



Examining the Relationships between Sense of Humor Styles, Emotional Intelligence, and Social Competence among Pakistani Youth

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Abstract

This study investigates the interrelations among sense of humor, emotional intelligence (EI), and social competence within a sample of 270 higher secondary school, undergraduate, and postgraduate students, aged between 18 and 30 years. Employing measures of humor styles, social competence, and emotional intelligence, the research identifies noteworthy associations. Notably, emotion regulation ability exhibits a positive and significant correlation with self-enhancing and affiliate humor styles. Conversely, the aptitude to employ emotions accurately shows a negative relationship with aggressive and self-defeating humor styles. Positive humor styles demonstrate positive correlations with multiple domains of social competence, whereas negative humor styles display negative correlations with both social competence and emotional intelligence. Additionally, the study scrutinizes gender disparities in emotional intelligence and humor styles, revealing negligible gender differences in both constructs. These findings provide valuable insights into the complex interactions among humor, emotional intelligence, and social competence, shedding light on their relevance within the context of Pakistani students.

Keywords: Humor styles, emotional intelligence, social competence, youth

Introduction

Cultural differences play a substantial role in shaping how individuals express humor, perceive social competence, and exhibit emotional intelligence. Given that Pakistan boasts its distinct cultural context, social norms, and humor styles, these attributes may deviate significantly from those observed in the original study conducted by Yip & Martin (2006). Therefore, conducting research on these variables in Pakistan is imperative as it affords the opportunity to investigate how these constructs intersect and manifest within the unique cultural framework of Pakistan. In this study, humor styles are examined as independent variables, exploring their relationship with social competence and emotional intelligence, which serve as dependent variables.

Sense of humor refers to a person's ability to perceive humor and appreciate a joke. It can also be seen as a personality type which gives someone the ability to say funny things and also see funny side of events (Merriam Webster). Sense of humor is an important element of our everyday life. Recently, more studies are being conducted on this matter to understand how sense of humor relates to various aspects of our lives. Sense of humor refers to humor as a stable personality trait or individual difference variable.

We have a concise and informative analysis of the fundamental foundations of humor owing to Martin's thorough characterization of humor. From a psychology perspective, humor can be defined as an affirmative affective state called "mirth," which is most often generated in social contexts through a cognitive evaluation process based on the awareness of humorous, non-serious incongruities. The ensuing outward presentation of this emotional state takes the shape of recognizable facial expressions and vocalizations that are typically associated with laughter. Hence, humor includes social, cognitive-perceptual, emotional and vocal-behavioral elements (Strick & Ford, 2021). The social component tells that humor does not take place in a social vacuum; therefore, humor is observed more often in the context of people's social activity and human interaction (Martin, 2018). The cognitive-perceptual module refers to the mechanisms involved in generating as well as in construing humorous messages as comical. The third element of humor involves the emotional facets of this phenomenon (Zeigler-Hill et al., 2020). In a nutshell, humor typically elicits a positive emotional response known as mirth. The outward expression of this emotional aspect includes smiling and laughter. Some argue that a strong sense of humor is evident in those who readily find amusement in humorous stimuli (Martin, 2019). This definition is reminiscent of the circular depiction of intelligence as that which is measured by an intelligence test. One is left with the task of defining what "humorous stimuli" means (Moody, 1978).

Humor Style Model

This personality-based approach defines humor as a four-style trait. Self-enhancing and affiliative humor are positive (intrapersonal/interpersonal), reducing stress. Self-defeating humor is self-critical, aiming for approval (Martin et al., 2003). Aggressive humor insults and devalues others, harming interpersonal relationships. Those favoring it disregard others, causing alienation and damaging social connections, severely impairing overall interpersonal relationships (Kuiper, 2012).

