The Clothing Consumer Profile in Paraná Coast (Brazil) in the Economy Resumption: The Post-Pandemic (Covid-19) 'New Normal'

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Abstract

Aiming to support a better understanding of the clothing retail trade scenario after the crisis of the new coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2: COVID-19) and the recovery of the Brazilian economy, it is presented the result of a descriptive exploratory research applied from June to September 2021 with 118 consumers located in Paraná Coast, in the Southern region of Brazil. The results showed that consumers were on average 29.06 years old with an average household income of USD 798.12, with women having a small greater margin in relation to the purchase of clothes when compared to men. The purchase preference among the interviewees was still for physical stores (n=51.95%), and among the factors that had greater relevance, the purchase of bespoke products was highlighted, eliminating the time-consuming exchanges of online shopping, the convenience of proximity to their homes and the possibility of trying on the desired pieces. The factors that hindered purchases were the small diversity of models and sizes of clothing, and in particular the issue of the price, which is considered high and constitutes a restrictive factor to retail trade in the region, and in a general context, the retail trade in Paraná Coast cannot satisfactorily meet the customers' wishes. Especially in this period of the economic recovery and the return to face-to-face work, after so many deaths of the Brazilian population, it is necessary to consider other influences, not only those originating from the marketing process, such as relationship marketing.

Keywords: Clothing; Commerce; quarantine; retail trade; social isolation; consumption in quarantine.

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1. Introduction

At the end of 2019, the world experienced the beginning of the viral outbreak of the new coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2 that causes the disease COVID-19, Coronavirus Disease, and due to its aggressive and lethal behavior, in the first month of 2020 this outbreak was classified by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a global pandemic [1].

The infection by COVID-19 according to WHO [2] causes multiple symptoms and can rapidly progress to pneumonia and other lethal complications. Due to high rates of propagation, as well as the mortality rates, the Brazilian government initiated prophylactic measures in order to control the disease, highlighting the social isolation in the form of quarantine and social distancing.

Similar to other countries, the measures to control the pandemic, caused reflexes in the world economy, although with distinction of intensity among nations and even among regions in a same country, Brazil have suffered consequences with the drop in production, reduction in the hiring of services and retail trade, with the sum of these issues conjoining with the retraction of the Brazilian gross domestic product [3].

Specifically in relation to the Paraná Coast, According to the authors in [4], report major impacts on the regional economy, and in some sectors the drop in revenue during the pandemic period reached rates above 70%. Paraná Coast, similar to other small cities in the interior of Brazil, suffered an even greater impact, without industries or large service providers, the retail trade ends up being one of the main sources of tax collection in these municipalities [5]. Among the various types of retail trade, clothing constitutes an important part of the economy of the cities in Paraná Coast.

The clothing retail trade in the region is similar to what was described in [6] with most commercial stores located on the streets, as the region does not have shopping centers or large shopping specific places, so in the coastal region this type of market is accessible for small businesses and entrepreneurs and has a cost that is adequate for the regional reality. However, the new coronavirus pandemic changed the characteristics of the clothing retail trade, causing the bankruptcy of many small companies that had physical stores. According to the authors in [7], when comparing the clothing production tables in the last quarter of 2019 and the first quarter of 2020, the drop in commercial values is sudden, with about 22% of the drop in the production, with this downward trend being maintained until mid-2021. With the advance of vaccination in Brazil, from the second quarter of 2021, this type of trade showed the first signs of reaction [8].

According to the authors in [9], the pandemic changed the consumers' behavior, who were fearful and intensified online buying and selling, as consumers felt more secure by the reduction of physical contact. But with the resumption of the new normal, the profile of this new consumer is still unknown, and in this sense it is urgent that further research be established in order to understand the consequences of the phenomenon caused by the pandemic.

Considering the process of economic recovery and aiming to subsidize the establishment of marketing actions for the retail commercial segment of clothing, it is presented the result from the evaluation of the marketing mix

and the profile of the clothing consumer, identifying the consumption habits, preferred types for purchase, main barriers to consumption, motivating factors for purchase as well as customer satisfaction in relation to the regional offer.

