corroborated by the fact that humorous ads generally are memorable" (Warren et al., 2019, p. 1037).

Additionally, humorous advertisements for alcoholic beverages in specific have demonstrated higher than average ad recognition scores (Solomon et al., 2013). It is thus fair to state that, when paired with certain factors, like certain product categories and simpler copy, consumer's cognitive responses can be aided by humour and incongruity.

The same depth of knowledge does not apply to attitudinal and behavioural consumer responses towards humorous advertisements, where extant literature does not provide as much consensus or as many sources. For this reason, attitudinal and behavioural consumer responses are explored in further detail in sub-sections 1.3.1 and 1.3.2. For the purposes of this study, and taking inspiration from Rauwers et al. (2018), attitudinal responses are considered in terms of A_{ad} and attitude towards the brand (hereinafter A_{br}), while behavioural responses are considered in terms of purchase intention (hereinafter P_{int}) and word-of-mouth intention (hereinafter WOM_{int}).

1.3.1. Humorous advertisements, incongruity and attitudinal consumer responses

Attitudinal consumer responses, such as A_{ad}, can be influenced by the characteristics of the advertising stimulus itself and even audience characteristics. In terms of incongruity, it is proposed that people are not likely to invest their affective resources in processing incongruity, unless there is a compelling reason to do so, although this is not specified (Lee & Schumann,

2004). In terms of humour, Eisend (2009) advances that the chance of humour enhancing A_{ad} depends on the characteristics of the stimulus, how it is presented and the kind of recipients it addresses. For example, the medium in which the humorous message is conveyed can play an important role. Moreover, Rauwers et al (2018) find that when using creative media, humour has a positive indirect effect not only on A_{ad}, but also A_{br}. Another example of ad characteristics influencing A_{ad} is given by Huang (2020). The author finds that the generated incongruity from visual hyperboles used in ads, leads to humour, which is itself deemed essential for more favourable A_{ad} (Huang, 2020). It is important to state, however, that another study found that hyperboles lead to positive A_{ad} when masculinity is high, while respondents with high femininity had more positive A_{ad} towards non-absurd ads (Weinberger & Gulas, 2019). In addition, Eisend (2009) finds stronger effects of humour on A_{ad} when the sample consists of students. These examples demonstrate that attitudinal responses towards a humorous and/or incongruous advertisement could vary according to a variety of factors, such as medium, humour type, level of masculinity and occupation, leading to somewhat differing results between studies. Nevertheless, a gap in the literature exists in terms of understanding how other ways of using humour, such as through the use of a specifically incongruous humour type (e.g., comic wit), influence A_{ad} and $A_{br,}$ taking into account audience characteristics.

While positive consumer responses towards an ad and brand are one of the main goals for marketers, negative reactions can also occur, something which can happen even if consumers perceived humorous ads as funny. Although some argue that humour can act as a distraction, inhibiting counterarguments from the consumer, thus, increasing the likelihood of message acceptance (Solomon et al., 2013), even if perceived humour is achieved, negative reactions (i.e., negative A_{ad}) to the same ad can also occur. Reactions such as embarrassment, offense and disgust prompted by a humorous ad will ultimately negatively influence A_{br}, even if the ad was perceived as humorous (Warren et al., 2019). Taking this into consideration, Warren et al. (2019) suggest that advertisers steer away from using risqué humorous ads in order to avoid triggering negative emotions, regardless of the level of perceived humour by their target audience. With this in mind, it can thus be inferred that A_{ad} can negatively influence A_{br} in humorous advertisements.

The topic of the direct effects of humorous advertisements on A_{br} remains somewhat contentious in extant literature, with no definitive consensus. While authors like Weinberger & Gulas (1992) and Eisend (2009) find that humour has a positive impact on A_{br}, it is still argued that audience factors, such as audiences with prior positive brand attitudes, could play a role in influencing brand attitude (Weinberger & Gulas, 1992). Likewise, the effects of humour on A_{br} depend on its relation to the product category (Eisend, 2009). Thus, it can be inferred that products belonging to the yellow goods category

(as seen in Table 2) would be best to optimise the odds of a humorous ad eliciting positive $A_{br.}$ On the contrary, later research finds that humorous print and television advertisements do not necessarily result in more favourable A_{br} (Warren et al., 2019). This apparent lack of direct relationship between humour and A_{br} can also be seen when ads provoke negative reactions in consumers (Warren et al., 2019). Other research proposes that a combination of gender, (in)congruous product settings and types of humour appeals all ultimately influence A_{br}. Mayer at al. (2019) find that in a sexually congruous product category, where a sexual humorous appeal is employed, male audiences have more positive A_{br} than their female counterparts (even though both genders provided positive evaluations). This means that female-targeted brands should be cautious when employing sexual humour (Mayer et al., 2019). The same study also finds that, when a sexually incongruous product category is used, female audiences have much more negative A_{br} and A_{ad}, despite appreciating the humour itself to the same extent as male audiences (Mayer et al., 2019). Hence, it is evident that humour's effects on A_{br} can depend on the congruity between the humorous appeal being used and the product category, as well as the target audience's gender. Nonetheless, it remains unexplored in the literature whether there exists any gender-based differences regarding A_{ad} when incongruity is used in different levels (low, moderate or high) or between different elements of a humorous ad (such as between the visual and textual elements).

1.3.2. Humorous advertisements, incongruity and behavioural consumer responses

As mentioned, for the purposes of this study, behavioural responses to humorous advertisements and incongruity in the literature were explored in terms of P_{int} and WOM_{int}.

Like with attitudinal responses, the success of behavioural responses elicited from humorous advertisements and/or incongruity are connected to a variety of factors. For example, in his meta-analysis, Eisend (2009) concludes that humour enhances P_{int} in the consumer. In more specific terms, the type of humorous appeal being used and the brand personality it is paired with are shown to influence P_{int}. Namely, a recent study found that affiliative humour generates better results in terms of P_{int} when paired with sincere brands, while the same happens when aggressive humour is paired with exciting brands (Béal & Grégoire, 2022). From this it is concluded that humorous appeals have a better chance in resulting in positive P_{int} among consumers when they are congruent with the brand's personality. In fact, when an advertisement elicits incongruent information the connection between the product category, brand information and the consumer's pre-existing schema is weaker, which may result in low P_{int} for the product (Yoon, 2013). Another example of ad characteristics influencing behavioural consumer responses is the type of media used for the ad. When using creative media rather than traditional media for advertising purposes, perceived humour was found to act as a positive

mediator towards WOM_{int}, as well as to have a positive indirect effect on P_{int} (Rauwers et al., 2018). Although literature on behavioural responses provide some insight into its effects when incongruity or humour is present, resources are fewer than those available regarding attitudinal responses. Such gap in the literature inhibits the generalisation of any effects that humour or incongruity have on behavioural consumer responses, allowing further exploration, namely into how humorous advertisements employing low and high incongruity between the visual and textual elements of the ad influence P_{int} and WOM_{int}.

1.4. HYPOTHESES AND RESEARCH MODEL

The literature review not only allowed a better understanding of the context surrounding each of the three concepts central to the present research, but also allowed the formulation of the hypotheses, as seen in Table 4, tested in the empirical portion of this research. Additionally, Figure 1 depicts a research model showing the constructs addressed in this chapter, as well their relationships with each other in terms of hypotheses.

Hypothesis	Author(s)
H_1: Consumers' A_{ad} is higher for humorous ads with low rather than with high incongruity.	Eisend (2009); Lee & Schumann, 2004; Yoon, 2013
H_2: Consumers' A_{br} is higher for humorous ads with low rather than with high incongruity.	Lee & Schumann, 2004; Warren et al., 2019; Yoon, 2013
H_3: Consumers' P_{int} is higher for humorous ads with low rather than with high incongruity.	Béal & Grégoire, 2022; Lee & Schumann, 2004; Yoon, 2013
H_4: Consumers' WOM_{int} is higher for humorous ads with low rather than with high incongruity.	Lee & Schumann, 2004; Yoon, 2013
H_{5a}: Consumers' A_{ad} positively impacts A_{br} in humorous ads with low incongruity.	Warren et al., 2019
H_{5b}: Consumers' A_{ad} positively impacts A_{br} in humorous ads with high incongruity.	Warren et al., 2019
H_{6a}: Males have higher A_{ad} than females in humorous ads with low incongruity.	Madden & Weinberger, 1984; Schwarz et al., 2015; Weinberger & Gulas, 1992, 2019
H_{6b}: Males have higher A_{ad} than females in humorous ads with high incongruity.	Madden & Weinberger, 1984; Schwarz et al., 2015; Weinberger & Gulas, 1992, 2019
H_{7a}: Students have higher A_{ad} than working individuals in humorous ads with low incongruity.	Eisend, 2009
H_{7b}: Students have higher A_{ad} than working individuals in humorous ads with high incongruity.	Eisend, 2009

Table 4 – Hypotheses and their respective supporting author(s).
Source: Own elaboration.

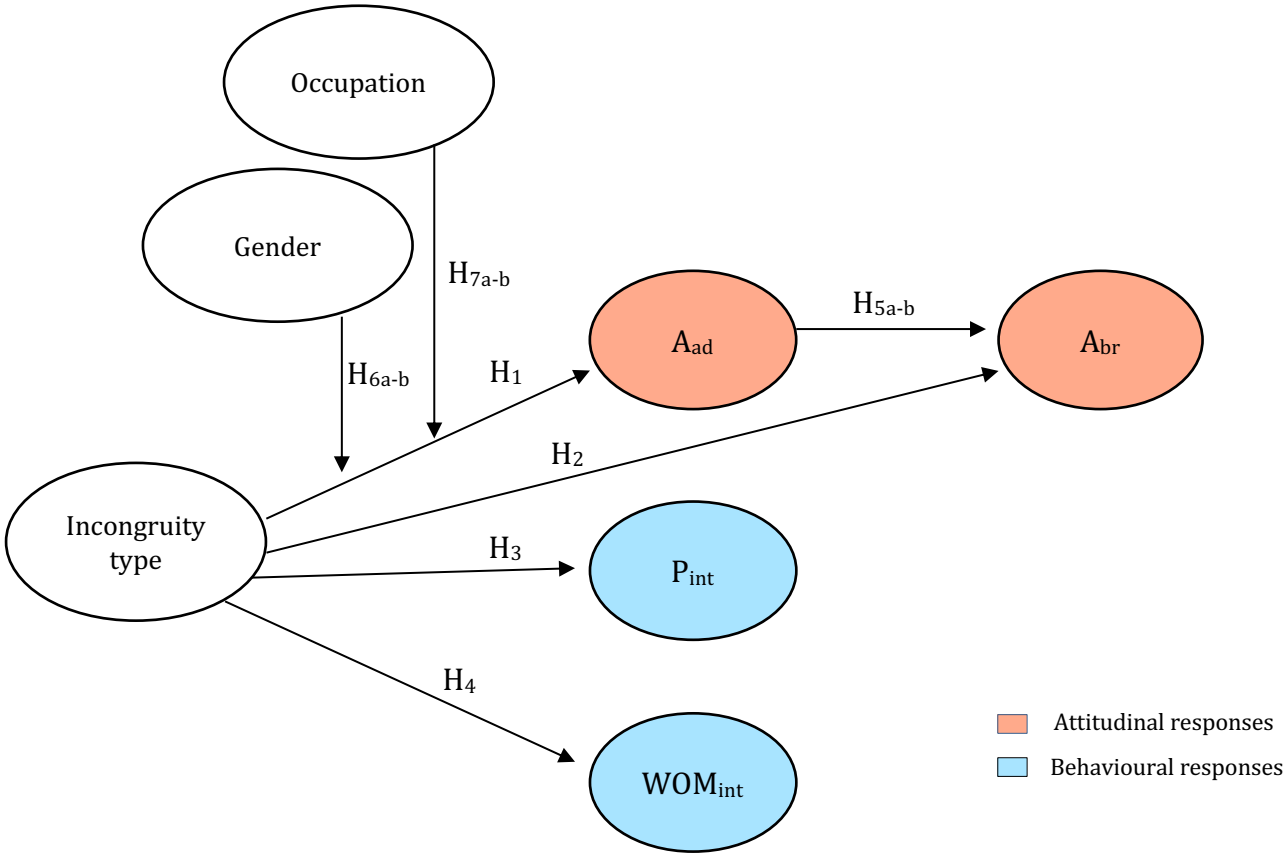


Figure 1 – Research model.
Source: Own elaboration.

