

## ARTICLE

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## WHAT IS THE RIGHT TONE? APPLYING CIALDINI'S PERSUASION APPROACHES IN MUSICAL INSTRUMENT RETAIL STORES

*Qual é o tom certo? Aplicando as abordagens de persuasão de Cialdini  
em lojas de instrumentos musicais*

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### ABSTRACT

The musical instruments market has shown steady growth in recent years. However, few studies have investigated it in Brazil. The present research aims to broaden the understanding of the dynamics of this market in Sao Paulo, focusing on the salesforce in brick and mortar retail stores. The goal is to identify and describe the main selling approaches used by sellers to influence the purchase decisions of consumers. To achieve the goal, we opted for the use of structured interviews, which were conducted with twelve vendors in eight stores in a region specialized in this kind of commerce. The content of the interviews was analyzed qualitatively. To further understand the persuasion approaches, we applied a validated scale (SOCO) to our interviewees. The main findings of the study showed that most vendors use an approach related to tactics of attraction, followed by illusion tactics and, finally, by the approach related to pressure tactics. Such verification leads to the conclusion that sellers tend to adopt sales strategies focused on the consumer. The analysis of the quantitative data collected by means of the SOCO scale – Sales Orientation-Consumer Orientation – corroborates this conclusion, pointing out that the sellers have high consumer orientation.

**KEYWORDS:** Cialdini, sales approaches, musical instrument retail stores, consumer orientation.

### RESUMO

O mercado de instrumentos musicais cresceu constante nos últimos anos. No entanto, poucos estudos investigaram suas características no Brasil. A presente pesquisa tem como objetivo ampliar o entendimento da dinâmica dele em São Paulo, com foco na força de vendas em lojas físicas de varejo. O objetivo é identificar e descrever as principais abordagens de venda usadas pelos vendedores para influenciar a decisão de compra dos consumidores. Para atingir o objetivo, foram realizadas doze entrevistas estruturadas com vendedores em oito lojas em uma região especializada nesse tipo de comércio. O conteúdo das entrevistas foi analisado qualitativamente. Para entender melhor as abordagens de persuasão, incluiu-se o uso de uma escala validada (SOCO) nas entrevistas. As principais conclusões do estudo mostraram que a maioria dos vendedores utiliza uma abordagem relacionada às táticas de atração, seguida pelas táticas de ilusão e, finalmente, pela abordagem relacionada às táticas de pressão. Tal verificação leva à conclusão de que a força de vendas nesse mercado tende a adotar estratégias de vendas voltadas para o consumidor. A análise dos dados quantitativos coletados por meio da escala SOCO – Orientação de Vendas-Orientação ao Consumidor – corrobora essa conclusão, apontando que os vendedores têm alta orientação para o consumidor.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Cialdini, abordagens de venda, varejo de instrumentos musicais, orientação para mercado.

## 1 Introduction

In recent years, the market for musical instruments and accessories grew and strengthened itself in Brazil, accounting for over R\$ 1.05 billion in sales in 2014. It represents an increase of 8% in comparison to 2013 (ABEMÚSICA, 2015a). Almost half of the segment's business is due to Expomusic - International Music Fair, the largest business event in the music industry in Latin America. Further, according to the Brazilian Association of Music (ABEMÚSICA, 2015b), the sector has about 4,000 workers and approximately 2,000 points of sale.

Despite Brazil's economic crisis, the market for musical instruments and accessories was able to withstand the recession. Both industry and retail maintained sales above R\$ 1 billion in 2016 and 2017 (ABEMÚSICA, 2017). For 2018, the National Association of Manufacturers of Musical Instruments and Audio – ANAFIMA – expects 5% of growth in sales (Música & Mercado, 2018).

Besides the already mentioned ABEMÚSICA, founded in 1986, the musical instruments and accessories market in Brazil has been strengthened and professionalised in recent years with the creation of new class entities. Among such entities, we highlight the National Association of Manufacturers of Musical Instruments and Audio – ANAFIMA, founded in 2001, and the National Retail Council of Audio and Musical Instruments – CONAV, founded in 2014. The latter signals the increasing importance of retail within the segment of musical instruments and accessories.

