

## Salespersons' Skills-Set in Marketing Exchanges: Implications for Pharmaceutical Companies

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### Abstract

The emphasis of this research study is about salespersons' skills-set (customer orientation, adaptive selling) and its influence on customer behaviors in terms of repeat purchase and word-of-mouth. In addition to this, study also aims at exploring the mediating role of salespersons' relational behavior between skills-set and customer behaviors. Since personal selling keeps on developing its dynamics, sales force is progressively accomplishing more than just communicating organizational message. Salespersons required additional skills-set including customer orientation and adaptive selling to cope with the modern behavioral challenges of customers. Quantitative research methodology was implied in which data was collected with the help of convenient sampling technique. Encouraging response rate of 80% was received from pharmaceutical employees out of 600 questionnaires. The responses received reveal significant positive impact of skills-set on customer behavior. Mediation effect of salespersons' relational behavior indicates salespersons focusing on cooperative intentions and mutual disclosure which are considered to be strong components of building relational behaviors. In high pressure selling techniques, salespersons possessing relational abilities are more likely to perform well. On this basis, it is recommended that with relational behaviors salespersons can better identify customer needs and wants. Secondly, salespersons will be in a better position to alter their selling techniques.

**Keywords:** Customer Behavior, Customer Orientation, Adaptive Selling, Relational Behaviors, Word-of-Mouth, Repeat Purchase, Cross-Buying, Pharmaceutical Industry

### Introduction

Studying customer behaviors is the prime focus of any organization. This is an era of competition where customers have multiple options in terms of brands and products. Numerous customer behavior models are available but still this research area needs further detailed investigation. As salespersons' job is getting more competitive and newly selling techniques are being incorporated. The implications of required measures have become more difficult to identify as sales processes are becoming multifaceted (Huhtala *et al.*, 2014). As it has become complex, the salesperson responsibility are also very demanding. Salesperson role is not only to sell the product but to answer the problem/issue of the customer in a way that the customers become loyal towards your company for the repeat purchases (Horbach & Rennings, 2013).

Both top management and salespersons jobs are getting tougher. For top management, they have to recruit salespersons with competitive skills-set. Due to these dynamic challenges it has become very difficult to select an individual and assess performance (Johnston & Marshall, 2009). The traditional method of selecting a salesperson was quite simple. The applicants who are extrovert, energetic, public dealing, task oriented was more likely to be selected (McClaren, 2013). As the modern era is more competitive, it is essential for both management and applicants to improve. For

management, additional measures are required to assess salespersons' performance. On the other hand, applicants should have more than traditional skills to become a part of any dynamic sales teams (Terho *et al.*, 2012).

After identifying a competitive skills-set, salespersons' are needed to develop their relational behaviors. These relational behaviors must have multiple outcomes in terms of cooperative intentions that these relational behaviors should be cooperative in term of exhibiting continuous support for the targeted customers. Secondly, interactions intensity that how often customers are willing to buy from you. The most importantly salespersons must play as a central hub for both company and customers (Sanja & Sylvie, 2016). This central hub should play smart for the interest of both parties. For company, salesperson should find loyal customers that make repeat purchases and interactions intensity must be high. For customers, a salesperson should assess and satisfy customers' needs and wants in a proper manner to gain his/her loyalty (Sanja & Rolland, 2016). Hence, this comprehensive model would more likely to develop loyal customer behavior in terms of repeat purchases and word of mouth.

This research shows evidence that sales professionals which focuses on buyer-seller relationship, influence sales revenue and retain more customers, which has potential implications for maintaining customer relationships over time. Salespeople who interacts customers more often, are more likely to perceive how the customer feels in various situations, know which selling strategies are useful in various settings, understand how basic cooperative strategy might evolve given a customers' current trust state, and manage emotions to reduce frustration and anxiety or elevate moods through positive emotion. Thus, relational behavior can be important to effective customer relationship management and can substantially affect the firm's bottom line (Alex *et al.*, 2012).

