Customer behavioral variables: a study in small and medium-sized commercial companies

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RESUMO

Objetivo – O presente estudo tem como objetivo geral identificar as variáveis comportamentais de clientes de pequenas e médias empresas comerciais.

Desenho/Metodologia/Abordagem – Esta pesquisa caracteriza-se como qualitativa, na qual foi realizado um levantamento bibliográfico e entrevistas com gestores para atingir o objetivo. A pesquisa bibliográfica consistiu em uma busca nos anais de todos os Encontros Nacionais de Engenharia de Produção, identificando trabalhos que abordassem o comportamento dos clientes. Em relação às entrevistas, foi aplicada a metodologia Delphi com gestores de pequenas e médias empresas comerciais.

Resultados – Após a realização da pesquisa bibliográfica, foram encontradas um total de cinquenta e oito variáveis comportamentais que podem influenciar a decisão de compra dos clientes. Com a aplicação da pesquisa *Delphi*, foi possível validar as variáveis comportamentais encontradas na pesquisa da literatura e agrupá-las, por meio de consenso entre os gestores. A pesquisa proporcionou identificar quais variáveis comportamentais são mais citadas/valorizadas pelos clientes. Após, os gestores puderam mensurar quais as mais importantes variáveis em seus segmentos e agrupar as mesmas. Os resultados têm potencial para suportar novas estratégias, visando apoiar os gestores em seu processo de tomada de decisão.

Originalidade/Valor – O trabalho proporcionou um amplo conhecimento sobre os diversos fatores e variáveis que podem influenciar no comportamento dos clientes de pequenas e médias empresas comerciais. Além disso, para validar as variáveis encontradas na literatura, aplicou-se a metodologia *Delphi* por meio de entrevistas realizadas com gestores de empresas, onde foi possível obter consenso entre as variáveis comportamentais, conforme a opinião dos gestores.

Palavras-chave – comportamento do cliente, variáveis comportamentais, pesquisa bibliográfica, método Delphi, pequenas e médias empresas.

ABSTRACT

Purpose – *The overall objective of this study was to identify the behavioral variables of customers of small and medium-sized commercial companies.*

Design/Methodology/Approach – *To achieve the objective, qualitative research was carried out along with a bibliographic search and interviews were held with managers. The bibliographic research consisted of searching the historical records of all the National Meetings of Production Engineering and identifying work that addressed customer behavior. Regarding the interviews, the Delphi methodology was used to interview the managers of small and medium-sized commercial companies.*

Findings – *After carrying out the bibliographic research, a total of fifty-eight behavioral variables were found that can influence the purchase decisions of customers. By applying a Delphi survey, it was possible to validate the behavioral variables found in the research of the literature and group them by consensus among managers. The research allowed the identification of which behavioral variables are most mentioned/valued by customers, and after that, managers were able to measure which are the most important variables in their segments and group them together. The results have the potential to support new strategies, aiming to support managers in their decision-making process.*

Originality/Value – *This study has provided a broad knowledge about the different factors and variables that can influence the behavior of customers of small and medium-sized commercial companies. In addition, it validates the variables found in the literature. The Delphi methodology was applied through interviews with company managers, where it was possible to obtain a consensus between the behavioral variables, according to the opinion of the managers.*

Keywords – *customer behavior, behavioral variables, bibliographic research, Delphi method, small and medium-sized companies.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

In a competitive market with a lot of alternative products and services, being familiar with the client is essential to support the process with better results when making decisions, willing to obtain advantage regarding its competitors. The lack of knowledge in relation to the customer profile may result in inefficient tactics, such as, wrong investments that might lead to struggles with organization. In this situation, getting to know the clients and their aspirations is the best way for an organization to reach the standards, being essential to a process of customer loyalty management. (PAVONI; CARDOSO, 2019; AZIMI *et. al,* 2020).

These challenges are even bigger to the smalls and medium commercial organization, due to a series of features from the organizations, for example: independent undertaking, that is, aren't branches of other companies; weak organizational structure; a few knowledge of technique and hardware, and management by owners; little investments in technology, and more. All that leads to a weakening from small and medium organizations towards bigger organizations.. (ZAGER *et al*., 2016; BARTIK *et al*., 2020).

