CLAV2016
9th Latin American Retail Conference

Título do Artigo: **“Smile! Earn my Money: Effects of Seller´s Smile on Consumer Behavior in Retail Stores”**

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Apoio

CAPES FAPESP FGV EAESP GVPESQUISA

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Smile and Earn my Money: Effects of Salesperson's Smile in Retail Stores

Abstract

The present research proposes emotional contagion theory as a theoretical basis for examining the effect of salesperson´s smile on consumer behavior in retail stores. Seven experiments composed of 409 consumers were performed. Results show that salesperson´s smile have a significant effect on salesperson´s profile assessment and product price attribution is mediated by salesperson's profile. Six hypotheses were corroborated and shed light on theoretical and managerial perspectives.

Keywords: retail, smile, consumers, price, salesperson

1 Introduction

The role of salespersons are extremely important in promotion strategies (Choi & Choo, 2016) to get customer´s attention. In retail contexts, salespersons and customers continuously change verbal and nonverbal messages which can affect the interpretation and interaction between them. During interaction with customers, salespersons give cues about their professional experience and product quality. Therefore, the more satisfied customers feel about the salesperson's attention, more positive is word of mouth and purchase intention (Beatty, 1996). In this sense, salesperson's smile is a powerful tool to signal attention and disposition to initiate contact with customer.

Central to this study is the hypothesis that smiles may affect customer´s judgment about salesperson's profile and price's attribution through smile's contagion. Salesperson's profile here is considered the general impression that customer creates about a salesperson at a first time. Our primary research question is how does salesperson's smile affect customers' judgment in retail store?

Research in marketing field shows that customers tend to develop relationship with salespersons and become more loyal to them (Pujol et al., 2013). On the other side, Melnyk et al., (2009) pointed out that women are more loyal store customer than men, but, don´t specify whether it refers to the store environment or the salesperson professional profile. So, these results are unclear and deserve more attention by marketing scholars.

Other aspect is that scholars on retail field have focused on customer's expectations and technology (Hopping, 2000), technology and performance (Fiorito, Gable, & Conseur, 2010), self-service technology (Cho & Fiorito, 2010), e-commerce and retail (Burt & Sparks, 2003), internet and retail (Doherty, Ellis-Chadwick, & Hart, 2003), internet and retail transactions (Lee, Lee, Kim, & Lee, 2003). All of them have focused on a hybrid perspective, customers and technology what can be seen as a type of myopia (Levitt, 1975). Thus, this paper addresses the importance to shed light in this fundamental human trait, the smile phenomenon in retail context.

In psychology literature, smile is pointed out as a powerful social instrument to influence individual´s behavior (Hess & Bourgeois, 2010). Smile provokes, maintains, reinforces or is gratified by the smile of the human partner; it becomes an instrument of exchange or contagion (Piaget & Inhelder, 2000 p. 23). Smile activates engagement in others helping to develop social competence, for instance: influencing opinions, sharing life experience or desire for interactions (Messinger et al., 2008). These behavioral responses are in line with emotional contagion theory (Schoenewolf, 1990; Hatfield et al., 1993). Given the influence of smile, it is argued that a salesperson with a smiling face will be better evaluated compared to non-smiling face and it will impact price attribution to the product.

Social psychology theory and neurological study done by Duchenne (1862) showed that smile is accompanied by positive emotions. Freud, Piaget and Darwin postulated that smiling is a type of positive emotion and reflects contentment, pleasure accomplishment and joy (Messinger, 2008). If smiling causes specific reactions to humans, like happiness, contentment and approachable (Messinger et al., 2008), is probably that salesperson's smile positively affect consumer´s judgment.

Based on classical theories and contemporary studies seven experiments were carried out to investigate the impact of salesperson´s smile on consumers's judgment about salesperson´s overall profile and product´s price. Different salespersons, retail stores and products were considered to prove that this effect is valid in different contexts.

