

# Is Full Bright Smile a Positive Factor for Higher WTP?

Evidence from a Cross-Cultural Study on the Integrated Effects of Salesperson's Non-verbal Behavior

## 밝은 미소는 소비욕구에 긍정적 영향을 주는가?

판매원의 비언어적 행동과 판촉효과에 대한 문화간 연구

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## Abstract

This study examined the extent to which culture and familiarity with a shopping situation moderate the impact of a salesperson's smile intensity on consumer decisions. Koreans, Indonesians, and Filipinos and Malaysians were recruited to represent low, mid, and high power distances, respectively. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two scenarios which asked to imagine shopping for a cosmetic product and being approached by a salesperson who either had a full smile and proactive service or had a limited smile and passively promoted sales. As predicted, the intentions to stay at the shop, purchase recommended items, and pay extra money for shopping were higher among the Korean participants when imagining a salesperson with a full smile. The Indonesians, in contrast, were more willing to pay extra money for shopping when approached by a salesperson with a limited smile. Implications for cross-cultural scholars and marketing practitioners are also discussed.

## Keyword

smile intensity(웃음강도), sales promotion(판촉활동), cross-cultural communication(문화간 커뮤니케이션)

## 요약

본 연구는 판매원의 미소 강도가 소비욕구에 미치는 영향이 문화적 권력거리(power distance)와 쇼핑상황에 대한 친숙도에 따라 달라지는지 탐사하였다. 응답자들 모두는 화장품 구매를 위해 상점에 들어서는 상황을 상상하도록 하였으며, 그 중 한 집단은 밝은 미소로 적극적인 서비스를 제공하는 판매원과, 다른 한 집단은 미소없이 소극적으로 판매에 임하는 직원과 마주치는 시나리오에 무작위로 노출되었다. 권력거리가 상대적으로 낮은 한국인들의 경우, 밝은 미소를 보이는 판매원을 상상했을 때 쇼핑지속 의도, 추천 상품 구매의도, 그리고 추가 지출의도 모두 더 높았다. 반면, 권력거리가 높은 인도네시아인들은 제한된 미소를 띤 판매원을 떠올렸을 때 쇼핑 중 추가지출 의도가 더 높았다. 이러한 결과는 소비자의 문화적 속성을 이해해야하는 마케팅 실무자들에게 실질적 시사점을 제시한다.

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## 1. Introduction

The effect of a salesperson's smile has been studied for a decade as a key factor in retail services, and the virtual sales agent perspective is currently attracting scholarly attention.<sup>1)</sup> Specifically, smile intensity remains at the center of the discussion, and most previous studies have confirmed that a big bright smile presents customers with better satisfaction than does a light smile.<sup>2)</sup> A recent study corroborated that dynamic facial expressions of avatars are much more recognized and appreciated than those with passive facial expressions.<sup>3)</sup>

However, conflicting evidence shows that a full bright smile does not necessarily help in professional services<sup>4)</sup> or luxury product sales.<sup>5)</sup> Researchers argue that, in such categories, salespersons with limited smiles are more likely to be perceived as more competent than are those with warm broad smiles. This raises important questions regarding the true effect of smile intensity, as it can vary depending on the

contextual fit such as customer backgrounds, product categories, and customer-salesperson relations.<sup>6)</sup>

This study examined whether shoppers' cultural backgrounds and shopping situations can moderate smile intensity impact on consumer decisions. Non-verbal behaviors such as smiles can be interpreted differently across cultures, as various social norms may define what a "proper" smile means for a given situation.<sup>7)</sup> Specifically, the cultural dimension of power distance (PD) is anticipated to moderate the impact of smile intensity.<sup>8)</sup> Recent studies have revealed that people from a high PD culture tend to exercise preventive regulatory focus<sup>9)</sup> when making purchase decisions. That is, instead of exploring new experiences from shopping (i.e., promotion-focused), not making a poor decision remains more important for those raised in a high-PD culture.<sup>10)</sup> For those from such cultural backgrounds, salespersons with a professional look and reserved facial expressions may be preferred over those working to make the shoppers happy.

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1) Chong, T., Yu, T., Keeling, D.I., and de Ruyter, K., AI-chatbots on the services frontline addressing the challenges and opportunities of agency, *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, Vol.63, 102735, Elsevier, 2021.

2) Keh, H.T., Ren, R., Hill, S.R., and Li, X., The beautiful, the cheerful, and the helpful: The effects of service employee attributes on customer satisfaction, *Psychology and Marketing*, Vol.30, No.3, Wiley, 2013, pp.211–226.

3) Fernández-Sotos, P., García, A.S., Vicente-Querol, M.A., Lahera, G., Rodríguez-Jimenez, R., and Fernández-Caballero, A., Validation of dynamic virtual faces for facial affect recognition, *PLOS ONE*, Vol.16, No.1, PLoS, 2021.