Adding to the direct effects of relational behavior on salespersons, our findings indicate that better relational behavior helps salespeople to significantly influence the effectiveness of key marketing exchange variables. The marketing literature has emphasized the importance of influencing customers' decision making to find optimal solutions and the importance of meeting customers' needs (customer orientation). This suggests that without relational behavior, sales professionals trying to use customer orientation may not recognize which emotions will reduce tension, fail to understand how negative emotions will lead to anger and frustration, and be unable to manage customers' emotions by helping them relax (Hur, Moon, & Jung, 2015).

In their failure, they might seem to be uncaring, disingenuous, or even manipulative. Thus, relational behavior can significantly improve the use of selling techniques (Delmas & Pekovic, 2015). These relationships represent an extension of how relational behaviors influence customer relationships and suggest that salespeople who have mutual disclosure as a their main concern will not only perform more effectively but also more proficiently employ strategies designed to create and maintain strong positive customer relationships (Yoo & Arould, 2014).

### **Literature Review**

Higher sales is the ultimate goal of any business organizations, for this reason every organization should have a best chunk of sale force. For this critical part, modern businesses have some pre-requisites of hiring potential salespeople. Hence, they are the boundary-spanners between the organization and its customers. Salespeople those are good in identifying customer needs and wants are more likely to perform well in the field. Additional skills like adaptive during sales encounters is also very important.

Salespersons role is different now, they are not hired to sell a product or service or solution to any problem. They are hired to create a strong bond between the organization and customer through being customer oriented and adaptive in the field. Furthermore, salespersons relational be-

havior is very important in making this bond stronger. This bond will have manifold benefits. Firstly, the customer will do repeat purchases. Secondly, if customer is satisfied with one product of the company then he/she will do cross-buying too. Thirdly, the most effective marketing tool is word of mouth (WOM), eventually if a customer is satisfied he/she will spread a positive word of mouth for that particular brand.

Therefore, researcher believe that, for this particular study all the variables (customer orientation, adaptive selling, emotional intelligence, salesperson relational behavior and customer behavior) have objective characteristics in organizations like pharmaceutical as this study is investigating reality of relationship between salespersons' skill set and customer behavior in terms of repeat purchase and word of mouth; therefore, researcher has selected objectivism. In this particular research study researcher has discussed about salespersons' skills (customer orientation, adaptive selling) and their impact on customer behavior (repeat purchase and word of mouth) with role of emotional intelligence (moderator) and relational behavior (mediator) which have tangible realities.

#### *Salespersons' Skills-set*

Customer orientation is considered as the key area of interest as far as salespersons abilities are concerned. Salesperson uses this as a tool which point out the limit to which a sales person can take part in buying decision for a customer. In case of facing customers the sales representatives with customer orientation, participate actively (Juliet, John, & Tanner, 2010). High level of customer orientation enables a representative to resist from actions that dissatisfy a customer.

Previous studies have shown salespersons with customer oriented abilities are more likely to influence customer behaviors in terms of repeat purchase and positive word of mouth. As a salesperson is a nominated representative of a company who faces customers therefore the sole aim of the salesperson is to fulfill customer needs (Sanja & Sylvie, 2016). Whereas companies that focus on customer orientation provide higher performance. They also deliver solutions according to the needs of customers as observed by sales representatives. Furthermore, representatives also provide the customers with alternative solutions to cater their needs better (Ehert, 2004).

It was mentioned by Saxe and Weitz (1982) customer orientation can be beneficial for the salespersons for building long-term profitable relationships between company and its customers (Stock *at al.*, 2005). Customer oriented behaviors can positively influence customer decision making in many ways. For instance, customer oriented salesperson will be in a better position to understand the needs and wants of the customers. Secondly, he/she shall be in better position to offer product, service or solution to meet that highlighted problem (Saxe & Weitz, 1982). Keeping customer oriented approach salespersons can build long-term profitable business relationships with their targeted customers (Yoo & Arnould, 2014).

