Trust During Retail Encounters: A Touchy Proposition

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◦ *Purpose: Adopting an interpersonal communication perspective on customer-sales employee encounters this study tests the proposition that a salesperson's touch leads consumers to evaluate wines more favourably by increasing trust.*

◦ *Design: An exploratory series of in-depth interviews followed by a 2 (touch/ no-touch condition) x 2 (consumers in France / Germany) experiment explore hypothesized relationships..*

◦ *Findings: The findings indicate that touch does not uniformly instil trust in customers. Instead a salesperson's touch relates to greater trust only when consumers have an inherent need for touch or when they are from a culture where personal touching behaviour is less prevalent. Trust, in turn, relates positively to evaluations of product attractiveness, quality, and to purchase intention.*

◦ *Practical implications: The effects of interpersonal touch vary between individuals according to their need-for touch and personal touching behaviour. While the notion that – in order to instil trust and be successful – a salesperson needs to adapt their behaviour to a customer's characteristics is certainly not novel, establishing what individuals and cultures respond more favourably to interpersonal touch should assist managers in more successfully using this means of nonverbal communication in wine retailing encounters.*

Key words: Attractiveness, Behavior, France, Germany, Quality, Trust, Touch, Wine.

Face-to-face, customer–salesperson interactions, as they occur in retail encounters, are thought to be among the most important elements in marketing communications. Exchange typically is initiated, maintained, and terminated on a person-to-person basis (Beatty et al. 1996; Reynolds and Arnold 2000; Van Dolen et al. 2002) as customers and salespersons engage in communication processes that can impact their attitudes, intentions, and behaviors (Jap et al. 1999). Acknowledging its relevance, scholars in the retailing literature have focused considerable attention on interpersonal communication behavior between customers and salespeople (e.g.,Winsted 1997). Nevertheless there is very little research that empirically examines non-verbal aspects of the interactions between salespeople and customers (Sundaram and Webster 2000). Yet, research on touch, possibly the most powerful means of nonverbal communication (Levav and Argo 2010), has been limited to investigations of crowding (i.e., customers inadvertently brushing each other: Baker and Wakefield 2011), customers touching other customers (e.g., Martin 2012), market researchers touching respondents (Hornik 1992a; 1992b), service personnel touching customers in hospitality contexts (Crusco and Wetzel 1984; Fisher et al. 1976), and customers touching products (e.g., Baker and Wakefield 2011; Marlow and Jansson-Boyd 2011; Peck and Wiggins 2006).

Our study aims to make a three-fold contribution. First, it examines the effects of a salesperson's touch on customers' product evaluation and behavioral intention. Second, it provides insight into the underlying mechanism by examining the role of trust as a process mediator. Finally, it examines the impact of individual differences that potentially moderate the touch-trust relationship. By providing insights into these issues the present research aims at aiding managers in more efficiently employing interpersonal touch in wine retail encounters. Figure 1 below illustrates the hypothesized relationships between model constructs.

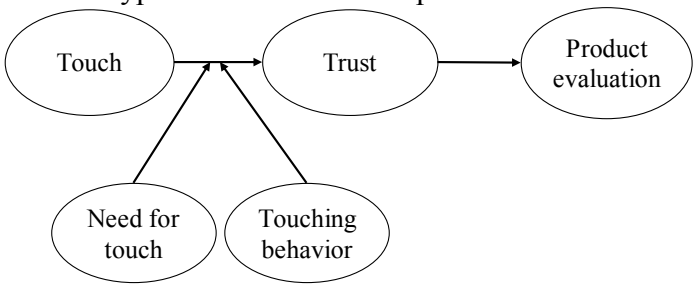

Figure 1. Hypothesized Relationships between Study Constructs.

1. LITERATURE AND HYPOTHESES

The present study is a first step in exploring the effects of a salesperson's touch on customers' product evaluation; that is, the process of how touch-evoked trust "spills over" from a salesperson to influence product evaluation, analogous to how loyalty spills over from a salesperson to the store (Reynolds and Arnold 2000).

