

Salesperson Capabilities and Customer Outcomes in Istanbul's Ready-to-Wear Retail Sector: A Cross-Sectional Customer Survey

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ABSTRACT

This study examines associations between customers' perceptions of salesperson communication skills, product knowledge, and motivation/professionalism and two customer outcomes: satisfaction and loyalty. A cross-sectional survey was administered face to face and online to 300 customers of ready-to-wear retail stores in Istanbul, selected through convenience sampling. The focal analysis used 22 five-point Likert items measuring communication skills, product knowledge, motivation/professionalism, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty. Internal consistency was high across the five constructs (Cronbach's alpha = .838-.901). Communication skills ($r = .691$, 95% CI [.627, .746]), product knowledge ($r = .637$, 95% CI [.564, .700]), and motivation/professionalism ($r = .715$, 95% CI [.655, .766]) were positively associated with customer satisfaction. Satisfaction was also strongly associated with loyalty ($r = .734$, 95% CI [.677, .782]); all focal tests were significant at $p < .001$. The findings indicate that customers who perceive stronger frontline capabilities also report more favorable retail experiences and stronger loyalty intentions. For managers, the results support sustained investment in communication, product-knowledge, and professional-service development. Because the design is cross-sectional, based on non-probability sampling, and relies on a single customer-reported instrument, the results should be interpreted as associations rather than causal effects.

Keywords: salesperson capabilities; customer satisfaction; customer loyalty; ready-to-wear retail; frontline employees; Istanbul

Introduction

Retailing has undergone substantial transformation as digitalization, omnichannel integration, data-driven decision-making, and new service technologies have altered how customers search for products, evaluate alternatives, interact with retailers, and complete purchases. Physical stores are no longer isolated points of sale but increasingly operate as components of broader retail ecosystems in which digital and physical channels interact. The expansion of in-store technologies has enhanced retailers' capacity to provide information, improve convenience, personalize customer experiences, and integrate physical shopping with digital resources (1). At the same time, dual-channel and integrated retail systems have become increasingly important for coordinating customer demand and improving operational and economic performance (2). These developments have sometimes raised questions about whether technology will progressively replace traditional frontline selling activities. However, emerging research suggests that technological advancement does not eliminate the strategic relevance of



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salespeople. Rather, it changes the nature of their contribution by increasing the value of capabilities that are difficult to reproduce through automated systems, including interpersonal communication, contextual interpretation, emotional responsiveness, adaptive problem solving, and relationship development (3).

The continued importance of frontline employees is particularly evident in service-intensive physical retail environments, where customers evaluate not only the products offered but also the quality of the interaction through which those products are presented and purchased. Customer perceptions of service quality can be influenced by multiple elements of the retail environment, including tangible and interpersonal aspects of the service setting (4). Within this environment, salespeople occupy a boundary-spanning position between the organization and its customers. They communicate product information, identify needs, answer questions, address uncertainty, facilitate comparisons, respond to objections, and often represent the most visible human embodiment of the retailer. Consequently, the capabilities demonstrated by salespeople during encounters may substantially shape how customers interpret the overall shopping experience. This issue is especially relevant in ready-to-wear retail, where purchase decisions frequently involve subjective considerations concerning style, fit, appearance, materials, size, comfort, intended use, and compatibility with individual preferences. Such considerations often require interactive assistance rather than standardized information alone.

Salesperson performance should therefore be conceptualized more broadly than the volume or monetary value of sales generated. Contemporary sales research increasingly recognizes that effective performance depends on a combination of behavioral, relational, cognitive, and emotional competencies. Selling skills enable employees to recognize customer requirements and translate product-related information into meaningful recommendations, while emotional competencies allow them to regulate their responses during potentially demanding interpersonal encounters. Recent evidence indicates that selling skills and salesperson emotional regulation are meaningfully related to salesperson performance, highlighting the importance of both technical and interpersonal dimensions of selling effectiveness (5). Similarly, adaptive selling research emphasizes that effective salespeople do not approach all customers identically; instead, they modify their selling behavior according to customer characteristics and situational requirements (6). In retail environments characterized by heterogeneous customer expectations, this ability to recognize situational cues and adjust interactional behavior may be essential for creating favorable customer evaluations.

