RELATIONSHIP MARKETING: AN ANALYSIS OF RELATIONSHIP *BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS* AT MULTI BRAND RETAILERS FROM THE *SURFWEAR* SECTOR

Kátia Pinheiro Lamarca
Masters Student in Textile and Fashion at the University of São Paulo, Brazil
Professor at IED São Paulo, Brazil
katialamarca@yahoo.com.br

Katherine Sresnewsky
Masters Student in Administration at the University of São Paulo, Brazil
ksresnewsky@usp.br

Alexandre Barreto
Masters Student in Administration at the Universty of São Paulo, Brazil
alexandre@barreto.adm.br

ABSTRACT

In the current market environment, a good relationship with clients proves to be an essential item to be worked on maintaining competitive advantages. Especially in business-to-business relationships between retailers and their suppliers where transactions have high economic value. The level of difficulty in managing these relationships highly increases when dealing with multi brand companies, which have high offer from suppliers. Therefore, this article aims to study the satisfaction degree of multi brand retailers in surfwear apparel segment when it comes to the relationship with their suppliers. The survey was applied to a closed mailing of companies in the sector, and the responses were analyzed to verify the accuracy of the hypotheses raised by the authors, from the previously studied literature. Specific items on the actions of relationship marketing have had higher dissatisfaction degree, and presented interesting links between the satisfaction degree of retailers and the years of relationship with the supplier, the number of stores and the volume of purchases carried out.

RESUMO

No atual ambiente de mercado, um bom relacionamento com clientes mostra-se um item essencial a ser trabalhado na manutenção de vantagens competitivas. Especialmente nas relações business-to-business, entre varejistas e seus fornecedores, onde as transações possuem alto valor econômico. O nível de dificuldade em gerenciar este relacionamento aumenta ainda mais em empresas multimarcas, que possuem alta oferta. Sendo assim, o presente artigo objetiva estudar qual o grau de satisfação dos varejistas multimarcas no segmento de vestuário surfwear, quando se trata do relacionamento com seus fornecedores. Foi aplicado questionário em um mailing fechado de empresas do setor, e as respostas foram analisadas para verificar a veracidade das hipóteses levantadas pelos autores, a partir da bibliografia previamente estudada. Itens específicos sobre as ações de marketing de relacionamento obtiveram maior grau de insatisfação, além de apresentadas ligações interessantes entre o grau de satisfação dos lojistas e seu tempo de relacionamento com o fornecedor, o número de lojas que possui e o volume de compras que efetua.

1   INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly competitive market, subjective differentials arise as the main assets of a company and the maintenance of a good relationship with customers prove to be an essential item to be worked on. When it comes to *business-to-business* relationships, especially between retailers and their suppliers, this differential is then much more important, because the economic value transaction is high, and the loss of a single customer can result in a significantly negative impact on income (Prieto & Carvalho, 2005).

Studies also reveal that, to the manufacturers, a close monitoring of the relationship with their customers - retailers - and devising strategies for improvement of this relationship help maintain the competitive advantages in the chain within which they are inserted. "It is up to organizations to seek ways of business integration with the relationship marketing approach in order to develop long lasting relationships with their suppliers so that they remain competitive in a globalized economy" (Crescitelli & Ikeda, 2006).

If it is not so easy to maintain a good relationship among the companies when there is an exclusive channel with their customers, the concern is even greater when a company is not the only supplier. Retailers, who work in the multi-brand model, by definition, need to offer a wide range of products, which makes the relationship with their suppliers even more difficult. According to Larentis and Slongo (2008, p. 11), "the needs of intermediaries dealing with competing suppliers to find product assortment may limit the degree to which strategically true relationships can be developed".

The proposed study was applied, in a questionnaire form, to the *surfwear* apparel retail, sector with large representation of the shopkeepers' multi-brand profile. A base of supplier active customers to the sector will be used, being therefore a closed *mailing*. The researchers agree with the idea that any strategy of relationship marketing is carried out only when the customer opinion is listened and their needs are interpreted, aiming at the improvement of actions thought previously.

