
The use of personal appearance cues to infer sales rep character

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Abstract: One hundred sixty-five respondents with prior home-buying experience evaluated female and male realtor photos on 20 sales representative attributes. Correspondence maps were generated and realtors were located as points in attribute space. Those attributes that most differentiated were 'enthusiastic', 'creative', 'trustworthy', and 'strong', indicating that the perceptual spaces generated for male and female realtors and female and male home buyers were homogeneous. Preference vectors overlaid the perceptual spaces, indicating that youthful appearance and the fashionable dress of female realtors favourably connote enthusiasm, optimism and creativity; that older appearance and the traditional dress of male realtors favourably connote enthusiasm and trustworthiness to male home buyers; and that a more youthful appearance and traditional dress of male realtors favourably connote enthusiasm to female home buyers. Theoretical and managerial implications are provided, and future research directions are discussed.

Keywords: personal appearance; attractiveness; grooming; adornment; personal selling; sales representative effectiveness; correspondence analysis; prefmap; visual perception; visual information processing.

Reference to this paper should be made as follows: Garber Jr., L.L., Honeycutt Jr., E.D. and Dotson, M.J. (XXXX) 'The use of personal appearance cues to infer sales rep character', *Int. J. Management Practice*, Vol. X, No. Y, pp.xxx-xxx.

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This paper is a revised and expanded version of a paper entitled 'The effect of personal appearance on sales representative perception and selection: an experimental study' presented at the 'INFORMS Marketing Science Conference', Atlanta, July 2014.

1 Introduction

We explore the effect of personal appearance on consumer assessments of sales rep character. There is little prior research on the effects of personal appearance, in any context, much less in the context of sales rep appearance. Such a paucity is surprising, since there is a great deal of empirical research on physical attractiveness, a related phenomenon. For example, looking at that part of the literature that addresses the role of attractiveness in a business context, DeShields et al. (1996) found that physical attractiveness encourages message approval; Patzer (1983) reported that physical attractiveness enhances source credibility in a business setting; Leigh and Summers (2001) noted that it facilitates communicability and the appeal of nonverbal cues; Parekh and Kanekar (1994) declared that physical attractiveness heightens perceptions of the quality of the products represented; Reinhard et al. (2006) revealed that physical attractiveness induces more positive attitudes and intentions to purchase; Vilela et al. (2007) discovered that physical attractiveness raises performance ratings; and Ahearne and Gruen (1999), Reingen and Kernan, (1993) and Wright and Lundstron (2004) confirmed that physical attractiveness improves the general perception of salesperson effectiveness.

However, this literature largely confines itself to the empirical demonstration of attractiveness' favourable effect on the assessment of various types of individuals in a host of interpersonal and professional contexts. It does less to examine attractiveness'

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underpinnings, neglecting the question of how assessments of attractiveness are formed. What aspects of personal appearance, or their combination, lead to favourable assessments of attractiveness? This oversight constitutes a crucial gap in the literature for those who seek to design appearance to achieve a favourable response from others, as in the case of sales reps and sales managers, for whom a knowledge of the role that aspects of physical appearance play in how impressions of attractiveness are formed could be valuable.

There are exceptions. A few studies do test the main effects of certain personal appearance aspects on a variety of dependent variables. For example, in research that examined the effects of certain facial features on attractiveness, Kwon (1997) found that androgynous women rate their own facial attractiveness higher than feminine and 'undifferentiated' women, though the ratings of other people's facial attractiveness were not examined. Also, Graham et al. (2010) reported that CEO's who displayed a combination of facial traits that 'lack maturity', a quality the authors and others refer to as 'babyfacedness', (e.g., Zebrowitz et al., 2007), caused subjects to rate 'baby-faced' CEO's as being less competent than those with 'mature' features.

In research that focused on aspects of other broad categories of appearance, grooming and adornment, Shannon and Stark (2003) examined the effect of facial hair on the selection of job applicants, finding that bearded men were selected at lower rates. McKelvie (1997) found that spectacles, an item of adornment that, apart from its ophthalmological function, is often selected to enhance facial attractiveness, caused wearers to be perceived as dull, intelligent, and less attractive. Fabricant and Gould (1993) examined another form of adornment, cosmetics, as a means of manipulating physical features to enhance facial attractiveness. And, lastly, in a third broad category of appearance, grooming, Das and DeLoach (2011) found that incremental additions to the time spent grooming in the morning were positively associated with professional wages. However, these studies are limited in the sense that they are, as stated earlier, main effects models that test rather circumscribed elements in isolation from other such elements.

Such models successfully indicate the significant effect that each appearance aspect tested has on assessments of attractiveness, but they cannot explain attractiveness per se, attractiveness being a global phenomenon that is the product of all appearance aspects presented simultaneously in combination. A comprehensive model incorporating all aspects of appearance is therefore required to tease out which aspects are key to such assessments, and which combinations cue assessments of attractiveness. Such a comprehensive model is proposed and tested herein.

This research constitutes an early step in such an inquiry. We propose to identify those dimensions of personal appearance, including aspects of physical appearance, adornment and grooming, that most affect sales rep assessment and selection, and what each aspect of appearance connotes for sales rep character. Such knowledge would facilitate the ability of the sales rep and the sales manager to design personal appearance to evoke favourable consumer assessments of character. Specifically, we: (1) review the sparse literatures that are pertinent, if tangentially so, on the effects of personal appearance on character assessment; (2) provide a methodology that explores the effects of sales representative appearance on perceptions of sales force efficacy and selection;

(3) present results that show which sales representative appearance types are associated with which sales representative attributes, and which of these are preferred; and (4) discuss theoretical and managerial implications, and future directions.

