

**THE INFLUENCE OF COGNITIVE SATISFACTION ON THE
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SALESPERSON PRESENTATION SKILLS
AND CUSTOMER'S INTENTION TO REPURCHASE**

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Abstract

The application of sales presentation skills by the sales force during their interaction with customers in the sales situation can have a significant effect on customer intention to repurchase in the Malaysian Computer retail business. The purpose of this paper is to examine the relations between important sales presentation skills and the relative roles played by cognition in the development of customer satisfaction which will lead to customer's intention to repurchase in a computer retail setting in Malaysia. This will then lead to increased benefits for the organization in the form of customer loyalty. The cognitive evaluation of customer satisfaction was found to explain customer's intention to repurchase in a retail setting in the Malaysian market. This finding holds importance to those retailers who have been able to generate high expectations in the eyes of their customers.

Keywords: *Sales presentation skills, Cognitive satisfaction, Customer loyalty*

1. Introduction

Recognizing the function of salespeople is important, both from an academic and practitioners' viewpoint. To a large extent, this curiosity develops because individual outcomes are a contribution to organizational performance (Schultz & Good, 2000). Salespeople play a significant role in organizational success or failure. Previous researches have agreed that there is no single factor that could explain selling effectively (Churchill et al., 1985; Schultz & Good, 2000). For example, voice characteristics (Peterson et al., 1995), environmental competitiveness (Schwepker & Ingram, 1994), personality traits (Dion et al., 1995), and psychological adaptiveness (Goolsby et al., 1992). These are a few examples that signify just a few of the qualities that have been connected with individual sales productivity (Schultz & Good, 2000).

As competition deepens, products and services become more indistinguishable, and markets become established, it is becoming increasingly tougher for companies in retailing industries to distinguish themselves from other stores. Simply offering customers with technical solutions to problems does not be sufficient anymore to be competitive and obtain and retain market share. Various value-added services, which commence before the actual operation begins, had gone far beyond it, so as to stay competitive and develop customer loyalty. Research and business customs have shown that upholding customers through value-added services costs less than obtaining new ones (Anderson et al., 1994; Reichheld & Sasser, 1990; Wetzels et al., 1998).

A prevailing belief holds that an essential key to performance rests with the ability to sustain customer relationships (Anderson et al., 1994; Ganesan, 1994). Correspondingly, as relational value continues beyond price (Wood, 1995), customer bond are particularly effective when involved in long-term relationships (Beal, 1995).

2. Literature Review

Sales organizations account for a considerable amount of marketing expenditures and revenues in many organizations. Operating at the edge between the organization and its environment, salespeople execute important boundary-spanning roles. The skills and efforts of salespeople have bearing on their individual outcomes as well as the effectiveness of their organizations. Since the sales force is decisively responsible for implementing business and marketing strategies, an essential objective of effective salespeople is giving superior value to customers and enhancing the organization's performance (Baldauf, 2002). Salespeople incorporate to sales volume, profits, and customer satisfaction. Because of this significant organizational role it is necessary for sales management to distinguish and analyze the factors that influence sales force outcomes and sales organization effectiveness.

In recent years, a number of authors have been confronted with this issue of the changing role of the sales force. Cravens (1995) scheduled a number of significant agenda items for reinventing the sales organization. It includes (1) building long-term relationships with customers, including assessing customer value and establishing priorities; (2) making sales organizational forms that are more lively and compliant to the needs of direct customer groups; (3) gaining greater job control and dedication from salespeople by removing functional obstacle within the organization and leveraging the team familiarity; (4) changing sales management style from imposing to coaching; (5) leveraging existing technology for sales achievement; and (6) better-incorporating salesperson performance assessment to integrate the full range of activities and outcomes pertinent within sales jobs today.

Up-and-coming trends of the extent and scope recorded above require a re-evaluation of the activities that salespeople must execute in order to successfully build and manage customer loyalty. Marshall et al., (1999), interviewed a diversity of professional salespeople to give evidence for 49 new sales activities that were not pointed out in Moncrief's (1986) original list. These latest activities fall into the following main categories: communication technology, selling technology, activities related to adaptive and consultative selling, and team-oriented activities. Many of the specific activities within these categories involve skills and content knowledge dissimilar from those traditionally observed in the past as key salesperson success factors.