4) Wang, E.S.-T., Tsai, B.-K., Chen, T.-L., and Chang, S.-C., The influence of emotions displayed and personal selling on customer behaviour intention, *Service Industries Journal*, Vol.32, No.3, RESER, 2012, pp.353–366.

5) Zhu, H., Zhou, Y., Wu, Y., and Wang, X., To smile or not to smile: the role of facial expression valence on mundane and luxury products premiumness, *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, Vol.65, 102861, Elsevier, 2022.

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6) Murali, M. and Pons, F., Regulatory fit from attribute-based versus alternative-based processing in decision making, *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, Vol.19, No.4, Wiley, 2009, pp.643–651.

7) Tsai, J.L., Blevins, E., Bencharit, L.Z., Chim, L., Fung, H.H., and Yeung, D.Y., Cultural variation in social judgments of smiles: the role of ideal affect, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol.116, No.6, APA PsycNet, 2019, pp.966–988.

8) Hofstede, G., *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values*, Sage Publications, 1980.

9) Song, L., How regulatory focus affects perceptions of online limited-time promotions, *International Journal of Market Research*, Vol.64, No.4, MRS, 2022, pp.443–450.

10) Fazeli, Z., Shukla, P., and Perks, K., Digital buying behavior: the role of regulatory fit and self-construal in online luxury goods purchase intentions, *Psychology and Marketing*, Vol.37, No.1, Wiley, 2020, pp.15–26.

The current study extends this rationale to the “big-smile versus limited-smile” debate. Specifically, it proposes that limited smiles, which could be associated with passive support or a lack of proactive sales attempts in reality, can indirectly indicate a salesperson’s confidence regarding product knowledge, especially for shoppers from a high PD culture.

## 2. Literature Review and Hypotheses

### 2-1. Effects of Smile Intensity

The smile effect has long been studied closely in light of the relationship between buyers and sellers, particularly in the domains of retail services and customer satisfaction. Most previous studies concur that smiling brings about higher customer satisfaction than not smiling.<sup>11)</sup> Some studies also point out that the effect of smiles is not limited to customer satisfaction but can also raise the perception of authenticity and fairness<sup>12)</sup> or attractiveness toward a service.<sup>13)</sup> A smile appears to have a positive effect on a salesperson’s service quality.

However, the effect of smiles seems to hold up to a certain point. A study by Barger and Grandey, for example, indicated that the affective element of a positive smile hardly transfers to customers.<sup>14)</sup> Similar results

demonstrate little influence of smiles on consumers’ emotional resonance (e.g., Hennig-Thurau et al.). These findings may be attributed to the fact that the researchers adopted low-involvement product categories (e.g., movie rentals and grocery stores) that require few customer-salesperson interactions. Nonetheless, a more recent study documented that customers shopping for luxury products also respond more positively to a limited smile.<sup>15)</sup> Some studies provide conflicting evidence indicating that a full bright smile is not necessarily beneficial for professional services.<sup>16)</sup>

Regardless of the reasoning behind these mixed results, this line of research concerns smile intensity across all service categories. Whether the smile effect depends on customers’ perception of charismatic services in professional product categories or their low involvement with the salesperson in mundane product categories, it seems clear that smile intensity is tied to a customer’s prior expectation and the actual perception of a salesperson’s service level.<sup>17)</sup> Therefore, a preliminary conclusion can be that customers’ expectations need to be considered a necessary component when estimating the effects of smiles.

Zhu et al. focused on the social distance perception created by customers’ expectations as a positive effect of limited smiles.<sup>18)</sup> According to researchers, neutral facial expressions tend to increase perceived social distance from a salesperson among customers, increasing the

11) Keh et al., *Op. cit.*, pp.211–226.

12) Olk, S., Lindenmeier, J.,Tschulin, D.K., and Zogaj, A., Emotional labor in a non-isolated service encounter – the impact of customer observation on perceived authenticity and perceived fairness, *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, Vol.58, Elsevier, 2021.

13) Park, S., Kim, S.P., and Whang, M., Individual’s social perception of virtual avatars embodied with their habitual facial expressions and facial appearance, *Sensors*, Vol.21, No.17, 5986, MDPI, 2021.

14) Barger, P.B. and Grandey, A.A., Service with a smile and encounter satisfaction: emotional contagion and appraisal mechanisms, *Academy of*

*Management Journal*, Vol.49, No. 6, Academy of Management, 2006, pp.1229–1238.

15) Zhu et al., *Op. cit.*

16) Wang et al., *Op. cit.*, pp.353–366.

17) Zhou, W., Hyman, M.R., and Jiang, J., Managing emotions in buyer–seller relationships: enhancing sales performance through proactive presales service, *Society for Marketing Advances Proceedings*, December 2016, Society for Marketing Advances, 2016, pp.400–401.