It is required for the salespersons to adopt behaviors which are appealing to customers and avoid those which repel customers (Dunlap, Dotson, & Chambers, 1988). The sales representatives that care more for customer's preferences are supposed to provide better solutions and products that satisfy them. High manipulative behaviors mostly mislead customers ultimately results in brand switching behaviors (Reinartz, Thomas, & Bascoul, 2008). Therefore, identification of customers' needs and wants is essential. Salespersons that are more customers focused are more likely to build strong customer behaviors in terms of repeat purchase, cross buying and positive word of mouth.

Secondly, the skill-set include adaptive selling, adaptive selling is defined as the shifting behaviors of salespersons while sales encounters. When this technique works it proves to be profitable for both parties. It also allows improving ones' ability to collect relevant information from the targeted customers and to utilize it effectively. Adaptive salespersons have this convincing ability that they can alter the decision making of the customers with their active participation (Boorum, Ram-

sey, & Goolsby, 1998). Therefore, customer behaviors can be altered by high adaptive salespersons (Keillor *et al.*, 2000). Being adaptive in sales encounters now has become prominent solution to deal with knowledgeable customers (Cannon & Perreault, 1999). As the positive effect on salesperson's attitude and behavior, adaptive selling has proved to be key to success in this competitive era (Park & Holloway, 2003; Fang, Evans, & Palmatier, 2004).

Hence, to deal with market competition and complex customer behaviors, companies need those salespersons which are more customers oriented and adaptive in several sales strategies. Therefore, study hypothesized as follow

**H1:** The more salespersons is customer oriented the higher will be the repeat purchases and positive word-of-mouth by the customer

**H2:** The better the salespersons' adaptive selling the higher will be the repeat purchases and positive word-of-mouth by the customer

### ***Salespersons' Relational Behavior and Customer Behavior***

Salespersons' relational behaviors defined as the behavioral capacity utilized to work continuously for the betterment of buyer-seller relationship (Irene, 2012). In simple words, actions, strategies developed in order to maintain the profitable relationship is the key interest of these relational behaviors. Although these actions or strategies are evaluated by the customers, how much a salesperson is responsible. This relationship is based on customer expectancy of salespersons' role in building this buyer-seller relationship. Crosby *et al.*, (1990) conceptualized salesperson relational behavior on three dimensions. He suggested that a salespersons role should be based on mutual disclosure, cooperative intentions, and interaction intensity. In contrast to this, other researchers considered relational behavior as in problem solving tactic. In this particular research study, author has taken salesperson relational behavior on the basis of mutual disclosure, cooperative intentions, and interaction intensity.

Building relationships is the key interest of salespersons these days. Due to dynamic customers behaviors this is becoming more difficult for the salespersons to exhibit such selling strategies which promote mutual disclosure (Huhtala *et al.*, 2014). Salesperson duty is becoming challenging as this is not about one time interaction. Relationships need continuous interactions to be aware on latest customers' issues. Therefore, even though a salesperson is customer oriented and adaptive during sales encounters. Hence, salespersons need to be cooperative as well as up to date with its target customer in order to maintain buyer-seller relationship. Therefore, this research study hypothesizes as follow

**H3:** The better the salespersons' relational behavior the better the mediating effect among customer orientation and customer behavior in terms of repeat purchase, and word-of-mouth

**H4:** The better the salespersons' relational behavior the better the mediating effect among adaptive selling and customer behavior in terms of repeat purchase, and word-of-mouth

### **Materials and Methods**

Quantitative research technique is used to measure social phenomena by gathering and dissecting numerical information, and concentrating on the connection among more modest number of properties crosswise over many cases (Tuli, 2010, p.106). Salespersons working in pharmaceutical companies of Pakistan make the population of this research study. Pharmaceutical industry in Pakistan is very competitive and fast growing industry. Around 800 pharmaceutical manufacturing plants are being installed and they are fulfilling 70% of the finished medicines demands of Pakistan. Many of these 800 pharmaceutical manufacturing units are controlled by 25 multinational companies operating in Pakistan. Therefore, a huge competitive has been seen between domestic and multinational-

al pharmaceutical companies in Pakistan. Following are the most popular domestic and multinational pharmaceutical companies operating in Pakistan.

