

# Impression formation using central traits and descriptive categories



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20 participants were tested to determine whether there was a noticeable difference in the writing of the descriptions and if this resulted in more correct judgements of the descriptions. Participants were also tested to determine if there was a noticeable change on the impressions formed about aspects of a person because of their type of residence. The subjects consisted of both males and females. Participants were all 2nd level students at Glasgow Caledonian University studying either social sciences or psychology. The study was investigated in a laboratory where participants were divided into experimental groups. The results showed that there was a significant difference in the number of correct judgements in both conditions and that there was also a significant difference in some characteristic aspects of a person because of their type of residence. This complements previous findings that impressions are affected by certain characteristics (central traits). The implications of these findings are discussed.

“ Social perception is defined as the process through which people interpret information about others, draw inferences about them, and develop mental representations of them (Bernstein, Penner, Clarke-Stewart & Roy, 2006, p. 678 ).” The perception of others is governed by the laws of perception of objects, which is that information is interpreted using schemas. Individuals develop Self-schemas through the formation of a social identity and comparison. ” These are mental representation of their beliefs and views about themselves (Brehm, Kassin, & Fein, 2005).” Schemas have a significant influence in perception, they determine what information is attended to or ignored and what information is remembered. “ As a result, we tend to process information about a person more quickly if it confirms our

beliefs (Smith & Quellar, 2001).” Unlike some aspects of social perception, first impressions are formed rapidly. The findings of several studies indicate that individuals focus on information concerning the traits of others. ” Asch (1946) stated that we look at a person and immediately a certain impression of his character forms itself in us.” In Solomon Asch’s classical study (1946) participants were presented with a list of characteristics which were said to belong to a stranger. He asked the subjects to indicate their impression of the stranger by writing a brief description of the person and by indicating on a list of traits which they felt best described the person. His results showed that impressions were strongly influenced by certain characteristics (central traits) than others (peripheral traits). ” Asch (1946) concluded that forming impressions of others involves more than simply combining individual traits.” He also concluded that ‘ central traits’ influenced the interpretation of ‘ peripheral traits’ and that the context determines whether a trait acts in a ‘ central’ or peripheral’ way. Based on the findings of previous studies, the aim of this experiment is to test the expectation that type of residence or descriptive categories will influence the impression formed and the judgement made. The experiment was conducted with two hypotheses. Hypothesis 1: Information about a person’s residence will influence the writing of the descriptions, leading to more correct judgements of the descriptions than incorrect judgements. Hypothesis 2: Information about a person’s type of residence will have an influence on the impression formed of some aspects of the person rather than others. The null hypotheses for the experiment are information about a person’s residence will not influence the writing of the descriptions, and will not lead to more correct judgements of the descriptions than incorrect judgements. The other null hypothesis is <https://assignbuster.com/impression-formation-using-central-traits-and-descriptive-categories/>

that information about a person's type of residence will not have an influence on the impression formed of some aspects of the person rather than others, Any differences are due to chance or error.

## **Method**

### Design

The independent variable in the experiment was the information about a person's residence. The dependant variable was the impression formed. The experiment used a single blind design so that the participants were ignorant of the experimental manipulation and it eliminated participant bias to an extent. The experiment was split into three time periods, the first was to allow participants to view their condition, the next was to write a script and the third was to complete a scale.

### Participants

There were 20 subjects used in the experiment which were drawn from a class of eleven 2nd year psychology students and nine 2nd year social science students at Glasgow Caledonian University. Subjects were selected by opportunity sampling, and the participants volunteered for the experiment as it was a required part of their course. Participants of any age, gender and cultural background were allocated at random to roughly two equal groups.

### Apparatus

### Paper and pens

Sheets with a short description of a person (condition sheets)

Rating of characteristics list

Judge response sheet

Class data table

Timer

Procedure

The experiment was carried out in Laboratory where it was easier to control extraneous variables from interfering with the experiment. Participants signed a consent form prior to the experiment and the experimenter made sure that each participant was seated. Subjects were then separated into 2 different residence condition groups (Council flat or country house). Each participant was then given a word list which depended on their condition. They were then instructed that they would have 30 seconds to complete their task and then instructed to turn over their sheets of paper and begin. Both conditions required participants to study the notes to form an impression and to not write anything down. Once time had elapsed, participants were instructed to stop and return their sheet to the experimenter. A second sheet was then given out to all of the participants. Subjects were instructed that they had to write a description based on the impression that they had formed about their person and were given 3 minutes to complete it. Upon completion the experimenter instructed participants to submit their scripts. Subjects were then issued with a Likert scale and instructed to rate the person on a series of 20 bipolar 7-point <https://assignbuster.com/impression-formation-using-central-traits-and-descriptive-categories/>

scales on the rating of a characteristics form. The experimenter then questioned the participants to find out if any of the subjects were aware of the variable being examined. Participants were then informed of the 'residence' variable. Subjects then issued with a response sheet and were informed that they would hear all of the scripts written earlier. The experimenter then instructed them to act as judges by indicating whether they thought the person lived in a council flat (condition 1) or a country house (condition 2) based on the impression formed. The experimenter then read each 'description' to the participants who judged the person's type of residence. Once completed the data was collected for analysis.

