

Nonverbal Communication (NVC) Modes As Survival Antics For Informal Traders: A Case Study Of ‘Chitima’ (Train) Market Centre Of Masvingo Town.

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Abstract

This research investigates how the informal traders at the Dr Grace Mugabe Market Centre [formerly the Garikayi Market Centre] in Masvingo town, Zimbabwe, popularly known as ‘Chitima’ (Train) Market Centre, utilise nonverbal communication modes as antics in their business transactions. The population of the study comprises all informal traders at the market centre who trade in various wares ranging from perishables and other food items to clothes and electrical goods. The study uses observation and interview to collect data. The study establishes that nonverbal communication is part of the natural advertising and marketing antics of most informal traders, though not all informal traders at ‘Chitima’ are conscious of the potential of nonverbal communication, while others may use it unconsciously in their transactions. Accordingly, the study recommends that the natural advertising and marketing talent of the informal traders could be exploited and perfected through formalised grooming.

Keywords: Informal trader, Chitima, Nonverbal communication, Antics.

INTRODUCTION

This research examines the use of nonverbal communication (NVC) by informal traders at Chitima (Train) Flea Market [now named after the Zimbabwe’s First Lady, Dr Grace Mugabe] on the outskirts of Masvingo town, Zimbabwe. It contends that in the context of informal trading where formal advertising may be unaffordable, the informal traders can turn to nonverbal communication, a naturally available marketing and advertising medium and form.

The researchers studied nonverbal marketing strategies of the informal traders in their natural setting of Chitima Flea Market and interpreted their NVC as constituting important business communication that had a bearing on the level of sales. Concomitantly, the researchers informally discussed with the consumers who frequented the

Chitima Flea Market in order to glean the latter’s views on the overall interactive behaviours of the traders, with specific reference to the traders’ nonverbal behaviours related to trading their wares.

Background

Following the adoption of a multi-currency system by Zimbabwe in 2009, alongside a relatively ‘loose’ policy on informal trade, Zimbabwe’s main cities, towns and growth points have witnessed swelling numbers of informal traders. The phenomenon of people moving around selling both used and new clothes (sourced from beyond Zimbabwe’s borders), has become a common feature. These clothes and attendant goods sold by the informal traders are priced lowly, making them affordable to the majority

whose income bracket for the period 2009 to 2011 has not exceeded \$US 250.

To regulate the activities of the informal traders, municipalities have established market stalls where traders can be monitored more easily. In Masvingo city, a market centre called Garikayi was set up in 2009. Due to its proximity to the railway track, it is popularly called the Train Market or Chitima in indigenous Shona language. Developments in the country's economic trajectory from 2014 have seen many people losing formal employment following the infamous judicial pronouncement that employers could retrench workers with no benefits (*The Herald*, 30 April, 2014). Thus, with many people jobless, with estimates going beyond 10 000 (*The New Zimbabwe*, 20 March, 2015), the majority had to join the ever-swelling informal trade, leading to a near explosive scenario when vendors and Council police would clash on allegations of selling at ‘undesignated’ points. Accordingly, the existing markets became a tense atmosphere of intense competition with the rechristened Dr Grace Mugabe Market Centre (‘Chitima’) evolving into a two-tire centre with one wing for edibles (vegetables and fruits stalls) and the main wing devoted to selling miscellaneous items (clothing included).

Given that the informal sector has “ease of access and entry” (Brand, 1986), it has become an escape route for many people. Chidoko et al (2011), Njaya (2015), as well as Ndiweni et al (2014) studied the economic impact of the informal sector in urban areas of Zimbabwe and all concur that due to the escalating unemployment rate, the informal sector has become the solace of many urban dwellers. Accordingly, this sector stands out as one critical area for national economic development trajectories to be harnessed. It is no wonder that the Government of Zimbabwe is gradually evolving policy mechanisms to try to harness the economic benefits of the informal sector so as to fulfil the objectives of the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable socio-economic transformation (Zim-Asset).

Since many traders sell the same type and make of goods at Chitima, competition for customers is rife, hence the need for effective marketing strategies. Compared to established companies which market their goods and services through new media and technology, Chitima traders have to rely on their natural ingenuity, largely inclined upon the use of NVC. The assumption is that effective NVC is a rewarding marketing strategy. The research further hypothesises that consumers either respond positively or negatively to traders’ interaction depending largely on how positively or negatively they view the import of the traders’ NVC modes.

Some traders are better equipped to lure customers through a combination of kinesics, paravocalics, artefacts and proxemics than others. Consumers finally settle to buy from a particular trader after carefully considering a number of nonverbal cues of the trader, a process similar to what Lieb and Shah (2010) call the Obama brand. In his presidential campaign, Barack Obama offered “numerous nonverbal cues that made him safe and accessible, despite his outsider position.” But as Lieb and Shah contend, it is the coordination of the various nonverbal cues in a greater context of a co-ordinated campaign that won him trust with voters. Similarly, traders need such abilities to co-ordinate their varied cues in the context of trading that will gain them the confidence of customers.

