

In the eyes of men: Analysis of men first impression formation on Tinder

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ABSTRACT

Do not judge the book by its cover. As good as it may sound, it is almost impossible to do so. As inquisitive human nature, we judge people based on what we see in them; the first time we meet them. Even though we did that many times and every time we meet someone new, the research in the field of first impression is little in numbers if we are about to compare within the field of communication science. On top of that, with the development of communication technology, people are seeking someone new as a potential life partner through virtual space. This research employed a qualitative approach to seeking the answer about "how men form a first impression based on a still photograph?". The data in the form of an interview was analyzed using four fundamental concepts of communication: verbal cues, non-verbal cues, information gathering and formation, and lastly, the concept of culture. The result shows that there are several aspects that men emphasize to make the first impression through a photograph. 1. Facial Features, 2. Existence of makeup, 3. Accessories, 4. Body proportion. Furthermore, specific facial features such as eyes, lips, etc. They are proven to be the most important factor that men use to judge. Cultural values are used as a means of interpreting the information they could get.

Keywords: First impression, Verbal, Non-verbal, Information gathering, Information processing, Culture

INTRODUCTION

"Do not judge the book by its cover". That is a phrase often heard and said, yet people can not help but do it. As human has inquisitive nature, human will seek information about someone they meet for the first time, and they seek every information they can get in that concise time to make a judgment about someone (Ambady & Rosenthal, 1993). Willis and Torodov (Willis & Todorov, 2006) claimed that the first impression happened in a very short time, one-tenth of a second. Nevertheless, it only happened within one-tenth of a second; it lasted for months (Gunaydin, Selcuk, & Zayas, 2017). Furthermore, Rydel and McConnell (Rydell & McConnell, 2006) implied that personal judgment based on the first impression still has stood before contravening the dispute of an individual.

Ambady and Rosenthal (Ambady & Rosenthal, 1993) explained that all information from verbal and non-verbal of a person was employed to construct a judgment. However, with the growing popularity of the internet and communication technology, face-to-face interaction which allows verbal and non-verbal observation, sometimes can not be met. For instance, interaction through social media such as Whatsapp does not allow non-verbal information to be fully conveyed.

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The growth of the internet and communication technology also brought a new approach in pursuance of looking for a potential life partner. Dating apps such as Tinder, become a viable option to look for a potential life partner. According to Business of Apps (Iqbal, 2019), Tinder has an enormous number of users; not less than 57 million people use Tinder, and not less than 4.1 million of them are even willing to pay for a premium Tinder Plus and Tinder Gold. He further implied that in 2018; Tinder processed 1.6 billion swipes a day on average, compared to late 2014, which is only 1 billion swipes. He further added that Tinder is being dominated by men; 67.8% of Tinder user is men and only 32.2% are women.

How Tinder work is relatively simple. Tinder allows their user to put in some criteria of what kind of people they prefer to have a date with. From there on, they try to match them with one another based on the criteria they put. They match their user by allowing them to choose whom they find interesting by looking at their picture profile. If they are interested, they will notice that it's a match. The interesting part transpires when we observe how Tinder works and try to analyze how human beings make a first impression of someone.

While the first impression was made by observing both their verbal and non-verbal behavior as said by Ambady and Rosenthal (Ambady & Rosenthal, 1993); modern date dating apps such as Tinder do not provide much information concerning their non-verbal and especially verbal behavior. A lot of scholars (Ybarra, 2001; Hunt, Eastwick, & Finkel, 2015; Gunaydin, Selcuk, & Zayas, 2017; Orghian, Almeida, Jacinto, Garcia-Marques, & Santos., 2019) had attempted to research in the field of first impression; from the length of it, how it affects personal judgment, how power affecting first impression, etc. Nonetheless, not one attempted to understand further how instant cognition with minor information sources such as still photographs is used to make a first impression. Research by MIT Technology Review (page, 2016) stated that woman is more likely to portray themselves to attract certain style of male such as male who loves chubby girl, Asian girl, etc. While doing so they score around 10% matched by men who view their profile. According to that research, I argue that there are certain characteristics to the photograph that men used to determine whether a woman is to their liking. To know more I wrote this paper to gain knowledge about how men form a first impression based on a still photograph.