Emotional Intelligence

A dictionary defines emotion as a state of feeling encompassing thoughts, physiological changes, and outward expressions. However, theologians, psychologists, philosophers, scientists, and researchers have constructed diverse theories to explore its profound and captivating nature. Theologians examine emotions as a means of connecting with the Supreme Being, while psychologists and sociologists scrutinize their impact on individuals and society. Meanwhile, natural scientists like physiologists investigate the origins, evolution, and functions of emotions. Emotions encompass various psychological subsystems, emerging in response to positively or negatively valued events, signaling and adapting to environmental changes. For instance, anger arises from perceived threats, fear from danger. Emotions organize behavioral responses, showing flexibility between motivations and cognition, differing from moods in intensity and duration (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

Many people have expressed opinions about the scientific viability of emotional intelligence (EI). EI has been said to matter twice as much as IQ. Emotional intelligence, as originally conceptualized by Salovey and Mayer (1990). "involves the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth" (Goleman, 1998).

Social Competence

In general, social competence encompasses social, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral skills essential for successful social adaptation. It includes perspective-taking, learning from experience, and optimizing social behavior based on available information, ultimately defined as effectively handling social interactions, forming and maintaining relationships, and responding adaptively in social settings. In accordance with the definition provided by Orpinas and Horne (2006), social competence is delineated as "an individual's age-appropriate proficiency and aptitude for harmoniously and innovatively engaging within their respective community or social milieu."

Emotional facets of social competence encompass awareness (recognizing and comprehending emotions in self and others), composure (remaining calm and exercising self-control), maintaining relationships (communicating both negative and positive emotions while preserving connections), and empathy (understanding others' perspectives) (Orpinas, 2010).

Literature Review

Do people with a better sense of humor have greater social competence and emotional intelligence? Numerous scholars, such as Flaherty and Lefcourt (2002), have posited that humor assumes a significant function within interpersonal relationships. This role encompasses the enhancement of positive interactions, the facilitation of self-disclosure and social probing, the mitigation of tension and conflict, as well as the preservation of one's social image, among other functions (Flaherty & Lefcourt, 2002). Conversely, humor forms encompassing negative attributes, such as aggressive teasing and sarcasm, can exert detrimental effects on social relationships. Therefore, the prudent application of humor emerges as a significant social skill, potentially complementing other social competencies like initiating social interactions, offering emotional support, and effectively addressing conflicts (Martin et al., 2003).

Some studies have found correlations between measures of sense of humor and such social relationship variables as marital satisfaction (Ziv & Gadish, 1989), perceived social support (Martin et al., 2003), and quality of social interactions (Nezlek & Derks, 2001). However, with the exception of a recent study by Kuiper and colleagues (2004), researchers have not examined associations between humor and the interpersonal abilities or competencies that presumably contribute to relationship quality. This view of sense of humor as a facet of social competence suggests that humor may also be related to the sorts of emotion-related abilities comprising the construct of emotional intelligence (EI). Recent studies have begun to show links between EI (particularly the emotional management facet) and the quality of people's social interactions (Lopes et al., 2004). Many humor applications are linked to emotional awareness and regulation, integral to Emotional Intelligence (EI). Research using the Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ) indicates self-enhancing and affiliative humor enhance interpersonal adaptability and emotional well-being, while aggressive humor associates with hostility, and self-defeating humor with negative emotions, low self-esteem, and limited social support (Kuiper et al., 2004). We expected that these positive and negative styles of humor would also be related in differential ways to EI and interpersonal competence (Martin et al., 2003).

A strong sense of humor is esteemed in social contexts, often accompanied by positive personality traits. Two studies explored observers' assumptions about personal qualities associated with varying humor levels. Results showed those with well above-average humor received more positive ratings on socially desirable traits and lower on

undesirable ones. In the second study, they were perceived as less neurotic and more agreeable. While these findings underscore humor's social value, the underlying reasons for its associations with other traits remain unclear (Cann & Calhoun, 2001).

A study explored humor's connection to social desirability. Adaptive humor styles were viewed more favorably, while maladaptive styles were strongly disapproved of, highlighting that a robust sense of humor encompasses more than humor sharing. It also linked humor styles to Dark Triad traits, finding higher psychopathy and Machiavellianism associated with negative humor styles and elevated narcissism with positive affiliative humor. These findings illuminate interpersonal tendencies in Dark Triad individuals, enhancing our comprehension of these traits. (Veselka et al., 2010). Another research explored the interplay between attachment styles, conflict styles, and humor styles within romantic relationships. The primary objective was to assess the associations between humor styles and conflict styles. Additionally, the study aimed to investigate the strength of the associations between conflict styles, humor styles, and the two dimensions of attachment styles. The findings indicated a positive correlation between maladaptive humor styles and insecure attachment (Cann et al., 2008).

