Motivation as a Driver of Customer Service: The Impact on Automobile Dealerships

La motivación como impulsora del servicio al cliente: Impacto en las concesionarias de automóviles

Roxana Dalila Escamilla
Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León (México)
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5819-191X
licroxana@hotmail.com
Adriana Segovia-Romo
Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León (México)
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7534-3003
adrianasegovia@hotmail.com
Maria Mayela Terán Cázares
Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León (México)
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5089-3909
mayela.teran@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The objective of the research is to analyze the relationship of Motivation as a soft skill that drives Customer Service in car dealerships, specifically in sales area employees. The survey was applied to a sample of 81 managers from the sales area of automotive agencies in the Monterrey metropolitan area. The proposed model was linear regression. The surveys were processed with SPSS Statistics. The hypothesis was confirmed, about the positive and significant relationship of the predictor variable and the dependent variable, in the employees of the sales area in the automobile agencies. It is suggested to analyze and build a complementary profile of the necessary soft skills of sales collaborators in car dealerships and other sectors.

Keywords: soft skills, motivation, customer service

Jel code: M12.

RESUMEN

El objetivo de la investigación es analizar la relación de la Motivación como una habilidad blanda que impulsa el Servicio al Cliente en las concesionarias de automóviles, específicamente en los empleados del área de ventas. La encuesta se aplicó a una muestra de 81 gerentes del área de ventas de agencias automotrices en el área metropolitana de Monterrey. El modelo propuesto fue de regresión lineal. Las encuestas fueron procesadas con SPSS Statistics a través de sucesivos pasos para obtener los resultados. Se confirmó la hipótesis sobre la relación positiva y significativa de la variable predictora y la variable dependiente en los empleados del área de ventas de las agencias automotrices. Se sugiere analizar y construir un perfil complementario de las habilidades blandas necesarias de los colaboradores comerciales en las concesionarias de automóviles y otros sectores. Esto mejorará el reclutamiento, la selección y la capacitación.

Palabras clave: habilidades blandas, motivación, servicio al cliente.

Código JEL: M12.

50

INTRODUCTION

Customer service is a differentiator in a highly competitive market, and the human factor is responsible for putting this service into practice (Solnet et al., 2019). Employees have a series of soft skills that allow them to: generate experiences that the customer wants, thereby increasing sales and fostering loyalty towards the organization (Heskett et al., 2008). The service approach in the organization has the essence of satisfying the needs presented by the client (Vega, Olivero and Gastelbondo, 2020). Service is also the fundamental experience where the contact between the organization and the client occurs, this set of experiences is known as moments of truth (Carlzon, 1991). The retention or loss of a potential client or a client already in shape depends on these interactions (Vazquez, 2014). So, organizations must view customer service as the essential and differentiating element which can determine their existence and/or permanence in the market (Montoya et al., 2013).

Customer service should also be considered in the auto dealership industry. Just to mention some data on this sector, the ADANL (2019) in the years 2017-2019 reported sales in Nuevo León that oscillated in 9,209, 9,382, and 9660 units respectively. The above data are indicators of the attention that should be paid to this important sector in all matters, in particular customer service. In this sector, customer service is key to influencing the purchase 51 decision. Car dealerships offer similarities for each segment in various attributes such as products, technology, safety, comfort, and prices. What makes the difference is the customer service. In addition to influencing the sale, customer service also generates loyalty towards the employee, the brand, and the dealer (Hennig-Thurau, 2004). Through good service, it is possible to get the customer to return for the maintenance of the car or a buyback (Díaz, Muñoz and Duque, 2021).

Given the above, the collaborators are the ones who represent the organization in the experiences that the client lives. They are the ones who can provoke an emotional connection, a unique bond of warmth and trust (Albrecht, 1990). When employees achieve the human touch in the service experience, a competitive advantage of the business is guaranteed (Bowen, 2016; Mody, Suess and Letho, 2019). This is how soft skills in employees who are in direct contact with clients require special attention (Faizal, Annual and Rashidi, 2019). Heckman and Kautz (2012) mention soft skills as qualities that do not depend on the knowledge acquired and are of relevant value in some positions. Soft skills are made up of common sense, the ability to deal with people, a positive attitude, and flexibility. They are the intangible and specific skills of the personality that determine the strengths of the leaders, facilitators, mediators, or negotiators of an organization (Robles, 2012; Faizal et al., 2019). In some universities and researchers, they have carried out studies to find out what are the

important soft skills in the labor market, within them, motivation is mentioned (Robles, 2012; Singh and Jaykumar, 2019).

This article aims to analyze in a particular way the soft ability of motivation as a driver of Customer Service. This study was applied to the automotive distribution sector, specifically to employees in the new car sales area in the Monterrey Metropolitan area. Several aspects are framed in the process: First, the statement of the hypothesis, the design of an instrument, data collection, and statistical calculations for the verification or rejection of the hypothesis. Later the importance of the innovation of the subject in the sector of automobile distribution. And finally, by having the human factor as the center of research.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section presents some definitions and theories of customer service and motivation that were the basis for constructing the definitions and models of both variables for the study. The definitions of the variables were the reference for the elaboration of the instrument that was applied in the part of the research methodology.

Customer Service (CS)

52 Carlzon (1991) establishes the moments of truth in his theory of customer service. These are the experiences that collaborators generate for clients and determine their warmth, attention, treatment, the service they offer, etc.

Within the analyzed definitions of customer service that gave the guideline for the development of the dependent construct are the following: Customer service is a set of basic individual predispositions and an inclination to provide what the customer needs, it involves being courteous and attentive when dealing with clients, associates, or collaborators (Alge et al., 2002).

Machorro et al. (2009), mention that the service is to offer honest attention, follow-up, and resolution of problems in such a way that the client is satisfied with the good or service acquired (Marinova, Singh and Singh, 2018). On the other hand, customer service is linked to the perception and expectations about the quality and satisfaction it generates, understanding the service as a courtesy, credibility, responsiveness, understanding of the customer, reliability, communication, security, and accessibility (Susskind, Kacmar and Borchgrevink, 2003; Fornieles et al., 2014).

According to Gonzalez et al. (2016) quality customer service can be seen from reliability; that is, the ability to perform the promised service reliably and carefully. Responsiveness: willingness and willingness of employees to help the customer and provide what is expected

of the service. The security, knowledge, and attention shown by employees coupled with their skills inspire credibility and trust (Dehghanpouri, Soltani and Rostamzadeh, 2020). In addition to the empathy and individualized attention that must be offered to clients (Gil et al., 2007).

The operational definition of customer service for this study is good treatment, understanding, willingness, and willingness to support the customer. Transmitting security, credibility, and trust at the time of interaction (Leppard, Molyneux and Santapau, 1998; González et al., 2016). The understanding of what the client expects, in such a way that, when receiving the service, it is of quality and therefore is satisfied with the reception of it (Montoya et al., 2013). It includes unique interactions for the client, with high differentiation and generating memorable experiences (Coste et al., 2017; Colón, 2017; Vega et al., 2020).

Motivation (MT)

For the skill of motivation, the theories presented by Haque, Haque and Islam (2014) and Marulanda, Montoya and Vélez (2014) that mention the motivation to achieve and affiliation were taken as a basis, in them, they explain that the collaborator extrinsically or intrinsically desires excellence, a job well done where he accepts the assigned responsibility. In addition to the above, it is suggested that they like to contact others, help and serve other people (Najul, 2011). In the analysis of this study, the intrinsic motivation present in both is taken: achievement and affiliation. For reference is the following graphic model adapted from the 53 authors as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Motivation Model
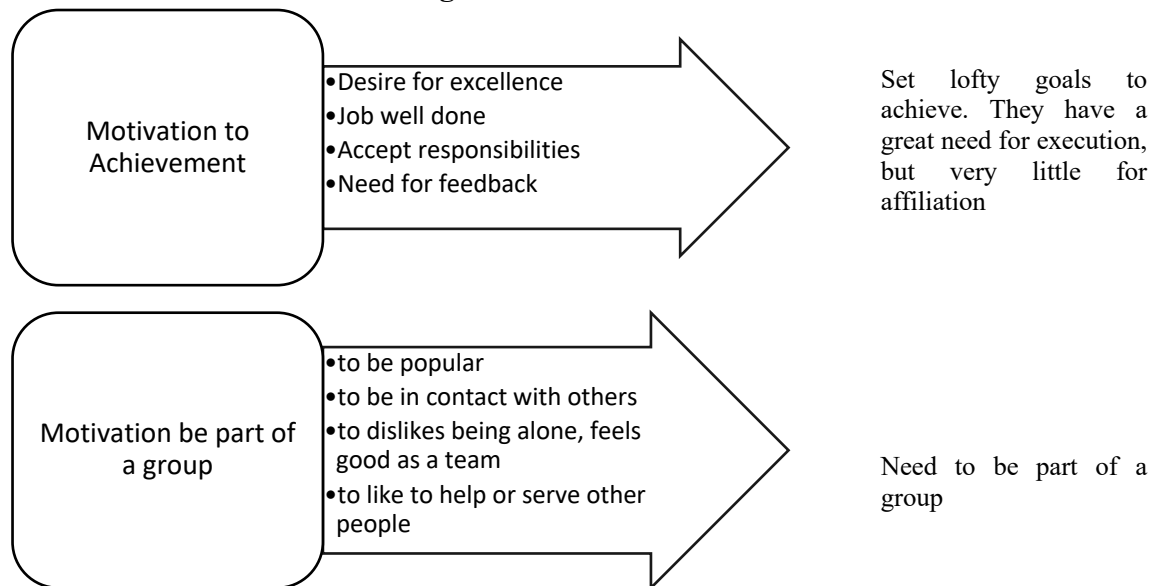
Source: Own elaboration (Haque M.F. et al., 2014; Marulanda et al., 2014).

Some found definitions of motivation that will help to build the construct for this study are the following: Motivation is a way of creating high levels of enthusiasm to achieve the organization's objectives, this situation results when collaborators want to satisfy some individual need in Their work shows commitment and dedication, benefiting the internal or external client (Abu-ELSamen et al., 2011). Motivation refers to the achievement of organizational objectives by satisfying the needs or demands of individual employees (Haque et al., 2014).

Motivation is a set of cognitive processes through which the individual determines the amount of time and effort that will be invested in the search to satisfy specific needs and objectives. Depending on their origins, motivational processes can be intrinsic, that is, inherent to the collaborator or extrinsic, external to him. Employees who feel the desire to enjoy performing a task have an intrinsic motivation, this results in high levels of autonomy, perception of self-efficacy, commitment, satisfaction, and fulfillment in job performance, impacting their leadership (Hernández et al., 2009).

Intrinsic motivation is considered to be one of the main explanatory variables related to self-direction mechanisms, especially strategies focused on behavior and natural reward, from this definition terms such as self-efficiency, autonomy, job satisfaction are rescued, own leadership, to determine and fulfill the proposed objectives (Curral and Marques, 2009). In these mentioned objectives, the collaborator will know how much energy and effort he will need to invest to achieve them, considering that organizationally the final benefit of this effort is reflected in the client (Mohd et al., 2012).

Navarro et al. (2011) define motivation in organizations as the degree of effort that people are willing to exert in their work to satisfy their needs. This is based on the assumption that employees have a set of needs that lead them to behave in a certain way to satisfy them. Such needs are individual dispositions of varying degrees that guide behavior toward the goal of achieving satisfaction and reducing the stress of unmet needs. Needs represent the source of energy that drives motivating employee behavior.

García and Forero (2014) mention employee motivation as an emotional state that is generated as a result of the influence exerted by certain motives. The reasons can be satisfaction, visualization of achievement, commitment and work interest, task orientation, and success orientation. This specifies that the reasons for the employee's behavior can be intrinsic, such as achievement, success, job interest, satisfaction, or extrinsic, such as homework, etc.

One motivation was analyzed from different points of view, the operational definition for this study is the degree of effort, enthusiasm, and commitment that collaborators are willing to exert in their work to satisfy their needs and those of clients (Navarro et al., 2011; Haque

54

et al., 2014). It is the desire to achieve the task or goal in favor of the client (Navarro et al., 2011; García and Forero, 2014; Marulanda et al., 2014). It is the good spirit to provide a quality service that satisfies the client (García and Forero, 2014).

Empirical relations between Customer Service (CS) and Motivation (MT)
Within the literature review, some studies were found in which a relationship between customer service and motivation was observed. Such is the case of an investigation on the development and implementation of software in Portugal, in which 108 collaborators were surveyed. The relationship between CS and MT was positive and significant ($\beta = .25$, p <.05). Concluding that promoting motivation in employees, reflected in their leadership and innovation in their work, results in better customer service (Curral and Marques, 2009).