In the worldwide retail scenario, Brazil is considered the most attractive country for retailers, according to report by the consultancy A & T Kearney's the *Global Retail Development Index 2013.* In Brazil, retail trade grew by 3% if compared to the sales volume of 2012 on the accumulated period, while for the clothing retail, textiles and footwear, the cumulative rate of the last 12 months is of 4.7% growth in sales volume (IBGE, 2013). In 2011, the volume of clothing retail sales reached R$ 150 billion.

Specifically about the *surfwear*, a report developed by SGI indicated that in 2011 its billing was of R$ 2 billion, and retailers are betting on a growth of between 5% and 10% a year (IMS, 2012), which signals a great challenge having in view the other rates of market growth and also the country growth.

After initial overview, in the following bibliographic references, it will be presented theories about relationships with suppliers and relationship marketing. In this explanation, it will be presented the variables related to this study and they will be detailed in the methodology section, which will adopt a quantitative approach to respond to the proposed problem. Finally, the results of the field research, analysis and final thoughts on the study in question will be presented.

1.1   RESEARCH PROBLEM AND OBJECTIVE

In the present paper, the objective is to study how the multi-brand retailers' relationship with their suppliers happens and how to assess elements that make up the existing relationship marketing. The relevance of investigating the retailers' satisfaction regarding the relationship actions comes from the definition of Claro (2006) who places the customer satisfaction in the long term as one of the stimulant factors to the relationship marketing.

It will also be carried out an analysis relating the level of satisfaction with the profile of each customer, in order to assess their profiles and check the hypotheses proposed by the authors.

As from a bibliographic survey, a scenario analysis and the understanding of this issue relevance, the question proposed by the authors is: what is the satisfaction degree of the *surfwear* retailers when it comes to the relationship with their suppliers?

The study becomes more relevant to the academic world because such subject has received little attention from researchers (Kellar, Hamster & Preis, 2012), and the existing researches are mostly directed to relationship marketing in the retail of food, appliances, automotive, among others.

2   BIBLIOGRAPHIC REVIEW

Although there are available theories for the market being studied, being these theories presented in a good didactical way, there is still too many controversies regarding to the administrative area. Having in view that the empirical knowledge acquired over the years by these entrepreneurs is consolidated as a universal truth, there is resistance to new knowledge. As this audience will also be reader of this article it is mandatory the presentation of important theoretical definitions, which will be addressed in the literature review below.

2.1   RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SUPPLIERS AND CUSTOMERS

Before the study of the relationship between suppliers and retailers, it is important to understand why companies decide to use intermediaries for their sales operations, rather than verticalize their business and meet their customers' needs directly. According to Toledo (1994), market intermediaries are all the institutions and individuals that make easier the manufacturer's task to promote, sell and distribute products to final consumers. The author further explains that direct selling is more costly and, for the costs dilution, it is adopted the use of intermediaries, even if it results in a decrease of control over how the product will be sold.

Aggregating the expenditure of the entire process, since the manufacturing until the sales to the final customer turns the process not only overly expensive, but also forces the supplier to use procedural knowledge which often is not part of their *know-how*. "The relationships allow companies to explore their resources to the most in order to obtain competitive advantages that they alone would not be able to get" (Claro, 2006, p. 3).

Coughlan et al. (2012) adds another factor that may influence the use of intermediaries: the ease of 'search'. Suppliers and consumers are not always physically close, which increases the uncertainty of both as to buying and selling some product, while the intermediary can be strategically located in order to make such a bridge with mutual interests.

For these reasons, most companies use this distribution format, to keep their production volumes, regardless of falling or rising demand, and meet the expected financial returns. This scenario demonstrates how the focus on production as an end in itself, no longer fits in the current tight market. It is essential an ever deeper understanding of the customer that is intended to meet: who, when, where, how, how much, how often and the reasons why it (motivation) buy (Toledo, 1994).

In the current environment, in which the offer is large, having a good product is not enough; "the company's survival in the long term has better conditions to be achieved when it is customer oriented" (Smith, 1992, p.38). Other literature reviews allow a brief discussion on the theories of market orientation. Hamza (2005) argues that in this kind of competitive environment, companies must be market-oriented and even points out a positive correlation between company performance and the market orientation degree. Sheth, Mittal and Newman (2001, p. 39) complement the customer orientation definition, wherein they suggest the full understanding of the customers' desires and needs, the environment and the nature of the market in which it is inserted, so as to develop the company plans and actions in order to satisfy customers.

