Dress to Impress: How Fashion Styles Influence Perceived Personality Traits Through Cognitive Biases

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Abstract

This study investigates how different fashion styles trigger the halo effect and confirmation bias, influencing ratings of personality traits (intelligence, competence, trustworthiness, and likeability). Using an experimental design, 155 participants completed an online survey experiment via Qualtrics. The independent variable was fashion style (professional, casual, trendy), and the dependent variables were ratings of the personality traits. To measure the halo effect, participants rated one attire condition on the four personality traits using a 7-point Likert scale. To measure confirmation bias, participants rated the individual again after viewing a professional CV. Results showed that professional attire enhanced perceptions of intelligence, aligning with the halo effect, while casual attire increased likeability. We found no confirmation bias for any traits. This research enhances the theoretical understanding of how fashion influences personality perception and biases, revealing that attire impacts different traits in varied ways. The findings highlight the complexity of cognitive biases and the importance of context in shaping perceptions. Practically, these insights are valuable for psychology, sociology, fashion, marketing, and human resources, helping organizations make informed decisions and individuals make better clothing choices. Additionally, the study underscores the need for bias awareness training to help individuals recognize and counteract their own biases.

Keywords: Halo Effect, Confirmation Bias, Personality Traits, Fashion Styles

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Introduction

Imagine walking into a room, and within seconds, the clothes you wear shape how others perceive your intelligence, competence, trustworthiness, likeability, and several other personal attributes. Fashion significantly influences first impressions, as research by Naumann et al. (2009) demonstrates that elements like clothing style and posture shape perceptions far beyond mere appearance. For example, Gille-Knauf and Mittag (2008) conducted research on female students and discovered that clothing choices influenced perceptions of intelligence. People perceived students wearing conservative attire as more intelligent than those wearing provocative clothing. This suggests that conservative fashion tends to project an image of competence and intelligence, while provocative clothing conveys messages of self-expression and a heightened awareness of sexuality. Similarly, Lightstone et al. (2011) observed that students rated lecturers dressed in formal clothing as more credible compared to those in casual attire.

Basing perceptions on clues such as someone's fashion choices involves cognitive biases, which are ways our thinking can be flawed or biased. For example, Fasoli et al. (2018) found that students who dressed professionally compared to sexy were seen as more competent, having put more time and effort into their thesis, and also obtaining better scores. However, this perspective was biased, as all students achieved similar results irrespective of their attire. It is important to understand the underlying processes behind these biases because it gives more insight into how the human mind works. Moreover, it would make it possible to develop certain strategies to avoid making false evaluations of individuals. This research is not just about fashion; it is about better understanding the underlying cognitive biases that shape human perceptions and ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to be seen for who they truly are. It is known that fashion choices have these profound effects, but less is known about why this is

the case; therefore, in this interdisciplinary study we want to combine these different research fields of fashion and cognitive biases to investigate these underlying processes.

Two biases which are the halo effect and confirmation bias, play a particularly important role when it comes to how we perceive others based on limited information.

The halo effect, first defined by Thorndike in 1920, refers to the cognitive error where one specific characteristic influence how we judge other unrelated attributes. For example, a person's physical attractiveness can lead others to assume that they have additional positive traits such as intelligence, even when such assumptions may not be true. This often happens unconsciously and is based on personal preferences and societal norms. This phenomenon is particularly relevant to fashion, as clothing is often one of the first noticeable aspects of an individual. When a person's preference for a certain type of clothing leads to attributing additional characteristics to another individual, this exemplifies the halo effect.

Confirmation bias refers to only looking for or interpreting information that is in line with one's pre-existing beliefs or desires (Johnson, 2018). This cognitive bias makes it difficult for people to find the objective truth because they are focused solely on information that reinforces their beliefs and they ignore contradictory evidence. Such selective information processing plays a crucial role in decision-making, shaping our evaluation of situations and individuals. This selective information processing prevents human beings from being able to form well-rounded judgments. Confirmation bias is particularly relevant in the context of fashion choices. For example, if an individual has a preconceived opinion about someone's competence based on their clothing, they may perceive them as less competent despite evidence of this persons' significant achievements.

Understanding the connection between these two biases and clothing is crucial as it shows how initial impressions based on clothing can influence the broader perception of an individual. As shown, there is extensive research on cognitive biases and the impact of clothing

on first impressions, however, little attention has been given to whether and if so, how specific fashion styles trigger biases like the halo effect and confirmation bias. It is crucial to address this research gap because fashion serves as a powerful social cue that shapes human beings' perceptions of others in everyday interactions, potentially reinforcing biased judgements. Therefore, the main research question that guides this study is: How do different fashion styles trigger the halo effect and confirmation bias, and how do these biases influence ratings of personality traits?

This study also offers important contributions to practical applications. The findings could have a significant impact for professional environments, particularly in recruitment and workplace settings, where attire for job interviews might unconsciously affect if a person is hired or not. Furthermore, individuals may use the insights gained from this study to better understand how the way they dress impacts other people's judgements. This helps them to make certain decisions on how they want to present themselves in for example a professional context.

Theoretical framework

The primary objective of this theoretical framework is to investigate the potential correlation between clothing choices and perceptions of personality traits and the thinking processes behind it. The framework begins by explaining what cognitive biases are. For each cognitive bias, the general definition is first provided, followed by a review of seminal research on the bias. Then, relevant psychological theories are discussed, such as symbolic interactionism for the halo effect, and cognitive dissonance theory and selective perception theory for confirmation bias. Subsequently, a brief explanation is given on how each bias is implemented in the current study, along with the four hypotheses.

Cognitive Biases

A cognitive bias is an error in thinking that happens when human beings interpret information from their surroundings. These interpretations influence their decisions and judgements (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). In this study, the focus lies on two cognitive biases, which are the halo effect and the confirmation bias.

The Halo Effect

The halo effect, first defined by Thorndike in 1920, refers to the cognitive error where one specific characteristic influences how we judge other unrelated attributes. This bias leads human beings to make assumptions about other unrelated traits based on a first impression. For example, in the study by Batres and Shiramizu (2022), it was found that when a person is considered attractive, they are also often perceived to have other positive traits such as intelligence, kindness, and competence. This is what they called the “attractiveness halo effect”.

The halo effect is usually tested by telling people about someone’s performance or standing on a certain attribute and then seeing how that information affects their opinions on

other, unrelated attributes (Laham & Forgas, 2022). An example is the classic study by Nisbett and Wilson (1977). In this study, they showed a videotape of a professor giving a lecture. They created two versions. One version showed a professor that was warm, engaging, and friendly. The professor was respectful of the students' intelligence, enthusiastic about the subject matter, and flexible in his teaching approach. The other version showed a professor that was cold, distant, and unfriendly. The professor would appear as distrustful towards the students, was not enthusiastic, and had a rigid teaching style. After the participants watched the video, they had to rate the professor on various unrelated traits such as appearance. This study demonstrated the halo effect. When the professor was perceived as warm and friendly, the participants would rate him more positively on unrelated traits such as appearance.

Similar effects were found for clothing. Fashion can be seen as a language. It tells a story about the person wearing it (*What is Fashion?*, 2023). Howlett et al. (2013) also highlights that clothing provides a lot of information about an individual, making it an effective tool for non-verbal communication. Throughout clothing research, this is an important recurring theme: People develop impressions of others based on their attire (Feinberg et al., 1992).

Symbolic Interactionism

There is one relevant psychological theory that explains how clothing affects perception. This theory is symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism is a sociological theory that explains how human beings create meaning through social interaction by ascribing meaning to objects, events, and behaviors (Nickerson, 2023). Human beings then act a certain way based on the meaning that they ascribe. For example, there are two people observing a dog. One person sees the dog as friendly and lovable due to previous positive experiences with dogs. The other person views the dog as a threat because he has been bitten before. Therefore, these two people approach the dog differently. The person who views the dog as friendly will

probably approach it with affection while the other person might avoid the dog out of fear. This example illustrates how individuals create meaning through their interactions and experiences, which then guides their behavior.

