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MASTER'S THESIS

**IMPACT OF SALESPERSON 'S BEHAVIOR ON CONSUMER'S
PURCHASE DECISION IN FINLAND.**

Examiners: Professor Olli Kuivalainen

Assistant Professor Jenni Sipilä

ABSTRACT

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This thesis aimed to study the impact of salesperson's behavior on customer's purchase decision in Finland. The theoretical part focused on the literature of salesperson role, different salesperson's behavioral aspects, and customer purchase decision in general. In this study, five behavioral aspects were chosen to study: ethical behavior, listening ability, relational skills, emotional intelligence, and customer orientation. For the empirical part, the qualitative method was conducted with semi-structured interviews. There were ten interviewees who were found to be interested in the topic and voluntarily participated in the study. The result of the study emphasized the important role of salesperson in the customer's purchase decision. It also showed that each of the five behavioral aspects of salesperson had an impact on a customer's purchasing. Ethical behavior and listening skill were found to be the most central aspects of salesperson's behavior. From the result, the study suggested open opportunities for further research with quantitative methodology on the same topic. It also suggested companies have regular training on salesperson, regular survey to take feedback from customer and yet important the awareness of salesperson's role in the success of selling activities.

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Once these words are written, my academic plan is going to be achieved. I could not show enough how much I feel appreciated and thankful to Finland where becomes my second home, where gives me everything I dream about. Studying at Lappeenranta University of Technology with Marketing is one of the biggest lucks. I have had a chance of meeting new wonderful teachers and friends. Studying ends at some point but now I have friends for life.

The thesis topic came from my interest during the time I worked as Sale Representative for Microsoft in Finland. I took a break and gave priority to my work and for another role of being mother. It indeed took me longer time to finish and surely this is not the best what I aim for, but I hope it could bring some new ideas and interest for other researchers.

I would like to show my appreciation to Professor Olli Kuivalainen and especially Assistant Professor Jenni Sipilä for your encouragement and precious support. Yet most important, special words to my father, my family who believe in me, in the way I chose to walk. My dear husband and my beautiful angel, you are a part of the motivation that always keeps me moving forward with this work as well as in everything.

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1 Introduction

This first chapter of thesis introduces the initial ideas and content of the study. Firstly, background of the study is opened up. Research aims and objectives are set in the following part. Next, to show the backbone of the study, a preliminary literature review and theoretical framework are also discussed. At the end of the chapter, key terms and concepts are summarized.

1.1 Background of the study

Dutta (2011, p.59), writer of the book *Sales and Distribution Management*, once said: “Selling is both an art and a science”. If it is so, the salesperson could be an artist and a scientist. Having a similar view on salespersons, Thacker (2000) emphasized that salesperson more involve in the human connection. Especially, nowadays, in a challenging environment, all companies and businesses put huge efforts into building more efficient sales and marketing strategies than competitors to win their position in the market as well as insist on their competitive advantages. Among the most important strategies, salesperson’s performance and their skills become the very first goal that firms target to achieve. (Yapal & Fernando, 2018, p.185)

Moreover, the customer is always the key factor that contributes to the success and development of a firm. That explains why the customer becomes the most important factor when building any marketing strategy (Ahmed, 2020). Susanto (2013), in a study, showed evidence to confirm that customer purchase decision significantly influences customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. On the other hand, salesperson is the representative of company who has direct interaction with the customer, and they involve in the profitability of any business (Punwatkar & Verghese, 2014, p.73). Therefore, leading to a sale success requires a salesperson a set of personality traits and skills to successfully behave to the customer (Thacker, 2020). Hence, studying how salesperson’s behavior impacts customer purchase decision posed questions and topic for this research

This topic is inspired by the author who worked as a sales representative for various brands in many retail stores in Finland. The author had much interaction with customers daily during working time. Surprisingly, there is none of the research studied about this topic in Finland earlier. Finland is known for many years as the happiest country in the world, by World Happiness Report 2019. Finland has the highest GDP growth forecast in the Nordics 2020 with the retail market is growing more rapidly than any other Eurozone. There is increasing number of shopping center where can offer more opportunities for retail brands to develop. This demand is due to repaid growth of the Finnish Population recent. (Finnish Council of Shopping Centres, 2019, p.5) In 2018, retail sales increased by 2,5 %, especially the food and beverage sector has the fastest growth in a decade (Finnish Council of Shopping Centres, 2019, p.9).

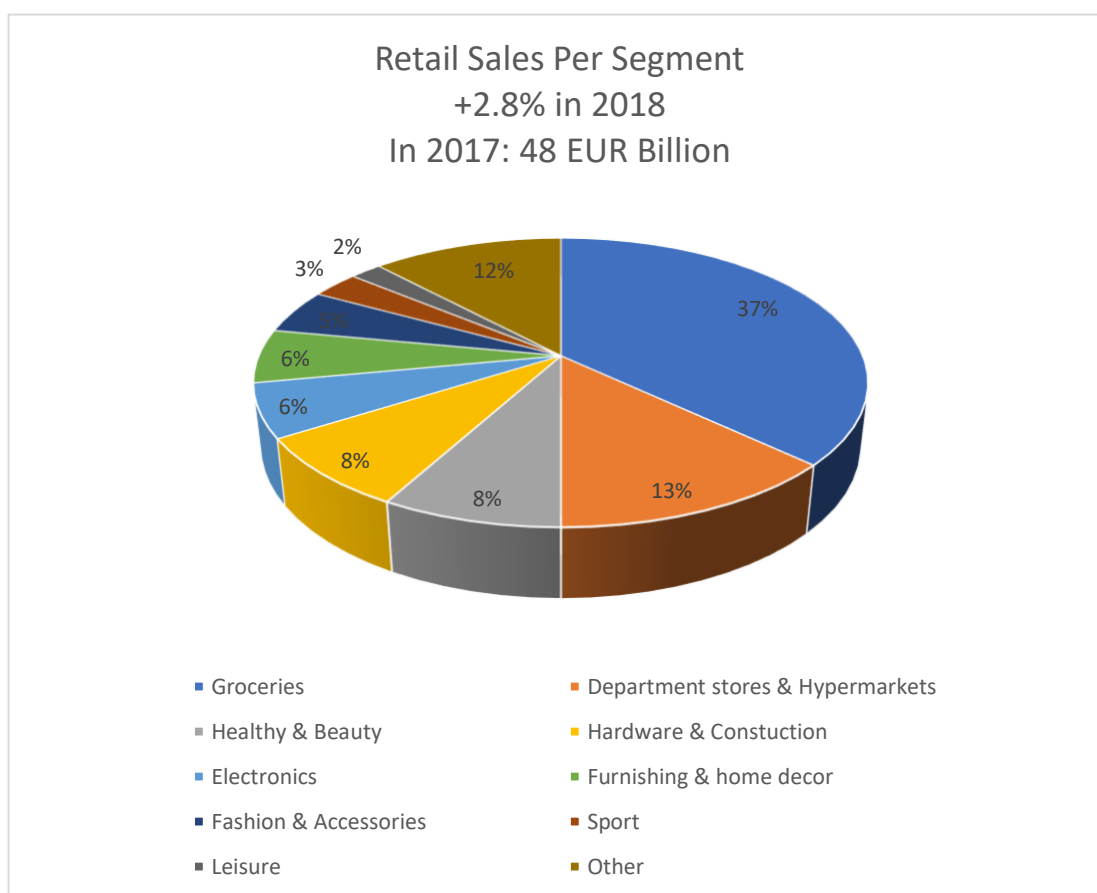


Figure 1: Retail Sales Per Segment

(Finnish Council of Shopping Centre, 2019, adopted from Statistics 2019, Finland)

Finnish online retail sale contributes to approximately 10% of the total retail sale with the increase in E-commerce. Moreover, Finland is ranked at sixth place in the EU for retail consumption which is over 20% higher than Eurozone's. This was due to the habit of Finns who use major part of their income in their retail and leisure activities. (Finnish Council of Shopping Centres, 2019, p.14)

When discussing the Future of Retail Industry in Finland, the famous YIT firm in the construction and housing service mentioned that "Finnish companies must also have something that consumers crave: the right price, excellent service, competent salespeople or unparalleled products. Guaranteeing specialization and the quality of service are in a key position when attracting consumers". (YIT, 2017) It is clearly seen that salesperson is still one of the most important elements which have a great impact on the retail business. Thus, how salesperson's behavior has impact on customers 'purchase decision in Finland is open to study further in this research.

