



STUDYING THE IMPACT OF PERSON PERCEPTION CUES ON PERSONALITY TRAITS JUDGEMENTS AMONG UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATES

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INTRODUCTION

It is never possible to wear clothes without transmitting some form of signal. Morris (1977) affirms that 'every costume tells a story, often a very subtle one, about its wearer' (p. 213). When people perceive something in the outside world and make judgments about that, they tend to make errors in their judgments. In psychology, it is called the 'halo effect'. The term halo effect is a kind of cognitive bias and Gräf and Unkelbach (2016) stated that the "halo effect works in two directions, so that positive information results in more positively evaluated traits and similarly negative information leads to more negatively evaluated traits". Therefore, the current study focused on how people make judgments about one's personality characteristics based on only minimal information especially clothing style, to understand what are the different expectations for how one should dress in different contexts, and understand how clothes impact self-presentation. The research hypothesized that the cues seen in clothes impact the judgment of personality characteristics.

METHODOLOGY

The quantitative method approach and quota sampling method were used in the current research. The total sample was hundred undergraduates from the University of Peradeniya ($N = 100$) and 50 for each gender. A questionnaire of closed-ended questions and 10 photographs were used as the research instrument. The photographs depicted two dress conditions; traditional condition and modern condition. There were five types of dress styles under these two dress conditions; Lungi, short skirt and top, long skirt and top, trouser and T-shirt, and pleated frock. One female target person was used in all photographs in same posture and no facial expression, because, participants should focus on clothing style only. The questionnaire consisted of two sections: demographic information of subjects and measures of their perception on personality traits based on a photograph. Fifteen personality traits were included in this scale: intelligent, conceited, friendly, sociable, kind, strong, competent, sensitive, independent, pleasant, innocent, attractive, polite, simple and erotic, and responses were measured by a five-point Likert scale as 1 - High, 2 - Fairly High, 3 - Moderate, 4 - Fairly low, 5 - Low. Internal consistency of the scale for measuring perception on personality traits based on clothing style was tested with Cronbach's Alpha reliability test which proved it is acceptable. ($\alpha = 0.784$).

Using previous literature as the theoretical basis, the following two main research hypotheses were postulated:

H1 = The person-perception cues seen in clothes impacts judgement of personality traits

H2 = There is a difference between males and females when judging personality traits based on clothing

One-way between-subject ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of dress condition on person perception on each personality trait, using SPSS version 20.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of hundred ($N = 100$) undergraduates participated in the study. Fifty participants each were exposed to the traditional dress condition and modern dress condition. The participant's age range is distributed from 20 to 28 years with a mean age of 23.16 ($SD = 1.91$).

The results of the study showed that the clothing style had significantly influenced the

subject's ratings of some personality traits out of the fifteen personality traits examined.

Table 1 presents the mean values of significantly different traits under different dress styles of traditional and modern condition. The mean ratings and the derived conclusions are as follows:

- Mean ratings- 1.00 – 2.00 = Personality trait is perceived as "High and fairly high"
- 2.00 – 3.00 = Personality trait is perceived as "Fairly high and moderate"
- 3.00 – 4.00 = Personality trait is perceived as " Moderate and fairly low"
- 4.00 – 5.00 = Personality trait is perceived as "Fairly low and low"

Table 1: Perception of Personality traits under traditional and modern dress conditions showing significant difference at $p \leq 0.000$ by ANOVA

Personality trait	Traditional		Modern		F Value	P Value
	M	SD	M	SD		
Conceited	3.70	1.07	2.34	0.96	44.549	.000
Erotic	4.16	0.93	3.08	1.20	24.980	.000
Friendly	2.64	0.89	3.26	0.85	12.534	.001
Innocent	2.30	0.83	3.36	0.96	34.402	.000
Kind	2.66	1.02	3.40	0.96	13.800	.000
Polite	2.02	0.86	3.24	0.98	43.360	.000
Sensitive	2.58	0.92	3.33	0.78	18.833	.000
Simple	1.82	0.82	3.28	1.16	52.508	.000

Results show that the two dress conditions have a greater impact on a person’s perception about the personality traits simple, conceited and polite respectively. Which means that by simply looking at the clothing style people tend to judge others as simple, conceited or polite. Similarly, there is a strong tendency to judge as innocent or erotic.