Sheth, Mittal and Newman (2001) also highlight that companies can get to have efficiencies on costs due to customers who regularly buy, practices of higher prices for established customers, protection in times of crisis, buying in only one place, among others . As from the points highlighted, it is valid to detail "pricing practices". The authors emphasize that satisfied customers do not change their current suppliers, and yet it is estimated a minimum of 5% in price advantages that are generated by customer satisfaction.

It is important to contextualize what is meant by customer satisfaction, and for such, Hamza (2005) proposes that satisfaction is the relationship between the real benefit obtained by the client and the expectation that he had toward the product he purchased. However, for this satisfaction to be perceived,

it can be crucial the involvement of other areas of the organization in the relationship with customers. Sheth, Mittal and Newman (2001, p. 35) propose what they call "client culture, this culture incorporates customer satisfaction as an integral part of the company mission, and uses the customer behavior understanding as inputs for all their marketing plans and decisions".

Concerning the obtainable return in satisfaction search, the studies of Kellar, Hamster and Preis (2012), indicate that satisfied customers increase their purchase intentions and the fidelity, while the dissatisfied ones are prone to break through the business relations and can damage the relationship with current and future customers by negative word of mouth marketing.

In addition to the variables mentioned above, Wilson (1995) also presents a number of features that have been successfully tested to measure the relationship degree in empirical studies, such as trust and loyalty. Wilson (1995) suggests that trust can be defined by the perception that stakeholders will act in accordance with each other interests, or that even just the word of one of the parties is sufficient for the other party knows that what was agreed upon will be fulfilled. It is noteworthy that the trust perception is borrowed by the marketing of other fields of knowledge which makes its measurement and analysis extremely laborious.

Other aspect to be noticed in a relationship between suppliers and customers is the dependency degree between the stakeholders. Wilson (1995) argues that dependency, in a business relationship, may lead one of the parties to carry out actions that normally it would not accomplish. This power asymmetry can cause discomfort in the affected part if it is exercised excessively and/or constantly, causing negative impact on the relationship that may be translated into future losses that do not compensate for the advantage gained in the short-term impacts.

A further important aspect in the relationship between suppliers and customers is the existence of alternatives to the established relationship. In the absence of an alternative, the remaining analyzes may be negatively affected once the relationship will happen simply because of lack of choice. Anderson and Narus (1990) present a slightly broader concept to measure the quality of the alternative. For the authors, the existence of alternatives of quality tends to weaken the relationship between the parties because it reduces the dependency

degree. That is, it is required not only the existence of an alternative but also it must minimally meet the needs inherent to the relationship.

3   RELATIONSHIP MARKETING

Having in view that the product quality and price are not sufficiently decisive factors when closing a purchase/sale - though very important - customers loyalty and a mutually reciprocal relationship acquire core value for a *business-to-business* transaction. Furthermore, considering the subjectivity of the relationships, which will hardly be copied by the competition with the same intensity that a product is copied, "companies begin to realize that the relationship is a differential hardly copied by the competition. To develop a relationship for such companies means to compete on a level that few companies have been entering into"(Claro, 2006, p. 6).

The attention driven to the customer loyalty of already existing customers, preferably to the unbridled acquiring of new customers, is justified by researches showing that the repeated purchases generate more than twice as profitability when compared to first purchases of recent buyers (Claro, 2006). Thus, loyal customers must be treated as an investment to be managed. This idea is made concrete in the form of concept, through the relationship marketing. According to Vavra (1993), the objective of relationship marketing is to maximize the continuous customer satisfaction, and, reinforcing this proposal, the *after-marketing* concept that the author presents arises as a guideline for building long lasting relationships.

With specific reference to the relationship among companies, Gummesson (2010) presents the relationship marketing as a process of engagement that establishes, develops and maintains cooperative long-term and mutually beneficial relationships between the company and its target audiences (primarily suppliers and customers). Larentis and Slongo (2008, p. 211) corroborate this notion, arguing that marketing strategies for the relationship with the intermediaries of the channel "have a key role in the creation and sustainability of competitive advantage" in the market in which the company operates.