1.1. Interpersonal Touch

Interpersonal touch has been described as the most powerful form of nonverbal communication and as a hallmark of human life (Levav and Argo 2010). Among types of physical contacts, touch is possibly the most fundamental communicative function among people. In social settings, touch conveys meaning (Jones 1994), emotions, status (e.g., Hall 1996), and influences behaviors ranging from response to life events (Coan et al. 2006), to

individual roles as consumers (Crusco and Wetzel 1984). Most relevant to the current context, interpersonal touch allegedly enhances trust as suggested by initial studies on flight attendants touching passengers (e.g., Wycoff and Holley 1990).

Despite the established importance of touch as a determinant of individual behavior, its effect on retail customers is not fully understood. Specifically, researchers have generated initial insights into effects of other types of physical contact such as customers accidentally brushing or bumping into strangers in high density environments (Martin 2012; Pons et al. 2006) and customers touching companions while shopping (Verhoef et al. 2009). They have paid scant attention, however, to touch as a means of nonverbal communication in salespeople's toolbox. In addition, the role of trust as a possible process mediator has been neglected outright.

1.2. Trust in Interpersonal Encounters

The trust literature (Mayer et al. 1995; Rousseau et al. 1998) distinguishes trustworthiness (the perceived ability, benevolence, and integrity of a trustee) from trust (the intention to accept vulnerability to a trustee based on positive expectations of his or her actions). Only recently has research interest in communication and trust converged in a retail context. Certain research focused largely on verbal communication showing that a salesperson's expertise and communicative power lead to higher customer trust (Doney and Cannon 1997). Swan et al. (1999) reported that customer trust is based on the salesperson being perceived as dependable, honest, competent, likable, and having a customer orientation. In their study of trust development of buyers and sellers Kennedy et al. (2001) report that trust is fostered by salesperson competence and low-pressure selling tactics. Leaning and touch by a service provider convey greater trust according to Burgoon (1991). In the context of selling a pre-owned car, Erceau and Guéguen (2007) found touch to be associated with more positive evaluations of the toucher on dimensions such as honest or trustworthy. Integrating research on interpersonal touch with the trust literature we expect:

H1: Trust will be higher when a salesperson touches a customer compared to no touch.

1.3. Effects on Product Evaluation

Two streams of research support the notion that a salesperson's touch, through increased trust, leads customers to more positively evaluate retail offers. First, a substantial body of research supports the general capacity of interpersonal touch to favorably influence customer evaluations and behavior. Waiters who slightly touch their guests receive larger tips from these customers than un-touched clients (Crusco and Wetzel 1984; Hubbard et al. 2003). Similarly, people are also more willing to sample a new snack in a grocery store when touched by a sales promoter (Hornik 1992b), and are generally more likely to comply with a toucher's requests after a series of fleeting touches (Vaidis and Halimi-Falkowicz 2008). The specific behavioral effects of a salesperson's touch within a retail context include customers spending more time in a store and spending more money (Hornik 1992a). Relating touch to evaluations, students consider library service to be better when touched by the service counter person (Fisher et al. 1976). Extant research argues that evaluations improve under conditions of touch versus no touch.

A second stream of research supports a positive effect of trust on customer evaluation not only of the trustee but also of spill-over entities. A relatively large body of work suggests that trust positively influences the development of customer attitudes, intentions, and behavior. (Swan et al. 1999). However, salesperson-level outcomes also "spill over" to larger associated entities (e.g., the store or the product); positive evaluations of the retail associate thus "rub off"

on associated concepts, brands, and stores (Beatty et al. 1996; Guenzi et al. 2009). This spill-over hypothesis has received some empirical support for customers' store evaluation (Macintosh and Lockshin 1997). Taken together, this literature implies that trust in a salesperson should enhance product evaluation because trust implies that the salesperson is motivated to act in the customer's interests and would not act opportunistically if given the chance to do so. Integrating this evidence with the previously discussed positive effect of touch on trust, we expect:

H2: Trust will mediate the positive relationship between touch and product evaluation.

1.4. Individual Differences

Nearly every society has an evolved set of carefully defined, though largely unspoken, rules about touch. In addition to these normative rules, there are individual differences that determine how comfortable people are with touching and how they respond to being touched (e.g., Fromme et al. 1989; Hall and Veccia 1990). Borrowing from the more general social psychology and personality domains, researchers have examined individual differences in touch avoidance within a marketing context (Peck and Childers 2003). Individuals high in need for touch (NFT) actively seek physical contact (e.g., with products) and base their reaction to a greater extent on the information obtained through this sensory mode (Peck and Childers 2003).