18) Zhu et al., *Op. cit.*

value of luxury goods. Given that perceived social distance provides a mechanism by which a limited smile works to produce a positive customer response, research on the effects of smile intensity should consider, regardless of product category, the perception of social distance as a major predictor of customer expectations of, and satisfaction with, service.

## 2-2. Cultural Difference in Power Distance and Regulatory Focus

While power distance (PD) or power disparity exists in any society, the readiness to expect or accept it tends to differ culturally. In a high PD culture, social hierarchy tends to be more readily accepted as a natural or inevitable part of the human condition, whereas in a low PD culture, social inequality is less highlighted or more actively challenged in social interactions.<sup>19)</sup> Like other major cultural dimensions (e.g., individualism-collectivism, tight-loose culture), PD involves enculturated sensitivity to external pressures from the collective, including social norms and orders and group harmony. The PD specifies such orientations in terms of power disparity. That is, in a high-PD culture, one is anticipated to incorporate power distance with the counterpart when identifying the self and engaging in communicative activities. Such tendencies are less pronounced in a low-PD culture, where individuals interpret themselves as unique from such social constraints.

We surmise that cultural differences in PD can lead to those in regulatory focus.<sup>20)</sup> In a high PD culture, what one is supposed to say or do remains restricted to the power relationship with one's counterpart. Rather than actively seeking what they desire, they are more likely to adopt

the assigned social roles to avoid potential problems. By contrast, such motivation for self-inhibition should be lower for individuals raised in a low-PD culture. Being less sensitive to power-based social constraints, such individuals are likely to promote themselves more actively. This conjecture is consistent with past studies that have linked "prevention-focus" with "interdependent self-construal" and "promotion-focus" with "independent self-construal".<sup>21)</sup> Individuals with interdependent self-construal, whose identity or self-perception depends on their counterparts performing complementary roles, tend to prioritize maintaining the relationship as the basis of their significance; therefore, they are likely to be more oriented toward preventing potential troubles in the relationship. Conversely, independents tend to possess an identity less bounded by the required social roles and, hence, are more prone to pursuing self-promotion. A more recent study by Kurman and Hui reached a similar conclusion, indicating that prevention focus is associated with vertical collectivism (i.e., the need to sacrifice one's desire to conform to social rules or demands), and promotion focus is linked with horizontal individualism.<sup>22)</sup>

The conjectured relationship between PD and regulatory focus has interesting practical implications for marketing and customer service, particularly when a perceived power imbalance exists between the product/brand and potential buyers. Especially for consumers who perceive the target product or brand as superior, the anticipation is that the power difference will be properly communicated by the salesperson.

19) Hofstede, G., Op. cit.

20) Aaker, J.L. and Lee, A.Y., 'I' seek pleasures and 'we' avoid pains: The role of self-regulatory goals in information processing and persuasion, *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol.28, No.1, University of Chicago Press, 2001, pp.33-49.

21) Lee, A.Y., Aaker, J.L., and Gardner, W.L., The pleasures and pains of distinct self-construals: the role of interdependence in regulatory focus, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol.78, No.6, American Psychological Association, 2000, pp.1122-1134.

22) Kurman, J. and Hui, C.M., Promotion, prevention, or both: Regulatory focus and culture revisited, *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, Vol.5, No.3, IACCP, 2011.

Buyers are expected to perceive salespersons with a more conservative look and reserved communication behavior as more compatible with the product or brand image, and hence prefer them more. Additionally, noting that high-PD individuals are also more prevention focused, they may rely more heavily on the expertise or trustworthiness of the salesperson. This is because such individuals fear failure more<sup>23)</sup> and, to prevent it, would attempt to mobilize the salesperson's resources. Therefore, they are likely to prefer salespersons with a reserved attitude to those who express kindness by wearing full, bright smiles.

By contrast, those from a low-PD culture are less likely to establish a power relationship with the products, brands, or people who promote them, and hence think less about the manner in which the salesperson communicates. Globally positive and welcoming treatment may be favored, irrespective of the product category. Promotion-focused, low-PD individuals are also more ready to explore new products, thinking less about potential failures. Empirical findings corroborate this, showing that the satisfaction of promotion-oriented individuals from a lower PD culture depends more heavily on the shopping experience itself than on the outcomes,<sup>24)</sup> and impulsive buying behavior is more likely in individuals with a low PD perception.<sup>25)</sup>

Based on the discussion thus far, this study presents the following set of predictions to

examine the potential association between the impact of smile intensity (limited vs. full) and culture (high vs. low PD). In particular, we propose adopting two sets of dependent measures: one that assesses purchase intention at the moment (i.e., willingness to stay longer at a shop, purchase items recommended by a salesperson, and spend extra dollars at the shop), and one that determines the level of long-term loyalty (i.e., willingness to revisit and the level of trust in store quality). This was done to determine whether the smile intensity effect was due to the social distancing perception, as intended, or due to temporal intimidation. Given the former case, smile intensity should influence not only purchase intention at the moment, but also their willingness to revisit and trust. If the latter is the case, the effect of smile intensity should cease to exist when it is related to the intention to revisit and trustworthiness.