Looking forward to cooperating with mitigating problems of the management from those organizations, authors like Palhares Júnior *et. al.,* (2019) e Moura *et. al.,* (2019), propose some actions, one of them, a better knowledge of the marketplace, the customers in particular. Other authors such as Alonso & Kok (2020), reinforce the importance of the small and mediums organizations in developing a bigger and better knowledge about their clients in a way to obtain a bigger competitiveness.

From the other side, there's no doubt about the significance of those organizations to the Brazilian economic scenario. According to the data from Sebrae (2020), Brazil has around 20 millions organizations, and 90% of those organizations are the sum of the micro, small, and medium organizations. It's embody about 30% of Brazilian Gross Domestic Product (GDP)

In the face of this representativeness, on the brazilian private departament scenario, its justified to take a good look over some struggles for this organizations, known that they contribute to a better income distribution, benefiting stability and social equality, becoming, an important sector, helping the low-income people to survive financial difficulties, and also for they to compete in the formal sector as owners in their branch of occupation (GALVÃO *et al*., 2020).

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Therefore, it is recognized the importance of small and medium commercial organizations in the Brazilian economic scenario, as well, the bigger need that these organizations have for better competition in their respectives marketplace. And the knowledge of the customers it's a big factor, aiming to mitigate the struggles of this scenario.

For Omoregie *et. al,* (2019) and DeCarlo *et. al,* (2021) the area of costumer behavior, currently, is pretty vast. Cover a lot of stages in the process of a possible purchase, such as: chose, acquisition, use or even get rid of products, financial services, ideas or experiments. For these authors an organization will only satisfy the clients when they understand the desires of those who make use of their products and services.

In that meaning VIJAYALAKSHMI et. al, (2018), recognize that there are a lot of consolidated models that try to explain the costumer behavior, among these some quite quantitative such as: micro and macroeconomic models. These authors recognize the need of major studies about the costumer behavior, in particular, by recognizing that nowadays many factors may impact the final decision when buying or and/or consuming some product or service.

Therefore, the current job justify itself for approaching the theme related to the costumer behavior, considering the goal of identify customer behavior variables of small and medium commercial companies. When this goal is responded, the work has the potential to contribute with the management of small and medium commercial companies, because managers of those organizations can make use of these results for a better maintenance of their decision-making processes.

The work delimits its application to the study of the behavior of customers of companies in the area of commerce, based on a bibliographical research accomplished in the annual Encontro Nacional de Engenharia de Produção (ENEGEP) and in the use of the Delphi method, for data collection with managers of small and medium organizations in the area of commerce.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The theoretical bases for carrying out the present study are presented below, contemplating the behavior and profile of customers.

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2.1 Customer behavior

Consumer behavior is not restricted to the moment when the customer pays and receives a product or service in return. A more wide view highlights this procedure involving struggles and factors that customers consider relevant before opting for the purchase, during the purchase and after the purchase.Understanding how the customer behaves is fundamental and extremely important, because, in addition to helping individuals to understand their own habits, it is also very useful for organizations to be able to develop their marketing strategies in order to help in the decision-making process of customers (ASSIS, 2011).

The buying behavior may be related to a customer's personal tastes and preferences, influencing the way he consumes the most varied types of products or services. Directly related to these preferences are the customer's financial conditions and purchasing potential. The more expensive the product, the longer the customer's decision-making time tends to be. In addition, customer interaction with a particular brand, effective marketing campaigns by companies and the influence of a certain group of people, whether friends or other customers can also interfere with behavior and generate incentives for purchasing decisions, (SILVA, 2020).

Still agreement with Silva (2020), in order to carry out a diagnosis regarding the customer's behavior and buying habits, it is important to consider what the customers' feelings are in relation to the options of brands, goods and/or services; which factors influence the customer to choose for one or another option of products and/or services; what are the customer's habits when researching products and making a purchase; and how the consumption environment can motivate the purchase decision.

Understanding customer behavior is an important strategy for providing a great customer experience during the purchase process. According to Silva (2020), there are four types of customer behavior, they are: habitual purchase behavior, which demonstrates the need that the customer has in relation to the purchase, and cannot be seen as loyalty to the company that provides the product or service; complex buying behavior, which comprises a high standard buying process, where customers are highly involved with the desired product or service; variety seeking behavior, which indicates a desire for variety, i.e., a customer chooses to try similar products despite their preferences; and dissonance reduction buying behavior, which is directly related to the expectations of customers who research a lot before making a purchase and are afraid of getting a bad deal.

