An Initial Evaluation of Industrial Buyers' Impressions of Salespersons' Nonverbal Cues

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Nonverbal cues are potentially important determinants of social impressions in industrial buyer-seller interactions. Yet there is a lack of empirical research concerning the effects of nonverbal cues in industrial selling contexts. This study reports the results of an experiment designed to assess the impact of salespersons' use of five nonverbal cues (eye gaze, speech hesitations, gestures, clothing, and posture) on buyers' social impressions of the salesperson and the sales presentation. Nonverbal cues are found to influence selected dimensions of buyers' perceptions of the salesperson and their evaluations of the video taped sales presentation.

Introduction

Do buyers' impressions of the salesperson in the initial sales call matter? Apparently so. As Jacobs, Evans, Kleine, and Landry (2001) and MacIntosh (1992) note, sales personnel lay the groundwork for future exchanges with the impressions they create in the initial sales call. Initial impressions persist (Berg 1984); they set a “template through which all subsequent information is filtered and assimilated” (Burgoon 1994, p. 251). Hence, research concerning how sales personnel create social impressions and exert social influence is indicated.

What factors influence buyers' impressions of the salesperson? Verbal and nonverbal disclosures are suggested by Jacobs et al. (2001; see also Altman and Taylor 1973). They report strong effects for task-specific disclosures (e.g., selling to needs) on impressions of business relationship potential and interaction quality, as well as modest effects of social disclosures (e.g., “I love curling”) on interaction quality. Nonverbal disclosures have not been systematically researched in personal selling contexts, as periodic calls have been unheeded (Hulbert and Capon 1972; Bonoma and Felder 1977; Stewart, Hecker, and Graham 1987). Meanwhile, evidence that nonverbal communications may be important in sales encounters continues to grow. Moreover, the popular press promotes beliefs about the power of nonverbal communications with such titles as “How to Read a Person Like a Book and Your Every Move Talks” (Burgoon 1994, p. 229). These beliefs are fueled by scholarly suggestions that nonverbal communications may account for 60-93% of the meaning developed in social encounters (Mehrabian and Wiener 1967; Birdwhistell 1955).

The reality is more sanguine and particular. Nonverbal cues, or “behaviors other than words themselves that form a socially shared coding system” (Burgoon 1994, p. 231), are fundamental in understanding interpersonal interactions, including a variety of sales-related issues such as self-disclosure, relational control, negotiation strategy, strategic self-presentation, and social influence (for reviews, see Burgoon 1994; Leathers 1992; Knapp and Hall 1992; Siegman and Feldstein 1987; Patterson 1983, 1991; Harper, Wiens and Matarazzo 1978). For example, the intimacy of a verbal disclosure may be intensified or deintensified by accompanying nonverbal cues (Argyle 1973; Branigan and Humphries 1972; Hale and Burgoon 1984). Similarly, the effectiveness of verbal statements intended to exert social control (“please let me be frank”) may depend on accompanying nonverbal behaviors (a reinforcing stare). Nonverbal correlates (steady eye gaze) influence the perceived truthfulness of verbal assertions, especially in suspicious and negotiation contexts (Kraut 1978; Knapp and Comadena 1979; Burgoon, Buller, Dillman, and Walther 1993).

Nonverbal cues also influence inferences about personality traits and social impressions, including approachability, attractiveness, likeability, credibility and responsiveness (Burgoon 1994; Patterson 1991). In particular, loudness, speech error, pitch, voice quality, silences, response latencies, eye contact, gesturing, postural relaxation, personal grooming, and colorfulness of clothing have been found to influence inferences concerning personality traits, psychological states, and emotions (Burgoon 1994). Of course, sellers may strategically manage their verbal and nonverbal disclosures to project desirable impressions (trust, expertise, liking and status) intended to influence buyer attitudes and gain compliance.

Our purpose is to examine the effects of a salesperson's use of nonverbal cues in an initial industrial sales call on buyers' impressions of the salesperson and the sales presentation. Theoretically, our study is consistent with the ingratiation, impression formation, and strategic social influence contexts for nonverbal communications. We extend this research to the context of professional buyer-seller interactions (Weitz 1981). Prior research has shown the importance of salesperson qualities and the sales presentation in buyer-seller exchanges (Levitt 1965). However, research concerning the nonverbal communication roots of these buyers' impressions is limited. Given that first impressions tend to persist, our results will offer initial insights concerning how sales personnel may more appropriately manage the impression formation process, or at least reduce the downside risks of miscommunication, in initial sales calls.

Our paper is organized as follows. We present a conceptual overview, based on the functional perspectives of Patterson (1991) and Burgoon (1994), to frame our empirical research concerning nonverbal cues in the initial sales call. We then
present our research hypotheses relating nonverbal cues to buyers' impressions of the salesperson and sales presentation. In developing these hypotheses, we identified five nonverbal cues as being relevant to sales call contexts, namely, eye gaze, posture, gesturing, speech hesitations, and professional attire. These nonverbal cues cover the range of nonverbal cue categories potentially relevant in the professional sales call context. Each of these nonverbal cues is from a class that has been empirically related to social impressions and relational communications (Harper et al. 1978; Burgoon 1994). We next review our experimental design, nonverbal treatments, and social impression measures. We conclude by presenting our empirical results and the implications for research and practice.

Conceptual Framework

The functional perspective on nonverbal communications stresses the need to study how nonverbal behaviors influence the achievement of social functions or outcomes (Argyle 1972; Burgoon and Saine 1978; Ekman and Friesen 1972; Patterson 1983, 1991). For example, Patterson's (1983, 1991) functional framework proposes five roles for nonverbal cues: providing information, regulating interaction, expressing intimacy, exercising social control, and facilitating service or task goals. Burgoon's (1994) multifunctional framework offers eight functions: message production and processing, identity formation, impression management, relational communication, judging deception, emotional expression, conversational management, and strategic social influence. To simplify our conceptual overview, we stress the effects of salesperson nonverbal cues on the industrial buyers' perceptions of the salesperson (e.g., trustworthiness) and the sales presentation (e.g., believability or interestingness). In functional terms, we examine the impression formation, relational communications, and strategic social influence roles of nonverbal cues. We will also provide a general overview establishing the relevance of nonverbal cues in these contexts.