1.2 Research Aims and Questions

With the above background, the research aims to study the impact of salesperson's behavior on customer's purchase decision and to find out the most important behavioral aspects which influence the decision. In order to achieve aims, questions are posed to find out the answers for topic discussed above.

The main research question of this research is: **How does salesperson's behavior impact on the customer's purchase decision?**

In this research, there are five behavioral aspects of a salesperson chosen to study. In order to have concrete answers for the main question, two sub-questions below are investigated:

Sub1: What are the effects of the behavioral aspect of salesperson: ethical behavior, listening ability, relational skills, emotional intelligence, customer orientation on consumer purchase decision?

Sub2: What are the most important behavioral aspects that impact on consumer's purchase decision?

In these questions, the relationship between each behavioral aspect and customer purchase decision is studied. The most central behavior aspects on purchasing decision are also expected to explore.

Next in the following part, the preliminary literature review gives background for the research.

1.3 Preliminary Literature Review

In competitive environment like business nowadays, salesperson's job is not only to sell products and services, achieve sale target but also involve in other important activities such as maintaining customer relationships. Salesperson acts as the link between firm and customers. They are the people who provide the necessary information and assist customers in buying process as well as post-purchase. Therefore, salesperson has impact on customer. Morgan and Hunt (1994) emphasized the critical role of salesperson in enhancing customer satisfaction. Similarly, an empirical study by (Najam, Muhammad, Muhammad, 2016), also confirmed the positive relationship between sales staff's behavior on customer's satisfaction. Recently, Rafi and Saeed (2019) showed the effects of customer orientation and relational behavior on customer behavior.

There are numerous researches study about the relation between behavioral traits and performance, customer satisfaction, outcomes an several behavioral aspects were discussed: ethical behavior, listening ability, relational skills, emotional intelligence. Castleberry and Stephen (1993) built a process framework showing connection between listening skill and sales performance which emphasizes listening as one of the most critical requirements for a successful salesperson. Ramsey and Sohi (1997) examined and gave evidence on the effect of salesperson's listening ability on customer satisfaction. Moreover, salesperson needs to behave more ethically in order to gain trust from customer, increase the loyalty and establish long term relationship, as a suggestion by Wedatama & Sukaatmadja (2019).

Some also discussed about customer orientation as an aspect in salesperson's behavior while opposite ideas were also opposed. Zablah, Franke, Brown and Bartholomew (2012) concluded that customer orientation should be seen from psychological view than behavioral view in a meta-analysis. However, looking back to early age literature, Saxe and Weitz (1982) who is very first person had deep learning about this topic, by evidences, proved that customer orientated salesperson supports customers in purchasing decisions, hence satisfies needs. Previous researches provide confirmed proof for the relationship between this trait on sales performance, such as the one by Homburg, Muller, Kalrmann (2011) and Noor (2005) who concluded in his study that the more customer-oriented the salesperson is, the more important he or she placed to work for customer' interest and find the products suit their needs. Therefore, customer orientation should be fairly seen as a trait in the salesperson's behavior. As such, in this research, customer orientation, together with other aspects contributes to the salesperson's behavior.

Although previous researches pointed out the link between salesperson behavior and customer, little research addressed the relationship with customer's purchase decision. In 2014, Punwatar and Verghese carried out an empirical study in order to find out the impact of salesperson's behavior on consumer's purchase decisions in India. In their research, customer orientation is not discussed as a behavioral aspect. The impact of sales staff on the purchasing behavior was also proved by the research of Yousif (2016). Similarly, Yapa and Fernando (2018) found the impact relationship between salesperson's behavior and customer purchasing. All of these studies on this topic used the quantitative method as chosen research methodology. Most recently, Jain, Misra & Rudi (2020) investigated the role of sales assistance in customer purchase decisions by observing stores through video data recorded. The qualitative methodology is described as "The data contain visual descriptors of customers and their in-store activities including the time they spent in interacting with salespersons (sales assistance), and are linked to purchase decisions" (Jain, Misra & Rudi ,2020, p.273).

Realizing there is still room for this research, the author would like to investigate the impact of salesperson behavior and customer purchase decision by qualitative methodology with interviews. Usage of this method enables to examine the earlier studies as well as to get deeper knowledge from customers' perspectives.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

Customer purchase decision and factors affect it is a topic many researchers are interested in studying more. As earlier mentioned, the behaviors of salesperson have impact on the sales performance, customer satisfaction and loyalty. Moreover, the literature also suggests that the behavioral traits of a salesperson have positive impact on customer's purchase decision.

Customer orientation is proved its importance as a critical skill of salesperson. Therefore, in this research, customer orientation is considered as one of the behavioral aspects, besides ethical behavior, listening ability, relational skill and emotional intelligence.

Moreover, customer purchase decision is considered as one of the stages in whole purchasing process, as Kotler, Armstrong, Opresnik (2018, p.175) mentioned it as the fourth step. Court, Elzinga, Mulder, and Vetvik (2009, p.4) also mentioned "The decision-making process is a more circular journey, with four phases: initial consideration; active evaluation, or the process of researching potential purchases; closure, when consumers buy brands; and post purchase, when consumers experience them". However, to be more precise, this study attempts to identify and measure the relationship of such behavioral aspects of salesperson and the whole the purchase decision. In another word, customer purchase decision is considered from macro view and how each behavioral aspect has impact on each stage or step of purchasing decision process is not preferably studied in this research.

Adopted with study of Punwatkar and Verghese (2014), the below theoretical framework is developed and studied in this research:

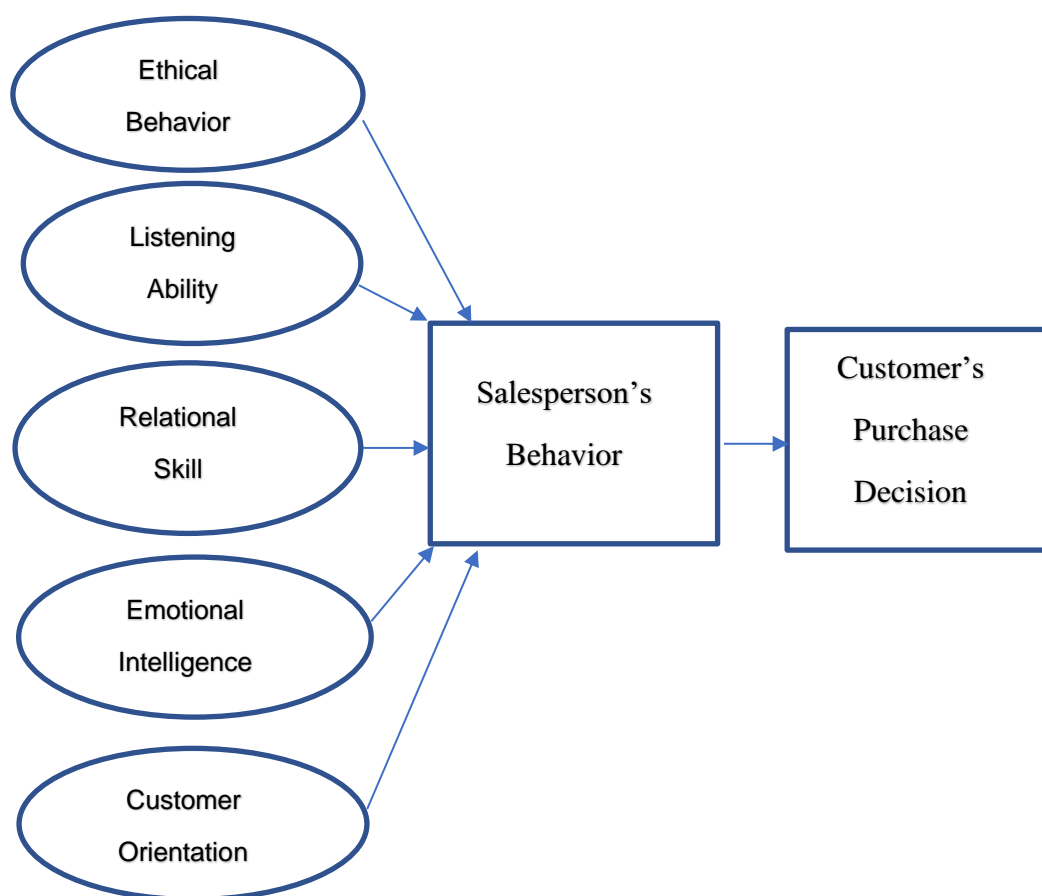


Figure 2: Theoretical Framework

1.5 Key terms and concepts

In order to have deeper knowledge about literature referenced in this study, below key terms and concepts are mentioned: Salesperson, Ethical Behavior, Listening Ability, Relational Skills, Emotional Intelligence, Customer Orientation, Customers Purchase Decision

