

BEHAVIORS, MOTIVES, AND IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT: AN EXPLORATORY ANALYSIS OF MARKETING STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

A common presumption in educational research is that students engage in desirable behaviors because it is expected of them and that it is the “right thing to do.” A review of the impression management literature suggests, however, that such behaviors may have a self-serving motive as well. Using the Jones and Pittman taxonomy of five forms of impression management, this study empirically examines this issue using a sample of 117 marketing students. The exploratory results indicate that while students have impression motives for their behaviors, the empirical relationships are generally weak suggesting that other motives (e.g., a desire to be good student) may be influencing behaviors as well.

INTRODUCTION

Educational research has identified and/or proposed numerous student behaviors that are believed to facilitate a well-functioning classroom environment. Among the desired behaviors are: (1) being civil toward instructors [7] [8], (2) paying attention to lectures and taking good notes [8], (3) attending class on a regular basis [6] [8] [20], (4) asking questions [13] [16], and (5) participating in class discussions [16] [22].

A review of the literature suggests that these student behaviors are similar to impression management behaviors. In particular, the Jones and Pittman taxonomy of impression management appears to closely reflect most of the desired student behaviors but with one exception; with impression management behavior, there is a specific motive to achieve a desirable image or, alternatively, to avoid an undesirable one [12] [19].

Do students have impression motives for their behaviors? The purpose of this study is to address this question.

THE JONES AND PITTMAN TAXONOMY OF IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

Ingratiation

Ingratiation is defined by Jones [12, p.11] as “a class of strategic behaviors illicitly designed to influence a particular other person concerning the attractiveness of one’s personal qualities.” Most researchers generally agree that while ingratiation may take many different forms, the impression motive is the same: to be liked. Hence, we propose that the need to be liked will be positively correlated with friendly behavior.

Self Promotion

Giocalone and Rosenfeld [9, p. 321] note that the “self promoter tries to make others think he or she is competent on either general ability dimensions (e.g., intelligence) or specific skills (e.g., ability to play a musical instrument).” As such, we propose that the need to be seen as competent will be positively correlated with class participation.

Exemplification

Individuals who engage in exemplification involve themselves in managing impressions of integrity, self-sacrifice, and moral worthiness [12]. Thus, we propose that the need to be seen as dedicated will be positively correlated with class attendance/attentiveness.

Intimidation

The Jones and Pittman taxonomy implies that the primary motive for intimidation is the need to be feared or respected. While the use of overt intimidation may occur in an educational setting, most attempts at intimidation would appear to be more subtle and reflect verbal challenges or confrontations. Hence, we propose that the need for respect will be positively correlated with confrontational/challenging behavior.

Supplication

Rosenfeld, et al. [17] maintain that the motive for supplication behavior is the need to receive extra help. Therefore, we propose that the need to receive help will be positively correlated with help-seeking behavior.

Supplemental Propositions

While the Jones and Pittman taxonomy maintains that each impression behavior is associated with a specific impression motive, some prior research has indicated that behaviors might be influenced by more than one impression motive [3]. As a result, we propose that the specific needs will be correlated with multiple student behaviors.

METHOD

A survey questionnaire was administered to a convenience sample of upper-level students enrolled in marketing course at a large, land-grant university in the intermountain west. The items were measured on a scale of 1-7 where 1 meant “strongly disagree” and 7 meant “strongly agree”. In total, 122 questionnaires were completed. Five were subsequently deleted since the respondents were nonbusiness majors/minors and we believed that the analysis should be restricted to a common population.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The scale items for the behavioral items were factor analyzed using a standard statistical software package (i.e., SAS) and a common factor approach. The loadings indicate an acceptable factor structure (i.e., all loadings above .62). The reliabilities are also acceptable, although the two item ingratiation scale shows an inter-item correlation that is less than optimal (i.e., .40). For individual items, there

appears to be adequate variance for the analysis. All eigenvalues were above the 1.0 criterion cut-off and the five factors accounted for over 75 percent of the variance.

The scales for the five impression motives were similarly derived and factor analysis conducted to measure internal consistency. The scales also appear to have adequate reliability for the purposes of this study. Additionally, all eigenvalues were above the 1.0 cut-off and the variance explained was over 75 percent. Where scales are comprised of only one item, there appears to be sufficient variance for further analysis.

The results indicate that fourteen of twenty-five correlations (or 56 percent) are significant. For the hypothesized relationship between the impression management behaviors and their respective motives, four of five are significant. Only the relationship between confrontational behavior and need for respect was not supported

The results also indicate that the correlations vary among the behaviors and motives. Ingratiation and supplication behaviors are related to more impression motives than the other three behaviors. For ingratiation, all impression motives are correlated, with several of the correlations above .40. For supplication, the only impression motive not correlated was the importance of being respected. For self promotion, one additional correlation was found with the need to be liked. For exemplification, two additional impression motives were correlated with the behavior; the need to be seen as competent and the need to receive assistance.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the association between a set of student behaviors and impression-oriented motives as defined by the Jones and Pittman taxonomy. The primary objective was to determine the extent to which the behaviors are correlated with each of the impression motives. While the results provide some support for the hypothesized relationships, it is important to note that the correlations are relatively modest.

[References are available from the first author upon request]