

CUSTOMER ORIENTATION AND GENDER

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INTRODUCTION

Salespeople who are customer-oriented take action aimed at increasing long-term customer satisfaction and avoid behaviors that may lead to customer dissatisfaction. They avoid actions that increase the probability of an immediate sale at the expense of sacrificing customer interests (Saxe and Weitz 1982). They suggested that selling behaviors of salesperson fall somewhere between high customer orientation (i.e., customer-oriented selling) and low customer orientation (i.e., selling orientation). Salespeople who are highly customer-oriented have high concern for others and themselves, whereas salespeople with low customer orientation show low concern for others and high concern for themselves. The study of Saxe and Weitz (1982) highlights the fact that long term satisfaction of the customer can be considered an important factor in customer orientation of salespeople. Customer-oriented selling is a viable option for organizations seeking to improve long-term customer relationships. By definition, customer-oriented selling is the use of the marketing concept within the salesperson-customer relationship. This implementation is designed to enhance the customer satisfaction attributable individually to salespeople and overall to sales departments (Saxe and Weitz 1982). Further Thureau and Thureau (2003) have argued that customer orientation as a core element of the marketing concept and is especially crucial to the concept of Relationship Marketing. They claimed customer orientation as a main condition for the better relationship marketing.

Sigauw and Honeycutt (1995) study highlighted the significant difference between the level of customer orientation of male and female sales representatives. Accordingly, Saleswomen reported to engage in a significantly higher level of customer-oriented selling than men. In Sri Lankan context the customer orientation with gender perspective has been not discussed in terms of services sector and this study is investigating customer orientation of gender in Sri Lankan banking sector.

METHODOLOGY

As the sample, two state banks and four major private banks were selected. The reason for selecting two state banks was due to their contribution to the banking sector in Sri Lanka. The Bank of Ceylon (BoC) has a stable capital base of over Rs. 24 billion with a 14.9 percent Capital Adequacy Ratio and asset base of Rs. 611 billion which is the largest in the Sri Lankan banking system (Ministry of Finance and Planning, 2010). Interestingly the other state bank, People's Bank is the second-largest Licensed Commercial Bank (LCB) in Sri Lanka, accounting for 18.44% of the industry's assets as at end December 2010 (RAM ratings, 2011). Four major private banks were selected to make the sample representative and also because of the growing competition in the sector. Furthermore, according to special report on Fitch Rating (2011) the six largest local LCBs identified as being systemically important – Bank of Ceylon (BOC), People's Bank (PB), Commercial Bank of Ceylon Plc

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(CB), Hatton National Bank Plc (HNB), Sampath Bank Plc (SAMB) and Seylan Bank Plc (SEYB) – accounted for 64% of sector assets, 74% of sector loans and 68% of sector deposits at end 2010. It is important to understand the regional distribution of LCBs as well. According to Central Bank (2011) out of 1700 branches of commercial banks operated, 746 branches operated in the Western Province (44%). And out of 746 branches, 294 branches represented by two state banks (39%). In the Western Province, Colombo has many branches 475 (64%) followed by Gampaha 176 (24%) and Kaluthara 95 (12%). Hence, the stratified random sample method has been adopted in the study. A stratified random sampling technique could thus claim to be more representative of the population than a survey of simple random sampling or systematic sampling. The branch of the bank was considered as unit of analysis in this study.

From these eight banks, a random sample of 200 respondents was and Questionnaires have been administered with the help of research assistants. But only 130 Customer Relationship Officers (CROs) were selected due to incompleteness of some questionnaires (See Table 1).

Table 1. Selected Sample Profile

Western province	CRO
Colombo (62%)	81
Gampaha (23%)	30
Kalutara (15%)	19

Source: Researcher's construction

Definition of Concepts and Operationalization

Customer orientation of salespeople refers to the degree to which salespeople practice the marketing concept by trying to help their customers make purchase decisions that will satisfy customer needs (Saxe and Weitz, 1982). Modified SOCO (Selling Orientation-Customer Orientation) scale of Thomas et al (2001) has used to operationalize the Customer Orientation among salesperson .

Table 2. Operationalization of Selling Orientation and Customer Orientation

Concept	Variable	Indicators
Selling Orientation and Customer Orientation (SOCO)	Customer Orientation	1) Try to figure out what customer needs are 2) A good employee has to have the customer's best interest in mind. 3) Try to bring a customer with a problem together with a product/service that helps solve that problem 4) Offer the product/service that is best suited to the customer's problem 5) Try to find out what kind of products/services will be most helpful to a customer
		1) Try to sell as much as I can rather than to satisfy a customer 2) It is necessary to stretch the truth in describing a product to a customer 3) Try to sell a customer all can convince them to buy, even if think it is more than a wise customer would buy

		4) Paint too rosy a picture of my product/service to make them sound as good as possible
		5) Decide what product/service to offer on the basis of what can convince customers to accept, not on the basis of what will satisfy them in the long run

Source : Author constructed from Literature

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to Table one (below) it can be observed that there is significant difference of customer orientation and gender in the banking context can be observed as well. An independent sample T-test was performed to measure the level of significance. Hence it can be argued that the more female salespeople are customer oriented than their male counterparts.

Table 3.

Male		Female		Independent
Mean	Std. Dev.*	Mean	Std. Dev.*	Sample T-Test and P Value
3.93	0.422	3.61	0.530	-9.980**(0.000)

Std. Dev.* - Standard deviation

**significance at 0.05 level

Source: Survey Data

Table 1. Customer orientation and gender

CONCLUSION

There is a significant difference observed between customer orientation and gender in the banking context. The customer orientation was tested by using two variables of selling orientation and customer orientation. It was found that female salespeople are more customer orientated than male salespeople. This also can be supported by the literature as Jolson and Comer (1992) suggested the expressive or feminine traits for which women are more renowned which contributed the most towards saleswomen's effectiveness "in retaining customers and performing non-selling activities". Furthermore, Sigauw and Honeycutt (1995) study highlighted the significant difference between the level of customer orientation of male and female sales representatives. Accordingly, Saleswomen reported to engage in a significantly higher level of customer-oriented selling than men. This has supported by Berrio and Henderson (1998) as that study concluded that "females had a higher customer orientation than males". Franke and Park (2006) highlighted that the role of saleswomen is higher in customer orientation than men in their study as well. Thus, it can be confirmed that females are similarly more customer orientated in the context of banking sector in Sri Lanka as well.

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