

# POSITIVE HUMOUR STYLES GIVE POSITIVE MEANING IN LIFE: A CORRELATIONAL STUDY

**Ramkumar Gupta, Gourav Kalkandha**

DIT university, Dehradun  
ram.pyp2@gmail.com  
kalkandhagaurav23@gmail.com

## Abstract

Previously use of humour found related with self-esteem, psychological perspective and mental health of the individuals. Hence the present study was conducted to assess the relationship between humour styles and the idea of meaning in life of the individuals. One hundred participants with ages between 18-45 years participated in the study. All the participants were assessed for (i) four types of humour style (affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-deprecating) (ii) meaning in life which are (intimacy, achievement, relationship, religion, self-transcendence, self-acceptance and fair treatment). In results, affiliative humour style reported positively correlation with relationship ( $p<0.05$ ). Similarly self-enhancing humour style was positively correlated with achievement, religion, self-acceptance ( $p<0.05$  respectively), relationship ( $p<0.001$ ), self-transcendence ( $p<0.01$ ) and fair treatment ( $p<0.01$ ). In contrast, aggressive humour style had a negative correlation with all factors of meaning in life ( $p$  values varied from 0.05 to 0.001). Similarly, self-deprecating humour style had a negative correlation with fair treatment ( $p<0.05$ ). In summary, higher use of positive humour styles showed a high score of meaning in life. Whereas negative humour styles such as aggressive humour style showed less meaning in life.

**Keywords:** Humour, psychological perspective, meaning in life, mind body intervention

## INTRODUCTION

Humour can be characterized as a personality trait with relative stability, constituting a multi-dimensional construct (Ruch, 1998). Facing with stressors in life, humour emerges as a frequently employed coping strategy, demonstrating its efficacy in alleviating stress and anxiety (Dionigi, Duradoni & Vagnoli, 2023) which can impact health as well (Gupta, Telles, Singh, & Balkrishna, 2018).

Humour styles are simply defined as individual differences in use of humour. Humour is an universal aspect that resonates with individuals across ages (Stanley, Lohani & Isaacowitz, 2014) and cultures, yet its expression can significantly differ. Similar to hope, humour allows individuals to endure and simultaneously confront that which is too dreadful to endure. In his 1977 book "Adaptation to Life," American psychiatrist George Vaillant characterizes humour as the most refined among defense mechanisms. Mature humour enables us to confront and address painful realities directly. He likens the safety of humour to the safety experienced in dreams while asleep, as it has the ability to turn pain into the absurd (Vaillant, 1977).

Martin proposed 4 types of humour style i.e., affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive and self-deprecating humour style (Martin et al., 2003). Whereas affiliative humour is about using wit and clever jokes to bring people together, strengthen relationships, and ease tension in social settings. Self-enhancing humour involves finding amusement in oneself, especially during tough times or personal setbacks. Aggressive humour is considered as a harmful type of humour that aims to hurt others through ridicule or teasing. At last, self-deprecating humour involves making self-critical or self-pitying jokes to gain approval from others. Evidences suggest that humour styles are linked with psychological parameters such as personality (Plessen et al., 2020), emotions (Farkas et al., 2021), psychological well-being (Jiang et al., 2020) and happiness (Ford, Lappi & Holden, 2016). We can conclude that use of humour styles in both positive and negative interfere human psychology or vice versa.

Simultaneously, a thorough understanding of a concept named meaning in life can be formulated by considering PURE: Purpose, Understanding, Responsible action, and Enjoyment/Evaluation (Wong, 2010). Incorporating meaning into global measures of well-being and quality of life is imperative. This is evident because positive emotions commonly contribute to the perception of meaning (King et al., 2006). The exploration of this idea gained momentum with the

publication of Viktor Frankl's "Man's Search for Meaning: From Death Camp to Existentialism" in 1959. In his book, Viktor Frankl expressed this idea through the following words: "Those of us who lived in concentration camps can recall the individuals who walked through the barracks, consoling others and even sharing their last piece of bread. Though they might have been few in number, they serve as ample evidence that everything can be taken from a person except one thing: the ultimate human freedom - the ability to choose one's attitude in any given circumstances, to choose one's own path".

Evidences suggest that meaning in life is also linked with psychological parameters such as personality (Schnell & Becker, 2006), emotions, psychological well-being and happiness (Hicks & Routledge, 2013). In a 1987 article (The panorama of humour and the meaning of life), Harvey Mindess Contended that humour had a connection to the essence of life: "Humour offers us recreation, which can be seen as a form of re-creation, involving a reconstruction of our thoughts, emotions, self-perceptions, and how we view the world around us.

