Relevance of Personal Interaction Factors between Customers and Sales Representatives in the Automotive Business

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to determine the personal factors in sales that are most relevant to the formation of positive consumer impressions and resulting sales effectiveness. The research enables scholars and practitioners to better understand the personal sales process and develop more efficient sales approaches. The study utilized an observational design methodology. Personal selling scenarios were filmed and shown to respondents who completed a consumer impression and sales effectiveness survey. Video content was also coded for statistical analysis. The resulting data was analysed via a multiple-regression model. A conceptual personal sales model was developed, and the model suggests that salesperson authenticity impacts consumer impressions and resulting sales effectiveness. Authenticity is shown to be a function of a given salesperson's affective, behavioural, and cognitive profile. The study focused on automotive retail sales scenarios in the United States. However, results may be generalizable to similar markets. Practical guidelines and a scholarly research foundation are provided, research gaps identified, and proposals for future research suggested.

INTRODUCTION

Maximizing salesperson effectiveness is a growing concern in today's economy. As the importance of sales rises, so does the difficulty associated with hiring and retaining salespeople (Harvard Business School Report, 2014). Manpower Group's recent Talent Shortage Survey (2015) listed sales as the second most difficult position for global hiring managers to fill. Therefore, companies must constantly seek effective sales training methods by which to maximize the performance of current salespeople.

In accord with the fact that interpersonal factors have been historically underrepresented in traditional sales process training, Erevelles and Fukawa (2013) suggested that "more research that examines the effect of salesperson personality on affect in sales contexts is needed" (p18). Although the reasons behind the failure or success of a given sales effort or person are not always straightforward (Morgan et al., 2002), one variable that affects sales contexts and influences selling effectiveness is the personal interactions that take place between a salesperson and customer (Bush et al., 2002; Sheth and Sisodia, 2002). The current study's macro objective is to

improve salesperson effectiveness through expanding the general understanding of the interpersonal factors that influence interactions and impressions in sales situations.

The study's specific objective is to understand the personal interactions within the sales process that drive buyer impressions of salesperson authenticity. The relative effectiveness of personal interactions is partially mediated by perceptions of authenticity. Prior research has demonstrated that authentic leadership positively influences staff and corporate success. However, the notion of interpersonal authenticity in sales settings has not been extensively studied (Algera and Lips-Wiersma, 2012; Avolio and Gardner, 2005; Avolio et al., 2004; Diddams and Chang, 2012; Neider and Schriesheim, 2011; Rego et al., 2011; Tate, 2009; Walumbwa et al., 2010). Consequently, the current research examines authenticity in sales settings. Study results may be used by academicians to better understand the personal dimensions of the selling process and by sales managers to develop effective sales training approaches and personal selling tactics.

Organizationally, the paper begins with a literature review and research gap discussion. Next, research propositions and hypotheses are reviewed in conjunction with the presentation of a new conceptual model that provides the foundation for a sales observation experiment. The choice of an observational design was influenced by Plouffe, Williams and Wachner's (2008) review of two decades of sales research. Results indicated that top marketing journals have recently published fewer sales studies. A partial explanation for the trend is the relative dearth of experimental and observational designs within sales research. Plouffe et al. (2008) called for the increased utilization of these designs and for model development based on extant consumer behavior theory. The current study follows both recommendations through observationally testing a sales model built upon the ABC hierarchy (affect, behavior, cognition) of attitude formation (Solomon, et al., 2003), the communication perception work of Mehrabian (1972), and Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) elaboration likelihood model (ELM). The paper concludes by discussing result, implications for practitioners, and limitations.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH GAPS

Since personal relationships can influence sales effectiveness, the personal interaction factors that form and affect these relationships should be identified and understood. Personal authenticity and the relative ease or discomfort ("uneasiness") that perceptions of engender are major factors that centrally influence human interactions. For example, the uneasiness created by interacting with another human who is not acting in a balanced, authentic manner creates feelings of discomfort which, in turn, affect emotional states (Henning-Thurau et al., 2006).

Freud (1938) suggested that the factors informing balanced authenticity are tripartite. Authenticity is derived from the inner equilibrium that exists when 1) physical [body language, "acting," (behavioral)], 2) emotional [joy, "feeling," (affect)], and 3) rational [mind, "thinking," (cognition)] characteristics are properly balanced. If these factors are not balanced, the resulting "inauthenticity" leads to feelings of discomfort on the part of those with whom the inauthentic person is interacting (Bauer, 2002). Conversely, balanced, authentic individuals facilitate personal equilibrium in others and generate positive performance results (Algera and Lips-Wiersma, 2012; Avolio and Gardner, 2005; Avolio et al., 2004; Diddams and Chang, 2012; Neider and Schriesheim, 2011; Rego et al., 2011; Tate, 2009; Walumbwa et al., 2010).

While Freud's (1938) inner authenticity factors are tripartite, the physical means by which authenticity is externally conveyed can also be categorized in a threefold manner. Bauer (2002) suggested that interpersonal interactions are built on how one human feels the other human feels, and these "feeling" perceptions are governed by the analysis of 1) vocal tone, 2) body language, and 3) words (Mehrabian, 1972). Physical gestures, mannerisms, and verbal content all contribute to the interplay between the body and consciousness. Damásio et al. (1996)

described this interplay as the "Spinoza-effect," summarized via the statement, "I feel, therefore I am."

