

## STUDY REGARDING THE ATTITUDE OF CUSTOMERS ON THE BEHAVIOUR OF THE SALES STAFF IN THE SUPERMARKETS FROM RESITA

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### **Abstract**

*The importance of commerce is becoming higher nowadays, in the context of a consumer society. The role of employees is thus essential in providing the best products and services to customers. The present paper tries to highlight the situation of supermarket staff in the city of Resita. Thus, the first part of the paper presents a theoretical background and a review of literature in the field, while the second part consists in a study carried out with the purpose of researching the attitude of customers on the behaviour of the sales staff.*

**Keywords:** trade, commerce, customers, employees, management

**Clasificare JEL :** D12, M12

### **1. Theoretical background**

Over time, the importance of stores in general and supermarkets in particular has increased, with the transition to a consumer society. Thus, global networks of companies have grown to serve the diverse needs of the population.

Employee behavior is often one of the main criteria that influences a buyer's decision to choose one supermarket or another; thus it becomes important how managers manage to coordinate their work, motivate them and make them perform.

"Sales people play a critical role in organizations in delivering customer value" [2].

The importance of the work of an employee in trade is emphasized on the one hand by the activities and attributions required by the job description but on the other hand it is largely influenced by the complex set of qualities and skills that a worker in trade must hold. They can be classified into at least two categories: personal qualities and professional qualities.

According to Sands [8], there are at least ten top sales force effectiveness determinants: sales potential, revenue concentration, retention level, available selling time, adjusted value, competency rating, compensation cost of sales, performance correlation, percent of reps achieving goal, voluntary engagement. These could be classified in four major categories: elements of strategy, elements that target the capacity, elements of skill and those which target the aspect of will.

If it were intended to draw up a specific profile [10] of trade workers, it should be noted that the list of qualities would include various aspects such as: responsibility, teamwork skills, empathy, communication skills, to which certain professions or crafts would also require specific physical or administrative skills. The correctness of verbal expression and a correct vocabulary are important for a good customer relationship.

Several studies [1] mention a certain number of variables that manifest a higher or lower influence over the performance criteria. Some of these could be so called role variables, but also environmental elements.

The commercial domain is not stranger to aesthetics, which determines employers to request this quality for subalterns, in order to create a suitable environment for sales. The ability to hold presentations is important in describing products for customers and identifying the most appropriate services or products, which also requires observer or even psychological qualities.

Literature states that "training and development recommendations are associated with specific sales competencies" [8].

The majority of workers in trade show the desire for professional development, accomplishing also university studies, although the level of studies normally required for practicing the jobs in commerce is only medium. However, a specific training is required from the point of view of acquiring the basic concepts of selling and communicating with customers. However, in order to carry out in good conditions the work of an employee in the field of trade, it is necessary a certain intellectual level, capable of giving the person concerned the opportunity to understand correctly and in depth the arrangements for the organization of the commercial act.

All commercial units are equipped with computers, which causes employers to require computer skills with specific software systems. Correspondence on the Internet is imposed nowadays in all areas, which implies the need to have minimal knowledge in this respect as well. Fairness, honesty, practical sense, sometimes even mathematical thinking, contribute uniformly to good product management, to making the act of sale itself, to make a correct forecast of the supply and stock needs, respectively, to collect the value of the products or to report the activity.

At the beginning, "the term 'sales management' referred to the direction of sales force personnel" [7], but nowadays it suffered several mutations, including a larger canvas of activities. Generally, the main elements in the field of sales management are: planning, coordination, controlling and motivation [7].

But managerial challenges [10] arise when the knowledge, skills, aptitudes of the employees, and the diversity and difficulty of their assignments, have to be correlated with the rewards [5] given by the management of the organization. Often, the commercial area, represented by supermarkets, is recognized on the one hand for the rather modest level of pay, and on the other hand, what appears to be a consequence of this first aspect, for the relatively high level of employee flow. „One of the most difficult problem a sales manager faces is the motivation of the sales force" [4,9].

This last aspect appears as a consequence, as most employees still consider money resources [3] to be the most important instrument of motivation, and in the absence of a suitable strategy from this point of view, workers will consider a reorientation to other commercial units or even to other areas.

Employee performance assessment requires matching the results with the proposed objectives, based on a well-established initial strategy, based on a set of concretely defined criteria. On the other hand, „assessing the performance of sales people includes allocating a relative score to reflect a sales person performance on the identified dimension for measuring both sales performance and behavioural aspects of the employee in the job" [6].

