When Social Anxiety leads to Impression Management: A Collectivist Culture’s Perspective

Filza Hameed†, Muhammad Mudassar Anwar† and Iftikhar Hussain‡

Abstract

In today’s world people are more concerned about others’. This notion holds true in collectivist cultural societies like Pakistan where people act and engage in certain behaviors to get favorable feedback and image about themselves from others. Keeping in view this important perspective, the current study intends to investigate the impact of social anxiety on impression management among front line female nursing staff of private hospitals of twin cities of Pakistan. Furthermore, the study intends to check the moderating role of collectivism in relation between social anxiety and impression management. The results of the study confirmed positive significant impact of social anxiety on impression management and also confirmed the moderating role of collectivism in relation between social anxiety and impression management. Practical implications and limitations are also discussed.

Key words: Social anxiety, Impression management, Collectivism, Feedback

Introduction

In today’s world and especially in the collectivist cultures like Pakistan people are much more concerned with what people will say or do in response of their chosen behaviors and/or actions. This horror and anxiety related to the negative judgment of other people can be referred to as social anxiety (American Psychiatric Association, 1994) which is a worldwide complaint as it produces nervousness and distress in all areas of a human life. Thus, fear of negative evaluation of others’ can produce social anxiety among individuals’ As per Stein and Kean (2000) if these individuals are not treated in adequate way it can have detrimental effect and can become a permanent problem. Instead of encouraging feedback when people give them fearful feedback (Kashdan, Weeks & Savostyanova, 2011) consequently they experience high levels of depression (Schneier et al., 1992).

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This social anxiety pushes them to manage their impressions before others. As a general phenomenon, people always try to put a positive impression of them on others and always wish to get positive feedback from them. So, they try to influence perceptions of other people about them and this phenomenon is referred to as impression management. This concept was first theorized by Goffman in 1959 and as terminology used in 1967 which is a state where individuals’ try to have effect on their impressions which are perceived by others’ (Rosenfeld, Giacalone & Riordan, 1995). As per social influence theory influencer’s characteristics make significant impact on the effectiveness of impression management tactics (Levy, Collins & Nail, 1998). Like, more skilled person is likely to put better impression of him/her as compared to less skilled person (Levy, Collins & Nail, 1998). This was also later affirmed by Turnley and Bolino (2001) that the way one change behavior in certain social situations/settings determines the success of impression management.

A contextual factor that considerably impact social anxiety as well impression management relation is culture. It has been confirmed by numerous researchers’ that cultural factors significantly associated with social anxiety (Hofmann, Asnaani & Hinton, 2010). Moreover, people who belong to collectivist culture societies are more concerned and care about others (group and group norms, family and family norms etc) therefore most likely to engage in managing their impressions (Riemer & Shavitt, 2011). Thus, in collectivist cultural societies like Pakistan (Hofstede, 1980) people become more socially anxious because of negative judgments’ and evaluations’ of them and to avoid this state of affairs and conditions they engage in managing better impressions of them before others. So, this paper intends to comprehensively examine the connection between social anxiety and impression management with the moderating role of collectivism. As, there is lack of perspective in this regard within the context of Pakistan, and the current study by filling this gap in the literature attempts to provide this theoretical contribution.

**Theoretical Background**

**Social Anxiety**

People meet with different persons’ everyday and need to interact with them. Certain social situations carry different type of fears for the individuals and one of them is fear of harmful assessment by others which makes them socially anxious. In behavioral literature different terminologies has been used for social anxiety like social inhibition,
interpersonal anxiety, embarrassment, social inadequacy, shyness etc (Van Dam-Baggen & Kraaimaat, 1989).

Cognitive theorists (Butler & Mathews, 1983; Clark, 1986) stressed that anxiety creates an inaccurate perception of danger thus socially anxious persons overestimate the danger associated with the event and/or situation. Curran (1977) and Zimbardo (1977) reported that 20–41% population feels uncomfortable in social situations. These people as a result become frustrated and depressed so try to avoid particular events. In order to remove pain or to get relief these persons may engage in negative activities like alcohol consumption etc (Pilkonis, Feldman & Himmelhoch, 1981).

As reported social anxiety starts from the age of approximately 13-15 years (Ballenger et al., 1998; Chartier, Walker & Stein, 2003). Whereas, Beidel, Turner and Morris (2000) reported diagnosis of its signals at the age of 8 years. However, both studies confirmed that if it is not treated well it can move forward into adulthood. Numerous researchers’ highlighted reasons behind socially anxious behavior. Like, Schlenker and Leary (1982) asserted that individuals set unrealistic standards (high) in relation to their social performance thus fails to satisfy the concerns of others leading to have adverse assessment of them.

