

***Impact Of Salespersons' Skills-Set On Customer Behavior: Mediating Role Of Salespersons' Relational Behavior In Pharmaceutical Industry***

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**Keywords:**

Customer Orientation,  
Adaptive Selling,  
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Customer Behavior,  
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**ABSTRACT**

*Sales force perform essential role in generating revenue and income for the companies. The principal responsibilities of salespersons are the selling of product or services in order to generate profits for the company. The current research examines the impact of salespersons' skills-set on customers' behaviors in terms of repeat purchase and word-of-mouth. Vis-à-vis, explore the mediating role of salespersons' relational behavior. The study based on customer behavior Cognitive theory of Zeithaml and Crosby theory of Relational Behavior. The sample is consisted of top 10 companies were selected based on market share, highly talent sales force, and reward system. Total of 617 questionnaires were distributed on the basis of simple random sampling technique among salespersons of these selected companies in which 450 questionnaires were selected for further examination. For the study data were collected based on certified questionnaire adapted from the studies of Zeithaml, Saxe, Weitz, Spiro and Guo. The results revealed significant positive impact of skills-set on customer behaviors (repeat purchase, word-of-mouth). Similarly, the moderation and mediation effects were found to be positively significant. Partial mediation was found among adaptive selling, repeat purchase and word-of-mouth. These findings have implications for improving interactions in buyer-seller relationships and salespersons selection and training.*

**INTRODUCTION**

Achieving sales goals has become very challenging these days, Firms these days confront severe challenges, where accomplishing deals objectives has turned to be very difficult. For instance, a survey

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report revealed that in 2018, just 29% sales representatives accomplished their sales goals. In such competitive business conditions, sales representatives might be enticed to utilize hard selling techniques, which may undermine an organization's capacity to assemble strong bonding with its clients. This can be risky, particularly on the grounds when clients' discernments about a sales representative's utilization of "pushy" practices may endanger the constructive outcomes. To develop and keep up long-lasting

associations with end customers, sales representatives need to adjust their selling techniques during different phases of the relationship or during that particular sale (Ahearne & Rapp, 2010).

Customer orientation and adaptive selling are essential concepts in the marketing literature. Many researchers have analyzed the customer orientation of sales representatives (Anaza, Nowlin, & Wu, 2016). One of a noteworthy issue in sales encounters is to find out ways of upgradation of salespersons. This vital yet unexplored inquiry is particularly applicable during the current economic conditions, as organizations are attempting to converge their focus on increased sales costs and declining customers' enthusiasm for purchase decisions (Hur, Moon, & Jung, 2015). A large variety of items are available in the market, thus customers have various choices available. In these circumstances, sales representative must be more talented as the end goal is to make a sale in current challenging conditions (Delmas & Pekovic, 2015). A meta-examination by Jaramillo, Marshall, and Mulki, (2007), demonstrated customer orientation as a fundamental determinant of salesperson's prosperity.

Customer orientation and adaptive selling directly effects execution (Yoo and Arould, 2014), moreover, it is the most noticeable stream in salespersons' research (Franke & Park, 2006). Sales representative who is customer orientated will probably see customers' needs, satisfy customers' request, and unraveling customers' difficulties (Pehrsson, 2014). Customer orientation and adaptive selling brings win-win scenario, the purpose of customer orientation is that each and every customer is served by his particular needs (Chen, Tang, Jin, & Paille, 2015). High or low Level of performance of a salesperson can be predicted through customer orientation (Pekovic & Rolland, 2016).

