

## Individual Differences in Managerial Humor Styles of Thai Managers in Real Estate Firms

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**Article History**

Received: 08.09.2017

Accepted: 17.09.2017

Published: 30.09.2017

**DOI:**

10.21276/sjhss.2017.2.9.11



**Abstract:** Despite numerous studies have placed the emphasis on an examination of individual differences in humor styles, the investigation of this topic in Thai context has been overlooked and needs to be explored. As a consequence, the objective of this present study was to examine individual differences including gender, age, and body mass index (BMI) in humor style of Thai managers in real estate companies. Seventy-nine managers in all hierarchical levels of two real estate firms listed in Stock Exchange of Thailand were gathered for data collection by using Humor Style Questionnaire (HSQ) as the instrument. The result of independent sample t-test showed that male managers had a higher score on the use of self-defeating humor style than female managers ( $t = 2.806, p = 0.007$ ). In addition, the result of Kruskal-Wallis H test demonstrated that there was a statistically significant difference in self-enhancing humor between the different age groups ( $\chi^2(3) = 8.731, p = .033$ ). Nonetheless, results of Kruskal-Wallis H test indicated no statistically significant differences in all four humor styles between the different BMI groups. Discussion and recommendations for further studies were also discussed.

**Keywords:** Individual differences, Humor styles, Thai managers, Real estate firms

### INTRODUCTION

Humor is viewed as one of key components for developing social interaction. People with different backgrounds have possessed the distinguished amount of humor styles [1]. Some people can easily use humor as part of relationship development with others whereas some people lack sense of humor to benefit themselves and build the relaxing atmosphere. As humor is perceived as “double-edged”, if it is utilized judiciously, humor can provide a lot of benefits to the individuals and organizations. In contrast, if individuals use humor unthinkingly, it might cause some burdens to the speakers as well as the bad feelings to the listeners [2]. Thus, individuals need to be careful about using humor as the consequences of humor can be either positive or negative depending on the proportion of the use. Nonetheless, past research revealed that the different quantity of humor usage and results depended on the individual differences such as gender, age, ethnicity, and body mass index [3-7]. Despite various studies paid attentions on examining the relationship between individual differences and humor styles, some suggestions for the replication study in the different contexts have still been proposed [3,8].

In Thai context, the study of humor has been underdeveloped and neglected [8]. The empirical

evidence of humor interest in Thailand was reported decades ago in the work of Aurjiraponpan [9] who proposed the use of humor as a management tool in nursing organizations. However, there were no reports relating to the use of humor in the large corporation in Thailand. Some organizations were assumed to be engaged to the use of humor as part of their organizational culture, but this information was not reported officially on their websites or annual reports. For example, Workpoint Entertainment Public Company Limited, one of the large media and entertainment companies in Thailand, was implied as the company that might have encouraged its employees to use sense of humor during their work since this company has produced various humorous TV programs and shows. In the light of this, it is quite interesting to enhance more knowledge in this area, especially the exploration of individual differences and humor usage of people who were in the large corporation in Thailand. In addition, individuals who worked in a real estate sector have increasingly faced a rapidly changing environment influenced by the government policy, consumer behaviors, and technological change. These factors can cause more stresses and pressures on people in this sector. Moreover, previous studies that attempted to explore the use of humor by managers in a real estate company have not yet been emphasized, and somewhat

ignored. Therefore, the purpose of this present study was to examine individual differences including gender, age, and body mass index (BMI) in humor style of Thai managers in real estate companies.

## LITERATURE REVIEWS

Humor is perceived as the basic element of human interaction that has an effect on individuals and organizations [5]. Using humor to effectively develop social relationships with others depends on individual characteristics. As humor varies based on gender, age, purpose, cultural background, and context [10], differences in person's demographics factors can influence the use of humor and result in the distinctive outcomes [11, 12, 3]. As a result, past studies attempted to examine the relationships between demographics variables and the use of humor [3, 6, 13, 7, 14].

