Are Dominant Wine Counsellors More Effective With Consumers?

Mirjam Holm Christian-Albrechts-University Kiel, Germany mholm@ae.uni-kiel.de

Ulrich R. Orth Christian-Albrechts-University Kiel, Germany uorth@ae.uni-kiel.de

Tatiana Bouzdine-ChameevaKEDGE Business School Bordeaux, Francetatiana-chameeva@kedgebs.com

Jochen Wirtz National University of Singapore jochen@nus.edu.sg

Abstract:

Purpose: This paper investigates how dominance exuded by wine counselors (e.g., service personnel and sommeliers) during their personal interaction with customers influences the effectiveness of encounters through instrumental and social outcomes.

Design/methodology/approach: A laboratory experiment with pictorial stimuli in two settings, and a field study in special wine stores test how counselor dominance influences the effectiveness of encounters (approach/avoidance and shopping experience) through competence (an instrumental outcome) and warmth (a social outcome).

Findings: Study 1 shows that perceived power (positive) and likability (negative) mediate the influence of dominance on approach-avoidance, resulting in an overall curvilinear relationship. Study 2 shows that wine counselor dominance relates positively to competence and warmth, resulting in an overall positive effect on shopping experience. Subjective product knowledge moderates the dominance-competence relationship.

Practical implications: Given the relevance counselor dominance has for service outcomes, wine marketers may be interested in benefitting from the findings by paying greater attention to the verbal and nonverbal drivers of dominance of their frontline employees.

Keywords: Competence, dominance, nonverbal behavior, sommelier, warmth

1. INTRODUCTION

The study of service encounters - when customers meet with frontline employees to seek and receive counsel on what to buy - has long been concerned with the question of what interpersonal perceptions and processes make for effective outcomes (Parasuraman et al., 1985). Among the general ingredients critical to a counselor's success are a broad and deep knowledge base, effective verbal communication, listening, human relations and organization skills (Deeter-Schmelz et al., 2008). Specifically for wine counselors (sommeliers, stewards, restaurant waiters-servers, salespeople in shops and wineries) critical ingredients include knowledge (Dewald, 2008), sales skills (Dodd, 1996), and service quality (O'Neill et al., 2002). Only a relatively small body of literature has focused on the impact of primarily nonverbal employee cues (such as dominance) on the perceptions customers form of counselors and the impact of these perceptions on outcomes (Gabbott & Hogg 2001).

One aspect of interpersonal perception affected by subtle and non-intrusive nonverbal behavior is the dominance dimension (see Hall et al. 2005 for a meta-analytic review). Personality and social psychology research has associated dominance with a number of positive outcomes including greater heterosexual attraction (Sadalla et al. 1987), managerial success (Phan et al., 2005), status (Cheng et al., 2010) and power (Carli et al., 1995). Service research has linked provider dominance to the belief that information conveyed by dominant communicators is more accurate (Bashir & Rule, 2014).

This study tests the prediction that customer perceptions of a wine counselor's dominance will substantially impact the outcome of the encounter. To date, the nature of the link between dominance and the effectiveness of service encounters remains unclear. Focusing on instrumental outcomes (an evaluation of dominance's relevance to the topic at hand), one school of thought (e.g., Littlepage et al., 1995) suggests that dominance reinforces customer impressions of counselor power, ability, and competence, thus implying a positive, linear relationship. Another school of thought (e.g., Dillard et al., 1997) focuses on social outcomes (an evaluation of dominance's contribution to the relationship) and suggests that dominance lowers perceptions of warmth, hereby implying a negative linear relationship. We adopt an integrative perspective, and merge both views with the literature on negativity bias (Baumeister et al. 2001) to identify how wine counselors should deal with dominance.

2. LITERATURE AND HYPOTHESES

1.1. Dominance Effects

There is substantial support (for a review see Hall et al. 2005) for the interpersonal perception of dominance (Dunbar & Burgoon 2005), which is rooted in nonverbal "power codes" (Schwartz et al., 1982) and the "shared meaning" of postures (Kudoh & Matsumoto, 1985). Subtle cues such as head tilt (Mignault & Chaudhuri 2003), body posture (Schwartz et al., 1982), head posture (Carli et al., 1995), and head and body canting (Halberstadt & Saitta 1987) can communicate dominance. Viewers then infer impressions such as power (Carli et al., 1995), and adjust their behavior (Kiesler, 1983).

