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# Sales Personnel Attrition Control and Retention – An Integrated Framework for Lifestyle Retailers in India (RSPR-LS)

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## ABSTRACT

A majority of organized brick-and-mortar lifestyle retailers in India believe that the cost of Sales Personnel (SP) attrition is insignificant, and this belief has made lifestyle retailers ignore the importance of SP attrition control and retention activities (SACR). Mathematically it may be true that the cost of SP attrition is very low as the average salary of the SP is 5.46 times lesser than that of Non-Sales Personnel (NSP) in the organization, but the fact is a majority of employees in a retail organization who are closest to the market and the consumers are the SP even though they are at the lower levels of retailer's organizational hierarchy. We determinedly believe that the key to success is in identifying who is closer to the market and the consumer and ensuring such employees (if performing well) are consistently motivated to stay in the organization for a longer duration. The literature, exploratory qualitative primary findings, and empirical evaluation indicate that the existing SACR model of select organized brick-and-mortar lifestyle retailers in India is irrational as it seriously fails to understand the magnitude of the negative impact that is moderated by higher SP attrition rates on the overall store's revenue and long-term firm's sustainability. This study was not limited to just evaluating the existing SACR model of retailers in the study and recommending a theoretical framework. Once the RSPR-LS framework was designed that is built on proven theories in the literature, findings and insights from the exploratory phase of this study, and recommendations from previous research works relevant for lifestyle retailing in India, we have experimented the RSPR-LS framework on one of the ten lifestyle retailers in the study over 24 months' at over 25 percent stores of the select retailer. Experimentation results demonstrate that these stores which have gone through the treatment have shown 37.59 percent improvement in walk-ins conversion rate, 87.54 percent improvement in consumer's repeat store visit rate that resulted in 20.23 percent improvement in the overall store revenue and 2.00 times improvement in the overall store profit on account of 21.35 percentage points improvement in SP retention rate thereby providing validity and reliability of the proposed RSPR-LS framework in the field.

**Keywords:** Indian Retail; Brick-and-Mortar Retail; Lifestyle Retail; Sales Personnel; Sales Person; Sales People; Retail Employees; Employee Turnover; Employee Attrition; Employee Retention; Consumer-Oriented; RSPR-LS

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

**Retail Sales Personnel in India:** Lifestyle retailing sector in India is expected to employ over 6.10 million people by the year 2022 that was just 4.5 million in the year 2015, but there is a wide gap in the skill sets required as the lifestyle retailing segment grows towards organized retailing. In a detailed survey by KPMG in association with National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) the key gaps that were identified concerning a retail store team skill sets were a) insufficient communication capabilities; b) people management and leadership skills; c) insufficient coordination skills especially during peak seasons or high attrition periods;

d) poor grievance handling skills; e) insufficient operational knowledge of Point of Sale (POS) terminal and payment processing hindering speedy transactions; f) insufficient accounting skills; g) insufficient product knowledge hindering speedy scanning of products; h) insufficient communication skills with ineffective demonstration and marketing of products; i) poor customer empathy with weak after-sales support and consumer feedback mechanism; j) inappropriate adaptation to changing technologies hindering marketing through digital media; k) insufficient product knowledge resulting in little or no support to consumers in purchase; l) poor numeracy skills; m) insufficient grooming and hygiene, and most importantly n) poor customer service orientation [1]. On average, the voluntary attrition rate in the Indian retail segment is 18.5 percent in the year 2018-19 that is the highest in the country among all other segments and the same is higher as the employee level in the organizational hierarchy goes down [2]. This attrition rate cannot be generalized as the survey conducted by KPMG was restricted to a few organized retailers.

**Lifestyle Retailing in India:** Each individual wants to have a unique identity that could be based on his/her a) background such as nationality, ethnicity, culture, subculture, social class, affiliation, environment, etc; b) experiences and c) choices. Lifestyle brands/retailers attempt to evoke emotional connections between consumers, and they need to have a unique identity and most importantly lifestyle brands/retailers are increasingly becoming one of the key components of consumer's self-expression [3]. To ensure the scope of this study is focussed, we define lifestyle retailer as the one, who attempt to offer a complete solution for a specific or wider lifestyle needs of consumers through their products such as Apparel, Footwear, Accessories, and Lifestyle Essentials with an ultimate goal of their products being key contributors of an implicit or explicit statement of consumers personality and identity. Lifestyle retail market size in India is expected to reach 130 billion USD by the year 2023 which is a 77 percent growth when compared to the year 2013 [4]. Based on India's 2011 census, the United Nation's (UN) Department of Statistics and Program Implementation estimates the Indian population to reach close to 1.38 billion by the year 2020 [5]. It is estimated that more than 300 Global lifestyle brands have plans to open their stores in India this year [6].