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## **Results**

### **Table 1 (Figure 1)**

#### **Average Mean of Characteristics Between Conditions**

### **Table 2 (Figure 2)**

#### **Standard Deviation of Characteristics Between Conditions**

#### **Average Mean of Characteristics Between Conditions**

The results (figure 1) showed that there was an increase in mean for transportation used between Condition 2 and condition 1 which increased from (1. 56) to (2. 91). This shows that more people who in a country house use a car compared to those who live in a council flat. There was also an increase in mean for class, education and intelligence. Between condition 2 and condition 1 class increased from (2. 44) to (4. 55), for education it increased from (2. 22) to (3. 91) and for intelligence it increased from (2. 00)

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to (3. 36). These results show that people who live in country houses have a higher class, are more educated and are more intelligent than those who live in a council flat. The average mean decreased between condition 1 (council flat) and condition 2 (country house) for religion (5. 18 > 4. 00) which meant that people living in a council flat were less religious than people in country houses. The results showed that between condition 2 and condition 1 the average mean for royalist increased from (3. 44) to (5. 18) and conservative increased from (2. 44) to (4. 09). This shows that people living in council flats are more radical and anti-royalty than those who live in country houses.

A binomial test was used to determine whether judge's decisions were beyond chance. These result of the binomial test indicates that the number of correct responses is significantly greater, at the  $p < 0. 05$  level, than would be expected by chance.

A Mann-Whitney test was used to compare the scores from participants in condition 1 (council flat with those in condition 2 (country house). There was a statistically significant difference between scores for the two ' residential' conditions.

Transportation: (n1 = 11, n2 = 9, U' = 25. 0,  $p < 0. 05$ )

Class: (n1 = 11, n2 = 9, U' = 16. 5,  $p < 0. 05$ )

Education: (n1 = 11, n2 = 9, U' = 16. 0,  $p < 0. 05$ )

Conservative: (n1 = 11, n2 = 9, U' = 11. 0,  $p < 0. 05$ )

Religious: (n1 = 11, n2 = 9, U' = 21. 5,  $p < 0. 05$ )

Royalist: ( $n_1 = 11, n_2 = 9, U' = 14.5, p < 0.05$ )

Intelligent: ( $n_1 = 11, n_2 = 9, U' = 16.5, p < 0.05$ )

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## **Discussion**

The results from the experiment were as expected. More correct judgements of descriptions were made than incorrect judgements and there was a greater impression formed of some aspects of a person. The results showed that there was an increase within participants in condition 1 (council flat) for the rating of characteristics. Condition 1 resulted in different impression of the person and differences in descriptive categories occurred. The impression was formed that people living in condition 1 used the bus more, were of a lower class, anti-royalist, were less educated, more radical, anti-religious and were less intelligent. People living in condition 2 were viewed as more privileged, were of a higher class, were pro-royalty and were better educated therefore more intelligent. As expected the results showed that some characteristics and descriptive categories were greater rated than others. The results showed that there was no significant differences in attitudes and personality as the average mean for participants impressions in condition 1 and 2 were roughly the same. However the differences for other categories were statistically significant as a binomial and a Mann-Whitney U were used. Therefore these findings support both hypotheses which were that information about a person's residence will influence the writing of descriptions, leading to more correct judgements and that information about a person's residence will have an influence on the impression formed of

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some aspects rather than others. This is consistent with Asch's research (1946) which investigated what influenced impressions. The results showed that central traits strongly influenced the overall impressions formed. This experiment complements previous work as 'residence variable', which was the central trait, influenced the overall opinion of the judge. The judge used these traits to form an impression of the entire person. Relating to Asch's study the peripheral traits in the experiment were the person's personality and attitude and the central trait influenced the way in which the participants interpreted them. The average mean first impression formed about the person's personality in both conditions was roughly the same as there was no difference in the condition sheets other than the residence variable. The results may have been hindered by lack of motivation, some students may have been more willing to actively participate in the experiment than others which may have altered the results. There was also the limitation that it was only psychology and social science students that took part in the experiment, of which some might have been aware as to what was being tested and would have given a socially desirable response. However external factors such as noise, light and heat were able to be controlled as it was a laboratory experiment. The present study used students from university and were roughly the same age, further investigation might use individuals the same age (both young and old), of different occupation or cultural backgrounds. It may also use a field experiment instead in which participants are in an environment where they will feel more relaxed. The present study has raised a number of issues for further investigation. Further research might use the methods of transportation as a central characteristic. It might be sensible to suggest that <https://assignbuster.com/impression-formation-using-central-traits-and-descriptive-categories/>

research could be conducted using a repeated measures design in which participants are given condition 1 then condition 2 and their results could be compared to that of this present study.

Word count: 553

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