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Research Paper

Patterns of Self Presentation Tactics in Young Adults

Ravi Kumar[1]*, Dr. Sujit Ram Tripathi[2]

ABSTRACT

Since the time immemorial the desire of people to control how others perceive them has been a constant phenomenon; though the ways of controlling other's notion about oneself have been proliferated and widened. Young adults often get engaged in controlling other's notion about them, as they are aware of the fact that the impression formed by others will affect their success in many walks of life. However, these ways are highly influenced by culture contexts, gender roles and identities of the participants. The present study aimed to investigate the dominating pattern of self-presentation in young adults, and how this pattern was directed and shaped by gender. A total of 169 college going young adults from Delhi-NCR participated in the study, out of which 97 were female and 72 were male. The data was obtained using Self-presentation Tactics Scale (Lee et al., 1999). The result obtained revealed that the most prominent self-presentation tactic among young adults was apologises and the least prevailing was intimidation. Male young adults were found to be significantly more involved in assertive self-presentation than female young adults however no such difference was obtained on defensive self-presentation. Furthermore, young adults irrespective of their gender were found to be more involved in using defensive self-presentation than assertive self-presentation.

Keywords: *Self-presentation tactics, impression management, image management.*

Self-presentation is a universal phenomenon as people across the world have a constant desire to be perceived in a specific fashion. To fulfil this everlasting desire, they engage in controlling other people's impression of them. There could be enormous numbers of motives underlying this social behaviour like approval, belongingness, getting a job done. Presumably, people are aware of the fact that how others form a notion about them will affect the desired outcome. Since how others perceive an individual might determine his success in romantic, social, professional and personal domains of life. Young adulthood is the period when all these concerns hold utmost importance. This rapidly passing phase of life demands young adults to accommodate and assimilate at a fast pace. However, this process of portraying desired self-image is not free from cultural context, gender and the socio-economic status of the individual.

[1]Student, Department of Psychology, University of Delhi, India
[2]Assistant Professor, University of Delhi, India
*Corresponding Author

Informally the roots of self-presentation can be traced to the earliest human interaction. However, the first formal introduction of this concept was made by Goffman (1959) in his book '*The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*'. He argued that ordinary people in everyday life work to convey desired impressions to others around them, just as actors on a stage work to present their characters to audiences. Since then, researchers have widely studied this concept from different perspectives, as it has implications in different fields. In the earlier era of research term impression management is often used interchangeably with self-presentation in the realm of social psychology; however, there is a marked disparity in how these two terms are defined. Some researchers like Schlenker (1980) and Schneider (1981) argued that impression management is an attempt to control images that are casted in real or imagined social interactions and when these images are "self- relevant" it becomes "self-presentation". Such authors state that people may manage the impressions of entities like their institutions, their cars, or some other people like friends and can be managed by some other person often purpose being to increase the power of the individual (Lee et al., 1999), but when the individuals themselves control the impressions other forms about them is self-presentation. However, recent researchers do not make any distinctions between the two terms (Leary & Kowalski, 1990).

Defining Self-presentation
Many scholars have tried to define self-presentation. One of the earliest definitions was proposed by Goffman (1959), who asserted that self-presentation consists of behaviours which are intended to manage the impressions that observers have of actors. Tedeschi and Riess (1981) defined it as any behaviour by an actor that serves the purpose of controlling or manipulating the attributions and impression formed of that person by others. Another prominent researcher Schneider (1981), conceptualised it as an attempt by one person (actor) to affect the perceptions of her or him by another person (target). Jones and Pittman (1982) defined it as "those features of behaviour affected by power augmentation motives designed to elicit or shape others 'attributions of the actor's dispositions". Recent theorists have defined the concept somewhat in a similar fashion as Leary, Allen & Terry (2011) suggest "self-presentation involves the process of controlling how one is perceived by other people". Though the definitions changed over time, the essence remained the same that it involves controlling others 'impression about the presenter. However, a critical shift can be noticed that earlier theorist viewed it as a phenomenon by which people may manipulate others, as the earlier notion of self-presentation was that people often fake about themselves. In contrast, new theorists accepted that portrayal could be genuine and not necessarily fake, and that is why the term "manipulation" has been omitted from the new definitions. Jones and Pittman (1982) had a view that people engaged in managing impression mainly for augmenting or maintaining power in the relationship as the actors use his behaviour to convey something about themselves, regardless of what other meaning or significance the behaviour may have.