Due to global economic disaster new customer behavior has developed (Ang, Leong, & Kotler, 2000). Customers have turned out to be more practical, economical and challenging (Flatters & Willmott, 2009). Thus, to improve their business execution, firms have turned out to be more clients focused, to offer the best incentive in an exceptionally aggressive market condition, investment in customer

orientation programs have gained huge importance (Lusch & Webster, 2010). Therefore, the prime objective of this research study is to check the impact of salespersons' skills-set. Moreover, this study also intends to check the mediating affect of relational behavior between customer orientation, adaptive selling, and customer behavior. Modernization and rapid changes in psychological behaviors of customers, has led researchers to take interest in the development of an understanding of special kinds of skills-set needed for the salespersons to cope with these modern challenges. To investigate such pattern, this particular research study aims at exploring the importance of salespersons' skills in marketing exchanges. Therefore, it also intends to investigate the mediating role of salespersons' relational behaviors and customer behaviors in terms of repeat purchase and positive word-of-mouth.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Customer Behavior**

Creative customer behavior can be used by sales personnel and service firms for obtaining useful ideas. Utilizing these ideas in terms of exploiting them for betterment and enhancement of supply chain system is based on customers and salespersons' suggestions (Gong & Choi, 2016). Companies consider customers as a source of improvement and innovation for product/service improvements. Innovative ideas for development of product/services are presented by firms at the time of consultation, in which customers can play their part in production of outcomes that prove to be successful. The reason that customers are comparatively more conscious of their own needs (Ingram et al., 2011). The way consumers settle on decisions regarding items available or services provide to consumer is contained in the literature with implicated or specific meanings related to consumer behavior. Customer behavior is the sum of powers that shape the process of customer purchasing along with consumer purchasing himself. These are addressed as identity, past encounters, states of mind, situational and promoting impacts (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2006). The way these become decisions through translation and comprehension is less practical than in discussions. Now days, business shouldn't be taken for granted or underestimated as the owners of these businesses take a detailed look into customer behavior so that the key point is impacted for decisions of customers related to purchasing. Marketers should find ways or strategies to achieve repeat purchases and positive word-of-mouth.

## **Customer Behavior Outcomes**

### **Repeat Purchase**

When a customer decides to purchase a product once again is known as customer repurchasing, along with the choice of taking part with specialist co-op in future and the shape in which the movement molds into. There are many parts of repurchase intentions concentrated by the analyst. According to depiction of Bhattacharjee (2001b), on fundamental rationale of ECT, the intention and making of mind for repurchasing have essential model sets of fulfillment and affirmation. Exchanging obstructions are directly influential on intentions for repurchase. Hence, past purchasing or exchanging, like rivalry, cost contemplations, suitable execution criteria, are the basis of intention of a customer to repurchase an item (Wathne et al., 2001). The dependence of repurchasing of an object is upon the purchasing of same service or item which clearly indicates the future of purchasing decisions. For the storage of productivity, basics require repeat-purchase intention of a client. About 25 to 85 percent increase in profits can be determined with just a 5 percent change in maintenance of client as sticking to one client is five times less costly rather than drawing a new one. Benefits can be built viably by organizations for products or services to lessen the costs for effective handling of customers along with the initiation of repeat-purchase intentions. Therefore, this is concluded to retain old customers, the companies should provide them with both functional and social benefits. The salespersons that provide better purchasing solutions to customers are more likely to retain customers. By getting both functional and social benefits, the old customers not only repurchase but also do cross buying from the same brand. The next section will discuss about word-of-mouth (WOM) and word-of-mouth as the best marketing strategy.

### **Word of Mouth**

The assessment of benefits among social private events are represented by WOM (Anderson, 1998), withstanding from exchange between firm and its customer and formal contacts, e.g., level of classes and progress. For instance, WOM is either extremely negative or positive looking from a clear perspective, direction, and suggestions. According to WOM correspondence is “the correspondence between a man and individual who receives data concerning an organization, brand or thing from the eye of a communicator who sees it as non-business”. At the time of advancing, this is a critical point as the customers become dependent on the course of others choice (Cheema & Kaikatki, 2010). The WOM

turns out as a reasonable influence upon buying rehearses rather than regular channels and after some time withholding clients (Villanueva et al., 2008). Similar is the WOM's central part in publicizing particular sort of correspondence, e.g. buzz displaying need to use imperativeness along these lines does viral advancing (Gruber, 2004). Bringing beneficiaries to the message along with straightforwardness are the focal points of promoting, bringing them straight towards WOM (Ahuja et al., 2007). Customers gain the energy to play their WOM improvement through the methods like intervening in message genuineness. The guarantee of data WOM can provide is various WOM in surroundings. It is still a fact to verify whether the persons benefitted by WOM who lead it themselves, have encountered things, and are more prone to give their encounters to others or not. With respect to these lines, this action has been emphasized by WOM to the correspondent of the one opposing it.