Taking into account this research model, Chapter 2 discusses the methodological approach taken in this study by framing it with the relevant context, as established in the Literature Review.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. EMPIRICAL CONTEXT AND OBJECTIVES

This empirical study is centred on the three concepts discussed throughout the literature review: humour, incongruity and consumer responses, with the former two being the stimulus presented to participants in the form of an advertisement, and the latter being evaluated through the different types of answers.

Taking into account that:

- the INC-RES humour process is the most widely used humour process (Gregory et al., 2019; Hatzithomas et al., 2009, 2011; Spotts et al., 1997);
- the INC-RES humour process is at the core most international humorous advertisements (Alden et al., 1993; Hatzithomas et al., 2011);
- that comic wit (the humour type solely consistent by the INC-RES humour process) is the most used humour type (Hatzithomas et al., 2009, 2011) and,
- that puns (an example of comic wit) have long been a popular tool in humorous advertising (Weinberger & Gulas, 2019),

this study combines these four characteristics to define the humour that was used in its empirical section.

Moreover, considering that the knowledge regarding how and why schema incongruity works among consumers is limited (Yoon, 2013), this study further incorporates incongruity by placing it between the visual and textual elements in advertisements, aside from the usage of the INC-RES mechanism. With Yoon's (2013) integration of Schema Incongruity and OSL theories in mind, this research explores consumer responses according to different types of incongruity, specifically opposing types of incongruity (i.e., low and high incongruity).

Finally, with the literature revealing varying results when it comes to consumers' attitudinal (A_{ad} and A_{br}) and behavioural (P_{int} and WOM_{int}) responses to both humorous and incongruent advertisings, this study expands on the available knowledge by assessing consumer responses to ads that are simultaneously humorous and incongruent.

Considering the above three-layered empirical context, the aim of this study is established: to compare consumer responses towards humorous advertisements which employ opposing (low or high) types of incongruity. To achieve this overarching objective, the same was divided into the seven specific objectives:

(1) Compare consumers' attitude towards the ad according to the type of incongruity present the humorous advertisement;

(2) Compare consumers' attitude towards the brand according to the type of incongruity present in the humorous advertisement;

(3) Compare consumers' purchase intention according to the type of incongruity present in the humorous advertisement;

(4) Compare consumers' word-of-mouth intention according to the type of incongruity present in the humorous advertisement;

(5) Understand whether attitude towards the ad impacts attitude towards the brand in humorous advertisements, under opposing types of incongruity;

(6) Assess whether attitude towards the ad differs according to gender, under opposing types of incongruity in a humorous advertisement, and,

(7) Assess whether attitude towards the ad differs according to occupation, under opposing types of incongruity in a humorous advertisement.

2.2. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Grounded in deductivism, this study is rooted on the basis of what is already known about the three core concepts of this research, from which hypotheses were deduced and subjected to empirical scrutiny (Bryman & Bell,

2011). As outlined in the previous chapter, these concepts rely on pre-existing theories such as Speck's (1991) humorous message taxonomy, Mandler's (1982) Schema Incongruity Theory, Yoon's (2013) optimal incongruity levels, the product colour matrix (Eisend, 2009; Weinberger et al., 1995) and to attitudinal and behavioural consumer responses to humorous advertising and incongruity, as seen in the Chapter 1.

This study is quantitative in nature as it examines relationships between variables, which were numerically measured using statistical techniques (Saunders et al., 2016). Like so, this study aimed to produce generalisable results that expanded on the available knowledge regarding consumer responses towards humorous advertisements which employ opposing (low or high) types of incongruity. In addition, this research also aimed to be replicable, be it throughout time, with different product categories, humour types or population samples.

2.3. DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

In this research, data was collected using the survey technique, which was divided into two stages: the pre-testing stage and the main testing stage.

The pre-testing stage made use of a questionnaire with an assortment of eight fictitious humorous ads, from a fictitious beer brand, with opposing types

of incongruity, which was the construct being evaluated. After the analysis of the data gathered from respondents, the two ads with the most significant levels of low and high incongruity, were incorporated into the main questionnaire.

The main testing stage presented these two ads to a larger sample of the population to assess the attitudinal and behavioural responses they elicited in participants as consumers. The evaluated constructs were: A_{ad} and A_{br} (as attitudinal responses), and P_{int} and WOM_{int} (as behavioural responses).

2.3.1. Objects of stimulus

In both the pre-testing and the main testing stage, respondents were expected to evaluate humorous and incongruous ads from a fictitious, unnamed beer brand. A fictitious rather than an existing brand was chosen for this study for two reasons. First, a fictitious brand prevents answering biases caused by individuals' prior brand attitudes, awareness and preferences (Chattopadhyay & Basu, 1990; Schwarz et al., 2015; Weinberger & Gulas, 1992). Second, it was difficult to encounter an existing brand that had humorous advertisements with different types of incongruity simultaneously available. In addition, the choice for having an unnamed fictitious brand stemmed from eliminating any unnecessary bias from the author when selecting a name, as well as due to the fact that, when processing ads from unfamiliar brands, the chances of

processing brand-related messages are lower in comparison to those of familiar brands (Lange & Dahlén, 2003). Hence, the inclusion of a brand name was not deemed necessary.

Humour was incorporated into the textual element of all presented ads through the inclusion of a beer-related pun, i.e., *don't worry,* ***beer*** *happy*. It was important that the humorous element directly related to beer as it has been proved that humour should be connected to the advertised product (Madden & Weinberger, 1984). As wordplay or puns belong to the comic wit type of humour, thus purely employing the INC-RES humour mechanism (Speck, 1991), it was deemed a straightforward way to ensure that humour was present in all advertisements, as well as some form of incongruity, even in the ads later categorised as having low incongruity by respondents.

The choice of the pun, i.e., wordplay, included in the advertisements was made by the author with the assistance of ChatGPT. ChatGTP is a currently free-to-use AI technology model developed by OpenAI, trained to answer prompts in a conversational way with the user (OpenAI, 2022). On 9 April 2023, the author prompted ChatGPT, to provide "funny puns with the word beer", as humour should be related to the product (Madden & Weinberger, 1984). The AI model provided eight different puns, from which:

- three were excluded from not including the word "beer", thus not being directly related to the product

- two were excluded for potentially touching riskier topics (namely, religion and sex), which is found to have higher chances of triggering negative reactions in consumers (Warren et al., 2019), thus increasing the possibility of biased answering
- one was excluded for having a Star Trek reference, to eliminate any possible biased responses from connoisseurs of the show

Finally, the author opted for the pun *don't worry,* ***beer*** *happy* over *it's* ***beer*** *o'clock somewhere*. This was due to the widespread popularity and familiarity in the otherwise well-known saying *don't worry,* ***be*** *happy,* which both native and non-native English speakers would likely recognise (even when including wordplay) due to the global popularity of the 1988 hit song with the same name, by Bobby McFerrin (Waring, 2021).

Incongruity was present in the showcased advertisements in two different manners. First, the use of humour employing the INC-RES mechanism ensured the presence of incongruity in all advertisements. Second, the main source of incongruity was introduced in the pictorial element in the advertisements. Taking Heckler and Childers (1992) study as an inspiration, this study operationalised incongruity by manipulating the pictorial element in the presented ads, given that the "pictorial element in an ad can be unexpected in relation to the featured copy" (Yoon, 2013, p. 364). The different pictorial elements were selected by the author taking into consideration the different types of incongruity (as seen in Table 3). A total of two pictures for each of the

four types of incongruity were chosen and presented to the participants in the pre-test with the intention of minimising the level of bias from the author's choices, as well as to provide participants with more options to identify the low and high types of incongruity the study looked for. All selected images incorporated into the ads were free-to-use, taken from online image repositories, namely pexels.com and unsplash.com.

The process of creating the eight different advertisements was straightforward. Given that it was important that realistic ads were shown to participants so as to avoid "laboratory settings" and decrease any biases that could stem from that (Eisend, 2009), the author took inspiration from ads from Super Bock, a Portuguese beer brand, well-known for its use of humour in their digital communication strategy (Rodrigues, 2022). Specifically, the plain background and simple idea of conjugating a funny phrase or saying with an image related to the product or brand was used (Super Bock, n.d.). All created advertisements looked identical apart from the pictorial element, including the same copy in the same font, size and colour, the same fictitious logo, and the same red background and shade behind each image. This was done to reduce any answering bias from participants which could derive from being presented with ads that had differing fonts, for example. The original background from each picture was removed using Adobe Express' online Free Image Background Remover. All ads were created using the online graphic design platform called Canva. All elements (logo and shadow), colours and fonts were free-to-use and

available in Canva as of April 2023. The eight ads created can be found in Appendix 1.

2.3.2. Data collection instrument

As the survey was divided into two stages, the data collection instruments used were two distinct questionnaires. The questionnaires were created with the free online survey tool called Google Forms, due to its user-friendly and intuitive interface, free cost, as well as the availability and convenience of downloading the respondents' answers in Excel format. The questionnaires were developed in English, matching the language used in the created stimuli.

For both stages of the survey, both sets of participants voluntarily and anonymously responded to a self-administered, online questionnaire with close-ended questions (with the exclusion of the place-of-origin question which was open-ended). The online distribution of the questionnaires was due to the convenience and fast speed of online sharing, the zero financial cost of creating an interactive, user-friendly questionnaire, the preparation of data for analysis being less time-consuming, the removal of interviewer bias and due to participants being usually much more comfortable in an online context (Malhotra et al., 2017).

Pre-test questionnaire

The questionnaire for the pre-test was shared online (on relevant Facebook and LinkedIn groups, WhatsApp and relevant Reddit communities) for eight days, starting on 18 April 2023. This questionnaire was divided into eleven sections. The first outlined the aim of the study, the time needed to complete the questionnaire, the target audience and the voluntary and anonymous nature of the questionnaire. The second included an explanation of the two dimensions being measured: expectancy and relevancy, followed by eight sections, each containing one different ad and the two questions regarding expectancy and relevancy. Each of these eight sections contained a short reminder of what was expected to be understood in terms of relevancy and expectancy by the respondent. As Google Forms does not offer the option to randomise the order in which sections appear, the order in which the eight ads were shown to participants was decided by numbering the ads, from one to eight, and using Google's free-to-use online number generator to decide their order of appearance. In this way, bias from the author choosing the order in the which ads appeared was eliminated. The last section asked participants to provide demographic information.

Following the standard, the prompts participants were questioned about were based on pre-existing scales. In the pre-test, solely the construct of type of incongruity was measured in regard to the presented ads (refer to Table 5). Specifically, incongruity was measured considering the dimensions of

relevancy and expectancy. Following Heckler and Childers (1992), a two-item, five-point Likert scale anchored by *extremely unexpected-extremely expected*, and by *extremely irrelevant-extremely relevant* was used to identify opposing types of incongruity (i.e., high and low incongruity) among the presented ads.

Scale	**Author**	**Type**	**Question**	**Items**
Type of incongruity	Heckler and Childers (1992)	Likert scale	The elements in the ad I just saw were…	Extremely unexpected (1) - Extremely expected (7)
			The elements in the ad I just saw were…	Extremely irrelevant (1) - Extremely relevant (7)

Table 5 – Pre-test questionnaire: scales and references.
Source: Own elaboration.