Organized retailing in India is expected to have approximately 25 percent of the market share by the year 2021 which was at 12 percent in the year 2017 [7]. Owing to the sheer market size and potential, India has attracted many Global lifestyle brands who have successfully become lifestyle retailers too. To name a few Decathlon, Lifestyle, Max, Levi's, Zara, United Colors of Benetton, Marks & Spenser, H&M, Mother Care, Carter's, Puma, Nike, Adidas, Reebok, Armani Exchange, Diesel, Gas, Gap, The Children's Place, Quiksilver, Superdry, Kappa, Bossini, Calvin Klein, Hanes, Tommy Hilfiger, Ed Hardy, Izod, Nautica, Arrow, U.S. Polo Assn, Jack & Jones, Vero Moda, Tumi, Lee, Hero, Maverick, Wrangler, Fila, and Jockey. India also is a home for a vast number of lifestyle brands originated from India. One can list more than 5000 lifestyle brands in India [8], of which one could list only a few which can be tagged as well-known/familiar/reputed Indian lifestyle brands cum retailers such as, Biba, Manyavar, Soch, Gini & Jony, Blackberrys, Louis Phillipe, Peter England, Provogue, Monte Carlo, Mufti, W for Women, Oxemberg, Indian Terrain, Global Desi, Parx, S Kumar's, Vimal, Mini Klub, Aurelia, Sparx, Campus, Go Colors, Enamour, HiDesign, Lino Perros, Idee, Spykar, Killer Jeans, Flying Machine, Da Milano, Park Avenue, Ethnix, ColorPlus, Lux Cozy, WildCraft, 612 League, WLS, John Players, Fastrack, 109 F, Proline, Image, Jealous 21, Liberty, Paragon and few more. Few of these are successful in becoming organized lifestyle retailers catering to specific product categories and specific consumer groups. Few companies have been able to establish themselves as purely organized lifestyle retailers who cater to multi-category, multi-brand, multi-location, and multi-consumer groups and one can list all of them as there are only a few National level retailers such as a) Westside, b) Shoppers Stop, c) Central, d) FBB e) First Cry, f) Toons, g) Wildcraft, h) Indian Terrain, i) Pantaloons, j) Brand Factory and few Regional level retailers such as, a) Kapsons, b) Ritu Wears Big Life, c) Stanmax, d) Bindals, e) Sohum Shoppe, f) City Life, g) Chunmun, h) Jade Blue, i) Neeru's, j) Mebaz, k) V-Mart, l) The Chennai Silks, m) Saravana Stores, n) M&M, o) Sirs & Hers, p) Juelle, q) G3 Fashions, r) Pothy's, s) RMKV, t) Naidu Hall, u) Chandana Brothers, v) Nalli and w) Kalyan Silks. Dominantly a majority of lifestyle retailers in India offer just one of the groups such as a) product-specific; b) gender-specific; c) need-specific; d) fashion-specific; e) function-specific; f) category-specific; g) life stage-specific; h) occasion-specific, and very few cater to multiple products offering to multiple consumer groups.

In addition to the humongous population, exponential growth in several working women, double-income families, middle-class consumer segment, increasing disposable income, rapid adoption of fashion, urbanization, the overall size of Indian retail industry, more and more unorganized retailers becoming organized, the emergence of modern retailing formats and most importantly, an enormous increase in internet

penetration/usage, simply caution existing and upcoming lifestyle retailers in India to revisit their attitude towards Sales Personnel and their retention strategies.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

**Sales Personnel:** How sales personnel interact with consumers need to be customized to each consumer and this could be able to determine their success[9]. The customer orientation is said to happen when the sales personnel and consumer together practice the marketing concepts and just the interaction between sales personnel and consumer does not yield to this orientation, it needs to encompass most of the marketing concepts driven centrally by the company [10]. Two key constructs of consumer orientation are i) sales personnel's tendency to ensure consumer needs are met and ii) the level of sales personnel's enjoyment in doing so [11]. Few studies believe that what can lead to sales personnel enjoy the process of interaction with consumers and ultimately selling a product is their strong orientation to learning [12]. It also important to note, various studies have shown that 70% of the purchase decisions are made in-store by most of the customers [13]. The profitability is significantly derived from consumer loyalty which is strongly linked to a) internal service quality and b) satisfied and productive service employee. The service-profit chain model created in their work holds even after globalization, liberalization, and digitization of the retail market [14]. Understanding sales personnel behaviors has been and is one of the important fields in social science research. One of the important aspects of sales personnel behavior that has a significant impact on consumer repeat visit intention and loyalty for a retail store is sales personnel's perception and predisposition about a consumer who he/she is attending to. The majority of sales personnel develop their mindsets to segment consumers into preferred consumers and non-preferred consumers and this mindset play an important role in the way the consumer will get treated by the sales personnel [15 to 17]. In the past, various indicators that can indicate a retail sale concerning the quality and level of sales personnel involved have been studied and analyzed by many researchers. Most important indicators were a) the amount and quality of time spent by the sales personnel with the consumer [18], b) variety of products/SKUs/models being showcased by the sales personnel to consumer [19], c) level of information being collected by the sales personnel on consumer needs directly from the consumer [20], d) sales personnel's efforts to understand the consumer brand preference and showcasing products/SKUs/models concerning the preference [21], e) sales personnel's capability to explain the features of products showcased to consumers and their confidence level while explaining the differentiation among a variety of products showcased [22], and f) the range of products/SKUs/models showcased by the sales personnel concerning price and utility expected by the consumers [23].

In our previous studies we have conducted various sales personnel centric experiments such as i) in the first experiment wherein by changing the sales personnel's performance measure from output-driven to input-driven measures it was found that the input-driven measures were all helping the sales personnel to understand the role of each product; be it essential, non-essential, high-priced, low-priced and so on and indirectly these measures were pushing them to focus on just the consumer's needs, consumer's lifetime value rather all the time thinking about just one transaction [24]; ii) in the second experiment wherein we attempted to decentralize the discounting process by empowering sales personnel to decide on the type and level of discount to be offered to consumer found that, it is not just the discount level, type, duration, coverage, and advertising discount offer which is important to attract more consumers and increase their intent to purchase more, what is also very important is a) how does the sales personnel who is dealing with the consumer directly and has real-time insights about consumer's intent, needs and attitude towards a particular purchase activity communicate available discount offers with confidence, b) does he/she believes in a particular discount offer and c) can he/she convince the consumer about the benefits of discount offers which are on products that are not immediate purchase requirement of a consumer. This experiment in a way indicates that sales personnel need to be considered as the most important last-mile communication delivery personnel who has the capability of creating a positive perception about the retailer [25]; iii) in the third experiment wherein we implemented a need-based sales pitch technique, results were affirmative of the fact that the level and quality of interaction between sales personnel and consumers is important to understand the consumer life-stage which in turn helps the sales personnel to correctly identify the real-time need of the consumer and suggest relevant products to be purchased. This in a way raises questions about are the stores run with the optimal number of sales personnel all the time that too especially during peak sales hours [26]. All these findings are affirmative to the fact that though the sales personnel is part of the lowest level of organizational hierarchy is a most important resource in retailing who can be a bridge between the retailer and the consumer and hence sales personnel retention rate

also becomes one of the most important aspects of retailing.

**Employee Retention:** Attrition costs both the time and the money for an organization whether or not impacting the bottom line directly or indirectly. These costs can be direct such as a) recruitment agency fee; b) recruitment cost; c) new employee training cost; d) new employee relocation cost, and can be indirect such as a) loss of network created by the exiting employee; b) loss of trained skill sets; c) low morale among continuing employees; d) disgruntled consumers [27]. There are few misconceptions concerning employee attrition that the employees quit organization due to poor pay, job dissatisfaction, and the supervisor's control/influence over alienating attrition is limited, thereby making it furthermore costly for any organization who tend to design strategies concerning employee retention based on these misconceptions [28]. Plethora of literature on employee attrition/turnover has identified many key reasons for employee's intention to quit job from an organization such as a) 'work-related factors' that refer to job satisfaction, pay, organizational commitment, and performance; 'individual-factors' that refer to education level, age, gender and tenure of employment; 'external-factors' that refer to unemployment rates, presence and influence of labor unions, and employees perceptions [29]; b) 'burnout' that refers to the chronic stress an employee may experience leading to emotional exhaustion, mental fatigue, cynicism, and inefficacy [30-34]; c) lack of career development opportunities, longer working hours, unhealthy work environment, and relationships at the workplace [35]; d) organization's roadmap for career growth [36]; e) leader's behavior, supervisor's behavior at workplace, superior-subordinate bond, leader's transparency level, and ethical behavior of leader/supervisor [37-40]; f) organizational instability [41-42]; g) organization's tendency to measure employee's performance quantitatively [43]; h) poor communication systems within the organization [44]; i) involvement level of employees in decision-making process and employee empowerment [45]; j) poor personnel policies, hiring practices, lack of recognition and competitive compensation systems [46].

Another group of studies indicates strategies to overcome employee attrition and improve retention such as a) better compensation methods [47-51]; b) effective rewards and recognition systems [52-54]; c) providing opportunities for promotion and growth [55-58]; d) allowing employees across hierarchical levels to participate in decision-making [59-60]; e) providing work-life balance [61]; f) creating better work-environments [62-64]; g) adopting efficient training and development programs [65-68]; h) better leadership [69-72]; i) providing job-security [73-76]. Indian wisdom on human resource described 5000 years ago in 'Panchatantra' still holds relevant concerning employee attrition and retention that indicates few strategies to overcome employee attrition such as a) ensure an environment that avoids discrepancy of treatment among rich and poor employees; b) motivate employees' to love their job and not just the earnings from the job; c) show kindness to employees; d) respect employee's self-respect; e) constantly flush-out non-performing and demotivated employees; f) create union-like bonds between employees and the management; g) even little appreciations and small rewards matter; h) honour employees; i) institute a fair reward system; j) gratify the employee's pride; k) never dishonour after honouring; l) never defame a performing employee in gatherings; m) never shame an employee; n) never insult achievers; o) ensure employee-role match; p) do not ignore special/unique qualities of an employee; q) give autonomy to supervisors to motivate employees; r) give due credit for all achievement irrespective of the magnitude of the achievement; s) pamper and love your employees; t) support employees who are suffering due to their personal issues; u) avoid absurd management tactics [77-78].