2 Background

Therefore, the domain of this research is not personal attractiveness per se, as a global construct, but that comprehensive bundle of personal appearance attributes that may be seen to underpin attractiveness, and their relative effect on assessments of sales rep character. Though we find a paucity of literature that directly antecedes this research, we do find two literatures that impact it at least peripherally. They are: (1) a literature within the personality and social psychology area that specifically tests the effect of facial expression on assessments of personality; and (2) a large practitioner literature consisting of how-to books and in-house appearance guidelines that mainly provide rules governing aspects of grooming and adornment, to aid the individual in obtaining some normative, usually referred to as ‘proper’, appearance in some particular social or professional context.

2.1 The effect of facial expression

In the areas of personality and social psychology, according to Petrican et al. (2014, p.260), there is “a growing body of literature [in the personality and social psychology area]...attesting to the importance of physical, mainly facial, appearance in driving perceivers’ evaluation of strangers”. For example, Oosterhof and Todorov (2008) used a computer-based model of face evaluation to generate a range of facial expressions (Oosterhof and Todorov, 2009) to find that trustworthiness and dominance were primary dimensions in predicting favourable evaluations of the personalities of individuals represented by their photographs.

Methodologically and analytically, this research is more antecedent to our research than the other literatures reviewed, in the sense that it is not testing a relationship between an aspect of personal appearance (facial expression) and personality, or character, as do we, in the context of sales rep appearance. However, these results are also limited, in the sense that it tests only one aspect of personal appearance, facial expression, while our purpose in understanding sales rep appearance requires a comprehensive model testing all aspects of appearance simultaneously, nor is facial expression tested in the context of sales rep appearance and assessment by clients.

2.2 The effect of grooming and adornment

The majority of the extant literature concerning sales rep appearance appears in the form of how-to’s and in-house dress codes. For example, Publisher’s Edge (2014) declares that “Your Appearance DOES Make a Difference” and focuses on hair and shoes. Concerning the latter, tips include: men’s hair should be medium to short. Women’s hair is best kept short to shoulder length. Women’s hair that is ‘long and flyaway’ gets in the way and distracts the customer, and style and colour should not be ‘too weird’. Hair spray is appropriate if you are outside. Beards and moustaches are objectionable ‘on both men and women’. ‘Shoes should always be polished’.

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Kasy Jones (2014), for eHow, offers tips about wardrobe, grooming, and accessories. Concerning wardrobe, a man should wear a suit or, less formally, a nice pair of slacks, dress shirt, and polished shoes. Women should wear either a suit, dress, or a skirt and blouse. The skirt should hit just below the knee. Blue is a good colour choice for men and women, as it gives a sense of authority and trustworthiness. Clothing should be pressed and without wrinkles and should fit properly without being too suggestive. Concerning grooming, sales representatives should always be 'fastidious'. Men should be clean shaven or have a trimmed beard. Keeping healthy looking hair shows that you care about your appearance and gives potential customers a sense of your demeanour. Clothes should be clean and pressed, free from hair and lint. Shirts should be tucked in, and shoes should be polished and clean. Refrain from strong smelling cologne, perfume, or aftershave. Concerning accessories, jewellery may include a wristwatch and wedding ring for a man, and a wristwatch, wedding ring and small earrings for a woman. 'Too much jewellery can look tacky and distract customers from the sale'. 'Any facial piercing should be removed before coming to work'.

With respect to in-house dress code, Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals Field Sales Guidelines for Dress and Appearance (2014) offers detailed lists of what clothing is and is not acceptable at each of three levels ranging from the formal to the casual, for both female and male employees, which are rather conventional. The lists are then supplemented by a more succinct list of what items are unacceptable at any level, these being spandex, bare feet, sexually provocative clothing, clothing of any kind that promotes competitor products, hats in the office environment, clothing with profanity, nude or semi-nude pictures, clothing with sexually or racially suggestive slogans, cartoons or drawings, an observable lack of undergarments or exposed undergarments, stilettos, and bare midriff shirts or tops.

Some prescriptives are far less detailed, but no less arbitrary. For example, Nick Moreno, author of *101 Ways to Be a Better Sales Rep in a Changing Economy* (2014), advises that "Salespeople should dress in the image of their prospect's most trusted advisor".

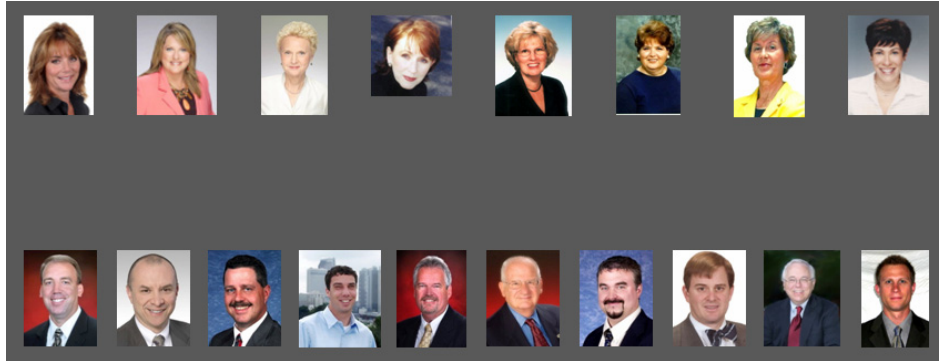
There are numerous other sources that can be cited, but we believe that these provide the flavour of all of them. There are limitations to this literature in that the guidelines cited in them are atheoretical, constitute rules of thumb not scientifically tested, the rules themselves are in many cases industry specific, and not generalisable, and therefore cannot in themselves contribute to a general theory of personal appearance.