Based on above mentioned literature, humour style and meaning in life are linked with psychological traits like personality, emotions, psychological well-being and happiness. But in authors' knowledge no study has been conducted to assess the relationship between humour styles and meaning in life among individuals. Hence, the objective of the present study to assess the relationship between humour styles and meaning in life.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Participants

In this study, 100 participants aged between 18 and 45 years (M: F, 50: 50) were recruited. Participants were diverse in terms of their native areas and courses of study. Information about the study was disseminated through university department notice boards and social media platforms. Participants were briefed about the study's purpose and procedures, assured of data confidentiality, and offered the option to receive results. A Google Form link was provided for assessment. Incomplete questionnaires were excluded from the analysis. No participants were excluded on this basis.

### Research design

A single time correlational research design was used to conduct this study.

### Data collection procedure

Data collection was conducted using a Google Form, which included obtaining informed consent, socio demographic information from participants, and administering the Humour style questionnaire (HSQ) and Personal meaning profile (PMP).

### Assessments

#### Humour Style Questionnaire (HSQ)

The Humour Styles Questionnaire (HSQ; Martin et al., 2003) was employed to assess participants' utilization of humour across four subscales: affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating. The questionnaire comprises 32 items, with 8 items allocated to each subscale. Responses to these items are rated on a 7-point Likert Scale, ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree). The reliability of the subscales, representing distinct humour styles, is high, with Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.77 to 0.79.

#### Personal Meaning Profile (PMP)

The meaning in life was measured using the Personal Meaning Profile, created by Wong in 1998. It comprises seven factors: Intimacy, Achievement, Relationships, Religion, Self-transcendence, Self-acceptance, and Fair treatment. The Personal Meaning Profile (PMP) has been employed in numerous studies, demonstrating robust reliability and validity. The results revealed strong internal consistency for achievement ( $\alpha=0.89$ ), relationships ( $\alpha=0.85$ ), religion ( $\alpha=0.80$ ), self-transcendence ( $\alpha=0.79$ ), self-acceptance ( $\alpha=0.68$ ), intimacy ( $\alpha=0.59$ ), and fair treatment ( $\alpha=0.56$ ).

## DATA ANALYSIS

Pearson correlation was used to assess the relationship between humour styles and different aspects of meaning in life using SPSS software (Version 24.0). The scores obtained through the administration of the questionnaire were subjected to statistical analysis such as Mean, Standard Deviation and Coefficient of Correlation.

## RESULTS

Higher values of affiliative humour style showed a positive correlation with relationship ( $r=0.195$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Similarly, self-enhancing humour style was positively correlated with achievement ( $r=0.220$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), relationship ( $r=0.328$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), religion ( $r=0.224$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), self-transcendence ( $r=0.297$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), self-acceptance ( $r=0.235$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) and fair

treatment as a ( $r=0.235$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) factor of meaning in life. In contrast, aggressive humour style had a negative correlation with all 7 factor of meaning in life intimacy ( $r=-0.202$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), achievement ( $r=-0.312$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), relationship ( $r=-0.293$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), religion ( $r=-0.320$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), self-transcendence ( $r=-0.251$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), self-acceptance ( $r=-0.202$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) and fair treatment ( $r=-0.198$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Similarly, self-deprecating humour style was negatively correlate with fair treatment ( $r=-0.198$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). The values of correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) are mentioned in Table 1.

**Table 1. Correlations values between humour styles and factors of all meaning in life**

Variables	Affiliative Humour	Self-enhancing humour	Aggressive humour	Self-deprecating humour
	r- value	r- value	r- value	r- value
Intimacy	0.041	0.119	-0.202*	0.039
Achievement	0.098	0.220*	-0.312**	0.003
Relationship	0.195*	0.328***	-0.293**	-0.030
Religion	0.061	0.224*	-0.320***	-0.045
Self-transcendence	0.082	0.297**	-0.251*	0.021
Self-acceptance	0.046	0.235*	-0.202*	-0.145
Fair treatment	0.090	0.275**	-0.198*	-0.198*

r = correlation coefficient; Pearson correlation; p = level of significance; \* $p<0.05$ , \*\* $p<0.01$ , \*\*\* $p<0.001$

## DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to explore the relationship between different humour styles and factors of meaning in life independently. In positive humour styles affiliative humour style relation with relationship factor of meaning in life. Similarly, Self-enhancing humour style has shown a positive correlation with achievement, relationship, religion, self-transcendence, self-acceptance and fair treatment factors of meaning in life. Inversely, aggressive humour shows negative correlation with all 7 factors of meaning in life which are intimacy, achievement, relationship, religion, self-transcendence, self-acceptance and fair treatment. Also, self-deprecating humour style shows the negative correlation with fair treatment.