This study therefore will consider how cognitive satisfaction mediates the relationship between salesperson sales presentation skills and customer's intention to repurchase. These situational factors have not been considered in prior research and provide new avenues for examining salesperson sales presentation skills and its consequences. Additionally, as most studies have considered salespeople as their unit of analysis, this study will add to the small but imminent body of research that investigates performance and effectiveness relationships at the customer's level.

Formation of loyalty through satisfaction

It is by and large believed that satisfaction leads to repeat purchase and positive word-of-mouth recommendation, which are the main indicators of loyalty. Marketing literature has paid much attention to the relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty (Chi, 2005). A number of studies have confirmed a significant positive relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty/retention (Chi, 2005; Cronin, Brady & Hunt, 2000; Taylor & Baker, 1994). If consumers are satisfied with the product or service, they are more likely to carry on purchasing, and are more willing to spread positive WOM.

Sales presentation skills

Churchill et al., (1997, p. 367) define selling skill as a salesperson's "learned proficiencies at performing job activities," and describe two general types relevant to professional salespeople:

- (1) *Vocational skills*. Job and company specific skills such as technical knowledge and vocabulary related to the firm's product line, the company, and its policies.
- (2) *Sales presentation skills*. Skills that are associated to successfully conducting the personal selling process (i.e. the series of interconnected steps that salespeople generally use to link with the influence customer).

Recognizing the importance of sales presentation skills, Marshall et al. (2003) gathered and ranked sales manager perceptions of "success factors" that contribute to salesperson job performance. They report that managers feel that six specific sales presentation skills: listening, adaptive selling, handling objections, closing, negotiating, and prospecting (in descending order of perceived importance) are highly important to salesperson performance (Johlke, 2006). Accordingly, this group of sales presentation skills will be used at the heart of the hypothesized model.

Customer satisfaction

Measuring customer satisfaction has become increasingly popular in the last two decades and today represents an important source of revenue for market research firms (Eggert & Ulage, 2002). The satisfaction construct has gained an important role in the marketing literature. It is widely accepted among researchers as a strong predictor for behavioral variables such as repurchase intentions, word-of-mouth, or loyalty (Eggert & Ulage, 2002).

Subsequently, the importance of customer satisfaction to the success of consumer goods manufacturers (Burns & Neisner, 2006) and to the success of retailers (Darian et al., 2001) has been well documented. Customer satisfaction is regarded as a primary determining factor of repeat shopping and purchasing behavior. The greater the degree to which a consumer experiences satisfaction with a retailer, for instance, the greater the probability the consumer will revisit the retailer (Burns & Neisner, 2006, p. 49; Wong & Sohal, 2003).

In summary, we note the distinction between transaction-specific and overall satisfaction, and for this study, we adopt the broader definition of satisfaction whereby the overall measure is an aggregation of all previous transaction-specific satisfaction, and involves both cognitive and affective components. Recently, the overall measure has been shown to be a better predictor of repurchase intentions (Jones & Suh, 2000).

Research Framework and Hypotheses

Based on the review of literatures concerning the study variables on sales presentation skills, cognitive satisfaction, and customer's intention to repurchase, the theoretical framework for this study is presented as in Figure 1 below. Oliver's (1997, p. 392) framework model based on the Cognitive-Affective-Conative Behavior pattern model were utilized as the theory underlying the research framework.

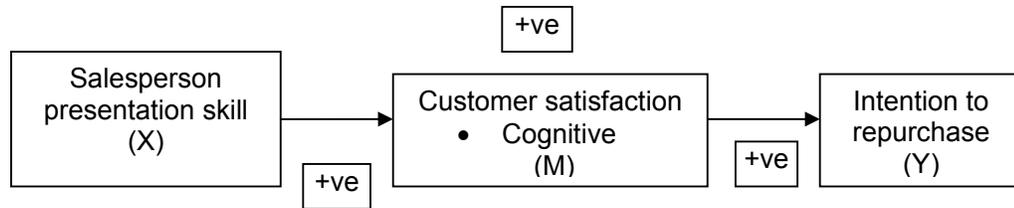


Figure 1. The research model.