Figures 1 to 8 shows how each personality trait is perceived by subjects based on traditional and modern clothing styles.

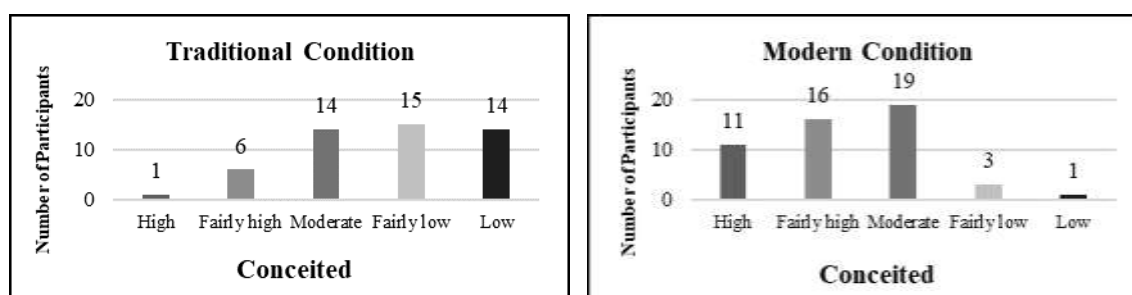


Figure 01: Perception of the personality trait “Conceited” based on traditional and modern dress conditions

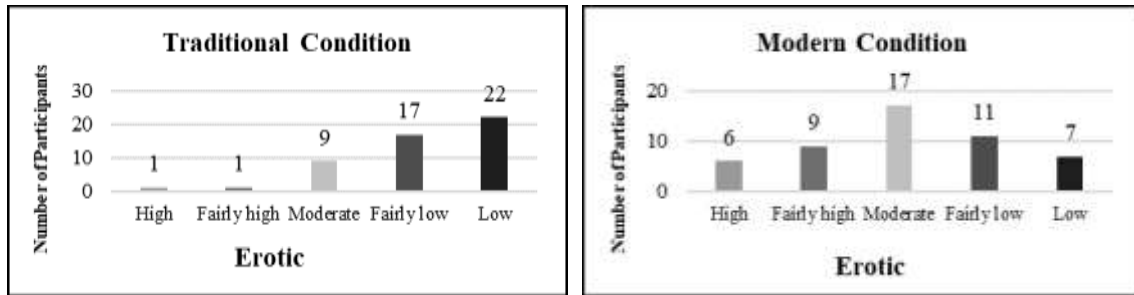


Figure 02: Perception of the personality trait “Erotic” based on traditional and modern dress conditions

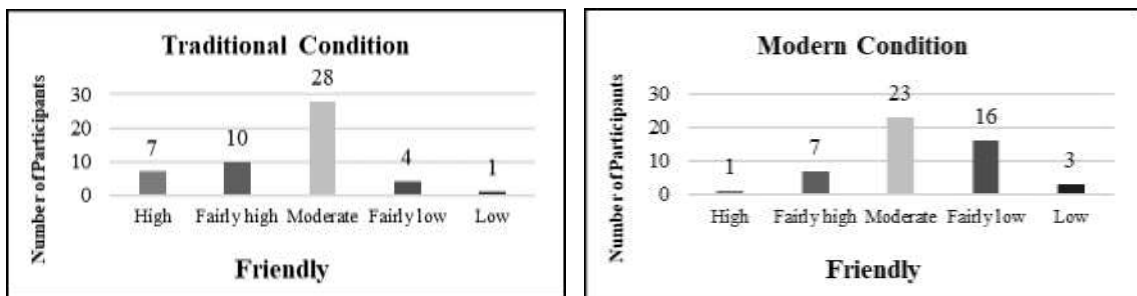


Figure 03: Perception of the personality trait “Friendly” based on traditional and modern dress conditions

