



Soft skills in customer service: Sales area in automobile dealers

Las habilidades blandas en el servicio al cliente: en el área de ventas de las concesionarias de automóviles

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Abstract

In today's highly competitive market, Customer Service has become a survival strategy and a differentiator for companies. This paper aims to investigate the relationship of some soft skills as drivers of Customer Service in sales area collaborators. In the methodology, the hypothesis were established. A review of the literature was carried out for the construct's establishment and the elaboration of the instrument. The survey was applied to a sample of 81 sale's managers of automobile dealership in the Monterrey metropolitan area. The model was a multiple linear regression. The surveys were processed with SPSS Statistics through successive steps. The findings revealed that the hospitality, effective communication, and motivation are significant in relation to customer service in the collaborators of the automobile dealerships, specifically in the sales area. Teamwork and problem solving were not significant. These contributions will serve to build a soft skills profile in the sales collaborators.

JEL Code: M10, M12, M53, O15

Keywords: customer service; effective communication; hospitality; motivation; soft skills

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Resumen

En el mercado altamente competitivo de hoy, el Servicio al Cliente se ha convertido en una estrategia de supervivencia y un diferenciador para las empresas. Este trabajo tiene como objetivo investigar la relación de algunas habilidades blandas como impulsores del Servicio al Cliente en los colaboradores del área de ventas. En la metodología se establecieron las hipótesis. Se realizó una revisión de la literatura para el establecimiento de los constructos y se elaboró el instrumento para la investigación. La encuesta se aplicó a una muestra de 81 gerentes de ventas de concesionarios de automóviles del área metropolitana de Monterrey. El modelo fue una regresión lineal múltiple. Las encuestas fueron procesadas con SPSS Statistics a través de pasos sucesivos. Los hallazgos revelaron que la hospitalidad, la comunicación efectiva y la motivación son significativas en relación con el servicio al cliente en los colaboradores de las concesionarias de automóviles, específicamente en el área de ventas. El trabajo en equipo y la resolución de problemas no fueron significativos. Estos aportes servirán para construir un perfil de habilidades blandas en los colaboradores de ventas.

Código JEL: M10, M12, M53, O15

Palabras clave: atención al cliente; comunicación efectiva; hospitalidad; motivación; habilidades blandas

Introduction

Customer service (CS) has had an evolutionary process in organizations. First, it was seen as a department where clients attended to file a complaint and there were certain procedures that the collaborator had to carry out to respond to the client, not always favorable (Kotler & Armstrong, 2019). Later it was seen as some support that was offered when buying a product or service. Finally, certain precursors appeared such as Kotler & Armstrong (2019), Albrecht (1990) and Carlzon (1991) that revolutionized the appreciation of customer service. They left the Service behind as a cold and static department. To be a strategic proposal that would be used throughout the organization, where everyone was part of this new way of operating in the company, they realized that the friendly and warm treatment towards the client was by far what generated customer satisfaction and what they called loyalty. This is how they related customer service to loyalty, profitability and, above all, to the permanence of companies in the market (Kotler & Armstrong, 2019).

One of the revolutionaries in customer service was Albrecht (1990). Who proposed the customer service model which contains 4 elements that form a triangle, in the three corners are: a) the systems, b) the collaborators and c) the service strategy and the fourth element is the customer who is located in the center of the triangle. With this model, collaborators are recognized as one of the key elements in the service. They are the ones who will give life with their warm and friendly treatment, necessary for

customer service. Given this, it is essential to understand what soft skills are necessary for collaborators for them to be able to offer good customer service

Soft skills are defined as non-technical skills, and include interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. They are the entire inventory of attributes, knowledge and skills a person has, which allows him to adapt to the environment and react to the various situations that arise with clients (Ray, 2017). At the World Economic Forum (2019), a global survey was applied to 5,000 human resources professionals and talent acquisition managers through LinkedIn. In it, 91% responded that soft skills is the main trend and challenge for recruitment in the next 4 years. This reveals the importance of identifying soft skills in job candidates or in employees already working in the organization (Fleming, 2019).

In the tourism, education and health sectors, including the retail sector, studies were carried out on soft skills in employees who offer customer service. At the automobile dealers sector, the studies by Balinado et al. (2021) that somehow make an approximation of communication with customer service. However, it is in the after-sales part and is focused on a specific brand. Another study found that communication from the digital point of view when buying a car is not related to customer service (Dahiya, R., & Sachar, D. 2021). Therefore, the importance of analyzing and complementing in the automobile dealers sector is highlighted.

In the studies found in tourism, health and education, some soft skills are mentioned: hospitality (HP), teamwork (TW), effective communication (EC), problem solving (PS) and motivation (MT) (Robles, 2012; Singh & Jaykumar, 2019). This article explored the skills cited before for auto dealership sales employees. It will contribute to: 1) increase the literature in this field, 2) build a profile of the contributor of the sales of the auto dealerships, 3) to be able to have the requested bases of soft skills at the time of recruitment and selection, as well as 4) to focus on training and development efforts for employees who are already in the organization and need to strengthen these skills.

Likewise, there are some limitations of the study such as the number of skills selected, and the focus is only on the sales area. Considering all of the above, the central research question for the article is synthesized below: Are hospitality, teamwork, effective communication, problem solving and motivation soft skills in sales collaborators that allow improved customer service at automobile dealerships? And starting from here, the following objective is established.

Objective

This article aims to analyze soft skills impact customer service. Specifically in the sales area of the automobile dealers sector.