Relationship between Salesperson presentation skill and Intention to repurchase

Although a customer's personality and the employee's customer orientation were considered an important antecedent to relationship strength, salesperson presentation skill rather than his/her personality would perform a greater part in determining relationship strength (Foster & Cadogen, 2000). Salespersons are social actors who learn behaviors that are appropriate to the positions they take up (Bove & Johnson, 2000). In other words, salesperson can be motivated to adapt their behavior to situational requirements in spite of personal preferences (Bove & Johnson, 2000).

In occasions where research has been conducted in consumer markets, they focused mainly on generic issues, and there has been few concentration on areas that are influenced by the nature of the industry or transaction concerned (Pressey & Mathews, 2000). As well, to date, there is a lack of studies investigating the numerous aspects of service that are imperative to customer retention (Zeithaml, 2000)? Furthermore, the different outcomes (i.e. attitudinal and behavioral) of relationship strength are left predominantly unexplored in the relationship marketing literature. In addition, there is a lack of studies that explore the impact of factors such as salesperson presentation skill on customer's intention to repurchase. Conclusively, there is little empirical work investigating customer relationship economies, which is the link between attitudinal measures (i.e. salesperson presentation skill, customer satisfaction) and behavioral measures (i.e. customer loyalty, intention to repurchase, and long-term customer relationship profitability), Storbacka et al., (1994); Wong and Sohal, (2006). Therefore, in line with the above reasoning's and findings, it is conjectured that:

H1: There is a direct positive relationship between salesperson's presentation skills and repurchase intention.

Relationship between Customer satisfaction and customer's intention to repurchase

Previous literatures have demonstrated that customer satisfaction has come to represent an important cornerstone for customer-oriented organizations (Szymanski & Henard, 2001). The concept highlighted on delivering satisfaction to consumers as well as obtaining profits in return (Mouri, 2005). Customer satisfaction is important to marketers because it is usually assumed to be a significant determinant of recurring sales, positive word-of-mouth, intention to repurchase, and customer loyalty. It is worthy to consumers because it reflects a positive outcome following the outlay of limited resources and/or the positive accomplishment of prior needs. As a consequence, maximizing satisfaction is seen as a significant objective, collectively for both the firm and the consumer (Lim, 2004; Mouri, 2005).

Likewise, theory suggests that satisfaction feeds back into the system to influence ensuing intentions and behaviors (Wallace et al., 2004). Customer's satisfaction with the shopping experience should reflect well on the retailer. An increase in satisfaction has been shown to result in increased customer loyalty (Donio et al., 2006). From the above arguments it is hypothesized that:

H2: There is a direct positive relationship between customer satisfaction and intention to repurchase.

The mediating role of Customer Satisfaction on Salesperson presentation skill and Customer's intention to repurchase relationship.

Overall satisfaction with an experience does lead to customer loyalty (Caruana, 2002). Bearden and Teel (1983) argue that customer satisfaction is imperative to the marketer because "it is generally assumed to be significant determinant of repeat sales, positive word of mouth, intention to repurchase, and consumer loyalty". Similarly, Bloemer and Poiesz (1989) have also argued that "satisfaction can be thought of as an important determinant of customer loyalty", while Selnes (1993) argues that it is satisfaction with a brand or service that leads to customer loyalty. This view is also supported by Dick and Basu (1994). LaBarbera and Mazursky (1983) show empirically that brand and service loyal customers had a lower probability to substitute brands or service due to higher levels of satisfaction. On the basis of the above findings, customer satisfaction is indicated as having a function and acting as a mediator in the link between salesperson presentation skills and customer loyalty (Lim, 2004). Therefore, in line with the above reasoning's and findings, the following were hypothesized:

H3: Customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between salesperson presentation skills and repurchase.

3. Methodology

Sampling Design

To have a representative finding, the sampling technique used must be objective. This is an important effort adopted by most researchers in order to furnish a finding pertinent to the general. To choose the sample for this study, probability random sampling was used. A probability sample is necessary if the sample is to be representative of the population (Reeves, 1992). Therefore, a two-stage systematic sampling technique is employed in this study.

