

The Effects of Facial Beauty in Personnel Selection: A Field Work in Retail Sector

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Abstract:

The perception of facial beauty and how it affects personnel selection by recruiters has long been debated by psychologists, anthropologists and even human resource management and development specialists. In this research, a field work in the retail sector was carried out to determine whether or not facial beauty has any effects in personnel selection. This research is a combination of an astute literature review and surveys. In the survey, 50 photographs of both hired and unhired people were rated by 50 students of psychology, business law, accounting and finance as well as Post Graduate Diploma in Management students. The other was a field work in the retail sector where employers were interviewed using a semi-structured interview format. The evaluation comprised of a Likert type scale of 5 (with 5=very attractive, 4=attractive, 3=normal, 2=unattractive and 1=very unattractive). Following the evaluation, preferred photographs and employed staff were compared for a trend in the selections. Based on the result of this research, there is a significant, meaningful relationship between the hired personnel and facial beauty. Thus, facial beauty is of importance in personnel selection in the retail sector.

Keywords: Beauty, facial beauty, personnel selection.

1. Introduction and Background of the Study:

In their 2004 article “Why beautiful people are more intelligent,” Satoshi and Jody referenced this 1983 article “Beauty as Status,” by Webster and Driskell where they argued that “physical attractiveness is a diffuse status characteristic, which affects others’ perceptions of competence. Their experiment demonstrates that subjects perceive attractive others to be not only more intelligent and competent in general, but also more competent in such a seemingly unrelated and specific task as piloting a plane.” For Nese and Betul (2013), they see beauty as a feature that has the feeling of a perceptual pleasure on human, concrete or abstract objects. This is seen to be often examined as a major part of aesthetics and also in the fields of psychology, sociology and more so from cultural dimensions.

For a very long time now, it has always been believed that the concept of facial beauty is strongly variable and subjective to the many cultures, races and the different eras of the people. Conversely, the psychological and medical sciences have asserted that there is a timeless, aesthetic facial beauty based on numerous facial proportions. Again, this concept of ‘beautiful face’ as recent scientific studies have revealed showed that it is not learned but seem more to be more “hard wired” into our minds instantly from birth (Hatice and Massimo, 2006; Larrabee, 1997; Yellin, 1997). Similarly, investigations cross culturally on facial beauty showed that there are different perceptions of facial beauty by different groups and that a universal concept of this facial beauty may only be defined throughout the different cultures, races and eras of the world (BBC Science, 2002; Chen et al., 1997; Jefferson, 2004).

Although there are many definitions of facial beauty as seen above, without doubt, one said or perceived to be facially beautiful may be described with some inner beauties like the person’s personality, elegance, smiles, composure, intelligence and charm, even before the outer beauties such as youthfulness and physical statue or health, etc. Nevertheless, it is unarguable that the outer beauty is what is first noticed at the very first glimpse before any inner beauties (Nese and Betul, 2013). Adding to that, the common saying that beauty is in the eyes of the beholder is another factor why one cannot quickly jump into giving the term beauty a specific definition. As earlier studies have shown, beauty or attractiveness is more of a feeling, experienced by an individual and is hardly ever quantified, qualified and or justified by the individual in such a situation. Thus the reason why some say that, as much as love is a feeling experienced by a particular individual, so is beauty, and generalizing this is not a thing feasible for anyone to do.

2. Review of Relevant Literature:

2.1 Facial Beauty:

Kniffin, et al., in their article “beauty is in the in-group of the beholder: Intergroup differences in the perceived attractiveness of leaders” asserted that, “physical attractiveness is most commonly presumed to be an exogenous characteristics that influences people’s feelings, perceptions, and behavior across a myriad types of relationships.” With this assertion, one can almost categorically say that facial beauty is indeed a great influence in personnel selection, more so because it guides how you feel, perceive and behave towards the candidate. Another related work shows that even at CEO’s level, facial attractiveness is keenly related to shareholder value. The results obtained by the researchers showed that the CEOs with better looking facial appearances got better returns almost all of the times around their job announcements than those with lesser facial beauty and had higher acquirer returns when they move to acquire other businesses or segments (Halford and Hung-Chia, 2014).

