

## Relationship Marketing in the Fashion World - A Case Study of the Carioca Brand FARM

### Marketing de Relacionamento no Mundo da Moda - Um Estudo de Caso da Marca Carioca FARM

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#### Abstract

In the present article, the objective was to move through the bibliographic references of Relationship Marketing, linking it to a real case. Immersing in the reality of the women's fashion brand FARM, as gather information about what that brand does in terms of relationship strategies with the end customer, as the basis for the case study. Founded in Rio de Janeiro in the late 90s, FARM achieved instant success, winning over the Brazilian consumer with its own products and style. Currently, it is present in 18 Brazilian states, with physical stores, in addition to the very strong online presence that already represents 10% of the company's revenue. We understand that the brand's strategy is not only to dress consumers and fans, but to become a reference in their unique lifestyle. Through differentiated and personalized communication, the brand gradually became part of its customers' lives, generating positive experiences and lasting relationships. Thus, through the article, we sought to identify and carry out a critical analysis of the strategies, actions, and tools that the brand uses in terms of relationship marketing.

**Keywords:** Relationship Marketing. Fashion. Communication. Strategies.

#### Resumo

No presente artigo, objetivou-se transitar pelas referências bibliográficas do Marketing de Relacionamento, vinculando-o a um *case* real. Imergindo na realidade da marca de moda feminina FARM, à medida que levantam as informações sobre o que a referida marca faz em termos de estratégias de relacionamento com o cliente final, como base para o estudo de caso. Fundada no Rio de Janeiro no final dos anos 90, a FARM obteve sucesso instantâneo, conquistando a consumidora brasileira com seus produtos e estilo próprio. Atualmente, está presente em 18 estados brasileiros, com lojas físicas, além da fortíssima presença on-line que já representa 10% do faturamento da empresa. Compreende-se que a estratégia da marca não é somente vestir as consumidoras e fãs, mas tornar-se referência em seu estilo de vida único. Com a comunicação diferenciada e personalizada, a marca gradativamente tornou-se parte da vida das suas clientes, gerando experiências positivas e relações duradouras. Deste modo, ao longo do artigo, buscou-se identificar e realizar análises críticas das estratégias, ações e ferramentas que a marca utiliza em termos de marketing de relacionamento.

**Palavras-chave:** Marketing de Relacionamento. Moda. Comunicação. Estratégias.

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## 1 Introduction

You live in the Post-Digital Age. An era of strong globalization, accelerated change and high competitiveness among brands. In the specific case of the fashion world, this competition shows itself to be even more fierce, with the presence of large brands seeking to conquer more conscious, attentive, demanding and critical consumers regarding product, price, service and service. It is natural that the various *players* who participate in this fashion market need to adapt to the demands of this new era. Many companies in the industry have been seeking different ways to strengthen relationships with their customers and impact new consumers.

Even the concept of competition has changed, before it was strongly based on price, quality and location, but today, these are certainly not the only criteria, as Mckenna points out (1992, p. 46): "from the consumer's point of view, differentiation is not related to the service or the sector, but to the way they do business". Customers behave with a higher level of demand, they want their desires and needs met, they seek affordable prices, first-class service, cost-effective products and facilities that exceed their expectations.

Thus, it is observed that, currently, for brands in the fashion business that operate in markets with a high level of competition, to conquer and retain customers is not just something simple and routine. It requires a strategic effort. Study, planning and market vision. It is almost a question of survival in an environment of changes and high competitiveness, which reinforces the latent need to create lasting relationships and bonds and invest in the valorization of each one of them.

This is how Mckenna (1993) described it in her book "Relationship Marketing", in which the author emphasizes the issue of brand positioning in the client's mind and states that the key to achieving this process is precisely Relationship Marketing.