To achieve this goal, Nickels and Wood (1999) suggest that companies opting for this strategy must have guidance on long-term, interest in long lasting relationships and a high level of engagement with the customer; they must also carry out continuous researches to identify needs and to measure satisfaction, regard the quality as a concern for all employees and obtain, therefore, the customer loyalty, repeated purchases, positive recommendations and low turnover.

It is worth mentioning that the relationship strategy provides for a good understanding of both parties and a mutual gain. According to Dwyer and Schurr (2006, p. 125), "the gratuities that each part draws from each other's performance and the increasing reliance on the expectations about the roles hold the parties to a network of interdependencies". Along with that, the authors suggest that when the buyer notices advantages in the relationship with his supplier, he creates resistance regarding the change of his products supply; this leads to a competitive advantage to the supplier that is isolated from price competition. This idea goes back to the beginning of the study settings that justified the customer orientation, and closes a continuous cycle of long-term advantages for the entire channel.

Regarding the relationship marketing, Sheth, Mittal and Newman (2001) emphasize the information exchange as a fundamental element, and Siqueira (1992), when dealing more specifically with the business exchanges relations, points out the institutional actions that value this information exchange between suppliers and buyers. Among them he highlights the actions that are related to the products positioning such as publicizing, promotion, *merchandising* and training.

Based on the bibliographical study, Table 1 presents how the factors that may influence the relationship between supplier and customer are related. These factors were used in this article, as variables for the research to be applied with the retailers.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITION	CATEGORY	MEASURABLE VARIABLES	BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE

Relationship with Suppliers	Influencing aspects	V1. Technical competencies V2. Actions and practices of supplier relationship V3. Dependency on the supplier relationship V4. Confidence and loyalty V5. Assessment of alternatives	Anderson e Narus (1990); Toledo (1994); Daronco (2001); Sheth, Mittal e Newman (2001); Wilson (1995); Frederico e Robic (2008); Rozzet e Demo (2010).
Relationship Marketing	Main actions	V1. Training V2. Publicizing and promoting V3. *Merchandising* V4. Information	Siqueira (1992); Vavra (1993); Sheth, Mittal e Newman (2001); Gummesson (2010)
Retailer Profile	Features and behavior	V1. Length of relationship V2. Size (number of stores) V3. Purchase volume V4. Location	Not reported

Table 1 - Measurable variables for the research
Source: Prepared by the authors based on the mentioned bibliographic references

After the theoretical investigation, the authors identified the absence of theoretical reference for the retailer profile variables and thus suggest the following hypotheses to be verified correlating these data with the shopkeeper satisfaction level regarding the supplier competencies.

The H1 proposal is to observe if there is difference in the customer satisfaction levels according to the length of relationship they have with the supplier and in the H2, it will be put under test the relationship between the retailer size and its satisfaction.

H1: The relationship length with the supplier influences the retailer satisfaction degree.

H1a: The longer the relationship, the higher the satisfaction.

H1b: The longer the relationship, the lower the satisfaction.

H1c: The shorter the relationship, the higher the satisfaction.

H1D: The shorter the relationship, the lower the satisfaction.

H2: The retailer size influences the satisfaction degree in the relationship with the supplier.

H2a: The larger the retailer, the higher the relationship satisfaction.

H2b: The smaller the retailer, the lower the relationship satisfaction.

H2c: The larger the retailer, the lower the relationship satisfaction.

H2d: The smaller the retailer, the higher the relationship satisfaction.

The H3 is proposed to verify whether there is difference in the levels of customer satisfaction according to the purchases volume that they perform with the supplier. Finally for the H4, it will be tested whether there is a relationship between satisfaction and the geographical distance the retailers are from the supplier.

H3: The retailer purchases volume influences the satisfaction degree in the relationship with the supplier.

H3a: The larger the purchasing volume, the higher the satisfaction.

H3b: The smaller the purchasing volume, the lower the satisfaction.