Main questionnaire

The questionnaire for the second stage of the study was also shared online (on relevant Facebook and LinkedIn groups, the author's personal LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram profiles, relevant Reddit communities, WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger) for twelve days, starting on 8 May 2023. The sharing of the two questionnaires was divided by a few days, precisely eleven days, not only to gather and analyse the results and set up the main questionnaire, but also to (1) lower the chance of having repeated participants answering both questionnaires, especially those from survey groups, and to (2) not to "tire" any overlapping respondents that could have participated in both questionnaires. The main questionnaire was divided into ten sections. The first

section outlined the aim of the study, the time needed to complete the questionnaire, the target audience and the voluntary and anonymous nature of the questionnaire. The second, third, fourth and fifth sections prompted participants to evaluate their A_{ad}, A_{br}, P_{int} and WOM_{int}, respectively, towards the humorous ad with low incongruity. The sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth sections prompted participants to evaluate their A_{ad}, A_{br}, P_{int} and WOM_{int}, respectively, towards the humorous ad with high incongruity. As mentioned, because Google Forms does not offer the option to randomise the order in which sections appear, the order in which the two ads were shown to participants was decided by numbering the ads, from one to two, and using Google's free-to-use online number generator to decide their order of appearance. In this way, bias from the author choosing the order in the which ads appeared was eliminated. Finally, the last section asked participants to provide demographic information.

In the main questionnaire, participants' A_{ad}, A_{br}, P_{int} and WOM_{int} were measured. A_{ad} was measured using Zhang's (1996) seven-point semantic differential scale. As mentioned by Rauwers et al. (2018), the scale items were anchored by *unpleasant-pleasant*, *unlikeable-likeable*, *irritating-not irritating* and *not interesting-interesting*. The Cronbach alpha for this scale was demonstrated to be .77 (Zhang, 1996), proving its reliability. A_{br} was measured using a seven-point semantic differential scale with four items by Rauwers et al. (2018), adapted from Bellman et al. (2011). The scale items were anchored by

bad-good, *unfavourable-favourable*, *unappealing-appealing* and *unlikeable-likeable*. The Cronbach alpha for this scale was demonstrated to be .88 (Rauwers et al., 2018), proving its reliability. P_{int} was measured using a seven-point semantic differential scale which evaluates the likelihood of respondents purchasing products from a given brand in the near future (Rauwers et al., 2018). Adapted from Lichtenstein and Teel (1984) and Zhang (1996), this purchase intention scale from Rauwers et al. (2018) has five items anchored by *unlikely-likely*, *improbable-probable*, *uncertain-certain*, *definitely not-definitely* and *ruled out-considerable*. The Cronbach alpha for this scale is .97 (Rauwers et al., 2018), proving its reliability. Finally, WOM_{int} was measured using a seven-point Likert scale with the following two prompts, anchored by *totally disagree-totally agree* (Rauwers et al., 2018), as seen in Table 6. Although a Cronbach alpha for this scale was not provided, it was chosen because it was used in previous study examining humorous advertisements and because it mentions sharing with others online in social media. A summary of the scales used in the main questionnaire is found on Table 6.

Scale	Author	Type	Question	Items
A_{ad}	Zhang (1996)	Semantic differential scale	What is your attitude towards this ad?	Unpleasant (1) - Pleasant (7)
			What is your attitude towards this ad?	Unlikeable (1) - Likeable (7)
			What is your attitude towards this ad?	Irritating (1) – Not irritating (7)
			What is your attitude towards this ad?	Not interesting (1) - Interesting (7)
A_{br}	Rauwers et al. (2018)	Semantic differential scale	What is your attitude towards this brand?	Bad (1) - Good (7)
			What is your attitude towards this brand?	Unfavourable (1) - Favourable (7)
			What is your attitude towards this brand?	Unappealing (1) - Appealing (7)
			What is your attitude towards this brand?	Unlikeable (1) - Likeable (7)
P_{int}	Rauwers et al. (2018)	Semantic differential scale	Rate your intention to purchase the advertised brand if you needed beer in the near future.	Unlikely (1) - Likely (7)
			Rate your intention to purchase the advertised brand if you needed beer in the near future.	Improbable (1) - Probable (7)
			Rate your intention to purchase the advertised brand if you needed beer in the near future.	Uncertain (1) - Certain (7)
			Rate your intention to purchase the advertised brand if you needed beer in the near future.	Definitely not (1) - Definitely (7)
			Rate your intention to purchase the advertised brand if you needed beer in the near future.	Ruled out (1) - Considerable (7)
WOM_{int}	Rauwers et al. (2018)	Likert scale	The likelihood that I will tell people about this advertisement is high.	Totally disagree (1) - Totally agree (7)
			The likelihood that I will tell people about this advertisement online via mail or social is high.	Totally disagree (1) - Totally agree (7)

Table 6 – Main questionnaire: scales and references.
Source: Own elaboration.

2.3.3. Population and sampling process

A defining characteristic of this research was to have a diverse sample of participants due to:

- humour having a universal appeal in advertising (Gregory et al., 2019);
- to allow the drawing of comparisons between demographic characteristics such as gender and occupation
  — which do not provide much consensus in current literature in terms of consumer responses (Eisend, 2009; Madden & Weinberger, 1984; Mayer et al., 2019; Schwarz et al., 2015; Weinberger & Gulas, 1992, 2019);
- to reduce the chance of bias, as it has been found that the use of student samples (representing young and well-educated consumers) enhances the effects of humour in advertising (Eisend, 2009).

Furthermore, the INC-RES mechanism is the predominant humour process employed in humorous advertisements (Gregory et al., 2019; Hatzithomas et al., 2009, 2011) and is suggested to be at the core most international humorous advertisements (Alden et al., 1993; Hatzithomas et al., 2011). Therefore, this study relied on English speakers, regardless of nationality as respondents, given that it is the most spoken language in the world either natively or non-natively (Statista Research Department, 2023),

which raised the chance to capture a wider variety of respondents. Nevertheless, as it was important to appeal to the target audience of the fictitious beer brand, the only restriction was that respondents were consumers or potential consumers (alcoholic beverage consumers or potential buyers of beer for third parties) of beer. In addition, participants had to be 18 years old or over, due to consent reasons.

For both stages, this study used the non-probability sampling technique, as each individual belonging to the available population did not stand an equal chance of being selected as a respondent (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In specific, participants were not only accessible through the author's own social media and instant messaging platforms, the groups to which the questionnaires were shared were chosen according to the author's judgement. The sampling for this study is characterised as volunteer sampling, specifically self-selection sampling. Self-selection sampling "occurs when you allow each case, usually individuals, to identify their desire to take part in the research" (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 303) by publicising the need for respondents. This is of special importance since a smaller group of studies has worked with convenience samples (Eisend, 2009). Snowball sampling attained through self-selection sampling was also accomplished given that respondents were invited to share the survey's link with others, thus allowing respondents to access further members of the population (Saunders et al., 2016). Participants were aware that no personal data was gathered or stored for the purposes of this research

and that they could withdraw from responding the questionnaire by simply closing their browser.

2.4. DATA ANALYSIS PROCESSES

In terms of the data analysis process, the IBM SPSS Statistics software package was used. After its extraction from Google Forms, the raw data for both stages was introduced and coded into a data matrix in this software. All entered data was double-checked by the author to ensure accuracy between the participants' responses and the data in SPSS.

To analyse the data and test the hypotheses assessed in this study a range of statistical analysis were employed. Firstly, it is important to understand how each of the constructs assessed in the questionnaires were measured:

Pre-test: Type of incongruity

Data from the pre-test was measured using descriptive statistics, specifically via *cross-tabulation*, i.e., *contingency tables*, which allowed the merging of the frequency distribution of two or more variables in a single table (Malhotra et al., 2017). In this case, the variables were relevancy and expectancy. This process was conducted to identify the two ads

which most strongly represented the dimensions of low and high incongruity from the eight presented ads (Heckler & Childers, 1992).

Main questionnaire: Attitude towards the ad

The mean of the ratings for each of the four items in this scale served as the measure for A_{ad} (Zhang, 1996). This was achieved through the use of the *compute variable* option in SPSS, where the four individual categorical variables (corresponding to the four items in the scale) were computed into one single numerical scale for the A_{ad}, using the *mean* function. This process was repeated twice, one to compute the mean for A_{ad} for the advertisement with low incongruity (hereinafter A_{ad1}) and another to compute the mean for A_{ad} for the advertisement with high incongruity (hereinafter A_{ad2}).

Main questionnaire: Attitude towards the brand

Likewise, the mean of the ratings for each of the four items in this scale served as the measure for A_{br} (Zhang, 1996). This was achieved through the same process, where the four individual categorical variables for A_{br} were computed into one numerical scale. This process was repeated twice, one to compute the mean for A_{br} for the advertisement with low incongruity (hereinafter A_{br1}) and another to compute the mean for A_{br} for the advertisement with high incongruity (hereinafter A_{br2}).

Main questionnaire: Purchase intention

The mean of the ratings for each of the five items in this scale served as the measure for P_{int} (Zhang, 1996). This was achieved through the same process, where the five individual categorical variables for P_{int} were computed into one numerical scale. Again, this process was repeated twice, one to compute the mean for P_{int} for the advertisement with low incongruity (hereinafter P_{int1}) and another to compute the mean for P_{int} for the advertisement with high incongruity (hereinafter P_{int2}).

Main questionnaire: Word-of-mouth intention

Given that this Likert scale was also composed of two distinct items, this study used the above process to keep consistency, where the two individual categorical variables for WOM_{int} were computed into a single numerical scale using the *mean* function. This process was repeated twice, one to compute the mean for WOM_{int} for the advertisement with low incongruity (hereinafter WOM_{int1}) and another to compute the mean for WOM_{int} for the advertisement with high incongruity (hereinafter WOM_{int2}).

H_1, H_2, H_3 and H_4 were all measured by conducting a *paired samples t-test* between the variables A_{ad1} and A_{ad2}, A_{br1} and A_{br2}, P_{int1} and P_{int2} and WOM_{int1} and WOM_{int2}, respectively. The choice for this test derived from the fact that data existed for two numerical variables that measured the same feature under different contexts (Saunders et al., 2016). For example, A_{ad} was measured twice

by the same group of participants, one time for the ad with low incongruity, another for the ad with high incongruity (i.e., A_{ad1} and A_{ad2}). The same applies to A_{br}, P_{int} and WOM_{int}.

To test H_{5a-b}, *simple linear regression* was used to determine whether the independent variable (A_{ad}) impacted the dependent variable (A_{br}). The selection of this process was due to simple linear regression being used to determine whether the independent variable explains a significant variation in the dependent variable, with both being scalar measurements, as well as to determine how much of the variation in the dependent variable can be explained by the independent variable (i.e., the strength of the relationship) (Malhotra et al., 2017). First, a *scatter diagram* with A_{ad} as the independent variable (*x* axis) and A_{br} as the dependent variable (*y* axis) was generated to verify that the relationship between both variables was broadly linear (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Then, a *correlations* table was generated to evaluate the strength of the relationship by verifying *Pearson Correlation (r)* (Bryman & Bell, 2011). From this the *Coefficient of Determination (R^2)* was calculated to understand how much of the variation in the dependent variable was due to the independent one (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Finally, the reliability of the model was evaluated through the Durbin-Watson test, the presence of homoscedastity and the examination of a histogram and a p-p plot. This process was conducted both for the low and the high incongruity humorous advertisements.

Finally, H_{6a-b} and H_{7a-b} were each assessed with and *independent samples t-test*. The choice for this test was due to the presence of a numerical (A_{ad}) and a categorical (gender for H_{6a-b}; occupation for H_{7a-b}) variable (Saunders et al., 2016). For these tests, only the "male" and "female" values were considered for H_{6a-b}, and only the "studying" and "working" values were considered for H_{7a-b}.

