

DRESS HOW YOU WANT TO BE ADDRESSED.

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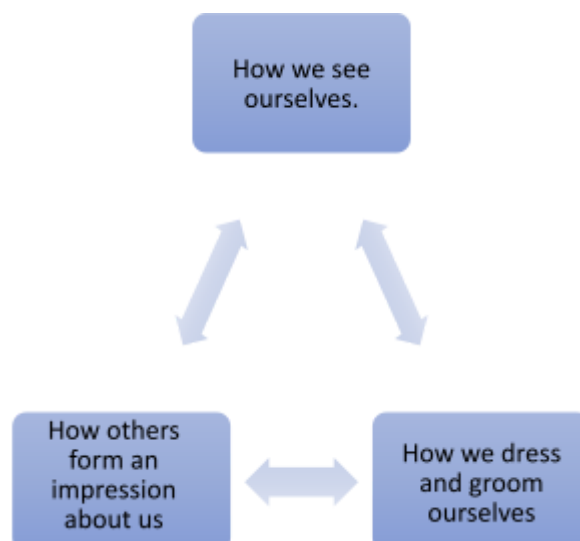
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Abstract : Because light travels faster than sound, people are seen before they are heard. That is why, even before a person utters a word, their appearance tells a lot about them in terms of their competence, their personality. This study aims at studying how clothes affect the time taken to form the first impression. A total of 30 participants were selected to participate in the study, where they were exposed to Inappropriately dressed figures and Appropriately dressed figures and their time taken to form an impression was noted down.

Keywords : Non-Conformity, Clothes, Norms, Impression Formation, Non-Verbal Cues.

INTRODUCTION.

Clothes are not just a means to cover our bodies anymore, it is a statement, an expression about oneself, a kind of a non-verbal cue, where other people understand what an individual has to say, without having to say it. These non - verbal cues which are also called as elements of first impression, are Clothing, Grooming, Vocal Communication and Body Language. Amongst this, Clothing and Grooming are the elements that are noticed first. In this research, the focus is going to be on *clothing and how it plays a role in forming a first impression*. In the era of multimedia and technology, making impressions about people, judging them on the basis of their looks or clothes is extremely easy, almost natural. Our brain forms instant impressions and doesn't require the full details of the stranger's persona to come to a judgement. A person always conveys a message through his/her appearance where clothes are the first thing people notice. There is no such thing as neutral clothing, a person cannot not communicate. Clothing choice of the person not only tells about what the person wants to say, but it also reflects one's cultural background.



The main idea of dressing appropriately is not just conforming to social norms, but how a person is expressing his or her individuality within those norms. The act of dressing appropriately should not be viewed as having limits on dressing how a person wants to, but as a step towards attracting the right crowd, a way of being respectful to the occasion and the people in that situation, which in turn also affects how positively or good we feel about ourselves. Impression Formation refers to the process by which different pieces of knowledge about a particular person is combined into a global, summarised impression. Solomon Asch has hypothesised that formation of general impression as the sum of interrelated impressions. The configural model states that people form a unified impression of people. It takes into account a more holistic approach wherein the perceivers actively construct deeper meaning out of bits of information that they receive about a person.

When a person appears to be dressed appropriately for an occasion, he/she creates a positive first impression where others are more likely to perceive positive traits and regard the individual favourably. We cannot afford to let others form a negative first impression, especially in a collectivistic culture like India, where community and being a part of any community is considered crucial, people are more and more interested in improving the way in which they can dress to impress others.

LITERATURE REVIEW

People are often very skilled at person perception—*the process of learning about other people*—and our brains are designed to help us judge others efficiently (Haselton & Funder, 2006; Macrae & Quadflieg, 2010). Our brains seem to be hardwired to detect negative behaviors (Adams, Gordon, Baird, Ambady, & Kleck, 2003), and at an evolutionary level this makes sense. It is important to tell the “good guys” from the “bad guys” and to try to avoid interacting with the latter. They concluded that “negative information weighs more heavily on the brain” (p. 887). In sum, the results of research in personal perception are clear: when we are perceiving people, negative information is simply more influential than positive information (Pratto & John, 1991). Roth (1989) specifies, the influence of clothing communication relies on some principles. These principles represent the understanding regarding social and cultural norms that members of a community or social groups share. The more people appreciate the code; the more adequate the clothing will be at communicating a message. However, there remains a pertinent issue concerning the type of

