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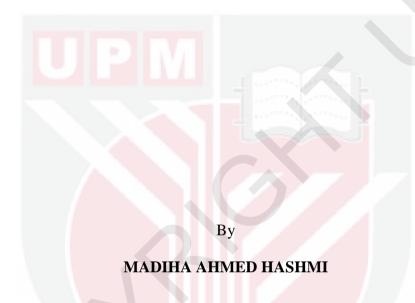
# DISCERNING GOODNESS OF LEADERS USING THIN-SLICED JUDGEMENT OF NONVERBAL CUES AMONG LAY MALAYSIAN AND CHINESE PERCEIVERS

## MADIHA AHMED HASHMI

FBMK 2016 32



## DISCERNING GOODNESS OF LEADERS USING THIN-SLICED JUDGEMENT OF NONVERBAL CUES AMONG LAY MALAYSIAN AND CHINESE PERCEIVERS



Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

## DISCERNING GOODNESS OF LEADERS USING THIN-SLICED JUDGEMENTOF NONVERBAL CUES AMONG LAY MALAYSIAN AND CHINESE PERCEIVERS

By

## MADIHA AHMED HASHMI

## August 2016

Chairman: Professor Ezhar Bin Tamam, PhD

Faculty: Modern Languages and Communication

The notion of goodness is implicitly central to the discourse relating to person perception. Research indicates that nonverbal cues greatly influence person perception. In addition, 'thin slice studies' (brief observation of nonverbal cues) have demonstrated that accurate personality appraisals of unknown others can be made at above than chance levels. To date no study has delved explicitly into the notion of goodness while forming rapid and unreflective inferences about others via nonverbal cues. The purpose of this study was twofold: to explore if accurate thin-sliced judgments of politicians' goodness could be made by politically naïve audiences – relying solely on nonverbal cues. Also, to understand how lay audiences perceive politicians through their nonverbal demeanor based on thin-sliced snapshots.

Performed in two phases, the study applied a qualitative research design by utilizing focus group interviews. In the first stage, six focus group sessions were conducted three focus groups comprising of Malaysian students and three focus groups comprising of Chinese students. These focus groups helped uncover the meanings and associations related to 'goodness' across the two collectivist cultures. In the second stage, politically naïve participants made impressionistic judgments about select politicians' perceived goodness — which was established through media reports. Study participants viewed brief glimpses of politicians while delivering speeches and were asked to make snap impressionistic judgments about the target stimuli, with a particular focus on the goodness element, followed by a discussion probing the rationale behind their evaluations.

Focus group participants' narratives were not entirely consistent across the spectrum. Perceivers were not able to form uniform judgments about all six politicians. That said, it is noteworthy that participants were still able to form fairly accurate impressions of some politicians based on brief glimpses of nonverbal footage. These contradictory findings are discussed and analyzed in the discussion section of this

dissertation. The purpose of this study was also to examine the nonverbal indicators of goodness as articulated by the participants after forming rapid thin sliced judgments. Across all the groups, paralinguistic cues (pace and pause in speech), dynamic cues (gestures and face/eye behavior) and static cues (appearance/features and age) were found to be instrumental in the formation of accurate perceptions of goodness based on thin slices of non-verbal cues. These findings have important implications for the areas of nonverbal behavior, political communication and personality judgment.



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

## TANGGAPAN KEBAIKAN PEMIMPIN MENGGUNAKAN PENILAIAN THIN-SLICED ISYARAT BUKAN LISAN DALAM KALANGAN PENERIMA MALAYSIA DAN CINA