The feeling perceptions that are generated on the basis of vocal tone, body language, and word analysis are formed remarkably fast. These perceptions, know as thin-slice judgements, are also relatively accurate. Ambady and Rosenthal (1993) illustrated that thin-slice judgments are valid predictors of formal evaluations. Student subjects viewed three muted, ten-second lecture segments and were asked to rate teaching effectiveness. Resulting evaluations were compared to formal evaluations submitted by students who had attended the teacher's class for one year. The consistency between student evaluations was significant.

Thin-slice judgments also affect perceptions in personal sales situations. Ambady et al. (2006) illustrated that subjects were able to assess sales conversations and the potential for a successful close through simply viewing a short video in which the salesperson's words were technologically garbled. Wood (2006), Hari et al. (2007), and Stros and Möslein-Tröppner (2014) subsequently confirmed the accuracy of non-verbal, thin-slice judgments. Ayres (2001) examined a successful car salesman and determined that the salesman was able to quickly and correctly discern customer intentions through making thin-slice judgments. In summary, initial perceptions are formed very quickly (Carney et al., 2007) and leave lasting impressions which are often difficult to subsequently correct.

Though thin-slice judgments affect interpersonal relationships and perceptions of authenticity, the personal interaction factors that inform these judgments are not fully understood. Physical (behavioral) elements such as facial expression, gestures, body posture, and laughing exert limited impact on sales interaction perceptions (Ambady et al., 2006; Hari, et al., 2007), but single behavioral elements, such as smiling, have little or no influence on interpersonal judgments, especially when the single element does not align with overall authenticity (Williams et al., 2001). Likewise, single cognitive elements, such as logical content, only partially inform perceptions. The "Dr. Fox Experiment" (Naftulin et al., 1973) illustrated that illogical statements do not generate negative perceptions if they are presented in an engaging manner. Apart from these findings, little is known of the effect of personal interaction factors on perceptions of authenticity. Therefore, Peterson and Wotruba (1996) called for a better grasp of the factors that lead "to a strong and lasting relationship between a direct salesperson and his customers" (p13). Wood (2006) specifically called for a review of the impact of verbal cues on perceptions of trustworthiness. Erevelles and Fukawa (2013) suggested that "more theoretical insight is needed to better understand the effects of a wider range of positive affective processes in personal selling and sales management" (p16). Their study concluded by contending that "more research that examines the effect of salesperson personality on affect in sales contexts is needed" (Erevelles and Fukawa, 2013, p18). Finally, Leigh and Summers (2002) called for "typological research concerning macro-level impression in sales calls" (p12), and Dixon and Tanner (2012, p12) highlighted that, "it is time to reconsider the way we approach and research the sales process."

The current research begins filling these gaps by identifying the operative personal interaction factors (physical, emotional, and rational) that influence authenticity impressions in personal selling situations. The paper also offers actionable contributions to the sales and marketing literature in line with the admonition that "a key challenge facing sales research thought is its ability to provide sales executives with actionable guidance" (Asare et al., 2012, p487). Actionable research enables "sales manager(s) (to) better train their salespeople and help salespeople handle their emotions more effectively" (Erevelles and Fukawa, 2013, p18).

MODEL, RESEARCH PROPOSITIONS, AND HYPOTHESES

Salesperson authenticity is believed to be a key factor driving positive consumer impressions (Algera and Lips-Wiersma, 2012; Avolio and Gardner, 2005; Avolio et al., 2004; Diddams and

Chang, 2012; Neider and Schriesheim, 2011; Rego et al., 2011; Tate, 2009; Walumbwa et al., 2010). Salespeople display emotions, communicate via body language, and also deliver know-how. When customers perceive these displays as authentic, positive impressions are generated. This process corresponds to the accepted ABC hierarchy (affection, behavior, cognition) of consumer behavior theory (Solomon et al., 2003) and also builds on Mehrabian's (1972) communication perception work and Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) elaboration likelihood model of persuasion. The ELM proposes that attitudes may be formed via central (cognitive) or peripheral (affective and behavioral) cues. According to Petty et al. (2004), central cues involve the logical dissemination of information via the spoken word while peripheral cues influence attitudes via non-cognitive means such as body language or gestures. The proposed model is also backed by the findings of Ahearne et al. (1999, p282) who demonstrated that "objective measures of communication skills may be a poor predictor of a particular applicant's potential for success if the relationship between attractiveness and customers' perceptions of the salesperson's ability is ignored." Thus, the following model (figure 1) is suggested:

Figure 1
Suggested Sales Process Model
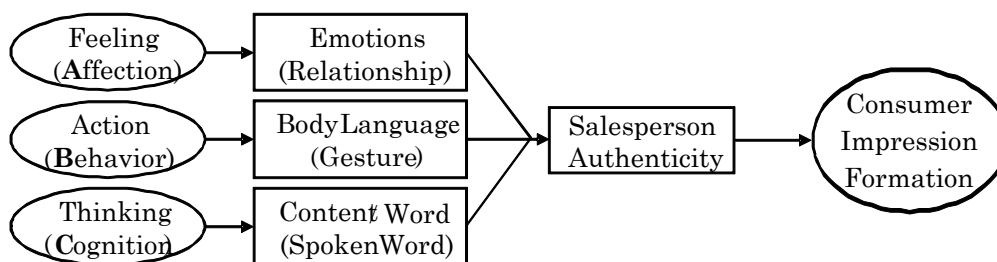
The model does not suggest that salesperson authenticity is the only factor affecting consumer attitudes and impressions. Rather, salesperson authenticity is a personal, controllable factor that non-exclusively contributes to consumer impression formation. Thus, the model proposes that congruent, balanced displays of affective, behavioristic, and cognitive factors will demonstrate a salesperson's authenticity and will positively impact consumer impressions. This proposal aligns with Neuberg and Fiske's (1987) finding that individuating assessments influence impression formation in situations characterized by outcome dependency. The salesperson/customer relationship exhibits outcome dependency, and based on this fact, customers can be expected to heavily rely on individuating characteristics (such as salesperson emotions, gestures, and words) to form impressions.