People who behave dominant rather than submissive attain more influence in groups, because they are thought to be more competent (Littlepage et al., 1995), and possess greater agency (Cheng et al., 2010). Even when dominance is exuded only nonverbally, people are rated higher in task capacity, (Ridgeway, 1987) competence, and power (Carli et al., 1995). On the downside, dominance is negatively associated with social outcomes, such as perceived cooperativeness, helpfulness (Cheng et al., 2010), likability (Ridgeway & Diekema, 1989), politeness (Dillard et al., 1997) and liking (Dillard et al., 1995).

1.2. Curvilinear Shape

The preceding discussion suggests that dominance relates positively to instrumental outcomes (competence), and negatively to social ones (warmth). We expect a curvilinear (bell-shaped) relationship between dominance and measures of effectiveness where a lack of effectiveness with wine counselors may revolve around markedly low levels of dominance or markedly high levels of dominance. High levels of dominance may bring instrumental rewards as customers associate providers with power, aiding them in achieving their goals but can be detrimental when the interpersonal relationship suffers due to a perceived lack of warmth. In contrast, low levels of dominance may bring social rewards but can undermine instrumental goals achievement. Thus, increasing levels of dominance may often entail a trade-off between social deficiencies and instrumental merits, or, as Ames and Flynn (2007, p.307) put it, "between getting along and getting one's way".

Readers may argue that the social and instrumental outcomes of dominance simply offset each other so that all levels of dominance ultimately lead to equal outcomes, just in different ways. In contrast, we expect that the downsides of markedly low or markedly high levels of dominance will have a disproportionate effect on customers' behavior. We base this prediction on both theoretical and evidential support. Conceptual support draws from Baumeister et al.'s (2001) 'bad is stronger than good' principle (see Grant & Schwartz 2011 for a review) and Rozin and Royzman's (2001) negativity bias. Empirical support stems from research on management in general (Pierce & Aguinis 2013), and studies on leadership (Ames & Flynn 2007) and sales personnel (Johnson, 2014) in specifics.

Extending the evidence for people's negativity bias suggests that the deficiencies of markedly low or markedly high levels of dominance may overshadow the merits from the perspective of the customer. Below a certain extent of provider dominance, instrumental deficiencies outweigh social merits so that a provider low in dominance will primarily be seen as incompetent or impotent rather than relationally appealing. In contrast, above a certain extent of dominance, social deficiencies will overshadow instrumental merits, so that a service provider perceived as high in dominance will be primarily seen as relationally unbearable rather than instrumentally effective. Consequently, some mid-range of dominance – levels where there are neither pronounced social nor instrumental deficiencies – should yield the most desirable response. In other words:

Hypothesis 1: Dominance will have a curvilinear effect on service provider effectiveness: Service providers perceived as markedly low in dominance or markedly high in dominance will be less effective than those perceived as moderately dominant.

Hypothesis 2: Dominance will be positively related to instrumental outcomes and will be negatively related to social outcomes.

Hypothesis 3: Instrumental and social outcomes will mediate the effect of dominance on provider effectiveness. This mediation will be shaped by negativity effects: At high levels of dominance, social outcomes will account for the effects of dominance on effectiveness; at low levels, instrumental outcomes will mediate.

3. EMPIRICAL STUDIES

3.1. Study 1

The purpose of Study 1 was to experimentally test the basic prediction that moderate levels of a counselor's dominance will be more effective than either low or high levels (H1). In addition, the study explores the underlying mechanism by testing the mediating roles of functional and social outcomes (H2 and H3).

3.1.1. Method

Study 1 employed a 2 (context: retailing vs. counseling) x 3 (dominance: low vs. moderate vs. high) x 2 (counselor sex: female vs. male) between subjects experimental design. Dominance was manipulated by using digital photos of a male and a female model accompanied by a short text describing either a situation where the depicted person was an employee of a retail store assisting in shopping or a dietician counseling on nutrition.

Our experimental manipulations generate variance in dominance (F(2,29)=25.0 p<0.001) with scores low (M=1.95) for the low dominance condition, high for the high dominance condition (M=3.94), and intermediate (M=2.77) for the moderate dominance condition.