3 Empirical method

3.1 Stimulus selection

The selected photos of sales representatives used for this research were taken from Garber et al. (2013) and shown in Figure 1. The photos were selected from realtor websites, and in the public domain, having been determined by an independent set of three judges familiar with home purchases and dealings with realtors, to collectively represent a full range of personal appearance types seen on those web sites generally.

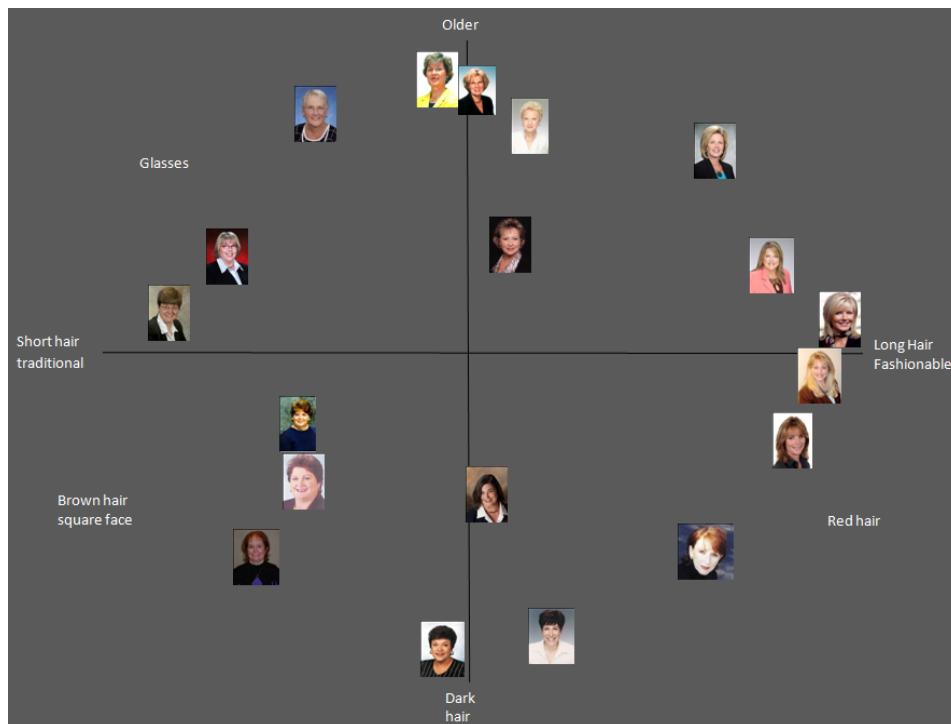
Figure 1 Female sales representative stimuli selected to represent a full range of those dimensions that differentiate by appearance



Source: From Garber et al. (2013)

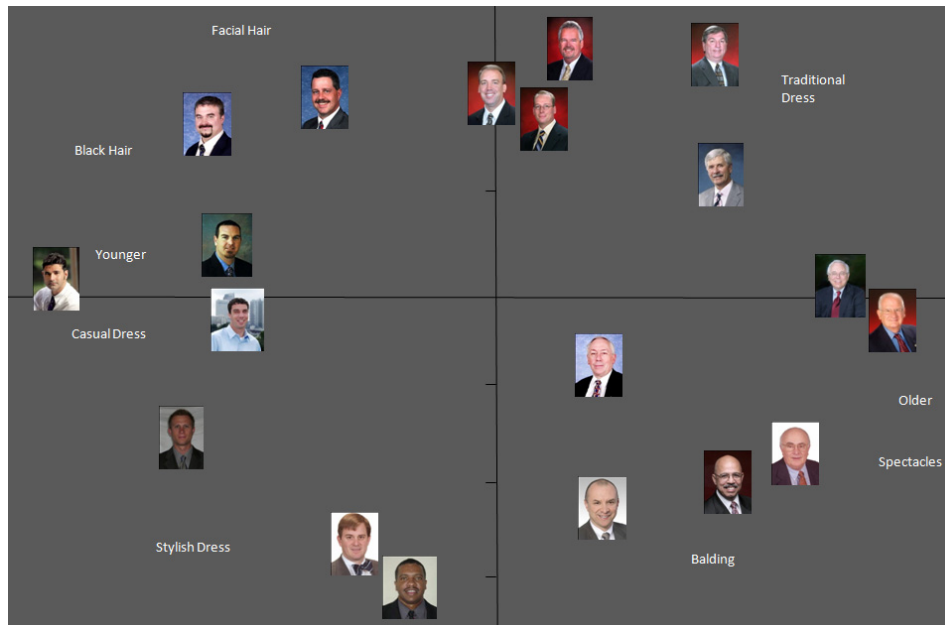
Those aspects that most differentiate between women realtors are hair length, mode of dress, apparent age, and hair colour, in that order. Those aspects that most differentiate between male realtors are apparent age, hair colour, and mode of dress. Other visual elements playing lesser differentiating roles are eyeglasses and, for men, facial hair (Garber et al., 2013).

Figure 2 Perceived similarity of female realtors



Source: From Garber et al. (2013)

Figure 3 Perceived similarity of male realtors



Source: From Garber et al. (2013)

3.2 Dimensions of sales representative efficacy

Sales representative efficacy is a complex multidimensional construct (Jolson and Comer, 1997). Client attitude toward a representative may be formed according to how the client rates the sales rep on each of these individual character dimensions, or traits. Thereby, a sales rep character profile may be derived. But, for that profile to be unbiased, a complete bundle of all those sale rep traits that matter to the client when evaluating and selecting sales reps must be included. In the literature we came across several sales articles that propose such bundles, shown in Table 1. Noting that they were not identical, we combined the unique attributes found therein to compile the master list of 20 sale rep character trait utilised in this study, and shown in Table 2.

