

A Study on Nonverbal Communication of Salespersons and their Service Behavior towards Customers in a Sales Encounter

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ABSTRACT

Nonverbal communication is the most expressive channel and is a major dimension of human communication. It includes all aspects of communication other than words. Although there are a number of definitions of nonverbal communication, in its broadest sense it is communication that transcends the bare elements of the written or spoken words. Though there are many classifications of nonverbal communication like kinesics (body's physical movements), Proxemics (personal space language), paralanguage (vocal behavior), Chronemics (time language), Haptics (touch communication), olfactics (smell), Gustics (taste), Environmental factors, this study focuses mainly on kinesic aspects of nonverbal communication.

Nonverbal communication has been the prime focus of research area in many fields like sociology, psychology and anthropology etc. But, despite the volume of research available in these disciplines, studies of nonverbal behavior in relation to marketing activity have been relatively few. Considering that personal interaction between purchaser and provider is central to most service encounters and that nonverbal communication will always take place where two individuals interact, recognition of this type of communication is critical in understanding the

nature of high contact personal service encounters such as retailing and professional services. Hence this study was an attempt with the primary objective to find the impact of nonverbal communication of the salespersons towards customers and the customer evaluations regarding the salespersons' service behavior.

Descriptive research design was adopted for this study. Out of the total population of all retail clothing outlets in Coimbatore, 254 retail shops was the sample frame. Based on two-stage sampling technique, in the first phase 11 retail outlets were selected based on 3 criteria: area of the shop should be more than 20,000 square foot, it should be a family shop and it should provide face-to-face service encounter. In the second stage, samples were selected randomly and the sample size was 950 based on 10 percent of the average footfall of the retail outlets.

A well structured questionnaire was developed, tested and used as a research tool to collect the data from the respondents. The questionnaire consisted of three parts: part one covered the demographic details of the respondents like, age, gender, occupation, annual family income and the marital status, part two consisted of the Nonverbal Dimensions like, facial expressions, eye contact, gestures and clothing. The third part

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consisted of the service behavior dimensions like, friendliness, credibility and courtesy. Various techniques like simple percentage analysis, independent sample t-test, ANOVA, Correlation, Regression and AMOS were used to analyze the collected data.

It was found that there exists a significant correlation between all the nonverbal dimensions and the service behavior dimensions and that nonverbal communication leads to customers' evaluation of salespersons that they are friendly, credible and courteous. Out of all the three dimensions of nonverbal communication, facial expression was found to have high significance on friendliness and credibility. With regards to courtesy, gestures and clothing was found to have high significance. The resultant model established that each of the nonverbal dimensions has significant relationship with service behavior dimensions and the model fit the data satisfactorily.

With respect to the demographic factors of the respondents, it was found that females were satisfied with the overall nonverbal communication of the salespersons. Business group, customers

with the income of Rs. 10 lakhs and above and married people had evaluated the overall nonverbal communication of the salesperson to be more satisfied than the other groups. It was found that customers in the age group of 56 and above are more satisfied with the overall service behavior of the salesperson compared to the other groups. Females compared to males, home makers, customers having annual family income level of Rs. 10 lakhs and above and married people were found to be more satisfied with the overall service behavior of the salesperson than the other groups. Customers considered smile, eye contact and facial expression to be the most important nonverbal cues and head movements and body posture to be least important nonverbal cues salespersons should exhibit during a sales encounter.

The findings of this study result in several interesting managerial implications. The results indicate that salespersons' nonverbal communication is the key factor in determining their service behavior. Hence it is important for the service persons to recognize the contribution of appropriate use of nonverbal communication in achieving positive evaluation about their service behavior.