Fashion is a form of symbolic interactionism because clothing is a symbol that carries a specific meaning. People have certain experiences with certain fashion styles and then ascribe social meaning (e.g., in the form of personality traits) to these fashion styles. A well-known commonly discussed example in sociology and psychology literature is the example of the doctor's white coat. The symbolic meaning of the white coat is that human beings associate it with medical authority (Mahoney, 2022). When an individual sees a person wearing a white coat, he or she is often associated with being a medical professional. It therefore also symbolizes professionalism and knowledge. This results in people being more prone to sharing their health concerns because they ascribe professionalism and knowledge to the person wearing the white coat (Mahoney, 2022). It therefore affects how they see the person and how they behave towards them.

This same reasoning can be applied to other clothing styles and associated personality traits. For example, Howlett et al. (2013) found that participants observed a man to be more professional when he was wearing a tailored suit compared to when he would wear a suit that was not tailored and bought in a regular store. This can be explained in a similar way as the white coat example. Over time, people come to associate professional attire such as wearing a suit with professionalism, and as a consequence, they then start to think that people wearing those clothes likely have these personality traits. Similarly, Gille-Knauf and Mittag (2008) compared conservative versus provocative outfits on female students. The conservative outfit included a blouse and knee length skirt, while the provocative outfit consisted of a low-cut top and a short skirt. They discovered that people perceived females in conservative attire as more intelligent and competent than those in provocative attire. Thus, over time, people started to

associate conservative clothing with intelligence and competence and therefore believe that those people have these personality traits. These studies demonstrate that presenting the same person with different outfits can influence personality traits. Therefore, in the current study, we created three attire conditions (professional, casual, and trendy) on the same individual; a female.

The halo effect can be seen as part of symbolic interactionism because one symbol (e.g., attire) can affect broader social judgments. This can be related to fashion in the way that well-dressed individuals are often judged more favorably in other areas as well. For example, there is research that suggests that casual or trendy attire, such as dressing more casually, can lead to positive responses when it comes to perceived sociability (Angerosa, 2014). Moreover, several research studies support the idea that professional attire can influence perceptions of competence, trustworthiness, and intelligence. Ruetzler (2012) found that physical appearance, including fashion style, significantly affects perceptions of a person's competence and intelligence. Professional attire is associated with higher intellectual capabilities and professionalism. Moreover, professional attire is also associated with higher levels of trust. Sotak et al. (2023), discovered that employees dressed in business formal or business casual attire are perceived as more ethical and trustworthy compared to those in casual clothing.

The Halo Effect and the current study

The current study explores this effect and was inspired by the Nisbett and Wilson (1977) study. In this study, it is also researched how people's overall impression of a person can influence their judgements of unrelated traits. However, instead of manipulating a teacher's teaching style the outfit of a person is manipulated. The given characteristic is fashion attire based on a picture of a person's outfit (professional, casual, or trendy). Participants were divided into three conditions and were shown one of the three outfits. Afterwards, participants

had to evaluate the person based on the picture of the outfit alone on four personality traits (intelligence, competence, trustworthiness, and likeability).

Two hypotheses were formed regarding the halo effect.

(1) Participants rate individuals in professional attire as more competent, intelligent and trustworthy than those in trendy or casual attire, reflecting the halo effect, and

(2) Participants rate individuals in trendy or casual attire as more likeable than those in professional attire, reflecting the halo effect.

Confirmation Bias

Confirmation bias refers to only looking for or interpreting information that is in line with one's pre-existing beliefs or desires (Johnson, 2018). Research on confirmation bias has been extensive. A classic and influential study on confirmation bias by Peter Wason in 1960, is the Wason's 2-4-6 experiment. In Wason's (1960) experiment, participants were told that the experimenter had a "rule" that applied to a sequence of three numbers. The experimenter gave them an example sequence (2, 4, 6) and participants had to figure out the underlying rule. In order to do this, participants could propose additional sequences of three numbers and the experimenter would tell them if this sequence fit the rule or not. Many participants hypothesized that the rule was "a sequence of even numbers increasing by two." Researchers discovered that participants preferred to propose sequences that supported their initial hypothesis over those that contradicted it. Therefore, most participants proposed a sequence such as 4,6,8 instead of a sequence that would disconfirm their hypothesis, such as 1,2,3. Participants often continued to present sequences that were in line with their initial hypothesis, even when those sequences were incorrect. This was the foundation for the confirmation bias. Participants focused on pre-existing beliefs instead of looking for information that might challenge or disprove those beliefs.

There are two theories that explain why individuals handle conflicting information and seek out data that is in line with their pre-existing beliefs. These two theories are the cognitive dissonance theory and the selective perception theory.

Cognitive Dissonance Theory

The cognitive dissonance theory was first introduced by Leon Festinger in 1957. This theory assumes that human beings can experience psychological discomfort which is called dissonance when they encounter information that is not in line with their pre-existing beliefs (Festinger, 1957). Human beings want to get rid of this negative feeling and this motivates them to maintain internal consistency, resulting in confirmation bias. For example, someone believes that a person who wears trendy attire is not really competent. A professional CV is presented for this person; this creates psychological discomfort for the person evaluating because the information on the CV is inconsistent with their initial assessment of that person. In order to keep internal consistency, the person might continue to believe that the person in the trendy outfit is not really competent and thus sticks to their first beliefs.

Selective Perception Theory

Selective Perception Theory is another theory that explains why confirmation bias occurs. Every day, human beings obtain a lot of information. They are unable to process all of it (Holland, 2024). This theory suggests that people filter this information where they attend and interpret the information that is consistent with their prior knowledge and perceptions, while ignoring information that contradicts it. This filtering role is crucial in confirmation bias because individuals unconsciously exclude disconfirming information and reinforce their initial opinions. Thus, these two cognitive mechanisms help individuals maintain their pre-existing beliefs.

Confirmation Bias and the current study

To the best of my knowledge there is no research that investigated confirmation bias and fashion. Therefore, the experiment in the current study drew its inspiration from the Peter Wason (1960) study. In the current study, participants first formed an impression on the model based solely on her attire (professional, casual or trendy). After this initial impression, they were presented with a professional CV, which provided new information about the model's qualifications. The study asked participants to re-evaluate the model's four personality traits (intelligence, competence, trustworthiness, and likeability) after viewing the CV, in order to assess confirmation bias. This set-up made it possible to examine whether participants aligned their second judgements with their initial impressions based on attire, despite the new, more relevant information in the CV.

Two hypotheses were formed regarding the confirmation bias.

(3) After presenting a professional CV, participants will continue to rate individuals in professional attire higher on competence, intelligence, and trustworthiness compared to casual and trendy attire (see Figure 1), reflecting confirmation bias, and

(4) After presenting a professional CV, participants will continue to rate individuals in trendy or casual attire higher on likeability (see Figure 2), compared to professional attire, reflecting confirmation bias.

It is important to highlight that this consistency in ratings shows the confirmation bias. If participants did not show any bias, all three outfits should be rated exactly the same on the four personality traits, given that the presented CV was the same for all outfits. However, if there is a difference between the clothing styles, this would confirm the confirmation bias (Figure 1 and Figure 2), as participants did not change their pre-existing beliefs.