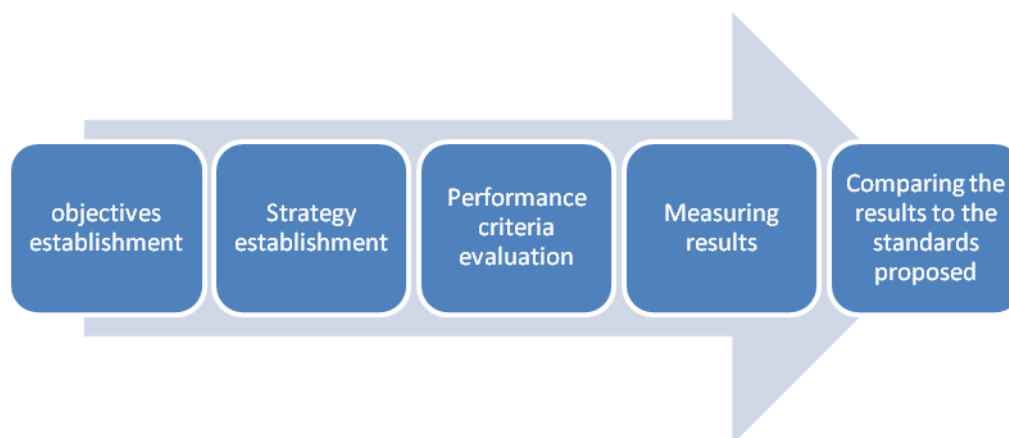


Fig. no. 1  
source [6]

”Evaluation provides information that affects key decision areas within the sales management function. Training, compensation, motivation and objective setting are dependent on the information derived from evaluation” [14]

## 2. SWOT Analysis of the Supermarkets in Resita

In the development of the case study, a sample of supermarkets in Resita city was analyzed and a SWOT global analysis was elaborated, in the form of the following two tables, in order to outline the main strengths and weaknesses, respectively the threats and opportunities for business development in this field.

This method of preliminary analysis was chosen because the SWOT analysis is one of the most used forms of business analysis that points to the impact of a complex set of factors, both internally and externally.

The supermarkets under consideration were: Kaufland, Lidl, Profi, Carrefour and Penny.

Table No. 1. Strengths identified

Strengths identified	Kaufland	Lidl	Profi	Carrefour	Penny
Children's Playground					
Provided Parking Places	*	*		*	*
Information Desk	*				
Shopping Cart	*	*	*	*	*
Existence of promotional offers	*	*	*	*	*
quality and fresh products	*	*	*	*	*
Grill-dining space	*				
Active worldwide	*	*		*	
various brands	*	*	*	*	
Possibility of credit-card payment	*	*	*	*	*
Affordable price of own brands	*		*		*
Coffee Corner			*		
Long operating hours	*	*	*	*	*
Many branches			*		
Fidelity card			*	*	*

source: developed by authors

Table No. 2. Weaknesses identified

Weaknesses identified	Kaufland	Lidl	Profi	Carrefour	Penny
The lack of free plastic bags	*	*	*	*	
Small store area			*		
Lack of some product / brand categories	*	*			
Insufficient staff on districts / houses	*		*		
Reduced grill menu / lack of meals		*	*	*	
Exclusive discount trade		*			
Niche player		*			
High flow of employees			*		
No parking space			*		
No storage space for luggage		*	*		
Crowded	*		*		
Reduced product range					*
Low supplies in the vegetable/fruit sector					*
Lack of aesthetics in the merchandising of some of the shelves / sectors		*	*		

source: developed by authors

Among the development opportunities identified, we can mention the following: a good moment of expansion on the market, periodic expansion of the product range, improved customer service, proximity to locations, at least for two of the supermarkets mentioned above.

Nevertheless, the threats are not lacking, as there is considerable competition in the field, more numerous branches of rival firms, the existence of a large number of proximity stores and a more effective policy of promoting rival companies.

### **3. Case study - direct research on respondents' attitude towards supermarket activity in Resita**

All five supermarkets are the top employers, developing the commercial sector in Resita over the past decade. Some of them have received, over the years, a number of distinctions from organizations in the field, on the basis of specific criteria such as: the primary and secondary benefits offered to employees, the working conditions, the professional training and the opportunities for developing career, as well as organizational culture.

#### **3.1. Premises of the study**

The theme of this research is an interview based investigation regarding the study of the attitude of consumers towards the professionalism and skills of commercial workers in existing supermarkets.

At this point we should especially like to thank first-year students from the Marketing and Business Communication programme, who helped us to collect some of the answers to the questionnaire through the interview-based survey method, within a collective effort on field research.