Based on this conceptualization, it is suggested that emotions (affection), body language (behavior), and spoken content (cognition) influence the development of authentic perceptions in personal sales situations. Affection specifically includes emotions like fear, affection, joy, and sorrow. According to Lynch and de Chernatony (2007), emotional factors are very important during the decision making phase of personal sales. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H1: A positive emotional expression (affection) on the part of the salesperson results in the salesperson being perceived as more authentic.

While research has shown that the emotional level is dominant within the attitude formation process (Elsbach, 2003), behavioral (action) factors may also have an impact. Behavioral factors relate to non-verbal behaviors and includes facial expressions, gestures, body posture, laughing, etc. Since behavioral elements exert either a limited impact (Ambady, 2006; Hari, et al., 2007) or, if not aligned with overall authenticity, no impact on interpersonal attitude formation (Williams, et al., 2001), the following non-directional hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Salesperson body language (behavior) affects perceptions of salesperson authenticity.

Finally, though the formation of thin-slice judgements does not necessarily require the cognitive understanding of spoken or written words (Hari, et al., 2007; Stros and Möslein-Tröppner, 2014; Wood, 2006), the cognitive processing of words is considered to be a factor that drives interpersonal feeling assessments (Bauer, 2002; Mehrabian, 1972). Therefore, it is also hypothesized that:

H3: Spoken content (cognition) influences perceptions of salesperson authenticity.

MEASUREMENT OF MODEL VARIABLES

In accord with the above hypotheses, the current research evaluated the authenticity factor model illustrated in Figure 2. The model shows the three elements [emotional expressions (affection), body language (behavior) and spoken word (cognition)] that influence perceptions of salesperson authenticity.

Figure 2
Authenticity Factor Model
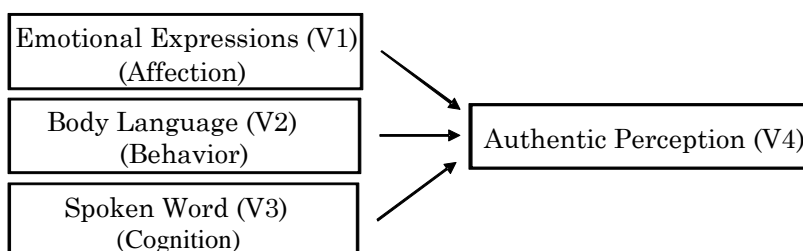
To measure emotional expressions (affection), the current study used Havlena and Holbrook's (1986) emotional expression scale. The scale includes three main items, 1) pleasure, 2) arousal and 3) dominance. The value of these items is determined by the 12 word pairs shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Definitions and Measuring Items of Emotional Expressions Variable

Variable	Item	Sub-Item	Description
Independent Variable			
Emotional Expressions (V1) (Affection) (Havlena and Holbrook, 1986)	Pleasure (V1.1)	Happy – Unhappy	Each pair of words below describes a feeling dimension. Some of the pairs might seem unusual, but you may generally feel more one way than the other. For each pair, place a check mark to best represent your feelings.
		Pleased – Annoyed	
		Satisfied – Unsatisfied	
		Contented – Melancholic	
	Arousal (V1.2)	Stimulated – Relaxed	
		Excited – Calm	
		Frenzied – Sluggish	

	Dominance (V1.3)	Agitated – Even-keeled	
		Controlling – Controlled	
		Influential – Influenced	
		Dominant – Submissive	
		Autonomous – Guided	

Though extant communication scales exist (Wiemann, 1977), these scales are not properly suited for sales dialogue scenarios. Additionally, the evaluation of spoken content in sales scenarios is not specifically covered in the literature. Consequently, a new scale was developed for the current study (see Table 2).

Table 2. Definitions and Measuring Items of Spoken Word Variable

Variable	Item	Sub-Item
Independent Variable		
Spoken Word (V3) (Cognition) (new scale)	Content of Speech (V3.1)	Evaluate the content of the speech. Was the content clear and well-articulated?
	Organization of Speech (V3.2)	In order to make the content of a speech clear and easy to digest, it needs to be organized well. a) Was the supporting argument logically structured? b) Do the speaker's points flow logically from one to the next?
	Content and Style (V3.3)	Does the content and style of the speech refer to what is spoken? a) Did the style of the speech work for the content, or against it? b) How convincing was the speaker?
	Tone of Speech (V3.4)	The tone of the speech relates to the overall impact of the content and the style.

Wood, et al. (2008) and Barret-Lennard (1998) described the manner in which individuals perceive others as authentic. The Wood et al. (2008) conceptual model of authenticity is primarily driven by (1) authentic living, (2) acceptance of external influence, and (3) self alienation. Wood et al. (2008) developed a set of 12 Likert scale questions. To minimize the total number of questions, the current study reduced Wood's scale to 8 questions, covering all relevant items (see Table 3).

Table 3. Definitions and Measuring Items of Authentic Perception Variable

Variable	Item	Sub-Item
Dependent Variable		
Authentic Perception (V4)	Authentic Living	He is aiming to be himself rather than to be popular.