2. Review

Brazil occupies the 10th position in the world in the production in the textile sector, generating hundreds of thousands of jobs driven by a wide variety of brands [10]. According to the authors in [11], this sector undergoes constant changes in order to adapt to the market needs, and in recent decades due to the strong action of Asian countries, in addition to technology that has also generated development and news in the fashion world that encompass artistic, cultural and aesthetic factors according to the multi-profiles of consumers.

According to the authors in [7], the clothing industry in Brazil is understood as a sector of easy entry into the market due to the low investment cost that, together with the growth of technology, generates a number of small and medium-sized companies, as well as informal producers throughout Brazil. Despite Brazil being a great power in the clothing industry, According to the authors in [9], there is still place for both macro and microeconomic growth in the various regional production centers across the country, such as São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Santa Catarina, Ceará [12] and the State of Paraná [7].

The production of clothing and accessories has generated an average volume of USD 9.340466,00 in gross value of industrial production [7], and in relation to Paraná [13], this sector generates more than 55 thousand jobs, highlighting the Northeast region, mainly in the cities of Maringá and Cianorte, references in the segment in the national market.

The pandemic caused by the New Coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 that causes the disease COVID-19 [2] caused great damage to the clothing industry in Paraná [14]. According to the authors in [15], argues that the clothing industry during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic was in fact affected, and the production chain decreased as people in confinement began to consume less amounts of clothing. The other historical alternative of the Brazilian industry when the internal economy was not satisfactory was exports, however even in the beginning of the pandemic, According to the authors in [16], a decrease of 70% in exports was registered, which limited the capacity of recovering.

Apparently with the advance of the vaccination in Brazil, this scenario is beginning to show signs of improvement, the economic recovery is a confirmed trend, according to the authors in [14] the balance of companies established in 2021 was 10% higher than the same period in 2020, 73 thousand new companies were created in the State, with individual microentrepreneurs (micro companies) being 76.9% of this total.

However, in crisis or post-crisis scenarios, it is important to know the changes that may have occurred in the consumption profile after this period, According to the authors in [17] warn that in addition to offering products that generate value for consumers and generate profits , it is necessary to understand what leads the person to buy or not buy certain products at given periods, and what the consumer needs for the product, as this process helps to understand whether consumption can happen for routine reasons, when it usually is aimed at basic and

cheap products, or by limited decisions that involve a moderate expenditure of time and effort, or finally extensive decisions, when consumers are willing to spend more time for value research and time searching for the desired product.

The reference of the consumers may have undergone changes in relation to the purchase process, According to the authors in [17] social, cultural and economic influences can generate new ways of consuming, this statement is corroborated by authors [3] who reveal that Brazil had a decline in the economic power of the population, and in this context, the forms of consumption before, during and after the most critical period of the pandemic, can have significant changes, which may vary due to situational influences involving physical environment or not, time available and the reason for purchase, and the consumer's momentary conditions, such as the mood, feeling of sadness or available financial value.

Thus, with regard to possible changes in the consumer profile in pandemic or post-pandemic periods, consumer studies can guide the market, helping small retail businesses to be successful, according to what was also reported by authors in [4,19].

