

Relationship Among Humor Styles, Internal Marketing Practices And Communication

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Abstract

Although humor at workplace provides positive results for the brands and intraorganizational management, there are only a few theorized studies proving this fact in the literature. Studies on humor at workplace can be mostly seen in the organizational behavior literature. Humor can be considered as a very critical component for both the internal customers and external customers in the marketing literature. Humor is effective in creating consumer perceptions and loyalty through various marketing channels and additionally, can be considered as a very important concept for maintaining the holistic marketing approach in internal marketing practices. Behaviors and attitudes of marketing department managers with different humor styles can increase cohesion among employees and maximize their performance. This study examines the effect of humor styles of the marketing department managers on the internal marketing practices under the moderating role of persuasive communication variable.

Keywords: Humor Styles, Internal Marketing Practices, Communication

Introduction

Once or twice a decade a scholar issues a call for more attention to be given to the potential benefits of humor in organizations (e.g., Bradney 1957; Duncan 1982; Duncan et al. 1990; Robert and Yan 2007). Humor has been studied frequently in the advertising studies within marketing literature. Advertising researchers have found humor to be positively related to attention, causing a favorable attitude toward the ad, decreasing irritation and providing a favorable attitude toward both the sponsor and the advertised product. Researchers have obtained different results depending on the culture (Hoffman et. al. 2014, Madden et. al.,1982, Duncan & Nelson, 1985, Crawford & Gregory, 2015). As a conceptual explanation, humor can be observed in verbal or nonverbal messages. In this sense communication has

became one of the most important issues for the relationship between humor at workplace and the employees behaving as internal customers. In this study, the effect of humor on the internal marketing has been explored. Also, the moderating role of the persuasive communication among the employees has been examined.

Hypothesis Development

Relationship between Humor and Internal Marketing Practices

Humor is defined as “intentional verbal or nonverbal messages, which elicit laughter, chuckling, and other forms of spontaneous behavior taken to mean pleasure, delight, and/or surprise in the targeted receiver” (Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield 1991). Such behaviors can be seen on both advertising content and also internal marketing applications of the brands. Organizations providing global consumer products sometimes strategically use humor in global ad campaigns as seen on the ads of Google, Heineken and Belvedere Vodka. (Cannes_Lions, 2009, White, 2012). Research on workplace humor includes the characteristic of humor to improve production performance (Caudron, 1992) and to prevent conflict among employees (Duncan et al., 1990; Fry, 1992) in business organizations (Duncan et al., 1990; Morreall, 1991); as a component of the uncertainty of business organizations (Hatch and Ehrlich, 1993) and as a social cohesion at work . Cross-cultural advertising indicates that humor in advertising has different effects on various cultures (Eisend, 2009; Gulas & Weinberger, 2006). As seen on the advertising studies humor has an effect on consumer perceptions, influencing their purchasing behaviors. In addition to its effect on consumers, humor is also important in internal marketing activities in the workplace (Cann et.al., 2014). Humor often plays a crucial role in creativity. Contrary to the widely held belief that groups interfere with creativity, groups often facilitate humor. Humor can provide an interesting perspective to internal consumers from which could be learnt more about a wide range of human behavior (Cundall, 2007). The other vantage point that has been apparent in research on humor, both in organizations and in marketing, is the focus on the positive effects of humor, with little attention being given to the negative uses of humor. Despite drawing attention to the negative uses of humor studies have mostly shown that positive effects of humor are widely dominant (Cann et. al, 2014). Producing humor through behaviors or verbal/nonverbal messages is not just an ordinary skill of an individual. This skill is one of the desirable traits that an individual can have to create a positive impact on employee skills (Cann et. al, 1997). Marketers define their marketing strategies focusing not only on external consumers, but also on internal consumers. Thus, humor is not just for the external consumers.

When humor appears among the employees behaving as internal consumers, these messages could enable them to produce more innovative outcomes.