H1-1: Shoppers from higher PD cultures, compared to those from lower PD cultures, are more willing to stay at the shop when treated by a salesperson with a limited than a big smile.

H1-2: Shoppers from higher PD cultures, compared to the ones from lower PD cultures, are more willing to buy the items recommended by a salesperson with a limited than a big smile.

H1-3: Shoppers from higher PD cultures, compared to the ones from lower PD cultures, are more willing to pay extra dollars at a shop when treated by a salesperson with a limited than a big smile.

H1-4: Shoppers from higher PD cultures, compared to the ones from lower PD cultures, are more willing to trust a shop brand quality when treated by a salesperson with a limited than a big smile.

H1-5: Shoppers from higher PD cultures, compared to the ones from lower PD cultures, are more willing to revisit a shop when treated by a salesperson with a limited than a big smile.

23) Higgins, E.T., Promotion and prevention: regulatory focus as a motivational principle, *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, Vol.30, Elsevier, 1998.

24) Trudel, R., Murray, K.B., and Cotte, J., Beyond expectations: the effect of regulatory focus on consumer satisfaction, *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, Vol.29, No.1, Elsevier, 2012, pp.93–97.

25) Zhang, Y., Winterich, K.P., and Mittal, V., Power distance belief and impulsive buying, *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol.47, No.5, AMA, 2010, pp.945–954.

### 2-3. Effect of Familiarity on Purchase Decisions

Many previous studies have confirmed that the emotional display of a salesperson helps to improve sales performance by making customers' purchase decisions easier. However, the psychological attributes and contextual boundaries of customers must be considered to clarify how underlying emotions affect sales performance. Customers' prior experiences have been shown to predict differential perceptions of smile intensity (i.e., broad versus limited; Campellone and Kring 2013). Depending on a customer's past shopping experiences, a salesperson with a reserved communication style can be perceived as intimidating rather than professional.<sup>26)</sup>

The unfamiliarity or novelty factor merits investigation as it may moderate the effects of smile intensity.<sup>27)</sup> This is based on the conjecture that people in a novel shopping situation, independent of culture, can correctly decode the true intention or meaning of a salesperson's smile because they lack prior experience. More effortful processing of a salesperson's communication behavior is anticipated for customers with fewer prior experiences. Conversely, customers with repeated experiences tend to be less sensitive to a salesperson's behavior and can even be tolerant to poor emotional services.<sup>28)</sup> This rationale leads to the prediction of widely different responses to a salesperson's behavior (i.e., full vs. limited smile) among those with fewer shopping experiences.

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26) Saraff, S. and Tripathi, M., Emotional intelligence: identifying emotions from facial expressions, *Journal of Psychosocial Research*, Vol.17, No.1, Prints Publications, 2022, pp.97–106.

27) Wang, M., Sun, L.L., Hou, J.D., How emotional interaction affects purchase intention in social commerce: the role of perceived usefulness and product type, *Psychology Research and Behavior Management*, Vol.14, Dove Press, 2021, pp.467–481.

28) Wang et al., Op. cit.

Accordingly, we propose the following second set of predictions.

H2-1: The effect of smile intensity (big vs. limited) on the willingness to stay at a shop is more pronounced among those with fewer similar shopping experiences.

H2-2: The effect of smile intensity (big vs. limited) on the willingness to purchase recommended items is more pronounced among those with fewer similar shopping experiences.

H2-3: The effect of smile intensity (big vs. limited) on the willingness to spend extra money is more pronounced among those with fewer similar shopping experiences.

H2-4: The effect of smile intensity (big vs. limited) on the willingness to trust the shop brand quality is more pronounced among those with fewer similar shopping experiences.

H2-1: The effect of smile intensity (big vs. limited) on the willingness to revisit the shop is more pronounced among those with fewer similar shopping experiences.

Aside from the mixed results concerning the effect of smile intensity, numerous contextual cues (e.g., the salesperson's baseline behavior in similar businesses and product categories) should be considered when predicting whether the (un)experienced prefer salespersons with a full or a limited smile. To find empirical answers to this question, we ask the following research question:

RQ: Does familiarity affect the preferences in the salesperson's smile intensity? That is, do customers with fewer (more) prior experiences prefer a big or a limited smile?