Figure 1

Hypothesis 3

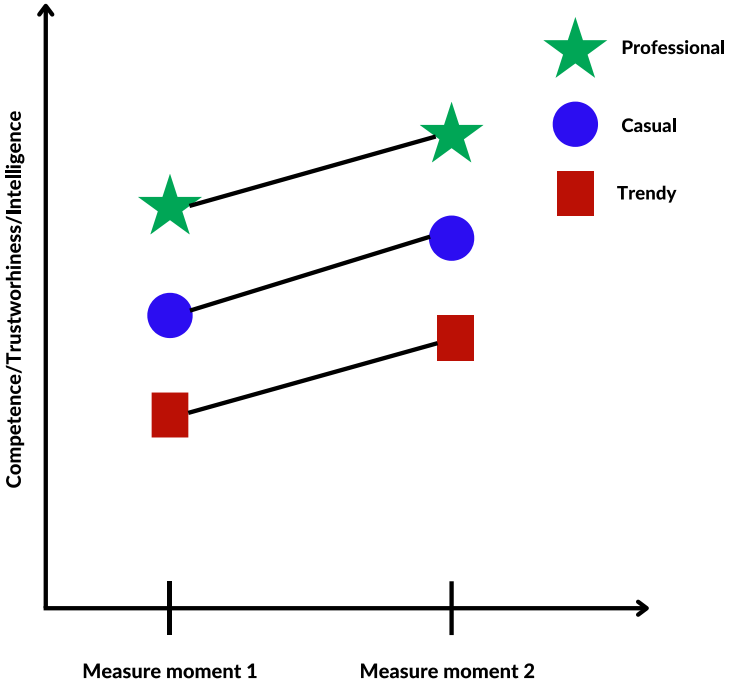
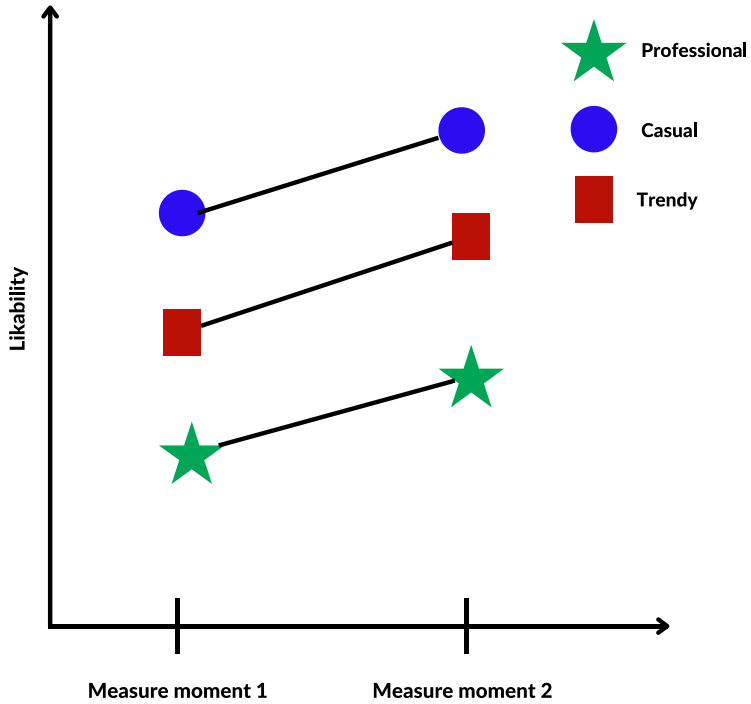


Figure 2

Hypothesis 4



Method

Design

This study made use of an experimental design (Figure 3) to explore how different fashion styles trigger the halo effect and confirmation bias and how these biases influence the ratings of personality traits. The independent variable in this study is the fashion style which consists of three conditions: professional, casual, and trendy. The dependent variables in this study are ratings of the personality traits: intelligence, competence, trustworthiness, and likeability. Additionally, demographic information, such as gender, age, education level, and the importance of fashion, was collected.

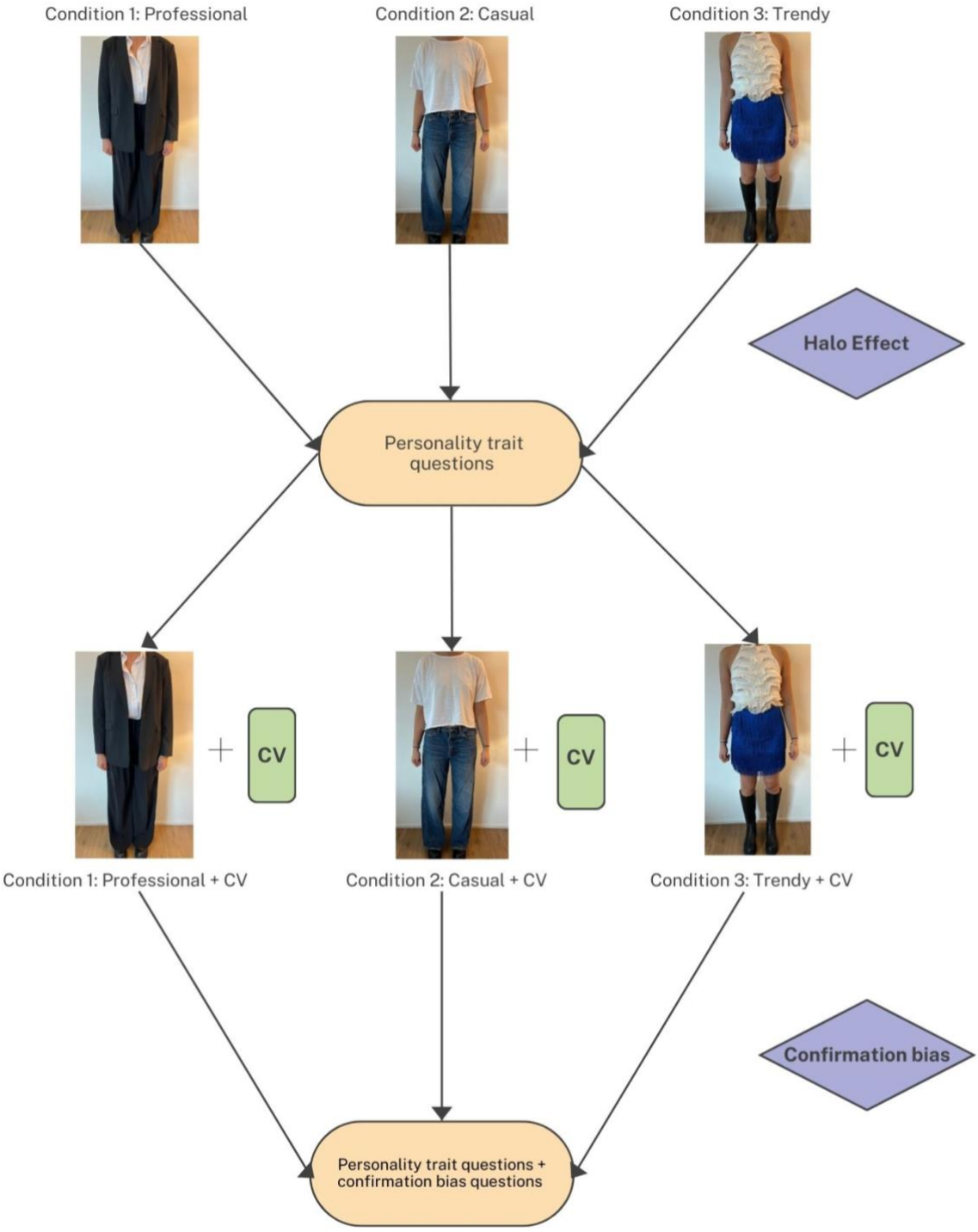
The experiment drew inspiration from seminal research in cognitive biases. First, the halo effect was examined. The research by Laham and Forgas (2022) explains that the halo effect is usually tested by telling people about someone's performance or standing on a certain attribute and then seeing how that information affects their opinions on other, unrelated attributes. This is also how the halo effect was researched in this study. The foundation for this experiment's design comes from the methodological approach of Nisbett and Wilson's (1977) study on the halo effect. This study demonstrated the halo effect by showing that participants rated a professor more positively on unrelated traits, such as appearance, when he was perceived as warm and friendly, compared to when he was cold and unfriendly. Similarly, in the current study, participants were first shown an image of a model in different attire (professional, casual, or trendy), and then asked to rate her on the related personality traits (intelligence, competence, trustworthiness, and likeability).

Secondly, the experiment focuses on confirmation bias. The construction of the current experiment also drew its inspiration from a classic and influential study on confirmation bias by Peter Wason in 1960, also known as the Wason's 2-4-6 experiment. In Wason's (1960) experiment, participants identified a rule for a number sequence (e.g., 2, 4, 6) by proposing

additional sequences and receiving feedback. The study demonstrated that participants favored sequences confirming their initial hypotheses even after telling them the proposed sequence was incorrect, highlighting the confirmation bias and their tendency to focus on supporting rather than challenging their beliefs. This concept was adapted to the current experiment of confirmation bias and fashion styles. In the current study, participants first formed an impression of the model based solely on her attire. After this initial impression, they were presented with a professional CV, which provided new information about the model's qualifications. To assess confirmation bias, participants were asked to re-evaluate the model after seeing the CV. This made it possible to examine whether participants aligned their second judgements with their initial impressions based on attire, despite the new, more relevant information (the CV).

