ABSTRACT

Retail salespeople play a critical role in customer’s perceptions of the retail environment and retail experiences. They occupy a pivotal and boundary-spanning position for retailers, as they are the primary point of contact between a retailer and customers. Salespeople as the most influential component of overall retail store satisfaction. Retail salesperson behavior is a critical influence on the success or failure of a retailer because of its influence on consumer responses, including store patronage and purchase intentions, purchase decisions, perception of service quality, and overall image of the retail store.

The objective of the present study is to identify how retail staffs influence the customers in their shopping. The retail segments selected for this study were food and grocery, apparels, jewellery and consumer durables and home appliances. The research data were collected by using questionnaire and validated to the present study. Based on the statistical techniques the current study has found the staff influence towards the customers was also found to be high. The present research has proved that there exists a positive relationship between staff influence towards the customers.

Keywords

Retail Staff, Customers, Shopping Behaviour, Information Seeking, Behavioural Variations, Convincing, Heterogeneity.
INTRODUCTION

Consider the prevalence of consumer interaction with salespeople. Whether shopping for clothing, automobiles, electronics, insurance, or real estate, consumers frequently interface with salespeople, sometimes by choice and sometimes because the market requires it. Consumer markets in emerging market economies like India are growing rapidly owing to robust economic growth. India's modern consumption level is set to double within five years to US$ 1.5 trillion from the present level of US$ 750 billion. Thus, with tremendous potential and huge population, India is set for high growth in consumer expenditure. With India's large ‘young’ population and high domestic consumption, the macro trends for the sector look favorable. Not surprisingly, research on customer-salesperson relationships and sales performance has been plentiful. More recently, researchers have begun to focus on the role of the consumer in the salesperson-customer interaction. Much of this study has grown from the acknowledgement of the Persuasion Knowledge Model of consumer behavior (Friestad and Wright 2004). This paper presents the generation and validation of the 25-item Salesperson Orientation of Consumers scale. The resulting scale has four subscales, each lending new insights into consumer attitudes and behaviors in the marketplace.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Larson and Bone (2009) this study explains a review of the salesperson literature, the authors argue that a multi-dimensional scale to measure the Salesperson Orientation of Consumers (i.e., SOC scale) is critical to the understanding of consumer heterogeneity in attitudes and behaviors toward salespeople as marketing agents. In total, five studies were run to develop and validate the four dimensions (Information Seeking, Self Presentation, Avoidance, Convinceability) of the SOC scale, each lending new insights into consumer attitudes and behaviors in sales-aided marketplaces. Across four studies, scale items were purified and the SOC scale’s reliability and construct validity were tested. In study 5, participants responded to a number of vignettes about marketplace behavior relating to salespeople and the results provide support of the predictive validity of the SOC scale. Based on the results of these studies the authors present a discussion of how knowledge of the four dimensions of the SOC scale will aid marketing agents in ensuring positive consumer-salesperson interactions as well as aid public policy-makers in protecting consumers from the adverse consequences of high-pressure sales situations. In conclusion, a future research agenda is outlined to examine the implications of the SOC scale in other contexts and in relation to other sales and purchase variables.

Vlachos et.al, (2010) the study investigate loyalty building and the creation of affectionate bonds in the
consumer-firm dyad. The study relies on face-to-face personal interviews in the context of grocery store retailing. The results identify the significant predictors of consumer-firm emotional attachment to be firm trust, trust in employees, likeability of service personnel and likeability of co-consumers, shopping enjoyment, self-expressiveness, place dependence, and place identity. Consumers’ self-enrichment, self-gratification and self-enablement likely influence emotional attachment, which in turn is a strong predictor of behavioral loyalty and word of mouth. Attachment anxiety appears to multiply the effects of emotional attachment on behavioral loyalty and word of mouth. The cross-sectional nature of the study precludes definitive conclusions concerning causality between the constructs utilized. The data come from the supermarket retail channel, limiting the generalizability of the results. As the results suggest that the consumer’s self-enrichment seems to be the most important factor in determining emotional attachment, managers should incorporate the notion of emotional attachment into strategic performance management systems.

