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# Retail Salesperson's Influence on India's Lonely Consumers

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## ABSTRACT

Many consumers in India experience loneliness and social isolation. Some may resort to shopping for a social experience, attempting to mitigate or remedy their situation. Looking to this key emerging market, we investigate how emotional loneliness, social loneliness, and social isolation influence enjoyment of social interaction with an in-store salesperson (ESIS). We also consider whether adaptive selling and predisposition to comply with salesperson input (PCSI) influence consumers' trust in salesperson, purchase intention, and retail patronage. We utilize partial least squares structural equation modeling with a sample of 303 Indian consumers. Additionally, we provide two importance-performance mapping analyses, which offer additional insights for retail managers trying to prioritize attention to constructs driving improvement of ESIS and PCSI.

In this study, the degree of consumer loneliness and social isolation were proposed to influence Indian consumers' enjoyment of social interaction with an in-store salesperson (ESIS), à la shopping as a social experience (Hu & Jasper, 2006; Jayasankaraprasad & Kathyayani, 2014; Rajamma et al., 2010). As posited and supported, two varieties of loneliness—emotional (EL) and social (SE)—along with social isolation (SI) were shown to be positively associated with Indian consumers' predisposition to comply with salesperson input (PCSI). Moreover, adaptive selling, which exhibited a positive relationship with PCSI, was propounded to demonstrate a salutary impact on three outcome variables: consumer trust in salesperson (TRUST), consumer purchase intention (PI), and consumer retail patronage (PATRON). Key values for variance explained ( $R^2$ ), relationship strength and direction ( $\beta$ ), effect size ( $f^2$ ), and predictive relevance ( $Q^2$ ) as well as our two importance-performance map analyses underscore the quality of the model presented.

The findings suggest that consumers' perceptions of loneliness and isolation can lead them to seek out social experiences that specifically involve visiting stores and interacting with salespeople. Additionally, given Indian consumers' realization of a store's function and a salesperson's primary purpose, seemingly consumers anticipate their willingness to be influenced by product recommendations and other inputs from salespersons. If, over time, social

relationships develop between consumers and salespersons, discrete transactions can evolve or graduate into more regular interactions that enhance trust, purchase intention, and retail patronage.

At present, there is relatively little research that deals with lonely and/or socially isolated consumers in the world's emerging markets. For countries such as India, most scholarship on loneliness relates almost exclusively to elderly persons or youth (Bhatia et al., 2007; Bowker & Raja, 2011; Tiwari, 2013; Upmanyu, Sehgal, & Upmanyu, 1994), providing very few insights into the scale or impact of loneliness for adult consumers and the middle class. This study is step towards bridging the research gaps in this area.

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