While NFT primarily relates to customers touching products suggests that individuals' desire to seek tactile input (i.e., assessed through the NFT scale) closely correlates with their need for sensory information obtained through the skin of other parts of their anatomy (i.e.., arms, legs, cheeks, rather than hands). Merging the literature on individual differences in need for touch with the previously discussed positive effect of touch on trust suggests that:

H3: Individual need for touch (NFT) will moderate the indirect effect of touch on product evaluation (through trust). Specifically, trust will mediate the indirect effect when NFT is high but not when it is low.

In a retail context, cultural characteristics can affect customers' responses to specific situations such as crowding (Pons et al. 2006), salespersons' attempts at persuasive communication (Winsted 1997), or trust in e-retailing (Park et al. 2012).

One dimension of culture is interpersonal touching behavior. Hall (1996) found that culture influences physical contact: contact cultures (e.g., Arabs, Mediterraneans) prefer tactile modes of communication and prefer involving behaviors including close personal distance, eye contact, frontal body orientation, and touch. Noncontact cultures (e.g., Americans, Germans), in contrast, process information visually and exhibit behaviors involving less physical contact. Previous research suggests that members of contact cultures touch more frequently than do members of noncontact cultures (Remland et al. 1995). These cultural differences further relate to individual differences in touch avoidance. Contact cultures are also located in the Southern parts of France (Hall 1996) and close to the Mediterranean (Remland et al. 1995), whereas Germany is classified as a noncontact culture (Shuter 1977). Individuals in contact cultures are more used to and more commonly exposed to interpersonal touch (i.e. high in interpersonal touching behavior). In contrast, individuals in non-contact cultures rely less on interpersonal touching behavior.

Attachment research aids in understanding how individual differences in personal touching behavior (PTB) may influence the touch-trust relationship. Extending research findings to a retail context implies that – when a salesperson does not touch a customer whose culture relies more on touching behavior (i.e., a customer from a contact culture), levels of customer trust should be lower. In fact, individuals from contact cultures may anticipate and expect touch,

be less affected by it, and may not develop trust at all in a situation where they expect it and do not experience it. In contrast, because individuals in non-contact cultures are less used to interpersonal touch and expect less interpersonal touch by salespeople, touch should relate to higher levels of trust. Therefore:

H4: Personal touching behavior (PTB) will moderate the indirect effect of touch on product evaluation (through trust). Specifically, trust will mediate the indirect effect when PTB is low but not when it is high.

In summary, we expect touch by a salesperson to increase a customer's trust, leading to more favorable product evaluations. Individual differences such as need for touch and personal touching behavior should moderate the touch-trust relationship. In order to test the stipulated hypotheses two studies were undertaken, they are presented below.

2. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

A qualitative study employed in-depth interviews with sales persons in non-contact and contact cultures to generate initial evidence and to aid in detailing a subsequent quantitative study. A subsequent experiment quantitatively assessed the hypothesized relations between constructs.

2.1. Qualitative Study 1

Study 1 adopts a qualitative perspective to evaluate the role of interpersonal touch in salesperson-customer interactions. It employs a grounded-theory approach to provide initial confirmation for the appropriateness of selected constructs, the effects hypothesized, and the selection of context and development of stimuli for the subsequent quantitative study.

2.1.1. Procedure

Data were collected from eighteen salespeople across a variety of retail settings in Germany (non-contact culture) and France (contact culture). The selection of cultures draws from previous research on individual differences in touching behavior (Hall 1996; Remland et al 1995; Shuter 1977). One of the authors conducted on-site in-depth interviews over a period of ten days, observing numerous salesperson-customer interactions in the process. All interviews followed a standardized format covering issues of: (1) salespeople consciously touching customers, (2) types and frequency of salesperson-customer touch, (3) factors fostering or discouraging touch by salespeople, (4) customer responses to touch, and (5) management practices and policies regarding touch. All informants were asked to discuss the history and practice of their touching behavior, its effects on customers, and possible mediators and moderators related to touching.