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to investigate the intricate interrelationships among sense of humor styles, social competence, and emotional intelligence, driven by their significance for the educational and professional success of Pakistani youth. This inquiry into their connections is pivotal for comprehending human interactions and the impact of attributes like emotional intelligence on social functioning, given their shared adaptive functions and societal benefits. Additionally, recognizing how humor styles affect social competence and emotional intelligence can promote cultural sensitivity and tolerance, fostering improved relationships within Pakistan's diverse society. Ultimately, this research may inform targeted interventions to enhance these competencies, ultimately benefiting the prospects of Pakistani youth in both education and careers.

Research Questions

- 1)What is the relationship between sense of humor styles, social competence, and emotional intelligence?
- 2)How does the sense of humor styles relate to social competence?
- 3)Is there a significant relationship between sense of humor styles and emotional intelligence?
- 4)What are the gender differences in adaptive and maladaptive humor styles?
- 5)How do gender differences manifest in emotional intelligence levels?
- 6)What is the impact of humor styles on emotional intelligence and social competence, and how do humor-related attributes influence these essential social constructs?

Methodology

This study utilized a quantitative design, a systematic and empirical approach that employs statistical methods to collect and analyze numerical data for objective measurement. The research focused on obtaining precise numerical information to identify patterns and relationships within the given context (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019). To gather data, an online

survey questionnaire was employed and distributed through social media platforms and online groups (De Leeuw & Hox, 2012), ensuring diverse participation from the general population of Pakistan.

Participants

Participants: The study collected data from a general population sample in Pakistan, comprising 270 individuals. Among these, 110 were male, and 160 were female participants. Additionally, the sample included participants with different educational backgrounds, with 35 having completed higher secondary education, 187 holding undergraduate degrees, and 48 having postgraduate qualifications.

Sampling Technique: A convenient sampling technique was employed for participant selection.

Survey Administration: An online survey questionnaire was used as the data collection tool. The survey was distributed to potential participants through various social media platforms and online social groups. It was made available for voluntary participation, and respondents completed the survey at their convenience.

This methodology allowed for the collection of data from a diverse sample within the general population of Pakistan.

Table 1.

Demographic Variable

Demographic Variable	<i>f</i>	%
Gender of participants		
Male	110	40.7
Female	160	59.3
Age of participants		
18-22	142	52.6
23-26	110	40.7
27-30	18	6.7
Education of respondent		
HSS	35	13.0
Undergraduate	187	69.3
Postgraduate	48	17.8

HSS=higher secondary school.

59.3% of participants are women and %40.7% of participants are male. 52.6% of the participants in the study were between the ages of 18-22, as seen in Table 1. 69.3% of the participants in the study received Undergraduate education, as seen in Table 1.

Data Collection Tools

After completing the demographic questions, the participants completed following survey scales:

The Humor Style Questionnaire (HSQ)

It was developed by Martin et al., (2003). This questionnaire consists of four sub-scales of humor: affiliative style, self-enhancing style, aggressive and self-defeating style, with each sub-scale containing eight items. Each item is responded on seven options based on

Likert-type format from “Totally Disagree” (1) to “Totally Agree” (7). Two adaptive styles “affiliative and self-enhancing” and two maladaptive styles “aggressive and self-defeating” styles of humor are measured. The Cronbach alpha in the present research for the 32-items of HSQ scale was .748 (Kuiper, 2016).

The *Interpersonal* Competence Questionnaire (brief form – ICQ-15)

It assesses multidimensional construct of social competence via five distinct, but related subscales: Initiation, Negative assertion, Emotional support, Disclosure, Conflict management, each subscale containing three items. Each item is responded on four options based on Likert-type format from “I’m always poor at this” (1) to “I’m always good at this” (4). The Cronbach alpha in the present research for the 15-items of ICQ-15 was .784.