It is a well known maxim that better looking people are most of the times better off. Regardless of age in all walks of life, more attractive people happen to be, more often than not, judged more favorably than less attractive people and are mostly treated better. To this end, even mothers are seen to give more attention and display more affection to attractive babies. This does not end there; teachers equally favor their more

attractive students and judge them to be smarter than their less attractive folks. This is the same with jobs/works; more attractive adults happen to get paid more for their works and not just that, they are at the same time known to have better successes in dating and mating the opposite sex. This also extends to the court rooms where juries and judges tend to find attractive people less likely to be guilty for crimes or offences brought to their court rooms and dish out lighter sentences or punishments when they do, if at all (Shannon, and Starck, 2003).

The brain is such a great tool in detecting which face is beautiful and which is not. In fact, recent researches have shown that an individual's brain can actually judge the appeal of a face the eyes see before the one seeing it is even aware of it. The experimental research by Olson & Marshuetz, (2005), proved that, at the times participants were shown both attractive and unattractive faces, in just a time frame of about 13 milliseconds, each participant was able to judge the faces' attractiveness level accurately (that is, in accordance to the given ratings of the experimenters), though there were indications that they looked unconscious and unaware of the stimuli, acting like they just guessed their ways through. Biologically, a beautiful face is found out to be more likely encoded into individuals. A study on infants accurately supported this assertion. The numerous studies proposed that infants tend to look much longer at attractive faces in a week time after being born. These effects of attractiveness on the ways infants gaze at beautiful faces is generalized across all genders and races and at the age of just 6 months as clearly depicted by Chatterjee and Thomas, (2009), Langlois, Roggman and Musselman, (1994).

Concluding on this and from other numerous researches, the tendency on engaging one at looking at attractive faces is seen to be innately present in the minds of humans as against being a thing learned. Therefore, from experiments, judgments on beauty are more likely to be universal rather than a thing formed and directed by cultural factors as some see and argue it. Though, Chatterjee and Thomas (2009) still argue that cultural factors cannot be entirely eliminated in this regard as they have some forms of implicit effects to a certain degree, this research also supports their argument. Several researches carried out portend that, although many are likely going to ignore the fact that cultural factors do play some roles in the perception of beauty, the anthropologists, psychologists and the human research management and development specialists cannot ignore it as a fundamental factor that determines how one perceives others' beauty.

2.2 The Effects of Facial Beauty in Personnel Selection:

Previous researches have indicated variedly, the significance of facial beauty in personnel selection, particularly in the retail sector. In justifying and clearly supporting the assertion, Nese and Betul, (2013) found out that two out of every three of the members of American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery have shown that both the men and women would prefer undergoing a cosmetic surgery for competition in order to stand out and get employed over others. This preference stems from the fact that some competitors in the market feel less attractive about themselves in comparison to their peers. Leveraging on the advancement in science and technology, they rather go through the plastic surgery to enable them stand out in the competition and possibly, enable them land their dream jobs much faster and quicker than they would have without it. The cosmetic surgery is now seen as a tool for competition by many.

Similarly, it has been found out that beauty is explicitly relative, more strongly so to halo effect. A powerful halo effect has been provided in this research and supported by previous researches as well. By the same token, the common saying that 'what is beautiful is good' bias is equally strongly supported by Chiu and Babcock, (2002) where they added that beauty bias is a norm in every culture, race and era. Trying to eliminate or ignore it is like committing a spiritual crime which no one can afford to deal with. All things being equal, resulting from the strong wielding influence of halo effect, the more attractive applicants are naturally assumed to be more skilled and talented and are given more favorable judgments than the less attractive applicants for the same job regardless of experience and education as is seen in some cases.

Adding to that, even in terms of making referrals, a less attractive individual might experience the bias of being less preferred to be referred to a more attractive individual. These more attractive applicants are predicted, strongly and subconsciously, to be more accomplished, much more qualified, honest and intelligent and are almost normally seen to be more compensated than their less attractive colleagues at the same levels as Bashour, (2006) mentioned.

