

Proposing Instrument to Measure Impression Management among Flood Victims

Nurul 'Aaina Binti Salleh, Che Su Binti Mustaffa, and Mohd Taib Ariffin

Abstract—As the field of impression management studies matures, the tools used to study and assess its components continue to be refined. Although these researches are appealing, there have been criticism and suggestions for improvement of the current measurements, developed in the Western organizational settings to make them applicable to the collectivist culture society. Therefore, this paper discusses the justifications for developing a new instrument to measure impression management among the flood victims in the Malaysian context by taking into consideration the cultural factor as one of the important dimensions.

Index Terms—Flood victims, impression management, instrument, Malaysian culture.

I. INTRODUCTION

Impression management is the process whereby one seeks to influence the image others have of them [1]. Successful impression management involves monitoring and controlling one's nonverbal behaviors, in line with what is appropriate within a given social environment [2]. In social and organizational settings, individuals try to influence the image others have of them by engaging in a variety of behaviors, consciously or unconsciously [3].

Impression management involves formulating and presenting favorable images of the self to others [4]. It is because the aim of impression management is to influence others' perception of the self.

Although interest in the area of impression management continues to grow, the lack of a measure that is both grounded in theory and well-suited for organizational use has slowed the progress in this area [5]. This occurs especially in the context of organizations that deal with flood management.

Flood is the most severe natural disaster in Malaysia. After the disastrous flood of 1971 which affected many areas in Malaysia, various strategies and measures have been implemented by the government to mitigate flood impacts. However, strategies that address the issues of the psychosocial effects of the flood victims are limited.

Flood, like any disaster, affects people from various psychosocial aspects. Flood survivors reported that flood has changed one's look at the spiritual and political aspects

of life. Flood can change the victims' beliefs about themselves and the meaning of life [6], [7]. Flood has changed one's looks at the spiritual aspect of life [8].

The governments of developing countries are increasingly dependent upon external support to distribute relief and rehabilitation services to flood victims [9]. The flood relief agencies, which include NGOs and donor communities, are important organizations to play their role in mitigating the effects of natural disasters and making government relief distribution more impartial and efficient. In managing floods, relief agencies need to use organizational communication to make their relief more effective for the flood victims.

The literature related to organizational communication has largely taken the Western concepts, such as impression management, self-presentation, achievement motivation, job involvement and job satisfaction and attempted to describe what they might mean in a different cultural context [10]. There has been an implicit assumption that the instillation of such motives is both desirable and possible (Munro, 1986), and this is despite the fact that the comparisons with Western countries suggest fundamental differences which indicate the need for redefinition of some of these concepts [11].

Thus, the goal of this paper has been to identify the current impression management scale and argue for the need to develop a new scale.

II. DEFINITION OF IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

Impression management involves attempts to establish the meaning or purpose of social interactions, guides actions and helps us anticipate what to expect from others [12]. Impression management is a mutual ritual that helps to smooth and control social relations and avoid embarrassment. Even actions that at first glance appear to be meaningless might actually be strategically performed to show the social actors in the best possible light [13]. People are performers who play many different roles to construct their social identities. When these social identities involve information related to the self, the term self-presentation is sometimes also used [14]. Some of these impression management behaviors are consciously controlled while others such as eye contact and posture are often unwittingly expressed. We attempt to control our impression management behaviors because they are a primary means of influencing how other people treat us [13].

The goal of impression management is to manage the impressions of specific targets by manipulating the information available to them on which their impressions are based [15]. Goffman describes the reasons for and the

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consequences of impression management:

When an individual enters the presence of others, they commonly seek to acquire information about him or to bring into play information about him already possessed. They will be interested in his general socio-economic status, his conception of self, his attitude toward them, his competence, his trustworthiness, etc. Although some of these information seem to be sought almost as an end in itself, there are usually quite practical reasons for acquiring it. Information about the individual helps to define the situation, enabling others to know in advance what he will expect of them and what they may expect of him. Informed in these ways, the others will know how best to act in order to call forth a desired response from him. (Goffman, 1959, pp.1)

According to Leary and Kowalski (1990), impression management which is also called self-presentation, refers to the process by which individuals attempt to control the impressions others form of them [4]. It is because impressions people make on others have implications on how others perceive, evaluate and treat them as well as for their own views of themselves, people sometimes behave in ways that will create certain impression management in others' eyes. However, Schlenker (1980) defined impression management as an attempt to control images that are projected in real or imagined social interactions and reserved the term self-presentation for instances in which the projected images are self-relevant [16].

Impression management may take many forms. Jones and Pittman (1982) identified five main categories of impression management behavior: self-promotion, ingratiation, exemplification, intimidation, and supplication. Self-promotion is when individuals point out their abilities or accomplishments in order to be seen as competent by observers; ingratiation is when individuals do favor or use flattery to elicit an attribution of likability from observers; exemplification refers to people self-sacrificing or going beyond the call of duty in order to gain the attribution of dedication from observers; intimidation is when people signal their power or potential to punish in order to be seen as dangerous by observers; and supplication refers to individuals advertising their weakness or shortcoming in order to elicit an attribution of being needy from the observers [4]. All of these categories were then collapsed into a typology of impression management tactics [17].

