

Grains of Trust: Nurturing Repurchase Intentions With Expertise and Likeability in Rice Sales

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of salesperson likeability and expertise on repurchase intention within the framework of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). In the highly competitive SME market, likeability—which goes beyond basic customer service to encompass qualities like relatability and empathy—has become a critical differentiation. Repurchase intention, which denotes consumer happiness and loyalty, is essential to the profitability and expansion of SMEs. The purpose of the study is to ascertain how salesperson expertise and likeability relate to repurchase intention. Using an online survey questionnaire, a sample of Padang, West Sumatera, clients of Beras Charissa is used in this quantitative study. The findings show that likeability and expertise both significantly influence the intention to repurchase. The study emphasizes how crucial likeability-based emotional ties and personal ties are in shaping consumer attitudes and actions. Furthermore, a salesperson's expertise gives clients confidence, which improves trust and the customer experience. Although skill is still important, the article makes the case that improving a salesperson's likeability through training that emphasizes customer engagement can boost client loyalty and promote repeat purchase.

Keywords: Expertise; Likeability; Salesperson; Small-Medium Enterprise

I. INTRODUCTION

Within the context of small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs), a trend that is emerging in salesman skills is the increasing emphasis on consultative and personalized selling (Udayana & Farida, 2021). These customers seek out salesmen that can both understand their unique needs and provide tailored solutions (Alnakhli et al., 2021). SMEs, as opposed to larger organizations with more traditional offers, require salespeople who can deliver flexible solutions that correspond with the concerns and aspirations of their target market (Tyrkkö, 2023).

A recent trend in the realm of SMEs is the growing significance of salesperson likeability (Udayana & Naili, 2021). Because of the increased competition and plethora of options

available to consumers, likeability has become an important differentiator for salespeople in SMEs (Aqmala & Ardyan, 2019). This goes beyond providing regular customer service; it also encompasses traits like empathy, relatability, and skillful communication that contribute to the development of enduring relationships with clients (Elliott et al., 2023; Susiang et al., 2023; Adigwe & Okoro, 2016).

For a number of reasons, likeability matters in SME sales (Nowlin et al., 2019). First, in smaller markets and industries, word-of-mouth referrals and personal recommendations are highly prized (Ngoma & Ntale, 2019). The possibility of positive reviews, referrals, and repeat business is increased by a personable salesperson, all of which help the SME's organic growth (Azigwe et al., 2016). Second, when customers have so many options, their likeability as a salesman becomes a decisive component in influencing purchases. Consumers are more inclined to deal with and buy from those they see as courteous, trustworthy, and helpful (Kim & Baker, 2017; Pertiwi & Balqiah, 2021). In short, the ability of sales teams in SMEs to establish a sincere and amiable relationship with consumers might be one of the primary variables affecting their performance.

Since repurchase intention is directly tied to the profitability and expansion of their businesses, SMEs place a high value on it (Wahyuningsih et al., 2021). A strong repurchase intention is an indication of customer satisfaction and loyalty in the context of SMEs, where customer bases are often more localized and interpersonal relationships are essential (Rantung et al., 2023; Ali, 2019). In the cutthroat world of SMEs, strong repurchase intentions also bolster positive word-of-mouth marketing, which contributes to a positive reputation and may even attract new customers (Ravula et al., 2022). Thus, repurchase intention needs to be recognized and nurtured as more than just a metric for SMEs who want to thrive in their markets.

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between salesperson likeability and expertise and repurchase intention. What we intend to address are the following queries: Which aspect of a salesperson's likeability and skill influences repurchase intention the most? This article presents the findings of a study conducted utilizing pertinent literature on the repurchase intentions of SME consumers. The study offers a valuable contribution in that it shows how salesperson likeability—which includes relatability and empathy—and expertise interact to influence repurchase intention in the highly competitive market of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). This highlights the strategic significance of emotional ties and personal ties in influencing customer behavior and loyalty. The novelty of the research is how it emphasizes the importance of both salesperson expertise and likeability as crucial determinants of repurchase intention in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Salesperson's Expertise

Due to their tendency to operate in niche markets with unique clientele and challenges, SMEs place a premium on experience (Rizvanovic et al., 2023). The ability of a salesperson to offer smart counsel, tailored solutions, and in-depth market knowledge is highly valued by SMEs (Aqmala & Ardyan, 2019; Alnakhli et al., 2021; Asyhari & Yuwalliatin, 2020). In SMEs, where customer relationships are often more individualized, a salesperson's skill sets are crucial in gaining clients' confidence and establishing their credibility and trust. Furthermore, the literature highlights how dynamic SME environments are and how salespeople who possess a thorough understanding of market trends and product intricacies are better equipped to

navigate challenges, resolve customer issues, and ultimately drive business success (Farida & Setiawan, 2022).

