

How Do the Halo Effect and Horn Effect Influence the Human Resources Manager's Recruitment Decision in an Occupation Interview?

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Abstract: How human resources managers make their recruitment decision has been one of the popular research questions of the century. Although existing research has demonstrated that human resources managers' decisions are highly likely to be influenced by external biases like halo and horn effects that are not included in the selection criteria, there are still unanswered questions and areas for investigation, especially how and why these biases are inevitable in human resources managers' decisions and the strategies to minimise them. The following literature review analysed and evaluated past research to explore the nature of the human decision-making process, pertaining to the research topic "How do the Halo Effect and Horn Effect influence the Human Resources Manager's Recruitment Decision in an Occupation Interview?" The results of the literature reviews have indicated that halo and horn effects play a critical role in human resources managers' recruitment decisions. The effects are strongly influenced by stereotypes and differ in different occupations, diverse cultural backgrounds, and genders. Current reviews suggest that improving the interview structure and adding a pre-admission test will efficiently mitigate the undesirable consequences of the halo and horn effects. Future investigations are recommended to focus on AI technologies and blind hiring methods in the recruitment process.

Keywords: halo effect, horn effect, stereotypes, decision making, occupation interview

1. Introduction

It's a common scenario that people say, "I chose you because your smile is attractive, and I believe you have good interpersonal skills." Or, "you must be very inefficient at work because you have a slow speed of speech." When we look back, people made mistakes in the pattern of judging individuals by one of their characteristics and overgeneralised it to an overview of that person and causing a failure in decision-making, especially in situations like the first meeting, when there is limited time and resources. Although people always highlight the importance of "don't judge a book by its cover", however, the scenario I have mentioned before is inevitable in the human information processing system [1]. This psychological phenomenon was first coined by American psychologist Frederick L. Wells and named as halo effect and horn effect under the categories of cognitive bias.

The halo effect and horn effect frequently happen in our life. By definition, they will only happen under time-limited and inadequate information [2]. Therefore, more often appear in party, date, and

occupation interviews. These halos and horns play an important role in a decision, such as whom we flirt with, whom we assist, or whom we employ [1]. It's very likely that the consequence of these halos and horns will become a hidden advantage or disadvantage for individuals. A company's hiring system, especially listed companies, will have a person or panel who specialises in HR and are usually responsible for all details and decisions relevant to recruitment, dismissal, and employee relations. Controversially, some people argue that human resources managers' decisions are completely rational since they have been professionally trained and have strict judging criteria and an examination process. The dissenting voices, by contrast, suggest that bias can unconsciously interfere with human resources managers' decisions, both in the curriculum vitae (CV) and in the interview process. They argue that human resources managers' decisions are influenced by factors other than individual ability and are not entirely rational and fair.

The influence of halo and horn effects can be significant in the hiring system if they are present. The recruitment decision with the tendency to outweigh some of the traits of an individual will lead to opportunity costs for both employer and employee. The following review will be based on existing journals and research to explore and analyse the research question, "How do the Halo Effect and Horn Effect influence the Human Resources Manager's recruitment decision in an Occupation Interview?".

2. Literature Review

2.1. Cognitive Bias

The halo effect and horn effect are forms of bias. The term cognitive bias was first coined by Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman in 1974 [3]. By definition, it refers to a systematic error that is irrational and usually violates logic in thinking and reasoning processes. These will result in the behaviour being guided by automatic and relatively unconscious tendencies rather than a most advantageous decision [4].

Bias is a deviation from impartiality and objective reasoning caused by a range of psychological, emotional, and cultural factors. This can lead to decisions that are less accurate and suboptimal than they would be if they were able to remain impartial and avoid the influence of these biases. Heuristics, or mental shortcuts, are often responsible for bias when there is limited time, insufficient resources, or a lack of expertise. In decision-making, perception, and judgment, it's a rule of thumb without any costs and benefits calculations or complex thinking and comparison in the available options [2]. It won't intentionally guarantee an optimal choice [2]. Heuristics are based on past successful experience and tends to minimise the efforts and time needed for analysing all aspects of the situation and the possibilities. It helps individuals make decisions or solve problems quickly and efficiently in situations where an exhaustive search for information or solutions is not feasible. In contrast, it will lead to the cognitive bias that usually causes people to make undesirable decisions.