3. Methodology

Exploratory-descriptive research was carried out as proposed according to the authors in [22], however the research sequence was similar to what was proposed according to the authors in [21]. Semi-structured interviews were carried out from June to September 2021 with consumers of clothing and in two municipalities located in the Northern of Paraná Coast, Morretes and Antonina. This region was chosen as according to the authors in [21], small municipalities have low per capita income, similar to more than ten thousand other Brazilian municipalities that have agriculture and retail trade as the main sources of tax collection. The sample consisted of 118 consumers and met the guidelines for marketing research and consumption profile when the population is unknown [23] and it was carried out when the consumer was in retail establishments that sold clothes and accessories. In order to identify the consumers' profile, information was collected on gender, marital status and education, and the consumption profile was established from data on frequency, reason and preferred products, as proposed according to the authors in [23]. The age classification was performed as adopted by IBGE [8], and for the income classification it was used the Economic Classification Criteria of Brazil, as proposed by ABEP [20]. The basic information related to the marketing mix was evaluated considering the level of consumer satisfaction with the offer in the region, adopting the ten-point Likert scale according to the authors in [24]. Even at this stage, the interviewees were asked about the preferred places of purchase, reasons for purchases, in addition to saying three potential factors that make purchase difficult and what would lead them to buy more organic products, categorizing them hierarchically (1 to 3).

4. Results

The survey revealed an average age of 29.06 years old, with women having a slightly greater margin in relation to presence in the stores (n=52%) when compared to men, and the profile was also evidenced by the majority of single and white people (Table 1).

Table 1: Characterization of the population sample evaluated in the study of the clothing consumer profile in Paraná Coast by marital status and color/race.

Marital Status	Percentage	Color/race	Percentage
Single	72,03	White	66,95
Married	13,56	Brown	27,12
Stable Union	8,47	Black	3,39
Divorced	3,39	Yellow	2,54
Separate	2,54		
Total	**100**	**Total**	**100%**

Source: the authors (2021)

Regarding gender identity, the vast majority identified themselves as cisgender (90.68%) and in relation to sexuality, heterosexuals were the majority among respondents (Table 2).

Table 2: Characterization of the population sample evaluated in the study of the clothing consumer profile in Paraná Coast by sexuality.

Sexuality	Percentage
Heterosexual	64,41%
Bisexual	16,10%
Pansexual	5,93%
Prefer not to say	5,93%
Homosexual	4,24%
Asexual	0,85%
Demisexual	0,85%
Lesbian	0,85%
Transsexual	0,85%
Total	100%

Source: the authors (2021)

In relation to the education of the respondents, higher education predominated with 60%, followed by high school with 33% and finally elementary and postgraduate education with 5% and 2% respectively.

Relative to the family income, considering all family members, the average was USD 798.12, with 55.93% of the respondents reported being formally employed, 33.05% reported being using some financial aid from the government, and the rest obtained the income in the informal market.

The purchase preference among respondents was still for physical stores (n=51.95%), large online stores chains (n=24.68%), and small multiplatform ventures on social media (n= 8.44%).

Among the factors that had greater relevance in this analysis it was the acquisition of bespoke products which met the needs of the consumers without any margin of error and eliminating the time-consuming exchanges by mail for online purchases, the convenience of being close to their homes and the possibility of experiencing the desired clothing.
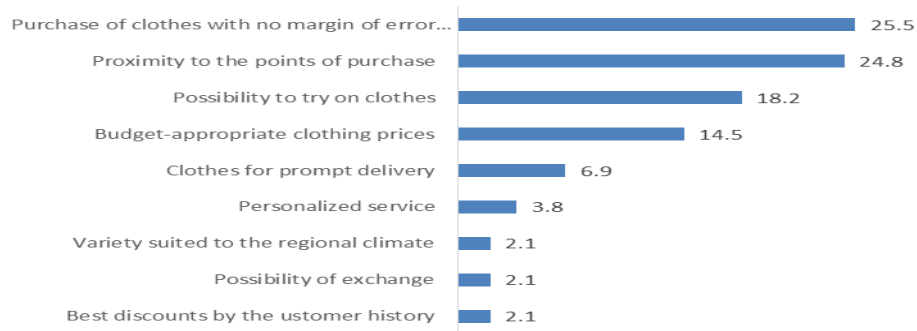

Figure 1: Main advantages of buying clothing in Paraná Coast during the economic recovery period (Quote in percentage %).

