

Study finds a manly beard may help drive sales

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The next time you are considering purchasing a big-ticket item, it might be worth paying attention to the salesperson's facial hair.

The [beard](#) seems to be a subtle but consistent clue used in evaluating the knowledge and trustworthiness of the sales/service personnel you interact with. If the salesperson is sporting a beard, you may be more likely to pull out your wallet. And if you work in a sales or service role, you might consider the power of donning a beard before no-shave November rolls around.

Sarah Mittal, assistant professor of Marketing at St. Edward's University and the paper's lead researcher, and David H. Silvera, associate professor of Business at University of Texas at San Antonio, conducted five studies to test the "power of the beard," predicting that the beard would be an advantage in sales and service roles. The studies examined the beard's effect on perception of expertise, trustworthiness, likelihood of sales and service satisfaction. Their findings are published online in the *Journal of Business Research* in their article titled, "It Grows on You: Perceptions of sales/service personnel with facial hair."

In the competitive world of sales and service personnel, expertise and trustworthiness are critical for relationship building and closing sales. They found that regardless of the sales industry or context (online), or the salesperson's race or ethnicity, attractiveness or likability, potential buyers view bearded sales personnel as having greater expertise and trustworthiness than their clean-shaven, stubbled and mustached counterparts.

"Our research suggests that those in a sales or service role, where expertise and trust are crucial to converting sales, would be well-served to grow a beard. Your LinkedIn profile and marketing materials may even benefit from the subtle cue conveyed by donning a beard," Mittal said.

Of the five studies, one was a real-world study utilizing Facebook Ad Manager. Using the Facebook platform, the researchers deployed

bearded and clean-shaven ads to examine the effectiveness for a real-world business. They found that the Facebook advertisement with the bearded version of the sales representative was able to yield a higher click-through rate (CTR), which places prospective customers in the sales pipeline. In fact, the bearded ad's CTR of 2.66% is considerably above industry averages of about 0.71% (industrial services) and 1.04% (technology).

While past research has focused on the benefit of beards in attracting potential mates (cue bearded Bumble profiles) and in the interview process, the researchers believe these studies are the first examination of the beard's effect in sales and service contexts. This effect is rooted in evolutionary psychology, which is one of many biologically informed approaches to the study of human behavior.

"Beards may go in and out of style in terms of their ability to increase physical attractiveness, but from an evolutionary perspective, they consistently serve as a cue to others about one's masculinity, maturity, resources, competence, leadership and status," Mittal said. "In sum, the ability to grow a healthy beard inherently signals 'immuno-competence,' and this has downstream effects on the way a bearded individual is evaluated in many facets of life."

Through their modeling, the researchers were able to rule out differences in perceived age, attractiveness and likability as alternative explanations for their results. They also controlled for the study subjects' own age, gender, income and ethnicity to ensure that consumer demographics did not influence the effects.

"The beard truly seems to send a consistent message about expertise in one's field—a key driver in sales success. These effects also hold in a service context, where bearded individuals receive higher service satisfaction ratings," Silvera said.

The researchers believe their studies' insights could influence not only policy and perceptions in the business world where the benefits of the beard are largely under-appreciated but that those working in such fields (with the ability to grow a beard) may nudge their performance success upwards with this simple change in appearance.

"Given these findings, corporate policies that currently ban facial hair may think twice; as other facial hair styles did not have a 'negative' effect on trust or expertise, there is only an upside to be gained from allowing individuals to don a well-kept beard," Mittal added.

Three takeaways from "It Grows on You: Perceptions of sales/[service](#) personnel with facial hair"

- Facial hair on male sales personnel drives increased perceptions of expertise, which then increases trust, purchase likelihood and satisfaction.
- The beard-effect happens regardless of the salesperson's race or ethnicity, age, level of perceived attractiveness and likability.
- The beard-effect occurs across sales industries and contexts (in-person and online).

More information: Sarah Mittal et al. It grows on you: Perceptions of sales/service personnel with facial hair, *Journal of Business Research* (2020). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.11.031](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.11.031)

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