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Brand Building Behaviors in Premium and Luxury Retail Store: Sale Assistant Physiological Responses to Experiences during the Selling Ceremony

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To my unique human and feline family

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A PhD is an intense, challenging and transformative experience. If I think back to when I started and where I am now, I can see I made a long journey. It is a route on which I embarked with the aim of developing, delving into a specific discipline, acquiring analytical ability and developing as a person and professionally. I feel very satisfied; I have nearly reached the summit and now more than ever I feel like it was the right choice. I learnt to look further afield, to use a structured though process and I feel stronger as a professional as a result of the cultural background that I have acquired.

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Introduction

This thesis is the synthesis of an exploration of both national and international literature over three years and empirical analysis of Brand Building Behaviors in the retail premium and luxury setting. This study assesses sale assistant peripheral physiology responses during the service encounter and analyzes the behaviors inside the Selling Ceremony that provide engagement and frustration. It explores the following disciplines in particular: *luxury, retail management & store management; customer experience and extraordinary experiences; sales management and personal selling process (including selling ceremony); behavioral branding & brand building behaviors; physiology and immersion*.

This research was conducted from 2015 to 2018, during the PhD program in Comunicazione e Mercati at *IULM University*. As part of my PhD I spent a full year abroad as a Visiting Scholar at *Claremont Graduate University*.

Purpose of the Thesis

The purpose of this research is to understand how the sale assistant (also called sale associate) can influence the customer purchase decisions, and what specific behaviors during the service encounter generate engagement and frustration. To do so, after the literature review, the research analysis is divided in two studies. Firstly, the quantitative study assesses the sale assistant peripheral physiology responses during the service encounter in the retail premium-luxury store, in order to understand how they influence customer purchase decisions. In the second observational study, this research observes the Brand Building Behaviors inside the script of the Selling Ceremony to analyze the positive and negative physiological impact and where these behaviors are located during the service encounter.

Retail has also changed dramatically over the last two decades with the advent of the online channel and the impact of the digitalization that has drastically reduced turnover from physical stores to online (Verhoef et al., 2015). Therefore, traditional retailers, including luxury and premium Brands, have been forced to completely rethink the role of the physical store as the place where customers expect a relational, playful, explorative, and informative experiences (Stephens, 2017). Within the premium-luxury sector, the store constitutes a central element in the positioning strategy (Moore et al., 2010; Doyle at al., 2008) and it’s the main place in which the Brand legitimates its power (Cervellon & Coudriet, 2013; Som & Blackaert, 2015; Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2012). In this perspective, the sale assistant personifies the role of a Brand Ambassador (Jacobs, 2003; Cervellon & Coudriet, 2013) and through his sales style greatly influences the in-store customer experience and costumer purchase decisions (Lent & Tour, 2009).

Increasingly, researchers are recognizing the significance of considering sale assistant and customer as co-producers in value co-creation during the service encounter (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2000; Vargo and Lusch, 2004). In particular, sale assistant is not only an integral part of service delivery but is also a critical determinant of customers' service perceptions and influencing customers' purchase decision (Bove et al., 2009; Liao and Chuang, 2004; Parasuraman et al., 1991; Mills and Morris, 1986; Zhao et al., 2018). Therefore, many internal branding studies have tried to align the employees' behaviors to the company vision and values. However, today, it is necessary to develop a structured process that uniforms effectively the behavior of the sale assistant to the Brand to provide the consumer with a high-quality relationship and experience (Ferraresi & Schmitt, 2006). And this is even more important in the premium-luxury context, that distinguishes itself from mass-market for the assistance and attention to the customer and the sales staff as a valuable Brand asset (Chevalier and Mazzalovo, 2012). Therefore, the present research, has applied for the first time the Brand Building Behavior concept inside retail, because it focuses on conveying a Brand-consistent meaning during the interaction with the customer to generate engagement and customer experience (Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2015). To adapt the concept of the Brand Building Behaviors to the service encounter inside premium-luxury stores, the script of the Personal Selling Process (PSP) (Dubinsky et al. 1980 & 1981) has been analyzed and enriched with the Brand values, evolving into the script of the Selling Ceremony (Caru' & Cova, 2003; Priest, 2016; Cervellon & Coudriet, 2013).

Considering the importance of conveying a consistent and effective customer experience, both academics and practitioners have tried to engineer the customer experience (e.g. Berry & Carbone, 1994 and 2002) or examined the sale assistant's behaviors that provide extraordinary experiences (Solomon et al., 1985; Bitner et al., 1990; Bitner et al., 1994), but most of these studies are qualitative and mostly based on customer's surveys (Elvin, 2003; Hsu & Chiang, 2011), and only a few of them consider the employee's perspective (Bitner, 1990; Schneider & Bowen, 1985; Brown &Swartz, 1989; Price &Arnould, 1994). And, although service scripts have been used across a myriad of organizations to facilitate sale assistant–customer interactions (Elvin, 2003; Hsu & Chiang, 2011), there has been surprisingly little quantitative research. And, none of these mentioned studies consider sale assistant and customer as co-producers and interdependent in value co-creation during their interaction (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000; Vargo & Lusch, 2004).

In the last decades, the growing field of neuroscience and behavioral sciences clearly suggests that what is reported by the customer during an interview or in a focus group (the result of a rational process), may not correspond to a real behavior, because it may be based on less rational and more automatic processes (Fazio & Olson, 2003). Moreover, how people respond to traditional survey scales is heavily impacted by culture, current physiologic state outside the target experience (e.g. fatigue, hunger), and socioeconomic status (Zak & Barraza, 2018). Therefore, customers can't accurately or consistently report their unconscious emotional reactions to experiences. Additionally, no physiological device has ever been used during a real service encounter and in a premium-luxury store, because methods like EEG, Eye-Tracking and FMRI are too invasive to be used in the store and they can invalidate the results of the investigation (Babiloni et al. 2007; Zurawicki, 2010).

Therefore, with the aim of understanding how the sale assistant is able to influence the customer purchase decisions, and what specific behaviors during the service encounter generate engagement and frustration, an innovative approach based on the immersion has been chosen for this study. The immersion has been defined by Zak and Barraza (2018) as a "*state of concentration or absorption in an activity, like work or performance*". It depends on two elements connected to the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems: attention to the experience and emotional engagement. The immersive properties of narratives have been studied in different researches(Gerrig, 1993; Green & Brock, 2000; Barraza & Zak, 2009; Lin et al., 2013; Zak, 2015). Barraza et al. (2015) has shown that narratives that sustain attention and generate emotional resonance are judged more enjoyable and significantly and independently predict charitable giving. Sale assistant's immersion can be measured biologically capturing neural signals associated to heart and gut through some forearm sensors with some advantages: the absence of self-report biases, the non-invasive method, and the robust signal. These studies on the immersive properties of narratives create a parallel with the present research. In fact, the script of the Selling Ceremony is the cognitive structure with procedural schemas, that like a narrative, guides comprehension and recall of the customer (Abelson, 1981; Bower et al., 1979; Humphrey & Ashforth, 1994; Nguyen, 2014; Hudson & Nelson, 1983).

In order to deeply analyze all the different aspects of this research, the functional use of more combined methods in three different phases (field experiment, quantitative analysis, behaviors' coding) is necessary. The first phase of the field experiment collects sale assistant's data inside the store through sensors on the sale assistant's arms and the video recordings of the interactions. The second phase of the quantitative analysis assesses sale assistant peripheral physiology responses through the immersion and during the service encounter to understand how these physiological responses influence customer purchase decisions. Lastly, the research combines the immersion data with video recordings, in order to identify the connection between Brand Building Behaviors in the Selling Ceremony and positive and negative peaks of physiological immersion.

Definitions of Key Terms

Brand (Luxury Brand): Brand is a name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of these, which is intended to identify the goods and services of a Company or a Group, and to differentiate them from those of the competitors (Kotler, 1991); a Brand can have tangible and intangible features (Park & Srinivasan, 1994), as well as social aspects like meaning, value, relationships, community, etc. (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001; Keller, 2003; Kapferer, 2004; Luedicke, 2006). In the same context, luxury Brands are regarded as images in the minds of consumers that comprise associations about a high level of price, quality, aesthetics, rarity, extraordinariness and a high degree of non-functional associations (Heine, 2012).

Consumer Experience: originates from a series of interactions between a customer and a product, business or part of an organization, which provoke a reaction. It is strongly personal and multidimensional (rational, emotional, sensory, physical and spiritual). Its evaluation depends on the comparison between the costumer expectation and the stimuli coming from the interaction and in the correspondence of the different moments of contacts or touchpoints.[1]

Extraordinary Experiences: memorable, uncommon and inherently superior experiences compared to common, ordinary, frequent experiences. They go beyond the realm of everyday life and they are more active, intense, and stylized, making the customer experience beyond the norm.

Brand Building Behaviors: the ability of employees "to convey Brand consistent meaning during the interaction with costumers and contribute to generate valuable positive outcomes

[1] Gentile, Spiller & Nuts (2007), p. 397, quoted in Verhoef P.C., Lemon K.N., Parasuraman A., Roggeveen A. & Tsiros M., Schlesinger, LA, (2009), Customer Experience Creation: Determinants, Dynamics and Management Strategies, Journal of Retailing, 85/1, p. 32.

in terms of Brand experience, customer Brand engagement and costumer experience in shopping and service encounters" (Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2015)

Selling Ceremony: the set of ritual behaviors and communications that the sale assistant, as a Brand Ambassador, must perform during physical or digital interactions with the customer, placing him at the center of the process" (Caru' & Cova, 2003; Sacerdote, 2016; Cervellon & Coudriet, 2013).

Psychophysiology: concerns relationships between physiology and behavior, where behaviors broadly construed to include some activities as sleep, problem solving, reaction to stress, learning, attention, memory, information processing, sensation, perception, and emotional responses (Andreassi, 2007). Psychophysiological responses are commonly referred covert changes in such things as heart rate, blood pressure or skin conductivity, as well as more overt expressive responses such as crying, facial expressions, body movement and brain activation.

Autonomic Nervous System: the system of nerves that regulates the function of all innervated tissues and organs throughout the vertebrate body except striated muscle fibers, that is, the innervation of the viscera, vasculature glands and some other tissues. It includes into three systems: the sympathetic nervous system, parasympathetic nervous system, enteric nervous system (Langley, 1903).

Immersion: is similar to "flow" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997), a state of concentration or absorption in an activity, like work or performance. Biologically it depends on two key elements: attention to the experience and emotional engagement during it. Both sympathetic and parasympathetic systems are indicative of attention and emotional engagement.

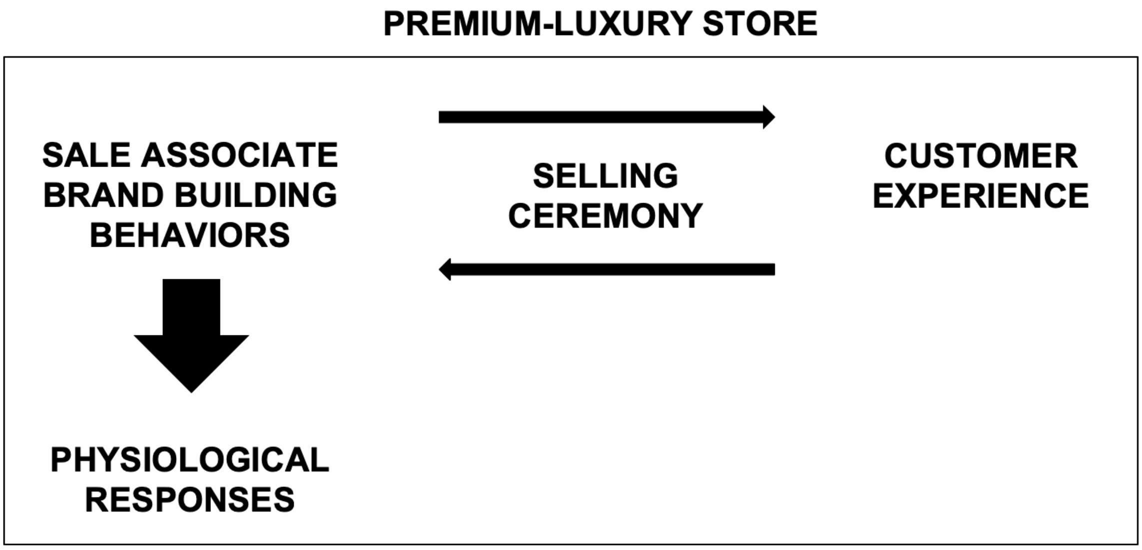
Chapter 1

Literature Review

The objective of the analysis of national and international literature was to identify a model for the research questions and related hypotheses. In the first part, the following conceptual framework has been analyzed.

Figure 1.

Conceptual Framework



The framework environment of this study is the premium-luxury retail store. In this context, the service encounter, specifically the sales assistant Brand Building Behaviors that create the customer experience within the Selling Ceremony has been analyzed.

Because this process is both cognitive and emotional, sales assistant physiological responses have been investigated to assess if they predict customer purchase decision. Then, the connection with sale assistant physiological positive and negative peaks of immersion and Brand Building Behaviors inside the service encounter has been analyzed, to understand the behaviors that generate engagement and frustration and where they are located.

1.1 The Framework Environment: The Premium-Luxury Retail Store

The purpose of this section is to explain the framework environment, where the sale assistant-customer interactions take place. In particular, research has shown how the concept of luxury has changed from a product-based "old luxury" approach and enlarged to a "new luxury" meaning where the concept varies from person to person (Corbellini & Saviolo, 2017). This justifies the decision to set the current research in a premium store.

As for luxury, the new functions of the premium-luxury store have been presented, where the store is not destined to disappear, but it plays a different and wider role to be a source of competitive advantage. Referring to the purpose of my research, the connection with the Brand and the role of the sale assistant have been developed.

1.1.1 Luxury: from the Definition to the Luxury Retail Store.

One of the most fundamental issues in the study is the concept of l*uxury*[2], because while it represented a specialized and "for a few" market in the past, today, it is transverse, global, and more accessible (Corbellini & Saviolo, 2007). In fact, what may be luxury to one person, or one culture may be not so to another. This term has been utilized by magazines and advertising to identify a multitude of Brands and products including apparel, leather goods, accessories, cosmetic, alcoholics, tourism, cars and even ice creams. Hence, a clear definition is necessary.

The definition of "luxury" has been debated in many fields of study including history (Berry, 1994), economy (Smith, 1776; Leibenstein, 1950), sociology (Bourdieu, 1984), psychology (Wong & Ahuvia, 1998) and even anthropology (Malinowski, 1922) over the last two decades. According to the Dictionary[3], luxury can be defined as a "something adding to

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[2] Going back in history, the word luxury derives from the Latin "luxation" meaning distance from ordinary and "luxus" meaning excess, extravagance and even vicious indulgence. The first definition, in terms of economic perspective, is that of Adam Smith (1776), who placed consumption in four categories: "necessary," "basic," "affluence" and "luxury." Luxury was identified as goods produced in limited quantities, which were difficult to find and/or very expensive.

[3] The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2016)

pleasure or comfort but not absolutely necessary one of life's luxuries; an indulgence in something that provides pleasure, satisfaction, or ease." Referring to the fashion luxury, the concept evolved indicating Brands and products with an intangible and aspirational value, becoming a synonym of "prestige"[4], which covers a wider meaning that can be applied to other categories inside fashion like upmarket, premium and luxury (Saviolo & Testa, 2005). Therefore, it seems possible to delineate two main categories (Corbellini & Saviolo, 2007): the luxury Brand in the strict sense, focused on iconic products, following scarcity rules, with limited editions and handmade; as well as, the premium Brand, focused on mass-produced products, attentive on quality and image, fashion-oriented with attention on contemporaneity and innovation.

In line with this concept of luxury and focusing on retail, Moore and Doherty (2007) define luxury fashion retailers as:

> *"...those firms that distribute clothing, accessories and other lifestyle products which are: ... exclusively designed and/or manufactured by/or for the retailer;... exclusively Branded with a recognized insignia, design handwriting or some other identifying device; ... perceived to be of a superior design, quality and craftsmanship; ...priced significantly higher than the market norm; ... sold within prestigious retail settings (p.143).*

Though not claiming to be an exhaustive list, retailers that conform to this categorization include Prada, Gucci, Dior, Louis Vuitton, Chanel, Giorgio Armani, Versace, Hermes, Burberry and Mulberry (Moore et al., 2010). This definition shows that the concept of "luxury" during the years has shifted away from a pure product-based "old luxury" approach, focused on the intrinsic characteristics of the product itself, to a "new luxury" meaning where the concept of luxury can vary from person to person, depending on their personal

[4] For further information, see: B. Dubois, S. Czellar, Luxury Brands or prestige Brands? 31st European Marketing Academy Conference Proceedings, European Marketing Academy, 2002, pp.4-5

consumption (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2008; Kapferer, 2014) and connected more to immaterial components like consumer's expectations and experience (Okonkwo, 2009). Consistent with this perspective, where the experience of buying a product is as important as the ownership of the product itself (Pine and Gilmore, 1998), the retail store (in particular the flagship) plays a pivotal role in communicating the retailer's values and market positioning to prospective consumers. If executed well, it offers a managed luxury consumption experience which coherently and consistently supports the status of the luxury fashion retailer, their Brands, and their values (Moore et al., 2010). For this reason, an increasing number of luxury and premium companies are placing experiences at the core of their marketing strategy, providing the symbolic value and emotional connection that keep the "dream component" of luxury Brands alive (Atwal & Williams, 2009; Berthon et al, 2009; Kapferer & Bastien, 2009; Grigorian et al. 2014).

1.1.2 Premium-Luxury Retail Store Evolution: The New Functions.

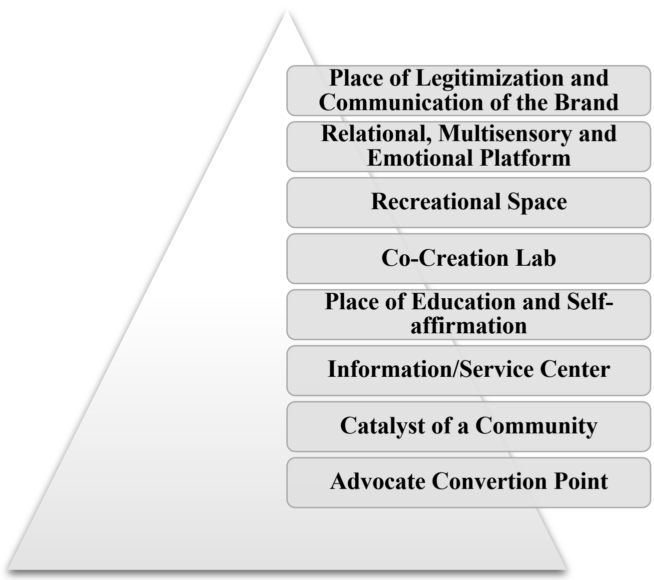
Retail has changed dramatically in the last two decades. This period has often been referred to as the "disruptive development" of retail to emphasize the advent of the online channel and the impact of the digitalization that has drastically reduced turnover from physical stores to online (Verhoef et al., 2015; Christensen & Raynor, 2003). Therefore, traditional retailers have been forced to completely rethink the role of the physical store in an omnichannel perspective (Herring et al., 2014).

It is precisely this shift from a multi-channel retail model to the omnichannel stage that has seen the rise of an outside-in approach where the customer seamless experience is the priority and all activities are redesigned based on consumer's preferences (Bettucci et al., 2016; Verhoef et al., 2015). These important changes have also led premium-luxury companies, traditionally product-oriented, to shorten and speed up the business chain to orientate towards a customer-centric perspective (Corbellini & Saviolo, 2014; Saviolo, 2017). In this change, not all distribution channels have the same importance, rather, they must be carefully managed as a portfolio and in synergy with the sole objective of customer satisfaction (Avery et al., 2012; Bettucci et al., 2016), during the whole customer journey (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Verhoef et al, 2015; Arnould et al 2004; Tynan, 2009).

In this omnichannel perspective, the store is not destined to disappear, but it becomes the place where customers expect a relational, playful, explorative, and informative experience to be a source of competitive advantage (Stephens, 2017; Herring, 2014). The following functions for luxury and premium retail stores have been identified from an analysis of the existing literature based on luxury and its development in the retail sector:

Figure 2.

The new functions of the luxury premium retail store



1. Place of legitimization and communication of the Brand

The choice to buy inside the store does not meet the criteria of pure functionality. In fact, luxury retail stores,[5] are extraordinary places of communication and legitimization of the Brand (Moore et al.2004). They have been compared to "*the pyramids of the ancient*

[5] For different format of retail stores see Corbellini & Saviolo (2007)

Egyptians were the emblem of the non-human status / as a God of the pharaohs "(Hirschman, 1990 in Cervellon & Coudriet, 2013) and contribute to the creation of Brand Identity and Brand storytelling[6] through physical elements such as location, shop windows, layout, merchandising, light, music; and soft components such as atmosphere, entertainment, service (Berry & Bendapudi, 2004; Stephens, 2016). In particular, luxury Brands legitimize their power in the store displays exhibiting merchandise from designer collections as treasures often behind glass windows and pedestals. Shiny display cases are ubiquitous, lighting is focused on the objects, and customers are placed at some physical distance from the items. (Cervellon & Coudriet, 2013). According to Dion and Arnould (2011), luxury Brands deploy a range of formal mechanisms derived from the world of museums so that the commercial luxury object obtains an "auratic power" derived from the magic and creativity that is injected by the artistic director into the Brand and diffused via the luxury retail strategy.

This prestige and status are used heuristically by the consumer when they compare Brands with each other (Dawson, 1988). Therefore, consumers understand the prestige of buying inside the store through elements such as the size of the store and the type of customer that frequents it (Dawson, 1988).

2. *Relational, multisensory and emotional platform*

The boutique strengthens its role as a relationship platform, a space in which Brands and customers meet, where the luxury hedonic appeal is multisensorial and affect-rich (Zaghi, 2008). Luxury flagships are designed to take into account all the senses and create an emotional response in its consumers (Riewoldt, 2002). This has been described as a “sensorial universe” that is capable of reaching different emotional contact (Desgrippes & Gobe, 2007, p. 80) Brand. Castaldo and Mauri (2005) use the term “relational innovation,” which acts through three main levers. One of them is *experiential shopping* defined as logics adopted by commercial enterprises to allow customers to experience a unique, emotional, and

[6] For Brand Storytelling characteristics in the service perspective refer to Ind, 2001 cap.7

thrilling shopping experience, determined by the presence, within the sales point, of sensorial stimuli aimed at eliciting an emotional response from an individual who, due to his individual characteristics and sought-after benefits, presents a hedonistic attitude towards the shopping itself.[7]

As Dior and Arnould state (2011) boutiques and shops are "*punctuated by rituals that structure customers' contact with the objects on offer.*" Like other magical rituals, "*they invite the customers to absorb some of the magic of luxury creation through contagion*" (Mauss & Hubert 1902/1993; Dior & Arnould, 2011 p. 512). There are the rituals of preparation, where the door is closed giving the impression that the entrance is restricted and where a well-dressed doorman opens the door for the customers and bids them welcome. There are selling process rituals designed to create a special retail experience that contains a range of myths, narratives, and stories involving deeply the consumer (Borghini et al. 2009; Kozinets et al. 2002; Hollenbeck et al. 2008).

3. ***Recreational space***

This function assumed by the store is linked to recreational shopping (Aiello & Donvito, 2005) showing that the motivations for going to the store vary depending on the type of customers and the different areas in which the activity of shopping is carried out (Castaldo & Botti, 1999). In luxury, there is a strong prevalence of recreational-hedonistic consumption.[8] Consumers engage in conspicuous consumption, or directly through the purchase of products or in a broader sense through the flagship environment. This environment offers consumers a combination of entertainment and Brand experience where two are closely intertwined to be indistinguishable from one another (Schmitt, 1999b; Borghini et al., 2009). Consumers are "browsers" (Chevalier & Gutsatz, 2012 p.110) who

[7] Inside Castaldo and Mauri (2007) "Innovation, Experience, Partnership", Milano: Franco Angeli, p.24 Prada Epicenters and Gucci are perfect examples of experiential shopping.

[8] Aiello e Donvito (2005 p.5) distinguish between two antithetical approaches: a utilitarian-functional vision and a purely recreational-hedonistic vision. In this case, shopping is considered a means of procuring goods, whose value derives from the products and services purchased (and therefore the success of a shopping experience is measured by the rationality and efficiency demonstrated in the purchase process).

consider the store as a recreational and inspirational place where shopping is a source of gratification and satisfaction regardless of the goods purchased. This is connected to the hedonistic nature of the act of purchase in itself. This fine pastime was defined by Csikszentimihalyi (1975) as autotelic activity (Aiello & Donvito, 2005) and by Wolf (Kozinets et al., 2002). Therefore, while the "economic" shopper classifies the benefits in terms of savings at the store, the "recreational" consumer, or recreational shopper, considers the benefits in relation to the pleasure deriving from the shopping activity carried out (Aiello & Donvito, 2005).

4. *Co-Creation lab*

Traditionally, value was created within the business and then delivered to the customer. Today, the retail environment becomes the product. Thus, this new logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2004) emphasizes service as the core component and brings a new understanding of retail, where value is created through customer's participation in the co-creation (Baron & Harris 2008) throughout the design, production, delivery and consumption processes (Payne et al. 2008). The fact the consumer is a collaborator, brings with it three assumptions: the value is determined by the user during all the consumption process and the connected experience (Kozinets et al. 2004 p.659; Corbellini & Saviolo, 2007); the customer becomes a co-producer; that co-creation is inherently relational and strongly linked to value in use reinforcing emotional Brand connection.[9].

5. Place of education and self-affirmation

Inside the store, the customer is able to actively experiment with new creative and entertaining methods of using the product because the store shows the product within its context, offering the consumer a complete vision (Stephens, 2016). This kind of activity can be defined as "edutainment" (Ferraresi & Schmitt, 2006), in fact, learning takes place with

[9] A 2013 study by Bain & Co. "Making it personal: rules for success in product customization" has shown that the people who make the product customization are more related to the Brand and provide a higher score in the Net Promoter Score

active participation. This activity in the luxurious environment of the flagship provides pleasure and self-affirmation, where being and becoming a desired and desirable self occurs within a prestigious context befitting to the goals of the individual who chooses to shop in that environment (Berthon et al., 2009). Successful Brands are the ones able to influence self-affirmation as described by Maslow (1998) as “the desire to become more and more what an individual is able to be.”.

6. *Information/service center*

The store is the place where information is sought, where the product is explained, and the customer is advised according to their specific needs. The interactive nature between store and consumer brings mutual benefits. In fact, if the store is the place where the consumer acquires the maximum information about a product, the company is concurrently in the position to grasp the maximum information about its customers (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2008). Bettini et al. (2016) report the main and non-replicable reasons that lead people to prefer the retail channel to online:[10]the possibility to see, touch, wear and try the comfort of the garments; the possibility of obtaining the products immediately; the speed and simplicity of making a return; the pleasantness of the store's environment; and the convenience of the price without delivery. In addition to these purely functional needs, the store allows consumers to experience cognitive, sensory, and emotional experiences associated with the Brand (Pine & Gilmore, 2000; Hameide, 2011).

7. *Catalyst of a community*

While visiting luxury stores in the USA, Twitchell (2003) documents a cultural shift where unity or a sense of community is based on acquisition of products, and a common experience in Branded spaces, where people sharing the same passion gather together and interact. This place, the store, celebrates the activities and lifestyle associated with a type of

[10] On the other hand, the characteristics of online that make it a preferred channel for purchases, are the possibility of making purchases without time constraints and without moving from home, the ease of comparing prices and finding exactly what you want without incurring stock-out risk (Bettini et al., 2016).

product (Stephens, 2016). The luxury store takes advantage of exclusivity by creating a sort of desirable club through invitations to special events such as fashion shows and trunk shows (Schor, 1998).

8. Advocate conversion point

The store is a place where every interaction with the customer is not aimed exclusively at the conversion rate, but it serves as the entrance gate to reach the entire ecosystem of the Brand (products, purchases, methods, services). The ultimate goal is to convert them into fanatical and long-term advocates (Stephens, 2016, p.160).

In summary, the retail store has changed its original purely functional-utilitaristic linked sales function, to a more strategic function in the omnichannel perspective. The most important tool is now to deliver the Brand Identity and its storytelling in the setting of premium-luxury stores. Whether it is a co-creation of activity, or a meeting between people who have the same interests, this multi-sensory activity acts as the thread that unites these functions. The role of the Branded customer experience connects these aims to create a positive and continuous relationship with the customer.