FARM, a women's and carioca brand, uses Relationship Marketing strategies to remain strong and desired in its market of operation, which allows to critically analyze the actions and understand the effective result of this path taken. It approaches the success story of the brand, founded in 1997 by partners Kátia Barros and Marcello Bastos, when they decided to set up a simple *stand* at the Fashion Fair. Six months later, the brand reached record sales at the event and consolidated itself as the great novelty of the moment. "Carioca is more than a birth record, it is a lifestyle. "That's the motto that the FARM women's brand carries in its clothes all over Brazil and other places in the world, according to the *website* Mundo Marketing (2010). Currently, the brand uses Relationship Marketing to reinforce its positioning, increasingly winning over its consumers through actions, strategies and exchange of experience.

Against this background, the problem of this study was defined as follows: What is the contribution of Relationship Marketing strategies for the FARM brand to achieve this differentiated positioning in the fashion market and so close to the clients?

As mentioned, the general objective of the survey was to identify the Relationship Marketing strategies used by the FARM brand in the fashion industry. The specific objectives, so that the general objective can be achieved, are: to provide conceptual information on Relationship Marketing and the world of women's fashion; to verify the effectiveness of the actions adopted by the FARM, and if there are indicators of results; and to understand if the strategies adopted could be applied in other business models.

## 2 Theoretical Reference

In order to deepen the knowledge on the subject of Relationship Marketing, the article approached the following topics as a basis to guide the study.

## 2.1 Relationship Marketing

### 2.1.1 Definition and concept

The term "Relationship Marketing" arose to designate the field of studies that analyzes the relationships between organizations and their customers, observing the relationship of exchange between them, within the discipline of Marketing (Rocha & Luce, 2006).

Authors like Mckenna (1993) and Peppers and Rogers (1994) stress the importance of selecting customers, of course you won't stop someone from being a customer, but efforts to seek loyalty must be focused.

Thus, the concept of Relationship Marketing is a continuous and growing relationship, seeking to achieve the highest level of customer attitude towards a brand.

According to Kotler (1998, p. 30), "it is the practice of building satisfactory long-term relationships with key parties [...] to retain their preference and business over the long term", allowing the company to increase its profitability in the direct relationship with each client in the portfolio, seeking to maintain active communication and focusing efforts on those that provide maximum value. According to Gummesson (2005, p. 23) "Relationship Marketing is marketing based on interactions within the relationship network.

For Lima (2006), the satisfaction process begins the moment a consumer or client gets to know the company, either by an advertisement or by someone else's indication. It suggests the author that getting the understanding of what motivates customer loyalty and satisfaction is essential for the continuous success of companies in this process.

For authors Kotler and Keller (2006) customers compare the performance of the product with their expectations about it. Their degree of satisfaction is absolutely proportional to the adequacy of the service to their needs, preferences and requirements. When acquiring a product or service, the client forms value judgment and acts on it. The positive judgment generates satisfaction which, in turn, is the premise for loyalty.

In today's context, the most competitive and result-oriented companies don't just want to win customers, but to have them for life, hence the importance of organizations in building lasting relationships with their customers. Kotler and Armstrong (2003) clarify that customer satisfaction is still an important component of customer loyalty. Gordon (1998) stresses that relationship marketing is a continuous process that identifies consumers, sharing long-term values and association.

Kotler and Keller (2006) cite three approaches to promoting customer loyalty: adding financial benefits (it is important to highlight two financial benefits so that companies can offer purchase frequency programs and membership marketing programs), adding social benefits (with regard to these benefits, the company's staff works to increase their social ties with customers, individualizing and personalizing the relationship with them, i.e., solid companies turn their customers into preferred customers.), and adding structural links (the company can offer some special equipment or computer *links* that help customers to manage their own orders, payrolls, inventory, among others).

Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan (2010) argue that marketing is constantly evolving. According to them, in the first phase, marketing was transaction-oriented, focused on how to make the sale. In the second phase, marketing became relationship-oriented, how to get the consumer back and buy more. In the third phase, marketing invites consumers to participate in the development of the company's products and their communications.

From the perspective of Stone and Woodcock (1998), Relationship Marketing is the use of various techniques and processes of marketing, sales, communication and customer care to identify customers in an individualized and nominal manner, create a lasting relationship

between your company and these customers and manage this relationship for the mutual benefit of customers and the company.