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However, it is also necessary to deduce from a new customer profile that is emerging in the market. For authors like Acquaah and Agyapong (2015), Atnafu and Balda (2018) and Alonso and Kok (2020), especially with regard to small and medium organizations, reinforce the need to deepen studies on customer behavior, in order to make this factor a competitive and management differential for these organizations.

2.2 New customer profile

Customer behavior has been changing as a result of behavioral and technological advances in recent years. The new customer profile is digital, who uses the internet easily, obtaining quick information, comparing brands and prices, checking nearby points of sale and, therefore, being less loyal to a brand. Thus, managers must understand this scenario and get to know this new customer profile (SHIMOYAMA, 2017).

To Garzaro *et. al,* (2020), establishing links and strengthening the relationship between organizations and their customers are fundamental for the development and growth of the organization. Reinforcing the impact of technology in this context Kushwaha and Sharma (2016) say that, with the advent of the internet, relationships between customers and organizations have significantly changed.

Customers are becoming more connected and adaptable to online shopping services, looking for services that are personalized and innovative. With the pandemic of covid-19 and the lockdown period, changes in customer behavior are even more visible, especially with the increased use of digital tools.

That way, organizations need to modify their processes and offer better results for the customer, aiming at quality through digital transformation. There are several tools available on the market that should be used to provide greater facilities for customers. With all these modifications, to build a customer-focused strategy, you need to consider the following aspects: desire; experience; novelty; readiness; and diversification of service channels(SANTOS *et. al.,* 2022).

Because customers are creating a new profile, which is directly related to technological factors and behavioral impacts, this work is important. Knowing, understanding and meeting the needs of this new customer profile is the basis for any company to obtain a successful marketing strategy.

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2.3 The importance of knowing the habit and profile of customers

The organization that does not know its customers is making a serious mistake, having knowledge and carrying out a customer profile analysis is important (PAULILLO, 2019). According to Coser (2019), in a highly competitive digital age, it is essential that companies are able to identify the profile of their customers, anticipating and efficiently satisfying their needs, with the aim of winning over their target audience and retaining them as customers.

From a greater knowledge when talking about customers, it becomes possible to develop and implement efficient marketing strategies to obtain better business results for the organization, in addition to enabling the optimization of services. Identifying your customers' information makes it easier to determine who your potential buyers are and who might be interested in your products or services. Information such as gender, age, income, location and hobbies are interesting data for an organization to know about its customers

In general, knowing the habits and profile of customers allows the organization to offer its products in a more assertive way, enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty, ensuring financial return and business sustainability. It is also important to remember that a customer satisfied with a company, product or service, spreads his satisfaction to other people, whether friends or acquaintances, guaranteeing free advertising (COSER, 2019)

For VIJAYALAKSHMI *et. al,* (2018) and VIJAYALAKSHMI *et. al*, (2020), it is important to know the models that seek to explain consumer behavior. Among these models, the authors highlight four groups, which are the following:

Microeconomic Model: classic model, which explains consumer behavior strongly based on microeconomic factors, such as: consumer budget; prices; needs; among other factors.

Macroeconomic Model: aims to explain consumer behavior from the flows and monetary value of products and/or services. That way, they try to explain expenses (consumption) according to family income; income groups; among other factors. Economic Behaviors: appear because the traditional economic models focused their studies on the factors: supply, quantity, demand and prices. However, they leave something to be desired when trying to explain consumer behavior, through the bias of other factors, such as: psychological factors.

Contemporary Models: can be explained by other models, which seek to understand consumer behavior beyond micro and macro economic factors. That way, factors such as:

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relationship between producer and consumer; consumer routines; search for recognition; between others.

From the shown above, it is proven the importance of an organization knowing the profile, or a new profile, of its client, a consequence of the change of habits in society, it is important to verify traditional factors, such as: quality, price, guarantee, among others. still others continue to be factors that can decide the consumption decision (HUILIANG *et. al*, 2021).

3. METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

This topic describes the methodological procedures used in the work to develop it and meet its objective. First, the work is classified according to the type of research; approach and goals. Subsequently, the procedures for data collection and analysis are described.

3.1 Search classification

For Nascimento (2016), the types of research are diverse and can be classified according to their nature, forms of methodological approaches, as to their objectives and according to technical procedures. In relation to nature, the present work is characterized as applied scientific research. For Gil (2017), this type of research is intended to acquire or generate knowledge to apply it in a specific situation, solving concrete problems.

