

# Influence of persuasive norms on the *personal shopper* service

## *Efecto de normas de persuasión en el servicio personal shopper*



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**Abstract:**

Some key disadvantages of online computer sales stem from unmet consumer expectations, insufficient product knowledge, and product returns. This study examined cognitive route factors and persuasive norms in online advertisements to determine the purchase intention of personal shopper services for laptops. Covariates included gender, educational level, marital status, prior shopping experiences, monthly income, and workplace location. The results from a mixed-methodology approach indicate that peripheral route advertising messages positively impact the purchase intention of personal shopper services, especially among women. Findings also demonstrate that monthly income and educational level influence the purchase intention of laptops when aided by a personal shopper. It was found that women prefer personal shoppers providing clear responses, while men prefer those with technical knowledge. Additionally, women prefer to pay for the personal shopper service as 3% of the purchase value, whereas men favoured a single payment. Finally, the purchase intention for the personal shopper service is higher among women. The potential effects of advertising messages on the purchase intention of the service are discussed.

**Keywords.**

Personal shopper, purchase intention, cognitive route, persuasion, online sales

**Resumen:**

*Las desventajas en la venta de computadores en línea se centran en quejas de los consumidores por expectativas, desconocimiento y devoluciones de productos. Esta investigación realizada en Bogotá-Colombia, examinó factores de ruta cognitiva y normas de persuasión, en anuncios en línea para determinar la intención de compra del servicio de personal shopper en laptops, considerando las covariables (género, nivel educativo, estado civil, experiencias de compra, ingresos mensuales y lugar de trabajo). Los resultados con una metodología mixta indican que los mensajes publicitarios bajo la ruta periférica en mujeres aumentan la intención de compra del servicio de personal shopper. Nuestros hallazgos muestran que ingresos mensuales y nivel educativo influyen en la intención de compra de un laptop con asistencia de personal shopper. Se descubrió que las mujeres prefieren los personal shopper con respuestas claras y los hombres los prefieren con conocimientos técnicos. Por otro lado, las mujeres prefieren pagar el servicio de personal shopper por el 3% del valor de la compra y los hombres en un único pago. Finalmente, la intención de compra del servicio de personal shopper se encuentra más alto dentro de las mujeres. Se discuten posibles efectos de los mensajes de la publicidad en la intención de compra del servicio.*

**Palabras clave.**

*Comprador personal; intención de compra; ruta cognitiva; persuasión; ventas en línea.*

**1. Introduction**

Computer sales have increased worldwide. The growing dynamics of remote work and distance education, prompted by the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, has augmented the need for computers. According to the World Trade Organisation- (WTO) (2020), the market for computers and electronic components expanded by 10% during the third quarter of 2020 compared to the corresponding period in the previous year, demonstrating the pandemic's impact on computer consumption. According to the International Data Corporation (IDC) (2021), the performance of the PC market during the third quarter of 2020 exhibited the most robust growth in the past decade. During this period, global sales reached 81.3m units from June to September, driven by the surge in demand resulting from new dynamics in remote working and learning. In Asia-Pacific, excluding Japan, a 10% growth was recorded, particularly for laptops for home-based education and work. Canada experienced its 17th consecutive quarter of growth in the computer market, while in Europe, the Middle East and Africa (EMEA) region, laptop sales also surged by 10%. This growth was supported by government policies, such as the UK and Japanese governments' distribution of laptops and tablets to facilitate online learning for students. In Latin America and the U.S, the market witnessed a 10% growth for the

first time in the last five years; demand for laptops in the region continues to rise, even as prices of laptops in these regions have soared due to high demand and shortages of components resulting from shrinking global supply chains (IDC, 2021).

However, worldwide sales of PCs in 2022 are expected to reach 292 million units, representing a decrease of 16.5% compared to 2021. This decline can be attributed to several factors, including the easing of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, rising prices of electronic components and the war in Ukraine (IDC, 2022). Similarly, the consultancy Gartner (2022) also estimated that global PC sales in 2022 would reach 292 million units, representing a 16.6% drop compared to 2021. These figures suggest that the PC market entered a consolidation phase following significant growth during the pandemic, with a slight bounce back in 2023 with an increase of 2.5%.

In Colombia, as in other parts of the world, the demand for computers has surged due to the shift towards remote work and study. Households need more computers to cater to the needs of each member, while businesses are acquiring additional computers in order to equip their employees. According to Growth From Knowledge (GfK) (2020), from April to June 2020, Colombia witnessed a 62% increase in laptop sales compared to the same timeframe in the previous year due to quarantine measures. According to Téllez (2020), the trends in the computer market in Colombia have fluctuated: (1) between January and April 2020, there was a 21% rise in computer sales compared to the corresponding period in 2019. (2) the average price per item increased from \$403 in May 2019 to an average price of \$432 in May 2020. (3) Cumulative laptop sales from January to April 2020 accounted for 87% of the total sales in this category. (4) virtual computer sales surged by 100% between March and April 2020, with online sales skyrocketing by 900% compared to the same period in 2019. However, notable shifts in market dynamics occurred in subsequent years. Indeed, if we compare sales figures for 2023 to those for 2022, we can see that sales decreased by 2.6%. With 1.7 million units sold, it is evident that the boom triggered by the pandemic has entered a process of contraction. Notably, post-pandemic preferences lean towards laptops, reflecting their mobility and suitability for remote work. However, the outlook for companies is different as fixed equipment predominates due to specific applications used in companies (Ospina, 2023).