1.2 The Experience Inside the Retail Store: Creating the Extraordinary during the Service Encounter

In this section, the concept of the experience is explored, with a focus on the retail setting of the premium and luxury store. The term "experience"[11] is the main component of experiential marketing, experience marketing, customer experience, and Brand experience. Even with this common focus, there are mixed views and interpretations in how to adopt this approach. Furthermore, some of these terms are used as synonyms, but not always. So, part of the literature review will clarify and define these concepts. This review also assesses how the customer experience is related to the Brand experience and to sales assistants' behaviors inside premium-luxury stores. This includes the co-creation dimension of the customer experience, a dimension that describes the experience as an exchange involving a dyadic interaction between a sale assistant and a customer (Grönroos, 1990), in which the immersion plays a key role. The final part of this section explores the extraordinary and terrible experiences inside the service encounter with a focus on the retail setting. The aim is to connect these experiences with Brand Building Behaviors (paragraph 1.3) and then assess the sale assistant peripheral physiology during the service encounter.

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11 Definition of experience Webster's Third New International Dictionary (Gove, 1976, p. 800)
L *experientia*, fr. *experient-, experiens* (pres. part. of *experiri* to try)
1 *obs* **a**: a trial or test **b**: a tentative trial **c**: a conclusive proof;
2 direct observation of or participation in events: an encountering, undergoing, or living through things in general as they take place in the course of time;
3 a: the state, extent, duration, or result of being engaged in a particular activity (as a profession) or in affairs, b *obs*: something approved by or made on the basis of such experience;
4 knowledge, skill, or practice derived from direct observation of or participation in events: practical wisdom resulting from what one has encountered, undergone, or lived;
5 a: the sum total of the conscious events that make up an individual life, b: the sum total of events that make up the past of a community or nation or that have occurred within the knowledge of mankind generally;
6 something personally encountered, undergone, or lived through, as a: an event observed or participated in, b (1): a state of mind that forms a significant and often crucial part of one's inner religious life and that is sometimes accompanied by intense emotion, (2): an account of such an experience, c: illicit sexual relations;
7 something by which one is stimulated or moved;
8 *philos* a: the act or process of perceiving or apprehending, b: the content or the particular result of such experience, c: the discriminative reaction or the nonconscious response of an organism to events or happenings within its environment

1.2.1 The Concept and the Characteristics of the Experience.

There is a lack of clarity in the term "experience" in the current literature. Tynan and McKechnie (2009) explain that experience is both a noun and a verb and "*it is used variously in the literature to convey the process itself, participating in the activity, the affect or way in which an object, thought or emotion is felt through the senses or the mind, and even the outcome of an experience by way of a skill or learning for example.*" (p.506). Experiences have many dimensions as there is a difference between the simple pleasure of an ordinary or mundane experience and the enjoyment of an extraordinary or flow experience (Carù & Cova 2003).

Experience Marketing

The first introduction of the concept of the experience was in the mid-1980s. Along with the mainstream literature in consumer behavior that deemed customers as rational decision makers, Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) offered a complementary[12] and enriched view to consumer behavior that included an emotional and irrational side, beyond the rational act of the purchase. This perspective was in contrast to the information processing perspective which stresses product attributes, utilitarian functions, and conscious and verbal thought processes (Addis & Holbrook, 2001). In their experiential view, affect plays a key role not just in influencing attitude and arousal, but in terms of the effects of the full range of possible consumer emotions (e.g., love, hate, fear, joy, boredom, anxiety, pride, anger, lust, and guilt). Their work is important because it shows the close connection between experience and the emotional dimension, emphasizing the need for a greater understanding of what happens within the individual during the experience. Given the impact of this perspective, the literature in the late 1990s and 2000s largely followed Holbrook and Hirschman's view. In

[12] Holbrook and Hirschman (1982 p.139) pointed out that they did not want to replace one theory with another, their approach was complementary. *"Neither problem-directed nor experiential components can safely be ignored. By focusing single-mindedly on the consumer as information processor, recent consumer research has tended to neglect the equally important experiential aspects of consumption, thereby limiting our understanding of consumer behaviour. Future research should work toward redressing this imbalance by broadening our area of study to include some consideration of consumer fantasies, feelings, and fun."*

1994, Carbone and Haeckel stated that the experience is the "*takeaway impression formed by people's encounters with products, services, and businesses, a perception produced when humans consolidate sensory information.*" For them, the experience could be good or bad, lasting or fleeting, a random phenomenon or an engineered perception.

In their influential paper Pine and Gilmore (1998, p. 98) present the ''experiences'' as the fourth economic offering, which emerges as the next step after commodities, goods, and services, termed the progression of economic value. They state that an experience occurs *"when a company intentionally uses services as the stage, and goods as props, to engage individual customers in a way that creates a memorable event.* Based on their experience economy theory (Pine and Gilmore; 1998 and 1999), the concept of Experience Marketing raised, and, as they said: "*it can create emotions by making entertainment for customers, by allowing them to escape from the reality, by educating them and giving them aesthetic objects or places to see."* The diverse perspectives and translations on experience marketing has made it difficult to define experience marketing as there is no consensus even today. What is clear is that it aims to emphasize how the quality of the overall experience affects the creation of memorable episodes: *a customer ́s direct personal participation or observation inside a process* includes rational decision-making and the sentimental consumption experience (Baron et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2010).

Although this concept was born in the business field in 1998, it has permeated service-oriented fields such as hospitality, tourism, retailing and entertainment (Grewal et al. 2009; Verhoef et al. 2009; Brakus et al. 2009; Gentile et al. 2007). Specifically, in retail, Pine and Gilmore (1998 and 1999) explained their view in the following manner: "*when a person buys a service, he purchases a set of intangible activities carried out on his behalf. But when he buys an experience, he pays to spend time enjoying a series of memorable events that a company stages to engage him in a personal way." (p.71)*

Experiential Marketing

In the same year, of Pine, and Gilmore, as well as Schmitt (1999) coined the term Experiential Marketing for a marketing discipline, providing new managerial tools that enrich the products (or services) by sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioral and relational values. According to Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), whereas traditional marketing frameworks view consumers as rational decision-makers focused on the functional features and benefits of products, experiential marketing views consumers as emotional beings, focused on achieving pleasurable experiences.[13] A lot of definitions of experiential marketing have been offered (International Experiential Marketing Association, 2011[14]; You-Ming, 2010[15]), but according to Same and Larimo (2012), all these definitions indicate that experiential marketing is mainly related to *emotions, feelings*, and *senses*; and has less to do with cognition and human intentions.

Schmitt's framework is composed of two aspects: five types of experiences, called strategic experiential modules (SEMs) and experience providers (ExPros) as tactical tools for Brand-related stimuli (Schmitt 1999a, 1999b). In this way, he related customer and Brand experience, where Brand experience is conceptualized as "*subjective, internal consumer responses (sensations, feelings, and cognitions) and behavioral responses evoked by specific Brand-related stimuli that are part of a Brand's design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments"* (Brakus, 2009).

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[13] The difference between traditional and experiential marketing can be highlighted in a number of ways. First, the focus is on customer experiences and lifestyles, which provide sensory, emotional, cognitive and relational values to the consumer. Second, there is a focus on creating synergies among meaning, perception, consumption and Brand loyalty. Third, it is argued that customers are not rational decision-makers but are rather driven by rationality and emotions. Finally, it is argued that experiential marketing requires a more diverse range of research methods in order to understand consumers. (Ferraresi and Schmitt, 2006; Brakus et al., 2009)

[14] International Experiential Marketing Association (2011) states that experiential marketing "*allows customers to engage and interact with Brands, products, and services in sensory ways"*.

[15] According to You-Ming (2010), experiential marketing is a "*communication method, which mainly raises customers' physical and emotional feelings*"

The Experience in Premium-Luxury Retail

Referring to premium-luxury retail, Brand experience is in most cases conditioned by the level of consistency achieved between three stimuli: product stimuli (quality, design, refinement in details, recognizability, etc.), environment stimuli (location of the store, interior design, architecture, visual merchandising, etc.), relationship stimuli (personnel behaviors, personnel communication, etc.). The first two is static and not customized because they are delivered to the customer in a predesigned state and not created in real time or dynamic as is the experience with the salespeople (Schmitt, 2003; Ferraresi and Schmitt, 2006). In premium-luxury retail stores, the reputation of the Brand is a guarantee of excellent product quality and refinement. Furthermore, the items are sold to rich customers, who can buy what they desire, hence, the price is not a discriminating factor of choice (Grewal & al., 2009; Verhoef et al., 2009).

As a result, the typical product evaluation (Kerin et al., 1993 p.378) is less important than the service encounter (Ferraresi & Schmitt, 2006). It is therefore natural that, in evaluating Brand experience inside the store, the customer refers to relational aspects and expects high-level, pleasant, and compelling treatment by the sales assistant, the Brand Ambassador. Brakus et al. (2009) reinforced this perspective while clarifying the subdivision product, shopping/service, consumption experience, and connecting them to retail. He deepened the concept of service experiences saying that experiences occur when a consumer interacts with a store's physical environment, its personnel, and its policies and practices (Hui & Bateson 1991; Kerin et al., 2002). Interactions are an essential part of these experiences, a medium through which customers construct their own meaning of the context and shape their preferences (Arnold et al. 2005; Boulding et al. 1993; Ofir & Simonson 2007). All of these experiences enhance the sense of belonging and help to create a sense of being a member of a group, which in turn makes the experience personal, memorable and unique, even when engaging in the same type of activities repeatedly (Gupta & Vajic, 2000).

According to the definitions of experience mentioned previously, the conceptual line of Same and Larimo (2012) can be understood as "*the strategic (customer-centric) and holistic management of relevant (and meaningful) experiences that takes into account the affective, cognitive and conative perspectives of consumption experience. Thus, experience marketing is employed to manage customer interactions, cross-channel exposure, and value co-creation" (p.483).*

Experiential marketing shows that the ways managers create experiences is part of experience marketing, because it's "a *tactical, rather than a strategic approach that marketers should consider central to their integrated marketing communications plans, including techniques, which are part of the core experience marketing strategy*" (Same & Larimo, 2012; Schmitt 2003).

The Experience in This Research

Despite the differences in these perspectives, there are some common core characteristics of experiences that refer to the emotional dimension, beyond the rational act of purchase, where affect plays a key role. This creates the space for my current investigation of the neurophysiological parameters involved in engagement and frustration. Experiences are:

1) Inherently personal, internal, with lack of tangibility. They exist only in the mind of an individual; hence, two people can't have the same experience (Pine & Gilmore, 1998,1999; Schmitt, 2003; Gentile et al., 2007). For this reason, each sales assistant interaction has been considered and measured individually in the current study;
2) They have holistic in nature and involve "*different customer levels such as sensorial, emotional, cognitive, pragmatic, lifestyle, relational, physical and spiritual"* (Hoolbrok & Hirschman, 1982; Schmitt, 2003; Gentile et al., 2007; Verhoef et al., 2009; Grewal et al., 2009). Hence, the inner dimensions should be measured not only traditionally and in a qualitative way (with surveys and interviews) but using quantitative methods to assess these dimensions;

3) They occur in response to some stimulations that can be interpersonal (between people) or intrapersonal (within a person). These stimulations can be created by controlled or uncontrolled elements (Schmitt, 1999a, 1999b and 2003; Ferraresi & Schmitt, 2006; Verhoef et al., 2009). In the service encounter they are interpersonal and actively co-created by sale assistant and customer (Bendapudi & Leone, 2003; Xie et al., 2008; Keh et al., 2001; Keh et al., 2013);

4) They are multi-dimensional because the Brand-related stimuli generate emotional, cognitive and behavioral responses. In fact, they have a temporal dimension which originates from the entire set of direct and indirect contact points[16] between the customer and the company (Addis & Holbrook; 2001; Carù & Cova, 2003; LaSalle & Britton, 2003; Gentile et al., 2007). In the store, the temporal dimension is the duration of the service encounter, from the welcome, to the farewell. Furthermore, they vary in strength and intensity (some Brand experiences are stronger or more intense than others) and in valence (some are more positive or negative than others);

5) Their value affects the memory in a powerful way (Pine & Gilmore, 1998 and 1999: Gentile et al., 2007), creating advocates and evangelists. For this reason, this research investigates the connection of the experience to customer loyalty;

6) Companies can work to create manufactured and reproducible experiences through Brand Building Behaviors in the Selling Ceremony. Customers hardly ever recognize such structures, but they perceive each experience as a complex but unitary feeling; each component being hardly distinguishable from the others (LaSalle & Britton, 2003; Schmitt, 1999; Gentile et al., 2007). Despite the importance of managing experiences, in most cases they are unexpected and spontaneous (Schmitt, 2003;

[16] *"Direct contact generally occurs in the course of purchase, use, and service and is usually initiated by the customer. Indirect contact most often involves unplanned encounters with representatives of a company's products, service or Brands and takes the form of word-of-mouth recommendations or criticisms, advertising, news reports, reviews and so forth."* (Meyer and Schwager 2007, in Verhoef, 2009).

Ferraresi & Schmitt, 2006). Therefore, the analysis of extraordinary and frustrating experiences plays a fundamental role in this analysis.

7) Experiences states are more likely to occur at work than during recreation due in part to having clearly defined goals (Gardener et al., 2002). Therefore, the analysis investigates the behaviors of sale assistants during the service encounter in the store.

1.2.2 Extraordinary and Terrible Experiences: from the Definition to the Analysis Inside the Retail Setting.

Defining Extraordinary Experiences.

Consumer researchers show that there is a difference between the simple pleasure of an ordinary (or mundane) experience and an epiphanic (Denzin, 1992) or an extraordinary (Abrahams, 1986) experience (Arnould & Price, 1993; Arnold et al.,2003; Schmitt, 1999 and 2010; Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2013: Sussmann & Alter, 2012). Ordinary experiences are common, frequent and occur within everyday life; they are routine and result, to a degree, from passive stimulation. Extraordinary or memorable experiences are uncommon and inherently superior (La Salle & Britton, 2003). They go beyond the realm of everyday life and they are more active, intense, and stylized, making them "special" (Zauberman et al., 2009) The current study measures several different aspects of such experiences including the: relative frequency, duration, superiority and inferiority to ordinary experiences.

Detailed analyses of extraordinary experiences have been conducted using interpretative research of river rafters (Arnould and Price, 1993), sky divers (Loeffler, 2004), and Harley Davidson motorcyclists (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Extraordinary experiences may also be aesthetic experiences, which may occur during a classical music concert, in art, or by viewing landscapes. Extraordinary experiences include extreme emotions, are often communal in nature, and transformational for consumers. According to this, extraordinary experiences can be referred in several ways in the literature (Arnould & Price, 1993; Caru' & Cova, 2003).

Table 1.

Definitions of Extraordinary Experience

Name	Definition	Academic/Researcher
Flow Experience	It's an internal process characterized as a state of intense concentration, focus, and absolute absorption in a challenging activity.	Csikszentmihalyi 1990, 1997 Carù & Cova, 2003
Peak Experience	It originates from the outside of the consumer and it's achieved through intense and focused activity, and the absorption or immersion in those activities.	Maslow, 1964; Privette, 1983
Epiphanic Experience	It ruptures routines and lives and provoke radical definition of the self. Epiphanic moments are connected to turning-point experiences, where people redefine themselves.	Denzin, 1992
Transcendent Customer Experience	It's marked by emotional intensity, singularity, extreme enjoyment, ineffability, focus of attention, and the testing of personal limits. It provokes radical redefinitions of the self.	Schouten et al., 2007
Extraordinary Experience	It's put inside a processual perspective. An ordinary experience corresponds to everyday life, routine and the passive acceptance of events. An extraordinary experience corresponds to more intense, framed, and stylized practices.	Abrahams, 1986
Experiences	Referring to Dilthey's distinction the "mere experience" is simply the passive endurance and acceptance of events. An experience stands out from the evenness of passing hours and years.	Turner et al., 1986
Perfect Costumer Experience	It results in customers becoming advocates for the Company, creating referral, retention and profitable growth. It is connected with advocacy.	Frow & Payne, 2007

Extraordinary Experiences in the Retail Setting

Referring specifically to retail, a definition of an extraordinary moment, called a “wow moment” comes from Kotler (2017). This moment derives from the expression used by customers when they receive a surprise so pleasant that it renders them speechless. This is also the term used by Louis Vuitton and Apple, while Burberry names them Iconic Moments *“which happen when the Company wows their customers, exceeds their expectations and provides exceptional customer service beyond the norm, making the experience also luxurious.*". These moments are well designed inside the Selling Ceremony and they connect to the Brand (the "motif").

On the grounds that not every experience is extraordinary, premium-luxury Brands made lot of efforts to create harmonization and surprise during the Selling Ceremony. Harmonization consists in the creation of a harmonious service that provides coherence, security, reassurance, familiarity (Ind, 2001 p.61). At the same time, the effect of randomness, the surprise, the sense of discovery incorporated within the values and the history of the Brand, is customized within the Selling Ceremony. For example, Nike carries in its extraordinary experiences, the values of excellence and "justified irreverence" (Ind, 2001 p.63). It has to be said that harmonization and surprise can vary according to geographical areas (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2008). Therefore, they have similar characteristics in the stores, with some unique traits depending on where they are located. FRSTeam calls these extraordinary experiences “goose bump moments” (Gallo, 2012 p.154), while Carbone and Haeckel[17] (1994 p.13) define these moments as "Sticktion." Both show how to create them, how to distinguish the Brand from competitors. For this reason, they need to be identified and put “over-index” (Smith e Co., 2013).

[17] Carbone and Haeckel (1994 p.13) define these moments as "Sticktion" using a term coined by the engineers of the 3M Company for magnetic bands, elements referring to limited moments of experience and which are sufficiently extraordinary to be remembered without being abrasive. The "Sticktion" goes beyond the experience but does not try to overwhelm it.

It has to be said that sales and service that brings extraordinary experiences isn't necessarily about grand gestures (Leadbetter, 2011). It can be about doing little things such as helping the customer carrying goods to the car, offering directions, or giving him a seat. Apple, for example, position employees at the front entrance during new product launches so they can cheer and clap for customers when they walk out with their new devices, or, they distribute bottled water or pizza slices to people in line always keeping the smile (Gallo, 2012 p.169). Burberry in London provides some umbrella bags on umbrellas on rainy days or Louis Vuitton provides a special gift that is not purchasable for special customers[18]. All these gestures are surprising, unique and personalized (Stephens, 2016; Kotler, 2017). Therefore, they affect the memorability (Pine and Gilmore, 1999 p.67) and they are contagious in the sense that they generate advocacy (Stephens, 2016) and loyalty.

But, to ensure the integrity of the customer experience and the exceeding of expectations, it is not enough to draw, test, and execute clues and positive moments. It is also necessary to eliminate any element that impoverishes, contradicts, or generates negative feelings (Berry & Carbone, 2007), because unfortunately, the disservice is perceived more than the service (Pine a& Gilmore, 1999 p. 81). In fact, the customer could forget a consistently reliable service and instead remember the occasional mishap that creates unpleasant sensations (Kang, 2012). Unfortunately, regarding the topic of salesperson failure, a few researches examined the factors associated with these negative experiences (Johnston et al, 1989; Ingram, 1992; Dolakia & Schroeder, 2001; Arnold et al., 2003).

The research of extraordinary and terrible experiences in the retail setting is connected to the service encounter (Suprenant et al., 1985,1987). The diagnosis of favorable and unfavorable incidents based on the customer's perspective have been examined by Bitner

[18] As at the Ritz Carlton Hotel in Naples where the knobs of the old doors turned into cards were given away, also happens by Louis Vuitton who creates special products and not for sale to give to his VICs (Very Important Customers) when they buy in shops. These products are many more powerful, the more they involve the senses (Berry, 1995) so some real examples are candles or wine.

et al. (1990). In their paper, they assess both satisfactory and unsatisfactory incidents that attributed to one or more of three major types of employee behaviors: how the employee responded to a service delivery failure, how the employee responded to customer needs and requests, and unprompted or unsolicited employee actions. The last category corresponds to extraordinary experiences. Bitner et al. (1994) later investigated the sources of satisfactory and dissatisfactory service encounters from the service employee’s viewpoint. The results of this study revealed that all the categories found in the original customer-perspective study were also found inside the employees’ study. However, previous research correlating customer and employee views of service is sparse and offers mixed conclusions. Schneider and Bowen (1985) and Schneider et al. (1980) found high correlations between employee and customer attitudes about overall service quality in a bank setting. Their results are contradicted, however, by Brown and Swartz (1989) where correlations were rather large but inversely related. Therefore, the current study is hypothesized to find similarities as well as differences in employee and customer views of the service encounter.

Arnold et al. (2003) continued the analysis, focusing on extraordinary (delightful) and terrible experiences. This study reported that the sorting of incidents led to two major groups of factors that appear to be associated with delightful shopping experiences: non-interpersonal and interpersonal. The non-interpersonal factor relates to situations in which the basis of the delightful experience springs from product procurement or value attainment. The interpersonal factor refers to situations when the source of the delightful experience is attributable to the actions of a salesperson. The latter is the focus of this research. Five categories emerged for both delight and terrible experiences: (lack of) interpersonal effort; (lack of) interpersonal engagement); (lack of) problem resolution; (lack of) interpersonal distance; (lack of) commitment. In addition, two more categories are only for terrible experiences: lack of ethics; lack of skills and knowledge.

These categories will be combined with the Brand Building Behaviors, in order to codify extraordinary and frustration experiences and assess the neurophysiological peaks associated with engagement and frustration.

1.3 Behavioral Branding as a Tool to Provide Experience in the Retail Setting

The role of the sales assistant is of primary importance in achieving an effective relational approach and in assisted sales contexts where the Brand has a strong impact. This is especially true in premium-luxury, where the salesperson becomes the Brand Ambassador, who must be represent the Company business goals and the Brand Image.

Many traditional human resources theories tend to align the behavior of employees with the Company's mission, its vision, its values. However, they are too abstract and usually focused on objectives of a general nature. An attempt to define a set of behaviors of a sales assistant who, taken as a whole, outlined an attitude and behavioral reference profile to relate to the customer and to pursue their satisfaction and loyalty over time is the concept of customer orientation. According to Castaldo and Mauri (2010 p. 390), it is described as "*the extent to which practitioners practice basic marketing concepts at individual level, personal interactions with individual customers, listening closely to their needs, accurately and accurately describing products, avoiding tactics of manipulation and manipulation of persuasion and trying to help customers make purchasing choices that meet their needs*." However, for this research, it is necessary to further develop this concept and connect it to the Brand and the Customer Experience. For this reason, the definition that seems more appropriate is Behavioral Branding, which focuses on conveying through the employee a Brand consistent meaning during the interaction with the customer, to generate engagement and costumer experience (Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2015).

In the section 3.3.1, the concept of Behavioral Branding is reviewed to show how these personnel behaviors provide experiences and extraordinary experiences inside the store. In particular, experience is connected to in-role behaviors recognizable inside the steps of the

Selling Ceremony; while extraordinary experiences are recognizable inside extra-role behaviors and related to extraordinary experiences. Then, the transformation of the sale assistant as Brand Ambassador inside a premium-luxury store is assessed and aligned to Brand Building Behaviors with the aim to be applied inside the Selling Ceremony in section 3.4.

1.3.1 From Organizational Citizenship Behavior to Behavioral Branding

Service Branding heavily relies on employees' actions and attitudes. The sales assistant become central to the delivery of a Brand promise at each service encounter. Because of their influences on customers' Brand perception, a Company organization needs to ensure that their employees are consistently delivering the service at the quality level promised by its Brand.

In order to understand the role of employee behaviors as experience providers and Brand Ambassadors, in this research the concept of behavioral Branding has been integrated. *Branding* refers to "*employee behaviors that convey Brand consistent meaning during the interaction with customers and contribute to generate valuable positive outcomes in terms of Brand experience, customer Brand engagement and customer experience in shopping and service encounters*" (Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2015). These behaviors consist of the in- or extra-role anticipatory actions that employees willingly take when they foresee future events and intend to generate a change (Morhart, 2009)

In premium-luxury retail, the focus will be on behaviors, which are relevant during the sale assistant- customer interactions (Henkel et al., 2007; Gremler & Gwinner, 2008; Punjaisri et al., 2009), in shaping the customer's experience (Morhart, 2009) and consistent with the Brand (de Chernatony, 1999; Henkel et al., 2007; Sirianni et al., 2013). Employee behaviors conveying the Brand's values have been defined as *Brand citizenship behavior* (Burman & Zeplin, 2005; Baker, 2014; King and Grace, 2012), *Brand supporting behaviors or Brand-adequate behaviors* (Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2006; Punjaisri et al., 2009), *Brand building behaviors* (Miles & Mangold, 2004; Morhart, 2009; Löhndorf & Diamantopoulous, 2014), *behavioral Branding* (Henkel et al., 2007; Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2015) or *Brand consistent behaviors* (Henkel et al., 2007).

Table 2.

Different Definitions of Brand-Building Behaviors

Construct	**Definition**	**Author**
Brand Citizenship Behaviors	Employee behaviors that are not prescribed or "above and beyond the norm," yet consistent with the Brand values of the Organization	Burmann & Zeplin, 2005, King & Grace, 2012 Baker et al., 2014
Brand Supporting Behaviors or Brand-Adequate Behaviors	Employee behaviors that support internal Branding in the delivery of the Brand promise	Punjaisri et al., 2009 Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2006
Brand Building Behaviors	Employees' contribution (both on and off the job) to an organization's customer-oriented Branding efforts.	Miles & Mangold, 2004; Morhart, 2009; Löhndorf & Diamantopoulous, 2014
Brand Consistent Behaviors	Behaviors that relate to the degree to which an employee's personal communication and appearance (uniform, make up, ...) is in line with the organization's Brand identity	Henkel et al., 2007; Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2015
Behavioral Branding	Any type of verbal and non-verbal employee behavior that directly or indirectly determines Brand experience and Brand values	Henkel et al., 2007
Branded Service Encounter	Service interactions in which employee behavior is strategically aligned with the Brand positioning.	Sirianni et al., 2013

From Organizational Citizenship Behavior to Brand Citizenship Behavior

Katz (1964) identified three basic types of behavior essential for a functioning organization: people must be induced to enter and remain within the system; they must carry out specific role requirements in a dependable fashion; there must be innovative and spontaneous activity that goes beyond role prescriptions. Concerning the third category, Katz noted "*an organization which solely depends upon its blueprint of prescribed behavior is a very fragile social system* (p.132)." Every factory, office, bureau depends daily on a myriad of acts of cooperation, helpfulness, suggestions, gestures of good will, altruism and other instances of what can be called citizenship behavior. Organ and Near (1983 and 1988) defined organizational citizenship behaviors as "*individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization. By discretionary, we mean that the behavior is not an enforceable requirement of the role or the job description, that is, the clearly specifiable terms of the person's employment contract with the organization; the behavior is rather a matter of personal choice, such that its omission is not generally understood as punishable*." This definition, albeit valid, has led to the identification of at least 30 different forms of Citizenship Behavior. An effective review of the literature was carried out by Podsakoff et al. in 2000, which identified seven common themes or dimensions[19]: helping behaviors, sportsmanship, organizational loyalty, organizational compliance, individual initiative, civic virtue, self-development.

Subsequently, Burmann and Zeplin (2005) resume Podsakoff's work on organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB) and introduce the concept of Brand citizenship behaviors (BCBs) to adapt it to the context of internal Branding. Citizenship Behaviors that are distinct from the OCB. In addition to turning to the organization, they also turn to the

[19] These dimensions find a strong resemblance to the size of "innovative and spontaneous behavior" initially identified by Katz (1964), which recognizes: *cooperating with others, protecting the organization, volunteering constructive ideas, self-training, maintaining a favorable attitude toward the company.*

outside in addressing the customer. King and Grace (2012) define them as collaborators' behaviors, consistent with Brand that can generate positive outcomes for the organization. According to Burmann and Zeplin (2005) BCBs cover different types of employee behavior, which categorize into seven dimensions[20]:

1. *Helping behaviors*, having a positive attitude, being kind, showing empathy with customers, having the will to help them, taking responsibility for tasks even outside their area of expertise;
2. *Brand consideration*, behaving according to Brand guidelines and reflect before taking action that may have a bearing on the Brand;
3. *Brand enthusiasm*, showing initiative outside its role in Brand-related behaviors;
4. S*portsmanship*, avoiding complaining and have the will to engage the Brand even if it requires high costs;
5. *Brand endorsement*, recommending the Brand outside of the business environment, for example to friends, and pass on Brand identity to employees just joined the organization;
6. *Self-development*, developing personal skills that are useful for Brand strengthening;
7. *Brand advancement*, having the will to help adapt the Brand identity to change situations.

