



Assesment of sales behavior types from the customer´s point of view in the context of interpersonal characteristics

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Abstract: The main goal of the study is to assess 4 types of selling behavior concerning sellers from the viewpoint of customer (gender differences and differences in the context of place of residence). The research sample consisted of 203 respondents (62 % of women and 38% of men) aged from 17 to 45 years (mean = 23.458, standard deviation= 3.482), 64% of participants living in the city and 36% of participants in the countryside. The research study used the DOS-Z methodology by Kovalová and Birknerová (2018) designed to assess the four determinants of sales behavior of traders from the perspective of customers, using also an abridged version of the IAS (Interpersonal Adjective Scales) methodology by Wiggins (1991) at the level of interpersonal relations. Statistically, significant gender differences were found in the assessment of stressful sales behavior, with women judging the type of sales behavior as more stressful.

Keywords: selling behavior; customer; interpersonal relations; gender; place of residents

JEL: D23, L29, L19

Ocena tipov prodajnega vedenja s stališča kupca v okviru medosebnih značilnosti

Povzetek: Glavni cilj študije je oceniti 4 vrste prodajnega vedenja prodajalcev z vidika kupca (razlike med spoloma in razlike v kontekstu kraja bivanja). V tem vzorcu so sodelovali 203 anketiranci (62% žensk in 38% moških), stari od 17 do 45 let (povprečje = 23,458, standardni odklon = 3,482), od tega je bilo 64% udeležencev, ki živijo v mestu, in 36% udeležencev, ki bivajo na podeželju. V raziskovalni študiji je bila uporabljena metodologija DOS-Z Kovalove in Birknerjeve (2018), namenjena oceni štirih dejavnikov prodajnega vedenja trgovcev z vidika kupcev, hkrati z uporabo skrajšane različice metodologije IAS (Interpersonal Adjective Scales), ki jo je izdelal Wiggins (1991), upoštevajoč tudi raven medosebnih odnosov. Pri oceni stresnega prodajnega vedenja so bile ugotovljene statistično pomembne razlike med spoloma, pri čemer so ženske vrsto prodajnega vedenja ocenile kot bolj stresno.

Ključne besede: prodajno vedenje; potrošnik; medosebni odnosi; spol; kraj prebivalcev

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Introduction

The digital revolution has caused several drastic changes in business. Schiffman and Kanuk (2004) state that consumers have more power and access to more information than ever before. Merchants are offering more and more products and services, while the exchange between the seller and the customer is more interactive and immediate.

The interaction between the seller and the customer is influenced by many factors, especially personality and relationship. These factors can be measured through the identified determinants of sales behaviour, as well as indicators of interpersonal relationships. The success of sales relations is also related to the demographic characteristics of both parties.

Theoretical background

Román and Ruiz (2005) state that the way the customer perceives the seller's behavior is subsequently reflected in the quality of the seller-customer relationship. The customer's commitment to the seller is also affected by customer's satisfaction and trust. A stronger effect on the level of customer satisfaction on the seller's behaviour is perceived more negatively than positively.

According to Saxe and Weitz (1982), customer-oriented behavior is defined as the ability of a salesperson to help customers by engaging in behavior that increases customer satisfaction. We can also denote such behaviour as the engaged behavior of the seller. Examples include the following types of behaviour: trying to help achieve customer goals, discussing customer needs, and trying to influence the customer with information rather than pressure.

Stock and Hoyer (2005) examined the impact of customer-oriented attitudes and types of behavior on customer satisfaction. A customer-oriented approach is defined as a measure of a vendor's influence in favor or against customers. It addresses issues such as the affinity to customer contact and understanding the importance of customer orientation for both, the individual and the company's performance. A similar view is shared by Peccei and Rosenthal (2000), who argue that it is important to encourage or strengthen the proactive attitudes by employees in services or direct sales, because they represent an important path to the desired customer-oriented behavior.

Hakanen and Jaakkola (2012) state that creating solutions which meet customer needs requires salespeople to understand the customers' problems and expectations regarding the purchasing process. Nevertheless, creating an appropriate solution with the customer requires vendors to understand not only the customers' needs in terms of the content of the most important solutions, but also the customers' preferences in terms of their role and control in the mutual creation process.

Di Mascio (2010) examined the perception of customer service by front line employees. The results show that there are three different interpretations of customer services or service models: (1) efficiently and courteously providing customers with what they require; (2) means to achieve immediate sales results, such as sales quotas; and (3) building mutually beneficial relationships with customers through problem solving.

Birknerová and Kovalová (2017; 2018; 2020) examined sales behavior from the customer's point of view based on selected determinants of sales behavior. They included assertive and engaged behavior of sellers among the prosocial, i.e. desirable forms of behavior. They assigned manipulative behavior and behavior in stressful situations to undesirable forms of business behavior. Whether the seller behaves manipulatively is also related to his adherence to ethical principles. Hansen and Riggle (2009) point out that customers have a more favorable attitude towards sellers whom they perceive as ethical. Consequently, they are more likely to show their desired behavior to such sellers. The ethical behavior of the seller is thus reflected not only in the relationship but also in his economic returns. The degree of emphasis that the customer places on the seller's ethics is related to the customer's age. The older the customer, the more he cares about the seller's ethics.

The behavior and attitude of the seller towards customers are influenced by his personality and the way he works in interpersonal relationships. This factor can be measured by IAS (The Interpersonal Adjective Scales), which was developed to provide geometrically accurate semantic indicators for measuring interpersonal relationships (Wiggins, 1979). The original IAS model consists of 128 separate adjectives, which are used to assess entities on an 8-digit Likert scale. The answers are accumulated on eight scales with 16 items. Each of the eight scales is identified by Ambitious-Dominant, Gregarious-Extraverted, Warm-Agreeable, Unassuming-Ingenuous, Lazy-Submissive, Aloof-Introverted, Cold-Quarrelsome, Arrogant-Calculating (Wiggins and Broughton, 1991). Gurtman and Pincus (2000) examined the suitability of the IAS model from several perspectives, tested different versions of the model, and applied different methods. The results of these analyzes support the circumplex structure of the IAS. The results were obtained from three circumplex models, which differed in the assumptions and were associated with different analytical methods. The connection of determinants of sales behavior with the IAS methodology is presented in the following part of this paper.

Methods

The research sample consisted of 203 respondents aged 17 to 45 years ($m = 25,458$, $SD = 3,482$), while the research sample consisted of 126 women and 77 men. The research sample consisted of 130 respondents living in the city and 73 respondents living in the countryside, 91 respondents had completed secondary education, 51 respondents had a university I. degree, 58 respondents had completed university education II. degree and three respondents had completed university education III. degree.

The research study used the DOS-Z methodology (Determinants of Sellers' Behavior) from Kovalová and Birknerová (2018) designed to assess the four determinants of sales behavior of traders from the customers' point of view (manipulative, engaged, assertive and stressful). Using an abbreviated version of the IAS (Interpersonal Adjective Scales) methodology by Wiggins (1991), the level of interpersonal relationships was determined and assessed by customers.

The IAS scale examined the level of interpersonal relationships. The methodology contains 24 properties that characterize the behavior of people in interpersonal relationships and are assessed on an 8-point scale (1- this property completely describes me and 8- this property does not describe me at all). The methodology was designed for customers to assess the interpersonal behavior of vendors with whom they were in personal contact. The reliability of the methodology was at the level of Cronbach alfa = 0.812.

The DOS-Z methodology was designed to assess four types of sales behavior of traders from the customer's point of view, while the determinants of sales behavior were assessed on a 6-point scale (1- definitely not, 6- definitely yes). The reliability of the methodology was at the level of Cronbach alfa = 0.721.

Items 1 - 12 analyze the seller's business manipulative behavior, items 13 - 24 analyze the seller's engaged business behavior as well as its awareness, items 25 - 36 analyze the seller's stressed business behavior and items 37 - 48 analyze the seller's assertive business behavior.

Examples of items with respect to different types of sales behavior.

Manipulative business behavior of the seller: *"I can prevent manipulative behavior in the business."*

The seller's engaged business behavior: *"I appreciate the seller's high commitment."*

Stressed business behavior of the seller: *"I am nervous when I am served by a stressed seller."*

Assertive business behavior of the seller: *"I have a better feeling from shopping if the seller respects my opinion on the product (Birknerová, Kovalová, 2017)"*

The reliability of the methodology was at the level of Cronbach alfa = 0.721.

Results

The main goal of the research study was to assess individual types of sales behavior from the customer's point of view in the context of interpersonal relationships. The research results were processed in the IBM SPSS 20.00 Statistics program using differential statistics, namely using a t-test for two independent samples and Pearson's correlation coefficient. Using a t-test for two independent selections, four types of sales behavior were compared from the customers' point of view with respect to their place of residence.

Table 1 Comparison of types of sales behavior from the point of view of customers with regard to the residence of respondents

Indepent variable	Place of residence	N	Mean	Standard deviation	t	Degree of freedom	p
Manipulative behavior	City	130	3.952	0.553	0.274	201	0.784
	Countryside	73	3.930	0.509			
Engaged behavior	City	130	3.819	0.810	-0.701	201	0.484
	Countryside	73	3.900	0.753			
Stressful behavior	City	130	4.074	0.645	0.610	201	0.543
	Countryside	73	4.019	0.561			
Assertive behavior	City	130	4.609	0.745	-0.365	201	0.716
	Countryside	73	4.650	0.788			

Source: own processing

The results of the analysis did not show the existence of statistically significant differences on the level of manipulative, engaged, stressed and assertive behavior of traders from the point of view of customers with respect to the place of customers' residence. Based on the research results, it can be stated that the customers from the city do not differ from customers from the countryside on the level of assessment related to individual types of sales behaviour exhibited by traders. Using a t-test for two independent selections, gender differences were found on the level of assessment considering traders' sales behavior by customers.

Table 2 Comparing the types of sales behavior from the customers' point of view with respect to the respondents' gender.

Indepent variable	Gender	N	Mean	Standard deviation	t	Degree of freedom	p
Manipulative behavior	Women	126	3.957	0.553	-0.436	201	0.664
	Men	77	3.923	0.509			
Engaged behavior	Women	126	3.923	0.756	-0.351	201	0.726
	Men	77	3.923	0.769			
Stressful behavior	Women	126	4.599	0.575	-3.130	201	0.002
	Men	77	4.638	0.645			
Assertive behavior	Women	126	3.836	0.752	0.255	201	0.799
	Men	77	3.865	0.850			

Source: own processing

The results of the analysis showed the existence of statistically significant gender differences in the assessment of stressed behavior by customers ($p = 0.002$). It was found that women rated the sales behavior of the trader as more stressed. On the other hand, no statistically significant gender differences were demonstrated in the assessment of the manipulative, assertive and engaged behavior of traders by the customers.

Table 3 Comparison of types of sales behavior from the customers' point of view with respect to the respondents' gender

Behavior		Dominant	Calculating	Cold-hearted	Introverted	Submissive	Ingenuous	Agreeable	Extroverted
Manipulative	R	0,179*	-0.026	0.015	0.080	-0.099	0.120	0.191**	0.211**
	p	0.011	0.715	0.834	0.255	0.160	0.088	0.006	0.002
Assertive	R	0.242**	-0.202**	-0.247**	-0.077	-0.290**	0.191**	0.246**	0.281**
	p	0.001	0.004	0.000	0.276	0.000	0.006	0.000	0.000
Stressful	R	-0.150*	-0.060	-0.209**	0.031	-0.022	0.135	0.225**	0.003
	p	0.033	0.397	0.003	0.660	0.755	0.055	0.001	0.962
Engaged	R	0.132	0.030	-0.125	-0.140*	-0.122	0.139*	0.153*	0.182**
	p	0.060	0.668	0.075	0.047	0.082	0.048	0.029	0.009

Source: own processing

The results of the analysis showed statistically significant connections between the evaluation of manipulative sales behavior and the evaluation of interpersonal characteristics by customers. In particular, a positive statistically significant relationship between manipulative behavior and dominance, warmth, and extraversion was confirmed.

There were also statistically significant correlations between the assessment of assertive sales behavior and the assessment of interpersonal characteristics by customers. In particular, a positive statistically significant relationship between assertive sales behavior and dominance, ingenuity and extraversion was confirmed. On the other hand, a negative statistically significant relationship between assertive sales behavior and characteristics such as arrogant, cold and submissive was confirmed, which means that the higher the level of assertive behavior a trader has, the less it appears to customers as arrogant, cold and submissive.

The results of the analysis showed statistically significant connections between the evaluation of stressed sales behavior and the evaluation of interpersonal characteristics by customers. In particular, a positive statistically significant relationship between stressed sales behavior and a warm approach was confirmed. On the other hand, a negative statistically significant relationship was found between stressed sales behavior and interpersonal dominance characteristics, which means that the higher the level of stressed behavior a trader has, the less it appears to customers as dominant.