H3c: The larger the purchasing volume, the lower the satisfaction.

H3d: The smaller the purchasing volume, the higher the satisfaction.

H4: The retailer location influences the satisfaction degree in the relationship with the supplier.

H4a: The more distant physically it is from the supplier, the lower the satisfaction.

4   OVERVIEW ON THE SPECIFIC RETAIL

Regarding the definition of the object of study, Las Casas (2006) considers retailers those companies in which more than 50% of their operations arise from retail sales. As for the format, the Brazilian market is made up of 15.7% of small networks, 30% of specialized networks and the multi-brand stores represent 37.8% of the retail market (Sebrae, 2012).

The specific retail of *surfwear* came up in Brazil in the 1970s (Feghali & Dwyer, 2004), despite already widespread in other countries. Over the years, the industry has developed and currently there are over 50 national and international brands, commercialized in exclusive retail stores and mainly the multi brand stores installed in shopping malls, high street shops and *online* retailers.

The multi-brand structure was chosen because it is present in large quantity and because the indicators show that, in 2011, some brands started their own retail activities with vertical operations, mostly due to the low quality of retail for sportswear brands in the country (SGI 2012). This fact reinforces

that there is room to work the good relationship between suppliers and retailers in this sector.

When it comes to the available demand, studies indicate that less than 8% of the sector's consumers actually practice the sport (SGI 2012), most of them enjoys the *surf* lifestyle and its aesthetic.

It is noteworthy that some products marketed in these retail stores can be inserted in the segment sorted by Iemi (Institute for Studies in Industrial Marketing) as *beachwear* (swimwear) and other products - such as pants, jackets, etc... - can be in the *casual wear* segment.

5   METHODOLOGY

According to Hair et al. (2010, p. 133), situations where it is sought to describe market characteristics or to assess the marketing strategies present a higher trend to be answered through descriptive approach. This sort of approach works especially well when one seeks for relationships between variables and the cause and effect relations among them, given the great possibility of using mathematical and statistical methods to carry out the analyzes of the obtained data. An issue to take into consideration when choosing a quantitative method is that it is usually observed low rates of utilization regarding the number of questionnaires mailed.

The research population consists of owners and managers of multi-brand retail stores, focusing on clothing and accessories for the *surfwear* sector, which concentrate part of their purchases in a common supplier, assignor of the database employed. The collection instrument was the *online* questionnaire based on the available tool GoogleDocs through the *link* made available via email to the respondents.

Therefore, it was used the method of self-administered survey, in which the researcher is not present at the time of response. The researcher absence has positive aspects, because it turns the search to be less costly financially speaking and minimizes the interference of other person, which could result in biased responses; however it prevents any questions from being resolved. This enhances the attention on the wording of the questions in order to reduce the respondent mistakes in case of misinterpretation of what was asked.

Another positive aspect resulting from the researcher absence is the increased feeling of anonymity and privacy experienced by the respondent. This aspect was especially decisive so that the research could use this type of approach, since the retailers could give "socially" acceptable answers, given the business relationship between the parties studied.

The questionnaire items subjected to assessment were adapted from different sources in order to thoroughly address the research problem proposed. The items related to the suppliers competence were adapted from Sheth, Mittal and Newman (2001) and Rozzet and Demo (2010) and, with respect to the topics on the relationship with the supplier, dependency in the relationship, trust and loyalty, and assessment of alternative suppliers, the questions were adapted from studies of Anderson and Narus (1990), Daronco (2001), Wilson (1995) and Rozzet and Demo (2010).

It was adopted, to assess the satisfaction degree in the relationship between retailers and suppliers, from the perspective of relationship marketing, the scale of Likert which was developed in 1932 by Rensis Likert and used to measure attitudes. It contains five points, the first being "strongly agree" and the fifth "strongly disagree" (Jamieson, 2004).

Regarding the supplier competences, it will be used points, the first being "very satisfied" and the fifth point "very dissatisfied". For the remaining topics, the scale used will be similar to the Jamieson one (2004).

A pre-test was carried out with a sample of five shopkeepers of the city of São Paulo, selected by convenience. After the appropriate adjustments, the *link* to access the questionnaire was sent to the closed *mailing* consisting of 1,600 customers, and the return obtained was of 112 valid questionnaires.