Tactics of Self Presentation
For portraying self in the desired manner, people often require some tactics or strategy. These tactics are behavioural strategies which are aimed to control other's notion about oneself. Many researchers have tried to conceptualise and categorise these tactics. Tedeschi and Lindskold (1976) categorised self-presentation tactics as assertive tactics and defensive tactics. They conceptualised assertive self-presentation as behaviour aimed to establish particular identities in the eyes of others, and defensive self-presentation as actions taken to defend or restore a positive identity. Later on, Jones and Pittman (1980) proposed five different strategies these are; Ingratiation, Intimidation, Self- promotion, Exemplification

and Supplication. Arkin (1981) categorised self-presentational behaviour as acquisitive and protective behaviours. The former is used to seek social approval and synonyms with assertive self-presentation; however, the latter is used to avoid disapproval which includes modest self-descriptions, self-deprecation and a reduction in social interaction. A recent classification was done by Lee et al. (1999) who suggested twelve different tactics of self-presentation these are; excuse, justification, disclaimer, self-handicapping, apology, ingratiation, intimidation, supplication, enhancement, entitlement, basting, and exemplification. They categorised these twelve tactics in two broader categories, defensive self-presentation tactics (excuse, justification, disclaimer, self-handicapping, and apology) and assertive self-presentation tactics (ingratiation, intimidation, supplication, enhancement, entitlement, basting, and exemplification). *Excuse* refers to verbal statements denying responsibility for negative events, *Justification* means providing overriding reasons for negative behavior as justified, but accepting responsibility for it, *Disclaimers* implies expressions offering explanations before predicaments occur, *Self-handicapping* refers to the production of an obstacle to success with the intention of preventing observers from making dispositional inferences about one's failure, *Apologies* means a confession of responsibility for any harm done to others or negative events and expressions of remorse and guilt, *Ingratiation* includes actions performed to get others to like the actor so that the actor can gain some advantage from them, *Intimidation*, means actions that have the intent to project an identity of the actor as someone who is powerful and dangerous, *Supplication* means projecting oneself as weak and displays dependence to solicit help from a target person, *Entitlement* means claims by an actor of responsibility and credit for positive achievements, *Enhancement* refers to persuading others that the outcomes of one's behavior are more positive than they might have originally believed, *Blasting* is a behavior intended to produce or communicate negative evaluations of another person or groups with which the actor is merely associated, and *Exemplification* is a behavior intended to present the actor as morally worthy and as having integrity.

Culture and self-presentation

People's from collectivistic cultures are likely to present self in a manner which emphasises dependence and adjusting well with others, while an individual from individualistic cultures are more likely to present self in a manner which enhances independence and personal achievements. People in collectivistic cultures are more likely to be modest and but self-promoting in individualistic culture due to difference cultural norms (Alicke & Sedikides, 2009; Chen et al., 2009). The members of collectivistic cultures are more concerned to avoid making an undesirable impression than making a desirable impression (Elliot, Chirkov, Kim, & Sheldon, 2001).