According to Grönroos, internal marketing are activities that aim to primarily satisfy the internal customers (employees) of an organization, thus to guide marketing activities in this regard and that enable the organization to establish a customer-centric approach (Grönroos, 1990). In another definition, internal marketing aims ‘to motivate and retain qualified employees by selling the company to the employees or making attractive the work conditions and products’ (Grönroos, 1990). On the other hand, Kotler defines internal marketing as providing training, motivation and compensation to employees to enable them to efficiently serve customers (Kotler et. al., 2014). According to Chow et al. (2015), internal marketing involves activities of training and motivating employees to enable the company to provide the best service to consumers. In the traditional management approach, the organizations benefit from the employees in compliance with the goals of the organization and guide their works in this regard. In the course of time, employees whose expectations have not been fully met exhibit dissatisfaction, which causes labor loss and ineffectiveness. Instead of this, in the internal marketing approach which considers the employee as a value, the employee and the organization are expected to have a dialogue (To et al., 2015). In order to gain competitive edge, organizations must adopt the internal marketing approach at all the levels from senior management to the lowest and create an organizational culture. Thus, the organization can assure customer satisfaction and increase customer loyalty (Loi, 2009). However, the employees directly affect the success of the organization. According to the internal marketing principles, customers and employees are equally important. Employees must have a knowledge of up-to-date and planned marketing tactics and how to act. The success of the internal marketing and the motivation of the employees positively affect the external marketing (Proctor, 2010). In his research of 1981, Berry, considering the bank employees as internal customers, examined the effect of the satisfaction of the internal customers on the external customers (Berry, 1981). Although a number of definitions have been given in the following years, this study is based on the definition provided by Berry and Parasuraman in 1991, wherein Berry and Parasuraman state that fulfilling the needs of the employees increase their loyalty and the motivation. In 1995 Varey defined the internal marketing as a process that help fulfilling the needs of the employees and guide the interdepartmental management and interpersonal communication. Lings (2000) suggested that through internal marketing service quality can be measured in line with the expectations of the employees.

The studies show that internal marketing practices must be planned and carried out before conducting external marketing practices. Arnett et al. emphasized the importance of internal marketing practices by stating ‘If you cannot motivate your employees, it will be impossible to satisfy your customers through external marketing practices’ (Arnett, Laverie and McLane, 2002). In a service providing organization, the organizations must give equal importance to the internal customers and the external customers. The management must work to enable the employees to adopt the organizational structure (Kandampully, 2006).

In the literature, internal marketing practices have been examined in two dimensions, namely the formal internal communication and informal internal communication (To. et al, 2015). The studies emphasized the importance of communication in in-service trainings, regular meetings and internal marketing activities in order to enable the senior management to infuse the employees with the vision and mission of the organization and assure that the employees have the required knowledge on the activities of the organization (Romero and Cruthirds, 2006). Strong communication between employees and executives and the senior management trying to learn the needs, emotions and thoughts of the employees at the lower levels by being in contact with the manager of the relevant unit and department can be considered as informal internal communication and an important component of the adoption of the marketing approach. By improving informal internal communication, a sincere language can be developed, thus increasing the positive behaviors of the employees, which in turn assure that the relationship between the employees and the external customers is positively affected (To et al., 2015). These studies suggest that that the marketing managers with humor styles exhibit humorous attitudes and behaviors while communicating with the employees affects the internal marketing activities. Accordingly it is hypothesized that;

H1: Liberating humor style is positively related to internal marketing practices.

H2: Stress-relieving humor style is positively related to internal marketing practices.

H3: Controlling humor style is positively related to internal marketing practices.

Moderating Role of Communication

In internal marketing practices and humor use, there should a strong communication and polite, positive and open messages between the senior management and the employees. This intraorganizational approach will enable the employees to behave in the same manner towards the external customers (Chow et. al, 2015). Employees must know the needs and

demands of external customers and focus on solving problems. In addition, employees must have a complete understanding of the products and services offered by their organizations. According to Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman, (1996), marketing practices, such as ads must be first watched and adopted by the employees, namely the internal customers. For a strong communication within the organization, the employees must be familiar with the other employees. It is suggested that through a strong communication channel, humor at workplace will have an improved effect on internal marketing practices. Thus H4 is developed as:

H4: Persuasive communication shows a moderating effect on the relationship of humor in workplace and internal marketing.