In a commercial frame, studies document the effect of physical attractiveness on the outcomes of spokespersons and, most pertinent to this research, sales representatives. With respect to spokespersons, physical attractiveness enhances the credibility of spokespersons or models in advertising (Baker and Churchill, 1977) and the favourability of the products they endorse (Chawla et al., 1994). In regard to sales representatives, the subject of this study, physical attractiveness encourages message approval (DeShields et al., 1996), enhances source credibility in a business setting (Patzer, 1983), facilitates communicability and the appeal of nonverbal cues (Leigh and Summers 2002), heightens perceptions of the quality of the products represented (Parekh and Kanekar, 1994), induces more positive attitudes and intentions to purchase (Reinhard et al., 2006), raises performance ratings (Vilela et al., 2007), and improves the general perception of salesperson effectiveness (Wright and Lundstrom, 2004; Ahearne and Gruen, 1999; Reingen and Kernan, 1993).

Table 1 Prior research listing salesperson traits

	<i>Furell (2003)</i>	<i>Johnson et al. (2006)</i>	<i>Johnson and Comer (1997)</i>	<i>Karr (2001)</i>	<i>Lill (2002)</i>	<i>Mauney and Reece (2000)</i>	<i>Moine and Friedenreich (1984)</i>	<i>Rasmussen (1999)</i>	<i>Swan et al. (1985)</i>
Optimistic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enthusiastic • Ambitious • Persuasive • Sociable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enthusiastic • Ambitious • Persuasive • Sociable 	<p><i>Instrumental Traits:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defends own beliefs • Independent • Assertive • Strong personality • Forceful • A leader • Risk taker • Dominant • Takes a stand • Aggressive <p><i>Expressive Traits:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affectionate • Sympathetic • Understanding • Eager to soothe hurt feelings • Loves people • Gentle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purposeful • Able • Handles rejection • Has self-esteem • Enthusiastic • Accountable • Hard worker • Ethical • Has integrity • Proactive • Stays in balance • Thinks out of the box 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enthusiastic • Empathetic • Asks questions • Resourceful • Takes initiative • Perseveres 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethical • Informative • Ethical • Has product knowledge • Positive • Problem solver 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extroverted • A leader • Accepts others • Tolerates stress • High energy • Has a sense of well-being • Moderately competitive • Reserved • Has self-esteem • Optimistic • Candid • Honest • Guarded 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong ego • Sense of urgency • Ego driven • Assertive • Risk taker • Sociable • An abstract reasoner • Healthfully sceptical • Creative • Empathetic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trustworthy • Honest • Establishes common ground with client

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Table 2 The 20 sales representative attitudinal statements used in subsequent analyses

Is Purposeful	Is Honest
Is Strong	Is Trustworthy
Is a Problem Solver	Has Integrity
Perseveres	Is Ethical
Is Resourceful	Is Empathetic
Takes Initiative	Handles Rejection Well
Is a Hard Worker	Understands My Needs
Is Proactive	Is Enthusiastic
Is Steady	Is Optimistic
Asks Questions	Is Creative

3.3 Subjects and experimental procedure

Employing empirical means to solicit how prospective home buyers utilise realtor appearance to assess them as prospective representatives, 165 individuals who have prior dealings with house buying and realtors (91 women, 74 men, 35% of whom were less than 35 years of age, 42% of whom were between the ages of 35 and 54, and 23% of whom were 55 or older) were solicited online from the local community, paid five dollars for their participation, and entered into a lottery with two \$100 prizes to complete the survey in eight parts. The questions in Parts A and B served as priming questions by asking respondents to recall their last prior realtor.

Parts C and D concern the eight female sales rep stimuli, whose collective appearance, represents the range of key visual aspects that most differentiate sales representatives by appearance. In Part C, respondents were asked to indicate which of the twenty sales representative attributes characterised each of the realtors (the eight women and ten men, respectively). They were instructed to base their evaluations solely on realtor appearance, though in fact they could do nothing else: respondents had no information about each of the realtors beyond appearance in the photos provided to them. In Part D, respondents were asked to rank order those three of the eight female reps with whom they would most want to work. Parts E and F ask respondents those same questions as in parts C and D, for the ten male sales rep stimuli. Part H concerns demographic data, and, lastly, queries respondents about their own appearance.

4 Results

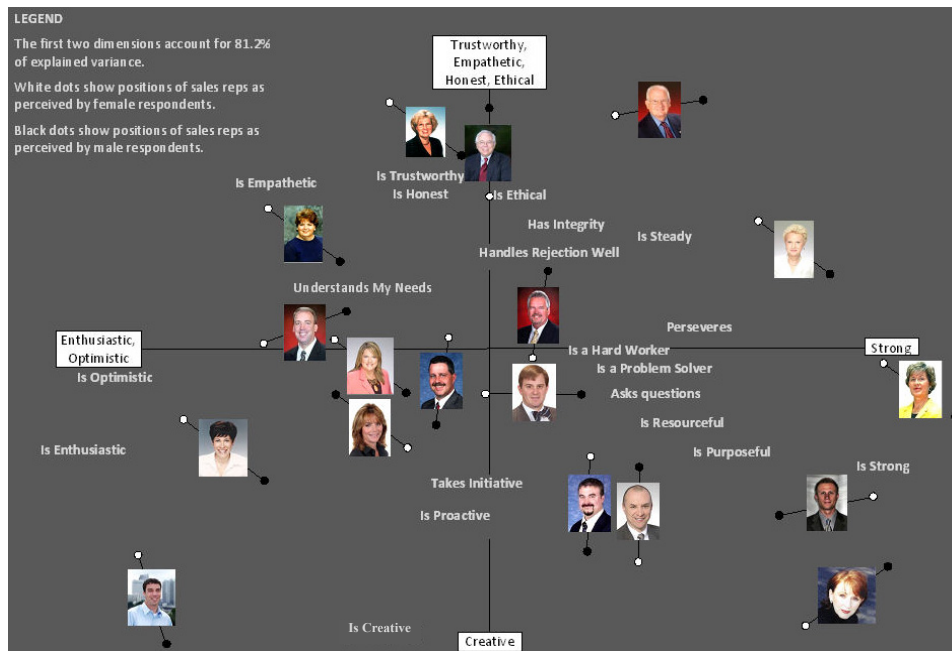
4.1 Results for home buyer perception of realtors based on personal appearance