As stated by Goudge, Good, Hyman and Aguirre (2017), salespeople serve as important links between retailers and consumers in brick-and-mortar stores. They remain key facilitators for enhancing in-store specialty retailer sales and customer satisfaction. However, sales staff cutbacks are quite common, as well as limited career opportunities in sales and low salaries. Considering the natural evolution of most industries, it is intuitive to imagine that part of the competitors within it, seeking to build competitive advantages, would strengthen their understanding of the market. The market orientation, which includes, among other things, the consumer orientation, has been linked to superior performance of companies in various academic and market researches in recent decades (Kara, Spillan, & DeShields Jr., 2005), highlighting the seminal studies of Ajay Kohli and Bernard Jaworski in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Further, it is important to highlight the research conducted by Kumar, Jones, Venkatesan and Leone (2011), according to which consumer orientation leads to higher performance in both the short and the long term.

Noteworthy are also the findings of Williams and Attaway (1996). The authors showed that companies find it difficult to create relationships with customers when sellers are not consumer oriented. This occurs even within organizational cultures highly geared to support the sales team. Thus, consumer orientation might be helpful in the creation of competitive advantages and long term relationships, especially in a turbulent environment, with fierce competition. Although there are specific situations in which market orientation does not lead to improvements in performance (Homburg, Müller, & Klarmann, 2011), consumer orientation helps building long-term relationships.

In the context of small retailers, the case of most stores of musical instruments and accessories in Brazil, Kara, Spillan and DeShields Jr. (2005) state that small retail store managers should emphasize the understanding and satisfaction of customers/consumers because this will increase market orientation which in turn will lead to improved performance. Companies should, however, be cautious and take into account the investment needed to balance the efforts and benefits (Homburg, Müller, & Klarmann, 2011).

While some research topics in the retail area, as consumer behavior and customer loyalty, have aroused greater interest of researchers and managers, and generated a large number of scientific studies, others remain without emphasis or importance (Brito, Vieira, & Espartel, 2011). Studies on marketing channels, distribution and salesforce management are still scarce in Brazil. Understanding sales approaches used by sellers to influence consumers' purchase decision contributes to an aspect not much explored.

In this context, this research aims to identify and describe the main sales approaches used by sellers in brick-and-mortar stores of that particular market in Sao Paulo. Our proposition seeks both a theoretical and managerial contribution. The first one is related to the application of a theoretical proposal to a specific market with few studies related to it, verifying the importance of relationships in specialty stores. In addition, the study aims to confirm whether the more frequent sales approach is consistent with consumer orientation (more aligned with the creation of long-term relationships). The managerial contribution, on the other hand, lies in the possibility for retail managers to design their sales policies based on an academic study, current and relevant to the area. With well-established vendor management and business practices, specialty retail street stores can create competitive advantages, standing out from the competition and retaining customers.

For this purpose, we used the classification of Iglesias and Damasceno (2013) of persuasion strategies used in retail. Although it is an exploratory and qualitative study, we applied the SOCO scale – Sales Orientation-Consumer Orientation – proposed by Saxe and Weitz (1982 cited by Bearden & Netemeyer, 1999) to our interviewees to evaluate their degree of customer orientation.

## 2 Theoretical Background

Many small businesses do not have a formal marketing area. In such companies, most marketing functions are operated by managers and the sales force (Kotler, Rackham, & Krishnaswamy, 2006). As the majority of the musical instruments and accessories stores in Brazil are small enterprises (SEBRAE, 2014), they can be characterized by this peculiarity of the marketing function being performed mainly by the sales area. Kotler, Rackham and Krishnaswamy (2006) emphasize the importance of the seller in this context, because it is the sales team who spends more time in contact with customers (current and prospects). Thus, it is an important source of information for a Marketing Information System, even if it is not formal because of the above conditions.

Knowing the influence that the retail seller has on the consumer's purchase decision, especially because of the wide variety of choices that consumers face, it is important to note that successful retailers have undergone adjustments to improve their offerings to the consumer (Levy & Weitz, 2000). Moreover, according to Parente (2000), as retail depends on customer satisfaction to establish lasting relationships with them, understanding consumers' needs and preferences has become critical to the store's survival.