Table 7 contains a summary of the statistical tests conducted to evaluate each hypothesis.

Hypothesis	Statistical test(s)
H_1	Paired samples t-test
H_2	Paired samples t-test
H_3	Paired samples t-test
H_4	Paired samples t-test
H_{5a-b}	Simple Linear Regression
H_{6a-b}	Independent samples t-test
H_{7a-b}	Independent samples t-test

Table 7 – Summary of undertaken data analysis processes.
Source: Own elaboration.

The following chapter presents the results gathered from the analysis of both stages of the survey, pre-test and main stage included.

3. FINDINGS

Due to the survey for this research being divided into two stages, the findings chapter is correspondingly divided in two as well. The first section is dedicated to the presentation of the pre-test findings and the second to presentation of the main questionnaire findings.

3.1. PRE-TEST FINDINGS

The pre-test findings section is divided into two sub-sections where the demographic statistics from the sample and the interpretation of the conducted cross-tabulations are presented.

3.1.1. Sample description

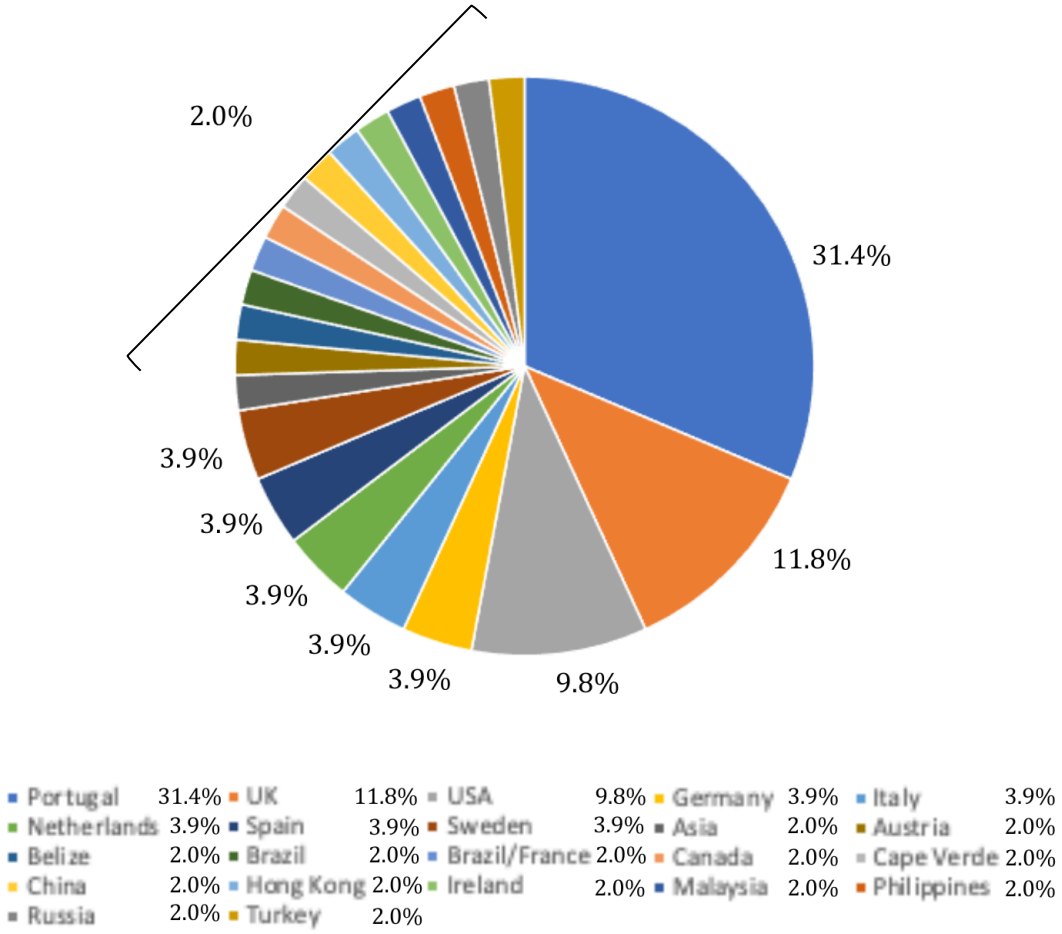
The pre-test questionnaire produced a total of 52 responses, with 51 valid responses. As mentioned, there were no limitations in terms of nationality, occupation, age or gender, as long as participants spoke English, were over 18 years old and were consumers or potential consumers of beer. Such produced a rather heterogenous sample, decreasing the chance for aforementioned biases.

Table 8 outlines the demographic characteristics (gender, occupation, age and English level) of the population sample (*n*=51). Graph 1 shows the provenance (country of birth) of the population sample (*n*=51) in percentages. As shown, a heterogeneous sample was successfully gathered, in line with the framing of this research. However, it is important to note that the question regarding the participants' place of origin was not well-formulated (i.e., not specific enough), which resulted in answers such as "Brazil/France" and "Asia" (refer to Graph 1). For the main questionnaire, this question was reformulated to specifically ask the participant's country of origin without subjectivity.

Sample Characteristics	*n*	*%*
Gender		
Male	17	33.3
Female	31	60.8
Transgender	0	0.0
Non-binary	2	3.9
Prefer not to say	1	2.0
Occupation		
Studying	26	51.0
Working	23	45.1
Unemployed	2	3.9
Prefer not to say	0	0.0
Age		
18-24	22	43.1
25-34	23	45.1
35-44	4	7.8
45-54	2	3.9
55-65	0	0.0
65+	0	0.0
Prefer not to say	0	0.0
English level		
Native	18	35.3
Non-native	33	64.7

Note: n=51

Table 8 – Demographics table for pre-test questionnaire respondents (*n*=51). Source: Own elaboration.



Graph 1 – Country of origin of main questionnaire respondents (*n*=51).
Source: Own elaboration.

3.1.2. Cross-tabulation

The conducted cross-tabulation resulted in eight different contingency tables where, through descriptive analysis, the two ads with the most significant levels of low and high incongruity became discernible. By computing the relevancy and expectancy variables for each of the eight ads into variables with only three items (Irrelevant (1), Neutral (2), Relevant (3), and, Unexpected (1), Neutral (2), Expected (1)), a clearer interpretation of the results was

possible. Table 9 and Table 10 show the contingency tables generated for ad 6 and ad 7, which were, respectively, the low incongruity and the high incongruity ads selected to show participants in the following stage. In Appendix 2, the contingency tables for all eight ads from the pre-test are presented.

			Ad 6 Relevancy			
			Irrelevant	Neutral	Relevant	Total
Ad 6 Expectancy	Neutral	Count	0	0	2	2
		% of total	0.0%	0.0%	3.9%	3.9%
	Expected	Count	4	2	**43**	49
		% of total	7.8%	3.9%	**84.3%**	96.1%
Total		Count	4	2	45	51
		% of total	7.8%	3.9%	88.2%	100%

Table 9 – Contingency table for advertisement number six (*n*=51).
Source: Own elaboration.

			Ad 7 Relevancy			
			Irrelevant	Neutral	Relevant	Total
Ad 7 Expectancy	Unexpected	Count	**40**	3	5	47
		% of total	**78.4%**	5.9%	7.8%	92.2%
	Neutral	Count	0	1	0	1
		% of total	0.0%	2.0%	0.0%	2.0%
	Expected	Count	0	1	2	3
		% of total	0.0%	2.0%	3.9%	5.9%
Total		Count	40	5	6	51
		% of total	78.4%	9.8%	11.8%	100%

Table 10 – Contingency table for advertisement number seven (*n*=51).
Source: Own elaboration.

As seen in the highlighted blue cells in Table 9, ad 6 showed a significant level of relevancy and expectancy among the majority of the population (*n*=43, %=84.3), with very few cases spread among the other values. Hence, ad 6 was identified as the one with the lowest incongruity among the eight presented ads.

As seen in the highlighted blue cells in Table 10, ad 7 showed a significant level of irrelevancy and unexpectedness among the majority of the population (*n*=40, %=78.4), with very few cases spread among the other values. Hence, ad 7 was identified as a the one with the highest incongruity among the eight presented ads.

3.2. Main Questionnaire Findings

The findings section related to the main questionnaire is divided into five sub-sections where the demographic statistics from the sample, the validity of the scales used and the presentation and results of the three different statistical tests conducted to test the hypotheses are outlined.

3.2.1. Sample description

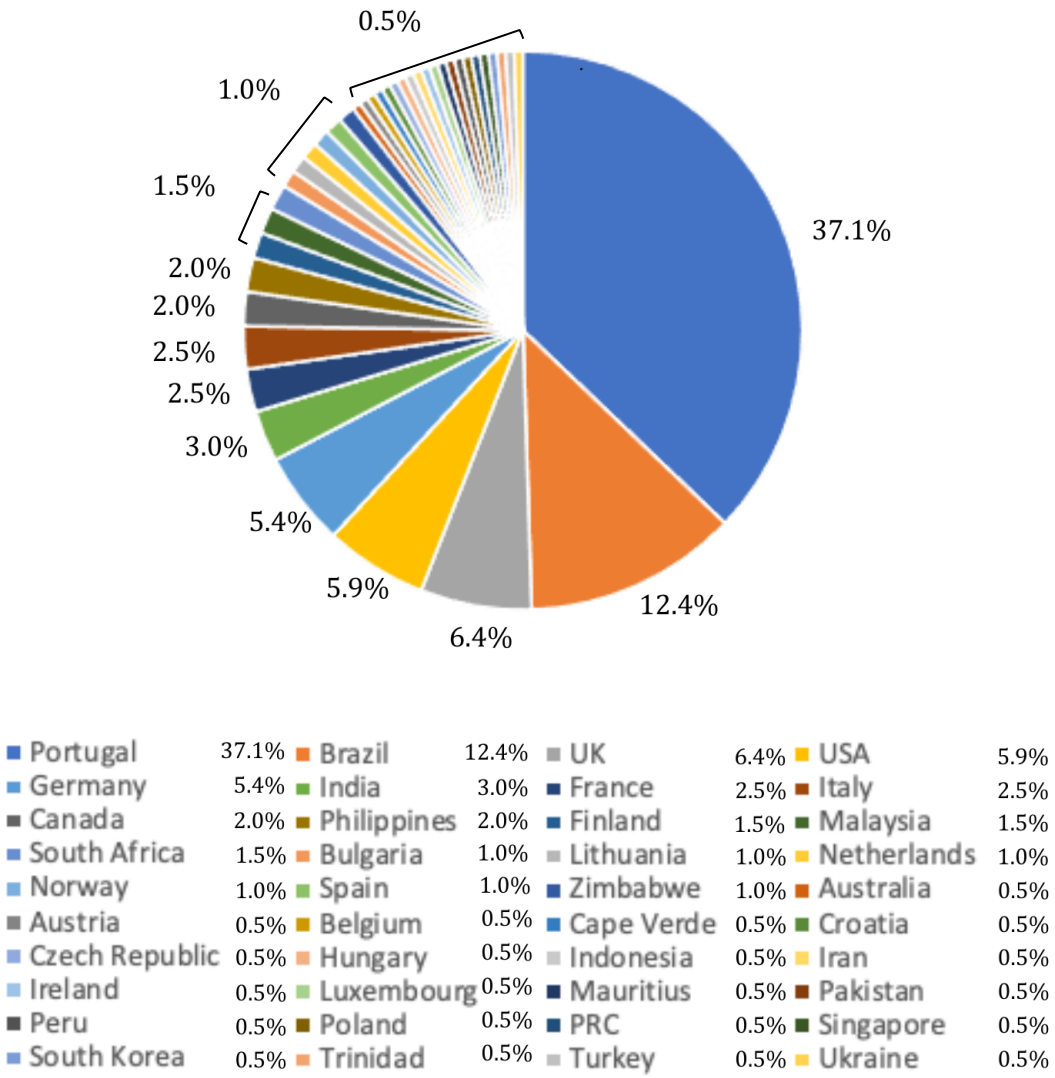
The main questionnaire produced a total of 204 responses, with 202 valid responses. As mentioned, there were no limitations in terms of nationality, occupation, age or gender, as long as participants spoke English, were over 18 years old and were consumers or potential consumers of beer. Such produced a rather heterogenous sample, decreasing the chance for biases, as outlined in the previous chapter.