### **3. PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:**

The need for this research indeed was originated due to various gaps found in theoretical, descriptive, empirical literature available in the employee attrition/turnover domain such as i) a majority of studies have focussed on attrition in a manufacturing context and not service context; ii) a majority of studies were skewed towards job satisfaction and pay as one of the key determinants; iii) most of the studies have not attempted to interlink many determinants; iv) absence of an employee retention framework that could integrate a majority of aspects of human resource for lifestyle retailers in the Indian context; v) a majority of lifestyle retailers in India follow and practice employee retention models incorporated by generalist retailers and organizations, and, most importantly v) lifestyle retailers in India are unable to control sales personnel attrition rates and protect firm's long-term sustainability. The present study proposes to a) understand lifestyle retailing market in India; b) understand evolution and performance of Indian lifestyle retailers; c) understand the existing sales personnel attrition control and retention models (SACR) of a few select lifestyle retailers; d) evaluate congruity of existing models vis-à-vis firm's long-term sustainability; e) analyze recommendations from previous research studies appropriate to the Indian context; f) design an integrated framework that would help lifestyle retailers

in India overcome negative impacts of sales personnel attrition/turnover; vii) test the RSPR-LS framework in real retail set up; viii) evaluate test results, findings, and insights.

#### **4. APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY:**

**Secondary Research:** Intense and in-depth analysis of data available in the public domain was carried to collect data relating to various aspects of lifestyle retailing in India through company websites, company annual financial reports, Government database, trade, and business journals. Research works relating to Indian lifestyle retailers and retailing were surveyed extensively to collect insights, recommendations, and frameworks to understand their existing SACR models with a firm's long-term sustainability in addition to an extensive review of theories, frameworks, and models available in the literature.

**Qualitative Primary Research:** Series of open-ended direct interviews were conducted with employees selected through convenience sampling representing different departments/functions of select lifestyle retailers in India to understand their perspective and attitude towards existing SACR models pre and post-test.

**Quantitative Primary Research:** In the first stage, ten organized lifestyle retailers in India were selected who can represent, a) different product categories such as fashion, functional, life-stage specific, product-specific, gender-specific, and need specific products; b) offering single-product category and multiple-product categories; c) serving different consumer target groups at low, mid-low, mid, mid-high, high, and premium price positioning; d) having single and multiple stores; e) offering single brand and multiple brands; f) having presence across Tier-1, Tier-2, and Tier-3 cities; g) having stores across the high street, malls, institutions, and neighborhoods, h) organizational forms, and i) new and established retail store image. The second stage was to evaluate the past sales personnel attrition rate vis-a-vis the overall performance of the retailer. In the third stage, 25 percent of the stores of one of the lifestyle retailers in the study were selected through systematic random sampling to undergo experimentation wherein the proposed RSPR-LS framework was applied for 24 months'. In the fourth stage, all the data was collected before experimentation from all the stores belonging to the control and experimental group. The fifth stage was to collect post-test data from the control and experimental group of stores and in the last stage the collected data from pre and post-tests periods were subjected to various statistical analyses and inferences were drawn.

#### **5. EVALUATING EXISTING SACR MODEL:**

**Qualitative:** Before the empirical study, we were able to derive qualitative insights by conducting open-ended direct interviews with employees representing all the departments/functions of different types of lifestyle retailers chosen for the study. Table 1 captures existing practices commonly adopted by the brick-and-mortar lifestyle retailers in the study mapped with key dimensions and sub-dimensions that are important to design employee retention available in the literature. Interestingly the perspectives and attitude towards sales personnel retention were different among Sales Personnel (SP) and Non-Sales Personnel (NSP) as detailed below.

##### **NSP Perspective:**

- The cost of SP attrition is very low and insignificant.
- New SP is easily available in the market and the general lead time for hiring new SP is low.
- SP have poor managerial and decision-making skills; thus, they are less empowered.
- As long as SP can showcase the products that a consumer is looking for the majority of the job is done.
- Basic-level of product training is enough for existing and new SP.
- It is recommended to measure SP performance quantitatively to ensure incentive calculations are easier.
- SP is required to be standing on the shop floor and hence creating a comfortable backroom is not essential.
- Following Government policies on laborers saves a lot of money as these policies are made for laborers in general and not specific for lifestyle retailing.
- SP with longer tenure in the company has to be differentiated from the new SP.
- It is difficult to make any programs concerning SP well-being as the store cannot be closed for even one day.
- It is hard to retain SP as they change companies often for higher salaries being offered by others.