The situation at Chitima is that traders have been allocated closely packed three by two square metre stalls in a completely fenced off area that prevents traders from walking with their goods on sale. Customers come to the stalls rather than the informal traders bringing the goods to them on the streets, work place or home. Since these traders normally sell goods of a similar range and quality, it seems it is no longer availability that is important to customers but how they are handled by these competing traders. Thus, communication, particularly nonverbal communication plays an important role. Hence the researchers’ interest in studying that interplay. According to behavioural ethnologists (Hinde, 1972 and Tinbergen, 1952) as cited in Lieb and Shah (2010), nonverbal

communication cues play a vital role which has continued to evolve with time.

In general, nonverbal modes appeal to people's various senses. At the market centre, voices belt out, sometimes to the accompaniment of music and one wonders as to which voice from the chorus of voices would be heard most and appeal to passersby and potential customers. Therefore, how the traders at Chitima who attract many clients make it or could improve their marketing strategies is the subject of attention in this paper.

Theoretical Framework

The Semiotics theory that signs and codes stand for something other than themselves (Fiske, 1990), shall be useful in studying the nonverbal behaviour of the informal traders at Chitima. Like verbal communication, non-verbal communication is a symbolic system of codes and signs to which meanings are assigned. Fiske (1990) notes that “a code is a system of meanings common to members of a culture or sub-culture. It consists of signs ... and of conventions that determine how and in what contexts those signals are used and how they can be combined to form complex messages” (p.19). According to Pearson, et al (2003) “nonverbal codes are codes of communication consisting of symbols that are not words, including non-word vocalisations” (p.107). These include bodily movements, facial expressions, appearance, use of space, time, touching, clothing and vocalics. However, as Pearson et al (2003) suggest, “interpreting the meaning of nonverbal communication is partly a matter of assessing the other person's unique behaviour and considering the context” (p. 108). This suggests the need to employ semiology, pragmatics and hermeneutics as we study these behaviours in their contexts.

Semiology concerns the study of how the sign, the message, the users and the culture within which the sign is used interrelate, with major focus on how receivers interpret signs or codes (Jansen and Steinberg, 1993). Pragmatics is problem-solving by way of using existing, situational evidence to heuristically establish the real meaning behind the

sign or code used (Leech, 1983), whereas hermeneutics explains that meanings are not fixed but are a result of negotiation between the text, its reader and the context of reading (Gadamer, in Jansen and Steinberg, 1993).

One important consideration is that NVC is situational or context bound. This means that an interpretation of a specific mode of NVC in one context cannot be used as a one off yardstick for all contexts involving similar NVC cues. Supporting this view, Pearson et al (2003) advise that “[a]ssessing another person's unique behaviour means that you need to know how that person usually acts”, hence the need for a study in the actual lived world (p.108). This research, therefore, undertakes repeated situational observations of how the same people could use the same non-verbal modes in different contexts and times.

The ambiguity of NVC codes should caution us from assigning meanings to NVC prior to well informed assessment of the target respondents over time. For instance, the same gesture such as a smile may be sent at different times, to a group of old women and then to a group of young girls but carrying different messages and enlisting different interpretations. This means more care should be exercised when assessing NVC of the informal traders, especially because communication theory tells us that nonverbal is more trusted over verbal communication. While nonverbal behaviour can be more difficult to fake than verbal communication, it can be faked nonetheless, hence the great havoc that has been caused amongst the citizens by well-practised conmen (Ross, 1989). In a world full of fraudsters whose success depends on their handling of nonverbal behaviour, it becomes important to pay fuller, objective attention to all nonverbal modes before assigning meanings. What this means is that while the meaning of verbal communication cannot be tied to that meaning by the speaker alone, the meaning of the non-verbal behaviour of an individual remains essentially, and peculiarly tied to that individual. Therefore, as much as one individual's smile may not have the same meaning

at different occasions, it may not have the same meaning carried in another individual's. This warns us not to always interpret as rudeness to customers, an apparently sullen, unsmiling face because of our preferences for a relaxed facial expression. According to Ross (1989) “non-verbals tend to be related, consistent, and supportive of one another. Where they are not, suspicions about your intent are raised” (p.206). This improbable separation of cumulative non-verbal behaviour assists assessors to correlate the meaning of a thumbs-up sign given together with averted eyes and a mouth turned down. Overall, assessors of non-verbal behaviour should recognise the whole message as imbued in all cooperative non-verbals and watch out for conflicting relationships.

While a trader may smile to convey warm welcome, the smile may be interpreted as dishonesty. The other point to ask is, does the smile always mean that we are genuinely welcome or does the trader know that people expect him to smile to express happiness and pleasure to serve? What this means is that we send positive and negative messages without knowing it. And this entails that how people dress, how they talk, the stance and posture they take and the gesture they make all count simultaneously.

Rationale

With competition for customers at market stalls like Chitima being rife, traders need to develop marketing strategies. Thus, since nonverbal communication modes are virtually the predominant tactics used to market wares at Chitima, it follows that the traders need a conscious understanding of how to use NVC effectively and consumers need to accurately interpret those cues.

Since non-verbal communication can be used to reinforce or substitute verbal messages, but at times conflict with the verbal utterance (Berko, Wolvin and Wolvin, 1998), informal traders may not be aware of this. Accordingly, they may use NVC cues unintentionally with repellent effects upon clients. To establish whether informal

traders at Chitima are really conscious of the positive and negative effects of certain NVC behaviour and whether consumers put NVC signifiers of the traders into consideration before purchasing becomes justified in this research.

Above all, this study intends to open up different avenues and knowledge gaps, if any, in the domain of marketing and advertising at the informal sector level.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Communication loosely refers to the sending or transmission of a message from a source to a receiver with or without feedback. For the purpose of this paper, communication can be understood from the conceptualisation of Berko, Wolvin and Wolvin (1998) who contend that it (communication) is:

A conscious or unconscious, intentional or unintentional process in which

feelings and ideas are expressed as verbal and/or nonverbal messages, sent,

received, and comprehended (p.4).

This brings out three salient issues about the communication matrix: firstly, communication can be conscious or intentional on one hand, and unconscious or unintentional on the other hand; secondly, the hallmark of communication centres upon expression, and ultimately conveying, of feelings and ideas, which should be comprehended or understood by the receiver; finally is the dichotomisation of communication into two strata, verbal and non-verbal.

While verbal communication refers to the spoken or written mode, nonverbal communication refers to “...all those messages that people exchange beyond the words themselves” (Burgoon, Buller and Woodall, 1996, p.1). Since this paper specifically pivots upon NVC, this dimension of human communication is herein explicated from three dimensions: categories of NVC; relationship between nonverbal and verbal communication; critical areas in the study of nonverbal communication.

Categories of NVC

Berko, Wolvin and Wolvin (1998) discuss eight dimensions of NVC: kinesics; paravocalics; proxemics; chronemics; olfactics; aesthetics; physical characteristics. These modes do not operate in isolation, but may occur in any combination or cluster. Pearson et al (2003) add tactile communication or haptics as a ninth dimension.

Kinesics, a derivation from the Greek term ‘kinesis’, “meaning movement [is the] study of posture, movement, gestures and facial expression”(Pearson et.al, 2003, p.108). Thus, people communicate through how they walk or stand, through gestures and through the face and eyes (Berko, Wolvin and Wolvin, 1998).

Hickson and Stacks (1993) contend that vocal quality (paravocalics) communicates nonverbally to the one listening. According to Pearson et al (2003) vocal cues include pitch (how high or low is the voice); rate (speed); inflection or pitch variety; volume (how loud or soft); quality (resonance of voice, for example huskiness or raspiness); non-word sounds (‘mmh’, ‘huh’, ‘ahh’, as well as pauses). Notable in paravocalics is that meaning is not a function of what is said, but how that which is said is conveyed. Silence is yet another dimension of paravocalics which, however, signals a dark side of communication (Oslo, 1997).

Proxemics refers to how space is used to communicate. Hall (1966) is the scholar credited for introducing the study of the human use of space. To date, two concepts are considered essential in the study of the use of space; territoriality and personal space, respectively (Pearson, et al, 2003). While the former alludes to one’s “need to establish and maintain certain spaces” one calls one’s own, the later reflects the ‘personal bubble’ of space that moves around with you” (Pearson, et al, 2003, p.112). As the pioneer of this dimension of NVC, Hall (1966) defined four distances that people use to communicate: intimate, personal, social and public.

Intimate distance extending from oneself outward to 18 inches (Berko, Wolvin and Wolvin, 1998) or

0 - 0.4 m is only permissible for intimate interactions. Graves and Robinson (1978), on one hand, and Burgoon (1978), on the other, contend concurrently that intimate distance reflects cordiality and warm relations.

Personal distance, extending from 18 inches to four feet (Berko, Wolvin and Wolvin, 1998) or 0.4 – 1.2 metres is observed during interaction with acquaintances or friends usually referred to as “the comfort bubble” (Berko, Wolvin and Wolvin, 1998, p.116).

While social distance (4 to 12 feet or 1.2 m – 4m) is observed for business transactions, public distance (exceeding 12 feet) is used for public speaking (Pearson, et al, 2003).

Related to the study of personal space is what Burgoon (1983) calls the “expectancy violation theory” which centres on the relationship between “personal space expectations and the communicative impact or violations of those expectations” (p.129). This implies that unfavourable outcomes usually follow up a violation of personal space.

Chronemics, the study of how people use and handle time (Pearson, et al, 2003) is yet another significant component of NVC. That is, some people value and strictly observe time while others may not. Berko, Wolvin and Wolvin (1998) hint that some cultures or communities treasure ‘precise time’ more than others.

Olfactics is the study of smell, that is, how people communicate through smells (Berko, Wolvin and Wolvin, 1998). In essence, many public personnel tend to value how they ‘smell’, hence the use of various perfumes and colognes.