Jayawardhena and Farrell (2011) this study explains a conceptual model of the effects of customer and service orientation (SO) behaviours of individual retail employees on individual customers’ perceptions of service encounter quality (SEQ), service quality (SQ), value, satisfaction, and behavioural intentions (BI). The sample (n = 271) was customers of a supermarket in central India, and they completed questionnaires following mall intercept. To test the hypotheses, structural equation modelling using LISREL 8.7 was employed. It was found that: service and customer orientation (CO) behaviours are positively related to SEQ and SQ; SEQ is positively related to SQ and customer satisfaction; SQ is positively related to value perceptions and customer satisfaction; and customer satisfaction
is positively related to retail customers’ BI. However, value is not related to customer satisfaction. More research is needed on customer perceptions of value in non-Western contexts and service evaluation frameworks in other cross-cultural contexts. Retail managers need to train or select retail personnel who are able to perform their roles in a service-oriented and customer-oriented way, and value does not appear to be as important to Indian retail customers as it is to Western retail customers. This paper extends current service evaluation frameworks by including SO and CO as antecedents, and it analyses an Indian retail context.

Lloyd and Luk (2011) this study investigate the service interaction behaviors that elicit a sense of comfort for the customer in the service encounter, and to investigate the mediating role of comfort on assessments of quality, customer satisfaction and positive word-of-mouth in two industries. In-depth interviews were used to create an initial list of interaction behaviors displayed by service employees in an encounter. A quantitative study was then used to collect data to empirically examine the relationship between the constructs of interest. Two key groups of interaction behavior are identified and contain specific behaviors that create a sense of overall comfort for the customer. Overall comfort positively impacts both overall quality and customer satisfaction, and this ultimately leads to positive word-of-mouth. The research focuses on two industries only: fashion apparel retailing and casual dining restaurants. Future research needs to examine other industries, experiential or credence services, level of involvement or the impact of culture. Managers are recommended to incorporate interaction behaviors into front-line employee training and design of comfort enhancing strategies. Research on employee behaviors and emotional aspects of the encounter is relatively scant, and this study investigates the specific behavioral repertoire that gives rise to an overall feeling of comfort in the service encounter. Although employee behavior is widely acknowledged to have an immense impact on the customer’s evaluation of the encounter, there still exists much room to explore specific behaviors that are important for successful service delivery.

Musgrove (2011) this study examines a retail salesperson behavior that has been largely overlooked in the literature: retail salespeople standing and waiting for customers near the entrance of the store in retail centers, such as in traditional shopping malls, as well as a variety of other retail shopping contexts. These salespeople are referred to as “hailers.” The small amount of previous work in the area and theory suggest that this practice is a positive influence. However, qualitative interviews and quantitative results suggest the opposite. Many consumers feel uncomfortable with a salesperson near the entrance of a retail store because they think that the hailer is going to use high-pressure sales tactics. The main study, which is grounded in approach-avoidance theory and emotional contagion theory, consists of two experiments that examine the effects of retail salespeople near the entrance of stores, as well as other environmental
factors and salesperson characteristics. The first study manipulates store familiarity and retail density in addition to the presence of a retail salesperson. The second study focuses on particular characteristics of a salesperson present near the entrance and manipulates the salespersons demeanor and their level of activity. Each of the stimuli consists of a photograph and scenario combination.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To analyze information seeking tendencies of customers from retail staff.
- To assess the categories applied by retail staff to influence the customers while they are shopping.
- To analyze the tendencies and intentions of customers towards sales people while shopping in the retail outlet.
- To assess the ability of staff to convince the customers during shopping deal in the retail outlet.

