

# **The Art of Appearance: A Study on Impression Management among Academicians of a Selected State University in Sri Lanka**

L.S.D De Silva

*Department of Business Administration, Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka*

*sawani.dil96@gmail.com*

## **INTRODUCTION**

As social beings, people always tend to interact with others though they have different goals and purposes to achieve. The most important thing is when interacting, people try to create an impression about themselves in other's minds. Cambridge Dictionary (2019) defines 'impression' as an idea or opinion of a particular person or about something which is seemed, looked or feel to be. Simply, impressions are what we feel and think about others who are around us. Due to the individual differences and diverse backgrounds of individuals, there may be some conflicts during interactions. Once an individual co-operates with another, the person should have the ability to behave in such a way where others will accept the presence of that individual. If not, problems may arise. That is where the concept of 'Impression Management' (IM) comes into the field.

Leary and Kowalski (1990) state that the Americans spend billions of dollars on diets, make-ups and plastic surgeries every year to make them more attractive to others. This indicates that people have an interest to know how others perceive and evaluate them, which is known as the concept of impression management. Impression management refers to the process by which individuals try to control the impressions that others form of them (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Similarly, Bozeman and Kacmar (1997, as cited in Drory & Zaidman, 2007) define impression management as intentionally exhibiting certain behaviours, both verbal and nonverbal, which lead others to perceive the actor as desired. Altogether, it can be defined as the conscious or unconscious efforts of individuals which influence and make them keen to know how others observe and accept them. People may use different techniques to impress others with different intentions in their minds. Many researchers have identified those various strategies of impression management, and they have built up theories on them (Jones & Pittman, 1982; Leary & Kowalski, 1990).

Having a better knowledge of impression management is very helpful to understand and be aware of our actions in day-to-day life with the impressions we give to others (Gaspar, 2016). So, it is much more important to give significant consideration to the concept of impression

management in the present scenario. “Thus, engaging in impression management can help to ensure that social interactions go smoothly” (Dunn & Forrin, 2007, p. 468). This statement illustrates the importance of conducting studies on impression management further. Over the past few years, many kinds of studies have been done to identify impression management and its tactics within the organizational context (Asawo & George, 2018; Bolino et al., 2006; Drory & Zaidman, 2007; Gwal, 2015; Mohamed & Gardner, 2004). However, Leary and Kowalski (1990) emphasize that even at home, work, school, and elsewhere, people monitor the reaction of others on them and try to show an image that promotes themselves. Correspondingly, Gwal (2015) highlights the importance of managing impressions in any kind of organization, which consists of individuals who possess different personalities. These statements direct that impression management can be practiced anywhere if there is a presence of individuals. So, even in not-for-profit organizations such as universities and colleges, impression management practices can be experienced especially among academicians as there are higher levels of interactions taking place with each other in such environments. The term ‘academician’ refers to a member of an academy or educational institute (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019). Though impression management can be utilized to enhance the quality of interactions of academicians, researchers in Sri Lanka have paid less attention to such mechanisms. As a result, there are limited studies done on impression management in relation to the educational institutions in Sri Lanka. Therefore, this study is designed to address the identified problem and focus to look at how and why impression management is done among academicians within state universities in the Sri Lankan context to give a thorough understanding of the site. Drawing from the above-mentioned gaps, this research study raises the following research questions:

- a) How impression management is done among academicians of a selected state university in Sri Lanka? and,
- b) Why impression management strategies are practiced among academicians of a selected state university in Sri Lanka?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **The Concept of Impression Management**

The theoretical framework for the concept of impression management was initially introduced by Erving Goffman through his book ‘The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life’. There, he defines impression management as a dramaturgical metaphor of individuals as actors on a stage performing for the audience (Goffman, 1971). Impression management is concerned

with studying how individuals present themselves to be perceived favourably by others according to the social-psychology viewpoint (Hooghiemstra, 2000, as cited in Chaubey & Kandpal, 2017). In an advanced way, “Impression management is a goal-directed, conscious or unconscious attempt to influence the perceptions of other people about a person, object or event by regulating and controlling information in social interaction” (Singh, 2013, as in Shoko & Dzimiri, 2018, p. 253). Further, the concept of impression management influences individuals and entities both positively and negatively (Akdogan & Aykan, 2008, as cited in Khadyr & Caliskan, 2016).

Dunn and Forrin (2007) demonstrate that impression management is mostly done unintentionally, since people do not expect to do so, by providing an example of how it differs the way we interact with a close friend from the way we interact with a family member. There, they state such different behaviour occurs not only because of what we wish to be viewed differently when interacting with people, but also the people whom we interact with have different hopes and expectations regarding our behaviour and how we should behave in front of them. Therefore, as individuals, we may use the best identity for a situation as we have different identities to interact (Araz, 1998, as cited in Khadyr & Caliskan, 2016).