Oleh

## MADIHA AHMED HASHMI

**Ogos 2016** 

Pengerusi : Profesor Ezhar Bin Tamam, PhD Fakulti : Bahasa Moden dan Komunikasi

Gambaran kebaikan bergantung kepada wacana berkaitan persepsi individu. Kajian menunjukkan isyarat bukan lisan sangat mempengaruhi persepsi individu. Tambahan 'kajian *thin slice'* (pemerhatian ringkas terhadap isyarat bukan lisan) menunjukkan penilaian personaliti yang tepat mengenai seseorang yang tidak dikenali boleh dibuat melebihi peluang yang ditetapkan. Sehingga kini tiada kajian terperinci dibuat terhadap gambaran kebaikan ketika kesimpulan yang pantas dan tidak reflektif dibuat menerusi isyarat bukan lisan. Kajian ini dijalankan dengan meletakkan sasaran berganda: untuk melihat sama ada khalayak yang naïf politik boleh membuat penilaian thin-sliced tentang kebaikan yang ditonjolkan oleh ahli politik – dengan hanya bergantung kepada isyarat bukan lisan. Juga, untuk memahami cara khalayak melihat ahli politik melalui sikap bukan lisan berdasarkan gambaran *thin-sliced*.

Dilaksanakan dalam dua fasa, kajian ini dibuat melalui penyelidikan kualitatif dengan menggunakan temu bual kelompok sasaran. Pada tahap pertama, kumpulan perbincangan berfokus (KPB) dilaksanakan – tiga kelompok sasaran yang terdiri daripada pelajar Malaysia dan tiga kelompok sasaran yang terdiri daripada pelajar Cina. Kelompok sasaran ini membantu menjelaskan maksud dan perkaitan 'kebaikan' merentasi dua budaya kolektivis. Pada tahap kedua, peserta yang naïf politik membuat penghakiman impresionistik mengenai kebaikan yang terjangka dalam kalangan ahli politik terpilih – yang dilaporkan oleh media. Peserta kajian melihat ahli politik memberi ucapan secara rawak diminta membuat penilaian impresionistik mengenai stimuli sasaran, dengan memberikan fokus khusus kepada elemen kebaikan, diikuti dengan perbincangan berkaitan rasional di sebalik penilaian.

Naratif peserta kelompok berfokus tidak konsisten sepenuhnya di sepanjang spektrum. Penilai tidak dapat membuat penilaian seragam tentang kesemua enam ahli politik. Namun, didapati bahawa peserta masih mampu membuat gambaran

tepat mengenai beberapa ahli politik berdasarkan pemerhatian rawak secara bukan lisan. Dapatan yang bertentangan ini dibincang dan dianalisa dalam bahagian perbincangan disertasi ini. Kajian ini juga bertujuan untuk mengenalpasti isyarat bukan lisan seperti yang diperkatakan oleh peserta selepas melaksanakan penilaian *thin slice* yang pantas. Berdasarkan kesemua kumpulan, isyarat paralinguistik (kadar dan jeda dalam ucapan), isyarat dinamik (sifat gerakan dan mimik muka/mata) dan isyarat statik (penampilan/ciri-ciri dan usia) adalah instrumental dalam pembentukan tanggapan kebaikan yang tepat berdasarkan isyarat bukan lisan *thin-slice*. Dapatan ini mempunyai implikasi penting terhadap bidang pengajian tingkah laku bukan lisan, komunikasi politik dan penilaian personaliti.



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I would also like to express my gratitude to Dr. Steven Eric Krauss who provided independent feedback on my work which greatly strengthened the rigor of my study. And finally, my parents who have given me so much love and inspiration – I am who I am because of you.

I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 24 August 2016 to conduct the final examination of Madiha Ahmed Hashmi on her thesis entitled "Discerning Goodness of Leaders using Thin-Sliced Judgement of Nonverbal Cues among Lay Malaysian and Chinese Perceivers" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Doctor of Philosophy.

Members of the Thesis Examination Committee were as follows:

## Siti Zobidah binti Omar, PhD

Associate Professor Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication Universiti Putra Malaysia (Chairman)

## Md Salleh bin Hj Hassan, PhD

Professor Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication Universiti Putra Malaysia (Internal Examiner)

#### Jusang bin Bolong, PhD

Associate Professor Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication Universiti Putra Malaysia (Internal Examiner)

### Carolyn Calloway-Thomas, PhD

Professor Indiana University Bloomington United States (External Examiner)



ZULKARNAIN ZAINAL, PhD

Professor and Deputy Dean School of Graduate Studies Universiti Putra Malaysia

Date: 28 September 2016

This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

## Ezhar Bin Tamam, PhD

Professor Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication Universiti Putra Malaysia (Chairman)