Salesperson refers to person who is representative of a company. Salesperson performs and takes part in following activities: prospect, communication, sale, service, information collection and relationship building. (Kotler, Burton, Deans, Browns & Armstrong (2017, p.504)

Ethical Behavior: According to Agrawal (2020, p.217), ethical behavior is defined as: “Ethical behavior is characterized by honesty, fairness and equity in interpersonal,

professional and academic relationships and research and scholarly activities. Ethical behavior respects the dignity, diversity and rights of individuals and groups of people”. (Agrawal,2020, p.217)

Listening Ability is described as “to listen is not just to hear, it is the active construction of meaning from all the signals-verbal and nonverbal-a speakers sending.” (Hennings,1992, p.3)

Relational Skills: in selling process, the interaction between seller and buyer is critically important. Hughes (1964, p.176) pointed out “that the buying process consists of a change in a buyer’s awareness and attitudes toward his present needs, his present means for meeting these needs and the products or services being offered.”

Emotional Intelligence: “Emotional intelligence is the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth.” (Salovey and Mayer, 1997, p.10).

Customer Orientation Behavior: Saxe and Weitz (1982, p.343) who had a lot of researches on this topic. According to them, customer orientation refers to adopt, implement the marketing concept in selling, help customers to make the right purchase decision that meets their needs and satisfaction.

Customer’s Purchase Decision is the fourth step in the customer purchase process. Other steps in this process are: need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives and post-purchase behavior. (Kotler, et al., 2018, p.175)

1.6 Research methodology

This research aims to explore the impact of salesperson’s behavior on the customer’s purchase decision. Therefore, exploratory research is chosen as exploratory research helps to recognize a problem and have a better understanding about it (Bhasin, 2020). The main methodology used in this research is qualitative method.

The qualitative method was processed with semi-structured interviews. There was total 10 interviewees who were asked and showed their interests in the topic. Each

interview was conducted once, based on the same questions prepared beforehand. Therefore, primary data was collected from these interviews while secondary data was from other previous study, literature sources.

1.7 Delimitations

This study focuses on the relationship between salesperson's behavior and customer's purchase decision. In previous literature, there are many studies, arguments regarding various behavioral aspects as a single factor and its impact on customer's buying and others. This study tries to focus on all the relevant existing literature. However, not much theory shows which behavioral aspects should be considered when discussing about salesperson's behavior. Some are chosen to study, as prefer of researchers. Therefore, there is a lack of theoretical background regarding concrete framework on which factors contribute to salesperson's behavior.

Moreover, this study aims to get general ideas about the topic and interviewee were the one who voluntarily joined the interviews. Therefore, the conclusion might not be valid in specific retail categories since each retail has own product, features which affect the nature of selling and may require special skills from salesperson.

1.8 Structure of the study

This study consists of five main parts: Introduction, Theoretical Background, Research Design and Method, Findings, Discussion and Conclusion.

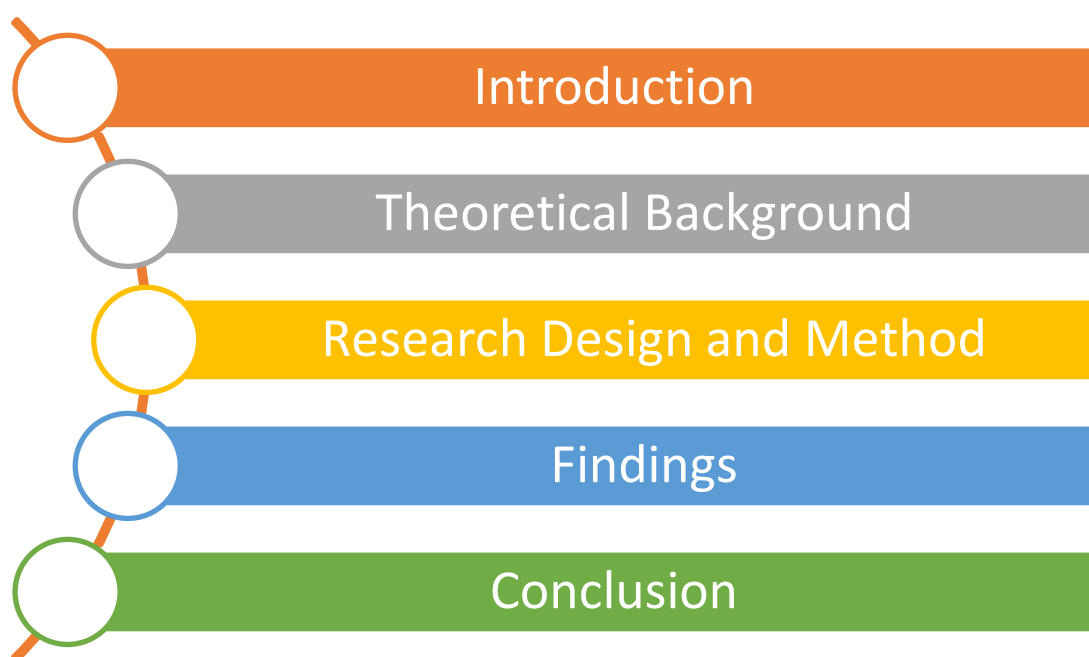


Figure 3: Structure of the study

The first chapter of the paper is the Introduction part which describe generally the study background, research aims and questions. Main literature reviews in summarized with the theoretical framework which is used as backbone for this study is followed. This chapter also includes brief in short key terms and concepts. Other parts end this part with research methodology, delimitations and structure of the study. Chapter 2 goes detail to the literature reviews with focusing on the salesperson role and salesperson's behavior with behavioral aspects chosen to study in this research together with customer's purchase decision as a phenomenon. Chapter 3 describes the research design and method in detail. The findings part is presented in the next chapter with key results. The Discussion and Conclusion is the last chapter of this study.

2 Literature Review and Theoretical Background

2.1 Salesperson's Role

Talking about salesperson, we all remind of a person who do the job of selling a product or service to customer. From academic view, there are many different views which described the more complex role of a salesperson in modern business. Kotler, et al. (2018, p.504) had one of the most famous at all times as “Salesperson is an individual who represents a company to customers by performing one or more of the following activities: prospecting, communicating, selling, servicing, information gathering and relationship building.” In another saying, a salesperson becomes company's ambassador who has interaction and creates an impression as well as opinion of customer on his company through his manner (Dutta, 2011).

What do Salespeople do? To answer this question, Kotler, et al. (2018, p.504) pointed out three main activities of a salesperson. Firstly, they create the values for company. They are a part of company's marketing plan to advertise products. The most important, in short, they are the ones who make profitability of every company and decide partly to the success or failure of the business. (Punwatkar and Verghese, 2014) Salesperson has direct contact with customer which is the initial step in creating the long-term customer relationship and customer satisfaction. Thus, managing relationships is another important task. The last one is gathering information. (Kotler, et al., 2017, p.505) Through a face-to-face conversation, salesperson can discuss and help customer to have thorough knowledge about the product. Hence, salesperson can influence customers buying decision and lead to a new product purchase. (Yousif, 2016) As implied by Helmrich (2016), a great salesperson enjoys product educating, trust building rather than trying to sell product with pressure.

Hase and Bush (2017, p.183) pointed out four kinds of salespeople, basing on two personality traits: self-motivation and empathy. Self-motivation and Empathy have been mentioned as one of the key success factors in personal selling by Mc Bane (1995).