An instance was given by Rhodes, (2006), where he said, naturally we tend to like attractive people and more so adapt to them easily, this is not different when employers seek to employ sales people in their businesses. He added that sales people are selected more from attractive applicants than the less attractive ones. Moreover, as a result of recruiters' perception of an applicants' appearance, some of the selection criteria set out for the job such as the required skills, related work experiences, and grades earned from administered examinations tend to be overlooked or manipulated in some ways as Chiu and Babcock, (2002) explicitly highlighted in their paper. This is to say that, the selection process set aside is altered on the basis of how one appears to be perceived by his recruiters. So, the less attractive one is perceived to be, the less likely it is that s/he is going to make it to the job offer and vice versa.

3.0 Methodology:

As employed by many researchers in this field, an astute review of literature was carried out and complemented by survey through administration of questionnaires to students for their responses. The objective was to find out and analyze how important facial beauty is in the recruitment processes by employers in the retail sector. The research scope covered sales persons in the retail sector (Yola/Nigeria). The studied sample here was drawn from different retail outlets within the locality (the blue collar employees). For the questionnaire, 50 different photographs of both employed and unemployed persons were randomly chosen for use. Rated by 50 students comprising students enrolled in psychology, finance, business law, Natural and Environmental Science, human resources management as well as students enrolled in the post graduate diploma in management (PGDM) courses. Rating was done solely in terms of how attractive the respondents perceived the photographs to be. The rating consisted of a Likert type scale of 5 where 5=very attractive, 4=attractive, 3= normal, 2 = unattractive and 1= very unattractive. Justification for the choice of the Likert type scale was based on what the original researchers adopted and used and was found to be prevalently used in this field. At the end of the evaluation, most preferred photographs were compared to those of employed staff. Finally, an SPSS package was used to determine the correlation of collected and collated data from respondents for accuracy and significance. In ascertaining the reliability of the scale used, a Chi-square and Mann Whitney U tests were also carried out.

4.0 Findings:

The study investigated, through field work and found out that 74.6% of applicants in the retail sector are men while the other 25.4% are women. Exactly 36.0% of the applicants are between the ages 18-25, 50.2% between 26-35 years old, 8.5% between 36-45 and only 5.3% are between 46-55 years of age. These results showed no significant difference from the actual numbers of those employed in this sector.

Again, from the field work, it was also found out that 17.7% of the applicants hold a primary school certificate where 64.0% are graduates of secondary school and 18.4% are university graduates. As regards the working experiences, employers in this sector were found to value experiences much more than anything else as it is the key driver to the successes of their businesses. This revealed that 13.8% of applicants only, have less than one year of working experience in the same kind of job they are applying for, while 47.0% of them have between 1-5 years working experience in the same industry, 31.1% have between 6-10 years, 6.45% have 11-20 years and at least 1.8% of the entire applicants have more than 20 years of working experience in the same industry and job.

An interesting revelation was the fact that, for many of the employed, only a few of them are required to send in formal applications. And in most cases, those asked to send in these formal applications are those that have no connections or are totally unfamiliar to the owners of the businesses. Most of these businesses were found not to be duly registered by the government for tax purposes thus the reason for not having a formal way of recruiting. This happens as a result of the nature of the jobs being done by the blue-collar workers as expounded by more than 65.7% of the employers. The other 34.3% claimed otherwise. Employers tend to employ staff for these jobs mostly based on familiarity, referral or observed and/or noticed experiences and not necessarily based on any pre examined application sent in. 81.6% of the applicants that eventually end up getting employed have only the primary and secondary school certificates combined. Since the blue-collar jobs are often seen as the dirty jobs or a man's job, very few women tend to apply to these jobs and not for positions that involved being in the field. This field work exposed the fact that 97% of the women in these jobs actually work as secretaries, lawyers, accountants or bookkeepers and/or the face of the company as customer relations personnel while the remaining 3% are women that are willing, interested and actually do work in the field in the same jobs as the men.