Figure 3

Online Experiment Overview



Participants

Participants were recruited through a convenience sampling approach using various online platforms such as Whatsapp, Instagram, and Facebook. A message that included a hyperlink to the experiment and the researcher's contact information was sent to the participants through these platforms. To avoid bias, the true purpose of the study was not revealed in the recruitment message. The criteria for participation were: age 18 or older, proficiency in English, and access to the internet. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the three fashion conditions (professional, casual, or trendy). The sample consisted of 198 participants. However, not all participants completed the experiment and, were therefore not included in the final sample. The final sample consisted of 155 participants, with 26.5% male and 73.5% female. The mean age was 27.5 (*SD* = 12.2). The professional condition consisted of 53 participants, the casual condition of 47 participants, and the trendy condition of 55 participants. The majority of the participants were highly educated, with 74.2% having a bachelor's degree or higher. Moreover, a 7-point Likert scale question regarding the importance of fashion (1= Not important at all, 7 = Extremely important) to the participants was included. The mean fashion importance was 5.1 (*SD* = 1.2). The majority of the participants said fashion was important to them, with 41.3% rating it moderately important and 34.2% rating it very important.

Materials and Measurements

The study was conducted as an online experiment using the Qualtrics platform. The model's attire consisted of three different fashion styles (professional, casual, and trendy). These styles were inspired by Angerosa's (2014) research on social identity and person perception but adapted to focus on the influence of cognitive biases like the halo effect and confirmation bias on trait ratings. The fashion categories were chosen to reflect commonly observed everyday styles, enhancing the study's ecological validity. The professional attire

featured trousers and a blazer. The casual attire consisted of jeans and a t-shirt. The trendy attire was represented by a blue skirt paired with a white ruffled top, reflecting contemporary fashion trends.

A female model was selected for this study, as women's fashion typically offers greater variety compared to men's (Howlett et al., 2013). Furthermore, research by Gabrieli et al. (2021) showed that gender and ethnicity do not significantly influence the halo effect, so including both genders was deemed unnecessary for this analysis.

Trait Ratings

The participants were asked to rate the female model on four personality traits. Trustworthiness and likeability were selected based on the Interpersonal Judgment Scale (Nesler et al., 1993) to ensure robust measurement. Additionally, intelligence and competence were selected based on research into the attractiveness halo effect across 45 countries by Batres and Shiramizu (2022), which found positive correlations between attractiveness and traits like intelligence and competence.

The ratings in the experiment were measured using a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 7 ("Strongly Agree"), chosen for its ability to maximize response variability and improve reliability (Finstad, 2009). Each personality trait was assessed with a single item: "This person appears intelligent" for intelligence, "This person seems highly competent in a professional setting" for competence, "This person appears trustworthy, for trustworthiness, and "I find this person to be personally likeable" for likeability.

Confirmation Bias Questions

Two questions were included at the end of the experiment to assess self-reported confirmation bias. These questions were designed to examine whether participants interpreted

the new information (the CV) in line with their initial impressions based solely on attire, following the approach of Nisbett and Wilson (1977). The questions were: “I believe my initial judgement of this person’s competence was accurate” and “The information on the CV confirms my first impression of this person.”

In the end, only the second question was used for examination. The internal reliability of this question was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha (a = .803), ensuring that the results are interpretable and statistically robust.

Procedure

Before starting, participants were required to give informed consent (Appendix A). They were then randomly assigned to one of the three fashion style conditions—professional, casual, or trendy—to avoid order effects and reduce demand characteristics, thus enhancing internal validity. Each participant viewed an image of a female model wearing one of the selected attires (Appendix D), without any accompanying CV. Participants rated the model on four personality traits using the 7-point Likert scale.

After rating the model’s attire, participants were shown a professional CV (Appendix C) next to the model’s image. Before moving on, they had to look at the CV for at least 20 seconds to ensure that participants really read the CV. The CV was constructed according to realistic guidelines (Kevin, 2024). The CV included contact information, a personal profile, an education and expertise section, achievements, and references. Key information was presented at the top and left of the CV and highlighted in bold. Additionally, work experience was listed in reverse chronological order. This ensured ecological validity by allowing participants to evaluate the model’s qualifications in a real-life context. Participants were asked if they understood all the information on the CV and then were asked to rate the model again on the same personality traits.

Finally, two questions were presented to measure confirmation bias, designed to assess whether participants felt that their ratings of the model remained aligned with their initial impressions (based on attire alone) or whether they adjusted their evaluations based on the CV.

Results

The experiment consisted of two steps. In the first step, the participants saw an attire picture of a person (professional, casual, or trendy) and were asked to rate this person on four personality traits (intelligence, competence, trustworthiness, and likeability). This information was used to test the first two hypotheses, which reflected the halo effect. The second step in the experiment consisted of showing participants a professional CV and participants had to rate the person again on the four personality traits followed by two confirmation bias questions. This information, was used to test the last two hypotheses reflecting confirmation bias. In the result section, the first two hypotheses will be discussed first followed by the results of the third and fourth hypotheses.

The Halo Effect

The first two hypotheses were formulated as follow:

(1) Participants rate individuals in professional attire as more competent, intelligent, and trustworthy than those in trendy or casual attire, reflecting the halo effect, and

(2) Participants rate individuals in trendy or casual attire as more likeable than those in professional attire, reflecting the halo effect.

The overall mean for intelligence was 4.43 (*SD* = 1.06), for competence 4.37 (*SD* = 1.17), for trustworthiness 4.70 (*SD* = 1.03), and for likeability 4.35 (*SD* = 1.19). Each personality trait also has a mean and standard deviation for every condition (see Table 2).

Table 1

Mean and standard deviation of every personality trait within each condition

Personality trait	Condition	*N*	*M*	*SD*
Intelligence	Professional	53	4.98	1.03
	Casual	47	4.36	1.01
	Trendy	55	3.96	0.90
	Total	155	4.43	1.06
Competence	Professional	53	4.55	1.28
	Casual	47	4.21	1.10
	Trendy	55	4.33	1.11
	Total	155	4.37	1.17
Trustworthiness	Professional	53	4.92	0.94
	Casual	47	4.66	1.13
	Trendy	55	4.51	1.02
	Total	155	4.70	1.03
Likeability	Professional	53	4.04	0.98
	Casual	47	4.62	1.11
	Trendy	55	4.44	1.37
	Total	155	4.35	1.12

In order to test the first two hypotheses, a MANOVA was conducted. It was decided to do a MANOVA because this study tested the effect of an independent variable consisting of three groups (professional, casual, trendy) on four dependent variables which are Likert scale ratings on the four personality traits (intelligence, competence, trustworthiness, and likeability). The scale ranged from 1 (= Strongly disagree) to 7 (= Strongly agree) for each personality trait.

Prior to the MANOVA, the distribution of participants' scores on the four personality traits was examined. This was necessary to determine whether the sample used in this study was normally distributed. The results of the Shapiro-Wilk test for all four variables indicate that we can reject the null hypothesis ($p < .001$) and conclude that the data are not normally distributed. However, this is not an issue because the sample is bigger than 30. Therefore, the MANOVA is robust, and it is still possible to continue this analysis. To test the homogeneity of variances, a Levene's test was conducted. The Levene's test was based on the median because this provides better robustness against non-normal data and therefore retains good power. For

all four personality traits the variances are not significantly different from each other (all $p > .05$) and the homogeneity assumption of variance is met.

The MANOVA revealed a significant effect of attire on intelligence, $F(2,152) = 14.745$, $p < .001$. The effect size, eta squared (η^2), was .162, indicating a large effect. The Bonferroni post-hoc test showed that participants rated the person in the picture with the professional outfit as more intelligent than the person with both the casual ($p = .006$) and the trendy ($p < .001$) outfit. The casual condition is not statistically different from the trendy condition ($p = .127$).

The MANOVA revealed no effect of attire on competence, $F(2,152) = 1.073$, $p = .344$, $\eta^2 = .014$.

The MANOVA revealed no effect of attire on trustworthiness, $F(2,152) = 2.257$, $p = .108$, $\eta^2 = .029$.

The MANOVA revealed a significant effect of attire on likeability, $F(2,152) = 3.253$, $p = .041$. The effect size, eta squared (η^2), was .041, indicating a small effect. The Bonferroni post-hoc test showed that participants rated the person in the picture with the casual outfit as more likeable than the person with the professional outfit ($p = .044$). The trendy condition was not significantly different from both the professional condition ($p = .237$) and the casual condition ($p = 1.000$).

Confirmation Bias

The third and fourth hypotheses are formulated as follows:

(3) After presenting a professional CV, participants will continue to rate individuals in professional attire higher on competence, intelligence, and trustworthiness compared to casual and trendy attire, reflecting confirmation bias, and

(4) After presenting a professional CV, participants will continue to rate individuals in trendy or casual attire higher on likeability, compared to professional attire, reflecting confirmation bias.

A repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to examine the effect of attire condition (professional, casual, trendy) and CV (before CV and after CV) on ratings of intelligence, competence, trustworthiness, and likeability. It was decided to conduct a repeated measures ANOVA because there are two measure moments in the experiment, which are the within-subjects factor and the different attire conditions, which are the between-subjects factor.

There are several assumptions that needed to be met to conduct the repeated measures ANOVA. There are no spurious outliers. The four personality traits are normally distributed, as confirmed by a Q-Q plot analysis. Since there are only two levels of repeated measures, the assumption of sphericity is met.

Intelligence

Table 3 presents the mean intelligence ratings for each condition, both prior to and following the presentation of the CV.

Table 2

Descriptives intelligence prior and post to the CV

	Intelligence					
Condition		Pre_CV		Post_CV		
	N	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	Difference
Professional	53	4.98	1.03	5.62	1.00	+0.64
Casual	47	4.36	1.01	5.70	0.88	+1.34
Trendy	55	3.96	0.90	5.67	1.03	+1.71
Total	155	4.43	1.06	5.67	0.97	+1.24

The repeated measures ANOVA showed a significant main effect of CV ($F(1,152) = 150.87$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .498$, indicating a large effect). Regardless of the attire picture condition, participants perceive the individual as more intelligent after reviewing the CV compared to before (see Table 3).

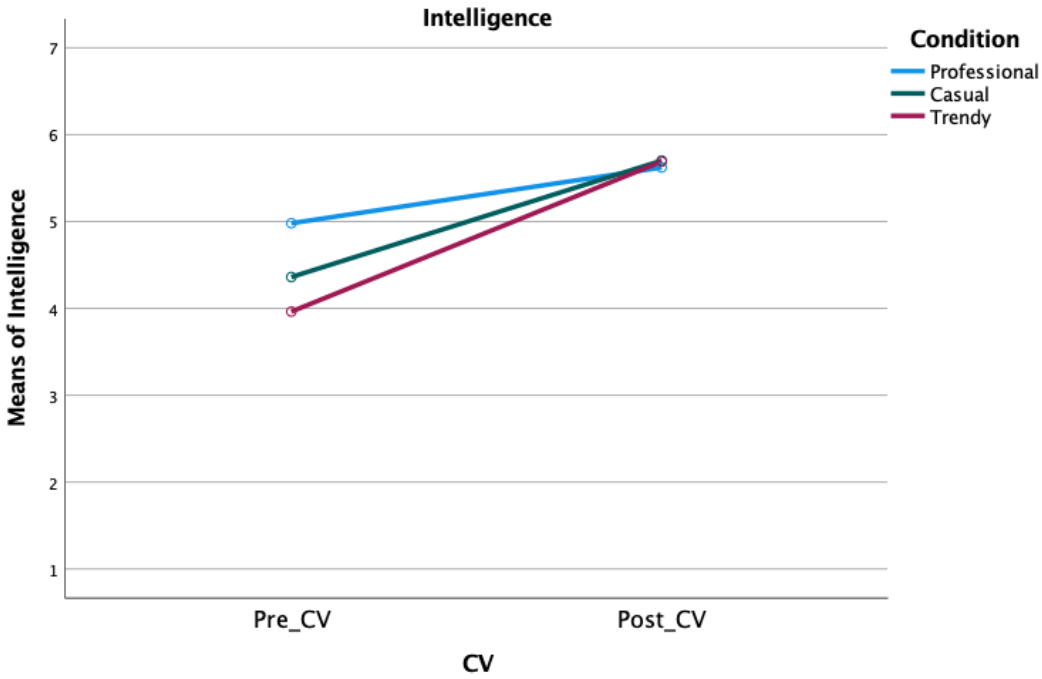
The repeated measures ANOVA showed a significant main effect of condition ($F(2, 152) = 5.366$, $p = .006$, $\eta^2 = .066$, indicating a medium effect). Regardless of when they had already seen the CV, participants' perceptions of the individual's intelligence varied across the different outfit conditions. The Bonferroni post-hoc test showed that participants rated the person in the picture with the professional outfit as more intelligent than the person with the trendy outfit ($p = .004$). The casual condition was not significantly different from both the trendy condition ($p = .522$) and the professional condition ($p = .228$).

The interaction between CV and condition was statistically significant ($F(2,152 = 10.399$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = .120$, indicating a medium effect). This indicates a combined effect of the CV and attire condition on intelligence ratings (Figure 4). Figure 4 illustrates that the effect of the CV is most pronounced for the trendy condition, as indicated by the steepest slope,

followed by the casual and professional conditions. This suggests that participants' perceptions of the individual's intelligence changed the most when the individual was dressed in trendy attire, followed by casual and professional attire. Consequently, the initial differences in intelligence ratings between the conditions observed before the CV was presented were no longer apparent after the CV was presented.

Figure 4

Means of intelligence ratings prior and post to the CV



Competence

Table 4 presents the mean competence ratings for each condition, both prior to and following the presentation of the CV.

Table 3

Descriptives competence prior and post to the CV

	Competence					
Condition		Pre_CV		Post_CV		
	N	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	Difference
Professional	53	4.55	1.28	5.64	0.90	+1.09
Casual	47	4.21	1.10	5.68	0.84	+1.47
Trendy	55	4.33	1.11	5.65	1.08	+1.32
Total	155	4.37	1.17	5.66	0.94	+1.29

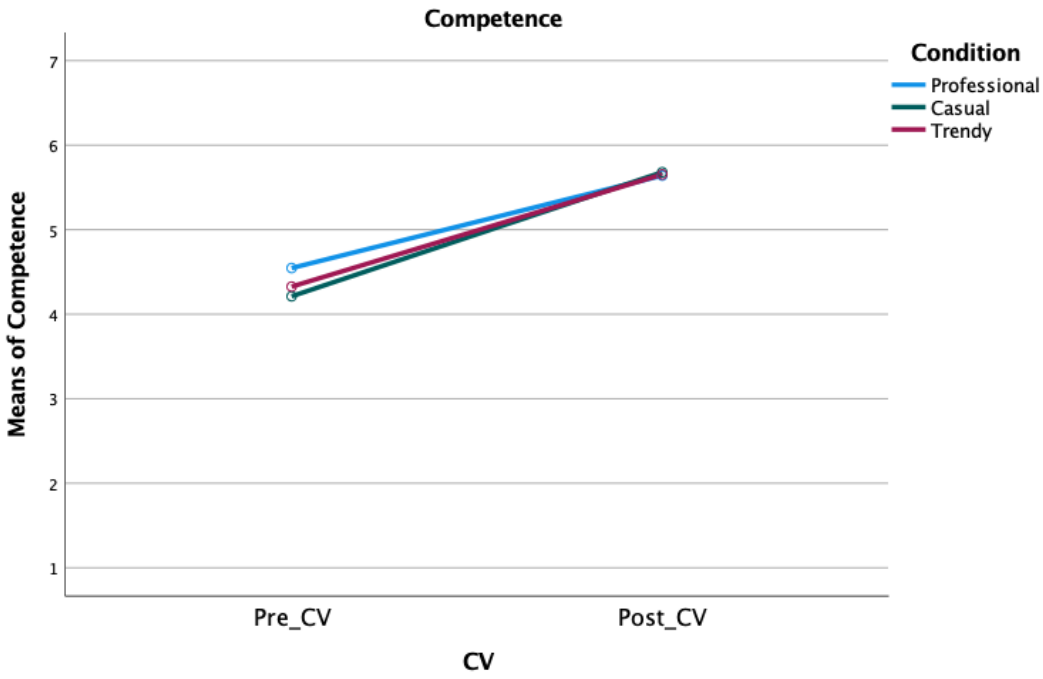
The repeated measures ANOVA showed a significant main effect of CV ($F(1,152) = 134.872$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .470$, indicating a large effect). Regardless of the attire picture they have seen, participants perceived the individual as more competent after reviewing the CV compared to before.