garment features that make an impact on first impressions. A first impression is simply defined as a consideration or judgment. In psychology, a first impression according to Flora (2004), is the event when an individual first encounters another individual and forms a mental picture of that person. Impression accuracy differs depending on the perceiver and the target being perceived. When an individual encounters somebody for the first time, they automatically form an impression of that person. First impressions have been shown to be enduring where it affects personal judgments even in the presence of contradictory evidence about the individual. (Gunaydin, Selcuk, & Zayas, 2017) Unless a person deliberately tries to change the impression that is formed initially, the person does not have a chance to repair if the impression formed is poor. First impressions significantly predict employers' future behaviour during job interviews as well as their ultimate recruitment decisions (Todorov et al. 2009). If their initial impressions of the candidates are positive, employers show a higher tendency to "sell" the job by providing information to the candidates about the job rather than gathering information from them (Dougherty, Ebert, & Callender, 1986; Dougherty, Turban, & Callender, 1994) Judgements about whether or not a person is trustworthy, for example, can be made in a fraction of a second, where these judgements are consistent with those made without any time pressure (Todorov et al. 2009). Focusing specifically on clothing and its impact on others, Researchers have shown how importance given to clothes, trends and being fashionable is rising, in women as well as in men. A person's attire has been shown to convey qualities such as character, sociability, competence and intelligence (Damhorst, 1990), with first impressions being formed in a fraction of a second (Todorov, Pakrashi, and Oosterhof, 2009) Global styles of dress have been shown to provide crucial information in impression formation. In the field of multimedia as well, it is found that advertisers also rely on the powerful influence of clothing to sell products. O'Neal and Lapitsky (1991) demonstrated that when a person was dressed suitably for a task depicted in an advertisement they were perceived as more credible by participants, who were also more likely to buy their products. Image Consultants are paid heavily by their clients, who want to learn more about the global effect of clothing and grooming and how significantly it affects the person's overall image. People are slowly getting more and more aware of the strength of clothes, it is wrong to assume that men are not really interested in their overall appearance and choice of clothes as

researchers have proven that in fact in today's age, men too feel insecure and do look forward to take serious steps to dress appropriately and look more presentable.

METHODOLOGY :

- Hypothesis : The time taken by the participants to form an impression when exposed to a male or female figure whose facial features are blurred, will be *less* when the male or female figure is dressed inappropriately in a particular context, i.e not suitable for an occasion.

This alternate hypothesis is based on the theory of Impression Formation which states that people form an impression on the basis of the norms of the society as well as the social roles expected by people. In any given social situation, the norms demand certain behaviour and practices which also includes the clothing of an individual. When we encounter someone who does not dress according to the norm and the expectation, there exists an invisible barrier, a definite social distance which results in the formation of negative interpretation. People will therefore be quicker in forming an impression when someone does not behave according to the norms as,

- ➔ According to ***Biological Perspective***, our brains are hardwired to detect negative behaviour more easily than positive information.
- ➔ According to ***Cognitive Perspective***, negative information tends to be more influential and has a greater impact on our judgement than positive information and draws greater attentional resources.
- ➔ According to ***Social Perspective***, We expect people to be positive and when they are negatively perceived, they are more likely to create strong emotional responses.

Participants : 30 participants were randomly selected, both boys as well as girls who fall within the age group of 15-30

Design : Repeated Measures Design with One Independent Variable having two levels where one participant is exposed to both the levels in a mixed order.

