

EVALUATION OF SALES BEHAVIOR BY CUSTOMERS IN THE CONTEXT OF SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF SALESPeOPLE

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ABSTRACT. Background: The research focuses on the psychological approach to the evaluation of sales behavior from the customers' perspective. In the context of sales behavior, it is essential to consider the approach of the seller, which is successful when sales are effective.

Aims: The aim of the contribution was to evaluate selected types of sales behavior from the perspective of customers in the context of interpersonal relationships. **Methods:** The research evaluated sales behavior from the customers' perspective, focusing on four distinct types of sales behavior: manipulative, involved, stressed, and assertive. The study utilized the DOS-Z methodology and the Interpersonal Adjective Scales (IAS).

Sample: The research sample consisted of 203 respondents, employees from the public and private spheres. **Results:** The study found no significant differences in sales behavior perceptions between urban and rural customers, but women rated salespeople as more stressed. Manipulative, assertive, stressed, and engaged behaviors correlated with traits like dominance, warmth, extraversion, and with some negative associations such as assertiveness with arrogance and introversion with engagement. **Conclusions:** The study concludes that place of residence minimally impacts perceptions of sales behavior, while gender influences stressed behavior. Interpersonal traits significantly shape customer perceptions, emphasizing their role in positive experiences.

Keywords: sales behavior, customer, gender, residence

JEL Classification: M1, M3

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Introduction

We describe sales behavior as an activity strongly tied to the personality of the salesperson. The success of sales and customer satisfaction depends on the specifics and determinants identified on the salesperson's side. The success of sales and customer satisfaction depends on the specifics and determinants identified on the salesperson's side. Understanding sales behavior from the customers' perspective is a crucial component of effective business practice. Sales interactions not only shape the immediate success of a transaction but also influence long-term customer relationships and loyalty. In the competitive landscape of modern commerce, the seller's approach is a decisive factor in determining the effectiveness of sales efforts.

This study explores the psychological dimensions of sales behavior, emphasizing the interpersonal dynamics between sellers and customers. The research investigates how different types of sales behavior—manipulative, involved, stressed, and assertive—are perceived by customers. Furthermore, it examines the interplay between these sales behaviors and interpersonal characteristics, shedding light on key factors that influence customer evaluations.

Theoretical background

According to Saxe and Weitz (1982), customer-oriented behavior is defined as the seller's ability to help customers by engaging in behavior that enhances customer satisfaction. This behavior is also referred to as engaged sales behavior. Examples include actions such as attempting to help customers achieve their goals, discussing customer needs, and attempting to influence customers with information rather than pressure.

Stock and Hoyer (2005) examined the impact of customer-oriented attitudes and behavior on customer satisfaction. A customer-oriented approach is defined as the degree to which the seller is for or against customers. It involves issues such as affinity for customer contact and understanding the importance of customer orientation for both individuals and company performance. Peccei and Rosenthal (2000) hold a similar view, stating that instilling or reinforcing proactive approaches in service or direct sales employees is crucial because it is a significant path to achieving customer-oriented behavior.

Hakanen and Jaakkola (2012) state that creating solutions that meet customer needs requires salespeople to understand the customer's problem and expectations regarding the purchasing process. Effective co-creation of solutions with the customer requires salespeople to understand not only the customer's needs regarding the content of the most important solutions but also the customer's preferences regarding their role and control in the co-creation process.

Di Mascio (2010) examined the perception of customer service by front-line employees. The results suggest three distinct interpretations of customer service or service models: (1) effective and courteous provision of what customers demand; (2) means to achieve immediate sales results, such as sales quotas; and (3) creating mutually beneficial relationships with customers through problem-solving.

As Glazer and Liu (2017) point out, work stress negatively impacts individuals and their productivity. According to Oksanen and Ståhle (2013), a pleasant work environment has a significant impact on the well-being, creativity, attitudes, perceptions, and interactions of individuals with others. Sales, in general, ranks high on the list of stressful jobs, and in the daily life of a salesperson, many factors contribute to stress. Salespeople often find themselves in situations that create highly stressful environments (Johansson, 2018). According to Kempa et al. (2013), the stress that affects salespeople has both positive and negative aspects, and each salesperson perceives a different situation as a source of stress. As Johansson (2018) emphasizes, challenging situations should be a challenge and an opportunity for salespeople to grow and learn how to handle stress and difficult situations, which is a fundamental skill in the workplace.

Proactive sales behavior is manifested through an assertive, engaged approach by salespeople, effective, pleasant and polite communication, attention, respect, and mutual trust between the customer and the seller (Štefko et al., 2019). Engaged and assertive behavior is part of the concept of positive work psychology, defined by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) as a scientific study of optimal employee performance aimed at discovering and supporting factors that allow employees and organizations to thrive. Joy (2016) argues that engagement has a positive impact on productivity and well-being at work, leading to a positive attitude of salespeople towards customers. Medhurst and Albrecht (2016) define

assertiveness as an effort to address situations arising from customer requirements. The assertiveness of salespeople brings increased sales, happiness, satisfaction, fulfillment, well-functioning teams, self-confidence, credible sales demonstration, creativity, service quality to customers, and less stress. Garner (2012) adds that assertive, passionate, honest, and humble salespeople work on customer loyalty.

Manifestations of manipulative behavior can be observed in the field of business behavior. In the business environment, a variety of tools, principles, and approaches are used to influence and manipulate customers (Daňková, Droppa, 2015; Sunstein, 2016). Braiker (2004) sees manipulation as a social impact aimed at changing customer decisions using various tactics. This may include distorting information about products and services, unclear arguments, unfair compliments, and unwillingness to help. Unethical practices perceived by dissatisfied customers cause greater harm than the short-term benefits of one-time sales (Dooley 2011).

Birknerová and Kovařová (2017; 2018; 2020) examined sales behavior from the customer's perspective based on selected determinants of sales behavior. They included assertive and engaged behavior of salespeople among prosocial, i.e., desirable forms of behavior. Manipulative behavior and behavior in stressful situations were assigned to undesirable forms of business behavior. Whether a salesperson behaves manipulatively is also related to adherence to ethical principles. Hansen and Riggle (2009) point out that customers have a more favorable attitude toward salespeople they perceive as ethical. Consequently, it is more likely that customers will exhibit their desired behavior with such salespeople. The degree of emphasis that a customer places on the ethics of a salesperson is related to the customer's age. The older the customer, the more they care about the ethics of the salesperson.

Gurtman and Pincus (2000) examined the appropriateness of the IAS model from various perspectives, tested various versions of the model, and applied various methods. The results of these analyses support the IAS models. The results were obtained from three models that differed in assumptions and were associated with different analytical methods.

Kincl et al. (2004) argue that consumer behavior is the result of influences that can be individual, microsocial, or macrosocial. Individual influences on consumer behavior consist of the psychological processes of an individual, states, and traits acquired through experiences that form their personal history. Microsocial influences are shaped by small groups connected to the individual throughout their life, which have a significant impact on them. These conditions are also referred to as group conditions. Macrosocial influences are equally important in consumer behavior as they are linked to cultural patterns and civilizational behavior models that the individual strives to follow. These conditions are also known as societal conditions.

According to Flešková and Dolinská (2010), several factors influence consumer behavior. Their impact on the decision-making process is evident in the purchasing process. These groups of factors primarily include cultural factors, social and marketing factors, personal factors, and psychological factors.

Cultural factors are transmitted from generation to generation, dynamic in nature, changing with societal changes, and thereby influencing consumer behavior during purchases. Cultural factors are a significant determinant of human behavior in society (Richterová et al., 2015).

Methodology

Mažár (2019) notes that the goal of every merchant is to establish a positive relationship with customers, fostering customer loyalty, forgiveness for any potential mistakes, and gaining a new chance in case of minor failures.

The conducted research focuses on the psychological approach to the evaluation of sales behavior from the customers' perspective. In the context of sales behavior, it is essential to consider the approach of the seller, which is successful when sales are effective. In the context of sales behavior, it is essential to consider the approach of the seller, which is successful when sales are effective.

The research sample comprised 203 respondents aged 17 to 45 ($M=25.458$, $SD=3.482$), with 126 women and 77 men. The sample included 130 respondents living in urban areas and 73 respondents residing in rural areas. Regarding education, 91 respondents completed secondary education, 51 respondents completed tertiary education at the bachelor's level, 58 respondents completed tertiary education at the master's level, and three respondents completed tertiary education at the doctoral level.

The DOS-Z methodology by Kovařová and Birknerová (2019) assessed four types of sales behavior from the customers' perspective, with determinants evaluated on a 6-point scale (1 - definitely no, 6 - definitely yes). Items 1-12 analyzed the manipulative business behavior of sellers, items 13-24 assessed the involved business behavior of sellers and their awareness, items 25-36 analyzed the stressed business behavior of sellers, and items 37-48 assessed the assertive business behavior of sellers.

Examples of items related to each type of sales behavior:

- Manipulative business behavior of sellers: "I can defend myself against manipulative behavior in the store."
- Involved business behavior of sellers: "I positively evaluate the high involvement of the seller."
- Stressed business behavior of sellers: "I am nervous when served by a stressed salesperson."
- Assertive business behavior of sellers: "I feel better about shopping if the seller respects my opinion on the product (Birknerová, Koval'ová, 2017)."