Following this work, Baker et al., (2014) propose a theoretical model that Brand Building Behaviors are promoted by Branding. For this reason, Brand citizenship behaviors are part of one of the six elements. They also combine service ability, such as the ability of the employee to offer a service in line with company expectations, a concept very similar to

[20] Burmann and Zeplin (2005) argue that the core driver of the BCBs, which brings employees to implement these behaviors, is *Brand commitment*, defined as a psychological connection of Brand collaborators, influencing their will to engage in an effort extra for the Brand to achieve its goals, i.e. the willingness to engage in BCBs for a sense of belonging to the organization. King and Grace (2012) explore the antecedents of Brand Commitment and Brand citizenship behavior, highlighting the relevance of their personal characteristics to them.

what had been theorized for the Burmann and Zeplin's second dimension of Brand consideration.

Brand-congruent Behaviors

Löhndorf and Diamantopoulus (2014) divide them into four types: *Brand-congruent behaviors, customer-oriented behaviors, participation in Brand development* e *positive word-of-mouth*. *Brand-congruent behaviors* relate to the degree to which an employee's personal communication and appearance (uniform, make up, etc.) is in line with the organization's Brand identity (Henkel et al. 2007; Morhart et al., 2009). The *customer-oriented behaviors* describe when employees help consumers make decisions that can meet their needs by developing a valued and authentic service (Baker et al., 2014; Berry 2002; Saxe and Weitz 1982, p. 344). While Brand-congruent behavior relates to conveying and creating an image specific to a certain Brand (e.g., an Apple salesperson who appears casual and trendy), customer-oriented behavior refers to the effective service delivery in general (e.g., an Apple salesperson who fulfills customer needs) (Henkel et al., 2007; Lohndorf & Diamantopouolos, 2014).

Participation in Brand development is defined as the proactive behaviors of employees that go beyond their role and indicate an active involvement in building a company Brand (Bettencourt, 1997; Hughes & Ahearne, 2010). Therefore, collaborators have the role of "sensors" to understand consumer needs and perceptions about the Brand and can provide inputs and suggestions on products and services as well as the Brand Experience (Morhart, 2009).

Finally, *positive word-of-mouth* occurs when the collaborator recommends and defends the Brand of the organization, providing credible advertising to the eyes of the real and potential consumers (Morhart et al., 2009). These four BBBs can be classified according to where they occur: in work situations (on the job), or outside the work situation (off the job).

In-Role and Extra-Role Brand Building Behaviors: The Link with Experiences Inside the Premium-luxury Store

Morhart et al. (2009) investigated work on leadership styles to identify Employee Brand Building Behavior in and outside work situations, which contribute to the Branding efforts of the consumer-oriented organization. Recapturing a previous defined classification (Motowidlo & Van Scotter, 1994), Mozart and colleagues include three categories: *retention, in-role Brand-building behaviors, and extra-role Brand-building behaviors.*

In particular, *in-role Brand-building behaviors* are defined as the behaviors of the organization that support the Brand. They can be written (behavioral codes, manuals, display lines, etc.) or communicated verbally, and are required or expected when performing the duties and responsibilities of the assigned role. These behaviors are part of the Selling Ceremony script. On the other hand, extra-role Brand-building behaviors describe activities beyond the job role and are discretionary. In particular, Van Dyne et al. (1995) define them as behavior "*which benefits the organization and /or is intended to benefit the organization, which is discretionary, and which goes beyond existing role expectations.*" This definition highlights that extra-role behavior is not simply a behavior that is beyond the role's expectations, but that it must be directed toward or be seen as benefiting the customer.

Accordingly, to Van Dyne at al. (1995), this definition has four implications: the behavior is voluntary and not prescribed, the employee actions are intentional, the behavior is positive (or perceived as positive), and the behavior is primarily disinterested from the perspective of the employee.

This distinction outlined by Morhart et al. (2009) is very important for the current research because of the parallelism between experience and extraordinary experiences. That is, the in-role behaviors are responsible for the ordinary experiences inside the store and are part of the Selling Ceremony steps, while extra-role behaviors are related to extraordinary experiences as they move beyond this script.

1.3.2 The Sales Assistant as Brand Ambassador

According to Brand Building Behavior definition, the employees convey, through in role and extra-role behaviors, a Brand consistent meaning during the interaction. In premium-luxury stores, this concept has been seen in the transformation of the sale assistant's role to a Brand Ambassador. In fact, in the premium-luxury industry, Brand identification is paramount (Chevalier & Gutsazt, 2012) and identification can serve as a powerful motivating influence for a person (Hughes & Aheame, 2010, p. 82). The sale assistant's behaviors greatly affect Brand Identification (Keller, 2003) and when the employees don't embody this, the customer expectations fall, the promises between the customer and the Brand break down (Punjaisri et al., 2009; Baker et al., 2014), and the Brand itself loses credibility and strength (Gambetti & Graffigna, 2011; Lent & Tour, 2009). Thus, what makes the difference between an average Brand and a great one is "*employees who actively and enthusiastically engage in delivering the unique Brand promise day in and day out*" (Jacobs, 2003).

Bendapudi and Bendapudi (2005) refer to service employees that personify Brand Values as the "*living Brand.*" Barlow and Stewart (2004) use the term "*Branded customer service*" to emphasize the impact frontline service employees can have on customers particularly when the Brand is relatively unfamiliar[21] (Sirianni et al., 2013).To ensure that their employees are able to deliver the Brand promise, the company needs to engage in any activities that aid personnel to humanize the Brand Identity (Bendapudi & Bendapudi, 2005) and to deliver service promise [22](Zeithmal et al., 2006) through consistent behaviors (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005; Morhart et al., 2009; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011).

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[21] When customers initially encounter a Brand that is unfamiliar to them, it is critically important for frontline employees to deliver service that supports the Brand's espoused image. If this occurs during a customer's initial experiences, unfamiliar Brands have the potential to match—or even surpass—market leaders in terms of overall Brand evaluations. This is a surprising finding that should also be of interest to more established competitors whose employees do not offer this Brand-strengthening advantage to the same degree (Sirianni et al., 2013)

[22] Such as recruiting, training, motivating, rewarding and providing equipment and technology

When sale assistants know, feel bound, and impersonate the Brand values and Identity, they become "*Brand ambassadors*" (Jacobs, 2003; Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2006) "*Brand builders*" (de Chernatony, 1999), "*Brand champions,*" "*Brand maniacs,*" or "*Brand evangelists*" (Lohndorf & Diamantopoulus, 2014; Morhart et al., 2009). In the luxury retail industry specifically, consistent with along Ritz-Carlton motto, salespersons are "ladies and gentlemen serving ladies and gentlemen." In this research, the use of the term Brand Ambassador is preferred. According to Cervellon and Coudriet (2013, p.876), an ambassador is "*the representative of a sovereign state in another country; metaphorically, the Brand is a country with its own culture and the store is the embassy, protecting the Brand and country of origin culture. The ambassador welcomes the customer into "the World of the Luxury Brand." Furthermore, an ambassador is the highest ranked diplomat, a very prestigious occupation which commands respect from all society members. Thus, an ambassador is also supposed educated, initiated to good manners, knowledgeable and with good taste, which confers superiority to the salesperson over the customer. If the salesperson does not endorse the role or fails to demonstrate expertise, the Brand aura and the customer dream is altered.*"

Through the Selling Ceremony, the Brand Ambassador is messenger of the aura of the Brand and performs rituals and visible artifacts. This gives them a social power, defined as "*a source of influence in a relationship, either attributed to an organization or to an individual*" (Busch & Wilson, 1976 in Cervellon & Coudriet, 2013). Referring to Cervellon and Coudriet (2013), this power is not only the result of a rational or economically-oriented process but integrates influences which are socially-constructed such as prestige and reputation. The powers associated with Brand Building Behaviors include:

- ***Legitimate power:*** The Brand Ambassador has the formal right to ask demands and give advice. When they are absent, consumers regret heavily the lack of support. The salesperson is expected to be distant, showing no familiarity, but at the same time, to be a protector of bad choices.

- ***Expert power:*** Omnichannel generates highly informed and demanding customer s, who are expecting a Brand Expert with a deep knowledge of the Brand and the product range (PWC- Total Retail, 2017, p.14).[23] Moreover, the customer expects the salesperson to share information on the manufacturing processes and the materials used, and to relay "secrets" or elements about the history of the Brand during the service encounter.
- ***Referent power:*** The Brand Ambassador is expected to wear a uniform, have good manners and communication skills, be well educated, and be distant and not familiar with the customer during the service encounter (Solomon et.al, 1985, Punjasri et al., 2009; Morhart, 2009). Moreover, the salesperson should be identified by the consumer with the same attributes which define the luxury Brand (Hughes and Aheame, 2010).
- ***Auratic Power:*** Brand Ambassadors are messengers of the aura of the Brand through the Selling Ceremony, composed by rituals and visible artifacts present from the welcome to the farewell. For example, in a luxury store, giving the price, if not asked for, is considered bad taste and rude. The customer is not in the store to finalize a financial transaction but to gain access to a world of beauty and grace.

It has to be said that in retail multiple variables impact the creation of a Branded customer experience. Alongside those of the servicescape (Bitner, 1992) that see store design as a central component, the field can be expanded from the physical environment to social and relational ones (Baker et al., 1992, 1994). In this research, the choice of preferring a

[23] In the research "Total Retail 2017" edited by PWC, the importance of sales assistants is clear. When asked to the global sample to rate how important certain attributes are in relation to in-store shopping experience, 78% respond that "sales associates with a deep knowledge of the product range" is the most important factor for consumers.

relational approach finds theoretical justification in the transformation of luxury from a product-oriented[24] perspective to a service-oriented perspective, and the evolution of the retail store in a content centered on customer interaction. Fiocca (2013) reported that:

"*in many cases the quality of a product or service is primarily due to the quality of the relationship so much that the two dimensions of quality are difficult to separate. The quality of the relationship and the perceived quality of the company's offer, even though they belong to different spheres, are exaggerated in such a way that they can declare the inevitable. It is therefore plausible that the quality of the offer is (also) determined by the quality of the relationship and the quality of the relationship is also (also) determined by the quality of the offer.*"

Some authors argue that customers show greater loyalty towards sale assistants rather than the Company or the store (Anderson, 1996; Macintosh & Locksin, 1997; Henkel, 2007). This loyalty is multi-level: behavioral, attitudinal and cognitive (Gremler & Brown, 1996) and, depending on the depth of the relationship with the sale assistant, can have an impact on purchase intentions (Macintosh & Lockshin, 1997).

Thus, within the premium-luxury industry, the objective of the sales representative is not only to sell but to create a bond with the customer, who eventually will make a purchase in the short or long term (Lent & Tour, 2009). In other words, if in the traditional approach, salespeople were at most problem solvers that matched the range of products/services available with the customer's needs, in a context based on the quality of the relationship, they serve as a procreator, able to define together the customer needs and wishes with the customer while offering customized service (Wotruba, 1996; Castaldo & Mauri, 2010).

For example, in Apple, employees don’t see their job as computer sellers. They have internalized the Brand vision to rebuild and to enrich lives. They are also trained to engage

[24] The reasons are to be attributed to the artisan-industrial matrix of Luxury Companies, to the length of the chain and to the production-creation cycle, to the distribution through the indirect channel, to the poor processes management of roles, systems and metrics oriented to ' anticipating customer needs.

customers in conversations that facilitate an emotional engagement. They don't sell things to customers but try to wow them, instead (Gallo, 2012 p. 156 and p.167). Furthermore, the staff is hired with no commission, in contrast with other retailers where the emphasis is on cross selling/up selling and in encouraging people to buy even if they don't want or need the product. Apple, in fact, thinks that being pushy doesn't enrich costumers' lives and it doesn't deepen the relationship with them. According to this, Ritz Carlton philosophy says that people never fall in love with a thing, they fall in love with people that make them feel special (Gallo, 2012 p. 168).

1.4 The Selling Ceremony as the Experiential Platform

The most effective way to apply Brand building behaviors inside premium-luxury stores is to identify the Brand ambassador behaviors during the service encounter that create experiences and convey a positive and consistent Brand image. This could be done transforming the script of the personal selling process or PSP (Dubinsky, 1980 and 1981), one of the oldest and most widely accepted paradigms within sales, inside the Selling Ceremony. In fact, all its steps contain the list of all behaviors the sale assistant should do to be effective and consistent with the Brand.

The personal selling process is composed the "seven steps of selling" and it was initially applied to telephone sales, then used in B-to-B and, in the end, in B-to-C, for goods and services (Hite & Belizzi, 1985) entering the retail sector. In premium-luxury stores, the PSP has been enriched with the values of the Brand, becoming a Selling Ceremony or Brand protocol (Cervellon & Coudriet, 2013). Within these stores, the product is highly customized, and the decision-making process is relatively long and complex. Therefore, the Brand ambassador plays a central role to develop an attentive and emotional relationship with the customer. This dyadic interaction affects, as showed in section 1.5, the sale assistant physiological responses.

According to Van Dyne (1995) and Morhart (2009) sale assistant can perform in role and extra role behaviors. In this research, all steps of the Selling Ceremony have been considered as in role behaviors and each step has been widely presented in detail. These behaviors provide experiences inside the store. Then, extra role behaviors have been shown and considered as special behaviors within the Selling Ceremony, but beyond the script. These behaviors provide extraordinary experiences.

The script of the Selling Ceremony has been used as base for the coding system and Brand Building Behaviors connected to physiological responses (positive and negative immersion peaks) have been assessed.

1.4.1 From the Personal Selling Process to the Selling Ceremony

According to many academic disciplines including marketing and organizational behavior, service scripts[25] are cognitive structures and procedural schemas designed by a company (Abelson, 1981; Bower et al., 1979; Humphrey & Ashforth, 1994; Nguyen, 2014). The logical structure of the script guide comprehension and recall during the narrative with the customer (Hudson & Nelson, 1983). They are formally used for guiding frontline employees' interactions with customers and controlling the service delivered (Leigh, 1987; Victorino et al., 2012). In this way, service scripts specify what actions an employee needs to take during the service encounter (Nguyen et al., 2014), with general rules and protocols to follow during each step.

In sale contexts, service scripts have a broad impact on the interactions and conversations between sale assistants and customers by controlling what sale assistants should say and do, and typically include a series of temporal action sequences that direct sales behavior (Abelson, 1981; Leigh & Rethans, 1984; Leigh, 1987; Leigh & McGraw,

[25] The conceptualization of service scripts is theoretically based on the psychological construct of cognitive scripts. Cognitive scripts are memory structures and mental schemas that comprise knowledge of expected sequences of behaviors, actions, and events (Abelson, 1981). Cognitive or mental scripts are developed through the repetition of behavior, which then becomes cognitively structured into the typical order and content of an event. Scripts in the service context are conceptually similar to mental scripts in that they guide behavior by specifying the actions and procedures an employee should carry out during a service encounter.

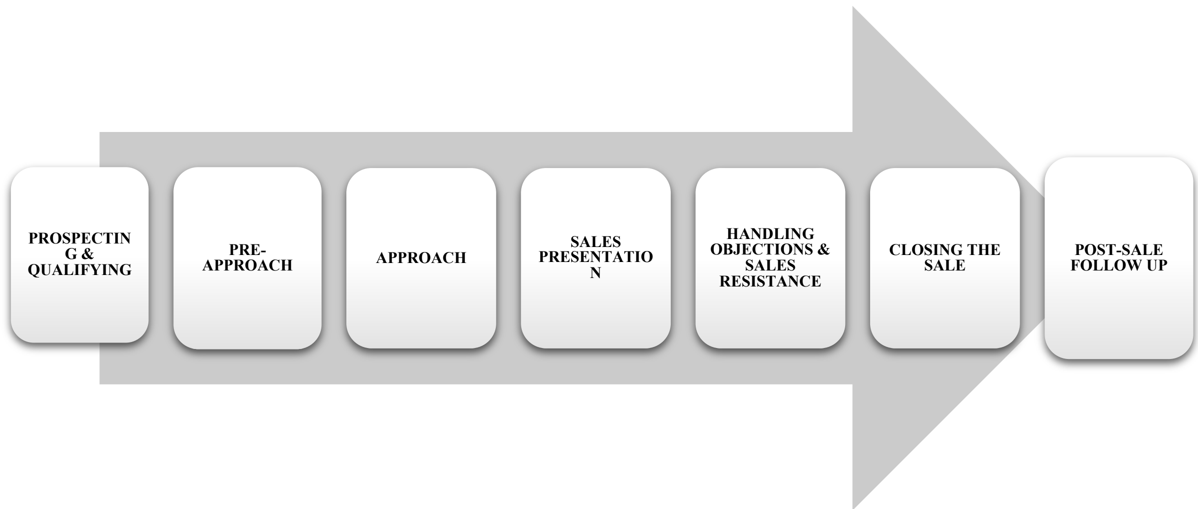
1989). For example, in a dialogue with a customer, a script-trained salesperson recognizes an objection and he carry out some specific strategies to handle this. Leong, Busch, and Roedder (1989) suggest that "*the possession and ready access of many such selling scripts is a primary variable that separates highly effective salespeople from their lesser effective peers."* Many organizations work to implement service scripts to ensure a high level of service quality and decrease the variability between service encounters (Hsu & Chiang, 2010). As argued by many customers, value predictability of service and service delivery may be inconsistent when it is left to the employee's discretion. The service encounter involves the performance of a script (Hsu & Chiang, 2010). Bitner et al. (1994) confirmed the correlations between the service encounter, the social role, and the script to the customer experience.

In retail, the study of the sale assistant and customer interaction is perhaps the oldest paradigm in the literature of the sale of a product or service, referred to as the Personal Selling Process or PSP (Dubinsky, 1980, 1981; Dubinsky & Staples, 1981). The PSP script consists of a series of subsequent steps that the sale assistant must complete within the service encounter to transform the lead or prospect into a customer (Dubinsky, 1980). This construct, born originally in the B-to-B market, was then included in B-to-C and retail sectors (Grewal et al, 2002) and developed further to maintain a long-term relationship with customers as those were the most profitable (Moncreif & Marshal, 2005).

The seven steps (Dubinsky, 1980,1981; Moncreif & Marshall, 2005) presented in the typical script sales scenario are the following: (1) prospecting, (2) preapproach, (3) approach, (4) presentation, (5) over- coming objections, (6) close, and (7) follow-up. Ever since selling began to be recognized as a professional discipline, the seven steps have served as a foundation in sales training for the process of making a sale, as well as for a framework for teaching personal selling classes (Hawes et al., 1993). In retail, breaking down the sales conversation into steps, helps people to learn and assess the most successful points and to evaluate their progress (Leadbetter, 2011). Each step has specific contents and multiple sales techniques that are elaborated according to the specific market field, the distribution channel, the product or service and the consumer (Dubinsky, 1980, Dubinsky & Staples, 1981). Today, despite the growth of customer expectations, the rise of omnichannel and digitalization, the sequence and consequentiality of these steps increase the chances of success in sales (Anderson, 1996). However, they have begun to change based on the influence of this variety of transformative factors.

Figure 3.

The Traditional Steps of the Personal Selling Process.



The Evolution of the Personal Selling Process

Retail has become customer-centric; hence, customers and sales assistants work together toward mutual beneficial ends (Moncrief & Marshall 2005). In particular, the customer is committed to create value for the Brand (Kotler, 2017; Saviolo, 2016; Carù & Cova, 2011). Concurrently, the salesperson role has also changed over times: sale assistants now are highly educated people with a college or graduate degree increasingly connected to the Brand as Brand Ambassador. Therefore, PSP selling methods have evolved from closed, forceful techniques to more customer-oriented strategies. These base customer’s interactions on investing time and efforts to uncover customer's specific needs and wants and matching them as closely as possible to the product/service (Brooksbank, 1995).

These changes have led to an evolved selling process, which reflects the concept of relationship selling, characterized by long-term sale assistant-customer commitments and the desire for a collaborative exchange where relationships are described as win-win partnerships between customers and salespeople (Guenzi et al., 2007). The customers and salespeople engage in interlocked behaviors characterized by a common sense of purpose, trust, and continuous learning used to interpret and retain information about each other during their relationship (Cravens, 1995; Ingram et al.,2015). In this way "*the personal selling process can be thought of as an interpretation system comprised of individuals whose goal is to reduce uncertainty with respect to each aspect of the evolved selling aspects*" (Shannahan et al, 2013). Therefore, while graphical representations of the sales process have always seen the customer influenced one way, Moncreif and Marshall (2005) provide a pictorial representation of the evolved selling process where the influence becomes bi-directional, given the interactive nature of the relationship sale assistant-customer, and the impact the customer has on each step" (Shannahan et al, 2013).

Moreover, the PSP is no more a series of subsequent steps. On the contrary, each phase is inserted differently during the interaction according to the various situations, the different requests, and the type of customer. Each of the evolved seven steps relies on the acquisition and interpretation of and responsiveness to information that is often provided to salespeople by customers. However, although the customer may offer information, the information must be perceived, correctly interpreted, and appropriately responded to by the salesperson to facilitate the selling process. Hence, "*throughout the evolved selling process, the seller and customer are actually working in tandem toward mutual success*" (Moncrief and Marshall 2005, p. 21). That is, success can be achieved only to the extent that a customer is a willing and cooperative relationship and communication partner.

In premium-luxury retail stores, this process has evolved even further. The script of the personal selling process sales has been enriched by the Brand's elements, turning into the Selling Ceremony (Sacerdote, 2016) or Brand Protocol (Cervellon & Coudriet, 2013), defined as "*the set of ritual behaviors and communications that the seller, as a Brand Ambassador, must perform during physical or digital interactions with the customer, placing him at the center of the process.* The transformation of the personal selling process to the Selling Ceremony, according to the Brand's values and personality from the company perspective (Aaker, 1996), brings the Brand out of the crowd of competitors, while broadcasting a coherent, intentional, different and worthful Brand Experience (Smith and Milligan, 2013). From the customer perspective, the Selling Ceremony allows the customer's integration into the Brand's world and into the community of similar customers as a peer group (Cervellon & Coudriet, 2013).

The core values of the Brand become recurrent themes found in the behaviors and communications of sale assistants with the aim of becoming a sort of "experience motif" (Berry et al., 2002; Berry et al., 2006; Berry & Carbone, 2007 - p.137 Ferraresi - PVE promise of experiential value). For example, Louis Vuitton focuses on travel and practicality; Hermès concentrates on craftmanship and exclusivity; Ferrari believes in performance. These themes must be clear and distinctive signs and be focused on the customer experience to ensure that this process is strategically focused and integrated with the other aspects of the Brand Experience presented inside the store.

As the term itself said, it's a "ceremony." Therefore, the script contains script behaviors and rituals, surrounding the product with a unique and magical allure (Mauss & Hubert 1902/1993 in Dior & Arnould, 2011, p. 512) According to Cervellon and Coudriet (2013), there are rituals of preparation and sake rituals. The rituals of preparation start outside the boutique, when the front door is closed, and the entrance is both restricted end exclusive. A well-dressed doorman opens the door for the customer and bids one welcome, signing a break with the external environment and marking the entry into a place of privilege (Som & Blanckaert, 2015). Once customer has entered, the Brand ambassador follows sake rituals in a script that contains a range of myths, narratives, and stories involving the consumer (Kozinets et al. 2002; Hollenbeck et al. 2008). In the case of luxury Brands such as Chanel, Dior and Vuitton, the customer experiences awe and reverence. The relationship between the extraordinary experience and ritual is complex. In fact, according to the definition of extraordinary experience in section 3.2.2, it is unique and must exceed expectations. Rituals become salient in enacting what the individual participants define as authentic, unique, and extraordinary (Abrahams 1986, p. 55). Therefore, rituals characterize the delivery of extraordinary experiences when they go beyond the act itself and exceed expectations.

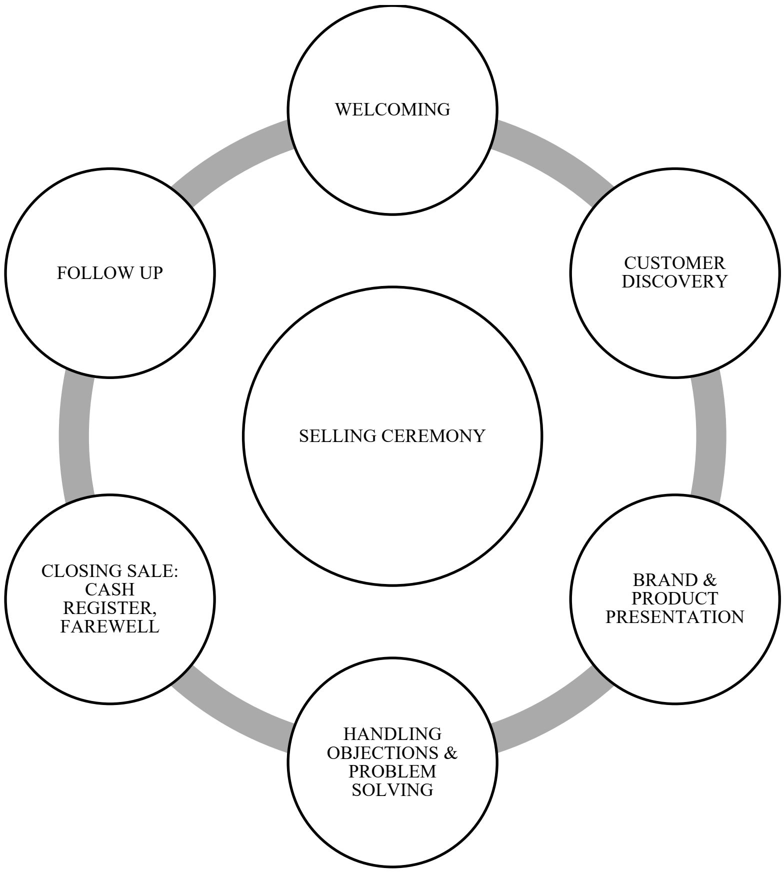
Many luxury companies tend to boast of the excellence and exclusivity of their selling ceremonies. This uniqueness must be detected internally on the basis of key elements that are specific to the Brand and not prevaricable or modifiable by the customer (Sacerdote, 2016 p.85). In fact, despite its elasticity, consistency must never be compromised. Louis Vuitton is called “LV Signature” and it is composed by 11 steps inside the service process: Welcoming, know your customer, Show appreciation, Create desire, Share passion, Cross/Up selling, LV Touch, Finalize Sales, Additional services, Leave the best Impression (personal source). In Apple stores, all employees know the steps of service as the acronym APPLE: Approach customer with a personalized, warm, welcome, Probe politely to understand all customer’s needs, present a solution for the customer to take home today, Listen for and resolve any issues or concerns, End with a fond farewell and an invitation to return (Gallo, 2012).

1.4.2 The Seven Steps of the Selling Ceremony

Following a deep analysis of the literature and the study of the most important premium-luxury Brand selling ceremonies, six common steps have been identified. According to Moncreif and Marshall (2005), the linear process of PSP has been transformed to a circle where the costumer is at the center. This shape is in line with the idea of customer-centricity (Saviolo, 2017) where the experience is integrated and customized for each customer (Pine & Gilmore, 2012) to generate an immersive experience inside a flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). This concept of immersion will then be discussed in section 3.5.

Figure 4.

The Selling Ceremony.



Step 1.

Welcoming

MOMENTS	BEHAVIORS
GREETINGS AND CIRCULATION	The sale assistant clearly, warmly, or genuinely greets the customer (with a smile, with eye contact, with appropriate body language or with a personalized greeting), while entering the store in a convenient amount of time. The sale assistant remains accessible to the customer as he/she browses (e.g. giving enough space to browse, but near in case he needs help). In case of busy time: the sale assistant asks the customer to sit down.

