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## Article

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## INNOVATION IN RETAIL: IMPACT ON CREATING A POSITIVE EXPERIENCE WHEN BUYING FASHION PRODUCTS

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### Abstract

Innovation in fashion retail is critical in order to ensure competitive advantage in a constantly evolving market, in terms of consumer expectations. The modern customer is mobile, permanently connected to the Internet, well-informed about international trends, mindful of the quality of products, but more price sensitive and less loyal to a brand. The shopping experience provided by retailers is a crucial factor in purchase decision, encompassing all these variables in a complex concept of exogenous variable. As retailers' efforts to provide excellence in shopping experience are focused on operating costs and thus on the profit margins, it is important to consider and identify which are the most relevant variables that form the perception of excellence for Romanian customers, so that retailers can innovate according to their expectations.

The purpose of this article was to highlight the role of innovation in creating a positive experience for consumers buying clothes, shoes and accessories. The approach was based on the conduct of exploratory research. The research – represented by five original objectives and as many different working scenarios – resulted in the identification of thematic outlined exploratory opinions, exploiting a first investigation of its kind in Romania, less Pearson coefficients used in the analysis of ordinal variables or hierarchical, but quickly assessed using SPSS, version 21. As a pioneering research emphasis was on identifying potential associations and quantified correlations and less on rigorous delimitation of exogenous or endogenous quality in general, leaving room for future studies, sharper and with a higher degree of representation. Thus, we could highlight some useful aspects of the investigated retailers, by the dominant character of interested customers' opinions according to their volunteer responses. Consumers are accustomed to using the Internet to obtain information; they rarely express opinions on social sites about the purchased goods, and are willing to receive information about special offers of the stores on personal mobile devices since the entry into the stores. Customers would also

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welcome separate exposure areas in selling space, where they can find products in promotional campaigns. Therewith, we could outline a primary profile of the ideal salesperson on fashion products, less rigorous but relatively consistent.

**Keywords:** retail, shopping experience, fashion products, salesperson, brand, innovation in retail.

**JEL Classification:** L81, O33.

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### **Introduction**

Retail fashion is in constant transformation, both as a result of the necessary adaptation to an increasingly demanding market in terms of price, quality and diversity of supply, but also due to increased competition from Asia. Sorescu, Frambach, Singh, Rangaswamy and Bridges (2011, p. S3) believe that “innovations in [retail] business models are increasingly critical for building sustainable advantage in a marketplace.”

Modern buyer has easy access to a variety of products, but finding the most suitable product means analyzing and interpreting a much larger quantity of information (Suri, Zhen Caib, Monroe and Thakord, 2012). In the fashion field, the buyer is more demanding when it comes to quality of materials and workmanship; he/she is eager to follow international fashion trends, but in a more economical manner, due to the effects of the financial crisis still present. It is a well-informed and mobile customer who uses multiple channels to search for information worldwide and expects to find the same level of products in Romania. Moreover, the customer pays attention to the shopping experience, starting from the store layout and location, its atmosphere, salespersons competencies and attitudes, customer service<sup>1</sup>, the use of innovative solutions for purchase online or offline which help saving time. Also, the customer is less loyal to a certain brand; the defining elements that determine the choice of a brand at a time being are the quality and design of the product, its price, the shopping experience and the promotional strategy (Allender and Richards, 2012). For all these reasons, the operating costs of retail businesses tend to rise putting additional pressure on profit rates.

Under these conditions, the introduction of innovation in retail is the main lever to increase competitiveness (Levy and Weitz, 2012; Berman and Evans, 2012). The research aims to explore how innovation is reflected in new layouts of retail stores, new types of commercial technologies, new sales methods or new market strategies, better focused on the expectations of the modern customer.

This article aims to answer a number of issues: what is the profile of Romanian fashion consumer, how can companies develop strategies in the field of excellence in shopping experience, so that to increase the retention rate of customers and improve their brand loyalty.

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<sup>1</sup> Typical Customer service in fashion retail may include: credit, delivery, alterations, packaging gifts, complaints and return handling, gift cards, special sales for loyal customers, online orders, parking, personal shoppers, information and advices.

