



Insurance Companies' Salesperson Lead Qualification Skills and Salesperson's Performance: Mediating Role of Salesperson's Adaptive Selling Behavior

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ABSTRACT

Examining the role of salesperson adaptive selling behavior (SPASB) as a mediator in the relationship between salesperson lead qualification skills (SPLQS) and salesperson performance (SP) in Ugandan insurance firms was the main research objective. A positivistic, explanatory design, 346 salespersons from a population of 3278 licensed insurance firms using proportionate stratified and simple random sampling techniques was utilized. A self-administered questionnaire was utilized, and data were analyzed using SPSS version 26 and Hayes Process Macro version 4.0. This study suggests that adaptive selling behavior plays a crucial role in connecting lead qualification skills to salesperson performance, giving significant results. Practical implications include the need for policymakers to implement a policy of rewarding and supporting adaptive salespeople and organizing professional conference dialogues to train salespersons in analyzing customer needs, categorizing, and qualifying leads. The empirical evidence in this study was that adaptive selling behavior is a mechanism through which lead qualification skills positively influence salesperson performance.

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Introduction

The pursuit of firms worldwide to enhance salesperson performance has placed considerable pressure on sales managers, attracting the attention of researchers and academics (Abu & Akroush, 2017). Salespeople are critical to acquiring new customers, retaining them, and expanding a firm's market share. Their performance serves as both an indicator of salesperson performance and a means of achieving organizational growth and development. Organizations depend on salespeople to devise strategies for healthy sales, as their primary role is to think creatively about sales (Abu & Akroush, 2018). Owing to their close proximity to both the company and customers, salespeople are sales performance activists and influencers, making them the most strategic in determining sales performance and, consequently, the most important people in a company's promotion

process (Tesfaye, 2018; Basir et al., 2010). Moreover, some businesses utilize salespeople to forecast or estimate future sales because of their direct contact with clients (Aqmala & Ardyan, 2019; Napitupulu et al., 2022) and their greater insight into emerging trends than any other group (Kotler, 2012). Thus, understanding the factors that impact salespeople's performance is of theoretical and practical significance.

Existing empirical research on salesmen's performance that focuses on the effect of lead qualification skills on salesmen's performance reveals inconclusive findings. Lead qualification skills, which are the proficiencies and understanding needed to evaluate the likelihood of a lead becoming a paying client, are likely to be positively associated with salesmen's performance (Román & Rodríguez, 2015). This is because salesmen with lead qualification skills are able to concentrate on leads that are likely to convert, giving more persuasive responses due to personal knowledge of the lead and the increased possibility of closing deals due to customized sales pitches (Sujan & Tybout, 1988). Indeed, studies by Román and Iacobucci (2010), Ohiomah et al. (2019), and Román and Rodríguez (2015) reveal a positive connection between lead-qualification skills and salesmen's performance. By contrast, Poor et al. (2013) and Magatef and Momani (2016) revealed an insignificant connection between lead qualification skills and a salesperson's performance. These contradictory findings necessitate an understanding of the mediating variables that complement qualification skills to enhance salesmen's performance.

This study examines the role of salesperson adaptive selling behavior in mediating the relationship between salesperson lead qualification skills and performance. Salesperson adaptive selling behavior is hypothesized to have a positive impact on this relationship. Adaptive selling behavior refer to the practice of changing in one's "selling actions throughout a customer interface built on the perception-based information on the selling state" (Weitz et al.1986). The demands placed on salespeople by organizations and the environment are increasing. These demands are characterized by expanding and shifting market demands, as well as the changes brought about by stiff competition, in which changes are not anticipated to end any time soon (Pedersew et al., 2020). This calls for a salesperson who is not only well equipped with relevant selling skills but can also adapt when selling to fit in the current business environment (Epler & Leach, 2021). Lead qualification skills are not only predictors of sales performance, but also adaptive selling behaviors. For instance, a seller who possesses lead qualification skills may easily know a potential customer's needs and budget and avoid wasting time on leads that may not become customers or concentrate more on leads that may become customers (Weitz & Sujan, 1986).

Existing research has studied the effect of lead qualification skills and salesperson's performance (Román & Iacobucci, 2010; Román & Rodríguez, 2015; Ohiomah et al.,2019), adaptive selling behavior and sales performance (Udayana et al., 2019) in silos. Assessments of various studies on salesperson performance have been disjointed when evaluating the precise nature of relationships. Currently, there is limited empirical evidence of studies that have investigated salesperson lead qualification skills, adaptive selling behavior, and performance constructs within a single framework or examined the relationships simultaneously. Consequently, the intricate interrelationships among these constructs have not been entirely discovered or understood by salespersons in the insurance sector and from a Ugandan perspective. Therefore, the main aim of this study was to explore how salesperson adaptive selling behaviors mediate the relationship between salesperson lead-qualification skills and adaptive selling behaviors among salespersons in the insurance sector in Uganda.