(scale adapted from Wood, 2008 and Barret-Lennard, 1998)	(V4.1)	He is true to himself.
		He communicates according to his values and beliefs.
		He communicates authentically.
	Accepting External Influence (V4.2)	He is giving his own opinion.
		He is not influenced by others.
	Self Authentication (V4.3)	He feels alienated from himself.
	Self Alienation (V4.4)	He has a high level of self-esteem.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The choice of a sales observation to test the model was partially influenced by Plouffe, Williams and Wachner's (2008) call for sales model development built upon experimental and observational research designs. The data collection technique was conducted in accord with Bakeman's (2000, p139) suggestion that "observational methods…can also be used in a variety of research contexts." Consequently, the current research utilized a video observation that was conducted at a public university in the United States.

In the social sciences, the utilization of videos in observational designs is widespread (Erickson, 2011; Jewitt, 2012). Furthermore, Goldman and McDermott (2009, p110) highlighted that "video is fundamental to its (observational research's) focuses on the description of the structures of interaction order, the social and behavioral mechanisms and regularities that people use to coordinate and organize their activities with others: to making sense of and to reveal the structures at work." Additionally, Erickson (2011, p4) stated that "the usage of video recording has particular qualities and features that mean it differs significantly from other kinds of data such as audio recordings or filed notes in regards to its character as real-time sequential record, a fine-grained multimodal record and its durability, malleable and share-ability."

The current study utilized a filmed car buying scenario. Automobiles are familiar to the studied population, and automobile buying situations offer multivariate applications. The automobile under consideration was a used hybrid model that carried a price premium due to its sophisticated technology. The sales situation was relatively involved since an explanation of the overall lifetime value of the vehicle (along with supporting features, advantages, and benefits) was required to explain the comparatively high purchase price. Professional actors were utilized in the video. The study used professional actors rather than actual salespeople since there was concern regarding the ability of professional salespeople to "act" in an authentic manner. Two professional actors, one female and one male, were employed. Both actors played two different roles. To validate the research procedure and measurement scales, and to pretest the questionnaires, a small group of experts was utilized.

Population and Sample

Automobile consumers are the population for the current study. Since the vehicle under consideration was pre-owned, college students at a university in the United States were utilized for the experiment. University students are more likely to buy used than new cars.

Study Design

To test the study's hypotheses, four two-minute videos were produced. In each video, the independent variables (emotional expressions, body language, and spoken word) were represented according to the scheme illustrated in Table 4. To display emotional expressions (affection), the actors emphasized either high or low levels of pleasure, arousal, and dominance. Regarding body language (behavior), actors portrayed either high or low levels of immediacy cues, relaxation, movements and facial expressions. In relation to the spoken word (cognition), both positive and negative versions of the sales dialogue were scripted (see appendix 2) and acted. Prior to filming, the scripts were reviewed by subject matter experts.

Table 4
Video Scheme

Video	Gender	Emotional Expressions (Affection)	Body Language (Behavior)	Spoken Word (Cognition) (Sales Dialogue)
1	Male	Positive	Positive	Positive
2	Male	Negative	Negative	Negative
3	Female	Positive	Positive	Positive
4	Female	Negative	Negative	Negative

Video Production

Each two-minute video featured a "salesperson" talking to a "customer." The videos were filmed so that the viewer could see the upper body of the salesperson but could not see the facial expressions of the customer. Each video contained the following narrative sequence:
- Welcome and introduction
- Product presentation pitch and application information
- Final phase and pre-close attempt

The videos were produced at an automotive dealership in the United States. A standard video camera and microphone were used to film the scenarios. Cyberlink PowerDirector 13 was used for post-production editing and sound adjustment. The finished videos were uploaded to YouTube (private setting) (see appendix 1).

Outcome Measures

The videos were shown to 443 business students at a public university in the United States. To eliminate potential bias, the study's purpose and structure were not revealed to participants. Four sub-groups were used, and the videos were shown to each sub-group via a randomized design (see Table 5).

Table 5
Video Assignments

	Video	Number of Participants
Group 1	1	113
Group 2	2	99
Group 3	3	110
Group 4	4	121

Following the showing, a questionnaire was administered to the viewers. The 26-item questionnaire reviewed both independent and dependent variables. Independent variables were emotional expressions [(affection) (for specific item descriptions see Havlena and Holbrook, 1986)] and spoken word [(cognition) (own scale applied)]. The dependent variable was authentic perception (items adapted from Wood, 2008 and Barret-Lennard, 1998) (see appendix 3). The participants rated all 26 items on a Likert scale (Likert, et al., 1993) with "1" indicating "strongly disagree" and "8" indicating "strongly agree". Respondents were instructed to answer the questions quickly and spontaneously. Completed questionnaires were collected by the study supervisor.

Video Content Analysis

Data on the body language (behavior) variable was collected via observational coding. Body language was coded with fOCUS II software. fOCUS II is a multi-media application developed by the Open University and BBC for use in the coding of observed behaviors in psychology (see also www.open.ac.uk/observationskills/content/about-focus-software). The current study utilized event-based sampling which permits a researcher to study the frequency, duration, latency, and intensity of the behavior under study (Pellegrini, 2004; Bowker, et al., 2009). This methodology has been successfully used in previous research (Bethell et al., 2007; Nock and Kurtz, 2005), and among the various coding categories, physical description codes are believed to be the most objective (Pellegrini, 2004; Ostrov and Collins, 2007).