Wong and *Law Emotional* Intelligence Scale, (WLEIS)

It is a short 16-item measure of emotional intelligence, The items on the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) are based on the ability model of emotional intelligence. This questionnaire consists of four subscales, each subscale comprises of four items. Each item is responded on seven options based on Likert-type format from “Strongly Disagree” (1) to “Strongly Agree” (7). The alpha reliability for the current study was .877. (LaPalme et al., 2016)

Table 2

Reliability Analysis of Measurement Scales

Scale	Cronbach’s Alpha	No. of items
HSQ	.74	32
ICQ-15	.78	15
WLEIS	.87	16

HSQ= humor styles questionnaire; ICQ-15= interpersonal competence questionnaire; WLEIS= Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale

Procedure

Permission to conduct this research involving the aforementioned variables was sought and obtained from the Department of Applied Psychology at Bhauddin Zakariya University, Multan. Data collection was carried out through the utilization of an online survey administered via Google Forms. The survey comprised three distinct scales: the Humor Styles Questionnaire for humor styles assessment, the Brief Interpersonal Competence Questionnaire (ICQ-15) for the evaluation of social competence, and the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) for the measurement of emotional intelligence. These scales encompassed 32, 15, and 16 items, respectively. The recruitment of participants was facilitated through a convenient sampling method. Prior to participation, respondents were duly informed regarding the research's objectives and procedures, with an assurance of the strict confidentiality of their identities and personal information. The study adopted a correlational research design for data analysis and interpretation.

Findings

Data analysis for this research was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). To explore the relationship among the study variables, namely humor styles, emotional intelligence, and social competence, as well as their respective sub-scales, the Pearson-product moment correlation coefficient was employed. Additionally, a t-test was

executed to discern potential gender differences in the participants' responses regarding the study variables.

The presentation of results is bifurcated into two distinct sections: descriptive analysis and inferential analysis. Initially, the data underwent thorough screening, which included the removal of outliers. This preparatory phase facilitated the execution of descriptive analysis, where key statistics such as means and standard deviations were computed. These computations provided an initial overview of the sample's characteristics and the distribution of study variables. The study sample was comprised of 40.7% males and 59.3% females, representing the gender distribution within the research cohort.

Table 3.

Correlation Analysis among Humor Styles and Emotional Intelligence

	Affiliative Humor Style	Self- enhancing Humor Style	Aggressive Humor Style	Self- defeating Humor Style	Social competence	Emotional intelligence
Affiliative Humor Style		.280**	.011	.039	.273**	.174**
Self- enhancing Humor Style			.075	.122*	.268**	.419**
Aggressive Humor Style				.374**	-.143*	-.294**
Self- defeating Humor Style					-.052	-.094

ICQ= interpersonal competence questionnaire

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

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

Table 3 presents the results of the correlation analysis. It reveals that affiliative and self-enhancing humor styles are strongly and positively correlated ($r = .280, p < .005$). Similarly, aggressive and self-defeating humor styles show a significant positive correlation ($r = .374, p < .005$). Notably, emotional intelligence exhibits a negative correlation with maladaptive humor styles (aggressive and self-defeating). Additionally, social competence displays moderate positive correlations with adaptive humor styles (affiliative and self-enhancing) and conversely, negative correlations with maladaptive humor styles. These findings suggest that an escalation in aggressive or self-defeating humor styles corresponds to a decline in social competence.

Table 4.

Correlation Analysis among Subscales of Humor Style, Social Competence and Emotional Intelligence

WLEIS facets	Humor styles			
	Affiliative	Self-enhancing	Aggressive	Self-defeating

Self-emotions appraisal	.201**	.391**	-2.30**	-.112
Regulating-Emotions	.188**	.269**	-.348**	.033
Use of Emotion	.133*	.322**	-.245**	-.133*
Others-Emotion Appraisal	-.003	.256**	-.060	-.056
ICQ scales				
Initiation relationships	.081	.121*	.032	-.011
Negative assertion	.150*	.163**	-.112	-.107
Emotional support	.223**	.238**	-.294**	-.125*
Disclosure	.244**	.234**	.142*	.175**
Conflict management	.185**	.099	-.292**	-.125*

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

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

In Table 4, correlation analysis among humor style sub-scales, social competence, and emotional intelligence sub-scales is presented. Affiliative humor style exhibits a statistically significant but weak correlation with emotional intelligence sub-scales, with the exception of the 'others emotion appraisal facet,' which displays a negative but statistically insignificant correlation. Self-enhancing humor style demonstrates a highly significant positive correlation with all emotional intelligence facets.