Social Impression Management in the Sales Call Context

Impression formation and management reflect the desire to encode or decode messages concerning personality traits or social impressions (e.g., friendliness, trustworthiness). As Burgoon (1994) notes, in initial encounters people rapidly categorize one another in order to infer "who they are" and "who they want to be," and hence, how they are likely to treat us (Burgoon 1994 p. 249; Mischel 1973; Jones and Nesbitt 1971). For example, in a sales call context the buyer might infer that the salesperson seems to be trustworthy based on the fact that he "looks me directly into the eye" or "has a firm handshake." Right or wrong, this belief may affect subsequent interactions. Nonverbal cues are linked to social impressions for several reasons. In the first place, they are felt to be less controllable than verbal disclosures (Giles and St. Clair 1979). In essence, "what one says" communicates less than "how one says it." Secondly, nonverbal cues may be subconsciously or automatically related to first impressions. The implicit personality perspective (Schneider 1973), for example, is that first impressions automatically link nonverbal behaviors to social impression stereotypes (Kleine 1986; Mischel 1973). This social learning view is supported by research which shows that children don't relate eye gaze to affiliation and friendship until they are 6 years old (Abramovitch and Daly 1978); that cultural differences exist in the use of nonverbal behaviors (Graham 1985; Argyle and Cook 1976); and that people's use of nonverbal cues and their personality test scores are correlated (e.g., assertiveness, and extroversion) (Kleine 1986). However, the accuracy of these learned heuristics may be modest (Gifford, Ng and Wilkinson 1985).

In our initial sales call context, we would expect that the day-to-day experiences of industrial buyers would lead them to rely on nonverbal cues to infer salesperson social impressions. In fact, given the relatively large number of sales calls on buyers' agendas, violations of their professional or personal expectations concerning the initial sales interaction may act as a quick screen of potential suppliers, even if inaccuracies occur. What nonverbal cues are likely to affect buyers' perceptions of salesperson impressions? Physical appearance, kinesic and vocal demeanor, and proxemic patterns are the most immediately available sources of information (Burgoon 1994). She suggests that the visual channel, including appearance, expressivity, age, smiling, and facial expression, contributes most strongly to the social attractiveness dimensions. However, facial maturity, vocal qualities (loudness, pitch, tempo), fluency, and personal appearance (size, weight) more strongly influence perceptions of power, warmth, and credibility on the task attractiveness dimension.

Relational Communication in the Sales Call Context

Nonverbal cues express relational qualities, or how the parties feel about each other and their relationship. In fact, nonverbal cues may explain a relatively large share of the relational communications (Mehrabian 1972a,b). While the same socially-learned expectancy mechanisms are expected to drive relational communications, the inferences are dyadic in meaning, including intimacy, liking, intensity, trust, composure, similarity, formality, and task/social orientation (Burgoon 1994). These relational meanings appear relevant to the sales call context for several reasons. In the first place, the social side of buyer-seller interactions can be of business value. For example, the aspects of social intimacy, especially immediacy or attentiveness, expressiveness, conversational management, social composure, and positivite, connote attraction, liking, trust, affiliative interest, similarity, and support. These relational outcomes facilitate buyer-seller dialogue and enhance the buyer's confidence that relationships will be productive. As the old saw suggests, "people buy from people they like."

A second relational quality is status or dominance, as embodied in sales calls as task-oriented competence (expertise, self-efficacy, and personal influence). Status signals to the buyer that the salesperson is capable and believable in his assertions or promises because the salesperson has the expertise, motivation, and influence to see that they are carried out.

A third relational aspect is task orientation, as reflected in formality in the interpersonal interaction. Initial sales calls are business interactions, not social occasions. The salesperson is expected to manage the sales call to accomplish both social and business task purposes. Hence, a reasonable degree of formality may signal task orientation, task competence, and professional confidence.

What nonverbal cues are likely to affect relational communications in sales calls? Intimacy is signaled through proximity, directness of body orientation, postural openness, direct eye gaze, facial and gestural expressiveness, interactional fluency, short response latencies, and postural relaxation.
Research Scope

Positivity is indicated by smiling, nodding, vocal pleasantness and relaxed laughter. Competency, (e.g., expertise, power and status) is signaled through personal appearance, postural relaxation, vocal qualities (loudness, pitch, and tempo), speech rate and fluency, direct eye gaze, smiling, and expressivity. Finally, formality is signaled by decreased vocal expressiveness, increased vocal resonance, precise articulation, and postural erectness.

Strategic Social Influence in the Sales Call Context

Strategic social influence research examines how nonverbal behaviors are purposely “designed to elicit or shape others’ attributions of the actor’s dispositions” (Jones and Pittman 1982, p. 233), thereby enhancing attitude or compliance. Despite the fact that the target may be well aware of the actors’ strategic intent, these managed disclosures have been found to be effective. For example, expertise, power, credibility, liking, similarity and empathy have been related to social compliance (Burgoon 1994; Patterson 1991; Harper et al. 1978). In fact, in our sales context, the buyer may expect the salesperson to demonstrate these qualities as a normative expectation for establishing the value of future interactions. Hence, failure to appropriately establish these social influence “bonafides” may exclude the seller from further consideration.

At the same time, the buyer may expect the seller to be adept at self-promotion or ingratiation; hence, buyers may be “on guard” for ulterior motives or self-serving disclosures. For example, the salesperson may be facile at employing direct eye gaze, smiling, or relaxed laughter to signal liking; speech fluency, active gesturing, or postural openness to communicate competency; and, slower speech rate, reflective pauses, or eye gaze to indicate sincerity (Burgoon 1994). In this case, doing what is normatively appropriate is likely to be the salesperson’s best strategy (Goffman 1959), as violations of norms may signal deception (Kraut 1978; Knapp and Comadena 1979).

What nonverbal cues are related to strategic social influence? Nonverbal cues normatively related to expertise, competency, credibility and status include: speech tempo, gesturing, facial expressivity, speech fluency, eye gaze and mature appearance. Liking and positivity are signaled through eye gaze, fluency, smiling, social pleasantness, speech rate reciprocity, and physical attractiveness. On the other hand, since sales personnel are normatively expected to be attentive, competitive, credible, sincere, enthusiastic, and professional, behaviors such as aversive eye gaze, speech hesitations, casual dress, or low gesturing may compromise otherwise acceptable verbal disclosures.

Research Hypotheses

Research Scope

As previously noted, prior research in related communications disciplines provides a strong basis for forming hypotheses concerning the effects of nonverbal cues in sales contexts. Moreover, Leathers (1992) provides anecdotal evidence that speech fluency enhances perceptions of a salesperson’s competency, trustworthiness, and dynamism; that vocal assertiveness (slowing speech rate, fewer filled pauses, more varied vocal pitch) affects perceived enthusiasm and competency; and that undue salesperson aggressiveness (i.e., unremitting eye gaze, emotionally loaded gestures, condescending tone of voice) can be tamed with training. Nonverbal cues may also affect buyers’ evaluations of the sales presentation itself (Levitt 1965; Sheth 1976). For example, a verbal message may be more persuasive when accompanied by “a moderately close approach, increased gaze, and appropriate paralinguistic emphasis” (Patterson 1991). To limit our research scope, we stress a subset of the nonverbal cues and social judgments relevant to the three communication functions previously discussed.

