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Salesperson-Customer Dyads in the Casino Gaming Industry: How Sales Competencies and Relationship Lifecycles Influence Customer Satisfaction and Account Profitability

Alicia Lechtenberger

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SALESPERSON-CUSTOMER DYADS IN THE CASINO GAMING INDUSTRY: HOW

SALES COMPETENCIES AND RELATIONSHIP LIFECYCLES INFLUENCE

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND ACCOUNT PROFITABILITY

By

Alicia Jean Lechtenberger

Bachelor of Science in Education
Northern Arizona University
1996

Master of Business Administration
Western New Mexico University
1998

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Alicia Lechtenberger

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Chih-Chien Chen, Ph.D.
Examination Committee Chair

Tony Henthorne, Ph.D.
Examination Committee Member

Seyhmus Baloglu, Ph.D.
Examination Committee Member

John Schibrowsky, Ph.D.
Graduate College Faculty Representative

Alyssa Crittenden, Ph.D.
Vice Provost for Graduate Education &
 Dean of the Graduate College

Abstract

Developing extraordinary relationships between sales personnel and customers is essential to corporate success. To meet the increasing demands of customers within the hospitality industry, corporations must ensure they pair customers with salespeople who are highly competent, possessing refined and adaptable skill sets that directly increase customer satisfaction and account profitability. Corporations spend billions of dollars annually on hiring and training salespeople; yet, salespeople often quit or miss their quota targets. Considering this industry-wide business problem, the purpose of this dissertation study was to determine how sales competencies influence customer satisfaction and account profitability while taking into consideration the duration of the customer-salesperson relationship. This study was the first to empirically measure the views of casino operators as they evaluated purchasing behaviors and satisfaction levels with the primary slot salesperson. By use of a mixed-methods approach— first, via one-on-one interviews followed by a survey to be sent to 4500 casino operators, $n=529$ responses indicated salespeople who possessed product knowledge, understanding the needs of the customer, honesty, and high communication skills, yielded the greatest profitability and customer satisfaction. The moderating variable of duration of the salesperson-customer relationship revealed the longer the length of the relationship, the higher the yield of profits and customer satisfaction.

Keywords: sales competencies, casino gaming, sales, slot machines, customer satisfaction, account profitability, customer lifecycle

Acknowledgements

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I began this journey while on a business trip in Frankfurt with my colleague, John Nalbor, who encouraged me to go back to school to pursue a life-long dream of obtaining a doctoral degree. John along with Landon Shores, a UNLV Master's student, helped me make the contacts I needed and to become enrolled in the PhD program. Thank you to you both for encouraging me to take on this wild journey.

Finally, I cannot leave out my family who have graciously given up time together with me as I have spent many hours away from home in classes or the countless hours, I spent working in my office drafting this dissertation. Thank you to my boys for your love and patience. Thank you to my fiancée, Sean, for believing in me even when I didn't. Lastly but not least, thank you to my father who has ever so patiently edited this paper. Without my family by my side, authoring this dissertation would have been a more difficult challenge than it already was.

Dedication

I have dedicated this dissertation to my younger and only sibling, Azia Marie Lechtenberger, who sadly passed away during the completion of this work. As her older sister, Azia always looked up to me, and I know she would have been proud of me for completing this program. Azia always had a way with people. With her beautiful smile, she could make people laugh effortlessly. I have always admired her in so many ways and words cannot express how much I miss her. It is to my dearest sister that I dedicate this dissertation.

My sister's favorite quote: *"Life isn't about waiting for the storm to pass. It's about learning how to dance in the rain."* – Vivian Greene

Azia Marie Lechtenberger (1976 – 2021)

Preface

My doctoral journey began in 2015 while working as an event planner for GES. One day a colleague and I were discussing our future careers. Jokingly, my colleague suggested I should get a doctoral degree in hospitality. He said a doctoral degree would be perfect as most of my professional career I have worked in the hospitality industry in various business verticals from hotel systems to casino gaming, meeting planning, and convention management.

Initially paying no mind to my colleague's suggestion, eventually my curiosity peaked. After meeting with a few hospitality professors and students, one professor noted students would benefit from having a business professional like me share real-world experiences that I have gained over my 24-year career.

Once I decided that getting an advanced degree was for me, I had to go back to move forward. In fact, I had to go all the way back to the sixth grade to relearn math. I even took on tutoring to be able to score well on the GRE. After 4 months of tutoring, I took the GRE and scored horribly. I studied another 3 months, took the exam, received an acceptable score, and applied to the program. Having worked in the secular world my entire life and having graduated with my masters in 1998, I was removed from the academic world and those first few classes in summer school 2016 were brutal. Technology had advanced significantly, and I was prepared to hand in my assignments manually! I had so much to learn about online student portals.

Not to mention all the other milestones along the way… taking the qualifying exam, writing academic papers, traveling to various cities, presenting at grad week and conferences, writing more academic papers, taking the qualifying exam, writing and presenting the dissertation proposal, receiving IRB approval, working with the IGT President to use the database for data collection, interviewing participants for the qualitative portion, completing the

customer survey, performing the data analysis and writing the findings. I completed the program

all while working full-time and exceeding in my position, traveling for work, raising two boys,

and running a household. None of what I just described was easy. Had I not had the background

and experience that I have had in sales and marketing, I believe this would have been an even

greater struggle.

I have been passionate about sales, selling and marketing my entire life. When I was a

young girl, I sold lemonade from my front porch.   Later, I sold hand-made bracelets out of my

garage. Selling then evolved into door-to-door distribution of the newspaper. Next, I took on a

"truer" sales role of door-to-door cosmetics sales with AVON. From my sales training, I have

learned to be prepared, to communicate with precision, to accept rejection, to manage deadlines,

to work in and manage teams effectively, to be professional, and to most importantly, take a

chance at something that I wanted.

Fortunately, I have been successful in my sales endeavors. More than the freedom or the

money that comes with a sales career, I savored the high I received from closing a deal. Even

today, I still relish the high of closing a multi-million-dollar deal; yet, I feel the same high when

I sell something small. To be a great salesperson, it starts with loving the process of selling. To

me, it is irrelevant to the dollar amount of the sale; it is the steps I took to be able to have a

person trust me to make a purchasing decision that excites me.

As I complete this dissertation, I am eager to spend time with the young minds of today

and impart upon them my experience and wisdom. There is nothing I would rather do than share

this passion with others willing to learn about the most exciting profession in the world –

professional selling.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

"Nothing of permanent value has come down to us from the past, save by the grace of good salesmanship on the part of somebody." Glen Frank, former President of the University of Wisconsin. (Nichols, 1991)

The sales profession has changed significantly over the last thirty years, advancing swiftly, while responding to an ever-changing marketplace. As businesses become increasingly more competitive, salespeople must adapt to more pressure to achieve higher quotas. Correspondingly, sales teams in organizations have increased in strategic importance and in size to meet the demands of competition (Piercy, 2006; Rakham,2000). The most productive salespeople are not bound by traditional practices; instead, they work in ways that yield successful outcomes (Rosenbaum 2001). Corporations can best support top-selling salespeople through investing in their knowledge and skills, just as corporations invest in equipment, knowing the economic impact will be favorable to not only the salesperson but also the organization (Becker, 2002; Busch, 2013). Rackham (2000) indicated that the effectiveness of a company's goals depends directly on the quality of the sales team. Quality is directly equated to the skills a salesperson has developed (Hughes, Le Bon & Rapp, 2013) and a professional salesperson's skills should be explored and developed.

There is a gap in empirical research related to specific sales competencies of individuals within the casino gaming industry. Previous literature, while readily available, has been either historical, regional, or descriptive and did not identify the key competencies of salespeople within the gaming industry that directly impact customer satisfaction and account profitability, two key performance measures that indicate the health and strength of an organization. Thus, an

investigation is required of the current state of salesperson characteristics in the hospitality industry and more granularly, within the casino gaming industry.

This study had two essential goals: first, to ascertain which sales competencies had the greatest impact on customer satisfaction and account profitability and second, to determine the appropriate length of the customer-salesperson relationship to assuage the law of diminishing returns.

It was anticipated data would reveal the which sales competencies were strongly correlated to customer satisfaction and account profitability. These findings are pertinent to human resources managers and sales managers who wish to be more selective in the hiring process to reduce turnover. Managers can also use the findings to better train their sales team by helping them develop more core sales competencies. Findings from the study indicated managerial implications of pairing a salesperson with a specific customer which was found to be relevant to the success of the salesperson and the customer. The customer-salesperson relationship dyad should be evaluated frequently to minimize the law of diminishing returns and keep the account continuously profitable. This work contributed to the body of academic literature by directly investigating correlations between sales competencies, customer satisfaction and profitability while considering the length of the customer-salesperson relationship.

Problem Statement

The casino gaming industry is highly competitive and slot machine manufacturers seek out the most highly competent salespeople to gain an edge over competitors. Yet, hiring managers and sales directors are not always in tune with the competencies that make a salesperson successful and how these competencies affect sales performance within the account, costing gaming companies millions in lost profits. Hiring the wrong salesperson in fact can cost a

company upward of annually 2 million dollars in profit per the wrong person hired (Bruce, 2014). Once a salesperson is hired, an estimated 29% of corporations spend a minimum of $2,500 annually per person to help each salesperson succeed; yet, some companies still miss annual sales targets as the salesforce does not possess the qualities needed to achieve their quotas (The Controllers Report, 2008). This in turn leads to much of the salesforce voluntarily or involuntarily leaving the company.

The casino gaming industry is not an exception to this challenge in hiring the right salespeople. Often, the casino industry has been referred to as a "good old boys" network, being primarily male-dominated and lacking in the employment of minority groups (Davies, 2021). Due to this traditional culture, it is customary practice for salespeople to move from manufacturer to manufacturer aided by their friendships and contacts; yet, they seldom improve their skills, nor are they held accountable for increasing customer profitability. Many salespeople have worked in the field their entire career and have had long-standing relationships with their customers, some spanning decades. Being overly comfortable, and forging friendships between customer and salesperson can oftentimes blur professional lines either making it more difficult to say no or easier to say yes to an undesirable sales proposition (Backstrom et al., 2009). This is where the role of the customer-salesperson lifecycle becomes tenuous and begs the question, where is the "sweet spot" in the relationship cycle, i.e., when is the relationship most profitable?