The scoring of observational data is "similar to the scoring of any quantitative data within the social and behavioral sciences" (Bakeman, 2000, p293). In practical terms, a score is given for each construct and then summed across the overall observed session (Ostrov and Keating, 2004). In the event of different session lengths, it is common practice to generate an average rate of behavior per session (Crick et al., 2006). These principles and standards were utilized by two trained coders to individually analyze the produced videos.

There are limitations associated with observational coding. However, Bakeman (2000) highlighted that as long as coding errors are not systematic, overall results are trustworthy. For the current study, the reliability between observers was assessed through calculating coder agreement percentages, revealing an agreement rate of 91.9%.

Data Preparation for Regression Analysis

Survey and video coding data were merged and standardized for further analysis via SPSS. The quality of the data was assessed, and outliers, missing values, skewness and kurtosis were reviewed. No abnormalities were observed. Though the data was normally distributed, several participant comments revealed that one question was misunderstood. Therefore, the question was removed. Removal did not negatively affect study results. The dependent variable "Authentic Perception (V4)" was derived by calculating the mean average of its items, "Authentic Living (V4.1)", "Accepting External Influence (V4.2)", "Self Authentication (V4.3)" and "Self Alienation (V4.4)" (Wood, 2008 and Barret-Lennard, 1998).

Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses. A multiple regression analysis is defined by Hair et al. (2009, p20) as "a general statistical technique used to analyze the relationship between a single dependent variable and several independent variables." The use of multiple regression involves multiple data requirements. First, observations must be statistically independent. Second, normality and linear relationships between the dependent and independent variables must be present. Third, there must be homoscedasticity (Hair et al., 2009; Kleinbaum et al., 1998). The current study's data met all requirements.

Multicollinearity between variables should also be reviewed in multiple regression situations. As stated by Kleinbaum et al. (1998), multicollinearity takes place when there is a significant correlation between independent variables in a regression model. Consequently, it is difficult to separate the effects of each independent variable (Cohen and Cohen, 1975; Kleinbaum et al., 1998). To address multicollinearity, the current study excluded the "Movements (V2.3)" variable in the first run and the "Immediacy Cues (V2.1)" variable in the second run of the regression (values are indicated in brackets in Table 6). This procedure did not negatively impact the regression model data.

Table 6
Definitions and Measuring Items of Body Language Variable

Variable	Item	Sub-Item	Description
Independent Variable			
Body Language (V2) (Behavior) (Mehrabian, 1969)	Immediacy Cues (V2.1) Note: Increasing degree of touching, forward lean and eye contact whereas decreasing degrees of distance and orientation are more immediate.	Touching	There is bodily contact between the communicator and the addressee.
		Forward Lean	The number of degrees that the communicator is away from the vertical plane.
		Eye Contact	Fraction of the duration of interaction.
	Relaxation (V2.2) Note: Increasing degrees of each of the proceeding criteria indicate	Arm Position Asymmetry	0: symmetrical position of the arm; 1: slight asymmetry in the position of the arms; 2: moderate asymmetry in the position of the arms; 3: Extreme asymmetry in the position of the

			arms.
		Sideways lean	The number of degrees of the communicator´s torso.
		Hand Relaxation	0: very tense; 1: moderately tense; 2: not tense
		Neck Relaxation	0: the head is not supported and the line of vision is pointing 10 deg or more above the horizontal; 1: the head is not supported and the line of vision is within 10 deg of horizontal; 2: the head is supported and the line of vision is 10 deg or more below the horizontal.
	Movements (V2.3)	Rocking Movements	Number of times subject changes his/her angle of forward-back lean of torso more than 10 deg.
		Head Nodding Movements	Number Cyclical up and down movements of the head.
		Gesticulation	Number of movements of hands or of fingers.
		Self-manipulation	Motion of a part of the body (e.g. scratching, rubbing, or tapping an arm).
	Facial Expressions (V2.4)	Facial Pleasantness	Number of each positive expression (such as smiles and not less than one second) minus number of each negative expression (such as frowns).
		Facial Activity	Total number of facial expressions including positive and negative ones.

Various model selection methods are described in the literature (Kleinbaum et al., 1998). Independent variables are chosen by model selection methods such as forwards, backwards, stepwise and simultaneous entry (Hair et al., 2009; Kleinbaum et al., 1998). Stepwise entries may be problematic and should only be used for predictive rather than explanatory models (Hair et al., 2009; Cohen and Cohen, 1975). The current study utilized simultaneous entry methods since the study's purpose was to test hypotheses rather than to predict dependent variable values.

RESULTS

Regression analysis results (see Table 7) were significant (sig = 0.000), with an F-value of 7.822 which exceeded the calculated critical F-value (1.853). The adjusted R^2 was 0.134. The relatively low R^2 can be justified by the complex nature of the sales process (Cohen and Cohen, 1975). Additionally, regression analyses in sociology studies have generated similar variance values (McKee et al., 2001; Wild et al., 2004).