Nonverbal cues. Nonverbal cues are categorized into major groups such as personal appearance, kinesics, paralanguage, and proxemics (Harper et al. 1978). In addition, nonverbal cues are also classified as static or dynamic (Hulbert and Capon 1972). We designed our research to reflect each of these characteristics. Specifically, we selected static and dynamic nonverbal cues from each of the four major nonverbal cue categories. Business attire and posture are static cues from the personal appearance and kinesics categories; eye gaze and gesturing are dynamic kinesic cues; and speech fluency is the most researched dynamic paralanguage cue. As previously noted, these nonverbal cues have been prominent in prior research (Burgoon 1994; Stewart, Hecker and Graham 1987). In our exploratory interviews, professional buyers identified these cues as influencing their inferences.

Social Impressions. The salesperson qualities selected for our study are trustworthiness, dependability, capability to service the account, professionalism, job-specific empathy, friendliness, aggressiveness (i.e., actively promotes his/her firm and its products), tactfulness, and likability. These traits are important in buyer-seller exchanges (Weitz 1981) and were also prominently mentioned in exploratory interviews with industrial buyers.

Sales Presentation Evaluations. Buyers’ bases for evaluating the sales presentation of interest here were the degree to which it is interesting, believable, persuasive, personal, and emotional. These characteristics have been prominently mentioned in prior sales and marketing research (Baker and Churchill 1977; Levitt 1965).

Research Hypotheses

Given this set of nonverbal cues and sales call outcomes, the set of potential hypotheses is considerable. We develop research hypotheses for each nonverbal cue when justified by existing theory and/or prior empirical research. When such support is lacking, we do not specify specific directional hypotheses. We will examine these effects in an exploratory manner.

Eye Gaze. Eye gaze (i.e., looking at the other individual’s eyes or face) has been found to positively affect judgments of a communicator’s sincerity, honesty, competence, credibility, self-confidence, dominance, potency, power, attentiveness, likability and attractiveness (Argyle and Cook 1976; Burgoon et al. 1986; Dovidio and Ellyson 1982; Hemsley and Doob 1978; Kleineke 1986; Kraut and Poe 1980). We would expect similar effects in an initial sales call. Furthermore, salespeople’s attempts to establish rapport and enthusiasm would seem to be enhanced by steady eye gaze. As such, buyers would seem likely to depreciate the dependability, capability, and professionalism of salespeople who avert their eye gaze.

Eye gaze is expected to positively affect the believability and persuasiveness of the sales presentation. Verbal disclosures are more favorably received when accompanied by high eye contact (Exline and Eldridge 1967); gaze avoidance is used as a clue to deception (Knapp and Comadena 1979); and, since eye gaze increases source credibility, it may also impact the perceived persuasiveness of the sales presentation (Kleineke 1980).
Eye gaze should also affect the buyers' evaluation of the sales presentation as interesting, personal, and emotional. Steady eye gaze should enhance the buyer's attention to the message and thereby evaluations that it is interesting. Furthermore, initial eye gaze enhances interpersonal attraction; hence, steady eye gaze would seem likely to enhance perceptions that the sales presentation is personal and emotional.

The above discussion leads to the following hypotheses:

**H1:** The salesperson's steady eye gaze has a positive effect on the buyers' perceptions of the degree to which the salesperson is: a) trustworthy, b) dependable, c) capable of servicing the account, d) professional, e) empathetic with respect to job-specific concerns, f) friendly, g) tactful, h) likeable, and i) an aggressive promoter.

**H2:** The salesperson's steady eye gaze has a positive effect on the buyers' perceptions of the degree to which the sales presentation is: a) interesting, b) believable, c) persuasive, d) personal, and e) emotional.

**Formal Posture:** Postural orientation (i.e., physical orientation, postural shifts, interpersonal distance and postural congruence) apparently signals intimacy, status, and emotion (Bull 1987; Harper et al. 1978). Furthermore, inappropriate postural orientation can yield disapproval and rejection (Argyle 1988).

Our interest is in postural formality versus relaxation. Formality is signaled through direct and erect orientation to the buyer (the "Lincolnesque" position). Relaxation is signaled by asymmetrical arm and leg positioning as well as a sideways and backward lean (Harper et al. 1978; Bull 1987; Argyle 1988). Relaxation positively affects perceptions that the communicator is confident, likeable, responsive, and potent (London 1973; Mehrabian and Williams 1969). However, formal posture creates greater interest (less boredom); sideways torso lean is considered relaxed but less tactful; and, "crossed legs above the knee" indicates greater tactfulness, friendliness (Bull 1987).

Formal posture would not seem to violate the social norms for an initial sales call; however, overly casual posture (e.g., an accentuated sideways and/or backward trunk lean) might signal an inappropriately high degree of familiarity. The buyer may prefer an "arms-length," or task-oriented, relationship in an initial sales call; however, overly casual posture (e.g., accentuated sideways and/or backward trunk lean) might signal an inappropriately high degree of familiarity. The buyer may prefer an "arms-length," or task-oriented, relationship in an initial sales call. Furthermore, formal posture may signal respect for the buyer's role and status, and thereby be seen as more professional.

The above discussion leads to the following hypotheses:

**H3:** The direct and upright (Lincolnesque) posture orientation negatively affects buyers' perceptions that the salesperson is: a) friendly and b) likeable.

**H4:** The direct and upright (Lincolnesque) posture orientation positively affects buyers' perceptions that the salesperson is: a) tactful and b) professional.

**Gesturing.** Gesturing is a commonly researched kinesic cue noted for communicating emphasis (Argyle 1988). Our focus is on the naturally active gesturing normatively expected of the salesperson versus restricted or limited gesturing. Research concerning the specific effects of gesturing is rare. Arm and hand gesturing has been studied in the context of cue patterns suggesting an active role performance (Leathers; Patterson 1983). For example, an active sales presentation could be signaled by high arm and hand gesturing, along with frequent head nods, recurrent postural shifts, smiling, and high eye gaze.

Gesturing appears to play a significant role in interpersonal communications. High gesturing (along with arm-position symmetry, sideways lean, openness of arm position, and leg position asymmetry) positively affects the perceived likability and status (Mehrabian 1969). High gesturing (along with facial activity, head-nodding, reduced reclining angles, and reduced self-manipulation) correlates with intended and perceived persuasiveness (Mehrabian and Williams 1969). Empathic gesturing (along with high eye gaze, assertive posture, and confident speech qualities) enhances source credibility directly and persuasion indirectly (Leathers; London 1973; Clifton 1975; Clifton 1979). Active job interviewers (i.e., high gesturing, eye contact, and smiling) are perceived to be more youthful, enthusiastic, approachable, interested, considerate, and intelligent (Mehrabian and Hakel 1973). Active applicants (e.g., high hand and arm gesturing, head-nodding, eye gaze, and smiling) are perceived to be more competent, qualified, motivated, successful and attractive, and, in fact, are more likely to be hired (Imada and Hakel 1977; Young and Beier 1977; Forbes and Jackson 1980).