According to Oliver (2006), consumer satisfaction occurs when the performance of the product or service he is consuming, reaches or exceeds the level of his expectations, providing a pleasant experience. The expectation is always the result of a sum of factors such as advertisements, commercial information, specifications, referrals from friends and even experiences already lived by the consumer himself. The author also adds that consumer loyalty can be defined as a deep commitment to continue buying a certain product or service in the future, despite occasional problems or marketing efforts by the competition.

According to Silva and Zambon (2015), all customers have needs, wishes or expectations that can somehow be identified and met. The authors quote that understanding clients is a fundamental step for those who wish to establish lasting relationships with clients; in this sense, it is necessary to understand the differences between the concepts of need, desire and expectation in order to understand how such concepts apply to clients in their different roles in order to seek to offer them what they desire.

## **2.2 The women's fashion and clothing industry**

Today, consumer society seeks to build identities through experiences and trends in the fashion industry. Fashion is the synthesis of the customs of a people consumed by modern society. Society of pleasure, leisure and disembarassment, the pleasure of seeing and being seen (Sant'Anna, 2007, p. 88):

Therefore, more than a nuance of global society, fashion is understood as the very dynamics of building modern sociability and, as such, appearance can be understood as the very essence of this universe. In the dynamics of fashion, the modern subject has acquired the legitimacy to live in appearance, to abandon religion, revolutionary and political ideals, to seek more the pleasure of living than its understanding. It is in appearance that the modern subject finds the reason for living.

The consumption of clothes is an integral part of the process of construction of the social identities of each individual, being the distinction, the main function of fashion, according to Georg Simmel (2008), in his book "Philosophy of Fashion and other writings".

Fashion and clothing are part of a universe that constitutes each individual. That is, clothing functions as a variable of the "subjective fashion", so that it has an extremely important role in the process of building the subject - individual, personal and private - but, at the same time, it is relevant to the relationship with the other. Each unique story is crossed by cultural, affective, family aspects, etc. (Mosque, 2007, p. 15).

Fashion is like a socio-cultural phenomenon that expresses society's values - uses, habits and customs - at a given moment. "Reflection of a time or the culture of a people, through fashion we can also understand the human mind." (Braga, 2008, p. 21). However, if, on the one hand, women have been conquering new spaces in the labour market, on the other, they concentrate on sectors and occupations defined as traditionally feminine.

According to Fialkowski (2014), fashion is the handwriting by which a woman reveals her need for individual affirmation, personal differentiation and, at the same time, her need for affirmation as a member of the social group in which she lives, realizing that her evolution accompanies the transformations in the context in which she is inserted.

### 3 Methodology

This article is characterized as a qualitative research guiding the exploratory type study. According to Gil (2007) the vast majority of this type of research involves: bibliographic research, interviews with people who have had practical experiences with the problem researched, and analysis of examples that stimulate understanding.

According to Santos (1999), in this type of research there are numerous methods of data collection. Among these, the following are the best known: participant observation, life history, oral history and interviews. Because the nature of the object of the study requires interaction between researcher and researcher to contextualize experiences, experiences and meanings, the interview is used as a special technique for the collection of direct information from the investigated subjects.

According to Gil (2007), the interviews can be structured in: informal, focused, by guidelines and formalized. The type of informal interview is the least structured and only differs from the simple conversation because it has as basic objective, the collection of data. Gil (1995, p. 90) defines interview as "a technique that involves two people in a face-to-face situation" in which one of them formulates questions and the other answers". The author of this article opted for the use of this technique to obtain the necessary answers to collect data for the case study, besides his observation.

In this study, data were collected through informal unstructured interviews, which were used in experimental situations, with the objective of exploring in depth some experience lived under precise conditions. The sample was used with groups of people who had undergone the specific experience. Among the group, interviews were conducted with 5 professionals related to the Sales area (resellers, representatives), and tenants.

As Mattar (2001) mentions, the methods used by exploratory research are broad and versatile. The methods used include: surveys in secondary sources, experience surveys, selected case studies and informal observation.

Yin (1994) "The case study has been gaining increasing popularity in educational research in recent years judged by the growing number of research projects using this research method".