The frequencies with which individual realtors were associated with efficacy attributes were mapped onto a common, multidimensional space using the SAS PROC CORRESP correspondence analysis package (SAS Institute, 2004; Greenacre, 1993). Relative preferences for the sales rep stimuli were had been solicited and average preference vectors were generated and overlaid on the joint spaces using the ‘Supplementary’ utility

in PROC CORRESP (SAS Institute 2004; Carroll, 1980). From these spaces, relative preferences for certain realtors by appearance, and, by extension, certain efficacy dimensions, could then be inferred.

Evaluations of female and male realtors were solicited separately, with the assumption that the perceptual structures that governed their evaluation would differ. However, the structures of the generated attribute spaces, revealed by the respective correspondence maps, were uniform. To obtain more robust results and to facilitate interpretation these data sets were pooled into a comprehensive map, shown in Figure 4, of both male and female realtors as points in a single sales representative attribute space. The female realtor map is shown in Figure 5 and the male realtor map is shown in Figure 6.

Figure 4 Attribute associations with and preference for sales representatives



The first two dimensions of the correspondence map presented in Figure 4 account for 81.2% of the explained variance. The endpoints of the primary dimension were interpreted to be ‘Enthusiastic’ and ‘Optimistic’, on the left hand side, and ‘Strong’, on the right hand side. The endpoints of the secondary dimensions were interpreted to be ‘Creative’, at the bottom, and ‘Trustworthy’, ‘Empathetic’, ‘Honest’, and ‘Ethical’ at the top. These indicate which of the twenty efficacy attributes most differentiated between realtor stimuli, by appearance, and are therefore the key attributes for preference and selection. Having thus interpreted this attribute space, this information was utilised to determine the meaning of the relative positions that individual realtors occupy within the space, by personal appearance.

The upper right hand quadrant is therefore shown to be ‘Trustworthy’ and ‘Strong’ space, and those realtors who occupy that quadrant are seen to be ‘Steady’. Prior calibration of these realtors indicates that they are older in appearance and traditional in

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their mode of dress, indicating that these aspects of appearance likely connote strength, honesty, and steadiness.

The lower left hand quadrant is the 'Enthusiastic', 'Optimistic', and 'Creative' space. Realtors within this space appear to be relatively young and contemporary, suggesting that young, contemporary appearance connotes enthusiasm, optimism and creativity.

The lower right hand quadrant combines 'Strong' and 'Creative'. Those realtors who occupy this space are perceived to be relatively fashionable and stylish, indicating that a more fashionable or stylish mode of dress and grooming connotes strength and creativity.

The upper right hand quadrant is 'enthusiastic' and 'trustworthy' space and those realtors who occupy that quadrant are more diverse in their appearance than those who reside in the other three quadrants, and, so, this space is more difficult to interpret. We reason that those realtors who fall into that space may collectively represent a middle ground in terms of age, appearance, and mode of dress, the latter between traditional and contemporary, which then connotes enthusiasm, trustworthiness, and empathy.

4.2 Results for home buyer preference for realtors based on personal appearance

Though home buyer perceptions of female and male realtors based on personal appearance is uniform across all respondent groups, female and male, young and old, permitting the pooling of the female and male realtor sets shown in the joint space map of Figure 4, there is some divergence in their preferences, as shown by the preference vectors overlaying the female and male realtor maps of Figures 5 and 6. All respondents, female and male alike, favour realtors who appear enthusiastic and optimistic, regardless of their gender. All respondents also favour female realtors who appear creative as well as enthusiastic and optimistic, with male respondents slightly more favouring the appearance of creativity and female respondents slightly more favouring the appearance of enthusiasm. It is younger, more fashionable female realtors who occupy the enthusiastic/creative quadrant in Figure 5, indicating that younger, more fashionable female realtors connote enthusiasm and creativity to home buyers, and are therefore preferred.

There is greater divergence in preference among female and male respondents for male realtors based on appearance. Male respondents favour male realtors who appear trustworthy and enthusiastic, while female respondents favour male realtors who appear more strictly enthusiastic, only slightly favouring appearance of trustworthiness. It is male realtors who appear somewhat older and are traditionally dressed that occupy the enthusiastic, trustworthy quadrant in Figure 6, indicating that older appearing, traditionally dressed male reps connote enthusiasm and trustworthiness to male respondents. Female respondents favour male realtors who are traditionally dressed, but appear somewhat younger than those favoured by male respondents, indicating that male realtors who are traditionally dressed but appear somewhat younger connote enthusiasm to female respondents. Presumably, this difference in female and male preference for male realtors reveals the role of older age appearance in connoting trustworthiness and honesty. Traditional dress being the preferred mode in both cases, as opposed to fashionable or casual dress, suggests that it is this that places those other favoured appearance aspects, and their sales rep meanings, into a professional frame.