The above discussion leads to the following hypotheses:

**H5:** The "natural" level of hand and arm gesturing (as opposed to the restricted level) will positively affect buyers' perceptions that the salesperson is: a) trustworthy, b) friendly, c) likeable, and d) an aggressive promoter.

**H6:** The "natural" level of hand and arm gesturing (as opposed to the restricted level) will positively affect buyers' impressions of the sales presentation as: a) interesting, b) believable, c) persuasive, d) personal, and e) emotional.

**Speech Hesitations.** Among the paralanguage cues, we are interested in a naturally fluent speech pattern versus interactive silences signaling caution or difficulty in responding (i.e. "buying time to think"). Anxiety, anger, contemptuousness, embarrassment, introversion, lack of empathy, and lower status (Argyle 1988; Beattie 1983; Bruneau 1973). Sales personnel are expected to be well versed and "hard to stump." Hence, speech fluency would signal control and assurance (Walsh 1985). However, if the salesperson is too fluent (as in a well-rehearsed speech), then buyers may perceive him to be glib, insincere, unconvincing, and inattentive (Beattie 1983; Wardhaugh 1985).

We contrast the salesperson's naturally fluent speech pattern with a pattern of long interactive pauses immediately prior to responding to routine buyer questions or comments. This pattern of speech hesitation is expected to violate buyer expectations and, thus, negatively affect: (1) buyer impressions that the salesperson is trustworthy, dependable, capable, and professional; and, (2) buyer evaluations of the degree to which the sales presentation is interesting, believable, and persuasive. Finally, since speech hesitations suggest anxiety, interpersonal discomfort and embarrassment, they were expected to reduce buyer perceptions that the salesperson is friendly and likeable (Mehrabian 1969).

The above discussion leads to the following hypotheses:

**H7:** Speech hesitations will negatively affect buyers' attributions that the salesperson is: a) trustworthy, b) dependable, c) capable, d) professional, e) friendly, f) likeable, and g) an aggressive promoter.

**H8:** Speech hesitations will negatively affect buyers' evaluations that the sales presentation is: a) interesting, b) believable and c) persuasive.
Professional Attire. Personal appearance norms are socially defined and attributed to self-presentation efforts (Berscheid and Walster 1978). Hence, they broadly affect social attributions (e.g., perceived social skills and industriousness) (Argyle 1988; Reingen et al. 1980; Ronkainen and Reingen 1979). Physical appearance itself is less influential than such controllable factors as cleanliness, bearing, and fashionability (Kleinke 1975). Our interest was in the effects of professional and casual business attire. Formal attire positively correlates with perceptions of communicator credibility (Harp, Stretch and Harp 1985), expertise (Barak, Patkin, and Dell 1982), and social skill (Gifford, Ng and Wilkinson 1985). Business people are urged to “dress for success” (Molloy 1975), with conservative attire normatively favored. However, conservative dress for a male may vary from very professional (e.g., high quality, business suit with a white shirt and matching tie) to moderately casual (e.g., traditional sport coat with a colored shirt and matching tie).

Basically, we expect that buyers normatively expect conservative attire, and hence will judge such salespersons to be more trustworthy, dependable, capable, and professional. This in-role self-presentation should also influence the buyer to perceive the sales presentation to be believable and persuasive. Finally, relatively casual attire may signal signal relaxation, hence have a positive effect on likability and friendliness.

The above discussion leads to the following hypotheses:

H1: Professional attire positively affects buyers’ perceptions that the salesperson is: a) trustworthy, b) dependable, c) capable, and d) professional.
H2: Professional attire negatively affects buyers’ perceptions that the salesperson is: a) friendly and b) likeable.
H3: Professional attire positively affects buyers’ perceptions that the sales presentation is: a) believable and b) persuasive.

Research Method

An initial industrial sales call provided the experimental context for the study. The experimental nonverbal cues were embedded in a videotaped sales call by the salesperson on a purchasing manager. These videotaped sales calls were then presented to experienced professional buyers for their evaluations. Laboratory experiments are appropriate as an intermediary step in sales research (Weitz 1981); role-plays have a strong tradition in communication research (Harper et al. 1978; Burgoon 1994). The videotaping procedure approximates the rich stimulus environment of an actual sales call, while allowing experimental control. Furthermore, observers of live and videotaped interviews have been found to provide similar evaluations (Imada and Hakel 1977).

The vendor company was modeled after a multiline distributor of industrial pipes and electronics. A task orientation was taken with the sales call stressing the products represented, as well as inventory policies, delivery schedules, and cost savings. Normative personal introduction and leave-taking rituals were included (Duncan and Fiske 1977). The salesperson closed by requesting a follow-up meeting.

The salesperson role was played by a middle-aged, professional actor. A subjective camera angle (i.e., over the shoulder of the buyer) was used to maximize the focus on the salesperson and to give the participants the perspective of interacting with the salesperson. The set was fully equipped (i.e., desk, chair, file cabinets, catalogues). Camera locations and angles, actor placements, lighting, and audio were controlled across the tapes. Each sales call was shot in color in four segments and multiple “takes” were prepared for subsequent editing to eliminate extraneous variation across treatments. Each videotape ran approximately 12 minutes, including the experimental instructions (see Appendix A).

A sample of 90 professional buyers was recruited from the membership of two Purchasing Management Association chapters. The most common job titles were purchasing director, purchasing manager, and buyer, with a mean of 12 years experience. Eighty percent were male and 20% held the CPM designation. Participants were randomly assigned, within sex, to experimental times, rooms, seats, and treatment videotapes. They were asked to visualize themselves as the purchasing agent in the videotape and were asked to provide their impressions at the conclusion of the videotaped sales call.

Experimental Manipulations

Past experiments in other disciplines and rehearsals of the sales presentation were used as guides in operationalizing the nonverbal treatments. Since the percent-of-time eye gaze targets noted in natural interactions (Argyle and Ingham 1972) are difficult to implement experimentally, eye gaze was operationalized as “steady” (high) and “intermittent” (low). Steady eye gaze involved nearly constant direct eye gaze at the buyer. Intermittent eye gaze was achieved by having the salesperson look away from the buyer at 25 specific junctures in the sales call.