The factors considered decisive for consumption even during the pandemic period were similar to those already reported by other authors before the pandemic period, with the product quality and service received in the purchase process being the most relevant factors (Figure 2).
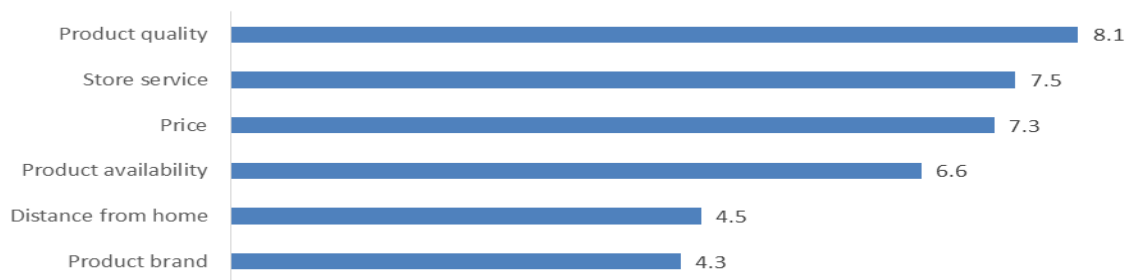

Figure 2: Main factors that motivate the purchase of clothing by consumers in Paraná Coast during the period of economic recovery. (Likert scale - 1 to 10)

The survey also showed another important data, that the frequency of clothes purchases was similar to what was already reported by the authors in [28], being higher than 9.5 kg per inhabitant [25], however, in this study, 73.73% of respondents reported that the frequency decreased, in particular because due to isolation there was no need for much variation in pieces (66%), as well as they also reported that the lower consumption was due to the loss of income (18.87%), price (10.36%) and the lack of social events (6.60%).

The purchase of clothes and accessories, already considering the recovery of the economy in Brazil, presented a situation that little diverges from the period before the pandemic, and specifically with regard to the Paraná Coast. The study pointed out as a priority for the purpose of purchase, the acquisition of new clothes in order to return to daily life (Table 3).

Table 3: Main purposes of purchase by consumers of clothing in Paraná Coast during the period of economic recovery.

Purpose of purchase of clothing and accessories	%
Need for new clothes to return to everyday life	53,11
Acquisition of clothing for work activities	15,82
Personal beauty	12,99
Fashion fit	7,91
Need for new and more comfortable clothing	5,08
Clothing beauty (impulse purchase)	5,08
Total	**100**

Source: the authors (2021)

The study revealed that the small diversity of models and sizes of clothing and accessories together with the high acquisition cost, were the factors that made it difficult for consumers to make a purchase (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Main difficulties in buying clothes and accessories in Paraná Coast during the economic recovery period (Quote in percentage %).

5. Discussion

The main function of retail is to promote the connection between wholesalers and the final consumer, it is the retailers that make sales to the consumers. For industries, the most practical way to transport production and stocks is through retail, however without the adequacy of supply in quantity and quality required by consumers,

retail companies fail to fulfill their main purpose, opening spaces for the installation of new competitors or new entrants.

Another issue to be considered is that the direct contact of retailers with the consumers plays a fundamental role in guiding the industries. Through this contact, between retailers and consumers, industries obtain information to be able to meet the needs of consumers and expand sales, if the retail offer is restricted, this communication is reduced and the market segment ends up not having growth direction and ends up not being able to satisfy the needs and desires of consumers, neither in the present nor in the future.

The research showed that with regard to the socioeconomic profile, the sample is similar to what was reported for other Brazilian regions, however the retail trade in Paraná Coast, for the most part, is unable to carry out extensive marketing in their projects, it should be noted that the recovery of the economy may represent a new moment for entrepreneurs to be able to review their performance in their commercial activities, which should direct the flow of goods and services to the consumer. However, apparently this flow in this resumption is incomplete, and not uncommon, it is possible to notice the absence of planning, structured price policy, promotions suited to the regional reality that effectively promote better profitability conditions, as well as the consumer satisfaction, so it is possible to notice that marketing variables such as price, product, promotion and place of these establishments are incapable of providing customer satisfaction. According to the authors in [26] mention that marketing even in small businesses needs to abandon the pure sales connotation and create mechanisms that actually provide customer satisfaction.