Therefore, this study makes. First, it reveals that adaptive selling behaviors are a mechanism through which lead qualification skills positively influence sales performance. Second, this study uses evidence from the insurance sector, revealing that lead qualification skills are characterized by analyzing, prospecting, and categorizing matters even in the insurance sector. Consequently, this study validates previous research conducted in other sectors. Third, this study uses evidence from a developing country, confirming that lead qualification skills are characterized by analyzing, prospecting, and categorizing matters in developing countries. These findings are of practical significance because sales managers can use the knowledge of the effect of

adaptive selling behaviors to encourage their sales executives to be flexible in their selling behaviors to complement lead-qualification skills to increase their influence on sales performance. This paper is organized in a structured manner. The subsequent sections include a literature review, hypothesis development, methodology, results, discussion, conclusions, implications, limitations, and suggestions for further research.

Literature Review

Our research incorporates Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory, which integrates Szymanski's (1988) categorization theory and Weitz et al.'s (1986) theory of adaptive selling behavior. In the context of personal selling, Vroom's expectancy theory assumes that a salesperson's behavior is influenced by the extent to which they expect a particular action to result in a specific outcome (Becherer et al., 1983). The theory was developed to predict the amount of effort employees put into performing various job-related tasks. However, the theory does not account for the possibility that an employee may be motivated by other factors, such as having the necessary selling skills and the ability to adapt their selling style in different situations, which makes achieving their expected rewards easier when they perform their duties. According to Szymanski's (1988) categorization theory, recognizing customers' needs for products and services is essential for correctly categorizing sales prospects into different sales categories at numerous stages of the sales procedure, including prospecting, presentation, and closing. The theory asserts that the accurate classification of sales leads is a factor in determining salesperson performance. Sujana and Weitz (1988) further support this by stating that salespeople who can effectively categorize their clients tend to perform better, as they can easily modify their selling methods to meet all types of customer needs. This finding aligns with their claims; however, it does not consider sales people operating in a competitive and dynamic environment, which requires them to be adaptive to make healthy sales.

Adaptation theory (Weitz et al., 1986) suggests that there is no one optimum approach to selling as a constantly shifting environment, and the variety of consumer needs it entails. Therefore, salespeople must be sufficiently adaptable to their selling operations and implement a contingency sales approach in line with the characteristics of clients and different selling circumstances, as Viio and Grönroos (2016), Román and Iacobucci (2010) suggest. The present research integrates categorization and adaptive selling behavior principles to corroborate the expectancy theory and elucidate the intervening role of adaptive selling behavior in the connection between a salesperson's lead qualification abilities and salesperson performance.

The aforementioned theories highlight the process by which salespeople categorize information in order to make well-informed decisions, and they stress the significance of effective lead qualification. Lead qualification involves categorizing leads based on their compatibility with the product or service, and salespeople must adopt a customized and tailored approach to selling that takes into account various factors such as the type of customer, the sales situation, and the feedback received. This requires the salesperson to adapt their communication style, strategies, and techniques to meet the specific needs and preferences of individual customers. Nevertheless, salespeople have expectations to attain their objectives, which will result in rewards. Salespeople who possess lead qualification skills, exhibit adaptive selling behavior, and expect to be rewarded for their efforts, are motivated to prioritize high-potential leads and tailor their approach accordingly, resulting in improved conversion rates and overall performance.

Salesperson's performance (SP)

Several researchers have proposed various definitions of salesperson performance, including Basir et al. (2010) and Mosissa (2022), who define it as the salesperson's influence on attaining an organization's sales goals. Similarly, Anderson and Oliver (1987) and Román and Iacobucci (2010) define it as the sales outcomes resulting from a salesperson's efforts and skill utilization. Moreover, salespeople's effectiveness is assessed by examining their actions that lead to the accomplishment of organizational objectives. Firms widely use sales performance

to evaluate individual salespeople's abilities and outputs. It is connected to both quality and quantity of work, such as job attendance and efficiency in job delivery (Mathis & Jackson, 2009). Additionally, it encompasses factors, such as meeting standards, costs, and time utilized (Kuvaas, 2006). Therefore, in this research the authors have considered the salesperson's performance as a measure of effectiveness, efficiency, and the attainment of sales goals by individuals responsible for promoting products or services on behalf of an organization. This encompasses their ability to achieve sales targets, generate revenue, establish and maintain client relationships, and contribute to the accomplishment of the sales department's objectives.

