

RELATIONSHIP MARKETING ORIENTATIONS OF SALESPERSON IN BANKS: IS THAT GENDER SENSITIVE?

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INTRODUCTION

The term “Relationship Marketing (RM)” has become a popular concept among the practitioners of marketing, as well as academics, during the last decade. During the twentieth century, RM gained wide recognition following discussion on RM which began to dominate the marketing agenda. During this period RM was probably the major trend in marketing and certainly the major (and arguably the most controversial) talking point in business management (Egan,2003). As learning organizations have close relationships with other organizations, it is important to focus on the relationship management program which can be critical for their growth. It is a firm’s potentials and competencies such as an ability to build effective relationships, an ability to sense changes in environments, and an ability to innovate, that will support an organization leveraging its valuable resources, including relational stakeholder-based assets, and, consequently, facilitate the creation and delivery of quality, value-laden solutions (Jarrat,2004).

It is useful to understand the buyer and his/her behaviour first to forecast the reflection of his/her action. According to Saxe and Weitz (1982), salespeople who are customer-oriented take actions aimed at increasing long-term customer relationships and avoid actions that increase the probability of an immediate sale at the expense of sacrificing customer interests. Hence selling is considered to be of paramount important in marketing and the lifeblood of marketing. Customer oriented selling and relationship building will play a vital role in this regards. According to Williams and Attaway (1996), the firm’s marketing success is largely dependent upon the sales force, because these individuals are the ones who have the most “immediate influence on customers.” The most important method by which the marketer may manage the “buying experience” is through the implementation of customer-oriented sales tactics (Crane, 1991; Grewal & Sharma, 1991; Sharma, 1997).

Many researchers have focused on relationship marketing orientation through a gender perspective as well. According to Chodorow (1978) women are more "relationship focused" than men. It has been discussed how this tendency develops from a psychoanalytic viewpoint. In sales management literature, it can be observed that saleswomen place a higher value on interpersonal and social aspects of their job, while men place a high value on career-oriented factors (Palmer and Bejou, 1995).This has been further established by the research done by Helgesen (1990), Sparks and Callan (1997), and Oakley (2000) as well.

Hence the following research problem has been advanced in this study.

“Is female salesperson more relationship marketing oriented than male?”

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is based on the Sri Lanka banking sector, which is considered competitive despite the global and local macro economic downturns.The financial sector has still maintained an 8.9%

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contribution to GDP in 2012(Central Bank ,2013).In that the role of licensed commercial banking sector can be considered as important(contributing 48.2% of total assets of the major financial institutions). Six major private commercial banks were selected to make the sample representative because of the growing competition in the sector. From these six banks,a random sample of 180 respondents (CROs-Customer Relationship Officers) were selected. Finally 146 CROs responded. But only 130 questionnaires were selected due to incompleteness of questionnaires. The analysis was performed by SPSS 13.0 ®.

Relationship marketing has been operationalized in terms of the variables of relationship commitment and trust. Endogenous constructs of Morgan and Hunt (1994), "The commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing", used (with modifications) as indicators of trust and relationship commitment. **Relationship marketing** refers to the relationship commitment and trust (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). **Commitment** refers to “an ongoing relationship with another that is so important as to warrant maximum efforts at maintaining it” (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). **Trust refers** to “willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence” (Morgan and Hunt, 1994).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to understand whether the relationship marketing orientation differs according to the gender category the same test of independent sample t-Test was performed and the following results can be observed.

Table : **Relationship marketing and gender**

Male		Female		Independent Sample T-Test and P value
Mean	Std. Dev.*	Mean	Std. Dev.*	
3.71	0.472	3.77	0.530	-4.993(0.000)**

Std. Dev.* - Standard deviation

**significance at 0.05 level

Source: Survey Data 2012

According to Table 5 it can be observed that female salespersons (CROs) are more relationship marketing oriented than male salesperson. Hence there is enough statistical evidence to claim that ‘Female CROs are more relationship marketing oriented than male CROs’.

CONCLUSION

The relationship marketing orientation of salesperson towards the customer and their gender also has been measured in this study. As discussed earlier the trust and commitment of salesperson are used as variables to measure the relationship marketing towards to the customers. It can be concluded that relationship marketing has been well practiced by women salesperson than men. This can be observed by using the literature of different contexts as well. Fournier (1998) used

female informants exclusively in her study of brand relationships and suggested that women "exhibit more and stronger interpersonal relationships and brand involvement". This is supported by Stout and Villegas (2004) who explain that "females have a psychological orientation toward a communal outlook characterized by emphasis on interpersonal relationships, affiliation and attachment to the self and other". This is further confirmed by Hook *et al.* (2003) and they argued that women "place more emphasis on love, affection, the expression of warm feelings and emotional sharing". Moreover Bhagat and Willimas(2008) elaborated that women will exhibit higher levels of intrinsic interpersonal commitment with higher levels of relationship strength. Similarly in the financial services industry, women have been found to give greater importance to both intangibles (empathy and assurance) and tangibles (Paswan *et al.*, 2004).Hence it is clear than women can be considered as important in relationships as men. It can be recommended for the banks to be considering the implications for their future recruitment and HRM practices as well.

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