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Influencing Negotiations: Salesperson Favor Requests
Veronica L. Thomas, PhD, Stephanie M. Mangus, PhD, and Dora E. Bock, PhD

Consumers have numerous negative stereotypes toward salespeople and often actively avoid sales environments because of these stereotypes. People often believe that salespeople do not have consumers’ best interests in mind and, thus, dread the idea of engaging in negotiations with a salesperson. In a business-to-consumer setting, consumers often avoid negotiations, are skeptical of the salesperson from the start, and go into the situation thinking it will be a bad experience. These negative views on negotiation have adverse effects on both the salesperson and the consumer, when in fact, negotiation can be a mutually beneficial tool for each party.

About our Study

In our research, we focus on the interpersonal relationship between the consumer and the salesperson. We take the idea of a favor request from a salesperson to a consumer to encourage engagement and the idea of negotiation. In our research, we define a favor as one that is requested by a salesperson and is an act of kindness unrelated to the negotiation process. This could be as simple as, for example, asking the consumer's opinion on the newly renovated showroom at a car dealership. These favor requests, however, are not sales requests. A sales request is an ask by the salesperson to move the negotiation forward. Favor requests are entirely unrelated to the act of negotiation.

We conducted five separate studies to see the effectiveness of a favor request in influencing final negotiation outcomes. We used these studies to examine three hypotheses for our research. Our first hypothesis was that if a salesperson requests a favor before the negotiation, this will positively affect negotiation expectations. The second hypothesis was that the effect of a salesperson's favor request on the consumer’s expectations of the negotiation process would be mediated by the customer’s perceptions of the salesperson's motives. In the test condition involving no ulterior motives on the part of the salesperson, participants were told that the salesperson did not earn a commission. The outcome showed that only in the favor-absent condition did the “no commission” stipulation improve outcome expectations. The final hypothesis states that as apprehension levels increase, the effectiveness of a salesperson's favor request on motives and expectations of the negotiation will be more pronounced.
Our Findings

Through our research, we concluded that there are positive impacts of a favor request being present. When a favor request is present, there are more positive expectations of the negotiation process. This simple favor request that is not related to a request for the product purchase also changes how a consumer views the salesperson. As a salesperson asks the consumer for a favor, the consumer then believes that the salesperson has positive motives and will offer the consumer a better deal. The benefits of a favor request even impact how a consumer feels when leaving a negotiation. Our study shows that when a consumer leaves a negotiation with a favor request present, the consumer has a positive feeling about the negotiation that just occurred. There are many benefits of a favor request that impact the negotiation process and the consumer's outlook on the salesperson and the negotiation.

We then conducted two additional studies examining the effects of a favor request when a motivation prime is present, as well as when apprehension is high or low. The motivation prime is a statement that suggests more trustworthy motives on the part of the salesperson. In the second study, we added a motivation prime that was designed to bolster perceptions. In this case, the motivation prime was a statement that the salesperson did not earn a commission for successfully closing the sale. When the prime was present, participants who were in both the favor absent and favor present conditions had similar expectations for the negotiations.

Finally, we examined how consumers who are apprehensive towards negotiations are affected by favor requests. We find that when consumers are more apprehensive toward negotiating, they are more positively affected by a favor request. Thus, those who have a negative view or attitude toward the negotiation process will be positively influenced by a favor request.

Real Estate Implications

Negotiation clearly plays a significant role in real estate sales, suggesting that improving consumers’ views of negotiations could improve outcomes in the field. A consumer who is interested in a home may be hesitant to fully engage in negotiations due to a preconceived and negative perception of negotiations. Asking for a favor can create a bond and relationship between the two parties. In our study, we show that a simple favor request can change the trajectory of the negotiation as a whole, as it can change the buyer’s anticipation of getting a better deal. Not only will a favor request improve the negotiation process for an agent, but it will also enhance the buying experience for a customer. Asking for a favor allows for the opportunity to build rapport and strengthen the relationship, fostering a more collaborative and mutually beneficial outcome.
Recommended Reading


About the Authors

**Veronica L. Thomas, PhD**  
*Associate Professor, Old Dominion University*

Dr. Veronica Thomas’ (PhD – Kent State University) expertise is in the area of consumer psychology, and her research focuses on social influence in the context of consumer-brand relationships and advertising. Her research appears in the *Journal of Consumer Psychology, Journal of Advertising, Journal of Public Policy & Marketing, Journal of Business Research, Marketing Letters*, and other prestigious peer-reviewed journals. Dr. Thomas has received national media coverage for her expertise in outlets such as *MarketWatch, Forbes, and Cosmopolitan*. She is also an Associate Editor for the *Journal of Advertising Research* and the *International Journal of Advertising* and sits on the Editorial Review Board for the *Journal of Advertising, the Journal of Marketing Theory & Practice, and Psychology & Marketing*.

**Stephanie M. Mangus, PhD**  
*Assistant Professor, Baylor University*

Dr. Stephanie Mangus’ (PhD – Louisiana State University) research focuses on buyer-seller dyads in sales and the sales and service interface, including service recovery and the emotions driving salesperson and customer behaviors. Her research has been published in the *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, Journal of Business Research, Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management, Industrial Marketing Management, and Psychology & Marketing*. She serves on the Editorial Review Boards for the *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* and the *Journal of Business Research*. She is the abstract editor and Editorial Review Board member for the *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*. Her work has been presented at conferences by the American Marketing Association, the Academy of Marketing Science, the Association for Consumer Research, the National Conference for Sales Management, and the Thought Leadership in the Sales Profession Conference. Dr. Mangus’ research and expertise have received international media coverage, including outlets such as *The Huffington Post, CJAD Radio, WLNS-TV, The Art Newspaper, The Speaker*, and *KIJK Magazine*, among others. She teaches personal selling and sales management for the Center for Professional Selling at Baylor and has received numerous teaching awards at the university and international levels.
Dora E. Bock, PhD
Bradley Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Marketing, Auburn University

Dr. Dora E. Bock’s (PhD – Louisiana State University) research focuses on customer relationships, gratitude, and decision-making. Dr. Bock’s work has appeared in the Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, Journal of Retailing, Journal of Service Research, Journal of Business Research, Journal of Business Ethics, Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice, Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management, Psychology & Marketing, and Industrial Marketing Management, among other journals and national conference proceedings. Dr. Bock’s research and expertise have received national media coverage, including outlets such as The Wall Street Journal, NerdWallet, HR Magazine, and Retail Executive, and she has been the recipient of the Department of Marketing's Outstanding Research Award. Dr. Bock has also been recognized for her teaching and has received the prestigious Lowder Teaching Award, awarded by the Harbert College of Business at Auburn University, the Outstanding Teaching Award, awarded by the Department of Marketing at Auburn University, and the Excellence in Teaching Award, awarded by the E.J. Ourso College of Business at Louisiana State University.