Additionally, in order to explore the relationships between individual differences and the use of humor, it is fundamentally critical to understand the difference of humor styles. Martin *et al.* [3] proposed four different humor styles as follows: Affiliative humor style refers to individuals who tell funny stories or make jokes to attract others and reduce the mutual distance. Self-enhancing humor style refers to those who have a humorous view of life when confront with tough time or inevitable situations. Aggressive humor style refers to a person who tries to tease or make jokes on others' inferiority to satisfy himself/herself. Self-defeating humor style refers to those who try to make jokes about their own weaknesses in order to get admittance from others. Previous research on individual differences in humor styles has been widely investigated in different contexts in the past decade as follows:

### Gender and Humor

Liu [13] pointed out that males had a tendency to view themselves having higher amount of humor usage than females. As women needed to behave properly, men were more likely to joke around, tease, and share funny stories than women. The study of Martin *et al.* [3] found that males scored higher in four different humor styles than females. Furthermore, their study revealed that males were more likely to use aggressive humor and self-defeating humor than females. These findings confirmed the previous findings of Martin and Kuiper [15] in which men were generally more engaged to negative humor styles than females. In addition, the recent study of Tümkaya [6] also supported that males were reported to have a higher score than females on aggressive and self-defeating humors. Based on their reviews, Romero and Cruthirds [5] suggested that men should use affiliative humor when speaking with women while women should utilize self-enhancing humor style when talking to men in the organization. However, Martin *et al.* [3]

suggested conducting the study on gender differences in the use of humor in the distinctive contexts to explore whether there would be any dissimilar findings between cultures. As a research on gender differences in the use of humor style in Thailand was scant, the exploration of this area deemed very interesting and could beneficially enhance the knowledge in this field. Therefore, the research hypothesis #1 (H1) was proposed as "*there were significant differences between gender and the use of humor by managers.*"

### Age and Humor

Martin *et al.* [3] found the differences between age and humor styles. The younger people were more likely to score higher on affiliative humor than the elders. In addition, they also found that the elder females were more likely to score higher on self-enhancing humor than the younger females. In contrast, the elder males were reported to have lower score than the younger ones. For aggressive humor, their study revealed that the younger ones were reported to use this style more than the elder ones. Nevertheless, no significant differences between two generations on the use of self-defeating humor style were found. A recent research of Stanley *et al.* [14] found that individuals who were young and middle-aged viewed aggressive humor to be hilarious whereas the elders had the opposite perspectives after watching proper and improper behaviors in the video clips. As the findings of these studies were based on samples in western culture, an examination of individual differences in using humor in different contexts was suggested. Thus, the examination of age differences in the use of humor by managers in real estate firms in Thailand deemed very interesting. Based on literature reviews, the research hypothesis #2 (H2) was suggested as "*there were significant differences between age and the use of humor by managers.*"

### Body Mass Index (BMI) and Humor

BMI is an individual's weight in kilograms divided by a person's height in meters to check whether the figure of an individual is underweight, normal, overweight, or fat. The major reason to check an individual's BMI is to assess the tendency of physical health risk. For example, an overweighted person might be at risks of high blood pressure, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases. On the other hand, an underweighted person might be at risk of quick infections caused by the poor physical efficiency to immunize the disease. Despite past studies had found the relationships between humor and physical and psychological factors, there were little evidences focusing on the association between BMI and humor. For example, Kerkkänen *et al.* [4] investigated correlations between sense of humor, physical health, and well-being of Finish polices, and found the relationships between sense of humor, greater body

mass, increased smoking, and greater risk of cardiovascular disease. However, Kasow [7] indicated that sense of humor and laughter were associated with good physical health such as decreased high blood pressure, reduced stress, and improved memory. As physical health can be assessed by BMI, this present study was interested in examining the relationship between sense of humor and BMI of Thai managers in real estate firms. Hence, the research hypothesis #3 (H3) was addressed as “*there were significant differences between BMI and the use of humor by managers.*”

## METHODOLOGY

### Participants

Seventy-nine managers in two listed real estate firms in Thailand were respondents for data collection. Managers in all hierarchical levels were randomly selected from the head offices of these two firms. Prior to distributing the questionnaires, all of these managers must agree to participate in data collection.

### Measures

Thirty-two items of Humor Style Questionnaire (HSQ) developed by Martine *et al.* [3] was adapted to use as the instrument for data collection. This scale was adjusted from a 7-point scale to a 5-point rating scale. To ensure the meaning of each question of this scale when translated into Thai language, the professional translator was designated to use the reversed translation technique. In addition, content validity was conducted to confirm the meaning of each item in this scale by using index-objective congruence method (IOC). Three experts in management field were contacted to assess the content validity of this scale. The IOC score of each item demonstrated that no score was lower than 0.5 indicating the decent validity of this scale. Also, reliability of this scale was checked with Cronbach's Alpha test. The alpha score of 0.628 for a total scale revealed the acceptable reliability of this scale [16].