**Table 1. Top 10 Pharmaceutical Companies**

No.	Company	No.	Company
1	Getz Pharma	6	Bayar
2	Abbott Laboratories (Pakistan) Ltd	7	SAMI pharmaceutical (Pvt.) Ltd
3	Ferozsons Laboratories	8	Hilton Pharma Ltd.
4	The Searle Company Ltd	9	Wyeth Pakistan Limited
5	Pfizer Pakistan Limited	10	GlaxoSmithKline Pakistan Limited

Questionnaires are distributed in different units of above mentioned pharmaceutical companies located in major cities of Pakistan like Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Sialkot and Gujranwala. The respondents were the employees of marketing and sales department of these above mentioned pharmaceutical companies.

## Results

### *Demographic Details*

Initially, a number of 450 questionnaires were collected from the sampling subjects. Almost same response was seen from all pharmaceutical companies. It was almost 80% encouraging response rate. Subsequently the scrutenization of questionnaires and entry of responses from the sample entities clears the picture that 480 questionnaires were filled and out of these 450 questionnaires were properly filled out by the respondents.

**Table 2. Gender-wise Demographics (N-450)**

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	379	84.2	84.2
Female	71	15.8	100.0
Total	450	100.0	

Table 2 explains gender-wise demographics. The majority of respondents of this research study are male. 379 respondents which are 84% of the total sample size fall in the male category. Remaining 16% respondents are female. This shows that most pharmaceutical companies have more male salespersons as compared to female salespersons. In other words, it can be assumed that pharmaceutical industry prefers to hire male salespersons as compared to female salespersons.

### *Mediation*

The researchers should remember that if the stages required in Baron and Kenny's process are totally fulfilled, despite everything it doesn't infer that the mediation has happened as there are different less conceivable models that are steady with the information. In direct relationship, the impact of independent variable (customer orientation) on dependent variable (customer behavior) is 11% as acceptance is confirmed by the p- value as it shows less than 0.05.

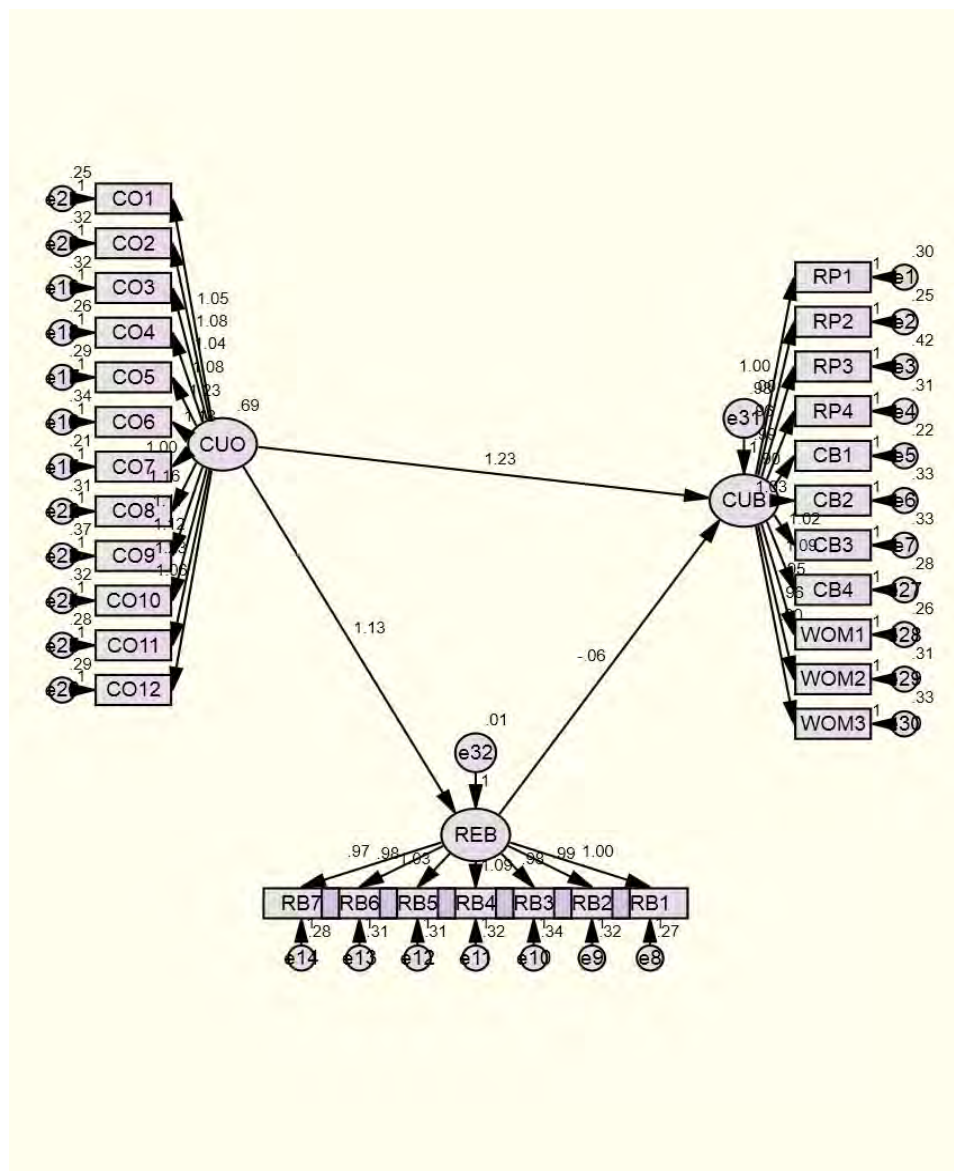
**Table 3. Regression Weights Mediation-1**

