Buying experience and customer satisfaction as outcome of salesmen’s facial expression: A social experiment

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ABSTRACT

This social experiment was carried out in branded clothing stores of Lahore to explore the effect of sales persons’ facial expressions on buying-experience and customers’ satisfaction. Sample consisted of two proportion including sales person (N=9) carrying natural facial expressions of G1: smile (n=3), G2: neutral (n=3) and G3: rudeness (n=3). Second proportion of sample comprises of customers (N=525) who buy products from these salesman without any suggestions or influence. Results revealed significant difference in customer’s buying experiences and satisfaction in the three groups of salesman. Smiling facial expression is the predictor of both positive buying experiences, and customer’s satisfaction. Both male and female have same customers’ experiences and satisfactions on the basis of three facial expressions. Further, positive experiences are predictor of customers’ satisfaction. The findings of this work have important implications for sales representatives, managers, trainers, students and researchers of consumer behavior.

ARTICLE INFO

JEL Classification

M
M3
L
L1
L2

Keywords

Facial Expressions
Customer Buying Experience
Customer Satisfaction
Social Experiment
Smile

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1. Introduction

Business world is competitive and fast. Survival of business is based on efficient and effective customer focused approach. An initial component of this approach is providing buyers a pleasant and comfortable experience. Great customer experiences produce great business results. According to Steve Jobs “you have got to start with the buying experience and work back to the revenue, not the other way around”. Researches shows that organization that provide great buying experiences raise twofold as fast as organizations that provide average experiences. Individuals have a tendency to "get" another person's feelings and to feel what others around them are feeling (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1993). In order to express feelings, individual use different gestures and facial expressions. Customers who buy from stores, their buying experience starts while interactions with sales person.

Facial expressions have strong effects; customers might react with facial expressions making them feel more positive about the buying experience (Howard & Gengler, 2001). Though, female customers are less fulfilled by a sales experience than guys when the salesman displays negative feelings, both men and women seem more fulfilled when the sales assistant shows a positive enthusiastic prompt more commonly ‘facial expressions’ (Tan, Foo & Kwek, 2004). Facial expression reveals to think about others and about what you do, so it’s a characteristic initial phase in costumers’ administration. Sales could be portrayed as obliging a good attitude including the facial expressions as a general and acknowledged display of positive feeling, and aptitude in articulating social courtesies, paying little respect to the genuineness of the sales person or their real emotions (Mattila et al., 2003).

A smiling facial expression is connected with positive traits, for example, amiability, truthfulness, and skill. Shaping of an attitude by the customer towards a sales person could be impacted by suspicion of the intentions behind the sales assistant's message which may be reduced by the representative's facial expressions (DeCarlo, 2005). Smiling is a pleasant nonverbal sign expected while interaction with sales representative. Neutral face expression has no facial movement give neutral impression. It is indicative of lack of any emotion. The neutral or blank face expression compels to conceal ones emotion as ‘poker face’, referring to the common practice of oneself composes. On contrary, rude facial expression considered as unwelcoming and unacceptable globally. Italian male salesman shows-off rude expressions by uplifting their brows and lauding their voice. In general, facial expressions play an integral part during a sales interaction. That is why, experts advocate non-verbal communication more. Similarly, the way a salesperson deal with the customer is the
foundation stone of customer satisfaction. “Customer satisfaction is state of mind in which
the customer’s needs, wants, and expectations throughout the product of service life have
been met or exceeded, resulting in future repurchase and loyalty (Anton (1996)”. Business is
getting more customer focus so the marketers are developing strategies to please customers in
order to provide pleasant buying experience and long term satisfaction. Many researchers
have reported the importance of customer satisfaction. Kotler (2000) define satisfaction as: “a
person’s feelings of pleasure or disappointment resulting from comparing a product are
perceived performance (or outcome) in relation to his or her expectations”. There are several
factors that may influence the customer satisfaction (Hokanson, 1995). In order to achieve
customer satisfaction, organizations must be able to satisfy their customers’ needs and wants
(La Barbera and Mazursky, 1983). Customers’ needs focus on the deficiency of a customer.
On the other hand wants derived from needs as these are learnt by culture and apart of
individual personality (Kotler, 2000). Customer satisfaction depends on experience of
customers both with reference to contact with the organization and personal gains.
Satisfaction further linked with “acceptance, happiness relief, excitement and delight” (Hoyer
& MacInnis. 2001). The focus of present research was to explore the effect of sales persons’
facial expressions on buying experience and customers’ satisfactions. It was further aimed to
explore the difference among the effect of sales person’s smiling, neutral and rude facial
expressions on buying experience and buying satisfaction. There was another query whether
gender contributes in the same regard or in either way. As per the researches knowledge
studies on phenomenon of sales persons’ facial expressions as well as other nonverbal
elements are occasional and limited. The present study will be of great implications for the
professionals of customer behavior and marketing.