Although most of the researchers have focused on how people present themselves to others under impression management, it can also be seen that some people try to manage the images of other people or other entities if they are related to them. To prove that, Cialdini and Richardson (1980, as cited in Mohamed & Gardner, 2004) show how people try to damage the image of others or business organizations to enhance their own image. Thus, the target of impression management is not always the self, but it may be other people or entities too. “Impression management can also be seen as a form of leadership behaviour” (Shoko & Dzimiri, 2018, p. 253). As per this quotation, it is implied that people use impression management to influence others as an act of leadership.

### **Strategies of Impression Management**

Akdogan and Aykan (2008) express that to have an effective impression management one should use a suitable strategy (as cited in Khadyr & Caliskan, 2016). Initially, scholars have categorized impression management strategies as direct and indirect tactics. Again, the direct tactics are divided as assertive and defensive tactics (Amaral, 2018). Similarly, Mohamed et al. (1999, as cited in Terrell & Kwok, 2011) have developed a 2×2 taxonomy of organizational impression management behaviours including all direct and indirect tactics with assertive and defensive tactics. Use of own information to improve/ repair the image is called ‘direct strategies’ while using information which one associates with to manage impressions is called ‘indirect strategies’. Assertive strategies are used to improve the good image while defensive

strategies are accompanied to reduce/ repair the damage incurred to the image (Terrell & Kwok, 2011; Yan & Ho, 2017). Moreover, Jones and Pittman (1982) introduce five strategies of impression management that are used by individuals aiming at protecting and maintaining one's image. Ingratiation, self-promotion, exemplification, intimidation, and supplication are those five strategies introduced under Jones and Pittman's taxonomy.

"Ingratiation involves doing a favor or use of flattery to be likable by the observers" (Chaubey & Kandpal, 2017, p. 10). Greetings and praising under the impression management tactic of ingratiation may have an impact on self-efficacy in an optimistic way (Bouffard-Bouchard, 1990, as cited in Ortbach & Recker, 2014). Likewise, praising colleagues for their accomplishments is an effective strategy of ingratiation in order to be attractive in the eyes of target people (Gwal, 2015).

Self-promotion is convincing the target people about the actor's competence to compete with others (Jones & Pittman, 1982). In the similar fashion, "Self-promotion is a proactive process in which the self-promoter has to actively say things to show the competence or at least undertake actions so that the competence is displayed to the target" (Gwal, 2015, p. 41). Also, the occurrence of self-promotion strategy increases when an individual tries to impress another person who is in a higher rank position than the actor (Giacalone & Rosenfeld, 1986, as cited in Chaubey & Kandpal, 2017).

"Exemplification involves showing oneself to look overly dedicated and committed while creating a feeling of guilt among others" (Arif, 2011, as cited in Chaubey & Kandpal, 2017). In the same way, Jones and Pittman (1982) describe exemplification as the action in which individuals seek to project integrity and moral worthiness where it makes others feel guilty. With that, individuals who use this tactic try to show that they are moral characters (Khadyr & Caliskan, 2016).

The actor tries to show that he/she is dangerous by advertising the available power by creating pain, discomfort and all types of psychic costs on the target person using the strategy of intimidation (Jones & Pittman, 1982). Khadyr and Caliskan (2016) suggest that intimidation strategy is the reverse strategy of ingratiation. According to Rosenfeld et al. (1995, as cited in Gwal, 2015), the intimidation tactic of impression management mostly flows from higher-level positions to lower-level positions.

As stated by Jones and Pittman (1982), the strategy of supplication is where a person exploits his weaknesses and dependencies to get help from the target. People who use supplication as a strategy try to establish a social norm that we should help others when they need the help of someone by displaying the weakness/ disability (Rosenfeld et al., 1995, as cited in Gwal,

2015). According to Akdogan and Aykan (2008), supplication strategy is opposite to the strategy of self-promotion (as cited in Khadyr & Caliskan, 2016).

Moreover, Lee et al. (1999) have developed a taxonomy of self-presentation skills including 13 tactics. Their 13 tactics of impression management include excuse, apology, justification, disclaimer, self-handicapping, entitlement, enhancement, blasting, basking, ingratiation, exemplification, intimidation and supplication. An excuse is used when the person rejects his/her responsibility for a negative action. A person confessing the wrongdoings done to the others is called an apology. Justification involves providing reasons for the wrongdoing while taking responsibility for it. Providing explanations before difficulties occur is the action of disclaimer. In self-handicapping, a person creates complications to the success of an action to prevent others from questioning regarding the failure. Entitlement means taking credit for a successful accomplishment. When the person shows that his/her actions are more positive than expected, it is called the tactic of enhancement. Basking occurs when a person tries to engage with the people who are perceived as good by others. Blasting is the opposite of basking where a person creates a bad image on others with whom he/she engages (Lee et al., 1999).

However, all the above-mentioned classifications have left out the non-verbal impression management tactics (Yan & Ho, 2017). Non-verbal behaviours such as facial expressions, movements, postures and appearance can be used for impression construction (DePaulo, 1992, as cited in Yan & Ho, 2017). Similarly, Brooks (1985, as cited in Gaspar, 2016) illustrates how first impression and nonverbal behaviours such as the attire are important in the formation of impressions. Yilmaz (2014) notes that although individuals face the same situation, the tactics they use may differ (as cited in Yan & Ho, 2017). Consequently, the extent to which one person employs impression management strategies may differ from one person to another and also from one organization to another (Shoko & Dzimir, 2018).