With regard to the form of approach, this study is characterized by being a qualitative research. According to Matias-Pereira (2016), this method classifies the research as descriptive, where the information is analyzed inductively, based on the interpretation of the observed phenomena.

As for the objectives that the study intends to achieve, it is characterized by being an exploratory descriptive research. Descriptive research aims to describe the characteristics of a population or phenomenon, in addition to identifying possible relationships between variables (GIL, 2017). For Matias-Pereira (2016), exploratory research provides greater proximity to the study situation, aiming at building hypotheses to make it clearer. Also for the author, it includes a bibliographical survey, interviews with specialists and analysis of models that facilitate understanding

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3.2 Bibliographic research

In the first stage of the work, a search was carried out on the website of the Brazilian Association of Production Engineering (ABEPRO) of all National Meetings of Production Engineering (ENEGEP), from 1996 to 2021, inserting as the only criterion search engine the word 'customers', which is identified in the title and body text of the articles. Afterwards, a pre-selection of these articles found in the search was carried out and, based on the theme and title of the work, they were downloaded.

Next, the articles were read in order to select those that fit the theme proposed in the work. Thus, the criteria adopted for selecting the articles was that they address customer behavior and satisfaction, as well as the factors that influence customer buying behavior. In addition, another established criterion was that the article should address commercial companies.

The theme of customer behavior is more adherent to courses/events/work related to the area of social sciences, in particular, courses related to the management area, such as the Administration course. In this way, the research could be carried out on the website of the National Meeting of Graduate Programs in Administration (ENANPAD). However, the search on the ENEGEP events website is justified for two reasons: a) work authors' work with a Production Engineering course; and b) the results found in the bibliographic research (see results topic), are in sufficient quantity and quality to support the development of the work.

After completing this bibliographical research and identifying all the variables that can influence customer behavior, a new phase of the work began, in which field research was carried out with the participation of businessmen and company managers, applying the data collection methodology.

3.3 Delphi method

According to the authors Dalkey and Helmer (1962), Delphi is conceptualized as a methodology whose goal is to reach the most reliable consensus of opinions among a group of specialists, through a succession of questionnaires, interspersed with a controlled feedback of opinions.

The Delphi method is a set of questionnaires with the objective of collecting and organizing opinions and responses from a certain group of people, composed of specialists in

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the field under study, being widely used as a tool to associate individual judgments (CUTRIM *et al.*, 2017).

Woudenberg (1991) summarizes the basic characteristics of the Delphi method as follows: anonymity, feedback and interaction. The specialists who participate in the questionnaires do not interact directly with each other and remain unknown in the group. This anonymity allows there to be no tendency of opinions among the members. The answers to the questionnaires are summarized, tabulated and returned to the participants for further validation of their opinions. Each time the expert answers the quiz, there will be a new round.

The methodology consists of consecutive rounds, where the number of rounds is predetermined or based on the group consensus standard. The number of rounds, according to the literature, can vary from two to ten.

About the questionnaire, Kayo and Securato (1997), observe that the elaboration of the first model must be based on the literature review regarding the object of study. The questions must be clear and contain spaces for possible comments by the specialists. As for the ideal size of the questionnaire, there is much debate, however, most authors defend questionnaires of 15 questions, which take up to five minutes to be answered.

Regarding the number of rounds, the vast majority of searches result in a maximum of four rounds. A larger number of rounds is not advisable due to time constraints and the fact that there is little change of opinion in later rounds, as shown by the surveys carried out.

With regard to a smaller number of rounds, if there is an acceptable level of consensus in the second round, the third round can be waived, considering that to characterize the Delphi method, at least two rounds are necessary (WRIGHT; GIOVINAZZO, 2000).

For their study, Osborne *et al.* (2001) defined consensus as a minimum of two-thirds, or 66% agreement on any specific topic, rating an item as four or five on the five-point Likert Scale. Also for the author, stability can be achieved when it becomes evident that there is low variability in the responses of the participants.

Among the advantages of using the method, it can be mentioned that Delphi is able to gather a large number of expert participants, with different opinions, anonymously. In addition, the application of the questionnaires with the specialists can be carried out virtually, enabling a reduction of costs and research time (NOGUEIRA; FUSCALDI, 2018).