Literature review

Customer service (SC)

Customer Service has unfolded into a series of memorable customer experiences. These experiences are taking place in interactions between employees and customers. These are the moments of truth seeking to satisfy and exceed the customer expectations. Albrecht (1990), Carlzon (1991) and Kotler & Armstrong (2019) established models and theories to contribute to the service evolution. Particularly two Albrecht's theories: Service Excellence and The Customer Value Management synthesized in the Customer Service Triangle Model. Besides Kotler theories: Marketing Management, Relational Marketing and Customer Behavior Theory.

Additionally, the Carlzon's theory: The Moments of Truth. These theories do intersect and was built the customer service model for this research, as it is presented in figure 1.

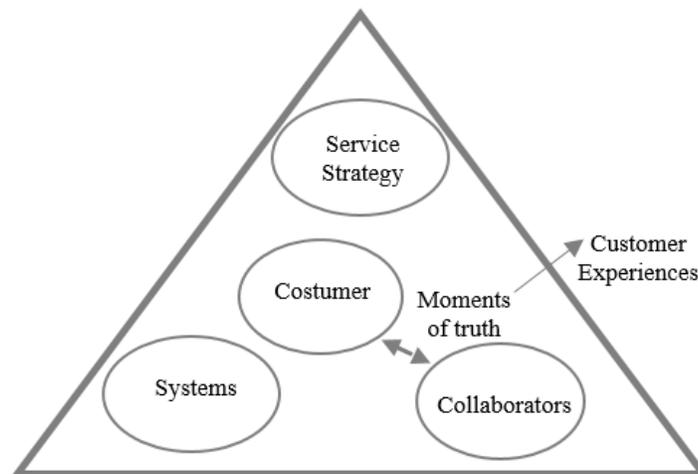


Figure 1. Model of Service Triangle, The Moments of Truth and Customer Experiences.
Source: Author's own adapted from Albrecht (1990), Carlzon (1991) and Kotler & Armstrong (2019).

A recent definition of customer service is focused as the purpose of making the customer satisfied (Huo, Chen, Lam, & Woods, 2019). It is understood as all related activities seeking to facilitate the purchase or use of a product or service for which the customer paid or will pay. The suggestion is that their needs and expectations are consistently met or exceeded. Three main components are observed in this definition: First, identify needs and expectations of customers, including desires that may change over

time. Second, develop actions to satisfy those needs, this includes customizing existing products and services. Third provide the service effectively and efficiently (Colón-Aguirre, 2017).

Vega-Sampayo et al. (2020), define quality customer service, such as satisfaction that exceeds mutual, business and customer expectations. An extraordinary service first needs to translate into understanding customer expectations. Which is achieved through reliability by offering an effective service, having a physical infrastructure, responsiveness and human interaction whilst serving and listening to the customer. For the above, the entire organization must be involved.

For this study customer service is considered as good treatment, understanding and willingness to support the customer. In short this is about providing security, credibility, and trust at the time of interaction (González, Frías, & Gómez, 2016). The understanding of what the customer expects providing unique & customized interactions in order to generate memorable experiences for which he paid, with customer satisfaction being as the final result (Coste et al., 2017; Vega-Sampayo et al., 2020).

Hospitality (HP)

Capezzone (2019) presents a theoretical model that integrates hospitality and customer behavior. This model is supported by three theories: 1.- Environment Theory (Tangible, Intangible and Social Factors). 2.- Customer's Emotional State Theory (Cognitive, Emotional and Sensations) and 3. Customer Behavior Theory (Influence on employee-consumer relationship). Through hospitality; social, cognitive and emotional factors can be worked for the customer, in order to the customer has a pleasant and satisfying experience. In this way, the behavior is driven toward in or away from the organization. The social factors are the relational experiences in which interactions are generated. The cognitive refer to pleasant mental experiences or thoughts created for the client. Finally, the emotional state is all the favorable feelings towards the service or product that is offered. Hospitality should be the footprint in each of the elements, in such a way that the customer be loyal to the organization. The theoretical model outlined in Figure 2 was used as the basis for understanding the concept of hospitality in this study.

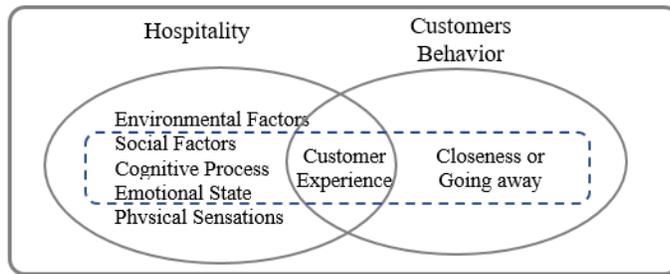


Figure 2. IAHCCH Model: Influence of the Environment and Hospitality on Customer Behavior.
Source: Author's own adapted from Capezzone (2019).

In some concepts found, Pramono et al. (2020) defined hospitality as offering respectful and human-approach services. Hospitality is about how to bring a product or service to life, directly touching the feelings of customers as human beings. It is when they are respected and valued during the purchase of the good or service. Serving wholeheartedly is the key to providing quality services to customer. This includes unconditional service as providers. With these actions, it is expected that customers feel satisfied, in such a way that they continue to require the products offered by the organization. Hospitality is a process by which a stranger becomes a guest for the organization, who may even become a friend and never opponents. Hospitality means creating a free and friendly space where customers can go in. It is to see the customer in a holistic way, including his mind and heart.