### **Relational Behaviors**

It may be mentioned by customer to state the relation with an individual worker with respect to affiliation and overall relationship offering. The relationships and affiliations within firms begin with creating contacts between each representative as the business is to deliver on the basis of these experiences (Ford, Gadda, Hakansson, & Snehota, 2003). Studies conclude that evaluation of individuals more doubtless and grounded reviews are given, while evaluating during social events, these reviews are closely related to the behavior and results. Similarly, in the presence of an individual specialist the judgments on relations would be lesser related to result in the presence of relational traits the firm offered, more certain as well as grounded (Palmatier, Scheer, & Steenkamp, 2007). Parallel to this a customer to businessman fight has been fought under unfavorable and profitable effects (Haytko, 2004). For instance, many firms bound their employees for making strong relationships with their clients due to the fear of diversion of customers' steadfastness towards the employee (Palmatier et al., 2007). After considering all scenarios it appears to Palmatier et al., (2007) that the relationship between customer and sales representative would be beneficial for both. Which are related to cash offers, offerings and advancement, resulting into paying esteem premiums due to loyalty and commitment to the firms. In this way the focus of affiliation will shift from singular relationship to long-term relationships. This would result as win-win situation for both customer and salespersons.

### **Adaptive Selling and Customer Behavior**

Adaptive selling is defined by Weitz and Sujan, (1986) as shift in the sales behavior when sale happen

or interactions with customer depending upon the information of this interaction. This idea was further developed by Spiro and Weitz (1990), while explaining the concept of adaptive selling. Adaptive selling considered as a tool-kit for the success of long-term relations. Furthermore, it considered to be cost effective for its dynamic implications for both customers and organization. Hence, adaptive selling enhances the capability of the sales people to collect relevant and accurate knowledge for application. While dealing in complex transaction, which may be of large volume, use of adaptive selling will reduce the cost to minimum level. By the reductions in conflicts, it also enables the salesperson to be more confident (Huhtala et al., 2014).

This technique outweighs other marketing techniques especially when it comes to huge business deals in large volumes. Adaptive behaviors minimize the issues in deals that results in long term buyer-seller relationships. When this technique works it proves to be profitable for both parties. It also allows improving ones' ability to collect relevant information from customers and then utilized the same type of selling tactics in same type of deal settings. Hence, adaptive selling enables a representative to learn through different sales encounters and uses if necessary. Even toughest business deals can be effectively managed through adaptive behaviors. Prior researches have recommended that sales representative's performance can be enhanced through adaptive behavior. There would be more win-win chances if these adaptive behaviors are utilized accurately and timely (Keillor *et al.*, 2000).

### **Customer Orientation and Customer Behavior**

Customer orientation directly effects sales performance (Yoo and Arould, 2014), moreover, one of the most important area of research regarding sales force investigations (Franke & Park, 2006). Sales representative who is customer orientated will probably see customers' needs, satisfy customers' request, and unraveling customers' difficulties (Pehrsson, 2014). Customer orientation brings win-win scenario, the purpose of customer orientation is that each and every customer is served by his particular needs (Chen, Tang, Jin, & Paille, 2015). Level of performance of a salesperson can be predicted through customer orientation on the basis of high or low level performance (Pekovic, Sanja, & Rolland, 2016). Meta analysis by Franke and Park (2006) proposed that a direct and significant relation exists between adaptive selling and customer behavior. During the incorporation of sales presentations, adaptive selling of high level is used by salesperson and modifications are also made by them according to the situations.