The repeated measures ANOVA showed no effect of condition ($F(2, 152) = .448$, $p = .640$, $\eta^2 = .006$).

The interaction between CV and condition was not significant ($F(2,152 = .935$, $p = .395$, $\eta^2 = .012$). This indicates that there is not a combined effect of the CV and attire condition on competence ratings (Figure 5). Given that the main effect of CV was significant, participants in all three conditions adjusted their opinions. However, the figure indicates that they did not adjust their opinions to different extents across the different conditions.

Figure 5

Means of competence ratings prior and post to the CV



Trustworthiness

Table 5 presents the mean trustworthiness ratings for each condition, both prior to and following the presentation of the CV.

Table 4

Descriptives trustworthiness prior and post the CV

	Trustworthiness					
Condition		Pre_CV		Post_CV		
	N	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	Difference
Professional	53	4.92	0.94	5.25	0.96	+0.33
Casual	47	4.66	1.13	5.30	0.86	+0.64
Trendy	55	4.51	1.02	4.95	1.11	+0.44
Total	155	4.70	1.03	5.15	0.99	+0.45

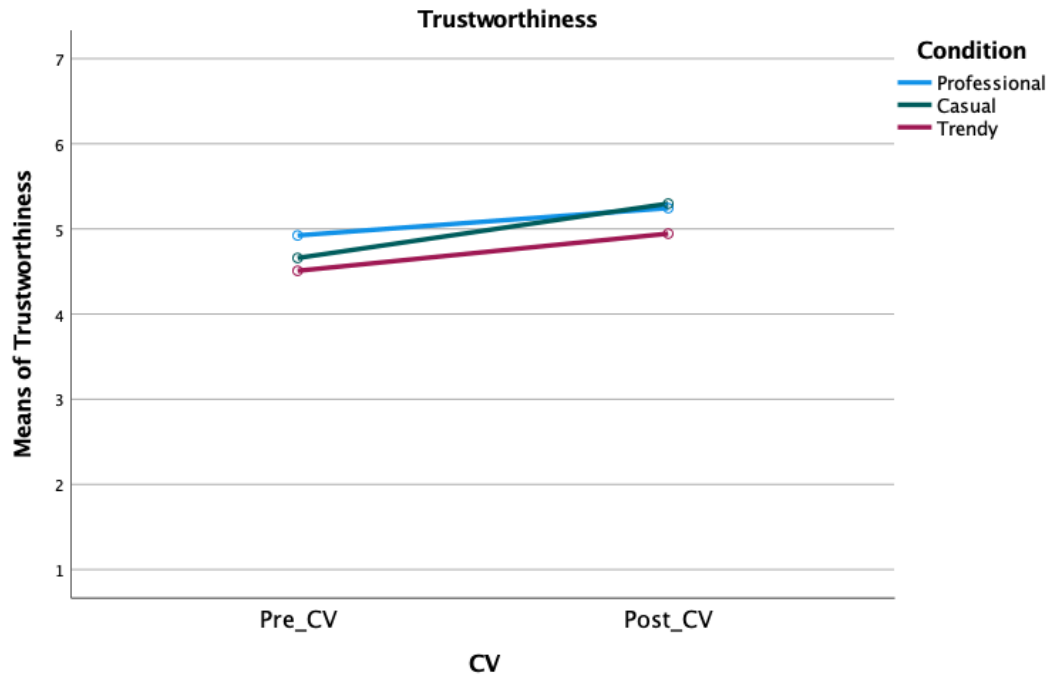
The repeated measures ANOVA showed a significant main effect of CV ($F(1,152) = 21.69$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .125$, indicating a medium effect). Regardless of the attire picture they have seen, participants perceive the individual as more trustworthy after reviewing the CV compared to before.

The repeated measures ANOVA showed no effect of condition ($F(2, 152) = 2.89$, $p = .059$, $\eta^2 = .037$).

The interaction between CV and condition was not significant ($F(2,152 = .829$, $p = .829$, $\eta^2 = .011$). This indicates that there is not a combined effect of the CV and attire condition on trustworthiness ratings (Figure 6). It can be noted that participants in all three conditions adjusted their opinions (given that the main effect of CV was significant). However, the figure indicates that they did not adjust their opinions to different extents across the different conditions.

Figure 6

Means of trustworthiness ratings prior and post the CV



Likeability

Table 6 presents the mean likeability ratings for each condition, both prior to and following the presentation of the CV.

Table 5

Descriptives likeability prior and post the CV

	Likeability					
Condition		Pre_CV		Post_CV		
	N	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	Difference
Professional	53	4.04	0.98	4.30	0.93	+0.26
Casual	47	4.62	1.11	4.45	1.14	-0.17
Trendy	55	4.44	1.37	4.38	1.11	-0.06
Total	155	4.35	1.19	4.37	1.06	+0.02

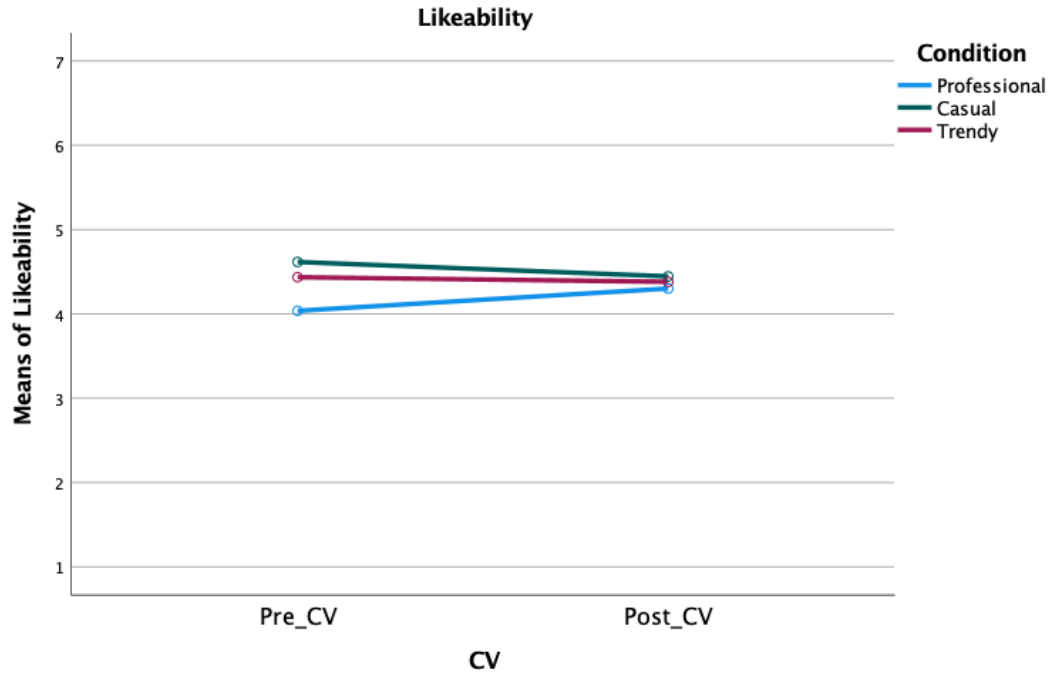
The repeated measures ANOVA showed no effect of CV ($F(1,152) = .018$, $p = .892$, $\eta^2 = .00$, indicating a small effect).

The repeated measures ANOVA showed no effect of condition ($F(2, 152) = 1.931$, $p = .149$, $\eta^2 = .025$, indicating a small effect).

The interaction between CV and condition was not significant ($F(2,152 = 1.789$, $p = .171$, $\eta^2 = .023$, indicating a small effect). This indicates that there is not a combined effect of the CV and attire condition on likeability ratings (Figure 7). These results suggest that neither the presentation of the CV nor the attire condition significantly influenced participants' likeability ratings. Figure 7 illustrates that participants' likeability ratings remained relatively consistent across different attire conditions and before and after reviewing the CV.

Figure 7

Means of likeability ratings prior and post the CV



Final Confirmation Bias Question

Finally, participants self-reported whether "the information on the CV confirms my first impression of this person." A one-way ANOVA was conducted on this final question. Table 7 presents the descriptives of the self-reported question.