According to Richardson (2007), the qualitative method has as its greatest difference the fact that it does not employ a statistical tool as a basis in the process of analyzing a problem.

The case study is characterized by a thorough and exhaustive study of one or a few objects, in order to allow a broad and detailed knowledge of it; a task practically impossible through other considered outlines. (Gil, 1995, p. 78).

The case study is widely used in exploratory research. According to Gil (1995), the case study presents a series of advantages such as stimulating new discoveries, emphasizing the totality and simplicity of procedures. Thus, the current research is characterized as a case study.

### 4 FARM Brand Case Study

"Carioca is more than a birth record, it is a lifestyle". This is the motto that the female brand FARM takes in its clothes all over Brazil and conquers its fans and clients (Mundo Marketing, 2010). According to the same source, the brand, which began its history by founders Kátia Barros and Marcello Bastos, and Kátia's desire to get involved with fashion, has a successful track record.

The history of FARM began in 1997, in Babylon, at a *Hype Fair*, an event that brought together alternative brands and young designers in Rio de Janeiro. In less than six months,

FARM's *stand* was the great sensation of the fair, breaking sales records, and in 1999, FARM opened its first store in Posto 6, in Copacabana.

"We were a *stand*, that turned into a store, that turned into several stores, in other words, a *stand* ended up becoming a lifestyle", in the words of Marcelo Bastos - FARM partner. In 2001, the second store was born, at the Ipanema Forum, and in December of the same year, the third store of the brand was inaugurated, at Shopping *Downtown*, in Barra da Tijuca. The sales expectation was 15 thousand pieces at the end of the year. The result was somewhat higher: 42 thousand pieces. In 2002, FARM was installed in a commercial building in downtown, generating a growth of 20% in sales throughout the chain. Since then, the brand has been conquering more and more space and admiration in the world of fashion.

According to a report on the *website* Agenda Carioca (2010), from the years 2004 on, 2005 the brand was inaugurated in the most famous *shopping malls* of São Paulo cities and, sequentially, also expanded to other regions. It is the name of the period of success of the brand, also marked by the initiative to take FARM to the São Paulo coast, as part of the summer project of its owners.

The 2008/2009 summer launch was considered the best collection launch in the brand's history. According to the report, in 2009 the stores in Porto Alegre, Curitiba and Belém were opened, besides an important concept store<sup>2</sup>, FARM Harmonia, in São Paulo. In 2010, it was Brasília's turn to win its second store. All this movement was part of Marcello Bastos' project, which was to open FARM stores in the main Brazilian capitals by 2010, and the opening of the first international store, in Barcelona, also this year.

The following year was thus marked by the strengthening of the brand's image and proximity to the public through the launch of the official *fanpage* on the social network Facebook, which today has almost 2 million followers, making the brand one of the largest women's fashion communities in Brazil. The unprecedented partnership with Pantone<sup>3</sup> in 2012 gave rise to an exclusive collection, which generated great visibility in articles in the media.

The theme "partnerships", as a brand strategy, will be better addressed later in this study. In 2013, FARM launched a furniture line in partnership with the Oppa store, which reinforced the brand's desire to sell *lifestyle*. In June 2014, the children's brand FÁBULA<sup>4</sup> launched its online store.

By describing itself as a brand, in publication on the *website* itself, FARM is characterized as a *persona from* Rio, an individual who loves culture, nature, colors and fashion.

It was with prints, colors and a lot of relaxation that FARM emerged in the south zone of Rio and conquered Brazil. Once upon a time there was a small *stand at* a fashion fair. It became a store and then a chain of stores that conquered one city, then other cities, states and even another country. That small *stand* became the brand of the Carioca girl and, who would have guessed it, gave birth to a *lifestyle*: the FARM lifestyle. (FARM, 2014).

One can then see how much the Carioca brand has grown and always seeks to strengthen its position in the fashion market. It is remarkable how much they always understood a fundamental, the establishment of well defined strategies, coherent and in connection with their target audience, which seems a recommendable path to achieve a successful brand.