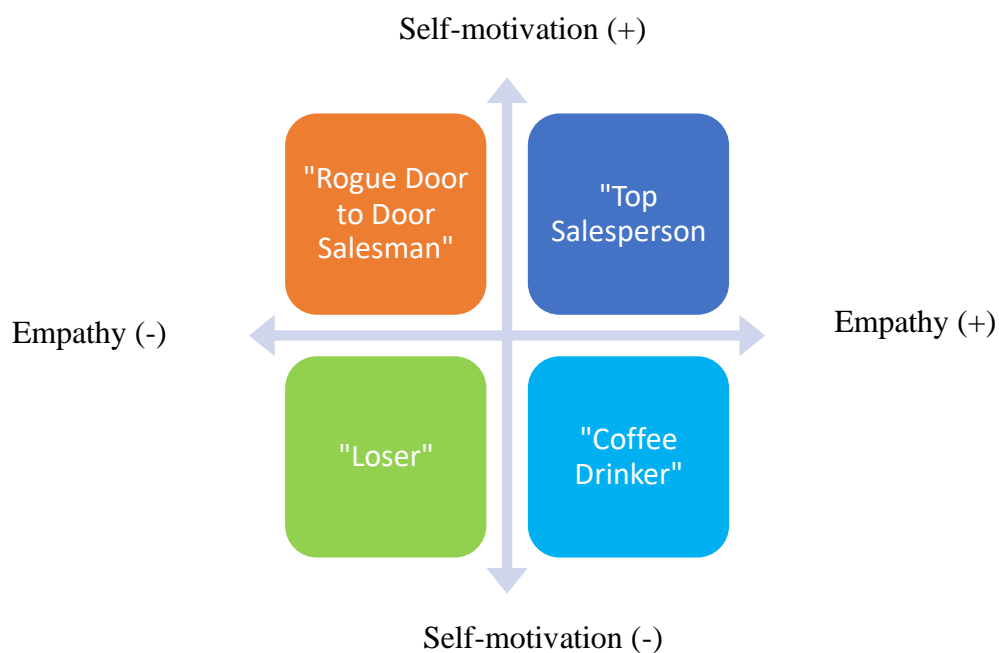


Figure 4: Four kinds of salespeople (adopted from Hase and Bush (2017, p.183))

- Coffee Drinker implies to the salesperson who has plenty of empathy, but some flaws such as lacking straightforward attitude, low motivation, not goal oriented (Hase and Bush, 2017, p.183).
- A loser is described as the unsuccessful salesperson who does not have specific characteristics: no empathy, no self-motivation (Hase and Bush, 2017, p.183).
- Rogue door to door salesman does not have any empathy. They care more about money than customers' needs. They have very high motivation in winning customer. (Hase and Bus, 2017, p.183)
- Top salesperson is a symbol of a successful salesperson who has high motivation and deep empathy. They are usually interested in building customer loyalty and relationship in long term. (Hase and Bush, 2017, p.183)

How does a professional salesperson look like? What does he need to succeed? There is a lot of literature discussing this. Thacker (2020) suggested that basic traits of a great salesperson are knowability, Likability, trustworthiness, which in short called

KLT characteristics. Hase and Bush (2017, p.183) has built of a good sale representative:

Table 1: Profile of A good Sale Representative (adapted from Hase and Bush (2017, p.183)

<p>“Profile of Sale Representative”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Is actively engaged in targeted cold calling of prospects” • “Makes actively contact with decision makers and “ • “Has regular personal contact with them” • “Knows his convincing “hooks” (What’s in for me?)” • “Is empathic and strong in analyzing customer needs (pain points!)” • “Finds logical performance portfolio expansions”
<p>“Dos”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Is always one step ahead” • “Communicates good business relationships: using references”
<p>“Don’t’s”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Has a negative mindset” • “Is mainly reactive” • “Is not prepared and structured”

2.2 Salesperson behavior

Salesperson is considered as one of the key factors which contribute to the profitability of any business. Especially in retail store where they have constant interaction with huge customer every day, salesperson's behavior is significantly important in order to attract and retain the loyal customer. (Punwatkar and Verghese, 2014) The concept of salesperson behavior was described by Walker, Churchill and Ford (1979, p.33) as "what people do (the tasks they expend effort on) in the course of working". Avila, Fern and Mann (1988) emphasized the obvious connection between specific skills of salesperson and successful sales outcomes.

Plank and Reid (1994, p.45) had a look at sale behavior from a widener perspective "what salespeople do", which "involves the execution of selling-related activities by salespeople in the performance of their jobs". They also looked salesperson behavior into 2 different categories regarding customer interaction: customer interaction and non-customer interaction. (Plank and Reid, 1994, p.45)

"Salesperson behaviors include sales force activities required in the sales process and activities related to the development of ongoing relationships" is another definition which was given by Brashear, Bellenger, Ingram and Barksdale (1997, p.178). As mentioned above, this concept emphasized also the post-selling period. Hence, the role of a salesperson is extended much more than just successfully deliver product or service to their customer.

2.2.1 Ethical Behavior

The salesperson is one of the most important parts of the marketing strategy of every retail business since they are the ones who have both direct (eg: face to face) and indirect interaction (eg: through phone, email or other social media channels) with customers. In order to motivate salespeople and increase sales, many companies build a commission system. However, this causes unethical behavior of salesperson who aims at own sales target rather than what customers interest and need, according to

Strout (2002). Some unethical behaviors are recognized as lying or overstate about product, telling wrong information about competitors or selling inappropriate products to customer's needs (Roman and Ruiz, 2005).

An ethical salesperson will deliver a fair and honest information, sell products/service which benefits customer and keep customers data private and confidential as mentioned by Madhani (2014). Roman (2007) also emphasized salesperson's honesty in providing the information according to facts as well as customer's personal data protection. Therefore, respecting customer becomes a standard which a salesperson needs to show to their customer (Cadogan and Lee, Tarkiainen & Sundqvist, 2009).

An ethical behavior of salesperson brings numerous benefits for business as many researchers proved. It will lead to positive feedback from customers and their satisfaction as well as repeated purchase in future. (Hansen and Riggle, 2009; Pezhman et al., 2013) Salesperson who behaves ethically will make customers feel satisfied. This will support salesperson and company to gain customer's trust. (Kotler and Keller, 2012) As Alrubaiee (2012) emphasized the significant impact of ethical behavior on long term relationship. In other way, it also affects the customer purchase decision.

2.2.2 Listening Ability

Listening is extremely vital part in every communication, especially in selling activity. "It requires serious attention and critical hearing, both concentration and penetration, both memory and knowledge", as DiGaetani (1980, p.42) emphasized. It can be stated that listening requires salesperson activities of full attention, comprehension and response to customer. Once the salesperson listens well to customer's needs, he will collect valuable information and understand what customer really needs, in order to provide accurate advice and suitable product selection. In consequence, customers will have feeling of being well taken care, trustworthy and reliable towards the salesperson. (Swan and Oliver, 1991) "By asking the right questions and creating an atmosphere of fairness and genuine concern, he builds trust and gives his guests the freedom to express themselves openly" (Stettner ,1988, p.44).

Castleberry and Shepherd (1993, p.36) conceptualizes the salesperson's listening which involves different activities: "the cognitive process of actively sensing, interpreting, evaluating and responding to the verbal and nonverbal messages of present or potential customers".

Many other definitions of listening were collected by Ramsey & Sohi (1997, p.129) on their research and proved the influencing relationship between the listening behavior and outcome, as described:

Table 2: Definitions of Listening (adapted from Ramsey & Sohi,1997, p.129)

Some Definitions of Listening	
Source	Definition
Yrle and Galle (1993)	"Active listening means listening well and demonstrating an interest in what is being said".
Castleberry and Shepherd (1993, p.36)	"The cognitive process of actively sensing, interpreting, evaluating, and responding to the verbal and nonverbal messages of present or potential customers."
Hennings (1992, p.3)	"To listen is not just to hear, it is the active construction of meaning from all the signals-verbal and nonverbal-a speaker is sending."
Lewis and Reinsch (1988, p.58)	"A set of interrelated activities, including apparent attentiveness, nonverbal behavior, verbal behavior, perceived attitudes, memory, and behavioral responses."
The Institute of Financial Education (1988, p.88)	"The process of receiving sights and sounds, attending to them, and assigning meaning."