The formulation of the primary research question came from the following business problem: business leaders and hiring managers are unclear about which sales competencies most impact customer satisfaction and account profitability within the casino gaming industry. When the wrong salespeople are employed, this costs corporations collectively millions of dollars in

training and lost revenue through employee turnover (Smart, 2005; Clifton, 2011). If hiring

managers and business leaders within slot machine manufacturing companies are not aware of

the importance of sales competencies and the dynamics of the customer-salesperson lifecycle,

then there are risks of lost sales, and market share to competitors, potentially causing

corporations millions in lost revenue (Fatemi, 2016).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to describe and explore which sales

competencies had the greatest impact on customer satisfaction and account profitability when

moderated by the duration of the customer-salesperson relationship.

This study revealed which sales competencies of salespeople in the gaming industry most

impacted customer satisfaction and account profitability when moderated by the tenure of the

customer-salesperson lifecycle. Moreover, the study accounted for the interaction of customer

and salesperson demographics on account profitability and customer satisfaction.

Outside of the extant literature, there is a need to find at which point the law of

diminishing returns applies to the relationship between the salesperson and the customer,

answering the research question, "At what point does the relationship no longer yield increased

sales revenues?" The findings from this study aids business organizations to optimize their

salesforce with salespeople who have optimal sales competencies which yield higher satisfaction

and account profits as measured by the customers.

Key Definitions

There are key terms used throughout this dissertation study relating to the overarching

topic of sales. The main concepts of the terms are defined as:

Account profitability – continued growth of a sales account as determined by the corporation that services the account. Growth can be measured in many ways, e.g., units sold, percentage growth, or market share. (Mullins et al. 2014).

Casino gaming industry – gambling facilities that offer table wagering games and other gambling activities, such as the application of Class II and Class III electronic gaming devices, otherwise known as slot machines (Eadington, 1984).

Commitment – an enduring desire to maintain a valued relationship (Moorman et al. 1992).

Customer lifecycle – duration and strength of the customer-firm relationship (Bolton, 1998).

Customer orientation – the philosophy and behavior directed toward deciding and understanding the needs of the target customer and adapting the selling organization's response to satisfy those needs better than the competition, thereby creating a competitive advantage (Saxe & Weitz, 1982).

Customer relationship quality – a concept that stands for the depth and magnitude of a relationship and its ability to endure (Shemwell & Cronin, 1995; Paulin et al. 2000; Barnes and Howlett, 1998; Mangus, Bock, Jones, & Folse, 2020).

Customer-salesperson dyad –an intricate relationship between the customer and the salesperson, also known as the buyer and seller, contingent on both the customer's and salesperson's characteristics (Williams, Spiro & Fine 1990).

Customer satisfaction – an individual's feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction which result in comparing a product's perceived performance or outcome against expectations (Kotler, 2003; Hill, Brierley & MacDougall, 1999).

Effective Listening – "qualities of being able to pay attention to others, withhold judgments, reflect, clarify, summarize, and share in either verbal conversation or through other forms of written communication" (Sullivan, 2011).

Empathy -   the ability to understand another person's ideas and feelings with a specific degree of accuracy (Comer & Drollinger, 1999).

Hard Skills - skills that deal with concrete problems and specific knowledge that help a person perform their job, i.e., computer programming, accounting, and advertising (Zang, 2012; Lyu & Liu 2021).

Market share – the percentage or portion of the total sales in a market going to a particular company (Kurtz, & Dodge, 1991).

Personal selling – an interpersonal persuasive process designed to influence some person's decision (Kurtz, & Dodge, 1991).

Product Knowledge – of or relating to a salesperson's knowledge of all the products offered by a company **(**Park & Moon, 2003).

Sales Competencies – composed of activities and a cluster of related knowledge, attitudes, and skills that are correlated with performance, can be measured against standards, and can be improved through educational initiatives (Parry, 1998).

Soft Skills – "personal transversal competencies such as social aptitudes, language and communication capability, friendliness, and ability to work in a team and other personality traits that characterize relationships between people" (Cimatti, 2016).

Trust – confidence in an exchange for a partner's reliability and integrity (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

Significance of the Study

This study is significant adding to the existing body of academic knowledge in sales, customer satisfaction, consumer behavior and account profitability. This study was the first to query casino gaming operators on their sales representatives and exclusively focused on the duration variable of the dyadic relationship between customer and salesperson. Within the casino gaming industry, it is commonplace for salespeople to be assigned to service customers for years without any changes, and the relationships are rarely evaluated or quantified. This research supplied a managerial blueprint for corporations which served as guidance for employee hiring, best practices for salespeople, customer-salesperson lifecycle management, sales training, and proper account management. Clearly understanding that not every customer-salesperson dyad will be productive provides business organizations latitude to make changes to the dyads. Through effective pairing of the salesperson and customer, while taking into consideration a salesperson's competencies, improves customer relationship quality and account profitability.

Organization of Study

This study is structured into five chapters. The introduction to the study, problem statement, purpose, scope, research questions, definitions, limitations, and significance have been identified in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 is a detailed account of the literature related to the topic, broken into five sections. The first section gives the reader some context regarding the history of sales and personal selling up to the modern age. Section 2 delves into which sales competencies have been the focus of previous research studies. Section 3 highlights the meaning of customer satisfaction along with the theory that provides support, and how customer satisfaction relates to the topic whereas Section 4 explores how companies evaluate the success of salespeople through quotas and measures which include continuously increasing account

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profitability. Section 5 concludes the chapter with the moderating variable of the duration of the customer-salesperson relationship and its influence on the dependent variables of customer satisfaction and profitability. Chapter 3 describes the rationale behind the research designs and methodology and includes the implementation of instruments in a survey format. In Chapter 4 there is a comprehensive analysis of the data and the statistical support for testing the study's hypotheses. Lastly, Chapter 5 discusses the findings of the study and details the theoretical contributions, practical implications, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to explore which sales competencies of salespeople within the casino gaming industry had the greatest impact on customer satisfaction and account profitability when moderated by the duration of the customer-salesperson relationship.

The review of applicable literature provided a concentrated overview of the research focused on the study which examined ideas and concepts about sales competencies, customer-salesperson relationships, customer satisfaction, account profitability, and customer-salesperson lifecycle. Topics were searched and synthesized for this study providing a theoretical and conceptual framework for the research. A review of the literature was conducted to gain an understanding of relevant topics related to sales competencies, customer-salesperson relationships, and the relationship lifecycle.

There were scarce scholarly articles that deliberately addressed the topic of sales competencies within the hospitality industry, specifically - the casino gaming industry. For this reason, the literature search extended to other industries such as education, retail sales, economics, marketing, sociology, and psychology.

To provide a thorough background and structural framework for this research, the review of the literature consists of five sections: Background of Personal Selling, Sales Competencies, Customer Satisfaction, Sales Performance as Measured by Account Profitability, Moderating Role of Duration on the Customer-Salesperson Relationship, and Research Gap. The first section, Background of Personal Selling, presents an overview of the history of sales as a profession and the relevance of sales within corporations. The section Sales Competencies provides the reader a variety of definitions of competencies and how competencies are imperative for successful salespeople to achieve their goals. Customer satisfaction delves into

what makes customers happy and how satisfaction is measured; also, this section aligns the theories and the hypotheses statements that support the research questions. The fourth section, Sales Performance Measured by Account Profitability analyzes sales success factors and account profitability as a measure of success and expounds on theories and the hypotheses statements that support the research questions. The next section, Moderating Role of Duration on the Customer-Salesperson Relationship provides insight into how the variable tenure of a relationship impacts factors relating to sales and customer satisfaction.

In the concluding section of Research Gap, the literature is briefly summarized as well as the gap in the literature and the need for this research are explained.

Background of Personal Selling

Personal selling is a profession as old as the historic story of humankind. Accounts from *The Holy Bible* spoke of Sadducees selling goods in the markets of ancient Greece and Rome. The book of Leviticus chapter 25 and verse 14 offers an historic account of a sales transaction, "If you sell land to any of your own people or buy land from them, do not take advantage of each other" (*The Holy Bible*, 1796). As it relates to our modern age, in his 2004 work, Freidman attributed the "birth" of the modern salesperson to the development of mass manufacturing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. American corporations such as Coca-Cola, Carnegie Steel, Wrigley's Chewing Gum, General Electric, and PepsiCo, to name a few, developed modern sales techniques to compete and drive revenues. A salesperson's role, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was accepted to be that of the facilitator of negotiation and transferer of goods from the seller to the buyer (Hartmann, Wieland, & Vargo, 2018).   This style of selling became known as transactional. Combined with nearsighted goals

and short-term outcomes, the primary intent of a salesperson was to convince buyers to purchase a product regardless of a buyer's needs (Jolson, 1997).

Eventually, sales, as a profession, began to become more respected as it offered individuals a pathway to personal success (Kurtz, Dodge & Klompmaker, 1982). As the sales profession gained popularity in America, more people were reading books to enhance their sales skills during this era. The book *The Man Nobody Knows* (Bruce Barton, 1926) portrays Jesus Christ as a successful sales executive quickly became a bestseller in the mid to late twenties. Another sales classic that gained popularity during the early 20th century was Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (1937), which shares stories Carnegie learned in his experiences working as a salesperson for Amour.

In the 1970s, there was a shift in paradigm within the sales profession from transactional selling to relationship selling. Relationship selling began to focus on developing and growing the relationship with the customer for ongoing mutual long-term benefits (Hartman, Weiland, & Vargo, 2018; Nunes, 2019; Weiner, Greenwell, & Shreffler, 2021). Jolson (1997) clarifies "Instead of viewing selling as a series of struggles that the salesperson must win from a steady stream of prospects and customers of all sizes and shapes, relationship selling or partnering focuses on the building of mutual trust within the buyer-seller dyad with a delivery of anticipated, long-term, value-added benefits to buyers" (p.76).

To this day, professional selling continues to grow as a career. As of the publication date of this dissertation, there were approximately thirteen million sales professionals in the United States, which represented 4.5% of the adult working population. The profession of sales is expanding and is projected to grow at a rate of 7% from 2020 to 2030 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021).

From 2009 to 2019, sales occupations contributed as much as 20% to the gross domestic product within the United States (Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2019).

Because sales professionals contribute trillions of dollars annually to the U.S. economy (Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2021), sales professionals are a critical component of not only the US economy but also corporations worldwide. Personal selling remains a crucial process for corporations to generate profits (Raynor and Ahmed, 2013). Chief Executive Officer of Mobee, Hal Charnley, praises sales professionals with this statement, "Sales associates are, arguably, the most strategic competitive advantage that a company has" (McGregor, 2016, p. 1). Major corporations in the United States spend over $15 billion annually on sales training and another $800 billion on sales incentives (Kodwani, & Prashar 2019) as corporations recognize a highly trained salesforce is one of their most important investments (Singh, Manrai, & Manrai, 2015).

Yet, when the wrong salespeople are hired or are not successful, millions of dollars are wasted as these salespeople become lost from organizational turnover (Lai & Gelb, 2019; Harris, Mowen, & Brown, 2005) thereby escalating the costs of sales recruitment and account management (Galea, 2005). Hiring successful salespeople with the best-fitting skillsets can yield dividends to the corporation. Both salesperson skills and the frequency with which preferred modeling behaviors are performed tend to result in high employee performance (Dahling et al., 2016).

Salesperson Competencies

Conventional wisdom informs us that successful salespeople possess an optimal skill base and competencies. A basic search for books on "sales skills" in the Amazon books section yields over 80,000 results, indicating an elevated level of interest in the topic of sales. Modern-

day sales expert Harvey Mackay (2011), in his book *The Mackay MBA of Selling in the Real World*, warns, "Without the right sales skills, something terrible happens: nothing."

Professional salespeople must be competent in their ability to mitigate the spread of losses in businesses and organizations. Competence permits an individual to evaluate and reflect upon one's work efficiently as well as to be accountable for the results of one's work (Ordon, 2008). Sales competencies can be defined as activities and a cluster of related knowledge, attitudes, and skills that are correlated with performance that is measurable against standards and can be improved through educational initiatives (Parry, 1998). Lucia and Lespinger (1999) define competency as, "a cluster of related knowledge, skills, and attitudes (behaviors) that affects a major part of one's job (a role of responsibility), that correlates with job performance on the job, which can be measured against well-accepted standards, and that can be improved via training and development."

Regardless of the numerous definitions of competence, sales competencies can be interpreted via multiple academic angles. A study by Pettijohn et al. (2007) found that customers preferred salespeople who were experts in their company's product lines and their industry. Customers also prefer salespeople who can facilitate clear communication, expedite orders, resolve issues, understand their needs, and respond to their needs accordingly (Garver & Mentzer, 2000). Comer & Drollinger (1999) delineated the principle of having effective listening skills as a salesperson. The authors argued that the most significant listening stage entailed both active listening and empathetic skills. Further, Comer & Drollinger (1999) defined empathy as the ability to understand another person's ideas and feelings with a specific degree of accuracy. Empathy also entails listening to an intuitive and literal understanding of meanings. Similarly, Locander et al. (2020), identified empathy as an obligatory element and vital part of

being a successful salesperson because it helps in satisfying customers' needs and interests. According to Wieseke et al. (2013), the distinction of empathy in sales and marketing was introduced by Lipps in 1909. Empathy is considered a stable trait (Comer & Drollinger, 1999), although psychologists argue that empathetic listening is a cognitive skill that can be acquired through social experience.

Prior research from marketing and sales used cognitive explanations of empathy such as the ability to guess various behaviors of normative people (Wieseke et al., 2013) and the ability to comprehend another person's condition or state of mind without having to experience the feelings of another (Comer & Drollinger, 1999). Several scopes of empathy have been proposed by prior studies conducted on the topic. These include perspective-taking, empathic concern, and emotional contagion. Perspective-taking entails adopting the viewpoints and opinions of another. In this domain, two forms of information must be considered and critically synthesized: background information about people and how they react in different environments and situations, and perceptual contribution from the cue source. When a person tries to adjust to understand the perspective of others, it is believed that the person is in a better position to accept and anticipate the reactions of others; therefore, the salesperson should be able to identify the needs of a customer and take appropriate actions to fulfill the needs.

Empathy is a paramount competency in that it not only improves the proficiency and professionalism of a salesperson but also helps in customer satisfaction (Reinartz & Kumar, 2003). Ramsey & Sohi (1997) argued that salesperson listening skills and competency are evaluated from customers' perspectives. Therefore, a competent salesperson should aim to understand the interest of the customers and should be capable of accepting customers'

bargaining points using the best words to convince them to buy products. Empathy has long been viewed as critical in personal selling.

Apart from salesperson empathy, various firms deploy the skill of salesperson intelligence in the marketing approach to boost sales performance. However, Mullins et al. (2014) argued that this approach could be problematic if the data is pegged on inaccurate perceptions. Salespeople constitute crucial informatical strategic planning and critical adoption of various marketing concepts. Hughes & Ahearne (2010) argued that marketing organizations highly depend on sales input to make major decisions concerning the general operations of the corporation. Hence, various organizations have heavily invested in applications such as consumer relationship management (CRM) approaches to aid salespeople to collect essential customer information and consequently advance personal and organizational decision-making procedures (Columbus, 2013). However, concerning a salesperson's perceptions of the buyers, organizations may face financial implications when these opinions fail to depict accurate customer-salesperson relationships. For instance, Homburg et al. (2008) highlighted salesperson perceptions and quantitative metrics such as levels of profits are often used concurrently to determine and to guide customer decisions. With inaccurate information, salespeople are often tempted to prioritize relationships that do not depict a customer's ideal profit capacity and, more specifically, an organization's extensive long-term plans. As a result, a top salesperson must be selective in choosing which directives to implement and which to disregard. The company will hold the salesperson liable for losing customers even if the mistake emanates from misleading managers' directives.

Subsequently, Rosenbaum (2001) identified the traditionally oriented managers as those who oftentimes instruct salespeople to adopt directives even though they do not yield a positive

customer-salesperson relationship. For example, these managers can discourage the use of technology in sales organizations. They believe that the time for computer interactions between customers and salespeople can be invested in other important things in the organization, not knowing that the modern sales organization is dynamic and requires technology to match the highly-competitive global market. Salespeople should have the ability to listen beyond just a customer's product needs. The salesperson should be equipped to listen emphatically at all costs and be ready to immerse themselves in the "shoes" of customers to understand why they have made decisions to buying or not buy certain products. The selling skills in this context revolve around improving the relational skills of salespeople to aid them in understanding customers' concerns. (Weitz, 1991).

Weitz (1991) meant that managers and sales leaders sometimes do not interact with customers as personally as salespeople do. For example, Shaw (2007) posited that selling skills should guide salespeople as they are the ones who interact with customers most often. As mentioned in the previous literature, corporations should teach empathetic communication skills to their salespeople to enable them to improve their selling skills. This explains the reason Shaw (2007) documented that realism in sales and marketing can be achieved through service learning. In the service-learning approach, salespeople are trained to give the best services to customers even if the customers will not purchase the products. Shaw (2007) highlighted that service-learning entails optimizing customer consultation, and giving feedback, among other services related to sales. Many sales managers want their salespeople to focus on the customers who buy products and focus less on the customers who do not purchase products.

Sales managers further seek out salespeople who are highly motivated and innovative. Rajabi et al. (2018) argued that salespeople require entrepreneurial motivation to improve their

competencies. Additionally, salespeople with higher entrepreneurial motivation have skills to tackle sales-related challenges. Töytäri et al. (2011) supported the claim made by Rajabi et al (2018) and suggested that successful selling entails being unique and competent. Successful salespeople understand and recognize the value of new business developments such as selling single products as opposed to dealing with multiple or integrated products. Modern clients have access to vast amounts of information that surpass the traditional sales approaches. Therefore, salespeople should be equipped with entrepreneurial motivation allowing them to define and to approach the ever-changing demands of their customers. Töytäri et al. (2011) defined entrepreneurial motivation as goal orientation directed towards identifying new business opportunities, creating, and starting identified opportunities, and avoiding challenges in business activities. Further Töytäri et al. (2011) argued that literature revolving around the entrepreneurial orientation of organizations or sales focuses on how salespeople can adapt to challenges they meet when they interact with customers.

The competency of salespeople requires that they be consistent in creating innovative ideas. Creativity and innovation, as explained by Rajabi et al. (2018), are core factors that determine success and competency among salespeople. Further, Rajabi et al. (2018) highlighted that those business-minded and motivated salespeople should think creatively when dealing with new and existing clients. As explained in previous literature, it is more expensive to get new customers than to maintain existing ones. This assumption aligns with the work provided by Rajab et al. (2018) in which salespeople should be creative when dealing with different clients. Not all customers reflect similar attributes. Some are easy to communicate with yet resist opinions presented to them by salespeople. Based on this assumption, a salesperson who lacks an entrepreneurial orientation can easily give up on resistant customers and lose them to

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competitors because of failing to develop a rapport with them. This explains the reason Töytäri et al. (2011) listed entrepreneurial skills as a determinant for competency among salespeople.

Various academics have identified many essential competencies and skills used as business strategies within corporations. Weber et al., (2009) determined that soft skills include cognition, communication, management, relationship, and organizational skills. Another idea is the skill of competitive intelligence translates into a larger share of the customer's budget as the salesperson uses the information to position products against competitors (Kakeesh, Al-Weshah, & Dababneh, 2021). Different contexts require different competencies. In a strictly transactional setting (the buyer purchases a product one time from a salesperson), salesperson competencies are likely to be of lower importance. Conversely, in a customer setting (ongoing sales transactions), the salesperson will require a higher level of competency (Piercy, Cravens & Lane, 2009).

Perspective is one key competency that requires a higher level of expertise. Perspective, as a dimensional skill expounded from communication, is accepted in the sales literature (Jap, 2001). Nonetheless, Moncrief (2001) echoed that most of the communication barriers can be avoided when salespeople place themselves in buyers' shoes. When a professional salesperson seeks to understand the world through the buyers' perspective, the salesperson becomes better at understanding the prevailing conditions affecting the buyers' decision-making process. Correspondingly, Piercy et al. (2009) argued that the salesperson should be more informed and adept to satisfy the needs of the buyers to improve performance and professionalism. Even though, this theoretical perspective could have been inaccurately extended to the sales context because it fails to synchronize the essential advocacy attributes of a salesperson's activities. As Piercy et al. (2009) posited, even though salespeople are focused on arriving at solutions to

customers' (problems that consider long-term satisfaction of these needs), salespeople and their

managers prefer solutions that maximize the products they are selling (Amyx et al., 2009).

Following this, Mark criticizes the meaning of this from an empathic point of view "Empathy is

not without its cost to the salesperson. To develop empathy, salespeople must agree to

themselves, 'I will never sell customers a product or service they do not need" (Mark, 1991).

Considering perspective may therefore limit a salesperson from, doing things that would

maximize profit, and increase sales at the expense of causing negative implications on customers

and not all salespeople follow Mark's code of honor in selling.

Further, various scholars have supported their assumptions of what they perceive to be

promoting competency in salespeople. Wiedmier et al. (2002) credited technological adoption as

a key issue in promoting professionalism in sales business firms. According to the authors, they

explain modern sales require interaction within a globalized scope. The degree of

professionalism of a salesperson in a contemporary business organization can only be measured

by how globalized the salesperson is. To meet this standard, Wiedmier et al. (2002) advocated

technological knowledge and skills as prerequisite requirements for salespeople. Technological

awareness provides the salesperson with the ability to direct the flow of the sales call to an

advantage.

The degree to which a salesperson controls sales interactions is explained as one of the

significant determinants of salesperson efficacy that may be contingent upon the resources of the

salesperson resources, such as empathy. Whenever a salesperson adopts behaviors intended to

direct the flow of interaction on a sale, this may assist the customer in eliminating the number of

possible options and help them to evaluate these options (Olshavsky, 1973). Regulating

behaviors are perceived to be an expression of how frequently a salesperson tries to lead a buyer

during a sales interaction process. Thus, this domain is comparable to being assertive (Bolton &

Bolton, 1994). Similarly, Norton (1977) argued that when a salesperson tries to direct the

process of interaction between customers and the buyers, they are not in any way trying to

dominate the buyers and deceive them into purchasing products they are not interested in and

instead create trust and build a high-quality customer-salesperson relationship. In addition,

having such high-quality relationships typically promotes and creates platforms for increased

communication levels between the buyer (customer) and the seller (salesperson). Johnston &

Lewin (1996) explained that the first strategic plan for improving salesperson competencies and

proficiency is helping the salesperson nourish a good rapport with the customers, which leads to

a higher level of customer satisfaction.

Hypotheses Development

Exploring the roles of a salesperson's various competencies is important to comprehend

the relationship among the study's constructs as well as the processes which lead to relationship

development. The overarching question in this study is, *what sales competencies most impact*

customer satisfaction and profitability? that guided the study's purpose, which was to

investigate sales competencies and the impact on customer satisfaction and customer account

profitability while at the same time considering the moderating variable of relationship lifecycle,

answering the secondary research question, how *does the customer-salesperson lifecycle impact*

customer satisfaction and account profitability? The final research question, *how do*

demographic characteristics affect customer satisfaction and account profitability? explored

the ways demographics affect customer satisfaction and account profitability. The two

dependent variables are customer satisfaction and account profitability. The independent

variables are considerable and include age, gender, education level, years in the industry, years

of professional

selling experience, and a list of various sales competencies. research questions and hypothetical statements are detailed as follows:

Research Q1: Which sales competencies have the greatest effect on customer satisfaction and profitability?

H_1: The greater the number of competencies a salesperson possesses, the stronger the effect on customer account profitability.

H_2: The greater the number of competencies a salesperson possesses, the stronger the effect on customer satisfaction.

Research Q2: How does the customer salesperson lifecycle impact customer satisfaction and profitability?

H_3: The longer the tenure of the customer-salesperson relationship, the stronger the effect on customer account profitability.

H_4: The longer the tenure of the customer-salesperson relationship, the stronger the effect on customer satisfaction.

Research Q3: How do demographic characteristics affect customer satisfaction and account profitability?

H_5: Age, gender, education level, years in the industry, and years of professional selling experience significantly and positively affect customer satisfaction and account profitability.

This research is further advanced by determining whether the customer-salesperson relationship tenure moderates the effects of customer relationship quality on account profitability. A moderating variable explains the process through which two variables are related, namely a predictor variable, and often represents an individual difference, part of the causal pathway of an effect (Thakur, & Srivastava, 2018). Moderating variables change the nature of a relationship between the original independent and dependent variables (Zikmund, 2013). Rephrasing the definition for this study, the specific sales competencies a salesperson possesses will transform the effect of a customer's satisfaction with the salesperson's organization and, in

doing so, will account for the relationship between the tenure of the customer-salesperson

relationship and customer account profitability.

The conceptual research model developed indicates competencies of the salesperson

impact customer relationship quality and customer account profitability. These phenomena are

further moderated by the life cycle of the customer-salesperson relationship in hypotheses H_3 and

H_4. The research model indicates the relationship between the variables as detailed in the

conceptual framework model in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework
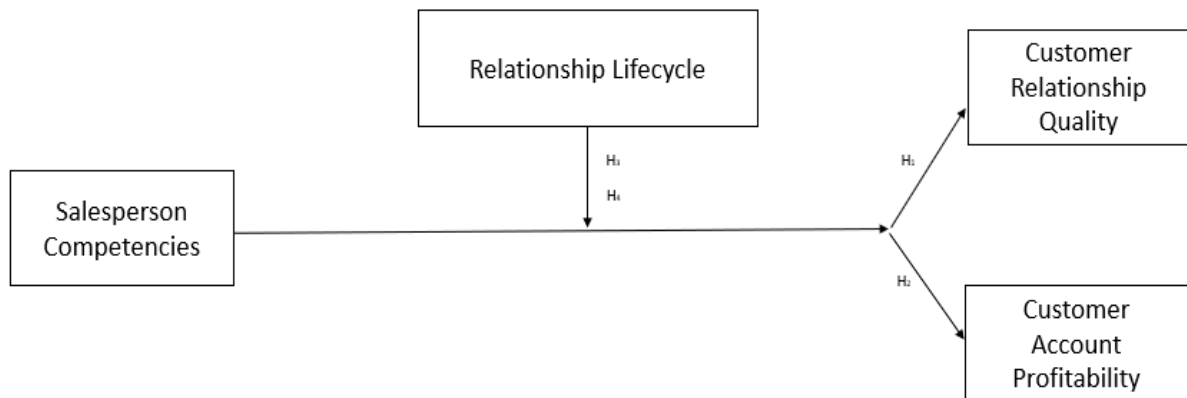
Note. Sales competencies is the independent variable, customer relationship quality and customer

account profitability are the dependent variables. Relationship lifecycle is the moderating

variable.

The following sections detail the development of theories that support each hypothetical

statement.

Customer Satisfaction

Salespeople play a pivotal role within an organization both as ambassadors to the seller's brand as well as customer relationship builders. Salespeople are so important that Comite Champs Elysees' Vice President commented, *"Salespeople are the most important people in our company. They are in front of the customer. They make the difference. Customers buy when they are satisfied"* (Merck, 2014). Further, Neslin et al. (2013) established that consumers are always changing, and business success today involves salespeople understanding and addressing customer needs with the goal of customer satisfaction. Shaw (2007) informs us that marketing philosophies advise corporations to implement strategies focusing on customer satisfaction in which to develop the ongoing relationships needed to accelerate long-term competitiveness. Salespeople must routinely interact and grow their relationships with customers using strategic planning and sales skills while incorporating value-added selling techniques to increase customer value and satisfaction (Michael, 2020). Johnston and Lewin (1996) showed in their seminal research that when there are conditions of high-purchase risks, a buyer will be more likely to purchase from a salesperson who has invested the time into developing the relationship with another vendor or competitive salesperson. Shaw (2007) confirmed that business success today is in understanding and proficiently addressing the changing demands of customers. This can sometimes limit organizations from registering good profits, but it has positive consequences overall. As explained by Weitz (1991), salespeople must consistently interact with customers through strategic planning in a manner that the customers will value their relationships with the salespeople (Swan et al., 2001).

Additionally, at times, customers display poor decision-making in their choices of products. Thus, it calls for proficient salespeople to help customers realize and satisfy their taste

in products. This ability is referenced as Value Opportunity Recognition (VOR). Bohm et al.

(2020) explained that the concept of value opportunity recognition emanated from

entrepreneurship. Similarly, Rapp et al. (2017) compared entrepreneurship and value

opportunity recognition to knowing how to identify new opportunities and resources from the

already existing ones.

Available evidence shows that existing (established) customers can be much more

profitable than new ones (Johnson & Lewin, 1996). Buyers prefer salespeople who are

communicative and are flexible to those with fixed mindsets. Besides, Boles et al. (1997)

supported this claim by explaining that positive interactions and communication between

customers and salespeople can make the customer more likely to initiate a purchase. The

authors' argument justified the claim that positive communication and interaction are essential in

establishing greater trust and loyalty to a specific salesperson and confidence in the corporation.

This is because the salesperson can interpret and understand the concerns, needs, and demands of

the customer and be willing to devise applicable strategies for meeting these demands and

concerns.

Bowl et al. (2020) examined the roles and responsibilities of salespeople in identifying

and satisfying customers' interests. The authors argued that a salesperson should always invest

time and effort in uncovering existing customer issues and then resolving them with appropriate

and relevant resources. A salesperson is responsible and accountable for the customer's

satisfaction (Jap, 2001). The salesperson is the representative of the organization. Within the

salesperson-customer dyad, customer satisfaction is correlated with a salesperson determining

customer expectations; the salesperson delivers customer service and provides solutions to

customers concerns. These behaviors synergize to influence the degree of customer satisfaction (Pilling & Eroglu, 1994).

A sure way of improving customer satisfaction is to prioritize customers' expectations and wishes. When this takes place, a salesperson has a higher degree of desired achievement (Harris, Mowen, & Brown, 2005).   Similarly, McFarland et al., (2006) indicated the skillset of salesperson accuracy, when used correctly in interpreting customers' communication styles, improves the profit salespeople generate from customers via increased customer satisfaction. In general, when salespeople possess an extensive degree of professional skills, they are more successful at not only retaining customers but also at keeping customers satisfied. The theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) posits that if a customer receives superior service, increased attention (salesperson competencies), and favorable prices, the customer will continue to be satisfied and the number of business transactions between the salesperson's company and the customer will increase. The theory of reasoned action describes the correlation between mindsets and behaviors in human connections. The theory is used to predict how individuals will behave based on their pre-existing attitudes and behavioral intentions. Related to this study, if customers have been satisfied in the past and present, they will continue to be satisfied through their salesperson's actions and behaviors (competencies). Given the theoretical background, it is hypothesized:

H_1: The greater number of competencies a salesperson possesses, the stronger the effect on customer satisfaction.

Salesperson Performance Measured by Account Profitability

Delpechitre et al. (2019) explained successful selling as being determined by the degree to which the parties involved have achieved a common consensus through effective

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communication and successful selling, which can be determined quantitatively by the number of products sold to the customer. Correspondingly, the study of salesperson performance is a notable focus within the area of sales force management (Ingram, LaForge, & Schwepker, 2007). Rapp et al. (2017) explained that not all salespeople can convince customers to love a businesses' product offerings. Thus, a firm should invest in training their salespeople in solution selling to make them competitive since the level of competency of a salesperson is measured in the number of sales made and the customer retention rate (Bohm et al., 2020).

The control measure by which a salesperson is held accountable varies from corporation to corporation and within industries.   For example, one method of a formal control measure is referred to as outcome-based control. Outcome-based control holds employees responsible for their performance; however, employees still have the freedom to choose their techniques to achieve their goals (Anderson and Oliver 1987). Sales quotas, also known as sales targets and part of compensation plans, are outcome-based measures and provide corporations with an indication of how successful a salesperson is. Quotas are a 'report card' and indicate to the sales manager if the salesperson is performing on the job. Sales quotas can be defined as specific goals set for salespeople who are responsible for attaining them over a set duration, typically, this period is one year. (Good & Stone, 1991). Normally, a sales quota is quantitative and based on the number of products sold or the value of the products sold which increases account profitability (Schwepker & Good 2012).   Within the casino gaming industry, the industry being investigated for this study, sales quotes are based on account profitability, or the dollar value sold (Orr, 2012).

Sales quotas are achieved when customer expectations are met. When a salesperson invests in the relationship and puts a focus on improving professional sales competencies, the goals of both the salesperson and the customer align. Marketing literature indicates that meeting customers' expectations is financially beneficial to the seller as customers feel obligated to increase purchase behavior (Homburg, Koschate, & Hoyer, 2005).

A customer's obligation to purchase can be thought of as reciprocity. The notion of mutual benefit is supported by social exchange theory which posits if a customer's needs are met, they are likely to help salespeople meet their needs (Gouldner, 1960; Huston & Burgess, 1979). Customers experience emotions like that of a person receiving a favor – meaning, a feeling of gratitude to someone who showed them kindness and feeling they owe something in return (Kolyesnikova, Dodd, & Wilcox, 2009). Emerson (1981) describes the interaction between two people as a social exchange, with each party offering benefits to the other and conditional upon rewards from the other with relations likely to develop when both parties trust that they are benefiting more from the interaction than they are giving up. Social exchange theory is one of the most impactful ideas of research to understand people's reactions. The classic theory has been used in many fields including psychology, anthropology, social psychology, economics, tourism, and hospitality (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon 2013). One of the first social theorists, Homans (1961) described social behavior as party A's behavior influencing party B's behavior followed by party B's behavior reinforcing party A's behavior in return.

In a sales-customer dyad, various communication exchanges transpire between the two parties and each exchange is dependent on the other party's actions. When there is positive social communication and exchanges, there are joint advantages to the customer and the salesperson (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005) and thus reciprocity occurs.

Specific to sales, reciprocity encompasses giving back certain advantages to a customer in exchange for profits attained (Molm, 2010). Social exchange theory posits that salespeople will get the sale when they exchange other favors to customers such as first to market with the product, higher discounts, and even gifts or "perks" such as concerts, sporting events and other events of interest to the customer. This is referred to as "rules of exchange." The rules are defined and adopted by the participants within the exchange (Cook, Rice, & Nakagawa, 2013). A particular antecedent that leads to interpersonal associations in the buyer-seller dyad is referred to as social exchange relationships (Cropanzano et al., 2001).   Within the realm of the buyer-seller dyad, Huston, and Burgess (1979) indicate as salespeople show concern for customers, social exchange interactions magnify producing optimal outcomes (e.g., additional purchases, recommendations, and future commitments).

Given the theoretical background, it is hypothesized:

H_2: The greater number of competencies a salesperson possesses, the stronger the effect on account profitability.

Moderating Role of Duration of the Customer-Salesperson Relationship

Boles et al. (1997) explained the essence of building customer relationships is mandatory when a salesperson considers that it is more expensive to get new customers than to keep the old ones. Besides, the authors argued that existing customers have higher purchasing power than new ones. Similarly, Johnston & Lewin (1966) posited that in circumstances of high purchase-related risk, a buyer is more apt to purchase from salespeople who have invested their resources to establish and maintain a close relationship with that customer. Boles et al. (1997) further point out customer retention is among the most discussed results of a positive relationship between buyer and salesperson. A critical cost-saving measure in selling to existing customers is

that it takes fewer sales contacts and calls to make a sale (to the current customers) than to prospective customers (new customers). This leads to greater profits for the firm via maintaining good personal relationships between their salespeople and customers.

Retaining the existing customers is not only less expensive than finding and convincing prospective customers but also more profitable for buyers and suppliers. When a supplier retains a customer, it is easier for the customer to discover more about the seller's product line. It becomes cheaper and easier to meet customers' demands; thus, customer satisfaction improves. This creates more opportunities for a supplier to serve the customer(s) better and increases the level of sales in a firm. Ajzen and Fishbein's (1980) theory of reasoned action insinuated that if a customer or a buyer receives unique and superior services such as increases and undivided salesperson attention to their demands, and best deals in terms of prices, then the positive intentions of extending the contract with the salesperson or the supplier will increase. Consequently, such positive intention will lead to higher levels of relationship quality. Boles et al. (1997) argued that maintaining high-quality relationships with buyers or customers appears to be significant in increasing long-term salesperson performance and competencies.

To simplify the issue, Swan et al. (2001) argued that organizations should see their customers in three specific ways. The only three identities that firms should accord to their customers are customers as commercial friends, customers as coworkers, and customers as business acquaintances. In other words, Swan et al. (2001) implores firms to invest in ways and strategies to satisfy their customers because the three identities discourage disloyalty between customers and organizations. Swan et al. (2001) explained that firms often try to be loyal to their business partners to avoid any form of abuse or fraud. Based on this assumption, when organizations perceive their customers as co-workers, they would not like to see them purchasing

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or transacting with other firms when they can offer the services and products the customers demand. Equally, as a customer builds confidence in the salesperson's forthrightness, the customer is more inclined to reveal information in general (Hughes, Le Bon & Rapp, 2013).

At times, salespeople within organizations perceive their customers as friends and vice versa. There is a benefit to creating friendly relationships between seller and customer as these relationships can enhance the goals and profits of the seller's corporation over time. Customers and salespeople are labeled as friends when they spend significant amounts of time with one another both during work hours and outside of working hours and have elevated levels of intimacy and self-disclosure (Price & Arnould, 1999; Swan, 2001).

Spending time with customers impacts the level of customer satisfaction (Frankwick, Porter, & Crosby, 2001). The duration of the customer-salesperson dyad can be referred to as the relationship lifecycle and represents a critical moderating effect on other context variables that may influence attitudes such as customer satisfaction and salesperson success (Dwyer and Oh, 1988). Kalwani and Narayandas (1995) described salespeople engaged in long-term relationships with customers have reduced costs over time at a rate comparable to sales growth. Verhoef et al. (2002) observed the age of the customer-salesperson dyad moderates the connection between relational structures (trust, affective commitment, and customer satisfaction) as well as the volume of services purchased.

Naturally, all relationships move through a series of stages. A salesperson's influence on customer satisfaction differs over time as customers also progress through various stages of the relationship with the highest level of customer satisfaction occurring in the later stages of the relationship (Wilson, 1995). Jap and Ganesan in 2000 provided researchers with a measure referred to as the Relationship Phase and Relationship Duration. This measurement tool assessed

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the stages of a relationship between two business parties. The first stage is exploration in which both parties are testing compatibility. The second stage is buildup in which both parties are receiving benefits and a level of trust has been established. Maturity is the following stage in which the parties have an ongoing and long-term relationship. Decline is the penultimate stage in which one or both members are experiencing dissatisfaction and contemplating terminating the relationship. Last is the deterioration stage in which both parties are discussing termination of the relationship.

Just as in an intimate relationship, customers progress in relationships with their salesperson and the corporations they represent just as a product goes through various life-cycle phases. A product can be a tangible item, a service, or an individual (salesperson). Product life-cycle theory states that products are broken down into four segments – introduction, growth, maturity, and decline (Mitchell, & Clark, 2019). Corporations use this theory to make major decisions as to when it is appropriate to increase or reduce prices, improve service, expand service, redesign packaging, change salespeople, and reconfigure sales territories to name a few (Nadeau, & Casselman, 2008). Kotler (1968) introduced the product lifecycle model, as shown in Figure 2, to assist management in making new product decisions.

Figure 2

Product Lifecycle Model
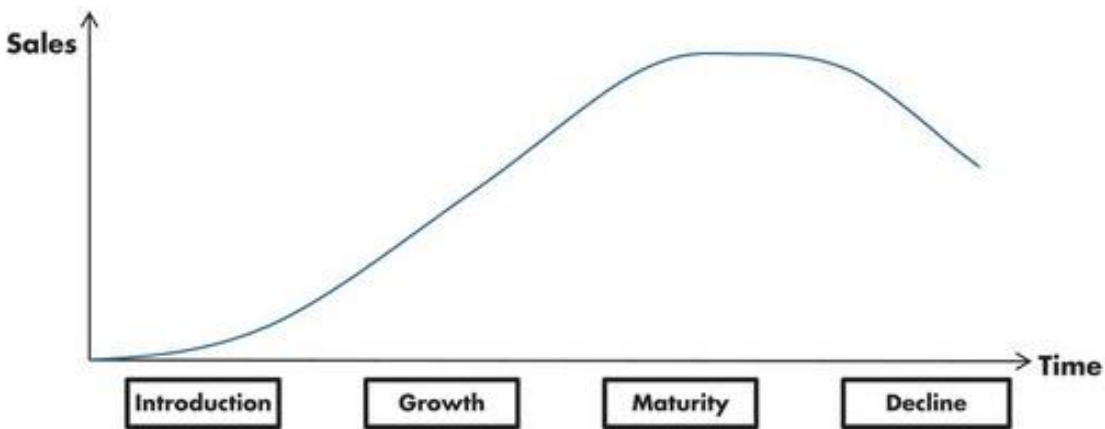
Note: From "Computer simulation in the analysis of new-product decisions." By Kotler, P., 1968, *Applications of the sciences in marketing management* (pp. 281-331) by John Wiley & Sons.

As previous literature has revealed, customers with relationships in the growth and maturity phases with their salesperson report higher levels of satisfaction (Jap, 2001). This is true as both the customer and the salesperson become more cohesive at the levels of inter-firm communication and shared social standards, increasing the mutuality between partners (Jap and Ganesan, 2000, Thorelli, 1986). When the customer has had an extended and positive relationship with the salesperson, Crosby et al., (1990) found that there is an increased likelihood of doing business with the salesperson in the future.

Customers decide whether to engage in long-term commitments (by making future purchases) or, in cases of considerable disagreement, whether to discontinue working with the salesperson or the company they represent. This pattern of behavior may be attributed to the lifecycle theory, like product lifecycle theory; (Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh, 1987) informs the reader that relationships naturally proceed through a sequence of stages, following a trajectory as the

relationship moves from phase to phase (Van de Ven and Poole, 1995). Several studies show that the life cycle of a relationship, or duration, of the customer-salesperson relationship, is a highly relevant variable that explains factors that influence customer purchases over time, with more long-term account relationships yielding higher profits when relational standards are present (Fink et al., 2008; Reinartz & Kumar, 2003). This notion of nurturing relationships is recapitulated by authors Kelley and Thiabaut (1978) who propose that interactions between two parties intensify as the parties meet and communicate more frequently. This behavior leads to customers having a higher level of satisfaction and purchasing more frequently from the salesperson. From a financial perspective, customer satisfaction becomes a derivative of relationship volume with a positive correlation between relationship duration and purchase behavior (Storbacka & Luukinen, 1996).

Given the theoretical background, it is hypothesized:

H_3: The longer the tenure of the customer-salesperson relationship, the greater the effect on customer account profitability.

H_4: The longer the tenure of the customer-salesperson relationship, the greater the effect on relationship quality.

Customer Demographics Effect on Customer Satisfaction and Account Profitability

Customers in different age brackets have diverse opinions on what it takes for a salesperson to provide an elevated level of satisfaction (Cardoso, Costa, & Novais, 2010). Homburg and Giering (2001) reasoned mature customers are frequently constrained in their information managing capability when compared to younger customers. Daughtrey, Vowles, and Black (2013) established as customers grow older, their loyalty increases.

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One study investigated the moderating role of age on customer satisfaction and revealed satisfaction was a strong predictor for loyalty with young customers but was inconsequential for older customers who appeared to behave more rationally in consumer decision-making (Thaichon, & Quach, 2016). Another key demographic within the literature is that of gender. Gender classification is a social structure that is interwoven with all facets of human behavior, not excluding customer satisfaction and account profitability. Due the differences, researchers have long been studying gender and consumer behavior. Thaichon & Quach (2016) advised women had a stronger feeling of obligation to purchase than do men. Women commonly make purchasing decisions on an emotional basis, while men decide armed with facts and information.

Considering time as a component of purchasing behavior, men tend to make purchasing decisions based on immediate needs and how well the product or service will satisfy needs right now into the near future (Herter, Dos Santos & Costa Pinto, 2014). Further gender purchasing considerations by Sreen, Purbey, and Sadarangani (2018) indicate women react more strongly than men to personal interaction with sales associates, while men are more likely to respond to more utilitarian aspects of the experience.

Regardless of demographics, age, gender, education level, etc., social psychologists argue purchasing decisions are based on an individual's identity (Burke & Stets 2009). Sniderman (1975) stated that a person's description of the self is frequently a function of one's disposition and professional tendency.

People long to be part of groups and gain a sense of belonging in their social world. This phenomenon is explained by social identity theory which states a person's identity shapes one's self-image. The more people relate with a distinct group, the more that group plays a role in

shaping how people view themselves, e.g., I am poor, I am educated, I am old, I am a male, I am experienced, I am inexperienced, etcetera (DeLamater, 2006).

Given the theoretical background, it is hypothesized:

H_5: Age, gender, education level, years in the industry, and years of professional selling experience significantly and positively affect customer satisfaction and account profitability.

Summary and Research Gap

This research contributes to the existing body of literature by detailing the complexity of how sales competencies affect customer satisfaction and account profitability within the casino gaming industry. The various sales professionals working within the casino gaming industry are faced with the prospect of responding to the constant changes in their internal and external environments. Salespeople must possess specific competencies not only be effective but also to thrive in a highly competitive environment. One of the key targets of this dissertation was to identify key competencies that belong to the most successful salespeople as evaluated by their customers.

To optimize the benefits of strategies that synchronize salesperson intelligence, a primary sales competency, organizations need more orientation in comprehending how to manage salesperson perceptions. Homburg et al. (2013) acknowledged the existing interest in addressing and examining this phenomenon in recent years. However, Vosgerau et al. (2008), explained that there are still three important research gaps that remain unaddressed. Primarily, even though existing literature captured empirical evidence that substantiated the roots of inaccuracy at an organizational level, studies on the causes of inaccuracy within the scope of salesperson competencies are still not sufficient (Homburg et al., 2013). This is integral research because sales leaders should understand why and when salesperson competencies best apply to the context. Second, there have been mixed findings on the effects of perceptual inaccuracy as a

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competency. According to Homburg et al. (2013), some findings proposed that salesperson perceptual inaccuracy has a negative influence on salesperson behavior. In contrast, Vosgerau et al. (2008), explained that overestimating relational intimacy reduces conflicts and increases relationship functioning. Besides, extant research studies fail to clarify whether the consequences of specific sales competencies within the level of the firm are manifested or extended to the salesperson-customer dyads. This research question cannot be overlooked because the relationship between a salesperson and customers is more interpersonal than that between a salesperson and an organization.

While numerous empirical research studies examine sales competencies in various industries, there is yet to be a study that examines salespeople in the casino industry. This study fills the gap of evaluating and exploring the sales competencies of salespeople within the highly competitive casino gaming industry while examining the effects of competencies on customer satisfaction and account profitability. This research will add context to the industry and scholarly literature relating to the scope of sales relationships, competencies, customer satisfaction, and account profitability. Furthermore, this work will contribute to the knowledge base of how the customer-relationship lifecycle can be maximized by lessening the law of diminishing returns and maximizing the most effective duration of the relationship, e.g., what is the optimal duration of the customer-salesperson relationship where the account yields the highest profits.

Chapter 3 - Methods

Research Design and Methodology

This chapter highlights research designs employed to answer the overarching research question: *What sales competencies most impact customer satisfaction and profitability*? and at the same time, to explore the customer-salesperson lifecycle as a moderating variable.

This topic of sales competencies and customer account profitability may be approached either with qualitative or quantitative measures, and neither method is superior (Cook & Reichardt 1979). However, according to Ennis (1998), the most worthwhile studies on competencies use multiple data gatherings and mixed methods engineered to reveal salesperson competencies. Additionally, when applying a mixed method approach, the researcher has an opportunity to expand the scope of data collected providing a comprehensive response to the research questions asked (Hong, Gonzalez-Reyes & Pluye, 2018).

Studies Overview

The research portion consisted of two studies. Study 1, the qualitative portion, explored and interpreted customers' views of which salesperson competencies were the most important and the relationship of salesperson competencies to the customer's level of satisfaction and account profitability. Study 2, the quantitative study, also evaluated which sales competencies had the strongest impact on customer satisfaction and account profitability as well as interpreted the moderating effect of the customer-salesperson lifecycle on customer satisfaction and customer account profitability. The subsequent sections justify the use of a mixed-method approach, design of the studies, operationalization of the variables in the studies, and measures of the dependent variables.

Qualitative Method: Study 1

While operating within a scope of research that has limited publications, applying a qualitative approach is more than acceptable (Drumwright, 1994). Qualitative research allows a researcher to provide elaborate interpretations of rich human experiences which can explore new phenomena (Glesne 2016). It encompasses generating research propositions to discover a new area.

The literature in this study informed the reader that because the topic of salesperson-customer dyads and salesperson competencies remain topics in the infancy stages of research, specifically in the casino gaming industry, one acceptable application of analysis is a qualitative methods approach (Heath & Cowley, 2004).

Sample and Data Collection

Study 1 involved a small group of ten participants who are gaming operators that had interacted with a slot machine salesperson within the last 3 months. These customers (participants) were selected by the researcher and took part in one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. Based on the researcher's professional experience in the casino gaming industry, the participants were carefully chosen to participate based on their professional experience and willingness to provide authentic and rich responses. Personal interviews paved the way for the exploration of topics and facilitated the preparation of the quantitative survey following Study 1 (Tracy, 2010). The personal interviews consisted of respondents answering open-ended questions about their salesperson experiences including the salesperson's skillsets and characteristics. Deeter-Schmelz & Sojka (2007) instructed that personal interviews permit participants to speak comfortably and in detail about their experiences. For example, the interview began with "*Do you recall the first time you met your salesperson? Please tell me more about that including your*

first impressions." According to Michel, Merk, and Eroglu (2015), by creating an intimate atmosphere, interviews will help a researcher obtain detailed and accurate information from the respondents

A non-probability purposive sampling method was used in Study 1 as the researcher had a clear idea of which customers were willing to take part in the study. The ten participants were recruited either via a personal phone call, text or asked in person by the researcher. Interviews took place in the participant's casino office, coffee shop or restaurant if the area was private and free from excessive distractions.

Twenty-one semi-structured questions were asked to assess the customer's (the participant's) interaction with their primary salesperson as well as intentions to purchase from the primary salesperson.   All questions were open-ended to capture as much detail as possible while guided by the researcher to keep the subject focused and on task. To minimize biases and errors in interview questions, structured questions, which were pre-determined, guided and systematic, supported data with a higher rate of generalization and quantitative analysis.

During the interviews, customers began with sharing demographic information such as age, gender, education level, and years in the industry, followed by an overall assessment of the buying experience with the customer's primary salesperson. The customer was then asked for a precise description of their interaction with the primary salesperson and proffered an opinion about the selling approach of the salesperson. Thirdly, customers were probed regarding any negative impressions of the salesperson they may not have mentioned previously. Customers were directed to expand on which sales competencies were most important to nourish the customer-salesperson relationship and why the customer ranked each characteristic in the order they did i.e., *"Name the top 3 most important characteristics in a salesperson." "Why did you*

rank them in that particular order?" Then those questions were followed by *"Name the top 3 characteristics your salesperson possesses."* To determine intent to purchase, customers were asked *"Describe how relevant your salesperson's behaviors and traits are in your purchase decisions."* To evaluate account profitability, questions relating to the customer's purchasing behavior were probed, for example, *"How has your relationship with your primary salesperson impacted your purchases?"* Lastly, to explore the moderating variable of customer-salesperson relationship lifecycle, customers were asked to expand upon the duration of the relationship they have with their primary salesperson. For example, "*How long has your salesperson worked with you?", "Thinking of the time you have worked with your primary salesperson, how has the relationship impacted your purchases?"* and *"During the time you have worked with your primary salesperson do you feel satisfied with the relationship now versus at the beginning of your working relationship and why?* For a comprehensive account of the qualitative questions, refer to Appendix C.3.

