IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS: A COMPARATIVE REVIEW

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This paper focuses on the potential impact on the accuracy of research findings, as a result of Socially Desirable Responding (SDR). Literature and empirical findings confirm two main factors of SDR: self-deceptive positivity, and impression management. The overall objective of the study was to examine the Impression Management (IM) of High School students. Specific objectives of the study were to assess and compare the IM of different Cultures and Genders. Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (BIDR) was employed to measure the IM of high school students. Study was conducted among 180 high school students (103 boys, and 77 girls) randomly selected from five high schools in Czech Republic (three high schools) and, Sri Lanka (two high schools). These students were following Science, Arts, Economics, Commercial and, Technical studies. The twenty questions (statements) of BIDR (to assess the IM of respondents) were included in the second part of the questionnaire to deviate the respondents' attention to the construct. Findings revealed that even amongst conditions of annonymity, and confidentiality, there exists IM among the high school students. Study focussed on the effect of Gender, and Cultural differences in managing impressions. Though the Mean (M) and Satandard Deviation (SD) values recorded by the Czech high school boys were closer to the normative values of BIDR, the M and SD values of Sri Lankan boys had deviated with an upward trend. This was more evident in the values recorded by the Czech and Sri Lankan high school girls. Study also examined the effect of gender differences in managing impressions. Further research (based on differing demographic stages) will provide insights to the implications of SDR factors, especially of IM. It will be prudent for policy makers, academics, and administrators to focus on the meaning of SDR factors of stakeholders feedback for effective reforms. Conducting large scale studies will facilitate the generalisation of findings.

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The many forms of response biases that are cited in the literature vary from deviant responding to consistent responding. Socially desirable responding (SDR) has been identified as a prominent response bias. SDR is defined as the tendency to give positive self-descriptions. In other words the respondents tend to project a healthier image of them to the society. This response style is psychological in nature and could be examined through a construct. Paulhus (2002) has opinioned of the SDR dimensions as follows: "Despite the growing consensus that there are two dimensions of SDR, their interpretation has varied over the years from minimalist operationalizations to elaborate construct validation. I argue for the necessity of demonstrating departure-from-reality in the self-report of high SDR scorers: this criterion is critical for distinguishing SDR from related constructs". Paulhus has identified a methodology that operationalizes SDR in terms of self-criterion discrepancy. He mentions of a two-tiered taxonomy focused on the degree of the respondents' awareness, namely conscious versus unconscious, and the information content, viz: agentic versus communal qualities. It concludes that research on SDR constructs has lead to the need of a broad reconciliation and integration.

Variants of Socially Desirable Responding

A major obstacle in managing SDR is that the reported inter-correlations are very low, especially among the established measurement instruments. This has led to some confusion (and frustration) of researchers. SDR measurement instruments, used for factor analyses have recorded two factors (Borkenau & Ostendorf, 1989). Paulhus (1991) mentions of one cluster associated with *Alpha*, introduced by Block in 1965, termed as the 'general anxiety factor' of Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI). And the other cluster is associated with another MMPI factor *Gamma* (Wiggins, 1964), which is linked to 'agreeableness and traditionalism'. *Damarin and Messick* (1965) outlined that the aforementioned two SDR factors represent (a.) self-deceptive positivity and (b.) impression management. In 1984, and later (1986, 1991, 2002) *Paulhus* established these two factors providing evidence. This is depicted in the Framework shown in Figure 1. This two-factor distinction has clarified many issues in SDR literature

Figure 1. *SDR Framework*
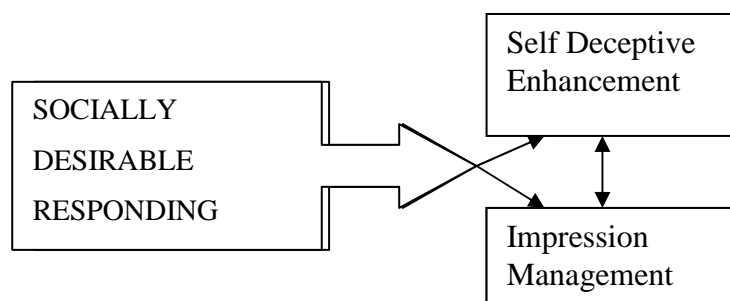
(*Source: Paulhus,1991*)

Self Deceptive Enhancement (SDE)

The term 'self deceptive enhancement' has been derived from the term self-deceptive positivity. This means an honest, but overly positive self-presentation, and is different from lying. It is the tendency to be overly (not unrealistically) positive about self, and the respondent feels same about him (or her) whilst responding. And it does not depict the reality, but aligns more with the self desire or aspirations. Paulhus (1991) has mentioned that the term 'self-deceptive' had been chosen by taking into consideration the verifiable distortion by high scorers on self-reported forms. On the face of it, this seems a relatively harmless term, but it spoils the results, without the knowledge of the respondent. There are many empirical findings to suggest that self deceptive enhancement seems to be intrinsically linked to personality constructs.

Impression Management (IM)

The term 'impression management' means a self-made (kind of) presentation to impress an audience (people around). It is a more conscious, and deliberate effort, in comparison to the self-deceptive positivity that we discussed above. This term has been chosen to depict the other branch (view) of SDR along with self deceptive enhancement. Crowne (1979) has elaborated as follows: "*The label 'impression management' is preferable to 'lying', which is an overly harsh and sweeping indictment. After all, such individuals may misrepresent themselves only to avoid social disapproval*". Paulhus (1991) further stated this tendency (impression management) could vary according to the situational contexts, and the existing motives (of the situation). And that the resulting variation is likely to obscure the validity of the respondent's self-reports. In a study conducted by *Jayawardena and Gregar* (2012) regarding the IM and Study Process of High School students, they were of the opinion that the absence of any established construct between the Study Process, and IM of respondents, does not warrant detailed analysis in the study.

Managing SDR

Research has established that the two branches of SDR, viz: self-deceptive positivity, and impression management needs to be handled subtly and warrants discrimination in treating these two factors distinctly between each other. However, the same does not apply to impression management. For example, researches reveal that chronic impression managers are faking high their situations. In practice, control measures are essential, under situational circumstances. Paulhus (1991) has defined these circumstances as "*when impression management is conceptually independent of the trait being assessed, but still contributes to the self-report scores of that trait*".

Methods that have been suggested to manage SDR are many and varied. Paulhus (1991) has mentioned of four types of methods, which are distinguishable in managing SDR. They are: Rational method, Factor Analytic method, Covariate method, and Demand reduction method. A.) Rational techniques are control features that have been purposely embedded into the self-report questionnaire. That is using carefully drafted statements, which have a higher relative influence of content over social desirability component (Jackson, 1967). B.) Factor analytical techniques are applied when the test construction procedure involves prioritizing the loading items

to mitigate the SDR impact in factors. C.) Covariate method involves inserting a SDR measure along with content measures and then partial out SDR of content correlations. Herein the SDR measure should be aligned (constitute) with the research construct. D.) Demand reduction methods include methods which are employed to mitigate the situational demands for desirable responding. One of the proven methods employed is establishing the anonymity of the respondents. Randomized Response Method (Greenberg, Abdulla, Simmons & Horvitz, 1969; Warner, 1965) is a technique employed to negate SDR in face-to-face interviews. Here the sensitive (high SDR) question is posed along with a less sensitive question. Another method used to overcome the weaknesses of self-report is the situational judgment test paradigm. There respondents are asked to make a series of judgments before responding to a situation. However, situational judgment tests having typical-performance instructions could also be prone to an amount of response distortion (Nguyen, Biderman & McDaniel, 2005).

Scope of the Study

Measurement is the language that can be effectively used to describe a phenomenon. We cannot manage something without describing it. There are many instruments used to measure SDR. The overall objective of the study was to examine the Impression Management of High School students. Specific objectives of the study were to assess and compare the IM of different Cultures (i.e. Czech and Sri Lankan), and Genders (i.e. Boys, and Girls). The conceptual framework of the study is depicted in Figure 2. Authors have employed the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (BIDR) for a survey to explicitly demonstrate the possible impact of SDR in research. BIDR was preferred for its' simplicity, and merit among the available instruments.

Figure 2. *Conceptual Framework of Study*
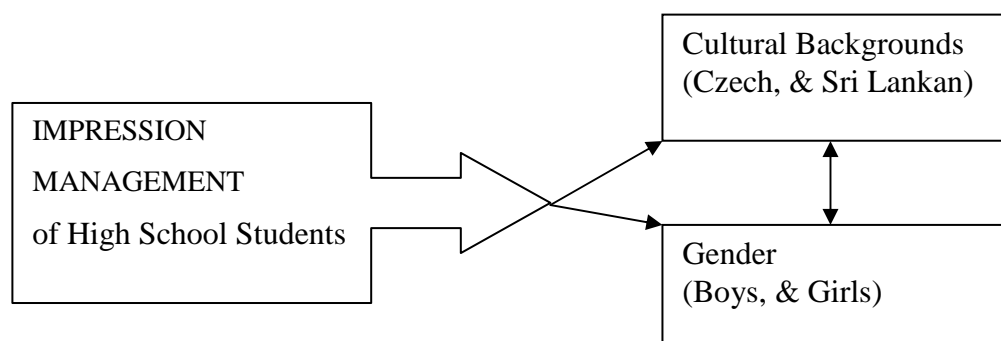
(*Source: Authors' Impression*)

Methodology
Operationalisation of the Research

Study focused on measuring the IM among high school students. Two comparative studies were conducted among 180 high school students, aged 18 to 19, (103 boys, and 77 girls) randomly selected from high schools in Czech Republic (CR), and Sri Lanka (SL). One hundred and fifteen High Schools students (63 boys, and 52 girls) were selected from three schools in Zlin, Czech Republic, viz: Tomas Bata Business Academy and Higher School of Economics Zlin, Commercial and Technical High School, and Polytechnic High School (Training Centre - Zlin). Sixty Five High School students (40 boys, and 25 girls) were selected from two Schools in Galle and Gampaha in Sri Lanka (viz. Sacred Heart Convent Galle, and Bandaranayake Vidyalaya, Gampaha) for the study. They were visited in schools, and were given instructions in small groups. Data collection was conducted using a paper based questionnaire, which was in Czech, and Sinhala languages respectively. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. First part of the questionnaire focused on academic progress in school life and the twenty statements related to IM measurement (of the BIDR instrument) was included to the second part of the questionnaire. These twenty statements were translated into Czech, and Sinhala languages, and modifications were conducted after pre-testing to improve understanding of the respondents. Appropriateness of the events captured in these statements was also improved. Students privacy was assured by not having any of the school staff members inside the room. They were handed over the questionnaires, for self responses, on the basis of anonymity. Students were briefed about the purpose of research. They were not specifically mentioned about SDR measurement factor (IM) included at the second part of the questionnaire to avoid sensitivity, and bias to their natural responses. Two members of the research team (who were native language speakers) were available for clarifications and students were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. Anonymity in responding has seemingly facilitated the responding process, and students were thanked for their cooperation.

Features of BIRD

Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (Paulhus,1988, 1991, 2002): This instrument contains separate measures for the two SDR factors, viz: self-deceptive enhancement, and impression management. This scale has forty statements, twenty each for measuring SDE, and IM. The normative data helps to discriminate honest responses from fake ones. BIRD has forty simple statements to test the two SDR factors. These statements are largely based on everyday events and tests the responses of the participants. First twenty statements are designed to measure the SDE factor of respondents. The next twenty statements (21-40) intend to measure the IM factor of respondents. There is a scoring key and according to that the maximum score for each SDR factor is 20, and the minimum is 0 (Paulhus, 1988). In his 2008 February update (unpublished) Paulhus records the reliability figures (Alpha values) for SDE in the range of 0.67 to 0.77, and for IM 0.77 to 0.85. These signify improved reliabilities among established SDR constructs. The normative means and standard deviations under two scale formats and two instructional sets have also been provided to compare with. Here, It is note-worthy that BIDR not only serves an opportunity to capture 'fake good' instances, but also to develop a feel for possibilities of 'faking bad', if any.