According to Stanton *et al.* (2007), laptops are considered comparison shopping goods, alongside items like clothing, furniture, high-value household appliances and cars. These goods are characterised by infrequent purchases, leading to outdated product information available to consumers. Access to purchase information is facilitated through various channels, such as family, friends or advertising. Consumers evaluate factors such as value for money, the origin and availability of the product, and, in the case of a repurchase, brand loyalty (Mesa, 2012). According to Stanton *et al.* (2007), access to more information allows consumers to make informed decisions, potentially saving them money and aligning their purchases with the product's expected benefits.

Purchasing a laptop without adequate information can lead to consumer dissatisfaction. Making a purchase decision about such products requires clarity regarding the expected attributes and benefits of the product. Woolcott *et al.* (2019) assert that disparities between the information provided by sellers and consumer expectations or requirements lead to an imbalance in consumer relations, where consumers are subjected to the dominance of sellers. The Colombian Consumer Opinion Survey reported an overall balance of 13.6% for the Consumer Confidence Index (CCI) in November 2020, marking an increase from the 14.4% recorded in the same month of the previous year. Specifically, the CCI of durable goods in November 2020 stood at 44.5%,

compared to 5.2% reported in November 2019, indicating a decline in consumer confidence. Similar trends are observed in the data during 2022 and 2023, with the CCI showing increases in consumer confidence of 2.5 and 3.6, respectively, in December compared to previous months (FEDESARROLLO, 2023). In line with Barreto (2020), consumer complaints have been on the rise. For example, from January to May 2020, the Delegation for Consumer Protection received 784 complaints, compared to 303 complaints during the same period in 2019. These consumer complaints were related to misleading advertising, failure to meet delivery deadlines, delivery of different products, and lack of response from customer service channels, indicative of a lack of communication and information between sellers and buyers. Potential uncertainties at the time of purchase may prompt consumers to seek and access information that allows them to update their understanding of the product they intend to purchase (Perreault et al., 2016).

Inexperienced consumers require expert advice when making significant purchases. Personal shoppers are now recognised as valuable advisers, leveraging their expertise and experience to alleviate consumer uncertainty and facilitate decision-making processes. According to Ayuningtyas & Mohd (2019), the profession of personal shopping is in high demand, with its success hinging on establishing trust between the shopper and consumer, who prefer advisors who respond responsibly and courteously. In recent years, there has been a notable uptick in demand for personal shopper services, driven by consumers seeking specialised and personalised shopping advice. This heightened interest is evident across various aspects of everyday life, reflecting trends towards personalised experiences, fast-paced lifestyles, convenience, emphasis on personal image and self-expression, as well as the growing influence of social media, among other factors (Aldana, 2023, Arslan et al., 2021; Anwar et al., 2020; Kurniasih, 2019). Recent studies show a significant increase in the adoption of personal shopping services, with a notable rise in consumers seeking expert advice and recommendations for their purchases (“Opportunities, Demand for personal shoppers”, 2021). This phenomenon, in turn, is directly linked to increased sales in various sectors (Meza, 2022). Moreover, personal shopper services have consolidated their position as a consumer trend, reflecting the evolving preferences and needs of contemporary consumers, who seek to personalise their shopping experiences, aligning them with their continually evolving lifestyles and adapting them to new consumption habits and needs (Marroquín-Ciendúa & Palacios-Chavarro, 2022). In this context, personal shopper services not only fulfil the demand for personalised shopping but also respond to the dynamic evolution of consumer expectations.

Kurniasih (2019) highlights that a personal shopper is remunerated when this professional assists a consumer at the time of purchase. This entails accompanying the customer when purchasing, aiding in optimal product or service selection, providing information, and addressing queries to facilitate informed decision-making. According to Burke (1999), a personal shopper must be able to anticipate, identify and map the consumer’s desires, alternatives and priorities. The perceived benefits that the customer obtains from the personal shopper’s advice should be substantial, contributing to client satisfaction, which, as noted by Kotler & Armstrong (2013), is the ultimate outcome of quality service. The quality of service the personal shopper provides influences consumer purchasing decisions; despite the perceived high cost of this service, more and more consumers are choosing to use personal shopper assistance for their purchases (Ayuningtyas & Mohd, 2019). Finally, emotions play a pivotal role in purchasing decisions, as Moody et al. (2010) highlighted that consumers prefer products/services that align with their identity.

The results of this research aim to enhance understanding of factors that may influence laptop buyers' preferences for the personal shopper service. To achieve this goal, the Elaboration Likelihood Model- ELM proposed by Petty & Cacioppo (1986) was employed to understand the influence of both central and peripheral routes in conjunction with various persuasion tactics described by Armitage & Conner (1999), and Schiffman & Kanuk (2010). The rationale behind this study lies in determining the users' preferences regarding the personal shopper service through digital advertising, given that it focuses on providing reasons for purchasing (Kulsum et al. 2020) and identifying the receiver responses, as it also facilitates audience segmentation and targeted messaging (Kotler, 2007). This medium was chosen due to its capacity for penetration and dissemination, compared to others that require in-person visits, such as point-of-sale promotions or those that reach a broad audience rather than a specific buyer, such as outdoor advertising (Esteban & Lorenzo, 2013).