Gender and Self-presentation

Due to different social roles and status, as well as because of the different underlying goals and motives, the usage of self-presentation tactics varies with gender. Studies by Konovsky & Jaster (1989) and Schoenbach & Kleibaumhueter (1990) suggest that female employees use excuse more than male employees. The research on justifications vreveals mixed results. As Konovsky & Jaster (1989) found that women engaged more in justification than men; however, Lee et al. (1999) found no such gender difference. No gender differences were noticed in using disclaimer tactics (Lee et al., 1999). There are many existing studies which suggest that men are likely to use self- handicapping than women (Dietrich, 1995; Hirt, McCrea, & Kimble, 2000; Shepperd & Arkin, 1989), whereas Lee et al. (1999) found no gender differences. Women are also found to be using more apologies than men (Lee et al., 1999). In terms of ingratiation there are mixed results as DuBrin (1994); Smith et al. (1990)

and Tannen (1994) found that women were more likely to use this tactic than men; whereas Dreher et al. (1989) and DuBrin (1991) found no such gender differences, and Lee et al. (1999) reported men using more ingratiation than women. Male is also more likely to use intimidation tactics than female (DuBrin, 1991; Lee et al. 1999; Offermann & Schrier, 1985; Smith et al. 1990). The literature also suggests that women are more likely to use supplication tactics than men (Arkin & Shepperd, 1990; Offermann & Schrier, 1985; Tannen, 1994). Men are more engaged in more acclaiming or entitlement than do women (Lee et al., 1999). The literature review suggests that men are more likely to engage in self-enhancement than women (DuBrin, 1994; Lee, Quigley, Nesler, Corbett, & Tedeschi, 1999). Cialdini et al. (1999) reported that men are likely to use blasting than women. No gender difference was noticed in using exemplification strategy (Lee et al., 1999). Such pattern of differences could be attributed to the cultural norms, expectations, and the gender roles. Women are expected to present their self in more defensive fashion while men are expected to indulge more in assertive tactics. Undesirable consequences results when either of the gender failed to meet such cultural expectations, and norms. Irrespective of cultural differences, such pattern of gender difference in terms of self-presentation is universal.

METHODS

The present study used random sampling through which 169 college going student were approached from different undergraduate and postgraduate colleges of Delhi-NCR; out of this 43% were male and 57% were female. The age range of the participants was 18-25, with an average age of 20.20 and standard deviation 1.92. In the sample 33 were post graduate students, 137 were undergraduate students. Also, majority of participants belong to middle socio-economic status.

Research Design
The study follows a between group research design

Measures
The study is done by using Self-presentation Tactics Scale.The scale is developed by Suk-Jae Lee, Brian M. Quigley, Mitchell S. Nesler, Amy B. Corbett, & James T. Tedeschi (1999) for the purpose of measuring the use of twelve self-presentational tactics. The scale has 12 dimensions. These dimensions are further categorised into two broader tactics; the first one is defensive tactics (excuse, justification, disclaimer, self-handicapping, and apology) and assertive tactics (ingratiation, intimidation, supplication, enhancement, entitlement, blasting, an exemplification). The scale has total 63 items. The respondents are asked to rate how frequently they engage in each behaviour on a scale ranging from 1 (*very infrequently*) to 9 (*very frequently*). The internal consistency reliability exceeded $\alpha = 0.70$ for nearly all tactics. Furthermore, Cronbach's alpha coefficients for defensive and assertive self-presentation tactics subscales were 0.86 and 0.91 respectively. The internal consistency reliability of the entire Self-presentational Tactics scale was found to be $\alpha = 0.93$. The scale has convergent validity (correlated with Self-monitoring Scale) as well as discriminant validity (correlated with Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale).