Research Design and Measures

To test the above hypotheses, we used multi-item scales adopted or developed from prior studies for the measurement of the variables. All variables were measured using 5-point Likert scales ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ (1) to ‘strongly agree’ (5). The questionnaire items are adapted from Lang & Lee (2010) for the humor styles in the workplace variable. Internal marketing practices are captured using eight items based on To et al. (2015). The questionnaire items were adopted from Weinberger & Gulas (1992) for the persuasive communication variable. After developing the new questionnaire items in English, two academics from US-based universities, each having marketing experience of more than eight years, evaluated the content and significance of the items to establish face validity. They did not note any difficulty in understanding the items or scales. The questionnaire items were then translated into Turkish by a bilingual researcher. During the translation process, we discussed and calibrated our views and interpretations of the measurement items to generate a common conceptual basis. Especially, persuasive communication scale was developed in 1992 by Weinberger and Gulas and it has a crucial importance to adopt their findings into questionnaire items in Turkish. In this sense, the study focuses on the cultural rather than mechanical approaches to translation and the degree of conceptual convergence across languages is evaluated rather than forcing the English meaning into the Turkish context. After translating the questionnaire items into Turkish, a second bilingual person retranslated them into English. The two translators then jointly reconciled all differences. Convenience sampling plan was used from postgraduate students from Istanbul Arel University and Marmara University, who have industrial experience in marketing departments. Being the center of the Turkish economy for the manufacturing and service sectors, the province of Istanbul was chosen for the purposes of this study.

The research's conceptual model, based on previous studies, is given in Fig. 1, showing the impact of three antecedent factors (liberating humor style, controlling humor style and stress-relieving humor style) on internal marketing practices. Humor style of employees on marketing departments and its dimensions are hypothesized to have a direct influence on internal marketing practices. Persuasive communication is also hypothesized to moderate the relationship between humor style and internal marketing practices.

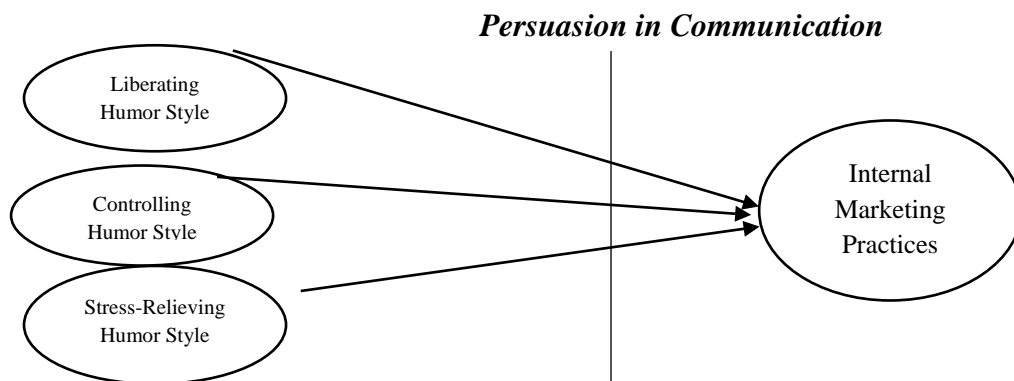


Fig 1. Proposed Research Design

Sampling

The pilot study was conducted with 30 respondents. The main survey, conducted in Istanbul, Turkey, focused on employees in marketing departments. Using a convenience sampling method, a total of 267 questionnaires were collected and of these 26 were excluded due to incomplete or missing items. 36% of the respondents were males and 64% females. Of the respondents, 22% were between 22 and 26 years old, 39% between 27 and 35, 28% between 36 and 45, and 11% between 46 and 55. On the other hand all the participants are working in marketing departments.

Measure Validity, Reliability and Hypothesis Testing

Humor styles and internal marketing practices after the factor analysis applied to the data to test the hypotheses of the study are given in Table 1. The application of the factor analysis to the data to test the hypotheses of the study shows that the humor style measure is divided into three factors: liberating humor, stress-relieving humor and controlling humor. Internal marketing measure is divided into two factors: formal internal communication and informal internal communication. Communication has been observed as one factor. The factor loads of these dimensions are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Standardized loading, Composite Construct Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of measures.