**Table 1:** Existing practices of lifestyle retailers concerning Sales Personnel retention

Dimension	Sub-Dimension	Existing Practice
<b>Work-Related Factors</b>	Job Satisfaction	No Specific Programs
	Pay - Fixed Salary	Linked to Minimum Wages Fixed by the Government
	Pay - Fixed Salary	Linked to Government Policies
	Pay - Savings	Linked to Sales
	Rewards	Once in a Year
	Recognition	Occasional and Inconsistent
	Organizational Commitment	Employment Contract
	Empowerment	Low
	Involvement in Decision-Making	Low
	Performance Measures	Quantitative and Output-Driven
<b>Individual Factors</b>	Education Level	Higher the Education Level Higher the Promotion Possibilities
	Gender	Linked to Government Policies
	Age	Linked to Government Policies
	Tenure of Employment	Higher the Tenure Higher the Job Security
	Burnout	No Specific Programs
	Relationships at Workplace	No Specific Programs
	Work-Life Balance	No Policies
<b>Organizational Factors</b>	Job Security	Higher the Tenure Higher the Job Security
	Career Development Opportunities	No Specific Programs
	Roadmap for Career Growth	No Specific Programs
	Working Hours	Linked to Government Policies
	Work Environment	Poorly Treatment Due to Lower Level in the Hierarchy
	Training and Development	Occasional and Inconsistent
	Supervisor-Subordinate Bonding	No Specific Programs
	Leadership Transparency	Low
	Organizational Stability	Medium
	Internal Communication Systems	Not Open
	Hiring Practice	Third Party Involvement
	Policies	In Favor of Organization
<b>External Factors</b>	Attractive Job Offers	If Resigns then Match the Offer for Good Performer
	Employee Perceptions	No Specific Programs

**SP Perspective:**

- New jobs are easily available in the market at a higher salary and in the same location.
- It is difficult to live up to consumer expectations as we need to refer to the Store Manager (SM) all the time.
- It is not just showcasing a product that a consumer is looking for; we have to convince them to finally buy it.
- Training is limited to products and rarely we are trained on communication and consumer handling skills. Sometimes consumers know about a product better than us as they have access to product information digitally.
- The majority of the time we think about the final output of our engagement with the consumer and cannot focus on making a long-lasting relationship as we are measured by how much we have sold and not how many loyal consumers we have made.
- We are required to be standing on the shop floor most of the time and hence we expect the company to provide us a comfortable backroom that would refresh our mind.
- A fixed salary must be aligned with the minimum monthly income required by the financial institutions (banks) for lending personal loans.
- SP with longer tenure in the company is not penalized even if they do not perform.
- We expect the company to create programs for our welfare and well-being.
- Increment in the pay happens only once in a year that is aligned with NSP using percentages. Our pay being the lowest in the organization the resultant absolute increment value is insignificant even we fall in the highest increment percentage bucket of the organization.

- There are many reasons for us to take up the sales role at an early age that hinders our capability to continue education. It would be a great motivator for us to stay if we are allowed to enhance our educational level while working full-time.
- Our feedback/requests on all aspects of the store are usually not taken seriously by any NSP including out SM. Our feedback is always real-time and consumer-centric and if taken seriously shall enhance our individual and overall store' performance.
- Visibility concerning our career development is very poor and the same is significantly dependent on SM's personal opinion/belief and not on any predefined rules.
- Most of the time we are communicated on any significant actions by the management only closer to the organizational announcement.
- The current incentive system does not allow us to earn additional pay consistently. We usually earn incentives during peak festival and end-of-season sale periods.
- We are always regarded as low-level employees in the organization.
- We are neither empowered to make decisions nor have any control over a majority of elements of the store, but we are responsible for the overall store's revenue and profit.

**Empirical:** Evaluating the last five years of data of lifestyle retailers in the study indicates that the average retention rate for SP was 68.29 percent and the same was 93.78 percent for NSP in the entire organization. A majority of SP was in the age bracket 25 to 30 years with 12<sup>th</sup> standard as the highest qualification and equally distributed among males and females. Table 2 indicates the association and determination among SP retention rates and key factors. A significant and positive association is found between SP retention rate and the overall revenue generated by a store that is moderated by the rate of converting every walk-in into a consumer which is expected to be the outcome of satisfied and productive SP in the store [14]. A majority of lifestyle retailers in the study were unaware of the role of SP retention rate in moderating overall revenue generated by a store in addition to a) not having relevant programs to retain SP [47-78]; b) highly imbalanced authority-and-responsibility [79]; c) irrational sales organizational structure [80].

**Table 2:** Association and determination among SP retention rate and key factors

Model	Predictors	Dependent Variable	R	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> Change	ANOVA Sig.
1	SP Retention Rate	Store Walk-In Conversion Rate	0.378	0.143	0.143	0.002
		Consumer Repeat Store Visit Rate	0.301	0.076	0.090	0.013
		Overall Store Revenue	0.444	0.185	0.197	0.000
2	Store Walk-In Conversion Rate	Overall Store Revenue	0.919	0.843	0.845	0.000
3	Consumer Repeat Store Visit Rate	Overall Store Revenue	0.818	0.663	0.668	0.000

Existing literature, exploratory qualitative primary finding, and empirical evaluation indicate that the existing SACR model of select organized brick-and-mortar lifestyle retailers in India is irrational as it seriously fails to understand the magnitude of the negative impact that is moderated by lower SP retention rate on the overall store's revenue and firm's sustainability. This brings us to the key research problem as to a) is there a different way to approach the SACR, and if yes b) what could be an ideal framework to control SP attrition and enhance retention. Considering recommendations from past studies and insights from this study we would now attempt to design a rational SACR framework for organized brick-and-mortar lifestyle retailers in India named RSPR-LS.