### Procedures

HR officials of these two real estate firms were officially contacted for permission to collect data. After receiving the permission, the researcher contacted two MBA students of a government university who presently worked as an employee for each real estate firm to help for allocating the questionnaires. Questionnaires were distributed to managers who worked in the headquarters at these two real estate firms only. The data collection process had been taken

between July-August 2017. In total, 79 questionnaires were returned with completion. All data were keyed in the statistical analysis software, and statistical analyses were calculated. Both parametric and non-parametric tests were used for statistical analyses. Independent sample t-test was used to compare the mean differences between genders. Due to the violation of assumptions relating to the sample sizes (less than 30 for each group), the use of a one-way ANOVA was inappropriate. Instead, Kruskal-Wallis H test was used to test research hypotheses for three or more independent groups. If significant differences were found, Mann Whitney U test was to be run for the pairwise comparison.

## RESULTS

Participants in this present study consisted of 79 managers who currently worked at the headquarters of two real estate companies listed in Stock Exchange of Thailand. Among these managers, 50.6% of them were male managers, and the rest of them were female managers. For their age, 41.8% of this group was between 31-40 years old following by aged between 41-50 years (32.9%), 20-30 years (20.3%), and 50 years up (5.1%), respectively. For their education, 60.7% of these executives received a bachelor's degree while 38% of them obtained a master's degree. Only 1.3% informed that they earned just a vocational degree. Regarding their hierarchical level, 69.9% of these managers were a first-line manager, 22.8% of them were a middle manager, and 7.6% of these people were a top manager. According to their work experience, 39.2% of this group had 5-10 years of work experience with their organizations, 29.1% had less than 5 years of work experience, 21.5% of these managers had work experience between 11-15 years, and 10.1% of them had more than 15 years of work experience with their current companies. Descriptive analysis showed that ‘self-enhancing humor style’ was reported as the highest mean score among the four humor styles ( $\bar{x} = 3.38$ , S.D. = .463) following by ‘affiliative humor style’ ( $\bar{x} = 3.34$ , S.D. = .489), ‘self-defeating humor style’ ( $\bar{x} = 3.05$ , S.D. = .487), and ‘aggressive humor style’ ( $\bar{x} = 2.89$ , S.D. = .512), respectively.

Analysis of independent sample t-test demonstrated that male managers had a higher score on the use of self-defeating humor style than female managers ( $t = 2.806$ ,  $p = 0.007$ ). Due to the significant level achieved for this variable was lower than 0.05, research hypothesis #1 was partially confirmed.

**Table-1: Independent Sample t-test between Humor Styles and Managers' Gender (n=79)**

Humor Styles	Male (n=40)		Female (n=39)		t	Sig.
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
<b>Affiliative</b>	3.30	.456	3.38	.528	-.766	.446
<b>Self-Enhancing</b>	3.38	.411	3.38	.575	-.002	.999
<b>Aggressive</b>	2.96	.454	2.82	.561	1.297	.200
<b>Self-Defeating</b>	3.20	.340	2.90	.566	2.806	<b>.007**</b>

\*\*Significant level at 0.01

A Kruskal-Wallis H test indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in self-enhancing humor between the different age groups,  $\chi^2(3) = 8.731$ ,  $p = .033$ , with a mean rank age of 36.25 for 20-30 years, 37.82 for 31-40 years, 40.12 for 41-50 years, and 72.55 for 50 years up (Table 2). Next, Mann Whitney U test was conducted to compare differences between each pair of age groups. According to statistical analyses, it can be concluded that self-enhancing humor style in age group of 20-30 years was

statistically significantly lower than the 50 years up group ( $U = 2.50$ ,  $p = .005$ ). In addition, self-enhancing humor style in age group of 31-40 years was statistically significantly lower than the group of 50 years up ( $U = 10$ ,  $p = .006$ ). Also, self-enhancing humor style in age group of 44-50 years was statistically significantly lower than the group of 50 years up ( $U = 8.50$ ,  $p = .008$ ). Therefore, a research hypothesis #2 was partly accepted.

**Table-2: Comparison of Humor Styles among age groups using Kruskal-Wallis Test (n = 79)**

Humor Styles	Age	N	Mean Rank	$\chi^2$	df	Sig.
<b>Affiliative Humor</b>	20-30 years	16	39.19	1.006	3	.800
	31-40 years	33	37.52			
	41-50 years	26	43.40			
	50 years up	4	41.63			
<b>Self-Enhancing Humor</b>	20-30 years	16	36.25	8.731	3	.033*
	31-40 years	33	37.82			
	41-50 years	26	40.12			
	50 years up	4	72.25			
<b>Aggressive Humor</b>	20-30 years	16	38.75	2.319	3	.509
	31-40 years	33	42.02			
	41-50 years	26	40.69			
	50 years up	4	23.88			
<b>Self-Defeating Humor</b>	20-30 years	16	35.16	5.058	3	.168
	31-40 years	33	43.59			
	41-50 years	26	41.65			
	50 years up	4	19.00			

\*Significant level at 0.05

According to Table 3, results of Kruskal-Wallis H test showed no statistically significant differences in all four humor styles between the

different BMI groups as p-value of each humor style was greater than .05. Hence, a research hypothesis #3 was not supported.

