

NEGOTIATION AND INFLUENCE COMMUNICATIONS: A CRITICAL REVIEW BASED UPON A CONTINGENCY APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the paper is to examine the generalizability of previous research concerning negotiation and influence communications behaviors to sales interactions in the retail setting. In order to accomplish this goal, the paper (1) discusses the unique contingency factors of the retail setting in order to conceptualize the unique structures of the retail environment, (2) examines the ways in which these contingency factors relate to the retail sales situation using sociological theories of structure and culture, and (3) provides a brief review of the negotiation and bargaining literature and an extensive review of the interpersonal communication influence/persuasion literature in marketing to examine the shortcomings of prior literature. Combined, these objectives help to build a simple conceptual model that provides an initial direction for exploring the complex personal selling communication issues in the retailing setting.

There are three general characteristics in which the retail sales situation is unique from other sales situations: the characteristics of the physical environment including retail atmospherics and retail geography; the characteristics of the consumer's buying task including shopping motives and product typology/usage; and the characteristics of the salesperson-customer interaction including relative power and extent of expected prior/future relationships. Theoretically, individuals in sales interactions are enacting roles, which presumes that persons are members of social positions and hold expectations for their own behaviors and those of others. These roles are embedded in social structures that constrain individuals' actions according to the mutually understood social system yet provide individual variation in choices of communication behaviors depending upon past patterns, evolving present circumstances, and future projections of the interaction. Therefore, the unique characteristics of the retail sales situation create social systems that guide and direct communication behaviors and are important to understand when examining the communication behaviors in retail sales situations. As such, prior research is only generalizable to retail sales interactions if the model is robust enough to account for the unique situational factors.

Based upon a review of the negotiation and influence communication research in the marketing literature, prior research may not be generalizable to the retail setting. First, a comparison of the results from each literature stream suggest that the contextual factors are important to understanding differences in influence communication behaviors, yet the vast majority of the methodologies have decontextualized the interaction from a real-world setting. This suggests that the constraints of the structural environment for each type of sales interaction are variable, yet prior research does not consistently account for these variations when examining influence communication behaviors. Second, the vast majority of the samples of prior research have decontextualized communication behaviors from the dyadic interactions, yet in a real-life situation one party never engages in sales communications alone. As suggested by the theory of human agency, both parties in the communication have the ability to make individual and isolated choices of communication behaviors, but these will vary as a function of past patterns, evolving present circumstances, and future projections of the dyadic interaction. Third, previous research has primarily examined influence communications using theories of social power. However, based upon the unique characteristics of the salesperson-customer relationship in the retail setting, little social power may exist and therefore suggests other factors are influencing the communication behaviors. Fourth, previous research has primarily examined the effects of individual, isolated behaviors and tactics as well as individually based psychological phenomena yet the unique characteristics of the physical environment suggest that these behaviors are constructed and understood in conjunction with perceptions of the structural environment.

In congruence with the conceptual framework and literature review, a model is created in which the communication behaviors of the sales interaction mediate the relationship between the situational characteristics (structural and human agency factors) and the outcomes of the communication.