2.1.2. Analysis

Our analyses aimed at disclosing patterns and themes, and clustering the observations into conceptual groupings in terms of the constructs identified in the literature review: touch, trust, product evaluation, need for touch, and personal touching behavior.

Examining the data revealed several themes crucial to our research: (1) Salespeople are aware that touch may influence customers, but the actual employment of touch depends on the individual (e.g. "*I try to keep up a certain distance to the customer. I don´t like to touch other people in general. I am not a "touchy" type*."). (2) Certain subtle touching behaviors are deemed acceptable to both salespeople (e.g. "*While making a joke with a well-known customer (slight single touch on the shoulder*)" and customers (e.g. "*During a nice conversation (joke etc.) people*

appreciate the touch and react favorable in terms of maintain/increasing their friendliness/happiness"); (3) There are cultural differences in social distance and touch (e.g., between the responses obtained in France and Germany), and (4) Retailers have explicit guidelines on touching customers ("*We are explicitly asked to interact with a certain level of distance and respect. This is because we regard wine as a product mainly consumed by people from upper income/ educational classes. We assume distance to be appropriate when interacting with our customers as it communicates respect and is congruent with selling a sophisticated product*".).

In summary, the qualitative findings of study 1 provide initial support for our conceptual model and yield valuable insights regarding manipulation, measurement, and consequences that were tested in the second, quantitative study.

2.2. Quantitative Study 2

Study 2 was designed to test the assertion that trust will be higher when salespersons touch customers than when they do not touch them (H1). It further extends the effect of touch to product evaluations by testing the mediating role of trust (H2). Individual differences in need for touch (H3) and personal touching behavior (H4) are also investigated as possible moderators.

Integrating the results of Study 1 with previous research suggests that wine is an especially appropriate example category. Wine retailing provides an ideal context for examining how salespeople's touch affects customer evaluations of products for at least three reasons. First, wine buyers are highly likely to rely on salespeople to infer product quality (Macintosh and Lockshin 1997). This strong reliance is less pronounced in other, potentially more objective categories where consumers tend to base their product evaluation on factors other than sales persons' evaluations (Hsieh et al. 2005). Second, wine is a hedonic product, and as such particularly prone to relate to multisensory purchase experiences (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982) including those involving social interaction (Verhoef et al. 2009). Third, for hedonic products, consumers yearn for reducing risk and are especially appreciative of experienced, credible, and trustworthy salespeople (Girard and Dion 2010; Mittal 2004). Fourth, wine buyers are more likely to rely on salespeople for evaluating a wine when they lack the ability to sample it (Macintosh and Lockshin 1997). And finally, customer trust is even more central for organic wine because 'green' attributes represent credence attributes that consumers can hardly verify themselves (Hsieh et al. 2005; Karstens and Belz 2006).

Another research objective was to investigate the influence of personal touching behavior on the touch-trust relationship. Building on previous work (Remland et al 1995; Hertenstein et al. 2006; Shuter 1977), we used country as a proxy for personal touching behavior. Intra country differences exist, but it was expected that collecting data in two cultures (France, a contact, and Germany a non-contact culture) would increase the variance in individual touching behavior.

2.2.1. Procedure

One-hundred-and twenty graduate students (60 in Germany and 60 in France, 51% females), who were on average 23.3 years old, took part in a 2 (touch vs. no-touch) x 2 (non-contact culture: Germany vs. contact culture: France) between subjects experimental design. In exchange for participating, respondents received a chance to win a bottle of wine.

In a laboratory setting, individual participants (one by one) went through a wine shopping experience designed to realistically reflect a retail encounter. The room was appropriately decorated with wine bottles displayed on several shelves. The same experimenter was employed in both countries. To establish procedural consistency across samples, the experimenter followed a pre-tested (N=8) protocol. Across conditions, the salesperson greeted her customers, and then

proceeded to introduce a 'newly arrived' organic wine. During the encounter there were two conditions, a "touch" condition involving a brief unobtrusive touch by the 'sales person' and a "no-touch" condition.

As the study took place in France and Germany we closely followed an array of previously identified best practices for conducting cross-cultural research (De Mooji and Hofstede 2002). To account for linguistic differences among the French and German samples we used English as the survey language. Procedurally, we established consistency across samples in terms of survey formats, data collection, and survey timing. Results indicated that there were no significant differences in terms of Cronbach's alpha for any of the study variables. We take these findings as evidence for cross-cultural equivalence.

2.2.2. Measures

Measures for all constructs consisted of established and previously validated scales : a six-item battery assessed consumer evaluations of the product (Dean and Biswas 2001), and a three-item scale assessed purchase intention (Dodds et al. 1991). Trust in the salesperson was captured through Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman's (1995) model with a focus on benevolence and integrity. Measures for individual differences included Peck and Childer's (2003) need-for-touch scale, and a twenty-item battery capturing personal touching behavior (Larsen and LeRoux 1984). We also included respondent perception of the sales person's attractiveness to guard against alternative hypotheses. Specifically, we employed Ohanian's (1991) scale, since salesperson attractiveness may directly influence trust. Additional information submitted by the respondents included age, gender, and nationality.

3. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

To check one of our basic premises, we compared consumer ratings of product evaluation, purchase intention, and respondent scores on the NFT and PTB scales for the two countries. Nationality did not significantly affect any of the variables studied ($p > .181$) except for personal touching behavior ($F(1,119) = 7.62$, $p = .007$) with mean scores indicating that German respondents exhibited less touching behavior than did French respondents ($M=2.75$ vs. $M=3.36$). We take these findings as evidence that nationality had no effect other than generating variance in touching behavior as intended.

3.1. Effect of Touch on Trust

H1 predicted that trust would be higher under conditions of touch rather than no touch. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) results indicated a significant effect of touch on trust ($F(1,119)=4.77$, $p = .031$) with scores higher under conditions of touch rather than no touch ($M=5.48$ vs. $M=4.89$). When respondent gender was included as a covariate, results of a two-factorial ANOVA indicated a significant main effect of touch ($F=4.82$, $p = .030$), a non-significant main effect of gender ($F=2.98$, $p=.087$), and a non-significant touch x gender interaction effect ($F=.16$, $p=.686$). When the sales person's attractiveness was included as a covariate, results indicated a significant effect of attractiveness ($F=25.39$, $p=.001$), a significant main effect of touch ($F=7.16$, $p = .001$), a non-significant main effect of gender ($F=1.24$, $p=.268$), and a non-significant touch x gender interaction effect ($F=.22$, $p=.643$). These results support H1. The influence of product evaluation on purchase intention was strong and positive ($B=.75$, $t=5.85$, $p=.001$), hence underscoring the relevance of our focal dependent construct.

Next we tested the remaining hypotheses with two interrelated steps. First, we examined a simple mediation model (Hypothesis 2). Second, we empirically tested for moderated mediation (Hypotheses 3 and 4).

3.2. Tests of Mediation

Hypothesis *H2* suggests an indirect effects model, whereby the relationship between a salesperson's touch and consumers' product evaluation is transmitted by trust. Preacher et al. (2007) recommend that mediational analyses be based on formal significance tests (Sobel) supplemented by bootstrapping (Edwards and Lambert 2007). Through the application of bootstrapped confidence intervals (CIs), it is possible to avoid power problems introduced by asymmetric or nonnormal sampling distributions of an indirect effect (MacKinnon et al. 2004).

Variable			*B*	*SE*	*t*	*p*
Direct and total effects						
Touch -> Product evaluation			.06	.09	.63	.529
Touch -> Trust			.31	.08	3.60	.001
Trust -> Product evaluation, controlling for touch			.51	.08	6.10	.001
Touch -> Product evaluation, controlling for trust			-.10	.08	-1.19	.237
	Value	*SE*	LL 95% CI	UL 95% CI	*z*	*p*
Indirect effect and significance using normal distribution						
Sobel	.15	.05	.02	.26	3.07	.002
Bootstrap results for indirect effect						
	M	SE	LL 99% CI	UL 99% CI		
Effect	.16	.06	.02	.33		

Note: *n* = 127. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. Bootstrap sample size = 5,000. LL = lower limit; CI = confidence interval; UL = upper limit.

Table 1. Regression Results for Simple Mediation

Table 1 above presents the results for the simple mediation tests. Touch was positively associated with trust, as indicated by a significant unstandardized regression coefficient (B= .31, $p < .05$). Also, the positive relationship between low trust and product evaluation, controlling for touch, was supported (B= .51, $p< .05$). And finally, touch had an indirect effect on product evaluation, and this indirect effect was positive (.15), as hypothesized. The formal two-tailed significance test (assuming a normal distribution) demonstrated that the indirect effect was significant (Sobel $z = 3.07$, $p<.05$). Bootstrap results confirmed the Sobel test (see lower half Table 2), with a bootstrapped 99% CI around the indirect effect not containing zero (.02, .33). Thus, Hypothesis *H2* received support.

3.3. Tests of Moderated Mediation

Hypothesis Concerning Hypotheses 3 and 4, we predicted that an individual's need for touch and personal touching behavior would moderate the positive relationship between touch and product evaluation. Assuming these moderation hypotheses receive support, it is plausible that the strength of the hypothesized indirect (mediation) effect is conditional on the value of the moderators (NFT and PTB, respectively), or what has been termed conditional indirect effects (Preacher et al. 2007); alternatively known as moderated mediation). Accordingly, we fully

considered the possibility of a statistically significant indirect effect that is contingent on the value of the proposed moderator. To test hypotheses, we again utilized an SPSS macro designed by Preacher et al. (2007).

Tables 2 and 3 in Appendix present the results for Hypotheses *H3* and *H4*. With regard to Hypothesis *H2*, we predicted that the positive relationship between touch and product evaluation would be stronger for individuals high on NFT than for individuals low on NFT. Results indicated that the cross-product term between trust and NFT on product evaluation was significant (B= –0.25, p<.05). To fully support Hypothesis *H3*, we further examined the conditional indirect effect of touch on product evaluation (through trust) at three values of NFT (see middle of Table 3): the mean (– 0.01), one standard deviation above the mean (1.00), and one standard deviation below the mean (– 1.01). Hypothesis *H3* was supported, such that the indirect and positive effect of touch on product evaluation through trust was observed when levels of NFT were moderate to high, but not when individuals' NFT was low.

Preacher et al.'s (2007) moderated mediation macro also computes conditional indirect effects at various arbitrary values of the moderator that fall within the range of the data. This output complements the more typical probing of the interaction using one standard deviation above and below the mean, and allowed us to identify the values of NFT for which the conditional indirect effect was just statistically significant at alpha < .05 (termed the region of significance). Results demonstrate that the conditional indirect effect was significant for any value of NFT greater than or equal to 0.06 on this standardized scale.

With regard to Hypothesis *H4*, we predicted that the positive relationship between touch and product evaluation would be weaker for individuals high rather than low on PTB. Results indicated that the cross-product term between trust and NFT on product evaluation was significant (B= –.41, p<.05). Examining the conditional indirect effect of touch on product evaluation (through trust) at three values of NFT indicated two of the three conditional indirect effects (based on moderator values at the mean and at -1 standard deviation) were significantly different from zero. Bootstrap CIs corroborated these results. Thus, Hypothesis *H4* was supported, such that the indirect and positive effect of touch on product evaluation through trust was observed when levels of PTB were low to moderate, but not when individuals' PTB was high. Conditional indirect effects at various arbitrary values of the moderator indicated that the conditional indirect effect was significant for any value of PTB greater than or equal to -.30 on this standardized scale.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. Theoretical and Managerial Implications

The present work extends research on nonverbal communication in salesperson-customer relationships by offering a novel perspective on customer evaluation of products, accounting for interpersonal touch (Levav and Argo 2010), the role of trust (Doney and Cannon 1997; Kennedy et al. 2001; Swan et al. 1999), and individual differences, including need for touch (Fromme et al. 1989; Peck and Childers 2003) and culturally specific touching behavior (Hertenstein et al. 2006; MacDaniel and Andersen 1998). Insights provided through two studies, one qualitative and the other quantitative, examine the role of touch and demonstrate that a salesperson's fleeting touch on a customer's shoulder enhances trust and increases favorable product evaluations. These results suggest that more attention should be given to interpersonal touch as an important and under-researched communication means not only in wine retailing.