## Abdul Mua`ti @ Zamri Ahmad, PhD

Professor
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Member)

## Moniza Waheed, PhD

Senior Lecturer
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Member)

**BUJANG BIN KIM HUAT, PhD** 

Professor and Dean School of Graduate Studies Universiti Putra Malaysia

Date:

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Signature:	
Name of	
Chairman of	
Supervisory	
Committee:	Professor Dr. Ezhar Bin Tamam
Signature:	
Name of	
Member of	
Supervisory	
Committee:	Professor Dr. Abdul Mua`ti @ Zamri Ahmad
Signature:	
Name of	
Member of	
Supervisory	
Committee:	Dr. Moniza Waheed

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## **CHAPTER I**

#### INTRODUCTION

## **Background**

"Nobility and dignity, self-abasement and servility, prudence and understanding, insolence and vulgarity, are reflected in the face and in the attitudes of the body whether still or in motion"

-- Socrates (Xenophon, Memorabilia, III)

Discerning meaning in human communication through nonverbal cues has a long tradition in human history and politics. Cicero in "Deoratore" and Quintilian in "Institutiones Oratoriae" showed how gesture, face, gaze and posture are an important part of "Actio" (discourse delivery) (Andre et al., 2010, p. 588). In the realm of politics, Richard Nixon made repeated attempts to eliminate the shifty eye behaviors and nonfluencies that helped reinforce the widespread public perception that he was "Tricky Dicky". Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher spent hours with a voice tutor doing "humming" exercises in order to lower the unpleasantly high pitch of her speaking voice (Leathers, 1992, p. 3).

Studies about the significance of nonverbal cues in communication have been a subject of intense scrutiny among scholars and practitioners. Nonverbal cues mean "perceptible behaviors, such as facial expressions and tones of voice that have the capacity to give insight into the expressor's attributes or condition" (Hall, Bernieri, & Carney, 2005, p.237). In their seminal study, Mehrabian and Ferris (1967) concluded that 55% of impression formation in our interactions is based on visual cues, 38% is based on vocal cues, and only 7% is based on verbal content of a message. Furthermore, Anderson (1999) asserted that around 60-70% of meaning is gleaned from nonverbal cues as opposed to verbal exchange. Givens (2005) has gone on to claim that the proportion of emotional communication often exceeds 99% in nonverbal exchange as compared to a verbal exchange. Regardless of the differences in the proposed weightages assigned to nonverbal communication, there is a consensus among scholars that nonverbal communication is heavily relied on to make inferences about others (Knapp, 1972; Ellis & Fisher, 1994; Sadler-Smith, 2008).

More recently, scholars of psychology and communication have been examining social judgments, including snap impressions of unknown others formed spontaneously and unconsciously (Ambady, Bernieri, & Richeson, 2000; Todorov et al., 2005). Social Judgment theory was founded by psychologist Egon Brunswick (1955) and further refined by Hammond and colleagues (Hammond, Stewart, Brehmer, & Steinmann, 1975; Hammond et al., 1977; Brunswik, 1955). Social Judgment Theory entails forming impressions about individuals and making personality judgments based on explicit or implicit cues (Forgas, Williams, & von Hippel, 2003).

Thin slice judgments fall into the category of social judgments that rely on implicit, procedural rather than explicit, declarative knowledge (Ambady, 2010, p. 274).

7KLQ VOLFHLM for excerpt of behavior sampled from the behavioral stream, less than five minutes in length' (Ambady, Laplante, & Johnson, 2001, p. 90). Malcom Gladwell (2006) iV KLV EHVWVHOOLQJ ERRN MOLQN 7KH 3RZHU RI 7KLQNLQJ:LWKF 7KLQNLQJ UHIHUM WINTERICIN DV WKH SUDFWLFH RI LQIHUULQJ WKH PRWLYDWLRQV LQWHQWLRQVRIRWKHUVS