Goss (1982, p.304)	“A process of taking what you hear and organizing it into verbal units to which you can apply meaning.”
Goss (1982, p.307)	“A problem-solving task that is centered on answering the question, “What does the speaker mean?”.”
Devine (1978, p.302)	“A matter of processing the incoming meaningful sounds into syntactical and then into larger units, so that the listener can make sense of the sounds”
Weaver (1972, p.12)	“The selection and retention of aurally received data”

Moreover, this research also pointed out 3 main elements of salesperson listening: sense, evaluation and response (Ramsey & Sohi,1997). Sensing is the initial sign in the salesperson listening process through verbal or non-verbal stimuli (Mead 1986). Evaluating involves in the quick process of determining main message, assessing the facts regarding (Brody,1994). Responding can be seen as next step in conversation. Salesperson needs to respond appropriately and quickly by answering on time, showing positive attitude, providing relevant information and clear explanation. Ramsey & Sohi (1997) Hence, it could not be denied the importance of listening ability in the salesperson behavior.

2.2.3 Relational Skills

Obviously, in selling process, the interaction between seller and buyer is critically important. Hughes (1964, p.176) pointed out “that the buying process consists of a change in a buyer’s awareness and attitudes toward his present needs, his present means for meeting these needs and the products or services being offered”. In this study, Hughes (1964, p.176) also defined the interaction as a process of learning each other where both buyers and sells involve actively in order to achieve own aims.

An effectual relationship between buyer-seller becomes a key factor which improves optimistic image of company since seller is the representative of his company. Moreover, interpersonal activities and salesperson's behavior significantly influence customer satisfaction and relationship. (Swan and Oliver, 1989) According to Crosby et al., (1990), a positively experienced interaction between seller-buyer should support for a long-term relationship. Moreover, it was found that quality of the buyer-seller relationship has a great impact on their interaction in the future. (Crosby et al., 1990) Similarly, if the buyer has trust in the seller, he or she tends to show interest in working with the same seller again (Morgan and Hunt,1994).

2.2.4 Emotional Intelligence

Emotional Intelligence as known Emotional Quotient (EQ) is one of very famous terms in psychological theory, which has been learned by many researchers. One of very first definitions given by Salovey and Mayer (1990, p.189) as “the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others 'feelings and emotions to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and action”. Seven year later, they developed the term as “Emotional intelligence is the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth” (Salovey and Mayer, 1997, p.10). Obviously, the term emphasizes the importance of recognizing, expressing, understanding and controlling the emotions of one's own and other people we interact.

Daniel Goleman- a science journalist who has deep knowledge and interest in emotional intelligence gave own concept: “Emotional intelligence refers to the capacity for recognizing our feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and our relationships” (Golema,1998, p.317). He also categorized five different elements of emotional intelligence as follows:

- Self-awareness: the ability to recognize own emotion and its impact could have

- Self-regulation: the ability to control own emotion and adapt ethically to the situation
 - Social Skills: refers to the maintaining relationships and network.
 - Empathy: ability to recognize others emotion
 - Motivation: the desire to achieve some specific aims and goals.
- (Goleman, 1995; p. 43–44).

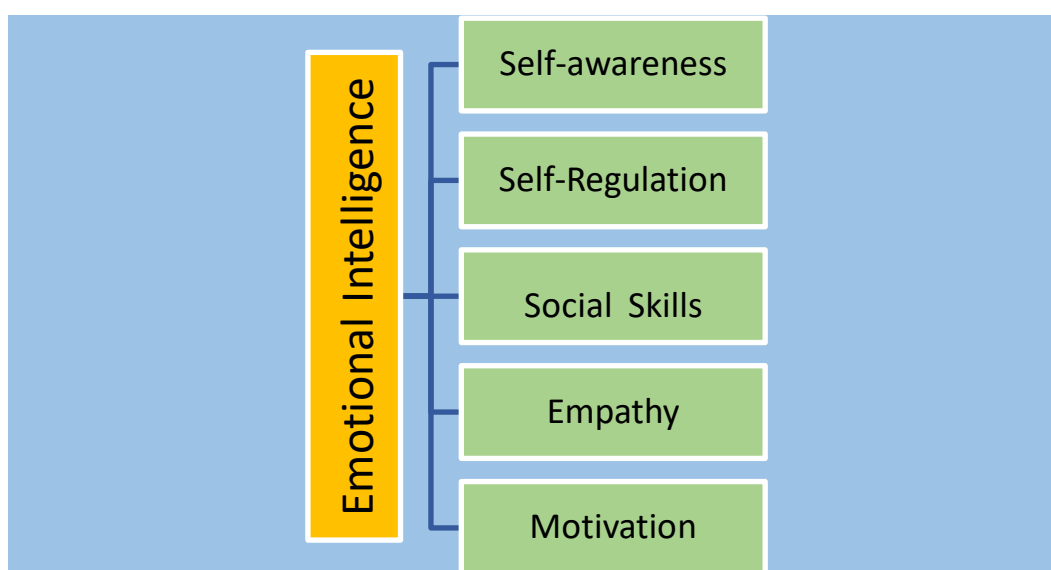


Figure 5: Elements of Emotional Intelligence (adapted from Goleman, 1995, p. 43-44).

As fact, salesperson is the one who has a lot of interaction with customers, therefore, emotional intelligence is extremely important. The higher level of emotional intelligence has, the better or she understands customers' emotion and needs. (Wang & Huang, 2009, p.384) As a result, they tend to deliver positive contact with customers and partly contribute to the sale as well as improve the sale's performance and sales revenue (Goleman, 1995, p.44). Hence, emotional intelligence becomes one of the key factors in salesperson's behavior.

2.2.5 Customer Orientation

Customer orientation is the term which can be seen in most of company's marketing strategy. Many firms encourage their business to engage in it. According to, Saxe and

Weitz (1982) who gave very first definition, Customer orientation refers to adopt, implement the marketing concept in selling, help customers to make a right purchase decision which meet their needs and satisfaction. Dunlap et al., (1988) confirmed that customer-oriented salesperson will pay prior attention to the customer benefits and customer's interest. According to Saxe & Weitz (1982), there are several situations where the customer orientation behavior is likely to happen as necessity:

- When there are various alternatives are offered and assisted to customer
- When complex purchasing decision is engaged by customer
- When there is cooperative relationship between salesperson and customers
- When the sources of business are mainly based on referral and repeat sales.

Customer orientation behavior is required more efforts and dedication from the salesperson who adopt it. Customer becomes center of the selling process and all information about customers 'needs must be collected and accordingly products with ultimate benefits must be designed and delivered. Task of building and developing the relationship between buyer and seller is likely achieved by a customer-oriented salesperson than the one who is not. (Saxe & Weitz, 1982, p.343)

As part of marketing concept, customer-oriented salesperson should also build long term customer satisfaction and assist customers in case of any question or problems might arise (Martin and Bush, 2003). Customer orientation is found out to have positive relationship with customer trust and value, according to Boles et al., (2001).

2.3 Consumer Purchase Decision

Customer purchase decision is a complex process which customer experience before any purchase decision made. According to Kotler, et al., (2018, p.175), there are five steps in process of buying: Need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and post purchase behavior. This process helps us to understand how people make a product purchase.



Figure 6: Customer Purchase Decision Process (adapted from Kotler, et al., 2018, p.175)

During this process, many factors have impact on the purchase decision. Burnett (2011) explained these factors, as following:

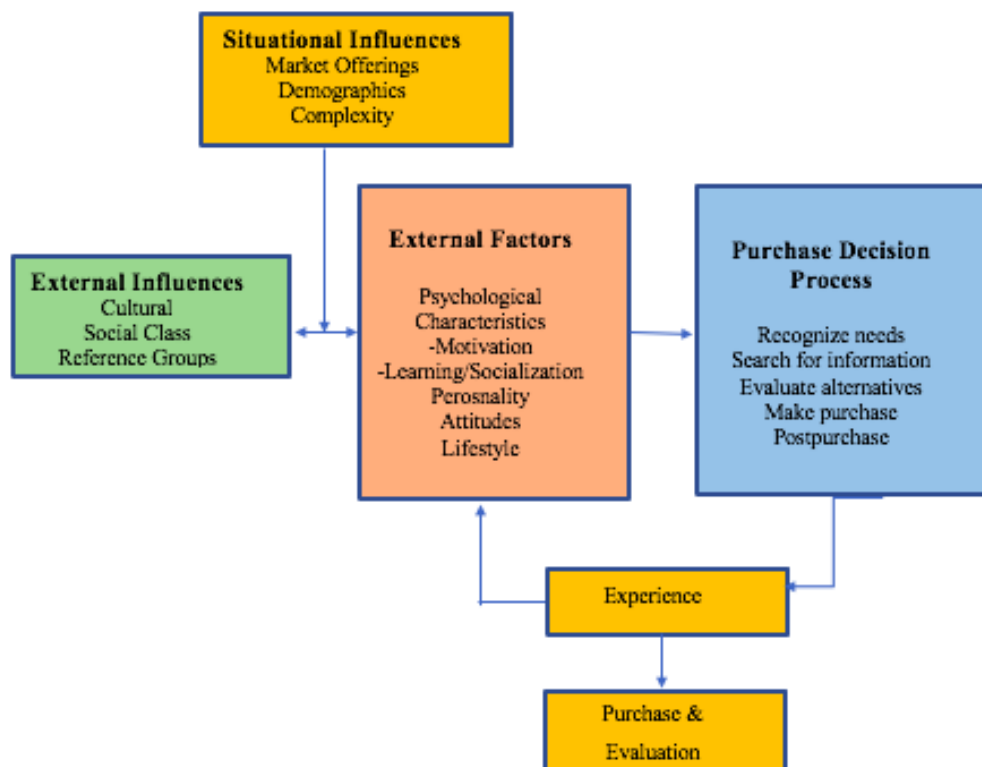


Figure 7: Factors impact on purchase decision (adapted from Burnett, 2011)