Salesperson Lead Qualification Skills (SPLQS)

Salesperson lead-qualification skills are defined as a salesperson's capability to assess and categorize potential clients and customers (Román & Iacobucci 2010). This also entails a salesperson's ability to identify and classify various client groups and their corresponding product and sales requirements (Román & Rodríguez, 2015). As stated by Ohiomah et al. (2019), a salesperson's skills encompass the procurement of new customers, qualification of customers through understanding and meeting their needs, provision of tailored solutions for each lead, addressing customer inquiries and objections about the proposed solution, and ultimately concluding the sale.

Alternative terms, such as customer qualification (Zhou and Charoensukmongkol, 2020; Román & Iacobucci, 2010; Román & Rodríguez, 2015), potential buyer qualifications (Olariu, 2016), prospect qualifications (Gopalakrishna et al., 2022), and lead qualifications (Pullins et al., 2017; Sabnis et al., 2013), have been used in the literature to refer to lead when evaluating skills. However, this study utilized lead qualification skills, as they were deemed most appropriate for the research. The researcher views a lead as an entity with unverified information and intent that has intentionally contacted the seller. By contrast, a customer is an entity with verified and sufficient information who has intentionally engaged with the seller, indicating that they have already conducted business with the company (Thorne & Quinn, 2017). In this study, authors looked at salesperson's lead qualification to refer to the process where a salesperson is evaluating potential customers, referred to as leads, to ascertain whether they meet the necessary criteria to be deemed qualified leads. This process is vital in sales and marketing, as it aids in identifying leads that are more probable to convert into actual buyers. Through qualifying leads, salespeople can prioritize their efforts and concentrate on those prospects that possess a higher likelihood of making a purchase.

Salespersons adaptive selling behavior (SPASB)

Adaptive selling is a sales technique that involves making adjustments to sales actions based on information around the selling state (Weitz et al., 1986). This method entails modifying sales strategies either during customer engagement or over time based on the salesperson's perception of the circumstances of the sale. Low adaptive selling levels are demonstrated by salespeople who consistently use the same standardized sales presentation, whereas high adaptive selling levels are demonstrated by those who adjust their presentations as needed throughout the sales process (Spiro & Weitz, 1990). To engage in adaptive selling behavior during sales meetings, salespeople must follow a series of actions. Weitz and Barton, (1978) outlined five main steps in the sales process and suggested a model for the ISTEAM to describe how salespeople adjust during the sales process.

Therefore, considering the different definitions put forward by different authors, we can conclude by saying that salesperson adaptive selling behavior refers to the ability of a salesperson to adapt and customize their selling approach based on the behavior, needs, and preferences of the customer and the specific selling situation. It involves tailoring the sales strategy, communication style, and presentation to match the unique characteristics of each customer and the dynamics of the sales interaction

SPLQS and SPASB

Leigh et al. (2014) suggests that salespeople with superior knowledge and competence are more adept at promptly and accurately categorizing consumers based on their need for a solution to their business challenges. As per the example provided by the study, "If affordability is an issue, emphasize the discounts available by consolidating all insurance with us, and if the customer is concerned that their spouse benefits as a result of their death, shift the focus on children's education and care." Anglin et al., (1990), also concur that highly skilled salespeople may possess a greater capacity to adapt to client circumstances and address issues due to their possession of more 'if then' rules kept in memory than their less well-trained counterparts. Zhou and Charoensukmongkol, (2020) established that a positive correlation exists between salesperson adaptive selling behavior and customer qualification abilities. A well-developed category structure in salespeople is associated with more frequent displays of adaptive selling behavior (Sharma & Levy, 1995). This conclusion is also supported by empirical research conducted by Román and Iacobucci (2010), who revealed a relationship between customer qualification abilities and adaptive selling behavior. These findings suggest that salespeople's customer qualification skills are predictors of adaptive selling behavior.

Ho1. SPLQS has no positive and significant link with SASB

SPASB and SP

Sales representatives capable of employing a variety of sales techniques based on the changing needs of their customers typically achieve better sales results (Bagus, et al., 2019). The effective implementation of adaptive selling requires that sales representatives consider a customer's personality, attitudes, and information needs, and tailor their sales approach accordingly to meet the customer's requirements (Porter, Wiener & Frankwick, 2003), thus increasing sales. Spiro and Weitz (1990) demonstrate that adaptive selling behavior is positively correlated with salesperson performance. Salespeople who can adjust quickly tend to perform better (Udayana et al., 2019). Furthermore, adaptive selling practices have been shown to enhance salesperson effectiveness (Singh & Das, 2013). Additionally, successful adaptive selling requires a salesperson to utilize an appropriate technique (Porter, Kraft & Claycomb, 2003). Moreover, even minor adjustments to sales contacts, such as how inquiries and criticisms respond to body language, can improve rapport and reduce objections (Spiro & Weitz, 1990).