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
CB	<---	CO	.930	.044	26.584	***

The effect of independent variable customer orientation is 0.930 where is significant value is less than 0.05. After including mediator variable (relational behavior) the impact become higher 1.133 with significant P-value stays less than 0.05 therefore no mediation is found between customer orientation and customer behavior.

**Table 4. Estimates mediation-1**

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
RB	<---	CO	1.133	.042	26.982	***
CB	<---	CO	1.228	.648	1.896	.058
CB	<---	RB	-.058	.569	-.101	.919



**Figure 1. Mediation between customer orientation & customer behavior**

**Table 5 Model-Fit Indices for Mediation 1**

Model Fit	Values
RMR	0.014
RAMSEA	0.022
Normed $\chi^2$	1.221
GFI	0.945
CFI	0.996
AGFI	0.935
NFI	0.976
IFI	0.996
TLI	0.995

The table 5 mentioned above signifies some of the other model fit indices which measures the goodness of model suggested by Jeremy an Hun (2009) in their research study like Goodness of fit (GFI), Adjusted goodness of fit (AGFI), Comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), NFI, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) and Root Mean Square Residual (RMR).

Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) proposed that GFI is alternatively used against  $\chi^2$ . Sigauw (2000) stated that the statistical range of GFI is 0 to 1. The value of GFI is closer to 1 signifies more goodness of fit index (MacCallum and Hong, 1997) and the acceptance range is .7 to 1. Sharma (2005) reported that the enhancement in GFI value is because of greater degree of freedom against the sampling size. The table shows that the value of GFI=.0945

AGFI statistics shows the value of .935 and is showing goodness of fitness index at excellent level. Adjusted goodness of fit (AGFI) signifies the degree of freedom depicting the reduction of fitness and more saturation of model ranges between 0 to 1 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Generally the values more than 0.90 are acceptable.

Comparative fitness index (CFI) demonstrated the statistics of 0.996, which is closer to the goodness acceptable index, and hence the value is equal to 1. Fan et al (1999) reported in his study that CFI is least affected by the sample size. The table further signifies the NFI = 0.972 which is excellent e as Hu and Bentler (1999) demonstrated the cut off criteria in their study that values near to 1 are acceptable.

