

# **THE ROLE OF SUPERVISORS' HUMOR ON JOB SATISFACTION, INTENTION TO STAY AND NEGLIGENT BEHAVIOR AT THE WORKPLACE OF INTERNS – AN EMPIRICAL STUDY AT UNIVERSITIES IN HO CHI MINH CITY**

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## **Abstract**

Internships are crucial for inspiring students to identify career goals and establish a suitable career development path. They offer students a chance to apply academic knowledge in reality, bridging the gap between theory and practice. For organizations, internships provide an opportunity to engage with potential future employees, aiding in talent attraction, recruitment, and retention. Numerous domestic and international studies have explored factors affecting intern satisfaction, intention to stay, and negligent behavior at the workplace, including the influence of supervisor's humor. An experimental study involving 433 university students in Ho Chi Minh City examined the impact of a supervisor's humor on intern attitudes and behaviors. Using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS and SPSS, the research found that Positive Humor positively affects satisfaction and intention to stay, while Negative Humor reduces satisfaction but increases negligent behavior. Satisfaction acts as a mediator between Positive Humor and Intention to stay.

Based on the study's results, the author suggests relevant managerial implications and intervention steps to help organizations and educational institutions in Ho Chi Minh City develop effective policies to improve the quality of internship experiences.

**Keywords:** Internship, Humor, Job satisfaction, Intention to stay, Negligent behavior

**JEL Code:** M12, M14, M54

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## **1 Introduction**

An internship is a key thing to developing a career, and humor in leadership ability can impact the attitudes and behaviors of interns. So, there is a need to conduct more in-depth

research to explore the role of humor in leadership ability and its influence on interns' experience. This research is outstanding in comparison with previous studies about employee attitudes and job performance in some key ways. Firstly, it explores the impact of humor on workplace relationships, which is often dismissed in existing studies. Secondly, it also examines the impact of negative humor in reality, which has not been thoroughly explored recently. Besides, it focuses on interns, which is one of the groups that has rarely been studied about workplace motivation, providing more insight and understanding about internships. This study also explores the mediating role of attitude in the relationship between humor and job performance. Overall, these findings can help to enhance the understanding of organizations, especially in improving internship experience and employee retention.

This study can help to investigate the way supervisors use their humor as a communication tool to influence intern attitudes and behaviors. Specifically, it examines the level of impact of negative and positive humor on intern satisfaction, negligent behavior, and intention to stay. This study also gives some implications, and policies for organizations, enterprises, and higher education institutions.

The research questions in this article address several key points:

1. Does the use of humor by supervisors affect intern satisfaction, intention to stay, and negligent behavior?
2. Is intern satisfaction a mediator in the relationship between supervisor humor and interns' intention to stay and negligent behavior?
3. Do factors such as supervisor position, gender similarity, type of occupation, positive and negative affect, intern age, intern gender, and supervisor gender influence the effects of humor on intern attitudes and behaviors?
4. What measures and recommendations can organizations, businesses, and higher education institutions implement to leverage supervisor humor effectively to enhance intern satisfaction, reduce negligent behavior, and increase intention to stay?

## **2 Theoretical framework**

### **2.1 Humor**

Humor includes many different forms, including verbal and nonverbal expressions to make fun of. Martin et. al. (2003) classified humor as positive (such as affiliative and self-enhancing) and positive (such as aggressive and self-defeating). This study focuses on

supervisors' humor to interns, including positive and negative. Positive humor enhances relationships, while negative humor can weaken relationships. Humor acts as a valuable tool for managers, supporting communication and building relationships. It also helps leaders in navigating business conflicts and fostering relationships in the integration process of the organization (Sobral & Islam, 2015).

## **2.2 Job satisfaction**

Job satisfaction reflects how individuals perceive and feel about their jobs (Spector, 1997). Enhancing intern satisfaction can improve their experience and bring benefits to organizations. Studies show no difference in satisfaction between temporary and long-term jobs (Guest et al., 2006), suggesting general rules apply despite intern differences. Thus, enhancing intern satisfaction is crucial for organizations, like efforts for formal employees.