Cardoso *et al.* (2005) highlight among the main advantages of the Delphi method: it provides individual and collective reflections on the themes addressed, without conflicts due

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to differences of opinion and without difficulties and organizational costs; enables integration and cooperation with ideas and visions among expert participants; it adds knowledge to the process through answers according to the opinions of specialists in the subject, as well as, through the rounds, which provides the improvement of the elaborated questions.

On the other hand, the method also has some disadvantages, among which stand out: difficulties in preparing the questionnaires, which require in-depth knowledge on the subject; difficulty in responding, as it requires time and reflection from specialists; and the deadlines for preparing Delphi, which are generally high (CARDOSO *et al*., 2005).

However, there are some precautions and concerns that the team responsible for preparing the questionnaires should take into account: questions with more than one question should be avoided; exclude questions with double meaning or ambiguity; develop objective questions that lead to a direct answer; and the total number of questions should not exceed twenty-five (CANDIDO *et al.,* 2007).

For the present work, aiming at validating the behavioral variables found in the bibliographical research, it was decided to carry out a Delphi in two rounds. Data collection was carried out with ten respondents in a process of personal contact. These interviewees, managers of companies in the trade sector, were selected for convenience and in snowball. According to Ochoa (2015), the convenience sampling technique is usual and boils down to selecting people who are accessible, not using statistical criteria for the choice.

That way, Delphi survey participants were selected because they were readily available. For Bockorni and Gomes (2021), snowball sampling translates into a technique that employs the use of relevant reference networks for research with a given group of people where approximation may become difficult, either by personal restrictions or because the research topic is more exclusive.

3.3.1 Context of data collection

Business size is a technical parameter used to classify companies according to their size. This classification is important to indicate the economic capacity of an organization and which legislation is applicable to it. As a result, a company may change its size after a certain period, in accordance with current laws. Essentially, the company can be micro, small, medium or large, depending on its billing data and the number of employees (CONTABILIX, 2020).

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According to Sebrae (2019), there are several parameters to determine the size of a company, such as revenue and number of employees. For this work, the criterion used to select the companies that participated in this work was the number of employees. That way, it was defined that the study would address the customer behavior of small and medium sized companies, not considering individual microentrepreneurs.

3.3.2 Data collection - first round

The possible similarity between the behavioral variables mentioned in previous topics may generate some type of data redundancy for carrying out the Delphi survey. The excessive amount of data can make the survey long and tiring, with a high number of questions that can cause respondents to lose interest. That way, to follow what is recommended in the literature, this number of behavioral variables was reduced starting the first round of Delphi, with the participation of ten respondents with experience and knowledge in the commercial area.

Between the months of March and April 2022, several contacts were made with businessmen from the city that was the focus of the work (a medium-sized city located in the state of Rio Grande do Sul-RS) and, through present visits to the companies, the invitation to participate in the Delphi survey. To the entrepreneurs who agreed to participate, a questionnaire was applied with the objective of using their experience and knowledge to verify which variables, among all those found in the bibliographical research, are similar. With this, it was possible to reduce the redundancy of variables and reduce the number of questions for later rounds.

Regarding the research, this first round of Delphi was qualitative, in which a three-page document was prepared. The first page contained the identification of the university, the city of the campus and the name of the course, followed by the identification of the researchers, with their respective names, telephone numbers and emails for contact.

In this page also, there is the title referring to the research theme, accompanied by a text with a presentation of the work. On the second page, the approach to the behavioral variables found in the literature began, explaining to the participant that the interest with the application of the research is that he indicates in the table of variables which he considers similar. For this, an example is given in the text of how these indications should be made.

Respondents were also informed that their participation is anonymous and that no other participant will be aware of their responses. On the third page, in landscape mode, there

is a table of variables with three columns: the first column shows numbers from one to fifty-eight; in the second column there is the identification of the variable, sorted in alphabetical order; in the third column, the equal to space is presented, which corresponds to where the participant will indicate which variable it resembles through numbering.

This document was printed and given to all entrepreneurs and managers who agreed to participate in the survey. The interviews were carried out in person, during the month of March/2022, visits were made to the companies selected for data collection. For all contacts in which the document was delivered, return deadlines of between two and three days were agreed so that the author could follow up on the progress of the research. There were also cases in which the respondent was available to answer the survey in the first contact, with no need to return. With the ten questionnaires answered, the analyzes were carried out and the second round began.