Communication constitutes one of the most fundamental capabilities underlying effective frontline selling. Retail communication extends beyond speaking clearly or presenting product characteristics. It includes active listening, asking appropriate questions, accurately identifying expressed and latent needs, responding to concerns, explaining alternatives, providing understandable information, and maintaining respectful interaction throughout the service encounter. Listening is particularly important because it provides the informational foundation for customer-oriented and adaptive responses. Evidence from sales research indicates that effective listening contributes simultaneously to relationship-building and sales-related outcomes by improving the salesperson's understanding of customers and facilitating responses that correspond more closely to their needs (7). Communication therefore performs both an informational and a relational function: it reduces uncertainty about the purchase while simultaneously signaling attention, respect, and genuine interest in the customer.

Proactive interpersonal behavior can further influence customer evaluations of frontline service. Salespeople who appropriately initiate contact, offer timely assistance, and demonstrate willingness to help can signal effort and accessibility, provided that such behavior is perceived as supportive rather than intrusive. Experimental research in

store environments has demonstrated that proactive employee behavior can positively influence customer satisfaction by shaping customers' perceptions of employee effort and performance (8). The quality of interpersonal conduct has also been identified as relevant to customer purchase behavior in the Turkish context. Research examining characteristics of personal sales employees has shown that customers may respond positively or negatively depending on the behavioral characteristics they perceive during salesperson interactions (9). Together, these findings suggest that communication capability is not merely an operational sales technique but an important component of customers' broader evaluations of the retail encounter.

A second critical salesperson capability is product knowledge. Customers frequently rely on frontline employees when product alternatives are numerous, differences between alternatives are not immediately apparent, or available information requires interpretation. In ready-to-wear retail, relevant knowledge may encompass materials, sizing, fit, garment construction, care requirements, design characteristics, seasonal suitability, product combinations, availability, and differences among comparable items. Product knowledge allows salespeople to transform product attributes into information that customers can use in their decision-making. Accurate and accessible explanations may reduce perceived uncertainty, enable meaningful comparisons, increase confidence in purchase decisions, and reduce the risk that customers perceive selling attempts as uninformed or misleading.

However, frontline competence does not operate independently of the situation in which an encounter takes place. Research has demonstrated that situational circumstances can modify the relationship between frontline employee competencies and customer satisfaction, indicating that the value customers derive from employee capabilities may depend on characteristics of the immediate retail context (10). This perspective is particularly relevant in physical stores, where customers differ in the amount and type of assistance they require. Some customers may enter with clearly defined purchase intentions, whereas others may seek substantial guidance before choosing among alternatives. Knowledgeable salespeople can adapt the depth and content of information accordingly, thereby making product expertise practically relevant to the customer rather than merely demonstrating technical knowledge. Product knowledge should therefore be understood as a customer-oriented capability: its value lies not simply in how much the salesperson knows, but in whether that knowledge can be converted into accurate, comprehensible, and useful assistance.

In addition to communication and product knowledge, customers may evaluate salespeople through visible indicators of motivation and professionalism. Motivation is reflected in an employee's willingness to invest effort, persist in assisting customers, remain attentive, and engage constructively with service requirements. Professionalism includes reliability, respectful conduct, preparedness, appropriate behavior, responsibility, and solution orientation. Although motivation and professionalism represent conceptually distinguishable characteristics, they frequently become observable to customers through related behaviors during service encounters. A customer may infer motivation from patience, attentiveness, enthusiasm, and willingness to assist, while professionalism may be inferred from competence, courtesy, consistency, and the employee's ability to manage problems appropriately.

Salesperson motivation and professional behavior also need to be understood within the wider organizational and psychological conditions influencing employees. Transformational leadership, for example, has been shown to influence salespeople's attitudes, striving, and performance, indicating that employee behavior at the customer interface may partly reflect the managerial environment in which sales personnel operate (11). Conversely, sales occupations can expose employees to psychological demands associated with performance pressure, rejection,

emotional labor, difficult interactions, and competitive expectations. A systematic review of negative psychological states and behaviors in sales highlights the importance of factors such as stress, burnout, anxiety, and other adverse psychological experiences for salesperson behavior and performance (12). These findings imply that the motivated and professional conduct observed by customers is not incidental; it represents a meaningful manifestation of the salesperson's capacity and willingness to sustain effective service behavior under the demands of frontline retail work.

