



Do good looks matter when applying for jobs in the hospitality industry? [☆]

C.I. Chiang^{a,*}, Y.L. Saw^b

^a Department of Hospitality Management, Hsuan Chuang University, No. 48, Hsuan Chuang Rd., Hsinchu City, Taiwan

^b Department of Information Management, Hsuan Chuang University, No. 48, Hsuan Chuang Rd., Hsinchu City, Taiwan



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ABSTRACT

This research aims to understand whether there is any difference in interview opportunities within the Taiwan hospitality industry due to physical attractiveness. The resume audit method was utilized to design fictitious resumes, and then they were sent to numerous job openings. The status of callbacks for interviews was observed, and the results showed that the attractiveness of job candidates is an important factor affecting the rate of interview callback in the Taiwan hospitality industry. For male candidates the “appearance effect” is particularly significant, though it is not as noteworthy for female candidates. Also, different types of job openings vary in the degree to which good looks affect a callback: the most important appearance effect exists for front desk receptionists; the second is for food servers at restaurants within a hotel. For other types of job openings such as housekeeping attendants, kitchen staff, and management trainees, there is no appearance effect.

1. Introduction

In 2010, a female employee who was 47 years old and worked for a hotel in Taipei for over three years was laid off because she wore glasses on duty. The employer claimed that men wearing glasses would give people the impression of expertise but not women!

Do employers truly think that customers will be better served by a more physically attractive worker? Do looks actually affect who gets hired, receives a promotion, and even makes more money?

The *Newsweek* study showed 57% of hiring managers agreeing that beauty plays a role in the hiring process (Benett, 2010). Another survey conducted from the 29th of February to the 6th of March in 2012 by the Yes123 (one of the top three job recruitment sites in Taiwan) also showed that 69.9% of 571 respondents specifically indicated that physical appearance does affect the likeliness of being hired at the interview stage (Wu, 2012). Few will admit that something so trivial will impact their decision making process, but it does. Even for a hiring manager that is aware of this tendency and tries to suppress it, appearance is still an influence.

According to the so-called “beauty bias” phenomena (Johnson et al., 2010), the psychological and biological hard-wiring that make us attracted to physically beautiful people, these good-looking people also tend to get higher salaries (Hamermesh and Biddle, 1994; Biddle and Hamermesh, 1994; Biddle and Hamermesh, 1998; Harper, 2000; Mobius and Rosenblat, 2006; Fletcher, 2009), better performance evaluations (Heilman and Saruwatari, 1979; Cann et al., 1981; Marlowe

et al., 1996), and better voter ratings when running for public office (Li and Luoh, 2008). Scholz and Sicinski (2011) argue that beauty essentially seems to be a benefit in the work world. To the employers, it is different from the skills, personality, and cognitive ability that were seen during the study stage. Based on these studies, attractiveness is an enduringly valuable characteristic in the labor market.

Furthermore, good-looking or attractive people may enjoy benefits in their pay. Hamermesh (2001) showed that, while controlling other factors that may affect wages such as education and work experience, males (females) with a more attractive appearance obtained wages approximately 17% (12%) higher than unattractive males (females). This effect stems from a so-called “beauty premium” (i.e., having an appearance above the average level of interest), which increased benefits by 4% for males and 8% for females, and an “ugliness penalty” (i.e., having an appearance below the average level of interest), which decreased benefits by 13% for males and 4% for females, respectively. Li and Luoh (2008) concluded that the effect of a person’s physical attractiveness on salary can be explained in three ways: (1) by some means, personal characteristics have been seen to relate to an employee’s productivity, and this then affects salary, followed by the company’s profits and growth; (2) employer discrimination; and (3) consumer discrimination.

For good-looking men and women, they will not only obtain higher payment but will also have a better chance at obtaining jobs (i.e., attractiveness is beneficial for men and women when applying for most jobs). The stereotype “what is beautiful is good” means that physical

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* Corresponding author at: Department of Hospitality Management, Hsuan Chuang University, No. 48, Hsuan Chuang Rd., Hsinchu City, Taiwan.
E-mail addresses: cichiang@hcu.edu.tw (C.I. Chiang), ylsaw886@gmail.com (Y.L. Saw).

attractiveness impacts employment decision making with the result that the more attractive an individual, the greater the likelihood is for that person to be hired (Shahani-Denning, 1993). Chiu and Babcock (2002) indicated that Hong Kong human resources management specialists were influenced by the attractiveness bias in evaluating short-listed candidates for an entry-level trainee position. The results showed that the perceived attractiveness of the candidates, along with their work experience and work-related skills, was more important than their public examination results.

Thus, physical appearance is highly valued in many fields. Due to frequent interactions with customers and the goal of positive customer experience, the need for beauty in each employee's appearance and demeanor is higher in service fields, such as receptionists, flight attendants, and sales representatives. After all, the meaningful measure of productivity in the service field is the amount a worker increases customer satisfaction and the happiness of co-workers (Barro, 1998). Parrett (2007) based a survey on five restaurants and found that good-looking waitresses get more tips; however, this phenomenon was not clearly shown for waiters. Luoh (2010) discussed how the perception of waiters' service quality is affected by the customer's gender, age, and appearance. The results show that participants commonly felt that the waiters with a more attractive appearance serve better than the waiters with a common appearance; however, the age and appearance of participants also affected their perception towards the service quality.