Impression Management

Everyone wants to be perceived and evaluated by others in a positive manner. People engage in different type of activities, behaviors to get positive feedback about themselves which is referred to as impression management. Impression management is an attempt to control the images which are projected in real or imagined social interactions (Schlenker, 1980). It is a process through which people try to influence the impressions which others have about them (Rosenfeld, Giacalone & Riordan, 1995). Thus they attempt on their part to generate positive image of them in the eyes of others consequently manages impression.

Previous studies reported numerous benefits people gained by managing their impressions. In this connection, researchers’ confirmed significant impact of impression management on interview selection (Stevens & Kristof 1995; Wade & Kinicki, 1997), performance ratings (Wayne & Ferris, 1990), career success (Judge & Bretz, 1994), assessments of promotability (Thacker & Wayne, 1995) etc. These studies also confirmed the usage of assertive and defensive impression management strategies by people to serve their purpose (Stevens & Kristof 1995). For example, assertive strategies (proactive mode) are utilized to increase
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performance ratings, increasing ratings in interview selection and for promotions (Stevens & Kristof, 1995; Wayne & Ferris, 1990). While, defensive strategies (reactive mode) are too utilized to protect themselves against negative feedback (Tedeschi & Melburg, 1984). Defensive tactics are pursued to escape from negative career associations and connections. Despite utilization of impression management strategies to serve people best, who are better able to manage their impression remained the topic of numerous studies. From the perspective of social influence theory (Levy, Collins & Nail, 1998), people who are more skilled in managing their impressions are also more successful in managing their impressions as compared to less skilled people. People who have capacity to inspire others also may influence their perception about themselves. Thus it can be concluded that either individuals adopts assertive or defensive impression management strategy, success of managing their impressions would depend on how skilled they are in influencing others.

From above stated arguments and discussion it may be concluded that when people become socially anxious they try to manage their impressions to have better feedback about themselves. From the perspective of conservation of resource theory (Hobfall, 1989) people possess limited resources. Personal resources includes: money, social status, self-esteem, social support etc. People try to reserve these resources to accommodate, survive or to overcome fear. Whenever people are threatened or become fearful, these resources are consumed which are scarce in nature. Resources like reputation compels individuals to secure them thus they engage on their part to manage their impressions. Thus on the basis of justification provided above, we may hypothesize that:

H1: There is positive association between social anxiety and impression management.

The Moderating role of Culture (Collectivism)

The main objective of current study is to investigate relationship between social anxiety and impression management. No doubt this main relationship can be influenced by moderating variable(s) hence it will be considered. In this scenario, the impact of collectivist culture as moderator is fulfilling the requirement as in collectivist societies people are more concerned about others so manage emotions and impressions accordingly. As per Mesquita and Frijda (1992) despite the fact that emotion related processes are universal still there exist numerous differences in culture relating to regulation processes, psychological as well as behavioral reactions and responses. Furthermore, cross cultural
research confirmed differences in work related attitudes as well values across countries. It is further confirmed by prior studies that culture impacts work-related outcomes (Dickson, Den Hartog, & Mitchelson, 2003).

In similar connection, especially females staff encounter these type of problems because in Muslim countries like Pakistan maximum women endures low social status as well power hence are more likely to encounter detrimental psychosomatic consequences of managing impressions. Chador and chardiwari philosophy of Pakistani society (Syed & Ali, 2013) has imposed certain physical as well as psychological restrictions on women’s working life. In turn to deal with limitations imposed by social, cultural and organization they stumble upon conflicting feelings and emotions of anxiety, nervousness, frustration etc still manages emotions and impressions of them. This hostile environment compels them to remain in continual effort and/or conflict as every move of them is being observed and watched as well discussed privately (Syed & Ali, 2013). Thus they become anxious and for job security and survival tries to manage good impressions. On the basis of arguments stated we thus explore whether association between social anxiety and impression management vary between cultures either collectivism moderates social anxiety-impression management relation.

H2: Collectivism moderates the relationship between social anxiety and impression management.

**Conceptual Model**

![Conceptual Model Diagram]

**Methodology**

*Population & Sampling*

The population of this study was the nursing female staff of private hospitals of Rawalpindi and Islamabad. Private hospitals are now a day’s
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busy in winning the race, so they strive best to provide excellent services comparatively. For this purpose, they compel staff to provide at their fullest. Thus the target population of the current study was female nursing staff working in top ten private hospitals of twin-cities of Pakistan.

Questionnaires’ was distributed to around 300 female nursing staff. As study intends to capture the responses from female nursing staff only because they meet requirement of study objectives. Thus, purposive sampling technique was adopted.