## **2.3 Intention to stay**

Intention to stay indicates employees' desire to continue working with the current employer, contrasting with turnover intention (Taylor, 2002). To retain employees, the organization needs to enrich work initiatives, including challenging assignments and fast advancements. Moreover, fulfilling psychological contracts through effective career management can lead to higher commitment and lower turnover intention when expectations are met.

## **2.4 Negligent behavior**

Negligent behavior is defined as employees reducing their concentration, intention, and attention in work, or increasing inaccuracy in completing assigned tasks; employees can continue working with less effort, concentration, and engagement than before (Leck & Saunders, 1992). This is considered an employee's reaction to dissatisfaction with the organization by demonstrating negative behaviors or activities that may not bring benefits and effectiveness (Vigoda, 2000).

# **3 Hypotheses**

## **3.1 Positive humor, interns' satisfaction, negligent behavior, and intention to stay**

Supervisors' positive humor shapes attitudes and intentions to stay of interns, fosters relationships within groups, and reduces stress (Morreall, 1991). It also creates a comfortable working environment, enhances happiness and positively influences intern satisfaction. While some studies note potential negative effects (Romero & Pescosolido, 2008), humorous messages enhance the influence of supervisors and the commitment of interns, impacting their negligent behavior and intention to stay for a long term (Sobral et al., 2015).

Based on the above theoretical foundations, the authors hypothesize that:

H1a: Supervisors' positive humor positively impacts intern satisfaction.

H1b: Supervisors' positive humor negatively impacts interns' negligent behavior.

H1c: Supervisors' positive humor positively impacts interns' intentions to stay.

### **3.2 Negative humor, intern satisfaction, negligent behavior, and intention to stay**

Despite the positive impacts of humor, humor can have various forms and deliver diverse messages. When used to attack or ridicule, or convey negative messages about organizations, it will harm the relationship between supervisor and intern and the perception of the intern, leading to dissatisfaction (Chen & Martin, 2007). Interns, often targets of negative humor, may experience ridicule and mockery, which leads to the intention to leave (Alcadipani & Rosa, 2010) and increases negative behavior (Frewen et al., 2008). A study by Sobral et al. (2015) supports this, showing the negative influence of supervisors' negative humor on the intention to stay and the negligent behavior of interns.

Based on the theoretical foundations above, the authors hypothesize that:

H2a: Supervisors' negative humor negatively impacts intern satisfaction.

H2b: Supervisors' negative humor positively impacts interns' negligent behavior.

H2c: Supervisors' negative humor negatively impacts interns' intention to stay.

### **3.3 The mediating effects of intern satisfaction**

Sobral et al. (2015) recognize that both positive and negative humor impact intern satisfaction, negligent behavior, and intention to stay of interns. Job satisfaction plays a role as a mechanism whereas humor impacts intern performance. Positive humor helps to enhance emotionally–social relationships and transfer information related to work, potentially impacting satisfaction. Satisfaction enhances the intention to stay and reduces negligent behavior. In contrast, negative humor can lead to turnover intention but indirectly positively impact negligent behavior through satisfaction. A study by Sobral et al. (2015) also shows that satisfaction mediates the relationship between supervisors' humor and the behaviors of interns.

Based on the theoretical foundations above, the authors propose the following hypotheses:

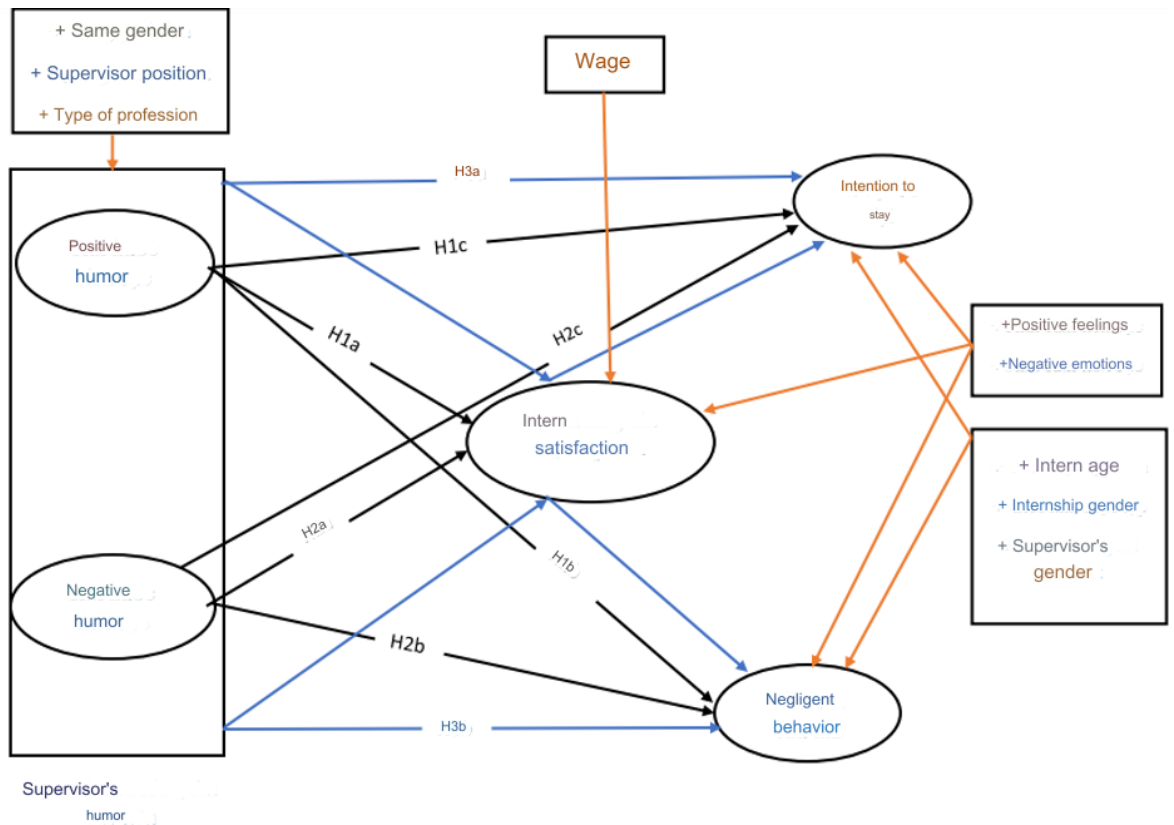
H3a1: Intern satisfaction mediates the relationship between supervisors' positive humor and interns' intention to stay.

H3a2: Intern satisfaction mediates the relationship between supervisors' negative humor and interns' intention to stay.

H3b1: Intern satisfaction mediates the relationship between supervisors' positive humor and negligent behavior.

H3b2: Intern satisfaction mediates the relationship between supervisors' negative humor and negligent behavior.

**Fig. 1: Research model and hypothesis**



Source: Synthesized by authors

## 4 Method

### 4.1 Sample and procedure

The research process includes four main steps. They are firstly, identifying the research problem, and setting up the research objectives and theoretical framework. Secondly, completing questionnaires based on feedback from four experts in human resource management and thirdly, conducting a pilot test with final students and data analysis by Smart PLS 4.0. Finally, the main study was conducted from 6 July to 28 July 2023 by distributing questionnaires through email to final students of Ton Duc Thang University and

other universities in Ho Chi Minh City, resulting 500 responses, with 433 valid responses for analysis.

#### **4.2 Measures**

*Use of humor:* Eight items regarding the supervisors' use of humor were measured in frequency of occurrence on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (frequently, if not always). The four items that measured positive humor (PH) were taken from Avolio et al. (1999). The other four items that measured negative humor (NH) were developed from the literature on humor and leadership (Decker & Rotondo, 2001).

*Intern satisfaction:* Intern satisfaction (IS) was measured with a 4-item scale derived from Brayfield and Rothe's (1951) Job Satisfaction Index, using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

*Intention to stay and negligent behavior:* Intention to stay (ITS) and negligent behavior (NB) were each measured with 3-item scales adapted from Leck and Saunders (1992). Participants were asked to indicate on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), how strongly they agreed with various behaviors at work.

*Positive affect and Negative affect:* The ten items that measured positive affect (PA) and the ten items that measured negative affect (NA) were taken from Positive Affect and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) (Watson, Clark và Tellegen (1988), using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Almost none) to 5 (Extremely much).