A human being can not not communicate (Watzlawick, et al., 2011). Based on this famous statement of Watzlawick that it is a nature for the human being to communicate. As humans evolve, they create a way to communicate effectively. We know two types of communication in human communication: verbal and nonverbal. Verbal communication is used in written and spoken formats, while nonverbal covers all forms other than written and spoken (Wood, 2011; Knapp, 1972; Levine & Adelman, 1993; Devito, 2008).

Seiler, Beall, and Mazer (Seiler, Beall, & Mazer, 2008) expand Watzlawick (Watzlawick, et al., 2011) statement mentioned previously by suggesting the importance of a symbol in a communication process as an instrument. Wood (Wood, 2011) also agrees on the importance of using symbols in conveying a message in verbal communication, in written or spoken formats, or in language. A study by Mehrabian (Mehrabian, 1981) found that, in face-to-face communication, around 93% of messages people receive are categorized as nonverbal communication, while only around 7% of the messages are categorized as verbal communication. Mehrabian (Mehrabian, 1981) further emphasizes that humans rely more on nonverbal communication rather than verbal communication.

What is nonverbal communication? Researchers such as Knapp, (Knapp, 1972), Levine, Adelman, (Levine & Adelman, 1993), and DeVito, (Devito, 2008), define non-verbal communication as encompassing almost all of the human communication except written and spoken communication. In other words, gestures, smiling or frowning, widening eyes, wearing jewelry, touching someone, moving the chair closer to someone, raising the vocal volume, or even saying nothing can be regarded as nonverbal communication. Non-verbal communication is also defined as sending, receiving, and exchanging messages in any modalities that do not involve words (Matsumoto, Frank, & Hwang, *Nonverbal Communication Science and Applications*, 2013). In other words, non-verbal communication is not just human behavior shown to others, but also

everything he shows in communication except words can be called non-verbal communication. Even it does not seem to make sense; we communicate without words (Mehrabian, 1981).

As we know that the first impression that we make of others is quite accurate, but we do not know how we make such a thing (Carney, Colvin, & Hall, 2007; Fowler, Lilienfeld, & Patrick, 2009; Levesque & Kenny, 1993; Vazire & Gosling, 2004). Several scholars (Anderson, Ames, & Gosling, 2008; Levesque, 1997) suggest that an accurate first impression can be related to successful interpersonal interaction.

In order to form a first impression, Kenny and DePaulo (Kenny & DePaulo, 1993) suggest that humans usually use certain traits to judge others' behavior. However, not all traits can be conveyed using certain media. A study by Daft and Lengel (Daft & Lengel, 1986) shows that certain media has limitations in conveying certain types of information. A study by Daft and Lengel (Daft & Lengel, 1986) was later known to become as a theory called Media Richness Theory (MRT). In this case, a study proposed by Joseph Walther (Walther, 1992) ever stated that when there is a lack of information people will just make use of available information to rationalize.

Culture is a term that is very difficult to define. Not a single scholar has the same definition of culture. Hofstede defines "Culture as the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another" (Hofstede, 1994, p. 5). Matsumoto defines culture as "the set of attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors shared by a group of people, but different for each individual, communicated from one generation to the next" (Matsumoto, Culture and Psychology, 1996, p. 6). While Spencer-Oatey defines that "Culture is a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioral conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each members behavior and his/her interpretations of the 'meaning' of other peoples behavior" (Spencer-Oatey, 2008, p. 3). Based on their definition of culture, I took a red line that is similar to their definition. Culture includes values, beliefs, and norms, which will affect people's attitudes and behavior. Culture is also shared by a group of people, making culture a distinguisher that will distinguish a member of a group of people from another. As stated that culture shapes behavior and attitude, and culture also shapes how we talk, think, react, and even all aspects of communication (Jandt, 2007; Moon, 1996).

