

# “I hear you like bad girls? I’m bad at everything”: a British-Spanish cross-cultural analysis of humour as a self-presentation strategy in Tinder profiles

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## Abstract

*This article explores humour employed as a self-presentation device in the biography section of Tinder profiles belonging to heterosexual users (male and female) in their 20s based in Spain and the United Kingdom. The main purpose of this investigation is to find out if male or female users are more prone to resorting to humour in their Tinder profiles and if the culture within which this interaction takes place also affects the frequency of use of humorous remarks. More specifically, we intend to answer the following research questions: (i) To what extent does gender influence the use of humour as an online self-presentation strategy?, (ii) To what extent does the users’ cultural context play a role in the frequency and way humour is employed? To that purpose, a total of 455 Tinder profiles from both Spanish (224) and UK (231) users was gathered with the help of a bot, Tinderbotz, and it was then analysed quantitatively and qualitatively with the assistance of the software program Atlas.ti. The results show that UK users favour humour as a self-presentation strategy in a significantly higher percentage than their Spanish counterparts, independently of their gender. Thus, while Spanish-speakers may regard humour as a risky mechanism that can backfire, UK users embrace it as part of the Anglo-Saxon ethos of not taking oneself too seriously.*

*Keywords: Tinder, self-presentation, humour, digital communication.*

## 1. Introduction

In the last few years, the number of dating app users has consistently increased (from 198.6 million users in 2015 to 323.9 by the end of 2021, according to Business of Apps<sup>1</sup>). So much so

<sup>1</sup> Available at <https://www.businessofapps.com/data/dating-app-market/> [last retrieved January 18, 2023]

that in 2017, 39% of heterosexual couples in the US claimed to have met online (Rosenfeld et al. 2019). This is specially the case of Tinder, which is the most popular dating app worldwide<sup>2</sup>, the most popular among people under 25 years old<sup>1</sup>, and one in which 93.3% of its users describe themselves as being interested in (at least) dating users of the opposite gender (Barrada and Castro 2020). Consequently, the investigation of these types of platforms from the perspective of digital communication has become highly relevant in order to understand how people today interact with the purpose of establishing romantic or sexual relationships. This practice has already been addressed by some researchers from different fields, such as sociology (e.g., Duguay 2017; Newett et al. 2018) or psychology (see Hobbs et al. 2017; Arias and Punyanunt-Carter 2018; Strugo and Muise 2019; Timmermans and Courtois 2018; Timmermans and De Caluwé 2017; Vangelisti and Perlman 2018, among others). These studies have focused on the users' motivations to resort to the app, the connection between use and personality traits or specific self-presentation strategies (Toma and Hancock 2011), such as how authenticity is constructed on Tinder (Duguay 2017). From a more linguistic perspective, most studies have focused on how gender is performed (and harassed) in the app (see García-Gómez 2020; Hess and Flores 2018; MacLeod and McArthur 2019; Sobieraj and Humphreys 2022; Thompson 2018). However, these studies have mostly focused on Anglo Saxon users interacting in English, while other languages, such as Spanish, are underrepresented (albeit see García-Gómez 2020). Furthermore, the use of humour as a self-presentation tool has, to the best of our knowledge, remained under-researched (although see Jonsson 2021 for a study of Tinder as a way to connect during the Covid times).

The aim of the present study is to redress this imbalance by analysing the use of humour as a self-presentation tool in Tinder profiles from a cross-cultural perspective, contrasting English and Spanish profiles. More specifically, we intend to answer the following research questions: (i) To what extent does gender influence the use of humour as an online self-presentation strategy?, (ii) To what extent does the users' cultural context play a role in the frequency and way humour is employed? It is hypothesised that gender will have an effect in the way humour is used, with male users employing it more often than their female counterparts (Kotthoff 2000; 2006), even if "[t]he relationship between humour and gender is becoming more and more complicated" (Kotthoff 2006, p.6) and overly simplistic generalisations are to be avoided (see Hofmann et al. 2023), especially when the non-binary distinction is often blurred, and there is an increasing interest in the study of 'queer humour' (see Hall 2019). Regarding the second research question, it is expected that, with humour being culturally-bound, the cultural background of the users will also affect the way humour is employed in their Tinder profiles, with British users resorting to humour (e.g., teasing) more frequently than Spanish ones (Haugh 2017; Haugh and Bousfield 2012).

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 below revisits the literature on the concepts of self-presentation and humour with special interest in the different mechanisms that trigger humour. This is followed by section three, which describes the methodology, more specifically the criteria followed in the compilation of the corpus and its description, the participants involved and the ethics of the investigation. The fourth section presents findings according to gender and cultural background. Section 5 discusses results from a quantitative and qualitative approach. Finally, conclusions are offered in Section 6 together with some pointers to future research and research already in progress.

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<sup>2</sup> Available at <https://www.similarweb.com/website/tinder.com/#overview> [last retrieved June 23, 2022]

## **2. Theoretical framework**

This section defines the main theoretical concepts and corresponding taxonomies regarding self-presentation and humour. For the sake of clarity, it has been divided into three sub-sections: section 2.1 briefly deals with the notion of self-presentation, section 2.2 revises some studies dealing specifically with how humour is influenced by the cultural context, and, finally, section 2.3. focuses on humour and the different taxonomies employed in its study.

### **2.1. Self-presentation**

Self-presentation can be defined as “the process through which individuals communicate an image of themselves to others” (Yang and Brown 2016, p.404). It is a dynamic process which develops along five major interconnected dimensions: “intentionality”, “depth”, “positivity”, “authenticity”, and “breadth” (Kim and Dindia 2011; Yang and Brown 2016). Nowadays, with the ever-increasing use of digital communication, self-presentation takes place not only face-to-face, but also digitally in the form of the profile or user status in numerous apps and social networks. As rightly argued by Attrill (2012), however, different settings will lead to different types of self-presentation. In the case of Tinder, users often resort to a multimodal profile where they post their photograph(s) and textual information. The latter includes their name and some optional personal information such as age, gender, sexual orientation, studies, and job, and the “About me” section, a space which can be used to include any type of text. The combination of both the picture(s) and the text is aimed at attracting potential partners so they “swipe right” to indicate their interest and can potentially “get a match” allowing them to use the chat tool of the app. However, other combinations are also possible, for example, some users choose to upload just a photograph of themselves and leave the rest blank; consequently, the inverse phenomenon is also possible, that is, profiles including a description but obscure photograph(s); i.e., blurry or unrecognisable images or only depicting, for example, one part of the face (eye, mouth, etc.). Other possibilities are the use of hybrid texts, where emoji are combined with verbal messages, or just the display of a verbal message (see Sánchez-Moya and Cruz-Moya 2015 on WhatsApp profile statuses).