**Table-3: Comparison of Humor Styles among BMI groups using Kruskal-Wallis Test (n = 79)**

Humor Styles	BMI	N	Mean Rank	$\chi^2$	df	Sig.
<b>Affiliative Humor</b>	Underweight	8	42.00	.206	3	.927
	Normal Weight	37	40.73			
	Overweight	29	38.64			
	Fat Level 1	5	39.30			
<b>Self-Enhancing Humor</b>	Underweight	8	34.31	4.813	3	.186
	Normal Weight	37	38.78			
	Overweight	29	39.52			
	Fat Level 1	5	60.90			
<b>Aggressive Humor</b>	Underweight	8	37.88	2.055	3	.516
	Normal Weight	37	36.66			
	Overweight	29	43.66			
	Fat Level 1	5	46.90			
<b>Self-Defeating Humor</b>	Underweight	8	40.38	1.072	3	.784
	Normal Weight	37	38.30			
	Overweight	29	43.09			
	Fat Level 1	5	34.10			

### Conclusion, Discussion, and Recommendations

The objective of this present study was to examine individual differences (e.g. gender, age, and body mass index) in humor style of Thai managers in real estate firms. Seventy-nine managers in all hierarchical levels of two real estate firms listed in Stock Exchange of Thailand were gathered for data collection by using Humor Style Questionnaire (HSQ) as the instrument. The result of independent sample t-test showed that male managers had a higher score on the use of self-defeating humor style than female managers. This finding partly supported Martin and Kuiper [15] and Martin *et al.* [3] in which men were more engaged to negative styles than females. However, this present study found only the difference in self-defeating humor, which was inconsistent with Tmkaya [6] who found that men had higher scores than women in aggressive and self-defeating humor. The reason that aggressive humor was reported no significant differences between male and female managers because most of them were aged more than 30 years, which could be presumed that they had enough maturity to know what should or should not be communicated in the workplace. While having fun on others' hurtfulness, aggressive humor can obviously minimize the group cohesiveness and cooperation in team [5]. Thus, managers tended to avoid using this humor style as both male and female managers were reported the lowest scores for this style. Also, Thai people have been socialized and taught to be humble and careful about talking with others, therefore; using negative humor to satisfy the self on the cost of others seemed inappropriate.

The result of Kruskal-Wallis H test demonstrated that there was a statistically significant difference in self-enhancing humor between the different age groups. In particular, managers who aged

more than 50 years were more likely to prefer self-enhancing humor than the other age groups. Findings of this present study were inconsistent with Martin *et al.* [3] who found that younger people preferred to use affiliative humor style more than elders. This finding contributes a new knowledge in this area and confirms the notion of differences in use of humor in different contexts. The reason that elder managers preferred to mostly use self-enhancing humor more than other age groups was based on their responsibilities and pressures. The longer they lived, the more responsibilities they had. Hence, they needed to find appropriate ways to get through their lives from the difficulties, and humorous view of their life while facing tough situations deemed a good idea to reduce stresses and burdens. Nonetheless, results of Kruskal-Wallis H test indicated no statistically significant differences in all four humor styles between the different BMI groups. This may be because of the variation of body mass index. People with different shapes were based on their life styles or heredity, and the use of humor was delivered according to people background and personality. Thus, this finding was inconsistent with the previous studies in which the association between BMI and humor was found [4, 7].

Like other studies, this study has some limitations. The sample size was not enough and could not be generalized. As shown, the undersize of each group variable had an impact on data analysis, and violated the basic assumptions of using parametric statistics. Thus, a future research should expand the sample size. Moreover, since demographics variables in this present study had been focused on gender, age, and body mass index, the further study should extend the emphasis on other demographics variables such as educational level, hierarchical level, and marital status. A comparison of individual differences in the use of



humor style between managers and employees is recommended for a future research. Also, a replication study in the different contexts and cultural backgrounds should be considered in the future study as well.

#### Acknowledgement

I am very thankful to Rajamangala University of Technology Phra Nakhon for research sponsorship.

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