Figure 5 Attribute associations with and preference for female sales representatives

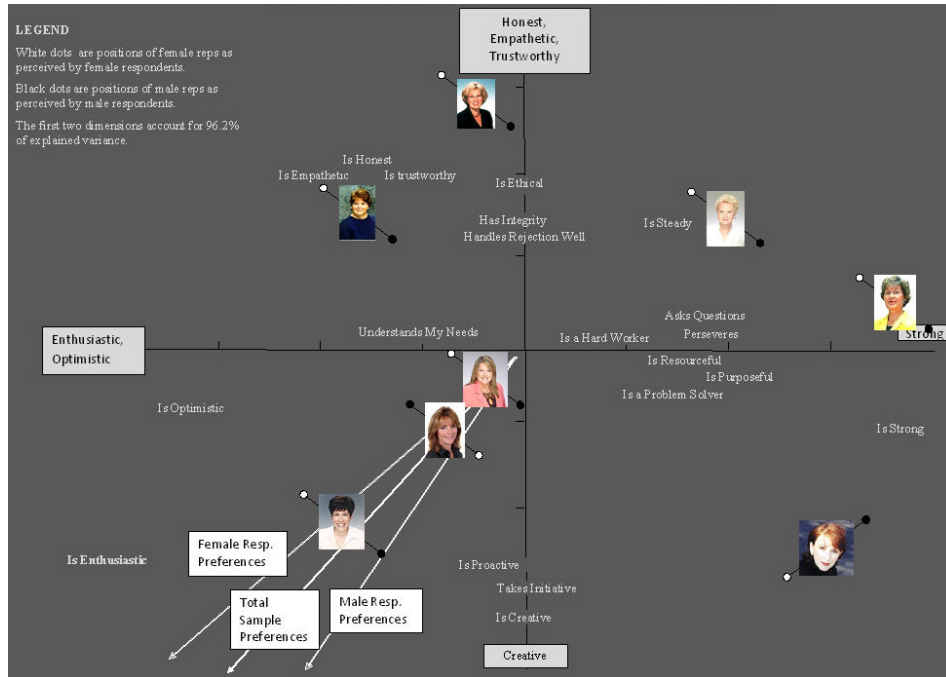
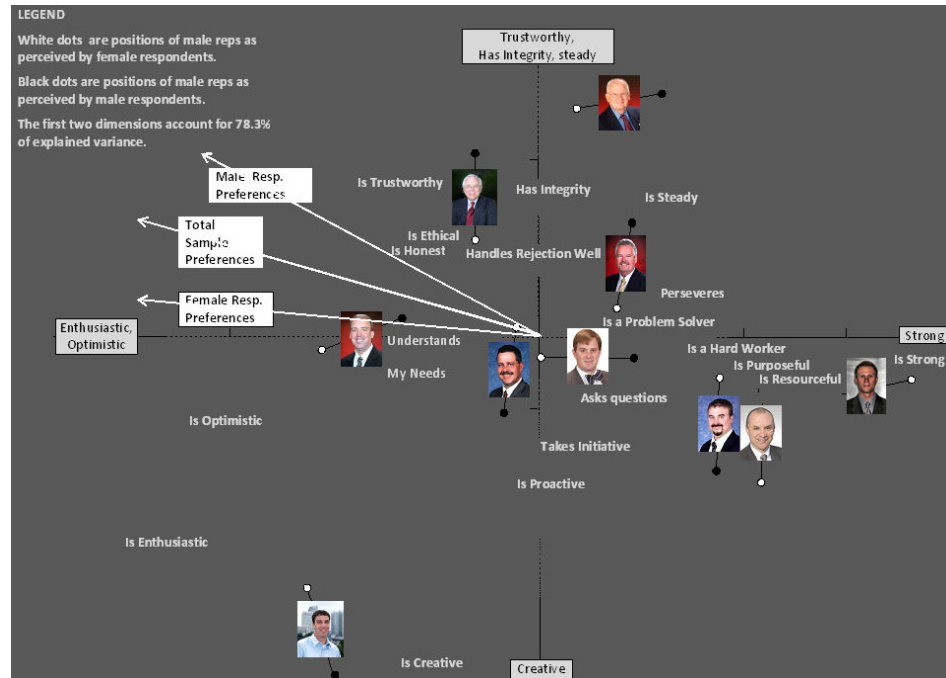


Figure 6 Attribute associations with and preference for male sales representatives



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It is important to consider the general preference for enthusiasm and optimism that is evident in both female and male maps. That is, another aspect of appearance that may additionally connote enthusiasm to the home buyer is a matter of affect: it is evident that realtors on the left hand sides of both maps have larger smiles.

5 Discussion

5.1 Summary

In this study, we explore how aspects of personal appearance connote sales representative character. Briefly, our findings are these.

5.1.1 Consumer perceptions of sales representative efficacy based on personal appearance

Correspondence maps were generated and sales representatives were located as points in attribute space. Those attributes that most differentiated between sales representatives by appearance, and therefore formed the anchor points at the ends of each of the major axes in these joint two-dimensional perceptual spaces, were ‘enthusiastic’, ‘creative’, ‘trustworthy’, and ‘strong’, indicating that the cognitive structures by which all prospective clients, whether female and male, old or young, differentiate between female and male sales representatives by appearance, are largely the same. Which is to say that the location of any given sales representative in sales representative attribute space, be they female or male, connotes the same thing to all consumers, whether they be female or male, young or old. We would not have predicted such uniformity in the perception of female and male sales representatives, by personal appearance, a priori.

