



Management Arts

Elixir Management 41 (2011) 6009-6012

Elixir
ISSN: 2229-712X

Lecturers' kinesics and its impact on students' satisfaction

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 17 October 2011;

Received in revised form:

15 December 2011;

Accepted: 28 December 2011;

Keywords

Kinesics,
Non-verbal communication,
Students' satisfaction.

ABSTRACT

Students' satisfaction has become an essence of success in today's highly competitive world. In service industry specifically the education industry, communication is vital to determine students' satisfaction. Past researches indicated that, most meaning of conversational messages comes from non-verbal communication. Evaluation on students' perception on lecturers' kinesics that would lead to their satisfaction to the services provided was examined. The results of the study illustrate that kinesics that is also known as body movements was shown to have the most impact on students' satisfaction. Therefore, from this study, it can be inferred that students' in Malaysian universities are mostly observant on the body movements used, facial expression and postures and gestures of the body of their lecturers when lectures are delivered to them. The present study caters for a wide spectrum of students and development professionals, especially those who are interested in non-verbal communication specifically kinesics-related issues. It is highly hoped that the information gleaned from the present study may assist all service employees specifically in understanding better, the importance of kinesics and its effects on students' satisfaction.

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Introduction

Preface

In the education industry specifically, communication is vital to determine the satisfaction of the customers who are mainly the students and this will lead to the success or failure of an organization. But organization should be aware that communication is not only verbally but much more beyond that. Studies have been carried out and it was concluded that 65% of the meaning of conversational messages comes from non-verbal cues, leaving only 35% to verbal communication (Philpot, 1983). Thus, such information will provide the basis for improvement in communication skills and contribute to make difference.

Non-verbal communication is composed of the messages we send without or in addition to words. These messages have a strong impact on us as receivers. Often, action speaks so loudly that they drown out spoken words. This happens because we use non-verbal communication symbols as a means to determine what sender really feels and the degree of importance the sender attach to the message and to us (Means, 2004).

Means (2004) also said that spoken or written symbols make up of verbal part of a message and are accompanied by non-verbal symbols. However, a non-verbal message may not have a verbal counterpart. Nonverbal symbols which include body language, appearance, touch, space, time and voice exist in written and oral communication as well as in the environment. Research indicates that when verbal and non-verbal symbols conflict, the receiver usually believes the non-verbal messages.

Although the verbal communication in service industry and its effects on customer satisfaction has been investigated widely, the nonverbal aspects and its effects on customer satisfaction in service industry mainly education remained virtually unexplored in the marketing literature. The services characterized by considerable interpersonal contact are likely to benefit greatly from an investigation of the role of nonverbal communication on

students' evaluations of service experiences. But not much research has been done on lecturers' nonverbal behavior despite its importance to students' satisfaction.

What is Kinesics?

Kinesics typically includes facial expression particularly eyebrows, forehead, eyes, mouth, postures and gestures. Thus, hand movements, a surprised stare, drooping shoulders, a knowing smile, and a tilt of the head are all part of kinesics (Gamble & Gamble, 2002).

Morreale *et al.*, (2001) said that kinesics focuses on how people communicate through movement and postures, gestures and the face and eyes. They also said that the six basic and universal emotions people display facially are anger, fear, disgust, surprise, happiness and sadness.

Ruben (1988) in his book *Communication and Human Behavior* said that movement of body, head, arms, legs or feet termed kinesics plays an important role in nonverbal communication. Gestures, as well as other cues, may either be purposeful; messages which are intended to achieve a particular purpose, or incidental and unintended. Some gesture are used as substitutes and complements for language, such as when, upon being asked a question, we shake our head back and forth while saying "no". In other instances we use gestures in place of words. A shrug of the shoulders, for instance, is used to indicate confusion or uncertainty and a frown with slow horizontal back-and-forth motion of head to indicate frustration or annoyance.

Means (2004) suggested that body language include facial expression and body gestures. Interpreting body language is surprisingly complex, because a single motion can have many different meaning. For instance, a frown shows negative feelings and a smile shows happy feelings. On top of that, eye provides most revealing facial expression such as excitement, boredom, concentration and confidence. Proper eye contact would show friendliness and interest.

For instance, research suggests that the cues of casual smiling, light laughter, forward body lean, open body posture, and frequent eye contact are perceived as conveying intimacy and non-dominance – the characteristics commonly associated with friendliness and courtesy. On the other hand, kinesics such as stoic facial expressions, either staring or avoiding eye contact, backward lean of body, and closed body posture are perceived as conveying dominance, unfriendliness, and emotional distance (Burgoon *et al.*, 1990; Mehrabian & Williams, 1969).

The effects of kinesics to customer satisfaction

A study focusing on the role of nonverbal cues in banking service transactions found that a greater usage of eye contact by bank tellers resulted in higher customer satisfaction with the service provider and with the service firm (Ketrow & Perkins, 1986).

In service situations where customers typically have encounters with different employees, they are likely to have a lasting impression that the firm and its employees are customer-oriented if those employees greet the customers with a smile. If the service employee's smile is accompanied by eye contact, the impact is even greater. While smiling will create the perceptions of warmth and friendliness, employees' eye contact will give the impression that they are sincere about their interest in their customers. As an example, airlines typically have their crew greet customers while boarding and unboarding the aircraft. It is imperative for employees to smile at and have eye contact with each customer (Sundram & Webster, 2000).

Sundram and Webster (2000) said that in all service situations, the use of frequent eye contact accompanied by other complementary nonverbal cues will help enhance perceptions of trust, believability, and sincerity. On the other hand, service employees should never use nonverbal cues that communicate dominance, unconcern, and superiority, such as scant or piercing eye contact, finger pointing, and closed body posture as it will lead to dissatisfaction of customer to the services provided.

Research has shown that eye contact, as a certain aspect of kinesics, is particularly important with respect to its effect on perceptions and interpersonal relations. While perceptions of a communicator's credibility become more favorable with more frequent and appropriately longer eye contact, perceptions of distrust increase with the absence of eye contact (Hemsley & Doob, 1978). Further, eye contact has been linked to increased likeability, believability (Beebe, 1980), and satisfaction (Ketrow & Perkins, 1986).

The display of interpersonal warmth (i.e. showing interest in and acceptance and approval of other people) is logically associated with service employees. It is particularly important for service employees to show warmth toward customers because such behavior serves as the basis for building satisfying relationships. Although interpersonal warmth can be communicated via both verbal and nonverbal cues, studies in clinical psychology note that warmth is more effectively communicated through nonverbal channels. In an investigation of a variety of vocal and kinesics nonverbal cues, smiling emerged as the most effective indicator of interpersonal warmth (Bayes, 1972).

Findings

The empirical evidence from the present study identified that among the five dimensions of non-verbal communication, four (i.e. kinesics, paralanguage and proxemics) contributed to students' satisfaction in the context of lecturers in UiTM Kedah. It indicated that there was a significant relationship between all

these independent variables to students' satisfaction. This finding is aligned with findings from Sundram and Webster (2000), Gabbott and Hogg (2000), Fatt (1997) and Haktanir and Harris (2005) which also indicated that there was a significant relationship of non-verbal communication cues to customer satisfaction. The findings are accordance, which would suggest that the way customers like to be treated are similar at any given time and place.

These variables in the present study that are closely linked to students' satisfaction shows that it is important for individuals (lecturers in this context) to understand their non-verbal behavior as every unspoken behavior provides, if not large, a little impact to their students' satisfaction. Besides, the findings also indicate that students' satisfaction is not only on how well the lecturers verbal communication are, but proof a significant result that non-verbal communication plays an important determinant to students' satisfaction too.

Kinesics that is also known as body movements was shown to have the most impact on students' satisfaction. This result is supported by Sundram and Webster (2000) that pointed out that the important non-verbal communication cue that leads to customer satisfaction was body movements and facial expressions. Therefore, from this study, it can be inferred that students' in Malaysian universities are mostly observant on the body movements used as well as the body gestures of their lecturers when lectures are delivered to them.

From the theoretical aspect, the finding of the present study implies that there is a strong causal relationship between non-verbal communication cues to students' satisfaction, as being supported by past researches. The non-verbal communication dimensions under study encompass various aspects of unspoken behavior provided by the lecturers when providing services like lectures and consultation with the students. A positive relationship between various aspects of non-verbal communication cues and students' satisfaction means that non-verbal communication is an antecedent that will affect students' satisfaction. This implies that any effort to enhance students' satisfaction should be preceded by improvement in non-verbal communication behavior.

Future improvements of kinesics for a better students' satisfaction

Concerning the managerial implications, the findings of the present study offer sufficient depth of insights into the specific areas that require the attention and improvement action of management of universities. Students tend to feel dissatisfied with service provider which has non-verbal communication cues that were rated at moderate or bad level (Gabbott & Hogg, 2000). Thus, the first step for management of universities to overcome this situation is by conducting non-verbal communication training to the all employees especially lecturers' in this context. This step is supported by Jolly (2000) which mentioned that managers in service companies must make sure that employees' non-verbal behavior should be trained in order to act in certain ways to provide the best non-verbal communication behavior as it would lead to customer satisfaction. Therefore, management of universities should be aware of this satisfaction and train their employees to be sensitive to their own non-verbal communication behavior that they portray when delivering services to the customers (students in this context). By being aware of their non-verbal behavior, they will be able to control unwanted non-verbal communication behavior to guarantee students' ultimate satisfaction.

Besides, it is vital for management of service companies to understand the importance of non-verbal communication in providing customer satisfaction and be able to communicate these understandings to service employees. This is to make sure that the employees would first understand what non-verbal communication is. This statement is supported by research conducted by Lemmink and Mattsson (2002). By communicating the understanding of non-verbal communication, the employees would know the importance of non-verbal communication that would provide satisfaction to customers. It was also indicated that given the same situation, non-verbal communication behaviors differ from one individual to another (Jolly, 2000). Consequently, understanding of non-verbal communication among employees would lead to a better service as the lecturers are aware that different students would perceive differently on their non-verbal communication behavior.

On top of that, since the finding of the present study shows that there is a significant relationship between non-verbal communication cues to students' satisfaction in the context of lecturers, management of universities could conduct a periodic survey of students' satisfaction on lecturers' non-verbal communication behavior. This solution was also suggested by Sundram and Webster (2000) in their article, "The Role of Non-Verbal Communication in Service Encounter". By conducting a periodic survey, the managers would be able to obtain significant results that would indicate changes in the satisfaction level. By having such result, the managements would then be able to conduct a corrective action in order to increase the satisfaction level of the students. In a nutshell, periodic survey would lead to continuous improvements that would enhance the image of the university.

What is more important is that management of universities to provide feedback on employees' performances on non-verbal communication. By practicing this, employees (lecturers) would be able to analyze where they stand and what action to take in order to enhance their performance. Also, managements may also provide incentive for employees to behave in certain way as well as for them to apply in training sessions. Incentive could be in monetary or non-monetary term; depending on the needs of the employees. The best incentive would be the one that suits what the employees want the most. Sundram and Webster (2000) mentioned that the incentive program as a way to enhance employees' motivation in order to portray the best non-verbal communication behavior. Thus, with these students satisfaction could be augmented.

A study conducted by Hollman and Kleiner (1997) said that non-verbal communication methods like verbal pacing, mirroring the other communicator, leading the conversation and study of another's sensory pattern would lead to better result in customer satisfaction. Hence, management of universities ought to master these methods and communicate them to the lecturers so that the lecturers would be able to use these techniques to improve their non-verbal communication behavior as well as enhance their understanding on other's non-verbal communication behavior.

Conclusion

A wise man once said, "Action speaks louder than words". Looking at the study by Philpot (1983), it was concluded that 65% of the meaning of conversational messages comes from non-verbal communication cues, leaving only 35% to verbal communication. People's opinions usually are based on the non-verbal communication symbols they observe and how they

interpret them. Studies have found that when judging attitude, people based 93% of their judgment on non-verbal symbols and 7% on spoken words (Means, 2004). Thus, the statement of "action speaks louder than words" is fairly true.

But, nonverbal behavior remains virtually unexplored despite its importance with respect to the outcome of service encounters that would lead to customer satisfaction. Clearly, the present study has proven that there is a significant relationship of non-verbal communication cues to students' satisfaction in service encounters with lecturers. These findings are aligned with a few previous studies.

The sender of non-verbal communication may be unaware that he or she is sending a non-verbal message. Consequently, he or she may not be aware of the impact that the non-verbal message may have. Since the non-verbal message may be transmitted unconsciously, the sender will not have planned it. Therefore, a non-verbal message can be more reliable than an oral or written message. It is the greatest hope that the new millennium will see more of research on non-verbal communication cues and how it effects students' satisfaction in various aspects; so that more will be aware of the importance of non-verbal communication that we portray in every day life.

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