As argued by Maíz-Arévalo (2021a, p.176), “[t]his interface personalization is hence exploited by users *to their own advantage* so as to present themselves in a specific light (e.g., humorous, tender, sophisticated, wise, etc.) which makes them unique and different from the others” (emphasis added). In fact, it has been proven that humour plays a crucial role in establishing personal identity and individualization, hence boosting social identity and community bonding, the feeling of connectivity, of peer validation and acknowledgement (Hübler and Bell 2003; Norrick 1993), e.g., when “creating something beyond the norms imposed by the group” and showing “command of today’s discourses exchanged on the Net” or web-literacy (Yus 2018: 10).

Arguably, users that display humour in their Tinder profile could be aiming at presenting themselves as fun to be with, entertaining, original, witty, etc. However, the use of humour as a self-presentation strategy is also risky and can misfire, especially when other users fail to grasp the intended humour or do not find it to their taste (see Maíz-Arévalo 2021b). In such cases, the use of humour as a self-presentation strategy may contribute to other users’ negative perception of their persona, and hence trigger a negative output (i.e., mismatch or “swipe left”).

### **2.2. Humour and culture**

Humour can be regarded as universal in human communication but it is also “culturally tinted” (Jiang et al. 2019). As argued by Mir and Cots (2019, p.1),

Humor is a key for opening up interpersonal relationships (Ziv 2010). We use humor to display identity, mark social affiliation, resolve conflict, flirt, etc., but the ability to recognize and create humor is bound by personal and cultural preferences.

In fact, the few studies that have cross-culturally examined humour have proven that the production, types of humour, its reception and interpretation can widely vary. In their review of prior studies on cross-cultural humour, Jiang et al. (2019) point out that research has shown there is a clear divide between Eastern and Western cultures with regard to how they regard humour. Thus, while Western cultures value humour as a positive asset in self-presentation, identity construction and interaction with others, Eastern cultures such as the Chinese tend to see it in a less positive light (see also Chen and Martin 2007; Lu et al. 2019; among others). However, it is important to note that this contrast between Eastern and Western cultures poses serious limitations. For example, considering both “blocks” as cultures oversees the complexity between different (national) cultures but also between different intracultures (e.g., in the case of China, rural areas may be culturally different from more urban areas, not to mention the specific case of Hong Kong).

Besides the Eastern-Western cultural divide, other studies have also contrasted humour in other national Western cultures. For example, Kuipers (2006) compared the US and the Netherlands, taking as a point of reference the masculine and feminine cultural dimensions. Her results show that, in masculine cultures such as the US, there is a tendency towards more aggressive humour. The contrast between seemingly closer cultures has also been explored. Thus, Toncar (2001) contrasted the use of humour in British and North American (US) TV advertisements. His results show that, even if humour in both cultures has become more similar, there are still subtle differences related to cultural dimensions (Hofstede 2001).

With regard to Spain, however, there is still a scarcity of contrastive studies. One of two exceptions is Maíz-Arévalo (2015), who compared jocular mockery by Peninsular Spanish and British speakers in technologically-mediated communication, revealing some cultural differences, even if both groups tended to accept jocular mockery rather than reject it. Likewise, Mir and Cots (2019) carried out another contrastive study between Peninsular Spanish and US speakers in the specific speech act of compliment responses in face-to-face interaction. Interestingly, the authors show that both North American and Spanish speakers favour teasing and ironic upgrades when humorously responding to compliments. However, the pattern was reversed with North American users preferring to ironically enhance the compliment, and the Spanish ones opting more frequently for teasing the addressee. Another interesting contrast was related to the use of self-deprecating humour, which was much more frequently employed by English speakers (25.5%) in contrast to their Spanish counterparts (4.5%).

The present study intends to bridge the dearth of cross-cultural humour studies where Spanish is contrasted with other languages (Spanish-other languages) by analysing the different humour mechanisms employed by Tinder users based in Spain and the UK in their Tinder profiles as a self-presentation strategy. The following section turns to the role of humour in self-presentation and the definition of different mechanisms to trigger such humour.

### **2.3. Humour as a self-presentation strategy in digital communication**

The use of humour in self-presentation has long been the subject of scholarly interest (see Renner and Heydash 2010; Ungar 1984) and, in the last few years, it has become even more popular when studied in connection with digital communication and social networks (see Chu and Choi 2010; Maíz-Arévalo 2021a, 2021b; Virtanen 2022; Wada et al. 2019, among others). Indeed, its role in self-presentation (and hence identity formation and impression) is essential:

Humor is a fundamental ingredient of social communication. It is a rare conversation in which at least one participant does not try to elicit laughter at some point or does not respond with amusement to something another has said or done. Jokes, witticisms, and other humorous verbal and nonverbal behaviors are commonplace in social interaction situations and can have a major impact on the quality of the interactions. For example, *one's interpretation of a stranger's remarks as humorous can influence the impression one forms of that person.*

(Wyers and Collins 1992:663) (emphasis added)

However, the use of humour can arguably be regarded as a risky move, as others might fail to find our remarks funny and form a negative impression rather than the intended one. This is especially the case when using humour among strangers, as is the case on Tinder. As argued by Maíz-Arévalo (2021b, p.16) in her study on humour on WhatsApp profiles, “humour is often associated with personalities and individuals, being hence decontextualized for these other users, especially those users who do not really know the person who tried to be funny in their profile status in the first place”. Consequently, this investigation builds upon these previous studies by looking into the humorous realisations present in Tinder profiles.

Existing literature on humour has demonstrated that it follows certain patterns and is often framed in such a way that it can be identified as humour by other individuals. Thus, a series of mechanisms has been identified (Attardo 1994, 2001; del-Tesso-Craviotto 2006; Dynel 2009b; Norrick 1993, 1994, 2003) to trigger humour, such as the use of register clashes, wordplay, canned jokes, etc. Although we are well aware that the denomination of these mechanisms might differ cross-culturally (see Chang and Haugh 2020; Goddard 2020), we have taken the following mechanisms as a point of departure prior to the analysis of the corpus, namely, intertextuality, incongruity, playful teasing (see Haugh 2017), often accompanied by typographic representations of laughter (i.e. either textual, such as LOL, or visual, such as 😄).