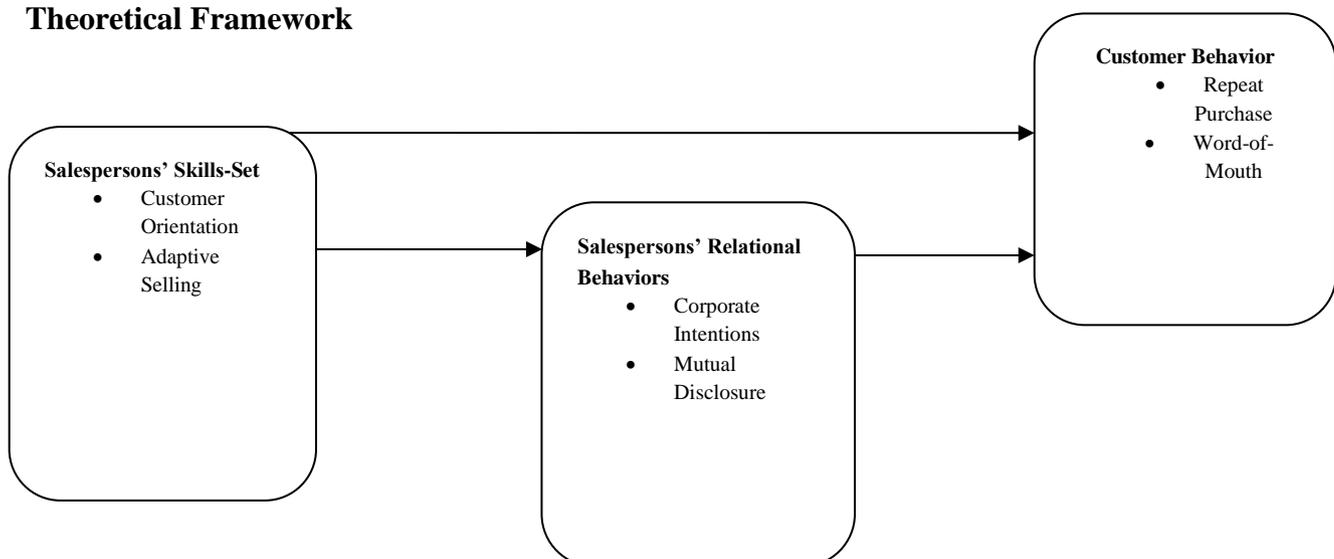
On the other hand, if adaptive selling is low in salespersons then they will use and apply the same and old styled presentations for all kind of sales, which may be ineffective (Salojärvi, Ritala, Sainio, & Saarenketo, 2015). Customer orientated behaviors are the source of customer satisfaction (Homburg & Stock, 2005). Hence, this loyalty and satisfaction will bring repeat purchase and positive word-of-mouth by the customers (Jones, Dacin, & Busch, 2003).

### Salespersons’ Relational Behavior and Customer Behavior

The main responsibility of the salespersons is to bring loyalty among targeted customers through adapting relational behaviors. Since a long time the topic of customer behavior has been of key importance (Anderson & Sullivan, 1993). A common meaning of satisfaction is disconfirmation/confirmation along with quality approach or perceived performance (Walter, Mueller, & Helfert, 2000). The foundations of satisfaction are based on quality of product and performance of representation. Satisfaction is the judgment passed by customer related to performance. Customer satisfaction covers variety of concepts, these contain ethical behavior, listening behavior, selling behavior, expectations fulfillment, empathy and expertise (Román & Iacobucci, 2010). Salespersons relational behaviors can positively influence customer’s behaviors in terms of repeat purchase and word-of-mouth.

Salespersons relational behavior is a topic that is emphasized in studies for delivering benefits to customers. As time and resources are not enough, the sales representatives have to decide the amount of effort required for directing customers. This allocation of effort is dependent on higher customer potential and higher customer’s propensity of switching which is negatively impacted by customer’s commitment and positively impacted by competitive offerings – therefore more effort should be subjected towards relationship. From studies it is suggested that a certain criterion should be set effort a sales representative has to allocate in a certain area (Tsiros et al., 2009), but vary less knowledge has been gathered that whether or not a person perceives to a customer’s commitment level.