Furthermore, affiliative humor style displays a strong correlation with the social competence facet 'initiation of relations' ($r = .081$), albeit statistically non-significant. Weak positive correlations, statistically significant, are observed between affiliative humor style and other social competence sub-scales. Self-enhancing humor style strongly correlates with conflict management ($r = 0.99$). Overall, maladaptive humor styles (aggressive and self-defeating) exhibit a negative correlation with emotional intelligence and social competence facets. An increase in these humor styles corresponds to a decrease in social competence and emotional intelligence.

Table 5.
T-test for Gender Differences on Humor Styles (N=270)

variables	Groups	N	M	SD	t	p
Affiliative Humor Style	male	110	36.763	7.130	-.595	.552
	female	160	37.306	7.685		
Self-enhancing Humor Style	male	110	34.854	7.552	.031	.976
	female	160	34.825	8.055		
Aggressive	male	110	27.236	7.511		

Humor Style	female	160	25.525	7.303	1.860	.064
Self-defeating Humor Style	male	110	31.236	7.827		
	female	160	30.906	8.292	.332	.740

SD= standard deviation, M= mean

Table 5 T-test for Gender Differences on Humor styles (N=270) indicates no major significant gender differences in humor styles but on average both males and females use more adaptive humor styles than maladaptive humor styles.

Table 6.

T-test for Gender Differences in Emotional Intelligence

Variable	Groups	N	X	SD	t	p
Emotional Intelligence	male	110	5.2847	.99862	.053	.958
	female	160	5.2785	.90313		

SD= standard deviation, M=mean

Table 6 T-test for Gender Differences in Emotional Intelligence indicates no significant gender differences in emotional intelligence.

Table 7.

Regression Analysis of humor Styles and Social Competence

Model	B	SE	β	t	p
Constant	32.575	2.887		11.285	.000
Affiliative Humor Style	.202	.056	.214	3.600	.000
Self-enhancing Humor Style	.201	.054	.223	3.730	.000
Aggressive Humor Style	-.143	.058	-.150	-2.448	.015
Self-defeating Humor Style	-.027	.054	-.031	-.506	.613

Table 7 presents gender differences in emotional intelligence using t-tests. The linear regression analysis between social competence (dependent variable) and humor styles (independent variable) reveals significant predictions of social competence by humor styles ($F=10.878$, $p<0.01$), except for self-defeating humor style. This suggests a substantial influence of the variable under investigation on social competence. Additionally, $R^2= .141$, indicating a 14.1% variance in social competence.

Adaptive humor styles (affiliative and self-enhancing) positively and significantly predict social competence ($R^2=.141$, $p<0.01$), while maladaptive humor styles (aggressive and self-defeating) negatively impact social competence.

Table 8.

Regression Analysis of Humor Styles and Emotional Intelligence

Model	B	SE	β	t	p
constant	4.371	.351		12.464	.000
Affiliative Humor Style	.007	.007	.058	1.071	.285
Self- enhancing Humor Style	.052	.007	.430	7.897	.000
Aggressive Humor Style	-.040	.007	-.315	-5.625	.000
Self- defeating Humor style	-.004	.007	-.031	-.553	.581

Note: Dependent Variable: Emotional Intelligence, SE= Standard error, $R^2= .286$, Adjusted $R^2= .275$, $F= 26.522$

Table 8 displays regression analysis results for humor styles and emotional intelligence (EI). The linear regression analysis between EI (dependent variable) and humor styles (independent variable) reveals a significant prediction of emotional intelligence by humor styles ($F=26.522$, $p<0.01$), signifying a notable influence of the variable under investigation on emotional intelligence. Furthermore, $R^2= .286$, indicating a 28.6% variance in emotional intelligence.

