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When Are Shoppers Turned Off by Attractive Salespeople?

Are we always drawn to physically attractive salespeople? Or are there times when the presence of attractive employees could deter us from making a purchase? According to a recent study in the [Journal of Consumer Research](#), consumers might avoid making an “embarrassing” purchase when the salesperson is attractive.



“Contrary to conventional belief, attractive service providers can lead consumers to become self-conscious or embarrassed. This is especially true when the provider is the opposite sex. Even when the attractive salesperson is the same sex, consumers may feel a sense of inadequacy through self-comparison. In either case, the shopper may avoid interacting with physically attractive providers, rendering the salespeople ineffective,” write authors Lisa C. Wan and Robert S. Wyer Jr. (both Chinese University of Hong Kong).

Through a series of studies, the authors found the effect of a good-looking salesperson dependent on the type of product or service for sale. For instance, female shoppers were consistently drawn to the relatively unattractive male salespeople versus the handsome ones when buying products they considered “embarrassing,” such as feminine hygiene or weight-loss products.

When shoppers encountered attractive salespeople of the *same* sex during those same “embarrassing” transactions, they tended to feel jealous and unhappy with their own appearance. The authors note this phenomenon only occurs in face-to-face transactions, where people want to make a good impression, so it doesn’t apply to using celebrities or models as spokespeople for these types of products.

“Our research defies the conventional wisdom that physically attractive salespeople are more effective. While that may be the case in many contexts, there are certain settings in which they intimidate shoppers and may ultimately decrease sales,” the authors conclude.

Lisa C. Wan and Robert S. Wyer Jr. “[Consumer Reactions to Attractive Service Providers: Approach or Avoid?](#)” *Journal of Consumer Research*: December 2015.



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