The significance of these salesperson capabilities ultimately depends on their connection with consequential customer outcomes. Among these outcomes, customer satisfaction occupies a central position in marketing and retail research. Satisfaction reflects customers' evaluative response to their experience and emerges from comparisons between expectations, perceived performance, and the overall quality of the encounter. Importantly, satisfaction formation may differ across purchasing environments. Comparative evidence concerning online and offline purchasing suggests that the antecedents and consequences of customer satisfaction are not necessarily identical across channels, with characteristics of the physical purchase experience remaining especially relevant in offline contexts (13). This distinction reinforces the need to examine human frontline capabilities specifically within physical retail rather than assuming that findings from digital channels can be directly generalized to store-based interactions.

Customer satisfaction is not merely an immediate psychological reaction; it is also associated with organizationally relevant outcomes. A substantial body of empirical evidence accumulated over more than two decades demonstrates a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and firm performance, although the magnitude and form of this relationship vary across contexts, measurement approaches, and performance indicators (14). For physical retailers, this makes understanding the interpersonal antecedents associated with satisfaction particularly important. Retailers can invest extensively in merchandise, technology, store design, supply systems, and promotional strategies, but customer evaluations may still be affected by the quality of frontline encounters occurring at critical moments in the purchasing process. Communication, product expertise, and professional service behavior may consequently function as important experiential resources through which retailers strengthen customers' evaluations of their shopping experiences.

Beyond satisfaction, customer loyalty represents a strategically important outcome because retail success depends not only on attracting customers but also on maintaining relationships over time. Loyalty is multidimensional and cannot be reduced simply to repeated purchasing. It may include intentions to revisit, preferences for a particular retailer, resistance to competing alternatives, willingness to recommend, and continued relational commitment. Research on the creation and measurement of customer loyalty demonstrates that loyalty has meaningful antecedents and can generate important performance consequences for firms (15). Satisfaction is among the most consistently examined correlates of loyalty because favorable experiences can reinforce customers' confidence in selecting the same retailer again and reduce incentives to search for alternatives. Nevertheless, satisfaction and loyalty remain theoretically distinct: customers may be satisfied without becoming strongly loyal, and loyalty may also be influenced by factors such as price, convenience, switching costs, alternatives, brand attachment, trust, and product availability.

The satisfaction–loyalty relationship is particularly consequential in contemporary ready-to-wear retail because consumers can switch relatively easily among competing stores, brands, e-commerce platforms, social-commerce channels, and hybrid purchasing formats. In this environment, physical stores cannot rely solely on access to

products as a source of differentiation. Human service may become more strategically significant precisely because product information and transactional functionality are increasingly available through digital channels. The future role of retail salespeople has consequently been conceptualized as complementary to rather than simply competitive with technology, with salespeople adding value through personalized interaction, relational engagement, creativity, empathy, and context-sensitive support (3). Similarly, technologies introduced into stores are most valuable when incorporated into a coherent customer experience rather than treated as ends in themselves (1). The implication is that the quality of human capabilities and technological resources should be considered jointly within evolving retail systems.

Despite extensive international research on sales performance, customer satisfaction, frontline service, and loyalty, several issues justify further examination in the specific context of ready-to-wear retail. First, much sales research has assessed performance from the perspective of employees or managers, whereas customers directly experience the observable manifestations of salesperson capabilities. A customer-based approach is therefore valuable because perceived communication quality, perceived product knowledge, and perceived professional conduct may be more proximal to the customer's evaluation of the encounter than internal organizational assessments of salesperson performance. Second, salesperson capabilities are multidimensional. Focusing on a single behavior may provide an incomplete representation of how customers evaluate frontline service. Examining communication skills, product knowledge, and motivation/professionalism within a common framework permits a broader assessment of the capability dimensions visible to customers.