Situation influences refer to customer's buying task, market offerings and demographics. Internal factors include factors such as customers' motivation, learning, socialization, personality, attitudes and lifestyle. External factors imply to those

factors from outside, such as culture, social class, reference groups. (Burnett, 2011, p.89)

Also, Burnett (2011, p.89) mentioned that marketing offerings is one of the situational factors which affect customer purchase decision. Marketing Offerings include activities in marketing strategy in order to support customer's product choice and purchase decision. Using personal selling or in other word salesperson/sale representative is familiar in marketing program. (Burnett 2011, p.89) Therefore, it could be foreseeing that salesperson involve in customer purchase decision and to some extent, there is likely to have impact on this process. According to Ashley, Noble, Donthu, Lemon (2011), interaction between salespersons and customers helps salesperson to identify the customer's demand and fulfill them.

3 Research Design and Method

This chapter introduced and explained the research method used in this study at first. Later, how the data is collected will be described in detail, followed by data analysis. The last part of this chapter will confirm the reliability and validity of the research.

3.1 Research Method

There are two methods which are commonly used in carrying out a research: quantitative research and qualitative research. According to Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2009, p.151), qualitative refers to data collection method or data analysis procedure by generating or using non-numerical data. Data in qualitative research involves data such as words, pictures, video clips and etc. With the aim and objective of this research, qualitative is chosen as the main method in this study. Moreover, exploratory research design is used as well. It supports to explore and gain deep information regarding the salesperson's behaviour and also the relationship with customer purchase decision in order to find out new knowledge.

In order to be successful in the qualitative method, interviews were carried out. The semi structured interview helps to explore deeply the different views, experiences, motivations of individual participants.

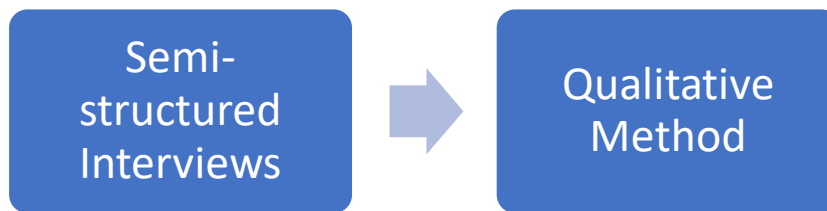


Figure 8: Research method in the thesis

3.2 Data Collection

The Secondary data in this research are being taken widely from scientific sources such as books regarding the thesis topic, earlier studies and researches, journalist articles, statistics. List of the references is attached in the appendices of this study.

However, the primary data in this research is collected from interviews.

Semi structured interviews

According to Ritchie & Lewis (2005,58), depth interview method helps to gain deeper knowledge from interviewee's perspectives. Moreover, more related topics are likely to open up during the interview. Therefore, author chose this method to collect the primary data for this study.

Since interviewees are with different backgrounds, areas of living in Finland, the semi-structured interviews are suitable for them to express personal feeling and share experiences. It also creates some flexibility for both interviewer and interviewee during the interview for the productive result.

A list of questions is prepared beforehand, and the same questions were asked to each of interviewee. The interviews were face to face, on skype interviews and were recorded for the analysis. Total 10 interviewees were interviewed for this study. Especially among the interviewees, two interviewees are author's colleagues who are sale representatives for some specific brands at the moment.

The table below shows the more detail information about interviews:

Table 3: Interviews brief

Interviewee	Personal Background	Interview method	Duration
Interviewee 1	Finnish/40years old/Vantaa-Finland	Face to face	25 minutes
Interviewee 2	Finnish/32years old/Helsinki-Finland	Face to face	15 minutes
Interviewee 3	Vietnamese/30 years old/Helsinki-Finland	Face to face	18 mintues
Interviewee 4	Vietnamese/29 years olds/Espoo-Finland	Phone	15 minnutes
Interviewee 5	Russian/25 years old/Lappeenranta-Finland	Skype	20 minutes
Interviewee 6	Spanish/30years old/Helsinki-Finland	Face to face	20 minutes
Interviewee 7	Chinese/50 years old-Porvoo-Finland	Skype	15 minutes
Interviewee 8	Finnish/67 years old/Vantaa-Finland	Skype	15 minutes

Interviewee 9	Finnish/35 years old/Vantaa-Finland	Face to face	25 minutes
Interviewee 10	Finnish/35years old/Vaasa-Finland	Phone	10 minutes

3.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis is one of the important parts in this study, which has direct impact on the outcomes.

Following guidelines of Ritchie, Liz & William, (2003), the author applied these steps into data analysis part: Transfer data into written notes; identify the themes, categorize data into relevant themes, code and interpret data and draw conclusion.

Data from interviews were noted down and learned carefully according to each question in order to find out the idea and answers for the questions. Later, data was chosen to present the findings accordingly.

3.4 Validity and Reliability of Research

According to Stenbacka (2001), a qualitative research is considered valid when participants in the research can freely response and share their opinion and knowledge to the research problem and study topic. Therefore, this study's validity is reached. All the interviews are semi-unstructured with list of open-ended questions prepared beforehand. Each interview was carried in confidential and by most convenient way chosen by interviewee: face to face, through phone or via skype. Therefore, interviewees are comfortable to discuss with interviewer about the topic.

Reliability in qualitative research refers if other repeated researches are carried out, what the ability of same result could be (Stenbacka, 2001). This study aims to maximize the reliability of the research by clear structure of study and data collection and analysis. However, the fact is author worked partly as a salesperson where she has

lots of interaction with different customers, some of author's own opinion and experience might have some influences on the findings. Therefore, minor bias cannot be avoided.

4 Findings

In this chapter, results from qualitative research are presented and analyzed. As discussed earlier, semi-structured interviews are used in order to explore customer's opinion freely. There is total 10 interviewees who are interested in the study and voluntarily joined. List of questions for the interviews were prepared and sent to interviewees by email before the interview so that interviewees had enough time to read and understand questions well.

Main research question: How does salesperson's behavior impact on customer's purchase decision?

Sub1: What are the effects of each behavioral aspect: ethical behavior, listening ability, relational skills, emotional intelligence and customer orientation on consumer purchase decision?

Sub2: What are the most important behavioral aspects that impact on consumer's purchase decision?

