

RESEARCH PROPOSAL

THE IMPACT OF HUMOR ON KNOWLEDGE SHARING IN ONLINE INTERCULTURAL COLLABORATION: THE MEDIATING ROLES OF EMOTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This research proposal seeks to investigate the interplay among leader's humor, member's emotions, and knowledge sharing intention in online intercultural teams. Adopting a mixed-method approach, with qualitative exploratory techniques and experimental quantitative methods using serious gaming, psychometric measurements, the study aims to explore the mediating role of emotions in the dynamics between leader's humor and member's emotions. Also, intercultural aspect is integrated to the model by adopting individual-level collectivist values as a moderator. By contributing to the management research domain on online intercultural collaboration, this study aspires to enhance understanding of humor in global virtual teams.

INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The growth of international markets and technological progress have resulted in the widespread occurrence of virtual teams in multinational companies, characterized by diversity in culture and geographical distribution (Connaughton and Shuffler, 2007; Gibson et al., 2014). Operating within a multicultural context, virtual teams face significant challenges in intercultural communication (Adair, Ivona Hideg, Jeffrey R. Spence, 2024). The utilization of communication technology limits the availability of interpersonal interactions. Consequently, this poses difficulties in achieving effective communication and resolving misunderstandings and conflicts (Johri and Pal, 2012; Marlow, Lacerenza, and Salas, 2017).

Given the diverse array of cross-cultural differences in virtual teams that adds complexity and uncertainty to the norms of intercultural communication (Gibson et al., 2014), understanding the communicational factors that contribute to improving interpersonal relationships can help

enhance the overall performance (Chua, Morris, and Mor, 2012; Zander, Mockaitis, and Butler, 2012). Among effective ways to create an effective working environment, researchers from various fields have emphasized the significant role of humor (Romero and Cruthirds, 2006) as previous studies have indicated that positive humor leads to numerous beneficial outcomes (Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2018). For example, humor can boost motivation (Davis and Kleiner, 1989), improve overall well-being by enhancing positive emotions (Samson & Gross, 2012), stimulate creativity in individuals (Deogro Lee, 2015), increase job satisfaction and commitment within an organization (Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2018), enhance performance (Ramlall, 2008), and foster stronger interpersonal relationships (C. Cooper, 2008).

Research gaps and research objectives.

Although humor has numerous potential advantages, it has not been extensively studied in the field of organizational studies (Lehmann-Willenbrock and Allen, 2014). One of the positive outcomes of humor in the organization that is under researched is knowledge sharing. Described as “provision of task information and know-how to help others and to collaborate with others to solve problems, develop new ideas or implementing policies or procedures” (Allameh, 2018). knowledge sharing has the potential to lower production costs, enhance decision-making, foster innovation, and increase profits (Allameh, 2018). By mitigating the adverse consequences of work-related stress, humor can improve employees' relationships within the workplace (H. Chen and Ayoun, 2019). Moreover, the use of positive humor in difficult circumstances enable employees to demonstrate a higher inclination towards engaging in innovative behaviors (De Clercq and Belausteguigoitia, 2019). Therefore, our first argument is that positive humor can lead to the practice of knowledge sharing. Specifically, this study examines the impact of positive humor (affiliative humor and self-enhancing humor) and also negative humor (self-defeating humor and aggressive humor) on the act of knowledge sharing.

Secondly, the present study also attempts to seek on the mediating role of emotions in the nexus between humor and knowledge sharing. Although there is a dearth of research on the mechanism among humor, emotions and knowledge sharing, there are still a limited number of studies on this mechanism with other positive organizational outcomes. For example, Wijewardena et al. (2017) investigate the mediating roles of emotions in the correlation between humor and psychological capital. Furthermore, Robert and Wilbanks (2012) suggest that if humor can promote "active liking," positive emotions, and the establishment of trust based on emotions, then it can contribute to team performance by facilitating effective knowledge sharing and supportive behaviors.