B. Salesperson's Likeability

In the context of SMEs, salespeople's likeability suggests a growing recognition of the crucial role that interpersonal skills play in developing fruitful business connections. Qualities that contribute to likeability include warmth, friendliness, and relatability; in the SME market, these attributes have a significant role in influencing consumer perceptions and purchasing decisions (Oleszkiewicz & Lachowicz-Tabaczek, 2016; Laursen et al., 2023; Yoon & Lee, 2022). Studies show that in smaller commercial environments where human contacts often drive transactions, a salesperson's likeability can have a discernible impact on client trust, loyalty, and repeat business (Oktavia, 2019; Emaratkar et al., 2018; Herjanto & Amin, 2020). Additionally, the emotional intelligence of likeable salesmen is crucial in SMEs because these are high-risk and long-term relationships are highly prized (Lassk & Shepherd, 2013). When SMEs navigate more competitive markets to sustain positive customer relationships, it becomes strategically imperative to understand and apply the likeability dimensions in sales interactions.

C. Repurchase Intention

Researchers have shown a strong correlation between customer satisfaction, perceived value, and repurchase intention in the dynamic SME market, where transactions are often bolstered by individualized contacts (Widodo et al., 2022; Jasin & Firmansyah, 2023). It is clear from empirical research that SMEs stand to gain a great deal by understanding and successfully addressing factors including perceived benefits, service quality, and overall customer experience that influence the intention to repurchase. Research also suggests that positive experiences customers have with salespeople and the creation of a nice shopping environment impact their propensity to return (Artha et al., 2022; Petrescu, 2021; Pangaribuan et al., 2020). According to the research, as SMEs strive to build a devoted client base in competitive environments, it is strategically important to identify and address the elements of repurchase intention in order to forge long-lasting relationships and foster corporate success (Jasin et al., 2022; Rozamuri et al., 2022).

D. Hypothesis Development

Repurchase intention is seen to be significantly impacted by a salesperson's likeability in the setting of SMEs (Jasin et al., 2023). Building on the literature that emphasizes the critical role that interpersonal skills play in SME transactions, it is suggested that customers who perceive salespeople as warm, approachable, and relatable are more likely to establish positive emotional connections, trust the salesperson, and, as a result, show a higher intention to repurchase (Guenzi et al., 2016; Homburg et al., 2011). The theory contends that salespeople's likeability plays a critical role in influencing customer loyalty and repeat business in SMEs, where interpersonal relationships frequently generate long-term success. Thus, the study's first hypothesis is:

H1: Repurchase intention is influenced by the salesperson's likeability.

Salespeople's expertise and abilities contribute to the growth of customers' self-assurance, enjoyment, and trust, all of which influence the likelihood that they will do repeat business with SMEs (Udayana & Naili, 2021; Chauduri & Holbrook, 2021). In this dynamic world of complex markets and one-of-a-kind interactions, the hypothesis highlights the strategic significance of salesperson knowledge in fostering customer loyalty and opening doors for

long-term corporate success. Therefore, in light of the discussion, the second hypothesis in this research is:

H2: Repurchase intention is influenced by the salesperson's expertise.

III. METHODS

In this research, the research subject is the Beras Charissa's customers that located in Padang, West Sumatera, and the object of this research is a rice shop called Beras Charissa. The measurement questions for the questionnaire utilized in this study included certain constructs from past studies that had been modified. To gather answers to important survey items and demographic data, the questionnaire was divided into two portions. Gender and age were the two demographic questions in the first segment. Eleven questions were asked in the second section. Three factors were covered by these items: the salesperson's expertise, likeability, and repurchase intention. A salesperson's expertise was measured based on a scale proposed by Oktavia (2019). Likeability was measured based on a scale proposed by Oktavia (2019). Repurchase intention was measured based on a scale proposed by Hellier et al. (2003).

The responses were selected by the researcher in accordance with the 100 total sample size. This is in line with Ghozali's (2008) suggestion that a study sample size of between 30 and 100 should be used for a Partial Least Squares analysis. This allows the data in this profile to be used by any other researcher who comes across it and finds the findings useful.

Table 1. Validity and Reliability Tests

Construct	Item	Loading	Alpha
Expertise	SE1	0.942	0.964
	SE2	0.956	
	SE3	0.944	
	SE4	0.959	
Likeability	SL1	0.924	0.981
	SL2	0.891	
	SL3	0.924	
	SL4	1	
Repurchase	RP1	0.981	0.953
	RP2	0.957	
	RP3	0.955	

This study used an online survey questionnaire as its data collection tool. The measurement items in the questionnaire were taken from earlier studies. Respondents, who were the repeat customers who had purchase rice at Beras Charissa, received the survey through Google Forms. The shop's salesman gently requested that the guests use their own device or the shop's mobile phone to complete the survey. The convenience sampling technique was employed to find respondents. The data collection took place between April and May of 2022.

