

Review-Assessing Stereotypes Related to Skin Tone

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ABSTRACT

The following is a review of a research titled 'Assessing Stereotypes related to Skin Tone', published in 2018 [1]. The aim of the review is to understand and critique the research methodology of the above research and to generate latest understanding around the results. The particular research was conducted to explore the differences in perception fair v/s darker skin tone women on various personality characteristics by their male counterparts. The experimental nature of the paper lends uniqueness to the area of research and has important implications within the context of Indian society. The relevance of the research and its results in the current age are discussed further.

Keywords: Perception, Personality, Experimental, Skin-tone, Stereotypes

INTRODUCTION

The research under review aimed to understand the differences in perception fair v/s darker skin tone women on various personality characteristics by their male counterparts in an Indian cultural setting. The paper itself is appropriately able to explain the context of the situation and why the issue is of relevance to the Indian culture and by large, the Asian community. The prevalence of stereotypical attitude towards women with darker skin tone is well captured throughout the paper. The following review will attempt to evaluate two key parts of the paper beginning with the research methodology and moving on to explaining the results and presenting comparison with relevant research studies. The relevance of the topic in the current age is also discussed.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology of the research pertains to the type of design used, the key psychometric properties of the instruments administered and the overall progress of the research. The particular research was carried out with a sample of 126 males in the age range of 18-20 years.

Design of the research

The selection of a research design requires the understanding of many factors [2] correctly point out that the choice of the research design requires consideration of many factors. An important consideration includes the final aim of the research and the awareness of the topic itself. The research under focus uses an experimental design. Upon considering the purpose of the research and keeping in mind the sensitivity of the topic,

the choice of experimental design is well informed. The design allows researchers to remove biases and social conformity that often creep into the responses, especially when the topic in question is socially, politically or religiously relevant. This is in comparison to a questionnaire or off-the-field approach where the researchers would have asked the participants to answer the questionnaire without necessarily the use of photographs of women with varied skin tones, which was used in the experimental design. A limitation in using the questionnaire approach here would have been the degree of variability between people's perception of what they consider darker and fairer skin tone. Additionally, the researchers were further able to observe the knee-jerk reaction of men towards the photographs which would be impossible to note in an off-the-field design. However, no evidence of whether this was observed and utilized to draw conclusions is mentioned in the paper.

Researchers [3] advocate a more field research among other methods. The design certainly allows for higher validity of the results, determination of results with specific conclusions and duplicability of the research in the future. However, a limitation of experimental research remains in its inability to

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explain the 'why' of the situation. This is addressed in the current paper by the researcher's own review of literature. However, a mixed method involving a follow-up interview with the participants would have significantly improved the reliability of the results and generated deeper insights to the study. Another significant limitation is the lack of control over participant's situation/ context or recent experiences that may have impacted their response to the experiment. Again, this could have been addressed by building rapport with the participant before the experiment but no indication of the same has been presented in the paper.

Within the research design, the researchers use the photograph of the same woman, photo shopped to a fair and a darker skin tone. These photographs are shown independently on different occasions to the male participants along with some buffer images to prevent them from noticing that the image is of the same woman. By doing this, the researchers were able to remove the effect of extraneous variable and the resulting error that could have crept in, if the photographs of different women were used for the research purposes. Factors like familiarity of one face over the other, facial features, golden ratio rule etc. were eliminated by being constant. This allowed for isolation of skin tone as a relevant factor and a direct causality could be established between the perception of personality traits and the skin color of the women. This ultimately eliminates the black box surrounding clear establishment of causality in experimental approaches, which is a recurring issue identified in research [4].

The researchers designed their experiment to allow gap between the presentations of photographs of the women to the same participant. The time period between the two testing conditions was three days which prevents the participants from recognizing that it is the same face. Further, the use of buffer images ensure that the participant does not feel 'attacked' or questioned about their perception of skin color differences. If a single image was projected to the participant to be rated on different personality traits, an impact of social desirability and faking of the responses could have contaminated the results.

The instrument

For the purposes of the research, a self-designed tool which laid out ten personality characteristics was used. The participant was then asked to rate the following ten characteristics: Affectionate, intelligence, friendly, assertive, attractive, ambitious, helpful, and confident, on a 10-point Likert scale. It is noted that the explicit nature of human perception is not best captured by a Likert scale with stricter points of differentiation.

The paper mentions the effect of the order of these characteristics and their appearance in the sequence of the tool. This impact has been carefully noted in the discussion of the results and highlights an approach of granular analysis undertaken in this research.

However, the reasons for picking out these very characteristics are not clear. Further, a working definition of each of these characteristics is not provided to the participants which may lead to variability in understanding of these terms.

RESULTS

The results of the research indicate no significant difference in the perception of darker skin and fair skin tone women by men on various personality characteristics. The results essentially highlight that although the Indian cultural context is widely known to hold stereotypical ideas around darker skin women and have shown biasness towards their fairer counterparts, the perception of the other gender towards women on their personality traits is in fact not impacted by their skin tone. The researchers explain the reasons why this sensitivity towards skin tone could have occurred in the sample, highlighting the impact of then-present social events that could have impacted the population's response. While the exact same personality characteristics are not researched together in any other study, various researchers have attempted to understand personality evaluations based on skin tone. Nagar's [5] study methodology and results coincide with those of the present research. Nagar [5] conducted an experimental research, asking participants to rate how strongly they would recommend the girl/boy as potential bride/groom for their children. The image of the same boy/girl was used and their skin tone was manipulated by a computer software. Nagar reports that fair-skinned highly attractive people received higher ratings than dark-skinned highly attractive people. However, ratings received for dark-skinned woman were not significantly lower than the ratings received for dark-skinned man. This study shows that the color of skin has the potential to even overpower traits such as general competency and physical attractiveness in both men and women. However, a vast majority of research before 2018 point out the prevalence of colorism in India [6-10]. It is unfair to assume that this age-old held stereotype was eliminated in a year. The research further presents limited generalizability due to following reasons (a) the skin color spectrum in India is much wider than black or white but encompasses a wider base of skin tones, thus limiting it to Asian countries (b) within India, the skin tone differences are huge in the northern and southern parts of the country, thus not allowing the research to be highly valid in the region other than where it was conducted.

However, the research on skin color and related outcomes remain limited, especially in the Indian context. The current research thus continues to fill a relevant gap in literature on this topic in India. The future directions that the research can take are many, including perception of women of their own, their counterparts and fellow women's personality based on skin tone differences. Further, it will be interesting to undertake a longitudinal approach to studying factors that may have contributed to a shift in these perceptions.

CONCLUSION

The research titled 'Assessing Stereotypes Related to Skin Tone' undertakes an experimental approach to assess whether skin tone affects perception of personality traits of fairer and darker skin toned women by men, in the Indian cultural context. The paper is appropriately able to highlight the relevance of the issue in India, the historical basis of issue and links it to the study of personality. The research uses a sound methodology to generate relevant insights; however, few recommendations have been made to optimize the results if the study is replicated in the future. Overall, the paper is able to add to the literature and generate valuable insights which are relevant in the current times as well.

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