Aesthetics involves communication through colour or music (Berko, Wolvin and Wolvin, 1998). Hospitals, schools and prison centres seem to acknowledge the power of different shades of colours to a person’s mood. Thus, softer colours (pink, blue or pastel) are used in hospital due to their alleged calming effect (Berko, Wolvin and Wolvin, 1998) while the field of ‘behavioural kinesiology’ contends that slow beat or tempo of music is calming while loud and pulsating music tends to be emotionally stressful. Therefore, what

colours are used alongside music played may have both negative or positive effects upon people, both unconsciously and consciously.

Berko, Wolvin and Wolvin (1998) add that physical characteristics can either draw or repulse people from oneself. That is, the way one looks is seen to either attract people or repel them. In fact, today's Advertising and Marketing industry seems to project this perspective by way of use of attractive models. Consequently, the attractive and appealing physical characteristics of the 'model' would be used to draw targeted people towards the advertised article.

Ornaments, adornments, alongside jewellery, make-up and clothing, constitute artefacts (Pearson, et al, 2003). According to Proctor (1978), artefacts are a form of personal expression that tell a message about who one is and how one perceives oneself or how one may wish to be perceived by others. However, Ross (1989) says “we cannot change everything about our physical appearance through clothing” (p.228).

Haptics or tactile communication refers to “ the use of touch in communication” (Pearson, et al 2003, p.116). One thing to note is that touch involves an invasion of another person's personal space. Therefore, it can be unwelcome or construed as sexual harassment, or very welcome where it reflects being wanted and warmth.

Given the wide spectrum of NVC modes and codes, it has to be established whether the informal traders at Chitima understand and appreciate how use of NVC can both boost or retard sales by attracting or repelling customers.

Relationship between verbal and non-verbal communication

According to Knapp and Hall (1997), the main relationship between verbal and non-verbal communication is four-fold in nature: substituting, complementing, conflicting and accenting. That is, there are times where a non-verbal cue, such as a nod completely replaces words. Also, a verbal utterance could be used simultaneously with a non-verbal code to complement each other for emphasis. That is, “shaking your head

horizontally from side to side while saying ‘no’ reinforces the negative verbalisation” (Berko, Wolvin and Wolvin, 1998, p.108). Sometimes, though, what one says may contradict body movements, bringing out the conflicting relationship where the ‘actual’ message is not the one verbalised, but the nonverbal one. In the accenting relationship, the nonverbal code accents the verbal one. For example, “jabbing someone's shoulder with a finger as you turn the person to look at you while commanding, ‘When I speak to you, look at me’”(Berko, Wolvin and Wolvin, 1998, p.109).

Critical areas related to NVC

Unlike verbal utterances which are ‘digital’ or discrete (that is specific) nonverbal communication is not (Pearson, et al 2003). That is, nonverbal communication cues are variable and continual. As such, NVC is susceptible to misinterpretation. Thus, Malandro, Barker and Barker (1989) posit that the interpretation of the intentionality or purposefulness of NVC codes may vary, making non-verbal codes rather ambiguous.

Again, nonverbal cues are bound by cultural stereotypes (Ross, 1989). Therefore, how a message from NVC is construed by one cultural group does not necessarily mean that it is the universal interpretation of the NVC message. Tied to the cultural milieu is the issue of context. That is, a response in one situation may not be the same in a different context (Ross, 1989; Mawonera and Lee, 2003), hence the problematic nature of interpreting NVC.

Ross (1989) adds that since NVC is usually believed, “conmen have always taken advantage of this fact”(p.206). Therefore, people stand to be swindled by actors who deliberately use their NVC antics to appear genuine and honest. Accordingly, it has to be established whether the NVC following up verbal utterances from Chitima traders really add up to the implied honesty, genuineness of the traders in question.

METHODOLOGY

The study targeted the informal traders in Masvingo town to explore how they can utilise non-verbal communication to spruce up their marketing communications. To make it a more controlled, yet informative survey, the researchers chose a case study. The researchers chose to focus on the Chitima (Train) Flea Market, an informal traders' makeshift complex of wooden stalls. We studied the informal traders' use of NVC in their lived world of informal trading and the consumers' responses to these, having at the back of our minds Goffmann's (1975) explanation of symbolic interactionism whereby every human communication event is likened to play-acting, the roles and meanings of which are socially predictable. The Chitima Flea Market has been purposely chosen because it is the only one which trades in and deals with an array of wares: kitchenware, clothes, beauty and health products and diverse perishables. Researchers were, however, more interested in analysing how the nonverbal signals used by informal traders at Chitima Flea Market fit the purposes of good trading or otherwise.

The study used observation and interviews to analyse the prevalence, utility and effective usage of non-verbal communication modes among informal traders.

Observation

The researchers targeted for observation in alternate observation surveys over five months (5) months, selected informal traders dealing in a similar line of products. The researchers sorted traders into target groups of those selling fruits, tomatoes, and other perishables; those selling electrical goods and accessories; those selling clothes, shoes and socks and those selling beauty and health products, perfumes and medicines. The researchers watched, recorded and analysed the informal traders' overall non-verbal behaviours and modes they engaged in to lure customers and conduct transactions thereof. The researchers studied particular traders' use of NVC from 1 August to 18 December, 2016. The

researchers wanted to ascertain traders' awareness of effect of NVC on consumers' reaction, and to surmise the relationship between particular traders' use of NVC modes and their sales volumes.