The main study (N=352) employed an online questionnaire to collect data from 352 consumers. Psychometric measures assessed dominance (Mehrabian & Russel, 1974, α =0.90, M=2.94, SD=1.06), power (Doney & Cannon, 1997, α =0.88, M=2.48, SD=1.05), likability (Doney & Cannon, α =0.92, M=2.47, SD=1.05), and approach avoidance (Robert & John, 1982, α =0.94, M=1.88, SD=0.90). Attractiveness (Hirschman 1986, α =0.87, M=2.94, SD=1.06) was included as a potential distorter.

3.1.2. Analyses and Results

Analysis of variance indicated a significant effect of the treatments on perceived dominance (F(351)=234.2, p<.001) with the stimulus selected for low dominance receiving the lowest (M=2.12), the high dominance stimulus receiving the highest (M=4.03), and the third stimulus receiving an intermediate score (M=2.67), as intended.

Analysis of variance results indicated a significant effect of dominance on approachavoidance (F(328)=66.5, p<.001) with scores low for the high dominance (M=1.57) and low dominance treatments (M=1.51) and higher for the moderately dominant treatment (M=2.58). Post-hoc tests (Scheffè) indicated that the moderately dominant score differed significantly (p<.05) from both the low dominance and the high dominance scores, which did not, however, differ significantly from each other. These findings provide initial support for H1.

To test our prediction that dominance would have a curvilinear effect on counselor effectiveness, we used regression analyses with viewer ratings of dominance to predict approach-avoidance. Our models featured both linear and squared terms for dominance. Obtaining a significant negative coefficient for the squared measure would be consistent with the expected inverted-U curvilinear effect. Results of the regression models indicated the predicted curvilinear effects as the squared dominance term on approach-avoidance had a significant negative coefficient, with p-values at or below .01. A tertiary split of dominance illustrated that the approach score was significantly lower for the highest level of dominance compared with those in the middle third (M=1.71 vs. M=2.24; t(122)=-7.00, p<0.001) although it was not significantly lower for those in the lowest third (M=1.71 vs. M=1.71; t(122)=-0.03, p=0.98). As expected, we found that a middle range of dominance was associated with the most favorable approach intentions.

Running both linear and curvilinear regression models to assess how dominance predicted social and instrumental outcomes yielded a curvilinear effect of dominance on likability (social outcome). A tertiary split on dominance clarified that providers who were perceived as high in dominance scored significantly lower on likability than providers with moderate levels of dominance (M=2.01 vs. M=2.81; t(128)=-10.10, p<0.001), but providers with the lowest levels of dominance did not have score significantly different on likability than providers with moderate levels of dominance (M=2.67 vs. M=2.81; t(109)=-1.44, p=0.15).

For power as an instrumental outcome, dominance exhibited a positive linear effect as well as a curvilinear effect. Using a tertiary split on dominance yielded that low dominance counselors exhibited significantly lower power scores than those moderate in dominance (M=1.54 vs. M=2.53; t(110)=-18.16, p<0.001), whereas high dominance counselors scored lower in power than those with moderate levels (M=3.25 vs. M=2.53; t(128)=9.81, p<0.001).

In sum, ascending from low to moderate levels of dominance yields a significant increase in instrumental outcomes (power), whereas moving from moderate to high levels does not yield a difference. Conversely, descending from high to moderate levels of dominance yields a significant increase in social outcomes (likability), whereas descending further from moderate to low levels of dominance does not yield a significant difference.

We further conducted a mediation analysis with approach-avoidance as the dependent variable. Using OLS regression supplemented by bootstrapping (Hayes and Preacher 2010), tested the instantaneous indirect effect of dominance on approach-avoidance through social and instrumental outcomes. Consistent with the proposed role of social outcomes, increasing dominance among counselors low in dominance slightly increased approach behaviors

through the effect of the increase in dominance on likability, which in turn affects intentions. However, an increase in dominance among providers perceived as moderate or high in dominance lead to a reduction in approach behaviors through its effect on likability.

Consistent with the expected role of instrumental outcomes, increasing the dominance of less dominant counselors can stimulate approach behavior through its effect on power. There is a diminishing return, though, such that changes in dominance have a bigger effect on approach behavior with counselors low rather than moderate or high in dominance.

