Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services 18 (2011) 381–388

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jretconser

Retail salespeople's mimicry of customers: Effects on consumer behavior

Céline Jacob[a], Nicolas Guéguen[a,*], Angélique Martin[a], Gaëlle Boulbry[b]

[a] *Université de Bretagne-Sud, IUT de Vannes, Département TC, 8, rue Montaigne, BP 561, 56017 Vannes, France*
[b] *Université de Bretagne-Sud, UFR DSEG, Rue de la Loi, 56000 Vannes, France*

ARTICLE INFO

Available online 22 June 2011

Keywords:
Mimicry
Seller–customer interaction
Consumer behavior

ABSTRACT

Developing interpersonal bonds between employees and customers in selling contexts can increase sales and positive perceptions of the employees and the store. Recent studies have found that mimicking the verbal and nonverbal behavior of strangers enhanced their liking for the individual who mimicked them, and influenced helping behavior. An experiment was carried out in a retail setting where four sales clerks were instructed to mimic, or not, some of the verbal expressions and nonverbal behavior of the customers. On their way out, these customers were asked to evaluate the sales clerks and the store. Results showed that mimicry was associated with a higher sales rate, greater compliance to the sales clerk's suggestion during the selling process, and more positive evaluations of both the sales clerks and the store. It was found that these evaluations mediate the relationship between mimicry and customers' behavior. Experiment 2 confirmed the behavioral effect of mimicry when a baseline condition was introduced. These results seem to show that mimicry really helps managers to develop positive relationships between their sellers and their customers.

© 2010 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

1.1. *Interpersonal bonds in employee–customer relationships*

The interaction between store employees or service industry employees and their customers is considered an essential part of customers' assessments of service quality and their relationship with the store or the service provider (Bitner, 1990; Gwinner et al., 1998). The development of interpersonal bonds may be a way for a store to differentiate itself from others and to increase their sales, to raise customer loyalty and to create a positive word of mouth for their store. Thus, managers might consider ways they could facilitate the development of interpersonal bonds, including encouraging the development of friendships between employees and customers. Coulter and Coulter (2000) found that as perceived similarity between customers and service employees increased, customer trust also increased. Gremler et al. (2001) found that customer positive word of mouth increased when employees used interpersonal bonds in their relationships with the customers such as employee familiarity with customers, personal connection between employees and customers, or care displayed by employees.

Thus, it could be interesting for managers to encourage their employees to use social psychological procedures that facilitate positive interpersonal relationships in their own relationships with the customer. Several studies have found that some of these social psychology techniques facilitated interpersonal relationships and increased the positive perception of the individual who used such interpersonal bonds. Some of these studies have shown the efficiency of these interpersonal techniques in a selling context. For example, touch is considered as a factor that facilitates interpersonal relationships, familiarity and truth. Several studies have found that the tactile contact of a patron by a server in a restaurant or bar increases tipping (Crusco and Wetzel, 1984; Stephen and Zweigenhaft, 1986; Hornik, 1992b; Lynn et al., 1998; Ebesu Hubbard et al., 2003; Guéguen and Jacob, 2005). Touching potential customers can also lead to an increase in product sales rates, or a greater amount of money spent (Guéguen et al., 2007; Guéguen and Jacob, 2006; Hornik, 1992a; Kaufman and Mahoney, 1999; Smith et al., 1982). Further studies found that the professional qualities of the seller or the restaurant employee were evaluated more positively (Crusco and Wetzel, 1984; Hornik, 1992b; Stephen and Zweigenhaft, 1986; Wycoff and Holley, 1990; Erceau and Guéguen, 2007). It has also been found that employee tactile contact was associated with a more positive perception of the store (Hornik, 1992a) or the restaurant (Hornik, 1992b).

Tactile contact is not the sole technique that facilitates interpersonal relationships. Within the various social psychology procedures, one of them, the mimicry technique, could have some interest for managers and sellers to create a positive perception of the employees among the customers. Mimicry has long been studied by social psychologist. However, its behavioral effect and its effect on the perception of the mimicker are relatively recent

---

[*] Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: celine.jacob@univ-ubs.fr (C. Jacob), nicolas.gueguen@univ-ubs.fr (N. Guéguen), angelique.martin@univ-ubs.fr (A. Martin), Gaelle.boulbry@univ-ubs.fr (G. Boulbry).

0969-6989/$ - see front matter © 2010 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.
doi:10.1016/j.jretconser.2010.11.006

and the influence of mimicry in a real selling context does not exist. The first objective of this paper was to test the effect of mimicry used by a salesperson on customer behavior and judgment in a real field setting. The second objective was to test the link between customer behavior toward a salesperson who mimicked him/her and the variation in judgment created by mimicking.

1.2. *Mimicry in social relationships*

As the saying goes ‘‘Monkey see, monkey do’’. This ‘‘Chameleon effect’’ (Chartrand and Bargh, 1999) refers to the unconscious mimicry of postures, facial expressions, mannerisms and other verbal and nonverbal behaviors. Today, research on this paradigm has shown that mimicry has the power to influence social judgment and behavior toward the mimicker. Recent experimental studies conducted in field settings show that using mimicry could influence compliance towards a mimicker's request.