Gesturing is also difficult to experimentally manipulate (Kendon 1970). Since it seems more difficult and awkward to add these movements to one’s natural pattern of gesturing than to restrict this behavior, the actor’s natural gesturing pattern in rehearsals (defined in terms of the amount of arm and hand movement) was used as the normative (high) level of gesturing. Low gesturing was achieved by limiting arm and hand movements to specific points in the selling script where the actor and researchers felt it was most essential.

Speech hesitations (i.e., interactive silences) tend to occur most naturally at speech junctures. Since it is very difficult to completely avoid interactive silences, the actor’s natural speech pattern was used as the normative (low) hesitation level. The high hesitation level was operationalized in terms of 26 interactive silences placed immediately prior to answering rather rudimentary questions or presenting selling messages. These programmed hesitations were expected to violate fluency norms in sales calls.

For postural orientation, casual and formal posture were contrasted. Casual (low) posture was executed by having the salesperson sit back in the chair, slightly leaning to the right, with the left leg crossed over the right, left arm resting in the lap, right arm on the armrest, and a slight right tilt to the head. Formal (high) posture was “Lincolnesque” with the salesperson directly oriented toward the buyer, sitting back and erect in the chair, with both arms on the armrests (except while gesturing) and both feet on the floor.

Business attire contrasts “professional” and “casual” dress. Professional (high) dress was operationalized in terms of a light beige, three-piece suit and conservative shirt and tie combination. Casual (low) dress was exhibited with a plaid sport coat and tie. The actor’s personal appearance was otherwise the same across the sales calls.

Experimental Design

Since a full factorial design would require 32 videotaped sales calls, we employed an efficient between-subjects, one-
quarter fractional factorial design, at two levels per factor (see Cochran and Cox 1957 p. 259). This design requires eight experimental videotapes to permit the estimation of the five nonverbal main effects, as well as two second-level interactions (see Appendix A). The estimates of these main and interaction effects are each confounded (or aliased) with remaining two-way and higher-order interactions. The implicit assumption (untestable) of these efficient fractional factorial designs is that the aliased interactions are either null or negligible, relative to the primary effects of interest (Cochran and Cox 1959).

Theoretical or laboratory studies regarding interactions between nonverbal cues are unavailable. However, studies of nonverbal cue patterns in job interviews generally focus on combinations of dynamic cues (e.g., kinesetically expressed confidence). Hence, on the presumption that pairs of dynamic cues are more likely to co-occur than interactions involving at least one static cue, we strategically assigned the nonverbal treatments so that our nonverbal main effects were each confounded with two-way interactions composed of at least one static cue. This allowed us to estimate the effects of two interactions: a confound of “eye gaze by gesturing” (AC, two dynamic cues) and “posture by speech hesitations” (BD, a static and a dynamic cue); and a confound of “eye gaze by speech hesitations” (AB, two dynamic cues) and “posture by gesturing” (BC, a static and a dynamic cue). In each case, the interaction between the two dynamic cues is of interest.

**Manipulation Checks**

Before conducting the main experiment, the efficacy of the nonverbal treatments was investigated. First, the authors visually inspected the tapes to confirm that the intended manipulations were achieved. Next, three trained judges reviewed the videotapes. These judges confirmed the efficacy of the nonverbal treatments. Finally, we collected manipulation checks as the last questionnaire task (Perdue and Summers 1986). A single seven-point bipolar rating scale was developed for each nonverbal treatment, with the anchors as follows: eye gaze, amount of direct eye contact (high/low); gesturing, tendency to emphasize points with arm and hand movement (high/low); speech hesitations, hesitancy in making statements and answering questions (very hesitant/not very hesitant); posture orientation, degree of directness in postural orientation (direct and forward/sideways and backward); business attire, degree of professionalism in business dress (professional/casual). These manipulation checks and their anchors were randomly assigned.

**Measures of the Dependent Variables**

The buyers' evaluations of the salesperson and sales presentation were measured using single-item bipolar scales (see Table 1). These items were randomly assigned within each set except for the final scale which represented an overall evaluation. The anchors for each item were randomly assigned to the ends of the scale.

**Results**

**Analysis of Manipulation Checks**

Each manipulation check was analyzed using the ANOVA model corresponding to the 1/4 fractional factorial design employed (Perdue and Summers 1986). Each nonverbal cue had a statistically significant effect (p < .01) on its corresponding manipulation check; the means are in the expected direction (eye gaze, 5.22 vs. 3.67; hesitations, 4.92 vs. 1.22; attire, 5.11 vs. 3.92; gesturing, 6.11 vs. 1.44; posture, 5.42 vs. 4.59). The effect sizes vary: speech hesitations (ω² = .35) and gesturing (ω² = .77) show large effects; eye gaze (ω² = .10), professional attire (ω² = .084), and formal posture (ω² = .05) show small effects.

The remaining 30 F-values in Table 2 relate to possible confounding effects. Only one effect (i.e., the effects of formal posture on the manipulation check for eye gaze) is statistically significant at the .05 level, which is less than would be expected from chance alone (i.e., 30 x .05 = 1.5). Furthermore, this unintended effect is very small (i.e., ω² = .032). In summary, these results suggest that the manipulations were successfully achieved.

**Effects of the Nonverbal Cues on the Dependent Variables**

Because of the large number of effects to be tested and the existence of correlations among several of the dependent variables, MANOVA procedures were applied to control for Type I Error (Table 3) within each of the sets of dependent measures. Significant effects (p < .05) were obtained for eye gaze and professional attire on impressions of the salesperson and eye gaze and speech hesitations on evaluations of the sales presentation. Gesturing, posture, and the estimable interactions do not show significant effects.

The t-values and ω²'s for the ANOVA results for the effects found to be statistically significant in the MANOVA tests are presented in Table 4. One-tailed t-tests are used for a priori hypotheses; directional two-tailed t-tests are used otherwise. This is equivalent to applying Scheffé's contrast method.

**Eye Gaze.** Steady eye gaze was expected to positively affect the “credibility” of the sales interaction as reflected in the perceived trustworthiness of the salesperson and the believability and persuasiveness of the sales presentation. The hypotheses linking eye gaze to these three social impressions all tend to share a common rationale that is based in part on previous empirical research showing a negative relationship between eye gaze and deception. Steady eye gaze positively affects the believability of the sales presentation (p < .05); however, significant effects are not found for persuasiveness or perceived trustworthiness.

Eye gaze was also anticipated to have a positive impact on the buyers’ “expectations” regarding the salespersons’ likely future performance as indicated by their perceptions of the salesperson's dependability, capability of servicing the account, and professionalism. The results are not significant with only the positive effect of eye gaze on dependability approaching significance (p < .06).