## **1. Scientific literature review**

Approach to innovation in our research starts from the definition given by Porter (1990, p.780): innovation as “a new way of doing things (termed invention by some authors) that is commercialized”.

There are two courses of action that traders are having in mind when considering the introduction of innovation in their business model: improving the shopping experience and marketing of new products and services.

Excellence in shopping experience or Customer Excellence is represented by all the actions that a retailer is implementing in order to make the shopping experience more valuable for the customers. Vehoeft et al. (2012, cited in Otnes, Ilhan and Kulkarni, 2012, p. 368) notes that customer experience “includes all cognitive, affective, emotional, social and physical responses to the retailer.” These actions are designed to increase the customers’ own perception about the value of the product or service purchased. It is important to note that actions under the customer service policy take place in several physical locations. These actions depend not only on the interaction with salespersons, but also on the activity of the whole company as well as that of some of its suppliers. The customer communicates with the retailer through various channels chosen by the first one, based on emergency, time of the day when the request takes place or the type of information needed (Fiorletta, 2014).

Many studies showed that surprising the customers with products and services they did not expect has positive results in increasing their satisfaction, as a result of exceeding their initially neutral or even negative expectations when entering the store (Hutter and Hoffman, 2014; Gyung and Mattila, 2010; Vanhamme, 2000). Dolbec and Chebat believe that improving interactions between the customers and the brand image and increasing the store image in perception of customers are obtained by a combination of “well-designed shopping experience”, highly trained personnel by specialized retail courses, and immersion of customers in the purchase show (Dolbec and Chebat 2013; Borghini, Diamond, Kozinets, McGrath, Muniz and Sherry, 2009).

In this respect, the role of social media is becoming ever more important - for consumers to be informed and to interact with the retailer, and for the latter to find out the opinions of customers and bring to market products and personalized services closer to their expectations. “The extensive involvement of today’s consumers with social media is also something that can be leveraged to update a retailer’s business model and increase its efficiency. For instance, many retailers show parts of their assortment on Facebook in an attempt to gauge customer interest. Gathering customer reactions to the retailer’s communications on social networking sites can be institutionalized and integrated more systematically with merchandising decisions” (Sorescu, Frambach, Singh, Rangaswamy and Bridges, 2011, p. S14).

From the point of view of the consumer, the decision to leave the store without purchasing any product is associated with dissatisfaction caused by the impossibility of finding “what he/she needs.” Conversely, increased satisfaction can be achieved through a more varied width and depth of assortment in order to meet as many varied individual preferences and to allow the consumer with the privilege of flexibility in his/her choice (Spasova and Issen, 2013; Kahn and Lehmann, 1991; Lancaster, 1990). Studies show that brand recognition and loyalty towards it are largely determined by the pricing strategy chosen by the retailer,

which is, ultimately, a way of segmenting customers (Allender and Richards, 2012; Krystallis and Chrysochou, 2014).

Interaction in the physical space of the store between the customer and the retailer occurs both directly (with salespersons, by sensory stimulation) and indirectly through the commercial equipment used (showcases, mannequins, signage), or by the architecture of the layout. As shown, some of these interactions are taking place when the customer is entering the store, while others have been worked out before the customer reaches the store (such as the concept of the store, arranging the selling space, selecting the level of customer service).

The effects of sensory stimulation in influencing the purchase decision have been widely studied in psychology and marketing (Peck and Childers, 2008, cited in Herrmann, Zidansek, Sprott and Spangenberg, 2013), the majority of investigations (Herrmann, Zidansek, Sprott and Spangenberg, 2013; Milliman, 1982) showing beneficial effects of music on the sales increase due to the positive influence on the well-being of customers in the store. Regarding the olfactory stimuli, there is a direct influence of smell on the attitudes and perceptions of customers, but one needs to be cautious when speaking about the existence of a direct effect on the purchase decision (Herrmann, Zidansek, Sprott and Spangenberg, 2013; Rayburn and Voss, 2013). However, some studies (Krishna, Lwin and Morrin, 2010; Spangenberg, Crowley and Henderson, 1996) showed that there is a direct correlation with sales, but the response to olfactory stimuli of each individual is different, which explains why the same smell can trigger buying decision for some people, while on others it has no effect (Herrmann, Zidansek, Sprott and Spangenberg, 2013).