Results and discussion

Respondents were 180 high school students, who were in the third year of study. Their ages ranged from 18 years, to 19 years. Table 01 depicts the scores recorded by the respondents for IM by using the BIDR 7-point scale.

Table 1. *IM scores of respondents based on BIDR*

Parameter	CR Boys (63)	SL Boys (40)	CR Girls (52)	SL Girls (25)
Mean (M)	4.78	7.39	6.25	8.73
Std. Deviation	2.76	2.43	2.60	3.01
Skewness	0.85	1.30	0.15	0.04
Kurtosis	1.17	2.81	-0.87	-0.17

(*Source: Authors' Survey Data of High School Students*)

Impression Management by Culture

Czech high school students recorded a Mean (M) value of 5.44, with a Standard Deviation (SD) value of 2.77. The M, and SD values recorded by the Sri Lankan High School students were 8.01, and 2.68 respectively. The significant deviation between the M values of IM of Czech and Sri Lankan students indicates the cultural impact. The M value recorded by the SL students was far above the normative M, and SD scores of 4.9, and 3.2 for honest responding. However, the M value was below the normative M (10.9) for deliberate IM. It seems that the Sri Lankan high school students had been more sensitive of their self status, and have tried to paint a more favourable picture of themselves to the society, compared with the Czech students.

Impression Management by Gender

Sri Lankan high school girls recorded the highest Mean (M) value of 8.73, and a Standard Deviation (SD) of 3.01. Czech boys have recorded M and SD scores of 4.78 and 2.76 respectively. These values were very close to the normative M, and SD scores of 4.3, and 3.1 for honest responding. Sri Lankan boys have recorded M, and SD values of 7.39, and 2.43 for IM, indicating an upward deviation from honest responding. Czech girls have recorded M, and SD values of 6.25, and 2.60 respectively. High school girls and boys have shown differences in managing impressions, to depict a better self status to the outside. Czech boys have responded honestly, whilst the Sri Lankan boys had made an effort to manage the impressions. Both Czech and Sri Lankan high school girls had managed impressions. The range values of 11.00, and 14.00, recorded by the Czech high school girls and boys respectively, were notable in the context of their M values for IM.

Conclusions

Study revealed that high school students have a tendency to manage their impressions even when they were assured of anonymity, and confidentiality of responses. The Mean values of IM by Czech and Sri Lankan high school students contrasted significantly. As per the normative sample of BIDR, SL students have managed (faked) their impressions significantly. Czech students (especially boys) have responded honestly, whilst Czech girls have also managed the impressions. Difference between the IM levels of the adolescents of the two nationalities (in context) suggests the cultural impact. Though Czech boys recorded closer figures to normative values, Czech girls had deviated with an upward trend. This suggests that high school girls are more sensitive of their impression in the eyes of outsiders. A similar difference was evident between the Sri Lankan high school boys and girls. This could also be related to differences in personality characteristics of high school girls and boys. However, the relatively higher values for other descriptive statistics (e.g. Range, Skewness, Kurtosis etc.) emphasize the need for a larger sample study. Study has reaffirmed the significance of the IM impact, even under highly controlled conditions. This is a challenge faced by the researchers, and policy makers alike. Employment of SDR instruments to negate the impact has to be conducted meticulously, and diligently.

Further research

This study focused on providing empirical evidences to the discussion on SDR, and was limited only to a single SDR factor, namely the impression management. It will be useful to test both SDR factors with a larger number of respondents. The study only focused on high school students, and it will be insightful to focus on different demographic and socio-cultural groups across regions. Conducting similar studies amongst different nationalities and comparing the results will enrich the findings with insights.

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