<i>Items</i>	<i>Components</i>					
	<i>Controlling Humor</i>	<i>Persuasion in Communication</i>	<i>Liberating Humor</i>	<i>Stress-Relieving Humor</i>	<i>Formal Internal Practices</i>	<i>Informal Internal Practices</i>
Marketing members issue veiled threats jokingly.	.831					
Stories are often told to put down others.	.816					
We are generally unsure whether to take a marketing manager's joke seriously.	.795					
Certain people are the butt of jokes told here.	.634					
To the extent that a humorous context functions as a positive reinforcer, a persuasive communication placed in such a context may be more effective.		.941				
A humorous context may increase liking for the academician and create a positive mood for increasing the persuasive effect of the message.		.930				
Humor does not harm comprehension.		.745				
Counter-intuitive jokes are encouraged to help us see things in a new light.			.839			
Quirky ideas get voiced and are welcome in most meetings.			.790			
The nature of the academic working environment affects the appropriateness of a humor treatment.			.652			
In our marketing team, funny stories and jokes that help us to see old problems in a new light are common.			.539			
There is hardly anyone to brighten up a bad day with a good laugh in marketing environment.				.832		
When we meet each other, we always tell stories to lighten up the day.				.787		
We laugh a lot around here to make work more pleasant.				.613		
The company has regular staff appraisals in which people discuss what employees want.					.860	
Managers interact formally and directly with employees to find out how to make employees more satisfied.					.874	

Managers meet with employees regularly to find out what expectations they have of their jobs.					.912	
The company surveys employees at least once a year to assess the quality of employment					.894	
When at work, our manager regularly talks to us to find out about our work.						.824
At work, when our manager notices that one of us is acting differently than normal, he will try to find out why.						.801
At work, our manager tries to find out what we want from the company.						.771
At work, our manager tries to find out our real feelings about our jobs.						.769
Composite construct reliability (CR)	.87	.91	.86	.82	.91	.78
Average variance extracted (AVE)	.69	.73	.60	.62	.71	.58

Both confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modeling (SEM) techniques were conducted using AMOS 22.0. The CFA determined the standardized loadings of items for all scales, and allowed for the calculation of the values of the average variance extracted, which confirmed the convergent and discriminant validity of the scales. The CFA and SEM produced fit indices for the measurement/structural model. Following the suggestions of Hair et al. (2006), some fit indices were used to determine how well the measurement/structural model fitted the collected data. The fit indices included the chi-square ratio statistic (χ^2/df), the root mean square residual (RMSR), the goodness-of-fit index (GFI), the comparative fit index (CFI), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). The cutoff values were set to $\chi^2/df < 3.00$, $RMSR < 0.05$, $GFI > 0.90$, $CFI > 0.90$, and $RMSEA < 0.08$ (Hair et al., 2006). Following To et al. (2015), Weinberger & Gulas (1992) and Lang & Lee (2010) items were loaded on their theoretical constructs as well as on a created common latent method factor. The resulting fit indices were then examined both with and without the method factor.

The fit indices for the measurement model were $\chi^2 = 184.7$, $df = 82$, $p < 0.001$; $\chi^2/df = 2.678$; $RMSR = 0.097$; $GFI = 0.910$; $CFI = 0.923$; $RMSEA = 0.072$; $AIC = 230.28$). The results imply the acceptable fit of the measurement model. Composite construct reliability and average variance extracted for the scales were computed. Table 1 shows that the composite construct reliabilities range from 0.82 to 0.91. The average variance extracted (AVE) indicates the amount of variance captured by a scale in relation to the variance caused by measurement errors. The AVE values

ranged from 0.58 to 0.73, which suggested an adequate convergent validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics and pairwise correlations of the scales. Discriminant validity exists when the AVE in each scale exceeds the square of the correlation coefficient with another scale (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). This criterion was met across all possible pairs of scales as shown in Table 2. Therefore, the analysis confirmed that all scales had discriminant validity.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and pairwise correlation (N = 267)

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Liberating Humor	4.21	0.58	0.850					
2. Stress-Relieving Humor	3.87	0.74	0.559**	0.774				
3. Controlling Humor	3.28	0.87	0.149**	0.327**	0.660			
4. Persuasion in Communication	3.91	0.82	0.328**	0.182**	0.075	0.762		
5. Formal Internal Practices	3.71	0.82	0.264**	0.214**	0.130**	0.527**	0.926	
6. Informal Internal Practices	3.71	0.85	0.115*	0.203**	0.138**	0.261**	0.366**	0.876
Cronbach's Alpha			0.83	0.78	0.78	0.75	0.91	0.79
Composite Reliability(CR)			0.86	0.82	0.87	0.91	0.91	0.78
Average Variance Extracted (AVE)			0.60	0.62	0.69	0.73	0.71	0.58
<i>*p<0.05, **p<0.01</i>								