Table 6

Descriptives final question

	N	*M*	*SD*
Professional	53	4.49	1.46
Casual	47	3.98	1.39
Trendy	55	3.73	1.37
Total	155	4.06	1.44

The Levene's test is not significant ($F(2,152) = .107$, $p = .899$) we can therefore not reject the null hypothesis and the homogeneity assumption of variance is met. There are no spurious outliers, as confirmed by a Q-Q plot analysis. Therefore, the data are normally distributed.

The one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect of attire condition on self-reported confirmation bias, $F(2,152) = 4.094$, $p = .019$. The effect size, eta squared (η^2), was .051, indicating a small effect. The Bonferroni post-hoc test showed that participants agreed with the statement more when the individual was dressed in a professional outfit compared to a trendy outfit ($p = .016$). However, the casual condition did not show a significant difference from either the professional condition ($p = .215$) or the trendy condition ($p = 1.00$)

Discussion

The main goal of this study is to explore how different fashion styles influence perceptions of various personality traits (intelligence, competence, trustworthiness, and likeability), which provides insights into the broader impact of clothing on interpersonal judgements. By looking into the halo effect and confirmation bias, this research aims to fill the research gap regarding the influence of fashion on unconscious biases, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of how appearance affects decision-making processes in human beings. The study's interdisciplinary approach integrates concepts from psychology, sociology, and fashion studies. This broad perspective enhances the relevance and applicability of the findings across different fields.

The Halo Effect

The halo effect is a cognitive bias where our overall perception of someone is heavily influenced by one specific trait or characteristic. A classic study on the halo effect is the study of Nisbett and Wilson (1977). They showed students two versions of a professor. One was warm and friendly while the other was cold and unfriendly. The students had to rate the professor on various unrelated traits. Their study on the halo effect showed that participants rated a professor more positively on unrelated traits, such as appearance, when he was perceived as warm and friendly. Conversely, when the professor was cold and unfriendly, participants rated him more negatively on those traits.

The current study formed two hypotheses that reflect the halo effect. The first hypothesis predicted that participants would rate individuals in professional attire as more competent, intelligent, and trustworthy than those in trendy or casual attire, while the second hypothesis predicted that participants would rate individuals in trendy or casual attire as more likeable than those in professional attire.

These two hypotheses were tested by conceptually replicating the Nisbett and Wilson's (1977) study. Participants were shown one of three fashion styles and had to rate them on various unrelated personality traits. The experiment partially supported both hypotheses. Participants perceived people wearing professional attire as more intelligent than those in casual or trendy attire. This finding aligns with the halo effect, where professional attire positively influences perceptions of intelligence. Furthermore, it was found that people wearing casual attire were rated as more likeable than people wearing professional attire. This finding suggests that while casual attire may enhance likeability compared to professional attire, the effect was not strong enough to distinguish between all attire conditions. Moreover, there were no effects for the personality traits competence and trustworthiness.

Potential reasons for lack of the halo effect

The unexpected findings included the lack of significant effects on the personality traits of competence and trustworthiness, as well as the insufficient strength of likeability to differentiate between all attire conditions. This could be attributed to the contextual factors of this study. Context might play an important role in various ways.

Firstly, it is important to consider the type of context. The study by Sotak et al. (2023) found that employees were perceived as more ethical and trustworthy when wearing business formal or business casual clothing compared to casual attire. This difference with the current study could be due to the business-related environment used in their study, which included two laboratory experiments with working professionals in settings such as corporate offices. In contrast, the current study did not simulate a business environment: participants were only shown a picture of a certain attire (CV was only presented later on in the experiment). This lack of a related business context might have influenced the results. One possible explanation is that professional attire may only result in increased trustworthiness in a business context. In such

settings, professional attire might signal that individuals can adhere to the social standards of the environment, indicating that they understand the expectations of dressing professionally in a corporate setting. This adherence to social norms could translate into perceptions of trustworthiness.

Secondly, the amount of information provided plays a crucial role. For example, Angerosa (2014) discovered that a person was more likeable when wearing trendy attire. This difference to the current findings could be due to the amount of information provided to the participants. In the current study, participants were only shown one of three attire conditions whereas in Angerosa's study they were shown images of individuals wearing different styles of clothes and were given additional background information such as educational background, moral character, and other personal attributes about these individuals. Therefore, it was easier for participants to rate the individuals on likeability because Angerosa created a more complete picture of the individual.

Future research could explore how different contexts affect halo ratings by simulating more realistic environments and providing more comprehensive background information. One possible approach is to conduct experiments where participants evaluate individuals in a professional, social, and casual setting, using the same background information in each context. This background information could consist of a detailed CV or social media profiles. Moreover, interactive elements such as video interviews or simulated social interactions could be incorporated. When comparing results across the different contexts with the same information, it is possible to determine how the halo effect varies and why certain traits are more influenced than others. This way, it is possible for participants to observe both attire and behavior.

Confirmation Bias

Confirmation bias refers to the tendency for individuals to interpret information in a way that aligns with their pre-existing beliefs (Wason, 1960). A classic and influential study on the confirmation bias is the Wason's 2-4-6 experiment, conducted by Peter Wason in 1960. In this experiment, participants were asked to determine a rule of a sequence of three numbers (e.g., 2,4,6) by proposing additional sequences and receiving feedback. Most participants confirmed their initial hypothesis (e.g., 4,6,8) rather than testing disconfirming sequences (e.g., 1,2,3), even after receiving feedback that their proposed sequence was incorrect. This illustrates confirmation bias because participants focused on validating their pre-existing beliefs.

The current study formulated two hypotheses that reflected confirmation bias. The third hypothesis predicted that after presenting a professional CV, participants would continue to rate the individuals in professional attire higher on intelligence, competence and trustworthiness compared to those in casual or trendy attire. The fourth hypothesis predicted that after presenting a professional CV, participants would continue to rate individuals in trendy or casual attire higher on likeability compared to those in professional attire.

These two hypotheses were tested with an experiment that drew its inspiration from Wason's 2-4-6 experiment. After the participants rated the individual in a certain attire on the four personality traits, they were asked to look at a professional CV and rate the individual again. Thus, the study made use of a repeated measures design, which means that participants' ratings were collected multiple times (before and after the CV was presented). This approach helped to get a better insight into how their initial impressions changed over time, which made the results more reliable because it minimized the influence of individual differences.

Both hypotheses were not supported because no confirmation bias was found for any of the personality traits. On the contrary, for intelligence which showed a strong initial halo effect, people corrected their initial ratings to the point that there was no difference in rating across the

conditions after seeing the CV. This was also reflected in the measure on self-reported confirmation bias: while the participants who saw a person in professional attire felt that their initial ratings were confirmed, participants who saw the trendy attire felt the need to adjust their initial ratings.

Potential reasons for lack of confirmation bias

There are several possible reasons for the lack of confirmation bias in this study. One of them is the impact of the CV. The CV might have provided strong information that overshadowed initial attire-based impressions. This potentially could have covered any subtle confirmation biases. This might explain why the CV had a significant impact on intelligence, competence, and trustworthiness ratings across all attire conditions, reducing the likelihood of confirmation bias. For future research, it would be beneficial to explore how varying the amount and quality of information in the CVs affects confirmation bias. By including different CVs with varying levels of detail and quality in each condition, researchers could investigate whether the impact of attire becomes more pronounced when less information is provided. This approach could also help determine how much and what kind of additional information is needed to override initial attitudes and thus override confirmation bias. Clearly, in this study, enough information was provided for participants to adjust their initial attitudes, but future research could focus on identifying the specific aspects of the information that triggered this adjustment.