Thin sliced judgments are intuitive in nature ±helping us navigate our way through uncertain and ambiguous situations (Ambady et al. 2001; Gladwell, 2006). Such judgments are ubiquitous and are communicated through nonverbal behavior that has EHQFKDUDFWHUL]HGDVĐQHODERUDWHDQGVHFUHWFRGHWKDWLVZULWWHQEQRQHDQGXQGHUVWRRGEDOO6DSLUS Several studies have shown that relatively accurate trait inferences can be made by viewing thin sliced nonverbal video-clips or static pictures of people - in less than 5 seconds and in some cases the time duration has been less than 2 seconds (Albright, Kenney, & Malloy, 1988; Ambady & Rosenthal, 1993; Todorov, Mandiosodza, Goren, & Hall, 2005; Naylor, 2007; Naumaan, Vazire, Rentfrow, & Gosling, 2009).

Albright et al. (1988) conducted research RQhHURDFTXDLQWDQFH#HURDFTXDLQWDQFI research is based on self and peer ratings - observers making personality judgments of unacquainted people. Studies conducted in zero acquaintance have shown that unacquainted SHRSOH@bservations and impressions about one another on certain personality traits are remarkably accurate.

Ambady and Rosenthal (1993) groundbreaking study revealed that teacher effectiveness can be accurately predicted by unacquainted students on various personality dimension scales based on brief nonverbal muted video clips. Further findings showed that deliberation and rational thinking actually diminishes the accuracy of spontaneous split-second judgments (Ambady, 2010).

Todorov et al. (2005) were able to conclude from their findings that people are accurately able to predict election outcomes based on a 1 second exposure of the candidaWHV¶DFI(SVatic picture). Competence proved to be the primary trait in predicting the electoral outcome.

Naylor (2007) conducted a study where they asked raters to evaluate pictures of financial consultants based on their job performance and personality dimensions. The study determined that people are able to evaluate unknown others accurately based on those traits which seem relevant to the domain in question. For instance, financial consultants were rated accurately based on prompetence, however their plantage production of the production of

Naumaan et al. (2009) did another study to further probe the accuracy of self and peer evaluations of unknown others based on personality dimensions. In their experiment they used two kinds of pictures  $\pm$  static and dynamic. It was found that dynamic pictures were more useful in impression formation since they provide more insights into nonverbal cues.

Darwin (1872) in his seminal work, 'Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals' claimed that human expressions and emotions are universal with respect to certain characteristics of the human face. Cross cultural research done by Izard (1971) and (Ekman & Friesan, 1975) in discerning nonverbal facial communication of emotions concluded and substantiated the claims made by Darwin that that fundamental emotions expressed by facial expressions are universal and hence understood across the cultural divide. These universal nonverbal expressions consist of the following facial expressions: anger, disgust, fear, happiness, surprise, and sadness (Ekman & Friesan, 1975).

Cross cultural studies in rapid impression formation of unknown others further lend credence to previous findings. For example Rule, Ambady, and Adams (2010) demonstrated through their research that there was a cross cultural consensus in ratings among American and Japanese students on personality evaluations of unknown political candidates. Similarly, in Lawson, Lens, Baker, and Myers (2010) study there was remarkable amount of consistency in Indian and Americans' rating of Brazilian and Mexican politicians regarding their electoral outcome. Further, Antonakis and Dalgas, (2009) study revealed that Swiss children and adults could accurately predict the electoral outcome of French parliamentarians based on nonverbal split second visuals. Hence, spontaneous and immediate reactions of universal emotions are often produced prior to the cultural reactions (Hwang & Matsumuto, 2015, p. 50).

The perception of political candidates and the significance of their nonverbal cues have a crucial impact on how people perceive and make evaluative decisions about candidates. The impact of nonverbal cues of political candidates has been found to be more pronounced among lay audiences who have an apathetic, ignorant and indifferent attitude towards political knowledge (Bennet, Ryan, & Flickinger, 2004; Lenz & Lawson, 2010). Kopacz (2006) claims that "where information is scarce, the way a candidate looks, moves, or speaks may provide quick and often reliable cues" (p. 3) - with regard to the domain in which they are being evaluated.