#### **4.3 Method of analysis**

This study uses PLS-SEM to test hypotheses through Partial Least Squares path modeling using Smart PLS 4 software. Evaluation focuses on reliability and validity, utilizing Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability to assess internal consistency and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) to measure convergent validity. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) is used to evaluate discriminant validity. Structural model assessment involves examining multicollinearity using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and determining the impact of independent variables on dependent variables through R-square, T-statistic, and P-values. ANOVA and Kruskal-Wallis Test are employed to quantify model control effectiveness.

## **5 Results**

### **5.1 Demographic descriptive statistics**

The survey resulted in 433 valid responses out of 500 collected, after eliminating 67 inappropriate samples. Gender distribution is balanced with 49.4% male and 50.6% female. Most interns (86.8%) are 22 years old. Supervisors were predominantly male (51.7%) and 90.8% of interns had a supervisor of the same gender. Supervisory positions are mainly held by staff/experts/assistants (73%). The service sector is the most popular internship field (68.8%), in which interns mainly study economics and law (55%). Most interns (92.8%) receive a salary.

### **5.2 Measurement model**

Regarding reliability, the results show that there are 5 observed variables with unsatisfactory outer loadings, including PA7, PA8, PA10, NA1, and NA10. Therefore, to ensure the suitability of the factors and the model, the author removed these variables from the model. Besides, the results show that the Composite Reliability index of all variables is greater than 0.7. For discrimination, the square root of AVE is larger than the latent variable correlations (LVC); the HTMT index ranges from 0.338 to 0.834, all ensuring the criterion is less than 0.85, so the model's discrimination is guaranteed. In addition, all variables have AVE values greater than 0.5, showing that the variables have acceptable and valid convergent validity.

### **5.3 Structural model**

The results show that the Outer VIF value ranges from 1.318 to 4.877 and the Inner VIF value ranges from 1.437 to 3.223. It can be concluded that there is no multicollinearity phenomenon occurring between observed variables as well as between independent variables. From the results of R - square Adjusted, we see that the adjusted R<sup>2</sup> value of the dependent variable IS is 0.649. So that the independent variables explain 64.9% of the variation in the IS variable, the level of explanation ranges from medium to high. The adjusted R<sup>2</sup> value of the dependent variable ITS is 0.577. Thus, the independent variables explain 57.7% of the variation in the ITS variable, the level of explanation ranges from medium to high. Finally, the adjusted R<sup>2</sup> value of the dependent variable NB is 0.415. So the independent variables will explain 41.5% of the variation in the NB variable, the level of explanation is close to the average level. Regarding the model's suitability, the model's SRMR index is  $0.064 < 0.08$ , NFI is 0.814 and Chi-Square is  $2,022,402 > 20$  following the

proposal of (Hair et al., 2011). All of the above indicators show that the author's research model is completely suitable for the research context in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

Based on the results of Table 1, the P-values of hypotheses H1a, H1c, H2a, H2b, and H3a1 give values less than 0.05, while the remaining hypotheses are H1b, H2c, H3a2, H3b1, H3b2 have P-values greater than 0.05. Therefore, it can be concluded that through the research process and analysis of results, hypotheses H1a, H1c, H2a, H2b, H3a1 are considered reliable, hypotheses H1b, H2c, H3a2, H3b1, H3b2 are not for statistical significance. At the same time, observing Table 1, we can also see that the T-test values of the five statistically significant relationships all give results greater than 1.96 at the 5 percent significance level.

**Tab. 1: Regression coefficient, Standard deviation, T- values, P - values**

Hypo.	Relationship			Regression coefficient ( $\beta$ )	Standard deviation	T - values	P - values	Conclusion
<b>H1a</b>	Positive humor	→	Intern satisfaction	0.493	0.071	6.966	0	<b>Accepted</b>
<b>H1b</b>	Positive humor	→	Negligent behavior	-0.014	0.109	0.132	0.895	Rejected
<b>H1c</b>	Positive humor	→	Intention to stay	0.286	0.111	2.574	0.01	<b>Accepted</b>
<b>H2a</b>	Negative humor	→	Intern satisfaction	-0.146	0.055	2.655	0.008	<b>Accepted</b>
<b>H2b</b>	Negative humor	→	Negligent behavior	0.257	0.097	2.651	0.008	<b>Accepted</b>
<b>H2c</b>	Negative humor	→	Intention to stay	-0.045	0.057	0.792	0.428	Rejected
<b>H3a1</b>	Positive humor	→	Intern satisfaction → Intention to stay	0.143	0.066	2.151	0.032	<b>Accepted</b>
<b>H3a2</b>	Negative humor	→	Intern satisfaction → Intention to stay	-0.042	0.028	1.513	0.13	Rejected
<b>H3b1</b>	Positive humor	→	Intern satisfaction → Negligent behavior	-0.096	0.055	1.755	0.079	Rejected