Diamantopoulos and Sigauw (2000) reported in their study that the most sensitive fitness index in connotation with the number of parameters in the research model is RMSEA. Byrne (1998) suggested in his research the statistical value range is .05 to 0.10 whereas the MacCallum (1996) sets the categorization on the basis of statistical value range depicting fair indexation fit of values beyond 0.10 are considered to be poor fitness index and values between 0.80 to 0.10 providing medium fitness index whereas the values below 0.80 shows good fit. However, more recently, a cut-off value close to .06 (Hu and Bentler, 1999) or a stringent upper limit of 0.07 (Steiger, 2007) seems to be the general consensus amongst authorities in this area. The table above shows statistics of RMSEA=.022 which is in an acceptable range.

### **Mediation 2**

The researchers should remember that if the stages required in Baron and Kenny's process are totally fulfilled, despite everything it doesn't infer that the mediation has happened as there are different less conceivable models that are steady with the information. In direct relationship, the impact of independent variable (customer orientation) on dependent variable (customer behavior) is 11% as acceptance is confirmed by the p- value as it shows less than 0.05.

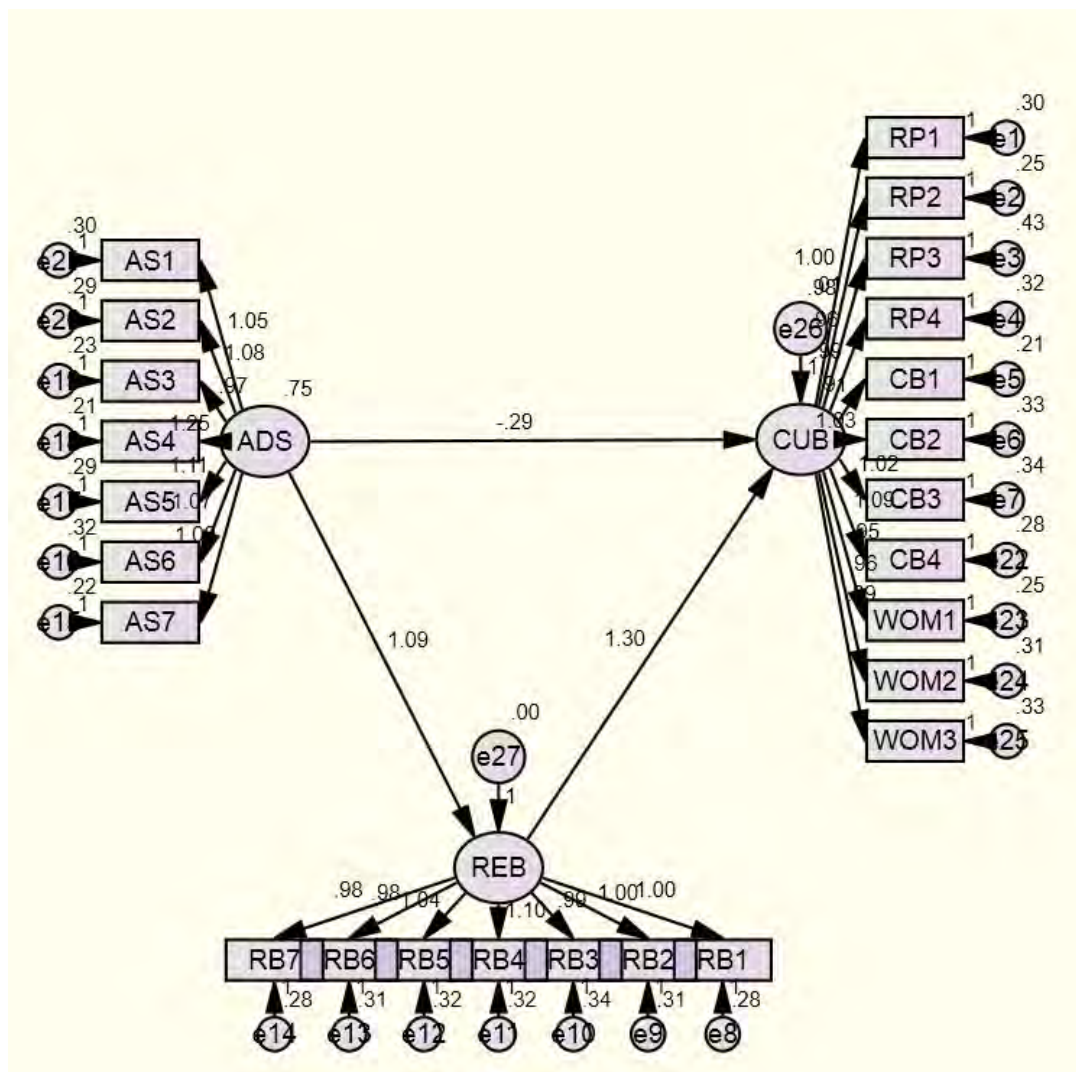
**Table 6. Regression Weights Mediation-2**