The usage of new information technology, increasingly popular in customer interaction via different applications, enables a personalized connection with various customer segments, by the most appropriate channels. Thus the information supplied by the retailer can be as close as possible to the customer's interests and needs, in the moment he/she need, and in a format that he/she is familiar to. Multichannel distribution gives the retailer more opportunities to target customers who either have not been in contact with him yet (did not know about its existence) or have had buying behaviors that were not met by traditional purchasing channels, or react differently to the marketing mix specific to each channel (Rose, Clark, Samouel and Hair, 2012; Breugelmans and Campo, 2011).

Another area of interest for the retailer is that of telephone or e-mail interaction with customers (release orders by phone, tracking orders, returns, complaints or requests for information). In some cases, this work is outsourced to a call center and/or a logistics company. From the perspective of excellence in customer service, it is essential that the retailer controls these activities and, together with the providers, define rules, procedures and key performance indicators that contribute to the success of these activities (Dumitru and Căescu, 2013; Felea and Albăstroiu, 2013).

Also, in the sphere of excellence in customer service, we include the interaction - mediated by online applications - of customers with the company's website or its virtual store. In this case, the web page design or the e-commerce software, how user friendly these pages are with a customer more or less familiar with the new IT technologies, the server capacity to take visitors or orders are essential elements of excellence in customer service. A recent study in the United States (Fiorletta, 2014) showed that 40% of the requests for information are addressed to the call-centers, 30% come through e-mail, 20% through online chat and

10% through social media. Monitoring and evaluation of customer satisfaction online by means of direct interaction (telephone, direct meetings at various events in the store) are essential to maintain his/her loyalty to the brand. (Rose, Clark, Samouel and Hair, 2012). In this respect, the trust of the customer towards the retailer plays a crucial role in online purchase decision. If the trust does not exist, the customer will only use the online as an information tool (Suryandari and Paswan, 2014).

The key to success lies in how a retailer translates the customer expectations into strategies to improve the shopping experience (Levy and Weitz, 2012; Berman and Evans, 2012). Obviously, innovation is the best way to achieve this goal. Retail sales must be reinvented by bringing new technologies in physical and virtual relationship with the customer.

## **2. Research Methodology**

The approach to achieve the purpose of this article has been based on performing an exploratory research on a sample of 269 people, collected through a volunteering questionnaire technique, with 18 questions posted on the website <http://www.isondaje.ro> and self-managed by the respondents aged over 18 years, customers of fashion stores, based in major cities in Romania.

*The aim* of the research was to identify ways in which innovations in commerce will influence the buying behavior of fashion products. This is determined by the need to differentiate retail companies, to find new sources of competitiveness by attracting a large number of consumers and by inciting them to spend more to purchase these products.

*The objectives* of this research were:

- Highlighting the impact of Internet and Information and Communication (ICT) on fashion consumers.
  - Identifying positive and negative factors that influence the creation of a pleasant buying experience.
  - Studying the consumer susceptibility to communicate on social networking sites opinions and experiences related to purchasing fashion products
4. Knowing the grounds on which it is based the shopping of clothes, footwear and accessories.
- Shaping the profile of the ideal salesperson in fashion retail.

The research started from a number of *hypotheses*, namely:

- Most consumers use the computer (or laptop) and therefore the Internet to inform about fashion products when they are interested in buying them.
  - There are differences in customer behaviors on social networks, meaning that people who express opinions are less numerous than those who get information from these sources.
3. There are differences between consumers who use the Internet as a way to find information about products and those who get information from other sources.
- Fashion consumers prefer to purchase from traditional stores and not online.
  - Loyal buyers of fashion products purchase based on value for money ratio.

To conduct the research we used a questionnaire with 18 questions, 12 of which are content based, 2 relate on identification of the city and favorite store and 4 on identifying the respondents. The questionnaire was posted on the website <http://www.isondaje.ro/> and the

completion has been made through self-management of the questions by the respondents, after they have accessed the announcement to participate in the survey through LinkedIn and Facebook profiles of the authors, and of the community Strategic Retail Management (on Facebook and LinkedIn).