- *Operational Definition of the variables* :
 - ❖ Dependent Variable : Mean reaction time taken in msec to form an impression i.e to answer two kinds of questions, one for each hypothetical social situation given.
 - ❖ Independent Variable : Exposure of the two conditions : inappropriately dressed and appropriately dressed male and female figures whose facial features are blurred and are presented in two social situations [Attending a Neighbour's Funeral and Conducting a Job Interview]

Procedure : The Inappropriately Dressed Figures as well as the Appropriately Dressed Figures were selected after getting them validated by 10 Image Consultants. Image consultants help people cultivate a professional or updated appearance. The consultants that were approached for validating the figures in this study were all specialists in clothing and social etiquette. The figures that were high on content validity were selected and were presented to the participants via the slides that were presented on a laptop screen. The facial features of all the figures were blurred. The two conditions, that is, appropriately and inappropriately dressed figures were exposed in a mixed order wherein, each slide was exposed for a period of five seconds. The participant was asked to observe the apparel of the figure and after each figure

shown, according to the context provided to them before the introduction of the particular figures, which includes *A Funeral* and a *Job Interview*, they were asked to answer a question choosing either “Yes” or “No”

The Question for the Two Contexts were :

- For the hypothetical situation of a funeral, the question was : Do you think the person who was just exposed to you is considerate/ being respectful?
- For the hypothetical situation of conducting a job interview, the question was : Would you consider hiring the person just exposed to you for the job?

The time taken by them to respond to the question was noted down and compared.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.

This study was conducted to understand the effect of clothing on time taken to form an impression. The participants were exposed to two conditions : Inappropriately Dressed Male and Female figures and Appropriately Dressed Male and Female figures and the mean reaction time taken for them to form an impression for both Appropriately and Inappropriately Dressed Figures was noted down and was compared.

Table number 1.

	Inappropriately Dressed Figures	Appropriately Dressed Figures
Total	7560.21	5490
Mean	252.007	183
Range	411.65	403.11
Standard Deviation	175.87	126.71

$t = 0.92$, (n.s.)

Table no. 1 shows the comparative analysis of participants' reaction time for two conditions : Inappropriately Dressed Figures and Appropriately Dressed Figures. It can be observed that the mean reaction time to form an impression when exposed to Inappropriately Dressed Figures was 252.007 milliseconds. and for Appropriately Dressed was 183 milliseconds. It can be noted that the mean reaction time was higher when the participants were presented with Inappropriately Dressed Figures, which is contradictory to what was hypothesised.

The obtained t value indicates that the data was not statistically significant. the study thus validates the null hypothesis which states that “ There is not a statistically significant difference between the mean reaction time taken to respond to Inappropriately Dressed male and female figures and Appropriately dressed male and female figures.”

The Theory of Non- Conformity, which is another view based on theory of Impression Formation which states that nonconforming behaviors, as costly and visible signals, can act

as a particular form of conspicuous consumption and lead to positive inferences of status and competence in the eyes of others. Bellezza et al. asserted that people who deliberately wear clothes that are not suitable for an occasion, they appear to be non conforming. These people are likely to be perceived as having

- **High Competence**, which refers to the perceived ability to successfully pursue and perform specific traits
- **High Autonomy**, wherein an autonomous person is someone who's capable of making a rational and informed decision on their own behalf.
- **High Status**, which means higher position compared to others on some dimension

This is known as the “Red Sneakers Effect” wherein people believe that the person who is non conforming to the societal norms of a situation by means of clothes, which is a primary non verbal cue, has the necessary level of independence to pursue his/her own inclination and is powerful enough to endure the cost of deviating from the norm. These individuals have wider latitude for deviation and are relatively free from social constraints. The people who do not conform to established norms concerning clothing are finally viewed as those who can deviate from conventional behaviour and common expectations without social disapproval. In a collectivistic country like India, people who resist group pressure are perceived as brave and are positively perceived for their admirable behaviour. As the participants perceived the Inappropriately Dressed Figures as positive, the time taken for them to form an impression was higher.

Thus, Individual's Impression of those who are inappropriately dressed depends on the viewer's perception. which is the way in which something is regarded, understood, or interpreted. It can either be Positive or Negative.