Analysis

Interviews were recorded using a free application software called Otter. At the conclusion of the ten interviews, audio recordings were organized in chronological order from the oldest to the newest and by participant. Duranti (2006) notes transcription of recordings has been used historically to provide evidence for the focus of a study. Following the guidance of professionals in the field of transcription (Henderson, 2018; Santos, 2012) the interviews were then transcribed in an edited manner and then read reflexively. Reflexive readings allowed the researcher to interpret what the data represented. Reading in a reflexive manner permitted the researcher to capture the relationship between the data source and the researcher (Bauman et al., 2002), i.e., accounting for the researcher own nervousness or laughter within the interviews.

Following, data was subjected to thematic content analysis using substantiated qualitative coding procedures recommended for qualitative research methodology (Cetin, 2018; Flick, Von Kardoff & Steinke, 2004).   Content analysis followed the premise of grounded theory as laid out by Glaser, Strauss, and Strutzel (1968). According to Flick, Von Kardoff, and Steinke (2004), grounded theory via inductive reasoning seeks to develop a theory by examining data with the intent of identifying variables and the relationships between them. Grounded theory will be applied to analyze the responses, develop a model, and then test the model against the original responses and thematic analysis will be used to analyze the data. Coding, as a part of grounded theory, would commence independently through the process of thematic analysis. According to Braun & Clarke (2013), thematic analysis is a good research approach when the researcher is seeking to discover something about people's views or opinions, in this case, casino operators' view of sales competencies. The thematic analysis reduced the material in such a way that the essential contents were preserved; yet, a manageable short text was produced.

Gradually, through the process of applying thematic analysis, categories from the material began to develop. The data were combed through carefully, meanings were interpreted, and patterns emerged which answered the overarching research question. As a last step, responses were be compared and sales competencies that occured most frequently were used to develop the theories which supported the phenomena. Other responses were coded including customer's purchasing behavior including past, current, and future behaviors as well as customer satisfaction in direct relationship to the variable of the length of years of the salesperson-customer relationship.

Reliability and Validity

Validity allows a researcher to assess the effectiveness of the measures used in a study. The validity, according to Zikmund, Carr, and Griffin (2013), is the "accuracy of a measure or the extent to which a score truthfully represents a concept." While the construct and content validity may be high in this mode of evaluation, reliability might be low as consistency is impacted by the subjectiveness of the researcher (Pallant, 2001). Yet, accessing validity in a qualitative study has been known to be more difficult, as there are no "scores" in an interview. As a discussion point, many qualitative researchers disagree about the role of reliability and validity in qualitative studies. Some outwardly reject the idea of objective data collection and support subjective data collection (Thyer, 2009). Researchers Guba and Lincoln (1994) reject validity in favor of authenticity. Kirk and Miller (1986) go deeper into the debate of the value of reliability and validity in qualitative work stating that validity is not theoretically attainable and further there are no checks or assessments for validity.

In science, reliability is an indicator of a measure's consistency (Thyer, 2009), in other words, if the interviews in this study were repeated, consistently administering the interviews would produce similar findings. In a qualitative study, it is not always possible to produce a reliable study due to the level of subjectivity introduced into the study (Brunt, Horner & Semley, 2017). However, to bolster reliability in this study, the researcher collaboratively conferred with peers both before administering the questions and after, as a peer debriefing process, which helped ensure the collection of the data remained consistent (Cetin, 2018). Reliability was improved with standardizing the conditions of the research by using the same interviewer throughout the data collection (Franklin & Balin, 2001).

Another process that assessed reliability in the study was triangulation, which is experiencing the same phenomenon from different perspectives in interviews (Sousa, 2014). Triangulation was achieved by having different peers review the interview responses. In Denzin's (2008) work, he referred to triangulation as an instrument of validation. In this research, triangulation also naturally occurred via the application of mix methods, as this study started with semi-structured interviews and ended with a comprehensive online survey described in Study 2.

Limitations

Limitations to the qualitative portion of the study included reduction, as focusing on words or phrases in isolation disregard context, tone, and vague meanings. Also, because the sample size of this study was less than 30, despite rigorous analysis procedures, it was difficult to draw generalizable conclusions as data was biased by the researcher and unrepresentative of the wider population. Thematic content analysis involves some level of subjective interpretation, which can influence the reliability and validity of the results and conclusions (Weinberg, 2002). Further, the semi-structured interviews lacked the flexibility to produce truly novel explanations. This study only covered customers in physical casinos and not online casinos and evaluated the salespeople who directly worked with customers who work in physical casinos. Further, this study was specific only to the United States and casino gaming is a worldwide enterprise; therefore, the findings are not indicative of the view of the entire population of casino operators.

<center>**Quantitative Method: Study 2**</center>

The first research question, "What sales competencies have the greatest impact on customer account profitability?" is descriptive, i.e., what are the characteristics of X? Zikmund (2013) advises descriptive research answers questions of who, what, where, when why and how.

<center>43</center>

Further, Zikmund (2013) defines descriptive research as "painting a picture" of phenomena or situations by detailing traits of organizations, objects, and people. In this work, specific competencies (traits) of salespeople were described. When a descriptive question is raised, it is best to work within the realm of quantitative analysis (Bryman and Bell, 2007), including when surveys are used. Quantitative analysis was appropriate as descriptive research aims to systematically define a population, as well as identify frequencies, trends, and correlations between the variables, yet descriptive research does not control variables in the way an experiment would (Creswell, Creswell & David, 2018).

According to Mayo (2013), when selecting an appropriate research design, it is up to the researcher to determine which type of study to use based on the sources of information available to the researcher. In selecting a research method, several factors were considered: (1) current research on this topic in gaming was limited; yet, the topic is highly relevant for practitioners, (2) a systematic approach to data collection was available with access to a large database of casino gaming customers as well as access to salespeople who work directly with customers, (3) because the study was time-sensitive, the research study had to be completed by fall of 2022, thus, this would eliminate any time studies series and (4) the researcher had access to primary data. The primary research question, "What sales competencies have the greatest effect on customer account profitability?" was answered primarily using multiple regression. This method is most appropriate as regression investigates cause and effect in relationships (Keith, 2019). In this study, the impacts of sales competencies (two or more predictor variables) on customer account profitability were investigated as one outcome variable and customer satisfaction as a separate outcome variable.

Because the hypothetical statements detailed in the introduction section were relational (Zikmund, 2013), they examined how changes in sales competencies varied changes in customer satisfaction and account profitability.

The primary predictor variables in this study were the competencies of the salesperson, which were first discovered in Study 1 via semi-structured interviews with the casino gaming operators. Other predictor variables include age, gender, education level and the number of years the customer had worked in the industry.

Salesperson competencies are nominal variables and positively impacted the dependent variables of customer relationship quality (a nominal variable) and customer account profitability (an interval variable) as determined by the customer's evaluation of purchasing behavior answered through questions in the survey. Customer-salesperson relationship lifecycle was evaluated as a moderating variable measured in intervals of years the customer has worked with the primary salesperson. Additionally, to mitigate redundancy in measuring similar constructs, as with parallel research studies published on the topic of sales traits (Jap, 2001; Hughes, Le Bon & Rap, 2013) factor analysis was initially used to reduce salesperson competencies measures into fewer groups to best facilitate results (Hair et al., 2019), as it was anticipated from Study 1, there would be more than 10 competencies identified from the participants in the study. However, after performing factor analysis, the factors were reduced to just one. This analysis method was not appropriate, and the researcher moved on to using regression and structural equation modeling to analyze the data to draw inferences against the hypothesis statements.

Sample and Data Collection

The target population was all gaming operations globally consisting of 2157 casinos as of 2019 (World Directory of Casino Statistics, 2019). It was not feasible within the time

constraints of this study to query the complete target population. Therefore, study 2 used a unique sampling group taken from approximately 9000 customers working in casinos in North America, which was representative of all casinos in this geographic region studied and this sampling frame ensured representativeness (Fink et al., 2008).

Probability sampling was used to give every member of the sampling frame a nonzero probability of selection and eliminate inherent biases (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2018). From the 9000, a systematic sampling procedure was utilized in which each casino customer was assigned a random number with the starting number selected at random, followed by every 2nd number on the list being selected with 4500 customers receiving the survey. The unit of analysis was the casino operator who had a Slot Director or higher position and who had directly interacted with the primary slot sales representative within the last 90 days (about 3 months). Casino operators were also buyers and were chosen as the sampling group as they were pre-qualified in the survey indicating interaction with the primary salesperson. All selected units (4500 customers) from the systematic sampling received an email and cover letter from the researcher's company explaining the study and inviting them to take a brief survey with customers answering questions about their primary salesperson. The email included a link to the survey which was administered in Qualtrics.

The design of this research supported the literature that theorizes due to its very nature, assessments of customer orientation towards their salesperson should come from customers themselves (Deshpande, Farley, and Webster 1993). Customers were directed to complete all items within the survey concerning their relationships with their primary salesperson. There were a total of 27 questions which evaluated customers' satisfaction with their salesperson's competencies as well as customer satisfaction with the relationship overall. Further, there were

questions regarding customer purchasing habits and the likelihood of purchasing from their sales

representative in the future. Test pilot of the survey indicated the survey took approximately 25

minutes to complete. The participant email was first distributed in June 2022, followed by two

reminder emails with each email being sent one week after the previous email. Details of the

specific measures used in the survey are specified in the subsequent measures section.

Measures

The design of this quantitative research examined in this study supported the literature

which theorized that due to its very nature, assessments of customer orientation should come

from customers themselves (Deshpande, Farley, and Webster 1993). Customers were asked to

rate and evaluate their salesperson including their satisfaction with the salesperson's abilities and

traits as well as their satisfaction with the relationship overall. Further, they were queried about

their purchasing habits and their plans to purchase from their sales rep in the future. Zikmund

(2010) reminds the readers when determining which level of scale measurement to utilize the

researcher is most benefited through collecting the highest quality of data possible.

The survey opened with basic qualifying questions including demographic questions to

determine if the participant fit the criteria to continue with the survey. Domains applied to the

survey evaluation are sales competencies, customer satisfaction, account profitability, and

customer-salesperson lifecycle. Not all scales were used in their entirety. Thirteen scales were

selected specifically to the domains examined by the researcher with all scales established,

tested, consistent and accurate. Most scales were Likert scales anchored at 1 = strongly disagree

to 7 = strongly agree with some anchored in a ranking of 5= strongly agree as well as a few

open-ended questions (as dictated by the gaming company providing the database).