Essentially, the main variables resulted from research which were sought to identify specific correlations rather than exogenous or endogenous character, are summarized in the Appendix 1.

As well, *Poema*, a Romanian fashion retail company, supported the research by posting the link to the questionnaire on its Facebook page. The survey was conducted between 10 and 31 October 2014, with 269 respondents across the country. Data analysis was performed using SPSS, version 21.

**3. Results and discussions**

The respondents were identified by four questions regarding age, gender, education and income: 165( 61.3%) were included in the category 26-40 years old, 90% of them being women, 115 people (42.8%) graduated college and 108 (40.1%) have a master degree. Regarding the monthly income per household, most respondents fall in the group 2001-4000 lei (95 people i.e. 35.3%), followed by less than 2,000 lei per household group (70 people i.e. 26%). The four questions related to variables' identification were correlated using Pearson's coefficient (see table no. 1). Excepting the relationship between average income and studies that correlate directly, but with reduced intensity at the 5% significance level, the other variables are correlated, at the 1% significance level, with medium intensities.

**Table no. 1. Correlations between identification variables of respondents**

Variables	Values			
Age	1			
Gender	-.344**	1		
Education	.279**	-.176**	1	
Average income	.231**	-.241**	.145*	1
** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				
* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).				

As the questions 6, 7 and 10 are multi-choice questions, ranked by 6 levels, to avoid centering responses we used  $\alpha$  Cronbach test to check the strength of the scaling. The values obtained (see table no. 2) indicate a correct scaling (questions 6, the value is 0.659, a little less than 0.7 indicated as favorable value, but not much different, while other values are bigger than 0.7).

**Table no. 2. Statistical reliability**

Questions	Value $\alpha$ Cronbach	$\alpha$ Cronbach based on standardized elements	No. of elements
6	.659	.640	7
7	.766		7
10	.750		8

At the same time, the values of the Analysis of variance – ANOVA (table no. 3) indicate that there are significant differences between the components of each 3 questions (according to the Fisher test values, where all 3 have thresholds of .000).

It should be noted that the question 6 refers to seven reasons why a customer leaves the shop without buying anything. Question 7 contains seven factors that contribute to a pleasant buying experience. Question 10 includes eight reasons for which a customer buys a fashion product. It is found that the average value for each of the three questions' elements is 2, which means "important" on the assessment scale.

**Table no. 3. Analysis of variance values**

ANOVA question 6		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Between People		972.309	268	3.628		
Within People	Between Items	360.786	6	60.131	48.573	.000
	Residual	1990.643	1608	1.238		
	Total	2351.429	1614	1.457		
Total		3323.738	1882	1.766		
Grand Mean = 2.1349						
ANOVA question 7		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Between People		770.660	268	2.876		
Within People	Between Items	233.683	6	38.947	57.803	.000
	Residual	1083.459	1608	.674		
	Total	1317.143	1614	.816		
Total		2087.802	1882	1.109		
Grand Mean = 1.8890						
ANOVA question 10		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Between People		869.274	268	3.244		
Within People	Between Items	1058.676	7	151.239	186.300	.000
	Residual	1522.949	1876	.812		
	Total	2581.625	1883	1.371		
Total		3450.899	2151	1.604		
Grand Mean = 2.1399						

Regarding the consumers' source of information on fashion products, the respondents chose among 6 options. Most of them, 136, i.e. 50.6% of them indicated their computer or laptop connected to the Internet as the main source, which confirms the hypothesis 1, that "Most consumers use the computer (or laptop) and therefore the Internet to inform about fashion products when they are interested in buying them." (see table no. 4).