<b>H3b2</b>	Negative humor	→	Intern satisfaction → Negligent behavior	0.028	0.02	1.413	0.158	Rejected
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Source: Synthesized by authors

### Oneway ANOVA and Kruskal-Wallis Test for control variables

Oneway Anova results show that male interns have a higher intention to stay and work than female interns. For couples (supervisor – employee) of the same gender, the use of positive humor tends to be more expressed than for couples of different genders. Junior supervisors and those in the investment industry are more likely to use positive humor. In addition, paid interns tend to be more satisfied than unpaid interns. Using the Kruskal-Wallis test, it can be concluded that there is a difference in satisfaction, intention to stay, and negligent behavior among interns with different levels of positive/negative affect.

## 6 Discussion

### 6.1 Theoretical contribution

This study investigates how supervisors' humor influences interns' attitudes and behaviors in Ho Chi Minh City universities. Positive supervisor humor increases intern satisfaction and intention to stay, while negative humor decreases satisfaction and increases negligent behavior. Intern satisfaction mediates the relationship between positive supervisor humor and intention to stay, aligning with Sobral et al.'s (2015) findings. All hypotheses except five showed reliable results with P-values below 0.05, indicating consistency with our expectations. However, five hypotheses had P-values above 0.05, suggesting differences from Sobral et al.'s (2015) findings in the Vietnamese context.

Supervisors' positive humor positively impacts intern satisfaction (49.3%) and the intention to stay (28.6%), creating favorable conditions for building relationships and reducing stress at the workplace. In contrast, negative humor reduces satisfaction (14,6%) but fosters negligent behavior (25,7%). Intern satisfaction acts as a mediator between positive humor and intention to stay, with a 14.3% increase in impact when interns are more satisfied. These align with the findings of Sobral et al. (2015). Negative humor's absence of negative effects on the intention to stay can be attributed to factors like strong relationships, positive mirroring, and constructive criticism (Tepper et al., 2009). Satisfaction doesn't solely mediate the relationship between negative humor and intention to stay, with factors

like organizational culture and career opportunities also influencing staying intentions. Similarly, satisfaction doesn't mediate the link between supervisor humor and negligent behavior, with factors like training effectiveness and work environment contributing more significantly (Tepper et al., 2009).

## **6.2 Practical implications**

Stakeholders can implement some important strategies based on the research results. In particular, organizations and supervisors should use humor as a communication tool but they need to consider interns' preferences and ethical boundaries, focusing on positive humor. They should also provide skills development, a positive environment, and recognition. Universities can enhance internship opportunities through job fairs, partnerships, and other channels. Interns should research internship organizations to be suitable for career objectives.

## **6.3 Limitations and Future Directions**

The limitations of this study include the small sample due to time limitations, focus on interns in Ho Chi Minh City, and depending on only interns' perception of supervisors' humor. Future studies could allow supervisors to evaluate their use of humor as well. Besides, in future research, we can consider focusing more research on the impact of positive humor on others positive work-related attitudes and behaviors of employees, such as work engagement, organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behavior.

## **7 Conclusion**

This study examines the influence of supervisors' humor on the attitudes and behaviors of university interns in Ho Chi Minh City. Positive humor increased intern satisfaction and intention to stay, whereas negative humor decreased satisfaction and increased negligent behavior. Intern satisfaction acted as a mediator between positive humor and intention to stay. While most hypotheses are consistent with previous findings, others differ, suggesting unique factors in the Vietnamese context. Stakeholders can use these insights to implement strategies, such as leveraging positive humor, and enhancing internship opportunities. However, this study has limitations such as a small sample size and narrow scope. Future studies could also explore supervisors' perspectives on their humor and examine the impact of humor on other aspects of interns' attitudes and behaviors to gain a more comprehensive understanding of interns' experiences.

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