The definition of hospitality for this analysis is the attitude of help, empathy & attention to the customer. Responding to the particular needs of the client and satisfying them with professionalism, making them feel like a unique person through friendly and humane treatment (Wakelin-Theron, Ukpere, & Spowart, 2018; Pramono et al., 2020).

Teamwork (TW)

Torrelles et al. (2015) presented a theoretical model for teamwork. This is the basis for this study. On it the Teamwork has 4 phases: identity, communication, execution and regulation. It also mentions the elements of teamwork: willingness & collaboration, common goals achievement, information exchange, problem resolution, collective development and improvement. Phases and elements are presented in Figure 3. This model presented by Torrelles et al., (2015) synthesizes three theories: 1.- Teamwork Development and Stages (Baker, Amodeo, Krokos, Slonim, & Herrera, 2010). 2.- Skills, Functions and Activities of Teamwork (Torrelles, et al., 2015) and 3.- Attitudes, Behaviors and Cognitions of Teamwork (Weaver et al. 2010).

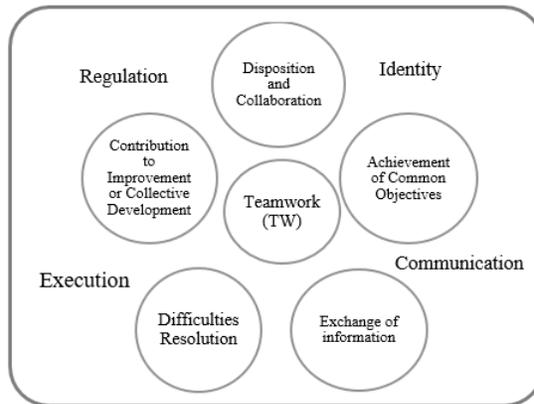


Figure 3. Teamwork Model

Source: Author's own adapted from Torrelles et al. (2015).

Rosen, Dietz, Yang, Priebe, & Pronovost (2019) claimed teamwork occurs when two or more people with specific roles perform a set of activities or tasks together, interdependently and adaptively towards a shared goal. The members can be physically or virtually distributed, temporary or permanent and will have their own codes of communication and behavior. The performance and effectiveness of teamwork is the sum of the tasks and activities of the members, satisfactorily evaluated, when the results were as expected according to the proposed objective. From the authors' point of view, teamwork is defined as dynamic interactions between its members, requiring coordination and communication. The team can be made up of two people, who work together interdependently and adaptively towards a common goal, with specific roles and skills, shared tasks and are evaluated based on performance aligned to the goal(s) (Rosen et al., 2019).

The teamwork skill is understood as the set of behaviors, knowledge and attitudes that influence the efforts of a group of people to achieve common and specific objectives. Teamwork integrates a set of related actions such as: performance monitoring, giving and receiving feedback, communication, support behaviors, adaptability and coordination, achievement of goals and results among team members (Creo, Mareque, & Portela- Pine, 2021).

For this study, teamwork is defined as the set of knowledge, skills and attitudes required to collaborate with others to carry out tasks and achieve common objectives, sharing information, organizing tasks and roles, taking responsibilities, solving problems, contributing to the improvement of the organization (Torrelles et al., 2015; Creo et al., 2021).

Effective communication (CE)

Figure 4 presents effective communication theoretical model used as a reference for the research. This represents the theory: Elements of Lasswell's Collective Communication System/Process (Sapienza, Iyer & Veenstra, 2015). Llacuna & Pujo (2008) and Espinoza (2009) synthesized, adapted, and presented it in their studies. They showed the classic communication process, including sender, receiver, message, code, and feedback. Complementing the process with questions that help to clarify each element as it appears in the model in figure 4.

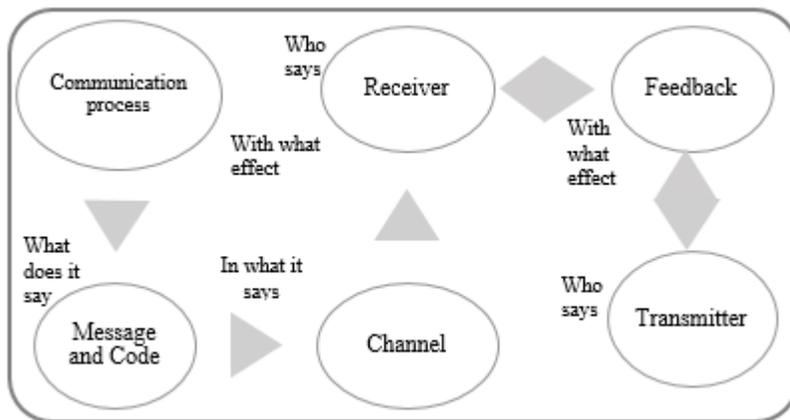


Figure 4. Effective Communication Model.

Source: Author's own adapted from (Llacuna & Pujol, 2008; Espinoza, 2009).

Coste et al. (2017) claim effective communication encourages the sharing of information and helps to recognize the contributions of others. It is a process in which relevant work information is transmitted. In the process can be demonstrates verbal fluency, rich vocabulary, precision of information, ability to express feelings and originality. For the collaborator, effective communication can be evaluated in different forms: (1) if it is clear, efficient, and fluent; (2) according to what you want to achieve; (3) clearly expressed to the team about objectives, strategies or responsibilities; (4) appropriate verbal and written language and (5) if provided feedback to individual and group depending of organizational position (Coste et al., 2017).