1.1 Hypotheses

- H1: There would likely to be a difference among the effects of smiling, neutral and
rude sales persons’ on positive buying experience and customer satisfaction of the
customers.

- H2: There would likely to be a gender differences among the effects of smiling,
neutral and rude sales person on positive buying experience of male and female
customers.

- H3: Smile would be the predictor of both buying experience and customer
satisfaction.
• H4: Positive buying experience would leads to customer satisfaction.

![Hypothetical model](image)

**Figure 1**
Hypothetical model

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

Experimental research design (3 X 2) was used, as research aimed to find out the effect of sales persons’ facial expressions on positive buying experience and customer satisfaction in customers. There were three groups of sales persons, 1) smiling sales persons and 2) rude sales person. Both these groups were taken as ‘experimental group’. Whereas sales person with 3). Neutral/blank facial expression was taken as ‘control’. Following experimental model has been emerged

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Social experimental research design (3x2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variables</td>
<td>Experimental Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Smile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buying experience (BE)</td>
<td>Smile X BE-male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Smile X BE-female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BE-female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Satisfaction (CS)</td>
<td>Smile X CS -male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Smile X CS-female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CS-female</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.2. Sample

The sample of present study was comprised of two proportions that are 1) sales person and 2) customers. Both groups of sample were selected from Brand store A, Brand store B, and Brand store C from Lahore. These three stores are trendy and leading brand-ware for females and males.
Sales Persons

Three groups of sales persons (N=9), comprises of natural facial persona of smile (n=3), neutral (n=3) and rudeness (n=3) were selected from brand outlets of brand store A, brand store B and brand store C, after careful observations. They were approached first with the consent of the management of respective stores and later asked for their own consent to become participant of this study. Their age was from 20 to 28 years with intermediate as minimum qualification.

Table 2
Frequency and groups of sales person taken from each outlet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brand Store</th>
<th>Smile</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Rude</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G1: Brand store A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G 2: Brand store B</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G3: Brand store C</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Customers

Customers (N=525) were selected through purposive sampling technique. Only walk-in males (n=196) and females (n=329) from selected clothing stores of Lahore, who bought any product without influence of any suggestions and above 18 years were considered to be a part of study after obtaining consent. The participants have diverse educational background from inter to masters with age ranging from 19 to 42 with mean age of 28 years. Approximately 53% were married and 47% were unmarried, 72% were employed, 28% were unemployed or dependents. Monthly income of the sample was 40,000 to 1.0 million, where majority (79%) considered them in middle social class and 21% claim to be in upper social class.

2.3 Assessment measures

Assessment measures comprise of following two instruments:

Demographic form

The demographic variables like age, gender, education, marital status, employment, income and socio-economic status etc. have been asked through self-constructed demographic sheet.

Scale of positive and negative experiences

The SPANE (Diener & Diener at el, 2009) is a 12-item questionnaire was used to assess the positive and negative buying experiences of the customers. “The SPANE is a twelve item scale, comprises of six items to assess positive feelings and six items to assess negative
feelings. For both the positive and negative items, three of the items are general (e.g., positive, negative) and three per subscale are more specific (e.g., joyful, sad).” Reliability of the scale for the current sample was 0.82.