To test the robustness of effects, we conducted a multiple regression analysis, predicting approach-avoidance with five main effect terms (dominance, dominance, social outcomes, instrumental outcomes, and attractiveness), and three interaction terms (Dominance x Social, Dominance x Instrumental, and Dominance x Attractiveness). The results indicate a significant positive effect of provider attractiveness on approach-avoidance (β =0.322, p=0.014). More importantly, although attractiveness had a significant positive effect on approach behavior (consistent with previous research), the effect of dominance remained significant. We take this finding as evidence that the influence of non-verbal dominance is stable across a variety of more and less attractive providers.

3.2. Study 2

The findings of Study 1 are important and significant, but could be limited by the non-winespecific context, and the study's experimental nature. The second study aimed to mitigate these concerns by being seated in special wine stores where there is more realism and a greater variance in wine counselors, specifically, their dominance. The purpose of Study 2 thus was to test whether the effects of counselor dominance established in Study 1 hold in the specific context of wine. This context-dependence is possible, perhaps even likely, because (1) wine as a product with experience and credence attributes (Müller, 2004) may lead customers to rely more on instrumental rather than social outcomes, and (2) previous wine research (Lockshin and Kahrimanis, 1998) suggests that instrumental and social outcomes of service encounters may be related/subsequent rather than independent influencers for differentiation a wine shop. In addition to testing Hypotheses 1 through 3, the study explores the role of customers' subjective wine knowledge as a moderator.

3.2.1. Method

Data was obtained from 100 visitors to special wine stores in the city of Bordeaux, France. Costumers of specialized wine shops are very focused on finding and purchasing just the right wine and store managers rely on their staff to aid customers in their quest. As such, the setting of Study 2 offers a robust context for (re)testing our hypotheses.

Study participants were randomly chosen from patrons of the stores over a period of two weeks. During different days of the week and times of the days research assistants intercepted customers who had consulted with staff when their visit was coming to an end. They invited them to participate in the survey in return for a bottle of Bordeaux wine. Upon agreeing, participants received a paper-and-pencil questionnaire containing questions about the service encounter, the wine counselor, and themselves.

Psychometric measures were identical to the ones employed in Study 1 and included perceived dominance (α =0.78, M=4.78, SD=1.16), competence (Fiske et al., 2002; α =0.78, M=6.48, SD=0.61), warmth (Fiske et al., 2002; α =0.88, M=5.48, SD=1.24) and attractiveness (α =0.69, M=4.88, SD=1.16). Different than in Study 1, the key dependent variable was a 4-item evaluation of the shopping experience (Mattila and Wirtz, 2001, α =0.75, M=3.70, SD=0.73). Subjective wine knowledge was assessed using Flynn and Goldsmith's 4-item measure (α =0.75, M=3.70, SD=0.73) (Flynn and Goldsmith, 1999).

3.2.2. Analyses and Results

To test Hypotheses 1 through 3 and the mediating roles of competence and warmth in the dominance – shopping experience relationship, we employed Preacher and Hayes' (2004) PROCESS macro (model#6). Counselor attractiveness was included as a covariate. The results indicated a total positive effect of dominance on shopping experience (B=.18, SE=.087, LLCI=.01, ULCI=.35). This effect was mediated sequentially by competence and warmth, as indicated by a significant indirect effect (B=.06, SE=.031, LLCI=.01, ULCI=.13). Specifically, the wine counselor's dominance had a positive effect on competence (B=18, t=3.13, p=.002), which, in turn, had a positive effect on warmth (B=.99, t=6.86, p=.001), which, then had a positive effect on the shopping experience (B=0.315, t=3.09, p=0.003). The direct effect of dominance on the shopping experience was non-significant (B=.11, SE=.085, LLCI=-.06, ULCI=.28). These effects emerged in the presence of a significant effect of attractiveness on the shopping experience (B=.21, t=2.24, p=.028).