Informal interviews

A convenience survey, where the researchers mingled with a largely anonymous consumer population was used. Researchers sometimes waited outside the exit gates and requested to hold brief informal interviews with willing customers who would have bought goods in categories listed above. Among the interviewees were also informal traders. The researchers' target was to interview 4 interviewees per week over 19 weeks. The researchers asked the consumers about the non-verbal communication attributes of specific traders and how these could have influenced them (consumers) to buy the goods from only one of the host of traders selling similar goods or wares. The informal nature of the interviews, conducted while standing with, or walking the customer on their path, largely ensured free responses.

RESULTS

Results from observations

One observation made is that music and shouting out wares constitute part of informal traders' advertising antics. That is, music belts out from various stalls, accompanied by Dj-style calls for customers. Here, the music ranged from gospel tunes to 'museve', (fast paced music) alongside interludes of 'country music'. As for the vocalised call for customers, there was a competition of voices, most of which were tuned, pitched and affected to lure clients to the stalls.

Another notable feature was that most clients thronged those stalls with less shouting, particularly where soft gospel music was played to the accompaniment of equally soft voices to call for customers. In their 1992 study cited by Rodman (2011), Jones and Shumacher have shown that 'Muzak' (trademark for that functional music) has compelling power on audiences. They discovered that this music, now "...piped into

elevators and department stores...was originally used in factories to control and regulate work and is now used in stores and malls to control and regulate consumption” (Rodman, 2011, p.47).

Yet another notable technique involved the display of clothing items to an approaching potential client, winking or beckoning with an index finger or even rushing forward to grab someone’s hand then whisper in the person’s ears. The way the clothes were either thrust, “dumped”, or put in the arms of approaching customers had differing effects on customers, with customers responding more favourably to latter traders who did not unilaterally invade clients’ intimate spaces. Sometimes, a trader would wink at a customer at a rival stall, obviously to turn away the customer from the rival. Thus, beckoning and winking here reflect the operation of kinesics (body movements).

Interestingly, where female traders engaged the kinesics antics to male customers, the majority of the observed cases had positive results for the female trader: male consumers ended up buying from the stalls of the female traders. However, there appeared to be a relationship between the kinesics and physical characteristics of the traders. That is, female traders whose physical make ranged from the slim built to those with round eyes and light complexion tended to have more clients, following the use of kinesics.

Nonetheless, some male clients would frown then turn away from the antics of winking, beckoning and being approached and whispered to by a female trader.

On one occasion, the researchers overheard a heated debate between a couple who wanted to buy tomatoes. While the woman wanted to buy the cheaper ones from the north-eastern end of the market area, the man vociferously objected saying he could not stomach the dirty outlook of the women traders at that section. In the end, the husband prevailed over his wife after raising the issue of health risks associated with unhygienic handling of fruits and vegetable products. The couple then moved to the central part of the market, where women in aprons trade fruits and

vegetables. At that part of the market, the traders use plastic paper as improvised gloves to handle fruits. From this incident, the researchers noted how the general appearance (attire and cleanliness) of traders could either invite or repulse potential customers.

During a weekend after the month-end of November (bonus salary month), the researchers went to the market place with a double mission: to scout for fruits and dried beans, on one hand, and to observe the goings-on in the market participatively. The first port of call was a stall where a middle aged woman was selling “mazhanje” or loquats. On seeing the researchers look at her overflowing bucket, she immediately stepped out, shovelled an armful of the sweet fruit and extended her arm, a smile on her face, then she said in indigenous Shona:

Vana bhudhi... onai mutakunanzva wehanzvadzi yenyu...ravirai munzwe!’ (translating to ‘My brothers...see the juicy fruits that your sister has...just taste for yourselves’).

The effect of the traders’ antics was that the researchers were impelled not only to taste, but to finally buy the fruits. Here, the woman had used kinesics (smile and movement), proxemics and paravocalics simultaneously. That is, besides her smile, that she moved to us, brought us closer to her. Furthermore, the way she entreated us to taste the mazhanje, calling us ‘brothers’ (‘vana bhudhi’) invoked in us a sense of our cultural ethos, that kinship is complemented by sharing food (ukama igasva, hunozadziswa nokudya) and that one good turn deserves another (chindiro chinoenda kunobva chimwe). We then bought from her, not from the other traders adjacent who wore blank faces.

After the incident with the ‘mazhanje’ sister, the researchers had their attention arrested by the jingling of a bell, accompanied by a baritone voice of one who scratched the ground with his legs like a bull while howling:

‘Muu, Muu! Hairasiki mombe kana ine bhera’ (translating to ‘Moo, Moo! No cow gets lost with this bell round its neck’).

The antics of mimicry drew three adult men who then inquired the price of the bells, only to be told that two bells went together with a free yoke strobe (chitorobho). Thus, to have a pair of straps, each man had to buy four bells. Here the theatrical antics of the trader led to the purchase of eight bells.