### *2.3.1. The use of incongruity*

Incongruity has been considered by many authors as the sine-qua-non of humour. Etymologically derived from the Latin word *incongruus* (from in- ‘not’ + congruus ‘agreeing, suitable’), being incongruous translates as lacking harmony, conformity, consistency or propriety. Incongruity has traditionally been considered a core aspect of humour, especially in the work of Suls (1972, 1977, 1983; see also Forabosco 1992; Koestler 1964; Shultz 1972, among many others). However, incongruity on its own does not suffice to generate humour, as resolution of the incongruity also needs to take place. This has often been referred to as the incongruity-resolution framework (Forabosco 1992). More recently, Dynel (2016) has argued that:

Incongruity is considered the sine qua non for the emergence of humor, and it is also used as the acid test for it. Most contemporary linguists and psychologists (e.g., Attardo 1994; Dynel 2008, 2009b, 2013, 2016; Forabosco 1992, 2008; Martin 2007) agree that the workings of jokes (and verbal humor in general) conform to the incongruity-resolution framework in the version put forward by Suls (1972, 1983) and Shultz (1972, 1976).

(Dynel 2016:672)

In other words, within the umbrella of incongruity we can find other specific phenomena such as:

- **Absurd skills:** users present themselves as able to perform what might be regarded as originally absurd, such as in examples<sup>3</sup> (1) and (2) by a British and Spanish user respectively, where the skill itself is put off until the end of the message, in a punchline-like fashion:

(1) The most impressive thing about me is my streak on Duolingo.

(2) *Profesión: dibujante profesional de mandalas* ✍

[Profession: professional mandala drawer]

- **Anecdote:** this is a device which consists in the telling of a story or an event that took place in the speakers' personal life which s/he considers to be humour-provoking (Dyner 2016; Norrick 1993, 1994, 2003). In example (3), a UK user partially tells a personal anecdote where he implicitly appeals to other users' imagination to try to figure out the reason why this (i.e., being with 2 Asian guys in a bathroom) could be the case (i.e., his only decent picture):

(3) Only decent pic of me in a suit is with 2 asian [sic] guys in a bathroom.

- **Comic relief:** As reported by Frew (2006, p.644), the utilisation of social comic relief is intended for diminishing the awkwardness, frustration and/or embarrassment of a given situation, as well as strengthening social ties with others. An example of this is found in example (4) enclosed within the profile of a male in the UK, which illustrates the use of the “rolling in the floor with laughter” emoji as a comic relief of the self-deprecatory remark expressed before.

(4) If we match message me frist [sic] sick of being ignored 🤪

- **Paradox:** a statement which shows an internal contradiction (Nilsen and Nilsen 1978), as illustrated by example (5) by a Spanish male user:

(5) *La vida son dos días así que perdamos tiempo en tinder* [sic]

[Life is just two days so let's waste time on Tinder]

- **Register clash:** a register clash involves the use of inconsistent items. For example, using childish language in an adult context or colloquialism in a formal one. It has been sub-classified into upgrading and downgrading or “bathos” (Attardo 1994, 2001; Partington 2006, 2008). Upgrading entails using items from a higher register in informal discourse while downgrading involves the use of words from a lower register in a formal text. Barrett (2017), for example, shows it is also a type of humour resource employed by African American drag queens, whose joking style mimics the stereotypical style of white women. Even though Tinder can hardly be regarded as a formal context, mimicking other sociolects is what triggers the humorous effect. In the corpus under study, examples (6) and (7) show, respectively, a Spanish and a British user reproducing a relaxed, highly colloquial vernacular pronunciation. Example (6) mimics what is considered a low-prestige sociolect in Spanish (often found in the southern regions of Spain). In example (7), the user reproduces a relaxed, highly colloquial pronunciation of “your favourite little [nightmare]”, hence mimicking the US pronunciation of the West Coast:

(6) *Ca' uno es ca' uno*

[Each person is each person]

<sup>3</sup> All the examples proceed from the corpus gathered for this study. Spanish examples are immediately followed by a translation in square brackets provided by the authors.

(7) Ya fave lil nightmare 😱

- **Puns or wordplay:** A pun can be defined as a humorous verbalisation which has (prototypically) two interpretations couched in purposeful ambiguity of a word or a string of words (collocations or idioms), dubbed the punning element, manifesting itself in one form (or two very similar ones) but conveying two different meanings (Dynel, 2009b). Example (8) by an English female user shows the sexual innuendo of playing with words (or, more specifically in this case, with punctuation):

(8) Cock(tails) the way to my heart

### 2.3.2. The use of intertextuality

As explained by Norrick (1989: 117), intertextuality “occurs any time one text suggests or requires reference to some other identifiable text or stretch of discourse, spoken or written”. For example, users may resort to references to popular culture to trigger a humorous effect, and appeal to other users’ background knowledge, hence boosting affiliation (and ideally, a ‘swipe right’). This is the case of example (9) by a Spanish male user, who also plays with the double meaning of the Spanish verb “*montar*” (assemble, for example, some furniture, and ride, with clear sexual connotations), which is left unsaid but easily retrievable for other users:

(9) *Acaba la frase “Quien fuera mueble de IKEA para...”*

[Finish the sentence “I wish I was an IKEA piece of furniture to be...”]

Arguably, intertextuality might also include what some authors define as allusions, since allusions also rely on the already existing material. Allusions have often been subclassified into distortions and quotations. While the former makes references to some linguistic units or longer texts, significantly changing the original forms and meanings, the latter operate on direct citations from original texts (see Nash 1985; Norrick 1993, 1994). The user in example (10) distorts the idiom “to be the third wheel” by means of a hyperbole:

(10) Was recently the 19th wheel at a party so yeah; think it’s time I got a girlfriend.

Incongruity and intertextuality, however, can combine and overlap (as in example 1) in other mechanisms, such as canned jokes (which often resort to incongruity but not necessarily). Although canned jokes are typical of verbal, interactional humour (see Dynel 2009b; 2013), users may occasionally resort to them, as in example (11), where a male UK user seems to combine this genre with that of a personal anecdote. The ambiguity of the first part of the message, with a clear sexual innuendo, is disambiguated in the punch line, where the referent is eventually revealed (an umbrella):

(11) She kept screaming at me: “Give it to me; give it to me! I’m so f\*cking wet; give it to me right now.” And I looked her in the eyes and said: “You can scream all you want; I’m keeping my umbrella.”