### **Motives Behind Impression Management**

To have desired impressions from others, it is required to consider the motivation and the belief of the person who creates impressions (Khadyr & Caliskan, 2016). Therefore, it is important to identify not only the strategies of impression management, but also the motives behind them. Schlenker (1980) points out that the motivation behind impression management behaviours leads to increase rewards while reducing punishments (as cited in Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Therefore, individuals tend to use impression management strategies when they get to know that they can gain more results through it (Schlenker & Weigold, 1992, as cited in Khadyr & Caliskan, 2016). Similarly, Demir (2002) directs that individuals use impression management to improve personality, manage emotions and have better results by creating good impressions in other's minds (as cited in Khadyr & Caliskan, 2016). Thus,

“Impression management is used when a person wishes to create and maintain a specific identity” (Drory & Zaidman, 2007, p. 290). In contrast, Becker and Martin (1995) express that there may be some incidents where people attempt to look bad with the intention of creating a bad image of someone else on behalf of them (as cited in Mohamed & Gardner, 2004).

Impression management strategies help to have desired outcomes while reducing undesired outcomes. Those outcomes may sometimes be social or personal such as authority, relationship, assistance, approval. On the other hand, some outcomes may be material like promotions, salary increments (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Schlenker (1980) expresses that motivation behind impression management increases when there is a person who is more powerful, authoritative and nice-looking than somebody who simply forms impressions (as cited in Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Furthermore, the increased confidence level of the impression former (actor) is another motive behind impression management. So, individuals are motivated to engage in impression management when there are reactions from others which increase their self-esteem (Schneider, 1969, as cited in Leary & Kowalski, 1990). In contrast, shame and lack of success too increase motivation towards impression management (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Moreover, impression management is used to accomplish the requirements based on the situation that the person is in (Scott, 1981, p. 582). As this highlights, motives behind people to engage in impression management may depend on the situation.

When it comes to educational institutes, some attributes such as designation, sense, intellect, knowledge, appearance, personality, social status, economic well-being, generosity and designation/ position enhance impression management among academicians (Chaubey & Kandpal, 2017). Besides, Shoko and Dzimiri (2018) suggest that the head positions in schools engage in impression management strategies to follow norms, to develop the identity of the school and about themselves, and to get approval and recognition from the society.

### **Impression Management in Educational Institutes**

Aside from being common in employment interviews and private organisations, impression management can be applied to educational organisations too (Shoko & Dzimiri, 2018). With that, there is a tendency to be engaged in impression management by academic communities when displaying their work (Ortbach & Recker, 2014). Academics who are extrinsically motivated by materialistic rewards use impression management than the academics who are intrinsically motivated by achievement (Khadyr & Caliskan, 2016). The study by Shoko and Dzimiri (2018), which was conducted in Zimbabwe, states that school heads spend more time during their leadership and management to manage impressions among teachers and stakeholders regarding their position and the school. Non-verbal behaviours also influence the

concept of impression management in educational institutions. As an example, when a lecturer enters into the class with an untidy dress, students may form the impression that the lecturer is not capable of teaching or he/she may be lethargic at teaching. Similarly, face is also another important factor to understand how lecturers maintain the image in the class (Gaspar, 2016). Therefore, during academic activities, non-verbal behaviours and facial expressions affect a lot when forming an impression of a person.

Students spend more energy on managing self-impressions and avoiding negative impressions when targeting professors than peers when it comes to academic performance (Haber & Tesoriero, 2018). Correspondingly, Valerius and Parr (1997) highlight students use impression management tactics to gain social goals such as obtaining recognition and personal contact with the instructor, rather than obtaining performance goals. And, students who are not that much knowledgeable receive better grades than they expect by the use of impression management tactics effectively with their teachers (Takei et al., 1998). Also, females tend to manage impressions than males in the school environment (Haber & Tesoriero, 2018).

By reviewing the above literature, it is understood that there is an opportunity to undertake a study on impression management with special reference to academicians within educational institutes which highlights the importance of carrying out this research study.

## **METHODOLOGY**

An exploratory study has been conducted that relies on the paradigm of interpretivism. Interpretivism is where researchers make sense of the subjectivity and socially constructed meanings about the phenomenon they are researching (Saunders et al., 2016). The concept of impression management is much more behaviour-focused and because of that, it is required to go to the field, observe and talk with the participants to come up with research findings. Therefore, the researcher and author of this paper had to play an important role in the data collection process. Thus, her personal values and her role during the research process cannot be separated from the research study, and therefore it is positioned under the interpretivism philosophy. By adopting the inductive approach, where it contributes to a theory through own observations and data analysis, the researcher has chosen the qualitative design for her research project. Hence, a qualitative study was carried out using a series of interviews as the research strategy.