Moreira (2007) emphasizes the responsibility of sellers, particularly of the kind he calls "sales-clerks", in terms of providing full services to any customer who enters the establishment, guiding them and giving assistance during the purchase decision. The author also points out that the great advantage of a specialty store is its ability to better understand the consumer's desire. This kind of store offers a reduced amount of products and usually targets a specific segment of the market. However, meeting customers' expectation is not sheer luck. The seller must have technical knowledge of the products, which requires some experience in the segment in which he or she works (Las Casas, 2001).

Since specialty retailers sell products within a particular category, it is important to retain salespeople with category-related skills, knowledge, and flexibility (Iqbal & Sharma,

2012). Lower turnover rates in this kind of store may lead to short- and long-term benefits to customers and retailers. According to Goudge, Good, Hyman and Aguirre (2017), such benefits include the creation of value, by being knowledgeable, honest, friendly, and able to evidence product significance. Further, the authors argue that salesperson orientation may influence sales: customers who believe a salesperson is sales oriented (only, interested in closing) are more likely to make a no-buy decision. The shopping experience is increasingly critical to retail performance and the sales team plays a central role to it. "Today's consumers want to feel more in control and they want to be seen and valued more than their money" (Medrano, Olarte-Pascual, Pelegrín-Borondo, & Sierra-Murillo, 2016, p. 2).

## **2.1 Sales approaches**

Within the area of consumer behavior, the issue of social influence is relevant for our research. With regard to this concept, Cialdini (2001) lists six basic principles: reciprocity, consistency, social proof, scarcity, sympathy and authority. From them, Iglesias and Damasceno (2013) developed a survey in order to understand how consumers perceive the persuasive strategies used by sellers in retail stores in the Brazilian context. As a result, the authors grouped sales approaches into three groups: pressure, attraction and illusion.

The pressure approach is related to the consumer's sense of urgency in relation to the purchase. It includes the principles of scarcity and reciprocity. The attraction approach is related to the pleasant demeanor of the seller, pointing more to the principles of sympathy and authority. Finally, the illusion approach uses the principle of sympathy in an exaggerated way, and also encompass the principle of social proof (Iglesias & Damasceno, 2013).

When dealing with informed buyers, which is the case of most of the musical instruments and accessories consumers, adapting the sales approach is critical to salespeople to influence consumers' buying decisions (Hochstein, Bolander, Goldsmith, & Plouffe, 2018). Salespeople seem to recognize that this kind of consumer is becoming more complex and so they adapt their sales approach using a combination of tactics to persuade these kind of buyers (McFarland, Challagalla, & Shervani, 2006). To better meet this consumer profile, it is important that the sales team is consumer oriented, that is, the company's orientation precedes the approach to be prioritized. Sales-oriented companies with more aggressive business policies tend to focus less on the creation of vendor empathy and adaptive behavior. This flexibility of the salespeople is called personalization by some scholars – the social content of interaction between service employees and their customers. Many of today's specialty retailers have become successful by combining some degree of personalization with a merchandise assortment geared toward a particular market segment (Medrano, Olarte-Pascual, Pelegrín-Borondo, & Sierra-Murillo, 2016).

## **2.2 The SOCO scale**

Saxe and Weitz (1982 cited by Bearden & Netemeyer, 1999) developed a scale of Sales-Orientation–Consumer-Orientation, the SOCO scale, to measure the degree of commitment of sellers during customer-oriented sales. In their study, the authors define it as the degree to which the seller exercises the concept of selling, trying to help their customer make purchase decisions that effectively meet their needs. A nomological validity test indicates that consumer-oriented sales are related to the ability of sellers to help their customers and to the quality of the relationship between seller and customer. Highly consumer-oriented vendors avoid actions resulting in dissatisfaction (cognitive dissonance) of those customers, while highly sales-oriented vendors are less sensitive to these considerations. Specifically, the SOCO scale measures six components: 1) the intent to help customers make good buying decisions; 2) help customers assess their needs; 3) offer products that meet customers' needs; 4) describe the products correctly; 5) to avoid deceptive or manipulative tactics; and 6) to avoid the use of high pressure.

Originally, the SOCO scale was implemented in two separate samples of vendors by Saxe and Weitz (1982). The results were consistent for both samples. The results of the internal consistency test ( $\alpha = 0.86$  and  $0.83$ ) indicated that the scale had high level of consistency/reliability. Additionally, Saxe and Weitz made a new test and found that after six weeks the correlation was  $0.67$ , showing that the scale had a good level of stability. Also, the scale was examined by a group of experts to prove its content validity. The overall average setting was  $79\%$  (Rozell, Pettijohn, & Parker, 2004).