## 2. Theoretical framework

It can be asserted that a personal shopper must possess specific characteristics, including validated professional training in their service field. It is also essential to be empathetic, charismatic and patient, as well as to have effective communication skills that are both assertive and empathetic. In some domains, a keen sense of taste and keeping up to date with consumption trends and social and cultural aspects are indispensable. Similarly, previous experience in navigating and liaising with specialised trade centres, shops, and other industry professionals is vital, as it allows access to exclusive information on new products and services (Pinto, 2021; Anwar *et al.*, 2020).

In addition, personal shoppers must possess observational skills to identify clients' needs effectively, as well as adaptability and creativity that enable them to find solutions within the constraints of the purchasing and consumption processes. Furthermore, this professional must be able to plan and organise, especially when managing multiple consultations or projects simultaneously. Being client-oriented is imperative, implying an understanding and respect for individual preferences. It is also necessary to have financial literacy, encompassing a basic knowledge of budgeting and cost-effectiveness, which are essential for optimising purchases within the clients' financial constraints (Ahearne *et al.*, 2022; Arslan *et al.*, 2021; Aldana, 2023).

Consistent with the above, the credibility of personal shoppers may vary based on their training, experience and reputation, all of which should be coupled with comprehensive knowledge and a proven track record in advisory services. Additionally, a portfolio and positive testimonials from satisfied clients are crucial. Positive recommendations and reviews enhance personal shoppers' credibility and showcase their ability to understand and fulfil their client's needs. Over time, a personal shopper's credibility is built through client satisfaction, professional integrity and a consistent demonstration of updated skills and knowledge in the field they serve as personal shoppers. In this way, connections with retailers and other professionals, professional ethics, adaptability, continuous learning and online presence also count. Regarding the latter, a robust online presence, whether through a professional website, social media profiles or partnerships with reputable brands, can enhance credibility. The consistency and quality of their online content are also factors to consider (Etrata *et al.*, 2022; Ahearne *et al.*, 2022; Oraedu *et al.*, 2021; Kurniasih, 2019).

On the other hand, various behavioural theories address the concepts of intention and persuasion when purchasing an item. Intention, as defined by Ajzen & Fishbein (1975), is identified as the primary determinant predicting voluntary behaviour. This concept aligns with the Theory of Reasoned Action, as such behaviour is closely related to motivational factors surrounding opportunities, resource availability, and ease of access to them to perform a particular action or behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Gotschi *et al.* (2009) argue that behaviour manifests as a causal outcome of behavioural intentions, which are influenced by subjective norms and attitudes. According to Servey (1974), attitude is a psychological construct in which emotions and beliefs combine, predisposing an individual to respond positively or negatively towards other individuals, objects and/or institutions. As described by Armitage & Conner (1999), subjective norms refer to an individual's perception of social acceptance within their reference groups concerning specific behaviours. This perception guides individuals to act in a way consistent with the norms accepted or rejected by these groups, which, according to Ajzen (1991), refers to their family, friends and work relationships. As outlined by Schiffman & Kanuk (2010), the subjective norm is evaluated by assessing how the consumer feels about what other individuals in their context would think of the contemplated action. Thus, attitudes and subjective norms provide insight into what holds significance for individuals when making decisions, considering the perceptions of their reference groups.

As Petty & Cacioppo (1986) state, persuasion is defined as any attempt to alter an individual's attitude when exposed to a persuasive stimulus, considering that the shift in attitude arises not solely from the information received but also from how the individual interprets that information (Petty *et al.*, 2008). This theoretical model is called the Elaboration Likelihood Model of Persuasion (ELM) (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). The model posits that the information the individual receives is processed using two cognitive pathways: the central and peripheral routes (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). According to these authors, information processed via the central route is done in greater detail, depth, and involvement from the individual, resulting in attitude changes. On the other hand, information processed via the peripheral route is not elaborated well and relies on little information. The psychological processes vary for each route, central or peripheral, and outcomes regarding attitude change differ. As Petty & Wegener (1998) stated, peripheral processing described in the ELM model indicates minimal effort is needed to change attitudes towards the stimulus. In such instances, individuals' attitudes are more susceptible to external components of the message, such as its design or the attractiveness or credibility of the source. In contrast, central route processing, from the ELM model, involves careful consideration of message elements, particularly the depth of the arguments presented, which can lead to attitude change (Feldman, 2014).