As for the data analysis, it was used descriptive statistical techniques to the profile questions; for the hypotheses verification it was made a crossing of the responses obtained regarding the satisfaction level on the issues of supplier competence, together with the profile data obtained in the collection. It was also analyzed using the descriptive statistics how the agreement and satisfaction levels in the existing relationship are. Finally, it was analyzed whether there is reliability in the scale with the calculation of Cronbach's Alpha, through factorial analysis.

6   ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

Based on the collected data it was obtained the following respondents profile: over 50% own a single store, 20% own two stores, 7% own five stores and 5% own over 13 stores. Regarding the sample geographical distribution, 30% of the shopkeepers are in the state of São Paulo, 17% in Rio de Janeiro, 15% in Santa Catarina and 12% in Rio Grande do Sul, all coastal states. Minas Gerais, which is not a coastal state, arouses the researchers' attention, once 7% of shopkeepers are located there, which confirms the bibliographical reference that suggests that there is no need to practice the sport for the purchase of products directed to *surf*.

With regard to the purchases volume of each respondent, 45% concentrate their purchases between R$ 2,000 and R$ 50,000 and 24% buy more than R$ 200,000. As for the length of the relationship with the supplier, Chart 1 shows how this distribution happens.
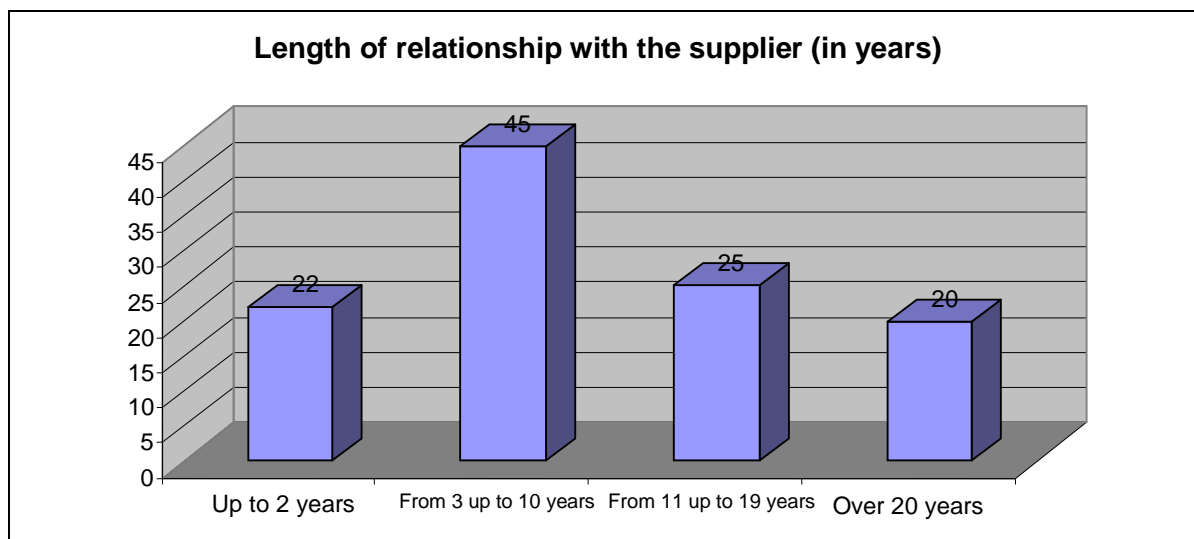

Length of relationship with the supplier (in years)

Chart 1: Length of relationship with the supplier (in years)
Source: Prepared by the Authors, based on the results obtained in the research

With respect to the different topics of relationship marketing, to analyze the results obtained with the responses of the variables and their agreement scales, first, the authors used descriptive statistics, which displays information based on the calculation of the latest trends, variances and standard deviations of each variable. As it was used the Likert scales with different purposes -

satisfaction and agreement - the results and analysis will also be presented that way whenever necessary.