Population and sample size

The unit of analysis for this study is individual customers who patronize the computer store. Studying primary consumer groups permits a more valid and reliable clarification to the model research in this study. A total number of 483 usable samples were collected from 5 different locations in the states of Penang, Kedah, and Perlis. In determining the sample size for this study, sample size selected were based on the criteria set according to Roscoe's rule of thumb (cited in Sekaran, 2003) i.e. a sample that is larger than 30 and less than 500 are appropriate for most research, and the size must be several times larger (10 times or more) for multiple regression analysis to be conducted.

Questionnaire Design

The survey questionnaire is divided into 7 sections: Section "A" covers the qualifying questions. To capture the salesperson's personal characteristics, 4 items were adopted from past literature and are listed under Section B. Three items (salesperson is younger or older, gender of the salesperson, and ethnicity of the salesperson) from this section will be controlled so as to see if it does have an effect on the Sales presentation skills relationship with customer's intention to repurchase. Following this, Section C and D measures the dimensions of the independent variables (sales presentation skills/knowledge) which are hypothesized as having an effect on the dependent variable.

Section E consists of the two dimensions of the customer satisfaction (emotional satisfaction and conative satisfaction) with a total of 4 questions. Questions from this section were phrased in positive and negative statements to encourage critical evaluation before responses are given. Section F requires the respondent to give objective opinions on their intention to be loyal to the store through behavioral intention statement and attitudinal responses. Lastly, an additional 5 questions in Section G serves as an instrument to capture the demographic characteristics of respondent.

4. Results

Profile of the respondents

Results from the analysis of the demographic profile of respondents indicate that there is a greater representation of customers in Kedah (41.4%), Penang (34.4%) and in Perlis (24.2%) respectively. This is viewed as being reflective of the accessibility to respondents. With the sample size of 700 customers and research assistant was able to gain response from 483 respondents exiting the computer retail store, giving a 69% response rate. An analysis of response and non-response bias was not deemed to be necessary as all respondents answers questions right away and collection of questionnaires were also done as soon as respondents finishes answering the questionnaire (Wan Yusoff, 2003). Moreover, the data for this study managed to be collected within the set time frame.

Majority of the sample are male (65%) as compared to female (35%). Respondents spanned the range of age categories from 15 to 64, with the majority (43.3%) of the respondents included in the survey sample being between the ages of 15-25, followed by the 26-35 age groups at 30.4%. The next largest age group was the 36-45 at 18.2%.

Respondents were also asked to provide information regarding their ethnicity. The analysis revealed that more than half of the total sample, or 53.2% of the 257 respondents included were of Chinese ethnic while 30.4% were Malays. By comparison, the state ethnic distribution from the 3 states sampled in this study is 62.1% Malay, 29.4% Chinese and 8.5% Indians (Malaysian Department of Statistics, 2005). However, in this study, it is the Chinese (53.2%) who frequent to the computer shops most as compared to Malays (30.4%), Indians (10.8%), and other races (5.6%).

Statistics on respondents Level of Education showed that a large proportion of the respondents (45.1%) were customers who possessed a Diploma or a College level education while 24.8% had attained a Bachelors Degree. Subsequently, Secondary School education customers made up a total of 17.0% of the sample population. Masters Degree, Doctoral Degree and primary school education respondents constituted 11.6%, 0.8%, and 0.4% of the sample respectively. The high proportion of respondents having a high education level was due to the urban nature of the sample.

The income frequency count showed that 40.0% of the respondents had a monthly income of less than RM 1000. 36.2% reported figures between RM 1001 – RM 3000 while 19.9% indicated income between RM 3001 – RM 5000. Subsequently, 3.3% of the respondents revealed income between RM 5001 – RM 7000. The remaining 0.6% of the respondents reported income up to RM 7001 and above. Majority of the respondents who visited the computer store are earning an income of less than RM 1000 as majority of them are students from a local University, colleges, and Schools. The money they earn

is from scholarships and contributions from their parents. The general scenario among consumers of a computer shop is that, working consumers who earns a fixed income are generally provided with computer facilities by their employers. Thus they do not make to the majority of the population who frequent to a computer shop as compared to students.