Thirdly, our aim is to add interculturality aspect by introducing individual-level collectivist values as a moderator. Individual-level collectivist values refer to the common beliefs, attitudes,

norms, and principles held by individuals regarding their relationship with the group within a particular society (Schwartz, 1990). Organizational dynamics are deeply influenced by cultural values, with employees' own cultural backgrounds shaping their emotional expressions and appreciation of humor (Robert and Yan, 2007), thereby setting the stage for examining how humor and culture interact. For instance, individualistic values such as independence and self-assertion tend to encourage emotional expression, while collectivistic values like interdependence and harmony in relationships may lead to emotional restraint (Butler, Lee, and Gross, 2007). Regarding knowledge sharing, previous research suggests that in cultures where collectivism is prevalent, the sharing of significant information among individuals is more common (Shore and Venkatachalam, 2003).

Moreover, to our knowledge, there has been no research studying the mechanisms among humor, emotions, and knowledge sharing within the context of an online intercultural environment and most of the studies examines the collectivism aspect in a national level, not individual level. So, by carrying out the research within the intercultural context, the study aims to contribute to the body of literature in the management of online intercultural collaboration.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Humor and knowledge sharing.

Humor is an extensive and multifaceted concept, encompassing verbal or nonverbal social communication intended to amuse audience or unintentionally perceived as amusing (Lynch, 2002). It involves various verbal and non-verbal mechanisms that engage processes such as perception, attention, memory, and conceptual frameworks (Ruch and Heintz, 2019). Specifically, regarding the organization context, Romero and Cruthirds, (2006) define organizational humor as communication that amuses and elicits positive emotions and cognitions in individuals, groups, or organizations through the control of linguistic structures like wordplay, irony, and satire, humor activates semantic, pragmatic, and socio-cultural knowledge (Evans and Steptoe-Warren, 2018).

While humor is typically regarded as having a positive connotation, it possesses a complex nature that can yield both beneficial and detrimental results. It has the capacity to convey not only positive sentiments but also prejudices (Evans and Steptoe-Warren, 2018). Martin et al. (2003) develop a classification system that categorizes humor into four styles based on purpose (self-support or connection with others) and nature (benign or detrimental): affiliative humor, aggressive humor, self-enhancing humor, and self-defeating humor. Affiliative humor, which is the most prevalent form of humor, is characterized by its positive nature and the intention to strengthen interpersonal connections with others (Martin et al., 2003). On the other hand, aggressive humor

represents a negative form of humor that is employed to foster relationships with others and, depending on individuals' cavalier humor beliefs (Hodson, Rush, and MacInnis, 2010), is often associated with being critical in nature. According to Navarro-Carrillo et al.(2020), self-enhancing humor involves finding humor or positive elements in everyday occurrences to enhance one's own self. On the other hand, self-defeating humor aims to amuse others and gain approval by making jokes about oneself. Within this framework, affiliative and self-enhancing humor are categorized as positive or constructive, while aggressive and self-defeating humor are classified as negative or destructive.

While humor is a shared human experience, its interpretation and utilization differ across individuals from various cultures and societies (Dong Yue, 2010). The manifestation and understanding of humor display notable variations across cultures, influenced by both individual and collective factors that shape the creation and interpretation of comedic stimuli (Morreall, 2019). Therefore, the utilization of humor entails risks due to its potential for failure across different contexts and situations (Bitterly, Brooks, and Schweitzer, 2017), especially in intercultural context. For instance, there is a consensus among scholars that Western individuals tend to tolerate and utilize humor more than Chinese individuals (G.-H. Chen and Martin, 2007; Dong Yue, 2010).

Knowledge can be understood as the accumulation of factual information, personal experiences, acquired skills, and technological know-how that is attained through education, learning, mastery, and practical experience (Rhee and Choi, 2017) while knowledge-sharing is defined as the act of exchanging task-related information and expertise with others, collaborating to solve problems, generate innovative ideas, or implement policies and procedures (Zhang et al., 2020). From a logical standpoint, the power and value of knowledge are amplified when it is disseminated and transmitted to others (Al-Kurdi, El-Haddadeh, Tillal Eldabi, 2024). Furthermore, knowledge-sharing brings several advantages, as outlined by (J.-T. Yang, 2010), including mitigating the loss of intellectual capital when employees depart, enhancing job satisfaction and performance by facilitating access to necessary knowledge, strategic utilization of organizational resources, achieving high-performance in service innovation (Hussain, Konar, and Ali, 2016). Moreover, it fosters social relationships among employees (Zhang et al., 2020), serves as a foundation for organizational innovation (Ernawati, 2020), and contributes to the creation of new knowledge. Consequently, knowledge-sharing is considered one of the pivotal activities for achieving organizational effectiveness (Kim et al., 2017).