Third, greater contextual evidence is needed because salesperson–customer relationships may vary according to sector, service characteristics, customer expectations, and cultural and market conditions. Turkish evidence has highlighted the relevance of salesperson characteristics for customer purchasing responses (9), but customer-based evidence simultaneously addressing several frontline capabilities and their relationships with satisfaction and loyalty in Istanbul's ready-to-wear retail sector remains comparatively limited. Istanbul provides a particularly meaningful setting because its large and diverse consumer market includes extensive competition among local and international retailers, physical and digital channels, and heterogeneous customer segments. Within such an environment, understanding how customers evaluate frontline human capabilities has both theoretical and managerial significance.

Finally, investigating these relationships requires appropriate restraint regarding causal interpretation. Salesperson communication skills, product knowledge, and motivation/professionalism may be associated with customer satisfaction, but customer evaluations of these dimensions may also share common perceptual influences. Similarly, satisfaction may be strongly related to loyalty without being its sole determinant. A cross-sectional customer survey is therefore most appropriately used to identify the direction and magnitude of associations rather than to establish temporal or causal effects. Such evidence can nevertheless clarify whether customers who perceive stronger frontline salesperson capabilities also report more favorable evaluations of their retail experiences and whether greater satisfaction corresponds with stronger loyalty intentions, thereby providing a foundation for subsequent longitudinal, experimental, and multilevel research.

Accordingly, the aim of this study was to examine the associations of customers' perceptions of salesperson communication skills, product knowledge, and motivation/professionalism with customer satisfaction and to examine the association between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty among ready-to-wear retail customers in Istanbul.

Methods and Materials

The study used a quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational survey design. The target population comprised customers shopping at ready-to-wear retail stores in Istanbul. Because a complete probability sampling frame was unavailable, 300 voluntary participants were recruited through convenience sampling. Surveys were administered both face to face and online. The questionnaire did not request identifying information, and participants were informed about the scientific purpose of the study. The Istanbul Nişantaşı University ethics committee approved the research on 27 May 2025 (Decision No. 2025-06).

The study includes 300 valid questionnaires, but the total number of invitations or distributed forms was not recorded; a response rate therefore cannot be calculated. Exact fieldwork dates, store count, and district-level distribution were also not retained. These documentation limits are acknowledged because they constrain the reproducibility and generalizability of the sampling process.

Table 1. Participant characteristics (N = 300)

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Women	168	56.0
	Men	132	44.0
Age	18-25	92	30.7
	26-35	118	39.3
	36-45	61	20.3
	46+	29	9.7
Previous visits to the evaluated store	First visit	54	18.0
	2-3 visits	101	33.7
	More than 3 visits	145	48.3

The structured questionnaire was developed by the researcher from the literature and used a five-point Likert response format ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The full instrument contained 25 substantive items across six dimensions. The present article analyzes the 22 items that correspond directly to its focused customer-outcome model: communication skills (5 items), product knowledge (5), motivation/professionalism (5), customer satisfaction (4), and customer loyalty (3). The three store-success items fall outside the scope of this article.

Cronbach's alpha is reported for each dimension, but the study does not provide item-level factor analysis, formal convergent or discriminant validity tests, a pilot-study record, or an auditable item-to-source map. Alpha is therefore interpreted only as evidence of internal consistency, not as proof of unidimensionality or construct validity. This distinction is carried through the analysis and limitations.

IBM SPSS Statistics was used for data analysis. Frequencies and percentages describe the sample; means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis summarize the focal constructs; and Cronbach's alpha assesses internal consistency. Pearson product-moment correlations evaluate the four hypotheses. Two-tailed significance was assessed at $\alpha = .05$. Ninety-five percent confidence intervals for the focal correlations were calculated using Fisher's z transformation from the reported coefficients and $N = 300$.

The hypotheses are evaluated as bivariate associations. Because communication, product knowledge, and motivation/professionalism are themselves intercorrelated, the coefficients are not interpreted as independent causal effects or ranked as independent predictors. This analytical scope is consistent with the cross-sectional design and avoids conclusions that the available evidence cannot support.