To test for the moderating role of subjective product knowledge in the dominancecompetence relationship, we employed Preacher and Hayes' (2004) PROCESS macro (model 1), again with attractiveness as a covariate. The findings indicate that the dominance x wine knowledge interaction effect is significant (B=-.18, t=-2.30, p=.024). Spotlight analysis yields that the effect of dominance on competence is significant and strong at low levels of wine knowledge (Mean - 1 SD: B=.31, SE=.082, LLCI=.15, ULCI=.47), moderate at intermediate levels at the mean (B=.18, SE=.056, LLCI=.07, ULCI=.29), and non-significant at high levels (Mean + 1 SD: B=.06, SE=.075, LLCI=.09, ULCI=.21). The effect of attractiveness on competence was not significant (B=.05, t=.95, p=.34).

4. DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that dominance is a significant influencer of counselor effectiveness, but social and instrumental outcomes yielded more mixed results. While competence and warmth conspired to yield an overall curvilinear effect of dominance on approach-avoidance in the more general contexts of Study 1, they worked in sequence to channel a linear positive effect on the experience wine shoppers had in wine stores in Study 2. This finding underscores the unique nature of wine counseling. It seems plausible that this differential outcome traces back to the nature of the product (i.e., wine vs. apparel or nutrition), the

different dependent variable (post shopping evaluation of the experience vs. a priori approach-avoidance), or the setting in France (wine as an integral part of national culture).

Managers may be interested in the straightforward applicability of our findings. Rooted in subtle nonverbal cues such as body posture (Carli et al., 1995), head tilt (Mignault & Chaudhuri, 2003), or body canting (Halberstadt & Saitta 1987), dominance is relatively easy to engineer with counselors to achieve desirable levels. We hope the contribution of this study will stimulate further research in this field.

REFERENCES

- Ames, D. R. and Flynn, F. J. (2007), "What breaks a leader: the curvilinear relation between assertiveness and leadership," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 92(2), 307.
- Bashir, N. Y. and Rule, N. O. (2014), "Shopping under the Influence: Nonverbal Appearance Based Communicator Cues Affect Consumer Judgments," P&M, 31(7), 539-548.
- Baumeister, R. F., Bratslavsky, E., Finkenauer, C. and Vohs, K. D. (2001), "Bad is stronger than good," Review of General Psychology, 5(4), 323.
- Carli, L., LaFleur, S., and Loeber, C. (1995), "Nonverbal behavior, gender, and influence," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 68(6), 1030-1041.
- Carney, D. R., Hall, J. A. and LeBeau, L. S. (2005), "Beliefs about the nonverbal expression of social power," Journal of Nonverbal Behavior, 29(2), 105-123.
- Cheng, J., Tracy, J. L. and Henrich, J. (2010), "Pride, personality, and the evolutionary foundations of human social status," Evolution and Human Behavior, 31(5), 334-347.
- Deeter-Schmelz, D., Goebel, D. J. and Kennedy, K. N. (2008), "What are the characteristics of an effective sales manager?" J. Personal Selling & Sales Management, 28(1), 7-20.
- Dewald, B. W. A. (2008), "The role of the sommeliers and their influence on US restaurant wine sales," International Journal of Wine Business Research, 20(2), 111-123.
- Dillard, J., Kinney, T. and Palmer, M. (1995), "Relational judgments in an influence context," Human Communication Research, 21(3), 331-353.
- Dillard, J., Wilson, S., Tusing, K. and Kinney, T. (1997), "Politeness judgments in personal relationships," Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 16(3), 297-325.
- Dodd, T. H. (1996), "Techniques to increase impulse wine purchases in a restaurant setting," Journal of Restaurant & Foodservice Marketing, 2(1), 63-73.
- Doney, P. M. and Cannon, J. P. (1997), "An examination of the nature of trust in buyer-seller relationships," Journal of Marketing, 35-51.
- Dunbar, N. E. and Burgoon, J. K. (2005), "Perceptions of power and interactional dominance in interpersonal relationships," J. Social and Personal Relationships, 22(2), 207-233.
- Fiske, S. T., Cuddy, A. J., Glick, P. and Xu, J. (2002), "A Model of (Often Mixed) Stereotype Content: Competence and Warmth," J. Personality and Social Psychology, 82(6), 878-902.