In the transformation of the PSP into the retail, the prospecting and pre-approach phases are replaced by the welcoming phase with a time-frame compression, because the interaction takes place only when the customer enters the store (Grewal et al., 2009). In some luxury boutiques the Selling Ceremony starts from the doorman's welcome when opening the door and then and continues when the Brand ambassador greets the customer and helps him find his way. Welcoming customers is not attacking the customer, but should convey common courtesy while providing a clear, warm, and genuine smile as well as positive body language and a personalized greeting within seconds of stepping inside. In busy times or when the sale assistant is doing something else, it is important that they acknowledge the customer with eye contact and/or a smile to show he/she they have seen the customer and that they care (Leadbetter, 2011; Srun, 2017, 2018). Apple sale assistants are empowered to interpret the greeting to fit their personality and to give the customers the type of attention they desire. Some customers just expect a smile, while other would like a deeper, more personalized and educational experience (Gallo, 2012).

The customer entrance and waiting for service in a retail store can influence expectations[26] (Kumar et al., 1997) and can lead to consumer dissatisfaction (Katz et al., 1991). Further research has shown that pre-process service delays are perceived more negatively than in-process service delays (Dubé et al, 1991). For this reason, it's critical to have sufficient sales assistants on the sales floor, visible to customers, particularly when the store is crowded (Grewal et al., 2003; Underhill, 2009). According to this, Louis Vuitton created the figure of "Maison Host,, while Nespresso has the "Welcome Manager." In both cases, this is a Brand ambassador, who stands near the entrance greeting and welcoming customers in a genuine and friendly manner (personal source). He/she is the first ambassador the customer finds in the store and he/she has the role of directing the customer in: presenting the store, explaining the floor division, answering questions and special requests, providing stock information (personal source). During the welcoming phase, Apple makes sure that customers are greeted within ten feet or ten seconds of entering the store, every time, because this kind of welcome alters the customer's perception of time and the overall experience is enhanced significantly (Gallo, 2012 p.112).

[26]The research of Grewal et al. (2003) suggests that managing wait expectations is particularly critical for male customers, compared to female customers.

Step 2.

First Approach and Customer Discovery

MOMENTS	BEHAVIORS
FIRST APPROACH	The sale assistant is friendly and approachable, he offers help or proactively assist the customer. The sale assistant shows concern for the visitor, expresses interest, and provides a sincere compliment. The sale assistant presents himself/herself (e.g. "I am Morgan/Arman... "). The sale assistant offers an explanation of the store layout and displays, or offers a verbal guide of the store, (e.g. "on the right side, you will find the accessories, on the left side we have the new season collection...").
QUESTIONING	The sale assistant asks if the purchase is for a specific occasion or a gift. The sale assistant asks questions to understand customer needs/preferences/tastes The sale assistant guides the customer to a specific area where the product is. If the customer is asking for an item or for a gift: the sale assistant asks additional information.
LISTENING	The sale assistant listens to the customer's answers and remarks and gives positive response through verbal (e.g. nodding, questioning, restating/summarizing) and nonverbal (e.g. facial expressions, eye contact, body language, emotions). The sale assistant builds a positive rapport with the customer, using positive language always (e.g. "of course I can help", "certainly I can") and tries to establish a connection with him/her by making appropriate comments on the products the customer is viewing.

In the past, the step of the "approach" was based on what tactics the salespersons employed once they were in front of the potential customer to lead a sale. On the contrary, today, this second step focuses on how Brand ambassadors provide customer experience and implement Brand engagement during the service encounter to create a long-term relationship (Solomon et al., 1985; Jolson, 1997; Johnston & Marshall, 2013). This is especially important for premium and luxury stores as most sales transactions don't occur during the first interaction but rather, are a result of multiple visits and contacts (Mouliner & Srun, 2013).

In this step, a sales assistant starts a meaningful conversation that builds rapport (Willet & Pennington, 1966; Gremler & Gwinner, 2008). The most typical approaches are: *Can I help you?* or *Are you ok?* and, whilst they can be effective, they are less likely to start a conversation. Just rewording the same sentences to *What can I help you with?* will open up the conversation and make it less likely for the customer to say *No thank you.* In the art of emotional engagement, making a comment or asking about something the customer is doing, wearing, or saying can help to initiate a conversation (Leadbetter, 2011). In some cases, like AT&T and Fedon 1919, retail staff introduce themselves by their first names to start a more emotional connection with the customer (Gallo, 2012; personal source). To create a good moment to approach the customer, it is possible to show concern for the visitor, express interest or offer a sincere compliment (Srun, 2017). While the customer is browsing, respecting the customer's freedom to *just look* and maintain space helps the customer to establish a good base for the interaction (Lent & Tour, 2009).

There are a few business settings in which asking questions is more important than sales.[27] Questions can be made to orient, to request opinions, to ask for suggestions (Bales, 1951) and can generate impressions (Huang et al., 2017) because they transfer beliefs, thoughts or emotions from one person to another (Epley & Waytz, 2010; Cherry, 2006). Naturally, questions are not the only factor that influences the quality of the conversation: the type, the tone, the rhythm, the volume, the sequence and the formulation count (Huang et al.,

[27] https://www.gong.io/
A recent study of more than 500,000 business-to-business sales conversations—over the phone and via online platforms—by tech company Gong.io reveals that top-performing salespeople ask questions differently than their peers. Consistent with past research, the data shows a strong connection between the number of questions a salesperson asks and his or her sales conversion rate. However, there is a point of diminishing returns. Conversion rates start to drop off after about 14 questions, with 11 to 14 being the optimal range.
The data also shows that top-performing salespeople tend to scatter questions throughout the sales call, which makes it feel more like a conversation than an interrogation. Just as important, top salespeople listen more and speak less than their counterparts overall.

2017; Birkenbihl, 2003; Lent & Tour, 2009) determine the information generated (Schuster & Danes, 1986). Open questions[28] encourage the prospect to talk about needs and desires. These can incite authentic information and help the sale assistant understand the customer's point of view. Closed questions involve yes or no answers and identify a frame of reference, allowing the prospect to choose what he thinks is best for him (Payne, 1951). Generally speaking, closed questions should be asked at the end because they lead to a decision. However, in the search for information, the sale assistant can perform both open and closed questions, depending on the degree of flexibility they want to give the customer and the level of control they want to keep in the conversation (Schuster & Danes, 1986).

Sometimes the customer shares a specific request before the sale assistant has time to ask questions, for example, offering a personal need or a gift. This request is not necessarily revealing its expectation, but it is the physical representation and the product of a need or desire. For this reason, it is important for the sale assistant to show and observe the customer's reaction to the object in order to understand the proximity of their desire. It is however essential to underline that the discovery must be made by the customer. This is necessary to understand their deep motivations and real desire, not only their current expression. The discovery process starts in this phase and must remain until the end of the sale, because each element is more valuable to generate not only the sale itself, but also the subsequent ones (Moulinier & Srun, 2013).

When the customer aims to purchase a gift, the Brand ambassador should use a specific approach, thanking the customer for coming, showing the customer the store and expressing their honor in being considered as a source for a gift. Discovering the occasion in a discreet and warm way adds value to the interaction by making suggestions a possibility. In talking about the occasion, the sale assistant should also discover information about who will

[28]Open questions start with word such as: who, what, where, when, why, how. Closed questions imply a *yes* or *no* answer.

be receiving this gift (the degree of connection with the customer, the tastes, related products already owned, etc.) and when the gift would be worn or used (Lent & Tour, 2009). After listening to the customer's response, the sale assistant can make several decisions to determine if the customer given enough information. Assuming that the decision is to ask further questions, the sales assistant or Brand ambassador can choose to use probing questions (Leadbetter, 2011) that are more focused on obtaining a clear answer (comparison, reflexive statements, internal summary) or can reduce the pressure and better understand the customer's point of view (amplification, clarification) with a pause or neutral phrase. Repeated questions can be included in both categories (Bales, 1951). Apple retail sale advisors probe the customers in three ways: by asking open ended questions, encouraging customers to have a meaningful dialogue and contributing to the conversation. In particular, asking for permission seems to be a consistent theme in Apple stores in all areas (sales, repair and training). In fact, the customer may hear question like *May I touch your computer*?; *Would you like to see this feature?; Would you like to hear more about our classes*?. According to Apple’s philosophy, asking permission before probing gives the customer a sense of warmth, comfort, trust and validates them as a human being rather than a means to make a salesperson’s numbers (Gallo, 2012).

In parallel to asking questions, the sales assistants must be good interpersonal listeners to gather precious information, uncover all pertinent details of customer's needs, and desires to guide them within the Selling Ceremony. According to the literature, interpersonal listening in the personal sales context may be defined as the cognitive process of actively sensing, interpreting, evaluating, and responding to the verbal and nonverbal messages of present or potential customers[29] (Steil et al., 1983; Comer & Drollinger, 1999; Weitz,

[29] *Sensing* refers to the actual receipt of messages, *processing* refers to activities that take place in the mind of the listener, while *responding* involves acknowledging receipt of messages. The dimensions represent stages in the listening process. They occur almost simultaneously but are sequential in that one dimension must take place before the next can occur.

Castleberry & Tanner, 1992). Listening in selling is an active rather than a passive activity, where the sale assistant is involved in a goal-oriented cognitive process (Steil et al., 1983).

Castleberry and Shepherd (1993) theorize that in a sales encounter, the salesperson allocates processing capacity to the listening process based on a categorization of the relative perceived personal importance of both the message and its source. Then, exposure, noise, and memory affect the salesperson's ability to listen (Castleberry & Shepherd, 1993). While the motivation or willingness to listen is due to extrinsic factors such as training, job pressures or potential monetary rewards, intrinsic factors ranging from an empathic concern for the customer (Hogan 1969; Johnson, Cheek and Smither 1983) to a self-monitoring concern for one's own self-image (Snyder 1979; Lennox and Wolfe 1984), may influence the willingness of a salesperson to listen to the customer. Empathy (Davis 1980) and self-monitoring are used as examples of the wide range of variables that influence the motivation to listen because both require a focus on others. In particular, empathetic listening is a critical part of the communication process and provides a supportive environment for the flow of messages between senders and receivers (Comer & Drollinger, 1999).

There is a connection between the Selling Ceremony and listening. In fact, the service scripts provide a series of temporal action sequences that direct sales behavior (Castleberry & Shepherd, 1993). For example, in a dialogue with a potential customer, an experienced salesperson may learn to recognize (or categorize) certain phrases as indicating that the potential customer is ready to place an order. As a result, the salesperson will activate (from memory) a closing script that includes a request for the order. In fact, Leong et al. (1989) suggest that the possession and available access of many such selling scripts is a primary variable that separates highly effective salespeople from their lesser effective peers. Furthermore, Castleberry and Shepherd (1993) suggest that there are different requirements for listening in the various stages of the personal selling process (PSP).

After listening, the sales assistant can identify details that need clarification and issues that need further investigation so that more questions are generated. In this way, questioning becomes an aspect of responding and the effectiveness of listening is reflected in the quality of the questions. During this time, the sales assistant can continue the communication using several behaviors such as note taking (as the sales assistant plans to report the discussion to others), positive responses through verbal (e.g. nodding, questioning, restating/summarizing) and nonverbal (e.g. facial expressions, eye contact, body language, emotions) behaviors (Steil et al. 1983; Weitz, Castleberry & Tanner 1992; Castleberry & Shepherd, 1993; Comer & Drollinger, 1999; Leadbetter, 2011; Moulinier & Srun, 2013, 2017).

Step 3.

Brand Product Presentation

MOMENTS	BEHAVIORS
PROPOSAL CROSS SELLING UP SELLING	The sale assistant tells the story about the product or of the Brand (history, heritage, etc.). The sale assistant is passionate about the Brand. The sale assistant handles the products with care and respect. The sale assistant invites or encourages the customer to hold, feel, or to try on the product. The sale assistant presents the product: materials, manufacture, origin (made in, quality), style, design, inspiration, functionality, use occasion, colors, etc. The sale assistant highlights how the product characteristics or benefits match the stated needs, preferences, desires, etc. The sale assistant offers the customer additional items complementing/ matching/ combining the one he/she asks for (cross-selling).

In the Selling Ceremony, the sales assistant is a Brand expert with a deep knowledge of the Brand and the merchandise in store. Therefore, the customer expects information on the manufacturing processes and the materials used, but also, “secrets” or elements about the history of the Brand (Cervellon and Coudriet, 2013). The expertise and knowledge of the Brand ambassador can affect why the customer chooses the Brand or the store above the competition. In premium-luxury stores, customers tend to expect more expertise and technical knowledge (Srun, 2017). Companies know this, so they put a lot of efforts to specialize some sales assistant s in specific product categories (exotic leather, watches, made to measure,...) and refer to them as "sales experts." In reference to the knowledge of the Brand ambassador, explaining the features of the products is not enough because customers care about the benefits and about how the product or service will improve their lives (Comer & Drollinger, 1999; Bosworth & Zoldan, 2012). There is general agreement that the most effective presentations stress benefits that closely correspond with the prospects' needs or give unexpected solutions (Rackham 1988; Gallo, 2012).

One of the most effective ways to present the product and influence the customer is in the storytelling. During the sales assistant's presentation, different Brand stories can be presented: problem stories, customer success stories, "two roads" stories and value-adding stories (Smith, 2017). Also, some stories can be based on true historical facts. For example, Burberry sales assistant tell the story of Thomas Burberry, who manufactured trench coats for soldiers in World War I. Other stories can be invented, like the Louis Vuitton story of the meeting with the actor Alain Delon and the producer Luchino Visconti, where the first accepted to work thanks to the initial LV (Luchino Visconti/Louis Vuitton) on the luggage. Other stories can be created through the appearance in editorials, magazines and on any social media sites or connecting the Brand to a special foundation. For example, Tory Burch is connected to the social responsibility to promote women entrepreneurship. Nevertheless, stories are useful because they generate the same general response for the majority of people. In fact, the ability of stories to grab cognitive attention and elicit emotions make them powerful tools for influencing attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors (Barraza et al., 2015; Barraza

& Zak, 2009; Lin et al., 2013) and they generate physiological responses (Barraza et al., 2015).

To reinforce the stories while presenting the product, some rituals must be followed. For example, the Brand ambassador can the product with care and elegance. He uses two hands, showing not only the professionalism but the quality of the product presented (Leadbetter, 2011). For watches and jewelry, he wears gloves not only to protect and avoid micro-scratches, but also to show that these pieces are precious (Srun, 2017). All gestures reflect importance and status. In the meantime, the sale assistant s "takes the pulse" of the customer (Jolson 1986; Weitz et al.,1992). Hence, he remains open to customer signals and uses questions to develop the presentation (Willett & Pennington 1966; Schuster & Danes 1986). Whenever possible, the customer must be allowed to try and feel the product. Depending on the specificity of the product, within this phase, there could also be the trial inside the fitting room, placed in a dedicated area of the store and near a mirror.

According to the selling ceremonies of Valentino and Max Mara, the Brand ambassador should escort the customer to the fitting room carrying and preparing the items inside. While trying, the sales assistant should remain nearby so that the customer could easily call for assistance. The sales person should invite the customer to exit with the items to look at himself standing in front of the mirror. Then the sale assistant can have the chance to ask for the customer's opinion with questions as *How does it feel?* Or *What do you like about?;* provide feedbacks/advices romancing the characteristics of the product, reassuring for the choice (color, style, fit, look or versality); show potential tailor’s alterations; and, propose additional/ complementary items. Maximizing the sale is about taking the opportunity to show the customers products that complement what they are buying, according to their needs. Customers are usually receptive to suggestions for items in addition to the initial purchase if they feel it is done with sincerity, because they don’t know everything the store has to offer.

Good service is about giving them the option. Questions like, "*Will there be something else?* Or *Can I get you something else?"* are not enough to encourage a customer to buy an additional product. Suggestive sales should be personalized to each customer depending on their needs. Offering related good is just good service. Therefore, some important questions should be: *This goes perfectly with...Let me show you what goes with...we have got something similar...We also propose...If you love this, you will also love...Have you seen?* Offering related sales is one of the most effective ways of increasing revenue without extra costs. It takes great questioning, good listening, and the confidence to offer additional products.

Step 4.

Handling Objections and Problem Solving.

MOMENTS	**BEHAVIORS**
HANDLING OBJECTIONS	If the customer raised any concrete (e.g. I don't like the color, it's the wrong size, it's too expensive) or vague objection (I'll l think about it, I' m not sure, I'll have to ask to, etc.) The sales assistant interrupts or contradicts the customer during the objection. The sales assistant listens to the customer during the objection. The sales assistant always has a warm and friendly tone in answering the customer during the objection. The sales assistant explains, in an adequate manner, to manage the objection (e.g. motivating the price, enhancing the product, etc.). The sales assistant offers other solutions such as another style, color, etc.

In the PSP, the goal of the traditional step of overcoming objections was to resolve all areas of concern that might interfere with concluding. Reasons for objections may include a lack of information, a dislike for the person, product, or price, or an unwillingness to make a decision. Thus, they must identify and resolve any potential areas of sales resistance. In the

Selling Ceremony, the Brand ambassador becomes more “consultative”: this shift presupposes predetermining many of the needs of customers and moving from problem solving to “solution selling” (Moncreif & Marshall, 2005). Hence, the sale assistant is not focusing so much on objections, but rather, on identifying problems, determining needs, and finally proposing and implementing effective solutions (Bosworth, 1995; Rackham & DeVincentis, 1999; Gallo, 2012). Many times, this will mean that the product originally proposed turns out to be inappropriate and/or that work needs to be done via product modifications. The result is not necessarily an immediate sale but rather the enhancement of the relationship based on win–win solutions. Fundamentally, in the evolved selling process, the mind-set of a salesperson should be that of a valued partner with his customers, and the feeling should be mutual (Bosworth, 1995).

Ideally, salespeople anticipate objections and forestall them before they arise (e.g., Anderson 1991; Futrell 1996; Oberhaus, Ratliffe & Stauble 1993; Weitz et al.,1992). Rackham (1988) argues that most objections arise because the solutions that are proposed do not fit the needs. Hence, effective probing and subsequent use of information will circumvent most objections (Solomon et al., 2014). While it may be more desirable to forestall them, objections may still arise. Conventional sales wisdom recommends that salespeople welcome objections because their presence indicates interest, and the sales literature gives suggestions for overcoming them (e.g., Alessandra et al.,1987; Rackham 1988; Lent & Tour, 2009).

Accuracy of processing is critical, and objections fall in two headings: concrete objections (*I don’t like the color, it’s the wrong size, it’s too expensive, etc.)* and vague objections (*I’ll l think about it, I’ m not sure, I’ll have to ask to, etc.).* Concrete objections are easier to handle as they give a clear indication of the concern. Vague objections need to be explored to find out the real issue through asking the customer what he/she is not sure about and turn a vague objection in a concrete one. This also makes the conversation two-way and provides the opportunity to learn what is stopping him/her from buying the product

(Leadbetter, 2011; Comer & Drollinger, 2011). Some potential responses to complaints can be done acknowledging the complaint, adding *I understand*; proposing immediate stating *Here's what I'm going to do*; asking questions to clarify the situation, taking personal responsibility, thanking the customer for bringing the situation to the attention (Lent & Tour, 2009),

Before moving to the closing step, it is worth asking some testing questions to anticipate the customer's reaction to the product. There are testing questions that can be used during the sale to highlight any objections such as: *How do you feel about?, which one do you prefer?, Have I missed anything you need to know?, is that what you have in mind? If I can arrange this for you would you be interested? Does this fit the budget?* These are some examples that determines the customer's interest as early as possible. There is no point presenting merchandise if the customer is not interested.

Step 5.

Closing Sale, Cash Register, and Farewell

MOMENTS	BEHAVIORS
CLOSING SALE	The sales assistant tries, in an adequate manner, to close the sale. In case the customer doesn't buy the sales assistant maintains a positive attitude.
CASH REGISTER TAILOR PACKAGING	The sales assistant follows the customer at the cash register. The sales assistant appreciates the choice of the customer, reassures him about the choice, and gives additional explanation on the garment (e.g. how to clean the items, etc.). In case of tailoring the sales assistant shows the customer the alteration and motivates the price . In case of price/discount request the sales assistant always has a warm and friendly tone in answering the customer. Packaging: The sale assistant wraps the goods with care (e.g. folding them, wrap them in a paper, putting them in the bag, attention to detail etc.). The sales assistant asks to include the hangers. In case of a gift: The sales assistant creates a special packaging, proposes a gift card, and proposes to create a separate receipt .
FAREWELL	The sales assistant greets the customer with a genuine, pleasant and personalized parting comment (goodbye) e.g. "Have a wonderful day" or "Goodbye, Mr. Jones." The sale assistant offers a business card. The sales assistant thanks the customer for the visit and invites him to come back again (e.g. to see the new collection). The sales assistant proposes to visit the website or social media of the Brand. The sales assistant escorts the customer to the exit.

Closing the sale involves gaining commitment from the customer: if the Brand Ambassador has tested the customer with questions, closing the sale should be easy. At this stage, it is very important that the sales assistant shows that the customer has full control over the final decision, without giving personal opinions and personal examples (Schuster and

Danes, 1986) and is sensitive to his perspectives. Performing these behaviors effectively is consistent with active empathetic listening. In fact, while traditional theories stressed strong control over conclusion techniques (e.g., Massimino, 1981), modern theories consider closing the natural culmination of a process that requires attention and good listening (Rackham,1988; Daley & Wolfe, 1996; Comer & Drollinger, 1999; Solomon et al, 2014).

On the other hand, customers often indicate that they are not sure by using non-committal words such as *maybe, possibly, perhaps should, probably, think, ...* That's why follow up questions or declarative statements are invaluable (Searle, 1975). They can be: repetitions, amplifications, clarifications, comparisons, pauses, neutral phrases, reflective statements, or summary reports (Kahn & Cannel, 1957; Payne, 1951). They are a means of controlling the conversation by keeping the focus on the topic like *Shall we go ahead? Shall we go to the cash?, I'm coming with you at the cash, How would you like to pay?, May I have your loyalty card?* The consequence is the arrival at the cash register and it's the opportune moment to ask the customer's contact details for future promotions, events, merchandise arrival, thereby opening the opportunity to retain the customer (Comer & Drollinger, 1999). If the customer is from abroad and he will be not returning, the sale assistant can tell him about the website and make their lasting impression memorable enough to tell other travelers about the service encounter.

At the cash register, the basic statement to "confirm the sale" can be done, but to create and emotional connection, the Brand ambassador must involve the customer, continue the interaction and "hold his hand." There is nothing worse than a sales assistant, who stops the Selling Ceremony, once putting the transaction through the till, or dumping the customer at the cash register and walking away. On the contrary, the sales assistant should use this time to reassure the customer that what he just bought is a very good choice. This will help him to overcome any guilt he may has of buying something he doesn't really need or spending more than he planned (Leadbetter, 2011). For example, at the Apple store, the Selling Ceremony always ends with congratulating the customer, summarizing some of the benefits of the purchase and reinforcing the customer's decision to buy a particular product (Gallo, 2012). Or, in the case of a gift, the Brand ambassador suggests how to present this to the receiver (Lent & Tour, 2009, p. 125).

An important moment at the cash register is when the sales assistant prepares the packaging. This is an important tool to transmit the Brand Image (Chevalier & Gutsatz, 2012). Prada, for example, trains sale assistant s to prepare the perfect package: the care of the product, how to wrap the merchandise, the maximum number of items in a bag, the package closure, and the position of the bow. Max Mara invented a special paper to wrap products, in order to avoid damage, and maintain the freshness. Sephora puts a perfume on the bag to remember the purchase. Also, the payment should be carefully organized and at the cash register the sales assistant must reassure the customers of their decision by providing them with indications on how to use the product, how to reduce any post-purchase problems, and should provide their business card (Solomon, Marshall, & Stuart, 2014).

In most luxury and premium stores, sales assistants escort the customers to the door, especially if they have some large boxes. They say *thank you* and invite them to return. (And, if there is a security guard, he opens the door). The farewell should take place regardless of whether or not the customer buys something.

Step 6.

Follow Up

MOMENTS	BEHAVIORS
CUSTOMER INFORMATION	The sales assistant enters the customer in to the database. The sales assistant adds qualitative information about the customer in the database or in the customer book. The sales assistant updates the information about the customer every visit. Service Personalization.
PHONE CALLS	The company connects to the customer. The sales assistant contacts the customer about new products.

In today's business environment, organizations are finding the old 80:20 rule to be even more of a reality. That is, 80% of the business is coming from 20% of the customers (or in many cases, an even more skewed ratio). Therefore, rather than focusing mainly on new customers, companies are spending more time and resources to retain existing, profitable and high potential customers (Sengupta et al., 2000), with positive impact on performance (Weeks & Kahle, 1990).

Comparing the personal selling process to the Selling Ceremony, the follow up step is enriched by the connection with the Brand and the research of extraordinary experiences. Therefore, the first step is collecting as much information as possible about the customer. Today this comes from technology (Moncreif & Marshall, 2005). Premium-luxury stores go further by collecting personal data within the Customer Book. This is a manual book owned by each Brand Ambassador, which contains information such as: the favorite food/beverage, the pet, the children's birthday, other customer's friendship, etc. All this information provides the basis to provide a personalized and unique service that guarantees a great and continuous customer experience.

The traditional follow-up was typically done with a phone call to determine if the product had met expectations. Today, it has been enriched by Brand Values. Immediately after the purchase, the company offers special Branded gifts, according to personal preferences such as a bottle of wine, cards, perfume, candles, etc. These products can't be bought, showing the uniqueness of the gift. Then, one week after the purchase, the customer receives a branded letter, with handwritten thanks.

The moment when the customer leaves the store is the beginning of a double relationship with the company and the sales assistant, transforming the follow up from transactional to emotional (Leadbetter, 2011). The company, two days after the customer purchase, sends him an email asking about the customer experience. In the case of Sephora, if for any reason, the experience has been bad, the store manager calls the customer directly to understand the motivations and invite him back to enhance the relationship. The sale assistant also starts a relationship through phone calls, text messages, email, according to customer's preferences and invites him to trunk shows, special exhibits, events, etc. with the aim to make the customer feel special and improve their knowledge of the Brand and create loyalty (Ingram et al., 2002).

1.4.3 Extra Role Behaviors Inside the Selling Ceremony to Provide Extraordinary Experiences

On the grounds that not every experience is extraordinary, some efforts have been made by premium-luxury companies to clearly underline the difference inside the Selling Ceremony through a differentiation between harmonization and surprise (Ind, 2001 p.61). Harmonization is using in role Brand Building Behaviors coherently to share knowledge, asking questions, giving advice to the customer (Van Dyne, 1995; Morhart, 2009). However, surprise is using extra role behaviors to introduce casualty effects, iconic moments and atypical actions during the interaction with the customer (Van Dyne, 1995; Morhart, 2009).

The research of extra role behaviors is connected to studies of extraordinary and terrible experiences within the service encounter (Suprenant et al., 1985, 1987), where the diagnosis of favorable and unfavorable incidents, based on the customer's and employee's perspective, have been examined by Bitner et al. (1990 and 1994). In their papers, they report that both satisfactory and unsatisfactory incidents can be attributed to one or more of three major types of employee behaviors. More recently, Gremler and Gwinner (2000 and 2008) studied the construct of rapport[30] and apply it in sales assistant-customer interaction, underlining the relational, dyadic perspective. Gremler and Gwinner (2000) state that rapport refers to "*the character of the interaction between employees and customers and relates significantly to customer satisfaction, loyalty, and word-of-mouth communication.*" This is a definition that is similar to Brand building behaviors (Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2015).

Then, they define customer-employee rapport as "*the perceived quality of the relationship, dealing with the communication between the two parties and characterized by a connection or understanding among the participants*" (Gremler & Gwinner, 2000 and 2008). They apply rapport building behaviors inside retail, defining specific employees' behaviors in five categories: uncommonly attentive behavior, common grounding behavior, courteous behavior, connecting behavior, information sharing behavior. These categories follow the in/extra role behaviors distinction made by Van Dyne (1995) and Morhart et al. (2009). As previously said, in role behavior are defined as the behaviors of the organization that support the Brand, they can be written (behavioral codes, manuals, display lines, ...) or verbally transmitted and are required or expected as part of performing the duties and responsibilities

[30] The construct of rapport has been the subject of studies in a variety of contexts and conceptualized in many different, though related, ways. For example, in a supervisor–subordinate context, rapport refers to "*communication characterized by warmth, enthusiasm, and interest*" (Heintzman et al. 1993, p. 200). In the area of conflict mediation, rapport building entails the efforts used to create "*more harmonious interaction between the parties*" (Ross and Wieland 1996, p. 229). In the context of the relationship between a caregiver and a person with developmental disabilities, rapport is discussed in terms of the "*quality of the relationship between two people*" (McLaughlin and Carr 2005, p. 69). Finally, in the linguistics field, Spencer-Oatey (2002) conceptualizes rapport as" *social interactions with a particularly noticeable impact on a relationship with another person*". These four studies have been cited not to suggest that one conceptualization of rapport is correct, and another is incorrect but rather to illustrate the varied and context-specific nature of the construct.

of the assigned role of the sales assistant. This group is composed by Gremler and Gwinner's (2008) categories of: common grounding behavior, connecting behavior, courteous behavior and information sharing behavior. These behaviors are standardized and performed by sales assistants in alignment with specific scripts inside the Selling Ceremony. The extra role behaviors are discretionary and go beyond existing role expectations. This definition can be applied to the Gremler and Gwinner's (2008) uncommonly attentive behavior. These behaviors are unexpected and atypical and generate extraordinary experiences.