Table 7
Results of the Multiple Regression

Multiple R = .392 R^2 = .153 Adjusted R^2 = .134 F = 7.882 (Sig. = 0.000; $F_{critical}$ = 1.853)				
Independent Variable	**Beta**	**t**	**Sig.**	**Hypo.**
Pleasure (V1.1)	.066	1.094	.275	H_1
Arousal (V1.2)	.067	1.409	.160	H_1
Dominance (V1.3)	-.029	-.629	.530	H_1
Immediacy Cues (V2.1)	**.305**	**4.413**	**.000**	**H_2**
	(.101)	(1.596)	(.111)	
Relaxation (V2.2)	**.328**	**5.632**	**.000**	**H_2**
Movements (V2.3)	**(.223)**	**(4.585)**	**(.000)**	**H_2**
Facial Expressions (V2.4)	**-.255**	**-4.585**	**.000**	**H_2**
Content of Speech (V3.1)	-.014	-.229	.819	H_3
Organization of Speech (V3.2)	.099	1.371	.171	H_3
Content and Style (V3.3)	**.226**	**3.484**	**.001**	**H_3**
Tone of Speech (V3.4)	.056	1.109	.268	H_3

Next, residual plots were used to test for linearity and homoscedasticity. No clear patterns were found, so the assumption of linearity and homoscedasticity was confirmed. Since there was no evidence to the contrary, all relationships were hypothesised to be linear (see also Hair et al., 2009; Kleinbaum et al., 1998; Kaplan, 1995). To detect potential autocorrelation, a Durbin-Watson test was used. The value of 2.090 exceeded the rule-of-thumb value of 1.0 or above (Gujarati, 2003). Therefore, it was assumed that no autocorrelation was present and that valid statistical tests could be performed.

The multiple regression analysis revealed that "Immediacy Cues (V2.1)" (beta = 0.305; sig. = 0.000), "Relaxation (V2.2)" (beta = 0.328; sig. = 0.000), "Movements (V2.3)" (beta = .223; sig. = 0.000), "Facial Expressions (V2.4)" (beta = -0.255; sig. = 0.000), as well as "Content and Style (V3.3)" (beta = 0.226; sig. = 0.001) have a positive effect on the "Authentic Perception (V4)" of a salesperson. On the other hand, the analysis yielded insignificant results for "Pleasure (V1.1)", "Arousal (V1.2)", "Dominance (V1.3)", "Content of Speech (V3.1)", "Organization of Speech (V3.2)" and Tone of Speech (V3.4)" variables.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

As shown by prior research, salesperson authenticity may be a key contributor to positive consumer impressions and resulting sales success (Algera and Lips-Wiersma, 2012; Avolio and Gardner, 2005; Avolio et al., 2004; Diddams and Chang, 2012; Neider and Schriesheim, 2011; Rego et al., 2011; Tate, 2009; Walumbwa et al., 2010). The current work measured authenticity using an adapted version of the Wood et al. (2008) measurement scale. Three components of authenticity (affection, behavior, and cognition) were investigated. Results indicate that "Emotional Expressions (affection)" do not exert a substantive influence within the suggested model. Emotional expressions were measured via the "Arousal," "Pleasure," and "Dominance" items of Havlena and Holbrook´s (1986) scale. Arousal, pleasure, and dominance are defined as follows:

- Arousal (V1.2) - a physiological and psychological state of being awake or reactive to stimuli (see also Pfaff, 2006)
- Pleasure (V1.1) - the class of mental states that humans and other animals experience as positive (see also Kringelbach, 2009)
- Dominance (V1.3) - the disposition of an individual to assert control in dealing with others (see also Lehner, 1998)

All three variables bore no significant relationship to authenticity. Consequently, "Emotional Expressions (affection)" do not appear to be of relevance during personal sales interactions.

Second, results indicated that "Body Language (behavior)" appears to be positively related to authenticity. Body language was measured via Mehrabian's (1969) scale (See Table 6). All body language items were significantly related to authenticity perceptions. Both the appearance of relaxation and the level of physical engagement (as opposed to static stances) were positively related to assessments of authenticity. Conversely, the overuse of "Facial Expressions (V2.4)" negatively influenced perceptions of authenticity. Exaggerated facial expressions did not generate positive impressions. However, non-verbal communication signals such as relaxation and movement (non-static) generated positive results.

Third, dialogue content ("cognition") did not significantly affect authenticity. To test the "Spoken Word" variable, the authors developed and tested a new scale. Results indicated that only the "Content and Style (V3.3)" item was of importance. Thus, sales dialogue needs to be clear and well-articulated. Additionally, the verbal style should properly reflect the words that are being spoken. However, the results also show that the content, organization and tone are not significant, and, therefore, not relevant. This finding is in accord with the "Dr. Fox Experiment" (Naftulin, et al., 1973).

Taking these findings into account, the following model is derived (see Figure 3):

Figure 3
Conceptual Model of Authentic Perception
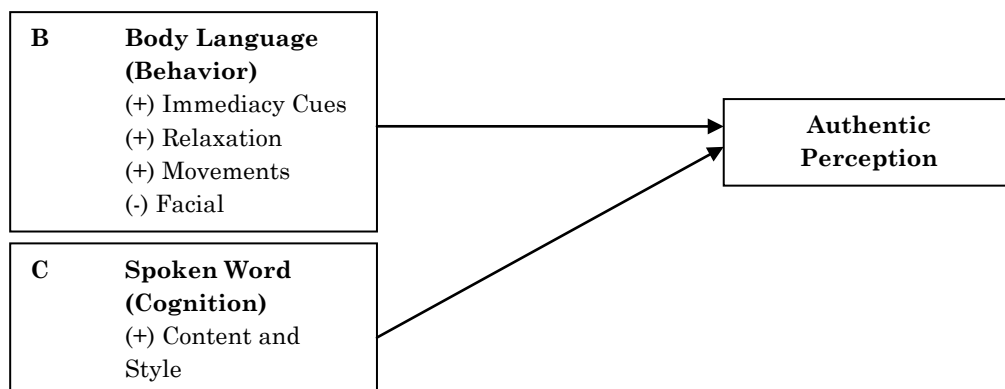
The proposed model fills several research gaps. First, the model highlights the impact of verbal cues on perceptions (see also Wood, 2006). Second, the model offers insights into the interpersonal factors associated with sales interaction impressions (see also Morgan et al., 2002). Third, the model provides a deeper understanding of the effect of a salesperson's personality on consumer impressions (see also Erevelles and Fukawa, 2013). Overall, the model highlights that although the success of field salespeople is influenced by personally non-controllable variables such as product and branding (Kotler and Keller, 2006), it is also influenced by the controllable degree to which a salesperson conveys authenticity. The model illustrates that demonstrations of authenticity are primarily a function of body language and communication style.