- Flynn, L. R. and Goldsmith, R. E. (1999), "A Short, Reliable Measure of Subjective Knowledge," Journal of Business Research, 46(1), 57-66.
- Gabbott, M. and Hogg, G. (2001), "The role of non-verbal communication in service encounters: A conceptual framework," Journal of Marketing Management, 17(1-2), 5-26.
- Grant, A. M. and Schwartz, B. (2011), "Too much of a good thing the challenge and opportunity of the inverted U," Perspectives on Psychological Science, 6(1), 61-76.
- Hall, J. A., Coats, E. J. and LeBeau, L. S. (2005), "Nonverbal behavior and the vertical dimension of social relations: a meta-analysis," Psychological Bulletin, 131(6), 898.
- Halberstadt, A. G. and Saitta, M. B. (1987), "Gender, nonverbal behavior, and perceived dominance: A test of the theory," J. Personality and Social Psychology, 53(2), 257.
- Hayes, A. F. and Preacher, K. J. (2010), "Quantifying and testing indirect effects in simple mediation models when the constituent paths are nonlinear," Multivariate Behavioral Research, 45(4), 627-660.
- Hirschman, E. C. (1986), "The effect of verbal and pictorial advertising stimuli on aesthetic, utilitarian and familiarity perceptions," Journal of Advertising, 15(2), 27-34.
- Johnson, J. S. (2014), "Nonlinear analyses in sales research: theoretical bases and analytical considerations for polynomial models," J. Personal Selling & Sales Mgmt, 34(4), 302-317.
- Kiesler, D. J. (1983), "The 1982 Interpersonal Circle: A taxonomy for complementarity in human transactions," Psychological review 90(3), 185.
- Kudoh, T. and Matsumoto, D. (1985), "Cross-cultural examination of the semantic dimensions of body postures," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 48(6), 1440.
- Littlepage, G., Schmidt, G., Whisler, E. and Frost, A. (1995), "An input-process-output analysis of influence and performance in problem-solving groups," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 5(69), 788-889.
- Lockshin, L. and Kahrimanis, P. (1998), "Consumer evaluation of retail wine stores," Journal of Wine Research, 9(3), 173-184.
- Mattila, A. S. and Wirtz, J. (2001). Congruency of scent and music as a driver of in-store evaluations and behavior. Journal of Retailing, 77(2), 273-289.
- Mehrabian, A. and Russell, J. A. (1974), Approach to environmental psychology, MIT Press.
- Mignault, A. and Chaudhuri, A. (2003), "The many faces of a neutral face: Head tilt and perception of dominance and emotion," Journal of Nonverbal Behavior, 27(2), 111-132.
- Müller, S. (2004), "The German wine law from an information economics perspective," International Journal of Wine Marketing 16(1), 76-100.

- O'Neill, M., Palmer, A. and Charters, S. (2002), "Wine production as a service experience-the effects of service quality on wine sales," Journal of Services Marketing, 16(4), 342-362.
- Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V. A. and Berry, L. L. (1985), "A conceptual model of service quality and its implications for future research" Journal of Marketing, 41-50.
- Phan, M. C., Styles, C. W. and Patterson, P. G. (2005). Relational competency's role in Southeast Asia business partnerships. Journal of Business Research, 58(2), 173-184.
- Pierce, J. R. and Aguinis, H. (2013) "The too-much-of-a-good-thing effect in management," Journal of Management, 39(2), 313-338.
- Preacher, K. J. and Hayes, A. F. (2004), "SPSS and SAS procedures for estimating indirect effects in simple mediation models," Behavior Research Methods, 36(4), 717-731.
- Ridgeway, C. (1987), "Nonverbal Behavior, Dominance, and the Basis of Status in Task Groups," American Sociological Review, 52(5), 683-694.
- Ridgeway, C. and Diekema, D. (1989), "Dominance and collective hierarchy formation in male and female task groups," American Sociological Review, 54(1), 79-93.
- Robert, D. and John, R. (1982), "Store atmosphere: an environmental psychology approach," Journal of Retailing, 58, 34-57.
- Rozin, P. and Royzman, E. B. (2001), "Negativity bias, negativity dominance, and contagion," Personality and Social Psychology Review, 5(4), 296-320.
- Sadalla, E. K., Kenrick, D. T. and Vershure, B. (1987). Dominance and heterosexual attraction. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 52(4), 730.
- Schwartz, B., Tesser, A. and Powell, E. (1982), "Dominance cues in nonverbal behavior," Social Psychology Quarterly, 114-120.