In another investigation in Hannover, Germany. They found a positive and significant relationship of motivation with satisfaction, customer service, and customer retention. The results were as follows: a $\beta = .76$ for customer motivation, service, and satisfaction. A $\beta = .08$ for customer motivation and retention. Both relationships with the significance of p <0.05. The questionnaire to obtain the data was applied to a sample of 989 retail consumers of books / CDs / DVD and travel agencies. That is 408 from travel agencies and 581 from media (DVD and CD) (Hennig-Thurau, 2004).

Swanson, Davis and Zhao (2007) investigated a theater to know the motivation for achievement and its relationship with service and customer satisfaction. The sample was 442 audience members. The result of the structural equations model was a path coefficient of 0.19 and a significance of p <0.05, mentioning that motivation positively influences general satisfaction.

In the investigation that was carried out in Zhejiang city of China. In the tourism industry. We wanted to see the impact of employee motivation (proactive personality) and customer service. It was using the application of a survey 1.- to 145 first-line collaborators of clients who had to wait time to be served and 2.- to 39 supervisors of said collaborators to evaluate their performance in customer service. The data were calculated through structural equations and the result was β .536 p <.01. They concluded that good customer service begins with the people, with the collaborators. That is, front-line collaborators by focusing their attention on the customer's points of view and being proactively motivated, helps in providing good service and that the customer is satisfied with the treatment received. When the employee has confidence in her abilities to participate in a broader set of roles to serve customers, it results in better customer service (Huo et al., 2019).

In Korea Japan, a study was carried out in electronic banking to find out the relationship between the employee's motivation expressed in the commitment they have towards the client and a good service experience and satisfaction when receiving said service. A questionnaire

was sent electronically to 247 clients and they were processed using structural equations, having the following result, a $\beta = .08$, and a $p < .05$ proving that the commitment that the employee feels and/or must satisfy the customer generates a positive influence on the service experience provided (Shin, 2021).

Once the theoretical framework was explored, the graphic model and the hypothesis were raised as shown in figure 2. Subsequently, the development of the measurement instrument, its application, and the calculations to obtain the results.

Figure 2. Graphic Model

X1 (MT) Motivation	(+) →	Y (CS) Customer Service
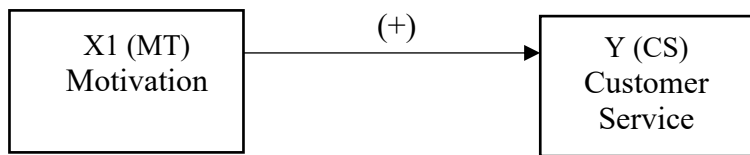
Source: Own elaboration.

From the graphic model the hypothesis of the study was established:
H₁: MT has a positive relationship with customer service.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

After establishing the models and definitions of the constructs of the investigation, the instrument was developed and applied (Annex 1). The items that made up the instrument were selected and adapted from the empirical studies found in the literature review. Among these instruments analyzed were SERVQUAL and SERVPERF (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1988), all of them validated with acceptable Cronbach's Alpha. Upon having the first version of the instrument, the content validity was performed with expert Doctors in Methodology and Human Capital. Before developing the instrument in Google Forms for its application, statistical adjustments and expert suggestions were made. Table 1 shows how the instrument was constituted with the Cronbach's Alpha values of each construct.

Tabla 1. Constitution and Reliability of the Instrument

Variable	Cronbach Alpha
CS	.939
MT	.884
Total items with demographics	11

Source: Own elaborartion (SPSS Statistics).

At the time of elaborated the instrument, the population and the sample were determined. The population of commercial automotive distribution agencies in the Monterrey metropolitan area was 96 (AMDA, 2019), automotive agencies are classified as SMEs, considering the number of collaborators (INEGI, 2009). The agencies studied vary between

MERCADOS *y Negocios*

8 and 60 collaborators. The statistical formula (equation 1) was applied for a simple random sampling with finite population $n = Nz2 (1-p) / (N-1) e2 + z2p (1-p)$ where, N = 96, Z = 1.96, p = .5, 1-p = .1, e = .05. Resulting in an n of 77 respondents.