Ho2. SPASB has no positive and significant relationship with SP

SPLQS and SP

Román and Iacobucci (2010) and Román and Rodriguez (2015) showed that salespeople with strong lead qualification skills have a clear understanding of customer requirements and a more accurate customer typology. As a result, they can engage in customer-focused selling by providing suitable explanations that satisfy the needs of customers. This approach leads to a greater likelihood of engaging in customer-focused selling activities and of achieving positive results. The export salespeople's ability to qualify clients is closely linked to salesperson effectiveness (Zhou & Charoensukmongkol,2020). Suján et al. (1988) argued that classifying and categorizing clients makes sales propositions and communications less complex and challenging. Ahearne et al. (2005) and Suján et al. (1988) revealed that possessing better salesperson customer qualification skills, along with a well-defined information structure on customer clusters, allows salespeople to use previous information to determine the time and effort to put into various customer types, resulting in a better understanding of customers that can pass through the sales funnel and ultimately lead to closing sales. By spending more time and making more effort to sell to the most profitable customers, a salesperson can increase their performance (Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016). Failure to qualify customers or concentrate on the most lucrative clients can lead to a loss of sales income and wasted resources (Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016; Monat, 2011).

Ho3. There is no positive significant association between SPLQS and SP

Mediating of SPASB

The abilities that salespeople possess are not sufficient to ensure their success unless they are accompanied by action. It is crucial for salespeople to demonstrate their ability to adapt to changing market conditions by applying their acquired skills. This adaptability enables salespeople to tailor their sales strategies to meet the unique needs of individual clients (Edmondson et al., 2019). Salespersons who are successful in selling must be versatile and able to employ a range of sales techniques depending on the situation to close a sale. Udayana et al. (2019) found that adaptive salespeople perform better in their roles. Additionally, Román and Iacobucci (2010), Levy and Sharma (1994), Spiro and Weitz (1990), Verbeke et al. (2004), and others show that adaptive selling behavior is a key factor in improving customer qualification skills, which, in turn, increases salesperson performance. In contrast, Poor et al. (2013) and Magatef and Momani (2016) suggest that empowerment of lead qualification skills has a negligible effect on salesperson performance. This implies that, as lead qualification skills improve, salesperson performance may decrease. Therefore, acquiring lead qualification skills alone may not necessarily improve salesperson performance. Rather, it is essential to develop adaptive selling behaviors that can influence salesperson performance through the use of these skills. The study found an indirect relationship of salesperson adaptive selling behavior existing on the association between lead qualification skills and salesperson performance.

Ho4. There is no mediating influence of SPASB on the link between SPLQS with SP.

Conceptual model

The theoretical framework for this research is grounded in Szymanski's (1988) categorization theory and Weitz et al.'s (1986) theory of adaptive selling behavior. The expectancy theory of Vroom (1964), categorization theory of Szymanski (1988), and adaptive selling behavior theory of Weitz et al. (1986) all supported our study, as illustrated below:

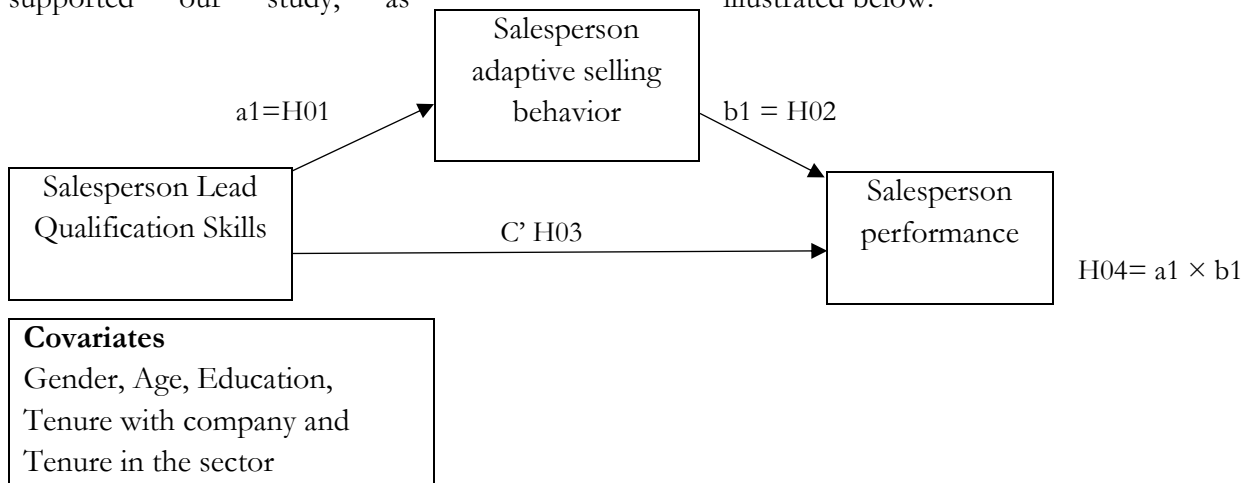


Figure 1: Conceptual model

Source: Hayes, (2018) Model 59

Methodology

The present investigation employed a cross-sectional explanatory design to gather and analyze the data. A sample of 346 salespeople from a population of 3278 insurance salespeople in Uganda was chosen for this