3.3.3 Data collection - round two

The second stage of data collection was carried out between April and May 2022, through face-to-face visits, contact was made with the ten respondents who participated in the first round. The objective was to apply a new questionnaire, elaborated in three pages, based on the analysis of the responses of the previous round. On the first page, there is the title of the work followed by an explanation of what needs to be answered.

The participant should indicate on a five-point Likert Scale, where 1 means I do not use/I do not recommend (not very important) and 5 means I use/I indicate (very important), the importance of each variable in the customer's behavior during the purchase process . Still on the first page, extending to the third, there is a list of the eighteen groups that reached consensus in the previous round, along with the description of which variables belong to the group, in case it covers more than one variable, and the scale to be completed .

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4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This topic describes the results of the work and respective analyses. The results are described in the following order: bibliographic research and then the use of the Delphi method.

4.1 Bibliographic research: results and respective analyzes

The bibliographic research was carried out on the website of the Brazilian Association of Production Engineering (ABEPRO) of all National Meetings of Production Engineering (ENEGEP), from 1996 to 2021. As a result, a total of 77 articles, which were pre-selected for download and further reading, based on topic and title. Subsequently, these studies were read, seeking to select those that addressed customer behavior and satisfaction, as well as identifying the factors that influence customers' buying behavior. In addition to these criteria, another requirement for selecting the article was that it address commercial companies.
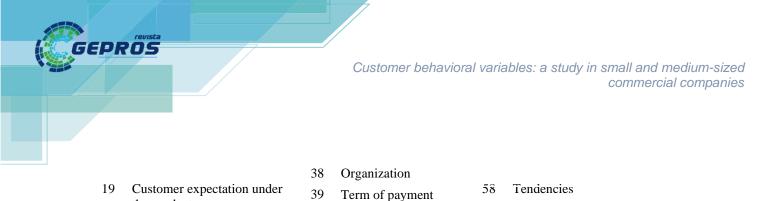
That way, of the 77 studies analyzed, 51 were selected. Then, a list of all behavioral variables found was made, where repeated words were eliminated. The final relationship of the variables found is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 – List of variables found

N°	Variable	N°	Variable	N°	Variable
1	Company environment	20	Cultural factors	40	Price/value
2	Team presentation	21	Personal factors	41	Customized products
3	Product presentation	22	Psychological factors	42	Discount programs
4	Gifts	23	Social factors	43	Promotions
5	Communication channels	24	Payment options	44	Quality of treatment
6	Convenience	25	Guarantee	45	Quality of prodcut
7	Affective commitment	26	Complaints management	46	Quality of servisse
8	Calculated commitment	27	Hygiene	47	Qualityu of site
9	Reliability	28	Opening hours	48	Speed
10	Customer knowledge	29	Company's image	49	Recommendations
11	Credibility	30	Innovativeness	50	Social media
12	Meeting deadlines	31	Cleaning	51	Relationship with the business owner
13	Product delivery performance	32	Company location	52	Social responsability
14	Product availability	33	Brand	53	Clients satisfaction
15	Internet availability	34	Environmental marketing	54	Security
16	Empathy	35	Marketing and advertising	55	Online sales system
17	Structure	36	Mix and variety of products	56	*Status*
18	Ethic	37	Customers' need	57	Waiting time

19	Customer expectation under the product	38	Organization	58	Tendencies
		39	Term of payment		

Source: authors of the work (2022).

According to Table 1, 58 behavioral changes were found that can influence the purchase decision of customers. Even after eliminating the repeated ones, it was possible to observe that there could be some kind of similarity between the variables. That way, the study was complemented by conducting a survey with managers of small and medium sized companies using the Delphi method, aiming to verify, through consensus, which variables can be grouped.

4.2 Delphi method: results and respective analyses.

This topic aims to present and analyze the results obtained with the research using the Delphi method, carried out with managers of companies in the field of commerce.

4.2.1 First round, results and analysis.

To analyze the results obtained in the first round of Delphi, with the help of Microsoft Excel, a table was created with the relationship between the variables found in the bibliographical research. This table was built crosswise, containing the fifty eight variables in the first column and the same fifty eight variables in the first row. With the forms answered by the entrepreneurs, where they indicated which variables they considered similar, it was possible to fill in the table with the relationship between them. It was considered as the cutoff point, that is, the consensus between the answers, those variables that were cited as similar by more than one respondent.

