


# How Adaptive Selling Behavior Influences Performance: Complementary Roles of Salespeople Skills and Service Leadership

Hsiang-Chih Hu, Asia University, Taiwan

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7735-0146>

Shu-Hui Chuang, Asia University, Taiwan

Shinyi Lin, National Taichung University of Education, Taiwan

## ABSTRACT

Sales behavior is a key criterion for judging the selling performance of salespeople. This study explores how salespeople use social networking sites (SNSs) to improve their selling performance. Accordingly, the authors examine the mediating role of adaptive selling behavior on SNSs and consider the relation between performance and service leadership. In this study, 422 salespeople are brought in direct contact with customers in Taiwan, and it is found that SNS infusion and service leadership are crucial to salespeople's adaptive selling behavior. The results provide strong evidence for the mediating effect of adaptive selling behavior on the relation between each antecedent and SNS infusion.

## KEYWORDS

Adaptive Selling Behavior, Relation Performance, Selling Performance, Service Leadership, SNS Infusion

## INTRODUCTION

The insurance market in Taiwan is connected with economic development, and innovation plays a crucial role in this development (Taiwan Financial Supervisory Commission, 2017). The insurance industry is different from the physical goods market, resembling special and intangible service-type goods, as its sales channels are mainly based on the service provided by sales personnel (Ha et al., 2015). Thus, this is an important topic for insurance salespeople. Nowadays, the sales situation is changing rapidly, where salespeople need to evaluate strategic positioning, emphasizing on service differentiation, and plan the most effective behavior to attract customers, establish and maintain long-term relationships with them, and use these relationships to improve personal sales performance. According to recent studies, adaptive selling behavior is a very effective marketing tool (Román & Martín, 2008) that can help salespeople maintain a long-term relationship with customers (Arnold et al., 2009) and effectively promote selling performance (Chen & Chen, 2014; Rapp et al., 2008).

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The issue of the effective selling behavior of salespeople has always been the focus of the personal selling theory (Wu & Ting, 2012). Wong, Liu, and Tjosvold (2015) showed that leaders can help develop an environment in which service salespeople can excel. They showed that leaders who have effective communication skills and service guarantees are an indispensable foundation for the customer service team. They also indicated that service leaders need to satisfy customer needs, drive value for, and provide high-quality service to, them and encourage the customer service team to engage in adaptive selling and use various methods to satisfy customer needs. Franke and Park (2006) advocated the use of personal traits and motivation to illustrate the effectiveness of adaptive selling behavior in improving sales performance. Adaptive selling behavior can provide high-quality service to customers (Saxe & Weitz, 1982) and can effectively regain from service deficiencies (Ashill et al., 2018).

Fang et al. (2016) proposed that obtaining correct customer information is critical to any marketing strategy. Therefore, a good salesperson should have sufficient information gathering and strategic resilience capacity for the selection of his/her strategies, and should adjust his/her sales behavior according to different customer needs and characteristics. Park et al. (2016) found that social networking sites (SNSs) play a significant role in the performance, as they promote the exchange of information between salespersons and customers and bring a competitive advantage to the company (Bianchi et al., 2015). However, there are studies that consider the inconsistencies and restrictions of SNSs on performance (Dellarocas & Wood, 2008), and even skepticism (Berger et al., 2010), despite the possible impact of web crawling and analysis in SNSs on the value of adaptive selling and sales. In addition, Itani et al. (2017) showed that SNS promotion by the sales director has more potential for influencing the behavior, competence, and success of salespeople in the market.

Based on the above considerations, this study integrates the two major literature areas of service leadership and adaptive selling behavior in the salesperson-to-consumer (B2C) marketing context to clarify whether service leadership can help increase a salesperson's adaptive selling behavior and understand the possible impact of overall leadership behavior demonstrated by the team leader on the performance of the salesperson's adaptive selling behavior. We further verify the intermediary process that influences a salesperson's adaptive selling theoretical deficiency and conduct more discussion for reference to the practice community.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES**

### **Service Leadership**

Leaderships are often described as an attempt through which leaders influence their followers and give examples to them for achieving institutional goals (Chemers, 1997; Santoso, 2015). service leadership can show business people that they need to listen to their customers' opinions to meet their needs; it can improve and provide high-quality customer service (Schneider, Ehrhart, Mayer, Saltz, & Niles-Jolly, 2005; Schneider, Salvaggio, & Subirats, 2002). To develop high-quality customer service, service leadership emphasizes that listening to customer needs (Spears, 1998) is an attitude and a key to success (Liden et al., 2008, 2015). Thus, service leadership has a direct or indirect relationship with customer satisfaction (Hess et al., 2014; Hu & Liden, 2011). To achieve organizational goals, leaders can help salespersons serve and expand customer context (Wong et al., 2015) and influence them to have effective behaviors (Morgeson et al., 2009; Wong et al., 2015). Leadership, therefore, plays a very important role in the perception, attitude, behavior, and sales performance of a salesperson in the team (Arnold et al., 2009; Cheng et al., 2014). In summary, this paper defines service leadership as an observation of involvement of team members in the service leadership of their leaders: to hear the service needs of business people, work with business people to understand customer demand, set high standards for customer service, provide clear guidance for customer service, and stimulate continuous improvement in customer service.

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