The effects of eye gaze on the buyers’ impressions that are characterized as more social or relational (i.e., the buyers’ perceptions of the salespersons’ job-specific empathy, friendliness, tactfulness, and likability, and the sales presentation’s personalness and emotionality) are generally significant. Four of these six effects (i.e., the salesperson’s job-specific empathy and tactfulness, and the personalness and emotionalness of the sales presentation) are positive and statistically significant (p < .05). In addition, steady eye gaze positively affected perceptions that the salesperson was an aggressive promoter (p < .01) and the sales presentation was more interesting (p < .05). However, eye gaze does not significantly affect the buyers' overall evaluations of the salesperson or the sales presentation.

**Professional Attire.** Professional attire was expected to positively affect buyer’s perceptions that the salesperson was...
Table 1
Dependent Variable Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Interesting</th>
<th>Uninteresting</th>
<th>Not Believable</th>
<th>Believable</th>
<th>Persuasive</th>
<th>Unpersuasive</th>
<th>Personal</th>
<th>Impersonal</th>
<th>Unemotional</th>
<th>Emotional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is your overall reaction to the sales presentation?</td>
<td>Favorable</td>
<td>Unfavorable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Salesperson Traits

Trustworthiness: to what degree is Mr. Blake sincere in his claims?
- Trustworthy
- Untrustworthy

Dependability: to what degree is Mr. Blake likely to be consistent in meeting the regular levels of product and service agreed upon?
- Very
- Not Very
- Dependable

Capability to Service the Account: to what degree is Mr. Blake likely to be able to arrange for services beyond those considered normal (for example, rush orders or special engineering service)?
- Very
- Not Very
- Capable

Professionalism: to what degree is Mr. Blake serious, thorough, and business-like in his sales approach?
- Professional
- Unprofessional

Empathy: to what degree is Mr. Blake the type of person who is able to understand the job responsibilities, feelings, and the ideas of the purchasing agent?
- Very
- Not Very
- Empathetic

Friendliness: to what degree is Mr. Blake the type of person who is friendly?
- Very
- Not Very
- Friendly

Aggressiveness: to what degree is Mr. Blake the type of person who actively promotes his firm and its products?
- Aggressive
- Unaggressive

Tactfulness: to what degree is Mr. Blake the type of person who is respectful, courteous, and diplomatic in relating to others?
- Tactful
- Blunt

Likeability: to what degree is Mr. Blake the type of person with whom you are likely to “get along” on a personal basis?
- Not Very
- Very
- Likeable

What is your overall evaluation of the salesperson?
- Favorable
- Unfavorable

credible and competent, as reflected in his perceived trustworthiness, dependability, capability to service the account, and professionalism. Significant effects are noted for capability to service the account and professionalism (p<.01). However, these effects are in the opposite direction of our hypotheses. That is, casual attire was associated with greater perceived capability and professionalism. A significant (p<.05) negative effect is also found on the buyers’ overall impression of the salesperson. Surprisingly, no effects of attire on either friendliness and likeability are found (p>.05). In summary, while professional attire shows significant effects, they are opposite of our hypotheses.

Speech Hesitations. The effects of speech hesitations on the buyers’ perceptions of the sales presentation are reasonably consistent with our expectations. As hypothesized, frequent speech hesitations influenced buyers to rate the sales presentation to be less interesting (p<.01) and less persuasive (p<.05). However, no significant effects of speech hesitations on believability and the buyers’ overall evaluation of the presentation are noted.

Discussion

Previous research indicates the potentially influential role of nonverbal cues in affecting salesperson and sales presenta-
Anova Results for Manipulation and Confounding Checks
(t-value, 82 d. f.; F-value, d. f. =1, 82: and \( \omega^2 \))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nonverbal cues</th>
<th>Eye Gaze</th>
<th>Formal Posture</th>
<th>Gesturing</th>
<th>Speech Hesitations</th>
<th>Professional Attire</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eye Gaze</td>
<td>3.581**</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>-0.25</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12.820*</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.101</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal Posture</td>
<td>2.19b</td>
<td>2.35*</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>-1.91</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.797b</td>
<td>5.54b*</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.032</td>
<td>.048</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gesturing</td>
<td>1.097</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>17.45*</td>
<td>-1.54</td>
<td>0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>304.53*</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.779</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech Hesitations</td>
<td>-0.48</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>7.108*</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>50.52*</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.350</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Attire</td>
<td>-0.69</td>
<td>-0.88</td>
<td>-0.85</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>3.19*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>10.19*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.084</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction 1</td>
<td>-1.67</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>-0.76</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Eye gaze by hesitation; posture by gesturing)</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction 2</td>
<td>-0.30</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>-1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Eye gaze by hesitation; posture by gesturing)</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.01
*b<.05
**Read: t-value, F-value, and \( \omega^2 \) associated with the effect of the eye gaze manipulation on its manipulation check measure were 3.581, 12.820 and .101. The two-tailed t-test was used except on the diagonal (bold) where the one-tail test was appropriate.

We drew on the functional communication framework to frame an investigation of the effects of nonverbal cues in terms of the social impressions, relational communications, and strategic self-presentations that appear relevant in sales contexts. However, our empirical findings were modest. We found that eye gaze significantly affected sales presentation believability, personalness, and emotionality; we also found eye gaze effects for salesperson job-specific empathy and tactfulness. However, we did not find significant effects for eye gaze on the such task-oriented salesperson judgments as trustworthiness, dependability, capability, or professionalism.

Speech hesitations showed negative effects on perceptions that the sales presentation was interesting and persuasive; however, speech hesitations did not affect salesperson impressions. Finally, attire strongly affected the salesperson impressions of capability and professionalism, but in the directions opposite from that hypothesized. Gesturing and posture show no effects. The sizes of our significant effects, as measured by \( \omega^2 \), are small in each case.

Hence, while we do show selective effects for nonverbal cues in our experimental sales call context, the reality may be that the effects of nonverbal cues are attenuated in the task-oriented contexts such as industrial sales calls. Theoretically, we would not ignore the likely importance of the nonverbal signals that accompany verbal disclosures. The strength of prior research support is too strong to do so (Burgoon 1994). Nevertheless, this assertion must be qualified by noting that channel use is dependent on what communication function is operative. For example, nonverbal cues are most influential when verbal and nonverbal cues conflict; when expectations for either channel are violated; when affective, rather than cognitive, judgments are relevant; and when social, rather than task-oriented tasks, are relevant (Noller 1986; Burgoon 1994). Thus, more precise conceptual investigations of the role of the social impression, relational communication, and strategic self-presentation functions in sales calls is needed, with attention to the situational contingencies that influence sales call processes and outcomes.