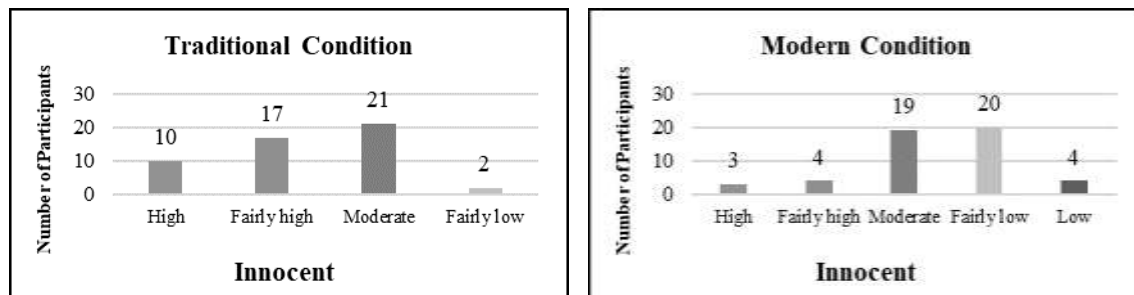


Figure 04: Perception of the personality trait “Innocent” based on traditional and modern dress conditions

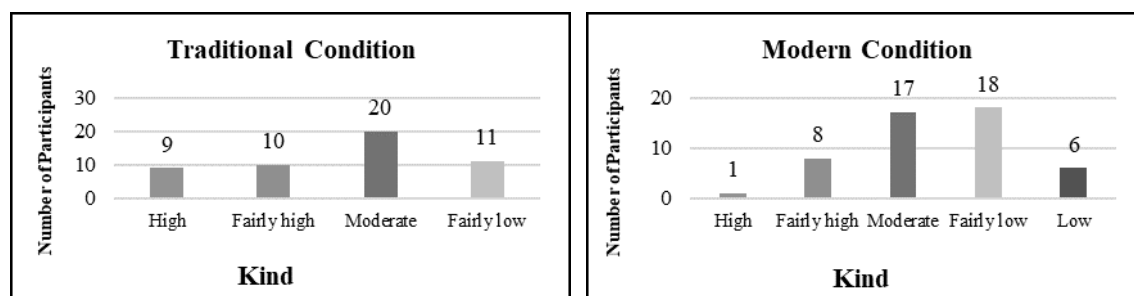


Figure 05: Perception of the personality trait “Kind” based on traditional and modern dress conditions

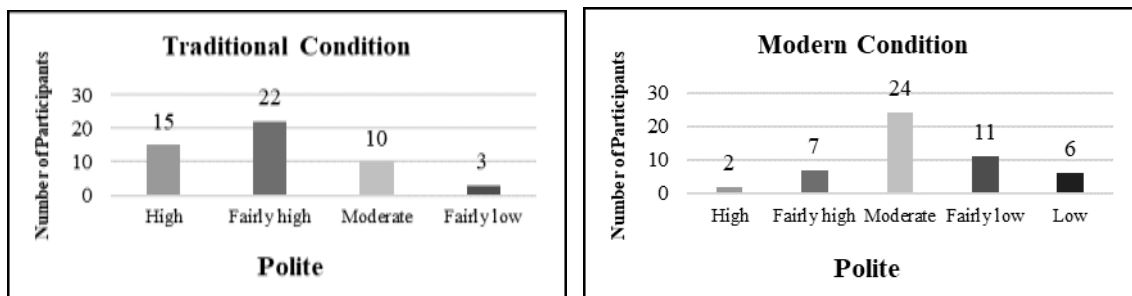


Figure 06: Perception of the personality trait “Polite” based on traditional and modern dress conditions