## 6. DEVELOPMENT OF RSPR-LS:

The key approach while designing the RSPR-LS was to adopt arguments of various human motivation theories available in the literature and i) identify elements of SP motivation that would directly or indirectly moderate their intention to perform and stay in the organization; ii) map such identified motivational elements per SP tenure with the organization; iii) demarcate among different levels of SP performance as detailed in this section.

**I. Professional Motivation:** Key SACR activities under this category are intended to improve the satisfaction level of SP concerning their professional development such as; **I-A:** Input-driven performance measures that would allow them to focus on quality engagement with every walk-in into the store thereby enhancing probability of creating more satisfied consumers; consumers intention to visit the store repeatedly; stress-free SP performance; lower SP burnout [30-34]; higher incentive earning [24][81]. **I-B:** Systematic empowerment



in decision-making that would support SP to take appropriate decisions on a real-time basis thereby enhancing consumer-orientation, probability of creating more satisfied consumers, and consumer's intention to visit the store repeatedly. The term systematic is very important and must ensure appropriate limits set by the management within which SP is empowered to make decisions [25][82].

**II. Emotional Motivation:** SACR activities under this category are intended to improve the satisfaction level of SP concerning emotional aspects such as; **II-A:** Overall performance level based weekly best performer appreciation certificate to be issued by the SM, monthly best performer certificate to be issued by the National Sales and Stores Operations Manager (NSM) and a yearly best performer certificate to be issued by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). All these appreciations/recognitions to be at the store level, regional level, and national level [77-78]. In addition to a certificate of appreciation, the winners at the regional and national levels must be given monetary-equivalent benefits such as gift vouchers, gift coupons, etc. **II-B:** Identification of special skills in each SP and allocating them to other stores on a temporary deputation basis to train other SP on such special skills which would enhance SP pride in addition to sharing the best resources/knowledge among stores [77-78].

**III. Personal Motivation:** Every SP has their personal goals and any organization's attempt to help SP realize such personal goals without any conflict of interest is expected to enhance their intention to stay for longer in such an organization. SACR activities that would enable this are; **III-A:** Adaptation of training and development framework that would integrate training contents capable of creating allrounder SP in the store thereby enhancing overall development and performance levels of SP [83]. **III-B:** Associating with Professional Certificate granting institutions providing short-duration (1 to 6 months) courses and enrolling interested SP in such courses on a part-time basis with partial financial assistance. **III-C:** Signing up MOUs with Diploma/Degree-granting institutions providing long-duration (1 to 3 years) programs and enrolling interested SP in such programs on a part-time basis with partial financial assistance.

**IV. Social Motivation:** It is imperative to understand the social motivation angle of SP retention. Social influence is one of the most important determinants of an employee's intention to stay [84]. SACR activities that are expected to enhance social motivation in the SP are; **IV-A:** Based on tenure, consistency in performance levels and improvement in managerial skills, identify SP and give them additional roles that are beyond their normal key result areas (KRAs) which are expected to give them visibility on their capabilities and roadmap for career development in addition to allowing the organization to train and evaluate the SP who can potentially take the SM role.

Framework 1 indicates the recommended deployment of I-A, I-B, II-A, II-B, III-A, III-B, III-C, and IV-A explained as SACR activities with SP tenure in the organization and SP performance levels. We have considered performance levels as one of the key determinants while deploying a particular SACR activity which would ensure eliminating SM bias, unjust treatment, and a clear demarcation between performing and non-performing SP in a store.

## **7. TESTING OF RSPR-LS FRAMEWORK:**

We were firm in our approach that, the proposed RSPR-LS framework has to be tested in a retail set up before we recommend the same to brick-and-mortar lifestyle retailers in India. But it was not that easy merely because of the vast scope of the experiment. Unlike other experiments wherein the treatment is limited to few concepts, components or variables this experiment required us to practically cover almost all the elements of an organizational framework which do require longer duration for preparations before testing, longer duration before the beginning of extracting the results and a longer period for the experimentation itself to ensure findings and insights are derived holistically. The biggest challenge of testing the new RSPR-LS framework was the time taken to make attitudinal changes in the employees of the select retailer across all departments and functions. The attitude of employees in the higher levels of hierarchy towards the RSPR-LS framework was significantly negative while the employees in the lower levels were encouraged by the new SACR framework. We were cognizant and it was inevitable that such significantly negative beliefs are addressed to ensure the testing of the proposed RSPR-LS framework has buy-in from the majority of the employees across functions, departments, and levels. Thus, we decided to undertake a series of training before experimentation. Out of many lifestyle retailers in the study, we selected one retailer and started applying a new RSPR-LS framework to one complete Region (experimental group) that represents 25 percent of the overall store count of the select retailer. We took the final reading of resultant data to further analyze, evaluate, and derive insights for an entire 24 months' period.