**Customer satisfaction scale**

Customer satisfaction was measured through 10 items customer satisfaction scale. It was measured on a 10 point scale. The items of this scale were based upon ‘client satisfaction scale’ developed by Larsen, Attkisson, Hargreaves, and Nguyen, T.D. (1979) for measuring the clients’ satisfaction among patients under treatment of medical program. Researcher found this instrument appropriate to measure the customer satisfaction with few amendments. In the present study, adaptation has been carried out by adding two statements in the mentioned scale. Customers were allowed to record their responses on ten point Likert type scale, hence providing them opportunity to express their satisfaction more sensitively. It is easily scored scale by summing up the individual item scores to produce a range of 10 to 100, with high score indicating greater customer satisfaction. Reliability of the instrument for the current sample is 0.87.

**2.4. Procedure**

Researchers approached the customers and sales persons, for this study, in different clothing stores of Lahore (Brand store A, Brand store B, and Brand store C). First the authorities of these stores were taken into confidence and they allowed the researchers to conduct the experiment as they themselves express that they were strongly interested in enhancing customer’s satisfaction. The consent of participating in the research was also taken from the shop manager, sales persons’ and the customers.

The reasons for selecting the naturally carrying facial expression was to isolate the effect of smile and how it influences customers experience and to check how much the experience of customers differ who dealt with rude and neutral sales representative. The customers visiting the stores were first asked if they have few minutes to participate in the research project. Some customers refused to participate while majority of them willingly agreed. An in-writing consent form was given to the customers who were willing to participate and they were fully ensured that the information gathered from them would be held confidential and would not be used other than this research and then the self-constructed questionnaire was filled through the information each participant gave. Instructions were also given to them about responding the self-report. Instructions were given to avoid biasness.
During the experiment it was observed that the customers who were dealt with the smiling sales person were in a happy mood and were more actively involved in buying. The customers who were dealt with the neutral sales person were also silently and moderately involved in buying as there was no such communication between the sales person and the customers. The customers who were given with the service of Rude Sales person were not as much tangled in buying and were leaving the stores, comparatively spending less time.

3. Results

Table 3
Descriptive statistics and Cronbach’s alpha for study variables (N=525)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>( \alpha )</th>
<th>Min Scores</th>
<th>Max Scores</th>
<th>( k )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Customers buying experience</td>
<td>48.85</td>
<td>18.845</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customers Satisfaction</td>
<td>69.96</td>
<td>16.63</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of the customer’s experience and satisfaction was .82 and .87 respectively, which shows a high reliability ranges for both the scales.

It was hypothesized that there would likely to be a difference among the effect of smiling, neutral and rude sales person on experience and buying behavior of customers. One Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was performed to see whether there was any difference among the three groups. Results are shown in the table below:

Table 4
Analysis of variance for the buying experience and customers satisfaction on the basis of facial expression (N=525)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>( n )</th>
<th>Buying Experience</th>
<th>Customer Satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smile</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>55.6</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>41.44</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rude</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>20.56</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

H1: Results revealed that there was highly significant difference observed in scores of customers’ satisfaction on the basis of smiling, neutral and rude expression of sales persons. As determined by ANOVA findings (\( F = 595.730, p = .001 \)). Detailed analysis through Tukey’s test revealed that the mean difference of customers experiences for smile has
significantly different from both the other groups. Similarly, smile contribute significantly to customer satisfaction too, as customer reported (F = 644.25, p=.001) more satisfaction, revealed through Tukey test, than rest of the other groups.

It was also hypothesized that there would likely to be a gender differences among the effect of smiling, neutral and rude sales person on customer satisfaction. Result reveals that smile contributes more satisfaction among customers than the rest two facial expressions.

Table 5
Independent sample t-test comparing the gender differences in the experience of customers and their buying experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Men (n=196)</th>
<th>Women (n=329)</th>
<th>t(73)</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>CI 95%</th>
<th>Cohen’s d</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buying experience</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>39.32</td>
<td>12.60</td>
<td>39.12</td>
<td>16.09</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customers’ Experience</td>
<td>41.17</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>39.23</td>
<td>17.25</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>.499</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

H2: Independent sample t-test was used to assess gender differences in the customer’s experience about the three groups. No significant differences were found in customer’s experience and satisfaction about the three groups on the basis of gender.