Interestingly, these results in part corroborate prior personality research in which those traits found to most differentiate individuals according to face evaluation were trustworthiness and dominance (Oosterhof and Todorov, 2008), and, also among men, honesty (Zebrowitz et al., 1996, 1998). We can now extend these results to the character appraisal of sales reps by clients responding to sales-rep-specific character traits.

5.1.2 Consumer preferences for sales representatives based on personal appearance

Female and male consumers both prefer sales representatives who appear enthusiastic and optimistic. Beyond that, there are some differences in their preferences, more so than in their perceptions, judging by personal appearance. Both female and male consumers want their female sales representatives to appear creative, male consumers a little more so than female consumers. For male sales representatives, there are greater differences between the preferences of female and male consumers. Female consumers are almost entirely concerned that male sales representatives appear enthusiastic; whereas, male consumers are concerned that male sales representatives both enthusiastic and trustworthy. Trustworthiness is only a slight concern for female consumers.

When we combine these preference results with what Garber et al. (2013) tell us about what aspects of appearance each of these realtors represent, we conclude that consumers prefer female sales representatives who are enthusiastic and creative, and who

are younger in appearance and more fashionable, indicating that younger appearing, more fashionably dressed women favourably connote enthusiasm and creativity.

With respect to preference for male sales representatives, male consumers prefer male sales representatives who are enthusiastic and trustworthy, and who tend to appear older and be more traditionally dressed. Female consumers prefer male sales representatives who appear enthusiastic, are less concerned with appearances of trustworthiness than their male counterparts, and thus favour male sales representatives who are younger in appearance.

Thus, it would seem that age appearance plays a primary differentiating role in both the female and male sales representative perceptual maps, as well as a primary, though disparate role, in preference formation. 'Older' in appearance along with traditional business dress connote trustworthiness, steadiness, and strength of character in male sales representatives to all respondents, and are preferred qualities to male consumers. Female consumers are less concerned with trustworthiness, are almost entirely concerned with enthusiasm, and prefer male realtors who appear younger, if not young, and are traditionally dressed. Conversely, 'younger' in appearance and more fashionable dress are favoured in female sales representatives by both female and male consumers, which favourably connote enthusiasm, creativity and optimism.

As previously mentioned, perceptions of sales representatives by appearance were consistent for male and female consumers, for both female sales representatives, as indicated by the similar efficacy attribute spaces of the two maps, which permitted us to create the joint space map, incorporating perceptions of both female and male sales representatives shown in Figure 4. Similarly, there was little difference shown in the perceptions of consumers by age. Therefore, perceptions of sales representatives according to personal appearance are not age or gender-specific, though greater divergence was evident for some preferences.

Interestingly, our results appear to partially contradict prior personality research. Where we found that consumer favoured enthusiasm over strength, prior personality studies of facial expression found that perceivers favoured dominance. And, where we found that consumers favoured creativity over trustworthiness among female reps, prior personality studies indicated that trustworthiness was favoured trustworthiness (Oosterhof and Todorov, 2008). Male client of assessment of male sales reps does indicate that trustworthiness is favoured along with enthusiasm, the former in agreement with prior personality studies (Zebrowitz et al., 1998, 1996). These results would appear to indicate that assessments of character based on appearance may be context specific.

5.2 Theoretical implications

No general theory of sales representative appearance presently exists. There are simply a great deal of empirical studies showing support for the idea that attractive people, whoever they are, are viewed more favourably on a great many dimensions having to do with performance in many different circumstances, some of which, though surprisingly few, are in a commercial frame. However, there is little that examines the direct effects of aspects of appearance, those same aspects that would underlie attractiveness, on individual performance independently of the level of attractiveness that those aspects may add up to; including their effect on assessments of sales representative efficacy

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among them. This research thus constitutes a first step in a bottom-up approach intended to build toward a general theory of sales representative appearance, and, by extension, and more broadly, toward a general theory of personal attractiveness.

An additional contribution is the experimental method employed here. This empirical study also represents the first application, to our knowledge, of a method for testing the effects of visual information first introduced by Garber et al. (2000), which they applied to package appearance, to testing the effects of personal appearance. There has been a longstanding problem in sensory research, namely the difficulty of separating the perceptual effects of stimulus exposure from the meaning conveyed by the stimulus. This issue has heretofore gone unaddressed by most personal attractiveness research, because most of this empirical research, implicitly or explicitly treated the sensory effects of appearance, without really addressing the meaning of appearance. That is, they tend to address the question of the effects of attractiveness, without addressing the questions of how we are attractive, or why.

To understand how appearance affects assessments of sales representative efficacy required us, however, to address both the sensory and memory effects of personal appearance as a visual stimulus. The approach utilised, in combination with the work that Garber et al. (2013) did to develop the experimental stimuli, is a combination of similarity scaling and correspondence analysis that allows the disentanglement of the perceptual effects of differences in personal appearance from the effects of what personal appearance infers about sales representative efficacy.

5.3 Managerial implications

These findings are managerially relevant because they are actionable. Those aspects of sales representative appearance that connoted favourable sales representative traits including hair, dress and appearance of age are calculable and able to be designed into appearance to convey a certain set of favourable sales rep character traits to the consumer. Sales managers can and should advise their sales teams on how to style their hair, dress and look younger. But, first, as this research points out, the designer of one's appearance must understand that appearance, and aspects of appearance, convey a meaning to the viewer, beyond sensory effect.

Based on our interpretation of the maps in Figures 4, 5 and 6, following is a summary of the more favourable appearance aspects for conveying the proper sales rep character traits for both women and men, and their meanings.

