Doctorado en Administración y Dirección de Empresas
Departamento de Organización de Empresas y Marketing

TESIS DOCTORAL

"PERFIL DEL EQUIPO DE VENTAS Y RESULTADO COMERCIAL: ANÁLISIS EN UNA ECONOMÍA EMERGENTE"

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A Dios y a la Virgen María

A mis padres Luis y Elba

A mi señora Patricia Marilú

A mi asesor Jesús

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.

RESUMEN EN CASTELLANO

Esta tesis doctoral tiene como objetivo determinar el impacto de un conjunto de variables relacionadas con el perfil de la fuerza de ventas en un mejor rendimiento de la actividad comercial. Aspectos tales como la empatía, el liderazgo, la motivación, el esfuerzo o la experiencia son propias del vendedor, mientras que existen otras relacionadas con el perfil y enfoque de la empresa: grado de orientación al mercado, o inteligencia de marketing que complementan el marco de referencia para tener una visión integral de la gestión del área de ventas de una organización.

Para alcanzar los objetivos propuestos se propone realizar una investigación cuantitativa basada en el análisis de ecuaciones estructurales. La recogida de datos se estructura desde una perspectiva triple: directores de ventas, vendedores y consumidores. Se plantean cuestionarios basados en escalas previamente validadas por la literatura y adaptadas a las características concretas del estudio. El análisis individual de cada uno de estos grupos de interés profundiza en aspectos concretos que definen una mayor eficacia y eficiencia desde distintos puntos de vista. La consideración conjunta de estas tres perspectivas ofrece una visión global sobre cómo mejorar la gestión de un equipo de ventas.

El estudio se desarrolla en el contexto de una economía emergente: Perú. Esta investigación contribuye a completar la brecha identificada en la literatura vinculada no solamente a la escasez de trabajos académicos que analizan perfiles de equipos de ventas, sino también al hecho de que esos escasos trabajos identificados consideran el contexto de Estados Unidos o economías occidentales desarrolladas. En un contexto económico y social cada vez más globalizado es importante considerar las peculiaridades de distintas realidades para valorar la necesidad de realizar adaptaciones en las estrategias y políticas de gestión empresarial, en este caso relativa a equipos de ventas. Los resultados de la tesis tienen importantes implicaciones teóricas y prácticas que se presentan en la parte final de la Tesis.

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CHAPTER I:

INTRODUCTION

1.1. INTRODUCTION

In recent times, technological advances, climate change and shifting social trends impacting customer behavior—among other factors—have driven changes in consumption patterns; logically, company-consumer interaction has followed suit (Moe and Ratchford, 2018; McLean and Wilson, 2016). In such a context, authors like Stein and Ramaseshan (2016) argue that consumers tend to demand more in terms of response time, information volume and shopping experience satisfaction—heightened expectations that specifically impact their overall experience. All this has explicit implications for sales results. Hence, companies should explore new business strategies where the role of the sales force appears to take a back seat. That said, our experience suggests that for certain products and contexts, the role of the sales force—together with the commercial capabilities, values and motivation of salespeople—remains one of the main factors driving business success for many companies.

This study highlights sales as a crucial factor and delves into the decisive impact they have on organizations. Sales both provide an understanding of a company's position in terms of market share and guarantee continuity over time—hence, they are essential for sustainability and growth. The literature is unanimous in acknowledging the fundamental role and high strategic value of sales teams (Cron et al., 2014). Palmatier et al. (2007), for instance, show that consumers can feel closely connected to salespeople, and that such bonds drive customer preference for certain companies. Sales executives, then, can be seen as an intangible asset with the potential to add value to the customer experience (Hunter and Perreault, 2007); they can also provide firms with a number of advantages, including market intelligence, and actively contribute to the development of new products (Kuester et al., 2017).

Some of the literature to date has focused on identifying characteristics and skills that managers should look for when selecting salespeople for their sales teams. Most, however, has done so from a human resources and/or company management angle (Deeter-Schmelz et al., 2002). There have been a number of calls for research aimed at better understanding sales force strategy itself and how it should be developed (Blocker et al., 2012, Cron et al., 2014)—as well as looking at the factors driving sales force effectiveness (Deeter-Schmelz et al., 2002). Factors such as empathy, commitment, effort, motivation, leadership and experience, among others, underlie and explain sales force success. From a business standpoint, aspects like degree of sales force market orientation, interaction with customers, customer-oriented sales and marketing intelligence management reinforce the human resources approach and provide a holistic vision for sales force management. Yet, despite the relevance of the sales force in the field of marketing, very little research to date has analyzed the impact sales force profiles on product success or business outcomes. Studies by Blocker et al. (2012) or Cron et al. (2014) are rare exceptions.

With this gap in the literature in mind—and with a view to advance understanding of sales force management—we put forth a comprehensive study built around three pillars of analysis: clients (Study 1), executives (Study 2) and sales force (Study 3). Looking at each of these areas individually—in separate studies—will allow us to fine tune our assessment of different perceptions among the interest groups of reference; looking at the three studies as a whole, we will shed light on effective, efficient sales force management. The ultimate goal is to determine how all this contributes to better outcomes for any type of organization. Sales performance is undeniably the central variable of interest for business management due to its obvious link to the success of almost all sales organizations. Given increasing competitive pressure, growing demands for cost containment and the rising cost of the sales function, understanding how different sales force-related factors impact sales performance is essential (Mahmood, 2014).

The idea revolves around understanding how different levels of certain sales force characteristics determine the success or failure of a particular business transaction and of a company overall. In this sense, sales force managers are best equipped to identify which profiles best suit their customers and objectives.

Based on my own professional experience, I believe that one of the scarcest yet most essential business skills is customer orientation and the versatility to attend to, understand and above all listen to them. This allows us to identify customer needs, preferences and reactions—be they positive or negative—quickly. From a practical standpoint, the sales force should be focused on providing solutions for customers; not merely on selling products. This premise, well-rooted in many contexts, is a pending issue in emerging economies, where short-term sales targets remain an evident reality. In many cases, a new approach to thinking about and setting both individual sales objectives and aggregate long-term goals would seem imperative. This would allow us to visualize the customer experience—to better understand consumer needs and desires, expectations, red zones and difficulties with regard to specific products or services. This study, then, will provide us with real, comprehensive data; equipping us, on one hand, to understand which factors will help boost sales, but also driving long-term emotional bond building with clients. In this way, customer loyalty—towards salespeople, towards the brand and, therefore, towards the organization as a whole—is shored up.

Gitomer (2014) ratifies these arguments in his article "The Old Way or the New Way? It's Really Not a Choice Anymore", which presents the new sales strategies perspective and identifies four basic features:

-Aggressive salespeople tell. Assertive salespeople ask.

-Aggressive salespeople try to "close". Assertive salespeople use testimonial proof.

-Aggressive salespeople go for the sale. Assertive salespeople go for the customer.

-Aggressive salespeople think "quota." Assertive salespeople think "relationship".

Other authors like Mahmood and Basharat (2014) highlight the contribution of salesperson creativity—considering it a key tool that has yet to be consciously exploited in practice. These authors link motivation and creativity to sales performance. From an eminently practical standpoint, Bowser (2015)—deemed among the top sales and leadership coaches in the United States—offers guidelines for recognizing a true sales professional: one who displays and/or incites trust, commitment, customer orientation, respect and self-worth, self-esteem and creativity as vital features; such traits, says Bowser, are of the essence if above average achievement of sales objectives is to be reached.

1.2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

Rooting my research in the ideas discussed above, I aim to answer the following questions:

-Do sales force profiles have an impact in driving better sales management results?

-Are there other underlying factors that help explain better sales management results?

More specifically, we want to know the extent to which sales force profiles—both for managers and salespeople—have a positive impact on business outcomes.

To this end, we put forth a three-prong multi-perspective analysis assessing sales management, salespeople, and customers. Delving deeper into each of these interest groups will shed light on perceptions among key actors and contribute to explaining the success of certain sales teams and overall commercial strategies. This integrated vision will also provide a holistic understanding of the ideal business framework scheme.

We take an emerging economy, Peru—presenting a number of idiosyncratic economic and socio-cultural patterns (Hofstede, 2019)—as our reference, as such contexts provide great potential for discussing research results and implications in an environment defined by globalization.

1.3. CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

Sales force profiles are the backbone of this study. This focus allows us to take a much closer look at those factors driving enhanced company-customer interaction—and, by extension, the achievement of company sales targets. These factors contribute to building mutual respect and trust-based environments and relationships—in short, to generating true added value in the service delivered to clients. Moreover, making Peru—an emerging economy—the stage for our field work enhances the interest of our research, given that the focal point of most research to date has been the United States or other developed western economies.

Use of new technologies—characterized by an abundance of information—availability of the work force, the wide range of communications options consumers have at their fingertips and market globalization are vastly changing our coexistence. The most successful firms in terms of sales all share a common denominator: the ability to add value in conjunction with consumers throughout business interaction—and the resulting strengthened salesperson-customer relationship. Being identified as the ideal salesperson means that companies must refocus corporate culture to be customer-oriented.

This approach should not only take the price variable into account; easy customer-product interaction—not only with the product itself but in terms of robust loyalty towards the brand, salespeople and the company itself—is also a priority. Moreover, salespeople

must be equipped with broad knowledge of the orders intake, customer service and post-sales processes, making them experts in the products they sell (Johnston & Marshall, 2009).

Square one for successful sales teams is selection and incorporation of the best professionals available. Hence, all successful sales personnel selection processes should substantially boost both sales force productivity and company profitability.

Customer demands regarding information and quality have prompted companies to evolve in terms of management. Firms can no longer act with their backs to customers, since—in the new sales paradigm—companies and customers co-create added value at various points throughout their business relationship (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). In this creation of customer-oriented value, Wachner et al. (2009) indicate that sales approaches that prioritize customers will help improve management and decision-making—boosting both customer satisfaction and, consequently, sales force remuneration.

All of this will be studied in a specific context that has yet to be the object of academic research. We will find out whether the general patterns identified in the literature for other contexts are applicable in an emerging economy setting—or if, on the contrary, global contexts call for taking local idiosyncrasies into account and making appropriate sales management adjustments. With regard to sales teams in emerging economies like Peru, it should be noted that interactions on the whole take place in informal contexts—where preparation is guided by subjective criteria and generally poor (Ogliastri and Salcedo, 2008).

1.3.1. Study 1

The first study addresses sales force profiles and how they impact both company-customer interaction and business outcomes. Specifically, we take consumer perceptions regarding salespeople as our reference—in terms of trust and the expertise salespeople

transmit, risk and/or pleasure perceived in the interaction, degree of loyalty and commitment towards the salesperson and potential for building robust relational bonds.

Most empirical studies on the antecedents of sales force success to date have focused on how salespeople communicate company value to customers (Echchakoui, 2019). We believe that understanding how sales force profiles impact the dynamics of buyer-seller interaction and potential results—in terms of trust and experience—is crucial for any company wishing to strengthen its competitive position and maintain or improve sales figures.

1.3.2. Study 2

The second study takes a closer look at manager perceptions. Companies should understand they do not depend on extraordinary products or services to be successful in the market segment they wish to satisfy. Effective market strategies, tactics and operational actions, on the other hand, are of the essence. Factors like customer orientation and salesperson effort—but also creativity and adaptability—must be taken into account, as they all have a direct impact on sales force performance. In this way, it is possible to understand sales success, measured both in terms of sales and potential success of new products. Delivering added value to customers, giving companies the opportunity to obtain market information and contributing to new product development are three ways the sales force can become an intangible asset of great competitive value (Kuester et al., 2017).

Excellence lies, then, in the skills all salespeople should possess: both an in-depth knowledge of the services and tangible products they offer and the ability to build relationships with individual characteristics that every sales manager should count. Not everybody is cut out to perform all of the activities that exist; obviously sales is no exception.

1.3.3. Study 3

Our third study analyzes sales force profiles—specifically the impact of sales team traits on salesperson performance. The impact of customer-oriented sales, effort and degree of commitment towards the company is also assessed. We suggest all these factors have an impact on job performance. Hence, sales outcomes can be explained through a chain of effects.

Table 1.1 presents the general objectives of this Doctoral Thesis, together with our conceptual framework and the salient aspects specific to each of the three studies that make up the whole.

Table 1.1: Objectives of the Doctoral Thesis

	RESEARCH OBJECTIVES	CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
PHD THESIS Salesforce profile and commercial performance: an analysis in an emerging economy.	Determine the extent to which sales force profiles have an impact on enhancing company business management performance in emerging economies.	Customer Sales Manager → Sales Force Profile → Managerial Performance Salespeople
STUDY 1: Impact of customer perception on salespeople in the relationship.	Evaluate extent to which sales force profiles—measured in terms of the level of trust and experience that salespeople transmit to consumers—determine a greater or lesser degree of perceived pleasure and risk in customer-company interaction scenarios. Determine the impact such perceptions can have in terms of building relational bonds.	
STUDY 2: Relevance of sales force profiles from a managerial standpoint.	Analyze sales force profiles—specifically factors such as effort, commitment, creativity and degree of market orientation—from the perspective of managers. Such factors can explain potential success of new product launch and sales outcomes in emerging economies.	
STUDY 3: Impact of sales force characteristics on work performance from the perspective of the salesperson.	Assess optimal sales force profiles from the perspective of the salespeople themselves. More specifically, the impact of commitment, effort and customer orientation on i) work performance and ii) sales performance are considered.	

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CHAPTER II:

HOW DOES CUSTOMER PERCEPTION OF SALESPEOPLE INFLUENCE THE RELATIONSHIP? A STUDY IN AN EMERGING ECONOMY

2.1. INTRODUCTION

Sales and sales force management is a complex activity that largely determines a company's commercial success. The sales force and salespeople are part of the marketing department that comes into direct contact with actual and potential consumers, thus acting not only as a spokesperson for the company but as a direct link between the organization and the market (Baumann et al., 2017). Salespeople management involves multiple aspects including selection, motivation and remuneration—all of which have been addressed from the field of human resources management. However, it seems appropriate to also assess—from the perspective of marketing—how consumers perceive the salespeople and what factors drive the highest levels of trust and loyalty, among other aspects (Blocker et al., 2012).

Most empirical work on the antecedents of sales force success has focused on analyzing how salespeople communicate company value to customers (Echchakoui, 2016). Other studies (Kesari and Atulkar, 2016; Yang and Peterson, 2004; Cronin et al., 2000) have delved deeper into how experiential issues impact customer behavior and decision-making. Yet the relative lack of literature examining how the consumers` perception of salespeople determines buyer-seller interactions is surprising (recent work by Lieven (2016) and Echchakoui (2016) being two exceptions). The present study aims to fill this gap by examining the role of experiential customer added value in relation to salesperson profiles. Understanding how salesperson profiles impact the dynamics of buyer-seller interaction and its possible outcomes—in terms of expertise or generated trust—is crucial for any firm wishing to strengthen its competitive position and maintain or enhance sales figures. In this way, sales team managers will be better equipped to understand certain factors behind fluid, successful salesperson-customer relationships and achievement of set objectives. To this end, we wish to highlight the value of salesperson expertise (Macintosh, 2007, Hennig-Thurau, 2004)—and the trust it builds with

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customers (Newell et al., 2011; Foster and Cadogan, 2000; Swan et al., 1999)—as aspects that can determine customers' first impression of salespeople capability and desire to establish business relationships. For authors like Babin et al. (2013), Shobeiri et al. (2013) and Oh et al. (2007), the impact of the overall experience as perceived by the customer is fundamental to understanding the relational dynamics and their potential long-term scope.

Companies could find a source of relevant, sustainable competitive advantage here (Srivastava and Kaul, 2014) given the importance of salesperson-customer interaction in the value creation process (Blocker et al., 2012). Through such interaction, customers can assess their degree of pleasure with the company (Poujol et al., 2013, Goff et al., 1997)—and the degree of perceived risk (Chang and Tseng, 2013)—paving the way for the establishment of long-term relationships (Liu and Leach, 2001). Hence, the salespeople not only communicate value; it can create value as well (Rackman and DeVincintis, 1999). The sales management literature in B2B contexts is very prolific—see, for instance, the considerable number of papers published in journals such as Industrial Marketing Management; or Poujol et al. (2013) in Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services. There are also dozens of papers considering salespeople and sales management in B2C settings. That said, the vast majority of these studies analyze the US, European or other western countries—all developed economies (Athanasopoulou, 2009). Cases in point are Echchakoui (2016, 2015) on the Canadian context; Giovanis and Athanasopoulou (2017) on Greece; Lieven (2016) on Germany; Anderson et al. (2016) on Sweden; Lombart and Louis (2012) on France; and Poon et al. (2017) on Hong-Kong. In stark contrast, scholarly analysis of the phenomenon in emerging economy contexts is very hard to come by. A few rare examples include: Al-Alak (2014), on relationship quality and continuity and WOM in Malaysia; Dewami et al. (2016) and Murali et al. (2016), looking at loyalty, gratitude and customer retention in India; and Choi and Choo (2016) on satisfaction with salespeople in China. As Nielsen Consulting recognizes, the

diversity of consumer profiles around the world renders a single, "one-size-fits-all" commercial strategy for all markets impossible. Hence, we should assume general ideas adapted to specific contexts—not universally accepted frameworks (Athanasopoulou, 2009, p. 583). The weight which emerging economies carry in international trade is a fact that cannot be ignored. In terms of market potential, the figures indicate that a large percentage of target populations are in developing countries—and in many cases the evolution of GNP and per capita income figures has begun to attract the attention of companies, driving a desire to initiate activity in these markets. It seems reasonable, therefore, to defend the interest of analyzing company-customer relational issues—and more specifically, customer-salespeople relationships—in emerging economies. To this end, the present study focuses on the context of Peru.

Table 2.1: Country comparisons

Country	Income per capita (ranking)	HDI (ranking)	Power Distance	Individualism	Masculinity	Uncertainty Avoidance	Long-term Orientation	Indulgence
USA	59.501 $ (7)	0.924 (13)	40	91	62	46	26	68
Canada	45.077 $ (17)	0.926 (12)	39	80	52	48	36	68
Germany	44.550 $ (18)	0.936 (5)	35	67	66	65	83	40
Spain	28.359 $ (31)	0.891 (26)	57	51	42	86	48	44
Hong-Kong	46.109 $ (15)	0.933 (7)	68	25	57	29	61	17
India	1.983 $ (142)	0.640 (130)	77	48	56	40	51	26
Peru	*6.199 $ (87)*	*0.750 (89)*	*64*	*16*	*42*	*87*	*25*	*46*
Income per capita is based on data from the International Monetary Fund (2017); HDI is based on data from United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2018); Power Distance, Individualism, Masculinity, Uncertainty Avoidance, Long-term Orientation and Indulgence are the six dimension in the Hofstede framework, identifying cross-cultural differences among countries (www.hofstede-insights.com)								

Source: The author

Table 2.1 shows very significant differences from one country to another. Countries where traditional retailing research has been carried out—the United States, Germany, Spain and Canada, for instance—display higher levels of income per capita and HDI. Less studied countries such as India or Peru, on the contrary, are far lower for both indicators. Moreover, cross-cultural data suggest important behavioral differences linked to higher or lower degrees of individualism, long-term orientation, distance of power or indulgence, among other factors—often due to religious reasons or to the existence of a common past. Such is the case, for example, in Peru and Spain; due to a partially shared past, these two countries display similar values in some dimensions (i.e. uncertainty avoidance, indulgence, masculinity) and clearly divergent values in others (i.e. individualism and long-term orientation). In an increasingly globalized economic context, therefore, it seems necessary to continue taking potential context-bound specificities into account—even more so in emerging economies, where lower levels of economic and technological development can impact both consumers purchasing behavior and customer-company interaction.

Peru has been classified as an emerging economy according to the annual Morgan Stanley Capital International (MSCI) ranking based on the most important stock indexes (2019).

The numbers reveal Peru's attractiveness and vast potential in terms of international trade: one of Latin America's fastest growing economies in recent years, third in Latin America in the Institute for Management Development 2018 global competitiveness ranking (behind Chile and Mexico) and, in just over 15 years, Peru's GNI per capita has tripled from $2,010 in 2000 to $5,970 in 2017 (The World Bank, 2018). On the other hand, the Ipsos Peru study (2017) reveals very low levels of confidence coupled with a lack of personal interaction and high levels of perceived risk—all of which can impact consumer behavior.

Therefore, we can justify the interest of developing this research in the Peruvian context, as an example of LATAM emerging economy. Specifically, the objective is to assess how the sales team profile—measured in terms of the level of trust and expertise salespeople transmit to consumers—determines a greater or lesser degree of perceived pleasure and risk throughout customer-company interaction scenarios and how this perception can impact the establishment of relational bonds. A mix of these factors and proper management could be leveraged to optimize the performance of sales teams in emerging economy contexts—both by companies wishing to access emerging markets and already established firms aiming to reorganize and streamline their activity. We exactly analyze the effect of such perception in the context of in-home B2C direct selling. As we want to identify global generalities we take as reference regular products.

To this end, the following section presents the literature review for the most relevant concepts relating to the context under scrutiny. Next, the hypotheses making up our reference model are introduced. Section 2.4 illustrates the characteristics of the field study and data validation, while Section 2.5 submits our results. Finally, the core theoretical implications of the study, implications for management and conclusions are discussed.

2.2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Relationship marketing postulates the interest in building and maintaining long-term customer-company relationships through higher value creation (Gummesson, 1995; Olavarría-Jaraba et al., 2018). Generally speaking, Customer Relationship Management (CRM) consists of managing successful, profitable relationships with customers (Ambler, 2005, p. 153) with a view to foster satisfaction, trust, loyalty, engagement and customer retention (Soltani and Navimipour, 2016; Siriprasoetsin et al., 2011).

CRM often involves direct contact between employees and customers—often providing personalized assistance and customer monitoring and adding value to the relationship (Soltani and Navimipour, 2016, Agnihotri et al., 2009; Yong et al., 2003).

According to Social Exchange Theory, each of the parties decides whether to continue interacting or not depending on the value they receive from the exchange (Ambrose et al., 2017, Lambe et al., 2001).

The principle of reciprocity then is key to understanding consumer behavior. According to this principle, when something positive is received, a feeling of gratitude is awakened in people leading them to want to reciprocate by giving something positive back in return (Mishra, 2016; Liang and Wang, 2007; Bagozzi, 1995).

Hence, the importance of the sales force in the process of managing positive interactions with consumers must be recognized.

In this line, Viio and Grönroos (2014, p. 1087) understand sales as a set of retail activities carried out by the sales force, distinguishing between the sales process—a focus that includes the managerial level and sales force management—and the selling process, explicitly referring to the work carried out by sales people.

Thus, for example, Poon et al. (2017) analyze aspects such as the trust generated among buyers and salespeople in direct selling. This is the reference we focus on in the present study: customer perception of salesperson profiles and activity.

The literature has clearly demonstrated that sales staff—as an active part of interpersonal processes of interaction between seller and buyer—can be essential to value creation (Echchakoui, 2015, Blocker et al., 2012).

Humphreys and Williams (1996) argue that it is precisely through interpersonal contact with the customer that added value is delivered. In fact, value is not derived from the product alone; a significant amount of value—trust, enjoyable interaction and perceived risk reduction, for instance—can originate in the relationship itself.

In this regard, elements like new technologies can play an important role driving enhanced customer perception of interactions, improved sales processes and greater trust in the seller (Keillor et al., 1997).

Aspects like trust (Newell et al., 2011) and salesperson expertise (Hennig-Thurau, 2004) are key to maintaining long-term relationships given their impact on obtained perceived value, commitment and retention.

Yet how and how much these factors and customer-salespeople interaction affect consumer behavior has been studied almost exclusively in developed economy contexts.

Table 2.2 shows a set of researches analyzing buyer-sellers interaction in different settings (sector, context, country) and considering different variables.

The sales management literature has focused prolifically on both B2B (e.g. Van der Borgh et al., 2019; Johnson et al., 2019) and B2C contexts (Vieira, 2018; Ladhari et al., 2017).

Only a small number of authors, however, have taken a closer look at the peculiarities of emerging economies in B2C settings (Choi and Choo, 2016; Dewami et al. 2016; Murali et al., 2016; Al-Alak, 2014).

Hence, focusing our study on an emerging economy is of interest given the potential for certain peculiarities which make adapting general sales force management policies advisable.

Trust, in general, can be defined as faith in the reliability and integrity of one's exchange partner (Morgan and Hunt, 1994, p. 23). Some authors identify two key sub-attributes of trust: credibility—trust derived from the other party's knowledge and experience-based ability to perform or manage certain tasks; and goodwill—trust placed in a partner on the assumption that their actions will be aimed at achieving mutual benefit, avoiding opportunistic situations (Baker et al., 1999; Ganesan, 1994).

Table 2.2: Customer perception of salespeople (context)

Authors	Variables	Sector	Context	Country
Hennig-Thurau (2004)	Technical skills, social skills, motivation, decision-making authority; customer orientation of service employees; customer satisfaction, commitment; customer retention	Travel agencies and electronic media retailing	B2C	Germany
Rajaobelina and Bergeron (2009)	Relationship quality (RQ); antecedents of RQ: customer knowledge, customer orientation, expertise, buyer-seller similarity; consequences of RQ: purchase intention, word-of-mouth.	Financial services	B2C	Canada
Guenzi and Georges (2010)	Drivers of customer trust –the salesperson's customer-oriented selling, expertise and likeability – and exploring the impact of customer trust on three behavioural loyalty intentions – customer intention to recommend, to purchase and to switch to competitors.	Banking	B2C	Italy
Newell et al. (2011)	Personal relationship behaviors, consultative task behaviors, salesperson expertise, salesperson trust, Relationship Loyalty	General	B2B	USA
Delcourt et al. (2013)	Employee emotional competence, rapport, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty	Hairstyling	B2C	Developed economy
Al-Alak (2014)	Bank's relationship marketing efforts (Client Orientation, Relational Orientation, Mutual Disclosure, Service Provider Attributes); Relationship Quality; Relationship continuity; Word of Mouth	Banking	B2C	Malaysia
Echchakoui (2015)	Expertise and trustworthiness (S); enjoyable interaction and risk perceived (O); salesperson loyalty and salesperson equity (R). SOR model.	Banking	B2B	Canada
Choi and Choo (2016)	Relationship Benefits (Functional Benefit and Social Benefits); Satisfaction with the salesperson; (foreign) Brand Attitude	Chinese consumers attitude toward Korean fashion brands	B2C	China
Dewami et al. (2016)	Structural Investments; Social Investments; Financial Investments; Customer Gratitude; Customer Obligation; Loyalty; Customer Purchase Intentions	Cloth and grocery stores	B2C	India
Echchakoui (2016)	*Sales person intangible resource*: Salesperson reputation; *Experiential value added by the salesperson:* economic value, service efficiency, service excellence, enjoyable interaction; *Customer behavior:* customer loyalty, customer share of wallet	Banking	B2C	Canada
Murali et al. (2016)	SERVQUAL-dimensions based ASS attributes (Reliability, Assurance, Tangibles, Empathy, Responsiveness); Customer Satisfaction; Customer Retention and Customer Loyalty	3 companies (Gas Stove, Water Purifier and Mixer Grinder) from the home appliances sector	B2C	India
Poon et al. (2017)	Trust, repurchase intention, perceived risk	Direct selling	B2C	Hong Kong
This research	*Salesperson expertise, trust, enjoyable interaction, perceived risk, salesperson-owned loyalty, salesperson-owned commitment*	*Direct selling, in-home*	*B2C*	*Peru*

Source: The author

Swam (1999) provides a comprehensive literature review of customer trust in the salesperson, indicating that the level of salesperson-owned trust may have an impact on perceived risk.

Salesperson expertise, on the other hand, is the notion that the salesperson possesses special knowledge making him or her relevant in the exchange relationship due to technical competence and the ability to provide satisfactory answers to specific questions (Guenzi and George, 2010, p. 119). Salespeople can use accumulated experience to improve skills in general and specialized knowledge of customer types and sales strategies in particular (Giacobbe et al., 2006).

Throughout the literature, numerous studies establish salesperson expertise as an antecedent to trust (Macintosh, 2007, Doney and Cannon, 1997, Moorman et al., 1993, Crosby et al, 1990, Busch and Wilson, 1976). Yet we have not found evidence of authors considering the two variables as capable of simultaneously influencing consumer behavior. In this study, we argue that both concepts are key to anticipating both the level of enjoyable interaction and perceived risk. While trust involves a more affective dimension, salesperson expertise includes a cognitive facet leading consumer to "delegate" and deposit trust in salespeople.

Thus, once consumers perceive salespeople as trustworthy, pleasant to interact with and possessing a satisfactory level of expertise, we consider that perceived risk linked to purchase decreases—and consumers respond positively, showing greater propensity to prolonging the relationship. This response is manifested through loyalty and commitment to the salesperson. In other words, we postulate that when consumers perceive interaction with the salespeople as having positive added value, their reciprocal response is shown through two key relational variables.

Based on the work of Yi et al. (2013), Casidy and Wymer (2016, p. 191) define perceived risk as the consumer perception regarding the probability of obtaining an

unfavorable or undesired result as a result of a certain decision or action. It can be understood, therefore, as a cognitive state driving an emotional / behavioral response (Biedenbach et al., 2011).

In parallel, Gremler and Gwinner (2000, p. 92), among others, analyze the importance of interaction. Such authors consider enjoyable interaction as referring to "...an affect-laden, cognitive evaluation of one's exchange with a contact employee" and personal connection, that represents "...a strong affiliation with the other person based on some tie". That is, a customer's perception of enjoyable interaction with a given salesperson may be characterized by a personal connection between the two. In our study, we consider the importance of enjoyable interaction since the concept captures the overall evaluation of positive feelings that consumers make with respect to interaction with salespeople, determines their degree of connection and captures the mutual affection in the customer-salesperson relationship.

Finally, these perceptions have an impact on the relational bonds between customers and salespeople. Hence, perceived risk and degree of enjoyability may influence customer intentions with regard to maintaining the relationship. In this sense, commitment refers to the lasting desire to maintain a value relationship (Verma et al., 2016, p. 208; Deshpandé et al., 1993, p. 83). The term implies not only the desire to continue a relationship but the will to make necessary efforts to maintain it (Alteren and Tudoran, 2016; De Wulf et., 2001; Macintosh and Lockshin, 1997). This variable has been used in both B2C (i.e., Giovanis and Athanasopoulou, 2018) and B2B contexts (Hunan and Naudé, 2014)—hence, it can be considered key to a deeper understanding of relational models.

Based on our research objectives, we highlight the importance of readiness to maintain the relationship, emotional ties and good intentions towards the other party—rather than potential contractual costs and obligations (Yuan et al., 2018).

In recent years, customer loyalty has been a focal concept in academic research (Murali et al., 2016)—defined in a very simple way as the repurchasing of a preferred product or service in the future (Cossío-Silva et al., 2016, p. 1622).

We can therefore understand loyalty as the intent to purchase a product or service in the future, regardless of available alternatives and marketing efforts made by competitors (Liu et al., 2001). Hence, we take into account the degree to which a consumer wishes to repeat purchase behavior in B2B (Poujol et al., 2013) and B2C (Babin et al., 2013) settings.

Traditionally, customer loyalty has been analyzed in terms of loyalty to the company—in other words, a given customer's desire to maintain a relationship with a given company, driven by positive feelings towards the supplier's products (Jaiswal et al., 2018, Oliver, 1999, Gremler and Brown, 1996).

Relatively few studies, however, have looked at customer loyalty in terms of loyalty to the salesperson (Echchakoui, 2016). Salesperson-owned loyalty refers to the consumer's desire to continue dealing with—and repeat purchase through—a given salesperson (Echchakoui, 2016, Palmatier et al., 2007, Reynolds and Arnold, 2000).

2.3. HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

We ground our model in Social Exchange Theory (SET)—the core idea being that individuals are driven to reciprocate when they have been taken good care of by the other party in a relationship (Groth, 2005; De Wulf et al., 2001; Bagozzi, 1995). According to SET, feelings like trust, gratitude and obligation are not always present; social exchange is essential to their existence (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). Customer-salesperson interaction spawns social exchange which, in turn, serves as a catalyst for customer feelings and opinions—both vital in the evaluation of perceived risk and enjoyableness of customer-salesperson interaction. Hence, when positive feelings and opinions are

generated in the customer, we postulate he or she will choose to reciprocate by showing

loyalty and commitment to the salesperson (salesperson-owned loyalty). Figure 2.1 shows

our causal model.

Figure 2.1: Causal model
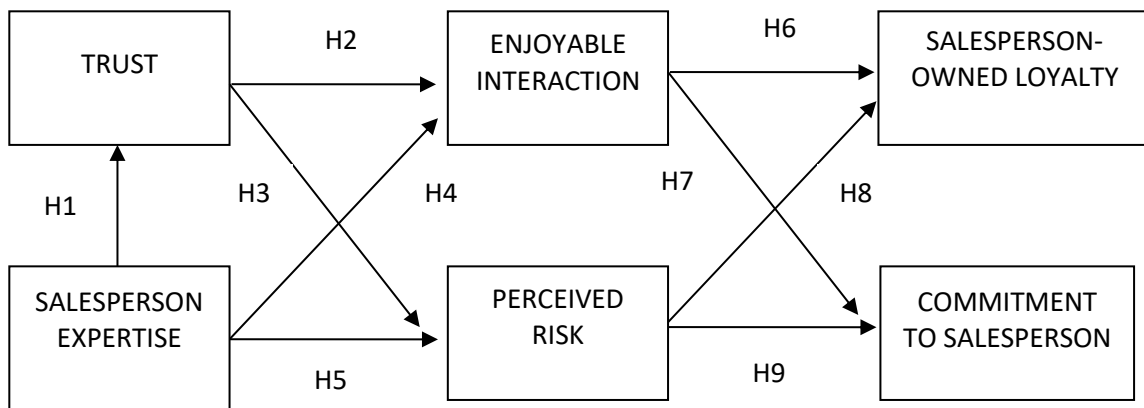
Source: The author

2.3.1. Trust and salesperson expertise

Trust is key to the establishment and maintenance of relationships because it

shows consumers' degree of acceptance with regard to what the other party offers. In this

sense, the salesperson's level of expertise transmits capacity to understand and satisfy

consumer needs and depth of knowledge regarding the product or service offered—its

operation and usefulness, among other aspects (Guenzi and Georges, 2010). Hence, the

level of expertise can boost the level of trust since—to the extent that consumers perceive

a salesperson's ability to respond to specific questions—positive feelings will be

generated towards him/her (Macintosh, 2007). The literature suggests that experience is

a key antecedent of trust (Echchakoui, 2015, Guenzi and Georges, 2010; Macintosh,

2009; Doney and Cannon, 1997; Moorman et al., 1993). Therefore, in line with existent

studies, we propose that:

$\underline{H}_1$: *Salesperson expertise has a positive impact on trust*.

Consumers often buy "promises" (Macintosh, 2009) and trust reduces perceived risk (Ring and Van Der Ven, 1992). In some sectors—financial or technological, for example—consumers feel that the effort required to obtain information outweighs expected value. In these cases, perceived risk may be very high (Guenzi and Georges, 2010). Kapferer (2008), among others, asserts that since consumers are either unable or unwilling to evaluate all available alternatives, brands must help out by transmitting assurance and trust.

We believe the salespeople can contribute in this regard through interactions with customers. Moreover, we expect that high levels both of trust in the salesperson (Swan et al., 1999; Echchakoui, 2015) and perceived salesperson expertise will help lower perceived risk (Echchakoui, 2015).

The authors also postulate that trust and credibility transmitted by salespeople generate a positive emotional state (enjoyable interaction) in customers, derived from the perception that the other party will not act opportunistically but on behalf of the mutual good (Kaski et al., 2018); if a customer perceives that a salesperson is able to offer the best of all alternatives, an internal state of relief is generated and the customer delegates decision-making to the salesperson, simplifying the process. Therefore, based on the foregoing, we propose that:

$\underline{H}_2$: *Trust has a positive impact on enjoyable interaction*.

$\underline{H}_3$: *Trust has a negative impact on perceived risk*.

$\underline{H}_4$: *Salesperson expertise has a positive impact on enjoyable interaction*.

$\underline{H}_5$: *Salesperson expertise has a negative impact on perceived risk*.

2.3.2. Enjoyable interaction and perceived risk

Emotions play an important role in consumer behavior (Emad, 2014, Bagozzi et al., 1999). Some authors define emotion as the response to external stimuli and attribute it to human information evaluation processes (Emad, 2014, Kalat and Shiota, 2007). Hence, to understand consumer decision-making, it is important to consider the emotional states triggered in individual customers (Jiun-Sheng and Haw-Yi, 2011).

The literature has analyzed how emotional contagion affects customer perceptions regarding service encounters (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2006) and in our research we link this to the salespeople. Emotional contagion is "the tendency to automatically mimic and synchronize expressions, vocalizations, postures, and movements with those of another person's and consequently, to converge emotionally" (Hatfield et al., 1994). By way of this phenomenon, salespeople can trigger corresponding emotional states in consumers (Lin and Liang, 2011). Hence, to the extent that a salesperson is friendly and exhibits meaningful emotional behavior, the customer will feel that the interaction is pleasant and want to maintain the relationship. A number of studies have shown that enjoyable interaction has a positive effect on customer loyalty (Echchakoui, 2016, Delcourt et al., 2013, Gremler and Gwinner, 2000) and commitment to salespeople (Lin, 2017, Anderson and Smith, 2016, Gremler and Gwinner, 2008). Based on the above, we propose that:

H_6: *Enjoyable interaction has a positive impact on salesperson-owned loyalty*.

H_7: *Enjoyable interaction has a positive impact on salesperson-owned commitment*.

Perceived risk is another key factor in consumer behavior (Tseng and Wang, 2016; Chang and Tseng, 2013; Park et al., 2013). Risk is perceived when customers associate feelings of uncertainty and potential negative consequences with a given activity—and

arises not from immediate benefits expected to be obtained from purchase but from the potential repercussions that a given purchase may have (Chang and Tseng, 2013; Dowling and Staelin, 1994). By the principle of reciprocity, we expect that low levels of perceived risk due to positive interaction with the salespeople will drive favorable attitudes and behaviors towards the seller in terms of customer loyalty and commitment. This idea is in line with previous studies showing that perceived risk has an inverse effect on consumer intent to purchase (Munnukka and Järvi, 2015; Chang and Tseng, 2013; Sweeney et al., 1999; Grewal et al., 1994). Therefore, we propose:

H8: *Perceived risk has a negative impact on salesperson-owned loyalty.*

H9: *Perceived risk has a negative impact on salesperson-owned commitment.*

2.4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To test the proposed hypotheses, we conducted empirical research in Peru—classified as an emerging economy according to the annual Morgan Stanley Capital International (MSCI) and example of the LATAM region.

Our sample consists of 415 consumers from Metropolitan Lima, Peru's capital city. According to the latest available data, Lima hosts more than 30% of the country's total population, 46.8% of all companies and 32.6% of GDP (very high if the mining and gas activity in the provinces is discounted). Forty-four-point six percent (44.6%) of our sample are males and 55.4% are females—in line with the last census count by the Peruvian National Statistics Institute (49.7% male, 50.3% female). The average age across our sample is 27.8 years old (28.4 in the case of the Peruvian population). Hence, the sample is representative of the population under analysis. Table 2.3 presents the technical data used in our study.

Table 2.3: Technical fieldwork data

Universe	Adults, inhabitants of Metropolitan Lima
Sample size	415 (44.6% males, 55.4% females; average age: 27.8)
Geographical scope	National
Sampling method	Random, quota
Fieldwork	July-September, 2018
Data analysis	Descriptive analysis Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) Measurement model (CFA) Structural Equation Model
Statistical Software	IBM SPSS 22 EQS 6.1

Source: The author

First, interviewers were trained to contact participants and explain survey guidelines. Respondents were then asked to think about one of the retail or B2C salespeople with whom they had interacted—in-home and/or via "*caseritos*" shopping[1]—to purchase daily-use products like food, hygiene and clothing.[2] A final prerequisite was having maintained a commercial relationship with the salesperson for at least one full year.

We should note that "*caseritos*" and in-home shopping is still very popular in Peru, as the Peruvian economy is developing and short-term oriented. Hence, based on

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[1] According to data from *Kantar Worldpanel* (2018), the retail sector in Peru is characterized by little penetration of more modern retail formats (e.g. supermarkets) and the predominance of traditional formats— "*caseritos*" (neighborhood grocery and convenience stores) and in-home sales making up more than 65% of the total market.

[2] According to 2019 data from Peru's Institute of Statistics and Computing (INEI), Peruvian consumers have an average monthly income of 1,723 soles ($521.92 USD), of which they dedicate, on average, 328 soles ($99.3 USD) to their monthly shopping basket: food, hygiene, clothing, health and transportation. Moreover, various reports—i.e., Kantar Insights and In-Retail Peru—recommend analyzing spending in daily terms rather than in aggregate annual amounts given that, in recent years, Peruvian consumers make an average of 300 small-volume purchases a year, in-home or in small neighborhood retail stores ("caseritos"), according to INEI and In-Retail (2018) data.

the experience and advice of one of our team members—and after consulting with experts in the Peruvian market research division at Kantar—this option seemed the right choice for analyzing the generalities of the Peruvian context.

A questionnaire was adapted from previously validated, contrasted scales to measure each of the constructs (see Appendix 2.I). In addition, a focus group was held, followed by a pre-test aimed at adjusting survey length, clarifying terms and ensuring survey quality and content validity. Our measurement model for trust was based on the scales in Weibhaar and Huber (2016) and Echchakoui (2015); commitment was measured using Weibhaar and Huber´s scale (2016); expertise, enjoyable interaction, perceived risk and salesperson-owned loyalty scales were adapted from Echchakoui (2015). We also include consumer age (27.8±7.7 years) as a control variable in line with previous studies (i.e., Lacey et al., 2007; Cambra-Fierro et al., 2018).

2.4.1. Data analysis

The first step in our analysis of the data was to verify scale dimensionality and validity. Results from the exploratory factor analysis indicate that the items loaded their dimensions. In terms of scale refinement, one item was eliminated from the perceived risk scale because it loaded below 0.6. The data indicate that all dimensions reach optimal levels of reliability, with Cronbach's α indexes above 0.75 (see Appendix 2.I).

A first order measurement model—confirmatory factor analysis—was estimated with robust maximum likelihood, with a view to validate construct factor dimensionality and psychometric properties (see Appendix I). Goodness of fit was satisfactory: the ratio Chi2Sat-B./df (275.44/155) was below 3.0, CFI were above 0.90 and RMSEA was below 0.08 (Hair et al., 2013).

Internal consistency of the dimensions was evaluated considering composed reliability—with a minimum threshold of 0.7 (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988)—and the

average variance extracted (AVE) for each scale (minimum threshold of 0.5; Fornell and Larcker, 1981). In the next stage, measurement scale validity was assessed. With regard to the validity of measurement scales, the standardized loadings resulting from the measurement model estimations were higher than 0.6 and significant at the 0.01 level (t-values over than 2.58). These values, shown in Appendix 2.I, confirm the convergent validity (Steenkamp and Van Trijp, 1991). The discriminant validity was analysed through the correlations between latent constructs, which were lower than the square root of AVE (see Table 2.4). Following Anderson and Gerbing's recommendations (1988), this validity was analyzed in depth with the Chi2 difference test between estimation of the model restricting the correlations between each pair of constructs to the unit and the unrestricted model. The statistic was significant at 99% (ΔChi2(df=21) = 280.17, p-value<0.001) confirming that each scale measures a different factor.

Table 2.4: Scale correlations

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
1. Trust	**0.871**						
2. Salesperson expertise	0.553**	**0.889**					
3. Enjoyable interaction	0.803**	0.694**	**0.815**				
4. Perceived risk	-0.354**	-0.032	-0.222**	**0.720**			
5. Salesperson-owned loyalty	0.653**	0.580**	0.752**	-0.216**	**0.823**		
6. Commitment to salesperson	0.739**	0.627**	0.768**	-0.220**	0.759**	**0.852**	
7. Age (control)	0.106	0.102	0.081	-0.079	0.148**	0.067	---
Numbers along the diagonal axis in bold are the square roots of the AVE for the factors; the rest of the numbers represent construct correlations.							
**: correlations are significant at the 0.01 level							

Source: The author

Lastly, given we were working with respondent views data, common method bias (CMB)—variable variance in relation to the measuring method (Podsakoff et al., 2003)— had to be checked for. A number of procedural and statistical strategies were used to address potential bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003), among others: ensuring participant anonymity, clarifying absence of right or wrong answers, using previously validated

scales and developing a pre-test to avoid possible ambiguities in scale wording. Harman's single factor test, suggested by Malhotra et al. (2006), was used to estimate a measurement model where all observable variables loaded to a single latent factor. Fit indices for this estimation (Chi2Sat-Bt/df=3840.86/190; GFI=0.710; CFI=0.136; RMSEA=0.217) were significantly worse at 0.01 level (p-value<0.0001) when compared with the model considering the six latent factors (ΔChi2 (df=21) = 1943.29). Moreover, none of the correlations between latent constructs shown in Table 2.4 were above 0.9 (Bagozzi et al., 1991).

The potential problems of CMB were analyzed in depth with the advanced CFA Marker Technique proposed by Williams et al. (2010) based on the correlational marker test (Lindell and Whitney, 2001). Specifically, we compared the baseline measurement model with another that included a marker latent factory, co-creation, measured by three items adapted from Ho and Ganesan (2013), which was theoretically unrelated to the main constructs. Specifically, we performed the Method-U Model as a congeneric common method variance procedure. This methodology starts from the measurement model, which included the six constructs that we intended to measure. We added the factor loadings from the marker latent factor to the items and they did not force to be equal. It is the way to reflect the assumption that the marker variable is differentially related to the items from the key six constructs.

The results showed that the percentage of variance in each indicator associated with the marker latent factor was very low (median value 0.066), the decomposed reliability values indicated that the six latent factors were not affected by method variance (the highest value of marker latent factor reliability was 0.014). Moreover, the comparison between the baseline model (Chi2Sat-Bt (df=221)=428.33, CFI=0.968 and RMSEA=0.037) and Method-U model (Chi2Sat-Bt (df=201)= 316.73, CFI=0.969 and RMSEA=0.038) indicated that there were not differences between them (ΔChi2 (df=20)=

21.97, p-value=0.341959). These results allow us to accept the null hypotheses that the method factor loadings associated with the marker latent factor were not related to each of the indicators we used to measure our constructs, verifying that our data is not contaminated by shared variance.99% (ΔChi2(df=21) = 280.17, p-value<0.001) confirming that each scale measures a different factor.

2.5. RESULTS

In order to confirm the proposed hypotheses, we estimated a structural equation model. The estimated path coefficients are shown in Table 2.5. Fit indexes for the estimated model were acceptable (Chi2Sat-B/df= 391.48/180=2.17; CFI=0.953; GFI=0.899 and RMSEA=0.054).

With regard to the estimated coefficients for the causal relationships, our results indicate a significant, direct association between salesperson expertise and trust. Hence, we can confirm H_1. A significant, positive link also exists between trust and enjoyable interaction, confirming H_2—as well as a negative link between trust and perceived risk (H_3).

Moreover, salesperson expertise has a significant impact on enjoyable interaction at the 0.01 level (H_4); yet the data indicate an insignificant impact on perceived risk, hence we cannot confirm H_5. If the customer perceives enjoyable interaction with the salesperson it will drive greater degrees of salesperson-owned loyalty and commitment; hence, H_6 and H_7 can be confirmed. With respect to perceived risk, while H_8 can be supported, the results do not show a significant link to commitment, so it is not possible to confirm H_9.

Table 2.5: Structural model results

Hypothesis	Standardized coefficient	t-value	R^2
H1: EXPER -> TRUST	0.551**	8.96	(TRUST) 0.304
H2: TRUST -> ENJ INT	0.603**	11.62	(ENJ INT) 0.749
H3: TRUST -> PERC RISK	-0.263**	-3.73	(PERC RISK) 0.089
H4: EXPER -> ENJ INT	0.372**	8.20	
H5: EXPER -> PERC RISK	0.118	1.51	
H6: ENJ INT -> SALE LOY	0.768**	14.10	(SALE LOY) 0.626
H7: ENJ INT -> COMMIT	0.883**	20.06	(COMMIT) 0.785
H8: PERC RISK -> SALE LOY	-0.118*	-2.42	
H9: PERC RISK -> COMMIT	-0.018	-0.55	
**: standardized coefficients are significant **: at the 0.01 level; *: at the 0.05 level			

Source: The author

In order to test the potential impact of demographics on salesperson-owned loyalty and commitment, the structural model was estimated again—this time including consumer age as an additional variable. The fit indexes for this second estimation were slightly lower (Chi2Sat-B(df=199) =420.87; CFI=0.950; GFI=0.888 and RMSEA=0.067). Key path coefficients retained their sign and significance but the added age coefficients did not exhibit a significant impact either on salesperson-owned loyalty (β=0.07; t-value=1.47) or on commitment (β=-0.01; t-value=-0.38).

2.6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Technological development continues to occur at such a pace it seems to be changing consumer behavior patterns. Year after year, online commerce grows in number and volume of transactions—driving many companies to focus on reorienting traditional activity towards e-commerce (Helm et al., 2018). The relevance of the sales force as a marketing variable remains decisive, however—both in sectors where the degree of service tangibility is low or the risk associated with purchase is high (e.g., involvement-intensive products) and in economies where technological development and Internet penetration are below average.

Authors like Blocker et al. (2012) and Srivastava and Kaul (2014), among others, highlight how focused salespeople management can continue to be a source of competitive advantage for companies, creating value through satisfactory salesperson-customer interactions. Salespeople create and communicate value by transmitting confidence, knowledge and a sense of proximity to the customer—but they can also relay information about the market back to the company and build relational bonds with customers (Liu and Leach, 2001). In this sense, our study offers a model for capturing customer experiences born of interaction with the sales force—allowing us to understand how customer assessment of salesperson-customer interaction in terms of perceived enjoyment and risk affects the establishment and development of relational ties.

One of the key characteristics of the sales force seems to be level of expertise. Salespeople not only need to transmit in-depth knowledge of the products in their portfolios but of the competition as well. Moreover, consumers also value guidance in the use of products. In this sense, our data reveal a direct link between level of expertise and salesperson-owned trust, as authors such as Echchakoui (2015) and Guenzi and Georges (2010) suggest.

Our results also reveal that projected trust affects customer assessment of interaction with salespeople, in line with ideas in Newell et al. (2011) and Guenzi and Georges (2010). Hence, we can argue that, in the analyzed context, higher levels of trust drive lower perceived risk—and facilitate the feeling on the part of customers that salesperson interaction is enjoyable. Likewise, we propose that the level of salesperson expertise influences how customers perceive interaction. Again, our data validate our hypotheses; coinciding with authors like Echchakoui (2015) and Kaski et al. (2018), we can confirm that, the greater the expertise the more attractive the interaction will be to customers. On the contrary, our results do not allow us to accept the direct relationship suggesting that the higher the level of expertise, the lower the perceived risk.

While the data seems to endorse the direction of this relationship, the statistical contrast indicates that the direct relationship is not significant. That said, the relationship between expertise and perceived risk does occur indirectly by way of trust. This finding is of great interest because it reflects the Peruvian consumer's attitude towards risk. Hofstede exhibits a value of 87 in the uncertainty avoidance dimension—a high risk aversion.

Hence, we think—in the case of Peruvian consumers—it is not enough for salespeople exhibit expertise; this must be reinforced with other actions that foster perceived reliability and integrity. This idea makes a lot of sense considering that Peruvian economy and society are characterized by high levels of corruption—ranking 105th in transparency out of a total of 180 countries (35-point index), according to International Transparency Organization figures for 2018. Another driving factor may be that economic resources are scarce for a large portion of the population. This may also explain the notably rational, demanding nature of Peruvian consumers (Nielsen Insights). Thus, to help reduce perceived risk, promoting aspects which are complementary to expertise like credibility and goodwill is essential—in addition to avoiding selfish, opportunistic behaviors. It is highly probable that this phenomenon occurs in other emerging economy contexts where average incomes are low.

Our last block of hypotheses proposes that customer perception of interaction with salespeople determines the intensity of potential relational bonds. Thus, as suggested by Echchakoui (2016) and Delcourt et al. (2013), enjoyable interaction has a significant, positive impact on the level of loyalty in the salespeople. Similarly, this factor determines a greater degree of salesperson-owned commitment, as noted in studies by Lin (2017) and Anderson and Smith (2016).

Regarding the impact of perceived risk on relational factors, our results indicate that an inverse relationship linking perceived risk and loyalty exists: the lower the degree

of risk perceived by the customer in relation to his or her interaction with a given salesperson, the higher his or her loyalty towards this salesperson will be (Echchakoui, 2016).

To date, most studies looking at antecedents to customer loyalty have focused on loyalty towards the company as their analytical point of reference (e.g., Jaiswal et al., 2018, Oliver, 1999); only Palmatier et al. (2007) and Echchakoui (2015, 2016) consider salesperson-owned loyalty as their reference point. Our study is in line with the latter block of research and, in this regard, serves to support these authors' conclusions.

However, in harmony with ideas in Munnuka and Järvi (2015), and Sweeny et al. (1999), we also proposed that the degree of perceived risk could determine the degree of customer commitment—in our case, towards the salespeople. Yet, our results do not allow us to defend this idea. This could be for several reasons. In the first place, a lot of studies analyzing this concept focus on commitment to the company, not the salespeople. Secondly, several traits characterizing our context of study, Peru, could explain why our results are insignificant for this hypothesis.

Peru is classified as an emerging country and certain cultural features cause distrust towards institutions to drive lower levels of commitment among citizens in general, and consumers in particular. This may be due to the fact that many consumers live with low income levels in subsistence economies—the case in the vast majority of emerging economy contexts.

The 2019 Hofstede model data for Peru in the long-term orientation dimension defines the Peruvian culture—with a low score of 25—as "more normative than pragmatic. People in such societies have a strong concern with establishing the absolute truth; they are normative in their thinking. They exhibit great respect for traditions, a relatively small propensity to save for the future and a focus on achieving quick results." We believe this may explain, on one hand, why commitment is not very relevant in our

model and on the other that its significance is derived from level of enjoyable interaction alone. Peruvians' short-term outlook would explain why risk is not a fundamental factor when building relational bonds, at least in terms of commitment. Canada, referenced in Echchakoui (2015)—and Germany, in Lieven (2016)—present much higher values in this dimension, for example. In this case, we believe that consumer perceptions of interaction and the feeling transmitted by salespeople can contribute to offsetting perceived risk.

Unlike most previous studies, our research focuses on customer assessment of salespeople, in particular, not companies in general. Thus, from a theoretical perspective, our study presents a model that in general terms allows us to understand customer perceptions regarding salespeople and how such perceptions impact the potential for building lasting relationships. Many of the variables we have considered in our model (e.g., trust, loyalty, commitment) form a part of relational models in B2B and B2C contexts. However, factors such as level of expertise, perceived risk and enjoyable interaction have been used more frequently to explore interactions between consumers and salespeople in B2C settings—yet to date, the literature has lacked a model for effectively analyzing interactions between relational variables in the context of buyer-seller relationships in emerging economies.

We must bear in mind the relevance of salespeople as a marketing variable, acting both as a company spokesperson and channel for products and services. In fact—in some sectors like insurance, for example—customers can contract directly with the salesperson rather than with the company.

From a practical standpoint, our results present important challenges for sales force management—some of which have already been intuitively pointed out throughout this section. The fact that all of the hypotheses in our model did not turn out to be significant leads us to reflect on the importance of cross-cultural factors. As Athanasopoulou (2009) indicates, results may vary in different contexts, hence it is not

advisable to suppose universally accepted frameworks. In an increasingly globalized competitive environment where customers from many different parts of the world may be engaged, the need to adapt commercial strategies to the cultural characteristics of each country/region should be considered.

In the case of emerging economies—where much of the population may have fewer economic resources and a more short-term outlook—it will be necessary to promote certain actions aimed at increasing relationship duration. In our opinion, offering tangible rewards such as discounts or promotions can be more effective than investing in emotional-type strategies.

Our results also anticipate salesperson-owned loyalty and a certain degree of salesperson-owned commitment. Yet, based on extensive managerial and training experience in contexts such as Peru, we can affirm that business practices often hinge on high salesperson turnover—despite the fact that consumers tend to deposit loyalty in the salesperson, not in the brand or company.

Hence, we believe it may be necessary to rethink the focus of sales force management, at least in the case of emerging economies. Surely the relative lack of long-term orientation in Peruvian society also manifests itself in weak contractual ties between companies and their salespeople. Peruvian consumers tend to be cautious, demanding and rational—attracted by promotions and discounts; due, perhaps, to a low average income level (Peru Retail, 2019).

According to this same report, 84% use a shopping list, only a small minority claim to buy occasionally on impulse, and 82% prefer to put their money into savings. Consumers in Peru also value aspects such as proximity, price and flexible payment conditions which adapt to their specific needs—e.g. personal credit or in-home sales visits (Kantar Worldpanel, 2019). They are also very sensitive to offers and promotions. Hence, we can foresee certain favorable attitudes towards loyalty—driven by proximity,

knowledge and quality; yet a low propensity, perhaps, for commitment, rooted in sensitivity to price / promotions, and concern for high corruption levels in Peruvian society.

Strategies such as CRM-related training for both executives and sales people could help to promote the idea of a shared relational interest. Managers should strive to create direct ties between the customer base and the company itself, rather than with the salesperson, in order to reduce dependence on the salespeople. It would also be interesting to generate and manage certain costs of change in the salespeople, not only of an economic nature—usually preferred in cultures which are very focused on the short-term—but of a psychological, emotional and legal nature as well.

We advocate a holistic model of sales force management that considers the importance of training, motivation and retribution in a specific socio-cultural context, adapts to societal values and facilitates tailoring salesperson behavior and communication strategies to consumer perceptions and expectations.

Locally-based firms will surely be familiar with the peculiarities of the context; more globally-oriented companies, however, must invest in getting to know and adapting to the cross-cultural nature of each market, bearing not only the consumer but sales force management in mind—along with other factors like economic development, societal values and religion.

Despite the relevance of our findings, certain potential limitations must be mentioned. First, results are based on consumer surveys, not on real behavior data. In part 4 of the Methodology section we outline the strategies we have adopted to ensure data validity and minimize potential bias. Secondly, data are limited to one specific context: Peru. However, given that the few studies on the subject to date work with samples from developed economies, rooting our research in analysis of an emerging economy only serves to reinforce our study's interest and contribution to the literature. That said, it

would be interesting to apply our model in other emerging economy contexts to assess whether potential variations in hypothesis validity could be explained by cross-cultural differences and/or differing degrees of economic development. This study considers the interaction with salespeople of regular in-home purchases -which has been considered as reference to analyze the generalities of the Peruvian context-. Future researches may consider comparisons to other types of products (ex., high vs low involvement) and/ or types of purchases (ex., regular vs sporadic, in-store vs in-home) in order to complete the framework.

Moreover, the inclusion of additional variables in the causal model may increase its explanatory capacity. On the other hand, increasing the number of variables could complicate implementation and comprehension. In addition, the data referring to the explanatory capacity of our causal model is above the usual acceptance standards. We wish to note that this study is part of a broader line of research aimed at streamlining sales force management efficiency in emerging economy contexts. Lastly, please bear in mind that our study analyzes customer perceptions of the salespeople. With a view to encourage more efficient sales force management we would find it very interesting to broaden the scope of analysis to include managerial perceptions of the salespeople and salespeople opinions regarding company policies.

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Appendix 2.I: Scale dimensionality, reliability and validity (measurement model estimation).

SCALE	SL (t-value)
TRUST (Mean=5.08; SD=1.13; α=0.924; CR=0.926; AVE=0.758)	
My contact at [firm] gives me a feeling of trust.	*0.801*
My contact at [firm] is trustworthy.	0.850** (18.86)
My contact at [firm] is reliable.	0.920** (17.58)
My contact at [firm] is sincere.	0.906** (17.86)
SALEPERSON EXPERTISE (Mean=4.82; SD=1.27; α=0.918; CR=0.919; AVE=0.791)	
My contact at [firm] is knowledgeable.	*0.868*
My contact at [firm] is qualified.	0.903** (21.63)
My contact at [firm] is skilled.	0.895** (21.23)
ENJOYABLE INTERACTION (Mean=5.04; SD=1.07; α=0.909; CR=0.908; AVE=0.664)	
In thinking about my relationship with this person, I enjoy interacting with this X.	*0.856*
This X creates a feeling of "warmth" in our relationship.	0.854** (20.58)
This X relates well to me.	0.827** (18.26)
In thinking about my relationship, I have a harmonious relationship with X.	0.760** (16.59)
I am comfortable interacting with this X	0.772** (14.30)
PERCEIVED RISK (Mean=3.43; SD=1.27; α=0.761; CR=0.759; AVE=0.519)	
The thought of making transaction with X causes me to be concerned for how really dependable the product/service will be *(deleted)*	
X tries to increase his profit through hidden or non-transparent costs.	*0.687*
Considering the potential investment involved, for you to purchase from X would be very risky.	0.885** (9.03)
I think that the purchase from X would lead to financial risk.	0.602** (7.57)
SALESPERSON-OWNED LOYALTY (Mean=4.57; SD=1.38; α=0.807; CR=0.808;	
I consider myself loyal to X.	*0.785*
X would be my first choice.	0.861** (14.64)
COMMITMENT (Mean=4.63; SD=1.30; α=0.884; CR=0.887; AVE=0.725)	
I view the relationship with my contact at [firm] as a long-term partnership.	*0.894*
I have a desire to maintain this relationship with my contact at [firm].	0.887** (21.67)
I'm willing to go out of my way to stay with this provider.	0.768** (19.02)
Fit indexes: Chi^2 Sat-B. (df=169) = 295.93 (p-value<0.001); RMSEA=0.043; CFI=0.970; GFI=0.916; AGFI=0.884. *SL= completely standardised loadings; SD=standard deviation; α= Cronbach's alpha (>0.7); CR= Composite reliability (>0.7); AVE= Average variance extracted (>0.5).* ***: t-values are significant at the 0.01 level*	

CHAPTER III:

RELEVANCE OF SALESPEOPLE PROFILES: AN ANALYSIS IN AN EMERGING ECONOMY

3.1. INTRODUCTION

The current competitive framework—together with new social trends impacting customer behavior—have led to a new business practice playing field (Fremont et al., 2019). In such a context the compendium of technological development, emergence of new communication channels, growth of consumer expectations and increasing customer knowledge and demands has both a specific impact on the overall customer experience and specific repercussions for company sales outcomes (Piercy, 2012). In this light, sales strategies and actions must be adjusted. Moreover, increasing competitive pressure and cost containment demands together with rising sales function costs require a better understanding of how different sales team traits impact sales performance (Bouzari and Karatepe, 2018). Hence, the capabilities of the seller—and his or her values and motivation—become key aspects in understanding sales success. It is no wonder then that the literature considers the sales force as playing a fundamental role, conferring it high strategic value (Cron et al., 2014). Palmatier et al. (2007), for instance, confirm that consumers can feel a strong bond with sellers—and that this union drives customer preference for a given company. Thus, the sales force becomes an intangible asset with the potential to provide the client with added value and provide the company with advantages such as obtaining market information or contributing to the development of new products, among others (Kuester et al., 2017).

The vast majority of existing literature, however, has focused on identifying traits that managers should look for when selecting salespeople for sales teams—principally opting for a human resources and management-centered approach to analysis (Deeter-Schmelz et al., 2002); far fewer studies, on the other hand, have looked at the subject from a marketing standpoint. Therefore, there have been a number of calls for further investigation with a view to determine the most effective sales strategies and best sales force profiles (Cron et al., 2014), as well as to analyze factors driving seller effectiveness (Deeter-Schmelz et al.,

2002). Concepts like creativity, commitment and effort—among others—can help explain salespeople success. From a strategic marketing perspective, notions such as degree of salespeople market orientation, seller-customer interaction, customer-oriented sales, or marketing intelligence management reinforce the human resources approach and provide a holistic view for effective sales force management. In other words, from a strategic standpoint, the extent to which the sales force exhibits market orientation is key to better understanding the complex mix of personal salesperson profiles and strategic guidelines handed down from the sales management. To date, however—despite the relevance of the sales force in the field of marketing—very few studies have considered the impact of sales team profiles on product success or overall sales outcomes. Cron et al. (2014) and Robey et al. (2019) are rare exceptions; but we have yet to find any evidence of research analyzing this phenomenon in emerging country contexts—often countries with drastically different cross-cultural profiles than those of the western, developed economies that have traditionally been in the limelight of academic research. Hence, we should suppose general ideas adapted to specific contexts, not universally accepted frameworks (Sharma et al., 2018a; Srivastava and Balaji, 2018).

The weight emerging economies carry in terms of global GDP and international trade is on the rise—a fact that cannot be ignored. In terms of market potential, the statistics indicate that a large percentage of target populations are in developing countries; and in many cases the evolution of GNP and per capita income statistics has begun to attract the attention of companies, driving a desire to initiate activity in these markets. In an increasingly globalized economic context, therefore, it seems necessary to continue taking potential context-bound specificities into account—even more so in emerging economies, where lower levels of economic and technological development, as well as consumers` priorities can impact both consumer purchasing behavior and customer-company

interactions (Guissoni et al., 2018; Sharma et al., 2018b). It is crucial, therefore, to better understand retail dynamics in these contexts (Sharma et al., 2018a). The results presented in this study should assist local and foreign managers in developing a more informed understanding of sales management activities in emerging economies in general, and in the Peruvian marketplace in particular.

Once this gap in the literature has been identified—with a view to enhance sales force management knowledge and know-how—we can propose a study based on sales manager perceptions, analyzing the impact of seller profiles and degree of market orientation on sales team performance. Our end objective is to determine how all this contributes to achieving the best possible outcomes for companies in terms of i) sales performance, and ii) the probability of newly launched product success. To this end, sales team managers are in a privileged position to identify the salesperson profiles that best suit their clients and objectives.

To achieve said objectives, the following section presents our bibliographic review of the most relevant concepts relating to the context under study. The hypotheses comprised by the reference model are presented below. Section 3.3 presents field work characteristics and data validation, taking as our reference a sample of sales managers from Peru, an emerging economy. Section 3.4 provides study results. In the final section, the main theoretical implications of the study and implications for management are discussed, along with our conclusions.

3.2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND HYPOTHESES

One of the underlying factors explaining a company's retail success is sales force performance (Kuester et al., 2017; Cron et al., 2014). Due to its impact on company success, sales performance is one of the most widely researched and well represented topics in the

marketing literature (Purohit, 2018; Hunter and Panagopoulos, 2015). Sales performance refers to sales force selling outcomes, including bettering annual sales objectives, generating high sales volume and rapidly growing sales of newly launched products (Hunter and Panagopoulos, 2015).

Moreover, given the complexity and turbulence of the environments in which companies move—owing, for instance, to the fact that consumer needs and tastes are constantly changing—the launch of new successful products is critical not only as a source of competitive advantage but for a firm's very survival (Amyx et al., 2016).

On the other hand, while the value of assessing new product success is widely recognized, carrying out this evaluation is a complex activity and there is no consensus when it comes to carrying such an assessment out (Ahearne et al., 2010).

For the present study, we adopted the approach proposed by Kuester et al. (2017)—measuring new product success in terms of degree of satisfaction and compliance with the objectives set for that product.

The interest which knowledge of the factors driving new product success has awakened in the literature can be easily understood. In this respect, although it has been demonstrated that the sales force is a keystone for successful introduction of new products in the market (Borgh and Schepers, 2018), its role in the launch of new products has not received enough attention (Atuahene-Gima, 1998).

Previous studies have analyzed a number of factors that can influence sales force adoption of a new product prior to success. This phenomenon has been defined the as "the interaction between the degree to which they accept and internalize the goals of a new product (i.e. commitment) and the extent to which they work smart and hard (i.e. effort) to achieve these goals" (Atuahene-Gima, 1998). We are of the opinion, however, that several other key features of the sales force profile—such as market orientation (Loveland et al.,

2015) and creativity (Wang and Netemeyer, 2004) should be considered as impacting both new product success and achievement of sales force target objectives. In order to formulate our causal model, we took the Resource Based View (RBV) as a reference. This theory considers the firm as a set of valuable, rare, difficult to imitate and non-substitutable resources and capabilities which—when effectively managed—constitute a source of competitive advantage (Barney, 1991).

In this sense, we consider that the knowledge the sales force nurtures via the MO approach, together with sales force creativity, commitment and effort to achieve new product success, become valuable resources for the organization—boosting salesperson performance in terms of enhanced interaction with consumers and feedback to the firm. This, in turn, will translate as better results for the company, measured through two key sales outcomes: sales force performance and new product success.

Figure 3.1: Model of reference
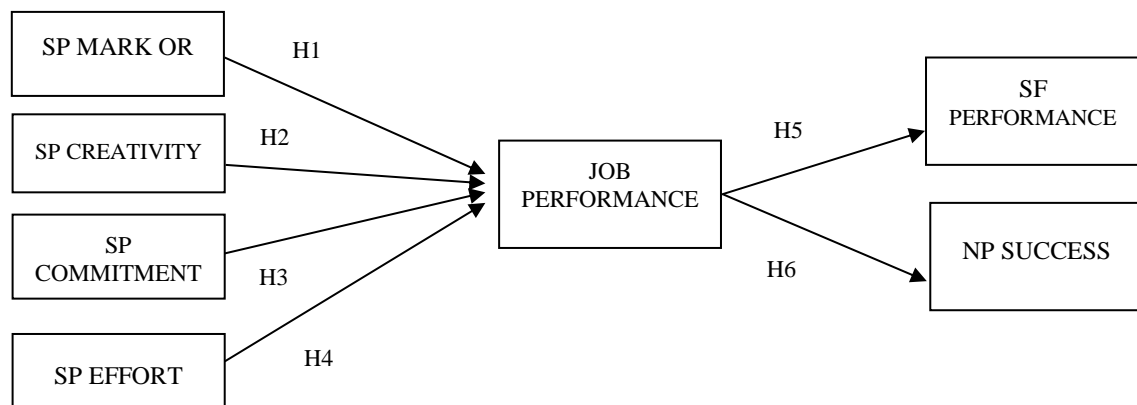
Source: The author

3.2.1. Links between market orientation, creativity and job performance

Market orientation (MO) refers to the set of activities aimed at satisfying customer needs at a level of excellence above and beyond that of the competition (Slater and Narver, 1998). This management approach has been pondered from two angles. From a behavioral perspective, MO involves garnering market intelligence, dissemination of this intelligence throughout the organization and the capacity to respond (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990). From a cultural perspective, on the other hand, MO comprises three key components: customer orientation, competitor orientation and interfunctional coordination (Narver and Slater, 1990).

Customer orientation involves understanding consumer needs in order to satisfy them. Competitor orientation focuses on the strengths, weaknesses, strategies and activities of key competitors. Interfunctional coordination involves internal coordination of company resources with a view to provide customers with superior value (Narver and Slater, 1990). For the present study, we have adopted the cultural approach as we understand it to be a strategic approach suited to garnering and disseminating market intelligence, while the behavioral approach is more operational in nature, suited to putting acquired knowledge to use.

We analyze this approach in a sales force context since it is the sales staff who are in most direct contact with the market—hence in a position to gather specific information from both the competition and consumers (Kuester et al., 2017).

Moreover, making the most of customer knowledge and understanding their needs has been shown to be vital to new product development (Amyx et al., 2016). That being said, while salespeople are in a privileged position to gather market intelligence, collecting information alone is not enough. The seller must consistently and competently use the knowledge acquired to transform intellectual capital into a competitive advantage. Thus,

sales staff's ability to foster a creative spirit based on all acquired knowledge favors the conversion of market intelligence into key, usable information in the development of new products. In general terms, creativity refers to innovative, useful ideas and approaches— different from what currently exists and capable of generating added value for the company (Fallah et al., 2018). Transferring this concept to the retail context, sales force creativity can be defined as the process by which salespeople—as a frontline employee—generate novel, meaningful ideas aimed at identifying and satisfying the needs of both current and potential clients (Coelho and Augusto, 2011). In short, creativity can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of daily work and boost customer satisfaction—hence, enhancing overall sales performance (Fallah et al., 2018; Bouzari and Karatepe, 2018; Amyx et al., 2016; Wang and Netemeyer, 2004).

To date, it seems all studies linking these two concepts do so by establishing MO as an antecedent to sales force creativity (e.g., Fallah et al., 2018; Wang and Miao, 2015). However, we believe the two factors operate simultaneously in job performance. Adopting an MO approach is fundamental if market knowledge is to be garnered; enabling companies to better meet current consumer needs and stay a step ahead of the competition when it comes to anticipating latent needs (Loveland et al., 2015). Yet, given the dynamic nature of company-customer interaction (Amyx et al., 2016)—and the fact that creative salespeople are better at detecting customer needs, building robust relationships and solving problems in resourceful, effective ways—we believe combining MO and creativity would drive better outcomes (Coelho et al., 2011). In this vein, we can expect a link between sales force creativity with job performance (Groza et al., 2016). Hence, we propose that:

H_1: *Salespeople market orientation has a positive impact on job performance.*

H_2: *Salespeople creativity has a positive impact on job performance.*

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3.2.2. Links between salespeople effort, salespeople commitment and job performance

Generally speaking, effort is a motivational force enabling hard-working, persevering employees to achieve their goals (Atuahene-Gima, 1998). Effort implies persistence and intensity, as well as efficiency in terms of energy allocation; in other words, carrying out activities aligned with target objectives (Sujan, 1986). Salespeople effort, then, refers to the strength, energy, persistence and intensity with which salespeople carry out their activities in order to achieve target objectives (Hultink and Atuahene-Gima, 2000).

Organizational commitment can be assessed from two distinct perspectives. From the first, commitment is defined as employee intention to continue working in a given company (Meyer, 1997). From the second, commitment is considered as an attitude, existing when "the identity of the person (is linked) to the organization" (Sheldon, 1971) or when "the goals of the organization and those of the individual become increasingly integrated or congruent" (Hall et al., 1970). Salespeople effort and salespeople commitment are, therefore, intimately related concepts that allow for gauging the job performance (Hultink and Atuahene-Gima, 2000; Atuahene-Gima, 1998). In this sense, there is ample empirical evidence in the literature for both concepts having a positive impact on sales performance (Wren et al., 2014; Atuahene-Gima, 1998). That said, it seems logical to assume that since the sales force is a companies' main tool for communicating with consumers and, at the same time, for gathering information about customer needs and desires, we believe that the more committed salespeople are and more effort they do, their job performance will increase—e.g., providing better service, detecting current and latent needs and providing feedback to the company-. Based on the above, we propose that:

H_3: *Salespeople commitment has a positive impact on job performance.*

H_4: *Salespeople effort has a positive impact on job performance.*

3.2.3. Job performance as antecedent to sales performance and new product success

Our model establishes good job performance on the part of the sales force as an antecedent to achievement of sales objectives and new product success. In general terms, job performance is the degree of an individual's ability to perform a specific task (Goodhue and Thompson, 1995); the term refers to employee behaviors—driven by the workers themselves—which contribute to organizational objectives (Purohit, 2018). In relational marketing contexts, the company's main objective is to build and maintain lasting relationships with customers rooted in an ability to understand and meet the needs of individual consumers (Amyx et al., 2016; Palmatier et al., 2007). In this sense, the sales force—as the company's chief interlocutor—must be able to meet the demands of the current market, where consumers are frequently unwilling or unable to evaluate all available alternatives (Kapferer, 2008).

This poses a greater challenge for salespeople, who must not only transfer knowledge about products and services to consumers but clear up customer doubts, provide effective solutions and minimize the uncertainty associated with the purchase process (Groza et al., 2016; Kapferer, 2008). Hence, the sales force play a fundamental role: on one hand, they are the chief communication link with customers, providing key information about products/services and dealing with doubts (Sangtani and Murshed, 2017; Amyx et al., 2016); on the other hand, they are in a privileged position to obtain hard-to-come-by information from consumers—beyond the knowledge of other internal functions (Kuester et al., 2017; Sangtani and Murshed, 2017).

Salespeople, then, have a positive impact on customer satisfaction with the overall purchasing experience. Customer satisfaction, in turn, has been demonstrated to have a positive impact on business outcomes as it positively affects consumer intent to purchase (Goff et al., 1997). Our study was conducted from the company standpoint—more

specifically, from the perspective of sales force; we firmly believe that the better salespeople perform, the more satisfied customers will be, hence, sales outcomes and new product acceptance will also be enhanced. Previous studies have shown that understanding customer needs and desires is a critical factor—on one hand, impacting the likelihood of success in developing value propositions for the customer, in turn driving higher sales volume (Sangtani and Murshed, 2017); on the other, largely determining the success or failure of new products (Judson et al., 2006).

Hence, if salespeople fulfill this double role effectively, customer satisfaction can be expected to increase, together with intent to purchase— translating as enhanced sales outcomes. Moreover, the feedback companies receive based on market intelligence provided by the sales force will drive new product acceptance on the part of consumers, as it is adapted to their needs; the end result being new product success (Li and Calantone, 1998). Based on the above, we propose that:

$\underline{H_5}$: *Job performance has a positive impact on sales performance*.

$\underline{H_6}$: *Job performance has a positive impact on new product success*.

3.3. METHODOLOGY

To test the proposed hypotheses, we conducted a study in the retailing sector. Our population was made up of sales managers in Peru, considered to be an emerging economy. The Lima Chamber of Commerce provided us with contact details for a random sample of 1,000 sales managers from a variety of retailing subsectors focused on both domestic and foreign trade. Questionnaires were distributed by email and phone calls were made to individual respondents with a view to recall the objectives of the research. We received 238 responses—however we were obliged to discard 30 due to incomplete data; hence, the final

sample size was 208 (age: average= 42.61, sd= 5.72; years of experience: average= 9.73, sd= 4.08). Fieldwork was carried out between June and September, 2018. The profile of the sample is as follows:

-Sector: food and beverage: 41 (19.7%); pharmacy and cosmetics: 23 (11.05%); household: 39 (18.75%); textile: 26 (12.5%); financial services: 37 (17.78%); telecom: 42 (20.19%).

-Size: small firms: 51 (24.52%); medium firms: 75 (36.05%); big firms: 82 (39.43%).

-Higher education & training (engineer, economist, business management or similar): 173 (83.17%).

A questionnaire was adapted from previously validated and contrasted scales to measure each of the constructs (see Appendix 3.I). We based our measurement model for sales force market orientation and salesperson creativity on the scales in Wang and Miao (2015). Salesperson commitment and salesperson effort were measured using the scales Kuester et al. (2017) propose. For job performance we used the scale in Locander et al. (2014). Finally, new product success was measured using the scale in Hunter and Panagopoulos (2015).

Given that we were using data from respondent opinions, common method bias—the proportion of variable variance in relation to the measuring method (Podsakoff et al., 2003)—had to be checked for. A number of procedural and statistical strategies were employed to address potential bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003): ensuring participant anonymity, clarifying absence of right or wrong answers, using previously validated scales and using a pre-test to avoid possible ambiguities in scale wording. Finally, the Harman single factor test was under 50% for our research data, indicating that bias due to use of a single method is unlikely; no single factor explains more than 50% of the variance, hence our data can be accepted as valid (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986).

All constructs included in this study can be considered design constructs or artifacts; in other words, theoretically justified, human-made instruments—typically created by company managers and staff (Henseler, 2017). Since such artifacts are comprised of a series of elementary components which are combined to form a new entity, Henseler (2017) suggests modeling them as composite constructs. Hence, as the aim was to estimate a composites model, a structural equation modeling technique using partial least squares (PLS) (SmartPLS v. 3.2.7) was employed in our analysis.

Considering that our study has a confirmatory purpose, we begin analysis of the estimated model by providing the standardized root mean square residual index (SRMR) — a measure of overall goodness-of-fit (GoF) which is available for PLS. This index yielded a satisfactory value of 0.075, which is under the usual 0.08 cut-off proposed by Hu and Bentler (1999).

With the objective of evaluating data quality, we carried out an individual reliability analysis of each item in relation to its construct. All resulting values exceed the threshold of 0.707, as required by Carmines and Zeller (1979). The same is true when assessing variable reliability using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability scores. Appendix 3.I shows all constructs to be reliable, as they exceed the 0.8 reference value for each index (Nunnally 1978).

Convergent validity was assessed by way of average variance extracted (AVE), which—according to Fornell and Larcker (1981)—must exceed 0.5. Over 50% of construct variance was found to be due to recommended indicators. Appendix 3.I shows that, in all cases, the reference value is exceeded. Finally, the existence of discriminant validity was validated by comparing the square root of AVE with correlations (see Appendix 3.II), in line with Fornell and Larcker's criterium.

3.4. RESULTS

In relation to the structural model, a bootstrap analysis was performed to assess statistical significance for the loadings and path coefficients. We created 5,000 subsamples, employing t-Student distribution with 4,999 degrees of freedom (N–1, where N = number of subsamples), obtaining the values t (0.05; 4999) = 1.64; t (0.01; 4999) = 2.32; and t (0.001; 4999) = 3.09. From these values, the acceptance or rejection of our hypotheses was determined (Table 3.1). With regard to explained variance of the endogenous variables (R2), the model shows adequate predictive power, since all endogenous constructs achieve an explained variance exceeding 0.1, the reference value established by Falk and Miller (1992).

Data indicate that salesforce market orientation has a direct, significant link to job performance. Hence, we can confirm H_1. We can also confirm H_2 and H_4, since—as predicted—salesperson creativity and salesperson effort have a significant impact on job performance. Our results reveal, however, that higher sales force commitment does not drive higher job performance; hence, we are not able to accept H_3. Finally, job performance shows a significant link to both sales' performance and new product success, hence we can confirm H_5 and H_6.

Table 3.1: Structural model results

Hypothesis		B	t-value	R^2
H1: Sales Force Marketing Orientation -> Job Performance	Accepted	.53***	5.47	
H2: Salesperson Creativity -> Job Performance	Accepted	.20*	1.88	
H3: Salesperson Commitment -> Job Performance	Not accepted	.08 (NS)	.82	
H4: Salesperson Effort -> Job Performance	Accepted	.17*	5.05	.55
H5: Job Performance -> Sales Performance	Accepted	.66***	11.34	.44
H6: Job Performance -> New product Success	Accepted	.50***	7.08	.2
* When the t value obtained by the Bootstrap technique surpasses the T Student value t(0.05, 4999) = 1.64, the hypothesis is accepted at 95% significance. *** When the t value obtained by the Bootstrap technique surpasses T Student value t(0.001, 4999) = 3.09, the hypothesis is accepted at 99.9% significance. NS: Not significant				

Source: The author

3.5. DISCUSSION

Sales team management continues to be a key factor in understanding the commercial success of a company (Cron et al., 2014). From the perspective of Resource Theory (Barney, 1991), the sales force is a first-level strategic resource insofar as salespeople are able to identify and garner market intelligence—i.e., consumption patterns, tastes, trends, competitor actions (Kuester et al., 2017)—and interact with consumers, establishing potential relational bonds (Amyx et al., 2016; Palmatier et al., 2007). The role of the salespeople becomes even more relevant when greater company-client contact is required, either due to the complexity of the purchasing process (i.e., customer involvement) or in those contexts where technological development is lower, hence physical selling is still necessary. The latter is the case in many emerging economies, characterized by less economic development and a lower Internet and e-commerce penetration rate (Guissoni et al., 2018; Sharma et al., 2018a). Under such conditions, maintaining strategies and actions adapted to specific environmental conditions—and better understanding how the different capacities, values and motivations of salespeople affect commercial success—is of the essence.

Many studies to date have addressed sales force management from a human resources standpoint (e.g., Deeter-Schmelz et al., 2002); relatively few, however, have done so from the perspective of marketing—considering its impact on variables such as product success and sales outcomes (Bouzari and Karatepe, 2018; Cron et al., 2014). Bearing these principles in mind, the initial aim of our research was to add depth and breadth to analysis of the impact salesperson profiles have on company commercial success—measured through new product success and sales figures, and taking sales manager perceptions as our reference. Our study analyzes the case of an emerging economy, Peru, and the data confirms our initial hypothesis: according to their managers, front line employee profiles do in fact determine

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the degree of commercial success. More specifically, the data show that greater sales team market orientation contributes to enhanced job performance. This is in line with authors such as Wang and Miao (2015), among others. As seminal studies by Kohli and Jaworski (1990) and Narver and Slater (1990) defend, making the most of market knowledge, understanding both customer needs/expectations and competitor actions, and providing an adequate response to all, has a positive impact on company outcomes. In this case, sales force work performance stands to improve not only in terms of the sales figures achieved but thanks to the feedback salespeople gather and the establishment of ties with customers that will facilitate transmitting market intelligence back to the company and building valuable customer-company bonds.

From a managerial perspective, however, this compels companies to modify their remuneration policies and embrace other parameters beyond mere billing. Based on our practical experience in the context under analysis, this does not occur in the majority of cases; in Peru, most sales managers—while recognizing the value in and need to modify these policies—continue to maintain traditional structures that minimize the potential positive impact of strategic sales force management; goal-based remuneration policies, i.e. rewards or bonuses awarded to salespeople maintaining above-average sales performance, remain the norm.

Given the impact market orientation has on sales performance, it would be advisable to provide all teams with CRM tools—delivering updated, real-time information about customers, competitors and the company product portfolio, among other aspects. And since information must be kept up to date for such tools to be truly valuable, timely preparation of reports and updating of customer portfolios and outreach efforts would be an essential part of sales force evaluation processes as well; hence, company-sponsored training courses may be required when implementing such systems. This kind of investment on the part of

companies in terms of CRM technology and training will be perceived not only as an effort to support sales force activity but as a commitment to maintaining a stable, sustainable sales force down the line.

Our data also reveal that creativity and effort (H_2 and H_4) contribute to enhancing sales force performance. This is not surprising given that this causal relationship has previously been anticipated in the literature. Atuahene-Gima (1998), for instance, explicitly emphasized that consistent, hard work aids in achieving target objectives; Wang and Netemeyer (2004) defend a similar notion with regard to creativity. Coincidentally, moreover, sales managers can assess these factors with relative ease, and then compare them to sales figures for each individual salesperson. Such factors are even more relevant in emerging economies—and tend to be one of the go-to remedies in times of recession and hyperinflation. Traditional objectives-based sales force remuneration systems encourage time commitments on the part of sales staff, while creativity (innate or acquired) aids in the systematic process of adaptation to the environment (Miles and Snow, 1978; Porter, 1980).

In this sense, established practice recommends increasing temporal pressure on sales force, with a view to foster smart & hard work behaviors. Yet, working under pressure does not always yield desired outcomes (Rosmani et al., 2019); undesirable—or even worse, unethical—behaviors that do not conform to sales policies and can damage company reputation may arise (e.g. ways of addressing consumers, cannibalization among members of the sales force, etc.). To avoid detrimental situations of this sort, we strongly recommend establishing obligatory standards and codes of conduct, verified by team leaders with a view to guarantee an optimal balance between stimulus and control.

Finally, to assess the suitability of our proposal, cross-cultural profiles for the contexts in question must be considered—given that eastern economies, for instance, tend to be more prone to implicit, unwritten codes of honor and social sanctions, vis-a-vis western

economies where clearly defined, written norms tend to be expected. That being said, our data does not confirm H_3, which proposed a direct, positive relationship linking sales force commitment and job performance. While recent work by Wrent et al. (2014) and Ahearne et al. (2010) and seminal studies by Hall et al. (1970) and Sheldon (1971) both postulate a direct relationship linking commitment and performance, in the analyzed context, this relationship is not fulfilled. We believe there may be two factors explaining this phenomenon. In the first place, lower economic development and less sales force training in the Peruvian context, leading to short-term sales goals and a general lack of knowledge regarding the advantages of more strategic, long-term approaches; secondly, potential cross-cultural differences distancing the contexts of the countries referenced in earlier research and the peculiarities of our country of reference.

To assess these factors, we take the framework proposed by Hofstede (Hofstede, 2000; Minkov and Hofstede, 2011) as a reference and—since we are discussing the impact of commitment—observe different country-specific scores in the long-term orientation dimension. Scores obtained by countries such as Japan (88), China (87), Germany (83) or Spain (48) allow us to anticipate differences with respect to countries such as Mexico (26) or Peru (25). Yet, other developed economies such as Canada (36) or the United States (26) present values which are very close to those of Peru. Low scores in this dimension suggest that people in these societies tend to exhibit a relatively small propensity to save for the future, and a focus on achieving quick results (Hofstede, 2019). Hence, we believe that—in the context under analysis—the phenomenon is triggered by the simultaneous effect of culture and the level of economic development in Peru. Given that commitment can be a key factor in sales force management, we believe actions aimed at helping salespeople identify themselves and feel more closely connected to their companies would be of interest. To this end, based on our knowledge of the Peruvian context, we recommend fostering coordination

and teamwork—aimed at making salespeople feel they are not merely employees, but play a decisive role in their company's objectives, decision making, and overall success. This approach can be shored up via progressive remuneration / bonus systems that act as change costs of the financial type.

From a practical standpoint, this is very significant; transnational / multinational companies must make sales force management policy adjustments, for instance. Moreover—given that the literature defends the importance of commitment as a relational variable—training, motivation, identification and remuneration-related factors will need to be adjusted to encourage desired behaviors. Otherwise, there is a risk that salespeople will not identify themselves sufficiently with the company. And if, moreover, the sales force suffers from reduced purchasing power due to low wages, the risk that a better opportunity will arise and employees will abandon the company—taking their entire customer portfolio with them—sharply increases. This problem is aggravated in contexts like the Peruvian market where, as mentioned previously, salespeople tend to be short-term oriented, paying little attention to planning for the future.

Finally, our study ponders the impact of job performance on sales department performance—as measured through sales outcomes and new product success. In this respect, the data show that these relationships are, indeed, significant. The degree to which individuals perform their work effectively—often under their own initiative—impacts the performance of the organization as a whole (Goodhue and Thompson, 1995). Front-line employees frequently receive product/service orders, identify unanswered customer needs, help design new products and services—or adapt existing ones—spread the word about them and even explain key characteristics and how to use them both to distributors and customers. Yet, sales management must take a number of additional aspects into account—namely, preparation and training aimed at familiarizing the sales force, as a whole, with new product

characteristics and functionality, ability to complement other products in the portfolio, advantages/disadvantages vis-a-vis existing products, etc. This can be achieved via product presentations and demos, updated catalogs and tutorials, together with remuneration systems and incentives specifically designed to reward target salesperson functions. Hence, sales force performance is—understandably—perceived as shoring up company success (Sangtani and Nurshed, 2017; Groza et al., 2016).