In positive humour styles both affiliative and self-enhancing humour styles were positively correlated with different factor of meaning in life. The positive correlation between affiliative humour style and the relationship factor of meaning in life aligns with existing psychological theories. According to social bonding theory, humour serves as a mechanism to enhance social connections and strengthen relationships (Martin & Ford, 2018). Therefore, individuals who frequently use affiliative humour to create positive social interactions are more likely to experience a greater sense of meaning in their relationships. Whereas self-enhancing humour style involves using humour to cope with stress and maintain a positive outlook on life (Martin et al., 2003). According to theories of positive psychology, individuals who engage in positive self-appraisals and perceive themselves as competent and capable are more likely to experience fulfilment and meaning in life (Phan et al., 2020). Hence, the positive correlations between self-enhancing humour and factors of meaning in life can be explained by the tendency of such humour to promote positive self-appraisals and adaptive coping strategies.

As a negative humour aggressive humour style involves using humour to assert dominance or cope with threatening situations through sarcasm, ridicule, or hostility (Burger, 2022). From a psychological perspective, aggression can stem from underlying feelings of insecurity, fear, or inadequacy. Therefore, individuals high in aggressive humour may struggle to find meaning in life as they may rely on defensive mechanisms to protect their self-esteem, leading to negative correlations with various factors of meaning in life.

Lastly self-deprecating humour style involves making jokes at one's own expense (Martin et al., 2003). Individuals who frequently engage in self-deprecating humour may have lower self-esteem or struggle with self-acceptance (Yue, Liu, Jiang & Hiranandani, 2014). Consequently, negative correlations between self-deprecating humour and factors of meaning in life, such as fair treatment, may reflect underlying feelings of inadequacy or dissatisfaction with oneself.

These results indicate that people who utilize affiliative and self-enhancing humour typically report greater satisfaction and fulfillment in different facets of life. Conversely, individuals who employ aggressive and self-deprecating humour may tend to experience reduced levels of well-being and sense of purpose. Additionally, mind body practices are believed to increase positive aspects and negative aspects in people's life. (Gupta, Bhatt & Harnal, 2022; Gupta, Singh & Singh, 2016; Gupta, Singh, Bhatt & Gupta, 2015). Overall, these findings align with existing psychological theories and research

on humour, social bonding, coping mechanisms, and self-esteem. They highlight the complex interplay between humour styles and individuals' subjective experiences of meaning in life, underscoring the importance of considering humour as a multifaceted construct in understanding psychological well-being.

## CONCLUSION

In summary, the current study has analyzed the relation between different humour styles and the different factors of meaning in life. The results reveal that there is a relation between humour styles and different factors of meaning in life. Aggressive humour scores highest with having negative correlation with meaning in life. Self-enhancing humour positively correlates with achievement, relationship, religion, self-transcendence, self-acceptance and fair treatment. These findings suggest that individuals who employ affiliative and self-enhancing humour styles often report higher levels of satisfaction and fulfillment across various aspects of life. Conversely, those who utilize aggressive and self-deprecating humour styles may be more prone to experiencing diminished levels of well-being and a reduced sense of purpose.

## REFERENCES

Burger C. (2022). Humor styles, bullying victimization and psychological school adjustment: mediation, moderation and person-oriented analyses. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(18), 11415. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph191811415>

Dionigi, A., Duradoni, M., & Vagnoli, L. (2023). Understanding the Association Between Humor and Emotional Distress: The Role of Light and Dark Humor in Predicting Depression, Anxiety, and Stress. *Europe's Journal of Psychology*, 19(4), 358–370. <https://doi.org/10.5964/ejop.10013>

Farkas, A. H., Trott, R. L., Edge, E. A., Huang, L.-Y., Kasowski, A., Thomas, O. F., Chlan, E., Granros, M. P., Patel, K. K., & Sabatinelli, D. (2021). Humor and emotion: Quantitative meta-analyses of functional neuroimaging studies. *Cortex*, 139, 60–72. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cortex.2021.02.023>

Ford, T. E., Lappi, S. K., & Holden, C. J. (2016). Personality, Humor Styles and Happiness: Happy People Have Positive Humor Styles. *Europe's Journal of Psychology*, 12(3), 320–337. <https://doi.org/10.5964/ejop.v12i3.1160>

Frankl, V. E. (1959). Man's search for meaning: An introduction to logotherapy. Beacon Press.