To some extent, heuristics is the fundamental cognitive bias. However, the difference is that heuristics can be changed or edited by a person's future experience, whereas people do have some ability to control it. Cognitive bias is a range of inertia of thought that causes people to make irrational decisions and has been discovered and concluded. Presumably, people are out of control of cognitive bias. The halo and horn effects are cognitive biases that people cannot avoid.

2.1.1. Halo Effect and Horn Effect

The conceptualisation of the halo effect and horn effect was first identified by the American psychologist Frederick L. Wells in 1907, and in 1920 another American psychologist Edward L. Thorndike conducted a series of experiments and first provided empirical evidence for the effects.

The halo effect is a psychological phenomenon in which one positive characteristic of a person's first impression can cause individuals to attribute it to other abilities of that person and automatically

consider they have impressive strength in all other areas. It is the tendency for an observer to form an overall positive impression of an individual from one or two favourable traits under time-limited and inadequate information [2]. The generalisation tended to exaggerate connections between evaluated traits [2].

A close related yet analogous psychological phenomenon, the horn effect, refers to a negative perception dominated by an unexpected personality or appearance in their first impression when there is deficient insight about the individual. The halo effect and horn effect are derivatives of confirmation bias, the tendency to seek information or take action that fits their existing values, beliefs, or schema. In situations like an interview, a speech, and one lesson, have time-restricted and non-enough information to interpret the person entirely. In their first impression, if people develop a perception of the individual from either a beneficial or detrimental trait, it's unlikely that people will judge and treat the individual without prejudice and discrimination from their pre-mindset. People usually anticipate their views on an individual's other ability following their mindset before it has been examined.

2.1.2. The Role of Stereotypes

American psychologist Gordon Allport in his book *The Nature of Prejudice* defined stereotypes as “An exaggerated belief associated with a category.” A stereotype is a relatively unchanged and underplayed generalisation about a group of people [2]. It is usually dominated by disadvantageous traits and negative influences, although the probability of recognising the positive stereotypes cannot be neglected [2].

The process of stereotyping tends to link an individual with abilities and a range of characteristics of a group that people presume they belong to when they first meet. When the stereotypes have been coded, the future use of stereotypes often minimises the effort that individuals use in judging and processing information. A positive stereotype might cause people to outweigh a person's abilities. A common example is the stereotype that “Chinese are good at mathematics”. This frequently causes people to believe that a random Chinese kid will have a better calculation aptitude than other kids of the same age without knowing the kid's actual abilities in mathematics. In the case of the halo effect, a positive stereotype can lead to an over-emphasis on positive traits of the group, thus ignoring individual differences and weaknesses. In the horn effect, negative stereotypes can generate prejudice and discrimination, leading to a tendency to overlook negative aspects.

2.2. Recruitment Decision

This section will explore the process and criteria for a recruitment decision focusing on the interview process. Further, concentrate on attractive appearance as a critical factor in biases and their potential consequences.

2.2.1. Human Resources Manager

According to the job descriptions from Society for Human Resource Management, a human resources manager leads and guides hiring and interviewing new staff, including further administering pay and resigning. Most companies require their HR personnel to have a bachelor's degree in human resources or higher education. A senior HR director has excellent communication, interpersonal and negotiation skills. They should possess stronger discrimination ability and make judgements under a time limit than others.

The hiring system usually involves a long process for human resources managers and company representatives to select the most suitable staff for the positions. The selections are based on strict criteria and are specific to different positions. The routine of hiring typically starts with reviewing

resumes. Those applicants with higher education and helpful past experience will enter the next round: interview, the most critical step for human resources managers to make their recruitment decisions.

2.2.2. Interview

An occupation interview will take approximately 10 to 30 minutes. During that period, it will have any questions related or unrelated to the job and help human resources managers make the optimal decision for recruitment. Most likely, applicants are well prepared and try to persuade human resources managers that they are the best person for this job. Human resources managers make the recruitment based on the applicants' multidimensional capabilities, for example, communication, problem-solving and improvisation ability. The importance of each skill depends on the occupation. If human resources managers are rational and objective, all the positions will be allocated to applicants who meet all the requirements simultaneously.