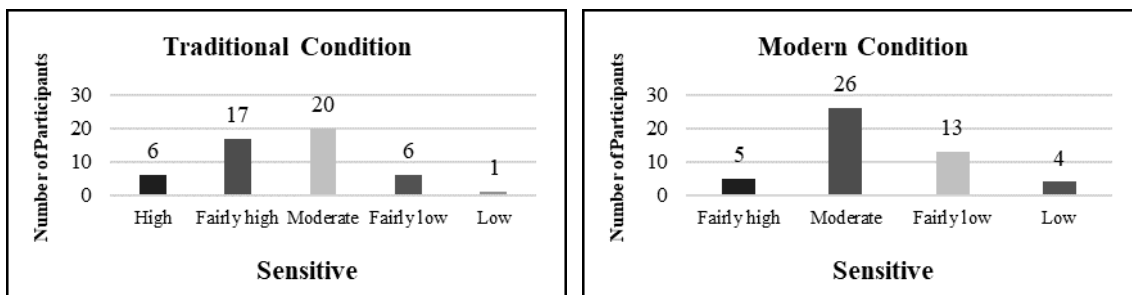


Figure 07: Perception of the personality trait “Sensitive” based on traditional and modern dress conditions

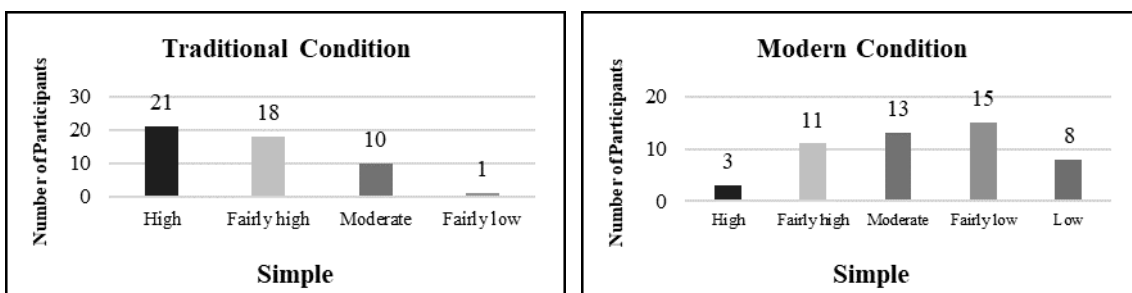


Figure 08: Perception of the personality trait “Simple” based on traditional and modern dress conditions

Out of the fifteen personality traits measured in the study the above eight personality traits showed significant difference on ratings of perception of clothing style on personality traits judgments between two dress conditions. But the other seven personality traits did not show significant difference between two dress conditions. Table 2 presents the mean values and p values of non-significant traits under different dress styles of traditional and modern condition.

Table 2: Perception of personality traits under traditional and modern dress conditions not significantly different at $p \leq 0.000$ by ANOVA

Personality trait	Traditional		Modern		F Value	P Value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Attractive	2.88	0.98	2.68	1.01	.998	.320
Competent	2.59	0.91	2.72	0.90	1.077	.302
Independent	2.62	0.92	2.74	1.06	.362	.549
Intelligent	2.56	0.73	2.32	0.71	2.756	.100
Pleasant	2.70	0.97	2.70	1.05	.000	1.000
Sociable	2.82	0.89	2.94	0.93	.429	.514
Strong	2.56	0.90	2.72	0.90	.780	.379



Assessment of Gender Differences of Person Perception on Personality Traits

The second hypothesis was to test if there is a difference between male and female when judging personality traits based on clothing. A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the gender difference on the ratings of variables that measure personality traits. The difference between these variables was not significant at $p \leq 0.00$. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted which means there is no difference between male and female when judging personality traits based on clothing.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine how the person perception cues seen in clothes impacts judgments of person's personality characteristics. There were fifteen personality traits used to measure this purpose and the results indicated that there was significant difference between two dress conditions in eight dimensions of personality traits: conceited; friendly; kind; sensitive; innocent; polite; simple; and erotic. However, no significant difference was seen between the two dress conditions in seven dimensions: intelligent; sociable; strong; competent; independent; pleasant; and attractive.

When analysing the results of this research, there was a pattern on the participant's ratings. The perceived personality traits that showed significant differences between two dress condition, such as friendly, kind, sensitive, innocent, polite and simple revealed that traditional style dress condition is more accepted than modern style dress condition. This may have been influenced by various existing societal attitudes towards dress style such as 'when a woman dresses very stylishly she may be cruel' and when "woman dress traditionally, they are very friendly, kind and more sensitive than people who dress in a very stylish or in a modern way". There are also beliefs such as "when women dress in the traditional way, they may be more innocent than the fashionable women", and "woman dressed in open dress style is impolite" and "fashion leads to people being more complex". So these kind of social beliefs and attitudes may have influenced participant's ratings on person perception cues on personality traits.