With slight modifications, certain past research constructs were employed as the measurement items for the questionnaire used in this study. A salesperson's expertise was measured based on a scale proposed by Oktavia (2019). Salesperson's likeability was assessed using a scale created by Oktavia (2019). Repurchase intention was assessed using a scale created by Hellier et al. (2003).

IV. RESULTS

According to the survey data collected, women account for 78% of all respondents. Most of the respondents are above the age of 24, accounting for 51% of the total number of persons who replied to the survey. People between the ages of 17 and 24 account for 41% of the overall respondents. The remaining respondents, who account for only 7% of the total, are under 17 years of age.

The outcome of the validity test is achieved by running data via the SPSS program. SE denotes Salesperson Expertise, SL denotes Salesperson Likeability, and RP denotes Repurchase Intention. According to the validity test results in Table 1, every item’s corrected total item value is more than the *t*-table, and each item’s 2-tailed significance is less than 0.05. As a result, each item on the questionnaire has been determined to be valid (Pangaribuan et al., 2020).

Table 2. Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test Output

		Unstandardized Residual
N		100
Normal	Mean	0.0000000
Parameters	Std. Deviation	1.34758005
Most Extreme	Absolute	0.305
Differences	Positive	0.155
	Negative	-0.305
Test Statistic		0.305
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		0.320

A. Normality Test

Table 2 demonstrates that the data is normally distributed. According to Singh et al. (2013), the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test may be used to determine if the findings are normally distributed when the significance (Asymp. Sig. 2-tailed) is more than 0.05. The data has a significance (Asymp. Sig. 2-tailed) of 0.320, which is greater than 0.05, as shown in Table 2. As a result, the variables in this study are normally distributed.

Table 3. Multicollinearity Test Output

Construct	Collinearity Statistics	
	Tolerance	VIF
Salesperson’s Expertise	0.264	3.785
Salesperson’s Likeability	0.264	3.785

B. Multicollinearity Test

Table 3 illustrates that there is no multicollinearity in the data. When the tolerance value is more than 0.1 and the variance inflation factor is less than 10, no multicollinearity develops (Ghodang, 2020). Table 3 shows that both variables’ tolerance values are greater than 0.1, 0.264 for the salesperson’s expertise variable and 0.264 for the salesperson’s likeability variable, and that both variables’ variance inflation factor values are less than 10, 3.785 for the salesperson’s expertise variable and 3.785 for the salesperson’s likeability variable. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that there is no multicollinearity in the data.

C. Heteroscedasticity Test

Table 4. Glejser Test Output

Construct	Sig.
Salesperson’s Expertise	0.755
Salesperson’s Likeability	0.260

Table 4 reveals that there is no heteroscedasticity in the data. According to Ghodang (2020), if the significance of the variables is more than 0.05, there is no heteroscedasticity based on the Glejser test. The significance of the salesperson’s expertise variable is 0.755, while the significance of the salesperson’s likeability variable is 0.260, as shown in Table 4. There is no heteroscedasticity because both variables have a significance level of higher than 0.05.

D. R-Square

The multiple R (R^2) from the regression test describes the strength of the overall linear relationship (Pangaribuan & Wirananda, 2020). Table 5 shows that the R^2 is 0.637, indicating that the salesperson’s expertise and likeability factors account for 63.7% of the repurchase intention variable. The rest are influenced by factors other than the study’s independent variables. Adjusted R^2 is also a modified version of R^2 . The R^2 might still be changed in this study because there are several independent factors. The modified R^2 is 0.629, which means that the salesperson’s expertise and likeability variables can explain 68.8% of the repurchase intention variable (see Table 5).

Table 5. Coefficient Determination Output

R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of the Estimate
0.637	0.629	1.36140

E. Hypothesis Testing

According to the significance value, the hypothesis is accepted when the level of significance is less than 0.05. The alternative hypothesis is thus rejected when the significance value is greater than 0.05. According to the comparison of the t -table and the t -statistics, the alternative hypothesis is rejected when the t -statistics is smaller than the t -table. When the t -statistics exceeds the t -table, the alternative hypothesis is accepted. By considering the df_2 and upper-tail regions, the t -table value may be calculated. The t -table has a value of 1.984 because the df_2 value is 97 (100-3) and the value of the upper-tail area is 0.025 (0.05/2). The research model can be seen in Figure 1.