Academicians were considered as the primary data source, because they are the repositories who possess the knowledge to address the research questions. Books, journal articles, conference proceedings, theses, statistics, reports and online websites have been used to

collect data as secondary data sources. All the academics in the selected state university were identified as the population of this study. Among them, eight academics of a leading management faculty have been drawn as the sample using the ‘purposive sampling technique’. According to Saunders et al. (2016), purposive sampling requires to use researcher’s judgment to choose cases that helps to answer the research questions. So, academicians who were willing to talk and share details regarding their ideas and perspectives, their designation and experiences, the department to which they are attached as well as their gender were set as criteria to draw the study sample.

Data collection was done using the interview method. Face-to-face and semi-structured interviews with a time duration of around 30-45 minutes were conducted among the selected academicians. Follow-up questions were used to come up with a rich collection of data. Also, the findings were analysed using the ‘thematic analysis technique’. Braun and Clarke (2006) define thematic analysis as a method of identifying, evaluating and reporting patterns or themes in a dataset. Within the analysis process, all the transcripts were read in between lines to investigate different patterns, themes and trends. Then, those were coded under different themes with the support of the literature review. By analysing the most significant codes and themes, the accurate findings which answer the research questions of this study were identified. The details of the participants are depicted in Table 1.

*Table 1: Details of the Participants*

No.	Name	Date	Venue	Interview Duration
01.	Ms. Ayomi	20.01.2020	Particular lecturer’s cabin	75 minutes (Morning)
02.	Ms. Amali	06.02.2020	Particular lecturer’s cabin	31 minutes (Morning)
03.	Mr. Madhushan	24.01.2020	Particular lecturer’s cabin	45 minutes (Evening)
04.	Ms. Priyani	03.02.2020	In a particular unit where the participant engages in	65 minutes (Morning)
05.	Mr. Sadeep	31.01.2020	Particular lecturer’s cabin	30 minutes (Afternoon)
06.	Mr. Sandun	05.02.2020	In a common room of the lecturer’s department	34 minutes (Evening)
07.	Ms. Siluni	03.02.2020	Particular lecturer’s cabin	33 minutes (Afternoon)
08.	Mr. Thulada	24.01.2020	Particular lecturer’s cabin	35 minutes (Morning)