Questions in interview are divided into 3 parts as below:

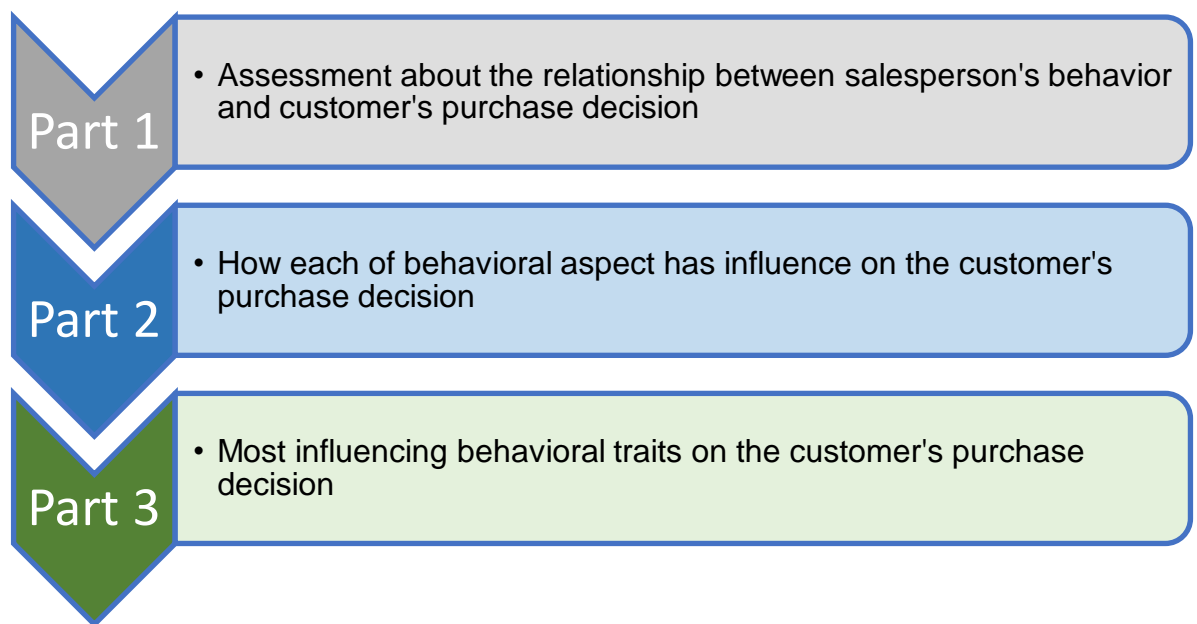


Figure 9: Main content of interviews

PART 1: Assessment about the relationship between salesperson's behavior and customer's purchase decision

In this part, the interviewer asked question about general feeling of customer if there is any link between their purchasing decision and salesperson's behavior by questions:

Do you think that your purchase decision is influenced by salesperson's behavior? How does it happen?

7 out of 10 interviewees answered Yes to this question. They agreed that their purchase decision is got influenced by salespeople and their behaviors. 1 interviewee stated that he is not sure about it. He also explained that for products which are already familiar to him and there is no need for help from salesperson. In case of some specific products which he does not have much knowledge about, he prefers to ask opinions from acquaintances such as friends, family or internet reviews. However, he also talked about experience once that he got advices and consultation from salesperson at store when he came to check for the demo product. The information provided by salesperson was later on compared with his acquaintances provided. However, he made his purchase decision through online website, not at store.

Similarly, another interviewee also said that it is not always her purchase decision got influenced by salesperson. It depends on what she wants to buy and when it happens. She explained:

“Sometimes I do not mean to buy that product. It is just by chance I visit store and see some discount, but I have no idea about it till the salesperson introduced about products. It sounds like I got a good deal and I can still make a return within 30 days in case of no more interest. So I bought it to test at home. Definitely if that salesperson was not active talking about it, I might not care or get any attention to it”.

The 10th interviewee said that his purchase decision is rarely influenced by salesperson because he thinks that salesperson wants to sell product, therefore, benefits for salesperson might be put priority than his needs: *“I don’t easily buy something what salesperson shows, especially which is expensive, I only keep in mind and check out that later. But when salesperson behave nicely and that makes me have good impression and interest on product.”*

The reasons for interviewees whose purchase decisions are impacted by the salesperson are summarized in short:

- Good Product’s offers and benefits salesperson provides
- Good and satisfying service salesperson provided and customer repurchased
- Salesperson’s behavior meets the expectation of interviewees, inspire and help interview in making better product choice.

One of the interviewees said that: “Salesperson is good at talking and making people want to buy products. They helped me to get what I am looking for and I tend to come back where I feel good to buy there even though the prices might be similar somewhere else”.

To summarize this question, most of the interviewees agreed the important role of salesperson in their buying as well as salesperson has impact in their purchase decision.

PART 2: Salesperson's behavioral aspects

In the second part of interview, questions regarding each aspect of behavioral and customer's purchase decision in order to have deeper look inside the research topic and answer for the research questions.

Ethical Behavior

**Question 1: Do you think the salesperson behave ethically during your purchasing?
How does salesperson's behavior show that?**

There are 6 interviewees agreed that among the salespeople they have met, they got ethical behavior from these salespeople. One interviewee answer by an open explanation: "*Salespeople are usually quite nice here but not always. Sometimes I feel I do not get attention from them*". In this answer, the general idea about salesperson is still quite positive.

While 3 others do not show total agree answer due to bad experience this interviewee met one shared his bad experience that he went to buy a discount product as gift for the child's birthday and he mentioned about it clearly to the seller. However, due to the low stock list, the seller reserved on system and make a confirmed promise to him with pick up at store option a week later and they will send text to him once the package is there. But over a week later, he did not get any info and he came back to store to clarify the problem. The answer he got from the same seller on that day is that there is no stock left so they could refund him. He said that he was very disappointed with the seller because of the troubles and also uncomfortable attitude. Another interviewee also mentioned about the bad attitude of the sales staff once he returned some stuff bought from online to store, that made him no want to even go that store again.

Third bad experience story said that sometimes seller tries to introduce some line of products what they are having on offer than the one what customer asked for and customer. Interviewee made a purchase and after that did a return due to unsatisfaction

with product. Obviously, these negative experiences create dissatisfaction and even indirectly pose the question to loyalty of customer.

For the second part of question “How does salesperson’s behavior show that?”, interviewees share their opinions and experiences which are summarized and categorized in short as below:

Table 4: Opinions of interviewees about salesperson’s behavior

Salesperson’s Attitude	Information and products offers	Security
-Responsible for what they say	-Offer products with customers’ needs	-Respect customer personal information
-Honest, sincere and friendly	-Give honest information about product, service and pricing	-Protect customer info in confidential
-Nice, patient active in helping to find the right product	-Show products advantage and disadvantage	-Make customer feel less risky and secure when use the service
-Easy to approach		
-Flexible and Respectful to customer choice	-Provide up to date information about product	
-Not force customers to buy product		

The ethical behavior of sale staff is recognized by the customer through their attitude, the quality of information and products they offer as well as the security matter the sales staff bring to customer.

Listening Ability

Do you think that the salesperson listens to what you say and support during purchase decision making? How does salesperson's behavior show that?

For this question, all of the interviewees think that salesperson listens to what they say and have respond according to their wish. The most common answer among interviewees is that salesperson listen to them attentively and they try to justify their needs by asking questions back to customers. These clarifying questions helps salesperson understand correctly customer's needs. One interviewee also said that she recognizes that the salesperson is listening to her questions by body language such as eye contact or some kinds of short answer to confirm that salesperson is following the conversation, as mentioned like "Yeah" or "Okay".

Some of interviewees who are not local people in Finland shares about their experiences that sometimes they got language barrier that they cannot communicate well Finnish language. In this case, the sellers actively suggested to change to English language which makes customer feel more comfortable. Another interviewee mentioned that some salespeople who are not good at English are ready to find his or her working colleague to support the customer instead.

Relational Skill

Do you think that the salesperson tries to build up a good relationship with customer during purchase decision making? How does salesperson's behavior show that?

This question gets many positive views from interviewees. 8 of them agreed with the question asked, while 2 others cannot give confirmed answers. They said that they are not sure, or they do not notice and mind about that.

One interviewee talked: “I just go to buy what I need and ask some help from them. I am not even sure if I see that salesperson second time there if I don’t go there when they work that time.”.

While majority opinions go to the appraise of their good experiences with the buyer. One interviewee mentioned that “I think salespeople always try to make customer feel comfortable and we are like king”. Some other interviewees talked that they always get the open suggestion after purchase decision or even if there is not any purchase made. For example, given by interviewees:” The seller told me at the end that I can return the product within 30 days if I don’t feel satisfy and I will get full refund. This makes me feel good.” Or “in case of any problem, you can come back to store or call our customer service, we will try to figure it for you”. This shows that sales staff wants to have customer come back and repurchase. As fact, customer satisfaction and loyalty is one of most important thing what every retail business want to achieve.

Interviewees gave some opinions regarding how they see salesperson show that they are making effort in building a good relationship. It mostly emphasized by the way how salesperson responds to customers, their attitude, their efforts in supporting customer to choose right products, or some special offer for product, even after a sale made.

As shared by an interviewee: “I think that seller will have me come back to store by his nice offer. I just bought 2 tablets as gift for my twin’s boys’ birthday. I just by the way shared that. He gave me a free subscription of Viaplay for 3 months. A good deal!”

