It’s What I Like

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Abstract

Previous research has been done regarding attraction and persuasion, much of which yields significant findings between the two. This study expands on the overall question that researchers have been asking; is there a relationship between people’s perceived attractiveness and their likelihood to persuade others? We used photographs of five men and five women that we pretested for perceived attractiveness. Participants then answered a survey with various questions centered on how likely they would be to be persuaded by the person in each photograph. Consistent with our prediction, we found a positive correlation between perceived attractiveness and likelihood of persuasion. Future studies might investigate gender differences to see if there is a difference in ratings of attractiveness and persuasion between men and women.
Attraction and persuasion are two ideas that were brought together to explain a very interesting phenomenon in social psychology. Many researchers have posed the question of whether there is a direct link between attraction and persuasion. Praxmarer (2011) came up with four hypotheses to test attraction and persuasion when attempting to sell an unrelated product (pp. 839-850). Her first prediction was that there would be a positive effect on persuasion based on the presenter’s physical attraction and perceived expertise for an unrelated product (p. 844). For this study, researchers expected the participants to like the product or have a strong attraction to it based on the presenter’s perceived attractiveness and expertise on the unrelated product. Though the participants may not have been, otherwise, interested in the product on its own, the presence of an attractive presenter who possessed a thorough knowledge for the product was predicted to sway the participant’s opinion in a positive direction. This aspect of Praxmarer’s study served as a guideline for the types of questions that we asked our participants in the study we conducted. Though we did not go into fine details in explaining the expertise of the person who is perceived to be attractive (or unattractive) on the products being sold, we asked question such as, “Would you be influenced to buy a watch from this person?” to determine a link between persuasion based on opinion of person.

Praxmarer’s (2011) second prediction was in two parts. She secondly predicted that “A presenter’s physical attractiveness positively affects persuasion via liking of the ad for an attractive-unrelated product” (p. 847). For this prediction, the researchers focused in on appearance as a factor of the participants like or dislike of the ad. In the second part of the prediction, she posed the question of whether there would be a stronger positive effect on physical attraction and liking of the unrelated product if the presenter and the receiver were of
the opposite sex (p. 848). The first part of this prediction is what led us to utilize color photos of both five men and women of average attraction ratings, selected at random based on pretest ratings from 10 Angelo State University students, to create our last question on our questionnaire of how attractive the subject was perceived to be on a scale of 1 to 7. For our study, we also gave men the surveys that contained photos of women, and women the survey that contained photos of men to determine a relationship between attraction and persuasion based on opposite sex.

Praxmarer’s (2011) third and most interesting prediction was, “A presenter’s perceived physical attractiveness would have a positive direct effect on the receiver if the receiver had low product involvement, but it would not have an effect if the receiver had high product involvement (p. 849). For this hypothesis, she predicts a direct link between attraction and persuasion based on involvement. She goes on to explain what exactly low involvement and high involvement are. When low involvement receivers evaluate a product, they use their affective state as a shortcut to infer their evaluations and happy individuals are expected to evaluate a product more positively than, for instance, bored or annoyed individuals. The reason she can predict a direct path between attraction and persuasion is because low involvement individuals use peripheral cues for their evaluation, for instance, the presenter’s attractiveness. High involvement individuals, however, process central information. They are likely to focus on, learn, and retrieve affect congruent information and to develop affect congruent associations, or in other words, pay attention more to the product than the presenter when making a decision on the given product. Our study is correlational, and we only utilized the low involvement aspect of the study to determine opinion.
In his article, Black (1974) discussed a study in which the researcher manipulated physical attractiveness and similarity of attitude (p. 403). Forty-eight men and 48 women from lower level courses at the State University College of New York volunteered to participate. For this study volunteer participants were paired with the opposite sex partner who was the confederate. In each session, there were two naïve participants (one man and one woman), and two confederates, one man and one woman. The researcher split the pairs into four equal groups of 12 pairs per group. The first group was attractive and similar. The second group was attractive and dissimilar. The third group was unattractive and similar, and the fourth group was unattractive and dissimilar. They first took a 12-item Byrne-type attitude inventory while trying to make as little contact, including eye contact, as possible. Then the subjects and the confederated were taken into a room where they were told to speak about a specific topic. After this part of the study, the participants took an interpersonal judgement scale where they were told to base their ratings on attitude towards interaction. Just as researchers expected, by the pairing of the participants into groups based on similarity, and manipulation of attraction, the results yielded a positive relationship between similarity of attitude and physical attractiveness on interpersonal attraction. Though we did not use an experimental approach to determine attraction, there may be some link towards participants’ similarities and interests when selecting a member of the opposite sex who may appear to be attractive to them.