Araujo & Miranda (2021) defined effective communication as the exchange of information and ideas between collaborators, members or customers of an organization to build relationships, trust and create mutual understanding. For this study, effective communication is defined as the skill to listen, ask questions, and express concepts and ideas effectively. Generate an assertive dialogue, using tools and / or

methodologies to obtain, understand and transmit information appropriately and promote trust in different situations with clients (Coste et al., 2017; Araujo & Miranda 2021).

Problem solving (PS)

Vera-Villarroel & Guerrero (2003), propose a classic theoretical model and still relevant. Is presented on fig. 5. This investigation is based on it. The model is founded on the Theoretical Assumption for the Problem Solving in Social Sciences from Piaget's previous works. It takes into account 5 stages: problem definition and formulation, generation of alternative solutions, decision-making, solution implementation and verification. All stages are put into practice consciously or unconsciously when a response is required.

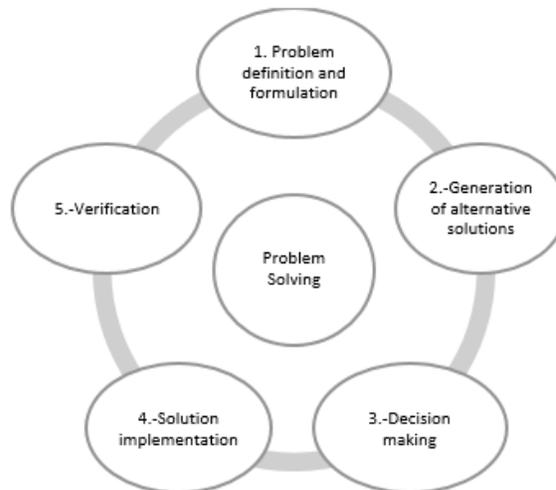


Figure 5. Problem Solving Model.

Source: Author's own adapted from Vera-Villarroel & Guerrero (2003).

Almeida & Benevides (2018) presented the problem solving as a skill that includes cognitive and behavioral capacities of the collaborator deployed in 4 dimensions: 1) formulation of the problem, 2) generation of alternatives, 3) decision-making and 4) verification of solutions.

A basic theme of supplier-customer relationships is ongoing problem solving. Clients have the understanding that the provider has the ability to design, develop and implement solutions to problems when they arise. When this doesn't happen, customers experience uncertainty. Providers are perceived as not being competent, the relationship can be damaged and eventually end. Effective problem solving improves customer service, reduces associated costs, and builds loyalty. It is the cognitive ability to

identify the problem and design and implement feasible, simple and effective solutions for customers (Chumpitaz & Paparoidamis, 2020).

Problem solving in this work is defined as the employee's soft skill to identify problematic situations in which it was required to respond to customers. Includes knowing how to clearly formulate the problem, generate alternative solutions, identify the viable solutions and make decisions to implement them effectively and efficiently (Almeida & Benevides, 2018; Chumpitaz & Paparoidamis, 2020). In addition, it includes requesting the collaboration of superiors or colleagues if necessary and communicating the resolution of the problem to the customer (Mughal & Shaikh, 2018).

Motivation (MT)

Figure 6 presents the theoretical model adopted and adapted for this research. It is based on three classical theories: 1.- Achievement Motivation Theory by Frederick Herzberg (1959) and McClelland (1961), 2.- Power Motivation Theory by Maslow (1943) and 3.- The Affiliation Motivation Theory by Maslow (1943). These were mentioned and synthesized by Haque M.F., Haque, M.A. & Islam (2014) and Marulanda, Montoya, & Vélez (2017) in their research. The theoretical model is focused on motivation for achievement, power, and affiliation. Each of these elements has characteristics that are presented in the sales collaborators. The features of achievement motivation are acceptance of responsibilities, self-setting of goals, and the drive to achieve them. The empowerment motivation refers to be considered important by the person. For affiliation, are a wellbeing with others and offering help or service to people.

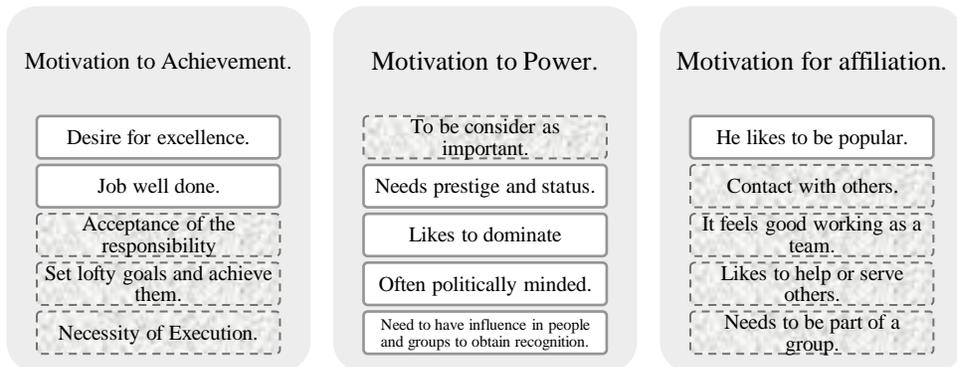


Figure 6. Motivation Model

Source: Author's own adapted from Haque MF et al. (2014) and Marulanda et al. (2017).

Motivation as concept comes from the Latin word "movere" which means stimulus or movement. Motivation address how to lead the power and impulse toward specific goals. collaborators work because they want to meet their daily needs. The impulse of what is desired varies from one collaborator to another. Motivation is a process that influences individual choices toward various forms of desired activities. Includes drive, needs, encouragement, rewards-reinforcement, goal setting, expectations, etc. Motivation in the workplace is a series of efforts by the employee that results in one or more responses. It arises from within as a driving force to work towards achieving its objectives, as well as those of the organization (Tampubolon, Murniarti, & Sidabutar, 2021).