The study revealed that consumers have a natural tendency to go shopping in the region where they live, as they can see clothes and have options to choose from, as well as being able to wear the clothes in an experimentation process, which reduces the margin of error in the purchase, however multiple situations were evidenced that can hinder the improvement of commercial efficiency.

The small diversity of models and sizes of clothing and accessories may be acting decisively among the factors that can prevent better levels of consumer satisfaction, according to the authors in [18], the business of an organization can be expanded or restricted, depending on the fulfillment of its available in-stock supply sources.

The constant restriction of available varieties of clothes and accessories can make it easier for new entrants or competitors to take advantage of existing commercial gaps and settle in the region and once they can offer the products in a broader way, they will be able to have a competitive advantage in terms of supply and consumers' satisfaction.

The price considered high is also a restrictive factor for retail trade in Paraná Coast, According to the authors in [21], analyzing other retail segments, found that the question of the cost of acquiring the desired product is one of the main factors in the decision of purchasing or not by the consumer in the region. According to the authors in [29], the price in any economic activity is considered the first attraction for consumption and can arouse curiosity for the first purchase or even for repurchase and consumer loyalty. The decision-making process for the purchase intrinsically depends on the motivation that the consumer receives from the external environment

and the perception he/she may have of the levels of influence in the satisfaction of his/her desire, and the situation created externally will define the attitude of purchase or rejection on the part of the consumer. Then it can be said that, for the region analyzed, price is the strongest influence in the decision-making process of not buying, and one of the first obstacles to be overcome in increasing the number of people trying out the first purchase.

Thus, the expansion of market potential in relation to supply and demand during the recovery period can initially be changed based on the price, which would have the function of a greater incentive in the first purchase or even in consumer loyalty to the product and retail business.

The use of this tactic may be relevant given the fall in economic power in Brazil generated by the pandemic, as well as according to the authors in [29], it is also relevant because customers have at their disposal a multitude of products with similar functions, and consumers choose from this range of products offered, those that according to their values or the external influence received, offer the best feeling of gain. The consumers' satisfaction or not in relation to the price paid can interfere in future decisions and in the frequency of new purchases. In this context, consumers, almost generally, have an acceptable range of prices that they are willing to pay for the desired product, and according to the authors in [29], they are extremely sensitive to prices changes, therefore, it is necessary for the best performance of the retail trade in the period of recovery that the prices of clothing and accessories are adequate to the regional economic reality.

The factors associated with the marketing mix can be considered essential in relation to improving performance in the recovery of the economy, as respondents reported product quality, satisfactory service, adequate price and product availability as relevant criteria, whose main purposes were purchases due to the need for new clothing in order to return to daily life, as well as the purchase of clothing for work activities. But it is important to say that, for the most part of these criteria considered relevant by consumers were not satisfying the desires and needs of consumers in the region surveyed. The consumers' satisfaction is an essential item for the survival of retail establishments in the economic recovery after the Novo Coronavirus pandemic, as consumer satisfaction, according to the authors in [29], describe as the feeling of pleasure or disappointment resulting from the comparison of the expected performance by the product or result of the use of the product in relation to the consumer's expectations. Thus, the main purpose of knowing the profile of the consumer and that the business behavior can be changed to meet the needs of the consumer through the product or service, considering the economic, psychological and social factors after the pandemic, which, in addition to the pandemic situation, also consider the scale of values used by the consumer for their individual satisfaction.