In flood management, flood relief agencies try to influence the flood victims' perception of a positive image. In this paper, we proposed the need to develop the instrument in measuring the impression management of relief agencies among the flood victims. Although much research has been carried out on impression management in general, the specific impression management of disaster or flood has not been widely explored.

III. CURRENT INSTRUMENTS OF IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

Existing empirical research has typically measured impression management using the current instrument developed by the scholars from this stream area. The approach taken by researchers attempting to measure impression management has generally involved the use of one of the current impression management scales. Although

each of the scales has its advantages, there are some limitations associated with their use [5].

The Self-Monitoring Scale (Snyder, 1974) is the most popular measure of impression management behaviors, focusing on the extent to which individuals differ in their attentiveness and responsiveness to social cues [12]. The focus is on both the choices to engage in impression management and how skilled the person is at it [12]. The 25-item scale measures the extent to which individuals in social situations actively monitor, manage and control their public behaviors and appearances [18], [19]. Although this scale construct helps us to understand a great many organizational phenomena, it also has its weaknesses. The Self-Monitoring Scale was multidimensional and did not assess a single unitary construct [20]. Lennox and Wolfe (1984) developed another scale to assess the ability to modify self-presentation and determine sensitivity to the expressive behavior of others [12].

The Self-Presentation Scale (SPS) is a 60-item scale developed by Roth, Snyder, and Pace (1986), and Roth, Harris, and Snyder (1998). The scale measures the tendency to use either attributive or repudiatory tactics. For each of the items, respondents indicate whether the statements made are true or false regarding themselves [12]. The 30 items to measure attributive is containing unrealistically positive statements because all of the statements are highly unlikely to be true. Another 30 items to measure repudiate describe undesirable characteristics that are likely to be true of almost anyone.

The 24 items of impression management measure developed by Wayne and Ferris (1990) taps the frequency with which individuals engage in supervisor-focused, self-focused and job-focused impression management behavior. The benefits of this scale are that it measures the respondents' self-reported impression management behaviors and is easy to administer, making it amenable for use in organizational setting [4]. Nevertheless, this scale also has its weaknesses. According to Bolino and Turnley (1999), the reliability and discriminant validity of many of the items in the Wayne and Ferris's scale (1990) and the lack of theory provided the basis for this scale [4].

The Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (BIDR) consists of 40 items designed to measure impression management and self-deception. On this scale, self-deception is of particular interest because it is a construct tapping into unconscious thoughts, whereas impression management is a construct referring to conscious ones [21]. The first 20 items measure impression management and the second 20 items measure self-deception. This scale was developed by Paulhus in 1991. The BIDR has recently been revised and its name was changed to the Paulhus Deception Scale (PDS). According to Cervellione, Lee, and Bonanno (2009), this scale may be a better fit for a multidimensional model because very limited research has been conducted regarding the factor structure of the self-deception scale [21].

The Measure of Ingratiation Behaviors in Organizational Settings also known as MIBOS, is also one of the impression management scales. The MIBOS is a measure of the frequency with which ingratiation tactics are used by subordinates in superior-subordinate relationship [22]. The measure can be broken down into four factors representing

the ingratiation tactics of other-enhancement, opinion conformity, self-presentation and favor rendering. This scale contains 24 items developed by Kumar and Beyerlein (1991). The MIBOS focuses on particular impression management tactics rather than the more global concepts of impression management response style or orientation.

The other measure that has commonly been used in impression management is Bolino and Turnley's impression management scale (1999). This scale, containing 22 items to develop a valid and reliable scale in measuring impression management behaviors, began with an assessment of the two available impression management scales predominantly used in the 1990s [22], [23]. Bolino and Turnley (1999) expanded the focus of impression management strategies employed by organizational members to five behavioral tactics: self-promotion, ingratiation, exemplification, intimidation and supplication. The construction of the item version of the impression management scale, employable to examine these five tactics, marked a very important step in the process of assembling a reliable and valid tool to study impression management behaviors in various organizational settings [24].

IV. WHY WE NEED TO DEVELOP A NEW INSTRUMENT

In the case of floods, social psychologists have devoted much research attention to impression management [25]. Although much has been accomplished within this stream of research, only a few studies have empirically examined the relationship between impression management and flood relief organizations especially in disaster management contexts [26].

The current instruments focused on particular impression management rather than the more global concepts of impression management response style or orientation. The other measure that has commonly been used in impression management behavior was developed to address four distinct shortcomings [27].

Ferris *et al.*, (1994) found that the self-focused tactics subscale demonstrated poor reliability and that many of items did show acceptable discriminant validity. The primary focus of the Wayne and Ferris (1990) study was not the development of an impression management measure. Instead, the authors derived the dimension of their scale based on the results of an exploratory factor analysis and consequently, the exact meaning of the dimension is somewhat unclear [4].