### Theoretical Framework



## **Hypotheses**

**H1:** Adaptive selling is likely to enhance salespersons' ability to positively influence customer behavior

**H2:** Customer orientation is likely to enhance salespersons' ability to positively influence customer behavior

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

## **METHODOLOGY**

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). In quantitative research methodology deductive approach is utilized to discover a connection amongst hypothesis and research, in which the fundamental stress is put on the testing of theories. Quantitative methodology joins the acts of natural science models and the positivism position of epistemology and objectivism position of ontology (Bryman, 2016).

As specified before the research strategy is chosen by coordinating research philosophies, procedure and research problem. The way of our research question is to test the current hypothesis (deductive) as opposed to growing new speculations. We additionally chose positivism position of epistemology and objectivism position of ontology; which coordinate with quantitative research strategy. Since researcher is concerns about a connection between adaptive selling and customer

behavior by gathering quantifiable information through questionnaires and dissecting it by utilizing measurable instrument i.e., SPSS and AMOS, accordingly, it is proper to take after quantitative research strategy.

### **Sampling**

Both national and international pharmaceutical companies make the sample of this current study. The major companies included in this sector are (GSK (Glaxo Smithclin), Sanofi, Merck, Hilton Pharma, Stand Pharm, Searle, Getz, Abbott, Werrick and Willson. Scale of this research study is based on 33 items. It is recommended that if an item get 10 responses it is considered to be suitable (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2012). It makes  $33 \times 10 = 330$  hence for more accuracy a sample size of 617 is included for this research study.

### **Research Instrument**

Customer orientation was measured on 12-items scale. For customer orientation Saxe & Weitz (1982) 12-items scale is incorporated. Adaptive selling was measured on 7-items scale. For Adaptive selling Spiro & Weitz (1990) 7-items scale is selected. Relational behavior was measured on 7-items scale. Relational behavior's scale was adapted from a study conducted by (Guo, 2012). Customer behavior was measured on 11-items scale. For customer behavior 7-items scale proposed by Zeithaml *et al.*, (1996) has been employed.

## **RESULTS**

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 617 questionnaires were filled and out of these 450 questionnaires were properly filled out by the respondents.

### **Reliability**

The data collected from the survey respondents through the instrument/questionnaire must be reliable in aspects of its contents and constructs. An instrument is considerably legitimate and genuine

if its reliability is attained. Legitimacy of the instrument provides facilitation to the researcher and experts in lieu of research design and ultimately justifies for what they are looking into.

**Table 1:** Items & Reliability of Variables (N-450)

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>Reliability</b>
Relational Behavior	07	0.951
Customer Orientation	12	0.914
Adaptive Selling	07	0.957
Customer Behavior	07	0.970
Total	33	0.875

### Correlation

The table 2 below elucidates the correlation among the study variables of skill-set including being adaptive and customer oriented in context of salespersons, relational behavior as mediating factor, and customer behavior. Pearson correlation depicts the correlation exists between the understanding incorporation potential and advancement.

Bless and Kathuria (1993) stated that the Pearson correlation declares the level of correlation among the variables and strength of the existing connection. Bryman (2012) proclaimed that methods of connection indicate both the durability and route (+ or -) of the connection between the two variables.