In addition to this table of relationships, the *IRAMUTEQ* software was used to support the analysis of behavioral variables. This tool enables several modes of analysis of textual data, organizing the vocabulary in an easily understandable and visually clear way. For this, a code was generated in Windows Notepad, following the instructions present in the tutorial for using the program, where a command line was created for each interview, containing in a new paragraph all the variables mentioned by the respective interviewee. After importing this code to *IRAMUTEQ*, the software processed the data and made the textual analysis available. Especially for the analysis of behavioral variables, two methods of analysis were used.

The first is the similarity analysis, allowing to identify the concurrence between the words, identifying some connection between them. The second analysis method was the word cloud, which groups and organizes them graphically according to the citation frequencies in the text. Both methods proved to be relevant, as they enabled an analysis that allowed viewing which behavioral variables can be grouped together, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 – Grouping of behavioral variables

Nº	Category	Grouped Variable
1	Gifts	No grouped variable
2	Organizational culture	Company environment; team presentation; product presentation; structure; organization; convenience; company's image; ethic; reliability; credibility; guarantee; empathy; affective commitment; social responsability
3	Stock	Availability of products; mix and variety of products
4	Influencing factors	Cultural factors; personal factors; social factors; psychological factors
5	Form of payment	Payment term; calculated commitment
6	Hygiene	Cleaning
7	Opening hours	No grouped variable
8	Innovativeness	Customized products; Tendencies
9	Company location	No grouped variable
10	*Marketing*	Environmental marketing; communication channels; social media; advertisements; brand
11	Discount programs	Promotions
12	Quality of service	Service quality; performance in the delivery of products; Deadline accomplishments; speed; waiting time; complaints management; Clients satisfaction; customers' needs
13	Quality of prodcut	Price/value; customer expectation under the product
14	Quality of *site*	Availability of internet; online sales system
15	Recommendations	No grouped variable
16	Relationship with the business owner	No grouped variable
17	Security	No grouped variable
18	Status	No grouped variable

Source: authors of the work (2022).

After analysis and grouping, it was possible to reduce the number of variables from fifty-eight to eighteen, without excluding any variable found in the bibliography, through association by similarity. In this way, this reduction enabled the beginning of the second round, where respondents should indicate the degree of importance of each variable group on a five-point Likert Scale.

Consistently with some authors cited in the theoretical framework that address a new profile of customer behavior, especially influenced by technological advances, at this point the following categories of behavioral variables can be highlighted: website quality and

innovativeness. These variables are directly related to the new technological and digital reality.

4.2.2 Second round, results and respective analyses.

As from the answers obtained, a table was created in Microsoft Excel containing nineteen columns and eleven rows. Regarding the columns, the first was intended to identify the experts and the other columns indicate the name of each of the eighteen groups of variables. With regard to the lines, the first is intended for the header of each column and the other ten were reserved for identifying the respondent and the score assigned to each variable, respectively.

With the table completed, the scores that each respondent assigned to each variable were entered. Coming up, a new line was inserted at the end of the table, where the individual sum of the scores received by each variable group was performed.

Based on this sum, it was possible to start establishing the parameters for defining the consensus between the responses. It is observed that the variable that refers to the quality of care was cited by the ten respondents as a very important factor in customer behavior, with a score equal to five on the Likert Scale by all participants. That way, it appears that this variable obtained 100% consensus, with a sum of scores equal to 50.

With this definition, it was established that the sum of scores equal to or greater than 40 correspond to 80% of consensus. The sum of scores equal to or greater than 37.5 are equivalent to the fourth percentile, or 75% of consensus. To calculate the consensus through the average, the average between the variables that obtained the sum of scores below 37.5 was considered. Thus, the variables whose sum of scores was equal to or greater than 35 were considered on average.

With the definition of these consensus parameters, it was possible to analyze the results of this round, verifying whether it was possible to achieve stability and consensus between the responses of entrepreneurs and managers. For the stability of the answers, the average analysis was considered. For consensus among responses, those variables that fell within the fourth percentile, with 75% or more of consensus, were considered.

Analyzing individually, it was observed that only the variable gifts and discount programs were below the established parameter for the average in the sum of the assigned

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grades. Thus, with a total of sixteen variables within the average, it was considered that a satisfactory level of stability between the responses was reached.