According to Cialdini *et al.* (1990), an individual's behaviour is influenced by their reference groups within an environment perceived as normal, considering socially approved and desired actions, thus providing individuals with a context for acting in a manner that is aligned with the actions observed in other individuals in their reference groups (Normative Focus Theory). The individual's behaviour is guided towards normative pathways: descriptive and prescriptive norms. Based on White *et al.* (2009), descriptive norms define typical or normal behaviour, motivating the individual's action by providing evidence of adequate and appropriate actions. This behaviour motivates the individual and is repeated because what is considered "normal" is effective and serves as an adequate model for environmental adaptation (Cialdini *et al.*, 1990). White *et al.* (2009) highlight that prescriptive norms motivate the individual's action by highlighting potential social rewards and punishments for participating in or refraining from certain behaviours. In the prescriptive norm, individuals' acts are based on socially

approved or disapproved norms, driven by the anticipated effects of their behaviour (Cialdini, 2003). According to Schwartz (1977), there is a third type of norm, personal norms, consisting of personal mandates or moral norms. These norms operate as moral rules internalised by the individual, reflecting the perception of self-approval or disapproval in engaging in specific behaviour. This implies a sense of personal responsibility to act in accordance with these moral standards. Manstead (2000) indicates that personal norms, or moral standards, are independent of immediate expectations and influences from others, playing a significant role in predicting behaviours with moral or ethical implications.

Moreover, as Campbell & Kirmani (2008) argue, consumers are aware of how sales agents attempt to influence their decisions, which sometimes creates a sense of scepticism or detachment from perceived persuasive intentions during the purchase. Understanding the impact of persuasion on purchase decisions is crucial for designing successful marketing strategies. Persuasion during sales involves understanding the characteristics a personal shopper should possess, as stereotypes related to gender or other attributes of the sales agent can affect the buyers' perception of their credibility. This understanding of persuasion leads to preconceptions about brands and product recognition (Sujan *et al.*, 1986). Briñol *et al.* (2015) emphasise that the clarity of the message directly influences persuasion and consumer decision-making as individuals tend to resist change when they realise that they are being persuaded. Consumers perceive it as a threat to their freedom and autonomy when the marketer tries to influence their way of thinking, reacting with resistance or opposition to the received message (Vohs *et al.*, 2007). The source's credibility is paramount for consumers, as it impacts the acceptance of the persuasive message; in the case of celebrities, attention to the message differs. According to Hedhli *et al.* (2021), applying the notions of "source internalisation (central route)" and "source identification (peripheral route)" described by Kelman (1961), source credibility can play a dual role, both peripheral and central, in a persuasive context. Attention to message content and detail suggests interactions between source features and product category (Kang & Herr, 2006); a source feature will only be effective in the message if it aligns with the right product. For example, physically attractive models may not necessarily be effective for advertising computers (Kamins, 1990). However, according to Celsi & Olson (1988), the product category is a critical determinant of enduring consumer engagement and motivation. Consumer interest and attention to the message are higher for larger goods such as computers.

### 3. Methodology

This study was conducted in Bogota, Colombia and employed a mixed methodology approach across three phases. The first phase is qualitative, the second inferential and the third experimental, using a "pure" experiment with two or more comparison groups. Data collection took place at the end of 2020. Participants for all three phases were recruited from social media platforms, Facebook and Instagram, selected for the research. The population characteristics were finite and discrete. In the first phase, 12 subjects interested in buying a computer shortly were selected. For the second phase, a non-probabilistic sampling method was employed on an N= 1610, with heterogeneity =50%, confidence level=95% and a margin of error=0.5. A total of 311 participants were included in the study, with those under 18 and over 65 excluded (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Participant description**

Variable	Description	M	SD
Gender	Women (42.4%), Men (57.6 %).		
Age	30 to 40 (45 %), 40 to 50(39 %), 50 to 60 (16%)	42.4	7.9
Workplace	Home (63.3%), Office (36.7%)		
Number of computers purchased	0(5.1%), 1(20.6%), 2(33.8%), 3(18.6%), 4(10.6%), 5(4.2%),6(7.1 %)	2.4	1.5
Marital Status	Single (21.8%), Married (59.2%), Divorced (16.8%), Widowed (2.2%)		
Monthly income (USD)	600 (42%), 900 (47%), 1200 (11%)		

**Source: created by the authors**

In the second experimental phase, 179 subjects were selected with the following characteristics: Gender (male 50.8 %, female 49.2%), Age: 40 to 50 years old (M= 44.58, SD= 3.21), Occupation (employed 74.9%, student 1.7%, self-employed 23.5 %), Educational level in years (11 (2.2 %), 13 (3.4 %), 16 (27.9%), 17 (26.3%), 18 (30.7%), 22 (9.5%) and monthly income (in USD). (300 (1.1) 600 (0.6%), 900 (2.2%), 1200 (1.1%), 1500 (8.9%), 1800 (19.6%), 2100 (25.1%), 2400 (21.8%), >2400 (19.6%).

#### 4. Design

An experiment was conducted employing a 2x2x3 factorial design to analyse consumer attention to the presented advertising and their intention to purchase the personal shopper service across 12 factorial groups segregated by gender. A world-renowned computer brand in its laptop version was evaluated. Each group was subjected to three factors: Cognitive route, Persuasion norm, and Participant gender. The levels of the first factor were central and peripheral, while for the Persuasion norm factor, the levels were descriptive, social and personal. All experimental groups were exposed to the same advertising material, albeit with variations in the messages based on their location within the factorial matrix. Participants were randomly assigned to each experimental group, each consisting of 12 subjects. The design demonstrated a small magnitude  $\omega^2 = 0.1$  and a power of 0.7.