At a stall selling cosmetics, jewellery and assorted adornments, a female trader clad in the latest fashion, her face heavy with powder, with lips almost ‘red’ with lipstick, traded the wares to passersby. She did not shout or raise her voice above a whisper. Incidentally, the dozen or so people who bought cosmetics, necklaces and earrings by-passed this woman’s stall for the next where a young woman trader perched herself on a makeshift stool, adorned in a Zion Christian Church uniform and badge. Why the clients by-passed the first stall for this one raised our curiosity, leading us to interview the buyers.

We also observed that specific non-verbal communication modes did not operate in isolation, but sometimes in a combined way. At one point, a lady trader of moderate build slumped herself in a reed-made chair, her face looking sullen. On seeing us approach her stall with a group of consumers, some of whom wanted to buy items she was selling among the phones, batteries, chargers, pouches and sunglasses, she smiled and then invited us to see her wares. Her smile, though appearing warm, tended to conflict with her outward bearing and posture, an outlook which made us feel that she was feigning or pretending to be enthusiastic to serve us. None among our group appeared any longer eager to inspect whatever she was selling and we had to politely say that we were looking for different items from what she had.

During our last visit for a purposive observation mission, the market was ‘noisy’. Shouts and music engulfed the air. Amid this noise was the jostling of people given that schools had closed for December and many people were making final shopping for Christmas. The clothing stalls had many customers, most of whom bought jeans, tackies and T-shirts. Merely looking at the items

bought, one could not easily distinguish them from those sold in stores such as Number One, Power Sales and even Jet (formal clothes shops), besides the low price tags.

The marketing techniques were a long mixture of display of wares, beckoning to potential clients, use of persuading language, ‘dhora rotenga’ (the dollar can now buy), ‘uya uhodhe’ (come and buy in bulk), alongside close proximity whispering to clients, hence proxemics. In the final analysis, those who were able to use their NVC to advantage gained more sales than their fellow competitors from adjacent stalls.

Results from interviews

Results from informal interviews reveal that customers expect much more from traders than to be told that certain goods are available at certain prices. According to the 76 interviewees, the buying-selling transaction should be the result of a deeper and more complex interplay of establishing the availability of the goods at a certain price and the total effect of the verbal and bodily language of the trader as she communicates with consumers. Interviewees noted that, all things being equal, their buying from traders is influenced by the personalities of those traders, personalities which are in turn also informed by customers’ understanding of traders’ overall NVC display. This is in a context where goods and wares are found in abundance but where the dollar is hard to come by.

Customer-interviewees said they preferred buying from traders with honest, open facial expressions, especially those who offer genuine smiles and engage in respectful bodily movements and orientations to those who, as one interviewee observed, “wear long, glass faces” and whose “bodily movements hardly show excitement at the hard earned Obama’s dollar we bring them.” Moreover, interviewees fear that some traders’ nonverbal behaviours express contempt, non-recognition and non-appreciation, hence the need for traders not to trash or to take customers for granted. Instead, they should polish their nonverbal communication so as to please and

retain clients. In addition, customers interviewed said they trusted buying from clean, well groomed and neatly dressed traders who maintain their stalls under irreproachable hygienic standards.

On the other hand, informal traders interviewed indicated that while it is difficult to be nice to all customers, some of whom are nagging, it is nonetheless crucial to use nonverbal behaviours to show recognition, extend welcome and express appreciation among others, since action speaks louder than words. The excerpts below are from some of the customers and traders interviewed and they all show the value customers attach to traders’ total communication and how that can influence their buying patterns and habits.

Excerpt 1: “Fresh vegetables and fruits such as mangoes, bananas, mazhanje (loquats) and so on need to be sold under excellent hygienic conditions. You remember we lost 5000 people to cholera in 2008 and who would sacrifice his/her life through buying from a dirty, unwashed trader who demonstrates no sense of personal hygiene? *Munhu ngaageze vozve, achichinjavo hembe nokuita kuti paanosevenzera pange pakashambidzika. Inga zvinonzi ‘n’ombe inonaka inotaura yoga*” (“A person should always bath, constantly change clothes as well as keep the working place clean. It is said ‘Good meat speaks for itself’”).

Excerpt 2: “*PamaiGeorge ndinoita zvokutambirwa namaoko maviri. Vanonditora vondisweddedza padyo navo vachinyatsotsanangura kunaka kwembatya dzavo nemubhadharo wavanoti wakadzika kusanganisira bhasera mushure mokutenga. Amai ava havakuvanzire panemhosho pamicheno yavo, havapembedzi zhingzhong zvenhando. Chiso chavo chakazaruka*” (“At Mai George’s stall I’m received with open arms. She brings me very close to her, explaining the good points to her clothes and she offers me ‘bonus’ goods after buying. This woman does not over-praise a *zhingzhong* (non durable material). Her face is like an open book”).