In social interactions between humans, we tend to look into the most accessible source of information we could seek which is the physical appearance (Ivarez & Cervera-Crespo, 2019). Ivarez & Cervera-Crespo (Ivarez & Cervera-Crespo, 2019), notes especially the face, is the part that people tend to give more attention to while engaging in social interaction. In response, stereotypes about being beautiful are the same as being good were formed. However Gross and Crofton (Gross & Crofton, 1977) offer a new perspective on the very stereotypes that we tend to perceive what is good is pretty. They (Ivarez & Cervera-Crespo, 2019) argue that whom we perceive as good eventually will look beautiful. There might be a bidirectional correlation between good and beautiful.

In relation to beauty and goodness, men prefer to seek a partner who is pretty in accordance with their preferences. However, men may have been attracted to women, not because of the good nature of the women but sexual stimuli given by the woman. That statement is supported by a study from Buss (Buss, 2007), which shows men are more responsive toward sexual stimuli compared to the woman. This indicated that men are more vulnerable to sexual stimuli by the opposite sex when they engage in relationship development. A study by Rupp and Wallen (Rupp & Wallen, 2008) claimed that men are exceptionally vulnerable to sexual stimuli, in the form of visual stimuli.

In relation to forming a relationship, even tho in recent development arise stereotypes that it is considered sexual harassment if men criticize women's physical appearance (Miranti & Sudiana, 2021). It is within men's nature to put more importance on their partner's physical appearance. This claim is backed by research from Furnham (Furnham, 2009) that indicates that naturally, men give special attention to their partner's physical appearance when it comes to a relationship. This also become a reason that men seek physical characteristics that they find more appealing in women, when they select their partner (Putranto, Sugihartati, Isnaini, Widodo, & AbaoGarcia, 2021).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this research, I apply a qualitative approach. This research tries to understand how the first impression formed and what kind of cues and why certain cues were given more attention than the others. The qualitative approach provides deep understanding through subjects' experiences and perspectives which is suitable for the needs of the research. Secondly, qualitative research methods are applied to this study that does not use numerical data. Consequently, the qualitative research method relies on an in-depth analysis of in-depth interview data to understand several issues, in this case, how the first impression is formed through still photographs. In the end, qualitative analyses are displayed in narrative and descriptive ways. With those reasons in mind, I choose the qualitative approach to be used in this research.

In this study I employed a deep interview based on observation of three individuals; three men aged between 18 to 34 as 60% of Tinder users are in the age range of 18 to 34 years old (Iqbal, 2019). The participants of this research are required to be more than 2 years and have at least five more than 50 matches. There are two steps that I will employ to gather sufficient data to understand how people make a first impression through still photographs. First, I will ask each individual to sort three photos of the opposite gender and select which one they think is interesting as a potential partner; vice-versa. The second step will be a deep interview regarding their choice and what they thought about the person they choose, also the person they reject.

This research will apply Grounded Theory. Because Ground Theory allows comparison and deep analyses to understand a process of a phenomenon, I will:

1. Categorizing the answer for each photo and the impression of each photo
2. Mapping the indicators they use as a cue that forms their perception regarding each person presented in the photo
3. Comparing and looking for a generalization of cues, used to form perception
4. Comparing and looking for generalization cues used by men and women

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of The First Informant Baseline

Before we begin to analyze how the first informant formed his first impression using photographs, I will first draw the baseline from the first informant. The first informant stated his preferences are a girl with a chubby face.

"Then I prefer the chubby one not skinny. It's more because of personal preference."

Simply understood that he prefers a girl that has a chubby or rounded face. Second, he also likes people with big smiles, although it only limits their lips. It can be seen within his answer:

"It's typical that I see from a wider smile."