**Table no. 4. Ways to find information**

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Using the computer or the laptop	136	50.6	50.6	50.6
	Using the tablet computer	26	9.7	9.7	60.2
	Using the smartphone	61	22.7	22.7	82.9
	Asking friends or acquaintances	18	6.7	6.7	89.6
	Receiving offers via emails	20	7.4	7.4	97.0
	Receiving offers via SMS	8	3.0	3.0	100.0
	Total	269	100.0	100.0	

Although consumers are inclined to use the Internet in general and social media in particular as source of information, there is a low tendency to express their views on fashion products purchased (see table no. 5). There is a big difference between the averages

**Table no. 5. Paired Samples Statistics**

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean			
Pair	Search information	2.8216	269	1.50054	.09149			
	Share opinion	5.1636	269	1.27666	.07784			
Paired Sample Correlations								
		N		Correlation	Sig.			
Pair	Search information – Share opinion	269		.307	.000			
Paired sampled test								
Pair	Paired Differences					T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Search information – Share opinion	-2.34201	1.64423	.10025	-2.5393	-2.14463	-23.362	268	.000

of the two paired samples. There is a positive correlation, with a medium intensity (correlation coefficient is 0.307 at the 1% significance level), between information seekers and those who express opinions about the fashion products they purchased. The T-test value of 23, 362 for 268 degrees of freedom is significant, accepting the second hypothesis formulated within the methodology (research hypothesis “There are differences in customer behaviors on social networks, meaning that people who express opinions are less numerous than those who get information from these sources”) and respectively the rejection of the null hypothesis, which assumes that there is no difference between those who seek information and those who express opinions on social networks. Also, the minus sign in front of the value of *t* denotes the meaning of this difference, namely, those expressing opinions are less numerous than those seeking information on social networks.

Another line of investigation was to highlight the relationship between consumers in terms of using the Internet as a way of finding information and as respects the means used to access Internet, respectively question 1 and question 2. The difference between the averages of the two samples is 0.62 (table no. 6). Among those who find information on Internet and those who get information on fashion products from other sources there is a direct correlation, of relatively low intensity (the value of Pearson coefficient is .228, at the 1% significance level). The value of the t-test of 5,580 for 268 degrees of freedom is significant, which allows the acceptance of the 3rd hypothesis (research hypothesis 3. “There are differences between consumers who use the Internet as a way to find information about products and those who get information from other sources”).

**Table no. 6. Paired Samples Statistics**

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean			
<b>Pair</b>	Search information	2.8216	269	1.50054	.09149			
	Find information	2.1970	269	1.45397	.08865			
<b>Paired Sample Correlations</b>								
			N	Correlation	Sig.			
<b>Pair</b>	Search information - Find information		269	.228	.000			
<b>Paired sampled test</b>								
<b>Pair</b>	<b>Paired Differences</b>					<b>T</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Sig. (2-tailed)</b>
	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>Std. Error Mean</b>	<b>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</b>				
				<b>Lower</b>	<b>Upper</b>			
Search information - Find information	.62454	1.83567	.11192	.40418	.84490	5.580	268	.000

The questionnaire contains two questions on the profile of an ideal salesperson in fashion retail, in terms of behaviors and attitudes in relation to the consumer. The two variables are positively correlated, with medium intensity, respectively the Pearson's coefficient is 0.272 at the 1% significance level (see table no. 7).

**Table no. 7. Correlations between behaviors and attitudes of the ideal salesperson**

		Behaviors	Attitudes
Behaviors	Pearson Correlation	1	.272**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	269	269
Attitudes	Pearson Correlation	.272**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	269	269

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

While most consumers said they use the Internet to find information about clothes, shoes and accessories, only a small part of them, respectively 16%, are actually buying these products online (see table no. 8). Most respondents prefer to do shopping in a traditional store, although most fashion companies are selling the same products online. This fact is determined either by the difference between the virtual image of the product (as seen on the web page) and the real one (in the store), or the need to try on these products. Therefore, it is acceptable that hypothesis 4, “Fashion consumers prefer to purchase from traditional stores and not online” is confirmed. In terms of retail strategies, it appears essential to have a good interconnection and continuous updating of information between the web page of the company, the online store, and the physical stores in order to ensure a good consistency between the products and the services advertised on the web site or sold through distribution channels.