The data therefore did not support the theory of Impression Formation which stated that people form an impression on the basis of the norms of the society as well as the social roles expected by people. In any given social situation, the norms demand certain behaviour and practices which also includes the clothing of an individual. When we encounter someone who does not dress according to the norm and the expectation, there exists an invisible barrier, a definite social distance which results in the formation of negative interpretation. People will

therefore be quicker in forming an impression when someone does not behave according to the norms as,

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Another Theory as to why mean reaction time was higher when the participants were presented with Inappropriately Dressed Figures can be explained through the role of Heuristics. Heuristic is a mental shortcut that allows people to solve problems and make judgement quickly and efficiently. They play an important role in forming impressions. as they help in effort reduction and simplification. In order to cope with the tremendous amount of information we encounter and to speed up the decision-making process, the brain relies on these mental strategies to simplify things so we don't have to spend endless amounts of time analyzing every detail. A representative heuristic involves making a decision by comparing the present situation to the most representative mental prototype that they have stored in their mind. When the participants were presented with the two hypothetical situations of a Funeral and a Job Interview, the participants are able to understand what an individual is expected to wear and how they are supposed to dress. a prototypical image forms in their mind which helps them to evaluate and form an impression of those who are appropriately dressed as they are an accurate representation of how one is supposed to dress. This leads to them taking less time in forming an impression. Therefore, we can say that due to the aid that representative heuristics provide, the mean reaction time taken to form an impression of appropriately dressed individuals is accordingly less.

Other factors that contributed to contrary data are:

Familiarity.

Participant's familiar with certain clothes which appeared under Inappropriately Dressed condition, interpreted the figure as positive as they only focused on the clothes without keeping in mind the situation or the occasion.

Preference.

Fashion is dynamic and notoriously transient, so people either get in-tune or out-dated with it. It is such a subjective construct wherein people's choices and preferences for certain types of clothes govern their process of impression formation. Even if certain clothes are inappropriate for certain occasions, if a person has certain preferences and liking towards certain clothes, they are more likely to focus on the garment as a whole rather than the situation. Their preference and liking will overpower their judgement.

Theoretical Implications :

Society has powerful formal and informal mechanisms that motivate individuals to conform to social norms and expectations regarding appropriate conduct. While conformity is rewarded with group acceptance and social inclusion, nonconformity can be risky and costly. Dressing appropriately to impress is worthwhile and can indeed be the answer to recognition, acceptance and success. However, uniqueness is encouraged in a variety of settings.

Observers may infer that a nonconforming individual is in a more powerful position as it allows them to follow their volition in autonomy and bear the cost of deviating from the norm. Clothes play a vital role in forming first impressions, and since this may impact positively or negatively on the individual, it is important to choose clothes carefully because people make different assumptions and take decisions about individuals. Understanding that impression formation depends upon situational as well as personal factors is very important.

Practical Implications:

People need to take into consideration the environment and the type of crowd that is going to be present as we cannot afford to let people form a negative impression. First Impressions are long lasting and affect subsequent conversations and opportunities. Understanding the dynamic nature of Impressions is therefore crucial. Understanding that a first impression can

be formed in a fraction of a second and is capable of doing so even with limited information. Clothing can enhance our psychological states, and it can improve our performance on tasks. When people perceive us positively, it boosts the individual's self efficacy and self confidence in dealing with his/her environment.

Limitations :

This study included a Smaller Sample Size. The experiment was conducted in a laboratory setting which created an artificial response, the timer was visible to the participants which could've been distracting, the participants were only given two hypothetical situations in which the Inappropriately as well as Appropriately dressed figures were presented, which is very limited in number to draw proper conclusions. Smaller number of Male and Female Figures were selected for presentation of the two conditions. Although nonverbal behaviors can be informative during the initial stages of person perception, they are limited in what they can convey.

Suggestions for Future Research :

This study can be further explored by comparing the time taken to form an impression of men and women. The social norms vary tremendously among genders. The way they are perceived also accordingly is different. The study can also be explored with respect to individual differences between the needs of uniqueness. This can help in understanding even more how people who are non conforming are perceived positively. This study can also be enriched with detailed qualitative research which incorporates the participant's economic standings, moral values as well as their current thoughts and feelings. This places importance on the individual characteristics which play a very important role in impression formation and it has a greater impact on the time taken to form an impression.

CONCLUSION : The data does not validate the directional alternative hypothesis "The time taken by the participants to form an impression when exposed to a male or female figure whose facial features are blurred, will be *less* when the male or female figure is dressed inappropriately in a particular context, i.e not suitable for an occasion"

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