Several aspects of our experimental design may have also attenuated the results. The industrial sales call may be more focused on the verbal, than the nonverbal, channel. Most previous research on nonverbal cues has been conducted in contexts where the focus of the interaction was almost exclusively the social attraction dimension. In sales calls, the task attraction dimension, and hence the verbal channel, may have been more salient. To control for this, a few studies have suppressed the audio, thereby focusing the observers' attention entirely on the visual channel (e.g., Burgoon et al. 1984). Moreover, in sales calls, nonverbal behavior may tend to be attributed more to the exigencies of the task situation rather than the salesperson's dispositions.
Table 3
Manova Results for the Salesperson and Sales Presentation Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nonverbal Cues</th>
<th>Impressions of Salesperson</th>
<th>Sales Presentation Evaluations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wilks Lambda</td>
<td>F-ratio (df. =10.73)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eye Gaze</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>2.40*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal Posture</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>1.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gesturing</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech Hesitations</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Attire</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>2.11*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction 1</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Eye gaze by gestures; posture by hesitations)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction 2</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>1.41*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Eye gaze by hesitations; posture by gestures)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.01

Second, our verbal script was designed to be highly plausible and realistic in the context of an industrial sales call. This may have worked against finding strong nonverbal cue effects. In prior research, implausible, ambiguous, self-serving, or suspicious statements are noted to trigger attention to the nonverbal channel (Kraut 1978; Burgoon 1994). This suggests the need for future research to examining the relative effects of verbal and nonverbal cues (and their interactions) under different levels of overall verbal script plausibility, argument strength, ulterior motive bias, and concreteness.

Third, the role-playing methodology may have diminished the effects of nonverbal cues in several ways. Role-playing is less visceral than actually participating in a buyer-seller interaction; nonverbal cues, therefore, may be less salient and have less impact, even if the subjective camera angle is used. Our relatively weak manipulation check for posture may reflect this effect. Furthermore, the fact that buyers were not subject to any consequences for their evaluations may have also reduced their sensitivity to the nonverbal cues.

Fourth, the fact that we focused on individual nonverbal cues, as opposed to covarying patterns of cues, may have attenuated our results. Nonverbal cues tend to co-occur in nature (e.g., enthusiasm is signaled by high gesturing, recurrent postural shifts, smiling, and high eye gaze). Hence, even though our estimable interaction terms show no significant effects, it is possible that some buyers may have responded to interactions among our cues.

Finally, our professional attire treatment, or perhaps the relative physical attractiveness of our salesperson, may have affected the salesperson evaluations. For example, it may have been that our execution of professional attire (i.e., a light beige three-piece suit with conservative shirt and tie) was less appropriate than expected (i.e., a dark clothing may be more normative); hence, buyers may have developed a negative impression that carried over to other judgments. In addition, it may be that it is less important that the seller is professionally dressed than that his/her attire be similar to that of the buyer (Campbell, Graham, Jolibart, and Meissner 1988). Physical attractiveness was not assessed or manipulated; however, it may have negatively affected the salesperson evaluation.

Since our gesturing manipulation was relatively strong ($\omega^2=.77$), it appears that even strong manipulations of the salespersons' arm and hand gestures by themselves may have little, if any, effect on the buyers' social impressions. Hence, the effects of gestures may be more appropriately studied as part of an overall nonverbal cue pattern (e.g., relaxation as indicated by active gesturing, facial activity, head-nodding, casual posture).

**Research Directions**

With the benefit of more recent conceptual developments concerning the functional aspects of nonverbal cues, we offer several research directions. Concerning strategic self-presentation, Burgoon (1994) suggests that macro-level strategies for projecting "desirable images along the dimensions of believability, expertise, attraction status, prestige, and the like" (p. 252) should be stressed, rather than the usual micro-level emphasis on the nonverbal cues that drive specific social impressions. Moreover, she indicates that there are a variety of theories (e.g., Goffman's 1959 dramaturgical model; Schlenker's [1980] impression management theory; E.E. Jones' [1964] ingratiation theory; Jones and Pittman's [1982] self-presentation theory; and Burgoon's own [1992] expectancy-violations theory) that might be useful in framing such research. For example, in sales calls, gaining compliance may involve both the social and task attraction dimensions (Jones and Pittman 1982). To the degree that social attraction is operative, then the visual channel should be particularly potent; hence, such nonverbal cues as physical attractiveness, personal appearance, eye gaze, smiling and facial expressivity
### Table 4
Anova Results for the Salesperson and Sales Presentation Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nonverbal Cues</th>
<th>Trustworthiness</th>
<th>Dependability</th>
<th>Capability</th>
<th>Professionalism</th>
<th>Job Specific Empathy</th>
<th>Friendliness</th>
<th>Aggressiveness</th>
<th>Tactfulness</th>
<th>Likeability</th>
<th>Overall Impression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eye Gaze</td>
<td>0.971&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1.604&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>-0.351</td>
<td>0.951</td>
<td>2.484&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1.083</td>
<td>2.565&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1.927&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1.118</td>
<td>1.455&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.942</td>
<td>2.574</td>
<td>0.123</td>
<td>0.904</td>
<td>6.172&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1.172</td>
<td>6.576&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>3.712&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1.251</td>
<td>2.118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Attire</td>
<td>-1.095</td>
<td>-1.308</td>
<td>-2.935&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>-2.582&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>-0.730</td>
<td>-0.356</td>
<td>-0.616</td>
<td>1.096</td>
<td>0.705</td>
<td>-1.964&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.198</td>
<td>1.712</td>
<td>8.615&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>6.667&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>0.533</td>
<td>0.127</td>
<td>0.380</td>
<td>1.201</td>
<td>0.498</td>
<td>3.858&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nonverbal Cues</th>
<th>Interesting</th>
<th>Believable</th>
<th>Persuasive</th>
<th>Personal</th>
<th>Emotional</th>
<th>Overall Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eye Gaze</td>
<td>1.996&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1.8521&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1.399&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>3.226&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1.707&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1.473&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.983&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>3.431&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1.957</td>
<td>10.409&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>2.913&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>2.171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.029</td>
<td>.025</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>.086</td>
<td>.020</td>
<td>.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>(+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech</td>
<td>-2.855&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>-0.729</td>
<td>-2.287&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>0.849</td>
<td>-0.940</td>
<td>-1.188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hesitations</td>
<td>8.152&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.531</td>
<td>5.232&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.720</td>
<td>.683</td>
<td>1.411</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.070</td>
<td>(-)</td>
<td>.045</td>
<td>(-)</td>
<td>(-)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup>p<.01;  <sup>b</sup>p<.05;  <sup>c</sup>p<.10

<sup>a</sup>One-tailed t-tests are used to test a priori directional hypotheses; two-tailed tests are used for all other significance tests. A priori hypotheses are represented by a (+) or a (-) under the measure.