Based on Pearson's correlation coefficient, statistically significant relationships between the evaluation of assertive sales behavior and the evaluation of interpersonal characteristics by customers were demonstrated. In particular, a positive statistically significant relationship between assertive sales behavior and ingenuity, warmth and extraversion was confirmed. On the other hand, a negative statistically significant relationship was found between assertive sales behavior and interpersonal characteristics by introversion, which means that the higher the level of assertive behavior a trader has, the less introverted he appears to customers. This research finding was also confirmed by the positive correlation between assertive sales behavior and interpersonal extraversion characteristics.

Discussion and conclusion

Demographic variables contribute significantly to the explanation of marketing and sales phenomena (Pol, 1991). For this reason, two socio-demographic characteristics were used in the research, namely, the place of residence and gender. Gender differences are an important area of sales research. Several studies have addressed gender differences in vendors (Giligan, 1982; Swan et al., 1984), with minimal attention paid to gender differences in assessing vendors and their sales behavior. In the context of comparing gender differences, it can be stated on the basis of the above-mentioned authors that women are better at developing interdependent and lasting relationships. Women are also considered better listeners than men. Women are perceived as more sensitive and therefore lose their customers excessively. And last but not least, it needs to be emphasized that women pay more attention to relationships than men, which may be one of the reasons why it takes women longer to stop selling.

The results of the analysis showed the existence of statistically significant gender differences in the assessment of stressed behavior by customers ($p = 0.002$). It was found that women rated the sales behavior of the trader more stressed. On the other hand, no statistically significant gender differences were demonstrated in the assessment of the manipulative, assertive and engaged behavior of traders by customers. The author Feingold (1994) points out the personality characteristics of salespeople, specifically stating that women are characterized by a lower level of aggression and, conversely, a higher level of friendliness and empathy than men. Franke and Park (2006) point to the empathy of salespeople, which increases awareness of situational factors in sales and a willingness to adapt during the sale process. Empathy is also emphasized by Siguaw (1991) as an important personality characteristic of salespeople. Researchers Neu, Graham, and Gilly (1988) demonstrate that although women tend to behave more cooperatively and exhibit higher levels of interpersonal behavior than men, this difference was not statistically significant. Goolsby, Lagace, and Boore (1992) found that successful sales women have acquired psychological traits that are more associated with men (e.g. aggression).

The research confirmed a positive statistically significant relationship between manipulative behavior and dominance, warmth and extraversion. In research, Birknerová and Kovalová (2017) state that the manipulative sales behavior of traders, which is associated with the feeling of negative emotions in customers, as well as with the feeling of pressure to buy, positively correlates with stressful sales behavior. The given behavior is characterized by a negative atmosphere, where the customer feels discomfort, because the seller transmits the manifestations of stress to the customer himself. The stressful shopping environment, which is associated with the manipulative elements of retailers' business behavior, drives customers crazy, often leading them to leave the store.

The research confirmed a positive statistically significant relationship between stressed sales behavior and a warm approach. On the other hand, a negative statistically significant relationship was found between stressed sales behavior and interpersonal dominance characteristics. Kovalová et al. (2018) in their research point to the fact that a happier and less stressed employee is more productive, his level of communication is increasing and so is customer satisfaction. Stress at the seller's job can be useful, but it can also be very harmful, with the ability to cope with stress being very important. The right level of pressure can contribute to motivation and productivity on the one hand, but on the other it can be paralyzing for the seller in terms of work activities. Research by Malika et al. (2011) confirmed a negative relationship between stress and job satisfaction, as well as a negative impact of stress on customer satisfaction.

In particular, a positive statistically significant relationship between engaged sales behavior and savvy, warmth and extraversion was confirmed. On the other hand, a negative statistically significant relationship was found between assertive sales behavior and interpersonal characteristics by introversion. Research by Birknerová and Kovalová (2017) showed a positive correlation between engaged and stressful sales behavior of sellers, which, according to the authors, means that excessive involvement on the part of the seller can have a stressful effect on the customer. These are extreme forms of behavior the seller should have under control.

All these findings emphasize the importance of knowledge in different selling behavior of sellers from the point of view of interpersonal characteristics. The issue definitely creates space for future research that has a general and interdisciplinary character. The limitation of research study are occasional or arbitrary choice of research sample and low number of respondents. The research results are basis for future research with more socio - demographic and personality characteristics.

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