Gupta, R. K., Bhatt, S., & Harnal, J. (2022). Yogic Management of Stress and Personality Evolvement in Perspective of World Peace. In: *Yoga and World Peace*, V. Maheshwari, AK Pandey, AK Tiwari (Eds.), Prachya Vidya and Jain Sanskriti Sanarkshan sansthan, Ladnun, pages 174-185.

Gupta, R. K., Singh, S., & Singh, N. (2016). Does yoga influence happiness and mental balance: a comparison between yoga practitioners and non-yoga practitioners. *Online Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 2, 1-5.

Gupta, R. K., Singh, S., Bhatt, S., & Gupta, S. (2015). A review on adolescents' aggression and mindfulness meditation. *Online Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 1(1), 12-17.

Gupta, R. K., Telles, S., Singh, N., & Balkrishna, A. (2018). Stress and coping strategies: the impact on health. *Yoga Mimansa*, 50, 20-26. DOI: 10.4103/ym.ym\_1\_18

Hicks, J. A., & Routledge, C. (2013). Emotions and meaning in life: A motivational perspective. In J. A. Hicks & C. Routledge (Eds.), *The experience of meaning in life: Classical perspectives, emerging themes, and controversies*, Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-6527-6\\_9](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-6527-6_9)

Jiang, F., Lu, S., Jiang, T., & Jia, H. (2020). Does the relation between humor styles and subjective well-being vary across culture and age? A meta-analysis. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 2213. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.02213>

King, L. A., Hicks, J. A., Krull, J. L., & Del Gaiso, A. K. (2006). Positive affect and the experience of meaning in life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 90(1), 179-196. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.90.1.179>

Martin R. A., Puhlik-Doris P., Larsen G., Gray J., Weir K. (2003). Individual differences in uses of humor and their relation to psychological well-being: Development of the Humor Styles Questionnaire. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 37, 48–75. [10.1016/S0092-6566\(02\)00534-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0092-6566(02)00534-2)

Martin, R. A., & Ford, T. (2018). *The Psychology of Humor: An Integrative Approach*. Academic Press.

MINDESS, H. (1987). The Panorama of Humor and the Meaning of Life. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 30(3), 82-95. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000276487030003007>

Phan, H. P., Ngu, B. H., Chen, S. C., Wu, L., Shi, S. Y., Lin, R. Y., Shih, J. H., & Wang, H. W. (2020). Advancing the Study of Positive Psychology: The Use of a Multifaceted Structure of Mindfulness for Development. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 1602. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.01602>

Plessen, C. Y., Franken, F. R., Ster, C., Schmid, R. R., Wolfmayr, C., Mayer, A.-M., Sobisch, M., Kathofer, M., Rattner, K., Kotlyar, E., Maierwieser, R. J., & Tran, U. S. (2020). Humor styles and personality: A systematic review and meta-analysis on the relations between humor styles and the Big Five personality traits. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 154, 109676. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2019.109676>

Ruch, W. (Ed.). (1998). *The sense of humor: Explorations of a personality characteristic*. Walter de Gruyter & Co.

Schnell, T., & Becker, P. (2006). Personality and meaning in life. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 41(1), 117–129. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2005.11.030>

Stanley, J. T., Lohani, M., & Isaacowitz, D. M. (2014). Age-related differences in judgments of inappropriate behavior are related to humor style preferences. *Psychology and Aging*, 29(3), 528–541. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0036666>

Vaillant, G. E. (1977). *Adaptation to Life*. Boston, MA: Little Brown and Co.

Wong, P. T. P. (1998). Implicit theories of meaningful life and the development of the personal meaning profile. In P. T. P. Wong & P. S. Fry (Eds.), *The human quest for meaning: A handbook of psychological research and clinical applications* (pp. 111–140). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

Wong, P. T. P. (2010). Meaning therapy: An integrative and positive existential psychotherapy. *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy*, 40(2), 85–93. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10879-009-9132-6>

Yue, X. D., Liu, K. W., Jiang, F., & Hiranandani, N. A. (2014). Humor styles, self-esteem, and subjective happiness. *Psychological Reports*, 115(2), 517–525. <https://doi.org/10.2466/07.02.PR0.115c18z6>