Although he added that, it is not necessarily until showing their teeth:

"I think the smile is not bright enough. A bright smile doesn't have to be a grimace. It just makes him feel uncomfortable. Like a formality, forced."

It can be understood that in the very least looking for a hint of Duchenne smile shown on the face:

"His smile looks like he's sincere ..."

The first informant also showed a likeability to draw a judgment based on facial features, especially the mouth and face contour. For instance, he judged the first photograph based on her smile only. And he also highlighted her best feature in the area of her lips.

"Her lips look thick too, that's good. It's just less content in my opinion. A bit skinny."

When he explained his judgement about her being an introvert he stated that he drew his conclusion based on the way she smile:

"I think from the way he smiles, how does he feel when you see him"

"I think his smile is not bright"

However, the first informant also drew his conclusion based on eyes and other facial features such as accessories that are being used. The conclusion drawn based on the eyes can be seen when he explained why he thought the girl from the first photograph was a kind girl:

"People seem to be friendly too, E... if you don't see it from their eyes, they look so friendly."

Furthermore, the first informant gave some consideration to accessories. He had several perceptions of accessories based on the mass culture:

"Wearing glasses also gives the impression of being smart but not a nerd."

Analysis of The Second Informant Baseline

Contrasting with the first informant, the second informant pays a lot more attention to the eyes rather than the mouth or lips. As for the second informant, the eye is the window to their soul, and he believes the eyes can not lie

"Yes, you can't have plastic surgery on your eyes... Someone said that too... My mother also said that. Those eyes can't lie. You can act happy, but your eyes must be tired."

He also put the eyes into heavy consideration when deciding on expected behavior. It also slightly become his judgment of the girl's preferences. For, instance:

"... his eyes are exciting, like he's hiding something or he just wants to look cool, eh... but I don't know which one. No make up either. If you say you want to introduce me with this photo, I'll just ask you what IG is. I want to see the original."

However, not only eyes; the second informant also put the existence of makeup as a huge factor to decide the expected behavior. It also became the deciding factor of his preferences as he did with the third photograph.

"It seems that if you show your original self in the media, it means that you are proud of yourself. Umm.... At least you are so grateful that you were born like that. And what's wrong with looking sad when you're really sad."

Based on his explanation, his mother's teaching was a factor that shaped his perception of facial features and accessories. In the end, that information becomes a deciding factor for him to judge behavior. The second informant also accommodates accessories to guess the daily activity or hobby:

*"It looks like he likes riding horses, because his necklace pendant is like a horse shoe."
"Hmm... I think because of the glasses, maybe he likes to read or play games, or something related to the screen. That's another design picture..."*

Analysis of The Third Informant Baseline

In contrast with the first two informants, the third informant used race as his baseline to decide on his partner. As his parents told them to pursue a particular race as his partner, it also became his guideline to expect some girl from that particular race.

"His eyes are beautiful, his gaze is sharp and fierce like that. But the shape is like an oriental, so it's nice to see."

"Skip, I like the oriental one. Hahahaha, I was taught that if you are looking for an oriental couple, that's the best... I'm sure. At least she still obeys her husband."

He also has a similarity with the second informant, which relies quite heavily upon the eyes, to predict behavior. However, different from the second informant; the third informant has a varied opinion regarding the makeup

"maybe the well-groomed person likes perfection as well. Perfectionists."

"You can't guess from his bright eyes like wearing glasses. It's the same as the make-up selection... the goal of people who put on make-up is to make others look attractive, at least not to look wrinkled or wrinkled. So it might be taken care of."

He also has a different opinion based on the type of makeup and on what purposes. For instance, he seems to criticize the first photo hairdo yet is pleased with the third one.

"From her hair, she really wanted to be nominated first for a photo session."

"It's the same as the make-up election... the goal of people who put on make-up is to make others look attractive, at least not to look wrinkled or wrinkled. So it might be taken care of."