Another example of how users may resort to both intertextuality and incongruity is example (12), in which a male Spanish user alludes to the proverb “money can’t buy happiness” (and maybe makes reference to the Beatles song too) but also includes an incongruous, unexpected resolution, quoting Homer in the famous TV series *The Simpsons* (Episode 19, Season 3), thus triggering the humorous surprise:

(12) *Tendrás todo el dinero del mundo, pero hay algo que jamas [sic] podrás comprar...*

*UN DINOSAURIO!* 🦖🦖

[You may have all the money in the world, but there is something you will never be able to buy... A DINOSAUR!]

### 2.3.3. Self-reported humour

Arguably, this kind of self-presentation strategy is not humorous in itself but can be regarded as a meta-comment on the importance humour has for the user as a way to present themselves. In fact, their mentioning that they are fun or humorous is an explicit way to intentionally present themselves as a funny person, as in examples (13) and (14) by a British and Spanish user respectively:

(13) I'm fun; sarcastic and have a dark sense of humour.

(14) *Me considero divertido*

[I consider myself fun]

### 2.3.4. Self-targeted humour

Though not many, some studies have been conducted on self-deprecating and self-enhancing humour (see Martin et al. 2003; Ruch and Heintz 2013). Self-deprecating humour takes place when the speaker makes fun or a critical remark towards him/herself. On the other hand, self-enhancing humour occurs when the speaker compliments oneself. Example (15), found in the profile of a Spanish male, combines both strategies since he first states that he may not be what his interlocutor may be looking for in a relationship ("I may not be the love of your life") but he then throws in the punch line in which he praises himself ("but I'm very close"). Parallely, examples (16) and (17) gathered from, respectively, a female and a male profile in the UK are clear illustrations of humour as a result of self-enhancement and self-deprecation. Face-threatening to the user themselves, self-deprecating humour can also be face-threatening for others, as in example (17):

(15) *Quizás no soy el amor de tu vida, pero me parezco muchísimo*

[I may not be the love of your life but I'm very close]

(16) Two words: wifey material

(17) Looks like we are both single; you know what that means.... No one wants us.

### 2.3.5. Teasing

Teasing has long attracted scholarly attention (Boxer and Cortés-Conde 1997; Drew 1987; Dynel 2008; Haugh 2017; Martin 2007; Norrick 1993; Partington 2006). It can be conceptualised as a higher-order concept embracing jocular utterances performing a variety of pragmatic functions (such as mock challenges, threats, or imitation), whose meaning is not to be treated as truth-oriented and which invariably carries humorous force to be appreciated by both interlocutors. Although teasing is typically employed in interactional humour rather than as a self-presentation strategy, the specific nature of the dating app may explain why users resort to it in an attempt to show an affiliative, playful nature by directly appealing to the interlocutor, and hence give rise to the other users' positive response (i.e., swipe right). Quite frequently, teasing is also explicitly marked by the use of visual elements such as emoji, as in example (18) below. In this case, it can be said to serve two purposes; first, it helps convey the playful-flirtatious tone expressed by the sentence, and second, it acts as a visual hedging device for the face-threatening act caused by the tease:

- (18) *Jugamos?* 😏; *Me gusta llevar la iniciativa, y si se puede repetir mucho mejor.*  
 [Shall we play? [smirking face<sup>4</sup>] I like taking the lead, and if it's possible to repeat, even better.]

In fact, in the case of digital communication, users often resort to multimodal means as meta-discursive cues to explicitly frame their message in a playful tone (e.g., by means of a winking emoji or a smirking face, as in example (18) above). Other ways for users to show their playfulness is to typographically represent laughter, i.e., either onomatopoeically, such as in “hahaha”, or by means of an acronym, such as LOL, as in examples (19) and (20) below, where users combine typographic alteration with other strategies of teasing (19) and self-enhancing humour (20):

- (19) My question for you is... if you were going to be any object what would you be? 😏  
 (20) *Vivo en Las Rozas y por eso todo el mundo dice que estoy forrado (ajajajajajaja) y que tengo un yate.*  
 [I live in Las Rozas<sup>5</sup> and that's why everyone says I'm loaded (ahahahahahahaha) and that I own a yacht]

Finally, other mechanisms identified in the literature, such as retorts<sup>6</sup> or banter<sup>7</sup> (see Norrick 1993; Sacks 1974; Schegloff 1986; Schegloff and Sacks 1973, among others) have not been considered in the present study as they require a conversational structure with at least an initiating and a response move, which cannot take place at the level of the Tinder profile. Figure 1 summarises the taxonomy adopted for the present study. It is important to note that users may choose to combine more than one mechanism when writing their profile, as will be discussed in Section 5 from a qualitative perspective.

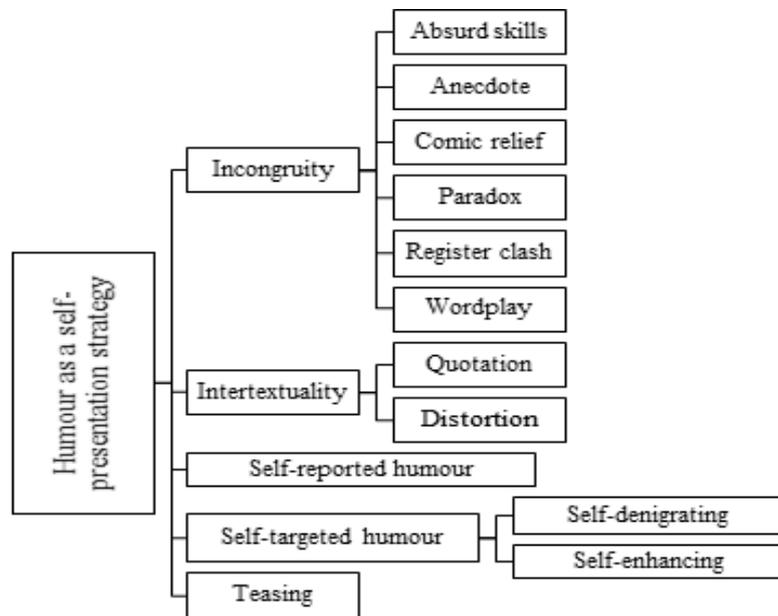


Figure 1. Types of humour as a self-presentation strategy

<sup>4</sup> This emoji often known as “smirking face” is often utilised to indicate a flirtatious or sexual intention; as explained in: <https://emojipedia.org/smirking-face/> [las retrieved January 18, 2023]

<sup>5</sup> Las Rozas is a neighbourhood in Madrid which is well-known for its high-level housing.