Table 3: Descriptive scales and construct correlations, and reliability estimates

	<i>DV: Internal Marketing Practices</i>	
	Model 1	Model 2
Main Effects		
Liberating Humor	0.46***	0.58**
Stress-Relieving Humor	0.12**	0.45
Controlling Humor	0.34***	1.28***
Persuasive Communication	0.26	0.39
Interactions		
Persuasive CommunicationxLiberating Humor		.21
Persuasive CommunicationxStress-Relieving Humor		.39**
Persuasive CommunicationxControlling Humor		.41***
R ²	.052	.583
Adjusted R ²	.062	.491
F Value	.019**	.227***

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01. Regression coefficients are standardized

To test research hypotheses, a series of multiple linear regression models were conducted. However, before carrying out any analysis, the mean of items (composite scores) was calculated for each variable in the

sample of 241 surveys from marketing employees. The Spearman–Brown test of the interclass correlation (ICC) was used to determine the reliability of the aggregated perceptions (James, 1982). The results showed that ICC for all measures ranged from 0.64 to 0.94, well above the value of 0.60.

To test the moderating role of persuasive communication between humor in workplace and internal marketing practices, a moderated multiple hierarchical regression analysis was used (Irwin and McClland, 2001). Because of the possibility of multicollinearity, the humor style and persuasive communication constructs' measures were mean-centered before performing the linear regression model as suggested by Aiken and West (1991). Variance inflation factors (VIF) were estimated to examine multicollinearity levels and the results (VIFs, 10) were found to be below a harmful level (Neter et al., 1990). In addition, the R^2 regression was compared with and without the cross product to determine if the incremental R^2 was significant. Results showed that the inclusion of the interaction terms on the hierarchical regression added a significant variance explanation ($p < 0.05$) in the models in Table 2.

As shown in Table 3, liberating humor impacts the internal marketing practices ($\beta = .46$, $p < .01$), stress-relieving impacts the internal marketing practices ($\beta = .12$, $p < .05$) and controlling humor impact the internal marketing practices ($\beta = .34$, $p < .01$). Thus, H1, H2, H3 were supported. However, as shown in Table 3, the coefficients of the interaction terms demonstrate that persuasive communication moderates the relationship between stress-relieving humor and internal marketing practices ($\beta = .39$, $p < .05$) and controlling humor style and internal marketing practices ($\beta = .41$, $p < .05$), partially supporting Hypothesis 4.

Conclusion and Future Studies

Internal marketing activities take an important role to maximize the employees' performance in the organizational processes. On the other hand, humor plays a particularly important role in the workplace from a relational perspective (Murata, 2013). Researches show that when a humorous workplace comes into existence; employees signal amusement to one another, providing social cohesion among employees. These approaches and the findings of these researches show that humor styles (liberating, stress-relieving and controlling) are positively related to internal marketing practices. When a marketing member frees himself/herself from his/her old mindset and starts to see things in a new light and make humorous attitudes towards others, these behaviors reveal informal and formal internal marketing practices through the organization. However when a member of the marketing department of an organization reduces stress in the workplace or exerts subtle control over the behaviors of others by humor, internal

marketing practices such as management commitment or effective communication between management and employees increase. On the other hand, persuasive communication moderates the controlling and stress-relieving humor and internal marketing activities by persuasive attractions. Using persuasive communication methods could show a stronger impact of stress relieving and controlling humor style on internal marketing activities. On the other hand, it does not have any moderating role on liberating humor and internal marketing practices.

There are some limitations in this research. First, the sample size was relatively small. The majority of respondents were young adults. These sample characteristics may bias the results that would have emerged in a larger and slightly more heterogeneous sample population. Nevertheless, since the great majority of employees in the marketing departments of most organizations belong to the age group of 22-35 in Turkey, we considered the sample as representative of the population. Second, the data have been obtained from self-completed questionnaires. Thus, the common method bias could be a problem. To ensure that this problem was not a significant issue in the study, the single-common-method-factor approach was conducted to assess the common method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

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