Table 11 outlines the demographic characteristics (gender, occupation, age and English level) of the population sample (*n*=202). Graph 2 shows the provenance (country of birth) of the population sample (*n*=202) in percentages. As is shown, a heterogeneous sample was successfully gathered, in line with the framing of this research.

Sample Characteristics	*n*	*%*
Gender		
Male	79	39.1
Female	119	58.9
Transgender (Male)	1	0.5
Transgender (Female)	0	0.0
Non-binary	2	1.0
Prefer not to say	1	0.5
Occupation		
Studying	55	27.2
Working	95	47.0
Studying and Working	46	22.8
Unemployed	3	1.5
Prefer not to say	3	1.5
Age		
18-24	54	26.7
25-34	80	39.6
35-44	29	14.4
45-54	15	7.4
55-65	16	7.4
65+	8	4.0
English level		
Native	61	30.2
Non-native	141	69.8

Note: n=202

Table 11 – Demographics table for main questionnaire respondents (*n*=202). Source: Own elaboration.



Graph 2 – Country of origin of main questionnaire respondents (*n*=202). Source: Own elaboration.

3.2.2. Data validity

Even though the scales used to measure A_{ad}, A_{br}, P_{int} and WOM_{int} have already been proven and validated by their original proponents, Chronbach's alpha was calculated once again for each of them so as to ensure that the

questionnaire had internal consistency. The alpha values for each of the scales validated the existence of this consistency, which can be seen in Table 12.

	Low incongruity humorous ad	High incongruity humorous ad
A_{ad}	α=.894	α=.909
A_{br}	α=.956	α=.967
P_{int}	α=.955	α=.970
WOM_{int}	α=.880	α=.823

Attitudinal responses

Behavioural responses

Table 12 – Summary of scales' Chronbach's alpha for the humorous ads with opposing types of incongruity.
Source: Own elaboration.

3.2.3. Hypothesis tests for H_1, H_2, H_3 and H_4

The four paired samples t-test generated results that allowed the validation of hypothesis 1 to 4. Table 13 provides a summary of each hypothesis and their respective null hypothesis (H_0).

H_1: Consumers' A_{ad} is higher for humorous ads with low rather than with high incongruity.	**H_0:** Consumers' A_{ad} is the same for humorous ads with low or high incongruity.
H_2: Consumers' A_{br} is higher for humorous ads with low rather than with high incongruity.	**H_0:** Consumers' A_{br} is the same for humorous ads with low or high incongruity.
H_3: Consumers' P_{int} is higher for humorous ads with low rather than with high incongruity.	**H_0:** Consumers' P_{int} is the same for humorous ads with low or high incongruity.
H_4: Consumers' WOM_{int} is higher for humorous ads with low rather than with high incongruity.	**H_0:** Consumers' WOM_{int} is the same for humorous ads with low or high incongruity.

Table 13 – Summary of $H_{1\text{-}4}$ and their respective null hypothesis.
Source: Own elaboration.

For H_1, the t-test was conducted to compare the attitude towards the ad after viewing the low-incongruity and after viewing the high-incongruity humorous advertisements. There was a significant difference in the score for the A_{ad1} (M=5.04, SD=1.41) and A_{ad2} (M=2.79, SD=1.56) conditions; $t(201)=17.53$, $p<0.001$. These results reject the null hypothesis and support H_1. In other words, consumers show higher attitudes towards a humorous ad that uses low incongruity than to one that uses high incongruity.

For H_2, the t-test was conducted to compare the attitude towards the brand after viewing the low-incongruity and after viewing the high-incongruity humorous advertisements. There was a significant difference in the score for the A_{br1} (M=4.84, SD=1.46) and A_{br2} (M=2.61, SD=1.51) conditions; $t(201)=17.77$, $p<0.001$. These results reject the null hypothesis and support H_2.

In other words, consumers show higher attitudes towards the brand for a humorous ad that uses low incongruity than to one that uses high incongruity.

For H_3, the t-test was conducted to compare the purchase intention of a consumer after viewing the low-incongruity and after viewing the high-incongruity humorous advertisements. There was a significant difference in the score for the P_{int1} (M=4.35, SD=1.58) and P_{int2} (M=2.44, SD=1.55) conditions; $t(201)=15.48$, $p<0.001$. These results reject the null hypothesis and support H_3. In other words, consumers show higher purchase intentions for a product in a humorous ad that uses low incongruity than to one that uses high incongruity.

For H_4, the t-test was conducted to compare the word-of-mouth intention of a consumer after viewing the low-incongruity and after viewing the high-incongruity humorous advertisements. There was a significant difference in the score for the WOM_{int1} (M=3.49, SD=1.78) and WOM_{int2} (M=2.79, SD=1.63) conditions; $t(201)=5.09$, $p<0.001$. These results reject the null hypothesis and support H_4. In other words, consumers show higher word-of-mouth intentions for a product in a humorous ad that uses low incongruity than to one that uses high incongruity.

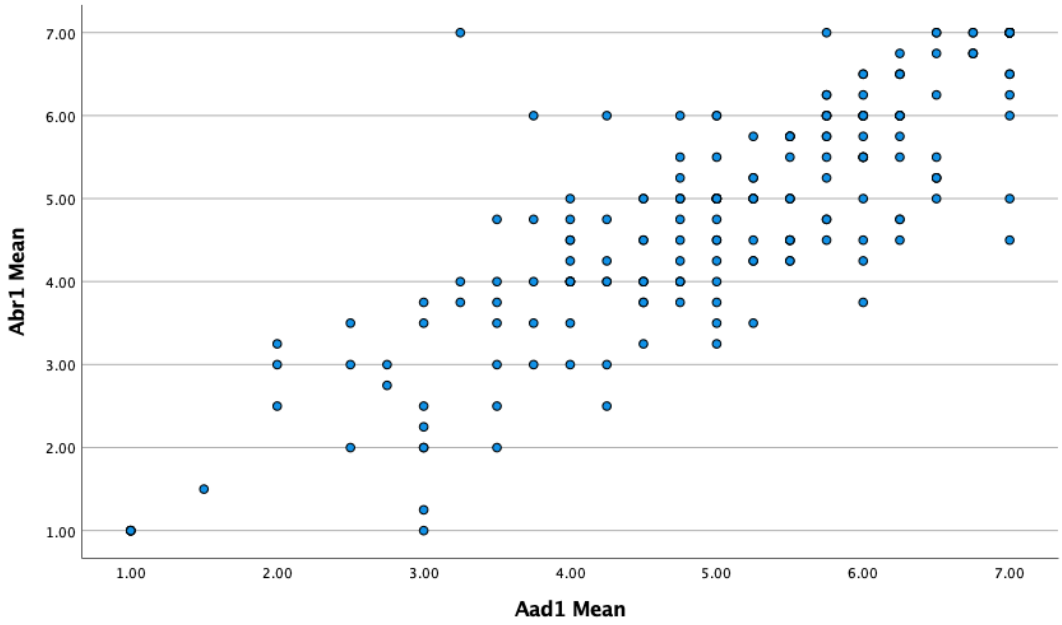
3.2.4. Hypothesis tests for H_{5a} and H_{5b}

The simple linear regression generated results that allowed the validation of H_{5a} and H_{5b}. Table 14 provides a summary of H_{5a} and H_{5b} and their respective null hypothesis (H_0).

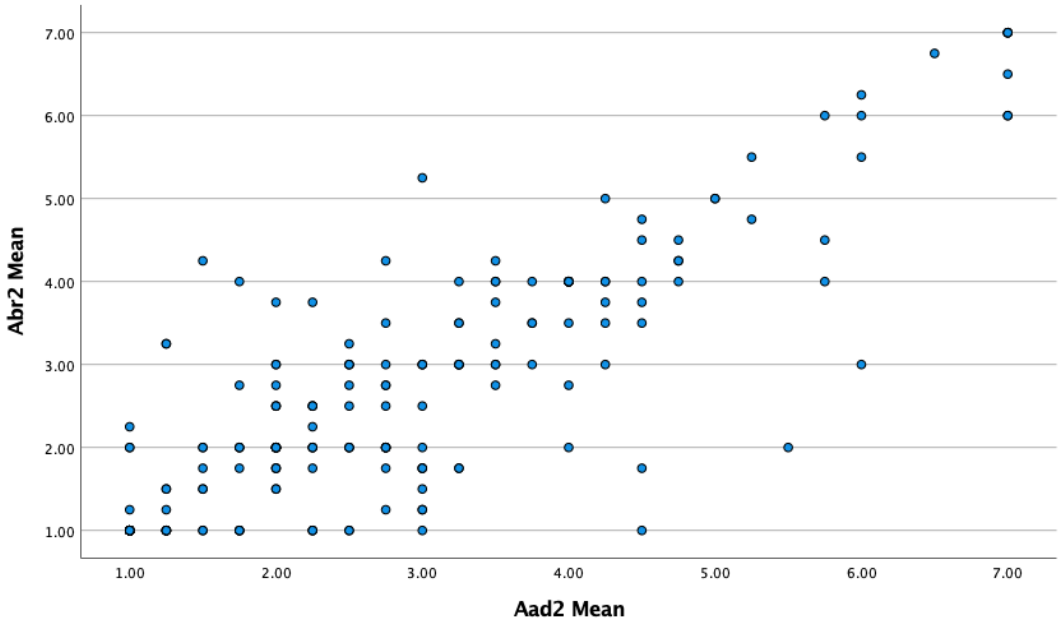
H_{5a}: Consumers' A_{ad} positively impacts A_{br} in humorous ads with low incongruity.	**H_0:** Consumers' A_{ad} has no impact on A_{br} in humorous ads with low incongruity.
H_{5b}: Consumers' A_{ad} positively impacts A_{br} in humorous ads with high incongruity.	**H_0:** Consumers' A_{ad} has no impact on A_{br} in humorous ads with high incongruity.

Table 14 – Summary of H_{5a} and H_{5b} and its respective null hypothesis.
Source: Own elaboration.

The first step to assess the existence, or lack, of a relationship between the independent (A_{ad1}; A_{ad2}) and the dependent (A_{br1}; A_{br2}) variables was to test whether or not a statistically significant correlation between them existed. This was achieved through the calculation of Pearson's Correlation and the generation of a scattergram. For H_{5a}, results showed a positive correlation between A_{ad1} and A_{br1}, r=0.845, n=202, p<0.001. In addition, the scattergram also showed a reasonably linear correlation between both variables (Graph 3), complementing the results. For H_{5b}, results showed a positive correlation between the A_{ad2} and A_{br2}, r=0.847, n=202, p<0.001. Likewise, the scattergram also showed a reasonably linear correlation between both variables (Graph 4), complementing the results from the Pearson's Correlation.



Graph 3 – Scattergram of correlation between A_{ad1} and A_{br1}.
Source: Own elaboration.



Graph 4 – Scattergram of correlation between A_{ad2} and A_{br2}.
Source: Own elaboration.

The following step was to calculate a simple linear regression to test if A_{ad} had a significant impact on A_{br}. As above, the calculation was repeated twice, once considering the variables in H_{5a}, and once considering the variables in H_{5b}.

For H_{5a}, the fitted regression model was $A_{br1} = 0.410 + 0.877 * A_{ad1}$. The overall regression was statistically significant (R^2=0.714, F(1,200)=498.436, p<0.001). It was found that A_{ad1} significantly predicted A_{br1} (β=0.877, p<0.001).