**Table 2:** Pearson Correlation

	<b>AS</b>	<b>CB</b>	<b>RB</b>	<b>CO</b>
<b>AS</b>				
<b>CB</b>	.964**			
<b>RB</b>	.958**	.959**		
<b>CO</b>	.960**	.964**	.952**	

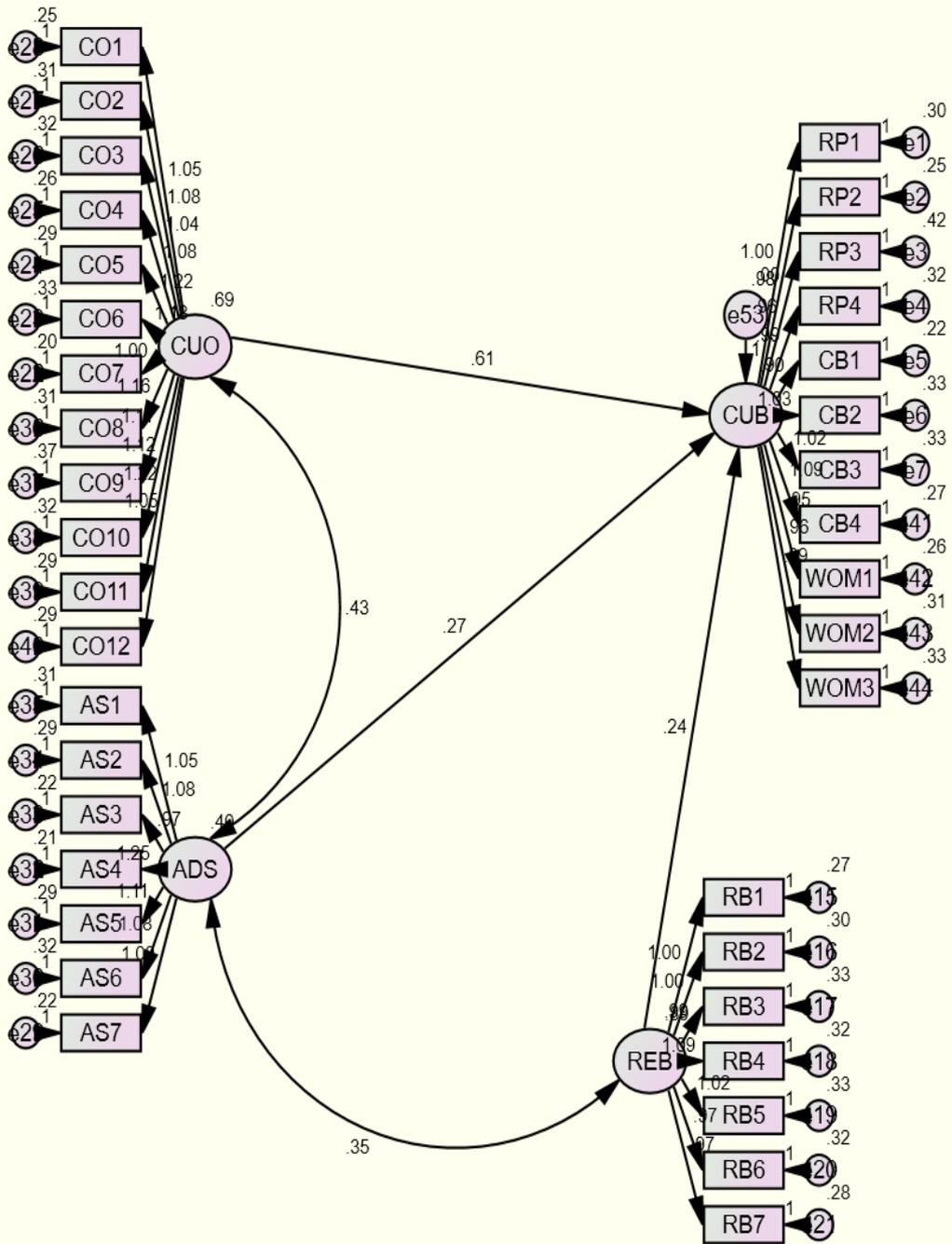
The above table shows the strong and positive correlation amongst the study variables which further signifies that customer orientation and adaptive selling context of salespersons, relational behavior, and customer behavior have positively strong effects on each other and if there will be change in any one of them the overall performance will be effected in the direction of change in variable.