For most of these businesses, the individuals evaluating any applications or the applicants physically, as the case may be, are usually the direct owners of the businesses and not human resource or recruitment specialists. More often than not, the evaluators happen to be the older individuals working in these businesses and in most cases, own the businesses. Though, it was found out that their secretaries or lawyers who are mostly the females do play a vital role in the process. Again, it was clear that the business owners preferred women to be their secretaries because they believe them to be more organized and better bookkeepers than the men and more so, because they want them to be able to accompany them when they go seeking for jobs or selling their products and services, to be the face of the company and possibly, wield in their influences as beautiful women.

In determining the different perceptions of facial beauty for the photos used, a Likert-type scale was used. For the evaluation, a scale between 1-5 was used where 5= very attractive, 4= attractive, 3= normal, 2= unattractive and 1= very unattractive. The photos of the men and women were sorted in a decreasing order of perceived facial beauty and the averages were calculated for further analysis.

In ascertaining the reliability of the scale used, a Chi-square and Mann Whitney U tests were done. The evaluation again used the Chi square analysis to determine whether or not there is a relationship between their recruitment process to the gender of the highest rated man and woman of all 50 photographs and got a $p < 0.05$ level of significance.

In using the other test Mann Whitney U test, the aim was to check whether there was a statistically significant difference in terms of two dimensions of the mass distribution center location taken from the random sample.

H_0 : The location of two mass distribution centers is the same.

H_1 : The location of two mass distribution centers is different.

$P < 0.05$ H_0 refusal.

$P > 0.05$ H_0 cannot be refused.

The Chi square analysis report showed a relationship between the recruitment process of the male candidates and that of the females.

In accordance with the Mann Whitney U Test which was done to test the actual perception of employers' view on applicants beauty, the result $p < 0.05$ was obtained. The H_1 -was concluded. Simply, the location of

the two mass distribution centers is different. A statistically significant and indeed meaningful difference was found relative to the different perceptions of beauty between the employed persons and the unemployed. Below are other test results, ANOVA descriptive and reliability of the test statistics that all proved same correlation as the Mann Whitney U Test results.

Test Statistics

	Person
Mann-Whitney U	162.000
Wilcoxon W	540.000
Z	-2.892
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.004

Descriptive Statistics:

Ranks

	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Person	Male	27	20.00	540.00
	Female	23	31.96	735.00
	Total	50		

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.930	.929	50

ANOVA with Friedman's Test

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	Friedman's Chi-Square
Between People	522.488	49	10.663	440.624
Between	394.248a	49	8.046	
Within Items				
Residual	1797.892	2401	.749	
Total	2192.140	2450	.895	
Total	2714.628	2499	1.086	

5.0 Conclusion:

From the results of this study, the different selection processes employed by different employers in the retail sector was found out to have a meaningful relationship to the perception of the facial attractiveness of the applicants. For different types of businesses and particularly dependent on the nature of the business, it was realized that the selection processes for males and females differed and in some, either males are preferred to females and vice versa. As a common knowledge and as depicted by previous researches on similar topics as this, particularly, for the white collar employees, beauty has always been a key player in terms of who gets the job and who does not. The quest for this research to investigate whether or not beauty or facial attractiveness is equally important for the blue collar jobs resulted in the findings that although it was expected not to really matter, it proved otherwise and was observed to really matter and showed a statistically significant and meaningful effect.

6.0 Recommendations:

This research was limited to just facial beauty or attractiveness and did not capture the other aspects of beauty. Further research will therefore benefit from expanding the research scope to include other aspects of beauty such as the individual’s personality, elegance, smiles, composure, intelligence and charm. As Chiu and Babcock, (2002) strongly supported the ‘what is beautiful is good’ bias, expanding the scope to not just include facial attractiveness will go a long way in eliminating the bias possibilities.

In the same manner, a study of this over a period of time could be seen to be more meaningful as the world is more dynamic than ever. Focusing on different sectors over a longer period of time will further expand the findings of the research and will reveal more information beyond simple human imaginations. Since the beauty bias is a norm in virtually all cultures, races and eras, the study over time could help to reduce this claim as time passes by and things change gradually. A comparative analysis of observations from different cultures could be made to the furtherance of this research to further elaborate on the findings and possibly have clearer picture as to the beauty bias as to how true that is across all cultures, races and eras.

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