This paper contributes to theoretical and substantial domains. On a theoretical domain confirms that salesperson's smile, a non-verbal signal, positively influence consumers in retail context; second, instigates a re-evaluation of human behavior in market contexts by marketing

scholars; third, interlink marketing and human resources with focus on retail. On a substantial perspective establishes human basic traits that should be considered by companies when recruiting and training salespeople. Finally, open a line of research that can investigate the impact of smile in different cultures.

In a general view this paper is structured in three parts. First, theoretical background and hypotheses; second, method; third, discussion, implication and limitations.

2 Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

The idea here is to adapt emotional contagion theory (Schoenewolf, 1990; Hatfield et al., 1993) to explain the influences of smile in marketing context. This theory explains that when people unconsciously mirror expressions of emotion, they come to feel reflections of those emotions (Hatfield et al., 1993).

About smile, is correct to say that it is a primitive trait and one of the most common nonverbal signal used in communication among humans. People who smile are considered more sincere, honest, friendly, approachable (Frank & Ekman, 1996) and express positive emotions (Messinger et al., 2008). Past studies done by Freud, Piaget and Darwin indicated that smile is a result of positive emotion and reflects contentment, pleasure accomplishment and joy (Messinger, 2008). A smile activates engagement in others helping to develop social competence, for instance: influencing opinions, sharing life experience or desire for interactions (Messinger et al., 2008).

Smile is signal of positive emotions (Duchenne, 1862) and influences the mood of others. In marketing field, customers in positive mood tend to give positive evaluations of products and advertisements (Scanlon & Polage, 2011) and in others social contexts, smile has a positive impact on person attractiveness, mating success, and job opportunities (Dion, Berscheid & Walster 1972; Scharlemann, Eckel & Kacelnik, 2001; Scanlon & Polage, 2011). These findings are in line with emotional contagion theory (Schoenewolf, 1990; Hatfield et al., 1993) witch posits that when people unconsciously mirror expressions of emotion, they come to feel reflections of those emotions (Hatfield et al., 1993). Based on these previous studies it is argued that the smile has the power to influence consumer´s judgment. Thus, is proposed the first hypothesis: **H_1** – when the candidate to work as a salesperson is smiling, the consumer's judgment about candidate's overall profile will better evaluated compared to without candidate´s smile.

During interaction salesperson and customer sends verbal and nonverbal information to each other, for example: appearance, lifestyle and socio-economic status (Crosby et al., 1990). Customers associate the salesperson's impression with store and product´s image (Choi & Choo, 2016). The impression customers have about the salesperson is very important because it influences their satisfaction (Chang, 2006) and overall judgment (Reynolds & Beatty, 1999). In this sense, smile is important to form a good salesperson´s impression (Crosby et al., 1990; Chang et al., 2006; Reynolds & Beatty, 1999). More important, smile is an openness signal of desire for interactions (Messinger et al., 2008). Therefore, the second hypothesis is proposed: **H_2** – when the salesperson is smiling the consumer´s judgment about salesperson's attention will be better evaluated compared to without salesperson's smile.

A smiling facial expression is associated with more positive attributes such as sociability and sincerity (Abel & Abel, 2007; Frances, 1979). Smiling person receives more positive scores on the dimensions of optimism and kindness (Pereira et al., 1993). These studies support the third hypothesis proposed here: **H_3** – when the salesperson is smiling the consumer´s judgment about salesperson´s friendly will be better evaluated compared to without salesperson's smile.

Many experimental studies report findings that positive mood increases in helping behavior (Forgas, 1998; Harris & Smith, 1975; Job, 1987; Levin & Isen, 1975). Specifically, Harris and Smith (1975) identified that smiling to a stranger enhances subsequent helping behavior towards another. Here, is proposed **H_4** - when the salesperson is smiling the consumer´s judgment about salesperson´s helpful will be better evaluated compared to without salesperson's smile.