## Structural Equation Modeling

**Table 3:** *Structural Equation Modeling Estimates*

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
CB	<---	CO	.613	.441	1.391	.164
CB	<---	AS	.275	.710	.387	.699
CB	<---	RB	.244	.274	.890	.374

**Figure- 1: Model Testing (SEM)**



**Table 4:** Model-Fit Indices for Structural Equation Modeling

Model Fit	Values
RMR	0.466
RAMSEA	0.067
Normed $\chi^2$	3.027
GFI	0.882
CFI	0.940
AGFI	0.867
NFI	0.913
IFI	0.940
TLI	0.936

**Mediation**

The direct impact of customer orientation on customer behavior is 0.163 which shows there is 16% change as acceptance is confirmed by the p-value as it shows less than 0.05 occurred in customer behavior with the change of 1% in customer orientation.

**Table 5:** Regression Weights Mediation-1

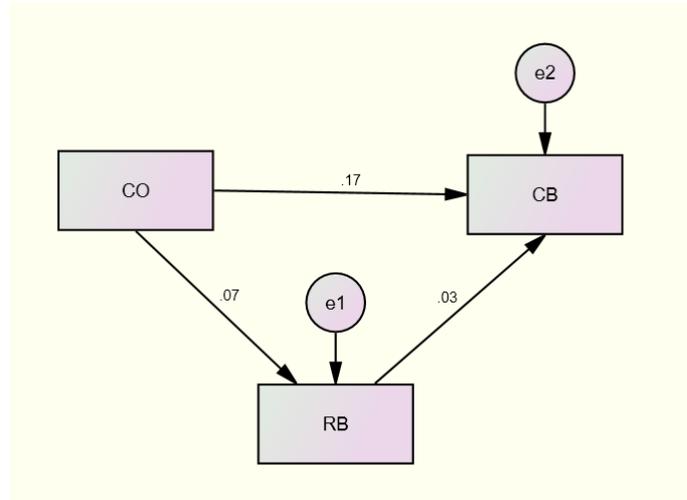
			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
CB	<---	CO	.163	.062	3.574	***

The effect of independent variable customer orientation is 0.163 where is significant value is less than 0.05. After including mediator variable (relational behavior) the impact become higher .220 with significant P-value stays less than 0.05 therefore partial mediation is found between customer orientation and customer behavior.

**Table 6:** Estimates mediation-1

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
RB	<---	CO	.098	.069	1.417	.156
CB	<---	CO	.220	.062	3.547	***
CB	<---	RB	.030	.042	.704	.418

**Figure 2:** Mediation between customer orientation & customer behavior



**Mediation 2**

The direct impact of adaptive selling on customer behavior is 0.203 which shows there is 20% change as acceptance is confirmed by the p- value as it shows less than 0.05 occurred in customer behavior with the change of 1% in adaptive selling.

**Table 7:** Regression Weights Mediation-2

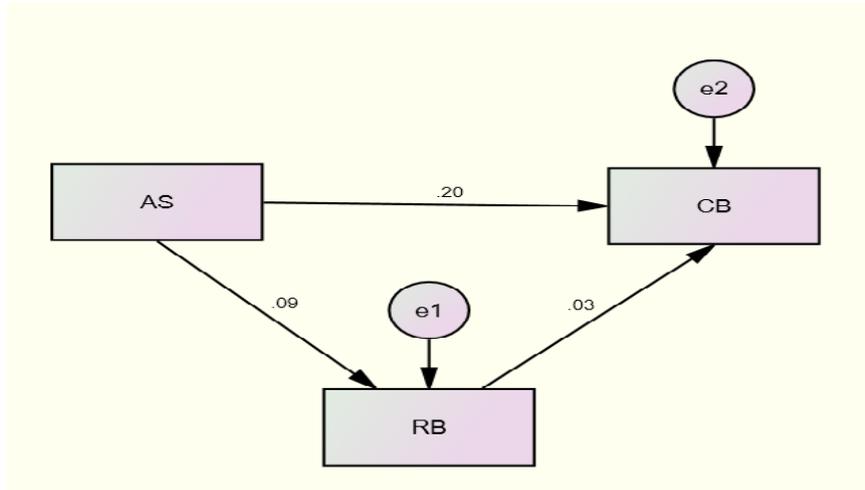
			<b>Estimate</b>	<b>S.E.</b>	<b>C.R.</b>	<b>P</b>
CB	<---	AS	0.203	.031	29.312	***