The modern dress style received high ratings for the traits 'conceited' and 'erotic' compared to the traditional dress style. It also may be influenced the existing social attitude that "the woman dress in a stylish dress style, may be very conceited" and when "she dressed more open dress style, she is very erotic women".

Other dimensions studied such as intelligent, sociable, strong, competent, independent, pleasant and attractive have not revealed significant difference between traditional and modern condition dress styles on participant's ratings. Harris et al (1983) found that when the model wore formal dress style, subjects perceived the model as intelligent. But this present study results didn't show a significant difference between two dress conditions on the ratings of the trait 'intelligent'. Various factors such as contextual factors, cultural factors, and methodological problems may have influenced the study results. For example, the researcher had used only undergraduates as the sample of this research, who possess the same education level and somewhat same attitudes. The attitude that 'the intelligence of a person cannot be measured from a photograph' may have influenced the result of trait 'intelligent'. It is evident because one participant had said "How to rate one's intelligence level from a photograph...?". The trait 'Sociability' also did not show significant difference. But, Morris et al (1996) concluded that when instructors dressed more casually, they were rated higher on sociability. Similarly, for the trait "competent" there was no significant difference, however, Morris et al (1996) and Cruz (1991) concluded that when the model dressed formally, they are rated more competent.



Culturally, Sri Lanka is a patriarchal society and accordingly "man is more powerful than the woman". This research only used a female model and the attitude about "the possibility of woman to become independent and strong is low in Sri Lankan society" may have influenced the results of the trait 'independent'. Methodologically, perhaps, the model's dressing styles may be reflecting attractiveness and pleasant either traditional or modern dress style and the modern dress style that was used in this research may not reflect higher competent level than the traditional condition. For example, a short skirt and top in modern condition is not a highly formal dress style. Hence, these methodological problems may have influenced the results of traits 'attractive, pleasant and competent' which didn't show the difference between two dress condition on participant's ratings. But studies by Harris et al (1983) and Hewitt and German (1979) shows that the model was perceived as attractive when she wore formal suit. The second purpose of the study is identifying gender differences of participant's ratings on perception, but the results revealed that there is no difference between females and males on judgments of personality traits. Similarly, Bassett (1979) revealed there was no gender difference on perception. On contrary, Rolloman (1980) had found that there were gender differences in some ratings. However, the current study assumes that both males and females may follow similar social norms about clothing styles.

While analysing the results of this research, it can be seen that the 'halo effect' had influenced on the participant's ratings. Because, results showed that, when the model's dress style tends to more traditional, participants had judged she is simpler, polite, kind, sensitive, friendly and innocent, whereas when the model wore modern clothes and somewhat revealing dress style, participants had judged she may be conceited and erotic. Generally, it is very difficult to form a judgment on personality based on their physical aspects, because human behaviour is a more difficult phenomenon to understand and interpret. But participants had rated the person's overall traits very simply based on their clothing style. Here, they had used minimal information, especially clothing style to judge person's other unrelated attributions. Therefore, this finding suggests that halo effect had occurred in their perception and interpretation.

CONCLUSION/ RECOMMENDATION

This study concludes that people used minimal information especially the clothing style of a person to judge personality traits such as friendly, simple, polite, kind, sensitive, innocent, conceited, or erotic. In the Sri Lankan context participants were more likely to combine traditional dress codes with more socially acceptable personality traits.

RECOMMENDATION

This study used undergraduate students as a sample. Therefore, future research can replicate the same study for the general society to get a better understanding of how people judge another's personality characteristics based on clothing style. And also, this study used only five dress types under each category. But there are various dress styles in one dress type. For example, when considering about trouser there are various styles of trouser such as office trouser, shorts, three-quarter, length pants etc. Hence, future researchers can get various styles under the one dress type to get a better understanding of perception of those dress styles. Therefore, future research can be conducted using a broad range of dress types and styles and using a large sample.

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