In summary, the sample included in this study appeared to be largely comprised of Chinese, Male, students, and includes more middle-income earners. Reasons being that, during the survey process, consumers who are presently working notified that they don't frequent to a computer shops as much as student groups because computer facilities are provided by their employer at their working place. Thus, it explained the reason for having more students at the computer shop as most students are deprived of such facilities. Furthermore, the nature of a student work required them to keep in pace with the latest technology. This gives them more reason to be of interest in computers and its peripherals.

Table 1
Profile of Respondents

	Description	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	314	65
	Female	169	35
Age	15 – 25	209	43.3
	26 – 35	147	30.4
	36 – 45	88	18.2
	46 – 55	34	7.0
	56 -64	5	1.0
Ethnicity	Malay	147	30.4
	Chinese	257	53.2
	Indian	52	10.8
	Others	27	5.6
Level of Education	Primary school	2	.4
	Secondary school	82	17.0
	Diploma or college level	218	45.1
	Bachelor's degree	120	24.8
	Master's degree	56	11.6
	Doctoral degree	4	.8
	Others	1	.2
Monthly income	Less than RM 1000	193	40.0
	RM 1001 – RM 3000	175	36.2
	RM 3001 – RM 5000	96	19.9
	RM 5001 – RM 7000	16	3.3
	RM 7001 and above	3	.6

Hypotheses Testing

Regression Analysis with Control Variables

The relationship between sales presentation skills and intention to repurchase

Table 2
Results of hierarchical regression analysis of sales presentation skills on intention to repurchase

Predictors	Model 1	Model 2
	Std. β	Std. β
Step 1: Control Variables		
Younger or older	-.05	.01
Gender	-.01	-.01
Ethnicity	.09	-.02
Step 2:		
Sales presentation skills		.25**

Note. Significant levels: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

From Table 2 above, sales presentation skills have positive and significant association with intention to repurchase; sales presentation skills ($\beta = .25$, $p < .01$), and Thus, the results provide evidence that hypotheses H1 is fully supported.

The Relationship between Cognitive Satisfaction and Intention to Repurchase

To test for hypothesis 2, another set of regression analysis was performed. The purpose of this analysis is to test for the effect of cognitive satisfaction on intention to repurchase. The predictor variable was cognitive satisfaction. The criterion variables relates to intention to repurchase. Salesperson's demographic variables such as younger or older than the customers, gender, and ethnicity were statistically controlled. Hence, these variables were entered into the regression equation in the first step. Cognitive satisfaction was entered in the second step. Table 4 summarizes the results of the hierarchical regression analysis. These results provide evidence that hypothesis H2 is supported.

Table 4
*Results of hierarchical regression analysis of cognitive satisfaction on
 Intention to repurchase*

Predictors	Model 1	Model 2
	Std. β	Std. β
Step 1: Control Variables		
Younger or older	-.06	-.05
Gender	-.04	-.05
Ethnicity	.02	-.01
Step 2:		
Cognitive satisfaction		.71**
R ²	.01	.50
Adj. R ²	-.00	.50
R ² Change	.01	.50
F-Change	.78	447.63**

Note. Significant levels: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

The Mediating Effect of Cognitive Satisfaction on the Relationship between Salesperson Behavior Performance and repurchase

Hypothesis 3 posits that cognitive satisfaction mediates the relationship between sales presentation skills and intention to repurchase. Results in Table 5 shows that none of the control variables had significant influence on intention to repurchase in step 1, however, sales presentation skills/knowledge ($\beta = .25, p < .01$), were found to significantly influenced intention to repurchase in the second regression equation.

Additionally, the third regression equation resulted in sales presentation skills to be insignificant. This indicates that emotional satisfaction fully mediates the relationship between sales presentation skills on intention to repurchase. The comparison can be seen in Table 5. These results provide evidence that hypothesis H3 is supported.