Methodologically, the current research makes two contributions. First, the study builds on Dixon and Tanner´s (2012) research suggestions by utilizing a mixed research method (video observation study in combination with a paper-based survey) that may be used as a template for subsequent sales and marketing researchers. Second, the study developed a new Likert-type measurement scale for the "Spoken Word."

IMPLICATIONS FOR MARKETING PRACTITIONERS

The current study offers several practical applications. First, today's marketing and sales managers must understand the importance of salesperson authenticity. Perceptions of authenticity are largely dependent on relatively brief exposures, and first impressions can overshadow subsequent, well-intentioned interactions. Furthermore, non-verbal behaviors are very important and may, at times, eclipse the importance of professional competency. This immediately raises the practical question: Can a salesperson be trained to systematically make a better impression? Feiertag (2004, p10) suggested that a "learning program to improve the first impression should be a self-imposed part of a person's training." Therefore, sales training programs are encouraged to include impression management techniques. The emotional regulation required for personal impression management may be generated by surface acting or deep acting (Grandey, 2003; Reyers and Matusitz, 2012). Surface acting focuses on changing external behaviors, while deep acting focuses on modifying inner feelings in the hope that modification will consequently lead to the ideal authentic state (Halpern and Lubar, 2003; Henning-Thurau et al., 2006). Research indicates that impression management via surface acting often spawns emotional exhaustion and should not be encouraged as a long-term impression management technique (Reyers and Matusitz, 2012). Thus, deep acting methodologies are preferable, and further research is required to determine approaches by which to teach deep method acting in sales training scenarios.

A second practical application draws from the fact that study participants were able to make judgments based on a short video. The study therefore confirms both the phenomena of "thin-slice judgments" (Ambady et al., 2006) and Ambady and Rosenthal's (1993) conclusion that thin-slice judgments are often valid predictors of formal evaluations. Hence, a theoretical foundation is provided for the use of the current study's methodology as an appropriate instrument for training and selection (see also Ahearne et al., 1999). A possible training and analysis instrument could combine the theoretical construct depicted in Figure 3 with the sales process model found in Figure 1.

LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Though the current study's methodology resulted in acceptable reliability and validity, limitations are still present. First, the study did not examine the impact of attractiveness and gender. Both the male and female actors were attractive, but the influence of attractiveness (as well as gender) on customers' perceptions was not investigated. Since the effect of attractiveness has been documented (Randall, 1990; Ahearne et al. 1999), managers should recognize and incorporate the effect of attractiveness in training scenarios. Additional research on this matter is suggested.

Second, the study's location offers a potential limitation. The fact that the experiment was conducted using an automotive dealership in the United States raises the question of whether the findings can be generalized to other business markets and varying cultural environments.

Finally, future research should study the influence of other marketing factors in relation to the derived model. In particular, marketing activities related to product, pricing, distribution, and promotion should be assessed in terms of the suggested model.

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APPENDIX 1

Positive, male version (GSM1)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=123zVo4P0soandlist=UU6fMMXUGeay2WtvmeW3ntug
Negative, male version (NSM4)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wn5nI341a50andlist=UU6fMMXUGeay2WtvmeW3ntug
Positive, female version (GSF3)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xByVK9Bm6Mgandlist=UU6fMMXUGeay2WtvmeW3ntug
Negative, female version (NSF3)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DDsB6MSEAo0andlist=UU6fMMXUGeay2WtvmeW3ntug

APPENDIX 2

Car Sales Script - Positive Example

Introduction

S: Good afternoon, my name is Steven Johnson with Imperial Autos. How may I help you or should I leave you alone?

C: Thanks, I'm just looking around right now.

S: Is there anything you're particularly looking for?

C: Well, yes, I want a car with better gas mileage.

Value Statement

S: Great, if you don't mind can I ask you a few more questions, and then I'll recommend a few vehicles that might be a good fit for you. My intention is to help you determine if there is a vehicle on our lot that will better meet your needs than your current car.

C: OK, that sounds fine.

Disqualify Statement

S: Wonderful. Since I'm not certain if we have a car that is right for you, let me ask a couple of questions?

C. Sure.

Qualifying Questions

S: How satisfied are you with your vehicle at the current time?

C: Somewhat dissatisfied

S: What are you currently driving?

C: A Honda Accord.

S: How old is your Accord? Did you purchase it brand new or what was the mileage when you first brought it?

C: About 8 years old

S: If you could change anything about your Accord, what would you change?

C: Better gas mileage. I'd like to get at least 40 miles to the gallon.

Common Pain Points

S: Beside the gas mileage, are there any other features or functional or quality concerns that you have with your Accord. For example, some customers want a bigger car, or a better safety rating, or a new style.

C. Not really, I'm pretty satisfied with my car. I just want to get better gas mileage.

Building Interest Points

S: Oh, ok. I understand. So tell me about the type of gas mileage you would like. You said you would like an average of 40 miles per gallon?