As mentioned previously, Edward L. Thorndike was the psychologist who published the first piece of evidence for the halo and horn effects. Thorndike experimented with 1915 employees from two industrial corporations [5]. He inquired flight commanders to assess their officers on a variety of different criteria, including their physical qualities, intelligence, leadership, personal qualities, and general value to the service [5]. Thorndike evaluated the results and observed an unexpectedly strong correlation between the officers' ratings for intelligence and leadership capabilities and their ratings for their psychical qualities [5]. The commanders were unable to assess certain qualities apart from others [5]. They had a general perception of their officers, either "good" or "bad, and this perception automatically guided the particular attributes they assigned to them [5]. Thorndike concluded that those ratings could not analyse the person's individuality and accomplishments [5]. People's judgments of the officers were reportedly impacted by a clear propensity to feel either positively or negatively about the individual in general, which affected their evaluations of the attributes [5].

As an extension of Thorndike's study, human resources manager is likely to experience similar irrational judgement as flight commanders did when they were asked to assess officers. The details like clothing, tone of voice and appearance, if they arouse and match the stereotype or reach any reference point of human resources managers' favourable or unfavourable traits, can easily influence their overall rating of the applicants and generate the same perception of other abilities of applicants. For example, the first interviewee has a clean face without freckles and acne, and the second interviewee has moderate skin problems. The first interviewee will have a greater chance of being recruited in most situations. This is because people will easily outweigh the significance of a clean face for forming a generally good impression and thus start to correlate a clean face with other aspects that take into consideration, such as organisation skills, time management and impression management proficiency.

2.2.3. Attractive Appearance

The halo and horn effects could be directed by any kind of factor, for example, handwriting, clothing, or confidence. Predominantly, these factors centred on a particular term – attractiveness. According to the Cambridge dictionary, attractiveness can be defined as the quality of causing interest or making people want to do something. It's not unusual to hear a statement like, "what is beautiful is good". An attractive appearance is one of the critical factors that cause people to have the tendency to believe a person's abilities are as good as their appearance. This phenomenon often appears in the first meeting or when insufficient information and time exist.

There is substantial empirical evidence to support that the attractiveness of appearance influences hiring decisions. People suggested that the more attractive a person are more likely to be recruited [6]. The anomalous face overgeneralisation hypothesis offers a justification for the phenomenon [7].

According to the hypothesis, the adaptive benefit of identifying people with illnesses or defective genes has equipped people to react to features of the face that might indicate low fitness [7].

Thus, when people judge normal individuals whose appearances match one or more features of the unfit, people tend to overgeneralise in their responses [1]. Because ugly faces are more comparable to those of unfit or ill people, which are more accessible for people to identify, they thus judge unattractive people more harshly than attractive ones [1]. In fact, rather than the idea that “beautiful is good,” the generalisations seem to be less influenced by the halo effect compared to the horn effect, with the belief that “ugly is bad” [1].

2.2.4. The Consequences

The halo and horn effects influenced the decision of recruitment, which will cause opportunity costs for both applicants and the company.

Suppose an applicant shows a few details in the interview that are not favoured by the interviewer, such as answering questions clearly but performing nervously. In that case, the interviewer may be influenced by the horn effect and be more inclined to see the applicant's negative traits and ignore their strengths and potential. This situation may result in the applicant being unsuccessful and have some impact on them. The applicant may feel lost and frustrated as they hope to achieve their goals through the interview. It may reduce their confidence and self-esteem, making them more nervous and less confident in future interviews.

In contrast, if an applicant possesses certain impressive attributes or achievements in an interview, the interviewer may give them a higher overall rating because of the halo effect. In this case, the halo effect may positively impact the applicant, as the interviewer will likely be more inclined to select those applicants with the halo effect. However, the selection may be based on something other than the applicant's ability and suitability for the position rather than the interviewer's impression of the applicant. Suppose the applicant needs to be more capable of doing the job. In that case, there are likely to be eliminated faster than usual, which could be not conducive to the long-term development of the applicant.

From the employer's perspective, both the halo effect and the horn effect can lead to opportunity costs for companies. Assuming that companies only consider certain distinguishing characteristics of applicants at the expense of other important factors, this has a high chance of facing the outcome of hiring the wrong people who are not capable of the position, which in turn increases training costs and reduces productivity and team effectiveness. If companies reject applicants simply because of certain flaws or shortcomings, they may miss out on some suitable applicants, resulting in lost talent, productivity costs and reduced team effectiveness.

The performance of the organisation as a whole suffers when recruitment decisions are made based on skill and ability unrelated to the position [8].