study, and data were collected through a closed-ended, self-administered questionnaire. The sample size was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table. The formula used to determine the number of salespeople for each insurance firm is: $\text{sample size} = (P/X) \times Y$, where P is the population of salespeople for a given company, X is the total population of salespeople from all companies, and Y is the sample size of salespeople. Proportionate stratified random sampling was used to determine the number of representatives (salespeople) from each insurance company in Uganda, utilizing the knowledge of Tharenou et al. (2007), to select the ultimate salesperson for large populations. A list of insurance companies and their salespeople was obtained from the Insurance Regulatory Authority Licensed Salespersons (2022). The response rate was 95%, which is higher than the acceptable threshold of 50%, in agreement with the majority of scholars.

Scholars contend that the operational definitions and measurement scales used in the current study can be modified by making minor changes from earlier research. These adjustments relate to the arrangement of items, clarity, and relevance and are designed to help contextualize the measurement scale in the specific country where the study is conducted. It is suggested that using the measurement scale employed by previous researchers enhances the comparability of results and standardizes the measurement process in a specific field. (Jackson, 2022). Additionally, the measurement of salesperson performance was conducted using an adopted scale from the studies of Behrman and Perreault (1982) and Verbeke et al. (2011) and comprised eight (8) items. Respondents indicated their agreement level with each statement using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated strong disagreement and 5 signified strong agreement. The statements included in the questionnaire were "I produce a high market share for the company," "I generate higher sales volume at every end of quarter assessment," and "I can quickly sell high profit-margin products." Furthermore, the development of the salesperson lead qualification skills instrument was informed by the research of Román and Iacobucci (2010); Román and Rodríguez (2015); and Zhou and Charoensukmongkol, (2020), which utilized six items that employed a 5 points Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (5). The items included in the instrument assessed the respondent's ability to determine and assess customer needs as well as their ability to comprehend customers' buying motives. Lastly, the development of the construct's measurement of adaptive selling behavior was based on studies by Sipro and Weitz (1990), which comprised seven (7) items. These items were measured using a five-point scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5), with examples such as "I always adjust my selling style depending on the situation," "I always change my selling methods," and "I always employ the same selling technique with most customers." The measurement also included an item that read, "I enjoy experimenting with various sales strategies," as well as an item that read, "I generally treat every customer the same'."

Results and Discussion

Profile of respondents

A total of 346 questionnaires were circulated, but only 328 were deemed suitable for analysis after excluding 10 that were not returned, five that were found to be outliers, and three that were improperly filled out. The demographic data in Table 1 reveals some interesting findings. For instance, the results indicate that men make up the majority of respondents, accounting for 50.6% of the total number of respondents, while women account for 49.4%. In terms of age, the majority of respondents (47.6%) were aged–26-33 years old. The age group of 34-41 years comes second with 27.1% of the respondents, followed by those above 42 years of age, who make up 4% of the total number of respondents. Only 21.3% of respondents were in the age range of 18-25 yrs old. Furthermore, the data revealed that the majority of salespeople (58.5%) had attained diploma programs, while 6% had attained postgraduate programs. The findings also indicate that most salespeople (57.0%) had spent between 6-10 years working in the sector, and 57.0% had spent 6-10 years working with a particular company.

Table 1: Demographic information about the respondents

Variable	Factor	Frequency	Valid %
Gender	Male	166	50.6
	Female	162	49.4
Age	18 – 25	70	21.3
	26 – 33	156	47.6
	34 – 41	89	27.1
	42 - 49	13	4.0
Education level	Certificate	84	25.6
	Diploma	192	58.5
	Undergraduate	50	15.2
	Postgraduate	2	.6
Tenure with the sector	1-5	31	9.5
	6-10	187	57.0
	11-15	103	31.4
	16-20	7	2.1
Tenure with the company	Below 1 year	6	1.8
	1-5	119	36.3
	6-10	121	36.9
	11-15	60	18.3
	16-20	22	6.7
	Total	328	100.0

Source: Research Data 2023

The mean, standard deviation, reliability, and correlation findings

Table 2, findings disclose salesperson lead qualification skills with a maximum mean of 3.4 with .623 standard deviation, proceeded by Salesperson Adaptive selling behavior of 3.2 and .654 while Salesperson's performance with the lowest mean of 2.4 and .690 being its standard deviation.