Those people who smile are seen in a positive way depending on the context. In help's contexts smile activates the desire for interactions, but, in dominance contexts, like fights competition, athletes those who smile are seen as less dominant (Kraus, 2013). Smiling before a physical confrontation is the same that to take on a submissive nonverbal posture (Dryer & Horowitz, 1997).

However, in retail contexts smile can reduce the psychological distance between salesperson and customer. In service encounter, for example, when the smile is perceived as authentic (Duchenne,1862) has a direct effect on customer satisfaction, regardless of task performance. Independently of salesperson's performance, it is argued in **H_5** that - when the salesperson is smiling the consumer's judgment about salesperson's fast, considered here as the disposition to attend quickly the customer will be better evaluated compared to without salesperson's smile.

A smiling facial expression is associated with more positive attributes such as sociability, sincerity, and competence (Abel & Abel, 2007; Frances, 1979). In a retail context, it is known that salesperson influences the costumer´s purchase (Choi & Choo, 2016). Therefore, salesperson´s smile influence consumer´s actions. Considering that smile causes specific reactions to humans, like happiness, contentment and approachable (Messinger, 2008), these positive feelings aroused through the smile may affect the product´s price. Thus, is proposed **H_6** – when the salesperson is smiling the customer will show more willing to attribute a higher price to the product compared to without salesperson's smile.

3 Method

Seven experiments composed by different products and salespersons were used to test the hypotheses**.** The first experiment was designed to test the effect of smile on salesperson's professional profile (H1). In the followings experiments were evaluated salesperson's professional profile and price's attribution (H2 to H6).

The choice of the type of smile was based on Duchenne (1862), which expresses sincerity and positive emotions. In total, four pictures with different smiles of the same people were shown to a group (n=8) in different sequences to choose that considered sincere and true. The pictures were pre-tested to check whether customer consider them as sincere smiling face or not-smiling face, in the second case, neutral expression.

After that, was asked to another group (n=10) of consumers to list characteristics that they consider most important for those who wants to have a job as a salesperson. The main characteristics mentioned were attentive, friendly, helpful and fast. These characteristics were used as dependent variables: This salesperson seems attentive; This salesperson seems friendly; This salesperson seems helpful; This salesperson seems fast in attending the customers. To analyze the candidate´s overall profile these variables were aggregated. All items were measured each one as a single item using a Likert scale of seven points: 1 completely disagree to 7 complete agree. One dichotomous affirmative was included as manipulation check about the salesperson´s smile (yes, the salesperson is smiling; no, the salesperson is not smiling) and another open question checked the price attributed to the product (How much would you pay to the product for?). The products used in experiments were chosen by

researchers. They are from different categories and purchase occasions to enhance external validations of the results.

The first part of the questionnaire had a picture of a salesperson with or without a smile. In the sequence was asked to the participants to imagine that they were shopping at a specific retail store, and would be attending by a salesperson. In the sequence the salesperson's picture was shown and asked to the participants to express their judgment about the salesperson's professional profile and how much would be willing to pay by the product.

Questionnaires were applied through the internet with a random technique to avoid demand effect. Data were collected during five months through the internet (from November 2015 to April 28 2016). The total sample in seven experiments was composed by 394 customers. Finally, demographics data were requested.

3.1 Experiment 1

Study 1 examines whether variations in salesperson's smile affects customer´s perceptions about the candidate for a job in retail store (H1). Dependent variables were composed by salesperson´s profile; attentive; friendly; helpful and fast. In this experiment a person (male) was described as a candidate of an opportunity to work as a salesperson in a retail store.

Procedure

A sample of (N=67) students was recruited to participate in this study and was told to assess the salesperson´s profile. Sample was composed by 35 (52%) males; 32 (48%) females; average age=28 years old; average income $803,90. Thirty three (49%) students evaluated the salesperson with smile and others thirty four (51%) without smile.

