

U of A study shows attractive retail salespeople are able to sell more

Jennifer Argo's study examines how attractiveness motivates retail purchases

BRENDAN COX
News Writer

A University of Alberta study has shown that consumers are more interested in buying clothes that are being promoted by attractive salespeople.

Jennifer Argo, an associate professor at the U of A School of Business who specializes in social influence, led the study that demonstrated that people will be more eager to buy a shirt after it's been worn by someone that they are attracted to.

Argo and her colleagues asked 300 people to try on a T-shirt at the U of A Bookstore. In the first part of the study, the participants were told to try on a specific shirt, only to be told by a researcher disguised as a salesperson that the last available shirt of that kind was already being tried on by someone else. Half the time, the person trying the shirt on was a model, and half the time, the person was of average attractiveness.

In every case, the participants observed the person leaving the change room and were then asked to evaluate the shirt. If the participants observed an average-looking person with the shirt, then they expressed little interest in the shirt, yet if the shirt had been worn by a model, the shirt then became more attractive to them, and they were willing to pay more for it.



BLUE STEEL, ANYONE? Argo holds up pictures of some of the study's models. DAVID RIDLEY

"The explanation that we can draw from our research is that people want to get the 'essence' of that other attractive person," Argo said.

In the second part of the study, male subjects were again told to try on specific shirt. Half the time, a female salesperson of average appeal told the subject that she had worn the shirt on her last shift, and half the time, a beautiful salesperson told them the same. Sometimes, the shirt was shown to the subject on a hanger to suggest that it had not been

washed, and other times, the shirt was in a dry-cleaning bag.

The subjects admired the shirt more when it was unwashed after being worn by a beautiful female.

"Our studies have only been with clothes, so I can't say whether it would be the same with pens or something, but there is a sort of intimacy that's desired. A shirt is pulled over your head and is close to your skin; that sort of touch is more desired when it's linked to someone attractive," Argo said.

Arts students discuss how best to increase the value of their degrees

EDMON ROTEA
News Staff

Last Wednesday, students, professors, and alumni from the Faculty of Arts met to discuss the state of arts education and the value of an arts degree, specifically in the context of the changing needs in Canadian society, the economy, and increased globalization.

The event, titled Creating an Arts Degree for future Students: The Whole Story, was presented by the recently formed Collective Body for Arts Students (CBAS) and the U of A Students' Union. It served as a forum for students and a panel of six professors and alumni—each from varying arts disciplines—to engage in a continuing discussion of Arts education in the 21st century.

"It's a valuable opportunity for faculty members and students to reflect on the whole process [of an arts education], to revitalize what we do, and perhaps reinvent what we do," said Dr Debra Cairns during the forum's opening remarks.

Cairns, a professor in the U of A's Department of Music, is also a member of a faculty-wide committee focused on engaging both staff and students in a series of dialogues concerning arts education. She noted that feedback from such dialogues is important in formulating a plan to improve the state of arts education and the student experience at the U of A.

"We felt that it was very important to gain input from undergraduate students," Cairns remarked.

The forum discussed the holistic

experience of an arts education, the meaningfulness and importance of an arts degree, and ideas for improving the undergraduate experience.

The forum also discussed the increasing difficulties experienced by students as they complete their degree, while presenting suggestions to improve student engagement in the classroom and post-graduation employment.

"Students today are facing more and more barriers to a [postsecondary] education, often having to take on second jobs [...] and other issues surrounding just being able to study here at this institution," said SU President Michael Janz.

He said that such problems are reflected in the growing number of undergraduates who are taking five or more years to complete a degree, as well as the dwindling involvement in campus-based volunteer and extracurricular activities.

Janz believes that the Faculty of Arts should foster stronger ties with public and private sectors to remedy the problems of employee turnover due to the aging workforce, especially in the government civil service.

"If we want to showcase the strength of the liberal arts to the public, we need to work closer, as an institution and as a faculty, with the various people in government and industry," Janz said.

"If we want to make sure that the federal civil servants can be replaced by students here today, we need to make sure that we are developing these kinds of programs and work more with the faculty," he added, making reference to the various co-op and internship programs that are more

prevalent in the business, engineering, and science disciplines.

Dr Tim Antoniuk, an assistant professor in the U of A's industrial design program, discussed the importance of the arts and humanities disciplines in an increasingly global economy.

"We are in a period of massive change. There are shifts of power, shifts of economy, shifts in what's happening ecologically. Humanities is going to have to start to get involved because we are heading towards a lot of crises—not because of altruistic reasons or government or corporations wanting to do the right thing, but because such changes will be forced and necessary," said Antoniuk.

Bill Moore-Kilgannon, executive director of Public Interest Alberta and a U of A Arts alumnus, discussed the importance of improving the quality of postsecondary education, especially in the Faculty of Arts.

"Critical analysis and academic work is the foundation of our democracy. You need to learn how to learn as citizens and learn how to engage in that process, and that, to me, is the richness that you can get in the Faculty of Arts," said Moore-Kilgannon, who discussed a lack of government funding, citing that the province had both the lowest participation rate and lowest GDP spending rates on postsecondary education in Canada.

"You cannot have a quality student experience if you are spending all your time raising enough money to eat, pay the rent, and to pay your tuition. Fundamentally, we need to look at how we advocate around all these broader issues," Moore-Kilgannon said.

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