Regarding the nexus between humor within organizational contexts and the act of knowledge sharing, a discernible research gap persists, necessitating further investigation and scholarly exploration. In research about online science communication, Yang (2021) asserts that

through the widespread popularity and acceptance, utilizing humorous and informal language help break down the barrier between serious and non-serious content and stimulate the knowledge sharing of scientific information. Additionally, in a research on the impact of organizational creative climate on innovative behavior and knowledge sharing in startups, Munir and Beh (2019) found that engaging in humor or playfulness within the workplace can serve as a catalyst, motivating individuals to actively share their existing knowledge to a greater extent. In light with that, recent empirical findings have indicated that leader humor has the potential to impact exceptional behaviors within organizations, including organizational citizenship behavior (Cooper, Kong, and Crossley, 2018). This research highlights that one of the primary roles of leader humor is to cultivate strong and positive relationships with subordinates, thereby fostering high-quality connections and leading to positive behavior. It can be assumed that employees who are immersed in a humorous climate might tend to enact more positive behaviors, including knowledge sharing.

Humor and emotions

Williams and Emich (2014) propose that humor has the capability to elicit emotions, which can be considered as an affective event (Robert and Wilbanks, 2012) at the workplace. Additionally, humor possesses the capability to enhance the intrinsic appeal of a message, thereby capturing the attention of listeners and minimizing the requirement for repetition or further elaboration (Gruner, 1976). Ford et al. (2012) reveal that a humorous condition can lead to lower reported anxiety levels among participants. In light with that, a study conducted by Cann, Calhoun, and Nance (2000) involving the use of humorous videos before or after exposure to unpleasant videos proves that humor can foster positive emotions while reducing negative emotions.

Empirical evidence consistently affirms the beneficial influence of humor on individual emotions. In group settings, it is argued that the effect of humor on individual emotions also has significant impact at group level (Robert & Wilbanks, 2012). Cheng and Wang (2015) discover that humor has an impact on persistence behavior by eliciting emotions. According to their model, individual behaviors can be deliberately employed to consciously manage and influence the emotional state. Also, drawing from the wheel model of humor proposed by Roberts and Wilbanks (2012), the manifestation of humor has the potential to initiate and sustain a cycle of positive emotions. According to this model, when a humorous individual generates humorous events, it can lead to the transmission of positive affect among the audience through a process of social contagion. In the context of team collaboration, member who employ humor have the capacity to elevate the experience of positive emotions among their team members. Those findings reinforce the idea that employing humor can influence emotions.

HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT AND RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Given the above literature review, we propose the following research framework:

Insert figure 1 here

H1: Leader's affiliative humor has a significant effect on members' emotions

H2: Leader's self-enhancing humor has a significant effect on member emotions

H3: Leader's self-defeating humor has a significant effect on member emotions

H4: Leader's aggressive humor has a significant effect on member emotions

H5: The relationship among leader's affiliative humor, member's emotions, and the intention to share knowledge is varied by the level of individual-level collectivist values

H6: The relationship among leader's self-enhancing humor, member's emotions, and the intention to share knowledge is varied by the level of individual-level collectivist values

H7: The relationship among leader's self-defeating humor, member's emotions, and the intention to share knowledge is varied by the level of individual-level collectivist values

H8: The relationship among leader's aggressive humor, member's emotions, and the intention to share knowledge is varied by the level of individual-level collectivist values

H9: Member's emotions has a significant effect on their knowledge sharing intention

H10a, b, c, d: Member's emotion acts as a mediator in the relationship between leader's humor and knowledge sharing intention.

METHODOLOGY

This research is conducted through quantitative and experimental research methods and is divided in two phases:

Phase 1: Exploratory research

In this exploratory phase, qualitative methods, particularly interviews, were prioritized to delve into complex processes and unveil new elements not previously identified in the literature. Unlike quantitative studies, qualitative research aims to explore and justify the reasons behind a particular phenomenon (Stewart, Gill, Chadwick & Treasure, 2008). The research interview, a

crucial method for collecting qualitative data, has found widespread application in field studies and ethnographic research (Qu, & Dumay, 2011). Even when not the primary method in quantitative studies, interviews are often used as a pilot study to gather preliminary data before designing a survey.