<sup>6</sup> Retorts are defined as quick and witty responses to a preceding turn with which they form an adjacency pair.

<sup>7</sup> Banter takes place when one-turn tease can develop into a longer exchange of repartees.

### 3. Methodology

This section presents the data gathered, the means by which the data was collected, and the methodology followed to analyse the sample and extract the results.

#### 3.1. Data-collection

The corpus of Tinder profiles used in this investigation was compiled by means of a Tinder scraping bot, whose code can be found on Github<sup>8</sup>, created by Frederik Mees using Python and Selenium. This tool permits researchers to collect the linguistic data publicly visible on Tinder profiles (e.g., age, verified, work, study, gender, sexual orientation, home, bio, passions, and social networks). The way the bot operates is by logging in into a pre-existing Tinder account (created for the purpose of this investigation) and behaving like an automatised Tinder user while scraping the information which appears on the screen and saving it as a csv. file. This study considered two main variables: that of gender (male, female) and that of location (Spain, UK). In order to collect data from people of different genders, the settings in the fake account were modified and, to gather profiles from Tinder users in the UK inasmuch as from Spain, the longitude and latitude in the bot's code was changed.

The bot was instructed to scrape 125 profiles from each of the collectives analysed on March 14, 2022, and the process took 5.6 hours. However, due to glitches and inaccuracies in the bot's performance, an unequal number of profiles (lower than 125) was collected from each of the groups. The convenience sample thus gathered amounts to a total of 455 Tinder profiles, of which 231 belonged to British users and 224 to Spanish ones. Out of the 231 users in the UK, 109 were female and 122 were male. In the case of the 224 Spanish users, 119 were female and 105 were male. As numbers are not exactly the same, results were ratioed to ease comparison between the four datasets. Figure 2 summarises the corpus description:

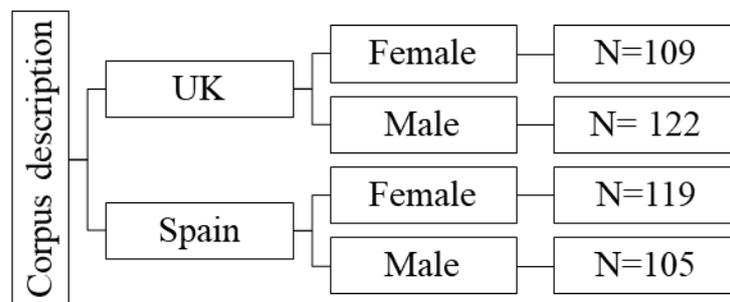


Figure 2. Corpus description

#### 3.2. Participants

The demographic characteristics of the Tinder users whose profiles constituted the corpus analysed in this investigation were highly controlled. This investigation was directed at Tinder users aged between 18 and 29 ( $\bar{x}=23.4$ ), who had instructed the app to show them profiles of people of the opposite gender. The main corpus (N= 455) was constituted by four smaller sub-corpora evenly distributed in terms of gender (female, male) and location (Spain, UK), as summarised in Figure 2. Furthermore, in order to compile a more representative sample, profiles were collected for each of the subcorpora from four different locations in each of the two

<sup>8</sup> Available at <https://github.com/frederikme/TinderBotz> [las retrieved February 5, 2022]

countries: the capital (London, Madrid), a city with more than 50,000 inhabitants (Edinburgh, Barcelona), a medium-sized town with a population of around 5,000 people (Holmes Chapel, Quesada), and a small town of about 1,000 inhabitants (Dromara, Artenara). Finally, it must be mentioned that all the profiles selected were verified by the app as genuine Tinder users to guarantee the authenticity of the profiles, which supports the validity of the sample.

### **3.3. Method**

The data was uploaded to the Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA henceforth) software tool Atlas.ti to facilitate and automatise the codification process. The first step was to identify all the blank profiles, i.e., profiles where users had intentionally written nothing. Then, the sample of self-descriptions was scrutinised in search of humorous remarks. To identify humorous profiles (as opposed to non-humorous ones), we followed three further steps. First, we looked for profiles that the users themselves had explicitly marked as humorous by means of meta-comments (“Just kidding”) or other markers such as emoji (:D) or acronyms of laughter (LOL). Subsequently, the profiles which had been identified as “humorous” were tagged by each researcher according to the following inductive self-made taxonomy created based on the works by Attardo (1994, 2001), Dynel (2009b), Maíz-Arévalo (2021a) and Norrick (1993, 1994, 2003) (see Section 2.2 and Figure 1). Finally, intercoder reliability tests were conducted to avoid the subjectivity of using just one analyst. After both researchers had tagged the corpus, results were contrasted, and it was observed that over 90 per cent of cases were in agreement. Discussions were carried out regarding discrepancies, and consensus was achieved.

### **3.4. Ethics**

When conducting research using online data, ethical implications should be considered, as it is recommended by the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) and their Internet Research: Ethical Guidelines 3.0 approved on October 6, 2019<sup>9</sup> which were consulted prior to conducting this study. In order to guarantee the ethical admissibility of the present study, the four main areas of concern put forward by Townsend and Wallace (2016) were considered and will be addressed in this section.

#### *3.4.1. Private versus public*

In order to establish the degree to which the information present in the profiles is public or private, the conclusions reached by other scholars have been considered, inasmuch as the app’s definition of its data in its Privacy policy. Regarding previous studies with similar data, it must be mentioned that Collins (2019, p.177) claims that “Tinder users can expect (and, in fact, rely upon) their profiles being visible to other users of the app”. Moreover, the app’s Terms and Conditions and Privacy Policy<sup>10</sup> explain that, by using the app, “you share information with other users when you voluntarily disclose information on the service (including your public profile)” and that “you’re comfortable [with this information] being publicly viewable since neither you nor we can control what others do with your information once you share it”. Finally, it also specifies that “you can share the profile of other users and they can share yours with people outside our services through the sharing functionality.” All things considered, it was decided that the data in Tinder profiles could be considered public enough to be used in this

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<sup>9</sup> Available at <https://aoir.org/reports/ethics3.pdf> [las retrieved July 22, 2022]

<sup>10</sup> Available at <https://policies.tinder.com/privacy/intl/es-es#how-we-share-info> [las retrieved July 22, 2022]

investigation, given that all profiles were automatically anonymized and there is no possibility to trace them back to the users.