**Source: Author Compilation**

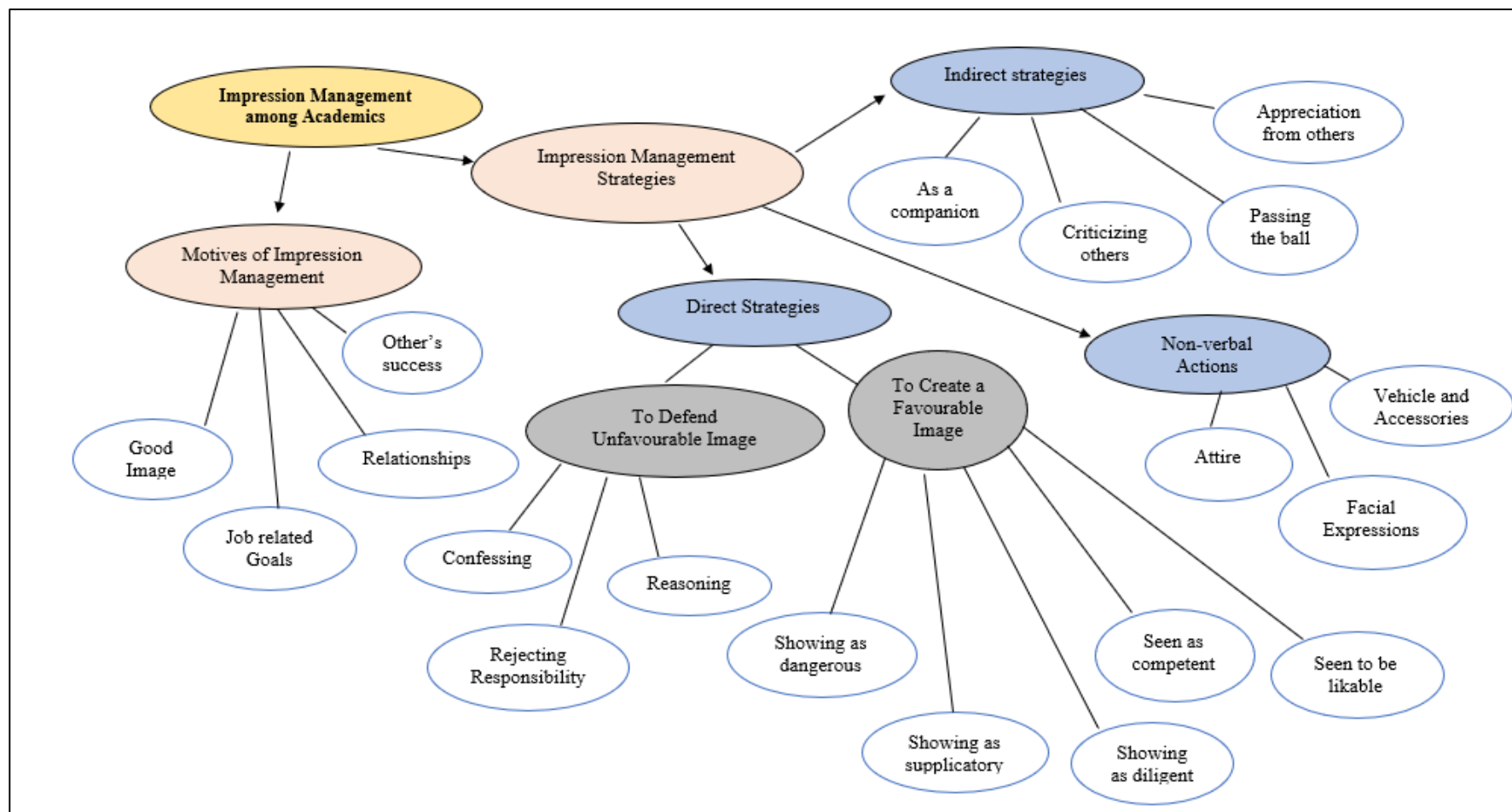


It has been considered as the ethical issues and actions were taken to address them too. Before the selection of the research topic, it was analyzed whether any parties would be negatively affected by conducting this study. Pseudonyms were therefore used to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants and the entities. Consent forms were administered to all of the participants prior to the interviews. During the interviews, all the questions were asked with the intention of not to harm/ embarrass the participants. Also, the participants were allowed to express their ideas freely, and to stop the discussion at any time they preferred. Further, when analysing the data, it was given the priority to the voices of the participants rather than the researcher's expectations regarding the findings. Moreover, all the secondary sources of other scholars were properly acknowledged by adhering to the citation and referencing guideline of the American Psychological Association (2019) - 7<sup>th</sup> edition.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

A thematic table and a thematic map (Figure 1) were developed to present the research findings. Findings were arranged into five main themes that are in line with the two research objectives. Direct ways of impression formation to create a favourable image, direct ways of impression formation to defend an unfavourable image, indirect ways of impression formation and non-verbal ways to impress others are the four themes designed under the objective of exploring the impression management strategies adopted by the academicians in the selected state university. Then, the final theme, which is the aims of impression management behaviours, was organized to examine the motives behind academicians to adopt those strategies that also is the second objective of this study. The following section presents the findings of the study under each theme.

Figure 1: Thematic Map



Source: Author Compilation

Note: The size and the distance between bubbles do not indicate any thematic relationship

## **Direct Ways of Impression Formation to Create a Favourable Image**

The findings of this theme of direct ways of impression formation to create a favourable image are interpreted using the five sub-themes of presenting oneself as a well competent person, presenting oneself to be likable, presenting oneself as diligent, presenting oneself as supplicatory and presenting oneself as dangerous and tough.

**Presenting Oneself as a Well Competent Person:** According to Gwal (2015), self-promotion is a process where individuals present things to display their competencies to the target audience. Almost all the participants in their self-introduction went on to describe their capabilities and competencies. With that, the researcher came up with a finding where academics in her context use this strategy of promoting their own competencies and capabilities to impress others by stating their performances, designations, previous employments, their own strengths and achievements among others.

**Presenting Oneself to be Likable:** People use flattery or do something in favour with the intention of being perceived as good in front of others. The findings of this study revealed that all the participants use flattery to impress others to some extent. Most of the time, male lecturers use it for lower-level employees like non-academics, while female lecturers use it among groups of friends. Also, academics in the sample respect others and try to be compatible with the university values to create a positive image of them in others' eyes. Further, those academicians have an indirect expectation behind joking in the classroom where if students have such a relaxed environment as a result of occasional humour, they tend to create a good impression of the particular academician as well. As a conclusion, it can be interpreted that the academics of the study sample not only use flattery and do flavour as to existing literature, but they also use some not so common behaviours such as greetings, sharing and respecting others. By doing so, they try to show that they want to maintain a favourable image in front of others.

**Presenting Oneself as Diligent:** During interview discussions, most of the participants emphasized on their huge workload to indicate how hardworking they are. Moreover, the researcher came across different stories narrated by the participants regarding the hard effort they have taken to make their students successful and excel in their performances. With that, it is implied that they wanted to be perceived as moral characters which agree with the existing literature where it has been observed that individuals try to highlight the fact they are hardworking moral characters using this strategy (Jones & Pittman, 1982; Khadyr & Caliskan, 2016). Further, findings confirmed that though academics of the study context do hard work and try to show that they are moral characteristics, they do so with real and honest intention and not to pretend.

**Presenting Oneself as Supplicatory:** The strategy of supplication is in which a person exploits his weaknesses and dependencies to receive a favour by the target (Jones & Pittman, 1982). An interesting result has been found where all the academics that the researcher has studied expressed

their incapacities with the idea of getting help from others. But, when and if taking assistance, they don't seek it only from a higher-level position as per the existing literature. They prefer to get assistance from any level of the career.