In 2001, Thomas, Soutar, and Ryan suggested a shorter version of the SOCO scale to reduce response fatigue and acquiescence bias in larger studies. However, as our interviews were not planned to be so long, we decided to use the original form as discussed in the next section.

### 3 Method

Since the goal of this study is to identify and describe sales approaches used by sellers of musical instruments and accessories retail stores, it can be classified as an exploratory and descriptive research. Although it is a fundamentally qualitative study, two auxiliary forms with a quantitative approach were also used. The quantitative data was incorporated into the interviews to improve our understanding of the behavior of sellers and of the sales tactics used by them. The data collection was developed through structured interviews with the use of two auxiliary forms.

This study does not intend to generalize its findings. It is an initial exploration of the attitude of the sellers in that market and our contribution relies on offering insights about a market that is still underexplored in academia.

We performed 12 interviews in eight different shops of distinct sizes without a default profile of the establishments or of the sellers. The respondents were selected by convenience in the Teodoro Sampaio Street area, in the city of Sao Paulo – a region well known by musicians and where many specialty stores are located. The Teodoro Sampaio area is known as a place with ample supply of skilled trades in the music segment. Although a bit messy, in the street there are several shops, one beside the other, selling musical instruments and accessories (“Ponto comercial”, 2013; “Conheça a variedade”, 2015).

The interviews were recorded and later transcribed for analysis. The number of respondents was determined from the saturation of the responses. All interviews started with introductory questions – focused on breaking the ice, including topics such as: daily routines, the vendor's career, trainings he or she took part in, and their relationship with the rest of the staff. Next, specific questions about sales approaches were included, following a structured interview script developed by the researchers. After this first part, all respondents were asked to fill out two forms, described below. We examined the transcriptions using flexible discourse analysis techniques, creating codes and trying to identify patterns in the responses.

#### 3.1 Auxiliary forms

The first auxiliary form was based on the questionnaire of Iglesias and Damasceno (2013). All items that are related to the retail of musical instruments were selected and adjusted in terms of language for a better understanding by the respondents. An example of this adaptation is the exchange of the original questionnaire item, “I say that professionals or experts recommend the product”, by “I say that musicians or other experts recommend the product”.



Other adjustments also occurred to balance the constructs, facilitating the comparison between the response blocks (approach strategy). Since the goal of this research is to provide highlights on the sales approaches as a whole and not the specific strategies within each group, we decided to use four questions per group. Hence, items of the original questionnaire as: “Try to act as a friend” and “Start a conversation about the customer’s life and the things he/she loves” were merged into: “Try to act as friend of the customer, chatting about his/her life and the things that he/she likes?”.

The strategies were grouped into three approaches (constructs) a. Approximation, b. Pressure and c. Illusion. For each group we prepared four questions, totaling 12 questions (with Likert summative scales), in order to understand how respondents use the sales approaches in their daily lives. The score of each question within the three groups was added to compare the groups.

The second auxiliary form was drawn from a validated scale called SOCO – Sales Orientation-Consumer Orientation – proposed by Saxe and Weitz (as cited in Bearden & Netemeyer, 1999). This scale measures the customer orientation of the sellers. The SOCO scale is a questionnaire with 24 statements, using a 9 point Likert scale each.

#### 4 Discussion

The first issue that we investigated was how long each respondent had been working as a salesperson in musical instruments and accessories retail stores. There was a wide variation of responses. The minimum experience was of six months, while the maximum was of 18 years. The average experience was of 87 months, approximately 7 years. Additionally to the respondents maturity in the music business, half of them claimed having worked as a seller in other segments. From this information, it was not possible to observe a pattern.

Following with the preliminary analysis, we observed that all respondents asserted that they played a musical instrument. String instruments – acoustic guitar, guitar and bass – were the most frequent responses. The fact that all respondents play at least one musical instrument supports two of the characteristics of sellers of specialty stores: technical knowledge about the products offered and the experience in the segment in which they work (Las Casas, 2001).

