



Measuring Customer Orientation of Salespeople: A Replication with Industrial Buyers

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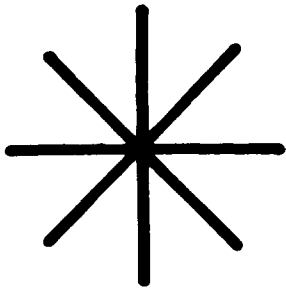
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... MEASUREMENT SECTION

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A national sample of purchasing professionals was used to replicate the SOCO scale with buyers assessing the customer orientation of salespeople who call on them. The results are almost identical to those obtained when salespeople assessed their own degree of customer orientation, except that buyers' mean ratings are substantially lower than salespersons' mean ratings.

Measuring Customer Orientation of Salespeople: A Replication With Industrial Buyers

Saxe and Weitz (1982) reported the development of an interesting new tool for research on buyer-seller interactions which they call the SOCO scale (Selling Orientation-Customer Orientation). The SOCO scale consists of 24 items related to specific actions a salesperson might take when interacting with buyers. Respondents indicated the proportion of their customers with whom they would take each particular action. The 24 replication items are listed in the Appendix, which also contains item-to-total correlations and factor loadings.

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The scale was implemented initially with two separate samples of salespeople. The results were consistent over the two samples. Saxe and Weitz reported high levels of internal consistency reliability ($\alpha = .86, .83$) and cited evidence of both convergent and discriminant validity. Their results supported their conclusion that the SOCO scale, when implemented with samples of salespeople who assess their own customer orientation, is a useful measure of the customer orientation of salespeople.

However, it also seems appropriate, perhaps even more appropriate, to implement the SOCO scale with customers themselves assessing the degree of customer orientation of the salespeople who call upon them. It seems reasonable to assume that the assessment of the sellers' customer orientation by buyers might be more objective than self-assessments by salespeople. Evidence of upward bias in individual self-ratings has been reported in

Table 1
STATISTICAL COMPARISONS OVER SAMPLES

	<i>Saxe/Weitz sample 1</i>	<i>Saxe/Weitz sample 2</i>	<i>Replication study</i>
N	191	95	997
Mean	183 (7.6)	186 (7.7)	138 (5.7)
S.D.	24	18	22
Skewness	-1.33	-0.88	-0.34
Coefficient α	.86	.83	.91
Mean inter-item correlation	NR	NR	.29
Mean item-total correlation	.45	NR	.51
Test-retest	NR	.67	NR
Factor 1 variance	53%	NR	33%
Factor 2 variance	20%	NR	12%
Factor 1 mean loading	.46 (.37 to .57)	NR	.63 (.50 to .75)
Factor 2 mean loading	.51 (.36 to .61)	NR	.58 (.38 to .69)

NR—not reported.

various contexts (Grashof and Thomas 1976; Silk and Kalwani 1982).

Though curiosity about the degree of congruity of buyers' and sellers' assessments had some role in motivating our research, a more general motivation was a desire to contribute to a replication tradition in marketing research.

REPLICATION STUDY

We modified the SOCO scale only to the extent necessary to accommodate the differences between the situation in which buyers evaluate salespeople and that in which sellers evaluate themselves with respect to their interactions with buyers. The original meaning of each SOCO item was retained and each item was rephrased to ask *buyers* to judge the proportion of *salespeople* calling on them who take each of the 24 actions reflected in the original SOCO items. Care was taken to ensure that the replication was complete and faithful to the objectives of the original study except for the nature of the respondents.

A random sample of 3216 names was chosen from the membership of the National Association of Purchasing Management (NAPM) and questionnaires were mailed to the respondents' places of work. A total of 1005 responses (31.25%) were usable. The rate of return compares favorably with that in most previous studies (e.g., Spekman and Ford 1981; Trawick and Swan 1981). The respondent profile corresponds closely to the national membership profile of the NAPM and the profiles reported in two other national studies (Parasuraman 1981; Reck 1978).

As can be seen in Table 1, the results of the replication study compare favorably with the Saxe and Weitz results. The internal consistency reliability for the replication is notably higher at .91 and skewness is lower. The factor structure of the replication study is almost identical with that of Saxe and Weitz, Sample 1. This

finding supports the *a priori* notion that the same underlying construct is reflected in the replication as in the initial study. The only dramatic difference in the results in Table 1 is the difference in the scale means between the replication study and the two samples reflecting self-assessed SOCO ratings. Whereas the Saxe and Weitz means are 7.6 and 7.7 for the two salesperson samples, the mean value of 5.7 in our study is approximately two scale points lower. The pairwise differences between the mean in the replication study and the means in the two Saxe and Weitz samples are highly significant statistically with $p < .001$ in each case. When the means are interpreted in terms of the verbal anchors, purchasing professionals rating salespeople indicated that more than "about half" but less than "somewhat more than half" of their customers were customer oriented. In contrast, for the two samples of salespeople, the means interpreted in terms of the verbal anchors indicated that more than a "large majority" but less than "almost all" of the respondents were customer oriented. From whatever perspective one might take, the difference between the mean of the buyer sample and the means in the two salesperson samples is so large that some effort to explain it is necessary.