For H_{5b}, the fitted regression model was $A_{br2} = 0.312 + 0.824 * A_{ad2}$. The overall regression was statistically significant (R^2=0.717, F(1,200)=506.513, p<0.001). It was found that A_{ad2} significantly predicted A_{br2} (β=0.824, p<0.001).

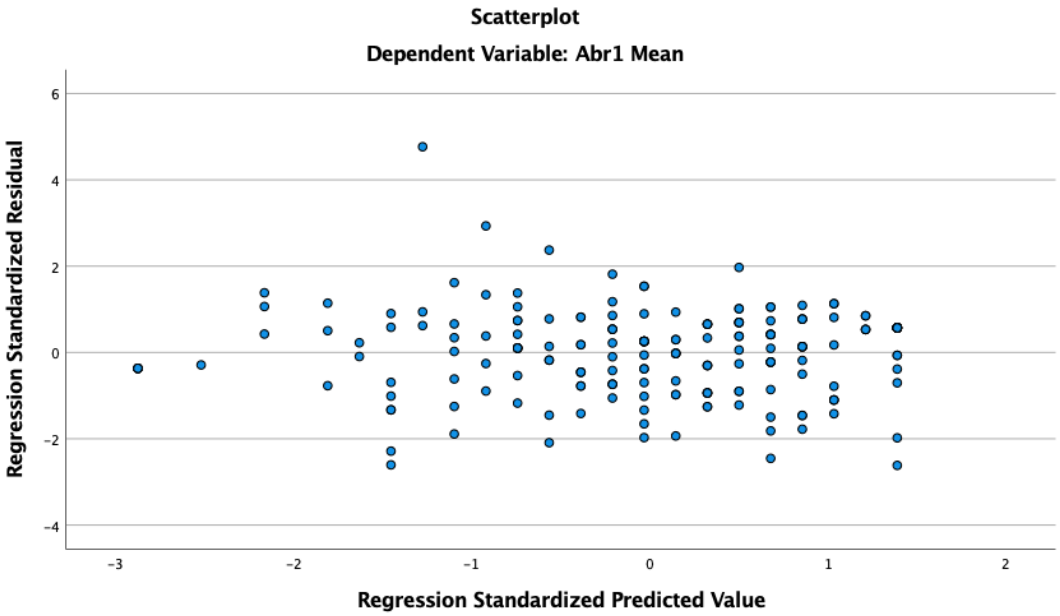
These two results show that a consumer's A_{ad} can be used to predict that same consumer's A_{br} when presented with either a low or a high incongruity humorous advertisement. Moreover, since the betas for both ads have very similar values (β=0.877 and β=0.824), it further suggests that the impact of A_{ad} on A_{br} is analogous for both low and high incongruity humorous advertisements.

The assumptions for this regression analysis are as follow:

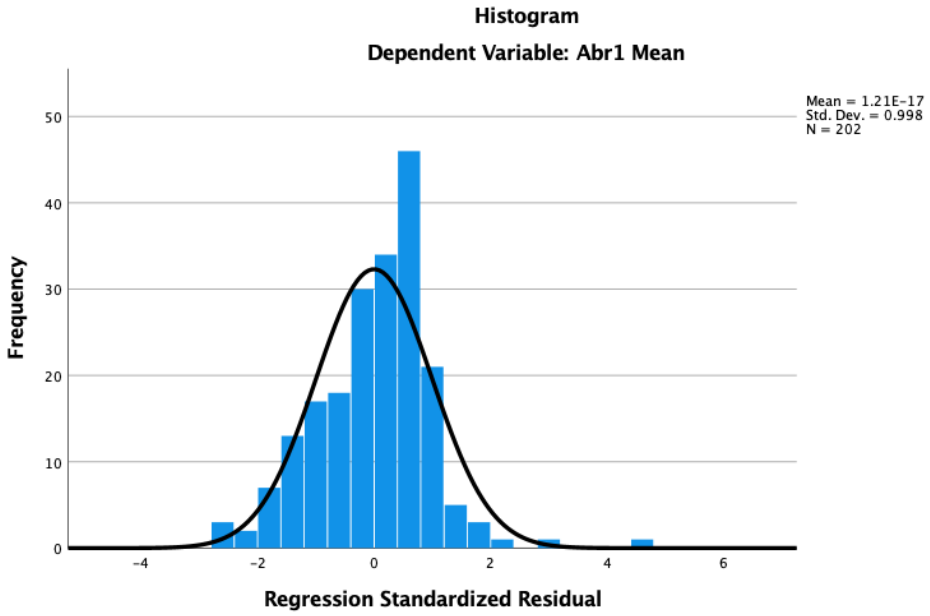
- For H_{5a}: the Durbin-Watson test generated a normal test statistic (DW=1.912); the respective scattergram showed homoscedasticity (Graph 5); the respective histogram showed an overall symmetric

bell-shaped curve (Graph 6), and the p-p plot showed residuals were overall normally distributed (Graph 7).

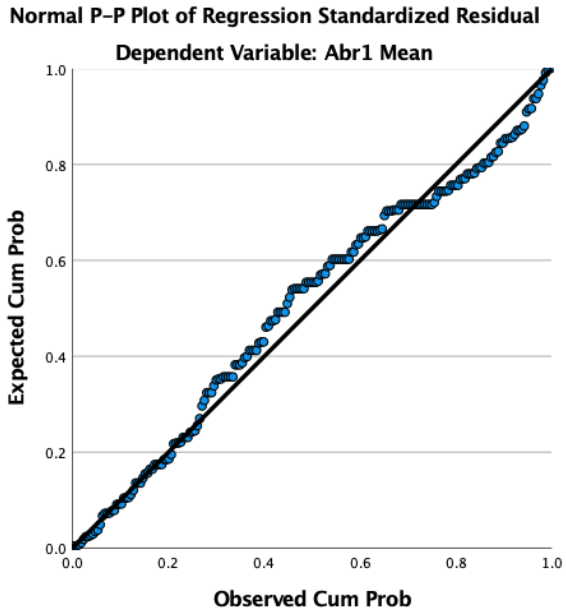
- For H_{5b}: the Durbin-Watson test generated a normal test statistic (*DW*=1.971); the respective scattergram showed homoscedasticity (Graph 8); the respective histogram showed an overall symmetric bell-shaped curve (Graph 9), and the p-p plot showed residuals were overall normally distributed (Graph 10).



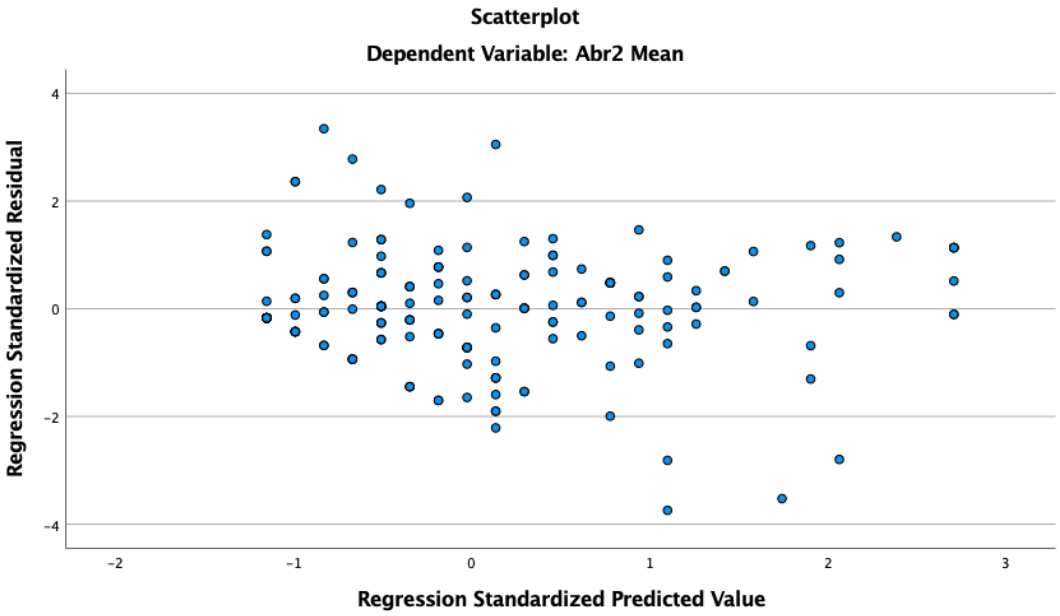
Graph 5 – Assumption homoscedascity scattergram for H_{5a}
Source: Own elaboration.



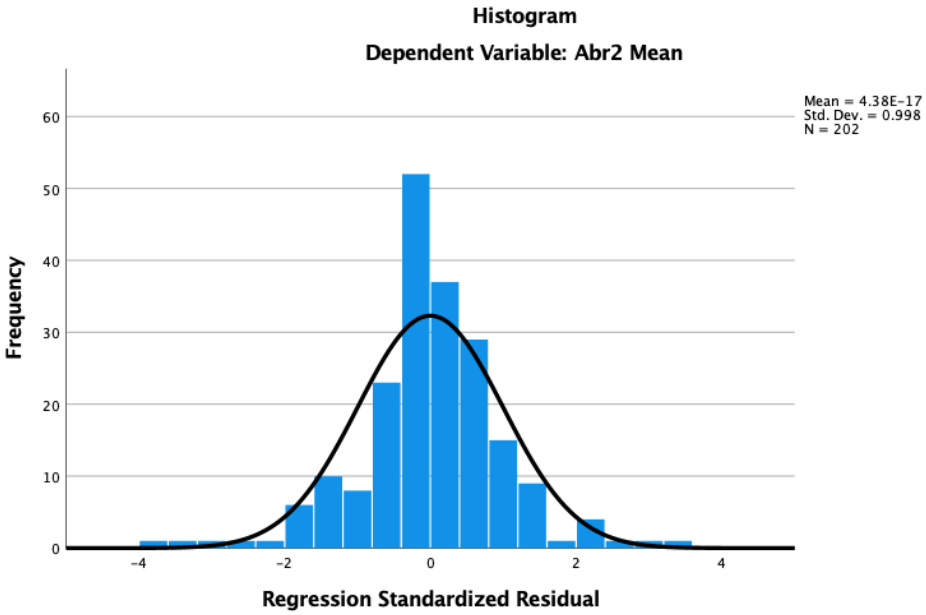
Graph 6 – Assumption histogram for H_{5a}
Source: Own elaboration.



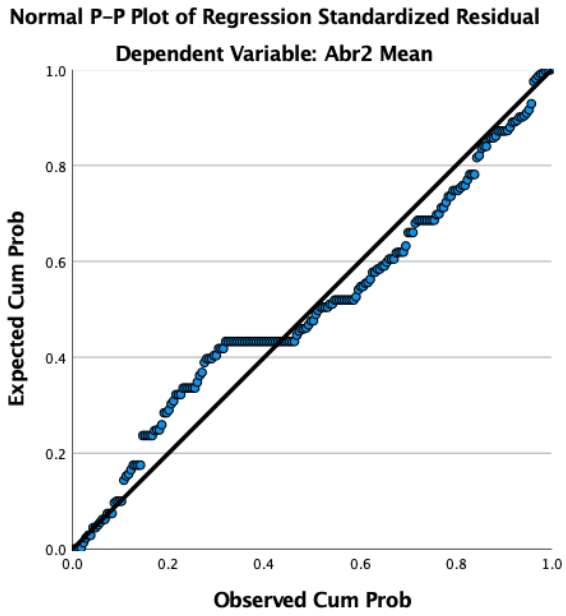
Graph 7 – Assumption p-p plot for H_{5a}
Source: Own elaboration.



Graph 8 – Assumption homoscedascity scattergram for H_{5b}
Source: Own elaboration.



Graph 9 – Assumption histogram for H_{5b}
Source: Own elaboration.