Previous work, relating to face-to-face-salesperson-customer interactions (Beatty et al. 1996; Reynolds and Arnold 2000; Van Dolen et al. 2002) and interpersonal communication (Williams et al. 1990), is extended by demonstrating that (aside from verbal means of communication) a fleeting touch by a salesperson enhances product evaluation. Although previous research has stressed the pivotal role of interpersonal communication between customers and salespeople (Williams et al.1990), specifically in creating satisfaction (Menon and Dube 2000), loyalty (Beatty et al. 1996), and positive shopping experiences (Verhoef et al. 2009); the present work clarifies that touch, a nonverbal communication behavior, can lead to more favorable product evaluation by enhancing trust. This finding is in line with previous studies and emphasizes the importance of nonverbal means of communication in retailing (Sundaram and Webster 2000). Researchers have previously reported the positive effects of interpersonal touch on the behavior of hospitality guests (Crusco and Wetzel 1984; Hubbard et al. 2003), air passengers (Wycoff and Holley 1990), and consumers (Levav and Argo 2010). In addition, retailing research has generated insights into customer responses related to accidental touch by fellow shoppers (Martin 2012), crowding (Pons et al. 2006), or the touching of products (Baker and Wakefiled 2011; Marlow and Jansson-Boyd 2011). However, those studies do not examine nor account for the impact of a touch administered by a member of the staff. Subtle salesperson touch may instill security and trust in the customer, which may subsequently spill over to other perceptions and generate more favorable product evaluations.

Our focus on interpersonal touch also complements trust studies and demonstrates that a nonverbal communication (i.e., interpersonal touch) influences customer trust and thereby product evaluation, which provides a novel perspective on spillover effects originating with the salesperson (Beatty et al. 1996; Guenzi et al. 2009). Further research would need to address the ways in which individuals develop attachments and how personal attachment style influences the development of trust based on touch.

A third contribution lies with our work integrating research highlighting the need to account for individual differences among retail customers (Verhoef et al. 2009). The fact that individuals differ in their touch avoidance (Fromme et al. 1989; Hall and Veccia 1990) or need for touch (Peck and Childers 2003) has just begun to attract interest in retailing and consumer research. The finding that need for touch enhances customer trust in response to a salesperson's touch, which impacts product evaluation extends the construct's relevance to the interpersonal relationships literature. Similarly, cultural differences in touching behavior represent an established difference between cultures (Hertenstein et al. 2006). Our finding that the influence of touch is less pronounced with individuals more used to personal touching behavior adds to the mounting evidence that cultural characteristics affect buyer-seller-relationships specifically in crowded (Pons et al. 2006), and trust-related contexts (Park et al. 2012).

Several managerial implications of the present research are worth noting. Managers should pay more attention to touch as a potent nonverbal means of communication. Given that trust in a salesperson may be a starting point for the development of key relationship outcomes, including satisfaction (Beatty et al. 1996) and loyalty (Swan et al. 1999), touch's effect on trust should assume an important role above and beyond the effect on product evaluation established here.

Of further importance to managing relationships between customers and sales associates is the finding that the effects of interpersonal touch vary between individuals according to their need-for touch and personal touching behavior. While the notion that – in order to instill trust and be successful – a sales person needs to adapt their behavior to a customer's characteristics is certainly not novel, establishing which individuals and cultures respond more favorably to

interpersonal touch should assist managers in more successfully using this means of nonverbal communication in retailing encounters.

4.2. Limitations and prospects for future research

Despite the importance of our findings to retail research and management, a few limitations need mentioning. Coupled with the new insights we have outlined from this research, we offer five avenues for future research.

First, this study was set in the context of wine retailing in Germany and France using an environment designed to closely resemble a store. Future research could test alternative factors in the treatments (e.g., a touch on the elbow versus on the shoulder or a handshake as a formal gesture, which is common in some cultures but not in others). The effects of different aspects of interpersonal touch, such as frequency, duration, or weight, should also be investigated.

Second, though our study focuses on the positive aspects of a salesperson's touch, a few studies have suggested that interpersonal touch may have negative effects as well (e.g., Burgoon 1991). For example, a touch by a salesperson that avoids eye contact, emits body odor, or adopts an ambiguous posture or body orientation may lack the positive effects established in our research. Additional studies should investigate the conditions in which a salesperson's touch yields positive effects, especially by examining the interactive effects with other verbal and nonverbal means of communication.