Studies have identified competence as the most important trait which people tend to discern while evaluating politicians (Todorov et al., 2005). Politicians who are evaluated as competent are also perceived to be honest, emotionally stable, dependable and less disorganized (Olivola & Todorov, 2010). Scherer (2012) did a feature on President Obama for TIME magazine. He attributed Obama's popularity to a variety of factors – one of them being his likable persona. Scherer (2012) call attentions to the focus group sessions conducted by David Simas. Simas ran Obama's research team and conducted the largest listening posts in US history. Voters were gathered in rented rooms across the swing states. Among swing voters democrat often elicited *Barack Obama* and republicans would yield words like *old* and *backward*. "Here is the best thing", he said of Obama when he went back to home base. "People trust him." (Simas, as cited in Scherer, 2012, p. 48). Mitt Romney's deputy manager, Gage contended "there was almost nothing that would stick to this guy, because they just like him personally" (Scherer, 2012, p.48).

Accurate, unreflective & rapid trait judgments of nonverbal stimuli in the context of person perception have intrigued communication scholars and psychologists alike. Person perception is broad and includes judgments of others' thoughts, emotions,

personality, status, and intentions. When we encounter another person, we use these perceptions to form impressions of that person and to guide our subsequent interactions (Hartigan, Andrzejewisji, & Hill, 2012, p. 483). Nonverbal behavior (appearance as well as style) importantly affects person perception (Rosenberg & McCafferty, 1987, p. 33). Person perception essentially entails two stages of evaluative judgments. The first stage is where snap impressions of individuals are made without any deliberation and effort. This process is spontaneous and unreflective and referred to as an 'anchoring' inference. The second stage of person perception involves conscious deliberation. This stage is referred to as an 'adjustment inference' in which the anchoring inference level evaluations may be modified (Gilbert & Malone, 1995; Quattrone, 1982). This initial evaluative stage of person perception reflected in thin slice judgments seems to be particularly important for the accurate processing of certain types of social information regarding affect, personality, and interpersonal functioning (Ambady, 2010, p. 274).

An important contribution of person perception literature, particularly for the purpose of this study, is its role in highlighting the significance of morality in intuitive impression formation of unknown others. Person perception studies have shown individuals' moral characteristics supersede all other personality trait evaluations. Furthermore, scholars assert that these moral judgments are automatic and rapid - made without any deliberation or intention. In addition, most of these studies have concluded that spontaneous personality appraisals in the context of morality transcend cultural boundaries and are universal in nature (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2008; Wojciszke, 1997).

Collectivist cultures place great importance on moral interpretation when it comes to judging others (Wojciszke, 1997). The current study includes collectivist cultures of China and Malaysia which have been identified as embodying collectivist philosophy – characterized by interdependent communal affiliations, harmony and reliance on nonverbal signals to communicate interpersonal information (Kennedy, 2002; Jogulu & Ferkins, 2012; Sueda, 2014).

## **Problem Statement**

Burgeoning literature in communication, psychology and political science suggests that social judgments are made spontaneously, and intuitively. Research scholars have studied many judgments, however the most intriguing are the ones which deal with morality -- more specifically, is a certain person good or bad? (Kihlstrom, 2010). Leathers (1992) explains that "the face communicates evaluative judgments through either pleasant or unpleasant expressions that indicate whether the communicator sees the current object of his or her attention as good or bad" (p. 32).

Dr. Nalini (Ambady & Rosenthal, 1992; Ambady, 2010) was able to demonstrate through her research that students can accurately evaluate teacher effectiveness based on brief glimpses of nonverbal behavior. Whereas Todorov et al. (2005) focused on rapid predictions of political candidates' winning potential – identifying competence as the key trait predictor of electoral outcomes. While both the scholars have explored the accuracy of intuitive and accurate social judgments about unknown others, they didn't examine where this notion of effectiveness and

competence is coming from. The researcher would like to argue that before we evaluate the accuracy of traits, such as effectiveness and competence in person perception, there's another element which dominates global impression formation making -- goodness. More specifically, when people are able to intuitively sense that a certain person is good, they might rate that person high on effectiveness or competence traits. Goodwin et al. (2014) postulate that moral character is the first thing that is evaluated in person perception. Moral character in person evaluation holds prime importance "because the goodness of another person's character determines whether they are likely to be harmful or helpful to the self" (Goodwin et al., 2014, p.148).