The FARM brand is always looking for new ways to experience, innovate and capture the attention of consumers, including the physical point of sale. In November 2010, the brand

<sup>2</sup> According to SEBRAE a concept store is an environment of rapprochement between brand and customer, in addition to setting trends in the contemporary market.

<sup>3</sup> Pantone is a brand considered an authority on color and is known worldwide for its cutting-edge systems and technologies, created for processes involving color.

<sup>4</sup> FÁBULA, FARM's children's brand, founded in 2008 by Katia Barros and Marcello Bastos.

received the award for Best Consumer Experience at the *Global Fashion Awards*, an award promoted by the WGSN, world renowned for its work in research and trend analysis.

#### 4.1 Relationship Marketing Actions performed by the FARM brand

Due to the importance of the brand to the company, Martins (1997, p. 17) says that it is necessary that the company always takes care of its brand, as an essential part of an endless and integrated management process, which is the search for improvement, recognition and loyalty by its consumers.

It can be seen that a good brand effectively transmits a certain set of information. The brand leads consumers to try it, to like it, to repeat the act of purchase and to recommend it positively. Pine (1996, p. 7) points out that "when buying a product, the consumer does not just buy a good. He buys the whole set of values and attributes of the brand". Because of its importance, the brand can sustain the company and maintain customer loyalty.

The more the consumer perceives the importance of the brand, the more he tends to identify with it. However, this depends on the style of the product being in line with the personality of the buyer, and the larger the size of the brand in the consumer's perception, the greater its strength (Cobra, 2007, p. 43).

For Cobra (2007), the essence of marketing is to differentiate one brand from another, in order to ensure correct communication with its target audience and also to ensure that the consumer creates esteem and bond with the brand by expanding their knowledge about it.

"Our consumers have a loving relationship with FARM, that is why our actions try to strengthen this relationship," André Carvalhal, FARM's marketing manager, points out in a report to Rayane Marcolino, for the *website* Mundo do Marketing (2010).

Through an original identity with potential, the FARM brand stands out in the women's fashion business. Its brand is no longer associated only with the store, but with a lifestyle and the strong customer relationship to the "FARM style of being" is understood as "a general trend away from product attributes and an approach to lifestyle or value systems" (Schimitt & Simonson, 2002).

It is known that, even though the brand is recognized for so many attributes and differentials before others that also participate and compete in this competitive world of fashion, if it did not properly relate to its customers, perhaps the initial enthusiasm, the appreciation for modern clothing and genuinely Carioca, "would die on the beach. In order to avoid this possibility, the brand invests, in fact, in Relationship Marketing actions with its customer base.

Still in the beginning, in 2003, FARM was already rehearsing actions that demonstrated its concern with the customer's experience and, therefore, a close look at the store environment, the POS, made perfect sense. Showcases inspired by the old Rio, with panels depicting the neighborhoods of Lapa and Santa Teresa. The soundtrack was chorinho and in the internal decoration there were pictures of prints of the city, all to, once again, reinforce its connection with the city of Rio de Janeiro, in the minds of consumers. Little by little, these sensory strategies began to improve and FARM began to invest in the ambient music of its points of sale. The brand joined the sensory *branding* company Rádio Ibiza to create exclusive soundtracks that connect to the brand's Brazilian and beach identity. The brand managed to go further, and the songs began to play, not only in stores, but also became available on the so-called FARM radio.

Hiller (2012, p. 82) further states that brands must plan how to adequately convey their values to their consumers, stating that "it is necessary to fully understand the capacity that their target audience has to decode such a message" and, for this, it is necessary to know and analyze the communication tools currently available in order to use the most appropriate for the identity to be worked on.

In Albrech's (1994) approach, needs and desires make up the "generic package of value to the customer", responsible for identifying and relating aspects or variables relevant to consumers and buyers. Aspects such as: environment and sensory, interpersonal, procedures, information and delivery.

In the field of fashion, Cobra (2007) highlights that brands are able to overcome the limits of physical attributes of products, as they provide an image of *status* and quality that goes beyond. The brands that generally manage to attract loyal consumers, who idolize them, are those that have personality and reinforce the lifestyle of their users.