The third and final study we looked at was by, Vogel, Kutzner, Fiedler, and Freytag (2009). They reviewed a four-part study on attraction and persuasion of which they conducted. The experiment that is most relevant to the study we are conducting is the 4th study in which they predicted that participants who think that their clientele is more attractive than themselves will hand them off to another colleague of similar attraction (p. 838). This aspect of the study is
the direct opposite of what we are studying. Their prediction can be broken down to say that the more attractive the participants considered themselves to be, the more likely they thought that they could persuade others. In our study, we tested how likely participants are to be persuaded by others based on how attractive they perceive the individual to be. With our study, we can gain knowledge of a different perspective from the study that Vogel et al. conducted.

For our study, we used a photo based survey as our stimuli to measure attractiveness and persuasion. Based on different aspects of the studies mentioned above, we formed a hypothesis and predicted that the more attractive a person is perceived to be, the more likely he or she will be able to persuade others.

**Method**

**Participants**

We recruited our participants through Sona Systems, and online research resource provided through Angelo State University. For our study, we had 31 participants, 65% women and 35% men. Our age range was 18 to 31 ($M = 20.3$ $SD = 3.06$). For our study, we also had a very diverse sample with 48.4% Caucasian/White, 29% Hispanic/Latino, 12.9% Black/African American, 3.2% Native American/American Indian, and 6.5% Other.

**Design and Procedure**

The study we conducted was a correlational design used where we correlated whether there was a positive relationship between attraction and persuasion. We utilized a survey to collect information on people’s opinions. This study is a within subject’s design. Though we utilized both men and women for this study, all the participants were exposed to the same questions.
The stimuli we used for this study were pictures. We used a group of five racially diverse male photos and five racially diverse female photos that we obtained from Google that did not contain a copyright. All the photos were in color and only show the subjects from the shoulders up in a 3” by 3” photo. We selected 26 male subjects and 26 female subjects and presented these photos to a panel of raters. From the ratings, we chose five male and five female photo subjects that were rated as neutrally attractive that received a score of 4 on a scale of 1 – 7 (1 = Not attractive, 7 = Very attractive) to allow for variability in responses of perceived attractiveness.

Our questionnaire was designed to measure whether participants can be persuaded based on their perceived attraction to the subjects that we selected. We put together 15 questions scored on a Likert scale such as, “Would you be influenced to buy a watch from this person?” and “Would this person influence you to read a new book?” The Likert Scale was based on a on a scale of 1 to 7, 1 = not attractive 7 = very attractive. There were 14 questions to determine persuasion and one question at the end of the survey, “Please rate the following picture on a scale of 1 to 7.” This question was also rated on a scale of 1 = not attractive 7 = very attractive. Female participants received surveys containing male photos and male participants received surveys containing female photos. We also attached a demographics sheet that asks the participants to select information about their race and ethnicity, provide their age, and indicate whether they are male or female.

The participants came to the assigned room for the study, and we greeted them at the door. As they walked in, we informed them that they may sit anywhere they would like. We then waited until everyone was in the room, then we proceeded to read the script verbatim. Halfway through reading the script, we passed out the consent forms, then waited five minutes for them to read and signed the forms. After they read and signed the consent forms, we then asked them if
they had any questions regarding the consent form. If there were no questions, we read the remainder of the script informing the participants that their participation was completely voluntary. They were also told that when they completed the survey, they were to place it in the manila folder located at the front of the classroom to maintain a high level of confidentiality throughout the entire study. After this, we passed out the surveys. When the participants finished, they came to the front of the classroom and placed their survey in the manila folder, and picked up a debriefing sheet on their way out which explained the purpose of the study and provided contact information for the faculty advisor. We thanked them for their participation in our study and they left the classroom.

**Results**

We hypothesized that higher ratings on perceived attractiveness would lead to a greater likelihood of persuasion; in other words, a positive correlation between attractiveness and persuasion. To test this we used a bivariate correlational test to determine whether we should accept or reject our hypothesis. To calculate the variables for the study, we calculated the means for questions pertaining to persuasion and created a persuasion variable. We also averaged the responses for perceived attractiveness and created an attractiveness variable. We then ran a bivariate correlational test to determine whether there was a relationship between perceived attractiveness and persuasion. As predicted, we found a positive correlation; the more attractive the men and women in the photos were perceived to be \((M = 4.78, SD = .97)\), the higher the ratings they received in persuasion \((M = 3.81, SD = .88)\) \(r (31) = .46, p = .009\). Therefore, we found evidence to support our hypothesis.