About having taken part in some training during the previous year, five of the 12 respondents answered positively. However, from the five, only two were sales training, illustrating the low interest of both the stores and the sellers in the development of sales skills. This is relevant because as stated by Pettijohn, Pettijohn and Taylor (2002), research indicates that more qualified sellers tend to be more consumer-oriented, which in turn, tends to improve sales performance. In addition, Weitz, Suja and Suja (1986) claim that the knowledge of the sellers (of customers and of selling techniques) is critical for the sales team to effectively deal with the dynamic and complex environment.

When asked about the sales strategy they adopt on a daily basis, most salespeople, eight of the 12 respondents, replied “the customer comes first”. Two other vendors said that they use other strategies, but both customer-centric: “let customers at ease” and “according to customer desires”. The other two sellers replied that they do not apply any strategy. Thus, it seems that most sellers are concerned about their customers. Even the vendors who work for stores that apply no specific sales strategy, reported that they adopt customer-centric sales strategies. It might be the case to verify their behavior using mystery consumers or other qualitative methods but it indicates a pattern of sales.

Respondents were also asked about a casual change in their sales strategy when they identify whether the customer is an amateur or a professional musician. Aside from the

vendor who works as a salesman for the shortest time, all other respondents asserted that they change their strategy. According to most of the answers, when professional musicians go to the store, they already know what they want (leaving little room for the seller to influence his or her purchase decision). On the other hand, amateur musicians are more susceptible to the influence of sellers.

Irrespective to both kinds of buyers, professional and amateur musicians, most vendors commented that customers have greater access to information, especially through the Internet. It is quite usual to see customers using their smartphones during the visit to the store, comparing prices and product attributes. Because of this, many consumers come to the store with a lot of information about the product they intend to buy. Even if the customer information is not correct, sellers say it is more difficult to convince them otherwise. Thus, better prepared (educated and trained) sales forces should be present in musical instruments and accessories retail stores in Sao Paulo, as in any specialty store.

About the factors that determine consumer's purchase decision, the responses varied greatly, but price was an aspect often cited. Greater access to information about the products also includes information on the price of products. Customers usually go to the store with a clear idea of a product's price. However, most respondents believe that the quality of the selling service might be a competitive advantage, a differential that can diminish the relevance of the price. This finding about the importance of the selling service is also present in the study by Medeiros and Cruz (2006), which concluded that skilled attendance positively influences consumer purchase decision.

#### 4.1 Sales approaches

The following three tables (Table 1, 2 and 3) present the results obtained with the auxiliary forms. Each table shows the score of all twelve respondents, their individual sum, the total of each statement and the total sum of the sales approach.

According to Table 1, with 170 points from 240 possible, the approximation approach seems to be the most used by the sales force of musical instruments and accessories. This sales approach includes: reaching customers with a smile, demonstrating technical knowledge about the product, saying that musicians or experts recommend the product and offering a gift or some promotional material. This result reinforces the statement of salespeople who declare to adopt the strategy of "the customer comes first". As stated by Iglesias and Damasceno (2013), the approximation approach is related to a pleasant demeanor of the seller. Since this approach stands out from the others, it seems to be the right tone. It corroborates with the idea that empathy and the creation of transparent and long-term relationships can increase customer retention and generate competitive advantage in specialty stores.

STATEMENT	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	TOTAL
1. I approach customer with a smile	3	3	3	5	4	5	5	4	5	4	5	4	50
2. I seek to demonstrate technical knowledge about the product	4	5	5	5	4	5	3	3	5	5	4	4	52
3. I say that musicians or other experts recommend the product	3	5	1	5	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	39
4. I offer gifts or other promotional material	2	2	1	3	3	2	1	3	2	4	3	3	29
TOTAL	12	15	10	18	15	15	12	13	15	16	15	14	170

**Table 1** – Attraction tactics approach

In second place, as depicted by Table 2, with 160 points out of 240, is the illusion approach. The aspects studied were: a. Agrees or shows interest in everything the customer says, b. Talks to other customers who bought and enjoyed a particular product, c. Tries to look customer friendly, and d. Finds someone else to confirm an opinion that was given to a customer. Again, the customer represents an important role. According to the definition by Iglesias and Damasceno (2013), the illusion approach is based on the principle of sympathy, in an exaggerated way. It also encompasses the principle of social proof.