For the block of the supplier relationships shown in Table 1, in the variables results that assess the satisfaction with the supplier technical expertise most customers are satisfied (partially or very satisfied), with emphasis on the quality of products, and the supplier structure and organization with 40% of customers very satisfied; regarding the products price customers are partially satisfied.

In relation to the assessment of alternative suppliers, it was observed high neutrality when the item is the cost, since 30% do not regard this item as an influencer item in the assessment of alternatives for changing the suppliers. Meanwhile, out of 27% who consider price as an important factor, all of them are satisfied with the value currently practiced, corroborating the exposed by Sheth, Mittal and Newman (2001) who suggest a supplier price advantage on satisfied customers.

The analyzed sample does not confirm the proposition of Kellar, Preis & Hamster (2012) who relate purchase frequency and satisfaction degree, since 41% of the respondents who purchase all the collections, are dissatisfied with the *merchandising* support and 33% are dissatisfied with the training. Only the variable information exchange presented a high level of satisfaction with 46% of approval.

Of the respondents, 60% would recommend the supplier confirming the findings of Kellar, Hamster and Preis (2012) that a satisfied customer will make positive word of mouth marketing. It was also observed that over 55% of customers intend to continue the relationship, once the product is offered in all the collections and therefore they depend on the supplier to make up their *mix*.

Confirming this possible scenario of dependency, in the variables that addressed this subject, 44% partially agree that they depend on the supplier to obtain profits and 38% agree that they depend on the supplier for procurement planning, which suggests, according to Wilson (1995), a special attention to possible imbalance of forces in the trade relationship.

Regarding the alternatives assessment, 36% of the respondents value the relationship as the main item to the supplier assessment. However 62% expect that the relationship continue for a long period, suggesting that, despite their

expectation in continuing the relationship, they do not consider it as the most important aspect in the assessment of other business opportunities. These results are consistent with the exposed by Anderson and Narus (1990), which highlight the need of not only the existence of alternatives, but also that they must present a minimal quality to be relevant.

For the hypotheses verification, some assumptions were adopted, as shown in Table 2, and the findings will be discussed as follows.

Verification of hypotheses (Barreto, Sresnewsky, Lamarca, 2013)

H1: The length of the relationship with the supplier influences the retailer degree of satisfaction	ASSUMPTIONS	FINDINGS
H1a: The longer the relationship, the greater the satisfaction	Long relationship: above 20 years	Longer than 20 years: 26% are satisfied
H1b: The longer the relationship, the lower the satisfaction		Longer than 20 years: 8% are dissatisfied
H1c: The shorter the relationship, the greater the satisfaction	Short relationship: up to 2 years	Up to 2 years: 15% are satisfied
H1d: The shorter the relationship, the lower the satisfaction		Up to 2 years: 6% are dissatisfied
H2: The retailer size influences the satisfaction degree in the relationship with the supplier	**ASSUMPTIONS**	**FINDINGS**
H2a: The larger the retailer, the higher the satisfaction	Largest retailer: above 5 stores	Above 5 stores: 14% are satisfied
H2b: The smaller the retailer, the lower the satisfaction		01 Store: 22% are dissatisfied
H2c: The larger the retailer, the lower the satisfaction	Smallest retailer: 1 store	Above 5 stores: 9% are dissatisfied
H2d: The smaller the retailer, the higher the satisfaction		01 Store: 42% are satisfied
H3: The volume of the retailer purchases influences the satisfaction degree in the relationship with the supplier	**ASSUMPTIONS**	**FINDINGS**
H3a: The larger the purchases volume, the higher the satisfaction	Largest purchases volume : above R$ 200 thousand	Above R$ 200 thousand: 20% are satisfied
H3b: The smaller the purchases volume, the lower the satisfaction		Up to R$ 50 thousand: 20% are dissatisfied
H3c: The larger the purchases volume, the lower the satisfaction	Smallest purchases volume: up to R$ 50thousand	Above R$ 200 thousand: 11% are dissatisfied
H4d: The smaller the purchases volume, the higher the satisfaction		Up to R$ 50 thousand: 36% are satisfied
H4: The retailer location influences the satisfaction degree in the relationship with the supplier	**ASSUMPTIONS**	**FINDINGS**
H4a: The more distant physically from the supplier, the lower the satisfaction	Near States: RJ, MG and PR	Customers located in other states (except those of the assumptions), around 20% are dissatisfied with the supplier

Table 2: Hypotheses Verification
Source: Prepared by the authors based on the survey results

For the information analysis and the respective hypotheses verification, it was chosen the variables of the context satisfaction that presented the highest and the lowest results. The variables that presented the highest levels of satisfaction were: quality of products and Structure and Organization of the supplier. And those who presented the lowest satisfaction degree were: Publicizing and promoting of brands and *merchandising* Support. These variables were then subjected to statistical crossings with the information obtained on the sample profile.