However, affiliative and self-defeating humor styles display a non-significant impact. Positive humor styles positively affect emotional intelligence, while negative humor styles negatively affect EI.

Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

Discussion

The study investigated the relationships between emotional intelligence, social competence, and the four humor styles assessed by the HSQ. The findings indicate that emotional intelligence exhibited moderate and highly significant correlations with adaptive humor styles ($p< 0.01$). Specifically, emotional intelligence displayed a positive correlation with adaptive humor styles and a negative correlation with maladaptive humor styles, aligning with prior research. Earlier studies have also observed positive relationship between emotional intelligence and adaptive humor styles. Furthermore, emotional intelligence exhibited a negative and significant relationship with aggressive humor style ($p< 0.01$), while no significant correlation was found with self-defeating humor style. This suggests that adaptive and maladaptive humor may involve distinct affective constructs and consequences (Gignac et al., 2014).

Our findings align with Kuiper et al. (2004), revealing that individuals scoring higher in affiliative and self-enhancing humor styles reported greater ability to initiate relationships and engage in personal disclosure. These positive humor styles facilitate initiating conversations and disclosing personal information in a humorous manner, offering a means to save face if needed. Conversely, negative humor styles showed negative correlations with various interpersonal competence measures, indicating that the hostility underlying aggressive humor hinders empathy and support for others, while aggressive teasing and sarcasm may exacerbate rather than alleviate tension in conflict situations. Notably, no significant gender differences in emotional intelligence were observed, consistent with prior literature (Meshkat & Nejati, 2017). All study hypotheses were confirmed, except for hypothesis V, potentially attributed to cultural differences and language barriers affecting questionnaire comprehension.

Conclusion

In summary, our findings reveal intricate relationships between sense of humor, social skills, and emotional intelligence. Positive humor styles demonstrate positive relationship with specific social abilities and facets of emotional intelligence, while negative humor styles exhibit negative correlations with other interpersonal competencies and emotional intelligence components. Hence, the absence of maladaptive humor styles appears equally crucial as the presence of positive styles for fostering social competence and emotional intelligence (Martin et al., 2003).

Furthermore, our study aligns with previous research, indicating no significant gender differences in emotional intelligence, consistent with Meshkat and Nejati (2017). While no significant gender disparities were observed in humor styles, both males and females predominantly employed adaptive humor styles over maladaptive ones, as also noted by Liu (2012).

Suggestions

The observed correlations between humor assessments, emotional intelligence (EI), and the Interpersonal Competence Questionnaire (ICQ) should be interpreted with caution, recognizing the potential influence of self-report biases. Another limitation of this study pertains to the homogeneity of the sample, which exclusively comprised educated individuals within the 18-30 age range. Consequently, the generalizability of these findings to a more diverse population remains uncertain. Moreover, the correlational design employed in this study precludes the establishment of causal relationships. While it is plausible that certain humor styles may contribute to the development of specific social skills and emotional management abilities, it is equally plausible that these humor styles are a consequence of possessing particular social and emotional competencies. To ascertain causality, future research necessitates experimental investigations.

Limitations

The study's results underscore the intricate interplay among humor styles, emotional intelligence, and social competence. Adaptive humor styles exhibit positive relationship with both emotional intelligence and social competence, suggesting potential benefits in enhancing interpersonal relationships and reducing stress through interventions aimed at cultivating positive humor styles. An intriguing avenue for future research involves comparing humor-

based training with other positive psychology techniques like savoring or gratitude expression, known to foster increased positive affect (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009).

Furthermore, this study highlights the significance of humor styles as psychosocial constructs. The observed correlations with social competence and emotional intelligence imply that an individual's humor styles may serve as behavioral indicators of psychosocial functioning and avenues to psychological well-being. These findings have implications for clinical interventions targeting interpersonal challenges and conflict management, advocating for therapeutic approaches that prioritize relationship development and incorporate social contexts, such as family therapy.

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