For female sales reps:

- Short or medium length hair styled naturally giving a fresh and contemporary appearance favourably conveys creativity, enthusiasm and optimism. A rather more conspicuously styled hair fashion connotes strength and creativity and is less favoured.
- A natural, casual, colourful and breezy mode of dress similarly conveys enthusiasm, optimism and creativity. Strong colours, or white or black convey strength, not a favoured quality.

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- That more favoured age appearance for women skews toward youthful, conveyed by stylishly but naturally groomed coifed short or medium hair of natural colour, not grey, and casual clothes in clear soft colours, which convey a fresh, contemporary appearance.
- And, again, as with men, a smile conveys enthusiasm and optimism.
- In summary, a fresh, natural, contemporary, friendly and youthful female appearance is most favoured for female sales reps, conveying enthusiasm, optimism and creativity, those qualities favoured in sales reps by both female and male consumers.

For male sales reps:

- Medium length hair neatly groomed favourably conveys trustworthiness, honesty and steadiness, particularly so among male consumers. Short hair conveys strength and creativity, but are qualities that are less favourably considered.
- Traditional business dress, including business suits and small print ties in standard colours over dress shirts in conventional colours and patterns, additionally conveys trustworthiness. Dress suits, bowties and other less conventional neckware over shirts in unconventional colours convey strength and creativity, and, again, are less favoured qualities in sales reps.
- Where the more favoured age appearance for women is youthful, which conveys creativity, the more favoured age appearance for male reps skews a little older, no doubt reflecting that fact that, where creativity is looked for in female reps, trustworthiness is looked for in male reps. Thus, the tendency to find favour in male reps who are a little dressier, in traditional business garb (though not too formal). Similarly, mid length hair neatly groomed of natural colour, not grey, is favoured over shorter hair that may appear to styled, in the case of young men, and too old in the case of older men. Older age appearance conveys strength and trustworthiness, strength again not being a favoured quality. Youth is associated with creativity, as it is with female reps, but in the case of male reps this is not a favoured quality for male reps.
- As with women, smiles are favourable, a wild card conveying enthusiasm and optimism.

These aspects of appearance that we find to be favourable to sales rep appearance are not unsurprising. However, what this research does do is place these findings into context, by uncovering their meanings in terms of favourable sales rep qualities. The sales rep and her or his manager are now afforded a greater understanding of why certain modes of appearance, including hair, dress and appearance of youth, have the effect on the consumer that they do.

5.4 Limitations and future directions

This research constitutes a first step towards a general theory of sales representative appearance. To advance such a theory, a succession of studies such as this one are needed to test the relative effects of aspects of appearance on sales representative efficacy in a great many client and sales contexts. As noted above, prior research on the effects of

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facial expression on character evaluation shows results that are in some instances contradictory to our own, and, indeed, shows mixed evidence in itself (Petrican et al., 2014; Olivola and Todorov, 2010; Zebrowitz et al., 1998), again, indicating that such assessments may be context dependent.

For reasons of external validity, we confined our tests to the range of appearance types extant on realtor websites. However, this population fell far short of representing a fuller range of all humanity by appearance, and future studies are required to examine the effects of a full range of human appearance factors.

Though in this research we relate sales representative appearance to perception and choice, we do not relate appearance to sales representative performance. Can appearance predict performance? This should be a future step.

Most prior visual studies, as well as this study, treat visuals as peripheral cues, stimuli that mainly affect first impressions, but little after. An exception is Willis and Todorov, (2006), who report that "...the outcome of such evaluation [of facial expression] remains relatively intact even when perceivers are given unlimited time" (Petrican et al., 2014, p.260). It would be interesting, then, to test the effects of sales rep appearance on character assessment through the course of a client's association with them, and whether the persistence of such impressions may encourage loyalty.

It may also be that self-image affects the assessment of others. Do we favour those who look like us? There is prior research showing the effect of self-other agreement on Big Five personality factors (Connolly et al., 2007), particularly with respect to conscientiousness and extraversion (Borkenau et al., 2009). Specifically, with respect to aspects of personal appearance, mode of dress has been shown to cue conscientiousness (Borkenau and Lieber, 1992), facial expression and smiling have been shown to indicate extroversion (Borkenau et al., 2009; Fink et al., 2005; Penton-Voak et al., 2006; Pound et al., 2007). It may be, therefore, that self-other agreement may lead to greater ability to predict customer assessment of sale rep character based on personal appearance, over and above direct assessment of the other.

The why's and wherefore's of the specific results of our maps also bear further investigation. The perceptual structures revealed by Figures 4, 5 and 6 imply that if a rep is enthusiastic, consumers expect her or him to also exhibit a lesser strength of character. And, if a rep is creative, consumers expect her or him to not be so trustworthy. This is interesting because, in principle, there is nothing to prevent these qualities from appearing together in people, and, in fact, they can be seen as complementary. Couldn't enthusiasm and optimism be seen as complements to strength of character? And what is preventing a creative person from also being trustworthy? More research needs to be done to understand why the consumers expect these qualities to be opposing in sales reps.

6 Conclusions

Evolving media have supercharged the primacy effect of visuals. It therefore benefits the sales representative, more so now than ever, to attend to and manage their appearance as an essential part of her or his sales presentation. Sales managers can help their sales team members improve their appearance by adopting suggestions offered in the managerial implications section of this paper. This research aids that effort by providing information about which aspects of personal appearance most differentiate individuals. Given that

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they are aspects of grooming (i.e., hair length and colour) and adornment (i.e., traditional versus stylish dress), the sales representative can be assured that those salient aspects of appearance are easily modified. In an ever-increasing visual world, a concern for appearance remains an ever more essential factor of success for the sales professional.

Acknowledgements

The financial support of the Chandler Family Professional Sales Center of the Love School of Business at Elon University is gratefully acknowledged.

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