**Table no. 8. Buying intention for a certain product**

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	If it can be purchased online, I'll buy it	43	16.0	16.0	16.0
	I search the Internet for the best offer and then I go to the store and try the product	59	21.9	21.9	37.9
	The virtual image is never the same with the real image	81	30.1	30.1	68.0
	I need advice from a professional salesperson	11	4.1	4.1	72.1
	I don't search offers on Internet	75	27.9	27.9	100.0
	Total	269	100.0	100.0	

An interesting aspect is the consumers' attitude toward the possibility to receive information on smartphone or tablet computer during their visit in a store. Most said they frequently use the Internet to search for information (70%). Also, 50.9% of all respondents would welcome such a service (see table no. 9). The percentages of those who wish to receive information into the store have to be addressed by retailers through developing specific applications. However, retailers should be aware that information provided through such a channel might disturb the consumers. It is found that 49.1% of respondents do not want to receive information about offers on mobile devices, which leads to the need for companies to carefully select what to communicate and to whom, by offering customers the choice of receiving this kind of messages or not.

**Table no. 9. Acceptance of receiving promotional information on mobile devices in store**

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Yes	137	50.9	50.9	50.9
	No	84	31.2	31.2	82.2
	Absolutely not, it is like a spam message	48	17.8	17.8	100.0
	Total	269	100.0	100.0	

The research shows a favorable attitude toward setting inside the selling space clearly defined areas for exposing the products promoted online. Over 70% of those who participated in the research (see table no. 10) stated that they would appreciate the existence of a distinct area with products, including special offers available online. The study identified a fashion consumer behavior – informed by the virtual environment before entering the store - which indicates a possible innovation in fashion retail layouts in order to facilitate the finding of products already observed in the online environment and thus to save the consumer’s time. This should concern the retailers both in choosing and communicating information about products in promotional campaigns and for allocating distinct areas in selling spaces.

**Table no. 10. Availability of distinct areas in selling space with offers promoted online**

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Yes	195	72.5	72.5	72.5
	No need	74	27.5	27.5	100.0
	Total	269	100.0	100.0	

The analysis of responses regarding the reasons why a consumer left the store without buying anything revealed significant correlations direct and powerful at the 1% level of significance (see table no. 11).

We can observe the links between the lack of products and lack of appropriate size of the products, between similar products with lower prices in other stores and the differences between virtual and real image, between insufficient customer services and the staff attitude, and that between the store atmosphere and the attitude of store employees, respectively the absence of some services. These relationships indicate the need to design an appropriate assortment, to communicate accurate information and images regarding the available products, to know the competition, to have qualified and well-trained personnel, to provide the level of services required by the targeted customers, and to ensure a store atmosphere able to generate a positive psychological impact on consumers.

**Table no. 11. Correlations regarding the reasons of leaving the store without buying anything**

Variables	Values of Pearson correlation coefficient						
	Missing product	Missing size	Differences between the real image and the virtual image of the desired product	Similar products elsewhere	Attitude of salespersons	Insufficient customer services	Atmosphere inside the store
Missing product	1						
Missing size	<b>.405**</b>	1					
Differences between the real image and the virtual image of the desired product	.193**	.050	1				
Similar products elsewhere	.125*	.119	<b>.420**</b>	1			
Attitude of salespersons	.097	-.066	.252**	.219**	1		
Insufficient customer services	.115	.026	.207**	.269**	<b>.492**</b>	1	
Atmosphere inside the store	.095	-.022	.154*	.113	<b>.572**</b>	<b>.411**</b>	1

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The reasons that create a positive experience of buying are in a direct correlation at the 1% significance level (see table no. 12).

**Table no. 12. Correlations between the variables that creates a pleasant shopping experience**

Variables	Values of Pearson correlation coefficient						
Store windows	1						
Visibility of products	<b>.515**</b>	1					
Nice, large fitting rooms	.311**	.351**	1				
Music inside the store	.309**	.270**	.297**	1			
Olfactory stimuli inside the store	.343**	.307**	.276**	<b>.750**</b>	1		
Availability of salespersons	.303**	.315**	.324**	.364**	.380**	1	
Promotions	.201**	.189**	.243**	.168**	.212**	.264**	1

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The results show a strong correlation between visibility of the products and availability of attractive store windows, and especially between the smell and the background music in the store. These elements lead to the need to design the store as a whole, so that the exterior design logically complements the interior, where, in addition to tangible, there are also intangible components that contribute to creating a favorable atmosphere - music, smell, cleaning, air conditioning, chromatics etc. Sensory elements have an important role in creating a positive buying experience.