The study subjects of the research were established as the Sales Managers or Coordinators of the automotive distribution agencies of the Monterrey metropolitan area. They are the ones who are closely involved in the operation of the business and determine the sales strategies of the agencies. They are also the ones who know, constantly treat, and observe customers. The instrument was sent to all study subjects of the population and thus to be able to receive the largest number of questionnaires to cover the sample. Eighty-one questionnaires were received, all of which were accepted for processing, and since the sample of 77 was covered, the calculations were carried out in SPSS statistics.

Regarding the demographic data of the sample, they were obtained through four items that refer to gender, age, education, and geographical area. Table 2 shows the results. In it, it is observed that the number of men and women is similar, slightly inclined towards men with 54%. Employees with an age equal to or greater than 36 years represent 50%. A small number of employees have a maximum high school education (16%). Regarding the demographic of the geographical area, they were segmented into two groups, area A, which is where the largest number of automotive agencies are located.

57

The area is made up of Monterrey and San Pedro, which are municipalities with high purchasing power, and are in the center of the Monterrey metropolitan area. In Zone B were the municipalities of Cadereyta, San Nicolás, and Santa Catarina, which are further from the central zone. The percentages of groups A and B are those expected according to the concentration of agencies by zone, 57% are in the group of zone A, that is, in the periphery and central municipalities.

Table 2. General demographic data

Demographics	Gender		Age		Schooling		Area	
Groups	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: Own elaboration.

RESULTS

The statistical model proposed for the investigation, according to the hypothesis was $SC = \beta 0 + \beta 1\ (MT) + u$. Linear regression with successive steps. The result is shown in table 3.

Table 3. Model and Method

Model	Incoming Independent Constructs	Statistics	Result	β	T	Condition Index	Sig.
Linear Regression CS= β0+β1(MT)+u.	MT= MT1, MT3, MT6	R² .746 F 98.839 Durbin Watson 1.075	MT accepted	MT .743	MT 9.942	1	MT <.001

Source: Own elaboration.

Talking of the results of the model, a coefficient of determination R2 of .746 and a Durbin Watson test of 1.075 are observed. Regarding the relationship between the predictor and the dependent variable, a β of .743 was obtained, with a statistical significance lower than .001, an estimation error of .075, a Condition Index of 1 and Fisher's test of 98.839.

58 Next, Table 4 shows the hypothesis and the degree of impact of the variable towards CS.

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

Independent variables: Soft Skill Motivation	β	Significance	Result
H5: MT has a positive impact on customer service.	.743	(+) <0.001	Accepted

Source: Own elaboration.

The appreciation of the results of this study shows that motivation has a driving relationship concerning customer service in direct sales collaborators in new car dealerships.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Theoretical implications

According to the methodological contribution, the process of developing the instrument and the results obtained through a quantitative method to obtain the relationship of the variables are highlighted. In turn, it is possible to compare empirical studies found in different sectors and how the behavior in this automotive sector of the relationship of motivation towards customer service is above the study carried out in software and entertainment (theater) and slightly lower than that applied to book / CD / DVD retailers and travel agencies. Table 5 presents the authors of said empirical studies found and the result of the linear regression of

this study to contribute to the relationship of the variables proposed for the automotive sales sector.

Table 5. Relations between Motivation (MT) the dependent variable (CS) and this study

Authors	β	Significance
(Curral & Marques, 2009)	.25	<0.05
(Hennig-Thurau, 2004)	.76	<0.05
(Swanson, Davis & Zhao, 2007)	.19	<0.05
(Huo et al., 2019)	.53	<0.01
(Shin, 2021)	.08	<0.05
This Research	.74	<.001

Source: Own elaboration.

Regarding the data of each demographic group, regressions of each group and category were processed in SPSS Statistics. Each iteration included the independent variable Motivation (MT) with the dependent Customer Service (CS). In addition, the calculation of a mean difference or t-test was performed to validate in which category the impact of motivation towards customer service was greater. Table 6 shows the assumptions based on the regression of each category and the result of the calculations. The relationship between TM and CS was stronger in women than in men, in those under 35 than in those over this age, higher in undergraduate students than in high school or a lower grade, and finally, there is a higher 59 degree of relationship of motivation towards customer service in the collaborators who are in the agencies of zone B, which are the agencies that are in fewer conurbation areas and with less purchasing power vs zone A.