STATEMENT	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	TOTAL
1. I agree or show interest in everything the customer says	3	5	3	5	4	5	3	3	3	5	4	4	47
2. I talk about other customers who bought and enjoyed a particular product	4	3	4	5	4	3	4	4	4	5	4	3	47
3. I try to look like a friend, pulling subjects about the customer's life and things that he/she likes	2	2	4	1	3	4	4	3	3	1	2	3	32
4. I look for someone else to confirm an opinion I gave	4	3	1	3	2	2	4	3	4	3	3	2	34
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>160</b>

**Table 2** – Illusion tactics approach

Pressure approaches received the lowest score, summing 141 points out of 240, as shown in Table 3. This approach encloses statements such as: telling the customer that a product is on sale or with low price for a limited time; letting the customer believe that the salesperson can get a special discount only for him/her; informing that a particular product it is the best option for the customer; and disclosing that there are only few units of the product left. For Iglesias and Damasceno (2013), the pressure approach is related to the consumer's sense of urgency in relation to the purchase. The fact that this group of sales approach obtained the lowest score among all reveals that vendors tend to be more customer-oriented. This result confirms the conclusion of the first part of the interviews, as well as the outcomes of the SOCO scale – the respondents presented a strong customer-orientation.

STATEMENT	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	TOTAL
1. I tell the customer that the product is on sale or with low price for a limited time	3	2	1	3	3	5	1	4	3	5	3	3	36
2. I tell the customer that I can get a discount only for him	3	2	1	1	3	3	3	2	2	1	2	4	27
3. I tell the customer that the product is the best choice in my opinion	3	5	4	5	3	3	3	3	4	5	3	3	44
4. I tell the customer that there are only few units of the product left	2	2	3	1	3	3	1	4	4	5	3	3	34
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>141</b>

**Table 3** – Pressure tactics approach

It is also possible to analyze the total score of each seller (summing up the total of each table). The average scores of sellers was 39.25 points out of 60 possible points. The lowest score of 31 points, was the seller 'C' who declared to "let the customer feel free to



break the sales mood". His score reveals that this statement tends to be true. Fewer sales tactics and strategies make the customer more comfortable and turns the sales process more informal. At the other end, with 46 points, is seller 'J', who also works as the store sales manager. Even claiming not to have participated in any training during his nine years of experience in sales, his job as a manager is probably leading him to think more about sales approaches and strategies. As he is also responsible for the store's sales force, sales approaches, tactics and strategies are common issues in his daily life.

#### **4.2 Consumer orientation**

As mentioned before, to analyze the consumer orientation of the interviewees, we applied the SOCO scale. All 12 sellers indicated, from one to nine – one for never, and nine for always – their attitude towards the 24 statements of the questionnaire (12 positive claims in relation to consumer orientation and 12 negative). To perform the analysis, the values were summed, and the total scores of the negative statements regarding consumer orientation were inverted. That is, answers 1 scored as 9, 2 as 8, and so on. Table 4 shows the result of this analysis. Seller 'C' preferred not to give his opinion regarding the statement "I offer the product of mine that is best suited to the customer's problem".

This study aims at providing insights on this particular market and explore the most common sales tactics/approaches. We used descriptive statistics only as support; missing scores do not affect the evaluation. Therefore, we decided not to delete the information on seller 'C' from this study.

The average sum of the responses was 183.33 points out of 216 possible. This high score indicates that the respondents are highly consumer-oriented in their sales activities. Once again, this finding reinforces the general consumer orientation of sales force within the musical instrument market.

The four sellers with scores above 200 are more experienced in terms of how long they work as musical instruments and accessories vendors. Two of them had been working for 10 years, one of them for nine years and the last, for three years. However, the latter, with less experience, had worked for two years as a salesman in another business. On the other hand, the three vendors with scores below 160, have less experience – eight months, a year and a year and a half. From these three, only the seller with eight months of experience had worked before as a salesman in another business (for six months). This might be an evidence of correlation between sales experience and customer-orientation in Sao Paulo.