It is also proved that interviews align well with experimental or phenomenological research paradigms (Aliyu, Bello, Kasim & Martin, 2014). Qualitative interviews are commonly categorized as unstructured, semi-structured, or structured, with semi-structured in-depth interviews being the most widely used. (Crabtree & Miller, 1999; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

In sum up, the question that needs to be explored will be: How does humor effect members' behaviors, especially knowledge sharing, in online intercultural teams? A qualitative method, specifically semi-structured interviews will be employed. The interviewees will be experts in the field of human behavior research and experienced managers, employees and researchers who have experienced working in intercultural teamwork environment.

Phase 2: Experimental research

An research design is an approach employed to establish cause-and-effect relationships by manipulating an experimental independent variable and observing its influence on dependent variables. (Miksza et al., 2023). In more details, actors such as individuals, groups, or organizations are randomly assigned to various conditions, and the impact on a dependent variable is examined. Random assignments facilitate the management of external influences and the identification of causal effects, rendering experiments particularly advantageous for validating hypothesized processes. Despite experiments historically being underutilized in organizational theory and research management, there has been a notable surge in the popularity of experimental methods in the 21st century, as highlighted by (Bitektine et al., 2022).

In this phase, we adopt experimental research design to examine the relationship among humor, trust among members, members' emotions, and knowledge sharing in online intercultural teams. To comprehensively understand the relationships among various variables, we will employ a quantitative experimental method, using an online serious game. In addition, FaceReader tool will also be used to help observe and evaluate participants' emotions.

The participant sample comprised team leaders, team members from different professions, different types of companies, different positions. Also, the intention of the research is to interview people from different cultures in order to compare the differences of the mechanisms in cultural aspects.

Serious game

The study adopts a serious game hosted on the GenaGame platform. Abt (1970) originally introduced the concept of serious games, which refer to games designed for educational purposes. Unlike traditional learning methods, serious games provide players with an immersive experience within a specific scenario, allowing them to actively participate and make decisions throughout the game (Vermillion et al., 2017). These games aim to create realistic worlds that enable players to engage with rich contextual information and make decisions relevant to the scenario (Vermillion et al., 2017).

The serious game designed for this study will be the case which the participants immersed in scenarios with different leader's humor types, in a virtual working team

Psychometric measurement

Moreover, members' emotions are measured by psychometric measurement tools. One tool that was put to use to measure the emotions of the participants is the face reader. FaceReader is a facial analysis program that can detect and classifying facial expressions. The program has been trained to recognize and categorize expressions into several emotional categories, including happy, sad, angry, surprised, scared, disgusted, and neutral. Additionally, FaceReader can also classify contempt as an expression, similar to the other emotions (Ekman and Friesen, 1986). FaceReader is educated specifically to categorize those expressions, and it also provides the flexibility to add custom expressions to the software. In addition to analyzing facial expressions, FaceReader offers additional capabilities such as detecting gaze direction and determining if the eyes and mouth are open or closed.

FaceReader utilizes a step-by-step process to classify facial expressions, which is outlined below. Firstly, the program employs a deep learning-based face-finding algorithm (Bulat and Tzimiropoulos, 2017) to locate the position of the face in a photo. This algorithm identifies potential face regions in the image at various scales. Secondly, FaceReader utilizes a facial modeling technique based on deep neural networks (Bulat and Tzimiropoulos, 2017). It generates a synthetic face model that represents the location of 468 key points on the face. This method efficiently estimates the full set of facial landmarks in a single pass, and Principal Component Analysis is applied to compress the key points into a compact vector representation that describes the facial state. Thirdly, the facial expressions are classified using a trained deep artificial neural network that detects patterns in the face (Gudi et al., 2015). FaceReader directly classifies the facial expressions based on the image pixels. The network has been trained using over 20,000 manually annotated images, with a focus on classifying the six basic or universal emotions defined by Ekman (1970): happiness, sadness, anger, surprise, fear, and disgust. Additionally, FaceReader can recognize a neutral state and analyze expressions of contempt. The primary outcome of FaceReader is the categorization of facial expressions displayed by the participants in the test.