Thus, by way of a conclusion for this section, we wish to stress the need for models which blend motivation, identification and remuneration harmoniously. Sales manager perceptions highlight the importance of sales force effort and creativity—together with a high degree of market orientation; the literature also sustains the benefits of commitment. Promoting these attitudes and behaviors in a sales team is not always easy and sales management policies can act either as an engine or a brake. Traditional sales objective models may well suffice to foster effort and creativity; only training, however—coupled with precise motivation and team-building techniques—are capable of effectively driving the highest degree of market orientation and commitment among the sales force. Taking economic development and specific cross-cultural traits into account is also essential if the most effective mix of strategies and policies is to be achieved and sales force efforts maximized.

3.6. CONCLUSIONS

The initial aim of this study is to assess the impact of several sales force-bound factors on salesperson performance and overall business outcomes from the perspective of sales managers, measured in terms of sales outcomes and potential new product success. More specifically, we focus attention on the retailing context in Peru, an emerging economy exhibiting cross-cultural traits which differ considerably from the contexts which some of

the literature we have structured our study upon has taken as a reference. Our research has yielded data of considerable interest, both for the literature and for business practice—especially regarding the impact and management of sales force commitment and the need to rethink motivation and mixed remuneration models which effectively blend traditional sales objective-based paradigms with up-to-date strategies fostering commitment and team spirit. Our data indicates this will have a positive impact on overall sales force performance and outcomes.

However, despite the apparent interest of our study, we must recognize a series of limitations. First, our data is derived from consumer surveys, not from actual behavior. In the Methodology section we have outlined the strategies we adopted to ensure data validity and minimize potential bias. Secondly, data are limited to one specific context: Peru. That said—given that the few studies on the subject to date work with samples from developed economies—rooting our research in an emerging economy context only serves to reinforce our study's interest and shore up our contribution to the literature. We believe that applying our model to other emerging economy scenarios, with different cross-cultural profiles, would prove to be a valuable tool in the quest to enhance sales force management—even more so given the current, inexorable globalization of world economies.

Finally, taking salesperson and consumer perspectives regarding a set of variables that explain the success—or failure—of physical company-customer interactions into account would help to flesh out the frame of reference and enhance sales management efficiency.

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Appendix 3.I: Measurement scales (Alpha C., FC, AVE) (Sources)

SALES FORCE MARKET ORIENTATION (.79;.88;.71) (Wang & Miao, 2015)
Customer orientation:
We are committed to customers
We create customer value
We understand customer needs
We meet customer satisfaction objectives
We provide superior customer service
Competitor orientation:
We share competitor information within the sales department
We respond rapidly to competitors' action
We discuss competitors' strategies
We target opportunities for competitive advantage
Interfunctional coordination:
We share information among different functions
There is functional integration in business strategy
All functions contribute to customer value
We share resources with other business units
SALES PEOPLE CREATIVITY (.87; .90; .66) (Wang & Miao, 2015)
Our salespeople are a great source of useful ideas for market and product innovation.
Our salespeople frequently come up with new ideas for satisfying customer needs.
Our salespeople routinely generate and evaluate multiple alternatives for new customer problems.
Our sales force provides fresh perspectives on old problems.
Our salespeople often improvise methods for solving customer problems when an answer is not apparent.
SALES PEOPLE COMMITMENT (.90; .93; .73) (Kuester et al., 2017)
Our salespeople
Had a positive attitude towards the new product.
Felt highly responsible for achieving objectives for the new product.
Showed strong commitment towards the new product.
Felt emotionally attached to the new product.
Strongly believed in the success of the new product.
SALES PEOPLE EFFORT (.86; .91; .71) (Kuester et al., 2017)
Our sales people:
Devoted a great deal of effort to the new product.
Spent a significant amount of time selling the new product.
Made significant efforts to reach objectives for the new product compared with efforts for our existing products.
Worked hard for the success of the new product.
JOB PERFORMANCE (.86; .90; .65) (Locander et al., 2014)
Building effective relationships with customers
Making effective presentations to customers
Achieving sales targets and other business objectives
Understanding our products and services
Providing feedback to management
Understanding customer needs and work processes
SALES PERFORMANCE (.79; .90; .83) (Hunter & Panagopoulos, 2015)
I am very effective at surpassing annual sales targets and objectives.
I am very effective at generating a high level of sales.
I am very effective at quickly generating sales of new recently launched products.
NEW PRODUCT SUCCESS (.93; .95; .88) (Kuester et al., 2017)
The new product met or exceeded its targets in terms of overall success.
The overall success of the new product was satisfactory.
The new product succeeded in achieving its main objectives.
We were pleased with the overall success of the new product.

Appendix 3.II: Discriminant validity

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Job performance	**.80**						
New product success	.50	**.93**					
Sales performance	.66	.54	**.91**				
Salesperson commitment	.49	.54	.38	**.85**			
Salesperson creativity	.60	.47	.47	.63	**.81**		
Salesperson effort	.54	.59	.44	.60	.64	**.84**	
Salesforce market orientation	.70	.50	.53	.64	.64	.54	**.84**

Numbers along the diagonal axis in bold are the square roots of the AVE for the variables; the rest of the numbers represent construct correlations. All correlations are significant at <0.01 (Fornell & Larcker 1981).

CHAPTER IV:

SALES FORCE CHARACTERISTICS AND PERFORMANCE: SALESPERSONS' PERSPECTIVES IN AN EMERGING ECONOMY

4.1. INTRODUCTION

Despite technological advances, the emergence of new communication channels, the increased amount of information available on the market or the expansion of e-commerce as a global phenomenon, among others, the role of salespeople remains essential in determining many companies' commercial success (De Bellis and Venkataramani, 2020; Rippé et al., 2016; Spreer and Rauschnabel, 2016). This is the case in some less developed economies in which lower levels of economic and technological development determine different priorities for consumers and have an impact on their purchasing patterns and ways of interacting with companies (Guissoni et al., 2018). Other products still require a high degree of involvement in the purchasing process, where salesperson-customer interactions allow to better understand the needs of consumers and generate higher levels of trust (Arditto et al., 2020). It is crucial, therefore, to better understand retail dynamics in these contexts.

The sales force and sales representatives make up an essential part of the marketing department, not only because they are dedicated to sales activities, but also because they guarantee direct and two-way interactions with consumers (Baumann et al., 2017). Thus, the role of the sales force continues to have a decisive influence on overall customer experience and specific repercussions for company sales outcomes (Piercy et al., 2012)

However, the increase in competitive pressure and a better understanding of the costs and benefits associated with each communication channel requires building more in-depth knowledge of how sales teams' characteristics influence sales performance (Vieira et al., 2019; Bouzari and Karatepe, 2018).

In this regard, the literature is prolific in terms of the number of studies that have addressed the impact of sales team profiles on commercial performance (e.g. Dax et al., 2019; Claro and Kamakura, 2017; Kim and Tiwana, 2017). Nevertheless, the vast majority of these works have taken as a reference the case of developed Western economies (e.g.

Bolander, 2020; Carter et al., 2014); with some exceptions in the case of China (Newell et al., 2016; Liu et al., 2001), or India (Rippé et al., 2016). Sharma's work (2016) presents highly relevant reflections on the need to adapt the principles used for developed economies to the context of emerging economies. But no evidence could be found of works that have analysed the context of emerging economies in the LATAM region. The study of Johnson and Boeing (2016) in the Brazilian context is a rare exception. Therefore, it seems interesting to complete the literature in this respect.

Furthermore, Herjanto and Franklin (2019) recently presented the results of a systematic literature review of over 250 articles published between 1986 and 2017 and classified the main underlying elements of sales performance, identifying five main types of factors: salesperson personal factors, organizational factors, co-worker factors, buyer factors and situational factors. It is worth noting nonetheless the lack of studies that consider salespeople' psychological state regarding their relationship with the company (e.g. organizational commitment) as a possible antecedent.

Commitment can be broadly defined as a force that enables an individual to act to achieve certain goals (Meyer and Herscovitch, 2001). Therefore, we believe that employee commitment can also be decisive in explaining the results obtained in sales terms.

Therefore, having identified these gaps in the literature, our research acquired a twofold objective. First, we wished to establish how salespeople' commitment to their company allows to better understand their level of effort and customer orientation. We also believe that these factors explain their work performance and, by extension, their commercial performance.

Additionally, we wished to contribute by expanding the scope of the study to emerging LATAM economies regarding the impact of the sales force's profile on performance. To do this, we took Peru as a reference.

The weight of emerging economies in global GDP and international trade is increasing and cannot be overlooked (Panagopoulos et al., 2011). Moreover, the statistics also reflect an increase in the population and per capita income, leading many companies to pay ever more attention to these markets. Statistics indicate that Peru remains a stable economy in Latin America (LATAM). According to a study by Atradius (2018), a trade credit insurer, Peru is considered as one of the world's most promising emerging economies with remarkable growth prospects in 2019. It should also be noted that Peru has signed trade agreements with the US, the European Union (EU), China and Mercosur, among others, including a new free-trade agreement with Australia. We believe that these data support the suitability of considering Peru as a reference for our research.

To meet the study's objectives, the following sections present a review of the major variables and include a series of hypotheses that allow to update the phenomenon under study. The section 4.4 presents the proposed methodology, based on a chain of effects tested using structural equations. The results of the study are shown below, and to finish, the main conclusions are presented, as well as the theoretical and business practice implications.

4.2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Relationship marketing as a paradigm has dominated commercial literature in recent decades (Palmatier et al., 2006). Relationship marketing is defined as a process to attract, maintain and intensify relationships with customers (Morgan and Hunt, 1994), seeking profitability through customer loyalty rather than by attracting new customers. (Grönroos, 1994). In this sense, we believe that the role of the sales force continues to be crucial in maintaining valuable relationships with consumers.

Given the highly dynamic and competitive environment that companies are currently facing, the search for competitive advantages is crucial for their survival (Stakhovych and

Tamaddoni, 2020; Helfat and Peteraf, 2003). The Resource Based View considers the company as a set of valuable, rare, difficult-to-imitate and non-replaceable resources and capacities producing three types of competitive advantages: physical capital, organizational capital and human capital (Barney, 2001). Within human capital, the sales force is a key element in the success of organizations (Joshi and Randall, 2001) because, in addition to being an essential channel of revenue, it is also in direct contact with the market and can capture very useful information from both customers and competitors (Le Bon and Merunka, 2006). For these reasons, companies must be aware of the importance of properly guiding their management and increasing their performance (Jaramillo et al., 2005). Therefore, identifying and analyzing the history of sales performance is a topic of major interest in the literature (Arditto et al., 2020; Evans et al., 2012).

In this sense, as we anticipated in the introduction, Herjanto and Franklin (2019) establish five types of factors: salesperson personal factors (related to salespeople's personal factors, sales social intelligence and sales social competence), organizational factors (which refer to organization and managerial factors), co-worker factors (which refer to collaboration across related departments and between co-workers), buyer factors (relating to consumers' feelings and responses according to the degree of satisfaction) and situational factors (referring to external aspects such as sales territory characteristics or the degree of turbulence of the environment).

However, there is a notable lack of studies that place the salesperson's psychological state regarding his or her relationship with the company (Organizational Commitment) as an antecedent of sales performance. Commitment, understood as a force that allows an individual to act to achieve certain objectives (Meyer and Herscovitch, 2001) is crucial for any company because it helps to understand employees' motivations in identifying with the organization's objectives (Imamoglu et al., 2019). Therefore, if we consider that companies'

main objective is to create, maintain and develop lasting relationships with customers and, on the other hand, that it is the salesperson who often truly maintains contacts and interacts with customers, it is unsurprising that a major subject in both the academic and business spheres is how sales teams' motivation and dynamics influence commercial results (Zang et al., 2020; Steenburgh and Ahearne, 2012).

Organizational commitment is a psychological aspect that explains the link between an employee and the company he or she works for (Imamoglu et al., 2019). The concept of organizational commitment is a measure of an employee's identification with his or her organization (Fu et al., 2014) and is made up of three different components: affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment (Meyer and Allen, 1991).

According to these authors, affective commitment is related to the emotional bond between the employee and the company; continuance commitment refers to the obligation to continue in the company due to the perceived costs of leaving it; and, finally, normative commitment expresses the obligation felt by the employee to remain in the company for moral or ethical reasons. Of all three, the affective component has the most desirable implications for employee behaviors (Ribeiro et al., 2018).

Therefore, this is the component we will use as a reference for our study since the objective of this work is to determine to what extent the salesperson's psychological state of belonging to the company–free of any feeling of obligation to stay for economic and/or moral reasons–is the beginning of a chain of effects that ends in higher sales performance.

There is evidence in the literature that the salesperson's feelings directly influence their way of behaving with customers (Kanibir, and Nart, 2012) and the undertaking of activities to collect information from the environment (Nasri and Zarai, 2012; Le Bon and Merunka, 2006).

Customer orientation selling. The modern marketing concept implies adopting a relational marketing approach that consists of identifying, developing, maintaining and terminating relational exchanges with the purpose of enhancing the firm's performance (Beck and Palmatier, 2012). This means companies place the customer at the heart of all their strategies (Habel et al., 2020). However, a company's clear customer orientation may be insufficient to obtain the best results. The salesperson is often a major source of communication with customers, and their conduct and behavior convey a company's attitude towards them (Schwepker, 2003; Beverland 2001; Magrath 1990). Therefore, it seems necessary for salespeople to adopt individual behaviors aimed at building lasting and valued relationships with customers. In this sense, the literature distinguishes two different behaviors when interacting with customers: customer orientation and selling orientation. Customer orientation (CO) is related to a salesperson's 'concern for others' and 'need satisfaction/problem solution selling approaches': not only in the present but also with respect to how they may evolve in the future, motivating the creation of long-term relational alliances (Schultz and Good, 2000). Conversely, selling orientation (SO) denotes 'concern for self', leading the salesperson to behave aggressively in order to achieve sales, even at the cost of sacrificing the satisfaction of consumer needs (Saxe and Weitz, 1982). In other words, CO is an approach aimed at maintaining long-term relationships based on satisfying customer needs, while SO is an approach aimed at achieving short-term sales, regardless of customer needs. Given these profiles, we opted for CO as the approach that best fits the patterns recommended by the current marketing literature.

Behavioral effort. Current levels of intense competition force companies to have an in-depth knowledge of the market in which they operate. Marketing intelligence refers to a continuous process of capturing data, information and knowledge about the various actors that interact with the company, with the aim of supporting decision-making to boost the

company's competitiveness (Nasri and Zarai, 2012). Thus, companies develop various marketing intelligence activities that provide constant information about the company's environment and everything that may affect its competitive position. In this regard, salespeople have been regarded as the main source of marketing intelligence (Nasri and Zarai, 2012; Le Bon and Merunka, 2006; Moncrief, 1986). However, various studies have concluded that only a small portion of salespeople perform this task, so it is necessary to examine what leads salespeople to make efforts to capture and transmit market information (Le Bon and Merunka, 2006).

The literature has shown a positive influence of organizational commitment on job performance (e.g. Fu and Deshpande, 2014; Ahmad et al., 2010; Luchak and Gellatly 2007). Nevertheless, we consider that the study of this direct relationship can be enriched by including a series of salesperson behaviors–i.e. CO and behavioral effort–that will improve their performance.

Thus, our study considers a chain of effects that starts from the salespersons' level of commitment to the company, passing through their level of effort and degree of customer orientation, determining their work results and, by extension, the sales performance.

4.3. HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

In view of the arguments exposed in the previous sections, we consider it necessary to advance in the study of organizational commitment as an antecedent of salesforce performance, through a series of salesperson behaviors that improve their performance.

To do this, we established a model that, based on the premises of relationship marketing and RBV, considers the sales force as a valuable resource, which, when properly managed, enables acquiring and maintaining competitive advantages. Our study tries to explain the chain of effects that results from the emotional connection of the salesperson

with the company. This chain is made up of a sequence of steps that would explain how organizational commitment makes it easier for the salespersons to develop a series of behaviors (customer orientation selling and behavioral effort) allowing them to better carry out their tasks and functions (job performance), which in turn translates into higher sales performance.

In the context of relational marketing, it is essential to offer the consumer higher value than that of the competition; the latter requires not only identifying their needs but also knowing what alternatives the consumer has within their reach in the market (Boulding et al., 2005; Slater and Narver, 1998).

Salespeople play a crucial role in this regard because they are in direct contact with customers and with the company's competitive environment.

In fact, the sales function is assigned very diverse tasks, ranging from sales calls, assisting and negotiating with clients to gathering and transmitting information (Le Bon ad Merunka, 2006).

Therefore, salespeople greatly contribute to that offer of value to the consumer beyond the product itself. On one hand, they solve their doubts, provide solutions or reduce the uncertainty associated with the purchasing process (Groza et al., 2016; Kapferer, 2008). On the other, they can obtain relevant market information that can be used to raise the value.

That is why we consider it necessary for salespersons to develop a series of behaviors (customer-oriented selling and behavioral effort towards marketing intelligence) that allow them to carry out their tasks properly and maintain lasting relationships with customers thus achieving better results. Figure 4.1 illustrates the causal reference model.

Figure 4.1: Model of reference
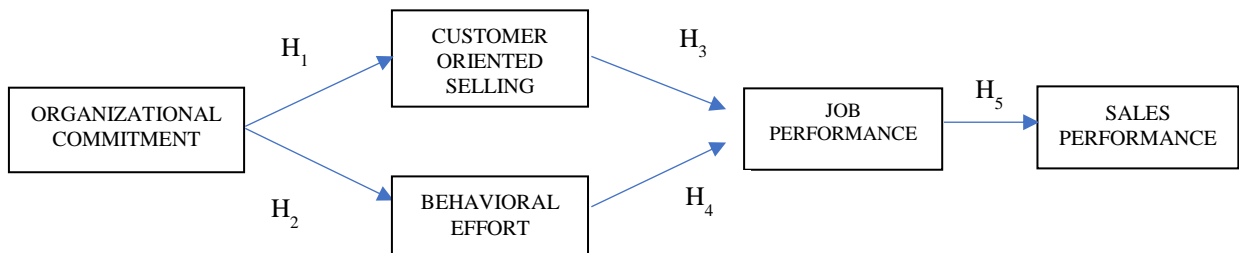
Source: The author

4.3.1. Organizational commitment and sales behaviors

Organizational commitment implies the existence of three interrelated factors: (1) a strong belief and acceptance of the organization's objectives and values; (2) a willingness to make a considerable effort on behalf of the organization; and (3) a strong desire to be a member of the organization. Under this perspective, organizational commitment must be understood as active loyalty that makes employees willing to implicate themselves and assume behaviors in order to contribute to the organization's well-being and objectives (Mowday, 1979).