For most people in Taiwan, the stereotype is that appearance is very important while searching for jobs in the hospitality industry. So, many employees in hospitality call themselves members of the "Good-Looks Club." But what's the effect of physical appearance on the screening of a resume by recruiters? Usually, they can only get the information about a candidate's attractiveness by the headshot on a resume. In the past, sending resumes with a headshot when applying for a job was the norm among almost every work arena in Taiwan. However, this rule has gradually evolved into sending resumes with or without headshots, due to the influence of western culture. Nowadays, employers in Taiwan will accept resumes with or without headshots. It is also worthy to mention that the rise of the video or photo resume gives recruiters a perception that's worth a thousand resume words, and such resumes evoke a subconscious filter that can make or break a candidate's chances.

Many researchers have worked on exploring the impact of emphasizing physical appearance at the stage of resume screening during the recruiting process (Ruffle and Shtudiner, 2010; Lopez Boo et al., 2012; Yamada and Galarza, 2012; Maurer-Fazio and Lei, 2014). To the best of our knowledge, there has not been any research done in Taiwan exploring the impact of physical appearance on job searches in the hospitality industry.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows: We will survey the research associated with the effect of physical attractiveness on callback rate, and follow it with a description of the logistic regression model and resume audit method. This study applied the resume audit method to conduct a large-scale field experiment (i.e., we manipulated the level of attractiveness in each photo, designed the fictitious resumes, and sent these designed resumes to recruiting advertisements posted by companies). Then we recorded the status of interview callback from companies. The observed results were analyzed to determine the impact of varying levels of physical attractiveness on interview callback, and the logistic regression models were developed to predict the probability of interview callback. Lastly, we discuss the results and demonstrate the implication of this study.

2. The effect of physical attractiveness on callback rate

In a study on the effect of physical attractiveness on job applications in Israel, Ruffle and Shtudiner (2010) sent paired resumes (one with a photo and the other without a photo) to each recruitment advertisement and compared the callback rate for the two resume types. Note

that the resume with a photo is classified into two categories based on the attractiveness level: plain-looking and good-looking. For males, the results showed that the callback rate for the resumes with a photo is 1.4% lower than the resumes without a photo. The response rate for resumes with an attractive male is 19.7%, which is higher than the resumes without the photo (13.7%). Furthermore, the response rate for resumes without a photo is higher than for resumes with less attractive males (9.2%). In other words, males with a more attractive appearance will get one response after sending five resumes, while those with a less attractive appearance will only get one response after sending eleven resumes.

For females, the resumes without a photo received the highest response rate (16.6%), followed by the plain-looking (13.6%), and then by those with an attractive appearance (12.8%). Compared to the resumes without a photo, the response rate for plain-looking women and good-looking women are 3.0% and 3.8% lower, respectively. As for the resumes without a photo, the response rate for males is 2.9% lower than that of females. Therefore, the authors concluded that the discrimination against unattractive people does not exist for females. According to the findings mentioned above, a beauty-premium exists for men, while for women, there is a penalty for being attractive or plain-looking.

However, could the above findings result from the different types of openings rather than from physical appearance? If so, the effects of different positions could be observed through the response rate for resumes without an attached photo. If the response rates were seen to be highly varying between the two no-picture resume categories, then the type of job opening could be seen as having an effect of the callback rate. The results of the study showed that the response rate for males without a picture that were paired with an attractive photo resume (14.6%) is not significantly different from the response rate for males without a picture that were paired with a plain-looking photo resume (12.8%). For females, whether the resume without a picture was paired with an attractive or a plain photo, the response rate for a resume without a picture is exactly the same. Therefore, the effect of different job openings on the callback rate does not seem significant.

Generally, for job openings requiring more experience, employers may not consider the factors that do not influence job performance during the recruiting stage. However, based on past research, when employers are faced with a number of people fulfilling the job requirements, they will take appearance as a final factor. As a result, researchers believe that if a job opening requiring work experience is competitive, appearance could be the decisive key.

When applying for office jobs and jobs interacting with the public, most people think that an attractive appearance is more suitable, because a customer will likely feel they are having a better experience due to the superior appearance. The results of Ruffle and Shtudiner (2010) showed that men with an attractive appearance have a greater advantage when applying for a job that requires work experience, but good looks may cause a negative effect for women. For male applicants, in either office or public work, the response rate for an attractive person is better than those who submit a resume without a photo, which is also greater than plain-looking applicants. But for females in a public position, there is no significant difference between a resume with an attractive photo, a plain-looking photo, and no attached photo. As for the office jobs, the response rate for an attractive appearance is lower than for plain-looking and no-picture resumes. According to the results, an attractive female surprisingly has no advantage for office and public positions and will likely suffer from discrimination. Readers can reference Buss and Haselton (2005): "women become especially distressed by threats from physically attractive rivals, whereas men become especially distressed by rivals with more resources." Thus, if the person to review the applicant's resume is a woman, she will likely penalize and discriminate against the attractive woman. Therefore, it is recommended that companies should set up a committee when handling applicants' resumes, and members should include both males and females to avoid the above circumstances.

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