Focusing only on extra role behaviors, they involve instances in which the sales assistant displays what could be considered particularly attentive behavior. Such behavior often appears in situations in which the employee, as perceived by the customer, performs out-of-the-ordinary or above-and-beyond actions. In this regard, Crant (2000) refers to proactive behavior as "*taking initiative in improving current circumstances; it involves challenging the status quo rather than passively adapting present conditions*" (p. 436). A confusing element in the literature is that proactive behavior has sometimes been defined as a type of contextual performance or extra-role behavior (Parker et al. 2006). However, Crant (2000) have argued that employees can engage in all work activities, including both task and contextual elements, with different degrees of proactivity. Thus, there is a growing consensus that there is no need to confine proactivity to the contextual domain only.[31] Several academics and researchers suggest that these uncommon behaviors are the most relevant in the service encounter to provide extraordinary experiences (Bitner et al. 1990, 1994; Arnold et al. 2003; Keaveney et al., 1995; Kelley, 1993). According to Gremler and Gwinner (2008) and Arnould et al. (2003), they can be divided in to the following broad categories:

[31] Bernieri et al. (1996) identify three predictors of this attentiveness: eye contact, physical proximity, and back-channel responses (e.g., head nods and "um-hmms").[31] Attentive behavior also can be exhibited through motor mimicry – that is, when one party displays communicative behavior that is appropriate to the situation or for the person with whom they are interacting (Andersen and Guerrero 1998). Finally, Hollman and Kleiner (1997) contend that rapport can be developed through emphatic listening and attentiveness to how the other party is communicating.

1. *Atypical actions*. These refer to behaviors where sales assistants go out (above or beyond) of their way, leading to customer delight (Arnold et al., 2003). Sale assistants are extremely helpful, and they make interpersonal efforts in explaining how a product functions or they propose additional product or service information. Burmann and Zeplin (2005) insert these behaviors inside the *helping behaviors* or having the will to help customers and assume responsibility for tasks even outside their area of expertise, while engaging in Brand- related behaviors. Bettencourt and Brown (1997, p. 41) refer to such atypical employee actions as "extra-role customer service, *"which they describe as "discretionary behaviors of contact employees in serving customers that extend beyond formal role requirements*." This special attention from the sales assistant can be also seen when the salespersons solves the customer's problems, even ''bending the rules'' and taking responsibility to solve it (Arnold et al., 2003). For example, a customer's warranty has expired, but the sales assistant arranges for the product to be repaired free of charge. The problem resolution factor found is similar to the Bitner et al. (1990) ''response to customer preferences,'' which may include employees accommodating requests that go beyond the scope of or their violation of the company's policies or rules. Other extraordinary behaviors inside this group are when the sales assistants spend a considerable amount of time assisting the customers while searching for a product. This category is referred to as time commitment by Arnould et al. (2003) or ''attention paid to the customer'' reported by Bitner et al. (1994).

2. *Interpersonal engagement and personal recognition*. These behaviors relate to situations in which the salesperson is extremely friendly and nice to the customer. This category is analogous to behaviors grouped by Bitner (1990 and 1994) in ''attention paid to the customer,'' where favorable encounters result when employees provide extra information, anticipate the customer's needs, show personal interest in a

customer or is especially attentive. Gremler and Gwinner (2008) add personal recognition to interpersonal engagement describing when the sales assistants recollect the name the customer’s name or remember specifics or relevant facts about the costumer (or their family). Beatty et al. (1996) indicate that relationships between sales assistant and customers, particularly in the early stages of the relationship, grow stronger when sales assistant remember more about their customers (including names) and their lives. Employee recognition of a customer’s uniqueness, termed “personalization” by some scholars (e.g., Surprenant & Solomon 1987; Winsted 1997), generally has a positive impact on service encounter evaluations (Winsted 1997) and increases rapport behaviors (Campbell et al. 2006).

3. *Intense personal interest*. These sales assistant behaviors demonstrate an intense level of interest in the customer as a person. Such interest in the customer’s situation is perceived by the customers as unexpected and out-of-the-ordinary and as an indication that the sales assistants primary concern is for the customers well-being and not making a sale (Gremler & Gwinner, 2008). Taking an interest in the other person helps facilitate rapport and it’s similar to the social bonding Bendapudi and Berry (1997) suggest leads to long-lasting relationships. This personal interest can be related to what Arnold et al. (2003) define in the delight experiences of interpersonal distance, describing stations where sale assistants are not too aggressive or “pushy” and leave customers free to browse in the store or not obliged to try or to buy the product.

Extraordinary experiences are not about grand gestures. They can be about the little things that make someone’s day such as carrying goods to the car, offering directions, or just taking the time for the customer. It is about providing an experience that customers enjoy so they come back to the store time and time again and tell their friends about it (Leadbetter, 2011 p. 171). Instead these extra roles behaviors are responsible of the quality of the relationship between sales assistant and customer. However, these behaviors and the corresponding physiologies of the salesperson or customer have not been investigated to date.

1.5 Assessing Experiences: Field Experiment, Peripheral Physiology and Coding Behaviors

In the previous sections, the important role of the sales assistant in providing experiences during the service encounter has been shown. Brand Building Behaviors contribute to generate valuable positive outcomes in terms of Brand experience, customer Brand engagement, and customer experience. And, they ultimately affect the final customer purchase.

This following section reviews several methods that have been used in the past to investigate sales assistant-customers interactions. However, most studies are qualitative and focus mostly on the customer's point of view, and only a few researches provide quantitative analyses of service scripts and consider the sale assistant's perspective (e.g. Solomon et al., 1985; Bitner et al., 1990; Bitner et al., 1994; Pugh, 2001; Arnold et al., 2003). Furthermore, service quality literature has primarily focused on the evaluation of technical and functional elements and not the emotional and immersive dimension of the service encounter (e.g., Price and Arnould, 1994).

Therefore, in the current research, the field experimentation is the starting point to investigate the service encounter. Then, the immersive dimension is assessed through the sales assistant physiological responses and, in the end, the observed behaviors are combined to provide a connection with positive and negative peaks of sale assistant physiology. In the following sections, all these methodologies are reviewed.

1.5.1 Field Experiment: Naturalistic Research

As previously said, different methods have been used to investigate sales assistant-customer interactions. The most widely used methods applied to measure perceived service quality are characterized by primarily qualitative measurements, and, within these, a great number of variants exist. Among the multi-attribute measurements category, the SERVQUAL instrument (Parasuraman *et al*., 1988; Pugh,2001) has attracted the greatest attention as a result of its claim of being able to investigate the relevant dimensions of the perceived quality, regardless of which service industry is being considered (Parasuraman *et al*. 1991; Buttle, 1996). This instrument is based on surveys and on the interviewers' responses. Qualitative researches have expanded this research even further by analyzing the incidents inside the service encounter including CIT (Flanagan, 1954; Stauss et al., 1993), Olsen's Technique (Olsen, 1992 and 1996), SPAT (Roos, 2002). The most important is the critical incident technique (CIT) that collects and classifies events or "critical incidents." Critical incidents are particularly satisfactory or especially unsatisfactory customer experiences in service contact situations (Bitner et al., 1990,1994; Kelley et al., 1993; Keaveney et al., 1995; Strandvik & Liljander 1994). These incidents are collected within qualitative interviews by asking consumers to recall, in detail, a remarkable experience with the service provider where they experienced a remarkable incident. Subsequently, the incidents are sorted into groups with similar topics and categorized in a stepwise process using content analysis. Because of what is referred to as "criticality," these incidents make it possible to distinguish what is not essential to the specific customer who relates what is essential and significant from the incident (Roos, 2002 p. 194). Also, the CIT is one of the few techniques where the employees' point of view is considered (Bitner et al., 1994).

In this regard and referring to the service employee's viewpoint, Bitner et al. (1994) observed that all the categories found in the customer-perspective study (Bitner et al., 1990) were also found inside the employees' study. However, previous research correlating customer and employee views of service is sparse and offers mixed conclusions. Schneider and Bowen (1985) and Schneider et al. (1980) found high correlations between employee and customer attitudes about overall service quality in a bank setting. Their results are contradicted, however, in a study by Brown and Swartz (1989) where the differences established were rather large and inversely related. Moreover, Price and Arnould (1994), while analyzing emotional responses to service encounter, found that what makes the customer happy is different from what makes the customer unhappy. Therefore, this this research can offer further enlighten on this subject

In the last decade, the growing field of neuroscience and behavioral sciences clearly suggests that what is reported by the customer during an interview or a focus group (the result of a rational process), doesn't always coincide with the less rational and automatic process (Fazio & Olson, 2003). Then, the current state of the art to measure the quality of experiences for consumers is to ask people their opinions in a survey that might not be answered for days or weeks after the experience. According to Zak and Barraza (2018) *"Surveys are known to be rife with biases, including poor recall of event details, providing socially acceptable answers, and easier recall of negative experiences. Focus groups, having participants turn dials, and mass emails all suffer from a fatal flaw: people cannot accurately or consistently report their unconscious emotional reactions to experiences. Self-report is often unreliable and difficult to compare across individuals. Moreover, how people respond to traditional survey scales is heavily impacted by culture, current physiologic state outside the target experience (e.g. fatigue, hunger), and socioeconomic status*". Therefore, in the current research, data have been collected through a naturalistic experiment and during the service encounter.

A field experiment describes researches that are conducted in a real-life setting, where the experimenter actively manipulates variables and carefully controls the influence of as many extraneous variables as the situation permits (Christensen, 1998 p.87). According to Miller (1977, p. 211), the first role of naturalistic observation doesn't serve to directly bridge the gap between field and laboratory, but rather, focuses exclusively upon what occurs in the field. By watching a natural behavior, questions can be transformed into scientific problems (Lehrman, 1971 in Miller, 1977). The second role of field research is an extension of the first role. That is, naturalistic observations initially serve as a starting point for investigating certain behavioral phenomena and subsequently serve as a methodological vehicle to develop laboratory procedures. The third role of naturalistic observation is similar to the second role, but in reverse order. Naturalistic observation can be used to validate or add substance to previously obtained laboratory findings. In this study, because the neurophysiological parameters have never been investigated inside service encounter, the characteristics of the field experimentation are indicated.

As Tunnel (1977) observed, the criterion of naturalness can be applied to the behaviors studied, the treatments applied (or not), and the setting in which the research is conducted. These three aspects can be combined, and their mutual interaction reflects the extent to which the total study can be judged as more or less naturalistic (Crano and Brewer, 2014). Regan and Llamas (2002) were the first to set up a naturalistic experiment in the retail field. In their experiment, the natural behavior was a sale assistant approaching a shopper; the natural setting was the store; the natural treatment was the sales assistant's dress.

Within naturalistic experimentation, the primary goal is studying the sale assistant's Brand building behaviors during the Selling Ceremony. As Crano and Brewer (2014, p.198) state, generalizability can be realized when the behavior under study is natural and naturally instigated and not made in response to the demand of the experiment. Therefore, the role of the participants must be considered as they are influencing the results. As used here, the term role refers to how participants perceive the research setting and how they react to this (Elmes et al., 2011). There are two general ways to guard against participants' reactions ruining observations: unobtrusive observations or unobtrusive measures (Webb et al., 1981). While the first has been done directly, the latter is indirect, and it affects the results. According to this study, the untrained sales assistant is observed directly, using a small hidden video camera to maintain the unobtrusive observation condition.

The second criterion of naturalness is natural treatment. According to Tunnel (1977, p. 428), the natural treatment can be seen as a "*naturally occurring, discrete event…that the subject would have experienced…with or without the presence of a researcher.*" Crano and Brewer (2014) state that the hidden manipulation doesn't destroy its naturalness and the participants' responses. Therefore, in this research, a minimal manipulation has been made to obtain consistent and valid data. Another important criterion of naturalness is the natural setting, which refers to a study that is conducted outside the laboratory. Following Cook and Diamond (in Crano & Brewer, 2014 p.203), a natural setting is "*a context that is not perceived to have been established for the sole primary purpose of conducting research*" and this contributes to the credibility of the treatment. Therefore, in this study, the setting were two real stores during their opening hours and no change in the environment was made.

Understanding the dynamics of the customer service experience presents methodological issues for researchers. Service encounters in real settings are problematic since interactions may be perceived differently depending upon when they are experienced and by whom (Bateson & Hui, 1992). In this particular natural retail setting, the video-based method has been employed to explore the sales assistant-customer interactions. Only a few research scholars have used this in the past (Kellogg and Chase, 1995; Seawright & Sampson, 2007; Victorino et al., 2012; Dallimore et al., 2007; Grandey et al., 2005; Mattila et al., 2003; McColl et al., 2003 Luong, 2005). However, this method has been found to induce similar psychological and behavioral responses compared to studies conducted in real retail settings (Bateson & Hui, 1992). This method provides realistic and dynamic emotional cues and more control over confounding effects during the offline coding. Furthermore, having a third-party perspective of the service experience makes this research less susceptible to error variance and observational biases (Seawright & Sampson, 2007), because the coders can watch the video several times, as explained in section 2.2.4.

1.5.2 Assessing Immersion through the Peripheral Physiology

Although many companies use service scripts, there is surprisingly little quantitative research on assessing their influence during the service encounter (Nguyen, 2014). Some studies have focused on how the employees should dress and present themselves aesthetically (Entwistle & Wissinger, 2006; Witz, Warhurst, & Nickson, 2003). Other studies have paid attention on employees' emotions during the service encounter (Mattila & Enz, 2002; Diefendorff & Richard, 2003; 2006 Barger & Grandey) and on the in-role behavior and extra-role behavior (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987; Zhao et al., 2018).

No research to date has assessed the physiological responses during the service encounter, despite, researchers have recognized the significance of considering sale assistant and customer as co-producers in value co-creation during the service encounter (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2000; Vargo and Lusch, 2004). In particular, the sale assistant has been recognized as integral to service delivery (Hartline et al., 2000; Keh et al., 2013; Liu et al., 2016) and his behaviors directly influence customers' overall service perceptions, evaluations and behavioral intentions (Bitner, 1990; Keh et al., 2013; Mills and Morris, 1986). Also, drawing on social exchange theory, Blau (1964) argues that although service scripts are designed to deliberately shape the behavior of employees, they can also impact on the way customers perceive, respond to, and participate in the service encounter itself , following the rules of reciprocity (Nguyen et al., 2014; Cialdini, 2003) and involving a set of mutual expectations of behaviors and obligations between the sale assistant and the customer (Mills and Morris, 1986). Therefore, sales assistant and customer are interdependent with regards to the service process (Ma & Dube', 2011), and the quality of the interpersonal process affects the service outcomes, such as customer satisfaction, buying intentions and loyalty (Bitner et al., 1990; Solomon et al., 1985).

This idea of process is line with Moncreif and Marshall (2005), that transformed the linear script of the PSP into a circular process where the costumer is at the center, in order to generate an immersive experience inside a flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). Recent researches related the flow to the similar concept of immersion, defined by Zak and Barraza (2018) as a "*state of concentration or absorption in an activity, like work or performance*". This state is more likely to occur at work (Gardener et al., 2002) and is tied to performance by improving concentration and motivation (Engeser & Rheinberg, 2008).

According to Zak and Barraza (2018), immersion depends on two elements connected to the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems: attention to the experience and emotional engagement. The study of the autonomic nervous system[32] (ANS) has seen the accumulation of an impressive body of replicated findings in which autonomic variables acquire a well-validated psychological meaning and extensive research suggests that both sympathetic and parasympathetic systems are indicative of attention and affective engagement. (Stemmler p.131, in Davidson et al., 2009). Attention is associated with energy expended. People are more likely to attend to stimuli eliciting sympathetic arousal (Boucsein, 2012; Kensinger, 2004). Activity in both sympathetic and parasympathetic systems, via electrodermal and cardiac activity occurs in response to emotional stories (Eisenberg et al., 1991; Eisenberg et al., 1988). A key component of the parasympathetic nervous system, the vagus nerve, is proposed to be central to the mammalian "social-engagement system" (Porges, 2007), with vagal activity being linked with affective experiences, most notably empathic concern (e.g., Oveis et al., 2009) and trait and state experiences of positive emotion

[32] The Autonomic Nervous System (ANS) is defined as the system of nerves that regulates the function of all innervated tissues and organs throughout the vertebrate body except striated muscle fibers, that is, the innervation of the viscera, vasculature glands and some other tissues. It's divided into three parts: sympathetic nervous system, parasympathetic nervous system, and the enteric nervous system (Langley, 1903). In particular, the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems are two "opposite" systems that constantly send information to the brain, in particular to amygdala. The sympathetic nervous system prepares, accelerates, and activates the body for action, instigated mainly on hormones like adrenaline and cortisol. The parasympathetic nervous system intervenes in reducing the speed, and enacting rest and relaxation, so it uses neurotransmitters like acetylcholine, which decreases the heart rate and blood pressure by making the organs work more slowly (Davidson et al., 2009). Once these signals are received by the amygdala, they are moderated by the pre-frontal cortex, which contextualizes the information and acts as a moderator. Multiple factors influence the ANS: physical movement, postural changes, sleeping, disease, and aging (Zygmunt & Stanczyk, 2010). For psychophysiologists, ANS responses through heart rate, blood pressure or skin conductivity can indicate activities as sleep, problem solving, reaction to stress, learning, attention, memory, information processing, sensation, perception, and emotional responses (Andreassi, 2007).

(DiPietro et al., 1992; Oveis et al., 2009). Also, literature (Zak, 2015; Barraza et al., 2015) while describing the neuroscience of the narrative, stated that immersion combines cognitive attention that comes from an increase of a cardiac activity and the affective engagement associated with the brain's synthesis of the neurochemical oxytocin that increases connection to the experience. Oxytocin binds to receptors on the vagus nerve that innervates the heart and changes cardiac rhythms (Cacioppo, 2010; Porges, 2001; Kemp et al., 2012). Norman et al. (2010) also link oxytocin (OT) [33]to the autonomic cardiac control, suggesting that it is a part of the mechanisms through which social behavior affects cardiovascular health and, in general, how social interactions influence autonomic processes. Recent work has associated oxytocin (OT) with cognition (attention) and affective engagement (empathic concern) while viewing public service announcements (Lin et al., 2013).

Then, Barraza et al. (2015), combined oxytocin with the evaluation of the heart rate, cardiac vagal control, and electrodermal activity to manipulate and measure the neural activity during narrative exposure, showing that narratives that sustain attention and generate emotional resonance are judged more enjoyable and significantly and independently predict charitable giving. This study on the immersive properties of narratives create a parallel with the present research because the script of the Selling Ceremony is the cognitive structure with procedural schemas, which guides comprehension and recall of the customer like a narrative (Abelson, 1981; Bower et al., 1979; Humphrey & Ashforth, 1994; Nguyen, 2014; Hudson & Nelson, 1983). As a narrative, the stages that run within the script of the Selling Ceremony are composed by cognitive and affective aspects (e.g. Barrett-Lennard, 1981) that grab attention and elicits emotional responses. And, in the end, they influence the customer

[33] OT is a nonapeptide hormone and neurotransmitter that is released during social interaction and contact (Zak, 2015; Zak et al. 2004). Its receptors are widely distributed in regions of the brain associated with social interaction, emotional processing, and stress responsivity (Loup et al., 1991). OT modulates the autonomic nervous system activity by exerting direct effects on the sympathetic (Gilbey et al., 1982; Pardini et al., 1989) and parasympathetic neurons (Higa et al.,2002). OT also impacts autonomic control through its influence on more rostral neural structures (e.g., cingulate cortex, amygdala); many of which express OT receptors and are known to orchestrate complex autonomic response patterns (Tribollet et al., 1992).

experience generating positive or negative attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs (Barraza et al. 2015; Barraza & Zak, 2009).

Following these findings, the aim of this research is to assess two sale assistants' peripheral physiology responses through their immersion during the service encounter in the retail premium-luxury store and the related customer behavioral outcomes to understand how the immersion influences customer purchase decisions.

According to Mendes (2009 p. 119), several methods assess the ANS including: electrodermal activity, cardiovascular activity (heart rate variability, respiration, cardiac output) and blood pressure responses, but only cardiovascular measures have been analyzed and connected to vagal nerve activity (Mendes, 2009). In this study, immersion is measured through wearable forearm sensors able to capture neural signals associated with attention (increases in heart rate and electrodermal activity) and vagal tone[34] (increases in heart rate variability). Sensors use the Valencell® biometric chip, which has been benchmarked for providing above 99% reliability, as compared to a cardiac chest strap (LeBoeuf et al., 2014; Eschbach et al., 2016). Sensors provide immersion values while synchronizing to a computer and collecting individualized, real-time immersion data from heart rate and vagus tone, through the analysis of the standard deviation of the beat-to beat intervals (Bernston et al., 1997; Mendes, 2009).

The measurement through the immersion and the use of sensors present three main advantages: the absence of self-report biases, the non-invasive method, and the robust signal.

First, the measurements of the ANS (and immersion) are not susceptible to self-report biases, where individuals may be unwilling to report their feelings (Gardner et al., 2000;

[34] The definition of vagal tone refers to the activity of the vagus nerve. In this research, the concept of vagal tone refers to the effect that the parasympathetic system exerts on various bodily districts with an almost continuous modality. Vagal tone is typically considered in the context of the regulation of cardiac function (Carlson, 1994). In fact, while the basic vagal tone is constant, the degree of additional stimulation (with respect to the basal tone) is regulated by a balancing action between the effects of the sympathetic and parasympathetic systems. In general, it is possible to state that an increase in vagal tone (and therefore a vagal activation) is associated with a decrease in heart rate and an increased cardiac variability. Conversely, changes in variability of heart rate are believed to be due primarily to control of the vagus nerve and thus primarily indices of parasympathetic control.

Guglielmi, 1999). In addition, ANS allows the dynamic analysis of moment-to-moment reactions that precede conscious awareness, revealing emotional responses that participants may not report or are yet aware of (Mendes, 2009; Bechara et al., 1997). Second, the problem with neuroscience techniques is they are often uncomfortable, for example, having participants lie in an intimidating and noisy MRI scanner, or being poked with needles to draw blood, or being wired up to a scary looking electroencephalogram (EEG) machine (Buchner et al., 2013; Babiloni et al. 2007; Zurawicki, 2010). On the contrary, sensors are non-invasive method able to capture the neuro-correlates of immersion outside the laboratory and in two retail stores. Third, the ANS provides "robust" [35]brain signals to predict people's behavior through the analysis of cardiac activity (Babiloni et al. 2007; Zurawicki, 2010). A serious problem in all neuroscience studies is "signal extraction." Most of what the brain does is keeping people upright, breathing, and conscious. For any experience people have, a small portion of brain activity is responding to that stimulus. Therefore, with the aim measure the immersion, researchers have methodically traced pathways in the brain using functional MRI, drug infusions, and EEGs in order to find robust brain signals that consistently assessed people's immersion in a message, ad, or experience and accurately predicted their subsequent actions, including purchases, donations to charity, recall of information, and social media shares (Barraza et al., 2015; Lin et al., 2013; Barraza & Zak, 2009; Barraza et al., 2011; Bracken et al., 2014).

[35] Robust" is a statistical term meaning that the signal predicts in all or most settings.

1.5.3 Observation and Coding of Behaviors

The immersion includes positive and negative peaks (engagement and frustration) that occur when an experience captures attention and generates emotional resonance that the brain tags as important and memorable (Zak, 2015). Hence, in the Selling Ceremony, they reflect not all process, but specific moments and related Brand Building Behaviors of the service encounter, where some expectations are confirmed or disconfirmed (Oliver, 1981).

Therefore, this research observes the positive and negative peaks of immersion that the sale assistants experience during the service encounter and define what behaviors are connected to these peaks and where they are located in the Selling Ceremony. The script of the Selling Ceremony serves as a coding scheme tool to observe the behaviors recorded in the field. Then the video recordings and the sale assistant physiological responses are combined to detected which behaviors during the service encounter are connected to positive and negative peaks in the immersion.

Two important issues arise with this approach: coder's observational biases and the quality of the coding scheme. Researchers have used video for many years particularly in workplace studies (Heath et al., 2010). Video-based fieldwork involves the collection of naturally occurring data using video cameras and is perhaps the most established use of video for data collection within the social sciences, and Goldman and McDermott (2009) argue that "*the use of video in social research became foundational to this theoretical approach and vice versa*". Using video recording enables researchers to maintain the desired consistency in treatment, limits potentially confounding scenario factors, and allows coders to watch the video several times, and at the end, reduces observational biases (Seawright & Sampson, 2007). Table 3 emphasizes some of the relative advantages of the video technique when compared to the direct observation.

Table 3.

Comparison of Coder's Perception Study Techniques

Data Collection Issue	***Pure Observational Studies***	***Video Recordings***
EMPIRICAL EXPERIENCE	Real experience	Real experience
ABILITY TO MANIPULATE FACTOR BEING STUDIED	High risk to reduce the natural setting, treatment, Behaviors	Not a problem
ABILITY TO CONTROL FOR POTENTIALLY CONFOUNDING FACTORS	Difficult to impossible	Not a problem
INTERPRETATION VARIANCE	Coders interpret actual experience, which are their perceptions	Coders have time to watch several times the video, less interpersonal factors biases
COSTS (MONEY AND TIME)	High money costs, time consuming	Reduced money cost, faster
ENVIRONEMENT INTRUSION	Very high	Limited, primarily for filming

The other important issue while studying naturalistic observations is determining what behaviors to observe (Elmes et al., 2011, p. 112). Hence, there is a limit to the range of behaviors that can be observed. In this research, the sales assistant behaviors are the focus. These are observed using the script of the Selling Ceremony while interacting with the customer.

In recent years, a number of tools have been developed for employing structured analyses of the service scripts. One of the first proposals came from Shostack (1984), where a visualization of service processes by flow charting is created. Her perspective was dominantly inside out, and the main purpose of her "blueprinting" tool was the systematic analysis of processes within a service company to identify internal causes of service failures and defects. Kingman-Brundage (1989) and Gummesson et al. (Gummesson, 1993; Gummesson and Kingman-Brundage, 1992) tried to change this perspective. In their blueprinting variant, called “service mapping,” the sales assistant -customer interactions are chronologically presented in a horizontal flow chart from the left to the right, reflecting the customer process.

Another method is the Sequential Incident Technique (SIT), which is a variation of CIT. According to Stauss and Weinlich (1995), the fundamental purpose is to sequentially record all incidents customers perceive in the course of the customer process, and to include the normal service encounters with critical service encounters (Liljander &Strandvik, 1995). This method of expanding on the critical-incident approach provides a better understanding of what leads a customer to be more or less satisfied (Ross, 2002). Once the points of the specific satisfaction-producing interactions (subservice encounters, service contacts, or contact points) have been identified, they can be analyzed and compared with areas in which dissatisfaction arises among customers.

According to the specific goal of this study, instead of using an existing coding scheme, a specific scheme has been developed, where only specific events have been coded and not the entire interaction. Hence, at first, the positive and negative physiological peaks have been combined with the video recordings and specific moments are assessed for each interaction. Only these specific units of the interactions were shown to two coders, who then describe the sale assistant observed behaviors. Then, this coding scheme were used to check the inter rate reliability among the interactions.

There are two kinds of reliability: observer consistency and inter-observer reliability. The latter has been used in this study and it can be defined as “*the extent to which two or more coders obtain the same result when measuring the same behavior*” (Robson, 1993 p. 221). In this case, coders independently observe and code from the video recording. Weick (1985) held that the reliability of a coding system is both the discriminality of the classifications that constitute the scheme and the efficacy of coder training. In the construction of the category system, intercoder agreement is of major importance because, without it, very little use can be made of the collected observations (Crano & Brewer, 2015, p. 220). The degree of inter observer reliability can be measured in several ways. In this case, given the small sample, we measured it with Lin’s coefficient (Lin, 1989). It ranges from zero (no agreement and no correlation) to one (perfect agreement and the highest correlation).