Graph 10 – Assumption p-p plot for H_{5b}
Source: Own elaboration.

3.2.5. Hypothesis tests for H_{6a}, H_{6b}, H_{7a} and H_{7b}

Independent samples t-tests were conducted to validate $H_{6a\text{-}b}$ and $H_{7a\text{-}b}$.

Table 15 summarises these along with their respective null hypotheses (H_0).

H_{6a}: Males have higher A_{ad} than females in humorous ads with low incongruity.	**H_0:** Males do not have higher A_{ad} than females in humorous ads with low incongruity.
H_{6b}: Males have higher A_{ad} than females in humorous ads with high incongruity.	**H_0:** Males do not have higher A_{ad} than females in humorous ads with high incongruity.
H_{7a}: Students have higher A_{ad} scores than working individuals in humorous ads with low incongruity.	**H_0:** Students do not have higher A_{ad} than working individuals in humorous ads with low incongruity.
H_{7b}: Students have higher A_{ad} scores than working individuals in humorous ads with high incongruity.	**H_0:** Students do not have higher A_{ad} than working individuals in humorous ads with high incongruity.

Table 15 – Summary of H_{6a}, H_{6b}, H_{7a}, H_{7b} and their respective null hypotheses.
Source: Own elaboration.

For H_{6a}, an independent samples t-test was conducted to compare A_{ad1} according to gender, namely *male* and *female*. For this test, *n*=198 as four cases were excluded given that these participants' answers to the gender variable did not fall under *male* or *female*. Results showed that there is not a significant difference in the scores for the male (*M*=5.15, *SD*=1.40) and female (*M*=5.03, *SD*=1.35) conditions; *t*(196)=0.595, *p*=0.552.

Similarly, for H_{6b}, an independent samples t-test was conducted to compare A_{ad2} also according to gender, namely *male* and *female*. For this test, *n*=198, the same exclusion criteria as above were applied. Results showed that there is not a significant difference in the scores for the male (*M*=2.98, *SD*=1.61) and female (*M*=2.62, *SD*=1.46) conditions; *t*(196)=1.614, *p*=0.108.

The results for the two above tests suggest that gender does not have an effect on attitude towards the humorous ad, regardless of whether it has low or high incongruity. Hence, these findings reject H_{6a} and H_{6b}.

For H_{7a}, an independent samples t-test was conducted to compare A_{ad1} according to occupation, namely *studying* and *working*. For this test, n=150 as 52 cases were excluded given that these participants' answers to the occupation variable did not fall under *studying* or *working*. Results showed that there is not a significant difference in the scores for the studying (*M*=5.01, *SD*=1.27) and working (*M*=5.14, *SD*=1.51) conditions; *t*(148)=-0.539, *p*=0.591.

Likewise, for H_{7b}, an independent samples t-test was conducted to compare A_{ad2} also according to occupation, namely *studying* and *working*. For this test, n=150, the same exclusion criteria as above were applied. Results also showed that there is not a significant difference in the scores for the studying (M=3.00, SD=1.56) and working (M=2.70, SD=1.60) conditions; $t(148)=1.614$, $p=0.254$.

The results from the two above tests suggest that occupation does not have an effect on attitude towards the humorous ad, regardless of whether it has low or high incongruity. Hence, these findings reject H_{7a} and H_{7b}.

3.2.6. Hypothesis tests summary

To finalise this chapter, below is a table listing each of the hypothesis in this study, along with their respective null hypotheses on the right. The supported hypotheses (null or alternative) are highlighted in blue in Table 16.

Hypothesis	Null Hypothesis
H_1: Consumers' A_{ad} is higher for humorous ads with low rather than with high incongruity.	**H_0:** Consumers' A_{ad} is the same for humorous ads with low or high incongruity.
H_2: Consumers' A_{br} is higher for humorous ads with low rather than with high incongruity.	**H_0:** Consumers' A_{br} is the same for humorous ads with low or high incongruity.
H_3: Consumers' P_{int} is higher for humorous ads with low rather than with high incongruity.	**H_0:** Consumers' P_{int} is the same for humorous ads with low or high incongruity.
H_4: Consumers' WOM_{int} is higher for humorous ads with low rather than with high incongruity.	**H_0:** Consumers' WOM_{int} is the same for humorous ads with low or high incongruity.
H_{5a}: Consumers' A_{ad} positively impacts A_{br} in humorous ads with low incongruity.	**H_0:** Consumers' A_{ad} has no impact on A_{br} in humorous ads with low incongruity.
H_{5b}: Consumers' A_{ad} positively impacts A_{br} in humorous ads with high incongruity.	**H_0:** Consumers' A_{ad} has no impact on A_{br} in humorous ads with high incongruity.
H_{6a}: Males have higher A_{ad} than females in humorous ads with low incongruity.	**H_0:** Males do not have higher A_{ad} than females in humorous ads with low incongruity.
H_{6b}: Males have higher A_{ad} than females in humorous ads with high incongruity.	**H_0:** Males do not have higher A_{ad} than females in humorous ads with high incongruity.
H_{7a}: Students have higher A_{ad} scores than working individuals in humorous ads with low incongruity.	**H_0:** Students do not have higher A_{ad} than working individuals in humorous ads with low incongruity.
H_{7b}: Students have higher A_{ad} scores than working individuals in humorous ads with high incongruity.	**H_0:** Students do not have higher A_{ad} than working individuals in humorous ads with high incongruity.

Table 16 – Summary of hypotheses and respective null hypotheses. Source: Own elaboration.

4. RESULTS DISCUSSION

The aim of this research was to compare consumer responses towards humorous advertisements which employ opposing (low or high) types of incongruity. Such was empirically explored by presenting a sample of the potential target audience for a fictitious beer brand with two humorous ads, one containing low incongruity and the other containing high incongruity. This allowed the completion of the specific objectives, which consequently led to the successful resolution of the main objective of the present thesis. Moreover, the incorporation of humour, incongruity and consumer responses in the same study allowed for a better theoretical understanding of these topics when combined. In addition to a discussion regarding the findings from Chapter 3 and their relationship with extant literature, insights into how humour and different types of incongruity interact with consumers are offered below, paving the way to subsequent research and practical implications.

In regard to overall consumer responses towards an incongruous humorous advertisement, consumers tend to have more positive responses towards ads with low rather than with high incongruity. In specific, all four constructs used to measure consumer responses (A_{ad}, A_{br}, P_{int} and WOM_{int}) produced higher ratings towards the advertisement with low incongruity when compared to those towards the ad with high incongruity. Considering that advertisements with low incongruity can lead to a sense of boredom and those

with high incongruity can lead to a sense of overwhelm (Lee & Schumann, 2004; Yoon, 2013), the findings suggest that when both types of incongruity are individually paired with humour, an unknown brand and an appropriate product category, audiences demonstrate more positive consumer responses towards the low incongruity option.

It is important, however, to highlight that the fact that the low-incongruity ad received more positive responses does not imply that consumers' responses were positive in general. Considering that mean scores <4 are negative responses, >4 are positive responses and =4 are neutral, this was possible to assess. For A_{ad}, A_{br} and P_{int}, consumers did indeed show positive scores towards the low-incongruity ad (respectively: M=5.04; M=4.84, and M=4.35) and negative scores towards the high-incongruity ad (respectively: M=2.79; M=2.61, and M=2.44). These findings suggest that, in accordance with the literature, a compelling enough reason to process the high-level incongruity was not provided to consumers (Lee & Schumann, 2004), hence the more positive results towards the low-incongruity ad. For example, a negative reaction could have been elicited by the high-incongruity ad (despite how humorous the ad was perceived to be) which might have resulted in overall negative A_{ad} and A_{br}, as proposed by Warren et al. (2019). Furthermore, the negative P_{int} ratings could be explained by the fact that the incongruent information created a weaker connection between the product category, brand information and the consumer's pre-existing schema, as explained by Yoon

(2013). When it came to WOM_{int}, however, both scores fell on the negative side, with mean results only slightly higher (M=3.49) for the low-incongruity ad than for its high-incongruity counterpart (M=2.79). Overall, this means that while a humorous advertisement employing low incongruity results in more positive responses in terms of A_{ad}, A_{br} and P_{int} in comparison to one with high incongruity, WOM_{int} does not necessarily benefit from humorous ads with either low or high incongruity. Hence, if a marketer or advertiser is designing a campaign with a main goal of increasing brand awareness through word-of-mouth, using a humorous advertisement with low or high incongruity is likely not the best option, although chances of success are slightly higher if low incongruity is used.

Expanding on the topic of consumer responses towards this kind of advertisements, it is important to highlight a couple more practical implications from the results gathered from H_{1-4}. The interpretations of the results should take into account that the advertisements shown to participants were designed for a fictitious brand, unknown to participants, which means that results could differ if the ads belonged to an existing brand. For example, the findings from this research remove a source of bias, given that negative prior brand attitude leads to more effective non-humorous ads than humorous ones (Chattopadhyay & Basu, 1990). Additionally, the product category and humour used in the ads were specifically beer and wordplay, which means that if a different ad with similar characteristics used low incongruity it would yield more positive consumer responses than if one with high incongruity were used.

Although the findings seem to corroborate that humour works well when paired with yellow goods (Eisend, 2009; Weinberger et al., 1995; Weinberger & Gulas, 1992), it cannot be said with certainty that it works well when high incongruity is used solely based on this study, given that this was not an evaluated concept. Nevertheless, this study suggests that combining yellow goods with low-incongruity humorous ads for an unknown brand works better than when paired with high-incongruity. Ultimately, while differences in consumer responses could occur if opposing types of incongruity were paired with a different product within the same category (e.g., tobacco) or a different product category (e.g., red goods), these could also occur when paired with a different humour mechanism (e.g., disparagement) or humour tactic (e.g., hyperbole), as also seen in extant literature (Hatzithomas et al., 2011; Huang, 2020; Weinberger & Gulas, 2019).

This research also concluded that a positive correlation exists between consumers' A_{ad} and A_{br}, regardless of the type of incongruity being used in the humorous advertisement. In other words, a consumer's attitude towards the ad was found to have a positive impact on that same consumer's attitude towards the brand. This means that consumers that showed higher A_{ad} tended to also have higher A_{br}, and vice-versa. Such finding agrees with instances in the literature where A_{ad} was found to have an effect on A_{br} (Warren et al., 2019). The implication of this finding is that a marketer who wishes to employ incongruity in their humorous advertisement for a new or unknown brand,

should consider that consumers' attitudes towards the ad positively impact their attitude towards the brand. Hence, the marketer is safer in adopting the low-incongruity option given that it results in overall higher A_{ad} and, consequently, A_{br}.

Finally, this study concluded that demographic characteristics such as gender and occupation do not have a statistically significant impact on consumers' attitude towards neither low-incongruity nor high-incongruity ads. This finding supports the notion that an ad should be aimed at the target audience, as also supported by (Gregory et al., 2019; Weinberger & Gulas, 1992), which led to the choice for a heterogenous sample with their main identifying characteristic being consumers or potential consumers of beer. These results relate to the current literature not only by rejecting the long-held belief that humorous advertisements are generally better suited for the male audience (Madden & Weinberger, 1984; Weinberger & Gulas, 1992, 2019), but also by further supporting Schwarz et al.'s (2015) finding that no gender-specific differences are found in terms of A_{ad} when comic wit is present. In addition, occupation was also found to not have an impact on A_{ad} in both the low and the high-incongruity stimuli, which goes against Eisend's (2009) idea that student samples provide biased results by enhancing the effects of humour. These results further add to the academic field by offering a novel way in which the impact of gender and occupation on A_{ad} can be measured, namely by combining humour with low or high incongruity. The implications for marketers in this topic are that gender and occupation should not be heavily

considered as long as the ad is specifically targeted to the intended target audience. Such gives space for marketers to consider other functional aspects of the ad more deeply, such as the appropriate type of incongruity to be used.