Excerpt 3: “*Veduwe, ngatisabatai vatengi vedu nekuseri kweruoko. Tinoona vamwe vedu vakati*

mbwerekesho apo mutengi achiratidza kutsvaka rubatsiro pazvitengeswa zvedu. Tambirai vatengi, ndobasa renyu guru. Mutengi ndimambo, saka ngaatengeserwe nemunhu akasimuka, nenguva isipi, akasununguka kwete kuti hee andipfuvisa nyaya yangu yandiri kuverenga kana kuteerera. Zvinoparara zvimisika zvedu izvi, hezvo masupermarket nema clothes shops opfachukira mutown umu” (“Please, let’s not allow our NVC to drive away clients. We see some traders sitting nonchalantly, their posture and orientation turning away the customer who wants to buy. Welcome customers; that’s your duty. The customer is king, attend to him on your feet, briskly and freely. You should not think, eh, he disturbs me from reading my paper or listening to a story. We will only destroy our businesses. Look, supermarkets and clothes shops are now well stocked in the town centre”).

Excerpt 4: “*Mwana waamai handiti waona ndirikufamba netsoka, zvinoreva ndinogara ndirisure kwenguva. Taikumbiravo kuti mutisevhe nenguva nemwoyo unemutsa. Haikona kuramba uchipwapwatisa mabonzo ehuku ini ndakamira muzuva. Ndosaka tichizoenda panevanoshambadza nedzimudzangara avo vanovimbisa chimbichimbi. Zvingava zvakanaka zvinhu zvaunotengesa asi kana wondididira zvicharamba zviri zvako*” (“My brother, you see me walking on foot [sic]; that means I’m always behind time. We beg you to serve us in time and with a willing heart. Don’t keep on noisily chewing chicken bones while I stand in the sun. That is why we sometimes go to those who sell with the assistance of shouting and music, those who promise quick service. The goods you sell might be good but if your behaviour is rude, belittling us, you might as well keep your goods”).

Excerpt 5: “*Uku haasi kunyemwerera, uku akatarisa divi kunge arikupfimbwa. Uku ndirikutaura naye uku hoyo tande kune umwe mutengi. Saka apedza neni ndisati ndagutsikana. Ini ndobvavo pakadarwo sezvo ndatarisirwa pasi*” (“Now she is not smiling, now she looks to the side like a shy girl being courted. Now I’m talking to her but off she goes to another

customer, turns her back on me. Therefore, she is done with me before I’m satisfied. In that case I also leave because I have been looked down upon”).

Excerpt 6: “Bhudhi zvenyu mutengeswi wese ngaaremekedze macustomer ake. Izwi zvinobvira pazvipfeko zvatinosimira mangwanani tichibva mukugeza nekushambidzika mangwanani savanhu vanoenda kumushando. Chiso ngachisunungukei, chimiro chako chiratidze kuti panosvikika kwete kumeso kunge ‘curfew’. Ngatipei vatengi mukana wekusvika padyo nesu nemidziyo yedu asi kwete zvekuti titsikane konzi kana kupindana muhomwe” (“Now my brother, every trader should respect and honour her [or his] customers. It starts from the clothes we put on in the morning after bathing like people who go to work. The face should be open and free, your whole being should be approachable, not to be threatening like ‘curfew’. Let’s allow customers to share our space, inspect our goods but not allowing too intimate overstepping of each other’s privacy”).

Discussion

Results from observation and interview tend to confirm the central role of NVC in all transactions, particularly informal trading. One Shona idiom used by an interviewee puts into perspective this importance. It goes, “Ngatisabatei vatengi neseri kweruoko” transliterated to “Let’s not handle our customers with the back of our hands” or “Let’s receive our customers with open arms.” This realisation is informed by the Shona philosophy of ‘unhuism’ which underscores mutuality and respect for fellow humans, among other tenets (Peresuh and Nhundu, 1989). While one trader made this observation, our research has also discovered that traders could realise much more economic gain if there was enhanced awareness by all traders of the indispensability of NVC and if there was guarantee that its effective application could improve their business. This was so apparent since consumers tended to flock to traders whose NVC denoted approachability and appreciation such as open facial gestures, inviting bodily dynamics and respectful promptness. It has

been noticed that buyers do not only expect to be smiled at because they are bringing business to a particular stall on that particular occasion but also because in an informal encounter there should be camaraderie, not that counter-space distance that may exist in a multinational shopping mall.

While observation has shown that many informal traders still need to activate their raw, inborn non-verbal characteristics, it has also exposed that skilful traders feel that they need to be full of antics and celerity in order to sell their wares. Interviewees believe that those who consciously utilise NVC for business purposes could still perfect their practice. This has been pertinent especially in a situation where so many informal traders are selling a similar range of products in close proximity. The importance of relevant tactics has never been so important as now when the informal traders not only compete among themselves but also with a resurgent formal sector following the stabilisation of the Zimbabwean economy. There has also been the need to deal with some traders’ inadequate skills such as inability to merge a series of nonverbal codes or to rid their communications of components of conflicting nonverbal codes.