The Interpersonal Adjective Scales (IAS), authored by Wiggins (1991), measured the level of interpersonal relationships. The methodology contains 24 traits characterizing individuals' behavior in interpersonal relationships, rated on an 8-point scale (1 - this trait describes me completely to 8 - this trait does not describe me at all). The methodology was designed for customers to assess the interpersonal behavior of sellers with whom they had personal contact. The reliability of the methodology was at Cronbach's alpha=0.812.

Results

The main objective of the research study was to evaluate various types of sales behavior from the customers' perspective in the context of interpersonal relationships. The research results were processed using the IBM SPSS 20.00 Statistics program, employing a t-test for independent samples.

Using the t-test for independent samples, the four types of sales behavior from the customers' perspective were compared based on their place of residence (Table 1).

Table 1 Comparison of Types of Sales Behavior from Customers' Perspective Based on the Residence of Respondents

Independent Variable	Residence	N	Mean	St. Dev.	t	Degrees of Freedom	p-value
Manipulative Behavior	City	130	3.952	0.553	0.274	201	0.784
	Rural	73	3.930	0.509			
Engaged Behavior	City	130	3.819	0.810	-0.701	201	0.484
	Rural	73	3.900	0.753			
Stressed Behavior	City	130	4.074	0.645	0.610	201	0.543
	Rural	73	4.019	0.561			
Assertive Behavior	City	130	4.609	0.745	-0.365	201	0.716
	Rural	73	4.650	0.788			

Source: *Own processing*

The results of the analysis did not show statistically significant differences in the level of manipulative, engaged, stressed, and assertive behavior of salespeople from the customers' perspective based on the customers' place of residence. Based on the research results, it can be concluded that customers from the city do not differ from customers from rural areas in the assessment of individual types of sales behavior of salespeople. Gender differences in the assessment of sales behavior of salespeople by customers were investigated using the t-test for independent samples (Table 2).

Table 2 Comparison of Types of Sales Behavior from Customers' Perspective Based on the Gender of Respondents

Independent Variable	Gender	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t	Degrees of Freedom	p-value
Manipulative Behavior	Women	126	3.957	0.553	-0.436	201	0.664
	Men	77	3.923	0.509			
Assertive Behavior	Women	126	3.923	0.756	-0.351	201	0.726
	Men	77	3.923	0.769			
Stressed Behavior	Women	126	4.599	0.575	-3.130	201	0.020
	Men	77	4.638	0.645			
Engaged Behavior	Women	126	3.836	0.752	0.255	201	0.799
	Men	77	3.865	0.850			

Source: *Own processing*

The analysis revealed statistically significant gender differences in the assessment of stressed behavior by customers ($p=0.002$). It was found that women tended to rate the salesperson's behavior as more stressed to a higher degree. On the other hand, statistically significant gender differences were not demonstrated in the assessment of manipulative, assertive, and engaged behavior of salespeople by customers.

The correlations between various types of sales behavior of salespeople and interpersonal adjectives assessed by customers were examined using the Pearson correlation coefficient (Table 3).

Table 3 Correlation between the Assessment of Various Types of Sales Behavior and Interpersonal Characteristics of Salespeople by Customers

Interpersonal Characteristics	Manipulative Behavior	Assertive Behavior	Stressed Behavior	Engaged Behavior
Dominant	R=0.179* p=0.011	R=0.242** p=0.001	R=0.150* p=0.033	R=0.132 p=0.060
Arrogant	R=0.026* p=0.715	R=0.202** p=0.004	R=0.060 p=0.397	R=0.030 p=0.668
Cold	R=0.015 p=0.834	R=0.247** p=0.000	R=0.209** p=0.003	R=0.125 p=0.075
Introverted	R=0.080 p=0.255	R=0.077 p=0.276	R=0.031 p=0.660	R=0.140* p=0.047
Submissive	R=0.099 p=0.160	R=0.290** p=0.000	R=0.022 p=0.755	R=0.122 p=0.082
Witty	R=0.120 p=0.088	R=0.191** p=0.006	R=0.135 p=0.055	R=0.139* p=0.048
Warm	R=0.191** p=0.006	R=0.246** p=0.000	R=0.225** p=0.001	R=0.153 p=0.029
Extroverted	R=0.211** p=0.002	R=0.281** p=0.000	R=0.003 p=0.962	R=0.182** p=0.009

Note: * $p \leq 0.05$; ** $p \leq 0.01$

Source: *Own processing*

The analysis results confirmed statistically significant correlations between the assessment of manipulative sales behavior and the assessment of interpersonal characteristics by customers. Specifically, a positive statistically significant relationship was confirmed between manipulative behavior and dominance, warmth, and extroversion.