In addition, the Content Validity Index (CVI) was evaluated using Lawshe's online worksheet for each variable, in order to assess the validity of the tool based on expert ratings. As per Hair et al. (2010), a CVI value of at least 0.7 is considered acceptable for each variable. It is noteworthy that all of the study variables satisfied this criterion. Furthermore, to ensure the consistency of the tool, professionals typically require a reliability of 0.7 or higher, as stated by Nunnally (1978). It is important to mention that the study results indicate that the reliability of all variables exceeded 0.7, which suggests that the instrument can be utilized with confidence. Lastly, the table more shows all variables having a positive, significant correlation with salesperson performance. Salesperson lead qualification skills presenting ($r=.525$, $p<.01$) with strongest relationship.

Table 2: Results for Mean, SD, reliability, and correlation

Variables	Mean	SD	Reliability	CV	1	2	3
Salesperson lead qualification skills-1	3.4	.623	.872	.780	1		
Salesperson Adaptive selling behavior-2	3.2	.654	.827	.821	.306**	1	
Salesperson's performance-3	2.4	.690	.878	.870	.525**	.318**	1

** Correlation significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Factor Analysis

Prior to the confirmation of the hypothesis, the research team executed a factor analysis using principal component analysis with varimax rotation to evaluate the validity of the construct, such that the researchers could confirm if the measures truly represented the given variable. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity demonstrated a significant 6242.100 Chi-Square with $df = 498$ at a p -value of .000, while the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) for sampling adequacy measurement yielded a value of .934. The use of factor analysis was deemed appropriate based on a KMO value greater than .5 and a statistically significant Bartlett's test, as depicted in Table 3.

Moreover, the three factors identified in the analysis accounted for a total variance of 63.614%. All of the variables and their respective items measured above .5 in factor loading. The first factor, salesperson lead qualification skills, comprised six items that accounted for 13.202% of the total variance. The second factor, salesperson adaptive selling behavior, consisted of seven items that loaded and contributed 21.199% of the total variance. Lastly, the third factor, salesperson performance, included eight items that loaded and accounted for 29.213% of the total variance.

Table 3: Factor Loadings

Items	Statement	Factor Loading
LQS1	I have the ability to classify and evaluate customer's needs	0.686
LQS2	I possess the ability to understand buyer's motive	0.674
LQS3	I possess the capability of distinguishing different kinds of leads e.g. cold, warm and hot leads	0.861
LQS4	I have the ability to prospect the right leads	0.956
LQS5	I have the ability to qualify a right lead	0.916
LQS6	I can ably open relationships with prospects.	0.956
ASB1	I always change selling style, time to time	0.688
ASB2	I am flexible in the selling tactic used	0.791
ASB3	I basically approach most customers the same way	0.693
ASB4	I try out different sales methods	0.841
ASB5	I handle most customers the same	0.693
ASB6	I am easy to change approaches when the sales method used is not fine	0.587
ASB7	I try to comprehend how a customer varies from another	0.711
SPI	I yield a higher market share for the business	0.934
SP2	I generate higher volume of sales at every end of quarter assessment	0.874
SP3	I can quickly sell profit-margin products which is high	0.909
SP4	I can generate new products sales for the company	0.949
SP5	I always exceed most sales targets	0.91
SP6	I bring in a new account at least every week	0.888
SP7	The qualified leads I get everyday has grown bigger	0.937
SP8	In relation to last years, I have improved customer retention rate	0.92
The KMO Test for sampling adequacy		.934
Bartlett' s Sphericity Test Approximate Chi – Square		6242.100
Df		498
Sig.		.000

Source: Primary data 2023

Testing Mediation

In order to explore the underlying mechanisms and processes through which variables are interconnected, researchers conducted a test of mediation to better understand complex relationships and the role of third variable in explaining the relationship. Thus, the primary objective of the study was to assess the mediating effect of salesperson's adaptive selling behavior on the relationship between salesperson's lead qualification skills and salesperson's performance in the Ugandan insurance sector, with a specific focus on the fourth hypothesis.

To accomplish this, a four-step process was implemented, based on the work of Baron and Kenny (1986) and MacKinnon (2012), and a fifth step that considered the total effect that assessed all the direct and mediating impacts. This process requires certain terms to be satisfied.

First, a significant association of salesperson lead qualification skills with salesperson adaptive selling behavior (path "a1"). Second, there is a significant association between adaptive selling behavior and salesperson performance (path "b1"). Testing the association between salesperson lead qualification skills and salesperson performance while controlling for adaptive selling behavior (path C). Salesperson lead-qualification skills have a significant indirect effect on salesperson performance via salesperson adaptive selling behavior ($a1 \times b1$).