**Presenting Oneself as Dangerous and Tough:** Basically, this strategy is used by individuals to create an image as they are more authoritative than others. Rosenfeld et al. (1995) show that the intimidation mostly flows from higher-level positions to lower-level positions (as cited in Gwal, 2015). Through findings, it is proved that if the academics are to use power, they use it to lower-level academics or to the non-academic staff. Shoko and Dzimiri (2018) highlight that school heads have used the intimidation tactic when the good impression management tactics did not give intended results. In line with this, academics in the context use only a little or no intimidation strategy when the other positive tactics fail to reach their expectations. As the final interpretation, it is proved that although certain situations arise for academics of the study sample to use power, they use it rarely and that too for lower-level employees. But they do not prefer to be seen as intimidators in others' minds.

### **01. Direct Ways of Impression Formation to Defend an Unfavourable Image**

Defending oneself as an apologizer, defending oneself by reasoning and defending oneself by rejecting responsibility are the three sub-themes that have been developed to present the research data within the theme of direct ways of impression formation to defend an unfavourable image.

**Defending Oneself as an Apologizer:** Apologizing is defined as a confession of responsibility for a negative action/ event done by the actor which makes him guilty (Tedeschi & Lindskold, 1976, as cited in Lee et al., 1999). According to this definition, the strategy of apologising is used by individuals to request pardon for a negative action done by them. With the statements raised by the participants, the researcher realised that academics use apology as a defensive strategy to repair their bad image, because all the participants emphasized that they would definitely say 'sorry' to anyone, regardless of their position, if they did something wrong.

**Defending Oneself by Reasoning:** Justification involves giving reasons to justify a negative action done by the actor while accepting the responsibility for the negative behaviour (Scott & Lyman, 1968, as in Lee et al., 1999). Giving reasons for the wrong action done is another way of impression management to defend the negative image. During the interview discussions, the study sample ended up saying that they provide reasons for the wrongdoing if they have so. Considering them, it ended up with the finding that the academics are using the strategy of justification to avoid an unfavourable image being created about them in the Sri Lankan educational context too.

**Defending Oneself by Rejecting the Responsibility:** In the study context, academics reject the responsibility for a negative action if the circumstance is reasonable to deny. They specifically underlined that, though others saw their actions as wrong, if they did not see it as wrong, then they

would strongly reject it. Excuses mean the reasonings given by individuals refusing the responsibility for a negative action (Tedeschi & Lindskold, 1976, as cited in Lee et al., 1999). Therefore, results demonstrated that academics use excuses as a defensive strategy of impression management in the study context to protect their image if there are only acceptable reasons for them to do so.

## **02. Indirect Ways of Impression Formation**

As stated in the literature review phase, people use the information of others to create a good image of themselves (Cialdini & Richardson, 1980, as cited in Mohamed & Gardner, 2004). To interpret the data of this research regarding the indirect ways of impression formation, the researcher has divided the theme further into four sub-themes namely improving oneself as a companion, improving oneself by criticizing others, improving oneself through other's appreciation and reducing the negative image by 'passing the ball'.

**Improving Oneself as a Companion:** "Association is whereby individuals enhance or protect their image by managing information about people and things that they associate with" (Shoko & Dzimiri, 2018, p. 255). When it comes to the findings of this study, it is confirmed that the irrespective of the situation being official or not, the sample promotes the university to create a good image for them. Further, some of the academics highlighted their families and with that, they tried to create a favourable image for them as well. In this sub-theme of presenting oneself as a companion, academics do not associate with others with the intention of creating a good image for them. On the contrary, they use the promotion of the university and their family as an indirect way of impression management.

**Improving Oneself by Criticizing Others:** The participants of this study pointed out certain circumstances where they criticize others with the intention to build a good image of them. People try to damage the image of others or business organizations to enhance their own image (Cialdini & Richardson, 1980, as in Mohamed & Gardner, 2004). Some participants criticized the actions of others in which they were not involved, and some discussed the situations where they saw others as wrong. Therefore, it can provide a finding where criticizing others is another indirect type of strategy used by academics in this study context to create an image about them in other's eyes.

**Improving Oneself through Other's Appreciation:** This strategy is a unique one which does not agree/correspond with existing literature. Some participants express how well they have done their job in coordinating/ teaching by stating how they got appreciation from others. Also, another participant spoke about how that person's teaching skills are constantly being recommended by friends. These indirectly create a good impression about them. When considering the perspectives given by the sample of participants, a new finding was established where the academics in the present context use others' appreciations and recommendations to show that they are favourable and pleasant in front of other people.

**Reducing the Negative Image by ‘Passing the Ball’:** This sub-theme is also another interesting finding in this study. With the raised voices during interviews, the researcher understood that there are some situations where academics want to prevent themselves from being seen as a bad person by passing the fault to another person. So, it allowed the author to present a unique finding that academics in this study context do not hesitate to avoid themselves from being seen as someone negative by pointing out other’s faults instead.

### **03. Non-verbal Ways to Impress Others**

Under this theme, the study presents the findings related to the non-verbal strategies used by academics with some sub-themes. Attire to present oneself, vehicle and other accessories to form an impression and facial expressions are the sub-areas that have been touched under the interpretation of non-verbal ways to impress others.