People enter into a purchase with some expectations about the performance of the service or product, therefore, satisfaction is the expected post-consumption result of whether a chosen alternative meets or exceeds expectations [27]. Especially in this period of economic recovery and the return to face-to-face work, after so many deaths of the Brazilian population, other influences must be considered that not only those originating from the marketing process, people can be directly influenced by the various social groups to which they are inserted, such as family, culture and reference groups and the values assimilated by these reference groups, as described according to the authors in [27]. The studies of consumer behavior most often focus only on the sales

process, which, in addition to the financial resource, focuses on the variety of forces that shape it, that is, a sequencing of actions that includes the attractive offer of elements such as price, place and promotion, associated with aspects of product quality, physical appearance, attractive packaging and labeling, all these influences affect consumer behavior, inhibiting or stimulating purchase, however the situation experienced by the Brazilian population during the pandemic requires that corrective actions in the retail trade be considered factors in addition to the monetary ones.

Apparently, shared strategies can represent a way to improve the quality of the relationship between establishments and customers that consider factors beyond those originating from purely commercial relationships. Among these strategies, the first one that should be considered is the relationship marketing, which according to the authors in [30] should involve activities aimed at developing economically effective long-term links between an organization and its customers for the mutual benefit of both parties, in other words, although the relationship is one of purchase and sale, retailers must be aware of how to integrate the parties involved in the commercial transactions over time, that is, company and customer, providing a lasting relationship whose fruits are economically focused on results of "win-win" type where both partners have the benefits, the retailer guaranteeing their profit and continuity of their company and the consumer that with the resumption of the economy will have their needs and desires satisfactorily met, this process is called relationship marketing. Engel and his colleagues (2006) add that it should be considered as a relevant alternative in the correction of dissatisfaction in the marketing mix, especially in the economic recovery process.

Relationship marketing is the process by which a company is able to partner with its customers by giving them and achieving a specific set of common goals. These partnerships involve activities designed in order to develop cost-effective long-term relationships between an organization and its customers for the mutual benefit of stakeholders. Therefore, it is necessary to identify and create value with individual consumers.

Relationship marketing actions point to a very viable form of customer loyalty, also pointing out to organizations the advantages of keeping their current customers, in view of this situation, According to the authors in [27] suggests that the retention of current customers should be prioritized over the acquisition of new customers, since the cost to retain customers is lower than the acquisition of new ones. Furthermore, the loss of customers can be disastrous in mature markets that are experiencing little real growth [27, 31], a similar situation is the case of the retail trade in Paraná Coast. Thus, customer loyalty based on genuine and continuous satisfaction is one of the greatest assets that a company can acquire, and it can represent a relevant attribute in the economic recovery after the Novo Coronavirus pandemic.

6. Final Considerations

The consumers were on average 29.06 years old with an average household income of USD 798.12, with women having a small greater margin when it comes to buying clothes when compared to men.

The purchase preference among the interviewees was still for physical stores (n=51.95%), and among the factors that had greater relevance, the purchase of bespoke products was highlighted, eliminating the time-consuming

exchanges of online shopping, the convenience of proximity to their homes and the possibility of trying on the desired clothes and accessories.

The factors that hindered purchases were the small diversity of models and sizes of clothing and accessories, and in particular the issue of the price, which is considered high and constitutes a restrictive factor to retail trade in Paraná Coast, in this context, the retail trade in this region cannot satisfactorily meet the wishes of customers.

Especially in this period of economic recovery and the return to face-to-face work, after so many deaths of the Brazilian population, other influences must be considered, not only those originating from the marketing process.

Apparently, shared strategies can represent a way to improve the quality of the relationship between establishments and customers that consider factors beyond those originating from purely commercial relationships. Among these strategies, the first one to be considered is the relationship marketing, where retailers must provoke actions and activities aimed at developing economically effective long-term relationships for mutual benefits, that is, despite the relationship being one of buying and selling, retailers must be aware of the ways to integrate the parties involved in the transactions over time, providing a lasting "win-win" relationship where both benefit, the retailer guaranteeing their profit and continuity of their company and the consumer who in the resumption of economy will have its desires met in a satisfactory way. For that it is necessary that each retailer can identify and create value of its enterprise with the consumers in an individual way.

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