Although great care was taken in developing the MIBOS, its most obvious shortcoming is its focus on one's specific form of impression management [12]. Kacmar and Valle (1997) pointed out serious concerns about the validity of the MIBOS and called for additional research to resolve the problems identified in their study [27].

The current scales of impression management focus on impression management at the workplace. Besides that, the weakness of the current instrument and Malaysian culture is also the cause of the importance of a new instrument.

Another important justification for developing a new instrument is culture. Culture is not just a tool for coping, but it is also meant for creating awareness or learning [28]. Most of the studies on culture aimed to discover the

similarities and differences between people from the same or totally different cultural environment.

According to Kamau (2009), the success of a given impression management strategy depends on the cultural environment because particular strategies are appropriate in some cultures but not others [29]. Impression management involves manipulating nonverbal cues such as facial expressions, smiling, eye contact, physical proximity and touching [30]. Montagliani and Giacalone (1998) emphasized the need for both verbal and nonverbal behavioral cues [31]. Different countries have different behaviors due to the influence of their cultural environment.

The existing impression management instruments are based on the Western context. These instruments tend to measure overall impression management behavior. So, because of the totally different cultural environment in the West and Malaysia, we need to develop a new instrument based on the Malaysian context. So far, no study has been conducted for the sole purpose of guiding organizations in Malaysia to gain full advantage of the nation's diverse populations [28].

Malaysians tend to value harmonious relationships, respect for elders and religion [32]. Malaysians who 'act' Western are typically labeled as self-opinionated, egoistic, task-oriented and assertive [33]. According to Hassan Abu Bakar and Che Su Mustaffa (2013), compared to the Westerners, Malaysians are nonconfrontative, indirect, flexible and respectful of the hierarchy [32]. Malaysians are a more collectivist society by nature; there are close ties among individuals and greater tolerance for a variety of opinions [34].

Besides that, Malaysians tend to value modesty and face-saving. Specifically, Malaysians tend to write neither of their successes nor failures, for example, Malaysians would not document successful participative experiences because of the values of modesty; likewise, failures would not be recorded in an attempt to save face, particularly for the managers who were responsible for the failed effort [28].

Hofstede (2003) suggested that the Malaysian organizational culture indicates high scores for power distance and masculinity-femininity dimensions compared to Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States. Additionally, Hofstede also illustrated that Malaysians as a collectivist society in nature, meaning that there are close ties among individuals and a greater tolerance for a variety of opinions [34].

Kennedy (2002) argued that even though Malaysia can be considered as a culture with high power distance, it is balanced with a strong human orientation in superior-subordinate relationships. Furthermore, effective leaders in Malaysian organizations are expected to show compassion while using more of an autocratic rather than a participative style [35].

In terms of ethnic, Malaysia has three main ethnics, which are Malay, Chinese and Indian but every ethnic has its own cultural values. The Malay cultural values tended to focus on displaying proper etiquette [28]. Abdullah (1996) referred to this as *adab*. *Adab* is a 'code of personal conduct, which is expected of an individual in his or her relationship with others and it denotes the individual's responsibility to be

courteous in words, generous in deeds and sincere in actions to all people at all times [33]. The Malays also believe strongly in the concept of a Supreme Being-Allah [28]. To show this commitment, prayers and shared rituals to remember God are practiced daily [27]. According to Tayeb (1997), religion still influences the characteristics of people and institutions.

The Chinese were more concerned with education and success. Being educated is the first step towards achieving success [25]. Their aim to achieve success leads back to providing for their families' needs and being able to gain good social standing and status in the Chinese community [36].

The Indians were also categorized as religious people. Most Indians begin their activities with prayers to deities [36]. They believe that their reincarnation after death depends very much upon their conduct in the present life [37].

In this situation, cultural diversity in Malaysia is different than the Western cultures. In high context cultures such as Malaysia, meaning is often more explicit and less direct than in many Western cultures[34]. This means that words are less important and greater attention must be given to additional forms of communication such as voice tone, body language, eye contact and facial expressions.

V. CONCLUSION

The aims of the study were to thoroughly analyze and understand impression management, current instruments and the importance of a new instrument to measure impression management among the flood victims. The existing impression management instruments are based on the Western context and are not reflective of the Malaysian culture.

Contemporary Malaysia represents a unique fusion of the Malay, Chinese, and Indian traditions, creating a pluralistic and multicultural nation that has its character strongly rooted in social harmony, religion and pride in its ancestral background [34].

For this study, the population of flood victims were Malaysians. So, the items must be instantiated in such a way as to be understandable and meaningful for the population of this study. People of different cultures misunderstand the intentions of those with other heritages and impressions are thereby mismanaged [38].

This paper has discussed the justification for developing a new instrument to measure impression management among flood victims in the Malaysian context by taking into consideration the cultural factor as one of the important dimensions.

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