The reasons to purchase fashion products indicate, also, significant direct correlations at the 1 and 5% level of significance (see table no. 13).

**Table no. 13. Correlations between the reasons of buying fashion products**

Variables	Values of Pearson correlation coefficient						
Design and chromatics	1						
Quality of raw materials	.130*	1					
Quality of workmanship	.225**	<b>.617**</b>	1				
Easy care	.003	.286**	.355**	1			
Web site	.097	.182**	.210**	<b>.445**</b>	1		
Advices from the salespersons	.025	.102	.162**	<b>.399**</b>	<b>.538**</b>	1	
Time for finding the right product	.053	.107	.171**	<b>.385**</b>	<b>.460**</b>	<b>.667**</b>	1
Right price	.133*	.110	.143*	.296**	.338**	.253**	<b>.403**</b>

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

There are strong correlations between the quality of workmanship and raw materials used, the information on the website and the ease of care, the advices received in store and the ease of care and the information published on the website, the time needed to find the right product and the ease of care, the information on the website and the advices received from the salespersons, and especially between the price and the time required to find the right product. Therefore, retailers should carefully select the assortment in depth, width and

sizes, provide relevant information on their websites, and focus on product features and benefits as well. The retailer also needs to pay attention to staff training, to the time spent by consumers in the store, to the ease of finding what they seek (through selling space architecture and visual merchandising, labeling, promotions at the sale point, etc.) and the price strategy.

A key issue pursued in research referred to the analysis of customer's loyalty to a certain fashion brand. The responses to this question reveal a relatively paradoxical situation (see table no. 14).

**Table no. 14. Customer loyalty for a certain brand**

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulated percentage
Valid	Yes, because the brand makes me more appreciated by my friends	14	5.2	5.2	5.2
	Yes, because the brand makes me trendy all the time	38	14.1	14.1	19.3
	Yes, because the brand offers good value for money	120	44.6	44.6	63.9
	Yes, because the sizes of the brand always fit	30	11.2	11.2	75.1
	No	67	24.9	24.9	100.0
	Total	269	100.0	100.0	

Therefore, most respondents, 44.6%, stated that brand loyalty is given by the right quality-price ratio perception, which illustrates a rational behavior in the purchase decision in fashion retail. Also 25% of respondents are not loyal to a particular fashion brand. This fact could be the consequence of continuous promotions availability which transforms the consumer in promotion hunter. Therefore, we can say that the hypothesis 5 of the research "loyal buyers purchase these fashion products based on value for money" is confirmed.

The profile of the ideal salesperson in fashion retail, according to the Romanian customer opinion, is kind, courteous, competent and well-informed about products and trends, and does not interfere aggressively in the sales process. Thus, 62% of customers prefer to be allowed to choose their products, without any intervention from salespersons, while 23% want to know that is he/she is available for them, without becoming too insistent. Only 11% of customers would receive with interest the advice from salespersons, provided that they are well trained, and 4% of respondents would appreciate a persistent attitude from the salespersons in presenting the products, even if initially they refused their support.

**Conclusions**

Although 70% of respondents use Internet for finding information about fashion products, purchase behavior analysis shows that only 16% of those respondents would buy those products online. This behavior is explained either by the lack of trust in the retailer, either

because in this type of retail trying the product is very important to purchase decision. The authors consider that the second issue is more consistent in this kind of business, the consumers feeling the need of physical interaction with the store and the desired product. For this reason, the very high percentage of respondents (27.9%) who prefer the traditional way of commerce and refuse the use of new technologies in the process of buying fashion products is not very surprising. Given that the sample is formed by 88.4% of people aged up to 40 years living in urban areas, people who not only are familiar with new technologies but they are even regular users, it is evident that there is a customer segmentation defined by the means of using new technologies, each cluster having clearly defined purchase behaviors. Therefore, from this perspective, the retailers' answer must be specific, personalized upon the customer segments expectations through marketing mix policies and sales strategies.