Findings and Results

All five focal dimensions showed high internal consistency, with alpha coefficients ranging from .838 to .901. Mean scores ranged from 3.88 for customer loyalty to 4.14 for motivation/professionalism. Skewness and kurtosis values fell within ± 1 , indicating no severe univariate departures from normality in the reported construct scores. These distributional checks support use of Pearson correlations, although they do not test multivariate normality or measurement validity.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics, internal consistency, and distributional indicators

Construct	Items	alpha	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Communication skills	5	.886	4.08	.68	-.724	.518
Product knowledge	5	.872	3.96	.72	-.658	.447
Motivation/professionalism	5	.901	4.14	.65	-.801	.693
Customer satisfaction	4	.857	4.02	.71	-.587	.371
Customer loyalty	3	.838	3.88	.79	-.432	-.118

The correlation matrix shows positive associations among all focal constructs. Communication skills, product knowledge, and motivation/professionalism were moderately to strongly related to one another ($r = .583-.654$), confirming that customers who evaluated one capability favorably often evaluated the others favorably as well. This overlap is one reason the bivariate coefficients should not be described as independent effects.

Table 3. Pearson correlations among focal constructs

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Communication skills	4.08	.68	1				
2. Product knowledge	3.96	.72	.612***	1			
3. Motivation/professionalism	4.14	.65	.654***	.583***	1		
4. Customer satisfaction	4.02	.71	.691***	.637***	.715***	1	
5. Customer loyalty	3.88	.79	.412***	.198***	.478***	.734***	1

All four hypotheses were supported at the association level. Communication skills were positively associated with satisfaction ($r = .691$), as were product knowledge ($r = .637$) and motivation/professionalism ($r = .715$). Satisfaction was positively associated with loyalty ($r = .734$). The confidence intervals excluded zero by wide margins, and all focal p values were below .001.

Table 4. Focused hypothesis results

H	Relationship	r	95% CI	p	Decision
H1	Communication skills - satisfaction	.691	[.627, .746]	< .001	Supported
H2	Product knowledge - satisfaction	.637	[.564, .700]	< .001	Supported
H3	Motivation/professionalism - satisfaction	.715	[.655, .766]	< .001	Supported
H4	Satisfaction - loyalty	.734	[.677, .782]	< .001	Supported

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study examined the associations between customers' perceptions of salesperson communication skills, product knowledge, and motivation/professionalism and customer satisfaction, as well as the association between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty among customers of ready-to-wear retail stores in Istanbul. The findings showed that all four hypothesized relationships were positive and statistically significant. Specifically, perceived salesperson communication skills were positively associated with customer satisfaction ($r = .691$, $p < .001$), product knowledge was positively associated with customer satisfaction ($r = .637$, $p < .001$), and motivation/professionalism showed the strongest bivariate association with customer satisfaction ($r = .715$, $p < .001$).

.001). In addition, customer satisfaction was strongly associated with customer loyalty ($r = .734$, $p < .001$). Taken together, these findings indicate a coherent pattern in which customers who evaluate frontline salesperson capabilities more favorably also tend to report more favorable retail experiences, while higher satisfaction is associated with stronger loyalty intentions. Because the study employed a cross-sectional correlational design, these relationships should be interpreted as associations rather than as evidence of causal effects.

The positive association between salesperson communication skills and customer satisfaction supports the proposition that interpersonal communication remains a central component of effective retail service. In the present study, customers who perceived salespeople as better communicators also tended to report higher levels of satisfaction. This result is consistent with the broader literature emphasizing that communication in sales is not limited to providing information but also involves listening, identifying customer needs, responding appropriately to questions, and adapting the interaction to the customer's immediate concerns. Itani and colleagues emphasized the importance of listening as a mechanism through which salespeople can simultaneously build customer relationships and achieve sales-related outcomes (7). Effective listening enables the salesperson to understand customer preferences more accurately and reduces the likelihood of inappropriate or overly standardized recommendations. In the ready-to-wear context, where customers may need individualized assistance concerning fit, style, materials, size, or product combinations, this communicative responsiveness may be especially salient.