Emotional Intelligence

Do you think that the salesperson understands your feeling and emotion during purchase decision making? How does salesperson’s behavior show that?

8 interviewees approved that the salesperson understand their emotion and feeling. 2 others similarly said that they do not know.

“I think the salesperson understand what I think and want. That is how they find the right product and suggest it to me. If they don’t understand, they could not do that”- One interviewee answered.

While other said: *“I went to buy a bag in Stockman. I liked one bag very much but they are currently not available at that store. The salesperson came and suggested me some other models which is on offer. I did not like those. The salesperson was so nice that she said to me she understands I like it a lot and suggested me 2 options: She could reserve me that bag in other Stockman department and I can come there to pick up or she can reserved it and they will bring it to this store. I did very much feel appreciated with her help and ending up with her first suggestion. If she does not try to help, I am sure I will perhaps just skip that”*.

How salesperson show that is interpreted from the answers of interviewees: by salesperson’s empathy attitude, by clarifying questions to customers, by motivation to bring positive atmosphere about purchasing which makes customers feel confident in their choice. Some of interviewees said that they think salesperson they met recognized their thought and that contributed to their buying decision.

Customer Orientation

Do you think that the salesperson understands your needs and puts your interest at high priority during your purchase? How does salesperson’s behavior show that?

Majority of the interviewees 9/10 agreed that salesperson understands their need and place high priority their interest. Only one stated that he is not sure.

This majority pointed out some of signs which show that behavior of salesperson, is categorized as:

- They try to ask questions to customer's interest to collect information they need before giving some advice
- They do understand what customer needs
- They try to explain and offer good products suit customer's need
- They ensure customer to get benefits and after sale care

“Seller asked what I want right away at first. They gave me some products show and compared them. However, I chose the one which fits with my budget.” One said.

“I do feel that they work out base on my requirement and wish and I am freely to ask and chose what I want.” Is another response.

PART 3: Most important aspects of salesperson's behavior.

Among all above salesperson's behavioral aspect, what have the most and the least impact on your purchasing decision? (Could you rank them according to their importance in your purchasing decision)

For this question, Listening Ability and Ethical Behavior got the same 4 times ranked as the most important factors of salesperson's behavior which effect on the interviewee's purchase decision. From this result, Listening Ability and Ethical Behavior are the factors which highly impact on the purchasing decision. On the other hand, Emotional Intelligence is considered as the factors has least impact on purchase decision, with 4 times ranked as the least one.

Moreover, there are two different ideas from interviewees for this matter. One stated: *“I think all of the aspects are equally important that I cannot give which one is more important than others. Sometimes I even don't see these aspects separately, they all contributed to salesperson's behavior”*

While another suggested:

“There are many others factors than behavior of salesperson which makes me decide to buy. I also think products and service are different from each other and they need

specific attention from sellers than others. Sellers's behavior will be affected by what he or she sells."

In above opinion, it can be drawn that the interviewee emphasized the seller's behavior is characterized by the products or service he or she sells as well as the importance of other factors in the purchase decision.

5 Discussion and Conclusion

In this chapter, results of the research are presented in both theoretical and managerial implications. Findings will be reflected in the literature which supports from academic view for this research. The managerial implications imply to practice. At last, the limitation of this research will be mentioned as well as recommendations and possible opening topic for further studies.

5.1 Theoretical implication

Literature approves the importance of salesperson in every business since they are the brand image and the link to connect the company and customer. "Selling is not just "nice blah blah" as many people might think. It is a very demanding profession", as mentioned by Hase & Busch (2017, p.164) when discussing about sales abilities. Being successful in selling career, a salesperson is required to have different soft skills and behavior (Thacker, 2020).

In this study, author built the research framework which is adopted from Punwatkar and Verghese (2014) and developed with 5 behavioral aspects of salesperson to study: ethical behavior, listening skills, relational skills, emotional intelligence and customer orientation. The aim of the research is to explore the impact between these aspects and customer purchase decision.

The result of this study by semi-structured interviews proved that salesperson 's behavior plays an important role in the purchase decision in Finland. This result once more time strongly confirmed strong evidence for the previous quantitative study by

Punwatkar and Verghese (2014) which also implies this existing relationship. However, in their research, customer orientation is not considered as one of the behavioral aspects. In this study, the result suggested that customer orientation has impact on the purchasing decision, which is suggested for future studies to consider this factor as one of important trait in salesperson's behavior. The result also confirmed that each of the behavioral aspect has positive relationship with the customer purchasing, which the same result in the study of Yapa and Fernando (2018). However, ethical behavior of salesperson reveals several issues in current situation in Finland. Some existing issues are recognized from the interviews: lack of attention from salesperson. Salesperson's promise is not trustworthy, and information is not delivered to customer on time which creates disappointment. Moreover, during sales period, salesperson puts sales target and their benefits higher priority than customers' interests.

Another aim of this research is to identify the most important factors in salesperson behavior toward the customer's purchase decision in Finland. Listening and Ability and Ethical Behavior are equally the most central aspects on the purchasing decision while Emotional Intelligence is considered as the least. This result is different from the previous by Punwatkar and Verghese (2014) which found out listening abilities and relational skills significantly influence buyer purchasing and ethical behavior and emotional intelligence have less impact.

The result of the study also points out the role of salesperson's behavior on the customer satisfaction and loyalty. Najam et al., (2016) in their studies emphasized the importance of salesperson in enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty.

5.2 Managerial implications

As the result of the study shows, salesperson plays a vital role in buyer-selling process and their manners at store have impact on the customer purchase decision. Therefore, it encourages both company and sale staff to have some actions in order to achieve more success and goals in future.

The result of study proved that ethical behavior of salesperson is the most influencing behavioral aspects on customer purchase decision, besides listening ability. However, from experiences of customers, not all salesperson behaves ethically. Therefore, a salesperson should acknowledge about the importance of ethical behavior and aims to build image as an ethical salesperson. They also should develop other skills in order to be better every day since salesperson is the reflection of a business.

Moreover, retail store and companies should also support the salesperson to have more opportunities to improve themselves such as provide regular training course, qualification. Also, in order to have good quality of sales staff in store, the recruitment should also be paid attention in order to have good human resources right away at the beginning. Regular activities such as randomly checkup salesperson should be done.

In order to improve better, opinions from customers are critical important to improve service quality, among that included salesperson. Survey should be sometimes carried out to collect the ideas from customer.

5.3 Limitations and recommendation for future research

The major limitation of this research is the number of interviewees. Even though the author tries to cover customers from different background, there are still cannot cover all buyers across whole Finland. As nature of qualitative research, it cannot be given assessment on which aspects of customer's behavior has more influence on customer's purchase decision than others.

However, it is promising opportunity to recognize this with numeric data from a quantitative methodology, which is open for further study. Taken ideas from the result of the studies, the research topic on the impact of salesperson behavior on the customer satisfaction, trust and loyalty is also another possible topic.

In conclusion, this study emphasizes the important role of salespeople and their manners in selling. The result answered main questions and two sub questions that there is impact of salesperson's behavior on customer's purchasing decision. Among 5 behavioral aspects, each has positive impact on the purchasing decision. Listening

ability and Ethical Behavior are the most outstanding factor while Emotional Intelligence is the least important one. Therefore, it requires company and salesperson always find opportunities to develop themselves in order to meet customer expectations.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: INTERVIEW QUESTION

PART 1: General Feeling about purchase decision based on salesperson's behavior

Do you think that your purchase decision is influenced by salesperson's behavior?

How does it happen?

PART 2: Salesperson's behavior

Ethical Behavior

Do you think the salesperson behave ethically during your purchasing? How does salesperson's behavior show that?

Listening Ability

Do you think that the salesperson listens to what you say and support during purchase decision making? How does salesperson's behavior show that?

Relational Skill

Do you think that the salesperson tries to build up a good relationship with customer during purchase decision making? How does salesperson's behavior show that?

Emotional Intelligence

Do you think that the salesperson understands your feeling and emotion during purchase decision making? How does salesperson's behavior show that?

Customer Orientation

Do you think that the salesperson understands your needs and puts your interest at high priority during purchase decision? How does salesperson's behavior show that?

PART 3: Most important aspects of salesperson's behavior

Among all above salesperson's behavioral aspect, what have the most and the least impact on your purchasing decision? (Could you rank them according to their importance in your purchasing decision?)

Thank you!