2.3. Distribution

The halo and horn effects always cannot be avoided in an occupation interview, but they tend to differ in occupation and geographical location. The nature of the job, the different hiring preferences, and cultural differences all tend to be responsible for the variations. The following section will explore some examples to demonstrate the distribution of effects and discuss the issues led by gender differences.

2.3.1. Occupations

The different occupations have different stereotypes based on the personality, appearance and academic qualifications generalised from most of the employees in this field. Doctor and fashion

designer represent two occupations that require a very diverse range of talents. In the hiring process, the applicants' "halo" and "horn" from the human resources managers' perspective tend to be disparate from each.

A doctor requires a high standard of education and goes through many years of clinical experience. Most people, therefore, assume that a doctor with one or more features of maturity (E.g. with a beard, wearing glasses and with a relatively short spacing between two eyes etc.) on their face has more experience and thus is more trusted, despite the fact that the profession of doctor has a lot of pre-qualification requirements and is less likely to be swayed by bias in interviews. However, there is an underlying "horn" from the interviewer towards the people with baby face features. People are likely to unconsciously combine baby-faced people with childlike traits such as naivety, honesty, and childishness [1]. People with one or more baby-faced features may be looked down upon for jobs that are challenging or require much experience because they have been linked with childlike traits [1]. Doctors can be one example.

Fashion designers are professionals who conceive and design the material, colour scheme and shape of clothing. Through the artistic treatment and expression of lines, tones, and textures, they make it fit and enhance the image and temperament of people who wear it. Their work content has led to a common belief that fashion designers are generally female and need to be young, beautiful, tall, have a body shape comparable with models, and must dress in line with fashion trends, always wearing the latest and most luxurious clothes and accessories. This stereotype leads to a strong gender and appearance bias in human resources managers' hiring decisions.

In this field, human resources managers are more likely to have a halo effect on applicants who satisfy the following features: women or men with feminine traits; have a natural advantage in looks or have good make-up techniques; have a perfect body shape and dresses in line with human resources managers' subjective aesthetics. The "halo" for the applicants overlooks their ability by correlating their physical appearance with their design skills, mistakenly confusing art with beauty.

2.3.2. Cultural Difference

Cultural difference is a critical factor that tends to influence the impact of halo, and horn effects in occupation interviews between countries since people with diverse cultural backgrounds value different characteristics and skills. In some cultures, physical attractiveness and social identity may be highly regarded, and people with these characteristics may be regarded as more capable or reliable than others. This can result in a "halo effect" when those with high social standing or physical attractiveness are seen as having additional favourable qualities like intelligence or leadership potential. Within particular ethnic groups, perceptions may be more strongly influenced by age, gender, or experience. For example, the elderly may be admired and seen as intelligent or knowledgeable in some cultures, which might have the unintended consequence of creating a halo effect where people think older people also have other beneficial qualities like patience or compassion. All these factors can cause people to have different priorities of traits and abilities, thus having different "halos" and "horns" in their impression generalisation.

The occupations like psychologist and counsellor who provide psychotherapy are usually considered heavily dependent on the applicants' cultural background, including race and the geographical location for work. From a rational perspective, the competence of a psychologist is not related to their cultural background. However, a psychologist's job is to communicate with people. Most people often prefer to choose a psychologist who shares the same ethnicity and speaks their mother tongue when they need someone to talk to. The speciality of the occupation causes human resources managers to have a preference for native-born and same-race interviewees when making the hiring decision and to overlook some of the more capable non-racial interviewees.

2.3.3. Gender Difference

As mentioned previously, the anomalous face overgeneralisation hypothesis (underpinned by the halo effect and horn effect) explains one possible mechanism behind statements like “what is beautiful is good.” However, there is a contradictory explanation of the mechanism “beauty is beastly”, and it violates the first statement [8].

Some research indicated that attractiveness for females has commonly been seen as a disadvantage in an occupation that has been classified as generally dominated by men, where it tends to reverse the bias of “what is beautiful is good” [8]. In this case, “beauty is beastly”.

The study by Heilman and Saruwatari in 1979 investigated how the evaluation of job candidates for managerial and non-managerial positions was affected by physical appearance and sex [1, 9]. The participants were presented with candidates’ resumes with a photograph [1, 9]. The candidates can be categorised into attractive and not attractive, male and female [1, 9]. They either apply for a traditional male managerial position or a traditional non-managerial position [1, 9]. The participants were told that all candidates were recently graduated with qualifications for positions, and then participants were asked to rate their resumes on competence, likability, and employability [1, 9]. The results demonstrated that more attractive female candidates had been rated negatively than unattractive female candidates for competence and employability in a managerial position [1, 9]. However, the result showed the opposite for males applying for a managerial position. Attractive male applicants presented remarkable advantages [1, 9].