#### 5. Instrument

Two data collection instruments were used: a general interest form in the initial study and an advertising attention and purchase intention form in the subsequent research (Marroquín-Ciendúa *et al.*, 2020) with Cronbach's  $\alpha = .86$ . Attitudes towards the advertising were assessed using various semantic differential scales, which measured attitudes towards the image, text and information conveyed in the advertisement. Purchase intention was measured using Likert scales ranging from 1 to

5, with 5 indicating “I will definitely buy it” and 1 indicating “I will definitely not buy it”. During the experimental phase, the brand associated with outcomes from the first and second parts of the study was used. The instruments were administered electronically, and no incentives were provided for participation.

The advertising items required in the experimental design were validated by judgements from three expert judges, who analysed their coherence with the types of norms and concerning the central or peripheral route (Figure 1). Female participants were presented with a female advisor, while male participants were presented with a male advisor. As illustrated in Figure 1, the advertising items were arranged with the following combined texts:

**Central route:** *“Get advice when buying a laptop” for only 3% of the purchase value.*

**Texts on the characteristics of the computer:**

*“14 HD”, “Core i5-10th Gen, Quad-core”, “RAM 8GB-DDR4”, “SSD 256GB”*

**Peripheral route:** *“Get advice when buying a laptop”, “We have the best advisors with clear answers”.*

Texts on the characteristics of the computer:

*“Better design, more style”, Really lightweight”, “Innovative like you”.*

**Descriptive norm:** *“Many women have already made up their minds.”*

**Prescriptive norm:** *“Don’t waste your money, Save!”*

**Personal norm:** *“Your family will thank you for this purchase.”*

Figure 1. Experimental advertisements



Source: created by the authors

## 6. Procedure

The results were analysed across three phases: (1) qualitative, (2) inferential and (3) experimental. In Phase (1), in-depth interviews were conducted using an instrument validated by experts, covering topics derived from the literature: (a) description of the computer purchasing process, (b) experiences when shopping for applications, (c) perception of purchase values, (d) preferences for computer equipment, (e) characteristics inspiring confidence when purchasing a computer, and (f) expected attributes of a Colombian personal shopper. The results were analysed using Vogant Tools software. Concerning Phase (2), various hypotheses based on the literature and research axes were contrasted; the association of the preferred brand of suppliers, type of computer and interest in the personal shopper service with demographic variables such as age, gender, educational level, occupation, work experience, place of work and monthly income were determined. Finally, in Phase (3), attention to the advertisements and purchase intention elicited by messages selected by the judges were evaluated using semantic differential scales. Attitude was assessed using the scales proposed by Chang (2015), while purchase intention used measures from Marroquín-Ciendúa *et al.* (2020) and Chang (2015). This experimental phase featured 12 visual advertisements, with  $n=12$  in each experimental condition. Each experimental group viewed electronically presented advertisements corresponding to their condition, maintaining consistent temporal, environmental and spatial conditions throughout. All phases were conducted with informed consent and assent forms, outlining research objectives, voluntariness of participation, data privacy and information handling. Analyses for the latter two phases were carried out using SPSS version 27.

## 7. Results

### 7.1. Qualitative phase

Two rapport questions and six open-ended questions were posed in the qualitative analysis. The corpus length and lexicometric density were estimated for each question, focusing on aspects such as the intention to purchase the advisory service when purchasing a computer, consumption practices, preferences about computer equipment, and characteristics expected from consumers who provide the personal shopper service. The corpus has a length of 9950, a vocabulary density of 0.15, a number of 1532 different words, a corpus retention percentage of 86% and 34.1 words per sentence. Empty words were excluded from the analysis in line with the research objectives, and full words with semantic meaning were retained.

During the lexometric analysis of the responses, participants expressed having bought computer equipment before, needing assistance during the purchasing process, and emphasising the importance of trust and credibility in the advisor because they require the equipment to work at home, update technology, and capitalise on promotions. Frequencies indicate that shoppers preferred to have a knowledgeable and approachable advisor accompany them, with the option to consult them through a digital application.

Similarly, the findings pertaining to each question posed show the presence of needs and habits regarding the necessity for purchasing assistance when acquiring a computer. Concerning computer purchasing processes, the findings underscore the importance of checking the item's price, knowing the equipment's capacity, determining the technology used, verifying its availability in stores and consulting the features offered online. Textual analysis indicates that the most frequently mentioned

terms include “check”, “price”, “features”, “internet”, and “capacity”. The frequency of these words may indicate an association with cognitive behaviours related to obtaining a reasonable quote, locating an available store, and finding a salesperson, reflecting the typical purchasing behaviour associated with this type of product (Figure 2a).

The results concerning the values buyers seek when purchasing a computer indicate that consumers value the attention and advice provided by the salesperson and the storage capacity and overall equipment quality. Respondents frequently mention “trust”, “help”, and “advice”. The word cloud illustrates the significance of phrases such as “advice from the person”, “storage capacity”, and “customer service”. This seems to suggest that consumers perceive the purchase not only as acquiring a physical product but also as obtaining intangible benefits such as advice from the salesperson (Figure 2b). Regarding the experiences reported by respondents when buying computers through apps, the results reveal a tendency among technology buyers to use apps and platforms. Frequent words include “technology”, “apps”, “shopping”, “good”, “shop”, and “internet”. These findings suggest that consumers generally have had positive experiences during the purchase process (Figure 2c).