RESULTS

The descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, minima, maxima and range) of self-presentation and its dimensions are presented in Table 1. The table reveals that among young adult participants apologies was the most dominating and intimidation was the least dominating self- presentation tactics. Since, the participants score was in higher range on apologies tactic. Furthermore, excuse, justification, disclaimer, self-handicapping,

ingratiation, entitlement, enhancement, blasting and exemplification tactics of self-presentation were in the average range. However, intimidation and supplication were in lower range. Moreover, defensive self-presentation tactics were slightly dominating than assertive self-presentation tactics among young adult participants. And, the overall self-presentation among participants was average. Furthermore, Table 2 represents the impact of gender on pattern of self-presentation tactics. It is clear that, the male and female mean scores on self-presentation tactics excuse, justification, self-handicapping, apologies, blasting and exemplification were slightly different, though the differences between two group mean analysis clearly reflects that these differences were not significant. While, the male respondents 'mean score was higher than the mean score of female respondents on self-presentation tactics ingratiation, intimidation, supplication, entitlement, and enhancement; also, these mean differences were statistically significant. Moreover, a slight difference was noticed in mean scores of male and female participants on defensive self-presentation tactics, but this difference was not statistically significant. Male participants mean scores were higher than female participants on assertive self-presentation tactics as well as on overall self-presentation and the mean analysis shows that these differences were statistically significant. Table 3 shows that among young adults the mean defensive self-presentation was significantly higher than the assertive self-presentation and this trend continued in male and female participants as well.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Participants on Measures of Self-Presentation Tactics Scale and its Dimension, by Total Sample (N=169)

Self-presentation and its dimensions	Mean	SD	Minima	Maxima	Range
Excuse	4.09	1.69	1.00	8.60	7.60
Justification	4.80	1.73	1.00	8.80	7.80
Disclaimer	4.72	1.51	1.40	8.80	7.40
Self-Handicapping	4.54	1.59	1.40	8.80	7.40
Apologies	7.14	1.43	1.80	9.00	7.20
Defensive Self-presentation	5.06	1.12	2.36	7.88	5.52
Ingratiation	4.16	1.59	1.00	7.75	6.75
Intimdation	3.04	1.63	1.00	7.20	6.20
Supplication	3.83	1.54	1.00	8.20	7.20
Entitlement	4.24	1.63	1.00	8.60	7.60
Enhancement	4.49	1.75	1.00	8.60	7.60
Blasting	3.48	1.59	1.00	7.80	6.80
Exemplification	5.32	1.60	1.00	9.00	8.00
Assertive Self-presentation	4.08	1.29	1.49	7.51	6.02
Overall Self-presentation	281.73	72.28	120.00	482.00	362.00

Table 2: The Main Effects of Gender on Self-presentation, and its Dimensions

Self-presentation and its dimensions	Female (n=97)		Male (n=72)		t-ratio
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Excuse	3.91	1.53	4.33	1.86	1.61
Justification	4.70	1.70	4.94	1.76	0.89
Disclaimer	4.49	1.40	5.02	1.62	2.25*
Self-handicapping	4.64	1.68	4.41	1.46	0.91
Apologies	7.18	1.47	7.08	1.37	0.42
Defensive Self-presentation	4.98	1.05	5.16	1.22	0.99
Ingratiation	3.89	1.56	4.52	1.56	3.02*
Intimidation	2.72	1.46	3.47	1.75	3.65**
Supplication	3.47	1.34	4.32	1.66	2.45**
Entitlement	3.98	1.51	4.59	1.72	2.31*
Enhancement	4.23	1.73	4.85	1.73	2.83*
Blasting	3.19	1.44	3.87	1.71	1.49
Exemplification	5.16	1.60	5.53	1.57	0.99
Assertive Self-presentation	3.81	1.17	4.45	1.35	3.32**
Overall Self-presentation	269.46	65.07	298.25	78.45	2.61*

*p<0.05, **p<0.01

Table 3: Comparison of defensive and assertive self-presentation among total participants, male participants and female participants

	Mean	SD	t-ratio
Total Participants (N=169)			7.43**
Defensive Self-presentation	5.05	1.12	
Assertive Self-presentation	4.08	1.8	
Male Participants (n=97)			
Defensive Self-presentation	4.98	1.05	7.38**
Assertive Self-presentation	3.80	1.16	
Female Participants (n=72)			
Defensive Self-presentation	5.15	1.21	3.29**
Assertive Self-presentation	4.45	1.35	

DISCUSSION

Young adults often get engaged in controlling others 'notions about them, as they are aware of the fact that the impression formed by others will affect their success in many walks of life. To present oneself they use a variety of tactics that they think would reflect the desired self-images, and would help to cover or discard undesired self-images. However, the process of self-presentation is not free from the cultural context, gender roles and identity.