Table 5
*Summary of mediating Effects of Cognitive Satisfaction on the Relationship
 between Sales presentation skills and intention to repurchase*

Predictors	Criterion Variables				Results
	Significant Levels and Beta before Mediating (Regression Equation II – DV on IV)		Significant Levels and Beta after Mediating (Regression Equation III – DV on IV & MV)		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2	
Control					
Younger or older	-.05	.01	-.06	-.00	
Gender	-.01	-.01	-.04	-.04	
ethnicity	.09	-.02	.00	-.05	
Independent					
Sales presentation skills/ knowledge		.25**		.07	Full mediation
Mediating					
Cognitive satisfaction				.36**	
R ²	.00	.56	.01	.58	
Adj. R ²	-.00	.55	-.00	.57	
R ² Change	.00	.55	.01	.57	
F change	.50	116.44**	.65	100.49**	

Note. Significant levels: *p<0.05, **p<0.01

5. Discussion

Hypothesis 3 deals with the mediating role of cognitive satisfaction in the relationship between Sales presentation skills and intention to repurchase.

Results of this study found that cognitive satisfaction fully mediate the relationship between sales presentation skills on intention to repurchase. This implied that sales presentation skills have an indirect impact on customer's intention to repurchase via cognitive satisfaction. This result suggests that salesperson who posses an overall sales presentation skill and was able to applied these skills during their interaction with the customers is vital in enhancing customers intention to repurchase.

The result of this study is consistent with the findings of previous study by Shemwell et al., (1998, p. 158) which suggest that satisfaction is a more central construct which mediates the effect of service quality perceptions on behavioral intentions and other outcomes. The published research in the field of service marketing universally acknowledges a strong positive correlation between salesperson service quality and satisfaction, some early works depicted salesperson service is perceived as an antecedent of satisfaction (Anderson & Sullivan, 1993; Bolton & Drew, 1991; Drew & Bolton, 1991; Oliver, 1993).

Thus the results of this study suggest that efforts to increase customer's loyalty should focus on enhancing customer's cognitive satisfaction during the salesperson/customers interaction. Special attention should be given to the enhancement of sales presentation skills, which were found to have significant effects on customer's intention to repurchase.

Significance of the study

The findings of this study are significant to marketers on an applied level, whereby the results provide information to retailers to help them to be more effective in providing appropriate customer service levels in the area of salesperson behavior performance.

The nature of the product used in this research may help to explain the reported importance of the sales presentation skills/knowledge delivered to customers. Computer goods are often complex or technical, have numerous features, and change frequently due to the inclusion of new features or combinations of features. For their part, customers shopping for computer products may find it easy to be overwhelmed with numerous details and become confused. They may well be seeking a straightforward presentation of only that information that will help them make a choice. Salespeople in this product category are typically much more knowledgeable than the customer, and may be eager to explain technical features of the product.

Limitations and Future Research

Future research may benefit if some limitations of this study are noticed. Although we have examined a number of important issues in this study, there are several limitations inherent in the study. Firstly, only computer retailers in the northern states of Malaysia were examined. As a consequence, and regardless of the fact that the customers of the firm represent a wide range of industries, the generalization of the findings to other retail organizations is limited. However, as noted by Foster and Cadogen (2000), the generalization of studies undertaken in a single firm must be viewed with some skepticism; the results are likely to have increased internal validity. Clearly future research which provides more information on the external validity of our study would be most welcome.

Subsequently, as with much of the research in consumer behavior realm, findings from the present research are no doubt being influenced by the context of the study. In particular, the specific variables sought by purchasers of computer product in their interactions with salespeople may not be the same as those sought by customers for other types of high involvement products. The salesperson behavior performance attributes important in the purchase of appliances, automobiles, or homes, for example, may vary.

Future research should address the following issues. The external validity of the findings should be examined through replications in other industrial settings. The advantage by using data from only one industry and customers of the same retail store (only computer retail stores were used in this study), as in the present study, is that the potential confounding effect of the industrial context is reduced. However, a stronger test of the model would be to test the hypothesized model across several industries and types of relationships.

6. Conclusion

The present study confirms that cognitive satisfaction was able to explain customer's intention to repurchase in a retail setting in the Malaysian market. The finding suggest that computer retailers whose customers possess high expectations on the salesperson presentation skills may need to place explicit attention on their customers' cognitive evaluations since their customers' cognitive reactions to performance appear to contribute to their assessments of satisfaction.

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