For the study, motivation was defined as the degree of effort, enthusiasm and commitment that employees are willing to exert in their work to satisfy proper and customer needs (Haque M.A. et al., 2014). It is the desire and the good spirit to achieve the goals providing a quality service that satisfies the own interes, also costumers and the organization (García & Forero, 2014; Marulanda et al., 2017; Tampubolon et al., 2021).

Relationship between customer service and soft skills

Some found empirical studies support the relationship of customer service with the independent variables of Hospitality (HP), Teamwork (TE), Effective Communication (CE), Problem Solving (PS) and Motivation (MT).

In Spain, a study was carried out on clients of established hotels around the world. They analyzed the attribute of hospitality and its relationship with customer service. About 165,739 surveys were measured. They were processed using a binary logistic regression to measure and test causal relationship. The result was positive and significant with a β .693, Wald 94.860 and sig. of .000 (Díaz, Muñoz, & Duque, 2021).

In a Danish insurance company, a study was carried out to see the performance of employees when a sports sponsorship was offered. Among the variables to consider was the impact of teamwork on customer service. In the study, 653 surveys were applied to collaborators of the service center. They applied a linear regression with the 628 appropriated questionnaires. Significant results were obtained with an $R^2 = 0.134$, significance of .000 (Wagner, Hansen, Kristensen, & Josty, 2019).

In southern India a study of 16 hospitals was conducted. A survey was applied to 436 patients to find out the impact of effective communication on the customer service experience. In this research, the result was significant when measuring the collaborator-patient relationship, with $\beta = .35$ and significance of .05. This research tested and identified communication skills of physicians as a relevant factor to impact on understanding patient's and customer's needs and confidence. Effective

communication comes from front-line physicians and staff by listening carefully, making the diagnosis well, and communicating assertively with patients. In the result of the research, effective communication considerably improves the experience of the customer service provided (Suhail & Srinivasulu, 2020).

To estimate the relationship between problem solving, service and customer satisfaction, a study was carried out in Belgium, France, and Netherlands. This research was done involving producers and sellers of beverages & food. The study was done through the application of a survey to 1218 users. It was carried out through the model of structural equations. The results were $\beta = 0.25$ $t = 6.81$ with an R^2 of 70%. A significant relationship was found between the variables (Chumpitaz & Paparoidamis, 2020).

In Korea & Japan, an investigation was carried out in electronic banking to find out the relationship between employee motivation and commitment when measuring how these are impacting service experience and customer satisfaction. A questionnaire was sent electronically to 247 clients. The study was processed relying on structural equations with significant results. ($\beta = .08$, $p < .05$). This impact proves commitment-action & motivation generates a positive influence on the customer service experience (Shin, 2021).

All relationships found from previous empirical researchs are a positive impact to customer service. That means the independent variables HP, TW, EC, PS and MT have a significant relationship with CS as it is shown in the table 1.

Table 1
 Relations between dependent variable (CS) and independent variables

Authors	Variable	B	Significance
(Díaz et al., 2021)	HP	.693	0.000
(Wagner et al., 2019).	TW	.134	0.000
(Suhail & Srinivasulu, 2020)	EC	.35	0.05
(Chumpitaz & Paparoidamis, 2020).	PS	.25	0.01
(Shin, 2021).	MT	.08	0.05

Source: Author's own

The studies found have been mostly conducted in the health, tourism, and education sectors. This strengthens the study to see the behavior of the dependent variable SC and the predictor variables (HP, TW, EC, PS and MT) in the automotive dealership sales sector. From the above, the graphic model (figure 7) and the operational hypotheses of the study can be deduced.

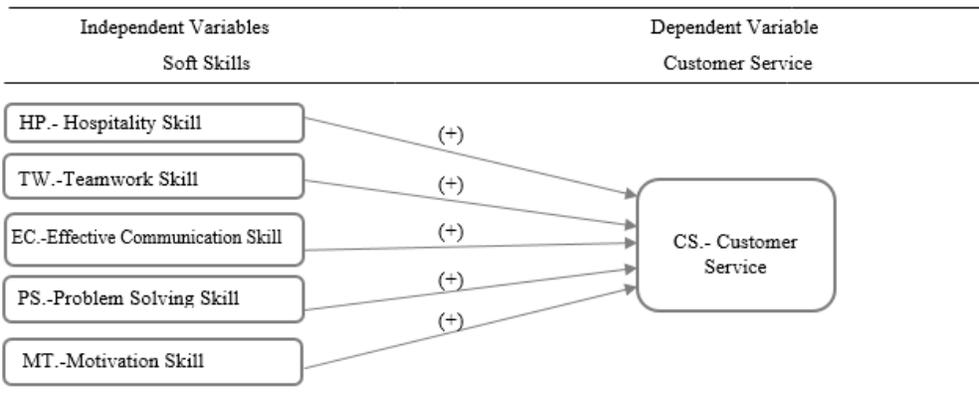


Figure 7. Graphic Model.
 Source: Author's own.

From the graphic model presented in Figure 7, the following hypotheses were established according with the literature review and the research question.

- H₁: HP has a positive impact on customer service.
- H₂: TW has a positive impact on customer service.
- H₃: EC has a positive impact on customer service.
- H₄: PS has a positive impact on customer service.
- H₅: MT has a positive impact on customer service.

Method

After having established the definition for each construct, presented the theoretical model, and established the research hypothesis, the measurement instrument was designed. For that purpose, items extracted were selected from the empirical studies found in the literature review. It was sought these items had an acceptable Cronbach's Alpha, and they represented and measured their construct respectively. In addition, such items were adapted to the context of, automobile dealers' sector for the application moment (Annex Table A1). As soon as the questionnaire was structured, it was validated with experts in methodology and human capital. The Cronbach's Alpha of each construct was validated, all of them with values above .8, which indicates that they are within the acceptance criteria. Finally, it was integrated into the Google forms. Sorting the items of each variable in different position for its application. See table 2 and Annex Table A1.

Table 2
 Constitution and Reliability of the Instrument

Variable	Variable No. of final Items	Cronbach Alpha
CS	3	.939
HP	3	.899
TW	3	.944
EC	3	.801
PS	3	.850
MT	3	.884
Demographics	4	
Total items without demographics	18	

Source: Author's own (SPSS Statistics)

The population and the sample were determined. The population of commercial automobile dealership in the Monterrey metropolitan area was 96 (AMDA, 2019; ADANL, 2019). The statistical formula was applied for a simple random sampling with finite population $n = Nz^2(1 - p)/(N - 1) e^2 + z^2p(1 - p)$, where $N= 96$, $Z=1.96$, $p=.5$, $1-p=.5$, $e=.05$. Resulting in an n of 77 respondents.

The instrument was sent to each Sales Manager or Coordinator. They are the ones who are closely involved in the operation of the business and establish the sales strategies of the agencies. They are frequently in contact with the customer and live daily the soft skills of the research. The instrument was sent to all sales managers or coordinators of the population and 81 were received and the data was processed based on this.

Results and discussion

The proposed model according to the hypotheses hypothesis statement and the graphic model was $CS=\beta_0+\beta_1(HP)+\beta_2(EC)+\beta_3(TW)+\beta_4(PS)+\beta_5(MT)+u$. Once the data was obtained. The Multivariate Regression was estimated in SPSS Statistics through successive steps. The Model and ANOVA results were the coefficient of determination $R^2 =.750$, a Fisher test of 77.032 and a Durbin-Watson test of 1.505. Also, can be observed high coefficients β 's of the accepted variables in their impacts on CS. HP $\beta=.374$, EC $\beta=.307$ and MT $\beta=.287$ all of them with significance $<.001$. The calculated T's values showed relevant levels of significance: HP 4.237, EC 3.302, and MT 3.48. The estimation error of 39%. The multicollinearity diagnosis was 3.064 it's indicated good acceptance range. The results of the model are shown below in the table 3.

Table 3
 Model and Method

Models	Method	Incoming Independent Constructs	Statistics	Variable's status	β	T test	Condition Index	FIV	Sig.
Multivariate Regression	Confirmatory	HP=HP1, HP4, HP8 TW=TW2, TW5, TW6 EC=EC1, EC2, EC3 PS=PS4, PS6, PS7 MT=MT1, MT3, MT6	R ² .750 F 77.032 Durbin Watson 1.505	HP accepted	HP .374	HP 4.237	3.064	HP 2.4	HP .000
				TW non accepted	TW .001	TW .987		TW 1.372	TW .987
				EC accepted	EC .307	EC 3.302		EC 2.662	EC .001
				PS non accepted	PS -.024	PS -.297		PS 1.970	PS .768
				MT accepted	MT .287	MT 3.48		MT 2.109	MT .001

Source: Author's own

Next, the ex post facto diagram is shown in Figure 8, in which appear the hypothesis and the independent variables in relation to the dependent variable and the result of the β 's and R².

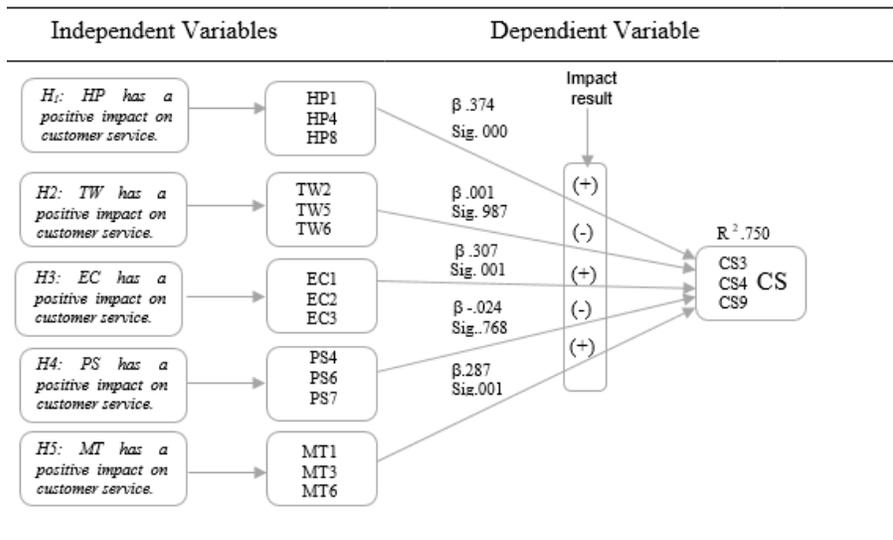


Figure 8. Ex Post Facto Diagram.
 Source: Author's own.

The variables wasn't accepted was the TW and PS with a β 's .001 and -.024 the significance was .987 and .768, respectively. Finally, HP showed a higher impact than MT and EC. This validated the relevance of this ability in this study. MT and EC showed similarity in importance, the difference between them was (.02). Table 4 below shows the hypotheses raised and the synthesis of the degrees of impact of the variables towards the CS.

Table 4
 Status of the specific hypotheses according to the results of the model

Independent variables: Soft Skills Result	β	Significance	Result
H ₁ : HP has a positive impact on customer service.	.374	.000	Accepted
H ₂ : TW has a positive impact on customer service.	.001	.987	Rejected
H ₃ : EC has a positive impact on customer service.	.307	.001	Accepted
H ₄ : PS has a positive impact on customer service.	-.024	.768	Rejected
H ₅ : MT has a positive impact on customer service.	.287	.001	Accepted

Source: Author's own

The table 5 shows the impact levels of the β 's and the significance of this study compared to the β 's and the significance of the empirical studies found. In the analysis of the table, there is similarity in the degree of impact of EC towards CS.

Table 5
 Degree of impact of the variables towards Customer Service of model vs previous studies

Variable	Theoretical Frame Authors	B	Significance	Degree of Impact	β of the study	Significance of the study	Degree of impact of the study
HP	(Díaz et al., 2021)	.693	0.000	1	.374	.000	1
TW	(Wagner et al., 2019).	.134	0.000	4	.001	.987	4
EC	(Suhail & Srinivasulu, 2020)	.35	0.05	2	.307	.001	2
PS	(Chumpitaz & Paparoidamis, 2020).	.25	0.01	3	-.024	.768	5
MT	(Shin, 2021).	.08	0.05	5	.287	.001	3

Source: Author's own

With the demographic data of the sample (table 6) it is observed that 54% are men and 46% women, which indicates a balance in gender. Regarding age, most of those surveyed are 62%, which represents those aged 36 or over. That means, only 38% are young. 84% have a bachelor's or postgraduate degree and 16% have a High School degree at least. In the geographical area, area A (70%) is made up of the areas with the highest purchasing power and is the most urbanized. In there are the cities of San Pedro

and Monterrey. In Zone B (30%) are the cities with the least population and purchasing power, they are Guadalupe, San Nicolás, Cadereyta and Santa Catarina.

Table 6
 General demographic data

Demographics Groups	Gender		Age		Schooling		Area	
	Men	Women	<36	≥36	≤ High School	≥ Bachelor's Degree	A	B
	81		81		81		81	
N	44	37	31	50	13	68	57	24
%	54%	46%	38%	62%	16%	84%	70%	30%

Source: Author's own

Conclusions

Through the investigation process in this article, it was possible to comply with the methodological phases as suggested by Creswell (2009) and Whetten (1989). Such phases were:

- 1) the establishment of objectives and hypotheses
- 2) literature review to deepen the theory and the establishment of the constructs
- 3) the design of the research instrument to collect the information
- 4) data collection and calculation
- 5) obtaining results and conclusions.

Therefore, this methodology led to the next conclusions.

Customer service is key to stay permanent in the markets. In that sense, car dealerships offer similarities in each segment: products, technology, safety, comfort, and prices. The line that marks the difference is the treatment of the customer (Díaz et al., 2021). Good customer service might influence the customer to come back for car maintenance or a buyback. To provide an optimum service, sales collaborators require some specific soft skills to give customers a warm treatment during the sales process. Also essential to the customers, is to make them feel unique, important, perceive empathy and above all to believe that the person listening to them can interpret their needs and preferences (Vega-Sampayo et al., 2020).

In relation to the soft skills this study was based on, were Hospitality (HP), Teamwork (TW), Effective Communication (EC), Problem Solving (PS) and Motivation (MT). These were analyzed to conclude if there are or not impact on customer service in the dealer automobile sector. In the literature review, it was found empirical studies of Díaz et al. (2021) on HP [β of .693], Wagner et al. (2019) about TW [β of .134], Suhail & Srinivasulu (2020) about EC [β of .35], Chumpitaz & Paparoidamis (2020) about PS [β of .25] and, Shin (2021) about MT [β of .08]. All of them significant impact on the independent

variables and the Customer Service impact. These studies were made in the sector of hospitality, education, service, and health. According with this paper results, it's confirm that also for the automobile dealers sector the variables of Hospitality (HP), Effective Communication (EC) and Motivation (MT), are drivers of customer service. Specifically in direct sales collaborators. This contribution, which previously only appeared in other sectors, now offers scientific support to the sector of automobile dealers and it's sales area.

As a as result of evaluating the impact of each one of the soft skills involved on this research, their order of significance can be concluded as follows. First, the skill of hospitality attending an attentive, professional, and warm treatment. Second, effective communication through eye contact and active listening that leads them to interpret needs, likes and preferences of the customer. And third, the team members' motivation to achieve their own goals and, as a part of it, to seek customer satisfaction.

In contrast, the variables TW and PS were not significant to Customer Service in this study, unlike the studies of Wagner et al. (2019) about TW and Chumpitaz & Paparoidamis (2020) about PS in both were approved the hypothesis. Given this, two theories were found that support this investigation findings. The studies of Hofstede (2021) and those of De la Cerda & Nuñez (1998).

According to the study by Hofstede (2021), Mexico is located with a high distance to power (81), high restriction (91) and collectivism (70). That means, in Mexico power is given great importance, there is a marked obedience and respect for authority.

