The Effect of Smiling to a Stranger

The Hypothesis of the research is that

if somebody smiles to strangers daily for 2 weeks, that makes them friendlier and easier to interact with.

Methodology

In order to satisfy the objectives of the research, the researcher adopted a qualitative design. The research was divided into two phases. The participants in this research were 35 students randomly selected from a nearby institution and who were traveling to school every morning on the bus. The researcher interacted with them on a daily basis. The estimated age of the participants was between 10 and 16 years.

The first phase entailed the researcher’s actions. The selected participants were identified and received a smile to each day for one week. The second phase involved the data collection as feedback from the first phase. At the end of each day, a questionnaire survey was collected indicating the input from the strangers. The data gathered entailed how the stranger responded on days 1, 3, 5 and 7 of the week. The participants were supposed to describe their daily experience and the perception of the stranger before and after the activity. Then, the data was empirically analyzed and presented in tables and graphs.

Findings

The results from the questionnaires indicated that the positivity of the stranger’s response from the perspective of the researcher improved over the one week. This data is represented in the table below.

Table 1. Strangers Response to a Random Smile

 Day 1 Day 2 Day 5 Day 7

Positive

1 8 17 25

Neutral 16 14 7 1

Negative 9 4 2 0

 This change can be represented graphically as shown below.

Figure 1. Strangers Response to a Random Smile

Besides, all the reports from the strangers indicated that the researcher’s perspective and feelings about the strangers had significantly improved over time. Fifteen of them ended up eventually accepting a handshake from the researcher, and two of them even learned his name.

Discussion

Research describes smiling as a communication and signaling behavior that human beings and, probably, many other creatures with highly organized nervous system use to interact with others of the same kind. However, psychology and sociology agree that there is more to a smile than mere signaling. A smile demonstrates friendliness and the desire to interact at a closer level.

The results from this experiment are consistent with this research evidence and demonstrate that smiling to a stranger makes people not only smile back but even goes ahead to make real connections (Tsujita & Rekimoto, 2011). According to the research, the strangers seemed friendly after just a few days of sharing a smile, and some became real acquaintances.

This data supports the hypothesis that if somebody smiles at strangers daily for two weeks. It makes them friendlier and thus more accessible for interactions. Thanks to these findings, respondents found it easier to smile at a stranger every day. As a result, most of them overcome the communication barrier and became friendlier, and their subsequent interaction became easier than before.

Conclusion

From this research, it is adequate to conclude that smiling helps to ease tension between strangers. When people smile, they can connect mentally and break the barriers that arise between them; besides, this practice makes it easier to interact further. Therefore, negative impressions tend to disappear within a short period of consistent interaction. The results are generalizable as the act of smiling is universally accepted regarding different cultures and etiquette (Krys, Hansen, Xing, Szarota, & Yang, 2014). However, future research should look into the gender and age variations among the respondents.

Limitations of the Research

One of the significant limitations of the research is that using students from the same location and age group may have led to the unification of the reactions, which might be considered subjective. However, as the strangers remained anonymous and I was not allowed to discuss them, the results remained credible and reliable.

References

Krys, K., Hansen, K., Xing, C., Szarota, P., & Yang, M. (2014). Do Only Fools Smile at Strangers? Cultural Differences in Social Perception of Intelligence of Smiling Individuals. Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 45(2), 314–321. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022113513922

Reis, H. T., Wilson, I. M., Monestere, C., Bernstein, S., Clark, K., Seidl, E., … Radoane, K. (1990). What is smiling is beautiful and good. European Journal of Social Psychology, 20(3), 259–267. https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2420200307

Tsujita, H., & Rekimoto, J. (2011). Smiling makes us happier. In Proceedings of the 13th international conference on Ubiquitous computing - UbiComp ’11 (p. 1). https://doi.org/10.1145/2030112.2030114