METHODOLOGY

The present research is of descriptive and Causal in nature with the sampling method being multi-phase sampling. For the Purpose of collection of data all the 1096 customers from the selected 18, 27155 populations at Coimbatore district were considered. Based on the sampling design, the responses were collected from 4 retail segments such as Clothing and textiles, Food and grocery, Jewellary and Consumers durables and home appliances for the purpose of data collection. This research has an applied questionnaire as the research instrument for collecting the data. This questionnaire has about 20 variables of 4 constructs as Information Seeking, Behavioural Variations based on salesmen, Avoidance and Convinceability. These variables were measured along the standard measurement scale (Five-point scale of Likert) ranging from “5” = strongly agree to “1” = strongly disagree. The data were then submitted to the factor analysis with varimax-kiser normalization method on the various aspects relating to retail staff influence attributes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Consumer heterogeneity in salesperson orientation can have drastic impacts on the market. Marketers need to develop a better understanding of the dimensions of consumer heterogeneity in the realm of salesperson orientation so they can better manage the customer-salesperson interaction.

The dimensions of Information Seeking and Avoidance require a careful balancing act for many managers. Salespeople are needed to aid the purchase decisions of those high on Information Seeking, but the presence of too many salespeople will keep high Avoidance consumers out of the store or out of the market. The optimal size of the sales force will be larger in market whose consumers are less informed, but high Avoidance consumers may still desire sales-free purchasing in such markets.

Consumers high on Convinceability are prone to encounter sales situations that
could end with them making unwanted purchases. Salespeople who encounter highly convincible consumers often have little incentive to not take advantage of the tendency. Even when the consumer can be expected to make repeat purchases based on influential inputs, salesperson still has a strong incentive to oversell consumers if future purchases from the consumer are not guaranteed to go through the same salesperson.

The presence of salespeople in a retail outlet engenders an atmosphere where purchase is an implied requirement. Moreover consumers demand exceptional service from salesmen for the products in a store. They were not even bothered what salesmen will think and never mind to switch the store. The presence of salespeople in a store will increase sales from consumers even without pushing sells or providing useful help to the consumer. Of course, sales increase further once consumers obligate themselves to the salesperson by accepting sales assistance.

**Findings**

In employing factor analysis the opinion of the respondents were put under 5 points scale and then the extraction method of principal component analysis with varimax-kaiser normalization method was used for factor analysis. In identifying the components / factors the rule adopted was “Eigen value greater than one”.

A. It is concluded that the 5 factors relating to information seeking can be reduced to 2 components as below:

**GROUP 1: INFORMATION SEEKING.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACTOR</th>
<th>FACTOR LOADING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GROUP 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2</td>
<td>0.692</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F3</td>
<td>0.880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F4</td>
<td>0.736</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**F2**- I go to sales person on my own to get his attention and information.

**F3**- I feel more comfortable buying something when a salesperson has recommended it to me.

**F4**- I want salespeople to support me make a decision on my purchase.

The important factor being **F3**- I feel more comfortable buying something when a salesperson has recommended it to me (0.880).

**GROUP 2: TRUST OF SALESPEOPLE.**
F1 - When a salesperson is helping me; I usually take his/her advice.

F5 - I trust the information I get from salespeople.

The important factor being F1 - When a salesperson is helping me, I usually take his/her advice (0.729).

B. It is concluded that the 5 factors relating to behavioural variations based on salesmen can be reduced to 2 components as below.

**GROUP1: BEHAVIOURAL VARIATIONS BASED ON THE SALESMEN.**

**TABLE No. 2 - RESULTS OF FACTOR ANALYSIS- BEHAVIOURAL VARIATIONS BASED ON SALESMEN.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACTOR</th>
<th>FACTOR LOADING</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GROUP 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G3</td>
<td>0.844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G4</td>
<td>0.858</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G5</td>
<td>0.499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

G3 - I always demand for exceptional service from salesmen.

G4 - I never mind what salesmen think of me while I am purchasing.

G5 - I complain if something goes wrong from the part of salesmen service.

The important factor being G4 - I never mind what salesmen think of me while I am purchasing (0.858).