When asked what their preferences were (brand, style, price, laptop or desktop) when buying a computer, participants preferred laptops, emphasising the significance of the computer and a trusted brand. The word analysis shows the following recurring terms: “trust”, “laptop”, “brand”, “design”, and “HP”. These findings indicate that considerations related to computer equipment encompass not only physical attributes but also concepts that may carry hedonic and conspicuous meanings (Figure 2d). In addition, when asked about the qualities that inspire confidence in a personal shopper when buying a computer, the results highlight frequent mentions of “knowledge”, “technology”, and “security”. It is noteworthy that words closely associated with “person” include “brand”, “generate”, “trust”, “know”, and “team”. These words highlight the importance of expertise and brand association in shaping the desirable traits of a personal shopper (Figure 2e). Lastly, when participants were asked about the attributes of a Colombian personal shopper, they emphasised the importance of understanding the customer. The most frequent words include “knowledge”, “person”, “have”, “proposed”, and “good presentation” (Figure 2f).



## 7.2. Quantitative Phase

In the quantitative phase, various hypotheses derived from the qualitative research axes were tested (Table 2). The results of the relationships between the variables indicate H1: Shoppers' gender is associated with personal shopper characteristics  $\chi^2(4, N=302) = 10.34, p=.03$ . Female gender shoppers prefer advisors who offer clear responses. In contrast, male-gender shoppers prefer those with technical knowledge. H2: Shoppers' gender is associated with the value willing to be paid for the personal shopper service  $\chi^2(2, N=302) = 6.92, p=.0$ . Women prefer to pay the personal shopper three per cent of the purchase value. In contrast, men prefer a single payment of USD 26. H3: Individuals with a monthly income of USD 900 demonstrate a willingness to pay for advice at the time of computer purchase  $\chi^2(2, N=302) = 6.92, p=.0$ . Regarding the characteristics of the computer, the findings show that regardless of gender: H4: Participants are willing to pay for consultancy at the time of purchase if the computer is a laptop  $\chi^2(1, N=302) = 7.18, p=.0$ , H5: Buyers prefer the brand Hewlett-Packard and laptop  $\chi^2(7, N=256) = 14.26, p=.0$ , H6: Participants choose to receive purchase advice through digital channels  $\chi^2(4, N=302) = 19.81, p=.0$  y H7: Buyers are inclined to pay between USD 570 -865 for a laptop  $\chi^2(4, N=302) = 9.91, p=.0$ . These results were used to determine the messages of each route, the image of the computer within the advertisements, the participants' monthly income in the experimental part and the characteristics of the advisor dependent on the gender of the shopper.

**Table 2. Hypothesis testing**

H1	Result
H1: Shoppers' gender is associated with personal shopper characteristics	$\chi^2(4, N=302) = 10.34, p=.03$
H2: Shoppers' gender is associated with the value they are willing to be pay for personal shopper services	$\chi^2(3, N=311) = 16.03, p=.0$
H3: Individuals with a monthly income of USD 900 are willing to pay for advice at the time of computer purchase	$\chi^2(2, N=302) = 6.92, p=.0$
H4: Participants are willing to pay for advice at the time of purchase if the device is a laptop	$\chi^2(1, N=302) = 7.18, p=.0$
H5: Buyers prefer Hewlett-Packard and laptops	$\chi^2(7, N=256) = 14.26, p=.0$
H6: Participants choose to receive the purchase advice service through digital channels	$\chi^2(4, N=302) = 19.81, p=.0$
H7: Buyers are inclined to pay between USD 570-865 for a laptop	$\chi^2(4, N=302) = 9.91, p=.0$

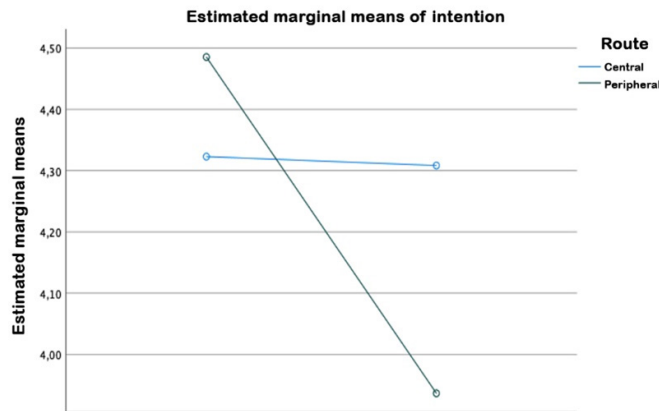
Source: created by the authors

## 7.3. Experimental phase

Finally, the experimental phase's results aim to elucidate the influence of the central and peripheral routes, along with different norms of persuasion, on attitudes towards the advertisements and the intention to purchase the personal shopper service.

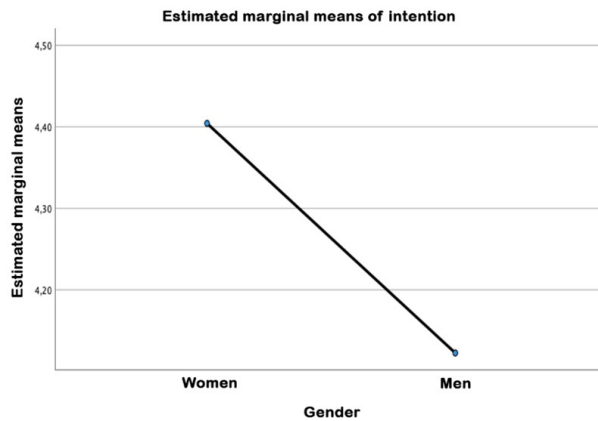
Regarding attitudes towards advertisements, the results indicate no significant differences between the means of the routes ( $M_{\text{central}}= 4.87, SD= 1.22, M_{\text{peripheral}}= 4.87, SD=1.24$ ) and none of the chosen factors or covariates demonstrated significant effects  $F(11, N=179) = 1.20, p=.28$ . Regarding the intention to buy the service, the results show that the three selected factors do not influence the intention to buy the service. However, there was some influence when covariates such as education level (in years) and monthly income (in dollars) were added. Specifically for individuals with an education level of 17 years  $F(12, N=179) = 2.73, p=.0$ , it was found that under the route and female gender, the intention means were higher than the other advertisements  $M=4.48, SD=0.12; F(1, N=179)=4.45, p=.0$  (Figure 4<sup>a</sup>). Similarly, significant differences were found concerning the female gender factor ( $M=4.40, SD=0.08$ );  $F(1, N=179) = 4.97, p=.02$  (Figure 4b). No other effects of the selected factors were observed. The findings show that the chosen messages under the peripheral route enhance the intention to purchase the personal shopper service for a computer when the prospective customer is a woman with 17 years of schooling. Regarding the monthly income covariate USD 2100, a significant effect was observed  $F(1, N=179) = 6.46, p=.01$ , indicating that under the female gender, there is a greater intention to purchase the service ( $M=4.40, SD=0.09$ );  $F(1, N=179) = 0.51, p=.03$  (Figure 4c). The largest partial effect size,  $\eta^2=0.83$ , is reported in the monthly income covariate regarding purchase intention.

**Table 4. Estimated measures of intention levels by gender**



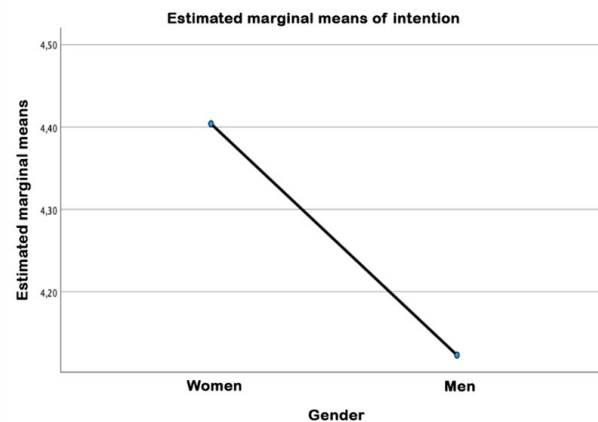
**Figure 4 (a). Influence of intention on educational level by (a) cognitive route and gender.  $M=4.48, SD=0.12$**

**Source: created by the authors**



**Figure 4(b). Gender and influence of intention on educational level by monthly income.**  
**M=4.40, SD=0.08.**

Source: created by the authors



**Figure 4(c). Women have higher purchase intention when they have a monthly income of USD 2100.**  
**M=4.40, SD=0.09.**

Source: created by the authors

Source: created by the authors

## 8. Discussion

In the qualitative phase findings, it was identified that consumer behaviour concerning computer purchase and consumption practices may be influenced by the need for reliable and credible advisors, coupled with an understanding and expertise of the technical features of these products and their implications for intended usage. Moreover, values linked to brands, warranty and post-sales service, cost-effectiveness, and references emerged as significant predictors of computer purchasing behaviour. These observations are corroborated by textual data from participants and align with the findings of Mesa (2012). Notably, it becomes evident that existing brand familiarity engenders positive attitudes towards the tangible features of computers,

alongside hedonic and conspicuous tendencies, which also extend to high-value items such as fashionable clothing, household appliances, furniture and cars, among others, impacting participants' purchasing decisions (Stanton, 2007). Furthermore, the potential access to additional information and arguments concerning the product can foster trust and demonstrate a tangible return on the effort invested in the search. These conditions have the potential to significantly sway the decision to purchase a computer (Stanton, 2007). Indeed, according to Woolcott *et al.* (2019), and in line with the research's findings, misinformation regarding these products can disrupt the balance in buyer-seller relationships, fostering perceptions of subordination and inequality vis-a-vis sellers. Consequently, uncertainty and insecurity during the computer purchasing process may prompt consumers to search for information to update their knowledge and bolster their confidence in their purchase decisions (Perreault *et al.* 2016).

Based on the above, and considering that the role of the personal shopper is currently recognised as a valuable alternative for providing knowledge and expertise to buyers, aiming to reduce uncertainty and assist in purchasing and consumption decisions, the current study, in its quantitative and experimental phases, sought to explore the understanding of factors that, for laptop buyers, could influence their preferences towards the personal shopper service.

In the results of the quantitative phase, it was found that the gender of buyers significantly shapes the desired characteristics of a personal shopper. Specifically, women prefer clarity and coherence in advice, while men gravitate towards the technical knowledge of the sales advisor. Apparently, and according to Ayuningtyas & Mohd (2019), the service offered by the personal shopper can sway consumer purchasing decisions in this type of product. Similarly, concerning the willingness to pay for such a service, despite its perception of costliness, the findings also revealed disparities between men and women. However, there is no gender disparity regarding the willingness to pay for sales advice. This behaviour is evident for both men and women, provided the purchase is a laptop. Similarly, men and women prefer the Hewlett-Packard brand and prefer advisory services delivered through digital channels. Indeed, as Moody *et al.* (2010) found, emotional conditions linked to sociodemographic characteristics could influence buyers' decisions when favouring products they identify with.

Finally, in its experimental phase, this research aimed to observe the impact on attitudes toward advertising and purchase intentions that advertisements for the purchase of laptops supported by a personal shopper, constructed with messages based on the central and peripheral routes of persuasion (Elaboration Likelihood Model), in conjunction with normative appeals (descriptive, subjective and personal-altruistic) might have. Although no significant differences were observed in the various combinations of messages regarding attitudes and purchase intentions, differences related to the participants' educational level and monthly income were identified. Indeed, the findings suggest that advertisements featuring an aesthetically pleasing personal shopper figure (peripheral route of persuasion) have significantly more substantial effects on purchase intentions among women with higher levels of education and income compared to advertisements solely focusing on the product and its technical features (central route of persuasion). Consequently, it was observed that emotionally charged messages bolstered by variables such as the aesthetics and attractiveness of models and emotive language alongside advertisement design could enhance the persuasive impact of the advertisement on intentions to purchase personal shopper services in the personal computer category. However, the results also suggest that this effect may be more pronounced among educated women with higher incomes.

Similar to findings by Campbell & Kirmani (2008), the aforementioned results illustrate that consumers perceive sales advisors as capable of influencing their decisions. Furthermore, advertising featuring advisors for purchases is more likely to be effective if they use attractive models. Perhaps, at the point of sale, the physical attractiveness of the advisor, coupled with product knowledge and trust instilled in the customer, influences the willingness to purchase a personalised advisory service. However, as Vohs *et al.* (207) suggest, consumers may also resist the sales agent and oppose their persuasive messages, perceiving a loss of autonomy in decision-making. Additionally, buyers' defences against persuasion may lead to negative attitudes towards brands, products and sales personnel (Sujan *et al.*, 1986).

On the other hand, although Briñol *et al.* (2015) indicate that message clarity in both advertising and point-of-sale communication directly affects the persuasive process, it is apparent that other variables related to the marketing process can influence consumers' behavioural intentions when exposed to such advertising communication. In this context, it is reasonable to assume that intentions and attitudes towards acquiring advisory services for computer equipment may be influenced by inherent brand positioning, perceived quality and after-sales service, given the heightened economic risk and involvement associated with technological purchases (Celsi & Olson, 1988). However, it is evident that, concerning the communicative variable, specific characteristics such as credibility and source recognition can enhance attention to messages and their persuasive effectiveness (Hedhli *et al.*, 2021), recognising that attractive models do not always work for computer purchases (Kamins, 1990). In this regard, as evidenced in the present study and suggested by Kang & Herr (2006), source characteristics and product type may interact to generate attentional and persuasive processes in consumers.

## 9. Conclusions

The findings of this study enrich the empirical body of evidence regarding the effectiveness of advertising communication and marketing processes in the context of technology consumption and the variables influencing consumer decisions. This research contributes to understanding persuasive message characteristics in conjunction with marketing variables, including those related to purchasing advisory services and after-sales support. Despite its limitations, population-specific characteristics, and methodological designs, this study presents findings that contribute to new perspectives in marketing research and technology consumption with post-sales service. Indeed, the findings show potential gender-related behaviours, presenting strategic implications for communication efforts within the technology product category. It also provides relevant information for strategically developing marketing processes surrounding technology consumption. Understanding consumers' perceptions of sales consultants and their potential impact on attitudes and decision-making can enhance advertising and marketing communication practices and facilitate the development of effective personal sales services. As Campbell & Kirmani (2008) suggested, consumers may perceive sales agents as negatively influencing their decisions. Therefore, identifying effective communication structures or persuasive combinations can help reduce this distrust towards sales personnel and improve brand-building processes within the category.

In conclusion, these findings underscore the significance of examining gender-differentiated technology purchasing behaviour. This study shows that men and women demonstrate different interactions, perceptions and decisions when encountering technological purchasing processes. Understanding these differences can assist commercial and technological sectors in

developing innovative communication strategies aligned with the psychographic profiles of potential consumers. Future studies could be replicated in other geographical, social, and cultural contexts to explore these differences further.

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Discussion and conclusions	Fernando Marroquín-Ciendúa, Manuel Medina-Labrador, Harold Germán Rodríguez-Celis and Yamile Castro Gonzales
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## 12. Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest contained in this article.

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