If we transfer this idea to the sales context, given that salespeople's main contribution to the company's goals focuses on meeting and satisfying customer needs and gathering market information, it seems logical to think that to the extent that salespeople are emotionally attached to their company, they will develop behaviors toward achieving these goals. In this sense, although the sales force is trusted with various missions (serving customers, advising them, satisfying their needs or gathering information on competitors and consumers), it seems that the most common way of assessing sales performance is in terms of sales.

With this reality in mind, a salesperson may find it difficult to attend to all his or her functions since some of them do not lead to bigger sales, but rather consume time and energy that could be devoted to other more objectively "productive" tasks (Lussier and Hartmannb, 2017). For this reason, we consider that if the salespersons feel emotionally linked to the company, they will become more involved in the common project and the company's objectives, making them their own. This force will drive them to wish to serve their customers more and better, to know them in greater depth, to not want to fail them. On the other hand, they will want to contribute to improving the company's competitive position by gathering as much information as possible about the competitive environment. If we understand sales effort in general as "the force, energy, or activity by which work is accomplished by salespeople" (Rangarajan et al., 2005) we could say that organizational commitment acts as the engine that drives these behaviors and makes the difference between doing simply work or doing making efforts, largely determining a greater or lesser work performance.

Previous studies have established a positive influence of organizational commitment on customer orientation (Kim et al., 2019; Gautam, et al., 2004; Culverson, 2002; Joshi and Randall, 2001). Regarding the influence of organizational commitment on behavioral effort, the literature (e.g. Nasri and Zarai, 2012; Sager and Johnston, 1989) has also shown a positive relationship. Therefore, based on the above, we propose the following:

H$_1$: *Organizational commitment positively influences customer-oriented selling*.

H$_2$: *Organizational commitment positively influences behavioral efforts towards marketing intelligence.*

4.3.2. Sales behaviors and job performance

Job performance is, in general terms, the degree of an individual's ability to perform a specific task (Goodhue and Thompson, 1995). The functions performed by the sales force are very diverse. They are not only linked to sales per se but also to serving customers, advising them, meeting their needs or gathering information from competitors and consumers. Thus, given the environmental conditions, increasing the performance of the sales force has become a major challenge for sales managers (Jaramillo et al., 2005).

In our model, we establish as an antecedent of job performance a series of behaviors aimed at better exercising the functions and, therefore, achieving a greater performance. Adopting a customer oriented selling approach refers to a selling behavior in which salespersons assist customers in making purchase decisions that will satisfy long-term desires and needs (Saxe and Weitz, 1982).

Salespeople applying customer-oriented selling are more willing to invest efforts to better understand their customers and adopt behaviors that strengthen their relationship with customers (Lussier and Hartmann, 2017). This implies that salespeople doubly interact with consumers: on the one hand, they provide them with information about the products and simplify their purchasing process (Groza et al., 2016; Kapferer, 2008) and, on the other, they can obtain unique customer insights that would otherwise be very difficult to achieve (Kuester et al., 2017).

Furthermore, given that companies move in highly competitive turbulent and changing environment, having access to environmental information is crucial to be able to respond to market requirements and offer greater value to consumers. Knowledge is a key organizational resource that can be a source of competitive advantage in a dynamic economy (Li et al., 2017). Salespeople turn out to be the main source of marketing intelligence since they can obtain information about the company's competitive environment, for example: the

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forecast of new competitive products before launch, changes in competitor prices, changes in consumer tastes and/or needs, etc. (Le Bon and Merunka, 2006). Therefore, it seems logical to believe that these sales behaviors will lead to greater job performance. Previous studies have linked customer-oriented selling (Goad and Jaramillo, 2014; Babakus et al., 2009) and behavioral efforts towards marketing intelligence (Mariadoss et al., 2014) with performance. In this light, we propose the following:

H3: *Customer oriented selling positively influences job performance.*

H4: *Behavioral efforts towards marketing intelligence positively influence job performance.*

4.3.3. Job performance and sales performance

Sales performance refers to the results generated by a salesperson's selling activities, such as exceeding annual sales objectives, generating a high level of sales (Behrman and Perreault, 1982) or quickly generating sales of newly introduced products (Hunter and Panagopoulos, 2015). This concept is studied for its clear impact on a company's success (Purohit, 2018).

There is a strong consensus in the literature that relationship marketing efforts generate stronger relationships with customers, which improve the company's performance results, including growth in sales, market share and profits (Brettel et al., 2012; Bonnemaizon et al., 2007; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Crosby et al., 1990). Relationship marketing strategies are a source of competitive advantage due to the added value of managing long-lasting customer relationships (Roberts et al., 2003). However, simply offering value is not enough in such a competitive environment. Offering a higher value to the consumer means knowing what their needs and expectations are in order to satisfy them

better than the rest of the competing companies, which implies having a close relationship with the customer and the market. Furthermore, consumers are increasingly in a dominant position and are more demanding on issues such as product quality or level of service (Homburg, et al., 2011). In this sense, salespeople play a key role in achieving better results since, on the one hand, they are the true customer interlocutors and, therefore, stronger and durable customer relationships greatly depend on them. Furthermore, they collect and transmit knowledge about current and future customer needs and competitor activities both formally and informally (Hattula et al., 2015). Such is the importance of salespeople' role in creating quality relationships with consumers that often a customer's loyalty towards a salesperson can exceed that towards the company, and the sales force job performance becomes a predictor of sales effectiveness and growth (Korschun, et al., 2014; Palmatier et al., 2007).

Therefore, if salespeople perform their job well, they are contributing to the company's ultimate goal, which is to create superior value for the consumer and for the company (Groza et al., 2016) in terms of satisfaction, and less uncertainty when launching new products or proposing effective promotions, among other aspects. Therefore, high levels of sales job performance can be expected to translate into higher sales levels. Therefore, we establish the following:

H$_5$: *Job performance positively influences salesforce performance.*

4.4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To test the proposed hypotheses, we conducted a study in the Peruvian retail sector. Table 4.1 shows the technical data used in our study.

Table 4.1: Technical data of the fieldwork

Universe	Retailing salespeople
Sample size	248
Geographical scope	National, Peru
Sampling method	Random sample
Type of questionnaire	24.8%
Fieldwork	July-September, 2018
Analysis of information	PLS Software

Source: The author

A questionnaire was adapted from previously validated and contrasted scales to measure each of the constructs (see Appendix 4.I). Regarding the measurement model, for organizational commitment (O COMMIT) and behavioral effort (BEH EFF) we took as a base the scales of Le Bon and Merunka (2006). For job performance (JOB PERF) COM) we applied the scale of Locander et al. (2014). Customer oriented selling (C OR SELL) and sales performance (SALES PERF) were measured using the scales of Hunter and Panagopoulos (2015).

All the constructs included in this study can be considered as design constructs or artifacts; that is to say, human-made instruments theoretically justified and typically created by managers and staff in companies (Henseler, 2017). Since such artifacts are shaped from a series of elementary parts or components which are combined to form a new entity, Henseler (2017) suggests modeling them as composites. As we aim to estimate a model of composites, to analyze the proposed model a structural equation modelling technique was employed using partial least squares (PLS) (SmartPLS v. 3.2.7) (Rigdon et al., 2017; Sarstedt, et al., 2016).

Considering that our study has a confirmatory purpose, we begin the analysis of the estimated model providing the standardized root mean square residual index (SRMR) (Hu

and Bentler, 1998), which is a measure of overall goodness-of-fit (GoF) (Henseler, 2018) available for PLS (Henseler et al., 2016). This index offers a satisfactory value of 0.062, which is under the usual cut-off of 0.08 proposed by Hu and Bentler (1999).

With the objective of evaluating the quality of the data, we carried out an individual reliability analysis of each item relative to its construct. All resulting values exceed the threshold of 0.707 required by Carmines and Zeller (1979). The same was found when assessing the reliability of the variables using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability.

Appendix 4.I shows that all constructs are reliable, as they exceed the reference value of 0.8 for each index (Nunnally 1978). The convergent validity was assessed by using the average variance extracted (AVE), which, according to Fornell and Larcker (1981), must exceed 0.5. As such, over 50% of the variance of the construct was found to be due to recommended indicators. Appendix 4.I shows that in all cases, the reference value is exceeded. Finally, the existence of discriminant validity was validated applying the comparison of the square root of AVE against correlations (Fornell and Larcker criterium) (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2: Discriminant Validity (Fornell and Larcker criterion)

	BEH EFFORT	C OR SELL	JOB PERF	O COMMIT	SALES PERF
BEH EFFORT	**0.892**				
C OR SELL	0.632	**0.944**			
JOB PERF	0.615	0.781	**0.925**		
O COMMIT	0.666	0.743	0.675	**0.793**	
SALES PERF	0.653	0.776	0.777	0.699	**0.924**

Numbers along the diagonal axis in bold are the square roots of the AVE for the variables; the rest of the numbers represent construct correlations. All correlations are significant at <0.01 (Fornell and Larcker 1981).

Source: The author

4.5. RESULTS

In relation to the structural model, a Bootstrap analysis was performed to assess the statistical significance of the loadings and the path coefficients. We created 5,000 subsamples, employing t-Student distribution with 4,999 degrees of freedom (N – 1, where N = number of subsamples), obtaining the values t(0.05; 4999) = 1.64; t(0.01; 4999) = 2.32; and t(0.001; 4999) = 3.09. From these values, we determined the acceptance or rejection of our hypotheses (Table 4.3). Concerning the explained variance of the endogenous variables (R2), the model shows adequate predictive power, since all of the endogenous constructs achieve an explained variance greater than 0.1, the reference value established by Falk and Miller (1992).

Table 4.3: Structural model results

Hypothesis	B	t-value	R^2
H1: O COMMIT -> C OR SELL	0.710***	10.013	0.504
H2: O COMMIT -> BEH EFFORT	0.669***	9.500	0.448
H3: C OR SELL -> JOB PERF	0.656***	6.145	0.633
H4: BEH EFFORT -> JOB PERF	0.197**	2.531	
H5: JOB PERF -> SALES PERF	0.777***	10.461	0.604
*** When the t value obtained by the Bootstrap technique overcomes T Student value t(0.001, 4999) = 3.09, the hypothesis is accepted with 99.9% significance. ** When the t value obtained by the Bootstrap technique overcomes the T Student value t(0.01, 4999) = 2.32, the hypothesis is accepted at 99% significance. * When the t value obtained by the Bootstrap technique overcomes the T Student value t(0.05, 4999) = 1.64, the hypothesis is accepted at 95% significance. NS: Not significant			

Source: The author

The data shown in Table 4.3 highlight that all the hypotheses have been accepted, since organizational commitment have a significant direct link to customer orientation selling and behavioral effort (H_1 and H_2). Also, as predicted, customer orientation selling and behavioral effort significantly influence on job performance (H_3 and H_4). Finally, job performance, as expected, has a direct significant link to sales performance (H_5). That is to

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say, the proposed chain of effects from organizational commitment to salesforce´s customer-oriented selling and behavioral effort will increase job performance in a company, which will lead to higher sales performance.

4.6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The sales force continues to be a topic of great interest in both the academic and business fields (Arditto et al., 2020; De Bellis and Venkataramani, 2020; Baumann et al., 2017; Rippé et al., 2016). Sales people represent a key link between the company and the market, embodying a multiple profile: on the one hand, they act as salespeople, identifying commercial opportunities, contacting consumers and transmitting the companies' offer; on the other, while acting as spokespersons, they deliver information to the company about possible changes in customer needs, tastes and expectations, about competitor actions, changes in the business environment that help improving the choice of commercial strategies and actions. Many authors (e.g. Le Bond and Merunka, 2006; Joshi and Randall, 2001) have suggested that properly managing these commercial teams represents a source of sustainable competitive advantage.

Today, we are witnessing a proliferation of multiple channels between companies and consumers, even among customers themselves, and ways of interacting have changed (Cambra-Fierro et al., 2016). A wide range of channels promote different connection options exponentially increasing the number of contacts between different interest groups (Rapp et al., 2013): Internet, mobile devices (smartphones and tablets), social networks, customer service helplines, smart-tv, among others. The fact of offering a wide range of contact and distribution channels is a very notable source of value that should help improve company-customer relationships. They increase the number of points of contact, they allow to establish and develop ever closer relationships, improve mutual knowledge and the sending of a

greater number of commercial stimuli (Venkatesan et al., 2007; Payne and Frow, 2005). However, even in this multichannel context, direct and adequate interactions between salesperson and customer inject fluidity and trust in the relationship, they convey a sense of importance to the customer, and ultimately help to improve experiences associated with the purchase.

Companies can and should encourage direct contact with consumers, promote the quantity and speed of communication and influence their experiences. This direct contact will increase the impact and efficiency of the communication issued by alternative and complementary channels, will allow personalizing the offer to each customer and make them feel truly unique and important. The objective is to provide consumers with totally satisfactory and personal experiences (Bolton et al., 2014).

In the case of emerging economies, where the level of economic and technological development still limits the impact of new technologies, the role of the sales force is enhanced. This is the case, for example, of Peru: the retail sector in Peru is characterized by the predominance of traditional formats—caseritos (neighborhood grocery and convenience stores) and in-home sales making up more than 65% of the total market—and a weak penetration of more modern retail formats (e.g. supermarkets, department stores).

In addition, in many emerging LATAM countries, we can observe a culture that is oriented towards the short term (Hofstede, 2020). This means that factors such as commitment or customer orientation are overshadowed by immediate objectives centering on sales figures. Given these circumstances, it seems important to assess to what extent a more long-term oriented approach would help to improve sales team results. Thus, this research suggests that salespeople's commitment initiates a chain of positive effects that influences both customer orientation–a relational concept that is superior to sales orientation (Habel et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2019; Beck and Palmatier, 2012; Schultz and Good, 2000)–

and their efforts. Finally, we propose that these elements affect job performance and, by extension, sales performance. We therefore assume that a relational approach to sales team management, measured using the salespeople's own perspective, would help improve results.

In this sense, our study complements the specialized literature in various ways. First, the recent study by Herjanto and Franklin (2019) identifies five groups of antecedents of sales performance. Our attention was drawn, however, to the fact that no factors were included relating to salespeople's psychological state in relation to the affective bond that may link them with the company.

Our data indicates that, as proposed in the model's first two hypotheses, organizational commitment positively affects both the degree of customer orientation and the salespeople's efforts. The existence of ties beyond mere contractual obligations allows us to internalize principles close to relationship marketing that go beyond short-term transactional approaches.

Furthermore, insofar as customer orientation allows time and effort to be devoted to better understanding the customers' characteristics, needs and expectations, it helps to improve the shopping experience and the value perceived by consumers, becoming a measure that is superior to that of a mere sales focus (e.g. Kim et al., 2019; Joshi and Randall, 2001). The literature also suggested direct relationships between commitment and effort (Fu and Deshpande, 2014; Luchak and Gellatly, 2007), which is in line with our data.

Our hypotheses 3 and 4 proposed positive relationships between customer orientation and effort and job performance. Our data, again, confirmed these propositions. Authors such as Goad and Jaramillo (2014); Babakus et al. (2009) or Mariadoss et al. (2004) anticipated these logical and intuitive relationships that, in addition, lead on to better levels of sales performance (Groza et al., 2016; Palmatier et al., 2007) that we proposed in our fifth and last hypothesis. Therefore, from an empirical perspective, we observe a virtuous chain of effects

that links sales peoples' commitment to the company to an improvement in sales performance. Nevertheless, in contexts defined by immediate objectives, the challenge is to bet on changes in the management system that foster lasting approaches. Salespeople themselves acknowledge that doing so would improve their performance. This bet would not only require a regulatory change in contracts and remuneration policies, but it would surely also require a cultural change.

It is extremely likely that in the case of emerging countries, training deficiencies affect the sales force, which explains short-term approaches instead of betting on the benefits of more strategic, long-term approaches. The salespeople themselves suggest that commitment has a positive impact on sales performance. Therefore, we believe that from a managerial point of view, it would be very interesting to promote actions that help employees to identify with the company so they feel more closely connected to it. The salesforce needs to feel involved in the goals, decisions, and achievements as a team.

To achieve this, it is possible to establish certain contract and remuneration systems that encourage much more active participation and, perhaps also significant costs of change. All this should be accompanied by actions that promote workers' training, motivation, and identification through courses, workshops, competitions or meetings, among other possibilities. Otherwise, we run the risk that the sales force does not fully identify with relational values and moves away from the desired behavior. This problem is aggravated in contexts such as that of Peru where salespeople tend to be short-term oriented, paying little attention to future planning.

Promoting and investing in concepts and tools related to CRM would help managers and salespeople to promote and understand the relational approach by exchanging and gaining updated information in real time about consumers, competitors and the company's product portfolio, among other elements. This proposal could be perceived not only as an

investment to sell more, but also to facilitate salesforce activity. Regarding the impact of effort on sales performance, strategies have traditionally been suggested to increase the pressure on the salesforce. However, excessive pressure can lead to unwanted or unethical salesforce behaviors that affect the company's image. It would be interesting to develop codes of conduct and control adapted to the company's values and objectives.

In short, we advocate a management that mixes economic and legal measures– which are preferred in economies defined by short-term visions–with other measures of a psychological and emotional nature. In other words, a holistic vision that includes training, motivation and remuneration to promote long-lasting relationships between salespeople and the company. The latter generate not only sales but also commercial intelligence that provides value to (re)define the commercial strategy and generate improved experiences and value for consumers.

Despite the theoretical and practical relevance of this research, we must recognize some limitations. First, the results are based on salespeople's opinions obtained through surveys, not on actual behavioral data.