**Attire to Present Oneself:** Almost all the participants agreed that the dress of an academician affects the impressions of students regarding that particular lecturer. According to Preves and Stephenson (2009), teachers try to maintain their identity within a classroom through symbols like attire (as cited in Gaspar, 2016). So, it was clear that in the current context also academics give reasonable attention to their attire as it affects the impression that others form of them as academics in a particular university.

**Vehicle and Other Accessories for a Good Looking:** Teachers use symbols such as vehicles, their appearance and manner of behaviour to form impressions within a classroom (Preves & Stephenson, 2009, as in Gaspar, 2016). Yet, the sample of participants gave a different idea about the non-verbal strategy of using vehicles and other accessories to create impressions. All the participants stated that they do not use those to maintain their status. Therefore, it can conclude that academics in the study context do not use vehicles and other accessories as non-verbal aspects to manage their impressions.

**Facial Expressions to Impression Formation:** During interviews, all the participants emphasized at many times the importance of maintaining facial expressions to form impressions in classrooms in consistent with Cuddy et al. (2011, as cited in Amaral, 2018) that individuals who use non-verbal cues including smiling, nodding and leaning are perceived as likable and friendly. So, it is proved that facial expressions help academics to create good impressions as a non-verbal strategy in the Sri Lankan educational context.

### **04. Aims of Impression Management Behaviours**

The final theme of ‘aims of impression management behaviours’ has been arranged to answer the second objective of this research study. The interpretation of results has been arranged in sub-themes namely to present a good image, to maintain good relationships, to achieve job-related goals and to encourage other’s success and well-being.

**To Present a Good Image:** The main goal of impression management is to present oneself in a way that they like to be perceived by others (Drory & Zaidman, 2007). The study sample mainly pointed out that they want to seem good in front of others at every time when interacting. Also, they expressed that they do not want others to see them as a bad person. Considering all the excerpts of participants, it is identified that academics manage impressions to present a positive image of them. But they do not manage impressions well in a situation where others perceive them wrong.

**To Maintain Good Relationships:** Findings disclosed that academics are motivated to manage impressions in order to build rapport among others. Not only that, but also the sample of academics expressed some unique ideas regarding their intention of impression management. Maintaining closeness, trustworthiness and openness when interacting with others are some intentions that lead them to manage a good impression about themselves in front of others. So, it can be said that academics are motivated to manage impressions to have good relationships, close interactions, trust and openness to conversation.

**To Achieve Job-Related Goals:** Most of the participants stressed their career development and career growth as job-related goals to engage with impression management. Not only that, but some of the participants also pointed out job security as another job-related goal which motivates them to manage impressions. As per the voices of the participants, it is identified that impressions are managed when one intends to gain more power, authority and higher positions in the career. Therefore, it is implied that impression management is important in the current study context to achieve job-related goals such as career growth, job security, power and positions in the career ladder.

**To Encourage Other's Success and Well-being:** This is one of the unique findings that the researcher has captured in research data which does not match with the existing literature. During interview discussions, participants underlined that they use impression management basically to facilitate mental happiness of the students as well as to motivate them in their studies. With that, a finding can be interpreted where academics in the current study manage impressions specially to facilitate, motivate and guide students towards their success rather than considering the academic's own interests.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study contributes to the field of impression management as it strengthens the existing theories as well as provides unique findings. The findings proved that impression management can be practiced either directly or indirectly as stated by Mohamed et al. (1999, as in Terrell & Kwok, 2011). Also, all of the participants use the five strategies introduced by Jones and Pittmans (1982). And, the motives

behind academics to manage impressions are in line up to some extent with the model developed by Leary and Kowalski (1990).

Other than the existing literature, this research study provides unique theoretical implications to the impression management field. Academics in the study context share their achievements and competencies basically to motivate others which differs a little from the existing literature. Not only the flattery and exaggeration, but some unique actions such as greetings, sharing and respecting others are also adopted by academics of the study sample to be seen as likable in front of others. Also, they like to show that they are hardworking but in a real manner and not to form fake impressions. Trying to improve the own image through other's appreciation and trying to diminish the negative image by pointing other's faults are two unique indirect impression management strategies that have been identified through research findings. Another interesting implication of this research is, almost all the academicians' intention to manage impressions is to facilitate and motivate students towards their success rather than to just consider their own interests.

Moreover, this study provides managerial implications to academics and other authoritative parties in the educational sector to improve the effectiveness of the interactions among others. Findings provide implications for individual academics to present/ create a good image that may help to achieve inner peace and attraction of others in both career and personal lives. Further, this study provides implications to any person in the educational or organizational sector who has an interest in conducting a study on impression management behaviours.

Although this study provides insights into impression management strategies and the motives behind them in the Sri Lankan context, there are some limitations too. Time constraint is the main barrier as it is required to be done within a limited time period. Another limitation that encountered when conducting the study was presenting the researcher as she is a beginner to this field of research. The incapability of doing observations with the time constraints also limited the chances to bring more rich findings regarding the study.