STATEMENT	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	TOTAL
1. I try to help customers achieve their goals.	7	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	8	9	7	7	101
2. I try to achieve my goals by satisfying customers.	5	9	1	9	9	9	9	8	5	9	6	8	87
3. A good salesperson has to have the customer's best interest in mind.	7	7	9	9	7	9	9	9	9	9	9	6	99
4. I try to get customers to discuss their needs with me.	7	9	9	9	8	7	5	9	9	9	7	8	96
5. I try to influence a customer by information rather than by pressure.	5	6	9	9	9	9	9	8	9	9	9	8	99
6. I offer the product of mine that is best suited to the customer's problem.	7	7	*	9	7	9	9	8	7	9	9	7	88
7. I try to find out what kind of product would be most helpful to a customer.	7	9	9	9	7	9	9	9	9	9	9	7	102
8. I answer a customer's question about products as correctly as I can.	7	9	9	9	9	9	9	7	9	9	9	6	101
9. I try to bring a customer with a problem together with a product that helps him solve that problem.	8	9	9	9	7	9	9	8	9	9	7	7	100
10. I am willing to disagree with a customer in order to help him make a better decision.	8	6	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	5	9	6	97
11. I try to give customers an accurate expectation of what the product will do for them.	4	5	9	9	9	9	9	8	8	8	9	8	95
12. I try to figure out what a customer's needs are.	7	9	7	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	8	7	101
13. I try to sell a customer all I can convince him to buy, even if I think it is more than a wise customer would buy.	3	4	9	1	4	9	5	5	2	9	9	4	64
14. I try to sell as much as I can rather than to satisfy a customer.	6	4	9	9	7	9	3	7	2	9	9	6	80
15. I keep alert for weaknesses in a customer's personality so I can use them to put pressure on him to buy.	4	5	9	9	2	9	5	8	1	9	9	6	76
16. If I am not sure a product is right for a customer, I will still apply pressure to get him to buy.	4	9	9	9	9	9	9	7	7	9	9	6	96
17. I decide what products to offer on the basis of what I can convince customers to buy, not on the basis of what will satisfy them in the long run.	7	7	9	9	9	9	9	6	2	9	7	5	88
18. I paint too rosy a picture of my products, to make them sound as good as possible.	4	5	9	9	9	9	5	8	1	3	9	5	76
19. I spend more time trying to persuade a customer to buy than I do trying to discover his needs.	6	9	9	9	9	5	9	7	6	9	9	5	92
20. It is necessary to stretch the truth in describing a product to a customer.	9	9	9	9	6	9	9	6	5	9	9	7	96
21. I pretend to agree with customers to please them.	6	6	9	9	5	9	9	4	1	9	9	5	81
22. I imply to a customer that something is beyond my control when it is not.	4	9	9	9	9	9	5	5	7	9	9	7	91
23. I begin the sales talk for a product before exploring a customer's needs with him.	4	9	9	9	9	9	9	6	8	9	9	8	98
24. I treat a customer as a rival.	9	7	9	9	9	9	9	7	2	9	9	8	96
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>197</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>2200</b>

Table 4 – Result of the SOCO scale

\* Seller 'C' did not answer.

As the approach of this research is qualitative, further quantitative analysis was not carried out and the patterns observed cannot be taken for granted nor generalized.

The scores of each statement were also added, as shown in Table 4 to observe those with higher counts. Five statements summed over a 100 points: i. I try to help customers achieve their goals; ii. I try to find out what kind of product would be most helpful to a customer; iii. I answer a customer's question about products as correctly as I can; iv. I try to bring a customer with a problem together with a product that helps him solve that problem; and v. I try to figure out what a customer's needs are.

It is important to note that three of the five statements are related to the product. This highlights one characteristic of the seller cited by Las Casas (2001): the importance of having technical knowledge about the products in specialty stores.

The other two statements are linked to wishes and needs of the customer, which reinforces the consumer-oriented position of the sellers and the importance of the sales professional to understand what the customer thinks, and their needs and desires (Moreira, 2007).

The analysis of the most common sales approaches suggests that the approximation technique is the right tone. In addition, evidence suggests that market orientation (consumer orientation) is the most common practice in instrument and accessory retail stores. This is consistent with the theory of commercial practices in specialty stores, where adaptive behavior, thorough consumer understanding, and the creation of long relationships are central. It should also be noted that the qualitative approach contributed to minimizing socially adequate responses, reducing interview bias and generating insight into the effective posture of sales teams.