Table 6. Hypothesis tests on Motivation´s relationships in the different groups

Demographic	Group	n	β	Typical Error	Assumptions	T-test
Gender	M	44	.722	.092	$MT_W > MTM$	3.59
	W	37	.805	.131		
Age	<36	31	.771	.099	MT<36 > MT≥36	2.16
	≥36	50	.721	.105		
Schooling	≤ Highs	16	.380	0.164	MT≥Bach >MT≤Highs	9.25
	≥ Bachelor	65	.789	.080		
Area	A	57	.677	.101	MTB > MTA	7.68
	B	24	.867	.102		

Source: Own elaboration.

Management implications

Within the practical contribution it is concluded that, in the automobile dealer sector, customer service is key to influencing the purchase decision. Car dealers offer similarity in each segment in several domains: products, technology, safety, comfort, and prices. What makes the difference is the treatment of the client (Gómez, 2011). In addition to influencing the completion of the sale, customer service also generates loyalty towards the collaborator, the brand, and the concessionaire (Causado-Rodriguez, Charris and Guerrero, 2019). By offering good customer service, you can get the customer back for car maintenance or a buyback. Loyalty is generated when clients feel trust with the sales consultant (Shoemaker and Lewis, 1999). The advisors must offer a warm treatment during the sales process (Wagner et al., 2019). Making them feel unique and important (Tesone and Ricci, 2006). Showing empathy and above all, listening carefully to interpret their needs and tastes (Da Silva and Leite, 2010). These last actions occur when the collaborator has certain soft skills.

By confirming the relationship of the soft ability of Motivation (MT) with Customer Service (SC), a latent reality in the automotive agencies sector is clarified and established that had not been found in the literature review previously.With this study, the importance of Motivation of the collaborator who is in front of the client is perceived. By having this ability, the collaborator has a drive and taste to achieve their goals and carry out their activities, in such a way that they lead them to achieve their objectives and satisfy their achievement needs within the organization and consequently, good service is provided to the client (Tampubolon, Murniarti and Sidabutar, 2021).

The statement of the hypothesis on the relationship of motivation and customer service in direct sales collaborators in car dealerships was accepted, so the practical contribution for this sector is valuable and has the purpose of gradually developing a profile of the soft skills of these collaborators, especially at the time of hiring and training.

Future lines of work and limitations

It is suggested to study this skill at the leadership or managerial level and expand it to the other areas of the automotive agencies. On the other hand, to complement this study, it is proposed to continue deepening in other soft skills such as flexibility, self-confidence, sense of urgency, and proactivity in the collaborators of the automotive dealership sales area. It is also suggested to extend the research to other locations, hoping to see the behavior of the data for this variable. Finally, it is proposed to take these studies to more retail sectors to analyze the relationship of motivation and customer service in employees who are direct with the customer, as well as the level of momentum compared to other sectors.

Situational moment of the Investigation. It should be noted that this study was carried out exactly at the beginning of COVID-19 in Nuevo León, which was at a significant moment in

car dealerships. This affected not only individual and collective behavior in the sales process and customer service. But also, before the process of the investigation itself. 44% of the surveys were applied and received before the pandemic, during this period the response and reception process was complicated, the estimated time was 3 to 4 weeks. As the home office was presented and more collaborators were online, filling out and receiving questionnaires was easier. The remaining 55% were shipped and received in a response time of 1-2 weeks.

According to the sales process before the pandemic, it was 90% face-to-face, that is, in person. This allowed the collaborator's skills to be put into practice naturally or visually. However, when the surveys were applied, that 90% of employees were making a significant effort to sell remotely and/or digitally. So, the skills had to be accentuated. They made them come true through calls or video calls, contact with the client had to be closer and warmer, taking care not to overwhelm him (Bullemore-Campbell and Cristóbal-Fransi, 2021).

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61

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63

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66

ANNEX 1

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 the soft skill of Motivation and Customer Service 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 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 to 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)					
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)					
D	Gender	⚪ Male female				
	Collaborator's age	⚪ 18-35 years 36 up				
	Level of studies	⚪ Until to High School degree Bachelor's degree onwards				
	Dealer Location	⚪ Saint Peter ⚪ Monterrey ⚪ Cadereyta ⚪ St. Catarina ⚪ St. Nicolas ⚪ Guadalupe				
	Dealers origin Country	⚪ Korea ⚪ Spain ⚪ Japan ⚪ China ⚪ France ⚪ USA ⚪ Germany				

67

D. Demographic questions

* The items were raffled in Google Form for their application

Source: Own elaboration.

68