Several studies on person perception in social judgments have concluded that morality is a dominant element in impression formation (Goodwin et al., 2014; Brambilla et al., 2011; Brambilla et al., 2012; Wojciszke, 2005; Parzuchowski & Wojciszke, 2014). However, existing literature on morality is too broad and vague – falling short in explicitly exploring as to how people understand, interpret and discern morality in others. In instances where researchers have attempted to study this ambiguous terrain, scholars have often either conflated traits such as warmth and sociability with moral character, or have chosen to define moral character in very broad terms (Wojciszke, Bazinska, & Jaworski, 1998; Fisk, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007; Goodwin et al., 2014). This study sets out to explore this intriguing phenomenon -that has been cited as the most paramount component in forming impressions about others, by first acquiring clarity on the concept of 'goodness'. The fundamental notion of goodness is intrinsically important and functionally pertinent for all human beings in order to survive and make sense of the world. Even though we tend to evaluate others and make inferences of goodness on a daily basis, this concept which is at the core of morality has scarcely received any attention in scholarly discourse. Related literature in person perception has assumed goodness to be a sub component of morality (Wojciszke, 1994) - without every really delving into the notion of goodness per se. This dissertation will explore the notion of goodness holistically by first understanding the meaning of goodness as interpreted by the study participants, probing the nonverbal dimensions associated with goodness (cues that communicate goodness to others), examining if accurate thin sliced judgments of goodness can be made by lay perceivers and also uncovering the thought process involved in thin sliced judgments pertaining to goodness.

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no qualitative study (nor quantitative for that matter) has explicitly delved into the notion of goodness -- how it's understood and perceived in others and if it can be discerned rapidly via nonverbal cues across cultures. To address this gap, the first phase of this study would entail generating themes, concepts, and ideas related to goodness. Once we're able to understand the notion of 'goodness' as interpreted by the participants of the study, we would be better equipped to approach the next phase of the study – discerning goodness in thin slices of nonverbal behavior. By exclusively delving into the notion of goodness, this study attempts to generate new knowledge on goodness - providing rich interpretations about the phenomenon that should result in a nuanced understanding of how goodness is perceived and discerned in others.

Literature on social judgments has demonstrated that lay audiences are able to nonverbally decode and make fairly accurate person evaluations regarding teacher effectiveness, perceived competence of congressional candidates, intelligence, etc. (Ambady & Rosenthal, 1993; Todorov et al., 2005; Olivola & Todorov, 2010; Zebrowitz & Rhodes, 2004). To date no study has attempted to examine if lay audiences are able to discern goodness of political candidates in brief slices of nonverbal behavior across cultures. This gap in literature is to be addressed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and final stage of the study, where laypersons will be asked to evaluate 6 political leaders (whom they have no prior knowledge of) using the' thin sliced impression formation paradigm' to determine if accurate and spontaneous personality judgments about a politician's goodness can be deduced via nonverbal cues.

In-addition to the above mentioned studies, almost all studies relating to thin-sliced social judgments/impression formation have been conducted quantitatively. In most of these studies participants are required to rate unknown others (i.e., teachers, politicians, etc...) by viewing thin-slices (brief glimpse) of their nonverbal (muted sound clips, or pictures) behavior. These rating are subjected to statistical analysis on the basis of which conclusions are drawn. There is absolutely no discussion as to: how these participants arrive at these fairly accurate judgments? What cues are they relying on to make these judgments? There seems to be no qualitative understanding about these evaluations utilizing the thin sliced paradigm. This methodological gap coupled with my own curiosity provided the impetus to employ a qualitative design to a thin-sliced paradigm by focusing on the concept of 'goodness' and exploring how people (laypersons) make social judgments about unknown others based on their nonverbal cues. By tapping into this unexplored process, the study should be able to contribute to a holistic and in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question. Braun and Clarke (2013) observe that by employing a qualitative design, we would be able to produce rich, in-depth and detailed data which will allow us to make claims. They further explain that qualitative approach "allows us to retain focus on people's own framing around issues, and their own terms of reference, rather than having it pre-framed by the researcher (e.g. items in a questionnaire) (p. 24)