Chapter 2

Methodology, Research Objectives and Procedures

2.1 Evidence from the literature review and research objectives

The analysis of the literature conducted up to this point has highlighted how the changing environment in retail, has forced premium-luxury retailers to completely rethink the role of the physical store as the place where customers expect a relational, playful, explorative, and informative experience. And today, the focal point of academics and practitioners is to understand how the customer experience can be generated, improved and monitored. In the same time, in premium-luxury field, the Brand is pivotal. Inside the store the sale assistant plays the Brand Ambassador's role, following the script of the Selling Ceremony and performing specific Brand Building Behaviors, which contribute to generate the customer experience.

Despite the importance of the Brand inside premium-luxury stores and the role of Brand Building Behaviors to enhance the customer experience, no studies used the Brand Building Behaviors inside the Selling Ceremony and in the retail field.

Then, as mentioned in the literature, different methods investigate sales assistant-customer interactions. However, most studies are qualitative, focus mostly on the customer's point of view, and only a few researches provide quantitative analyses of service scripts. In addition, only some of them consider the employee's perspective, giving different and contradictory results. Furthermore, the growing field of neuroscience has shown that what is reported by the customer during an interview or a focus group is rife with biases and it doesn't always coincide with the less rational and automatic process. Moreover, how people respond to traditional survey scales is heavily impacted by culture, current physiologic state outside the target experience (e.g. fatigue, hunger), and socioeconomic status. Therefore, customers can't accurately or consistently report their unconscious emotional reactions to experiences. Additionally, no physiological device has ever been used during a real service encounter in a premium-luxury store, because methods like EEG, Eye-Tracking and FMRI are too invasive to be used in the store and they can invalidate the results of the investigation.

Furthermore, the literature has recognized the significance of considering sale assistant and customer as co-producers and interdependent in value co-creation during their interaction. In particular, the sale assistant has been recognized as integral to service delivery and his behaviors and performance have been shown to directly influence customers' overall service perceptions, evaluations and behavioral intentions. But so far, the related researches have primarily focused on the evaluation of technical and functional elements, but not the emotional and immersive dimension of the service encounter. Therefore, on the basis of the literature, this research aims to contribute to the theory and give further explanations to some research gaps related to the fields of customer experience and sales inside the retail setting,

To investigate these research gaps, the functional use of more combined methods in three different phases (field experiment, physiological parameters analysis, behaviors' coding) has been necessary, in order to deepen the different aspects of this research and to ask questions that could have not been answered with one technique alone or with two techniques used at separate times.

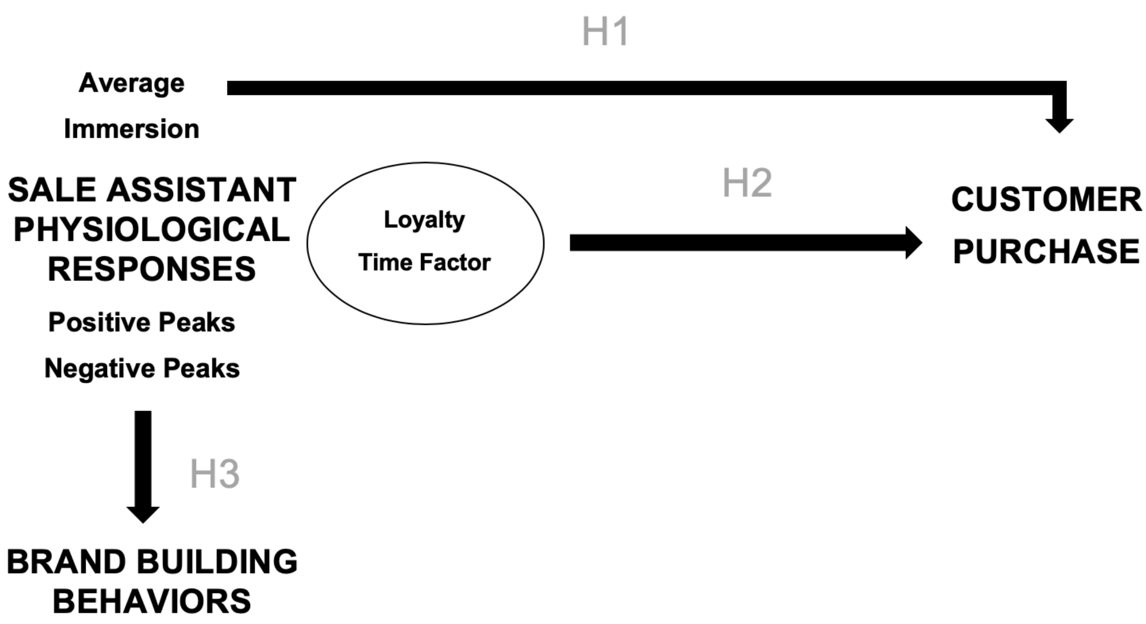
The first phase of the field experiment collects sale assistant's data inside the store through the sensors on the sale assistant's arms and video recordings. The second phase is based on a quantitative analysis and assesses the sale assistant physiological responses during the service encounter through the immersion, in order to find a positive relationship between these responses and the customer purchase decision. In the third phase, the research combines the sensors' data with video recordings, in order to observe the Brand Building Behaviors inside the script of the Selling Ceremony, and then identify what behaviors generate the positive and negative neurological immersion. Also, the aim of this study is to investigate the field and open new research questions, that opens opportunity for further studies.

Given this, the main questions that arise with respect to the analysis are as follows:

- Does sale assistant physiology predict the customer purchase decisions? Could neurologic immersion predict if people purchased or not?
- Is there a positive relationship between customer purchase, loyalty, time factor and the sale assistant physiology, measured through the average immersion?
- How does the neurological impact that sale assistants experience during the service encounter generate engagement and frustration? In other words, are positive or negative peaks of immersion related to specific behaviors in the service encounter? And where are these behaviors located?

Figure 5.

The Research Objectives Framework

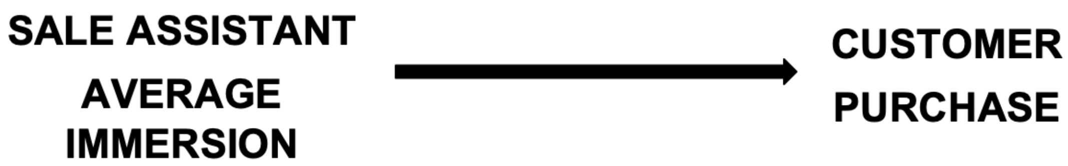


2.1.1 Hypothesis of the research

As mentioned above, **the first hypothesis** assumes that the sale assistant physiological responses during the service encounter, assessed through the immersion, influences customer buying purchase. Logistic regression is used to investigate this hypothesis for the Woman Store, the Man Store and both Stores combined.

Figure 6.

The first hypothesis



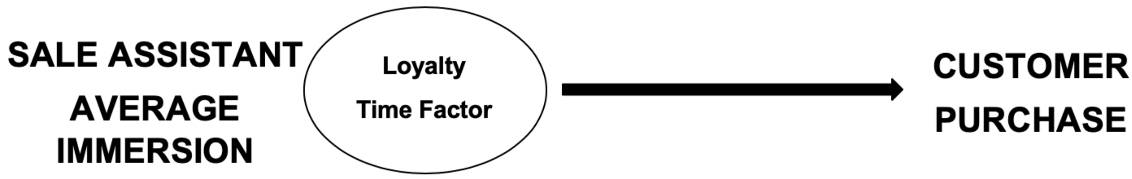
HP1: Whether or not sale assistant's average immersion positively predicts customer purchase.

Customer Purchase = $\beta 0 + \beta 1$ * Sale Assistant's Average Immersion

The second hypothesis assumes that there is a positive relation between customer purchase, loyalty, time factor and the sale assistant physiology, measured through the average immersion.

Figure 7.

The second hypothesis



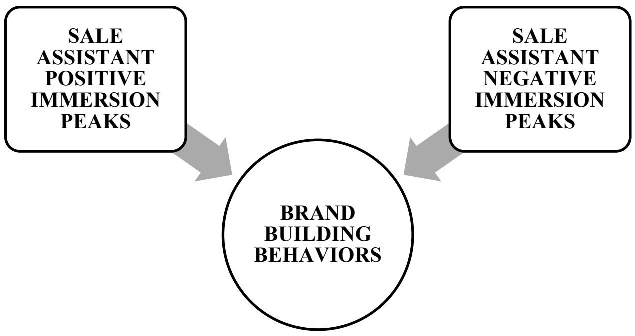
HP2: Whether or not sale assistant's average immersion, time factor and loyalty increase the likelihood of purchase

Customer Purchase = $\beta 0 + \beta 1$ * Sale Assistant's Average Immersion + $\beta 2$ * time factor + $\beta 3$ * loyal

The third hypothesis assumes that there is a relationship between sale assistant positive and negative physiology peaks, measured though the immersion, and specific Brand Building Behaviors observed in the Selling Ceremony.

Figure 8.

The Third Hypothesis



HP3: Whether or not sale assistant positive and negative immersion peaks are positively related to Brand Building Behaviors

Synoptic Table and The Variables Investigated

Table. 4

Synoptic Table

HYPOTHESIS	METHOD	INDEPENDENT VARIABLE	COVARIATES	DEPENDENT VARIABLE	UNIT OF ANALYSIS	SAMPLE SIZE
HP1	Quantitative Analysis	Average Immersion		Customer Purchase	Sale Assistant-Customer interaction	49
HP2	Quantitative Analysis	Average Immersion	Loyalty Time Factor	Customer Purchase	Sale Assistant-Customer interaction	49
HP3	Coding and Observation	Combination of Video Recordings and Sensors, in order to collect the behaviors related to specific positive and negative peaks of immersion			Sale Assistant-Customer interaction	14

The Variables Investigated

<u>Independent Variable</u>

Immersion: sale assistant physiological response, average heart-rate standard deviation for each interaction, measured through the sensors.

<u>Dependent Variables</u>

Purchase: dichotomous numeric variable of whether customer purchase happened denoted by 1 and 0 otherwise.

<u>Co-Variate Variables</u>

Time Factor: numeric variable, time was transformed in its relative number excel

The high quality of service in premium-luxury store is pivotal, because luxury purchases can be regarded as high involvement purchases. Involvement describes the degree of motivation and interest of the costumer in the product as well as in all product-related information (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012; Puccinelli et al., 2009). Furthermore, with regard to the premium-luxury store, performing all Brand protocol (rituals and Selling Ceremony) requires a long sequence of Brand Building Behaviors necessary to integrate the customer into the Brand's world and into the community, and is line with the high-level of service expected (Cervellon & Coudriet, 2013)

Loyalty: dichotomous numeric variable of whether customer loyalty happened denoted by 1 and 0 otherwise,

Literature shows how customer loyalty is important in premium-luxury stores. Consumption of luxury Bands is largely determined by social-function attitudes (i.e. self-expression attitude and self-presentation attitude) as costumers express their individuality (e.g., need for uniqueness) and exhibit their social standing (e.g., self-monitoring) through luxury Brands (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2008; Srun, 2017). The ability of luxury Brands to create self-image and symbolize social classifications and group affiliations is based on strong costumers-brands relationships (Crosno et al., 2009), and in retail contexts, through long-term sale assistants- customers relationships (Cervellon & Coudriet, 2013). The literature recognizes that customers can develop relationship with the company, but also with individual sale assistants, especially in premium-luxury stores (Beatty et al., 1996, Berry and Gresham, 1986; Reynolds & Arnold, 2000). Beatty et al., (1996) show that the customer's primary loyalty is to the retail assistant and not the store.

2.1.2 Possible contribution to the theory

The contribution of the research lies in the use of sale assistant physiological responses (immersion) to assess the service encounter and the relative purchase decisions. Also, the innovation is the methodology that consists in the use of unobtrusive sensors in real setting of the retail store.

Researchers have recognized the significance of considering sale assistant and customer as value co-producers during the service encounter, and the literature includes the co-creation dimension in the study of the customer experience, defining it as an exchange and a dyadic interaction between sale assistant and customer. The sale assistant is integral to service delivery and his behaviors and performance have been shown to directly influence customers' overall service perceptions, evaluations and behavioral intentions. Despite of this importance, no research to date has assessed quantitatively how this interaction affect the customer purchase decisions.

Then, previous literature has demonstrated that both sympathetic and parasympathetic systems are indicative of attention and emotional engagement. And research, while methodically assessing the narrative through the autonomic nervous system, demonstrated that immersion combines cognitive attention and affective engagement, predicting purchases, donations to charity, recall of information, and social media shares. Despite of the script of the Selling Ceremony can be considered as a narrative, no research to date has assessed quantitatively the immersion to understand how it predicts customer purchase.

Therefore, based on the above, this research helps to increase the knowledge ion the co-creation in the service encounter and to answer some questions about the immersions: could neurologic immersion predict if people purchased or not? How effectively retail sales assistant create personal emotional connections to customers and drive sales? And, what are the other factors that work with the immersion to influence the customer purchase decisions?

This research also observes the Brand Building Behaviors inside the script of the Selling Ceremony and combine them with positive and negative peaks of immersion, in order to define where these behaviors are located in the service encounter and what kind of behaviors generate engagement and frustration. Retail has changed dramatically in the last decades and they have been forced to rethink the role of the physical store as the place where customers live highly immersive experiences. Also, within the premium-luxury sector, the store is the main place in which the Brand legitimates its power and the sale assistant personifies the role of a Brand Ambassador, who follows the script of the Selling Ceremony. Consequently, a lot of efforts have been made to align the personnel to the Brand and to improve the selling techniques. This research contributes the literature identifying what Brand Building Behaviors caused immersion to rise and to drop and where they are located in the Selling Ceremony, in order to improve the customer experience.

Referring to the innovation in methodology**,** the existing literature of customer experience and extraordinary moments during the service encounter is extremely rich. In spite of this, the current state of art is using qualitative methods such as surveys, questionnaires and focus groups to assess the service encounter, while the research in neuroscience has showed how they are rife with biases and with a poor recall of details. At the same time, the problem with neuroscience techniques is that they are uncomfortable and difficult to use in a real retail setting because intrusive. Hence, this research contributes to a significantly realm in the study of the service encounter and customer experience, assessing the sale assistant-customer interactions with a reliable, bias free and non-invasive sensor able to collect signals associated with the brain's control of the heart and vagus nerve.

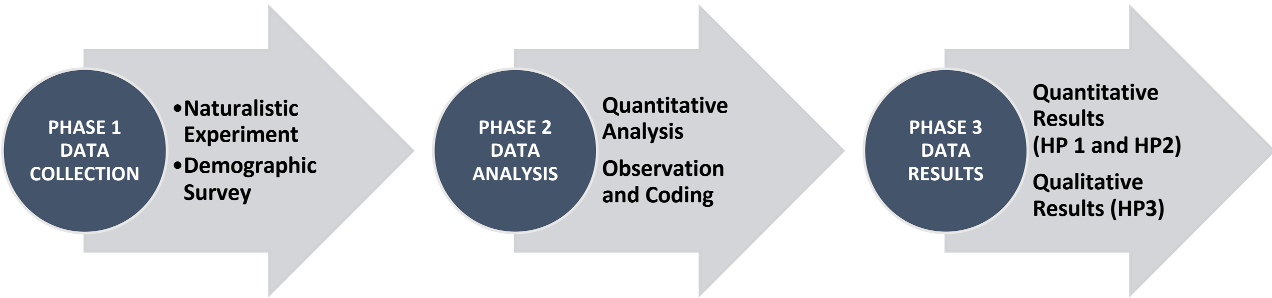
2.2 Methodology and Research Design

This chapter aims to justify the multi-method approach employed in this research. In general, most introductions to the field stress the benefits of employing multiple methodologies (Camerer, 2007; Camerer, et al., 2004; Camerer, et al., 2005). Furthermore, multiple measures provide convergent evidence for the neural mechanisms (Camerer, 2008). Then, according to Kable (2011), the functional use of more combined methods is necessary to highlight what can be gained by studying the same topic with different perspectives. Also, it enables to ask novel questions that could not be answered with one technique alone or with two techniques used at separate times.

The research design is the structure for data collection, analysis, and results. Referring to this study, different methods were applied to collect, analyze and interpret data.

Figure 9.

Research Design

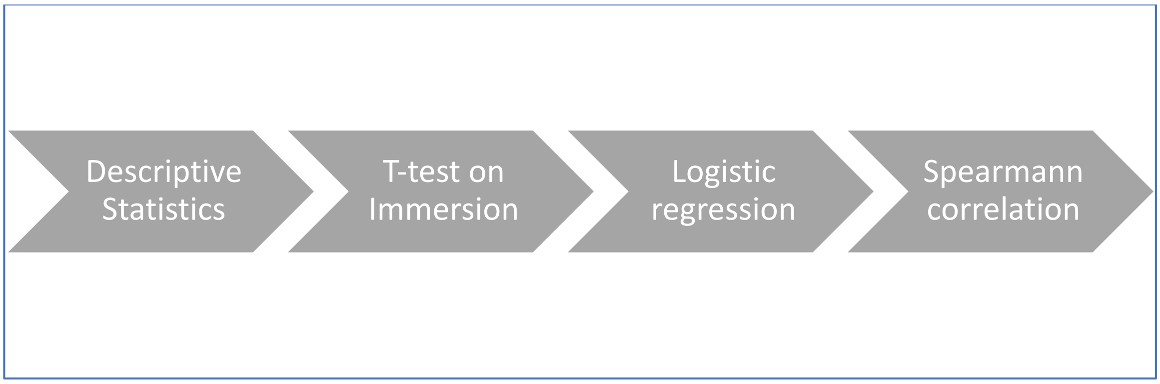


In the first phase, the goal is the data collection during the service encounter of two premium-luxury stores. The procedures and requirements of the field experiment (Appendix A and B) are followed and after a pre-test N=30 sale assistant-customer interactions are collected inside one women store and while N=25 sale assistant-customer interactions inside one men store through forearm sensors placed on sale assistants and video recordings. After every interaction, a demographic survey (Appendix C) is presented to the sale assistants to collect information about each customer.

The second phase is divided in two different analysis. The quantitative analysis assesses the sale assistant's physiology through the immersion to predict the customer purchase (Appendix D1 and D2) and how some customer's variables collected through the demographic survey interact with the immersion (Appendix F). The first step of this second phase is performed using a statistical analysis from which it has been determined if average immersion and other covariates related to consumer's behaviors (e.g. time factor or loyalty) increase the likelihood of purchase. To conduct this kind of study this research two different approaches are used: the first of them is a typical test of inferential statistics – t test chosen because the sample has a numerousness higher than 25 units – from which it has been determined if average immersion has a mean value higher when the interaction is followed by a purchase; the second approach is performed using a logistic regression from which it has been calculated the likelihood of purchase related to increase or decrease of average immersion. To determine the presence of outliers, to reduce risk to obtain high odds ratios, and to avoid biases due to the small sample, the average immersion variable has been standardized before being used in the logistic regression. Statistical analysis is concluded with a Spearman correlation able to determine the impact of time factor on amount, and vice versa. The level of significance was set to 0.10 ($p < 0.1$) given the aim and the topic of our study. The statistical software used in this study is STATA15 (StataCorp., College Station, Texas, USA).

Figure 10.

Statistical Methodology



After the quantitative analysis, sensors are combined with the video recordings of sale assistant-customer interactions and the related brand building behaviors are observed through a coding sheet (Appendix E) based on the Selling Ceremony. Two coders watch the videos and the inter rate reliability is measured through the Lin's coefficient, to define where these behaviors are located and which of them generate positive and negative peaks of immersion.

In **the third phase** the results of the quantitative and qualitative analysis are presented to create the conclusion and open new questions for further researches.

2.2.1 Data Collection: Field Experiment

The Methodological Procedure: Behavior, Treatment, Setting

The field experiment refers to the observation of behaviors in the natural setting. As Tunnel (1977) observed the criterion of naturalness can be applied to the behaviors studied, the treatments applied (or not) and the setting in which the research is conducted. These three aspects can be combined, and their mutual interaction reflects the extent to which the total study can be judged as more or less naturalistic (Crano & Brewer, 2014).

According to this specific research, we can define:

- Natural Behavior

In this research the behavior of the participants (two sale assistants) is natural and naturally instigated by the interactions with the customers. Researchers didn't train participants and they ask them to be natural. In order to achieve this criteria, pre-tests were done inside both stores with them, to make the participants feel comfortable, to act spontaneously and to forget that they were being recorded and wearing the sensors.

- Natural Treatment

In Tunnel's (1977 p.428) view, a natural treatment is a "*a naturally occurring, discrete event…that the subject would have experienced…with or without the presence of a researcher*". According to Crano and Brewer (2014) the hidden manipulation doesn't destroy its naturalness and the participants' responses. In this research, in order to obtain consistent and valid data, minimal manipulation was made necessary, through video recording and the presence of the sensors.

- Natural Setting

According to social sciences, a natural setting refers to a study that is conducted outside the laboratory. Following Cook and Diamond (Crano & Brewer, 2014, p.203) is "*a context that is not perceived to have been established for the sole primary purpose of conducting* *research*" and this contribute to the credibility of the treatment. In this study the setting was two real premium-luxury stores during their opening hours and no change in the environment was made. Every day the setting preparation was made 30 minutes before the stores opening (Appendix A); some adjustments due to technical issues (USB Memory Disk full, the sensors stop gathering data, …) were solved with no customers inside the stores or during the participants breaks and with no customers inside the store; the video cameras and the sensors were taken out from the store after the closure to the public.

The Sale Assistants as Participants

The participants are not customers, but two sale assistants. The choice of not having customer can be justified by the will to maintain a naturalistic setting that could have not happened with real customers. And, the choice of mystery shoppers or participants not totally aligned with the stores' target could have affected the results in terms of purchase and loyalty that couldn't have been investigated. Moreover, studies by Schneider and Bowen (1985), Schneider et al. (1980), Bitner et al. (1994), found correlation between the customer-perspective study and employee viewpoints.

For this research N=2 participants were recruited: a woman for the womenswear store and a man for the menswear store. Both stores are premium-luxury stores, they are located in the center of Claremont in California and they have common customers. According to Churchill et al. (1985), some determinants are related to sales assistant performance, between them: personal factors, skills, seniority, role variables, aptitude, motivation, and organizational/environmental factors. Therefore, both participants can be comparable: they owned the stores, they had 20 years of expertise in sales and their age was between 50-55 years. In agreement with the sale assistants, the interactions were recorded on Thursday/Friday/Saturday as the footfall on these days inside both stores were higher. Store visits were varied systematically so that observations were made during opening hours from 10am to 6pm.

Prior to consent, the participants have been informed about the purpose of the study that is to investigate what happens in their physiology when they are exposed to sales interactions with the customer. They have been also informed that their identities would be kept confidential and that the data would be used only for research purchases. The consent form further asked participants to allow video recording them and the customers inside their stores and informed them that they would wear 2 autonomic physiology sensors on the left and right arms, during their daily work, with the aim to establish the level of immersion, engagement and frustration while interacting with the customers. Making covert observations in a public place is generally viewed as ethical where the subjects are aware that others can observe their behavior (Webb et al., 1981). Therefore, the participants were completely aware of all steps and measurement of the experiment and customers were informed, they were video recorded through a clearly shown leaflet.

The Role of the Researchers

In the naturalistic experiment, the degree to which an observer interacts with participants of an experiment affects the quality of data that is collected and the consequent results. In this study no observer participation has been allowed.

For this reason, the researchers went to the store before the opening hours to set the location (Appendix A), placing the cameras in the store and the forearm sensors on sale assistants with no customers in the store. Then, during the experiment, researchers remained hidden in the adjacent rooms of the store and watched the video interactions through a smartphone connected to the camera and saw the sale assistant physiological responses from a computer synchronized to the sensors.

2.2.2 Data Collection: Demographic Survey

To investigate the second hypothesis of the research and collect customers-related variables, a demographic survey was presented to the sale assistants, in order to collect data about the customer (Appendix C). The prepared questionnaire was presented at the end of each service encounter and contained 6 questions, to avoid being backfired, or interference in the sale assistant job's daily routine and create a concern in the level of confidentiality.

Moreover, most of the customer could have been answered by the researcher, without asking the participant in case the participant was busy.

The questions asked were of three types:

- pure demographic questions (day, gender)
- customer related questions (loyalty, time factor, presence of companion)
- store related question (presence of other customers in the store)

The pure demographic questions and the store related questions were chosen because they were helpful to identify the customer's interactions while combining sensors and video recordings to recognize the service encounter and as criteria to inclusion or exclusion in the observation (par. 2.2.4).

The customer related questions comprehend a variety of variables. Bagozzi (1986) defines customer response as the outcome or final action toward or reaction, including psychological reactions such as attitudes and/or behavioral reactions. Donovan and Rossiter (1982) suggested several responses in a retail environment, also used by Sherman and Smith (1986). They include the amount of money spent in the store, amount of time spent in the store, presence of the companion and whether the customer likes the store environment. According to the purpose of this research, the customer's loyalty and the time are the only two variables assessed (see par. 2.2.1 for details). The other variables, presence of companion and presence of other customers, although important, are used during the video recordings, as criteria to inclusion or exclusion in the coding.

2.2.3 Data Analysis: Sale Assistant's Physiological Responses through Immersion

The Sensors

For the recovery of neural signals through physiological data, participants wore a small sensor on a stretchy band on both forearms underneath the shirt or the jacket sleeves. Wearable sensors, Scosche Rhythm band model, were preferred with respect to any other measuring system because they are minimally obtrusive (no wires dangling around the participant's body, lightweight, and small; naturalness and easiness in the daily routine work; not noticeable by customers); power-efficient (at least 8 hours without a single charge); low-cost (below $100). The sensors were integrated with an open system composed of a sensor dingle, which gathered the raw signals from the sensors and synchronized them to a computer, collecting individualized, real-time immersion data from four signals associated with the brain's control of the heart and vagus nerve. The signal processing algorithm showed immersion data within 10 seconds after activating the sensors and collected second-by-second immersion during the participants' daily work. The participants wore the same two sensors on the light and left arm for the duration of all experiment. Sensors were placed before the store was opened and were removed after the store's closure. The participants were required to wear long sleeves shirts for all duration of the experiment to cover them. Every night, the sensors were charged.

Figure 11.

The Sensor

Pre-Test and Calibration

Because the research was run in a real retail setting, it was difficult to control variables, therefore, two months of pre-tests were done before the experiment and some sale assistant-customer interactions were recorded, without being used in the experiment. It was decided that the data collected by the sensors must contain the whole interaction, from the beginning (when the customer when the customer crosses the door threshold) to the end (when the customer exits the store).

In particular, it was necessary a calibration work in the store environment to understand how to hide completely the sensors; how to solve the lack of signal from the sensors or the lack of connection with computer; and, where to place the long cord to collect data without environmental interferences (such as the heater and the air conditioning). Therefore, tests were made while the sale assistant was moving around the store, while in the stock, in the bathroom, in the parking lot and long cords were placed in areas where the signal was not disturbed. In order to hide completely the sensors and, in the same time, prevent the loss signal, it was asked both sale assistants to wear the sensors on both arms and wear long sleeve garments.

Then, according to the purpose of the thesis, it was decided to exclude from the analysis all service encounters where it was not possible to clearly define the customer purchase or not purchase, such us episodes where the clients was entering the store to pick up a product already paid, the customer who left the purchase on hold, the customer who came only to try the dress after the sartorial repairs.

2.2.4 Data Analysis: Observing and Coding Behaviors

Video Recordings

In order to analyze the neurological impact that sale assistants experience during the service encounter, it is necessary to define the positive and negative immersion peaks inside all sale assistant-customer interactions and then observing the connected Brand Building Behaviors inside the script of the Selling Ceremony through the video recordings.

As mentioned in the part of the field experiment, there was the smallest manipulation of the store environment, and this was possible by having cameras that were chosen for the small size. In details, for the women wear store, the camera chosen to record the interactions was GO PRO Hero4, carefully placed in the store not to be invasive in the left corner opposite the entrance at the third shelf and it was able to record the whole store. For the men wear store, the interactions were recorded through a GO PRO 5 Session, placed near the entrance, at the right corner; while GO PRO Hero4 was placed over the highest shelf near the fitting room.