EXPECTED IMPLICATIONS

Theoretical contribution

This study contributes several theoretical advances. The study is one of only a few studies within the intercultural domain that assess the role of humor on member's emotions and knowledge sharing. The results also provide a contextual understanding of the moderating mechanisms of collectivism values.

Moreover, this study is also expected to help improve our understanding of this dynamics in the context of online intercultural collaboration. Previous studies in intercultural management have addressed the importance of some other management issues, but not humor and emotions in online context.

Practical contribution

In the context of globalization and the rapid development of technology, it is critical that managers employ more management practices to effectively manage the diverse workforce. Therefore, the findings expect to provide managers and leaders with suggestions on how to use humor judiciously and with sensitivity to cultural differences to maximize its effectiveness and avoid potential pitfalls

PROJECT PLAN

Task	Start date	End date	Duration (months)
Discuss with advisor about the research topic Explore reference materials to finalize the final research topic	1-Dec-23	1-Dec-23	1
Prepare a full proposal to submit	1-Feb-24	1-May-24	3
Literature review	1-May-24	1-Aug-24	3
Theoretical framework development	1-Aug-24	1-Oct-24	2
Fieldwork	1-Oct-24	1-Mar-25	5
Research Methodology	1-Mar-25	1-May-25	2
Data collection	1-May-25	1-Oct-25	5
Data analysis and hypothesis testing	1-Oct-25	1-Dec-25	3
Data results and discussion	1-Dec-25	1-Feb-26	3

Conclusion and implications	1-Feb-26	1-Apr-26	2
Preparing dissertation oral defense	1-Apr-26	1-Jun-26	2
Revisions	1-Jun-26	1-Aug-26	2
PhD Dissertation submission	1-Aug-26	1-Dec-26	2
PhD Completion			36 months

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APPENDIX

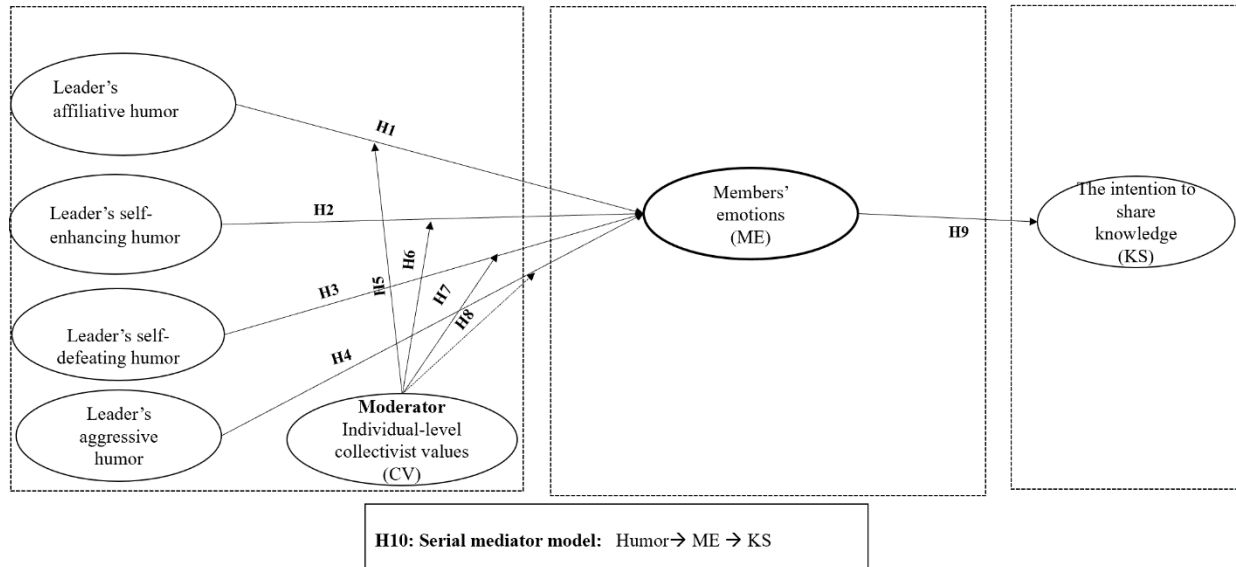


Figure 1: The framework