Third, our research is based on evaluative and intention measures provided by respondents after they finished the wine buying scenario. Other alternative methodologies, such as observational techniques or field studies, could provide additional insights.

Fourth, personal factors other than need-for-touch and touching behavior, such as gender or shopping motivation, may influence customer trust and product evaluation. Incorporating gender appears a worthwhile endeavor given the differential effects of touch in same-gender and cross-gender dyads (e.g., Hubbard et al. 2003), as well as touch-related differences between males and females in general (Dibiase and Gunnoe 2004; Hall and Veccia 1990). Researchers could also examine the effects of situational factors, such as browsing (hedonic motivation) versus buying (utilitarian shopping motivation; Baker and Wakefield 2011).

Fifth, though one of the contributions of this research is its focus on the customer as the target of a sales person's touch, further research might also switch the focus to take a deeper look at the salesperson. A carefully crafted study examining this issue could significantly contribute to a better understanding of the role of interpersonal touch in adaptive selling.

In sum, this study provides insight into the psychological process of how a salesperson's fleeting touch on a customer's shoulder influences trust and product evaluation contingent upon individual characteristics. We hope the contribution of this study will stimulate further research in this important field.

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APPENDIX

Table 2 : Regression Results for Conditional Indirect Effect – Need for Touch

Predictor	*B*	*SE*	*t*	*p*
Trust				
Constant	-.51	.30	-1.65	.101
Touch	.33	.19	2.74	.008
Product evaluation				
Constant	-.01	.09	-.03	.488
Trust	.45	.11	5.56	.001
NFT	.16	.09	1.55	.124
Touch x NFT	.25	.13	2.17	.032
	Boot indirect effect	Boot *SE*	Boot *z*	Boot *p*
Need for touch				
Conditional indirect effect at N-exp = M ± 1 SD				
- 1 SD (-1.01)	.03	.06	.49	.586
M (-.01)	.14	.04	1.82	.080
+1 SD (1.00)	.36	.05	2.75	.013
	Boot indirect effect	Boot *SE*	Boot *z*	Boot *p*
Need for touch				
Conditional indirect effect at range of values of N-exp				
-2.83	.07	.14	.94	.348
-2.35	.04	.12	1.08	.282
-1.87	.07	.10	1.26	.191
-1.39	.08	.08	1.64	.133
-.90	.11	.07	1.82	.099
-.42	.15	.06	2.21	.068
.06	.19	.06	2.51	.027
.54	.23	.08	2.64	.012
1.03	.27	.10	2.77	.007
1.51	.32	.12	2.80	.006
1.99	.36	.14	2.95	.003

Note. N = 107. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. Bootstrap sample size = 5,000. Range of values represent an abbreviated version of the output provided by the macro.

Table 3 : Regression Results for Conditional Indirect Effect – Personal Touching Behavior

Predictor	*B*	*SE*	*t*	*p*
Trust				
Constant	-.51	.30	-1.65	.101
Touch	.33	.19	2.74	.008
Product evaluation				
Constant	-.01	.08	-.05	.963
Trust	.37	.08	3.61	.001
PTB	.07	.08	1.25	.215
Touch x PTB	-.41	.10	-4.27	.001
Need for touch	Boot indirect effect	Boot *SE*	Boot *z*	Boot *p*
Conditional indirect effect at N-exp = M ± 1 SD				
- 1 SD (-1.01)	.29	.05	2.83	.005
M (-.01)	.24	.07	2.53	.011
+1 SD (1.01)	.09	.06	1.30	.194
Need for touch	Boot indirect effect	Boot *SE*	Boot *z*	Boot *p*
Conditional indirect effect at range of values of N-exp				
-3.73	-.33	.20	2.90	.004
-3.16	-.30	.19	2.78	.005
-2.59	-.27	.16	2.55	.009
-2.03	-.24	.13	2.26	.013
-1.46	-.21	.11	2.08	.028
-.89	-.18	.08	1.92	.045
-.32	-.15	.06	1.77	.066
.25	-.12	.05	1.67	.096
.82	-.10	.05	1.58	.114
1.39	-.07	.05	.82	.414
1.96	-.04	.04	.35	.725

Note. N = 107. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. Bootstrap sample size = 5,000. Range of values represent an abbreviated version of the output provided by the macro.