C: Yes, that's right. I want to average around 40, between highway and city.

S: Well, then, I might recommend the Ford Fusion hybrid. It averages around 40 mpg, and it handles very nicely as well.

C: Yes, but I did some research on the Internet, and the Fusion hybrid is more expensive than the Honda Accord.

S: You are right. It is more expensive. But are you more concerned about upfront expense, or long-term operating costs?

C: So you think the gas savings of the Fusion hybrid will more than compensate for the higher cost?

S: Yes, you are right.

Close

S: Would you like to walk into the dealership with me, and we can discuss some specific numbers?

C: OK, yes, let's do that.

S: Great. Here at Imperial Autos, we have a no haggle sales approach, so you can be assured that we will offer you a straightforward price that will be very competitive. Let's go figure out how we can make this work for you.

Car Sales Script - Negative Example

Introduction

S: Good afternoon, what are you looking for?

C: Thanks, I'm just looking around right now.

S: Ok, if you have any questions, than you can ask me. I will be here in the office.

C: Well, yes, I want a car with better gas mileage.

Value Statement

S: Ok, we have certainly a car that is going to better than your current car, in case you can afford it?

C: OK, if you think so.

Disqualify Statement

S: However, I am still not sure if we have an appropriate car for you that is within your budget?

C. Sure?

Qualifying Questions

S: I am sure that you are not satisfied with the brand of your vehicle at the current time.

C: Somewhat dissatisfied

S: What are you currently driving?

C: A Honda Accord.

S: It seems to be a pretty old car, time to change.

C: Yes, it is about 8 years old.

S: If you could change anything about your Accord, what would you change?

C: Better gas mileage. I'd like to get at least 40 miles to the gallon.

Common Pain Points

S: Beside the gas mileage, there are certainly others concerns with your old car. For example, some Customers usually want to have a bigger car, or a better safety rating, or a new style. Do you have such a concern?

C. Not really, I'm pretty satisfied with my car. I just want to get better gas mileage.

Building Interest Points

S: Oh, I see, you need a more economical car

C: Yes, that's right. I want to average around 40, between highway and city.

S: There we have the Ford Fusion hybrid. It averages around 40 mpg, and it looks much better as well.

C: Yes, but I did some research on the Internet, and the Fusion hybrid is more expensive than the Honda Accord.

S: You are right. I know that you are looking for an affordable, not very expensive car. You need to take the long-term operating costs into account when choosing car.

C: So you think the gas savings of the Fusion hybrid will more than compensate for the higher cost?

S: Yes, that's exactly how it is.

Close

S: Let's go to the showroom with me where I can make you an offer that might suit your budget.

C: OK, yes, let's do that.

S: Great. Here at Imperial Autos, we have a no haggle sales approach, so you can be assured that we will make you a best price offer. Let's go figure out how we can make this work for you.

APPENDIX 3

Survey Instruction

Dear Participant,

The survey you are about to take is part of an international study regarding personal sales. You will view a short sales scenario video and will then be asked to provide your personal opinions and impressions. You will specifically answer questions regarding the salesperson and the sales dialogue. The survey will take 5-10 minutes to complete.

Instructions are as follows:

- First, read (but don't answer) the questionnaire attached to this sheet.

- Second, watch the sales video.

- Third, complete the questionnaire.

- After you have completed your questionnaire, your instructor will collect it.

Thank you for taking part in this study. Your responses will be kept both anonymous and confidential. Responses will be collated with those of other participants. If you desire, we will provide you with a summary of the results.

Thank you for your help and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Researchers' names

Video #: _____ **Participant Code:** ___ (leave empty) _____ **Date:** _____

What is your gender (circle one)?   Male   Female

What is your personal impression of the retail person?

Each pair of words below describes a feeling dimension. Some of the pairs might seem unusual, but you may generally feel more one way than the other. For each pair, place a check mark to the box that best represents your feelings. Read each item or question once and then record your response.

1. happy – unhappy
   [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7] [8]

2. pleased – annoyed
   [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7] [8]

3. satisfied – unsatisfied
   [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7] [8]

4. contented – melancholic
   [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7] [8]

5. stimulated – relaxed
   [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7] [8]

6. excited – calm
   [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7] [8]

7. frenzied – sluggish
   [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7] [8]

8. agitated – even-keeled
   [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7] [8]

9. controlling – controlled
   [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7] [8]

10. influential – influenced
    [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7] [8]

11. dominant – submissive
    [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7] [8]

12. autonomous – guided
    [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7] [8]

Spoken Word (Cognition)

For the following statement, please tick the appropriate box (1 <u>strongly disagree</u>, 8 <u>strongly agree</u>):

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
13. The content of speech was fully clear and well-articulated	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
14. The supporting argument content of speech was logically structured	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
15. The speaker's points flow logically from one to the next	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
16. The content and style of the speech does refer to what is spoken	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
17. The speaker was convincing	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
18. The tone does relate to the overall impact of the content and the style	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□

Authentic Perception

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
19. He is aiming to be himself rather than to be popular	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
20. He is true to himself.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
21. He communicates according to his values and beliefs.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
22. He communicates authentically.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
23. He is giving his own opinion.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
24. He is not influenced by others.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
25. He feels alienated from himself.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
26. He has a high level of self-esteem.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□

Would you like to add a comment to this survey?

_____

In case you would like to receive the results, please add your mail address

_____

Thank you very much for your cooperation!

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