



Humor Styles, Cognitive Styles and Emotional Expressions- A Correlational Study

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ABSTRACT

Humor in simpler terms is understood as a way of communication using jokes and puns which all humans use to communicate. Humor may be used as satire, innocent jokes, defense expression etc. However the use of humor is different depending on the context and situation it is being used. A major factor of the style of humor usage also depends on with whom it is being used and who is using it. Each one of us has a different style of humor which is being used on a daily basis. The humor style is a way of emotional expression as well as it also depends on the cognitive abilities and style of cognition. Humor styles adopted by people are also heavily influenced by how people think and how they express their emotions. Study aimed to understand the correlation of humor style with cognitive styles and emotional expression. The study had a sample of 100 participants. The random and snowball sampling methods were employed for the sample selection. The research was done using 3 standardized questionnaires i.e. Humor Style Questionnaire by Martin & Doris, 2003; Cognitive Style Inventory by Lorna P. Martin, 1983; and Barkley Expressivity Questionnaire by Gross & John, 2000. The results drawn from the data showed a positively significant correlation between specific humor and cognitive styles as well as emotional expression

Keywords: Humor style, satire, cognitive style, emotional expression

Introduction-

Martin (2007) has tried to express humor such as humor is described as expressed ability to have the perception and understanding of stimulus which are humorous in nature (such as funny jokes, incidents, satire and pun), it is capability to express joy and cheerfulness, the aptness/competency to make comical remarks and to perceive amusement, it is the skill to appreciate kinds of jokes, cartoonistic observation which is comical in nature, and other humorous material; humor is also the tendency to eagerly seek the options that bring out laughter; it is also the aptness to memorize jokes and funny incidents in life and it is also a skill to use humor as a mean of coping mechanism. The humor process has been said to have four parts which are described as; a) social context, b) cognitive-perceptual process, c) emotional response, and d) the vocal behavioral (e.g.) expression of laughter (Martin, 2007). Humor is "anything done or said, purposely or inadvertently, that is found to be comical or amusing" as stated by Long and Graesser (1988). Crawford (1994) illustrates that when people witness verbal or nonverbal humorous behavior of other individuals, they have a positive cognitive or affective reaction. Romero and Cruthirds (2006) have also defined humor as comical communication that creates a positive cognitive and emotional reaction in a person or a group. The definitions of humor appears to be little problematic in a way that they refer only focused on the reactions of the audience and have not include attempts made at humor by the individual.

Internationally social communication is a widely viewed form of humor (Robert & Yan, 2007). The use of verbal and non-verbal cues of communication with an intention to bring out positive responses e.g. laughter or joy was the most emphasized phenomena studies by Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (1991).

However when defining humor intention is not a crucial element of definitions as there is also some humor responses which are unintentional in nature and called unintentional humor (Martin, 2007 & Long & Graesser, 1988), that shows an appropriate characterization of the instructional humor i.e. connecting with other people in positive and active manner (Wortley & Dotson, 2016) and organizational humor (applying humor in organizational setup). The humor is viewed as a communicative activity that seeks active communication among individuals or group and focuses on eliciting laughter after any anecdote or incident, but none of the

definitions of humor is able to explore whether what kind of statements elicit humor and can be classified as humorous or non-humorous. The conclusion for the same is drawn from the reaction of the audience.

The way individuals engage in humorous communication and choose to opt for different kinds of humor is described in various Humor Styles (Martin et al, 2003). There are four humor styles which are prominently studied which are; first is Self-enhancing humor style which is defined as the capacity to find amusement in distinctive approaches and not so joyful incidences of life (e.g., adversity) and helps people attain distance from problems in stressful situations; second is Affiliative humor style which is describe as a person's aptness to engage in a relationship by cracking jokes or displaying funny banter which is being enjoyed by all involved in the activity. In this style the comical statements are made to laugh which are not at the expense of self or others. Both, self-enhancing and affiliative humor provide an adaptive function, and is also classified as positive humor. The third in the line is Aggressive humor style which is known to employ the use of satire, irony of the situations, sarcasm orbiting around incident, teasing, and mockery in an unpleasant way which extends to the use of sexist and racist comments to elicit humor response. Aggressive humor style is also seen as a humor approach which engages in manipulating or belittling others for the sake of humor. The fourth and last humor style is Self-defeating humor style where people engage in telling funny stories or incidents about their life or try to enact funny things at their own expense. The purpose of this humor style is to gain the appreciation of others by belittling oneself, e.g. making fun of your own self to humor others (Martin et al, 2003).