<i>SACR Activity</i>		<b>SP Performance Level</b>			
		Below 70%	70 to 79%	80 to 89%	90% & Above
<b>S P  T e n u r e</b>	Above 2 Years	<i>Involuntary Separation</i>	<i>Involuntary Separation</i>	<i>I-A; I-B; II-A; II-B; III-A; III-B; IV-A</i>	<i>I-A; I-B; II-A; II-B; III-A; III-B; III-C; IV-A</i>
	1 to 2 Years	<i>Involuntary Separation</i>	<i>I-A; I-B; II-A; II-B; III-A; III-B</i>	<i>I-A; I-B; II-A; II-B; III-A; III-B; IV-A</i>	<i>I-A; I-B; II-A; II-B; III-A; III-B; III-C; IV-A</i>
	0 to 1 Year	<i>I-A; II-A; III-A</i>	<i>I-A; II-A; III-A</i>	<i>I-A; II-A; II-B; III-A; III-B</i>	<i>I-A; II-A; II-B; III-A; III-B; IV-A</i>

**Framework 1:** Integrated framework for Sales Personnel attrition control and retention (RSPR-LS)

## 8. KEY FINDINGS AND INSIGHTS FROM THE EXPERIMENT:

We have recorded results of data analysis independently for empirical and qualitative as detailed in this section to ensure that we take an unbiased look at each of these findings before we consolidate all the results to conclude.

**Empirical Analysis:** Pre-test post-test real treatment effect has shown a significant increase in all the key factors that are in favor of an organization concerning long-term sustainability as shown in table 3. Table 4 demonstrates the variance in key factors of the experimental and control group of stores during the post-test period over their pre-test period. Results indicate that the improvement in all the key factors is significant in the experimental group of stores in comparison to the control group of stores. Our hypothesis of the SP retention rate is one of the important moderators in deciding the motivation levels of SP towards consumer-orientation holds. The results demonstrate the positive and significant association between overall store revenue/profit and consumer-orientation levels that is moderated by the SP retention rate. Table 5 demonstrates the difference in the key factors of the experimental group of stores during pre-test and post-test periods over the control group of stores. One can observe a dramatic shift in most of the key factors in the post-test experimental group of stores that can be attributed to the RSPR-LS framework.

**Qualitative Analysis:** As far as qualitative findings are concerned an open-ended interview was conducted with select employees across SP and NSP groups in the experimental group of stores. Results indicate that the RSPR-LS was able to improve job satisfaction; motivation levels; understanding of changing market needs in real-time; productivity levels; managerial skills; incentive earnings; quality of communication; clarity of communication; coordination levels; efficiency levels; relevancy of training and development contents; organizational capabilities; employee attitudes towards the organization; positive relationships between the people inside and outside the organization; perspectives of NSP group of employees towards SP; work environment; market-orientation; sales personnel empowerment; customization level of consumer-level offers/promotions; store image in the consumer's minds and most importantly the consumer-orientation level of the SP.

**Table 3:** Pre-test post-test real treatment effect across key factors in the experimental group as a percentage change over their pre-test period

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Post-Test Experimental Group</b>
Average Performance Level of SP	41.94%
% of SP with Qualifications Higher than 12th Standard	129.41%
% of SP Taking Additional Role	503.45%
Sales Incentives Earning by SP	82.72%
SP Retention Rate	28.65%
Store Walk-Ins Conversion Rate	40.80%
Consumer Repeat Store Visit Rate	48.26%
Overall Store Revenue	113.99%
Overall Store Profit	1527.06%

**Table 4:** Post-test percentage change in key factors in the experimental and control group over their pre-test periods

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Post-Test Control Group</b>	<b>Post-Test Experimental Group</b>
Average Performance Level of SP	4.62%	46.77%
% of SP with Qualifications Higher than 12th Standard	20.00%	147.06%
% of SP Taking Additional Role	60.00%	555.17%
Sales Incentives Earning by SP	-34.77%	42.34%
SP Retention Rate	1.84%	30.43%
Store Walk-Ins Conversion Rate	-3.27%	37.59%
Consumer Repeat Store Visit Rate	40.77%	87.54%
Overall Store Revenue	-13.02%	20.23%
Overall Store Profit	-61.27%	149.94%

**Table 5:** Comparison of the experimental group of stores against a control group of stores across key factors during pre and post-test periods

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Pre-Test Experimental Group</b>	<b>Post-Test Experimental Group</b>
Average Performance Level of SP	-4.62%	33.82%
% of SP with Qualifications Higher than 12th Standard	13.33%	133.33%
% of SP Taking Additional Role	16.00%	375.00%
Sales Incentives Earning by SP	-13.90%	87.88%
SP Retention Rate	3.18%	32.15%
Store Walk-Ins Conversion Rate	1.95%	45.01%
Consumer Repeat Store Visit Rate	3.79%	38.27%
Overall Store Revenue	-5.87%	30.12%
Overall Store Profit	-75.24%	131.94%