Qualitative research involves interviewing a limited number of people and seeks to reach deeper information levels related to specific subjects, the data not being statistically representative of the studied population.

The interviews took place in the supermarket parking lots, in the period April - May. Thus the sample contains 24 people for each of the 5 stores, including 12 women and 12 men. The age of the respondents and the occupation were not taken into account, but only the willingness to respond to this interview.

The sample chosen can not be representative by extrapolation to the Resita population. To analyze and interpret the data from the 120 questionnaires, we need to establish the criteria on which we make these assessments. As mentioned above, it is a qualitative inquiry, not quantitative, but a mathematical interpretation is nevertheless necessary to draw some relevant conclusions.

#### **3.2. Data analysis and interpretation**

Before studying the respondents' views of the employees from the supermarkets outlined above, we wanted to find out what is their attitude about the attractiveness of the store. The results were centralized in the following table:

Table No. 3.

<b>Supermarket</b>	<b>K</b>	<b>L</b>	<b>Pr</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>P</b>
Very attractive	33,33%	60%	13%	75%	25%
Attractive	41,67%	30%	49,5%	12,5%	50%
Nothing special	25%	10%	37,5%	12,5%	25%

As we can see, there is a very small percentage of those who consider that supermarkets are not distinguished by a specific characteristic, generally the opinions being positive. The lowest score in this respect is registered by the Profi store, where the "nothing special" feature records a

fairly high percentage. Carrefour is the store with high score at the "very attractive" feature, but it is overtaken by Lidl as a positive overall score. There is a certain category of consumers who do not have a very good opinion about the supermarket policy, but come to these stores for some brands of products they do not find elsewhere.

From the desire to find out the frequency of shopping at these supermarkets, we centralized respondents' answers in the following table.

Table No. 4

Supermarket	K	L	Pr	C	P
Twice a week	33%	60%	50%	45%	12,5%
Once a week	50%	30%	50%	45%	41,7%
Once per month	17%	10%	-	10%	45,8%

In general, respondents say they are attending the supermarkets on average once a week, spending between 30 minutes and 120 minutes at each shopping session, with an average spending of 100 - 150 lei, according to the following chart:

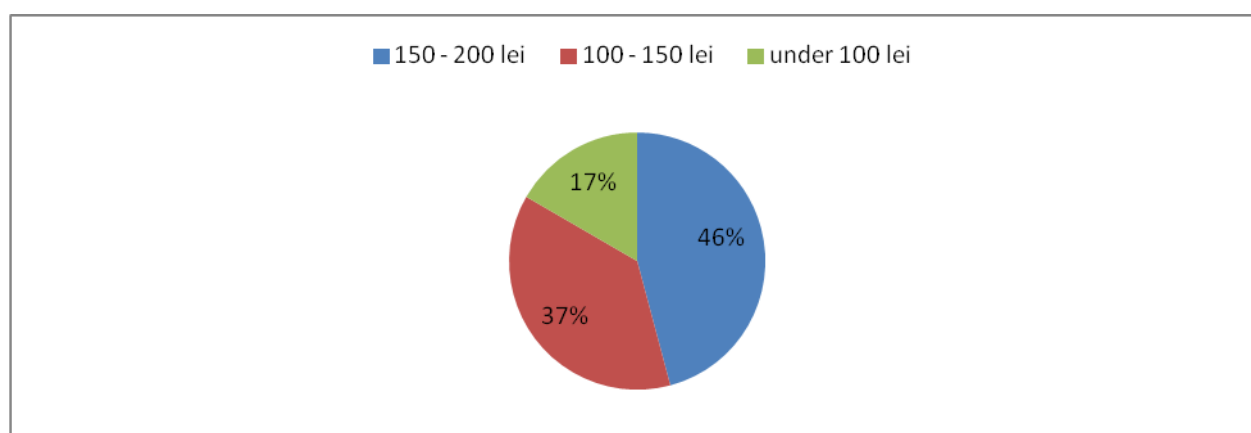


Fig. no. 2

source: developed by authors

Most of the respondents appreciate the additional services provided by supermarkets such as Grill, Coffee Corner and Zebra Pay.

Employee professionalism is appreciated by the majority of respondents, 62.5% of whom are favorable, appreciating their skills. A 25%, although positively appreciating skills and abilities levels, is unhappy with the waiting time at the cash registers. A fairly small percentage, 12.5%, thinks that commercial workers are not always showing seriousness.