Similarly, statistically significant correlations were demonstrated between the assessment of assertive sales behavior and the assessment of interpersonal characteristics by customers. Specifically, a positive statistically significant relationship was confirmed between assertive sales behavior and dominance, wit, and extroversion. On the other hand, a negative statistically significant relationship was confirmed between assertive sales behavior and characteristics such as arrogance, coldness, and submissiveness, indicating that the higher the level of assertive behavior of the salesperson, the less arrogant, cold, and submissive they appear to the customer.

The results of the analysis also showed statistically significant correlations between the assessment of stressed sales behavior and the assessment of interpersonal characteristics by customers. Specifically, a positive statistically significant relationship was confirmed between stressed sales behavior and a warm approach. On the other hand, a negative statistically significant relationship was found between stressed sales behavior and the interpersonal characteristic of dominance, indicating that the higher the level of stressed behavior of the salesperson, the less dominant they appear to the customer.

Based on the Pearson correlation coefficient, statistically significant correlations were demonstrated between the assessment of engaged sales behavior and the assessment of interpersonal characteristics by customers. Specifically, a positive statistically significant relationship was confirmed between engaged sales behavior and wit, warmth, and extroversion. On the other hand, a negative statistically significant relationship was found between engaged sales behavior and the interpersonal characteristic of introversion, indicating that the higher the level of engaged behavior of the salesperson, the less introverted they appear to the customer. This research finding was also confirmed by the positive correlation between engaged sales behavior and the interpersonal characteristic of extroversion.

Discussion and Conclusion

In the discussion, the research results are compared with previous studies in the field of sales behavior. The evaluation of sales behavior and interpersonal characteristics of salespeople by customers was investigated.

Demographic variables significantly contribute to explaining phenomena in the field of marketing and sales (Pol, 1991). For this reason, two socio-demographic characteristics, specifically place of residence and gender, were used in the study. The analysis results did not show statistically significant differences in the level of manipulative, engaged, stressed, and assertive behavior of traders from the customers' perspective regarding the customers' place of residence. Based on the research results, it can be concluded that customers from urban areas do not differ from customers from rural areas in the assessment of individual types of sales behavior.

The analysis results demonstrated statistically significant gender differences in assessing stressed behavior by customers ($p=0.002$). It was found that women rated the sales behavior of the trader as more stressed to a higher extent. On the other hand, statistically significant gender differences were not confirmed in the assessment of the manipulative, assertive, and engaged behavior of traders by customers.

The assessment of the interpersonal characteristics of traders from the customers' perspective was the subject of the research. Based on the research results, a positive statistically significant relationship was confirmed between manipulative behavior and dominance, warmth, and extraversion. Birknerová and Koval'ová (2017) in their research state that the manipulative sales behavior of traders, associated with the experience of negative emotions by customers, as well as the feeling of pressure to buy, positively correlates with stressful sales behavior. This behavior is characterized by a negative atmosphere where the customer feels discomfort because the salesperson transfers signs of stress to the customer. The stressful shopping environment associated with manipulative elements of traders' sales behavior can disturb customers, often leading them to leave the store. Based on the research findings, it can be stated that customers from the city do not differ from customers from the countryside in assessing individual types of sales behavior.

The assessment of the interpersonal characteristics of traders from the customers' perspective was a secondary subject of the research. Based on the research results, a positive statistically significant relationship was confirmed between manipulative behavior and dominance, warmth, and extraversion. Birknerová and Koval'ová (2017) in their research state that the manipulative sales behavior of traders, associated with the experience of negative emotions by customers, as well as the feeling of pressure to buy, positively correlates with stressful sales behavior. This behavior is characterized by a negative atmosphere where the customer feels discomfort because the salesperson transfers signs of stress to the customer. The stressful shopping environment associated with manipulative elements of traders' sales behavior can disturb customers, often leading them to leave the store. Based on the research findings, it can be stated that customers from the city do not differ from customers from the countryside in assessing individual types of sales behavior.

The study's limitations include a relatively small sample size (203 respondents) with a younger age distribution, potentially limiting the generalizability of findings. Its focus on a specific cultural and regional context further restricts applicability to other settings. The reliance on self-reported data through the DOS-Z and IAS methodologies may introduce bias, and the study's cross-sectional design does not capture changes over time. Additionally, the research examined only four types of sales behavior, omitting other factors like non-verbal communication or environmental influences, and did not explore the long-term impact of sales behaviors on customer loyalty or satisfaction.

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