Studies have indicated that rapid and fairly accurate impression formation of unknown others often transcends cultural boundaries. Naïve evaluators hailing from different cultural backgrounds often are in agreement on basic personality trait judgments pertaining to dominance, attractiveness, predicting electoral outcomes, competence etc. (Rule et al., 2010; Lawson et al., 2010; Antonakis & Dalgas, 2009; Poutvaara, Jordahl, & Berrgren, 2009) This study intends to extend previous research with regard to the universality of appearance based judgments, with a particular focus on perceived goodness -- probing it in a different cultural context. As stated earlier, in one study, Indian and American participants hailing from two different continents were able to come to the same conclusion about Mexican and Brazilian politicians' perceived competence. It would be interesting to see if Malaysian and Chinese participants might also be able to form similar rapid cross cultural impressions of select politicians' perceived goodness - given that collectivist cultures have greater propensity to rely on nonverbal cues to decode information (Sueda, 2014).

While we have substantial body of research claiming that fairly accurate personality appraisals can be made via nonverbal cues using a thin sliced methodology, what is lacking however, is a serious discourse about the notion of goodness in the context of person perception. If we're able to define and discern goodness in others - not only will that benefit us enormously in terms of managing our relationships in the workplace, family and friends, but also, it can have tremendous public policy implications. If we're able to accurately discern goodness in others, we would be making effective decisions regarding who we elect in public offices, how we train our police officers, the kind of people we hire in our institutions, etc.

## **Research Questions**

Specifically, this study posed the following research questions:

- 1. What constitutes goodness among the Malaysian and Chinese perceivers?
- 2. How do nonverbal cues influence lay perceptions of goodness among the Malaysian and Chinese perceivers?
- 3. How do nonverbal cues influence lay perceptions of goodness in political leaders among the Malaysian and Chinese perceivers?

## **Research Objectives**

## General Objectives

The aims of this study are twofold:

- 1. To explore the extent to which lay audiences are able to make accurate thinsliced judgments of politicians' goodness – relying solely on nonverbal cues.
- 2. To understand how lay audiences perceive politicians through their nonverbal demeanor based on thin-sliced snapshots.

## Specific Objectives

- 1. To determine how goodness is perceived among the Malaysian and Chinese perceivers
- 2. To determine how nonverbal cues influence perceptions surrounding the notion of goodness
- 3. To determine how nonverbal cues influence layperson's perceptions about politician's goodness

## **Significance of the Study**

Prior work on thin sliced paradigm has almost exclusively relied on quantitative methods – making broad claims about accuracy without delving into the process. This study will be the first of its kind to explore thin sliced paradigm qualitatively. This methodological variation has attempted to extend research on thin sliced studies by not just asking whether people are able to make accurate judgments about

unknown others but attempts to delve deeper -- allowing the participants to articulate their thought process for the first time when making such evaluative judgments.

In a bid to understand the notion of goodness, the study has attempted to delineate 'goodness' from morality – generating novel literature on goodness. A qualitative inquiry into the notion of goodness has produced rich interpretations about the phenomenon that should result in a nuanced understanding with regard to how goodness is perceived and discerned in others.

This dissertation study provides valuable insights to the literature of cross cultural consensus in thin-sliced social judgments. Studies relating to cross cultural consensus have primarily relied on quantitative designs to carry out their research. In the context of this study, focus group discussions have facilitated in gaining a nuanced understanding -- as to how Chinese and Malaysian participants perceive goodness in thin-slices of nonverbal cues based on their own cultural orientations. Are these two collectivists nationalities relying on the same cues in making social judgments or are they observing something different? Their responses to these questions within the focus group setting helped illuminate and "unearth individual and group narratives" (Hesse-Biber, & Leavy, 2006) that facilitated in gaining insight into cross cultural narratives pertaining to goodness.