The communication finding is also compatible with evidence showing that proactive frontline behavior can influence customers' evaluations of service encounters. Söderlund found that proactive behavior by store employees could positively affect customer satisfaction, particularly when employee initiative was interpreted as evidence of effort and helpfulness (8). This mechanism is relevant to the current findings because communication skill often becomes observable through behaviors such as initiating appropriate contact, asking useful questions, explaining alternatives, and providing assistance without creating excessive pressure. Likewise, Turkish evidence has shown that salesperson-related characteristics can influence consumers' purchase-related responses positively or negatively (9). In this sense, the relatively strong correlation observed between communication skills and satisfaction suggests that customers may incorporate the quality of interpersonal interaction into their overall judgment of the store experience.

The result concerning communication can also be interpreted through the perspective of adaptive selling. Effective communication provides the informational basis required for adapting sales behavior to different customers and situations. Chang and Lin showed that adaptive selling behavior is relevant to salesperson performance and that salespeople benefit from adjusting their approach rather than applying a uniform sales strategy across all interactions (6). In physical ready-to-wear retail, customers vary substantially in how much guidance they need, how clearly they can express preferences, and whether they prefer proactive assistance or greater autonomy. Communication competence may enable the salesperson to recognize these differences and select an interaction style that is more appropriate for the customer. Thus, the observed relationship may reflect not only the value of verbal clarity, but also the salesperson's broader ability to interpret customer signals and manage the interaction effectively.

The second major finding was that perceived product knowledge was positively associated with customer satisfaction ($r = .637$, $p < .001$). Although this was the smallest of the three capability-satisfaction correlations, it still represented a substantial relationship. Product knowledge is particularly important in retail settings where customers must evaluate numerous alternatives and may lack complete information about differences in quality,

materials, fit, maintenance, or suitability. Knowledgeable salespeople can reduce uncertainty by explaining product characteristics accurately, making comparisons, and helping customers identify options consistent with their preferences. In the ready-to-wear sector, the usefulness of this knowledge may extend to understanding garment materials, sizing differences, care requirements, seasonal applications, combinations, and expected fit.

The current finding is consistent with research suggesting that frontline employee competence is related to customer satisfaction, although the magnitude of this relationship can depend on situational circumstances. Lucia-Palacios and colleagues showed that the impact of frontline employee competencies on satisfaction may vary according to characteristics of the service environment and the conditions under which assistance is provided (10). This is relevant because customers do not always need the same level of product-related support. For some customers, product knowledge may be critical because they enter the store with uncertainty or require detailed comparison across alternatives. For others, it may be less central when the purchase decision is already well defined. The current positive association therefore supports the general importance of product competence while also remaining compatible with the view that its value depends partly on when and how that competence is applied.

The role of product knowledge can also be understood in relation to broader patterns of satisfaction formation in physical retail. Research comparing online and offline shopping has indicated that the antecedents and consequences of satisfaction differ across purchase channels and that features of the purchasing experience remain especially important in offline settings (13). In a physical store, the salesperson can supplement product displays, labels, and digital information by interpreting product characteristics in relation to the individual customer. Such interaction may convert general product information into personally relevant guidance. The present findings therefore suggest that knowledgeable assistance remains a meaningful component of the offline shopping experience even as consumers increasingly have access to product information through digital channels.

The third finding indicated that motivation/professionalism had the strongest observed association with customer satisfaction among the three salesperson capability dimensions ($r = .715$, $p < .001$). Customers who perceived salespeople as more motivated, attentive, professional, and solution-oriented were also more likely to report higher satisfaction. This finding suggests that customers respond not only to what salespeople know or communicate, but also to the manner in which service is delivered. Motivation may be perceived through enthusiasm, willingness to assist, persistence, patience, and effort, whereas professionalism may be reflected in reliability, respectful conduct, composure, preparedness, and appropriate problem solving. These behaviors may signal to customers that the salesperson is genuinely engaged with the service task and is willing to invest effort in providing an effective experience.

This result is consistent with research emphasizing the importance of psychological and organizational factors in salesperson performance. Gao and colleagues found that transformational leadership influences salespeople's attitudes, striving, and performance (11). Although the present study did not examine leadership directly, this evidence supports the broader argument that employee motivation and observable service behavior are connected to underlying attitudinal and organizational conditions. Salespeople who are encouraged, supported, and motivated may be more likely to display the persistence and interpersonal engagement that customers interpret positively. Similarly, research on emotional regulation and selling skills indicates that salesperson performance reflects both technical capability and the ability to manage interpersonal demands effectively (5). The strong relationship between motivation/professionalism and satisfaction in the current study is therefore consistent with a multidimensional view of salesperson effectiveness.