A project that has been published on the Mundo Marketing *website* (2010) stands out and is fully connected with the purpose of this article: since 2005, the FARM brand has been running the "I want FARM" program. Through this initiative, registered customers gain keys that must be presented every time they go to the physical store, at any of the addresses throughout the country. With each purchase, the customer presents their keyring number or only their CPF and thus the store can identify that customer's purchase profile and offer exclusive and personalized benefits, discounts and advantages.

The purchases serve to, along with other information, draw the profile of consumers and help in developing the relationship. Among the advantages of participating in the program is the fact that customers are communicated via e-mail of releases, in addition to receiving the fashion catalogs and have the right to exclusive settlements, invitations for *previews* of releases, special products, monthly *newsletter* and tips on *looks* for each season.

André Carvalho, in a report on the *website* Mundo Marketing (2010), emphasized that this program also provides other benefits for customers, such as settlements, special gifts, payment flexibility, birthday discounts, invitation to open stores, previews of launches, news and production tips, e-mail communications, among many others. In addition, during the whole year, the brand invests in other differentiated actions for a selected group of Vips customers, such as renting chairs and beach stalls in the Ipanema store, exclusive bottles as a New Year's gift and Carnival in seasonal stores. It is also worth remembering that for each collection, FARM develops a differentiated product to give to the A curve customers, that is, those with higher average *ticket* and who consume the products more frequently and regularly. They are offered an exclusive "mime".

Through social network, one can see the records and comments of the brand's fans, which leads one to conclude that FARM, more than gifts and privileges for loyal clients, provides proximity and affection recognized and valued in various testimonials in the digital world. Size the frenzy with the brand, led the company and created a department totally dedicated to "I love FARM!", the brand's *blog*, Twitter and e-mail marketing. On Twitter and the *blog*, the relationship is even closer and Internet users comment on brand products and the service they receive in stores. Then, all this is passed on to the marketing and creation departments. Gerson (1999) says that communicating with the customer is very important for the company to be attentive to their needs.

According to reports on the brand's own *website*, FARM, reveals that 2014 was the year in which the brand literally gained more space in the fashion market. The partnership with the sports brand Adidas is considered the main reason for the "peak" of the brand's success. In March 2014, the first Adidas Originals and FARM collection was officially launched at Baixo Gávea. During the same period, the brand launched the FARM Radio application and a new partnership was consolidated, this time with Foxton, to create the Foxton and FARM surfboards in celebration of Valentine's Day.

Still in 2014, the brand carried out an action that had repercussions on social networks. This was posted on the *blog* "I Love FARM!" on Facebook and sent via e-mail to all customers registered in the relationship program "I Want FARM! The strategy aimed to ensure outstanding experiences for all registered customers, thrilling and investing in the imaginary linked to



Brazilian culture, a date known and loved for tradition. The idea was precisely to align and give meaning to the "Our Thing" collection, whose purpose was to value genuinely Brazilian elements in each piece of the portfolio.

Currently, in the year 2020, FARM opened its own house in Lagoa Rodrigo de Freitas. The proposal is not to be a store, but an area of coexistence. Investing in a closer relationship with customers by creating a cultural space, a cool and intimate meeting place for those who like to celebrate friendship, music, art and culture.

According to an article in the Carioca Agenda (2020), in addition to having gastronomic areas and very tropical menus, the house has three floors. On the second floor, the public will be able to check out trends in jewelry and semi-jewelry, as well as product displays from partners and independent producers. The third floor of the house is focused on curiosities and support related to the world of fashion:

Tips on how to wash, reuse and repair clothes are some of the topics open to the public in workshops such as Muda and Re-Roupa, dedicated to conscious consumption (seamstresses available to renew pieces among other actions). And, on the top floor, it is possible to enjoy the landscape of Rodrigo de Freitas Lagoon and participate in free activities such as yoga classes, *altinha* on the beach, *surfing in the arpoador*, races and much more news that will always be disclosed in the official Instagram of the house. (Thaissa Barzellai, author of the Carioca Agenda 2020).