The intuitive explanation is that the discrepancy results from an upward bias in self-assessed ratings of the salesperson samples which was not present in the more objective evaluations of salespeople made by professional buyers. However, a variety of competing explanations could be offered. One might argue that buyers are negatively biased in their evaluations of sales representatives. This notion seems to be counter to the widely reported trend toward long-term collaborative or integrative relationships between industrial buyers and sales representatives (Clopton 1984). It is possible that there are biases in both directions, upward for salespeople and downward for buyers. Questions of possible biases aside, one would expect differences in the customer orientation

of salespeople over different industries and different kinds of salesforces. This issue cannot be resolved with our data and further research is needed to provide an explanation for the differences in mean values between the Saxe and Weitz study and our replication.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

A replication of the SOCO scale with a sample of industrial buyers was conducted with a large probability sample. The 24-item scale was modified only to the extent necessary for it to reflect the views of buyers rather

than salespeople, who were the subjects in the initial Saxe and Weitz (1982) study. The replication appears to be successful. The results are similar to the previous results of Saxe and Weitz; the factor structure is virtually identical to the original results and the internal consistency reliability of the scale in the replication study is higher than in the initial study. Therefore, we tentatively conclude that the SOCO scale works as well with buyers as with salespeople. We hope further testing of the SOCO construct in the future will lead to its refinement and that its use will contribute to improvements in the quality of research on salesperson-buyer interactions.

APPENDIX
CUSTOMER ORIENTATION SCALE FORMAT AND ITEMS USED IN THE REPLICATION

The statements below describe various ways a SALESPERSON might act with you as a customer or prospective customer. For each statement please indicate the PROPORTION of salespeople who act as described in the statement. Do this by CIRCLING one of the numbers from 1 to 9. Their meanings are:

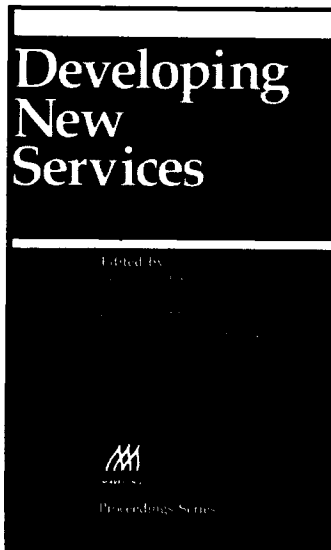
- 1—True for NONE of the salespeople
- 2—True for ALMOST NONE
- 3—True for A FEW
- 4—True for SOMEWHAT LESS THAN HALF
- 5—True for ABOUT HALF
- 6—True for SOMEWHAT MORE THAN HALF
- 7—True for A LARGE MAJORITY
- 8—True for ALMOST ALL
- 9—True for ALL of the salespeople

Item number	Corrected item-total correlation	Loading on	
		Factor 1	Factor 2
1 —Salespeople give accurate representations of what their product will do for me.	.54	.57	.22
2 —Salespeople try to get me to discuss my product needs.	.28	-.50	-.10
3*—Salespeople apply selling pressure even though they know the product is not right for my company.	.54	.19	.65
4*—Salespeople imply that things are beyond their control when they really are not.	.46	.12	.60
5 —Salespeople try to influence me through information rather than by pressure	.55	.61	.19
6 —Salespeople that call on me are customer-oriented.	.67	.68	.29
7*—Salespeople spend more time trying to persuade than they do trying to discover my product needs.	.60	.27	.64
8 —Salespeople try to help me achieve my purchasing objectives.	.58	.62	.22
9 —Salespeople answer my questions about their products as honestly as possible.	.55	.56	.25
10*—Salespeople agree with me only to please me.	.49	.16	.60
11*—Salespeople treat me as an opponent.	.40	.23	.38
12 —Salespeople try to figure out what my needs are.	.56	.71	.11
13 —Salespeople have my best interest as a customer in mind.	.65	.65	.30
14 —Salespeople take a problem-solving approach in selling to me.	.59	.69	.16
15 —Salespeople will go as far as to disagree with me in order to help me make a better purchase decision.	.41	.53	.06
16 —Salespeople recommend the product best suited to solve my problems.	.53	.62	.15
17*—Salespeople stretch the truth in their product representations.	.55	.16	.69
18*—Salespeople talk first and listen to my needs later.	.44	.15	.51
19*—Salespeople try to convince me to buy more than I need.	.42	.10	.56
20*—Salespeople paint rosy pictures of their products to make them sound as good as possible.	.32	-.04	.58
21 —Salespeople try to provide for my organization's satisfaction.	.61	.67	.21
22*—Salespeople make recommendations based on what they think they can sell, and not on the basis of my long-term satisfaction.	.51	.20	.59
23 —Salespeople try to find out which products would be most helpful to me as a customer.	.63	.75	.16
24*—Salespeople are always looking for ways to apply pressure to make me buy.	.43	.10	.58

*All negatively worded items are reverse-scored.

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