**GROUP 2: SALESMEN’S SERVICE.**

G1 - I appreciate or motivate salesmen for his/her good service in my own way.

G2 - I never mind switching from one store to another if I am not satisfied with service.

The important factor being G2 - I never mind switching from one store to another if I am not satisfied with service (0.837).

C. It is concluded that the 5 factors relating to avoidance can be reduced to 2 components as below.
GROUP1: AVOIDANCE

TABLE No. 3 - RESULTS OF FACTOR ANALYSIS- AVOIDANCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACTOR</th>
<th>FACTOR LOADING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GROUP 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2</td>
<td>0.815</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4</td>
<td>0.939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H5</td>
<td>0.897</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

H2- When shopping, I would rather make the decision on my own before talking to any salespeople.
H4- I feel more comfortable entering a store where I know salespeople will not approach me.
H5- I wish I could forever avoid having to talk to a salesperson.

The important factor being H4- I feel more comfortable entering a store where I know salespeople will not approach me (0.939).

GROUP 2: SALESMEN’S PREVENTION.
H1- I avoid stores with a lot of salespeople.
H3- I wish salesclerks only to answer my questions instead of trying to convince to buy something.

The important factor being H3- I wish salesclerks only to answer my questions instead of trying to convince to buy something (0.858).

D. It is concluded that the 5 factors relating to convinceability can be reduced to 2 components as below.

GROUP 1: CONVENIENCE.

TABLE 4: RESULTS OF FACTOR ANALYSIS- CONVINCIBILITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACTOR</th>
<th>FACTOR LOADING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GROUP 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>I2</td>
<td>0.693</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I3</td>
<td>0.899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I4</td>
<td>0.886</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I2- My purchase decisions are highly influenced by salesman who assist me from entrance of the shop.
I3- I am a person who is easily convinced by salespeople.
I4- I could be taken into a purchase by a persuasive salesperson.

The important factor being I3- I am a person who is easily convinced by salespeople (0.899).

GROUP 2: INFLUENCE OF SALES.

I1- I appreciate if sales person perform well to convince me.
I5- I have prior experience of making good purchases based on influential inputs of salesman.
The important factor being I5- I have prior experience of making good purchases based on influential inputs of salesman (0.740).

LIMITATIONS

This study is limited to the survey of customers in Coimbatore district. Although, Coimbatore district is a two tier city and 2nd major city in Tamil Nadu, the findings may not entirely reflect the views of customers of entire state in general. Hence, research in other cities and other customers is required to examine the validity and reliability of the identified store attributes and retail staff influence factors.

The researcher found it very difficult to make the respondents answer for lengthy questions as they were in shopping mood and neglect to answer the questions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The optimum size of the sales force in any retail store or outlets seems to be very high, so the managers may be able to encourage better sales behavior from their sales staff by ensuring that salespeople get to keep past customers.

Providing sufficient sales help to Information Seeking customers without pushing the Avoidance consumers away is especially tricky in these markets. Since the customers have prior experience based on the influential inputs of salesmen the customers are easily convinced by them. The managers can ensure and motivate the salesmen for better results.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Further research is recommended to examine the effect of salesperson orientation on post-purchase processes. Those who score high on the Convinceability dimension have likely come to recognize this property in them due to past experiences wherein they have been convinced to purchase items they came to regret. Obviously, a retailer would be very myopic to encourage the sales staff to take advantage of these consumers, as they
would likely never become repeat customers.

Future research is recommended to consider utilizing a broader range of potential respondents by surveying all retail segments and compare the assessments on the orientation of consumers toward salespeople. Corporate buyers are trained for interaction with salespeople, thus their orientations towards salespeople are likely to differ from consumer orientations.

Reference


Carolyn Findley Musgrove (2011) Hailers: Retail Salespeople near the Entrance of the Store and Shoppers’ Approach-Avoidance Reactions, UMI 3461372 Copyright 2011 by ProQuest LLC.