Based on Hofstede (2021) studies, authority figures or bosses are those who have the knowledge and education while collaborators are the once who are waiting to hear what to do and how to do the job. Inequality is marked and decision-making is not promoted in all environments; autocracy predominates. Regarding high restriction, this refers to the fact that in Mexico there is a tendency for constant vigilance and there is lack for freedom of expression and decision-making. Elements such as autocracy, little freedom to express ideas, to caring more for the relationship than for the task (Hofstede, 2021), could be some of the causes why the Sales managers of the present research, do not see Teamwork and Problem Solving as soft skills to offer good customer service. Since their authority, position, harmonious environment, etc. could be affected directly or indirectly.

Subsequently, another study that talks about how Mexican culture does not favor Teamwork and Problem Solving is the one from De la Cerda & Nuñez (1998). This study mentions that the culture of work in traditional Mexico is characterized by values of a pre-industrial society, and among them are authoritarianism, idealism, passivity, resignation, dependence, and submission. By cultural heritage, the Mexican tends to submit to authority. The worker is normally willing to submit to domination-dependency relationships in exchange for paternalistic protection. The authors say, the Mexican favors his interests and sometimes prefers to take care of his relationships over performance. Also, they mentioned the

Mexican is notorious for his individualistic attitude in search of image and power, besides has little disposition to Teamwork. Outside the family framework, he is highly suspicious, insecure and finds it difficult to identify with norms and objectives. Additionally shows little initiative in solving problems in their job, until the boss authorizes, gives his opinion, indications, or approval. The foregoing for fear of disobedience or infringing the rules that affect their image; for putting their job or good relations with their boss or colleagues at risk. What is mentioned in the theory of De la Cerda & Nuñez (1998) is another possible reason why Teamwork and Problem Solving were not significant in the study.

Therefore, given that TW and PS were not significant as a contribution, the following can be concluded:

1.- The environment and culture must be considered in both, the model, and the definition, 2.- TW and PS will impact in a positive or negative way depending on the culture where they will be analyzed, 3.- Soft skills as TW and PS do not have a significance on customer service at automobile dealers in the Mexican context in direct sales collaborators. And 4.- It is important to consider that in the sales environment there is constant competition to sell, and individualism stands out more than being part of a team.

Recommendations

It is recommended to complement in next studies 1.- Other soft skills such as flexibility, self-confidence, sense of urgency and proactivity in the members of the team in the automobile dealership sales area. 2.- It is also proposed to extend the research to other regions and sectors of the economy in the sales area, waiting to see the behavior of the data and variables to help build the profile of sales collaborators. These profiles and skills should be vital for organizations during the hiring and training process.

Likewise, 3.- It is suggested that a specific training program for the development of these skills (HP, EC and MT) in team members gets established in the organizations. All the above should be highly considered to ensure that the skills that drive into better customer service are present. Customer service should be understood as the differentiator of organizations, which generates satisfied customers, who intime will prove their permanence and loyalty to an organization (Kotler & Armstrong, 2019).

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Annex

Table A1
 Final Application Instrument.



UNIVERSIDAD AUTÓNOMA DE NUEVO LEÓN
 FACULTY OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTING AND ADMINISTRATION
 Division of Postgraduate Studies

This research is part of a doctoral thesis and deals with soft skills in automobile dealers employees in the sales area. I will greatly appreciate your support by reflecting and answering this questionnaire, the information will be treated confidentially and anonymously, so your name will not be requested.

Here are some suggestions for filling in the questionnaire:

- a) Carefully read all the questions or statements.
- b) Answer all the questions, although some may be perceived to be similar.
- c) Answer them all please.
- d) Do not answer what it should be or what you would like, but what it really is.
- e) The scale for each statement is as follows: 1.- Never 2.-Rarely 3.- Occasionally 4.- Frequently 5.- Always.

The questionnaire asks for the frequency or the degree to which you observe certain behaviors in your collaborator (s) on your team, particularly the consultants in the sales area. It will take you approx. 5 mins answer it. Thanks!

Var	Ítem	1 Never	2 Few times	3 Occasionally	4 Frequently	5 Always
SC	SC3. Most of the time you are willing to support customer					
	SC4. Makes the customer feel secure in the Customer-Advisor relationship					
	SC9. Offers unique experiences creating memorable moments for the customer. (González et al., 2016)					
HP	HP1. Helps customers with their needs and actively responds to them.					
	HP4. Do you care about the needs of your customers?					
	HP8. Demonstrate professionalism in providing a service. (Wang et al., 2018)					
TW	TE2. Relies on his peers at work for the customers.					

TE5. When performing tasks for the customers, you trust co-workers. (Hussaina, Konarb, & Alic, 2016)

TE6. Do you help your colleagues to develop and execute new projects for the customers? (Al-Harthy et al., 2018)

EC
 CE1. Through dialogue with the customers, seeks to understand their needs.
 CE2. Through active listening collects information about customer needs.
 CE3. Communicates orally effectively with the customer. (Al-Harthy et al., 2018)

PS
 RP4. At the dealer, raises different alternatives in solving problems for the customer.
 RP6. Demonstrated interest in solving problems that are presented to customers.
 RP7. You have the freedom and authority to act independently to solve problems. (Causado-Rodríguez et al., 2019)

MT
 M1. Shows and expresses enthusiasm for their tasks.
 M3. You are constantly motivated in your activities.
 M6. You are excited to build a good customer relationship. (Tampubulon et al., 2021)

Gender Male Female

Collaborator's age 18-35 years 36-45 years 46-60 years

Level of studies Until to High School degree onwards Bachelor's degree

D
 Dealer Location Saint Peter Monterrey Cadereyta St. Catarina St. Nicolas Guadalupe

Dealers origin Country Korea Spain Japan China France USA Germany

D. Demographic questions

* The items were raffled in Google Form for their application

Source: Author's own