As already mentioned, FARM is a brand that aims much more than the sale of clothing and accessories. It has always been involved in a composition of values, lifestyle and higher purpose. In addition to offering its products, FARM constantly and sequentially conquers its target audience, strengthening the relationship it already has with clients. This reinforces what Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan (2010) state, in total harmony with André Carvalhal's statement:

A fashion brand is not just a product, it is not just clothes, people when they buy the clothes, in fact, they are buying a lot more things. They are buying a whole universe, a whole package that is there around that clothing that makes the person identify, that makes the person come closer, that they like the brand or not. (André Carvalhal - Marketing Manager of the FARM brand, 2016).

To enrich the approach and better explore the focus theme of this article, we chose to invest in unstructured interviews with 5 sales professionals, including tenants and suppliers, with qualitative questions.

According to the report of a brand reseller, when reporting on the relationship program "I want FARM!" that has existed since 2005, the program helps and optimizes information to keep customers, strengthen the relationship and generate more sales. This includes strategies that contribute to verify the consumer's profile, segmenting customers in relation to their Recency, Frequency and Value (RFV). According to Hughes (1998), the RFV technique allows the division into categories, the records present in a database, in order to know who are the most recent buyers, those who buy more frequently and those who spend more on products and services.

According to the interview conducted, the opinion of representatives from the Sales area, the program brings many benefits for customers such as: exclusive settlement notices, flexibility in the form of payment, deadlines, gifts and birthday gifts, invitations to events in stores, previews of releases of collections, tips from the brand and clothing. According to them, the main difference of this relationship program for the great majority of those who exist in the

market today and are applied in fashion retail, "is that the consumer is the focus, and not only the product.

Figure 1 shows the 20% discount *newsletter* on all purchases during the anniversary month. The birthday discount is valid for physical stores and the amount varies according to the customer's spending volume.



**Figure 1-** FARM birthday discount newsletter  
Source: Personal e-mail (2012).

Figure 2 shows the advantages that the FARM brand offers to its customers, making available for subscription the "FARM Loyalty Club" program, which contains exclusive products, collections, special discounts and other offers.



**Figure 2 -** FARM Club Newsletter  
Source: Adoro FARM (2020). Retrieved from <https://adoro.farmrio.com.br/>

Since the brand was created, *e-commerce* was created to better leverage sales and have interaction with consumers. Currently, each store has specialized salespeople who are oriented to pay more attention to customers. The sellers have exclusive discounts, so for each online purchase, *you* can use a seller's discount coupon. According to an interview for *O Globo* newspaper, Kátia emphasizes that the brand values a lot the team of employees, from those who work in the office to the salespeople, who are carefully chosen by the partners. The whole selection process is very much analyzed before, because there is a concern in hiring salespeople

who truly convey the style of the brand. All are submitted to intensive training in order to learn about behavior, service and, of course, all the details of the collection.

In the Instagram social network, each saleswoman has a professional profile (Figure 3) aimed at selling the brand exclusively. These salespeople interact with the customers, posting news and clothing tips. The brand is able to constantly use WhatsApp to communicate with customers by sending out invitation postings, gift cards, discounts, and other special notices mentioned earlier in this article.



**Figure 3** - FARM salesperson profile

Source: Instagram (2020).

According to the information obtained in an interview conducted directly with a brand seller, FARM is currently investing in the relationship with this channel, which is so important for spraying the brand. The company provides various benefits through relationship actions that cause impacts seen as very positive by partners. "There is a relationship of trust and appreciation between the supplier and the store owner," said the interviewee, adding that FARM usually provides differentiated payment terms, gifts and, above all, flexible negotiations that enable greater security and trust for both parties in a context of total "win-win".

## 5 Final Considerations and Analysis of Results

When it comes to women's fashion, clothing, many brands come to mind. In fact, there are many representatives of the feminine universe who meet all tastes and styles, seeking to suit a complex, unique woman who wants to be represented in the shop windows of physical and virtual stores that offer them products. By choosing to write about FARM, they position themselves not only as researchers, but as "card fans" of a brand that goes far beyond the production of women's clothing. As they write and identify the Relationship Marketing strategies used by the Rio de Janeiro clothing brand FARM, they tighten their bonds and become even more admired.