#### *3.4.2. Informed consent*

In this regard, it can be argued that even if the Tinder users whose profiles were automatically extracted from the app are not aware of this particular fact, having agreed to the app's Terms and Conditions and Privacy Policy, they have expressed their understanding that it is possible that their Tinder profiles are shared outside of the app and they are comfortable with the information being publicly viewable.

#### *3.4.3. Anonymity*

Paccagnella (1997) and Mann and Stewart (2000) argue that online research can be considered ethical provided the researchers act cautiously and do not endanger either the vulnerability or privacy of the participants. Furthermore, as explained by Kozinets (2015, p.142) “analyzing online community or culture communications or their archives is not human subjects' research *if the researcher does not record the identity of the communicators*” (emphasis in original). This is why all the names or references to participants as well as photographs or any other identifying devices were carefully and automatically eliminated by the bot which collected the information. The rest of the text did not suffer from any further editing, which explains the typos and mistakes that may be encountered in some of the instances.

#### *3.4.4. Risk of harm*

With regards to other relevant issues such as age or vulnerability, it should be pointed out that all the participants are over eighteen years old, as required by the app itself. Moreover, it must be noticed that Tinder is a dating app and the utilisation of this platform in the present moment, at least, in the European context (on which this study focuses) is seen as a normal and natural practice for relationship seeking. Therefore, it was considered that the analysis of this data would not be in any way harmful to the users, especially considering that there is no possibility to trace the data back to them.

To summarise, it was considered that this study was cautiously designed in order to respect Tinder users' privacy inasmuch as it is able to throw some light upon different humorous strategies used in Tinder profiles.

## **4. Results**

This section presents the results which were obtained after individually analysing the sample of Tinder biographies according to categories and mechanisms described in Section 2.2. and having reached an interrater agreement (92.5 per cent) between both researchers for a greater reliability of the study. For the sake of clarity, we shall first focus on the general picture from a quantitative perspective before moving on to qualitative analysis. Figure 3 summarises the types of profiles according to the users' gender and location:

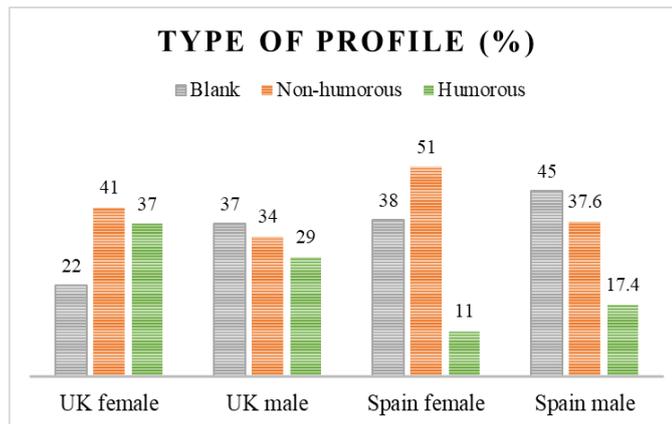


Figure 3. Types of profile considering gender and location of the users

As shown in Figure 3, UK female users are the population most prone to using humour as a self-presentation strategy (37 per cent), even if there is a general preference among the four groups to resort to more traditional, non-humorous profiles, stating what the user is looking for in the app, as in example (21), or including personal information such as their location, height and hobbies, as in example (22):

- (21) Looking for someone to spend time with and go on adventures camping and cute dates 🧑
- (22) Valladolid 1.70 Apasionada Pilates-Yoga 🧘  
[Valladolid 1.70 Passionate about Pilates -Yoga]

It is also interesting to observe that a great deal of users chooses to leave their profile blank, simply relying on their photograph to strike a match. This is more commonly the case with Spanish male users (45 per cent). It is beyond the scope of this paper to ascertain users' motivation to avoid giving any personal information in their profile other than their own photograph. However, future research might look into users' motivations by means of interviews.

Regarding the use of humour as a self-presentation tool, UK female users lead the group (37 per cent), followed by their male counterparts (29 per cent). This tendency is reversed in the case of Spanish users, who, independently of their gender, seem less keen on employing humour in their profile, with Spanish female users using humour in 11 per cent of the cases and male ones in 17.4 per cent. This tendency to avoid humour in the case of Spanish users seems to be in line with previous research on other platforms such as WhatsApp (Maíz-Arévalo 2021a, 2021b), where the use of humour is significantly low in comparison with other self-presentation strategies, such as the display of emotions, inspirational quotes, or the use of “by default” statuses. It seems to be the case that, for Spanish users, humour is perceived as a risky mechanism that can backfire rather than present them in a favourable light; especially considering that common ground plays an important role in the use of humour by collectivist cultures such as the Spanish one, and context in virtual environments can be highly varied (Mendiburo and Páez 2011). Hence, they opt for more conservative profiles or just upload their photograph without any description at all. Arguably, the employment of humour by UK Tinder users seems to point to a cultural difference where the playful, affiliative role of humour is positively valued by these users, who independently of their gender, employ it to attract others while adhering to the Anglo-Saxon ethos of “not taking oneself too seriously” (Haugh and Bousfield 2012). This is confirmed by the results of the chi-squared test, which show such correlation to be statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ).

Table 1. Results of the calculation of the  $\chi^2$ -test considering the frequency of usage of humour in the profiles of each of the collectives analysed, in terms of country and gender

	$\chi^2$	Degrees of freedom (df)	P value
UKFe vs. UKMa vs. SpFe vs. SpMa	20.84	3	<0.001
UK vs. Spain	18.72	1	<0.001
Female vs. Male	0.36	1	>0.5

From a qualitative perspective, it can be said that UK users resort to a wider range of mechanisms to trigger humour than their Spanish counterparts. This may also be a result of the higher number of humorous profiles in this subcorpus. Thus, and below the umbrella of incongruity, both male and female UK users may choose to attract others by displaying absurd skills or telling anecdotes (23) and (24), where the male user employs a prototypical joke structure to disambiguate the sexual double entendre in the punch line. UK users also play with register clashes, especially with wordplay and puns, as in examples (25) and (26), by a male and female user, respectively:

- (23) Best Moment ever: That one time my cat liked me enough to sit on my lap to sleep.  
Worst Moment ever: Accidentally shifting and losing my cat's trust forevermore.
- (24) I can tip you on this week's Tesco's deals. Then you can come by the shop and we can play along as if we'd just met so we can tell that to our parents instead of saying we matched on Tinder
- (25) Working hard; hardly working
- (26) Fishguard/Cardiff Fishguard is a place... I don't guard fish 🐟

Intertextual humour is also employed by UK users, who tend to distort idioms or well-known genres such as Terms and Conditions, as in example (27) by a female user, which she 'sprinkles' with explicitly sexual references:

- (27) Swipe right to subscribe to the wife© material package; features include:
- home cooked meals (or some biscuits at least)
  - pussy on demand (but I sleep a lot)\*
  - unlimited cuddles and i'll tell you you're a very handsome boy.
  - will support you at your football matches and wave a big banner even if you're really shit 💖
- \*blowjobs sold separately; see terms and conditions for more details.
- Also- I am real 🧑

UK users also employ self-reported humour (albeit only occasionally), where they explicitly state that they are fun to be around, as in the case of (28) and (29), by a female and male user, respectively:

- (28) You wouldn't know it but I'm actually very funny.
- (29) More fun than your ex.

Self-targeted humour tends to be slightly more inclined towards the self-enhancing side, which could be explained as an attempt to present themselves in a positive light, making a strength of their own weaknesses, in line with the already mentioned ethos of "not taking oneself too seriously". Thus, the female user in (30) presents as "strengths" her tolerance to alcohol and

physical strength (arguably not very ‘feminine’ characteristics), hereby also teasing her male potential liaisons:

(30) 5”1 but convinced I could outdrink you and beat you in a fight.

Closely connected to the previous example, where the potential suitors are teased, teasing is also employed both by female and male UK users, with a slight preference in the case of female users, although the limited number of cases prevents from generalising these results. Example (31) illustrates teasing (in combination with register clash, as shown by the informal spelling of the second person pronoun), as the first part of the message seems to incongruously mislead the interlocutor into a sexual game rather than a Lego one:

(31) If u play ur cards right and i'll let u build the lego titanic with me.

In the context of Tinder profiles, in which users intend not only to provide personal information, but also make an impression and be liked (Gábor et al. 2018), it is not surprising that teasing would be employed since it is a strategy commonly known to be used as a way of creating affiliation (Haugh 2010), especially when understood as a “non-serious” kind of humour rather than the serious, derogatory type (see Haugh 2017). Furthermore, teasing explicitly includes the interlocutor in the message, which might hereby be inclined to “continue the conversation”, as in example (32), where the user directly alludes to the potential receivers of his message by including a direct question. He also adheres to a humorous frame by playing with the polysemy of the noun “numbers”, which could be interpreted as the receiver’s telephone number but also other numbers such as her ‘measurements, age’ and the like:

(32) I’m an accountant; so let’s talk numbers. What’s yours?

Finally, it is worth mentioning that especially male users showed a tendency to use anecdotes as a way of creating humour in their profiles, as can be seen in examples (33) and (34); even though the latter also includes a reference to the Twitter trend in which celebrities were asked to run over fans with cars as a way of inflicting severe bodily harm on them as part of a sexual fantasy<sup>11</sup>.

(33) One wrote an essay on Mean Girls and still proud of it.

(34) Occasionally I’d hit someone with my car.

Regarding Tinder profiles in Spain, it must be mentioned that, despite the limitation of the sample, the distribution in terms of the strategies used seems to follow a similar pattern to that of the UK dataset. As has been previously stated, teasing seems to be the most popular strategy among both males and females. An example of teasing found in the profiles of a male (35) and female (36) user can be seen below:

(35) *En algún momento de tu vida; vas a conocer a alguien y finalmente te vas a dar cuenta; por qué no funcionó con nadie más. Te la juegas o te quedas con las dudas?*

[One day you’ll meet someone, and you’ll realise why it didn’t work with anybody else. Will you take the chance or keep on wondering what would have happened?]

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<sup>11</sup> Available at <https://www.thecut.com/2019/01/people-tweeting-run-me-over-at-celebrities.html> [last retrieved March 5, 2022]

- (36) *Si eres más alto que yo; te invito a una 🍺 Por el contrario; me invitas tú.*  
[If you're taller than me, I'll buy you a [beer] Otherwise, you can buy me one]

After teasing, Spanish users seem to resort more commonly to self-deprecating humour, hardly ever mitigated with the use of comic relief. As has been explained beforehand, this behaviour is typical of Spanish speakers and, even though the frequency of usage of this strategy was not so disparate from that of English speakers, it highly contrasts with the utilisation of self-enhancing humour, which Spanish users rarely employ. As in the case of teasing, both males and females made a similar usage of self-deprecating strategies as instantiated in examples (37) and (38) below. In the case of example (37), humour is generated as a combination of self-deprecation and the double meaning of the adjective “*vago*” in Spanish, that is, lazy and vague. Regarding example (38), humour can be considered self-deprecating since the female user who created this profile uses the term “minion” as a derogatory descriptor of her short stature as an analogy to the characters of the same name in the film “*Despicable me*”. This disparate use of self-deprecating and self-enhancing humour in the case of Spanish and English speakers is in line with other studies on Spanish humour, which have also proven the preference for this kind of self-deprecating practice, especially among female speakers (see Ruiz-Gurillo and Linares-Bernabéu 2020).

- (37) *Más vago que un recuerdo*  
[Lazier/Vaguer than a memory]  
(38) *Minion de 1'58*  
[1.58 minion]

Spanish speakers also seem to have a preference for distortions, again, with minimal gender differences. Example (39) below shows how a female user appeals to a common message in medical advertising to create humour. Parallely, the male user in example (40) starts his description as if it was a LinkedIn one and then changes his discourse to make it more suitable for a Tinder description.

- (39) *9 de cada 10 dentistas recomiendan comerme la boca 🤪*  
[9 out of 10 dentists recommend snogging me]  
(40) *Dinámico y proact... Ah no,espera,que esto no es linkedin. Ok, pues a ver. Vivo en Pozuelo.*  
[Dynamic and proact... hang on, this isn't linkedin. Ok, let's see. I live in Pozuelo.]