### 2-4. Non-verbal Behaviors and Proactive Service of a Salesperson

In general, a salesperson's emotional expression has a tremendous impact on customers' evaluations of service satisfaction.<sup>29)</sup>

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29) Kidwell, B., Hardesty, D.M., Murtha, B.R., and Sheng, S., Emotional intelligence in marketing

While facial expressions constitute the most prominent part of the affective aspects, other behavioral signs or gestures often add extra benefits to the customer perception of service quality.

The level of consistency among such signs has been proven as the most important. The perceived authenticity of a salesperson's smile increases when it is associated with congruent non-verbal behaviors. Importantly, when the facial expressions of a salesperson are inconsistent with their non-verbal behavioral signs, whether positive or negative, customers tend to depend more heavily on behavioral cues to reach a decision.<sup>30)</sup> Researchers have also found consistency between the facial expressions and behavioral signs of a salesperson, boosting the perceived valence of service quality in either the positive or the negative directions.<sup>31)</sup> Researchers argue that matching non-verbal behaviors with smiles is critical, particularly during the presale period, because that is when customers most effortfully assess the sincerity and authenticity of the smiles.<sup>32)</sup> Particularly, positive smiles and corresponding gestures may help promote the perception that a salesperson is conducting a proactive service and, in turn, the chance to lead the interaction into an actual purchase. Andrzejewski and Mooney's work validates that a smile alone may be insufficient to secure service quality, in that customers show more positive reactions to Duchenne or authentic

smiles compared to non-Duchenne or non-genuine smiles.<sup>33)</sup>

Past research suggests that the positive impact of a broad smile can be amplified when accompanied by relevant bodily gestures. This human tendency has been reaffirmed in more recent studies on avatars, demonstrating that an avatar's smiling facial expressions can cause positive interpersonal effects only when it is mapped in combination with consistently positive gestures.<sup>34)</sup>

## 2-5. Research Context

To examine the extent to which culture and familiarity moderate the impact of smile intensity, this study subjected culturally different samples (i.e., Indonesia, South Korea, and the Philippines and Malaysia) to a scenario-based experiment. In this scenario, cosmetic products were promoted in a store in South Korea. Recent statistics show that Southeast Asia is home to the largest population wanting to visit South Korea within the next three years and has consistently increased its imports of cosmetic products from South Korea.<sup>35)</sup> Data from Hofstede's Insights (2022) indicate that Indonesian culture is more PD (78/100) than South Korea (60/100), and the other Asian groups ranked the highest in PD (Malaysia 100/100, Philippines 94/100).

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exchanges, *Journal of Marketing*, Vol.75, No.1, Sage Journals, 2011, pp.78–95.

30) Campellone, T.R. and Kring, A.M., Who do you trust? The impact of facial emotion and behaviour on decision making, *Cognition and Emotion*, Vol.27, No.4, Taylor & Francis, 2013, pp.603–620.

31) Zhou et al., Op. cit.

32) Medler-Liraz, H. and Seger-Guttman, T., The joint effect of flirting and emotional labor on customer service-related outcomes, *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, Vol.60, Elsevier, 2021.

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33) Andrzejewski, S.A. and Mooney, E.C., Service with a smile: Does the type of smile matter?, *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, Vol.29, Elsevier, 2016, pp.135–141.

34) Kruzic, C., Kruzic, D., Herrera, F., and Bailenson, J., Facial expressions contribute more than body movements to conversational outcomes in avatar-mediated virtual environments, *Scientific Reports*, Vol.10, No.1, 20626, Nature, 2020.

35) Korea Tourism Data Lab. URL: <https://datalab.visitkorea.or.kr/datalab/portal/nat/ge-tForTourForm.do#>, 2024. 6. 2.



### 3. Method

In total, 146 college students participated in the experiment after providing informed consent. Koreans ( $n = 73$ , low PD) constituted the majority of the sample, followed by Indonesians ( $n = 42$ , moderate PD), Filipinos ( $n = 17$ ), and Malaysians ( $n = 14$ ). Filipino and Malaysian cultures were combined to represent the highest PD culture.

The participants were randomly assigned to two scenarios, in which they were instructed to imagine that they were shopping for cosmetic products and being treated by a salesperson who was either actively promoting the products with a full smile (Scenario A,  $n = 76$ ) or passively performing the job with a minimal smile (Scenario B,  $n = 70$ ). Dependents (e.g., willingness to stay at the shop, purchase items recommended by the salesperson, spend extra money to shop at the store, revisit, and the level of trust toward the brand) and the control measures (e.g., gender, one's prior experiences, and frequency of visit to a Korean cosmetics shop) followed in that order.

The two scenarios were based on prior field observations,<sup>36)</sup> which concluded that two extreme cases are the most prevalent: either a bright smile with highly proactive behaviors (e.g., guiding shoppers to the spot where the desired products are located) or a limited smile with passive behaviors. Noting that salespersons' services to tourists were mostly non-verbal due to language barriers, the assumption that the current scenarios represent two realistically different levels of integrated non-verbal behaviors is valid.

36) Mastiani, A., A cross-cultural study on the influence of salespersons' non-verbal communication on the purchase intentions of southeastern tourist to Korea. Unpublished Master's Thesis, Kwangwoon University, Seoul, South Korea., 2021

### 4. Results

#### 4-1. Scenario by Culture Interactions

To examine H1-1 through H1-5, a series of covariance analyses (ANCOVA) were conducted. The respondents' nationality, scenario conditions, and their interaction terms were entered into the model as major predictors of the dependents. Prior experiences with similar shopping situations, number of visits to cosmetics shops in Korea, sensitivity to salesperson behavior, and gender served as covariates. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics.

[Table 1] Descriptive Statistics

		Dependents					Controls		
		WTS	WTB	WTP	WTT	WTR	Prior	Sensit	NVisit
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )
Scenario A									
Korea	38	2.95 (1.18)	2.58 (0.95)	2.84 (1.37)	3.05 (0.90)	2.89 (1.25)	3.03 (1.10)	3.16 (1.31)	3.76 (1.48)
Indonesia	19	3.47 (1.12)	3.05 (0.91)	2.58 (1.50)	3.11 (0.66)	3.84 (1.01)	3.63 (0.60)	3.05 (1.18)	2.53 (1.78)
Fil+Mal	19	3.05 (1.27)	2.42 (1.22)	2.89 (1.37)	2.84 (1.12)	2.42 (1.43)	3.16 (0.90)	3.47 (1.26)	3.05 (1.58)
Scenario B									
Korea	35	1.91 (1.09)	1.57 (0.78)	1.77 (1.21)	2.60 (0.98)	1.83 (0.86)	2.60 (0.85)	3.20 (1.35)	3.03 (1.79)
Indonesia	23	3.48 (0.99)	3.13 (0.69)	3.48 (1.41)	3.30 (0.64)	3.48 (0.99)	3.43 (0.90)	3.09 (1.16)	4.39 (1.08)
Fil+Mal	12	2.83 (1.34)	1.83 (1.19)	2.58 (1.31)	2.75 (0.75)	2.25 (1.22)	2.33 (0.89)	3.33 (1.23)	2.92 (1.68)

Notes: WTS = Willingness to Stay more at the current store (1 = not at all, 5 = definitely); WTB = Willingness to Buy unplanned items recommended by the salesperson (1 = not at all, 5 = definitely); WTP = Willing to Pay extra dollars to purchase the product recommended by the salesperson (1 = \$0.5, 2 = \$1.0, 3 = \$1.5, 4 = \$2.0, 5 = \$2.0 or more); WTT = Level of Trustworthiness about the products sold at the store (1 = not trustworthy at all, 5 = definitely trustworthy); WTR = Willing to Revisit (1 = definitely not, 5 = definitely); Prior = Frequency of having experiences similar to the scenario (1 = never, 5 = always); Sensit = Sensitiveness toward the promotion of salesperson (1 = not important at all, 5 = very important); NVisit = Number of visits to cosmetic stores in Seoul (1 = never, 2 = once or twice, 3 = 3-4 times, 4 = 5-6 times, 5 = more than 6 times).

Consistent with H1-1, H1-2, and H1-3, the results indicate a significant culture-by-scenario

interaction on willingness to stay at the store ( $F[2, 134] = 2.88, p = .05$ ), purchase items recommended by the salesperson ( $F[2, 134] = 2.98, p = .05$ ), and spending extra dollars buying the recommended items ( $F[2, 134] = 2.86, p = .05$ ; see Table 2 for full results). Specifically, Koreans (Low PD) displayed a sharp contrast between the two scenarios. Their willingness to stay longer at the store, purchase the recommended items, and spend extra dollars was substantially greater when asked to imagine that the salesperson was genuinely kind ( $M = 2.95, SD = 1.18$ ;  $M = 2.58, SD = 0.95$ ;  $M = 2.84, SD = 1.37, n = 38$ , respectively) than when told to think of being assisted by a salesperson with a nominal smile ( $M = 1.91, SD = 1.09$ ;  $M = 1.57, SD = 0.78$ ;  $M = 1.77, SD = 1.21, n = 35$ , respectively).