The research has been informed by the understanding that polysemy and conflicting meaning characterise nonverbal codes. Our analysis has thus been guided by a close look at the intentionality of the NVC chosen by the traders and the conscious use of the codes. From this position the research argues that traders’ voice, facial expression, personal appearance, kinesics, posture and clothing could have been diversely intended to attract business for informal traders at Chitima. But this has been with differing degrees of precision, success and effects. The research, however, notes that much of the shouting by traders has not been more directional and purposeful. This feeling has been buttressed by responses from interviewees. That is to say, consumers being shouted at have expressed the need to feel acknowledged and respected. Therefore, traders who choose to shout should use a pitch and inflection in a manner that is

consciously and moderately directed to the consumers. It is so because shouting itself seems ineffectual since these customers have already come to Chitima market voluntarily because they have something they have planned and budgeted to buy. However, the manner in which those traders selling that desired product shout may influence from whom the consumer will eventually buy. So, the suave, cadence, warmth of voice together with other combinations of nonverbal signs related to the advertisement and honest appraisal of that product such as a winking smile, kinesics and display may determine a sale.

A disturbing observation has been the apparent sexualisation of nonverbal behaviours where in our observation we discovered that male clients tended to respond more positively to female traders' nonverbal cues than to those of male traders. Such was the case with Mai George's stall which seemed to have more regular male customers than female ones. The questions it raised were whether female traders were more accomplished at nonverbal communication than their male counterparts or whether the male buyers were being paternalistic, wanting to impress the female traders and thus create a sexual relationship. It was, however, established that though some female traders' facial expressions, posture, proxemics and orientation appear more genuinely attractive to males than to their female counterparts, it was also the females' superior cleanliness and clothing that drew male customers to them. It is thus contended that traders' appearance and cleanliness enhance the personality of traders and promotes likeability and preference from customers. Most male traders have been seen to lack the polished deportment and clean personal appearance of many of their female competitors. Another area traders should manage carefully is proxemics. Paradoxically, distance between the trader and the potential client can either discourage interaction (a sociofugal effect), or encourage it (a sociopetal effect) (Hall,1966).

It was also observed that nonverbal communication modes are embedded in the

people's cultural practices, values and behaviours. Cultural acts of generosity such as offering a customer goods free of charge or a portion to taste (bhasera/nzwisa), strengthen ties between traders and customers and opens more avenues for cooperation and trade and thus constitute a vital component of business communication. What this means is that informal traders could utilise some of their culturally received knowledge about how to interact with strangers to perfect their marketing skills at Chitima. Herein comes the application of the Expectancy Violations Theory, a theory which propounds that communicators in any interaction expect certain kinds of NVC, violations of which can either increase or decrease attraction (Burgoon,1983).

Interviewees also revealed that though make-up and other artefacts improve the attractiveness and personality of traders, overdoing it may elicit unintended meanings and reactions. Too much make-up may cause consumers to misjudge the morality of the traders. On the same vein, dressing or clothes should be consistent with character. This has been seen in relation to church-clad traders whose nonverbal communications are positively attracting customers. While the customers' preference to the church members' stalls shows that Zimbabwe is a Christian society, it demonstrates that customers can be conned through non-verbal accoutrements. This knowledge about the positive effects of clothes and artefacts should be useful to both informal traders and customers, leading to proper dressing and cleanliness of both trader and trading scene on one hand and consumer satisfaction on the other. This research has shown that buyers prefer buying from neatly dressed and well groomed traders but cautions against the possibility of being put off or taken in by appearance.

In the context of informal trading, it has been noted that posture and orientation are crucial determinants in understanding the traders' meanings. These often provided more telling clues to the overall meaning of the nonverbal codes than others. Researchers, as they carried out their observations, tended to notice conflicting cues

transmitted by the traders, but like the customers, tended to take as truer, the meanings conveyed by posture and orientation than those conveyed by a smile or a beckoning gesture. Postures and gestures researchers have found unwelcome have also been identified by customers interviewed. These include a bored, slumped posture, an averted face, a turned back, deliberate, unexplained movement away from a customer and careless thrusting of goods into customers' arms. Such nonverbal codes have almost always been interpreted as lack of respect for and lack of enthusiasm to serve customer, hence an unwelcoming, unappreciative trader.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The research has established that nonverbal communication could be a vital tool in the hands of committed informal traders. The point made is that in every human transaction, be it social, political or business, communication is the glycerine that smoothens the transaction. And in informal trading such as at Chitima Flea Market, the informal traders' business language and marketing strategies could be bolstered by nonverbal communication. However, though NVC is spontaneous, its place in marketing communication in informal trading can be emboldened through conscious endeavours hence the research's desire to recommend that:

- Informal traders consciously develop and nurture the array of nonverbal communication such as posture and orientation;
- Informal traders get training on the functions of nonverbal communication;
- Informal traders seek feedback on the appropriacy of their nonverbal communication from customers;
- Informal traders think about values of respect, hospitality and 'unhuism' and the nonverbal communication that tunes up with these values;
- Consumers read the traders' nonverbal communication accurately;

- Consumers should not be misled by pleasant nonverbal communication into buying products that are of poor quality.

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