In sum, the successful resolution of the research objective allowed this study to contribute to the academic field by providing a new, quantitative perspective on the knowledge surrounding humour, incongruity and consumer responses both individually and in combination. Moreover, the conclusions gathered from this research complemented extant research by providing further insight into attitudinal and behavioural consumer responses towards humorous and/or incongruous advertisements, which are not as well explored as cognitive responses, as mentioned in the Introduction and in Chapter 1. Similarly noteworthy, was the addition of knowledge concerning word-of-mouth intention to the literature, which was extremely scarce and underexplored. Finally, as mentioned throughout the present chapter, there are various practical implications in relation to this study's findings, which can serve as support or guidance for marketers, advertisers and campaign designers to carefully consider in relation to how humour, type of incongruity, consumer responses and audience characteristics all interact with one another, ultimately influencing the success of an advertisement.

5. Conclusions, Limitations and Future Research

The present research aimed to achieve its main objective and seven specific objectives. Taking into consideration that: (1) more positive attitude towards the ad, attitude towards the brand, purchase intention and word-of-mouth intention emerged from humorous ad with low rather than high incongruity; (2) attitude towards the brand positively impacted attitude towards the ad, regardless of the type of incongruity used, and (3) that neither gender nor occupation have an impact on consumers' attitude towards the ad of both low and high-incongruity humorous advertisements, these objectives were successfully answered. This means that, in sum, the present thesis led to a comprehensive study on the elicited consumer responses from a humorous ad employing low incongruity and from another employing high incongruity. Nevertheless, as with any scientific research, the present thesis has its limitations which, in turn, are useful in providing recommendations for future research. These are outlined in the following paragraphs.

First, it is important to state that the use of self-selection and snowball sampling, both non-probability sampling techniques, allowed the development of a source of bias. Specifically, as some members of the population were more likely to be selected than others bias was generated, which could otherwise be removed through the use of a probability sampling technique (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Future studies into the topic of consumer responses towards humorous

and incongruous advertisements could thus benefit from using a random sampling technique. However, if the brand being studied is fictitious, such a study could be difficult to conduct. If the study pertains to an existing brand, then, a random sample could be easier to access, such as via the brand's consumer database.

Second, it is important to state the limitations concerning the use of a fictitious, and therefore unknown, brand. On one hand, the choice for a fictitious brand allowed the pooling of potential consumers of the advertised product from a variety of backgrounds, a factor which was crucial for achieving a heterogeneous sample of participants with a wide range of age, gender identity and occupation. On the other hand, the only factors that were used to define the target audience of the brand were the ability to speak English and the consumption or potential consumption of beer. Thus, if a real and established brand had been used, the advertisements could have been created considering other audience-specific targeting factors. For example, this could be accomplished with a global beer brand such as Heineken, where consumers from a variety of backgrounds could be accessed to draw comparisons of their responses towards between humorous advertisements that employ low and high incongruity. Again, this process could be further enhanced by using a probability sampling technique to provide added valuable insights to a specific company.

Similarly related to the sample, it is important to take into account that with a heterogeneous sample, such as the one in this study, the size of the sample must be rather large (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Due to time constraints a sample comprised of 204 individuals (with 202 valid responses) was gathered for the main questionnaire. Thus, a replication of this research could benefit from gathering a larger sample of participants, providing a set of results which can be more accurately generalisable.

As just mentioned, this study gathered responses from a global perspective, which was due to an existing gap in the literature concerning the research of humorous ads regardless of culture or nationality. Hence, a complementary study could also provide additional insights by integrating a cross-cultural design, similar to existing studies as seen in Chapter 1 (Gregory et al., 2019; Hatzithomas et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2019). An example of such a study could be the comparison between Portuguese and Brazilian consumer responses towards humorous advertisements with opposing types of incongruity. In the case that such a study was to directly complement the present one, a fictitious brand would also have to be used, although the implications of having differing results between the two cultures in the pre-test would have to be addressed. In the case that such a study did not directly complement this one, a global brand could be used to address significant differences in consumer responses towards humorous advertising with low and high incongruity. Nevertheless, this design would face the obstacle that the present study also had to consider, which is the difficulty in identifying an

existing brand which presents consumers with different types of incongruity in their humorous advertisements.

Another additional limitation of this study is that it relates to one product category, meaning that its findings cannot be generalised to consumer responses towards humorous ads with opposing types of incongruity to all product categories. Even though it not harmful to consider this research's findings when creating an advertising campaign, they are likely most reliable when such a campaign relates to yellow goods specifically. Considering that the combination of the product category and humour-product relatedness can affect the strength of effects it has on consumers, such as A_{br}, (Eisend, 2009), future research can expand on this knowledge by considering other product categories in studies of the same nature.

One further limitation concerns the quantity of constructs that were measured, specifically in the pre-test. Firstly, although the use of the humour incorporated into the ads presented to participants was based on literature, perceived humour and the identification of the intended type of humour by the participants in the pre-test could help ensure that participants found the ad funny and that the correct type of humour was used (in this case, comic wit). Second, even though a group of people that share similar characteristics — in this case consumers of beer and English speakers — would be in close proximity to their optimal incongruity level (Yoon, 2013) and hence have

somewhat similar reactions to low and high incongruity, the identification of participants' optimal incongruity levels could enhance the clarity of the findings. Therefore, subsequent studies can benefit from taking these additional steps, either in the same pre-test or additional pre-tests, to ensure humour and incongruity are incorporated with the lowest level of bias possible, as well as to expand on the topic of optimal levels of incongruity.

Adding to the topic of eliminating biases, another aspect to address is inability of randomising the order in which the sections containing each of the advertisements in the pre-test and main questionnaire appeared to participants. Due to financial constraints and the own limitations of Google Forms, the order of the ads shown to participants, in both stages of the survey, was randomly assigned by a random number generator. While this allowed a reduction of the level of bias relating to the order in which the ads appeared, the same order of ads was presented to all participants. Such can, for example, influence participants' attitudes towards later ads, after being presented with the first ones. In the future, the use of a platform which allows this kind of randomisation between participants would enhance the reliability of the findings.

Finally, future replications of this study can compare low and high incongruity in humorous advertisements in other ways. As mentioned, the present study employed incongruity in two ways: (1) in the humour used, and (2) between the visual and textual elements in the ad. To expand on the

knowledge of incongruity, and humour to a smaller extent, consumer responses to incongruity between other elements of the study can be incorporated. Examples of these include between settings and situations in an ad, between ad and brand and between brand and medium (Yoon, 2013).

In conclusion, the present study produces findings that expand on the current knowledge available on the three core concepts of this thesis (humour, incongruity and consumer responses) individually, as well as to the scarce literature that simultaneously approaches all three. Considering the limitations of this study, its findings should be sensibly considered when developing new research as well as in practicality. This thesis responds to the need for more recent studies into humour and incongruity, specifically into how these concepts affect consumer responses.

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APPENDIX 1

Pre-test ad 1

Source: Own elaboration.

Pre-test ad 2

Source: Own elaboration.

Pre-test ad 3

Source: Own elaboration.

Pre-test ad 4

Source: Own elaboration.

Pre-test ad 5

Source: Own elaboration.

Pre-test ad 6

Source: Own elaboration.

Pre-test ad 7

Source: Own elaboration.

Pre-test ad 8

Source: Own elaboration.

APPENDIX 2

Contingency table for pre-test ad 1

			Ad 1 Relevancy			
			Irrelevant	Neutral	Relevant	Total
Ad 1 Expectancy	Unexpected	Count	1	3	3	7
		% of total	2.0%	5.9%	5.9%	13.7%
	Neutral	Count	2	1	6	9
		% of total	3.9%	2.0%	11.8%	17.6%
	Expected	Count	6	6	23	35
		% of total	11.8%	11.8%	45.1%	68.6%
Total		Count	9	10	32	51
		% of total	17.6%	19.6%	62.7%	100%

Source: Own elaboration.

Contingency table for pre-test ad 2

			Ad 2 Relevancy			
			Irrelevant	Neutral	Relevant	Total
Ad 2 Expectancy	Unexpected	Count	37	3	2	42
		% of total	72.5%	5.9%	5.9%	82.4%
	Neutral	Count	2	2	1	5
		% of total	3.9%	3.9%	2.0%	9.8%
	Expected	Count	2	1	1	4
		% of total	3.9%	2.0%	2.0%	7.8%
Total		Count	41	6	4	51
		% of total	80.4%	11.8%	7.8%	100%

Source: Own elaboration.

Contingency table for pre-test ad number 3

			Ad 3 Relevancy			
			Irrelevant	Neutral	Relevant	Total
Ad 3 Expectancy	Unexpected	Count	19	7	5	31
		% of total	37.3%	13.7%	9.8%	60.8%
	Neutral	Count	5	4	4	13
		% of total	9.8%	7.8%	7.8%	25.5%
	Expected	Count	2	1	4	7
		% of total	3.9%	2.0%	7.8%	13.7%
Total		Count	26	12	13	51
		% of total	51.0%	23.5%	25.5%	100%

Source: Own elaboration.

Contingency table for pre-test ad number 4

			Ad 4 Relevancy			
			Irrelevant	Neutral	Relevant	Total
Ad 4 Expectancy	Unexpected	Count	0	0	1	1
		% of total	0.0%	0.0%	2.0%	2.0%
	Neutral	Count	0	2	1	9
		% of total	0.0%	3.9%	2.0%	5.9%
	Expected	Count	6	5	36	35
		% of total	11.8%	9.8%	70.6%	92.2%
Total		Count	6	7	38	51
		% of total	11.8%	13.7%	74.5%	100%

Source: Own elaboration.

Contingency table for pre-test ad number 5

			Ad 5 Relevancy			
			Irrelevant	Neutral	Relevant	Total
Ad 5 Expectancy	Unexpected	Count	35	2	5	42
		% of total	68.6%	3.9%	9.8%	82.4%
	Neutral	Count	2	2	2	6
		% of total	3.9%	3.9%	3.9%	11.8%
	Expected	Count	2	1	0	3
		% of total	3.9%	2.0%	0.0%	5.9%
Total		Count	39	5	7	51
		% of total	76.5%	9.8%	13.7%	100%

Source: Own elaboration.

Contingency table for pre-test ad number 6

			Ad 6 Relevancy			
			Irrelevant	Neutral	Relevant	Total
Ad 6 Expectancy	Neutral	Count	0	0	2	2
		% of total	0.0%	0.0%	3.9%	3.9%
	Expected	Count	4	2	43	49
		% of total	7.8%	3.9%	84.3%	96.1%
Total		Count	4	2	45	51
		% of total	7.8%	3.9%	88.2%	100%

Source: Own elaboration.

Contingency table for pre-test ad number 7

			Ad 7 Relevancy			
			Irrelevant	Neutral	Relevant	Total
Ad 7 Expectancy	Unexpected	Count	40	3	5	47
		% of total	78.4%	5.9%	7.8%	92.2%
	Neutral	Count	0	1	0	1
		% of total	0.0%	2.0%	0.0%	2.0%
	Expected	Count	0	1	2	3
		% of total	0.0%	2.0%	3.9%	5.9%
Total		Count	40	5	6	51
		% of total	78.4%	9.8%	11.8%	100%

Source: Own elaboration.

Contingency table for pre-test ad number 8

			Ad 8 Relevancy			
			Irrelevant	Neutral	Relevant	Total
Ad 8 Expectancy	Unexpected	Count	6	3	5	14
		% of total	11.8%	5.9%	9.8%	27.5%
	Neutral	Count	2	9	7	18
		% of total	3.9%	17.6%	13.7%	35.3%
	Expected	Count	5	7	7	19
		% of total	9.8%	13.7%	13.7%	37.3%
Total		Count	13	19	19	51
		% of total	25.5%	37.3%	37.3%	100%

Source: Own elaboration.