Surely, the differences between the supermarkets listed above exist, as well as the common points. As regards the staff, though competent, it is remembered as being insufficient for the actual service needs, particularly in the case of assisted service windows. Here it is necessary to consider that overcrowded and frequent multitasking personnel are unlikely to perform in the long run, with supermarket management being forced to take action. The quality of commercial act is higher when an employee works under a lower level of stress and responsibilities. The high staff flux and the insufficient number of employees can not be considered as a minus for the employees themselves, but rather for the departments they belong to, reflecting in the results.

However, if employees are assigned more tasks than they can do in terms of quality, this is also reflected in the attitude towards work in general, leading to mistakes and stress.

In general, the respondents' experiences were somewhat pleasant, as they stated that the level of training of the employees was high, they showed courtesy and quickness at work.

However, the respondents pointed out the level of complaints, claiming lack of time and understanding from the responsible staff.

General recommendations are related to the need to supplement the staff from assisted service windows and to shorten waiting times at cash registers.

### 3.3. Conclusions

From the point of view of the general conclusions, following the above study and implicitly the interpretation of the data, we find that there are both strengths and weaknesses of the personnel policy implemented by the supermarkets in Resita.

However, these are not isolated, can be analyzed in parallel, most of them confronted with the same negative aspects - the staff shortage and the large staff flow.

As a continuation of this study, a sample of employees of these supermarkets could be made as a research base to determine the underlying reasons for this large flow. We believe that the reasons differ from one point to another, from one store to another, since each person's management is different and the staffing policy implemented is a specific one.

The aspects to be considered are at least two types, both qualitative and quantitative, as can be seen in the following scheme:

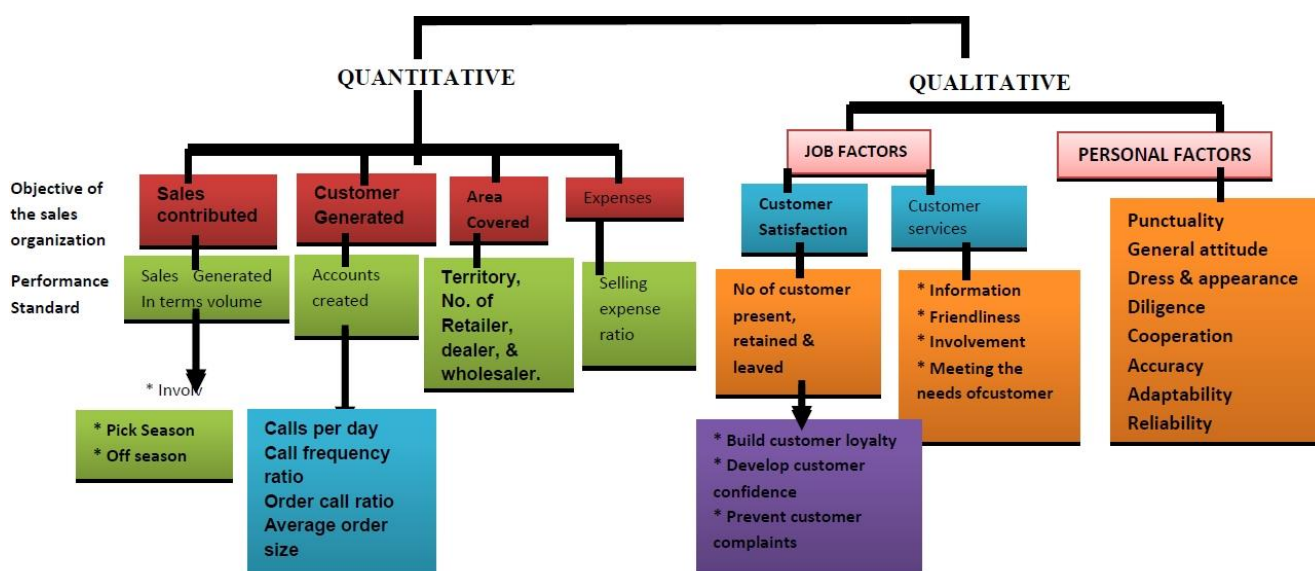


Fig. no. 3  
source: Kesari, 2014

The results however can be improved, taking into account the following aspects, in order to increase the efficiency of the organization [12]:

- I: Improving Lead Management
- II: Enhancing Pipeline Management
- III: Refining Distributor Selection and Channel Management

Some conclusions of the centralized interviews were:

- The frequency of shopping is small, regardless of the supermarket
- Supermarket employees are friendly and nice, but there are also cases when the staff move slowly and so the time spent at the cash registers is high, which is an unpleasant thing for customers.

- A general conclusion valid for all supermarkets is the low number of staff, a feature of self-service sales, where there is consumer contact with the product and the least involvement of the commercial agent in this trial.

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