The cameras were connected through Sena (GP10-01) Bluetooth Pack for GoPro to: Sena (BT10-01) Bluetooth Mic and Intercom to record the voice and reduce the environmental noise during the recording; Anker 20100mAh Portable Charger PowerCore 20100 to record 8 hours nonstop. In each camera, a 2 USB Memory Disk Lexar 64GB was used and was replaced every 4 hours during the participants break. Video cameras were taken out of the store after the store closure and recordings were saved every evening in an External Hard Disk and erased from the Memory Disk. Power banks were charged.

Figure 12.

The Camera Go Pro Hero4

Pre-Test and Calibration

As it happened for the sensors, the real retail setting made difficult to control variables, therefore, some pre-tests were done for two months before the experiment and sale assistant-customer interactions were recorded in both stores, without being part of the experiment.

After the pre-test and following Goldman and McDermott's guidelines (2009, p.30-32) some criteria were considered for reliable:

- '**Wholeness/particularity'** which refers to the need to ensure that the video was sufficiently detailed and fully presented to capture the essence of a particular event and to bring the viewer 'inside' it. Referring to the wholeness, only the videos with the whole Selling Ceremony were considered (no cut in the SD card, clear customer entrance and exit) Referring to the particularity, only the interaction where all details of the service encounter are visible, such as the clarity of the interaction near the fitting room or at the cash register.

- The potential of the video to connect the viewer through a sense of "**Being there/Being with**" the sale assistant. For this reason, the service encounters taken into consideration were the ones where the sale assistant was serving only one customer and the customer was served only by the sale assistant and not colleagues; and, the interactions when the microphone was paired with the camera and all dialogue between the sale assistant and the customer was clear.
- **'Chronological verisimilitude'** the use of video to represent the order events, not necessarily as a chronological account but in a way that enables the observer to comprehend events in a manner that is 'in sync with the meaning of events' and 'truthlike'. In the case of the man store it was difficult to understand the service encounter, because there were two cameras of which one dedicated to the fitting room and room, while the other without, generating difficulties to assess a clear chronology. Therefore, for the analysis of behaviors, only the woman store was considered.
- **'Perspectivity'** which referred to the use of the video to make clear the sale assistant's point of viewing. For this reason, some videos were not considered because the sale assistant was giving the back to the camera, there was a mannequin placed near the camera which blocked the view, there were a lot of customer inside the store and it was difficult to understand the customer that was served in a specific moment.

Combination of Video Recordings and Sensors

The positive and negative peaks of immersion have been analyzed for each sale assistant-customer interaction and classified for duration. Then, these positive and negative immersion peaks have been combined with the video recordings of each interaction to detect the associated Brand Building Behaviors. The markers put inside the sensors' recordings at the customer entrance and exit in the store defined the beginning and the end of each interaction.

Figure 13.

Video and Sensors Combined

Coding Behaviors

In order to provide evidence of the connection between the positive and negative immersion peaks and Brand Building Behaviors, a consistent coding scheme was developed accordingly to the Selling Ceremony and then presented to N=2 coders to observe and code the time-frames related to these sale assistant behaviors. Coders were selected based on their familiarity of the retail field. A set of complete coding instructions was written and included general instructions for coders, an operational definition of each step and decision rules for assigning behaviors to categories. These are procedures recommended by Perreault and Leigh (1989) for improving the reliability of judgment-based data. The situation to be studied was clarified: the behavior of the sale assistant who is wearing the sensor during the interaction with customers. Hence, only the participant, no other sale assistants, no other customers present in the store, no other activities except for sales must be considered. Where the situation was complex to understand, or the coders were not thoroughly familiar with the activity, supervised practice in applying these definitions and coding was provided through videos of interactions that can be immediately watched with the questionnaire and the confirmed or corrected. No explanation was made regarding peaks and frustration and some additional neutral moments were added because clearly recognizable in the Selling Ceremony. During the observation, coders were provided by a computer containing N=14 video interactions, headphones, a coding sheet and the time frame to be analyzed.

After the coding was done, inter rate reliability have been used to assess the extent of agreement between coder through Lin's coefficient (Lin, 1989).

Chapter 3

Results

3.1 Field Experiment

During the field experiment, N=55 interactions were collected, but a choice of a valid data was done according to the sensors' calibration (par.2.2.3) and the necessity to exclude all service encounters where it was not possible to clearly identify the customer purchase or not purchase. Therefore N=6 services encounters were excluded, because they were episodes where the clients was entering the store to pick up a product already paid, the customer left the product on hold, the customer came only to try the dress after the sartorial repairs.

Referring to both criteria, from 1st June 2018 to 30h June 2018, inside the woman store N=30 interactions were recorded, but only N=27 interactions were considered; inside the men's store N=25 interactions were recorded from 1st June 2018 to 30h June 2018 and only N=22 were considered. The data set of 49 interactions was very small, but it was used at the first attempt to understand the relationship between the customer behavior and the sale assistant's immersion. a choice has also been made regarding the sensors to be used.

In details, for the women's store:

- 22 interactions have the average of both right arm and left arm sensors;
- 2 interactions have the left arm data to be considered;
- 3 interactions have the right arm to be considered.

In details, for the men's store:

- 8 interactions have the average of both right arm and left arm sensors;
- 11 interactions have the left arm data to be considered;
- 3 interactions have the right arm to be considered.

3.2 Demographic Survey

The data set of the demographic survey was collected from N=55 interactions, but only N=49 interactions were maintained, representing the 89,09% of all interactions.

All survey data was aggregated according to the survey results and consistently to these following categories: purchase, level of loyalty, time factor.

Every customer was named according to the field experiment: RS_1...RS_49. Then, the categories were created according to the answers of the demographic survey (Appendix C).

The sample was composed by 49 customers, with a prevalence of female (61.22%) in comparison with male sub sample (38.78%). 67.35% of the total sample made a purchase (70% in the female sample and 63.16% in the male sample).

Every customer spent about 1462.37 seconds (24.37 minutes) to complete the purchase process, meaning with the locution "purchase process" not only the effective purchase, but also the decision to not complete the transaction. The behavior about time factor between male and female was characterized by a statistical significance ($t = 1.9521$, $p < 0.1$): time was higher in the female sub sample (1788.83 ± 1801.95 seconds, equivalent to 29.81 minutes) than in the male sub sample (946.89 ± 647.29 seconds, equivalent to 15.78 minutes).

With attention to customer's loyalty, 42.86% of the customers had a previous purchase in that store. Comparing loyalty between male and female, results show that male were more loyal (63.16% of men) than female (30.00% of them) and this difference was characterized by a statistical significance (chi2 = 5.22, Fisher's test = 0.023).

Table 5.

Customer's Characteristics

	Total Sample		**Female**		**Male**		**p**
N. Obs	49		30	61.22	19	38.78	
Purchase (%)	33	67.35	21	70.00	12	63.16	0.75
Time (s), mean (s.d.)	1462.37	1513.49	1788.83	1801.95	946.89	647.29	0.05
Loyal (%)	21	42.86	9	30.00	12	63.16	0.02

3.3 Hypothesis 1: Sale Assistant's Average Immersion and Customer Purchase

The aim of the first hypothesis is to demonstrate that sales assistant average immersion has a positive impact on the likelihood of purchase from the customer.

The results from Table 6 show the descriptive statistics of this continuous immersion variable. Average immersion in the total sample is 4.45 ± 0.24 and it doesn't register any statistical significance about gender or store. Instead, paying attention to purchase, it is noted an average immersion mean value higher in case of customer purchase (4.49 ± 0.25), result characterized by a statistical significance at level of 5% (t = -2.0308, p = 0.0479).

Table 6.

Immersion Descriptive Statistics

		Immersion		
		Mean	**Standard Deviation**	**p**
	Total Sample	4.45	0.24	-
Purchase	*No*	4.35	0.20	0.0479
	Yes	4.49	0.25	
Store	*Women*	4.42	0.21	0.3491
	Men	4.48	0.28	
Gender	*Female*	4.46	0.25	0.7002
	Male	4.43	0.25	

HP1: Whether or not sale assistant's average immersion positively predicts customer purchase.

About the first hypothesis the logistic regression shows that average immersion has a positive impact on the likelihood of purchase (OR = 2.22, p = 0.05), so determining that an increase of 1 unit of average immersion produces a rise of likelihood equal to 2.22 times, equivalent to 69% of increase. The result is stronger for the men store (OR = 3.06, p = 0.07), so showing that the immersion in this store is higher than in that dedicated to women. In the men store the likelihood is equal 3.06 times, value equal to 75% of probability of purchase. In the women store, Odds Ratio is not characterized by a statistical significance (OR 1.79, p = 0.373), so showing that purchase in the women store is not the result of direct impact of average immersion, but it could be determined by a combination of different factors. To confirm this hypothesis, the hypothesis have been widened as showed in the following H2.

About the validity of logistic regressions reported in the table 6, it can be noted that the validity of the binary regression, performed on the total sample, is assured by Likelihood Ratio chi2 (LR = 4.60, p = 0.320) and by Hosmer-Lesmenov's test (p = 0.7303). With attention to the two sub-samples, it is registered a lack of significance for subsample referred to women store (LR = 0.93, p = 0.6755), and about this only Hosmer-Lesmenov's test confirms however the validity of regression. This phenomenon could be the result of the lack of statistical significance of average immersion coefficient in the women store.

Instead, the subsample of men store shows a goodness of fit of the logistic regression to explain the impact of interest variable on the likelihood of purchase, reaching for the Likelihood ratio chi2 a value of 12.77 with a p-value lower than 0.01.

Table 7.

Sale Assistant's Immersion and Customer Purchase

Total Sample	**Women Store**	**Men Store**	**Total Sample**
	H1	**H1**	**H1**
Immersion (standardized)	2.22** (0.94)	1.79 (1.17)	3.06* (1.94)
cons	2.29** (0.76)	3.24** (1.58)	1.41 (0.68)
LR chi2	4.60**	0.93	4.86**
Hosmer-Lesmenov	0.7303	0.6755	0.2087
Num. Oss	49	27	22

3.4 Hypothesis 2: The Relationship between Customer Co-Variables and Physiology

Before implementing the second hypothesis, this research demonstrate that the number of chosen covariates is appropriate, it respects the principle of parsimony, and it is in accordance with the time factor of the purchase process. Therefore, the research excludes from the covariates set the purchase amount because this variable is subsequent to the purchase and its value could be due to the average immersion and other factors, not studied in this work. To confirm this hypothesis, the research performs at the end of the statistical analysis, a Spearman correlation (Table.7), from which emerges that the purchase amount is not correlated with immersion, but it has a strong and positive correlation with time factor ($\rho = 0.7485$, $p < 0.01$). This means that time factor influences purchase amount and, at the same time, purchase amount influence time factor. The presence of this high level of correlation avoids using in the same regression model both variables (i.e. time factor and purchase amount), because this strong correlation could invalidate the logistic model with a perfect collinearity between two independent variables.

Table 8.

Spearman Correlation

	Immersion	Duration	Amount
Immersion	1.000		
Duration	0.023	1.000	
Amount	0.144	0.7485***	1.000

***P<0.01

Therefore, repeating the same logistic regression analysis introducing two covariates, related to customer's behaviors (time factor and loyalty), they register a statistical influence of average immersion on the likelihood of purchase (OR = 5.07, $p < 0.01$). In particular, when the average immersion increases of one unit, the likelihood to register a purchase rises of 5.07 times, value equivalent to 84% of likelihood. Observing the trend of immersion on purchase in either women or men store, it was noted that in men store the average immersion has a positive and significant impact on the likelihood of purchase (OR = 5.68, $p < 0.1$), rising the probability until 85%. The same trend was noted about women store, but the lack of significance in OR showed again that purchase in the women store is not only influenced by immersion, but it is a more complex process in which, as emerged by the logistic regression, the time spent in the store has a positive impact (OR = 1.00, $p = 0.1$). Moreover, in the subsample of women store, the purchase is always concluded (100%) when the customer was loyal, event that it was not present in the men store in which only 63.6% of loyal customers conclude positively the purchase process.

In general, time spent in the store has a positive impact, as registered in the total sample (OR = 1.00, $p < 0.01$) and in men store subsample (OR = 1.00, $p < 0.1$). The loyalty of customer has a positive and, we could affirm, a decisive impact on the likelihood (OR = 9.70, $p < 0.05$), so showing that increase in the average immersion determines a rise of 9.70 times, equal to

91% of likelihood. The same trend was not registered in women or men stores, so showing that loyalty is a characteristic of customer, but it is not gender-related factor.

Table 9.

Summary Table

	Total Sample	**Women Store**	**Men Store**
	H2	**H2**	**H2**
Immersion (standardized)	5.07** (3.27)	5.91 (7.14)	5.68* (5.17)
Duration (s)	1.00*** (0.00)	1.00* (0.00)	1.00* (0.00)
Loyal	9.70** (10.14)	-	2.59 (3.55)
cons	0.08**	0.02*	0.11*
LR chi2	28.31***	12.20***	12.77***
Hosmer-Lesmenov	0.7338	0.7994	0.9213
Num. Oss	49	17	22

About the validity of the logistic regression performed to demonstrate this second hypothesis, it can be noted a goodness of fit for all three binary regressions. More specifically, Likelihood ratio chi2 has always a statistical significance lower than 0.01 (total sample = 28.31, $p < 0.01$, women store = 12.20, $p < 0.01$, men store = 12.77, $p < 0.01$). The Hosmer-Lesmenov's tests, performed for all regressions, confirm the validity of the regression models and therefore the validity of our results about the statistical evidence of research hypotheses.

3.5 Coding and Observing Peaks of Immersion with Behaviors

In order to provide evidence to the third hypothesis which assumes that there is a relationship between sale assistant positive and negative immersion peaks and specific Brand Building Behaviors, the inter observer reliability on a coding sheet between two coders is measured, through the Lin's coefficient, that shows a value of 0.8268, the 82.68% of agreement.

The observations of the Brand Building Behaviors connected to positive and negative peaks of immersion focuses only on describing the results at the level of the thoughts, since the coding of only 14 interactions was done. Additional analysis of a larger sample at the individual level and during sale assistant-customer interactions is necessary to investigate further what emerges from the observations.

STEP 1: WELCOME (CODE 1, 2)

During the welcome (CODE 1), sale assistant's immersion doesn't present any positive or negative peaks of immersion. Short positive peaks of 3 seconds are observed during the sale assistant recognition of a loyal customer. Negative and short negative peaks of immersion (3 seconds) are registered during the welcome while the sale assistant is busy in other activities such as replacing the stock, at cash register with another customer or while serving another customer (CODE 2).

STEP 2: DISCOVERY CUSTOMER (CODE 3, 4, 5)

The sale assistant first approach (CODE 3) is present only in one interaction and observed by both coders. No positive or negative immersion peaks are related to this.

In this phase of the Selling Ceremony can be inserted CODE 4 and CODE 5. Referring to the first, it is related to moments when the sale assistant is entering in a meaningful conversation e.g. using questions to define needs, asking for clarification, asking for additional information etc. Positive peaks of immersion are registered during these interactions. On the opposite, in questioning and having small talks not related to the product (CODE 5) with behaviors like asking about children or partners; talking about customer’s hobbies and interests, finding a common ground (horoscope, perfume, etc.), negative immersion peaks are observed.

STEP 3: BRAND AND PRODUCT PRESENTATION (CODE 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 AND 18)

Product presentation (CODE 6) and Brand presentation (CODE 8) represent the majority of the time frames, they are relevant and long in all interactions and easy to observe. Product presentations refer mainly to the product characteristics, materials and manufacturing; while Brand presentation refer to the store history, the ownership of other stores and some stories related to her family. In the same group of behaviors, are also put the episodes in which the sale assistant tells the customer episodes related to other customers of the store (CODE 9). All these behaviors are always related to positive and long immersion peaks (over 6 seconds).

Also included in step 3 there are behaviors that occur in front of the mirror and near or inside the dressing room (CODE 15). They can be considered in a relationship selling perspective in which the sale assistant plays a role of advice and help. They include multiple behaviors, such as bringing the product in the fitting room before the customer enters; offering the customer additional items, complementing, matching, and combining the choice; suggesting how to wear the product; helping the customer for an alteration, etc. All these moments are related to positive peaks. In the same relationship selling perspective, sale assistant compliments (CODE 7) that support the customer's trial or show appreciation for the customer, such as “*It looks good on you; you look pretty*” or recommendations on how to take care of the product (CODE 18) are related to positive peaks of immersion.

At this stage, within the sale assistant - customer interaction, moments of disconnection between the sale assistant and the customer can be detected, observed when the intervention of external elements such as a telephone call (CODE 10). In these episodes, negative peaks of immersion by the sale assistant can be detected.

Other important episode of negative peaks of immersion can be detected while the sale assistant discover that the product is sold out (CODE 13).

In this phase of interaction with the customer, negative peaks of immersion are recorded and connected to operational activities, less related to the service encounter, but integral part of the sales activity. These behaviors are related to the search for a product in the stock (CODE 11), the search for an alteration (CODE 12) and the request of a colleague's help (CODE 14).

STEP 4: HANDLING OBJECTIONS AND PROBLEM SOLVING (CODE 16, 17)

In a relationship selling perspective, Brand Building Behaviors associated to handling objections (CODE 16) are characterized by sale assistant's negative peaks of immersion. In details, they are related to sale assistant's listening of the customer's objection (vague or concrete) and positive immersion peaks are found while the sale assistant is answering or giving explanations to the customer. Similar positive peaks of immersion are observed while the sale assistant is justifying the product's price or the alterations to the customer (CODE 17). I

STEP 5: CASH REGISTER (CODE 18, 19)

In the observations, the step of the cash register was divided in sale assistant behaviors outside the cash register while the costumer is going to pay (CODE 18) and inside. (CODE 19). The latter contains different situations, such as wrapping the product, printing the receipt, preparing the gift packaging, etc. As happens for the operational procedures in step 3, they are related to slight negative immersion peaks of 3 seconds.

On the other hand, all behaviors connected to the positive outcome of the customer purchase, such as going to the cash register for a payment (CODE 18) and making the customer pay or adding the name in the database (CODE 19) are related to positive immersion peaks.

FAREWELL (CODE 20)

During the farewell (CODE 20), exactly as happens for the welcome (CODE 1), the sale assistant’s immersion doesn’t present any positive or negative peak of immersion.

Chapter 4

Discussion, Limitations, Conclusions

4.1 Discussion

This research is the first study that investigates the sale assistant physiological responses during the service encounter in the retail premium-luxury store through the use of immersion and how the immersion positively predicts the customer purchase decisions. Also, this study investigates the relationship between immersion and some covariates and costumer's purchase. The peripheral physiology responses have been assessed through a logistic regression and a t-test.

Then, a second analysis observes the Brand Building Behaviors inside the script of the Selling Ceremony to analyze the neurological impact that sale assistants experience during the service encounter and define where these behaviors are located and which of them cause a positive or negative physiological impact. To provide evidence of the behaviors identified the inter rate reliability has been measured.

Figure 14.

Main Research Questions and Empirical Studies Conducted

HP1: LOGISTIC REGRESSION

- HP1: Whether or not sale assistant's average immersion positively predicts customer purchase

HP2:LOGISTIC REGRESSION, SPEARMAN CORRELATION

- HP2: Whether or not sale assistant’s average immersion, time factor and loyalty increase the likelihood of purchase

HP3: LIN'S COEFFICIENT AND OBSERVATION

- HP3: Whether or not sale assistant positive and negative peaks are positively related to Brand Building Behaviors

4.1.1 Sale Assistant Physiology and Customer Purchase

The objective of this research is to investigate for the first time to the best of our knowledge, if the sale assistant physiological responses, measured through the immersion, predict customer purchase during the service encounter in two premium-luxury retail stores.

A logistic regression has been used to test hypothesis 1 in which the interest variable is sale assistants’ average immersion and the dependent variable was customer purchase. In the empirical analysis this research demonstrates that average immersion has a positive and significant effect to determine the increase of likelihood of purchase (2.22 times higher than the lack of immersion, value equivalent to 69%). This value is higher in men store (3.06 times, equivalent to 75%) than in the women store in which the logistic regression showed a difficulty to fit into our sample.

It has to be said, that the dataset collected through the field experiment of N= 49 interactions is small, but, according to the literature, several studies have been successful in demonstrating that people seem to have similar neurophysiological responses to the same stimuli, and, additionally, these neurophysiological responses are similar throughout the exposure to a stimulus (Barnett & Cerf, 2015; Barnett & Cerf, 2017; Barnett, White, & Cerf, 2016). The research also suggests that a small subset of people's neurophysiology throughout an exposure can be used to predict the responses of a larger population (Barnett & Cerf, 2017; Barnett, White, & Cerf, 2016; Dmochowski et al., 2014). Also, continuous measures of neurophysiology might not predict individual preference but be more indicative for the larger populations' preferences (Golland, Keissar, & Levit-Binnun 2014; Dmochowski et al., 2014). Studies examining neurophysiology during stimulus exposure find that the neurophysiology between two or more people can fluctuate in a coherent pattern based on fluctuations of arousal and emotional valence for the stimuli being presented. Using the coherent fluctuation of a small subset of people these studies were also able to predict behaviors of a larger population (Barnett & Cerf, 2017; Barnett, White, & Cerf, 2016; Dmochowski et al., 2014).

However, in the women store, although immersion has a positive effect to determine the increase of likelihood of purchase, the reduced number of samples has not allowed to obtain an empirical evidence of our hypothesis. For this reason, this research creates the basis to analyze the sale assistant-customer relationship in the service encounter, but further research is needed.

Observing how immersion predict customer purchase s makes it possible to understand that sale assistants and customers are co-producers in value co-creation during the service encounter (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2000; Vargo and Lusch, 2004). The sale assistant is integral in the service delivery (Hartline et al., 2000; Keh et al., 2013; Liu et al., 2016) and behaviors directly influence customers' overall service perceptions, evaluations and behavioral intentions (Bitner, 1990; Keh et al., 2013; Mills and Morris, 1986). Blau (1964) in the exchange theory, argues that, although service scripts are designed to deliberately shape the behavior of employees, they can also impact on the way customers perceive, respond to, and participate in the service encounter itself , following the rules of reciprocity (Nguyen et al., 2014; Cialdini,

2003) and involving a set of mutual expectations of behaviors between the sale assistant and the customer (Mills and Morris, 1986).

The results also show that sale assistant physiology, is a good measure to predicts the customer purchase. According to Zak and Barraza (2018), immersion depends on two elements connected to the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems: attention to the experience and emotional engagement. As happened in this research, previous studies assessed the people's immersion in a message, ad, or experience and immersion accurately predicted their subsequent actions, including purchases, donations to charity, recall of information, and social media shares (Barraza et al., 2015; Lin et al., 2013; Barraza & Zak, 2009; Barraza et al., 2011; Bracken et al., 2014). Considering the script of the Selling Ceremony as a cognitive structure with procedural schemas that grab attention and elicits emotional responses along the process (e.g. Barrett-Lennard, 1981), creates a parallel with the previous studies. And, in the study, it has been assessed that the level of sale assistant's immersion is able to influence the customer experience generating positive or negative attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs (Barraza et al. 2015; Barraza & Zak, 2009).

4.1.2 The Relationship between Immersion, Customer Covariates and Physiology

In order to deepen the service encounter analysis on both stores, the impact of average immersion on the likelihood of purchase has been analyzed considering the customer's loyalty and the time spent in each store from each customer.

More specifically, the research demonstrates that average immersion assumes a higher value if it is considered with customer's characteristics as time factor or loyalty in that specific stores. In the total sample, this increase is equal to 84% ($OR = 5.07$, $p < 0.05$) and increases in the men store (85%, $OR = 5.68$, $p < 0.1$). In the women store, the research registers a different approach: although logistic regression in this case has a very high goodness of fit (LR $chi2 = 28.31$, $p < 0.01$), odds ratio remains without significance ($OR = 5.91$, $p > 0.1$) showing that in women store, the purchase is not a result of the average immersion alone (or better there is a lack of empirical evidence of impact between average immersion and purchase), but it is due to a series of components in which the time factor and loyalty play an important role.

These results reflect how in the premium-luxury stores delivering high-quality service is critical. In fact, consumption of luxury Bands is largely determined by social-function attitudes (i.e. self-expression attitude and self-presentation attitude) as costumers express their individuality (e.g., need for uniqueness) and exhibit their social standing (e.g., self-monitoring) through luxury Brands (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2008; Srun, 2017). The ability of luxury Brands to create self-image and symbolize social status and group affiliations is based on strong costumers-brands relationships (Crosno et al., 2009), and in retail contexts, through sale assistants- customers relationships (Cervellon & Coudriet, 2013).

Referring to time factor, it has to be said that premium-luxury purchases can be regarded as high involvement purchases. Involvement describes the degree of motivation and interest the costumer has in the product as well as in all product-related information (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012; Puccinelli et al., 2009). According to these results, the literature shows, the higher the interest, the longer the time a consumer spends in the store and the more intensive the selling procedures (Ehbauer & Gresel, 2013; Lueg et al., 2006). In fact, regarding the Brand Building Behaviors in the Selling Ceremony, the luxury firm must ensure in-depth knowledge of the customer about product materials and manufacturing, care instructions and additional services (personalization, care instructions, etc.) as well as product design and history. Furthermore, in premium-luxury stores, performing all Brand protocol (rituals and Selling Ceremony) requires a long sequence of behaviors necessary to integrate the customer into the Brand's world and into the community, and is line with the high-level of service expected (Cervellon & Coudriet, 2013). Then, by the customer's perspective, the time factor increases the comfort inside the store (Luegg et al., 2006) and, in addition, the amount of purchase (cf. Mangleburg et al., 2004). Beatty and Ferrell (1998) found that increased in-store shopping resulted in increased impulse purchases (as mediated by the urge to buy impulsively). They explained this effect by addressing the idea of physical proximity (Hoch & Loewenstein, 1991). That is, when one shops more, one sees more items she or he would like to own, and therefore, this produces more urges to buy and more purchases results.

The other co-variate variable correlated to the immersion is the loyalty. Literature shows how an important factor in premium-luxury stores is the customer loyalty and how this relationship is part of a process that grows up through the interpersonal relationships between sale assistant and customers (Anderson, 1996; Macintosh and Lockshin, 1997; Henkel et al., 2007). This loyalty is multi-level: behavioral, attitudinal and cognitive (Gremler and Brown, 1996) and, the depth of the relationship can have an impact on purchase intentions (Macintosh and Lockshin, 1997). Loyalty is translated to certain behavioral intentions of the customers, such as repeated use (Oliver 1997), expressing a preference for it and recommending service to others (Cronin et al., 2000; Zeithmal et al., 1996). Also, Beatty et al., (1996) show that the customer's primary loyalty is to the retail assistant and not the store. In fact, in premium-luxury Brands, the relationship with the customer is part of a relational plan, where for each high-spending customer, there is a sale assistant dedicated.

The connection between the loyalty and the strong relationship with the sale assistant can be observed in the results of both stores. In fact, while in the men store only 63% of loyal customers conclude positively the purchase process, in the case of the women store, all loyal customers (100%) purchase. This high result is due to the small sample of N=49 interactions considered. Therefore, this research creates the basis to analyze the relationship between loyalty, immersion and purchase, but further research is needed.

4.1.3 Sale Assistant's Immersion Peaks and Brand Building Behaviors

The observation of Brand Building Behaviors inside the Selling Ceremony through a coding sheet shows Lin's coefficient equals 0.8268 between the two coders. Based on these results, the positive and negative peaks of immersion have been combined to the related behaviors.

Working on a reduced sample of 14 interactions, the study doesn't lead to definitive conclusions, but it shows the existence of a link between the Brand Building Behaviors and the physiological responses of the sale assistant. In particular, from the video recording observations it emerges that, although Brand Building Behaviors generate customer Brand engagement and customer experience (Mazzei and Ravazzani, 2015; Henkel, et al. 2007; Punjaisri et al., 2009; Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2006), these customer's outcomes don't necessarily show a parallelism on the physiology of the sale assistant. Also, many factors contribute to the generation of sale assistant positive and negative peaks of immersion and they are not necessarily connected to the service encounter, but to the internal organization and the procedures of the store.

In particular, the findings show that the expected in-role behaviors (Morhart et al., 2009; Crant, 2000; Van Dyne et al., 1995) such as welcome, first approach and farewell are not connected to any positive or negative peaks of immersion. These observations can be explained through the difference between the surface acting and the deepest emotional level (Grandey, 2003). In fact, sale assistant is typically expected to express positive behaviors and emotions (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987) as part of his in-role behaviors (Van Dyne et al., 1995; Morhart, 2009). "*The prevalence of acting in service roles is not surprising, given the ubiquity of display rules and the fact that ever service agents who identify strongly with their role will not always feel precisely what is expected of them*" (Ashforth & Tomiuk, 2000, p.189).