Finally, it has identified some avenues for future inquiry to those who are interested in conducting research studies in this field. It is better to conduct a study in the field of impression management based on private universities as well since this research is focused and limited only to a selected state university in Sri Lanka. Also, there is another opportunity to do a comparative analysis by capturing the differences of impression management behaviours of academics in state universities vs private universities.

Further, future researchers should connect the situational factors which are prevailing in contemporary society such as the COVID-19 pandemic to the field of impression management. Because, due to these circumstances, it allows people to connect virtually. There, it is recommended for prospective



researchers to find how impression management can be applied in online and electronic platforms of communication.

## REFERENCES

- Amaral, A. (2018). *Why does honest impression management positively influence interview ratings? The mediating effect of interviews' perceptions* [Master's thesis, The University of Guelph, Ontario, Canada]. <https://atrium.lib.uoguelph.ca/xmlui/handle/10214/13046>
- Asawo, S. P., & George, B. M. (2018). Leaders' intimidation impression management and subordinates' affective job commitment in Nigeria. *International Journal of Organization Theory & Behavior*, 21(1), 2-16. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJOTB-03-2018-002>
- Bolino, M. C., Varela, J. A., Bande, B., & Turnley, W. H. (2006). The impact of impression-management tactics on supervisor ratings of organizational citizenship behavior. *Journal of Organizational Behaviour*, 27(3), 281-297.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Cambridge University Press. (2019). In *Cambridge dictionaries online*. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org>
- Chaubey, D. S., & Kandpal, B. C. (2017). A study of impression management techniques applied by academicians in selected educational institutions of Dehradun. *Uttaranchal Business Review*, 7(1), 9-20. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319164392>
- Drory, A., & Zaidman, N. (2007). Impression management behavior: Effects of the organizational system. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 22(3), 290-308. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02683940710733106>
- Dunn, E. W., & Forrin, N. (2007). Impression management. In R. F. Baumeister, & K. D. Vohs (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of social psychology* (p. 468). SAGE Publications, Inc. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412956253.n277>
- Gaspar, C. (2016). *Impression management strategies of college professors with disabilities* [Master's thesis, Minnesota State University, Mankato]. Cornerstone: All Thesis, Dissertations, and Other Capstone Projects. <https://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/etds/654>
- Goffman, E. (1971). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Penguin Books Ltd.

- Gwal, R. (2015). Tactics of impression management: Relative success on workplace relationship. *The International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 2(2), 37-44. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/310240037>
- Haber, J., & Tesoriero, R. (2018). Student impression management in the classroom. *Global Research in Higher Education*, 1(1), 69-79. <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/grhe.v1n1p69>
- Jones, E. E., & Pittman, T. S. (1982). Toward a general theory of strategic self-presentation. In J. Slus (Ed.), *Psychological Perspectives on the Self*, 1, 231-262. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Khadyr, A., & Caliskan, K. (2016). Extrinsic motivation orientation as a predictor of impression management among academics in Istanbul, Turkey. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324182490>
- Leary, M. R., & Kowalski, R. M. (1990). Impression management: A literature review and two-component model. *Psychological Bulletin*, 107(1), 34-47.
- Lee, S., Quigley, B. M., Nesler, M. S., Corbett, A. B., & Tedeschi, J. T. (1999). Development of a self-presentation tactics scale. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 26, 701-722.
- Mohamed, A. A., & Gardner, W. L. (2004). An exploratory study of interorganizational defamation: An organizational impression management perspective. *Organizational Analysis*, 12(2), 129-145. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/eb028989>
- Ortbach, K., & Recker, J. (2014). *Do good things and talk about them: A theory of academics usage of enterprise social networks for impression management tactics*. [Research-in-Progress]. 35<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Information Systems, Auckland. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/287293079>
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2016). *Research methods for business students* (7th ed.). Pearson Education Limited.
- Scott, M. B. (1981, July). [Review of the book *Impression management: The self-concept, social identity, and interpersonal relations*, by B. R. Schlenker]. *Contemporary Sociology*, 10(4), 582-583. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2067758>
- Shoko, S., & Dzimiri, W. (2018). Impression management tactics employed by primary school heads to influence management and leadership decisions in schools: A survey of two districts in Zimbabwe. *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal*, 5(5), 252-261. <http://dx.doi.org/10.14738/assrj.55.4567>

- Takei, Y., Johnson, M. P., & Clark, M. E. (1998). Academic achievement and impression management as factors in the grading of white junior high pupils. *Sociological Perspectives*, 41(1), 27-48. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1389352>
- Terrell, K. H., & Kwok, L. (2011). Organizational impression management behaviours in social media: A perspective of a social networking site. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254698962>
- Valerius, L., & Parr, M. G. (1997). Antecedents of and engagement in impression management tactics among college students. *SCHOLE: A Journal of Leisure Studies and Recreation Education*, 12(1), 31-46. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1937156X.1997.11949409>
- Yan, L., & Ho, H. (2017). Impression management of tour leaders. *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, 22(4), 422-435. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10941665.2016.1276086>