A number of procedural strategies were used to address potential bias and to ensure data validity (Podsakoff et al., 2003): ensuring participant anonymity; clarifying that there were no right or wrong answers; using previously validated scales; and developing a pre-test to avoid possible ambiguities in scale wording. Secondly, the data were limited to one specific country.

However, given that the few studies on the subject to date are based on samples from developed economies, rooting our research in the analysis of an emerging economy can only reinforce the significance of our study and its contribution to the literature.

Replicating the study in other emerging countries would be highly instrumental to improve sales team management, which would be of great interest to multinational or global

companies. Considering the views of managers and consumers regarding the variables that determine the success of salesperson-consumer interactions will help to better understand the design of salesforce management systems.

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Appendix 4.I: Measurement scales (Sources) (Alpha C., FC., AVE)

(Mean, Standard deviation)

	Mean	Standard deviation
ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT (O COMMIT) (Le Bon and Merunka, 2006) (0.914;0.931;0.629)		
I am willing to put a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help this organization be successful	5.984	1.164
I talk up this organization to my friends as a great organization to work for	5.79	1.291
I would accept almost any type of job assignment in order to keep working for this organization	4.468	1.692
I find that my values and the organization´s values are very similar	5.621	1.097
I am proud to tell others that I am part of this organization	6.097	0.928
This organization really inspires the very best in me in the way of job performance	5.734	1.048
I am extremely glad that I chose this organization to work over others I was considering over the time I joined	5.862	1.062
I really care about the fate of this organization	5.903	1.181
For me, this is the best of all possible organizations for which to work	5.573	1.375
CUSTOMER ORIENTED SELLING (C OR SELL) (Hunter and Panagopoulos, 2015) (0.939; 0.961; 0.891)		
I try to help the customers achieve their goals	6.129	0.975
I try to give customers and accurate expectation of what the product will do for them	6.032	0.967
I answer the customer´s questions about products/services as correctly as I can	6.113	0.985
BEHAVIORAL EFFORT (BEH EFFORT) (Le Bon and Merunka, 2006) (0.873; 0.921; 0.795)		
When I am in the field, I try to systematically provoke situations that will allow me to gather and transmit reliable information about competitors	5.532	1.11
When I am in the field, I always assign myself objectives to obtain information about competitors or about customers in order to transmit them to the headquarters	5.621	1.075
In order to be viewed as a top information gatherer, when I am in the field, I make a great effort to collect and transmit a lot of competitive information	5.463	1.03
JOB PERFORMANCE (JOB PERF) (Locander et al., 2014) (0.916; 0.947; 0.856)		
Building effective relationships with customers	6.105	0.966
Making effective presentations to customers	5.911	1.016
Achieving sales targets and other business objectives	5.855	0.939
Understanding our products and services	6.041	0.999
Providing feedback to management	5.565	1.109
Understanding customer needs and work processes	6.008	0.996
SALES PERFORMANCE (SALES PERF) (Hunter and Panagopoulos, 2015) (0.914; 0.946; 0.854)		
I am very effective in exceeding annual sales targets and objectives	5.71	1.076
I am very effective in generating a high level of sales	5.683	1.069
I am very effective in quickly generating sales of newly introduced products	5.669	1.053

CHAPTER V:

CONCLUSIONS

5.1. RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES: OBJECTIVES AND STRUCTURE

This study is pioneering in its analysis of sales force profiles in the context of an emerging economy: Peru. As we indicate in the theoretical framework section for each chapter, all earlier research had focused on analyzing this phenomenon in the context of developed economies. Hence, the virtual absence of studies looking at emerging economies was very evident. As a result, one of the main challenges we faced was to successfully situate this research—not only within the Peruvian context but in the broader global context as well.

The primary objective of this PhD thesis was to analyze the perceptions of customers, sales managers and salespeople themselves to determine the impact of sales force profiles on company sales outcomes. Moreover, we took a closer look at the specific case of Peru, prime example of an emerging economy.

Sales force performance is a driving factor behind the success or failure of firms of all shapes and sizes. This doctoral thesis, therefore, proposed to address three key objectives. Firstly, to better understand customer perceptions regarding expertise, trust, interaction and risk—and their impact on building lasting customer-salesperson bonds. Secondly—taking market orientation and sales force creativity, commitment and effort as our reference—we aimed to determine manager perceptions regarding two components of business success: sales figures and potential new product success. Thirdly, the objective was to determine— from the perspective of salespeople themselves—the impact of commitment, effort and degree of customer orientation on sales force performance and, through a chain of effects, on overall sales outcomes. Due to changes in the competitive context, establishing appropriate sales strategies and actions is critical to understanding the current positioning and prospects of companies going forward (Vieira et al., 2018; Bouzari and Karatepe, 2018; Piercy, 2012).

To achieve these aims, this PhD thesis was structured into three interrelated studies. Quantitative research was carried out based on questionnaires directed at customers, salespeople and sales managers. Hypothesis testing was carried out based on structural equation models using the PLS technique—with a view, in each case, to propose the analysis of the relationships between proposed concepts.

Lastly, a logical process was followed throughout: we started by identifying the basic problem for analysis; then, we determined the theoretical framework which would allow us to put forth the hypotheses for statistical comparison.

5.2. CONTRIBUTION TO THE LITERATURE

The literature considers the sales force as playing a fundamental role—hence, granting salespeople high strategic value (Palmatier et al., 2007; Cron et al., 2014). In line with this, our research focuses on the impact of sales force profiles and enhancing sales management performance in an emerging economy.

In the first place, as Baumann (2017) indicates, managing sales and sales teams is a complex activity that, to a large extent, determines a company's commercial success of. Likewise, it seems appropriate to evaluate—from a sales department standpoint—how consumers perceive salespeople and what factors drive higher levels of trust and loyalty, among other aspects (Blocker et al., 2012). Most empirical work on the antecedents of sales force success has focused on analyzing how salespeople communicate company value to customers (Echchakoui, 2016).

Thus, with the theoretical concepts in mind, our study presents a framework that, in general terms, allows us to understand perceptions regarding the sales force held by a range of stakeholders—from customers, to managers, to the salespeople themselves—and how these perceptions impact both sales department success (i.e. sales figures and new product

market positioning) and potential lasting relationship building (i.e. loyalty and commitment). In contrast to most previous studies, our research took perceptions regarding the sales force in particular as a reference—rather than towards the company in general. We should not forget the relevance of this marketing variable; salespeople act both as company spokespeople and as channels for demand for company products and/or services. Moreover, in some contexts—the retail sector in emerging economies, for instance—customers continue to prefer interacting with salespeople over interacting with the company itself.

Secondly, the literature confirms that technological development, the advent of new communication channels, growing consumer expectations and a deeper understanding of customers' needs and demands all have a specific impact both on the overall customer experience and company sales outcomes (Piercy, 2012). Moreover, growing competitive pressure and demands for cost containment—along with the growing costs of the sales function—call for a better understanding of how different sales force features impact sales performance (Vieira et al., 2018; Bouzari and Karatepe, 2018).

The role of salespeople becomes even more relevant when greater company-customer contact is required—either due to the complexity of the purchasing process (i.e. customer participation) or in those contexts where technological development is lower, hence, physical brick-and-mortar sales channels are still necessary. The latter is the case in many emerging economies, characterized by lower economic development and limited access to the internet and electronic commerce (Guissoni et al., 2018; Sharma et al., 2018a). Under such conditions, maintaining strategies and actions adapted to specific environmental conditions—and better understanding how the different capacities, values and motivations of the sales force impact business success—is crucial. Blocker et al. (2012) and Srivastava and Kaul (2014), among others, point out that proper sales force management can continue to deliver competitive advantages for companies, creating value through interaction with

customers. This is why it is essential that today's sales managers have a profile which guarantees management success—both as professionals and representatives of their companies.

Considering how interpersonal relationships impact outcomes is fundamental. The close personal relationships linking salespeople and their customers stands out, especially in emerging economies like Peru. A prime example are terms like "caserito" (popular, endearing term used in for local street market or 'mom-and-pop' vendors in Peru), "me puedes fiar" (in reference to local vendors customarily allowing loyal customers to buy now and pay later) and "yapa" (little something extra thrown in for free). Such terms put words to close personal vendor-buyer interactions that nurture satisfactory, low-risk consumer experiences; friendly personal relationships in the process of seeking common ground and resolution of potential conflicting interests. Such negotiation processes play out in informal settings, often characterized by little or no prior preparation and calling for subjective skills and criteria—in stark contrast to the objectivity expected throughout sales processes involving business organizations.

Once each of the studies has been completed, we believe we can make a number of contributions to the literature. On the whole, we observe that the context we have analyzed meets the general theoretical guidelines for sales force management—from the perspective of customers, salespeople and managers. In a multichannel context increasingly dominated by technological advances, personal salesperson-client interaction remains relevant in many cases.

Moreover, in a world defined by the growing impact of globalization, our results highlight the need to bear the economic and cultural specificities of different contexts in mind (Hofstede, 2020).

Hence, in Study 1—where customer perceptions are the focus of analysis—the fact that, in the current context, companies must be able to create value at various points throughout interaction should be kept in mind (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). In the Peruvian case, value creation is produced in two ways: via an increase in interaction-based enjoyment and a decrease in perceived risk.

In emerging economies like Peru, many customers prefer interaction with close, friendly salespeople capable of resolving everyday conflicts. Hence, the degree to which sales teams can effectively transmit trust and expertise to their customers is essential to driving a positive assessment of the interaction. In the end, each of the parties will decide whether to continue interacting or not, depending on the value they receive from the exchange (Ambrose et al., 2017; Lambe et al., 2001). The Principle of Reciprocity is key to understanding consumer behavior (Palmatier et al., 2007). According to this principle, when something perceived as positive is received, a feeling of gratitude is awakened in people—leading them to want to provide something positive in return (Bagozzi, 1995).

Such perceptions impact potential for building robust relational bonds between customers and salespeople. Hence, the degree of perceived risk and pleasure in the interaction can influence customer desire and intention to maintain the relationship. Customer commitment, then, refers to an enduring desire to maintain a valued relationship (Verma et al., 2016; Deshpande et al. 1993)—implying not only the desire to prolong the relationship but also a willingness to make the effort to do so (Alteren and Tudoran, 2016; De Wulf et., 2001; Macintosh and Lockshin, 1997). In line with our research objectives, we underscore the importance of customer predisposition to maintain commercial relationships, emotional ties and good intentions towards salespeople and firms—rather than hinging the duration of relationships on possible costs and/or contractual obligations (Yuan et al., 2018).

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Study 2 analyzes manager perceptions regarding the sales force. We adopt the approach proposed by Kuester et al. (2017): to evaluate sales force performance both in terms of sales figures and potential success of new products. For salespeople, garnering approval and prestige through sales is no easy feat. It entails a command of myriad complex factors; among others, effort, creativity and effective management of essential customer and market information—which will help build credibility and trust. Success is reflected in sales figures—but also in other factors like successful product market positioning. It should be noted here that not all salespeople work in the same way or at the same level of performance; this is often the perception, at least. (Smith, 2004).

Different types of relationships exist in the sales force sphere of (Jones et al, 2005). In contexts like Peru—where a short-term outlook prevails (Hofstede, 2020) and customer commitment remains very low—sales managers should make every effort to build commitment and reciprocity (Orlando, 2011) while focusing on new business opportunities (Schwantz, 2004).

Finally, Study 3 analyzes the perceptions held by salespeople regarding their own performance. The literature has clearly demonstrated that the sales force—as an active part of the interpersonal interaction processes linking salespeople and buyers—can be essential to value creation (Echchakoui, 2015, Blocker et al., 2012). All organizations have models for establishing their own sales force performance evaluation guidelines.

The literature suggests that the degree of salesperson effort, commitment and customer orientation determines sales force performance outcomes. Canfield, (1999) argues that a preparation period is essential to proper diagnosis of customer needs and concerns—hence, to an ability to provide customers with effective, on-target solutions. Moreover, salesperson effort (Hultink and Atuahene-Gima, 2000; Wren et al., 2014), as expected, also explains job performance. In contrast to Atuahene-Gima (1998), however, our data suggest

commitment does not determine job performance. Again, we believe this is due to the short-term outlook of the Peruvian economy (Hofstede, 2020); and perhaps as well to shortcomings in sales force training leading to salespeople being unaware of the long-term benefits of relational constructs. In any case, we do confirm the existence of a chain of effects—even underlying sales success.

5.3. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BUSINESS PRACTICE

As a result of this research, we can put forth a wide range of recommendations for business aimed at boosting sales force effectiveness in general, and in the Peruvian context in particular.

Firstly, the business culture of many sales teams needs to be modified and the importance of focusing sales operations on customers more widely understood. This must be accompanied by an appropriate strategic approach for obtaining and disseminating market intelligence.

Our study demonstrates that making the most of customer-oriented knowledge, understanding customer needs and demands, is vital—to understanding both short-term sales figures and the potential success of new products and services.

Sales force capacity to foster a creative spirit rooted in all acquired knowledge favors converting market intelligence into key sales information. It also improves company-customer interaction and enhances the shopping experience. It is essential to understand that, for customers, demonstrating high levels of knowledge and expertise—hence, reducing purchase-associated risk—is fundamental. Moreover, transmitting trust can build lasting emotional bonds; bonds far stronger than those built on contractual foundations.

Sales managers should be familiar with all of this information—both to ensure effective selection and training processes and to better manage sales force activities.

Frequently, having salespeople that exhibit a degree of creative capacity will also be relevant, due to the complexity of the environment.

The fact that commitment does not contribute significantly to explaining job performance drew our attention. This is most likely due, as we indicated earlier, to the prevailing short-term outlook of the Peruvian economy. Given that the literature clearly confirms the enormous value of this variable, however, to the extent that companies are able to generate lasting ties with their sales team we can expect results of interest to both parties. In this vein, in Chapter IV we suggest working more on getting salespeople to identify themselves with the company—in lieu of other types of contractual commitments that may trigger a range of tensions, including opportunistic behavior.
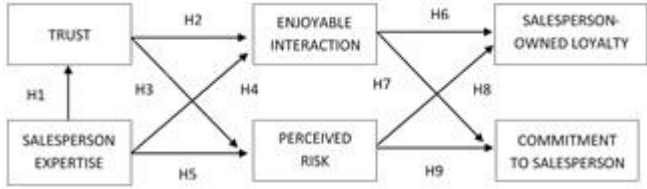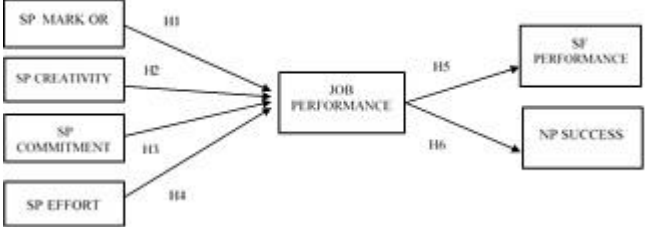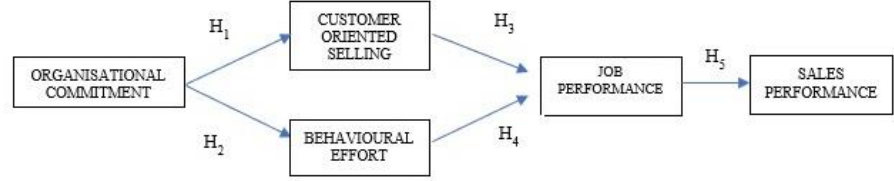
Each of the chapters of this doctoral thesis presents a broad range of proposals to maximize the usefulness of our conclusions.

5.4. LIMITATIONS AND PROPOSALS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As in any empirical investigation, a number of limitations should be pointed out. Firstly, we have worked with surveys. Although each of the three questionnaires was based on a set of scales previously validated by the literature, it was necessary to adapt and check their validity in the context under study. Secondly, in studies of this nature a number of standard biases may occur. To minimize potential bias, we followed recommended guidelines and techniques, including: anonymity, item simplicity and pretesting, as indicated in each of the studies (Podsakoff et al., 1986). In this regard, our statistical tests indicated an absence of bias—confirming that both our data and results are valid. Secondly, the fact that our study was carried out in a specific context, Peru, can reduce the margin for extrapolating results and implications. Our analysis of an emerging economy context remains relevant despite this limitation, however, as the majority of prior research has analyzed developed

western economies. Moreover, certain cross-cultural profiles, unique to Peru, contribute to enriching the academic discussion. In this sense, there is remarkable opportunity for future research: namely, to replicate our research in other emerging economies with a view to assess the extent to which different patterns may be driven by varying degrees of economic development or cross-cultural traits—e.g. geography, language, religion—sometimes even within the same country. All of this would help improve sales force management in global-local contexts. Other interesting lines of research to be explored going forward may include: integrating more variables in models so as to boost their explanatory capacity and introducing a greater cross-sector component—especially in the service sector where traditional salesperson-customer interaction seems to be ceding ground to e-commerce.

Table 5.1: Implications for theory and practice

	CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND PRACTICE
PhD Thesis Salesforce profile and commercial performance: an analysis in an emerging economy.	Customer Sales Manager → Sales Force Profile → Managerial Performance Salespeople	-New technologies, workforce mobility, ease of communications and market globalization are impacting sales dynamics. -Sales force success begins with the selection and hiring of good sales professionals. -Customer demands regarding quality and information have driven companies to evolve management. Understanding different perceptions among different interest groups is essential.
Study 1 Impact of customer perception on salespeople in the relationship.		-The literature suggests that experience is a key antecedent of trust. Both elements determine how customers perceive interaction with the sales force. -Emotions play an important role in consumer behavior and helping to establish relational bonds.
Study 2 Relevance of sales force profiles from a managerial standpoint.		-Market intelligence and an understanding of customer needs are vital to business success. - Staff creativity and effort determine commercial success. -In short-term oriented cultures, sales force commitment to the company is not a significant factor. -Business success is defined by two factors: sales figures and (new) product positioning in the market.
Study 3 Impact of sales force characteristics on work performance from the perspective of the salesperson.		-There is a chain of effects that starts with the impact of sales force customer orientation and effort on work performance. -In short-term oriented cultures the sales force commitment does not drive work performance. -Sales force work performance drives sales results. -Cultivating market intelligence and sales force effort and commitment is essential.

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