Manipulation Check. After look at the picture of the candidate, participants were told to specify if the person was smiling or not. It was controlled by two dichotomous variables – 1 – Yes, the person in the picture is smiling; 2 – No, the person in the picture is not smiling. To isolate smile effect from customers genres on dependent variables, chi-square test was performed with genre and stimulus (smile vs. no smile); $\chi^2(1) = .764$ (**p=ns**).

MANOVA was performed to check the effectiveness of experimental manipulation. Results indicate a significant effect of smile manipulation evaluation ($\mathbf{F}_{\text{candidate´s profile}}$ (1,66) = 15,484; p=0,01; $n^{2=}$0,19; ($\mathbf{F}_{\text{attentive}}$ (1,66) = 10,967; p=0,01; $n^{2=}$0,14; ($\mathbf{F}_{\text{friendly}}$ (1,66) = 29,664; p=0,001; $n^{2=}$0,31; ($\mathbf{F}_{\text{helpful}}$ (1,66) = 2,576; p=0,01; $n^{2=}$0,03; and ($\mathbf{F}_{\text{fast}}$ (1,66) = 13,215; p=0,01; n^{2}=0,16. As expected, the salesperson´s smile manipulation has an effective effect on individual perception, in this case, positively - Table 1.

Table 1 – Basic premises of smile's effect on customer´s evaluation

Dependent variables	Results
(H_1) - Candidate´s profile	$\mathbf{M}_{\textbf{smile}}$=4,79 sd=1,89 vs. $\mathbf{M}_{\textbf{without smile}}$=2,81 sd= 1,80; t(65)=3,560; **p<0,01**;
Attentive	$\mathbf{M}_{\textbf{smile}}$=4,48 sd=1,95 vs. $\mathbf{M}_{\textbf{without smile}}$=3,20 sd=1,62; t(65)= 2,672; **p<0,01**;
Friendly	$\mathbf{M}_{\textbf{smile}}$=4,75 sd=1,01 vs. $\mathbf{M}_{\textbf{without smile}}$=2,01 sd=1,62; t(65)= 3,699; **p<0,01**;
Helpful	$\mathbf{M}_{\textbf{smile}}$=4,62 sd=1,84 vs. $\mathbf{M}_{\textbf{without smile}}$=3,61 sd=1,56; t(65)=2,567; **p<0,05**;
Fast	$\mathbf{M}_{\textbf{smile}}$=4,48 sd= 1,75 vs. $\mathbf{M}_{\textbf{without smile}}$=3,30 sd=1,89; t(65)= 2,808; **p<0,01**;

As evidenced, the phenomenon of smile's contagion is timeless, recurrent and influences others individual's judgment as postulated by Freud, Piaget and Darwin. The next studie will test this assumption in marketing contexts.

3.1.2 Experiment 2

In this experiment is tested the effect of salesperson´s smile on consumer behavior in context of purchase in a retail store. The same independent and dependent variables were. The product used to this one was Panettone considered a seasonal product and the genre of salesperson is male.

Procedure

A sample of (N=76) students was recruited to participate in this study. Sample was composed by 39 (51%) males; 37 (49%) females; average age=27; average income $903,15. Thirty seven (49%) students evaluated the salesperson with smile and others thirty nine (51%) without smile.

Manipulation Check was done as before (experiment 1) and occurred as expected. To isolate smile effect from customers genres on dependent variables, chi-square test was performed with genre and stimulus (smile vs. no smile); $\chi^2(1) = 1.568$ (**p=ns**).