This article shows that the success of the FARM brand is unquestioned by its growth, by the differentiated and constant products, in the effort to link its brand to values, feelings and purposes that, in the act of purchase and consumption, acquire real value for consumers. This was one of the reasons that led to the choice of the FARM brand as the object of study.

It was possible to ascertain how essential and important the brand's relationship with its consumers and customers is, making it clear that there is a strong relationship that goes beyond its points of sale. Through the Relationship Marketing strategies that happen before, during and after the purchase, the brand began to participate more actively in the lives of its customers, providing them with positive experiences and making them build a true fan club. It is also worth

reinforcing that it was possible to realize how much the brand cares about having an interactivity, both with its loyal customers and with new and future consumers.

Among the possible conclusions from what was investigated is that the brand constantly invests in communication, developing actions and strategies in its own channels, such as *e-commerce*, the *blog* "Adoro FARM!" and the brand loyalty club available on the *website*. Also noteworthy are the profiles on social networks such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. It was observed that all communication is aimed at producing a kind of enchantment and thus strengthen the relationship with customers.

As far as Relationship Marketing is concerned, it has drawn attention to the fact that it has existed since the creation of the brand, i.e., FARM has always considered after-sales, active and heated relationships to be present. They definitely want the client to return, to buy back, to indicate, to influence and experience forever the lifestyle linked to the brand.

According to Bretzke (1992) relationship programs generally use these features: customer club; customer seminars; user sponsorship; customer targeted publications: *newsletters*, magazines, audio and videos; credit cards or special credit conditions; additional company privileges; 24 hour order fulfillment; assistance; special discounts and lower price guarantees.

As Gordon (2002) quotes, "relationship marketing is the ongoing process of identifying and creating new values with individual customers and sharing their benefits over a lifetime of partnership.

Relationship Marketing, unlike Mass Marketing, actually acts in a personalized way, *one to one*, considering the individualities and establishing a dialogue with the client. However, it is known that in order to consolidate itself as a successful and recommended strategy, Relationship Marketing needs to be measured and monitored. To do so, it is necessary to rely on key performance indicators, also known as *Key Performance Indicators* (KPIs) in order to obtain proper control and always be able to project improvements in the strategy. Today, the company measures the result of its Relationship Marketing actions by means of number of followers on social networks, *Net Promoter Score* type satisfaction surveys, which, according to *Rock Content* (2019), is a customer satisfaction methodology developed to evaluate the degree of customer loyalty of any company profile, after the purchase at the physical stores and *e-commerce*, with personalized conversation with customers at the FARM concept house, portfolio customer repurchase index, increase in the average *ticket of a captive customer*, various posts on the "Adoro FARM" *blog*, among other indicators.

In order to broaden knowledge and vision about Relationship Marketing, this study contributed to academic and professional growth. Thus, the case study developed, besides enriching the knowledge for the parties involved, in which it was possible to seek information so that this study could be carried out, served to guide and deepen the knowledge about Relationship Marketing, which is increasingly being an indispensable tool for companies and also serving as an advance for professionals in the marketing sector.

## **6 Limitations, Restrictions and Suggestions for Research**

The results of this study may contribute to a better understanding and perception of the Relationship Marketing study for companies, in what way this impact is in the "eyes" of customers and why the relationship sector is generating more and more positive results in the fashion industry today.

This study may also serve as a basis for other brands starting in the fashion business. It will expand ideas and knowledge about the influence of Relationship Marketing, as well as serve as a comparison to new business models of clothing brands.

It is worth noting that the present study faced some limitations. For example, a limitation regarding the search for more information and with respect to data collection, as it was an exploratory type of research, it was necessary to build some hypotheses and improve ideas, which made the search for data and evidence more difficult. A larger sample, if possible collected, with other statistical analyses, could generate new results and better guidance. For this, it was necessary to invest in planning and improving priority information, both in data collection and analysis, in order to minimize the effect of possible biases. Therefore, the development of the model presented, with possible new interactions, is recommended as a suggestion for future contributions, in order to be improved and strengthened.

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