Table 6
Regression analysis showing facial expressions as predictors of customer buying experiences and customer satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Smile</th>
<th>Rude</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE B</td>
<td>β</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer buying experience</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.14*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer satisfaction</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.75**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΔR²</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F for changes in R²</td>
<td>644.25**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01

H3: Regression analysis was carried out using dummy coding revealed that smile is a facial expression that significantly predicts customers’ positive buying experience and customer satisfaction. On the other hand rude facial expression inversely predicts both experience and
satisfaction. Moreover, neutral or blank facial expression has no outcomes. The findings of regression analysis lead to acceptance of H3.

**H4**: Simple regression analysis show that positive buying experience of customers is outcome of customer satisfaction thus accepting our hypothesis H4.

As an outcome of regression analysis following model has been emerged showing facial expressions as strong predictors of customer buying experience and customers’ satisfaction.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 2**
Final model emerged showing smile as predictor of buying experience and customer satisfaction

### 4. Discussions

Customer satisfaction has been perceived as a standout amongst the most critical components of contemporary promoting thought, especially on account of administration segments and one of the primary objectives in marketing. These results explored that a sales agent’s smile can have critical impacts on customers beyond the basic development of a positive impression connected with the smile. This finding was predictable with different studies demonstrating that a smiling individual is seen all the more absolutely on both interpersonal and fitness measurements than one who smile less. The participants were more responsive to smiling sales person as compared to neutral and rude sales person. The literature also supports this phenomenon. A more constructive impression of the individual before recognized as a sales representative, was discovered regardless of sex when the individual depicted a smiling vs. neutral facial statement supporting results from past studies (Abel & Walters, 2005), thus accepting H1.
In social associations, smiling shows a craving to associate with others and to proceed with the current association. Such practices demonstrate great client benefit in examination to an experience where the interpretation recommends an absence of yearning to proceed with the communication. The second hypothesis was that there would likely to be gender differences in customer’s experience and buying behaviors. Studies inspecting service quality in the promoting writing have given little thought to distinguish gender contrasts in administration quality assessment. Past examination on gender consequences for client impression of administration quality has delivered sort of clashing results. For instance, Stafford (1996) recommends administration quality may be more vital to ladies than to men when transacting business with a bank. The H2 was not accepted as the results indicated that there were no differences in customer’s overall satisfaction i.e. their experience and buying behaviors on the basis on gender. This result is different from the previous findings; one reason could be that only cross cultural researches have been done on this topic. There is no indigenous literature available.

Positive facial expressions of sales man create pleasant buying experiences and great customer satisfaction. The findings of the present research confides with Tsai (2001) who uncovered that employees’ positive feelings (e.g. smiling notwithstanding welcome, thank, eye contact, and general invitingness) were identified with the customers’ more noteworthy ability to visit the store again and pass complimentary remarks about the store to the companions. Further, Taylor and Baker (1994) reported the same that client fulfillment and positive assessments of administration quality were identified with more noteworthy ability to return and readiness to prescribe the business to others. Other research by Donovan et al. (1994) proposed that clients' certain feelings were interfaced to obtaining conduct, measure of time used in the store, loving of the store, and eagerness to come back to the store and prescribe the store to their companions. On contrary, rudeness of sales person is invers predictor of buying experience and customer satisfaction. It is depicted that rudeness cause bitter experience and less satisfaction among customers. Affective component of sales person have strong impact over experience, satisfaction and loyalty of consumers (Ting Yu & Dean, 2001). Researchers suggested that facial expression last more in memory, particularly associated with negative emotions. The individual who had experienced negative emotions made attempts to avoid such situations in future thus result in less customer satisfaction (Sato et al, 2013). Finally, it is concluded that facial expressions of sales person are integral component and strong contributor of positive buying experience and customers’ satisfaction.
5. Limitations

It was not applicable to conduct this social experimentation with random sampling technique. Because customers were walk-in and researcher interested to use natural facial persona of salesman. Any training or acting in the delivery of facial expressions might be biased the results. More explorations could explore some other significant patterns in the experiment which were not hypothesized.

6. Implications

Results from this study give helpful bits of knowledge to sales persons to recognize their costumer' needs, make a move to enhance administration conveyance, and secure norms of execution to address the distinguished costumers' requirements. Further training programs would be developed by emphasizing more on the soft skills and facial persona for enhancing better customers’ experiences.

References