ANOVA was performed to check the effectiveness of experimental manipulation of smile on dependent variables. From this to the following experiments was including as dependent variable how much consumers would be willing to pay to the product for. Results indicate a significant effect of salesperson's smile on customer's evaluation ($\mathbf{F}_{price}$ (1,74) = 4,525; p=0,037; n^2=0,058; ($\mathbf{F}_{salesperson´s\ profile}$ (1,74) = 12,671; p=0,001 n^2=0,146; ($\mathbf{F}_{Attentive}$ (1,74) = 7,139; p=0,009; n^2= 0,088; ($\mathbf{F}_{friendly}$ (1,74) = 13,686; p=0,001; n^2=0,0156; ($\mathbf{F}_{helpful}$ (1,74) = 6,588; p=0,012; n^2= 0,082 and ($\mathbf{F}_{agility}$ (1,48) = 7,887; p=0,006, n^2=0,096 - Table 2.

Table 2 – General effect of salesperson's smile on customer´s evaluation

Dependent variables	Results
Salesperson´s profile	$\mathbf{M}_{smile}$=4,45 sd=1,89 vs. $\mathbf{M}_{without\ smile}$=2,94 sd=1,80; t(74)=3,560; **p=0,001**;
(H_2) - Attentive	$\mathbf{M}_{smile}$=4,48 sd=1,95 vs. $\mathbf{M}_{without\ smile}$=3,35 sd=1,72; t(74)=2,672; **p=0,009**;
(H_3) - Friendly	$\mathbf{M}_{smile}$=4,75 sd=2,01 vs. $\mathbf{M}_{without\ smile}$=3,20 sd=1,62; t(74)=3,699; **p=0,001**;
(H_4) - Helpful	$\mathbf{M}_{smile}$=4,62 sd=1,86 vs. $\mathbf{M}_{without\ smile}$=3,61 sd=1,56; t(74)=2,567; **p=0,001**;
(H_5) - Fast	$\mathbf{M}_{smile}$=4,48 sd=1,75 vs. $\mathbf{M}_{without\ smile}$=3,30 sd=1,89; t(74)=2,808; **p=0,006**;
(H_6) - Effect´s on product´s price	$\mathbf{M}_{smile}$= U$3.09 sd=4,48 vs. $\mathbf{M}_{without\ smile}$=U$2.45 sd=4,18; t(74)=2,127; **p=0,001**;

Results show positive effect of salesperson's smile on price's attribution F(1,74) = 4,52, p = <.01, R^2 = .06; b = 2,11, t(74) = 2,13, p<.05. The effect of salesperson's smile on salesperson's professional profile F(1,74) = 12,67, p = <.01, R^2 = .14; b = 1.51, t(74) = 3,55, p<.01 and the effect of salesperson's smile mediated by salesperson's professional profile on price's attribution F(1,74) = 7,38, p = <.01, R^2 = .17; b = 0,80, t(74) = 3.11, p<.01; b = 0,90, t(74) = .88, p<.37; Z = 2,29, p = .05, k^2 = .13.

3.1.3 Experiments 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7

These studies replicate the findings from the second study with different products and salespersons. It was considered a minimum of 20 participants per group of participants (Hair et al., 2009) in all studies. Results are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3 – Experiments 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 (Prices attributed to the products)

Studies	**Products**	**Salesperson's genres**	**Experimental Conditions (N=214)**	
			With Smile	*Without Smile*
3 (n=52)	Chocolate cake	Female	M_{Price}=2,31 (0.20)	M_{Price}=1.41 (0.62)*
4 (n=63)	Backpack	Male	M_{Price}=22,30 (2,30)	M_{Price}=18.43 (1,80)*
5 (n=42)	Tapioca	Male	M_{Price}=2.25 (1.44)	M_{Price}=1.30 (2.05)**
6 (n=54)	Oriental food	Male	M_{Price}=4.75 (1.69)	M_{Price}=2.32 (1.52)*
7 (n=55)	Churros	Female	M_{Price}=1.72 (0.45)	M_{Price}=1.05 (0.11)**

Note: For each row, the means across smile conditions differ at the $p < .05$* and $p < .01$** levels. Standard deviations are reported in parentheses

4 General discussions

The main purpose of this paper was examined the effect of salesperson´s smile on consumer behavior in retail stores. It was tested at the same time the salesperson's overall profile to identify the effect of smile in hiring a candidate for a job and the impact of smile on price´s attribution. It was found that smiling candidate is preferred compared to no-smiling person.