Another possible reason for the lack of confirmation bias in this study could be the setting. Initially, when participants only saw an attire picture, they rated the three conditions differently on intelligence and likeability. However, after the CV was presented, participants adjusted their opinions to the point that there was no difference in ratings across the conditions. The CV had a significant impact on intelligence, competence and trustworthiness ratings across

all attire conditions. This means that once the participants received the information of the CV, they only focused on this rather than the attire. This might reflect social desirability bias. Instead of expressing their true thoughts or behaviors, participants might have answered the questions in a way they thought others would find favorable. Therefore, there might have been no effect and thus no confirmation bias. Furthermore, participants might have realized that the study was about cognitive biases. Those in the trendy condition, in particular, might have recognized that they had initially misjudged the person based on attire and corrected their ratings in the second judgment. This awareness and subsequent adjustment could explain the lack of confirmation bias observed in the study. For future research, it would be important to use indirect questioning. When using scenarios or third-person perspectives, it is possible for participants to rate personality traits indirectly instead of asking them directly. For instance, ask them how they think "most people" would rate the individual based on the attire and CV. This way, we can reduce social desirability bias.

Moreover, since there was no main effect of CV for likeability it is important to research whether adding more personal information to the CV could influence likeability ratings and therefore confirmation bias on attire. Two new potential research questions could be: How does including personal characteristics in a CV affect the impact of attire on likeability and other personality traits? Moreover, can a more personalized CV mitigate or amplify the influence of attire on initial impressions and confirmation bias?

Theoretical Implications

This research offers important contributions to the theoretical understanding of how fashion influences personality perception and biases. By examining the halo effect and confirmation bias in relation to fashion styles, this research adds on existing theories in several ways.

The findings show that professional attire can improve perceptions of intelligence, which is in line with the halo effect. This suggests that attire serves as a powerful visual cue that influences judgments about an individual's cognitive abilities. However, this study also shows that the impact of attire does not work the same for all personality traits. For example, while professional attire may enhance perceptions of intelligence, it did not have the same effects on traits like competence and trustworthiness. Furthermore, people perceived those wearing casual attire as more likeable compared to those wearing professional attire. This shows the complexity of the relationship between cognitive biases and attire, highlighting that the various factors, such as context, play an important role in shaping these perceptions.

Practical Implications

The practical implications of these findings are particularly relevant in fields such as psychology, sociology, fashion, marketing, and human resources.

Firstly, in recruitment and workplace settings, it is important to understand how attire influences perceptions. This research can help organizations make better decisions because when they understand cognitive biases such as the halo effect and confirmation bias, they will be able to make objective decisions on whether to hire someone or not. For example, training programs could be developed to educate hiring managers about the potential biases that are associated with attire. When they understand the consequences of biases such as the halo effect

and confirmation bias and their association with attire, they can pay more attention to qualifications and experience rather than superficial cues.

Secondly, individuals can use the insights from this study to make informed choices about their clothing in various situations. For instance, wearing professional attire to job interviews or important meetings can enhance perceptions of intelligence. This knowledge can help them make smart choices about their clothing in certain situations and therefore make better impressions on others.

Furthermore, the fashion industry and marketers can use these findings to design clothing and marketing campaigns that are in line with desired personality traits. For instance, when consumers want to show their intelligence and trustworthiness, marketers can make it prominent to wear professional attire.

Additionally, this study shows the importance of addressing and reducing biases. Interventions such as bias awareness training can help individuals recognize and counteract their own biases. Creating a more inclusive and fairer environment where judgements are not based on superficial appearances is important and possible by educating people about the influence of attire on perceptions.

Conclusion

This study explored how different fashion styles influence perceptions of various personality traits, focusing on the halo effect and confirmation bias.

These findings contribute to the understanding of the halo effect by showing that attire can influence perceptions of intelligence and likeability but not competence and trustworthiness. This shows how complex the relationship between cognitive biases and attire is because some personality traits are affected and others are not.

The results did not show confirmation bias; however, they did show that the CV had a significant impact on intelligence, competence, and trustworthiness.

In professional settings, these insights can help individuals and organizations to make better attire decisions which can have an impact on hiring practices and personal presentation strategies. Additionally, interventions such as bias awareness training can help individuals recognize and counteract their own biases. Educating people about the influence of attire on perceptions is crucial for creating a more inclusive and fairer environment where judgements are not based on superficial appearances.

To conclude, this study provides valuable insights into how fashion styles influence perceptions of personality traits. With its interdisciplinary approach, it highlights the important role of attire in shaping interpersonal judgements. By exploring the halo effect and confirmation bias, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the unconscious biases that affect decision-making.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent Form

Exploring the Impact of Fashion Styles on Perceptions

Researcher: Josephine Christine Wakim

Contact Information: J.C.wakim@tilburguniversity.edu

Participation:
Participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to complete an online survey that takes approximately 5 minutes.

Confidentiality:
We will keep all your responses anonymous and confidential. We will collect no personally identifiable information and store your data securely. The results will be reported in aggregate form, and individual responses will not be identifiable.

Risks and benefits:
There are minimal risks associated with participating in this study. It might be possible that you feel some discomfort in expressing your perceptions, but your participation will contribute to a better understanding of how fashion and perceptions interact. So do not hesitate to be really honest! There are no direct benefits to you, but the findings will help to better understand interpersonal judgments.

Withdrawal:
Participation is entirely voluntary, and you can withdraw from the study at any time. If you want to withdraw from the study, just close the survey. We won't record or store the data.

Consent:
By clicking "I agree" below, you acknowledge that you have read and understood the information that is provided above, and you agree to participate in this study. If you do not wish to participate, please exit the survey.

- ■ I agree to participate in this study.
- ■ I do not agree to participate in this study.

Appendix B

Survey

Survey Introduction
Thank you for participating in this survey! Your insights and perspectives are valuable to us. We aim to explore various aspects of interpersonal perceptions and how different factors can influence them in this study.

You will see an image of an individual in this survey. Once you've viewed the image, we'll ask you to share your impressions of each individual based on a set of characteristics. Please answer the questions honestly and based on your initial reactions. We will keep your responses confidential and use them only for research purposes.

There are no right or wrong answers; we are simply interested in your opinions. We appreciate your time and input in helping us understand how perceptions are formed.

Survey Questions (Before Showing the CV)
Demographic questions

1. What is your age?
2. What is your gender?
   - Male
   - Female
   - Non-binary
   - Prefer not to say
3. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   - Primary school
   - High school diploma
   - Bachelor's degree
   - Master's degree
   - Doctorate
4. How important is fashion to you? (1 = Not at all important, 7 = Extremely important)

Picture of attire (Professional, casual, or trendy)
(1-7 point Likert scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree)

1. Intelligence: This person appears intelligent.
2. Competence: This person seems highly competent in a professional setting.
3. Trustworthiness: This person appears trustworthy.
4. Likeability: I find this person to be personally likeable.

Then show the CV + picture of attire (same picture as before) for at least 20 seconds
Question: Was the CV clear and understandable?

- Yes
- No

Survey Questions (After showing the CV + Picture of Attire)
(1-7 point Likert scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree)

1. Intelligence: This person appears intelligent.

2. Competence: This person seems highly competent in a professional setting.
3. Trustworthiness: This person appears trustworthy.
4. Likeability: I find this person to be personally likeable.

Confirmation bias perception questions
(1-7 point Likert scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree)

5. I believe my initial judgement of this person's competence was accurate.
6. The information on the CV confirms my first impression of this person.

Appendix C

CV

EMMA MAZZULLI

Contact

Phone
+31642240989

Email
Emma.mazzulli@hotmail.com

Address
Prins Bernhardlaan 38,
Amersfoort, Netherlands

Education

2017
M.Sc. Supply Chain Management
Tilburg University

2016
B.Sc. International Business Administration
Tilburg University

Expertise

- Project Management
- Data Analysis
- Strategic Planning
- Microsoft Office Suite
- Presentation
- Process Flows

Language

English

Dutch

OBJECTIVE

A dedicated professional with 5+ experience in supply chain management and project leadership, seeking a challenging role in logistics and process optimization to drive efficiency in global operations.

WORK EXPERIENCE

Project Manager — 2020 - 2024
XYZ Corporation
Led cross-functional teams of 10+ members to deliver 5 major projects on time, with budget and implemented process improvements that increased efficiency by 15%.

Business Analyist Intern — 2018-2020
ABC Inc.
Conducted market research and data analysis to support strategic planning and assisted in the development of business proposals and presentations.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Employee of the Month, XYZ Corporation, June 2021
Dean's List, Tilburg University, 2017

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

Member, Project Management Institute (PMI) 2020-Present
Member, American Management Association (AMA) 2019-Present

REFERENCES

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Appendix D

Attire Conditions (professional – casual – trendy)