Cognition is the combination of the mental processes such as awareness of the surrounding, perception of the stimuli, reasoning behind the situation, and judgment of the responses. The roots of cognitive process are traced back in the Gestalt psychology and the studies done on the cognitive development of children by Jean Piaget during the 19th century. Carl Jung (1923) published "Psychological Types" postulated that the personality consists of three facets; the first facet includes attitude, which can range from extraversion personalities who are outgoing in nature, to introversion personalities who are more focused inward or staying in. The second facet includes perception that handles an individual's approach of understanding any stimulus which will be different for every individual for example a person with an intuitive perceptive approach is more meaning-oriented where a person tries to draw meaning out of the stimulus presented while a sensory perceptive person is more driven toward detail-orientation. The third and final facet is Judgment which deals with a person's approach to decision making. A person with a thinking trait of personality possesses more analytical and logical abilities while a feeling trait in a person's personality tends to judge the situation based on values gathered. Curry (1983) studied cognitive styles in terms of an individual's approach to adapting and assimilating information; it does not interact directly with the environment, but it is an underlying and relatively permanent personality dimension that is observed across many learning instances. The dimensions of thinking/cognitive styles are- a) Intuitive thinking style which is associated with a spontaneous holistic and visual approach. People with this thinking style tend to adopt a definition of a problem without having collected descriptive data on the situation. They formulate hypotheses based upon incomplete data, and fail to seek out possible alternative explanations. The person tends to ignore the available data/information if the data/information does not align with his already established assumption (Dawes, 1982); b) Systematic thinking style as the name suggests is a well organized way of thing where the cognition takes place in a series of well-structured events like processing, organizing, distinguishing the various facts, relating the relevant one and then outcome. Schoenfeld (1985) found that training in such a non-pragmatic manner (heuristics) improves problem solving performance among individuals. He suggests that heuristics helped subjects to structure their solutions through discoveries instead of simply rushing into them.

Emotional expressions are a way of expressing oneself in life. It is the quality of how one relates to life. The emotions can be categorized in two categories- Negative and Positive. Negative emotion is an expression of an attempt or intention to exclude. When people have negative emotional expressions they tend to strengthen one's own position at the expense of others trying to keep stuff that is perceived as 'bad' away, destroying things that are perceived as a threat. Negative emotions are fueled by unknown fears of the actions of others, there is a need to control the others or their actions or stop them to avoid being harmed. Examples of negative emotions include apathy, grief, fear, hatred, shame, blame, regret, resentment, anger, hostility.

Opposite to negative emotional expression, positive emotional expression makes an attempt or an intention to include by considering the whole thing. Individuals with positive emotional expression work on learning more viewpoints, interacting more with others, and enjoying making things better. Positive emotions are fueled by an underlying desire for enjoyment and unity. Examples of positive emotional expressions are interest, enthusiasm, boredom, laughter, empathy, action, curiosity.

Impulse Strength is the expression of emotions in the form of an impulse or what we usually use in common day to day life. The 'impulse actions' is an action that is directed by the judgment of a perceived object, event or situation as pleasant or unpleasant, beneficial or harmful or which response is befitting to have an impact on that object, event or situation. Impulsive actions possess some "impetus"- an increased urge to do something. With impetus they have certain strength and urgency.

Objectives-

1. To understand the relationship between Humor Styles with Cognitive Styles.
2. To understand the relationship between Humor Styles with Emotional Expression.

Hypotheses:

Ho1: There is no significant correlation between humor styles and cognitive styles

Ho2: There is no significant correlation between humor styles and emotional expression.

Methodology:

Scope of the study- The study was conducted on a college population that included students and teachers.

A) Research design- The study employs quantitative research design. The investigation of the present study is empirical in nature which involves correlation between humor style, cognitive style and emotional expression.

B) Participants- The representative group is of size N=100, 50-50 representing each group and within the groups N=25 for males and N=25 for females for both the categories. This summarize the sample size as- Total population = 100

Age	Sample (N)	Male	Female
Below age 30	50	25	25
Above age 30	50	25	25
Total	100	50	50

C) Sampling technique- The present study endeavour random sampling and snowball sampling method for the purpose of research.

D) Material/tools used for data collection- With the intention of gathering information regarding the objectives of this current research work three standardized questionnaires were used a) Humor Style Questionnaire b) Cognitive Style Inventory and c) Barkley Expressivity Questionnaire.

“Humor Style Questionnaire”: This questionnaire was developed by Rod Martin and Patricia Doris (2003) as a measuring tool for measuring individual differences in style of humor. This questionnaire consists of 32 items for which the responses range from 1(totally disagree) to 7 (totally agree) in 4 different dimensions i.e. four distinct humor styles: affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive and self-defeating.

“Cognitive Style Inventory”: Developed by Lorna P. Martin (1983), the Cognitive Style Inventory dispenses a ground for identifying the pattern of behavior that represents people’s approach to critical activities such as thinking, learning, problem solving, and decision making. This tool recognizes cognitive styles that implicit preferred and persistent/consistent patterns of responses that are habitual and unconscious as well as deliberate. The inventory consists of 40 items or statements, half of which concern systematic styles i.e. 20 items/statements and other half with intuitive i.e. 20 items/statements.

“Barkley Expressivity Questionnaire”: BEQ, Gross and John (2000) formulated this expressivity questionnaire. This questionnaire was designed to measure 3 facets of expressivity i.e. Negative Expressivity, Positive Expressivity and Impulse Strength on a 16 item scale, the responses of which are answered on a 7- point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

E) Procedure for data collection- The questions of three different questionnaires were set with only instruction written above the questions, separately, for each questionnaire. The whole set of questionnaires also include a consent form which discusses the information about the purpose of the study, asks the participants for their permission in order to gather their personal information and required information (age, gender etc.) of the participants who were asked for the fulfillment of objectives of the recent study. At the end the participants were confronted that their personal information i.e. their data would be a matter of confidentiality and would not be disclosed to anyone. Their data is required only for the collective results among the sample. Later on at the attempt of the last question the participants were thanked for their time and willingness to support this study.

F) Data analysis- Data analysis was done using SPSS. Descriptive statistics and Correlational analysis was done using Mean and Pearson correlation respectively.

Results:

Table 1- Descriptive Statistics of the dimensions among the chosen sample

Variables	Descriptive Statistics					
	Dimension	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Humor Style	Affiliative humor	100	10.00	36.00	27.58	4.61
	Self-enhancing humor	100	8.00	39.00	27.41	5.59
	Aggressive humor	100	10.00	34.00	20.95	4.81
	Self-defeating humor	100	9.00	33.00	22.10	5.05
Cognitive style	Intuitive thinking	100	45.00	84.00	65.61	8.52
	Systematic thinking	100	39.00	89.00	69.68	8.83
Emotional Expression	Negative expressions	100	10.00	36.00	22.77	5.99
	Positive expressions	100	4.00	28.00	20.86	5.45
	Impulse strength	100	7.00	42.00	29.84	7.23

Table 1 shows the mean value for humor style; affiliative ($m_{aff}= 27.58$), self-enhancing ($m_{se}= 27.41$), aggressive humor ($m_{ag}= 20.95$) and self-defeating humor ($m_{sd}= 22.10$) respectively. The mean value for cognitive style; intuitive thinking ($m_i= 65.61$) and systematic thinking ($m_{st}= 69.68$) and the mean value for emotional expression; negative ($m_n=22.77$), positive ($m_p=20.86$) and impulse strength ($m_{is}= 29.84$).

Table 2- Correlation between humor styles and cognitive styles

	Intuitive thinking	Systematic thinking
Affiliative		
Self-enhancing		
Aggressive		
Self-defeating		

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 shows that self-enhancing humor style is significantly positively correlated with both intuitive thinking (.313**) and systematic thinking (.403**) at 0.01 level of significance as p value is less than $p < .01$. Self-defeating humor is positively correlated with intuitive thinking (.263**) once again at 0.01 level of significance. The aggressive humor style is negatively correlated with systematic thinking (-.031) but not significant at any level of significance.

Hence the null-hypotheses H_{01} was partially rejected.

Table 3- Correlation between humor styles and emotions expressions

	Negative expression	Positive expression	Impulse strength
Affiliative	.072	.259**	.279**
Self-enhancing	-.155	.424**	.191
Aggressive	.134	.035	.090
Self-defeating	.007	.240*	.106

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 shows that the affiliative humor (.259**) and self-enhancing humor (.424**) are significantly positively correlated with positive emotional expressions at 0.01 level of significance. The affiliative humor is also significantly positively correlated with impulse strength (.279**) at 0.01 level of significance as p value is less than $p < .01$. The self-defeating humor style is significantly positively correlated with Positive emotional expression (.240*) at .05 level of significance as the p value is less than $p < .05$.

The self-enhancing humor style is negatively correlated with the negative emotional expressions but not significant at any level of significance.

Hence the null-hypothesis H_{02} was partially rejected.

Discussion:

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between humor styles with cognitive styles and emotional expressivity. The results were drawn by employing pearson correlation between the various dimensions of the humor style questionnaire (adaptive humor styles- affiliative and self-enhancing, maladaptive humor styles- aggressive and self-defeating) with cognitive style inventory's two main dimensions (systematic and intuitive

cognitive styles) and dimensions of emotional expressivity questionnaire (positive, negative and impulse strength). The results showed that both self-enhancing and self-defeating humor styles are significantly positively correlated with intuitive cognitive styles at 0.01 level of significance which means that when people have high self-defeating humor style as a mean to sense of humor there is high intuitive cognitive style employed by the person as a mean of thinking style and vice versa which is also supportive by the study conducted by Mayer et al. (2014) concluding that humor based on belittling process or disparagement process, strongly contingent on cognition processing.

The self-enhancing humor style is significantly positively correlated with both the systematic cognitive style and intuitive cognitive style at 0.01 level of significance which means that when people use a self-enhancing humor style has higher usage of both types of cognitive style and vice versa. Individuals who employ a self-enhancing humor style tend to think in a systematic manner as well as they also have a tendency to think spontaneously with little information to deal with the situation that they encounter. Self-enhancing humor style is found to be negatively correlated with cognitive distortion (negative biases thinking process) (Rnic et al., 2016) which expands its understanding such that when people use self-enhancing humor style their thought process is less disruptive and they are able to think well and vice versa.

The positive emotions expression is significantly positively correlated with three styles of humor i.e. affiliative, self enhancement and self-defeating humor style; means that employment of these three humor styles increases the positive emotion expression such as interest, enthusiasm, boredom, laughter, empathy, action, curiosity. The impulse strength expression is positively correlated with affiliative humor style suggesting that when the person is involved in affiliative humor (sense of fellowship, happiness, and well-being) they tend to become disinhibited in their expression of impulse and act on their impulse as a sense of urgency for example- joking on one incident which everyone find funny and tend to enact as well in order be involve more in the joke without weighing on the need to do so.

Conclusion

The study lighted some major humor styles which are associated with cognition and emotional expression. The Humor styles which individuals use on daily bases majorly depends on various cognitive and emotional expressions besides the way individuals think and express themselves also get influenced by how they choose to humor themselves and others as well. The findings of the study have also highlighted that some cognitive styles and emotional expression strongly associate with specific style of humor and then others. The study strongly suggests that the understanding of humor style may prove to be beneficial in understanding the cognitive distortion and emotional expressions among individuals who may be suffering from psychological issues and may be helpful in treatment of the issues as well.

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