Finally, it must be mentioned that there were a number of strategies which seemed to be rather popular among Spanish users. However, further studies are needed in order to establish whether this is a consequence of the reduced sample analysed in this investigation or if it is a clear and recurrent tendency worth looking into. This is the case of paradox, register clash, quotation and self-reported humour. In this regard, while the differences in usage between Spanish and English speakers was barely noticeable in the case of register clash and self-reported humour, it was more marked in the case of paradox and quotation, as illustrated by examples (41) and (42), respectively. Example (41) expresses the paradox of how easy things are often done complicatedly when they should be done easily and the other way around. On the other hand, example (42) is a quotation which may come from a viralized video on Twitter in which a girl opens a wine bottle by hitting it against the sand<sup>12</sup> or from the song “*Borracha (Pero Buena Muchacha)*” by Pitbull, Vikina and IAMCHINO. As already mentioned, however, the limited number of tokens does not allow for generalisations, although the fact that such a small number

<sup>12</sup> Available at [https://twitter.com/rochy\\_scarlata/status/1220913023092772864](https://twitter.com/rochy_scarlata/status/1220913023092772864) [las retrieved July 27, 2022]

of occurrences presents a wide range of strategies can arguably be considered an interesting result *per se*, worth further exploration in future research.

- (41) Con facilidad hacemos las cosas difíciles, Con dificultad hacemos las cosas fáciles  
[Easily we make things difficult, with difficulty we make things easier]
- (42) Borracha pero buena muchacha,  
[Drunk but good lass<sup>13</sup>]

## **5. Discussion**

This section revisits the results from a quantitative and qualitative perspective. For the sake of clarity, it has been subdivided into two sections, even if results are closely related. Section 5.1 focuses on the cross-cultural comparison between the British and the Spanish datasets. Section 5.2 presents the comparison between both genders, independently of the users' cultural background.

### **5.1. Cultural contrast: Tinder profiles in the UK vs. Tinder profiles in Spain**

Having conducted the chi-square test on the results of this research, it was determined that there were statistically significant differences in terms of the presence of humour in the profiles of Tinder users taking into consideration the country in which they used the app ( $\chi^2= 18.72$ ;  $p=<0.001$ ). In this regard, profiles created in the UK were twice as likely to be humorous than profiles in Spain.

Regarding different humorous strategies, only a qualitative approach could be conducted considering reduced sample size. However, even though no statistical tests could be conducted, some clear tendencies were observed in the data. It is especially worth mentioning that paradox and quotation were especially popular among Spanish speakers, while self-enhancing was more common in the profiles of Tinder users in the UK. Moreover, it must be said that, despite the disparity in its frequency among Tinder users in both countries, teasing was the most pervasive strategy. This is not surprising in the present context since the use of teasing is very much in line with other studies on dating language, where teasing was shown to function as a way to foster affiliation among strangers. As argued by del-Teso-Craviotto (2006, p.473): “teasing can create intimacy or the illusion of intimacy, and foster feelings of solidarity and closeness.” Moreover, even in cultures such as the Spanish one in which teasing may not be traditionally as popular, recent research such as the one conducted by Mir and Cots (2019) shows that teasing is also used to strengthen familiarity and closeness ties between interlocutors, in line with the positive politeness nature of the Spanish culture (see also Iglesias Recuero 2017).

### **5.2. Gender contrast: Male vs. female users**

As it has been explained throughout the paper, statistically significant differences were not observed among male and female users regarding the frequency with which humour was used in the profiles ( $\chi^2= 0.36$ ;  $p=>0.5$ ). However, from a qualitative perspective, small differences regarding the tendency of usage of different humorous strategies were accounted for. However, the limitation of the sample does not allow for generalising these results, which is the main reason why we opted for a qualitative approach in this case. In spite of this, some trends seemed to emerge in the case of the use of self-deprecation and anecdote (more common among male

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<sup>13</sup> Notice that, in the original sentence in Spanish, both “borracha” and “muchacha” rhyme, which is also an indicator of wordplay.

users), and register clash, quotation, and self-reported humour (more frequently present in female profiles). The high level of popularity of other humorous strategies, such as the recurrent presence of teasing in female profiles, and self-deprecation and self-enhancing in male ones, though not as marked, was expected since it tallies with the results obtained in previous studies (see Lampert and Ervin-Tripp 2006).

Nonetheless, it must be reiterated that there was an intragroup disparity regarding the country of interaction of the users of each gender in this study with more than 60 per cent of humorous profiles belonging to users who interacted in the UK. Again, this is not surprising considering the cultural differences in terms of the use of humour by Spanish and English speakers (see Mir and Cots 2019). Further studies ought to be conducted in order to determine clearer tendencies in terms of the usage of different humorous strategies. For example, even though humour was not a highly popular strategy among Spanish female users (only 11 per cent of the profiles were considered humorous), they at times made use of strategies which no other collective seemed overly interested in, such as quotation and wordplay, and avoided using others, for example, self-enhancing humour, a gender difference in the Spanish context which has already been hinted at by other scholars (see Maíz-Arévalo 2013). In the same line, though, again, not overly popular, the use of register clash as a strategy to generate humour appeared with moderate frequency among the profiles of users belonging to all collectives but for those of males in the UK.

## **6. Conclusions**

The present study aimed to analyse the use of humour as a self-presentation strategy in Tinder profiles from a cross-cultural perspective, contrasting English and Spanish profiles. More specifically, we intended to answer the following research questions, repeated here for the sake of clarity: (i) To what extent does gender influence the use of humour as an online self-presentation strategy?, (ii) To what extent does the users' cultural context play a role in the frequency and way humour is employed?

Regarding the first question, our initial hypothesis was that gender would have an effect in the way humour is used, with male users employing it more often than their female counterparts. However, after conducting a chi-square test, this hypothesis had to be refuted, as gender differences in the use of humour were not statistically significant. This seems to be in line with more recent research, which has shown that female users are increasingly changing their humorous patterns (Kotthoff 2006; Linares-Bernabéu 2019).

As for the second research question, it was hypothesised that, being humour culturally bound, the cultural background of the users will also affect the way humour is employed in their Tinder profiles. In this case, the hypothesis was supported by the chi-square test, which rendered a highly significant result ( $p = .001$ ). UK Tinder users favour the use of humour as a self-presentation strategy much more than their Spanish counterparts. This might be pointing to cultural differences regarding the value and perception of humour, a tendency that needs to be further investigated.

As previously mentioned, this study is not without limitations, small sample size (especially in the case of Spanish users) being one of them. Future research intends to widen the corpus size to gauge whether these tendencies can be quantitatively corroborated. Furthermore, it would be interesting to interview Tinder users to know their motivations behind their self-presentation strategies, as well as explore how users from different age spans perform self-presentation on Tinder.

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