The third informant also takes into consideration accessories and body proportion. For instance, he did comment and draw expecting behavior from the second photograph and body proportion from the third photograph.

"The person is also regular in my opinion because the face is the same as the body is good, proportional like that."

"From the style of the photo, yes.... in my opinion.... people who have that style because they want to be seen and liked. Hmmm how do you explain it...? Hmm.. that's too much of a veil, isn't it, too much hair, isn't it? Keep his face open. It's like he wants to be noticed by people like that... That's it.... if you think I'm the one who's really ugly..."

Men's First Impression Formation Analysis

From three informants, I could formulate some aspects that were used as a baseline for men to form their first impression through a photograph. Firstly, facial features are the first thing men notice and use to draw a baseline of expected behavior. Two of the informants picked eyes as their focus, and one picked mouth or lips.

"Uh... I think it's typical that you can't see from his wider smile. Yes, the point is that it's not like this."

"Yes, you can't have plastic surgery on your eyes... Someone said that too... My mother also said that. Those eyes can't lie. You can act happy, but your eyes must be tired."

"His eyes are beautiful, his gaze is sharp and fierce like that. But the shape is like an oriental, so it's nice to see."

Other than facial features, make-up and accessories are the second things seen as an indicator of behavior. Two of the three informants draw their conclusion based on the accessories and make-up. One despised makeup and one saw the meaning of the makeup. In comparison, both of them try to make sense of the accessories that it been used in the photograph.

"It seems that if you show your original self in the media, it means that you are proud of yourself. Umm.... At least you are so grateful that you were born like that. And what's wrong with looking sad when you're really sad."

"You can't guess from his bright eyes like wearing glasses. It's the same as the make-up selection... the goal of people who put on make-up is to make others look attractive, at least not to look wrinkled or wrinkled. So it might be taken care of."

"It looks like he likes riding horses, because his necklace pendant is like a horse shoe." It's a hood, isn't it, and the hair is too, isn't it. Keep his face open. It's like he wants to be noticed by people like that... That's it.... if you think I'm the one who's really ugly..."

While body, background, and color do not play many roles in consideration, everyone has their own preferences based on their own culture and values.

"Then I prefer the chubby one, not the skinny one. That's more because of personal preference."

"Yes, you can't have plastic surgery on your eyes... Someone said that too... My mother also said that. Those eyes can't lie. You can act happy, but your eyes must be tired."

"Hahahaha, I was taught that if you look for an oriental couple, that's the best... I'm going to die. At least she still obeys her husband."

Despite all that, the facial feature still holds the highest priority to determine first impression formation. It also becomes the most deciding factor in deciding choice for a future partner for men.

"We are talking about people who look only from our profile pictures. Well, if something is covered like that, usually there are two types of people, curious or skip. I prefer to skip, what if I get caught in a Batman trap?"

His statement could be interpreted as a lack of facial features shown, which could lead them to impartially unable to expect some behavior out of her. However, the effect may vary between individuals since two out of three informants said that they like it.

I suggest that their decision may be affected by which features they are most likely to use as guidelines. When they are unable to access those features, it may lead to rejection by men, for instance the second photograph in which a girl shows only her eyes and cover the rest of her face is accepted by two informants who emphasize the eyes but are rejected by the informant who emphasizes on lips.

CONCLUSION

From the analysis result, I conclude that men emphasize several aspects to make the first impression through a photograph. 1. Facial Features, 2. Existence of makeup, 3. Accessories, 4. Body proportion. Facial features become the most crucial aspect for men to draw a baseline of information to form the first impression of women through a photograph. Furthermore, men tend to emphasize specific facial features such as eyes, lips, etc.

In order to interpret all of the information they got, all of the informants rely on their cultural and personal values. Most of the cultural values that they adopt have been taught to them by their parents. One of the informants relies on his personal value, which he acquired from his past interaction.

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