[Table 2] ANCOVA

	WTS		WTB		WTP		WTT		WTR	
	F	p	F	p	F	p	F	p	F	p
Covariates										
Prior Experiences (Exp)	4.20	.04	0.80	.37	0.80	.37	0.89	.35	1.96	.16
Number of Visits (NVisit)	0.13	.72	0.13	.72	5.91	.02	0.20	.65	0.95	.33
Sensitiveness	0.71	.40	0.77	.38	0.02	.89	0.24	.63	0.29	.59
Gender	2.52	.11	1.27	.26	8.77	.01	0.14	.71	0.13	.72
Model										
Culture	0.61	.55	1.63	.20	0.42	.66	0.41	.67	5.75	<.01
Scenario	0.08	.78	0.80	.37	0.68	.41	1.31	.25	0.38	.54
Culture × Scenario	2.88	.05	2.98	.05	2.86	.05	2.20	.11	2.40	.09
Exp × Scenario	0.13	.72	0.14	.71	2.04	.16	2.02	.16	<.001	.97
NVisit × Scenario	<.001	.98	0.09	.77	1.38	.24	0.18	.67	1.40	.24

This tendency was less pronounced in Indonesians (Mid PD). Their willingness to stay at the shop or purchase the recommended items remained almost invariant, regardless of whether the fictitious salesperson wore a full smile ( $M = 3.47, SD = 1.12$ ;  $M = 3.05, SD = 0.91, n = 19$ , respectively) or a limited smile ( $M = 3.48, SD = 0.99$ ;  $M = 3.13, SD = 0.69, n = 23$ , respectively). However, consistent with this prediction, the buyers willingness to spend extra

dollars at the shop was greater when they thought they were treated with a limited smile ( $M = 3.48, SD = 1.41, n = 23$ ) than with a full smile ( $M = 2.58, SD = 1.50, n = 19$ ). This data is consistent with the prediction regarding the association between cultural power distance and the perception of a salesperson's behavior. That is, Indonesians raised in a more power-distant culture than Koreans tend to see limited engagement of the salesperson as an expression of expertise. In addition, the significantly higher WTP among Indonesians for a limited smile implies the potential influence of added unfamiliarity with the shopping situation.

Contrary to the prediction, those from Malaysia or the Philippines (High PD) responded similarly across the conditions. They were not necessarily more willing to stay, purchase recommended items, or spend extra dollars when they imagined being treated with a limited smile ( $M = 2.83, SD = 1.34$ ;  $M = 1.83, SD = 1.19$ ;  $M = 2.58, SD = 1.31, n = 12$ , respectively) rather than with a full smile ( $M = 3.05, SD = 1.27$ ;  $M = 2.42, SD = 1.22$ ;  $M = 2.89, SD = 1.37, n = 19$ , respectively). The present data are partially consistent with H1-1, H1-2, and H1-3. The culture-by-scenario interactions, as predicted by H1-4 and H1-5, which involve the level of trust and intention to revisit, were not apparent within the current data.

#### 4-2. Scenario by Familiarity Interactions

The same ANCOVA model was used to examine H2-1 through H2-5. Intended familiarity with scenario interactions was nearly absent across all dependent measures, providing little support for the predictions (see Table II). All H2s were inconsistent with the data.

For exploratory purposes, the impact of familiarity with the shopping situation was established separately for scenarios A and B in correlation terms (see Table 3). Familiarity was estimated using self-reported prior experience

with, and frequency of visits to, Korean cosmetics shops. The correlations within scenarios A and B were compared after Fisher's  $z$ -transformation to address the non-normality of product-moment  $r$ 's sampling distribution.

The overall pattern indicated that the greater the perceived familiarity, the more positive the attitude toward shopping when treated with a limited smile (scenario B). This relationship was less pronounced in scenario A, in which participants imagined being treated with a full smile. Nonetheless, the analysis indicated that only two sets of correlation terms differed significantly in that way. Among scenario B participants, prior experience predicted an increased intention to spend extra dollars at the shop ( $r = .29, p = .02$ ), whereas among scenario A participants, its impact remained nearly absent ( $r = -.05, p = .69$ ). Similarly, while past visits to Korean cosmetic shops had a significant, positive impact for the willingness to revisit among the scenario B participants ( $r = .33, p = .01$ ), its impact fell within sampling error among the scenario A participants ( $r = -.14, p = .22$ ).

**[Table 3] Correlations by Condition**

Scenario	Prior Experience			N of Visits		
	A	B	$p$	A	B	$p$
WTS	.30	.32	.90	.02	.25	.16
WTB	.15	.38	.14	-.01	.28	.08
WTP	-.05	.29	.04	.25	.29	.80
WTT	.13	.04	.59	.07	.10	.86
WTR	.19	.39	.19	-.14	.33	<.01

## 5. Discussion

### 5-1. Implications

The current results extend the debate on the effects of smile intensity to the cultural domain, demonstrating that it can be moderated by cultural differences and the associated situational familiarity. Particularly, the cultural difference

influenced shoppers heavily. Compared to those from a lower PD culture, those from a higher PD culture were more tolerant of the "nominal" smile accompanied by passive non-verbal services. As manifested in the current data, the responses from the higher PD groups remained less affected by the salesperson's smiling intensity. As hypothesized, a higher power disparity perception may cause shoppers to perceive a salesperson's limited smile as more persuasive. Thus, the current results coincide with previous data documenting the positive effects of limited smiles in certain categories.<sup>37)</sup>