1.3. *Mimicry: an automatic behavior*

It has been found that posture and mannerisms are routinely mimicked in social interaction (Bernieri, 1988; LaFrance, 1982). Giles and Powesland (1975) found that people mimic the accents of their counterparts. Speech rate (Webb, 1972) and speech rhythms (Cappella and Panalp, 1981) are also mimicked unconsciously by human beings in their social interactions. The contagious effect of laughter has been found in several studies (Bush et al., 1989; Provine, 1992) and many experiments have found that the use of canned laughter causes an audience, in return, to laugh longer, more often, and to rate the humorous material as funnier (Cialdini, 2011). Chartrand and Bargh (1999) showed that participants were more likely to touch their own face when they interacted with a face-touching confederate who was a stranger, than when they interacted with a foot-shaking confederate. In the same way, the reverse effect was found when the confederate shook his or her foot: the participants were more likely to shake their own feet than to touch their own face. When confederates were instructed to smoke in a bar-laboratory, it was found that participants imitated this smoking behavior (Harakeh et al., 2007). Quigley and Collins (1999) found that alcohol consumption is influenced by our counterpart in social interaction and the type of drink selected, the drinking rate, and the volume of beverage for each sip is imitated. However, these later studies found that people were not conscious that they mimicked the behavior of their counterparts.

1.4. *Mimicry increases positive evaluation of the mimicker*

Research has also found that mimicry is associated with a more positive evaluation of the mimicker. Chartrand and Bargh (1999, study 2) engaged participants in a task with a confederate who was instructed to either mimic the mannerism of the participant, or to exhibit neutral, nondescript mannerisms. Participants who were mimicked by the confederate subsequently reported a higher mean of liking for the confederate, and described their interaction with him/her as smoother and more harmonious than those who were not mimicked. This result is congruent with previous work by Maurer and Tindall (1983), who found that when a counselor mimicked a client's arm and leg position, this mimicry enhanced the client's perception of the counselor's level of empathy compared to when the counselor did not mimic the client. Interacting in an immersive virtual reality with an embodied artificial agent mimicking our own behavior is sufficient to influence the agent's rating. In a recent experiment by Bailenson and Yee (2005), a virtual agent verbally presented a persuasive argument (a message advocating a campus security policy) to a participant. In half of the cases, the virtual agent mimicked the participant's head movements with a 4-s delay; for another group of participants, the agent mimicked the prerecorded movements of another participant. After the interaction, the participant indicated his/her agreement with the message delivered by the agent and gave his/her impression of the agent. It was found that the mimicking virtual agent was more persuasive, and received more positive trait ratings than non-mimickers.

1.5. *Mimicking someone to create affiliation and rapport*

Rapport and affiliation are also associated with mimicry. LaFrance (1979) conducted a longitudinal design survey to explore the relation between a measure of nonverbal synchrony and self-report indications of rapport with college students. She found that posture sharing between the instructor and the students was positively related to rapport. For this author, postural mimicry may be influential in establishing rapport. This link between affiliation and rapport has recently been demonstrated by Lakin and Chartrand (2003). In their experiment, participants performed a first task in which they were exposed to a priming procedure using words related, or not, with the concept of affiliation (friend, partner, etc.). In a second unrelated task on memory, participants watched a videotape of a female confederate who was touching her face. During this second task, it was found that the participants who were primed with the unconscious concept of affiliation mimicked more favorably the confederate displayed on the video tape than when no affiliation priming was used. This seems to show that affiliation and mimicry are related. This effect was recently confirmed by two studies by Yabar et al. (2006), who found that participants mimicked more favorably the nonverbal behavior of members of their in-group than members of their out-group. Once again, the link between mimicry and the desire for affiliation was attested. The same effect can be found in closer interaction. In a recent study (Guéguen et al., 2007) an experiment was carried out during real sessions of speed-dating, in order to test the behavioral effect of mimicry in a courtship context. The young women confederates who interacted with men during such sessions were instructed to mimic some of the men's verbal expressions and nonverbal behavior, or only verbal expressions, or nonverbal behavior alone, or no mimicry. Data showed that men evaluated more positively both the dating interaction and the women confederates when the latter mimicked them. At the end of the dating session, men expressed a greater desire to meet again the women-confederates who had mimicked them than the same women-confederate when they had not.

1.6. *Behavioral effects of mimicry*

If mimicry is associated with a greater liking for the mimickers and a greater feeling of affiliation, several studies have found that mimicry leads to enhance pro-social behavior toward the mimickers. Van Baaren et al. (2003) found in two experiments that mimicking the verbal behavior of customers in a restaurant increased the amount of the tips. In their first experiment, a waitress was instructed to mimic the verbal behavior of half of her customers by literally repeating their order. It was found that the waitress received significantly larger tips when she mimicked the patrons than when she did not. In a second experiment, it was found that compared to a baseline condition, mimicry was associated with a higher rate of tipping customers, and also with larger tips. Spontaneous helping behavior is also affected by mimicry. Van Baaren et al. (2004) mimicked the posture (position of the arms, of the legs, etc.) of half of the participants in a task in which they were

دریافت فوری ← متن کامل مقاله

ISIArticles
مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات