



A Comparative Study of the Impact of Employee Behavior on Consumer Preference: Maybelline New York Vs. Revlon

AVANI SHARMA

MBA Scholar

Maharana Pratap Engineering College,
Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, India

MOHIT GUPTA

Assistant Professor

Maharana Pratap Engineering College,
Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, India

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Evolution of the Beauty Retail Landscape

The global cosmetics industry is no longer merely about the chemical composition of a lipstick or the longevity of a foundation. In the 21st century, it has evolved into a sector driven by "Experience Economy" principles. As digital commerce continues to grow, physical retail spaces have been forced to redefine their value proposition. For brands like Maybelline and Revlon, the retail counter is a theater where the brand's identity is performed by frontline employees (FLEs).

The "Genesis of Choice" in cosmetics is deeply psychological. Unlike a utility purchase, beauty products are aspirational. Consumers are not just buying a product; they are buying a version of themselves. Consequently, the behavior of the person selling that aspiration—the retail assistant—becomes the primary influencer of consumer preference. This study investigates the shift from product-centric marketing to behavior-centric service, analyzing how the human element acts as a catalyst for brand switching or a cornerstone for brand loyalty.

1.2 The Competitive Duopoly of Identity

This research focuses on two industry titans that occupy distinct psychological territories in the Indian market. Maybelline New York, a subsidiary of L'Oréal, represents the "Mass-Market Trendsetter." Its branding is synonymous with urban energy, accessibility, and high-velocity fashion. Conversely, Revlon represents the "Sophisticated Classic." It carries a legacy of professional elegance and a consultative approach to beauty.



The competition between these two is not just about market share; it is a competition between two different "Service Philosophies." Maybelline thrives on high-energy, transactional efficiency, while Revlon relies on slow-burn, relationship-based trust. Understanding the impact of these behaviors on consumer preference requires a deep dive into how different demographics react to "Affective Labor"—the effort employees put into managing their emotions to match a brand's persona.

1.3 Problem Statement

Despite the maturity of the cosmetics market, there is a significant "Retention Gap." Brands are spending millions on celebrity endorsements and digital ads, yet they often lose the customer at the "Last Mile"—the retail counter. The problem lies in a lack of behavioral alignment. If a Maybelline assistant is overly formal and slow, it creates a disconnect with the brand's "New York Energy." If a Revlon consultant is dismissive or overly transactional, it destroys the brand's "Prestige" image.

This study seeks to address the deficiency in behavioral training models. The core problem is that retail staff are often trained on *product features* but not on *behavioral psychology*. This research identifies how specific behavioral archetypes—the "Trend-Guide" vs. the "Beauty Consultant"—influence the final "Confirm" click in the consumer's mind, especially when price points are comparable.

1.4 Research Objectives and Rationale

The primary objective of this study is to quantify the impact of specific behavioral traits (Energy, Expertise, and Empathy) on consumer preference. This research is significant for **Brand Managers** at L'Oréal and Revlon, providing them with empirical evidence to restructure their HR and training protocols. Furthermore, it contributes to the academic field of "Services Marketing," specifically the **Service-Profit Chain**, by illustrating how employee behavior translates directly into consumer brand preference in the specialized field of personal grooming.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework: Service-Dominant Logic (SDL)

According to **Vargo and Lusch (2004)**, the "Service-Dominant Logic" posits that the interaction between the service provider and the customer is a "co-creation of value." In cosmetics, the product remains "value-in-exchange" until the employee demonstrates its use, at which point it becomes "value-in-use."

In the context of Maybelline vs. Revlon:

- **Maybelline Value Co-creation:** Fast-paced, trend-based advice that saves the customer time while making them feel "current."
- **Revlon Value Co-creation:** In-depth skin analysis and color matching that provides the customer with a sense of "expert care" and "professional validation."

2.2 Brand Congruency and the "Living Brand"

Keller's (2013) Brand Equity Model emphasizes that brand meaning is built through imagery and performance. However, in retail, the employee is the "Living Brand." Literature on **Brand Congruency** suggests that a consumer experiences a "Cognitive Harmony" when the salesperson's personality matches the brand's advertisement.



Research by **Smith and Wheeler (2002)** on "The Service Encounter" indicates that for mass-market brands (like Maybelline), "Reliability and Speed" are the primary behavioral drivers. For premium brands (like Revlon), "Assurance and Empathy" take precedence. This study builds on this foundation, testing these theories in the high-stakes Indian cosmetics market.

2.3 The Psychology of Impulse Buying in Cosmetics

A critical aspect of the literature involves the "**Impulse Buying Tendency**" (IBT). Studies by **Beatty and Ferrell (1998)** suggest that "Positive Affective States" induced by sales staff can lead to spontaneous purchases. This is hyper-relevant for Maybelline, where the "Staff Energy" serves as a psychological trigger for impulse buys. Conversely, Revlon's "Consultative" model aligns more with the "**Theory of Planned Behavior**" (**Ajzen, 1991**), where the consumer is looking for a rational justification (expert advice) for their purchase.

2.4 Emotional Intelligence (EQ) in Frontline Services

Recent academic focus has shifted toward the role of **Emotional Intelligence** in frontline employees. **Goleman (1995)** argued that the ability to read a customer's non-verbal cues is essential for service success. In this research, we examine how "Emotional Contagion"—the phenomenon where an employee's high energy "infects" the customer—serves as Maybelline's secret weapon, while "Deep Acting"—the ability to genuinely empathize with a customer's skin concerns—is Revlon's core behavioral asset.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design: Descriptive and Comparative

This study utilizes a **Descriptive-Analytical Research Design**. This dual approach is necessary because we are not just describing the current state of consumer preference but also analyzing the *causal link* between specific staff behaviors and the final purchase decision. The comparative element allows us to see how the same consumer might react differently to two different behavioral archetypes (The Trend-Setter vs. The Classic Consultant).

3.2 Sampling and Data Collection

- **Sample Size:** Data was gathered from 200 respondents (N=200) across urban shopping centers in Kanpur and other metro cities.
- **Sampling Method: Purposive Convenience Sampling** was employed to ensure that all respondents had interacted with either a Maybelline or Revlon counter in the last six months.
- **Primary Data:** A structured questionnaire using a **5-Point Likert Scale** was used to measure satisfaction with "Staff Warmth," "Staff Expertise," and "Service Speed."
- **Secondary Data:** Sourced from L'Oréal's annual reports, Revlon's bankruptcy and recovery strategy papers, and retail consumer sentiment indices.

3.3 The Conceptual Model: Behavior-Preference Link

The research uses a multi-variate conceptual model:

1. **Independent Variables:** Interpersonal Warmth, Technical Knowledge, Behavioral Energy, Persuasion Style.
2. **Dependent Variables:** Purchase Intent, Brand Switching, Brand Loyalty Score.



3.4 Data Analysis Tools

The data was analyzed using **Percentage Analysis** for demographic trends and **Weighted Average Scores** to rank the behavioral traits. **Sentiment Analysis** was also conducted on qualitative feedback to identify "Trigger Words" associated with each brand (e.g., "fast," "cool" for Maybelline; "trust," "elegant" for Revlon).

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS & BRAND-SPECIFIC FINDINGS

4.1 Maybelline: The "Trend-Setter" Approach Analysis

Maybelline's behavioral strategy is built on the "Power of the Now." The staff are trained as "Trend-Guides" rather than traditional salespeople.

- **Data Insight: 74% of respondents** reported that the "Energy Level" of the staff was a deciding factor.
- **Interpretation:** For Maybelline, the FLE acts as a social validator. Because the brand is budget-friendly, the "risk" of purchase is low. Therefore, the "Positive Contagion" of a high-energy staff member is often enough to trigger an impulse buy.
- **Behavioral Gap:** The data shows that Maybelline staff often struggle with "Deep Knowledge" of product ingredients, but this is overlooked by consumers who value "Trend Knowledge" (e.g., what is currently viral on social media).

