

Study Shows Impression Management Can Reduce Trust, Especially in High-Ability People

A field study of over 100,000 Facebook consumers shows bragging reduces trust

TUCSON, ARIZ., UNITED STATES, July 25, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A new study by researchers at the University of Arizona and Stanford University found that impression management can reduce trust in high-ability people. The study published this week in the journal [Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences](#) found that when someone can do a task, they are trusted. However, if they brag about how great they are, high-ability people are trusted much less.

In social psychology, impression management is the process by which people seek to control the impressions others form of them. It can be seen as a strategic effort to influence how others perceive one's actions, abilities and intentions.

The goal of impression management is to present oneself in the best possible light and to create a favorable impression. People engage in impression management in various settings, including the workplace, relationships and academic settings.

There are several ways in which people can try to manage impressions. One common tactic is self-promotion, or touting one's accomplishments and positive attributes. Another is ingratiation, or trying to make oneself likable and pleasant.

Impression management is a complex phenomenon with important implications for social interaction and behavior. It sheds light on why people act the way they do in various social contexts, in both private and professional life.

When someone has high ability and is willing to use tactics like self-promotion or intimidation, this can backfire. The research team of Martin Reimann, Christoph Hüller, Oliver Schilke and Karen S. Cook found this when conducting experiments in online labs (N = 5606) and with over 100,000 Facebook consumers. The large sample size and unique research platforms delivered some interesting results.

Capable people are held to higher standards in terms of honesty and kindness. This is why impression management is not only often ineffective but can actually decrease trustworthiness perceptions of these capable individuals.

Reimann, the lead author, said, "A person's competence, combined with self-promotion, decreases that person's perceived benevolence and integrity and, in turn, the level of trust placed in them."

It is commonly assumed that ability leads to trust – the more competent an actor, the more likely others will be to trust them. The research conducted contests the universality of this assumption.

The study states, "By embracing a symbolic interactionist approach and separating ability from how it is conveyed through impression management, we demonstrate that the relationship between ability and trust is far more conditional than previously assumed. Even in meritocratic societies, highly competent actors may experience greater trust from their fellow citizens if they are humble and refrain from efforts to manipulate others' impressions of themselves."

In a world where people constantly try to make positive impressions, does too much self-promotion have negative consequences? Although most people want to be seen as trustworthy, the overuse of self-promotion can make people appear less deserving of trust. As employees return to the office and are more likely again to engage in post-pandemic impression management behaviors, these findings have important implications for understanding trust, democracy and meritocracy in organizations.

For more information, visit <https://eller.arizona.edu/departments-research/schools-departments/marketing> and <https://iriss.stanford.edu>.

About the University of Arizona

The University of Arizona is a public land-grant research university in Tucson, Arizona. Founded in 1885, the University of Arizona was the first university in the Arizona Territory. As of 2021, the university enrolled 49,471 students in 19 separate colleges and schools, including the University of Arizona College of Medicine in Tucson and Phoenix, the James E. Rogers College of Law, and the Eller College of Management, and is affiliated with two academic medical centers (Banner - University Medical Center Tucson and Banner - University Medical Center Phoenix). The university classifies as an R1 university; that is, a doctoral university with very high research activity.

About the Institute of Research in the Social Sciences (IRiSS) at Stanford University

The main mission of the institute (founded in 2004) is to support data drive discovery in the social sciences. Growing access to novel data sources, the development of powerful computing tools, and innovation in quantitative and qualitative research methods are opening a new frontier for social scientists to explore bold, inventive research questions. In this burgeoning era for social science research, the Stanford Institute for Research in the Social Sciences (IRiSS) facilitates first-rate interdisciplinary research, trains the next generation of scholars, and incubates research projects to address critical societal challenges. IRiSS ensures that world-class, evidence-based research is produced to meet evolving problems in areas of governance and

democracy, economic inequality, immigration policy and other social issues that affect communities across the globe.

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