Data Collection Procedure
Self-administered questionnaires were used to get responses of female nursing staff. Prior to data collection phase, a contact was made with higher authorities (HR Head) of concerned hospitals who were told about study objectives. HR Head of all concerned hospitals facilitated the data gathering process. They were ensured about confidentiality of data.

After getting permission from higher authorities, a formal contact was made with front-line female nursing staff to fill questionnaires. 300 questionnaires were personally distributed. Out of 300 questionnaires 190 were received back which generated response rate of about 63%.

Instrumentation
The data was gathered on 5 point Likert scale. In order to measure social anxiety of female nursing staff, 30-item scale developed by Caballo et al., (2010) was used ranging from “not at all or very slight” to “very high or extremely high”. For measuring impression management, 22-item scale developed by Bolino and Turnley (1999) was used ranging from “never behave this way to” to “often behave this way”. In order to measure cultural dimension, Triandis (1995) developed 32-item scale to measure individualism-collectivism, 16-items for measuring individualism and 16-items to measure collectivism. Thus, collectivism was measured by adopting 16-item scale developed by Triandis (1995) ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly agree”.

Data Analysis
Data analysis of the current study was carried out using SPSS version 20. Descriptive statistics (showing mean and standard deviation) and correlation analysis was conducted to show relation among variables. Moreover, to check casual impact regression analysis was conducted.
Results and Discussion
Table 4.1 Correlation Analysis

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<td>2. IM</td>
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<td>3. COL</td>
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Where SA= Social Anxiety, IM= Impression Management and COL= Collectivism. Moreover, *P< 0.05; **P< 0.01 and ***P<0.001

The descriptive statistics and correlation analysis are shown in the table 4.1. The correlation coefficient value between social anxiety and impression management is 0.404 (p<.01) which indicates a significant positive relationship between variables. Social anxiety is also significantly associated with collectivism as the correlation value between these variables is 0.582 (p<.001. There is also significant positive correlation between impression management and collectivism which is 0.601(p<.01).

Table 4.2 Regression Analysis

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<td>Step 3</td>
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Where SA= Social Anxiety, IM= Impression Management, COL= Collectivism and SA*COL = Social Anxiety multiplied by Collectivism.. Moreover, *P< 0.05; **P< 0.01 and ***P<0.001

Regression analysis was conducted to check casual impact of variables. Table 4.2 shows that social anxiety significantly positively impacts impression management indicating β= 0.46, p<0.001 which confirms hypothesis H1. The results of the study also indicates that collectivism moderates the positive effect of social anxiety on impression management indicating β= 0.58, p<0.01. Thus, H2 is also supported.

Discussion, Practical Implications & Limitations
The findings of the study revealed sufficient support for the acceptance of study hypotheses. Specifically, first hypothesis was formulated to inspect the relationship between social anxiety and impression management indicating β= 0.46, p<0.001 which confirms hypothesis H1. The results of the study also indicates that collectivism moderates the positive effect of social anxiety on impression management indicating β= 0.58, p<0.01. Thus, H2 is also supported.
management and second hypothesis was made to check the moderating role of collectivism in relation between social anxiety and impression management, both were accepted. The strong positive association between social anxiety and impression management are consistent with previous studies. The researchers’ hold this version that during social interactions and situations’ people feel shyness (Curran, 1977; Zimbardo, 1977) as a result they engage in impression management. Additionally, shyness is the God gifted characteristic among females which further causes them to be socially anxious. This finding of the study indicates that frontline female nursing staff engages in impression management when they become socially anxious. Moreover, they confront critical situations where they are desired to manage their impressions.

Culture matters, this notion holds true in the context of Pakistan where collectivist culture bounds people to think about others (close ones) while doing anything especially while performing their jobs. The findings of the study further confirmed moderating role of collectivism in relation between social anxiety and impression management. Moreover, it shows that Pakistan is a collectivist cultural (Hofstede, 1980) society where female nurses know that they are being observed, watched and discussed (Syed & Ali, 2013). Thus, they become socially anxious and consider it necessary to manage better impressions of them.

The current study provides useful implications for the private hospitals. The higher authorities of private hospitals need to realize that social anxiety can have detrimental effects which can deteriorate nurses’ performance. So, they must consider ways to reduce harmful effects associated with social anxiety. For this proper counseling and support can be provided which can buffer the negative effects. In addition to this proper training in this perspective can also helps them in smoothening working environment where they can work without having any fear of being judged, observed or privately discussed.

There are few limitations of the study like limited sample size. For in depth understanding larger as well as diverse sample needs to be taken which further erase issue of generalizability. In addition to this, data was taken single point in time. To overcome this, longitudinal studies can help eradicate this issue. Lastly, to make it more attractive comparative analysis needs to be done between public and private hospitals to better understand differences in mechanisms and to capture its full essence.
References