As stated before, modern consumers are always running out of time. Research has shown that a proportion of 72.5% respondents who usually find information on Internet about fashion products and then go shopping in a store, would like that the retailer facilitates the shopping process through layout settings, so as to enable them to quickly identify all the products found on the website. Thus, we can say that a modern fashion store should always be connected to what is happening online, on the retailer's sites, which implies an increasing focus on visual merchandising, including the use of new technologies. This not only involves innovative solutions in architectural planning, which combines classic layouts with technology, but also generates higher costs and human resources with extended capabilities, at least for higher positions.

It is interesting to note that, regardless of the reasons why the consumers are using new technologies in assisting the purchase process, 50.6% of them are using their laptop or personal computer and 29.4% their smartphone or computer tablet. This can be explained by the mobility of modern consumer, fully connected to the Internet at office or at home.

Excellence in shopping experience is given utmost by the store atmosphere, the ease of finding the desired product and the continuous availability of promotions. This implies higher costs for retailers due to innovative arrangement of the selling space, but also an aggressive marketing policy to respond properly to the expectations of customers for various discounts (this expectation is probably a consequence of the crisis, but also a learned behavior due to the fact that most fashion retailers use mainly markdown policy as a key strategy in marketing mix).

It is surprising that the majority of respondents, 74%, do not use social media to express their views about the selling process after purchasing a product, or concerning the services received or even regarding the brand itself. This trend is a paradox somehow, given that the vast majority of fashion customers are young (88% up to 40 years with above-average income) and currently using new technologies.

The main limitation of the research is the non-representativeness of the sample, as a result of the selection of respondents. Although the sample seems unbalanced from a gender perspective, respondents recognized that women are the main customers in purchasing fashion products, both for themselves and for other household members (especially children). In addition, non-specialized fashion stores allocate larger sale surfaces, more complex assortments and more information for ladies products.

In this pioneering research, the emphasis was on identifying possible associations and correlations rather than on a rigorous delimitation of exogenous or endogenous quality in general, leaving room for future studies, sharper and with a higher degree of representation.

As future research directions, the authors will address several issues in close connection with this exploratory study:

- Identifying the main directions of change in Romanian retail;
- Identification and consistent parameterization of more consistent models resulting from mixed layered samples, with representativeness and error calculated at the layer, in which endogenous and exogenous variables be rigorously foreshadowed by the correlation matrix based analysis;
- Analyzing the impact of new technologies and the possibilities provided by some emerging solutions;
- Proposing performance indicators to measure the impact of innovations in retail.

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**Table nr.1 Main investigated variables**

<b>Variables – full name</b>	<b>Variable code or abbreviation</b>
Searching for information on the Internet	cautinform
Finding information	afluinform
Intention to purchase a fashion product	intentionezac
Entering the store	intrumag
Existence of a clear area	zonaclara
The product is missing from the store	prodnuexista
The size is missing from the store	marimeacautata
Differences between the webpage and the store	diferente
Similar products more cheap	prodsimilare
Sales advisors 'attitude	atitudinea
Insufficient services in the store	serviciiiins
Store atmosphere	atmosfera
Attractive shop window	vitrina
Easily visible products	usorvizibile
Opportunity to try on the selected products	potproba
Nice music	muzica
Pleasant smell	miros
Friendly and well informed sales advisors	amabili
Existence of special offers	oferte
Customer of a brand	clienfidel
Expressing opinions on social sites	exprimparerea
Design and chromatics	designcromatica
Quality of materials	calitatemateriale
Quality of workmanship	calitatemanopera
Ease of care/cleaning/maintenance	usurinta
Providing necessary information on the website	paginaweb
Advice received in the store	consilierea
Short time of finding products	timpgasire
Price of products	pretul
Ideal salesperson	consilierideal
Attitude of salesperson	atitudine
Respondent's age	varsta
Respondent's gender	genul
Respondent's education	studii
Respondent's household average monthly income	venitmediu