The finding can also be interpreted in light of the negative psychological conditions frequently associated with sales occupations. Salespeople may experience stress, emotional exhaustion, rejection, performance pressure, and other adverse psychological states that can influence their behavior toward customers. A systematic review by Lyngdoh and colleagues documented the importance of negative psychological states and behaviors in sales contexts and their implications for salesperson outcomes (12). From the customer's perspective, such internal states may become visible indirectly through low engagement, impatience, reduced attentiveness, inconsistent service, or lack of responsiveness. Conversely, when salespeople maintain motivated and professional behavior, customers may experience the encounter as more reliable and respectful. The present findings support this interpretation by showing a strong association between favorable perceptions of motivation/professionalism and customer satisfaction.

The relative strength of the motivation/professionalism correlation should nevertheless be interpreted cautiously. The study used bivariate correlations, and the three salesperson capability dimensions were themselves moderately to strongly interrelated. Accordingly, the finding does not establish that motivation/professionalism is an independently stronger determinant of satisfaction than communication or product knowledge. Instead, it indicates that customers who perceived higher levels of motivated and professional behavior also tended to report higher satisfaction. In practice, these capabilities may operate jointly. A salesperson who is motivated and professional may also be more willing to communicate carefully, learn product details, and adapt to customer needs. Thus, the observed associations likely represent overlapping aspects of an integrated frontline service experience rather than isolated mechanisms.

The fourth major finding showed a strong positive association between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty ($r = .734$, $p < .001$). This was the strongest focal relationship in the study. Customers who reported greater satisfaction with the retail experience also expressed stronger loyalty intentions. This result is highly consistent with established marketing research that identifies satisfaction as an important antecedent of customer loyalty. Watson and colleagues showed that customer loyalty is shaped by multiple relational and evaluative factors and can generate substantial value for firms (15). Although loyalty is not equivalent to satisfaction, positive evaluations of prior experiences can increase the likelihood of repurchase, revisit intentions, recommendation, and preference for the same retailer.

The result is also consistent with research showing that customer satisfaction has meaningful consequences for organizational performance. Otto and colleagues, drawing on more than a quarter century of empirical evidence, demonstrated that customer satisfaction is positively related to firm performance, while also noting that the magnitude of this relationship varies according to context and measurement (14). The strong satisfaction-loyalty association in the present study provides customer-level evidence consistent with this broader pattern. In a highly competitive retail market, loyalty-related intentions can be strategically important because they may contribute to customer retention and reduce the likelihood of switching to competing stores or channels. However, the present findings should not be interpreted to mean that satisfaction alone determines loyalty. Loyalty may also depend on price, store accessibility, merchandise assortment, brand attachment, competitive alternatives, convenience, and switching costs.

The strong satisfaction-loyalty association can further be considered within the changing structure of contemporary retail. Customers increasingly move between physical and digital channels, and retailers must coordinate experiences across these channels rather than manage them independently. Sustainable and profitable

dual-channel retail management requires effective coordination across customer touchpoints (2). At the same time, the expansion of digital channels has made it easier for customers to compare alternatives and switch between retailers. This environment increases the importance of creating satisfying experiences that offer reasons for customers to maintain relationships with particular retailers. The present findings suggest that, within physical ready-to-wear retail, customer satisfaction remains strongly connected to loyalty intentions despite the availability of alternative digital and physical channels.

The findings also contribute to the continuing discussion regarding the respective roles of technology and human salespeople in the future of retail. In-store technologies can enhance convenience, information availability, personalization, and operational consistency (1). Nevertheless, Pappas and colleagues emphasized that future retail salespeople can create value through uniquely human capabilities such as relationship building, creativity, adaptive interpretation, and personalized customer support (3). The current results are compatible with this complementary perspective. Customers who perceived stronger communication, product knowledge, and motivation/professionalism also reported greater satisfaction, suggesting that human frontline capabilities remain relevant even as retail environments become more technologically sophisticated.