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
CB	<---	AS	0.900	.031	29.312	***

The effect of second predictor variable adaptive selling is 0.900 where is significant value is less than 0.05. After including mediator variable (relational behavior) the impact become higher with a value of 1.089 with insignificant P-value (0.825) which is not less than 0.05 therefore full mediation is found between adaptive selling and customer behavior.

**Table 7. Estimates mediation-2**

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
RB	<---	AS	1.089	.041	28.826	***
CB	<---	AS	-.295	1.332	-.221	.825
CB	<---	RB	1.299	1.059	1.059	.289



**Figure 2: Mediation between adaptive selling & customer behavior**



**Table 8. Model-Fit Indices for Mediation 2**

Model Fit	Values
RMR	0.014
RAMSEA	0.019
Normed $\chi^2$	1.160
GFI	0.938
CFI	0.996
AGFI	0.928
NFI	0.972
IFI	0.996
TLI	0.996

The table 8 mentioned above signifies some of the other model fit indices which measures the goodness of model suggested by Jeremy an Hun (2009) in their research study like Goodness of fit (GFI), Adjusted goodness of fit (AGFI), Comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), NFI, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) and Root Mean Square Residual (RMR).

Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) proposed that GFI is alternatively used against  $\chi^2$ . Siguaw (2000) stated that the statistical range of GFI is 0 to 1. The value of GFI is closer to 1 signifies more goodness of fit index (MacCallum and Hong, 1997) and the acceptance range is .7 to 1. Sharma (2005) reported that the enhancement in GFI value is because of greater degree of freedom against the sampling size. The table shows that the value of GFI=.0938

AGFI statistics shows the value of .928 and is showing goodness of fitness index at excellent level. Adjusted goodness of fit (AGFI) signifies the degree of freedom depicting the reduction of fitness and more saturation of model ranges between 0 to 1 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Generally the values more than 0.90 are acceptable.

Comparative fitness index (CFI) demonstrated the statistics of 0.996, which is closer to the goodness acceptable index, and hence the value is equal to 1. Fan et al (1999) reported in his study that CFI is least affected by the sample size. The table further signifies the NFI = 0.972 which is excellent e as Hu and Bentler (1999) demonstrated the cut off criteria in their study that values near to 1 are acceptable.

Diamantopoulos and Siguaw (2000) reported in their study that the most sensitive fitness index in connotation with the number of parameters in the research model is RMSEA. Byrne (1998) suggested in his research the statistical value range is .05 to 0.10 whereas the MacCallum (1996) sets the categorization on the basis of statistical value range depicting fair indexation fit of values beyond 0.10 are considered to be poor fitness index and values between 0.80 to 0.10 providing medium fitness index whereas the values below 0.80 shows good fit. However, more recently, a cut-off value close to .06 (Hu and Bentler, 1999) or a stringent upper limit of 0.07 (Steiger, 2007) seems to be the general consensus amongst authorities in this area. The table above shows statistics of RMSEA=.019 which is in an acceptable range.

### Discussion

The prime objective of this research study is to check the impact of salespersons' skills-set and their impact on customer behaviors mediating affect of relational behavior between customer orientation, adaptive selling, and customer behavior.