This study cuts across disciplinary boundries and is not only realevant to the field of communication but also the political science discipline - owing to the political communication element embedded in the scope of the study. The study findings pertaining to how the politically unsophisticated (laypersons) perceive politicians based on thin-sliced impressions will result in an increased understanding of: how politically unengaged audiences form impressions of leaders and what kind of nonverbal cues do they focus on when making these judgments — providing invaluable insights to the student of politics and communication. In addition to the field of communication and political science, the study findings also have great amount of relevance for the discipline of social psychology since the conceptual framework primarily borrows concepts originating from the field of psychology — such as thin sliced paradigm and person perception.

The study findings should help increase awareness about the importance of acquiring nonverbal skills in order to form sound social judgements – potentially changing the discourse in decisionmaking in the realm of politics, leadership selection and other applied settings.

## **Scope of Limitations of the Study**

This study has it's share of limitations as is the the case with any type of research endeavor. Firstly, due to a relatively small sample size the findings of the study ought to be interpreted with caution. Since this is a qualitative study no broad claims of generalization can be made. That said, the purpose and aim of a qualitative study is not to generalize but to understand and describe a phenomenon holistically from the participants' viewpoint – which is what this study has stived to achieve. It is up to the reader to decide on the transferability of the findings to a similar setting or context.

Secondly, Although only those participants were selected for the study who were reasonably proficeint in English, some nuances might have been missed during the focus groups sessions given that non-native speakers of English at times struggle to articulate their thought process with confidence and clarity. To reduce their language anxiety the moderator of the focus group encouraged the reticent participants to cross talk in their own language, where the more fluent members of the group helped translate the exchange.

Thirdly, the sample size included Malaysians of all ethnicities – Malays, Chinese and Indians. It might be argued that all these 3 groups may not be representative of a homogenous Malaysian Identity. However, since these various multiethnic groups have been living in close proximity as members of one nation, an assumption of 'enculturation' was made to account for the selection of all ethnic groups which supposedly subscribed to the same national ethos.

The selection of only male political leaders to be shown in the thin-sliced clip can be construed as a possible limitation of the study. The rationale behind this decision lay in the fact it was relatively easier to find male leaders who met the criteria of goodness (philanthropic disposition/social welfare policies) and the opposite of goodness (human rights violation and war crime allegations) as compared to female leaders. Exclusion of female leaders as subjects of the study inhibits the researcher in making firmer claims about the study findings. A natural extension of this study would be to include female political leaders as well in order to acquire a more nuanced perspective concerning thin-sliced judgments and perceptions.

#### **Definition of Terms**

- 1. **Thin Slices**: Making rapid inferences about others based on quick nonverbal snapshots (Ambady & Rosenthal, 1992)
- 2. Lay Audiences: People/Participants who are making judgements about unknown others
- 3. **Politically Naive Audiences**: Particpants making rapid evaluations of politicians of which they have no prior knowledge/information about.
- 4. **Person perception:** Judgment or interpretation of the internal states and traits of others (Hartigan, Andrzejewski, & Hill, 2012, p.483)
- 5. **Social judgements:** Judgement based on a variety of sources of information, or cues (Doherty & Kurz, 1996, p.125)
- 6. **Ecological Theory of Social Perception**: Making dispositional inferences about others through their nonverbal behavior provides opportunity and has adaptive value for both the encoder and the deceiver (Zebrowitz & Collins, 1997).
- 7. **Unconscuious Thought Theory**: Efficient and spontaneous social judgements can be made without any conscious mental effort (Dijksterhuis, & Nordgren, 2006).
- 8. **Adaptive Unconscious**: Mental processes that are inaccessible to consciousness but that influence judgments, feelings, or behavior (Wilson, 2002, p. 23).

- 9. **Social Intuitionest Model**: Moral judgment is caused by quick moral intuitions, and is followed (when needed) by slow, ex-post facto moral reasoning (Haidt, 2001, p. 817).
- 10. **Functionalist Hypothesis**: People make moral evaluation of others in order to identify if the other person's behavior can benefit or harm them (Brambilla et al., 2011).



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