The influence of smile in social contexts was based on past studies done by Freud, Piaget and Darwin and contemporaries scholars in marketing (Choi & Choo, 2016; Cho and Ku, 2002), but, a gap still existed in marketing field. None of them have linked two fields, human resources and marketing as here.

According to Piaget & Inhelder (2000) smiles tend to be gratified by the smile of the human partner. This study shows that the smiles activate a reciprocity mechanism as explained by emotional contagion theory (Schoenewolf, 1990). So, salespersons, those demonstrate positive emotions through smile have more chance to achieving better performance in sales comparing to others without smile.

It was found when customers evaluate at the first time a salesperson with smile; he or she is perceived more adequate to work as a salesperson. This finding is aligned with Deutch, LeBron and Fryer (1981) about smiles and global perception of a person. Individuals who smile are perceived more positively that no-smiling agents (Ochs & Pelachaud, 2012). Thus, customers see the salesperson more competent to working and show a higher disposition to pay more to the product.

Some people have ability to decode nonverbal cues, others not so well. However, it is certain the capacity of distinguish among different types of smiles during within a specific social context (Frank, Ekman, & Friesen, 1993), thus, the salesperson must pay attention to customer´s presence and to use smile as a social influence tool.

To operationalize this study, six hypotheses related to salesperson´s smile were tested with different products, salesperson´s genre and contexts. All smiles' pictures were pre-tested before. To achieve the objectives of this study all smiles used were considered genuine too (Duchenne, 19862) and was identified a genuine effect.

Other important aspect must be mentioned here is that, the expression of smile impact the observer´s perception (Ochs & Pelachaud, 2012). A smile is the easiest and the first signal decoded by observer, hence, can impact the observer´s perception. Whether the observer perceives a positive smile, the observer´s judgments tend to be more positive (Ochs & Pelachaud, 2012). .

Finally, is possible to say that customers in positive moods tend to give positive evaluations of products and advertisements (Scanlon & Polage, 2011). The same happened in seven experiments, that is, when salesperson smiles customers' evaluation is more positive

about salesperson´s perception and attribute a higher price to the product. Therefore, salespersons have to be nice with customers to arouse positive feelings before and during interaction to get success in their profit margin.

4.1 Managerial and Theoretical Implications

In a managerial view, our results support that smiles is a very important aspect in developing advertising, merchandising actions, and in a general way in promotion strategies. Human Resources Department must pay attention when selecting candidates to work as a salesperson. So, extroverted person must be preferred to work with sales. Another point must be considered is that, salespeople have to be trained to be friendly and fast in attending a customer, what can result of a positive perception of the salesperson, image´s store and improving the performance of store.

In a theoretical perspective this study contributes to the application of emotional contagion theory by showing that nonverbal signal influences others in purchasing contexts. Other contribution is the understanding of face's reading by customers at a first visual contact with salesperson and how its affect salesperson judgment. More important, all experiments in this paper provide support for contagion theory as the underlying theoretical basis for explaining salesperson´s evaluation by customers in retail stores.

4.2 Limitations

This research sheds light on important issues, but several limitations must be noted. First, this research was done considering a single culture. Future research must be conducted to test the effect of smile in different cultures, where the smile can be interpreted in different ways. Second, in this paper was tested the effect of smile on salesperson´s profile and price attribution. Maybe, different results can be found in service industries, where the interactions between salespersons and consumers are closer and intense. Fourth, for these studies were used pictures for experimental manipulation, so, tested it in a real store maybe can take advantage on its own.

Therefore, further study should be conducted with more emphasis on attractiveness of the salesperson or considering cultures of individualists and collectivities societies.

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