However, cultural differences based on smile intensity were found in shoppers' willingness to stay more, purchase more, and pay extra dollars for items recommended by the salesperson but not in their willingness to revisit or trust the brand beyond the shopping moment. Thus, the results clarify the influence of perceived power distance from shoppers rather than their appreciation of the specialty or excellence of the salesperson with a limited smile. It can be assumed that the shoppers' preventive regulatory focus caused them to focus on their shopping goals rather than on the salesperson's kindness. Previous studies conducted on premium product categories emphasizing shoppers' admiration and trust in the expertise of the salesperson may be somewhat exaggerated. For example, when patients visit a doctor's office, their main goal is to treat the symptoms; therefore, they focus on the doctor's diagnosis and prescription, not the doctor's kindness. Tourist shoppers from a high-PD culture may have been situated in a similar context, pursuing the goal of completing shopping rather than judging the salesperson's kindness.

Contrary to the predictions, familiarity produced little difference in the perception of smile intensity. Although an increase in similar prior experiences predicted shoppers' willingness to stay at a shop, it did not affect other

37) Wang et al., Op. cit.

purchase-related intentions. The small influence of familiarity on smile intensity, irrespective of the direction, renders the cultural influence even more convincing. Whether it is prior experience of a similar situation or frequent visits to any cosmetic shop in Korea, shoppers' willingness to purchase was strongly affected by cultural background, not by familiarity with the conditions.

Observing the Indonesian tourists with more prior experiences, who intended to pay more for the salespersons' "chilled" services, provided an intriguing clue to the direction of the effect. A recent study conducted by Medler-Liraz et al. (2021) points out that, excessive smiles and flirting can result in negative impressions such as being "bothersome" and "inauthentic" to new customers. This leads to the conjecture that salespersons' bright smiles may not always be particularly beneficial to tourists with high cultural PD or those who are unfamiliar with the local shopping situation. In conclusion, this signifies that the positive effects of limited smiles may not be limited to certain industries or product categories but are expandable to the discipline of cross-cultural research. From a practical standpoint, the current study's results can also be used to customize virtual or human salespersons' services (e.g., facial expressions) to customers' cultural backgrounds.

Unlike the other two tourist groups, Korean shoppers were quite sensitive to the smile intensity. This may be attributed to Koreans being raised in a relatively low PD culture in Asia; however, alternative explanations, for example another cross-cultural indicator such as uncertainty avoidance (UA), are probable. Studies have shown that high UA is associated with a prevention orientation, whereas low cultural UA often manifests as a promotion focus.<sup>38)</sup> Indonesians were higher in UA (48/100) than Malaysians and Filipinos (36/100 and 40/100, respectively). Instead of the former being

particularly more experienced than the latter, they may have worked to produce the current data pattern. This interpretation assumes that cultural influences exceed the impact of familiarity in this particular domain, the validity of which should be tested in future replication studies.

## 5-2. Limitations and Future Studies

An alternative explanation for the current results exists, constituting a major limitation of this study. The quality of service in tertiary industries is advancing rapidly in South Korea owing to persistent corporate investments to promote customer satisfaction. This could have raised the expectations for service quality, making it increasingly difficult to please the average Korean customer. Salespersons with less than a full smile may violate such expectations, resulting in a substantially poor service evaluation. By contrast, the tourist shoppers from Southeast Asia may have yet to develop such high expectations because of a lack of familiarity with a similar service performance level. However, this alternative interpretation still does not explain the different response patterns between the two tourist groups: the Indonesians turned positive, whereas the Malaysians and Filipinos remained indifferent to the salesperson with a limited smile.

The current study is also limited in that cultural differences in PD were assumed based on nationality, not measured for the analysis. Although the data from Hofstede's insight (2022) are believed to represent cross-cultural differences reliably and are widely cited for that reason, a more rigorous study should measure PD at the individual level to strengthen the internal validity of the findings. In addition, among the purchase-related dependent measures, we obtained the most consistent data from willingness to pay extra money only. Future researchers should add and employ additional measurements that are more sensitive to

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38) Song, L., *Op. cit.*

induction (e.g., acceptability of a salesperson's smile and perceptions of the salesperson at each phase of the promotion efforts).

Lastly, results from the present study can be extended to further investigate the design features of smiles within the context of visual persuasion. Clinical research<sup>39)</sup> has demonstrated that the symmetry and balance of a smile have a strong influence on the perceived beauty of the target. What remains unknown is whether symmetry constitutes an element that influences the perceived fullness of a smile and/or affects the level of attractiveness or persuasiveness of the salesperson in marketing situations. Answers to these questions could be revealed through design research that attempts to develop an operational definition of a full smile and its persuasive impact.

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