The researcher applied the bias-corrected percentile bootstrap method to determine whether the last condition (H04) was satisfied. The total effect (C) is represented by the equation $Y = C X + \epsilon = (a1 \times b1) + C'$. The study included gender, age, tenure with sector, education level, and tenure with company as covariates. The PROCESS Macro Version 4.0 (Model 4) provided by Hayes (2018) was used for the multiple regression analysis. The initial results showed a significant impact of salesperson lead-qualification skills on salesperson adaptive selling behavior, with a value of .376 and a p-value of 0.00. Model 1 explained 21% of the change and all covariates were found to be insignificant.

The performance of salespeople is significantly influenced by their adaptive selling behavior, as indicated by Model 2, with a significant β value of .328 and a p-value of 0.00. Model 2 was utilized to examine the third step, and it was determined that salesperson lead qualification skills play a significant role in influencing salesperson performance (.004, $p=0.00$). The results of this study indicated that none of the covariates had any significant influence. Model 2 accounted for 18.7% of the observed variation. Finally, the data revealed that the mean indirect effect, as determined through the bias-corrected percentile bootstrap analysis, was statistically significant.

Table 4 illustrates the indirect effect of salesperson lead qualification skills on salesperson performance via adaptive selling behavior was significant ($a1 \times b1 = .376 \times .328 = 0.123$, $SE = .0249$, $CI = .0407, .1750$). We recognized that all path "a1" and "b1" were significant, therefore, there was a partial mediating effect between salesperson lead qualification skills on salesperson performance via salesperson adaptive selling behavior (Zhao et al., (2010) Furthermore, Table 4 further shows (Direct + Indirect) the total effect = $.004 + .123 = .127$ was significant as shown by $\beta = 0.127$, $p = 0.000$.

Additionally, the results reveal a total effect accounting for 23% of the total change in salesperson performance. These findings further indicate that the covariates were not significant. Based on these results, H01, H02, H03, and H04, Hypothesis was not supported by the study results and thus taking alternative.

Table 4: Indirect effect test results of SPASB on Salespersons Performance

Variables	Dependent Variable					
	Salesperson Adaptive selling Behaviour Model 1		Salesperson Performance Model 2		Total effect Model 3	
	Coef	T	Coef	T	Coef	T
Gender	-0.0490	-0.3619	0.0634	0.4635	0.0432	0.8261
Age	0.0267	0.0541	-0.0653	-0.0764	0.0385	0.7694
Tenure (sector)	-0.0680	-0.0957	0.0378	0.3261	0.2734	0.8653
Education	0.0143	0.2745	0.0305	0.2544	0.1832	0.2375
Tenure (Company)	0.0166	0.7411	0.0171	1.1070	0.1430	0.7761
Salesperson lead qualification	.376**	4.2102	.004*	11.2373	0.127*	0.000
Salesperson Adaptive selling			.328**	6.1092		
R ²	.2078		.1413		.2313	
F	13.013**		18.707**		22.970**	
Bootstrap results	Co-eff	SE	T	P	LCI	UCI
Total-effect (Direct*Indirect)	0.127	0.0391	14.2102	***	0.6131	0.8050
Direct effect (X on Y)	0.004	0.0417	10.0321	***	0.4531	0.7192
Indirect effect(a ₁ *b ₁)	0.123	0.0249		***	0.0407	0.1750

Notes: P<. 001.LCI=Lower Confidence Interval, UCI=Upper Confidence Interval
Source: Research Data (2023)

Discussion

A body of literature explores the direct and indirect impacts of a salesperson's lead qualification skills and adaptive selling behavior on salesperson performance. Our findings align with earlier research, which has consistently shown that lead qualification skills positively influence salesperson performance (Román & Rodríguez, 2015; Abdolvand & Farzaneh, 2013; Román & Iacobucci, 2010; Johlke, 2006; Wachner et al., 2009). The findings provide novel insights into the indirect consequences of salesperson lead-qualification abilities in the context of an emerging economy such as Uganda. In line with previous research, our findings reveal that lead-qualification skills significantly influence salesperson performance. Salespeople with high lead qualification skills are adept at identifying suitable customer types, understanding customer needs, and being customer-oriented during the sales process. This enables them to provide appropriate solutions that meet customer needs, thereby improving sales performance. Our research contributes significantly to the present knowledge body by presenting further insights into the direct impact of salesperson lead-qualification skills on salesperson performance, particularly in emerging markets.

Research demonstrates that adaptive selling behavior has a significant impact on salesperson performance. This is in line with Spiro and Weitz (1990), who posited a positive correlation between the adaptive selling behavior of salespeople and their sales performance. Salespeople capable of adapting to various selling situations are more likely to close deals (Udayana et al., 2019). Moreover, research has shown that adaptive selling practices can enhance salesperson performance (Singh & Das, 2013). Furthermore, minor adjustments to a salesperson's body language, responses to customer inquiries and comments, and other aspects of their interactions with customers can help build rapport and reduce objections (Spiro & Weitz, 1990). Additionally, the test results of Pahlevi et al. (2019) demonstrate that a salesforce with adaptable salespeople enhances sales performance.