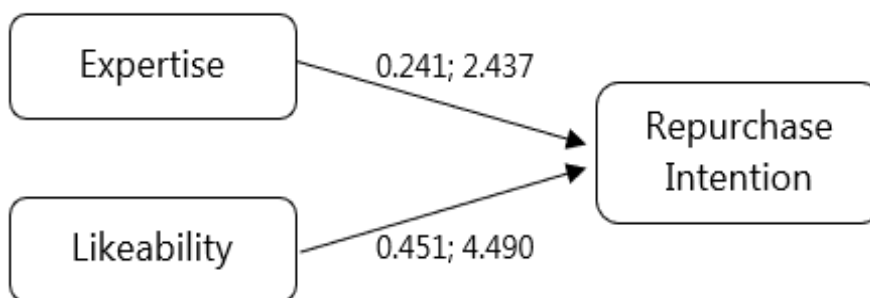


Figure 1. Research Model

The *t*-statistics for the salesperson’s expertise is 2.437, with a significant value of 0.017 (see Table 6). Hypothesis 1 can be accepted since the *t*-statistics, which is 2.437, is bigger than the *t*-table, which is 1.984. Therefore, the salesperson’s expertise variable has a significant effect on repurchase intention.

The *t*-statistics for the salesperson’s likeability is 4.490, with a significance value of 0.000 (see Table 6). Given that the *t*-statistic, at 4.490, is greater than the *t* table, at 1.984, hypothesis 2 can be accepted. H2 is approved since the salesperson’s likeability significant value of 0.000 is less than 0.05. As a result, likeability of the salesperson has a major impact on repurchase intention; the results of this study are consistent with those of Anwar et al. (2016).

Table 6. *t*-Test

Construct	β	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Salesperson’s Expertise	0.241	0.099	0.290	2.437	0.017
Salesperson’s Likeability	0.451	0.100	0.535	4.490	0.000

V. DISCUSSION

The likeability of salespeople to influence repurchase intention can be linked to several psychological and relational factors that impact customer perceptions and behavior in the context of small and medium-sized firms (SMEs). First and foremost, the formation of sound emotional connections is a significant motivation. When there is an emotional bond between the salesman and the customer, the purchasing process results in a favorable emotional experience. This emotional connection fosters a sense of trust and satisfaction and increases the likelihood that customers would return to the SME for future transactions. The results of this study are consistent with those of Anwar et al. (2016).

Moreover, the establishment of a personal bond between the sales professional and the client is influenced by likeability. In small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), where business connections are frequently characterized by a greater degree of uniqueness, clients are more likely to feel appreciated and understood when engaging with amiable salespeople. This sense of personal connection not only enhances the entire client experience but also establishes the foundation for ongoing loyalty and repeat business.

Additionally, how likeable a salesperson is influences how the SME’s honesty and integrity are seen. Likeable salespeople are perceived by customers as genuine and trustworthy, attributes that are critical for building a positive brand for a business. When clients see that the salesperson genuinely cares about their needs and problems, their impression of the SME as a whole improves, and they are more likely to make another purchase.

The impact of salespeople’s talent on repurchase intention in SMEs is rooted in the actual value and trust that consumers associate with skilled sales experts. To begin with, competency gives clients greater confidence in their purchase decision. When salespeople demonstrate a deep understanding of the products or services, industry trends, and are able to provide relevant and accurate information, customers are more likely to trust that the purchase they made is suitable and of high quality. Consumers are more inclined to come back to a source they consider to be reliable, therefore this assurance plays a critical role in influencing their inclination to make additional purchases. This finding is similar to Oktavia’s (2019) study.

Moreover, the competence of sales agents enhances the customer experience by permitting a more tailored and personalized interaction. Since small and medium-sized business (SMEs)

customers may have different needs, it is especially crucial for salespeople working for SMEs to be able to offer knowledgeable recommendations and solutions catered to each customer's unique expectations. In addition to better satisfying the client's needs, this customized approach raises the client's perception of the SME, fostering customer loyalty and the desire to make additional purchases.

VI. CONCLUSION

This research looks into how salesperson knowledge and likeability can impact repeat business in the setting of rice sales at Beras Charissa. This study lends credence to the idea that the main element affecting repeated purchases is likeability rather than knowledge. One way to implement this strategy is to provide salespeople with likeability enhancement training that emphasizes customer engagement and relationship-building. The findings show that, while competence is still important, emphasizing the social and emotional aspects of the Beras Charissa sales experience can increase client loyalty and encourage repeat business. This study's usage of a narrow sample scope among Beras Charissa's clientele is constrained. To increase the applicability of the findings to a wider population, future studies using a quantitative design with a larger sample size and a more thorough geographic segmentation can be carried out.

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