4.2 Revlon: The "Sophisticated Classic" Approach Analysis

Revlon's strategy is the antithesis of Maybelline's. It is "Consultative" and "Instructional."

- **Data Insight: 68% of respondents** cited "Consultant Reliability" as the reason they chose Revlon over a cheaper competitor.
- **Interpretation:** Revlon consumers are looking for a "safe harbor." They value staff who take the time to explain *why* a product works for their specific skin type. The "Subtle Persistence" of a Revlon consultant is seen as "Care," whereas a similar persistence in a Maybelline setting is often viewed as "Pushy."

4.3 Comparative Trait Impact

The data reveals a stark contrast in what consumers "forgive" in each brand:

- **Maybelline:** Consumers forgive a lack of personalized attention but are highly sensitive to "**Slow Service**" and "**Out of Stock Knowledge**."
- **Revlon:** Consumers forgive a slightly slower service but are highly sensitive to "**Inattentiveness**" or "**Lack of Professionalism**" in staff attire or speech.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION & THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The Service-Profit Chain in Action

The findings confirm the **Service-Profit Chain (Heskett et al., 1994)**. Internal service quality (training and behavior) leads to employee productivity, which creates external service value. In this study, Revlon's higher loyalty score (4.2/5) despite lower market penetration proves that "Behavioral Excellence" creates a "Protective Moat" around a brand. It makes the customer less likely to switch even if a competitor offers a lower price.



5.2 The "Halo Effect" of Employee Behavior

The research demonstrates a powerful "**Halo Effect.**" When a Revlon consultant displays high expertise, the consumer subconsciously assumes the product itself is of a higher scientific grade. Conversely, when a Maybelline assistant is "Trend-Savvy," the consumer assumes the brand is more "Innovative" and "Fashion-Forward." This proves that the employee doesn't just sell the product; they *define* the product.

5.3 Sentiment Analysis: Speed vs. Sophistication

Qualitative data suggests that Maybelline has successfully created a "Low-Friction" environment. The sentiment is one of "Efficiency." Revlon has created a "High-Engagement" environment. The sentiment is one of "Trust." The discussion highlights that both models are successful, but only if they remain **Congruent** with their brand identity. The biggest threat discovered was "Behavioral Mismatch"—where a brand's staff act out of character.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION & STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Conclusion

This research concludes that frontline employee behavior is a **Primary Determinant** of brand preference in the cosmetics industry. While product quality and price are essential to enter the consumer's "Consideration Set," the final choice is dictated by the quality of the human interaction. Maybelline wins on "**Behavioral Energy**" and "**Trend-Savviness,**" making it the leader for impulse-driven Gen Z and Millennials. Revlon wins on "**Behavioral Trust**" and "**Domain Expertise,**" making it the leader for loyalty-driven, sophisticated consumers.

6.2 Strategic Recommendations for Brand Management

- **For Maybelline:** Implement "Micro-Training" modules that focus on "Speed with a Smile." Reward staff who can manage high-traffic crowds while maintaining a high "Energy Quotient." Integrate digital prompts that allow staff to stay ahead of viral beauty trends.
- **For Revlon:** Continue investing in "Beauty Academies" for staff. The focus should be on "**Consultative Psychology**"—teaching staff how to build long-term skin-health portfolios for their clients.

6.3 Recommendations for HR and Retail Operations

1. **Behavioral Hiring:** Recruit for "Extroversion" for Maybelline and "Conscientiousness/Empathy" for Revlon. Use personality testing to ensure "Brand-Staff Fit."
2. **Incentive Shift:** Move away from purely volume-based incentives. For Revlon, introduce incentives based on "Customer Retention" and "Consultation Depth."
3. **Continuous Coaching:** Move away from annual training. Use "Shadow Coaching" where experienced managers provide real-time feedback on employee-customer interactions.

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