According to this, a salesperson's lead-qualification skills exhibit a positive and significant relationship with adaptive selling behavior. This finding aligns with Zhou and Charoensukmongkol's (2020) research, which demonstrates a correlation between a salesperson's capability to qualify customers and their adaptable selling style. Hansen et al. (2011) suggest that a salesperson's knowledge affects the quality of their adaptive selling behavior, as adaptation requires a complex knowledge structure of selling scenarios. This view is also supported by Leong et al. (1989), who argue that salespeople with strong customer qualification skills possess in-depth and well-developed knowledge of various customer types, allowing them to effectively organize, interpret, and evaluate sales situations; select customized sales strategies for different customers; and make necessary adjustments to cater to various customer needs during sales presentations to improve sales.

The results indicate that salesperson adaptive selling behavior serves as a significant mediator in the connection between salesperson lead-qualification abilities and performance within the insurance industry. This suggests that flexible selling behavior enables lead qualification skills to be realized in terms of improved salesperson performance. This aligns with the views expressed by Román and Iacobucci (2010), who argued that possessing skills alone is insufficient for success; it is also crucial to be able to apply them adaptably. Hence, it is vital to consider salespeople's adaptability to their market environment. Previous research has also found that adaptable selling behavior functions as a mediator in the link between customer qualification skills and salesperson performance, including studies by Suján et al. (1994), Levy and Sharma (1994), Vida, Obadia, and Plank (2016), Spiro and Weitz (1990), Verbeke et al., (2004), Boorom et al. (1998), Park and Holloway (2003), and Román and Iacobucci (2010).

Conclusion

The key objective of this study was to investigate the mediating role of adaptive selling behavior on the association between salesperson lead qualification skills and salesperson performance. This investigation was conducted by collecting data from 346 salespersons working in insurance companies in Uganda. The results of the study reveal that both salesperson lead qualification skills and adaptive selling behavior are significant predictors of salesperson performance. Additionally, the study found that salesperson lead qualification skills have a substantial, positive, and significant influence on salesperson adaptive selling behavior. The novel aspect of this research is the mediation findings, which show that salesperson adaptive selling behavior partially mediates the relationship between salesperson lead qualification skills and salesperson performance. The mediation effect ($\beta = .123$, S. E. = .025, 95% CI = .041-.175) was greater than the direct impact of salesperson lead qualification skills on salesperson performance ($\beta = .004$, $p > 0.001$). These findings suggest that salesperson lead-qualification skills are more effective in determining salesperson performance through salesperson adaptive selling behavior than through direct influence.

Implications of this Research

The research presented herein provides both theoretical and practical recommendations. Theoretically, this research supports Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory, Szymanski's categorization (1988), and adaptive selling behavior, Weitz et al (1986) theories, and builds upon existing studies regarding the direct impact of salesperson lead qualifications skills and adaptive selling behavior on salesperson performance.

Additionally, the study provides novel insights into the mediating effect of adaptive selling behavior on the relationship between lead qualification skills and salesperson performance. The researchers propose practical recommendations for managers, policymakers, and curriculum developers to create selling and marketing curriculum content that addresses critical issues that enhance salesperson performance through adaptive selling behavior. Sales managers can explore innovative methods, such as personalized interactions, to boost customer engagement and drive sales growth. They can utilize the information to stay current on market dynamics, identify emerging trends, and adjust their sales strategies accordingly.

Furthermore, economic policymakers are encouraged to develop policies and programs that foster a culture of adaptive selling skills by investing in staff training to learn various customer-handling techniques, collaborating with outside technical specialists and knowledge-generating organizations, hiring outside consultants and professionals, and attending outside insurance-related trade fairs, seminars, and professional discussions.

Limitation and Future Direction

This study utilized a cross-sectional design, which may restrict the capacity to assess whether salesperson's adaptive selling behavior and performance persist or change in the absence of lead qualification skills. Future research could employ a longitudinal design to delve deeper into this topic. Moreover, a sample size of 346 salespersons from insurance companies may not adequately represent the overall salesperson population. Hence, future research could broaden the sample to encompass salespeople from other sectors. The hypothesized model demonstrated an R square of 0.2313, which indicates that it accounted for approximately 23% of the variance in salesperson's performance. This finding indicates that there are other factors in the operating environment that were not captured by the model, accounting for the remaining 77% of the variance in salesperson's performance. Future researchers could explore these additional factors like product knowledge, Job Satisfaction in order to decrease the unexplained variance and enhance the overall comprehension of salesperson performance in insurance companies.

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