It was also observed that only the variable gifts, discount programs and status do not fit into the fourth percentile. Thus, the other fifteen variables obtained 75% or more of consensus, which is considered an acceptable level of consensus among the responses.

Having achieved the objectives of the study and reaching acceptable levels of stability and consensus among the responses of the ten participants, based on the literature, it was decided to end the Delphi survey in this second round, dispensing with a third stage of interviews and avoiding the repetition of questionnaires that could take a long time to show little variability in relation to previous responses.

The variables gifts, discount programs and status, which obtained the sum of scores below 37.5 and were below 75%, were eliminated due to lack of consensus among the participants. Table 3 shows the relationship of behavioral variables that were maintained after performing the Delphi.

Table 3 – Remaining behavioral variables

Nº	Variable	Nº	Variable
1	Organizational culture	9	Marketing
2	Stock	10	Quality of service
3	Influencing factors	11	Quality of product
4	Form of payment	12	Quality of *site*
5	Hygiene	13	Recommendations
6	Opening hours	14	Relationship with the business owner
7	Innovativeness	15	Security
8	Company location		

Source: authors of the work (2022).

Comparing the initial result of the bibliographic research, shown in Table 1, with the Delphi result shown in Table 3, a reduction in the number of behavioral variables is observed.

Initially, with the bibliographic research, 58 variables were found that can influence the behavior of customers. After the application of the first round of Delphi, it was possible to create 18 groups of behavioral variables, reducing the amount through consensus among the participants. At the end of the second round, three more behavioral variables were eliminated due to lack of consensus. That way, there was a total reduction of 43 behavioral variables.

As from table 3, with the final composition of behavioral variables, it can be seen that aspects related to the quality of the site and innovativeness remain, reinforcing issues related

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to the new profile of customers. On the other hand, traditional variables, such as: product quality; quality of service; security; among others appear as variables that interfere in the purchase decision.

In this context, it is highlighted that the variable location of the company appears as one of the variables that influence the behavior of customers. This fact, in a way, is contradictory in relation to the new habits of customers, such as buying online.

5. CONCLUSION

This work, through bibliographical research, identified the various variables that can influence the decision making of customers throughout the purchase process. In a second moment, aiming to validate this set of variables, a survey was carried out using the data collection method, called Delphi, with managers of companies in the field of commerce. During the literature review, it was possible to identify variables that can greatly influence the decision of some people.

Comparing the variables found in the bibliographical research with the results of the interviews carried out with the managers, it can be observed that there was a great reduction in the amount due to the grouping by similarity. As a highlight among the fifty-eight variables analyzed by the specialists, through consensus, fourteen were considered intrinsic to the organization's culture and nine were cited as an integral part of the quality of care.

Analyzing the behavioral variables resulting from the interviews with the variables found in the literature, it can be observed that they are in agreement. Having a well-established culture inside the organization, a clean, safe consumption environment, with a good location and opening hours, can motivate a purchase decision. Buying behavior can also be related to a customer's tastes, experiences and personal preferences, as well as the external environment in which he is inserted.

Comparing the results of the work with the models, mentioned in the topic the importance of knowing the habit and profile of the clients, it is verified that they are present among the main factors, and/or variables, that influence the consumer, elements as much of traditional models (micro and macro economic), but also factor of contemporary models and psychological factors, greatly influenced by the new profile of the client/consumer.

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Providing a good experience for customers during the purchase process can be one of the differentials to promote greater loyalty. In this sense, in a technological environment, with a digital customer profile, who uses the internet easily, it is necessary to have a quality, secure website or social networks that is capable of meeting the needs of customers.

The contribution of the present work is clear for two aspects: the academic one for the methodological rigor in the collection and analysis of the data; and for the management practices of its context when meeting its objective, which was to identify behavioral variables of customers of small and medium commercial companies. By identifying this set of variables, the managers of these organizations can better support their decision-making processes.

As a limitation of the work, it is possible to point out the context of the bibliographical research, which was carried out only in the annals of the ENEGEP event. In addition, the Delphi method was applied with entrepreneurs and managers of companies in the field of commerce. As suggestions for future work, it is proposed that research be carried out in other events and/or journals. It is also proposed to carry out surveys with owners and managers of other business sectors, seeking to verify other factors that may influence customer behavior.

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