**Discussion**

**Summary and Results**
For this study, we predicted that as ratings for perceived attraction went up, so would the ratings for persuasion. We found that there was a moderately positive correlation between the two factors, meaning that there is a positive relationship between how attractive a person is perceived to be, and how likely that person will be to persuade someone else.

Praxmarer (2011) predicted in her study that participants would have a positive reaction to the presented ad if the ad was presented by a member of the opposite sex. Her hypothesis was similar to our study, because each participant received a survey that contained pictures of a member of the opposite sex, or males received surveys containing photos of females, and females received surveys with photos of men. We theorized that a halo effect would yield a positive relationship between attractiveness and persuasion in this study. An example of the halo effect would be a man who is very attractive receiving a promotion at work over a man who is not as attractive based solely on the fact that he is “beautiful.” His qualifications may not be better or even as good as the man who is not as attractive, but according to the halo effect since he is good-looking he is perceived as highly qualified. Our participants rated subjects on a scale based on level of perceived attractiveness. They weren’t given any background information on the subject, such as his or her character, qualifications, or education, so because our results showed a positive correlation, we can conclude that the halo effect did influence our participant’s decisions.

Relevant to our findings, Praxmarer (2011) looked at differences among high involvement subjects versus low involvement subjects (849). Our study only focuses on low involvement subjects because, just like the halo effect, low involvement subjects pay attention to peripheral cues to make judgements. An example of a low involvement would be a student who walks into a new class with a new professor. This student does not know anything about the
professor, but how he looks physically and maybe how his voice sounds. For this example the professor is very attractive, so the student makes a decision based on his looks that she is going to love the class and it’s going to be an amazing year with this professor. Low involvement participants do not need to know anything about the subject, they just go with what meets the eye to make decisions and that’s how this aspect of Praxmarers study lines up with our study.

**Positives and Limitations**

There are many great things about our research. First and foremost, it expands on past research and it even replicates one of the studies that we looked at for our study. It also creates awareness of the fact that when we see others who we view as attractive; we tend to be more apt to be persuaded by them, even when we don’t realize it. Some limitations to the study would be that correlation does not equal causation. For our study, that means that there is a relationship between attraction and persuasion, however attraction does not cause someone to be persuaded and just because someone may be persuaded by a person, that doesn't mean that they are attracted to them. Also, the sample size that we were hoping for was about 50 to 60 participants, yet only 31 participants volunteered to participate in our study. If we had more participants, we might have found an even stronger correlation. One aspect of our study that may also have been a limitation is the fact that we didn’t have any questions that were reverse-coded, so participants might have simply circled answers based on what they remembered from the previous pages. If this study were to be repeated, some of the questions should be reverse-coded to make sure that the participants are reading and responding to each question in the survey. Also, recruiting a larger sample on campus would be beneficial. If we had a larger sample size, then we would be able to generalize the relationship that we found in our results to a larger population.

**Future Research**
If this study is repeated in the future, a suggestion that I would make would be that researchers work to find more variables that they can include in the study. For example, future researchers might investigate if there are gender differences in responses between men and women, or if a certain demographic group, such as age, would show higher ratings of attraction and persuasion. Future researchers could also look at high involvement in attraction and persuasion. An experimental study could be conducted to test whether participants rate attraction and persuasion differently depending on whether they are high in involvement or low in involvement. Though our study did show a significant positive correlation, it would be a good idea to expand and include other variables to see if the relationship can be affected by other factors.

**Conclusion**

The attraction and persuasion aspect of social psychology, though just a small slice of the broad topic, may help explain the reason that when we go to car dealerships, electronic stores, or really any place having to do with retail sales, that we see handsome men or beautiful women. Even though we are not outwardly conscious of the fact that we are affected by their beauty, our brains are aware and because of this reason, we are being persuaded to purchase things that we don’t really need or maybe even want. Bringing awareness to the relationship between attraction and persuasion can save someone for the next time they go into a store. They will be sure to find a salesperson that they don’t view as super attractive so that when they get home, they won't find that they just purchased a bunch of items that they did not intend to get.
References