The role of the broader service environment should likewise not be ignored. Customer perceptions are shaped by the totality of the retail encounter, including both employee-related and environmental elements. Research in retail banking has shown that the physical environment can influence customers' perceptions of service quality (4). Although the current study focused specifically on salesperson capabilities, this broader perspective suggests that frontline service operates within a wider service setting. High-quality salesperson behavior may be reinforced by an effective store environment, whereas poorly designed or stressful service conditions may reduce the extent to which employee capabilities can be translated into positive customer experiences. Future explanatory models may therefore benefit from examining the interaction between salesperson capabilities and physical or technological aspects of the retail environment.

Overall, the findings provide a coherent customer-based account of the relationship between frontline capabilities and retail outcomes. Communication skills, product knowledge, and motivation/professionalism were each positively related to customer satisfaction, while satisfaction was strongly related to loyalty. These results align with previous evidence on listening and relationship development (7), adaptive selling (6), proactive employee behavior (8), frontline competence (10), salesperson motivation and striving (11), salesperson psychological functioning (12), customer satisfaction (13, 14), and customer loyalty (15). They also support the view that human salespeople continue to play an important role alongside technology in contemporary retail environments (1, 3). At the same time, because the evidence is correlational, the results identify meaningful patterns of customer perception rather than independent causal effects.

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the study employed a cross-sectional design, which prevents determination of temporal order and causal direction among salesperson capabilities, satisfaction, and loyalty. Customers who were already highly satisfied may have evaluated salesperson communication, knowledge, and professionalism more positively, creating the possibility of reciprocal or halo effects. Second, the use of convenience sampling and data collection from ready-to-wear retail customers in a single city limits the generalizability of the results to other regions, retail sectors, or consumer populations. Third, all focal variables were measured through the same customer-reported questionnaire, which may have increased shared-method variance. Fourth, although internal consistency estimates were high, the researcher-developed

instrument was not supported by reported exploratory or confirmatory factor analysis, convergent validity, or discriminant validity testing. Fifth, motivation and professionalism were assessed as a combined construct, although they may represent empirically distinguishable dimensions. Finally, information regarding exact fieldwork dates, store distribution, response rate, and detailed sampling procedures was not fully retained, which limits the reproducibility of the sampling process.

Future studies should use longitudinal and experimental designs to clarify the temporal and potentially causal relationships among salesperson capabilities, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty. Probability-based, stratified, or multistage sampling across several Turkish cities would improve representativeness and allow comparisons across regions and customer segments. Researchers should validate the measurement structure using exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis and assess convergent and discriminant validity before testing structural relationships. Motivation and professionalism should also be examined as separate constructs to determine whether they exert distinct relationships with customer outcomes. Future studies could incorporate multiple data sources, including customers, employees, supervisors, and objective store records, thereby reducing common-method bias. Structural equation modeling could test more complex mechanisms, including the mediating role of satisfaction between salesperson capabilities and loyalty, while moderation analyses could examine whether age, purchase frequency, store type, digital channel use, perceived crowding, product involvement, or customer need for assistance changes the strength of these relationships. Comparative studies across retail sectors would also help determine whether the observed patterns are specific to ready-to-wear retail or generalize to other service-intensive environments.

Retail managers should treat frontline capability development as a central component of customer-experience management rather than focusing exclusively on short-term sales volume. Communication training should emphasize active listening, accurate need identification, clear explanations, respectful interaction, and the ability to adjust communication according to different customer preferences. Product-knowledge development should be continuous and should cover materials, sizing, fit, care requirements, product comparisons, availability, and new collections so that salespeople can provide timely and reliable assistance. Managers should also create working conditions that support motivation and professional conduct through realistic performance targets, constructive feedback, adequate staffing, recognition, development opportunities, and fair evaluation systems. Digital tools should be used to strengthen rather than replace frontline capability by providing salespeople with rapid access to product information and customer-service resources. Finally, retailers should monitor customer satisfaction alongside traditional sales indicators and incorporate customer-experience measures into salesperson development and performance-management systems, since the results indicate that favorable customer evaluations of frontline service are closely associated with satisfaction and that satisfaction is strongly related to loyalty intentions.

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Authors' Contributions

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Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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