## 5 Conclusion

It was possible to identify the main sales approaches used by sellers in brick-and-mortar retail stores of musical instruments and accessories to influence the purchasing decisions of consumers in the city of Sao Paulo. We also classified them according to the social influence principles proposed by Cialdini (2001) and organized the approaches in agreement with the three groups – approximation, illusion and pressure – by Iglesias and Damasceno (2013).

The tactics that are part of the approximation approach group were the most relevant ones. According to Iglesias and Damasceno (2013), this approach is related to the pleasant demeanor of the seller, pointing to the principles of sympathy and authority by Cialdini (2001). The illusion sales approach, which includes the principle of sympathy, but in an exaggerated manner (Iglesias & Damasceno, 2013), ranked second. The tactics that are part of the pressure approach obtained the lowest scores. Iglesias and Damasceno (2013) state that the principles of scarcity and reciprocity proposed by Cialdini (2001) are the characteristic of this approach.

Finally, it was also possible to analyze the sales force customer orientation and compare the results with the sales approaches. High consumer orientation was found among the respondents; the analysis of the introductory questions led to this finding and the SOCO scale reinforced this initial discovery. With an average of 183.33 points out of 216 possible, sellers showed that they effectively adopt strategies focused on the customer. This is in line with the academic literature, in the sense that specialty stores should avoid sales orientation and focus on building empathy and long-term relationships.

And so, the present study contributes to the field of marketing and sales management, showing that there is evidence that specialty stores working with musical instruments prioritize approximation approaches and consumer orientation. However, there are few sales training initiatives among the analyzed stores. In managerial terms, the paper

stresses that companies should focus more on sales training. As commented by Goudge, Good, Hyman and Aguirre (2017), such training programs should focus on adaptive behavior and methods for desensitizing consumers to sales-oriented behaviors.

### **5.1 Limitations and future research**

The present study provided a significant evidence on the behavior of salespeople working in musical instruments and accessories brick-and-mortar stores. The findings offer several future research possibilities.

Further research on this subject can use other qualitative methods such as observation, mystery consumer and even shadowing in order to verify the statement of the interviewees. The investigation can also include phone calls and e-mails to check other forms of contact.

The fact that all respondents play an instrument and the relationship of this fact with the characteristics of sellers of specialty stores (high technical knowledge about the products offered), makes room for a quantitative research about the musical instruments and accessories market. This aspect might also be relevant in other markets where specialty stores play an important role. In addition, investigating sellers' adaptive behavior might offer further insights and help managers better guide their sales team. In terms of quantitative investigation, it is also worth deepening the analysis on the possible correlation between sales experience and customer orientation, evaluating the orientation of who reported predominance by one type of approach.

The low participation in sales training is another finding that deserves further study. It is possible to investigate whether musical instrument store managers, e.g.: i. understand the importance of sales training; ii. know the difference between sales-orientation and customer-orientation; iii. are aware that customer-orientation can improve firm performance; and iv. are aware that the sales force is not being properly trained. This becomes even more important due to the fact that most sellers reported that consumers are more informed and more critical nowadays. This finding reinforces that "store managers/owners should encourage adaptive behaviors and customer information acquisition [...] by their salespeople" (Goudge, Good, Hyman & Aguirre, 2017, p. 1268).

The change in approach alleged by the respondents when sellers meet a customer who is a professional musician and another who is an amateur musician can also be used to compare what techniques, tactics or selling strategies work best for each type of consumer. Research in this direction could point out best practices and describe how to maximize sales results according to the customer's profile. To relate salespeople's personality traits (Brown, Mowen, Donovan, & Licata, 2002) and the type of consumer they are dealing with would also contribute managerially and theoretically.

About the tactics and sales approaches, a quantitative research would confirm and quantify whether the sellers of musical instruments and accessories actually prefer, as pointed out in this study, the attraction approaches, followed by the illusion and the pressure ones. Further, it is possible to measure the impact of each kind of approach on the consumer, by means of a survey or experiments with customers of musical instruments and accessories stores. To explore the differences between professional and amateur musicians would make this research proposal even more relevant.

Lastly, a quantitative survey, with a representative sample randomly chosen, could be carried out to enhance the discovery of this research on the consumer-orientation of sellers from musical instruments and accessories stores in the city of Sao Paulo. Studying the

opinion and the preferences of consumers in relation to this type of approach might also represent a significant research topic.

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