## 9. CONCLUSION:

A single theory, model, and framework available in the literature across perspectives, paradigms, and domains was not entirely applicable that could have been adopted to suit lifestyle retailers in India concerning SACR activities. However, an empirical/experimental orientation in addition to the thoughtful application of existing theories, models, and frameworks in the domain of employee turnover and employee retention was the key approach in designing the RSPR-LS framework. We found theories of motivation are best suitable for

designing the SACR framework that would integrate a majority of elements directly or indirectly influencing SP retention. Some of the key motivational theories from which we have borrowed insights were a) Maslow's 'theory of human motivation' [85]; b) Herzberg's 'two-factor motivation theory' [86]; c) McGregor's 'theory 'X' and theory 'y' of human work motivation management' [87]; d) Vroom's 'expectancy theory of motivation' [88]; e) Locke's 'goal-setting theory of motivation' [89]; f) Alderfer's 'existence-relatedness-growth (ERG) theory of motivation' [90]; g) McClelland's 'need theory of motivation' [91]; h) Skinner's 'reinforcement theory of motivation' [92]; i) Adam's 'equity theory of motivation' [93]; j) Bandura's 'social cognitive theory of motivation'. We have also adopted a) Neilson's argument on 'balancing authority-and-responsibility' [79], recommendations from the 5000 years old Indian wisdom 'Panchatantra' [77-78], and Morris's 'service-profit chain model' [14] in addition to various findings from our previous studies relevant for lifestyle retailing in India [23-25] [80-83].

While designing the RSPR-LS we have followed a logical mixture of these theories and studies in the literature and incorporated insights gained from the qualitative/empirical exploratory phase of this study that involved evaluating ten organized lifestyle retailers in India who represented, a) different product categories such as fashion, functional, life-stage specific, product-specific, gender-specific, and need specific products; b) offering single-product category and multiple-product categories; c) serving different consumer target groups at low, mid-low, mid, mid-high, high, and premium price positioning; d) having single and multiple stores; e) offering single brand and multiple brands; f) having presence across Tier-1, Tier-2, and Tier-3 cities; g) having stores across the high street, malls, institutions, and neighborhoods and h) new and established retail store image in addition to evaluating their last 5 years' overall performance. Once the RSPR-LS was designed, we have experimented with the recommended SACR model on one of these ten lifestyle retailers to test the validity and reliability of the RSPR-LS framework. Experimentation results empirically and qualitatively demonstrate that the existing belief of brick-and-mortar lifestyle retailers in India which assumes SP retention rate is not a costly affair is just a misconception and does not hold. The RSPR-LS framework proposed in this study takes into consideration the complexity brick-and-mortar lifestyle retailing in India and we have attempted to reduce this complexity level to the best possible. When we experimented the RSPR-LS for over 24 months at over 25 percent stores of a select retailer, results demonstrate that these stores which have gone through the treatment have shown 37.59 percent improvement in walk-ins conversion rate, 87.54 percent improvement in consumer's repeat store visit rate that resulted in 20.23 percent improvement in the overall store revenue and 2.00 times improvement in the overall store profits on account of 21.35 percentage points improvement in SP retention rate thereby providing validity and reliability of the proposed RSPR-LS framework in the field.

## **10. SUGGESTIONS:**

The sustainable success of a brick-and-mortar lifestyle retailer in India significantly depends on the trueness level of their image that is carried in employees, investors, competitors, and consumers' minds and not the revenue or profit they generate [94-97]. To ensure a lifestyle retailer gets a true lifestyle image, they need to think beyond revenue, profit. Unless a retailer adopts a SACR framework that ensures an optimal level of consumer-orientation by its SP, it is unlikely that the retailer will ever be able to create a positive store image in consumer's minds in addition to creating a higher number of consumers with high levels of patronage with their stores. Every employee in an organization has a role to play concerning a firm's long-term sustainability irrespective of his/her level in the organizational hierarchy. The key to success is in identifying who is closer to the market and the consumer and ensuring such employees (if performing well) are consistently motivated to stay in the organization for a longer duration. It is also not just about retaining the SP, what is important is whom are we trying to retain. A balanced approach is a must in ensuring retailing performing SP and involuntarily separating non-performing SP in a store.

## **11. LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH:**

The main limitation of this research work is the coverage of various stakeholders viz., the number of lifestyle retailers, product categories, consumer groups, employees, organizational forms, and price positioning while designing the recommended RSPR-LS. This might limit the generalizability of research findings to other sets of lifestyle retailers. The second limitation would be that the empirical validation is restricted to a few lifestyle retailers selected for the study and hence the generalizability of the findings and suggestions to other lifestyle retailers in India. The third limitation would be our ability to carry out true experimental design, at best we were able to carry out a pre-test post-test control group experimental design. However, it provides significant

inputs regarding the ways to utilize these findings as all the findings have been derived from an experiment spread over 24 months' on a larger sample in addition to incorporating recommendations of proven theories in the literature.

## **12. SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH:**

We strongly recommended that the RSPR-LS is used by researchers to further test its validity and reliability in addition to finetuning it further if required for lifestyle or non-lifestyle retailers. Based on short-term and long-term the key business objectives of lifestyle retailers, the RSPR-LS framework can be used as a basic tool while designing SACR activities and finetune the same suitably.

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