The study obtained that the most dominating tactics used by young adults was the apologies, which reflects that young adult might be conscious about their self-image, as doing harm to others and not apologising may pose a severe threat to the morality and their self-image (Schumann, 2018). It could be the guilt, shame, and perceived decline in the sense of morality associated with misconduct that was compelling young adults to apologise (Bastian et al., 2013; Carpenter, Carlisle, & Tsang, 2014). Such pattern of usage of apologies tactics could also be attributed to the cultural norms of the country, as India is more inclined towards collectivistic culture. As a result of the collectivistic standards young adults may feel much social pressure, and to gain social approval involve in apologising (Guan, Park, &

Lee, 2009). Among tactics of self- presentation, intimidation was the least frequent in young adults. Which shows that young adults didn't want to be perceived as one who lacks generosity, and lacks compassion for others, as usage of intimidation more frequently may decrease their chance of being intimately involved with others. Moreover, young adults are more likely to be involved in interactions and roles in which they have a lower status with respect to teachers, parents, authority figures, people at work, and perhaps older people in general, and so they have little chances to use intimidation tactics. Further, the collectivistic culture may also be responsible for low level of usage of intimidation tactics, as such culture put strong norms for maintaining social harmony and avoiding any direct aggressive behaviour (Forbes, Zhang, Doroszewicz, & Haas, 2009).

Moreover, young male adults were found to be more involved in assertive tactics than defensive tactics. Which reflects that male young adult are more likely to forge new identities than female young adults. Such differences could be attributed to the social roles of male and female individual. Bakan (1966) suggests in terms of social roles, women are expected to be more communal that is, friendly, unselfish, concerned with others, and emotionally expressive; and men are expected to be more agentic that is masterful, assertive, competitive, and dominant. The different normative expectations for both genders might be responsible for shaping their behaviours in social situations. Since these role prescriptions not only affect how men and women behave, but they also determine how others perceive and evaluate their actions (Smith et al., 2013). Women's self-presentation might be socially strategic rather than based on inner beliefs and abilities (Amanatullah & Morris, 2010), and hence they avoid making assertive self-presentation which are based on one's personal views and skills.

Furthermore, young adult participants irrespective of their gender were found to be more involved in using defensive self-presentation tactics than assertive self-presentation tactics. It implies that, the participants were more concerned with defending their already existing identities, than forging new identities. Since, people from collectivistic cultures are more likely to avoid negative outcomes; so young adults would be more concerned about not to making an undesirable impression than making a desirable impression, since social costs for making undesirable impression is more negative than the social benefits of making a desirable impression; and by using defensive tactics they make an effort to escape from negative evaluation of oneself (Elliot, Chirkov, Kim, & Sheldon, 2001). Also, because of the rapid changes in internal and external environments and due to the constant struggle with them young adults have a relatively low level of self-esteem compared to middle adulthood, or childhood (Robins & Trzesniewski, 2005). This relatively lower level of self-esteem may be responsible for higher involvement in defensive tactics (Baumeister, Tice, & Hutton, 1989).

CONCLUSION
The findings of the study suggested that young adults use apologies tactic more frequently while they rarely use intimidation tactic. Gender was found to be an important determinant in terms of using self-presentation tactics; as male young adults were significantly more frequently involved in using assertive tactics as well as self-presentation tactics than female young adults. Also, young adults were more engaged in using defensive tactics than assertive tactics. These findings suggest that cultural norms and social expectations are important factor that shape the self-presentation style of the individuals.

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