The effect of second predictor variable adaptive selling is 0.203 where is significant value is less than 0.05. After including mediator variable (relational behavior) the impact become lesser with a value of .182 with significant P-value, therefore partial mediation is found between predictor variable and outcome variable.

**Table 8:** Estimates mediation-2

			<b>Estimate</b>	<b>S.E.</b>	<b>C.R.</b>	<b>P</b>
RB	<---	AS	.087	.047	1.807	.070
CB	<---	AS	.182	.041	4.353	***
CB	<---	RB	.023	.042	.568	.566

**Figure 3:** Mediation between adaptive selling & customer behavior



**Table 9:** Summary of Results of Hypothesis Testing

No.	Hypothesis	Results
1	The better the salespersons' customer orientation the higher will be the repeat purchases, and positive word of mouth by the customer	Supported
2	The better the salespersons' adaptive selling the higher will be the repeat purchases and positive word of mouth by the customer	Supported
3	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	Not Supported
4	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	Supported

## DISCUSSION

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. Being adaptive is something which gives you knowledge and edge in several selling techniques. Therefore, it is recommended when a salesperson choose any selling technique he/she should be confident while applying that particular selling technique

(Keillor *et al.*, 2000). In addition to this, salespersons should have this capability to alter their selling strategy according to the given situation. Adaptive selling techniques give salespersons a knowledge structure of different selling techniques in different selling encounters (Park & Holloway, 2003). However, before applying appropriate selling technique a salesperson should collect all relevant information which can assist him in applying that particular selling strategy. After collecting all the required information about the target customer and command over knowledge structure of being adaptive, implementation phase is still the most critical phases of all. As it is said, selling strategy cannot considered best strategy only, until and unless it is implemented timely and accurately (Park & Deitz, 2006).

## CONCLUSION

Higher sales are the ultimate goal of any business organizations. For this reason, every organization should have a best chunk of sale force. To cope with this critical part, modern businesses have some pre-requisites of hiring potential salespeople and hence, they are the boundary-spanners between the organization and its customers. Those salespeople who 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. The 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.

### Limitations of the Study

In spite of the fact that the examination discoveries are promising, a few constraints of the investigation ought to be considered for future research ponders. Assessing salespersons capacities and abilities just in pharmaceutical industry may result as generalisability. There are legitimate shots may happened that outcomes might be different if salespersons selected from industries other pharmaceutical companies. Along these lines, this model must be investigated in different business settings as well. Second impediment consider concentrated on just the contingent effect among relational behavior, skills-set (customer orientation, adaptive selling) and customer behaviors in terms of repeat purchase and word-of-mouth. However other mediating effects may exist between relational behavior and control factors, for example, age, sex, and experience. Diverse settings may reveal different findings in

marketing exchanges. The mediating effects of relational behavior on salespersons' skills-set (customer orientation, adaptive selling) might be different in other industries. However, mediating role of salespersons' relational behaviors might have a different perspective in other business settings.

### **Future Research Directions**

Additional empirical research with different sample size and industry is needed on these variables so we can better understand the extent of the effect of each variable on customer-salesperson relationship. Researcher assumes that this study will provide researchers with a guideline to better interpret the influence of emotions, relations and feelings in marketing transactions. Understanding the impact of salespersons' relational behavior and emotional intelligence might lead to a range of results, including knowledge of salespeople that how to deal with customers, and how to feel and use different emotions while marketing exchanges. Emotional intelligence was tested on Mayer' four dimensions model of emotional intelligence, another model provided by Goleman can also be selected and empirically tested in different business settings.

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