The first hypothesis of this research study is "the better the salespersons' customer orientation the better will be the customer behavior in terms of repeat purchase, cross buying and word-of-mouth". Customer oriented salesperson can play an essential part during sales encounters. The reason behind this that customer-oriented salespersons are more likely to better evaluate customer needs and wants (Franke & Park, 2006). Furthermore, they are more likely to provide customers with best suitable solutions with regard to customer needs and wants.

Organizations these days are growing faster, the essential key factors regarding how to better communicate to the targeted customers to make them aware about organizational value creation, giving assurance, evaluating and offering best solutions to customer needs and wants, these key goals cannot be achieved without including the vital frontier spanners, the salesperson.

Customer orientation is getting attention in marketing literature. Customer orientation from the salesperson's perspective has examined in many researches. Enhancement of salesperson's performance is a key concern in the sales process. This aspect is very important but still it is unexplored and in the current economic situation where companies are trying to be more competitive with high productivity and rise in cost of sales with less interest of consumer in purchasing undertaking.

The second hypothesis of this research study is "the better the salespersons' adaptive selling the better will be the customer behavior in terms of repeat purchase, cross buying and word-of-mouth". Salesperson who has adaptive selling behavior will have more knowledge about several selling techniques, which are required in different sales situations. Salesperson should have confidence in the capability to utilize a wide range of different sales techniques (Keillor *et al.*, 2000).

Furthermore, Salesperson should have confidence in the capability to modify the sales technique during a market sales encounter (Jaramillo *et al.*, 2007). A knowledge structure that assists to know about different selling circumstances to identify which technique is best suited in each circumstance (Park & Holloway, 2003). Collecting information to adapt best selling technique is mandatory. The accurate utilization of several techniques in several selling situations is essential at the end because until and unless an accurate selling technique would result worst if it were not implemented accurately (Park & Deitz, 2006).

The third and fourth hypothesis of this research study is "the better salespersons' relational behavior the better the mediating effect among a) customer orientation b) adaptive selling and customer behavior in terms of repeat purchase and word of mouth. The relationships and affiliations inside firms start with making contacts between every representative as the business is to convey on the premise of these encounters. Tests infer that while the assessment of people an all the more surely and grounded surveys are given while assessing amid get-togethers; these audits are firmly identified with the behavior and results. Thus, within the sight of an individual expert the judgments on relations would be lesser identified with result within the sight of social attributes the firm offered, progressively sure and in addition grounded. Parallel to this a client to businessman battle has been battled under ominous and beneficial impacts. For instance, many firms headed their workers for making solid relationships with their customers because of the dread of preoccupation of clients' endurance towards the representative allowing them to "seize" clients while moving among occupations. In the wake of considering all situations it appears to that the client to representative determination may consolidate to give eventual outcomes that are identified with money offers, offerings and headway, coming about into paying regard premiums because of loyalty and commitment to the organizations alongside the client's ability. Along these lines the concentration of alliance will move from solitary relationship to offerings related relationships. Because of this the connection the go between in connection would be more useful as it is a superior choice as contrast with self-association. As there is no immediate show to gauge the force at singular level, e.g. inside the isolat-

ing point crossing individuals notoriety and particular partner individuals acknowledge the piece of between authoritative trades.

### Conclusion

Relational behaviors of salespersons should be the main concern of organizations. Adaptive selling behavior during every single sales encounter is very important where the competition is very high, buying patterns of customers are very complicated. Study forecast that relational behavior might have essential contingency effects in sales encounters rather effecting directly customer behavior. Building long-lasting relationships through salespersons' relational behavior during every single sales encounter is very important where the competition is very high, buying patterns of customers are very complicated. Adaptability is crucial for every salesperson. In several selling situations it is difficult to evaluate customers' choice. Salespersons with better adaptive selling would easily alter their selling techniques in that particular situation. Similarly, salespersons' relational behaviors can potentially enhance repeat purchases and word-of-mouth.

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