In comparison, for the non-managerial positions, attractive candidates have been rated generally higher than unattractive candidates, irrespective of their sex [1, 9]. Heilman and Saruwatari concluded that both sex and physical appearance are taken into account but have different impacts when evaluating job candidates for managerial and non-managerial roles [1, 9]. Particularly for managerial positions, females are penalised for their attractiveness, while males are rewarded [1, 9].

3. Implications

“You never get a second chance to make a first impression.” This proverbial adage is just about impression management or the act of attempting to control how others perceive themselves [10]. While attempting to change how other people perceive themselves, impression management considers what people say, do, and how [10]. People will attempt to portray themselves in ways that will result in favourable assessments by others by highlighting their accomplishments and hiding their weaknesses [10].

From the employee’s perspective, impression management is neither intrinsically good nor bad, according to Giacalone and Rosenfeld, but rather an essential component of society and life [11]. Job applicants make an effort to highlight the characteristics they think will increase the likelihood of them getting the position they want. Many interviewees choose to find the preferences of the interviewer and the type of interview in advance so that they can make the best first impression and cause the interviewer to be influenced by the halo effect, thus reducing the negative impact of their weakness and increasing their chances of being hired.

Conversely, suppose the human resources managers for a company is driven by the deliberate performance of job applicants often when choosing whom to recruit. In that case, it will have a higher chance of making incorrect hiring decisions and a brain drain. Therefore, it’s a big success for the company to avoid the halo and horn effects in the hiring system [12]. Some strategies can be implemented to the greatest extent possible to avoid the halo and horn effects [12]. The implication of structured interviews, which entail asking all candidates the same questions in the same order and using objective criteria to assess candidates, can be an efficient strategy to prevent the halo effect [12]. Also, having more than one interview with the different interviewers to evaluate each candidate

helps lessen the impact of each interviewer's "halo" and "horn" [12]. It is also advised to provide interviewers with feedback on their judgements and teach them to recognise and prevent being influenced by the effects [12]. Data-driven techniques like pre-employment testing and assessment centres can be used to supplement the reliability of the interview process [12].

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the halo effect and horn effect are two cognitive biases that can have a significant impact on how Human Resource Managers make recruitment decisions in occupation interviews.

First, the halo effect and the horn effect as cognitive bias are systematic errors in human thinking and decision-making process that are almost unavoidable. Also, the limited time and information available to human resources managers during the interview make it even easier to make the choices that have been biased by halo and horn effects. These "halos" and "horns" are unfair and involve powerful personal emotions and experiences. According to the researches mentioned above, they have been deeply influenced by stereotypes.

Secondly, although it is debatable which is more influential, "beautiful is good" or "ugly is bad", the common is that these are part of the halo and horn that subconsciously influence human resources managers' choices. It usually causes human resources managers to exaggerate the association of one characteristic with other abilities of the applicants, which is likely to lead to a wrong hiring decision.

Thirdly, these halos and horns have the potential to have undeniable consequences for both the company and the candidate. When the wrong choice is made, there will be inevitable opportunity costs for them, including money and time.

Last but not least, the halo and horn effects in interview selection often have a different influence on human resources managers' decisions, depending on the nature of different occupations and cultural backgrounds. The research above also implicit gender discrimination and suggests that the gender differences between males and females result in "what beautiful is good" turning into "beauty is beastly" for females in male-dominated positions.

Finally, suggestions were made for minimising the halo and horn effects. Human resources managers can assist in guaranteeing that the most competent individuals are chosen for the position, independent of their personal qualities, by taking actions to counteract these biases, such as defining explicit criteria, employing a structured interview process, and receiving professional training to minimise the impact of bias. In the long run, this has great potential to result in a more inclusive and diverse workforce, which would be beneficial for both the business and society.

Future research may concentrate on investigating various methods to migrate the influence of the halo effect and horn effect for human resource managers during the occupation interviews. This might involve examining the usefulness of employing AI technologies to aid in the review process and the usage of blind hiring methods.

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