<sup>b</sup>READ: t-value, F-value, and r<sup>2</sup> associated with the effect of eye gaze on trustworthiness are 0.971, 0.942 and "not reported “ because of the lack of statistical significance (p>.10).
might be expected to elicit attributions of liking or positivity. On the other hand, self-promotion on the task attractiveness dimension might involve a complex interplay of ingratiation, intimidation (signaling status and power), and exemplification (regarding sincerity, honesty, and self-sacrifice) strategies (Burgoon 1994). Hence, vocal and pleasantness cues (fluency, pitch variety, smiling); kinesic and proxemic intimacy cues (physical closeness, direct eye gaze, frequent eye gaze); vocal and kinesic dominance cues (rapid and fluent speech, facial expressiveness); and credibility cues (symbolic attire, gesturing, and social “pleasantness”) may be potent. In this light, typological research concerning macro-level impression management strategies in sales calls is needed. Creative experimental research could then be designed to tease out the verbal and nonverbal roots of these macro-level strategies.

Concerning relational communications, Burgoon (1994) notes that impression management and relational communications share attributional processes and nonverbal signals. However, while impression formation stresses internal dispositions to the actor “observed” (“the salesperson is a likeable guy”), relational communications stresses relational meaning (“I like that salesperson; he’s a lot like me”). In other words, the meaningfulness of the salesperson to the buyer on the social attractiveness (“how we might get along”) and task dimensions (“how we might work together”) is more personalized. In our study, we employed several relational measures (e.g., likeable, empathetic); however, our role-playing methodology may not have been adequately sensitive to the dyadic nature of relational communications. Hence, an interesting research question is how to best investigate relational communications in sales contexts.

The argument that buyer-seller research should examine the buyer-seller dyad as the unit of analysis is long standing (see Evan’s 1963 buyer-seller similarity view; and Pennington’s [1968] naturalistic retail bargaining study). The dyadic perspective deserves more research attention in sales contexts particularly in reference to verbal and nonverbal disclosures that drive dyadic meanings. For example, the similarity hypothesis would benefit from conceptual and empirical developments concerning the processes and conditions under which buyer-seller similarity (“likes attract”) and dissimilarity (“opposites attract”) operate. Hence, one might research how similarity on these dimensions affects the nature and outcomes of the sales encounter. Is similarity verbally or nonverbally disclosed? Does similarity operate in the fashion of “messages of intimacy” (Burgoon 1994, p. 256)? Or does it facilitate rapport, conversational management and coordination, hence communications efficiency? Does similarity directly affect such task-oriented relational outcomes as trust, prestige, competency, and professionalism? Or, does it indirectly affect those outcomes through social attraction? These are just a few questions that reflect the similarity role of nonverbal cues.

Buyer-seller interactions should be studied in situ (see also Duncan and Fiske 1977; Graham 1985). Reflecting the similarity perspective, studies of interactional synchrony, or behavioral similarity, might provide an interesting starting point for buyer-seller research (Giles and Smith 1979; Kendon 1970). Following the functional perspective, relational meaning research should stress messages of intimacy (immediacy, expressiveness, attentiveness), affect (rapport, liking), and task competency (power status, prestige, expertise). Hence, buyer-seller research might stress the dynamic role of verbal and nonverbal discourses in creating or managing these dyadic outcomes.

Buyers and sellers play different roles. In light of their task-related responsibilities, each has goals, plans, and principles to guide the exchange process, expectations and preferences, and even scripts or routines that they bring to the sales call. Hence, the interplay of these normative buyer-seller expectations deserves research attention. From a nonverbal perspective, this would involve expanding prior research concerning the dominance (status, power, prestige), formality and task orientation, trust and credibility, and service task dimensions of social influence and relational communications. Prior research has noted that nonverbal cues and functions will differ with the relationship type (i.e., romantic, doctor-patient, superior-subordinate) and stage (i.e., getting acquainted, establishing exchange expectations, evaluating relationship satisfaction). Hence, phenomenological research is indicated to identify specific nonverbal cues related to these relational context distinctions. However, developing an understanding of the processes and the “meaning” involved when expectancies are violated suggests a role for creative experimental design as well (perhaps using interactive CD technology). As Burgoon (1994) notes, conforming to expected norms in relational communications terms may not always be optimal. The “meaning” of a verbal or nonverbal disclosure may depend on the buyer’s environment at that relationship stage. Hence, an experiment might be an efficacious way to study meaningfulness in buyer-seller exchanges.

Managerial Implications

Given the modest results we found, we will simply note that caution is advised in training programs; despite anecdotal evidence and the widespread availability of popular press books concerning nonverbal communications in sales contexts, the jury is still out. Hence, attempts to offer universal principles (never use piercing eye contact; always look alert) are, at best, “guidelines.” Similarly, books providing universal interpretations for buyer nonverbal cues (i.e., crossed arms signal “no interest”) are ahead of science. The problem is that these recipes stress the obvious and ignore the subtleties involved. As one academic expert, who also has significant sales training experience, observes, “empirical knowledge of impression management has expanded rapidly . . . however, (it) has not been synthesized and organized in a way that makes it easily usable” (Leathers 1992, p. 210). These are the conceptual and empirical linkages that a systematic program of research concerning salesperson impressions and nonverbal cues would seek to calibrate.

References


**Endnote**

1 Although the social impression measures were developed as single-item scales, several reviewers suggested that factor analysis might uncover multi-item scales that would enhance reliability and, hence, the results achieved. Exploratory factor analysis suggested three factors (loadings > .5; low cross loadings), a business-oriented role factor (dependable, capable, trustworthy, professional, overall rating), a socially-oriented factor (empathy, friendly, likeable, tactful), and aggressive promoter (a single item). The ANOVA results show significant effects of (1) eye gaze (p < .05) on the "social" summed item scores and aggressiveness and (2) professional attire on the "business" factor. These results are comparable to the original single-item scale outcomes.

### Appendix A

#### Experimental Design: Five Nonverbal Cues, Two Levels Each 1,2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Video Tape</th>
<th>Length (Min.)</th>
<th>A: Eye Gaze</th>
<th>B: Postural Orientation</th>
<th>C: Gesturing</th>
<th>D: Hesitations</th>
<th>E: Appearance</th>
</tr>
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</table>

1. Based on a one-quarter, fractional factorial design developed by Cochran and Cox 1957, p. 277. The main effects have 2-way interactions as aliases.

2. Two estimable 2-way interactions are available, AC=BD and AD=BC (i.e., each interaction is aliased with the second interaction listed). In the above design the 2-factor estimable interactions are respectively:

   a) eye gaze x gesturing (AC)=posture x hesitations (BD)

   b) eye gaze x hesitations (AD)=posture x gesturing (BC)