With regard to the hypothesis verification H1 it is confirmed the H1a with a majority of satisfied customers after 20-year relationship, and the H1d with only 6% of customers dissatisfied in relationships of up to two years. For the

hypothesis H2, it is confirmed the H2d, where the lower the retailer, the higher their satisfaction, and also the H2a, suggesting that the retailer size should not influence their relationship satisfaction. In the hypothesis H3 it is confirmed the H3d with 36% of the respondents who purchase up to R$ 50 thousand satisfied in the relationship, and the H3a, with 20% of shopkeepers who purchase over R$ 200,000 satisfied, indicating a lack of relation between purchases volume and the satisfaction degree. Finally, it is not confirmed the H4, with only 20% of dissatisfied customers located far away from the supplier.

Previously to the exploratory factorial analysis, it is necessary to examine the correlations matrix and the adequacy of the sample for such an analysis. In the assessment, it is calculated the measure of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO), which compares simple correlations with partial correlations (Favero, Belfiore, Silva and Chan, 2009). For this sample, the KMO is 0.909, suggesting high relation among the variables and enabling the exploratory factorial analysis.

Regarding the sample adequacy, in parallel with the feasibility test of factorial analysis, non-parametric statistical techniques recommend the sample normality test, through the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test which refers to the agreement degree among the distribution of a set of sample values, and determines the specific theoretical distribution and indicated for samples, where $n > 30$ (Siegel, 1981, p. 52). The results obtained with the test indicate that the sample has a normal distribution with *p-value* = 0.

The calculated exploratory factorial analysis suggests the grouping of the 34 variables in six components that have similar factorial load, which would explain 67% of the total variance. If excluded the variable with the lowest ratio of communality (0.453) which deals with getting products from supplier without checking the goods, the explained total variance rises to 69%, or also the study could be accomplished with only four components which would explain 60% of the total variance, indicating the low factorial load of two existing components.

Finally, in order to test the reliability of the scales used, it was calculated the Cronbach's Alpha of the 33 variables, which, for the study results in an Alpha of 0.957, indicating that the scales are reliable and liable to replication.

7   CONCLUSION

Considering that, in this paper, the objective was to study the way it happens the *surfwear* multi-brand retailers relationship with their suppliers and how these suppliers assess the elements that make up the existing marketing relationship, the study suggests that there are several aspects that make up this relationship and influence on their assessment and satisfaction. It was found the importance of regularly assessing the level of customer satisfaction since most of shopkeepers are satisfied with the relationship in general terms. However the relationship marketing actions deserve special attention because these were the variables that stood out with the highest dissatisfaction degree in the survey. This suggests that a better work on the variables of relationship would cause a direct impact on the overall satisfaction of customers towards their supplier.

In relation to the proposed hypotheses, it was found that a long time relationship positively influences the satisfaction degree shown by the shopkeepers. However regarding the retailer size, it was observed proportional inverse relation, showing a higher satisfaction degree precisely in the smaller shopkeepers - just one store. Such relation was also observed in the purchases volume carried out by the shopkeepers: higher purchases volume reflects in a smaller dissatisfaction degree.

The authors suggest that the same study be replicated to other retail sectors of the clothing market, since the studied market presents specific features and, as a closed *mailing* was used, there is no possibility to extrapolate these data to the universe concerned.

Other relevant point for future studies would be the broadening of the dependency concept, in which the supplier action in an imbalance of forces can be verified, as well as statistical deepening through a *cluster* analysis in order to identify possible retail groups that could present similarities besides satisfaction and agreement.

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