Exceptions can be found related to personal recognition of a loyal customer (Gremler & Gwinner, 2008) when short positive peaks of immersion are registered (3 seconds), in line with the quantitative results found for the average immersion in the HP2). Relationship marketing literature recognizes that customers can develop relationship with the company, and also individual sale assistant (Beatty et al., 1996, Berry & Gresham, 1986; Reynolds & Arnold, 2000). Also, research suggests that interpersonal relationships are much more important in retail contexts, where customers prefers personalized service and close relationship with the sale assistant (Beatty et al., 1996). Furthermore, relationship selling studies show that the customer's primary loyalty is due to the sale assistant and not the store (Beatty et al., 1996), finding empirical support in the literature (Gremler & Brown, 1996; Macintosh & Lockshin, 1997). Therefore, although there is a lack in the literature regarding the loyalty of the sale assistant to the customer, the positive immersion peak registered during welcome can be explained by the strong relationship between the sale assistant and the customer (Beatty et al., 1996). Additional research is required given the reduced sample observed.

Short time negative immersion peaks (3 seconds) are registered during the welcome while the sale assistant is busy in other activities such as replacing the stock, at cash register with another customer or while serving another customer. These observations can be explained according to the literature. In fact, Rafaeli and Sutton (1990) demonstrated that the level of store business influences the inner motivation of sale assistant during the service encounter, in particular, the crowded environment, is negatively related to sale assistant positive emotion, because it makes sale assistant suffering from cognitive overload (Fiske & Taylor, 1984).

More in-role behaviors have been observed through the videos, and they are related to episodes when the sale assistant is entering a meaningful conversation with the customer (e.g. using questions to define needs, asking for clarification, asking for additional information etc.). Positive peaks of immersion are registered during the interactions. On the opposite, in questioning and having small talks not related to the product (e.g. asking about children or partners; talking about customer's hobbies and interests, finding a common ground), negative peaks of immersion are observed, with the exceptions of the small talks with a loyal customer, where positive peaks of immersion are registered. These different results can be explained through the literature (Castleberry & Sheperd, 1993; Boucsein, 2012), which theorizes that in the interaction with the customer, the sale assistant makes a greater cognitive effort in the discussion or during the listening, based on the relative importance of the message. In particular, when the message is related to the product (or service) to be sold the cognitive process activates by interpreting and responding to the customer (Comer & Drollinger, 1999; Steil et al., 1983). Hence, this cognitive effort can explain the positive peaks of immersion.

Regarding the negative peaks of frustration registered while conversing with customers about non-sale-related topic, an explanation can be traced in the mentioned difference between the acting approach of the sale assistant and her inner feelings (Grandey, 2003; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987). The intent is to seem authentic to the customer; thus, this acting has been called "faking in good faith" (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987 p.32). At the same time, exceptions of positive immersion with a loyal customer indicate the strong relationship between the sale assistant and the customer, as said above (Beatty et al., 1996).

Moving the discussion from in-role to extra-role behaviors (Morhart et al.2009; Crant, 2000; Van Dyne et al., 1995), the observation shows that they are connected to positive immersion peaks, but with some exceptions. In the first case, positive peaks of immersion are registered when the extra-role behaviors happen on a relationship-selling function in which the sale assistant helps and gives advices to the customer (Guenzi, 2007). Some examples can be observed when the service encounter takes place in front of the mirror and near or inside the fitting room, and the sale assistant makes actions such as bringing the customer's coat in the fitting room before the customer enters; offering a drink; offering the customer additional items complementing, matching, and combining the choice as a personal stylist; suggesting how to wear the product in a formal and informal way; helping the customer for an alteration, etc. In the same perspective, sale assistant compliments can be read and associated to positive peaks of immersion, while supporting the customer's trial or showing appreciation for the customer, such as "*It looks good on you; you look pretty*" or recommendations on how to take care of the product. Positive immersion peaks are also observed when the sale assistant asks empathetic questions and then listens to customer, in order to understand the occasion of use of the product requested, or, in the case of the gift's request, the sale assistant helps the customer to understand the receiver's desires, preferences and needs. These positive peaks can find a base in the rapport literature (Argyle, 1990; Winsted, 1997) and named empathetic concern (Cheek & Smither, 1983; Hogan, 1969) and courteous behaviors (Gremler & Gwinner, 2008) in the retail setting. According to Morhart (2009), they can be considered inside the extra-role behaviors and they appear intentional and natural (Crant, 2000; Parker et al., 2006; Van Dyne et al., 1995). Positive peaks can be explained through the high level of immersion of the sale assistant, where the cognitive efforts (Castleberry & Sheperd,1993; Boucsein, 2012) and the level of engagement (Oveis et al., 2009) activate sensing to verbal and nonverbal messages of the customer (Comer & Drollinger, 1999; Steil et al., 1983).

In the analysis of Brand Building Behaviors, the longest and the most positive peaks of immersion are located in the Selling Ceremony phase named Brand and Product Presentation. Product presentations refers mainly to the product characteristics, materials and manufacturing; while Brand presentation referred to the store history, the ownership of other stores and some stories related to her family. In the same it can be inserted the observations, in which the sale assistant tells the customer stories related to other customers of the store. These findings can be explained because the product and brand presentation are narratives linked to individual attitudes, belief and behaviors that presents a transportation (Green & Brock, 2000). In their research, Barraza et al. (2015) showed that an influential narrative increased sympathetic activation, through an increase of heart rate, which is responsible of positive peaks.

In the Selling Ceremony phase named Handling Objections and Problem Solving, the sale assistant presents intermittent positive and negative peaks, according to the dialogue with the customer. Negative immersion peaks are found when sale assistant is listening of the customer's objection (vague or concrete) and positive immersion peaks are found while the sale assistant is responding to the customer. Similarly, intermittent positive and negative immersion peaks are observed while the sale assistant is justifying the product's price or the alterations to the customer. In the literature, this can be explained through the comparison of the sale assistant-customer discussion as a negotiation process where conflicts are handled by the sale assistant to arrive to an accommodation or a compromise (Thomas, 1992). Prior research on emotion in negotiation has shown how this process has intrapersonal effects, and how this emotional state influences the consequent behavior (Van Kleef et al., 2006). Therefore, the negative peak of immersion shows that when the customer makes an objection it is followed by a positive immersion peaks, because the cognitive activity increases during negotiation (Fulmer & Barry, 2004), while the sale assistant arrives to an accommodation or a compromise (Thomas, 1992).

Referring to the phase of the phase of the Selling Ceremony named Cash Register, the behaviors observed are either outside, either inside the cash register, while the costumer is going to pay. All behaviors connected to the customer purchase are related to positive peaks. Although a specific study linked to the relationship between the cash payment and the customer is not present in the literature, it is possible to presume a relationship through the study of the research carried out on the customer. In literature, money is reported to have a surprisingly weak relationship with well-being (Kahneman & Deaton, 2010), however, recent research suggests that this relationship doesn't hold universally, as individual differences moderate this (Hill & Howell, 2014; Millar & Thomas, 2009; Zhang et al., 2014). For example, experiential purchases consistently result in greater happiness for experiential customers (Zhang et al., 2014) and purchases are also positively affected by people and environments (Matz et al., 2016).

In contrast, negative immersion peaks are detected when there is a disconnection between the sale assistant and the costumer such as phone calls made to the customer during the service encounter or when the sale assistant discover that the product is sold out. Although specific studies by the sale assistant's perspective have never been done, it's possible to link these behaviors to the disconfirmation theory (Oliver, 1981), in which the affective character of satisfaction or dissatisfaction is expressed in the difference between expectations with an object, action, or condition and result (Locke, 1967). Therefore, as consumer satisfaction is an emotional response to the experiences provided by, or associated with, particular products or services or even patterns of sale assistant behaviors, the same could be assumed for the sale assistant.

Unexpectedly and surprisingly, some other behaviors are important to consider, as they cause negative peaks of immersion. They are unrelated to Brand Building Behaviors, but they are integral part of the sale assistant's job responsibilities and they are located within the whole Selling Ceremony. Some moments related to these negative physiological responses are visual merchandising or restocking activities, and elaborate cash procedures (such as wrapping the product, printing the receipt, preparing the gift packaging, etc.). These results can be explained by the literature that finds a relationship between the external customer service and the workplace design, as tools for service quality and colleague relationship (Heskett et al., 1994). In particular, negative peaks of immersion are due to the discrepancy between environmental demands (customer) and individual capacities to fill these demands (Ornels & Kleiner, 2003; Topper, 2007; Vermut & Steensma, 2005). In fact, Rafaeli and Sutton (1990) demonstrated that the level of store business influences the inner sale assistant during the service encounter, in particular, crowded environment is negatively related to sale assistant positive emotion, because it makes him suffer from cognitive overload (Fiske & Taylor, 1984). Although the analysis is limited and partial, this opens new ideas for further research on streamlining procedures for the delivery of an effective costumer experience.

4.2 Limitations and further research

4.2.1 Methodology

Sample Observed for Coded Behaviors (number, gender)

Although the concordance level is 82.68%, and the research suggests that a small subset of people's neurophysiology throughout an exposure can be used to predict the responses of a larger population (Barnett & Cerf, 2017; Barnett, White, & Cerf, 2016; Dmochowski et al., 2014), further research on a larger sample is needed to create a strong pattern of observation. Also, in the observation of Brand Building Behaviors, the interactions recorded in the two stores were N= 49, but only the videos following the Goldman and McDermott's guidelines have been chosen, reducing the dataset number of N=14. Hence, the results observed may have been affected and further research is needed (Ma & Dube', 2011).

Sensors

Wearable sensors still need to consider light absorption issues (e.g., skin tone) that may reduce signal fidelity. Also, with the ease of use, there is the possibility of less optimal placement by poorly trained users. As with any wearable autonomic sensor, optical noise and blood perfusion can introduce statistical noise into measurement as well. Therefore, additional research over this technology is required.

Confounding variables in the field setting

In the field setting, it is not possible to control external variables as closely as laboratory experiments (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968), which could influence the results. The existence of potential rival factors can create difficulties in determining the exact cause of a behavior and can't be separated from the effects of the variables under investigation (Crano & Brewer, 2014). Further research is needed to analyze the variables independent and dependent in a laboratory research.

4.2.2 Further limitations

The Brand

In an attempt to understand the customer experience, another important facet to consider is the interaction the customer has with the Brand that may influence the customer experience itself. This research is carried out in a premium-luxury multi-Brand store, where the Brand plays a fundamental role, but it would be interesting to monitor what happens in a single-Brand store.

Recent research investigates new aspects of this relationship. Specifically, Fitzsimons et al. (2008) found that the type of Brand and consumers' perceptions of the Brand can influence their behaviors and emotional effects through fMRI (McClure et al., 2004). There is much yet to learn about the influence of Brand on the customer's retail experience. This suggests an area that is ripe for future research, namely, understanding how a customer's perceptions of a retail Brand inside the store may influence the customer's subsequent positive and negative physiology.

Immersion in the Service Encounter

The field setting justifies the choice to run the experiment with sale assistant and not customers. In fact, choosing mystery shoppers could have affected the results. However, the service encounter is a dyadic construct, in that it requires two parties (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Yet this study investigates the interactions from the single sale assistant's point of view and don't capture the different customer's perspective. Additional studies should investigate both parties in the service encounter, to obtain a complete picture.

In Role and Extra Role Behaviors and Extraordinary Experiences

A sale assistant can perform in-role and extra-role behaviors (Morhart, 2009; Crant, 2000; Van Dyne et al., 1995). In this research, the sale assistant's behavior, in line with the characteristics of the field experiment, was kept intentionally natural. But additional research is needed to find how extra-role behavior can provide extraordinary experiences (Arnold et al., 2003; Bitner et al, 1990; Bitner et al., 1994).

Customer's variables

Although customer's variables of loyalty and time factor are investigated, some other important variable such as the presence of other clients in the store and the presence of companion are not considered (Verhoef et al., 2015; Donovan & Rossiter, 1982; Sherman and Smith, 1986). These variables can affect the customer experience and the final decision (Underhill, 2009; Verhoef et al., 2009). Therefore, further research is needed.

4.3 Conclusion

Customer experiences in retail stores are high valued, and in the premium-luxury store the sale assistant has a significant role, while performing Brand Building Behaviors in a Brand protocol composed the Selling Ceremony and other rituals. Although the strategic importance of the service encounter, most of the researches previously done are qualitative and they don't assess the value of co-creation in the sale assistant-customer interaction. Therefore, this study uses the sale assistant physiology responses, measured through the immersion, to assess customer purchase decisions. Then, the positive and negative peaks of immersion are combined with sale assistant Brand Building Behaviors.

Findings show that immersion is able to predict customer purchase decisions, and results are statistically significant, although the small sample observed needs further research. Also, there is a positive and statistically relationship between immersion, time factor and loyalty and the customer purchase.

Then, findings on the combination between positive and negative peaks of immersion and specific Brand Building Behaviors show that, although these behaviors are related to the customer experience inside the Selling Ceremony, there are many several factors that impact on immersion peaks. These factors are not necessarily connected to the service encounter, but to the sale assistant's job duties, the store procedure, and the internal organization.

Managerial Implications

The existence of a relationship between the sale assistant's immersion and the customer purchase provide retail managers with insights of the pivotal role of the sale assistant in the whole service encounter and the Selling Ceremony.

First, it provides managers a valid and non-biases physiological measure for assessing the in-store customer experience and the service quality. Immersion can be used as an alternative or completion of mystery shopping during the service encounter . The accurate information acquired could be the foundation for training programs designed to enhance the standards of service and working on specific phases of the Selling Ceremony.

Second, the identification of reliable and non-invasive sensor able to detect the immersion and to process data in real time, allow retailers to study the immersion inside a retail store and not in the laboratory. Therefore, results can be tailor made and contextualized over a specific store, team and Brand.

Third, findings show how it is important that the sale assistant is attentive and engaged during the service encounter, and how situations related to the job duties, the in-store procedures, and the internal organization have an impact on the interaction with customers and the service quality. In order to increase immersion and reduce negative peaks, managers might rethink in-store work organization (hourly coverage, daily duties) and in-store procedures.

Fourth, the relationship between the immersion, the time factor, the loyalty and the customer purchase show retailers how the in-store consumption of luxury Bands is largely determined by social-function attitudes and based on sale assistants-customers relationships. Therefore, the customers are expecting a Selling Ceremony with long rituals. And, they also enjoy dedicated sale assistant, who take all the time is necessary to understand their needs, desires and preferences, in line with the high-level of service. The research also demonstrates that loyalty affects both the customer and the sale assistant. The sale assistant's immersion shows an increase of attention and engagement at every phase of the Selling Ceremony, which impacts on the final purchase. This result can help retailers implement loyalty tools that require a direct relationship between sale assistant and customer.

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Appendix

Appendix A

Daily Instruction Checklist

DAILY INSTRUCTION CHECKLIST- DATE ……

<u>The day of the experiment</u>

<u>09:30am</u> (BEFORE THE EXPERIMENT)

- Go to the lab to get all the materials needed for the experiment in the two stores
- Take the clipboard and fill the check list sheet for the equipment

<u>10:00am</u> (BEFORE THE EXPERIMENT)

- Go to the store before store opens
- Place the leaflet of video/audio recording outside of the store

GOPRO CAMERA + SENA INSTRUCTIONS

- Take the 3 GOPRO Cameras, put them in **WI_FI ON** and check the following video setting: **RESOLUTION 720; FPS: 30; PROTUNE: ON; COLOR: FLAT; ISO LIMIT: 100-400; SHARPNESS: LOW; EV COMPENSATION: 0; VIDEO FORMAT: NTSC**
- If present, take out the battery of the GOPROs
- Insert the memory card Lexar 64 GB for the morning (labelled A)
- Open the GOPRO app in the smartphone and check the connection with the GOPRO Cameras
- Attach Sena Bluetooth Pack + connector to the GOPRO 4 **(NEVER GOPRO 5)**
- Attach the Anker Power Bank to the GOPRO 4 and 5
- Turn on the Sena Bluetooth Pack
- Pair Sena Bluetooth Microphone with GOPRO 4 **(NEVER GOPRO 5)**
- Place the Bluetooth Microphone on the sales assistants and ask them to turn on when the first customer arrives
- Place the 3 GOPRO cameras in the defined positions of the stores
- Make sure GOPRO cameras are connected to the smartphone

SENSORS + IMMERSIONNEURO INSTRUCTIONS

- Open the Retail Store project from Immersionneuro website.
- Assign the Sensors to sale assistants and code their numbers inside Immersionneuro website
- Put the Sensors on each seller's arms (N=2 for Susa and N=2 for Xerxes). **Keep the sensors numbers on the same arm for all the experiment!!!! Crosscheck that the number on the sensor is the same of the experiment event!!!**
- Turn on the Sensors
- Position the 2 computers to receive the Sensors' signals
- Open the excel file with the customers' information

<u>11.00am-6.00pm (DURING THE EXPERIMENT)</u>

INTERACTION BUYER_SELLER

- Turn on the GOPRO until the customer arrives and put the tag on Immersionneuro website. **THE MOMENT MUST BE PERFECTLY SYNCHRONIZED.**

- Ask Morgan and Arman to turn on microphone **when first customer arrives** and turn off during the break
- Tag inside Immersionneuro the beginning of every interaction with the customer
- Tag inside Immersionneuro everything important in the buyer-seller interaction
- **After each interaction** make Morgan and Arman completing the demographic survey
- **After each interaction** fill the excel file for each customer whose interaction has been recorded
  TO CHECK CAREFULLY
- Check if GOPROs are working and wi-fi connected,
- Check in the computer if the sensors are working properly, in particular check if both sensors are sending signals. **NEVER CLOSE THE FILE WHILE IS RUNNING!!**
- Check that the Sensor's findings are complete and ongoing throughout the duration of the seller-customer interactions

MEMORY CARD INSTRUCTIONS

- Change the Memory Card after 3,30 hours of recording (11 am – 2,30 pm)
- Use Memory Card A for the morning and B for the afternoon
- Save videos recording to external hard drive and delete them from the Memory Card

<u>6.30 - 7.00pm</u>

- Collect the experiment’s equipment and return this to the laboratory
- Fill the check list sheet for the equipment
- Recharge all equipment: 1 Anker Power Bank, 1 Sena Bluetooth Mic, 2 Sensors,
- Take out the memory card from the GOPRO 4 and 5
- Put the video/audio recording on the hard disk of the Lab

<u>Other days</u>

- Checking audio/video quality
- Editing recording through DAVINCI RESOLVE
- Combine GOPRO recording with Sensors recording through DASHWARE

Appendix B

Materials List for Womenswear and Menswear Store

Materials - Womenswear Store

- 1 GoPro HERO 4 Silver Edition Action Camcoder
- 1 Anker 20100mAh Portable Charger PowerCore 20100
- 2 USB Memory Disk Lexar 64GB
- 1 Sena (GP10-01) Bluetooth Pack for GoPro
- 1 Sena (BT10-01) Bluetooth Mic and Intercom
- 2 physiology collecting equipment (Scosche Rhythm band)
- 1 physiology band charger
- 1 Long cord to collect data inside the store
- Materials to fix Gopro Camera and Long Chord - white tapes
- 1 PC Computer for researcher synchronized with Immersionneuro.com
- 1 Smartphone for researcher connected with GoPro Camera
- 1 Headphones
- Editing program to synchronize recording and physiology equipment
- Demographic survey to collect information about the customers
- 1 clipboard with sheets
- 1 Smile sheet to show store recording
- External Hard Disk

Materials - Menswear Store

- 1 GoPro HERO 5 Session Action Camcoder
- 1 GoPro HERO 4 Silver Edition Action Camcoder
- 2 Anker 20100mAh Portable Charger PowerCore 20100
- 4 USB Memory Disk Lexar 64GB
- 1 Sena (GP10-01) Bluetooth Pack for GoPro
- 1 Sena (BT10-01) Bluetooth Mic and Intercom
- 2 physiology collecting equipment (Scosche Rhythm band)
- 1 Long cord to collect data inside the store
- Materials to fix Gopro Camera and Long Chord
- 1 PC Computers for researcher synchronized with Immersionneuro.com
- 1 Smartphone for researcher connected with GoPro Camera
- 1 Headphones
- Editing program to synchronize recording and physiology equipment
- Demographic survey to collect information about the customers
- 1 clipboard with sheets
- 1 Smile sheet to show store recording
- External Hard Disk

Appendix C

Demographic Survey

DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

****Please check with SA if this customer has been already recorded!!**

DATE:
TIME SPENT IN THE STORE (*refer to the mark of the Sensor):
EVENT & CAMERA:
BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE CUSTOMER:

1.Gender
Male
Female

3. Customer Lifetime
New Customer
Loyal Customer

4. Were there other customers in the store during the interaction?
....

5. Was the customer alone?
....

6. Amount of the receipt (please put the amount in dollars)
……………………………

Appendix D

Data Set for Woman and Man Store

Table D.

Data Set for Women and Men Store

		IMMERSION	DURATION OF INTERACTION	GENDER	PURCHASE	0 NEW/ 1 LOYAL
STORE DONNA (SUSA)	RS-1	4.371293774	0:03:51	FEMALE	0	0
	RS-2	4.551384977	0:23:40	FEMALE	1	0
	RS-3	4.476191742	0:16:50	FEMALE	1	0
	RS-4	4.254046212	0:23:20	FEMALE	1	1
	RS-5	4.399100841	1:29:00	FEMALE	1	0
	RS-6	4.470389775	0:50:45	FEMALE	1	0
	RS_8	4.267167821	0:50:47	FEMALE	1	1
	RS-9	4.409712862	0:09:19	FEMALE	0	0
	RS-10	4.446649077	0:07:00	FEMALE	0	0
	RS-11	4.520219893	1:29:42	FEMALE	1	1
	RS-12	4.453822672	0:30:31	FEMALE	1	0
	RS-13	4.500457899	2:11:25	FEMALE	1	1
	RS-14	4.680429379	0:13:45	FEMALE	1	0
	RS-15	4.454542662	0:08:42	MALE	1	1
	RS-17	4.126726088	0:30:11	FEMALE	1	0
	RS-18	4.173779175	0:09:18	MALE	1	1
	RS-19	4.068268568	0:08:02	FEMALE	0	0
	RS-20	4.431304955	0:14:36	FEMALE	1	1
	RS-21	4.502869465	0:15:47	FEMALE	1	0
	RS-22	4.550195341	0:23:42	FEMALE	0	0
	RS-23	4.254702616	0:21:22	FEMALE	1	1
	RS-24	4.201082635	0:33:30	FEMALE	1	1
	RS-25	4.487679565	0:17:59	FEMALE	1	1
	RS-27	4.229415582	0:18:43	FEMALE	0	0
	RS-28	4.388872945	1:13:47	FEMALE	1	0
	RS-29	4.423122264	0:14:28	FEMALE	0	0
	RS-31	5.166910718	0:12:16	FEMALE	1	0
STORE UOMO (XERXES)	RX-1	4.378628507	0:38:46	MALE	1	1
	RX-6	4.937294007	0:09:07	MALE	1	0
	RX-8	4.268255016	0:27:05	MALE	1	1
	RX-10	4.630827114	0:07:57	MALE	0	1
	RX-11	4.461371371	0:04:37	MALE	1	1
	RX-12	4.377017279	0:01:30	FEMALE	0	0
	RX- 13	5.252060086	0:20:11	FEMALE	1	0

	RX-14	*4.555801015*	***0:34:47***	*FEMALE*	*1*	*1*
	RX-15	*4.362504188*	***0:23:21***	*MALE*	*1*	*1*
	RX-17	*4.459160283*	***0:19:31***	*MALE*	*1*	*1*
	RX-18	*4.044408173*	***0:19:31***	*MALE*	*0*	*1*
	RX-19	*4.462816273*	***0:08:06***	*FEMALE*	*0*	*0*
	RX-20	*4.454762277*	***0:08:06***	*MALE*	*0*	*0*
	RX-21	*4.72405188*	***0:34:28***	*MALE*	*1*	*1*
	RX-22	*4.370557208*	***0:27:11***	*MALE*	*1*	*0*
	RX-23	*4.609712375*	***0:23:41***	*MALE*	*1*	*0*
	RX-24	*4.453194186*	***0:05:33***	*FEMALE*	*1*	*0*
	RX-25	*4.327585533*	***0:11:47***	*MALE*	*0*	*0*
	RX-26	*3.927245519*	***0:03:55***	*MALE*	*0*	*1*
	RX-27	*4.211679147*	***0:06:58***	*MALE*	*0*	*1*
	RX-28	*4.732696168*	***0:01:54***	*MALE*	*1*	*0*
	RX-29	*4.636072778*	***0:13:56***	*MALE*	*0*	*0*

Appendix E

The Coding Sheet

Table E1.

The Coding Sheet

BEHAVIORS	NUMBER
WELCOME The S.A. greets the customer warmly and in a genuine way upon entering the store e.g. Hello!; Hello Mrs. Jones; It is ages that I haven't seen you...	1
WELCOME The S.A. greets the customer, but she is busy when the customer enters (at the cash register, showing a product to a customer,...)	2
FIRST APPROACH The S.A. proactively approaches the customer expressing interest, placing a compliment e.g. I like your bag; I like your hair; you are fashion; I like your perfume; have you been here before?	3
QUESTIONING RELATED TO THE PRODUCT The S.A. asks questions e.g. to understand need and desires, to understand if it is for a gift and for who, to understand if they need something for a specific occasion (birthday, party,...)	4
QUESTIONING AND CONVERSATION The S.A. has a conversation with the customer not connected to the product e.g. They find a common ground, they speak about children, they speak about gym, ... The S.A asks questions not related to needs and desires e.g. to understand if it's the first time they visit the store, if they are from Claremont, how old they are, where do they buy, their work,...	5
PRODUCT PRESENTATION The S.A. is PRESENTING VERBALLY and/or SHOWING the product to the customer Materials, manufacture Origin (made in, quality) Style, design, inspiration Functionality, use occasion, total look ideas Color and different options	6
COMPLIMENTS The S.A. supports the product during the customer's trial and/or show appreciation for the customer e.g. It looks good on you, you look pretty,... APPLICABLE AT THE CASH REGISTER	7
BRAND PRESENTATION The S.A. gives information about her store (opening days, opening hours, the story...) a. presents other stores connected to her store (Xerxes, Persepolis) APPLICABLE ALSO AT THE CASH REGISTER	8
The S.A. is speaking about another customer/friend of the store	9
The S.A. is waiting while the customer is on a call	10
The S.A. is searching for the product in the store	11
The S.A. is searching for the ALTERATION/PRODUCT ON STOCK asked by the customer	12
The S.A. says that the product is sold out or finished APPLICABLE AT THE CASH REGISTER	13
The S.A. is asking another colleague for help (a product for the customer, working on the assortment,...)	14

TRIAL AND/OR FITTING ROOM The S.A. helps the customer to try the product (in the fitting room and/or in front of the mirror) "The S.A. gives suggestion to the customer near the fitting room or/and in front of the mirror e.g. how to wear the product, suggestions of total look, how to clean the product,..." The S.A. brings the product in the fitting room BEFORE the customer start trying The S.A. follows the customer at the fitting room and/or she speaks to the customer while in the fitting room The S.A. helps the customer for an outrage The S.A. offers the customer additional items complementing/ matching/ combining the one in the fitting room	15
HANDLING OBJECTIONS The S.A. handles customer objections	16
The S.A. is explaining the reason of the price or an alteration	17
CLOSING SALE The S.A. gives recommendations of how to take care of the product (out of the cash register)	18
INSIDE THE CASH REGISTER The S.A. goes to the cash register (SHE IS NOT INSIDE!!!!) The S.A. is the cash register for making a payment, for preparing the packaging, for preparing the gift The S.A. is at the cash register and she puts the name of the customer in the database of the store The S.A. writes at the cash register on a paper the name/color/size of the product the customer is interested in The S.A. Is at the cash register and she's having a conversation or asking questions	19
FAREWELL The S.A. thanks the customer for the visit and/ or invited him/her to come back again The S.A. greets the customer with a genuine and pleasant parting comment (goodbye) e.g. "have a wonderful day" or "Goodbye, Mr. Jones" or "enjoy the party" The S.A is greeting the customer while she is at the cash register	20