

## P-82: THE SALESPERSON-CONSUMER INTERACTIONS: A STUDY IN THE SURFWEAR RETAIL

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### PRESENTATION

Technological advances allow new points of contact, where the salesperson-consumer interaction can be in the digital, physical environment, or both.

Guo and Main (2017) suggest that sellers should adjust their approach based on consumer characteristics such as mood and buying motivation, thus creating a better perception of the service and further memorable experiences (Bustamante & Rubio, 2017).

Given the complexity of the effects of the human variable in the retail environment (Turley & Milliman, 2000) which presents itself as a rich empirical context for behavioral investigations (Penz & Hogg, 2011), the research is oriented by the following question: **how do the interactions occur between salesperson and consumers in the surfwear retail?**

### THE SALESPERSON-CONSUMER INTERACTIONS IN RETAIL

Five blocks of salesperson-consumer interactions were identified:

Approach	Attendance and communication	Physical distance and personal contact.	Store environment	Other participant's
<p>Begins when a consumer enters the store and is welcomed by a salesperson or other employee with greetings such as "Hello," "Welcome", "How can I help you?". The consumer-focused approach (Del Vecchio, Zemanek, McIntyre &amp; Claxton, 2003) assumes that the seller sees customer needs as a unique moment, with communication focused on interaction through consultation and clarification on the product in question. Consumer experience in retail varies according to the way they enter the store and interact with the products and sellers (Zhang, Li, Burke &amp; Leykin, 2014).</p>	<p>Tree attendance models such as (1) efficiency - the act of offering consumers what they request efficiently and courteously; (2) means - a way to meet goals such as sales goals; and (3) win-win - the formation of a mutually beneficial relationship with consumers through problem solving (Mascio, 2010). About communication, the impact of the seller praising a consumer while buying jeans and the findings indicate that a salesperson who has made negative comments have been perceived as sincerer and have more consumer confidence, unlike those have only made positive comments (Basso, Santos &amp; Gonçalves, 2014)</p>	<p>The intimate zone it's a length of up to 45 centimeters; the private area, from 45 centimeters to 1.2 meters; the social region, from 1.2 meters to 3.6 meters and is frequent in interpersonal relationships; and finally, the public area, with distances over 3.6 meters, more present in speeches, shows, etc (Hall, 1966). As for physical contact, some individuals see it as agreeable and for others not so much, as it varies according to the culture, subculture, and ethnicities that the individual is inserted (Hornik, 1992). The intensity of NFT can vary according to the cultural values of each country and that every society has its normative rules for touch (Orth, Chameeva &amp; Brand, 2013).</p>	<p>The more they interact with the product, the more significant their interest and engagement with the item (Zhang et al., 2014). In clothing retailing, Argo, Dahl, and Morales (2006) investigated that consumers when discovering that others have proved a specific T-shirt they were looking for and it was the last item in stock, it reduced their purchase intention even though they did not see the "contamination." Does the time of the relationship with the retailer influences the interactions with these physical elements of the environment?</p>	<p>the presence of other people in clothing stores according to Zhang et al. (2014) can encourage consumers to interact more with products, but when accompanied they share opinions and get distracted..The importance of other staff members in providing the service was studied by Beatty et al. (1996), where they found that salespeople recognize the importance of each member in delivering a better service to the consumer. Support personnel is fundamental to determine the level of service since if they perform their functions correctly, the environment will be better suited to the service delivery (Susskind, Kacmar &amp; Borchgrevink, 2003).</p>

### METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

Exploratory and descriptive approach. Structured observation and a semi-structured interview.

The survey conducted at three stores located in malls in the cities of São Paulo, Porto Alegre, and Rio de Janeiro, belonging to an American surfwear store chain:

**Salesperson-consumer interactions** -> **Consumer profile and opinion** -> **Salesperson profile and opinion about interactions**

**Structured observation of salesperson-consumer interactions:** research script "Who is approaching?", "Is the seller introducing himself to the consumer?", "Is the seller smiling?", "Does the seller touches the consumer?", "Is there a handshake?", "Does the seller interacts with hangers, shelves, and furniture?", "Were there other consumers in the store?", And "Are there interactions with the store staff?".

**Consumer and salesperson profile data and interactions' opinions collected with the semi-structured interview:** age, gender, educational level, family income range, frequency of visit to the store and purchase of clothes and accessories, "How did the interactions happen?", "What is your opinion about the service?" where asked for the consumers, and for the salespeople questions such as sales experience time, store experience time, "Which was most often?", "Which interaction disturbed/helped?".

### MAIN FINDINGS

Approach	Attendance and Communication	Physical distance and contact	Store environment interaction	Other participants
<p><b>Observations:</b> initiated by the seller, at the entrance of the store, where he/she presents himself and asks for the name of the consumer.</p>	<p><b>Observations:</b> seller availability for the service, with a natural smile, maintain eye contact, speak out loud and answer a variety of questions.</p>	<p><b>Observations:</b> low physical contact, and when happens, the consumer can initiate it. The types observed were a handshake, kiss on the cheek and slap in the back. Distance maintained was normal.</p>	<p><b>Observations:</b> consumer search for products through the store, sample items and ask for other options. The seller demonstrates and looks for products in the store and stock.</p>	<p><b>Observations:</b> active participation of support staff (cashier, manager and other vendors) during sales and some consumers were with companions.</p>
<p><b>Interviews:</b> evaluated as good, normal, cool, calm and objective. Examples: "The seller introduced the store, made me comfortable, did not stay up, and I called her later." "Like all other stores sellers, it was normal: Have a good day, how can I help you?"</p>	<p><b>Interviews:</b> evaluated as good, normal, great, cool, quiet, formal and excellent. Examples: "He (seller) said what I wanted to hear." "He (seller) left me at ease, and showed other options." "The consumer is shy."</p>	<p><b>Interviews:</b> evaluated as necessary, ideal, optimal and professional. Examples: "Standard distance consumer-seller". "You have to keep a distance. Surf shop has to be free. I do not like when the seller is on top". "1 meter approximately is a good distance". "Goodbye kisses because I liked her (seller)."</p>	<p><b>Interviews:</b> evaluated as an organized shop, with visible products and confusing space. Examples: "I look at everything." "Okay, but it wasn't a 'shopping experience'" "Pictures and embellishments attracted my attention."</p>	<p><b>Interviews:</b> Examples: "Cashier was very attentive." "Manager never gives attention, and in this store she gave." "It was fast, and I did not pay attention to other people." "I realized there were other consumers, but it did not mess up." "I asked for a license for the consumer."</p>

### FINAL DISCUSSIONS

For all situations observed it was not possible to establish a parameter in the events for the other interactions or even suggest a sequel to those moments between seller and consumer, except for the approach that occurred at the beginning of all interactions. Future research can explore how interactions occur according to gender, to consumer profiles by a group of similarity as did by Zhang et al. (2014), and also apply the block of the five interactions to other retail segments and formats. The future goal is to evaluate if other interactions weren't identified and to verify if there is any pattern in how the seller-consumer interactions in different locations and store types, contributing to deepening the understanding of how the human variable interacts with the retail.

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