Refer to Appendix F for more detail and specific questions by scale.

Domain 1: Sales Competencies

1. Goldberg (1992) - Big Five Factor Structure

2. Netemeyer et al. (2005) - Customer-Focused Extra Role Behaviors

3. Reid et al. (2002) - Information Use Behaviors

Domain 2: Customer Satisfaction

1. Lages, C., Lages, C. R., & Lages, L. F. (2005) -The RELQUAL Scale

2. Ruekert and Churchill's (1984) - Reliability and validity of alternative measures of channel member satisfaction

3. De Wulf et al. (2001) - Trust, Commitment and Customer Satisfaction

Domain 3: Account Profitability

1. De Wulf et al. (2001) – Measures Customer Satisfaction and Account Profitability

2. Palmatier et al. (2008) - Share of Wallet

3. Increased Customer Purchases (Fink et al. 2008)

Domain 4: Customer-Salesperson Lifecycle

1. Jap and Ganesan (2000) - Relationship Phase and Relationship Duration

2. De Wulf et al. (2001) - Salesperson-Customer Relationship Duration

3. Starzyk et al. (2006) Personal Acquaintance Measure (PAM scale) - calculates one's degree of familiarity and acquaintance with any person.

4. (No Scale Items) - Customer-Salesperson Lifecycle

Analysis

Study 2 was designed to determine the impact of various customer-rated sales competencies (as revealed in Study 1) on customer satisfaction and account profitability. Following study 1, results of customer responses describing relevant sales competencies, the dimensional reduction technique, factor analysis was applied. Various academics have suggested

factor analysis is appropriate to manage multicollinearity among the variables (Hair, 2019; Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2018; Brunt, Horner, & Semley, 2017). However, after applying factor analysis, the result was one factor. Therefore, the researcher determined it was best for H_1 and H_2 to be analyzed via multivariate procedures. The researcher checked for multicollinearity by inspecting Tolerance/VIF values. VIF *values* <10 did not show multicollinearity among continuous variables (e.g., salesperson competencies; Appendix H). Variances were assessed through covariance and multivariate analysis, specifically regression analysis (Keith, 2019). This method was most appropriate as it tested the relational hypotheses statements that involve multiple independent variables (Brunt, Horner & Semley, 2017).

Finally, analysis using Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to further refine the measures and eliminate items whose inclusion resulted in lower alpha coefficients.

Hypotheses 3 and 4 influenced the use of multiple regression to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between the moderating variable of customer-salesperson lifecycle and account profitability and customer satisfaction (Montoya, 2019). Significant effects for each of the equations for H_3 and H_4 positively supported the moderating relationship. An additional hypothesis arose in the data analysis, H_5 -- Age, gender, education level, years in the industry, and years of professional selling experience, significantly and positively affected customer satisfaction and account profitability. To analyze the data for the new hypothesis statement, regression was used.

Sample Size

Using the G*Power program, the researcher conducted a power analysis to derive the sample size. The researcher used the effect size (0.15), α (0.05), 95% power, and the number of the independent variables (10) to decide the sample size for multiple regression (Liekweg et al.,

2005). The power analysis found that 118 participants would be needed for multiple regression as shown in Figure 3. Of the 4500 surveys that were distributed, there were *n*=529 responses which mitigated random sampling errors in the survey because the responses were greater than 400. (Zikmund, Carr & Griffin, 2013).

Figure 3
Power Analysis
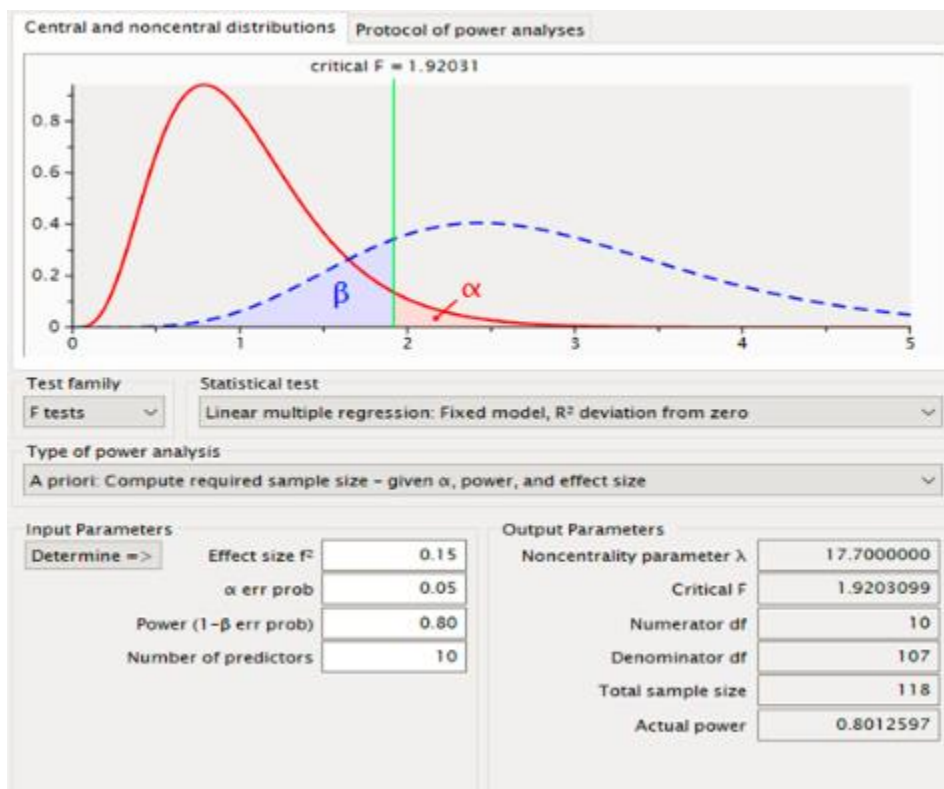
Reliability and Validity

To ensure reliability and in Study 2, thirteen different established and proven scales, as detailed in the measures section, were implemented to collect and to measure data. Because there were more than ten items in the scales used, it is customary with a higher number of items

to aim for a coefficient alpha level of .70 or higher (Nunnally, 1978), which is another way to increase reliability. The results aligned with a high level of reliability as the coefficients were all higher than .90. Reliability in this instance was safeguarded by applying Cronbach's alpha, also referred to as coefficient alpha (Eisinga, Grotenhuis & Pelzer, 2013) which allowed this study to detect how closely related a set of items are as a group.

Construct validity was addressed via the application of a multivariate analysis technique of multiple regression combined with factor analysis, both of which have been proven to be a method with higher levels of overall validity (Hair, 2009). The data had high construct validity in this study because there were high correlations between most variables for the same construct ($p<0.05$). Convergent and discriminant validity was evaluated through a review of correlation values, e.g., seeking correlation values less than .75. Related concepts should be significantly correlated but not so highly correlated that they are no longer independent concepts (Stangor, 2014). Face validity, a scale's ability to reflect what was intended to be measured, and content validity, the degree which a measure covers the domain of interest (Streiner, Norman, & Cairney, 2015), was assessed by using the previously detailed and established sales and marketing scales. In this study, criterion-related validity was evaluated via the validity coefficient. In this study, the cutoff was a coefficient value of .21 or higher for the findings to be useful to the research. Lastly, validity was improved via using established and tested measurement scales as were chosen for this study.

Limitations

This study provided insights into areas that have yet to be revealed including specifically which salesperson traits affect customer relationship satisfaction and customer account profitability. As with any research study, there are limitations which should be addressed.

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When employing a quantitative approach, the results are bound by the questions asked (Flick,

Von Kardoff, & Steinke, 2004). The majority of questions were Likert scale ratings which only

allowed for close-ended questions and the opportunity to capture additional information from the

respondent was not available in that format; except, at the end of the survey, there were two

questions which were open-ended. There was also a high chance of response error as

participants are also customers who evaluated their salesperson, and it was possible that they did

not trust that the survey as confidential, or they did not respond at all creating a nonresponse

error. Although the sampling group allowed for testing customers' perceptions of the

salesperson's characteristics and satisfaction with the company represented by the salesperson,

the sampling method limited the generalizability of the findings only to field sales organizations

in industries within casino gaming. Future research is recommended to replicate this study and

extend the work into other industries such as medical field sales and financial services in which

salespeople, who are like the salespeople in gaming, and have frequent visits with their

customers (fifteen or more visits per year).

Finally, this study only included customers in physical casinos and not online casinos and

only evaluated salespeople who directly work with customers who work in physical casino

operations. Further, this study is specific only to the United States; casino gaming is a

worldwide enterprise, and the findings are not indicative of the view of the entire population of

casino operators.

Chapter 4 - Results

Study 1 – Qualitative Results

The purpose of this dissertation study was to define which sales competencies had the greatest impact on customer satisfaction and account profitability as well as establish the appropriate length of the customer-salesperson relationship to minimize the law of diminishing returns. This chapter presents (a) details of the study participants, (b) a discussion of the overarching research themes discovered through the data analysis, and (c) findings for each research question.

The results presented in Study 1 were based on data taken from ten casino operators located in Las Vegas, Nevada, who participated in one-on-one interviews with the primary researcher. Interviews took place in various locations including restaurants, libraries, and the participant's work offices. A free transcription application called Otter was used to record and to transcribe the interviews verbatim while accounting for verbal tics and non-verbal vocalizations (Savin-Baden & Howell-Major, 2013).

The researcher placed emphasis on frequencies of the occurrence of words used in the interviews leading to recurring themes. Following the process of the thematic analysis method (Drisko & Maschi, 2016), analysis began with first-cycle coding in which data were able to be seen in a macro sense by use of a free, online software called Taguette. Utilizing an elemental descriptive coding method allowed longer passages to be truncated into smaller words in order to describe customer's perceptions of their salesperson (Glesne, 2016). Initially, data collection began with the researcher using a short master code list following the deductive coding method. However, as more interviews transpired, codes emerged progressively during data collection, coding shifted to an inductive coding approach.

Next, similar codes were clustered together and were condensed into smaller pattern codes as part of the second-cycle coding process (Knowlton & Phillips, 2012).

Following the guidance of Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña for coding (2018), the first data analysis yielded 109 open codes, which were merged and condensed down into sixty-seven codes. The codes were then grouped into 8 axial groupings and 4 domain groupings, and selectively coded to address each research question. The 8 axial codes assessed were positive sales traits, negative sales traits, product orientated, salesperson rating by customer, quality time, relationship quality, customer satisfaction rating and purchasing behavior. The 4 hierarchical domain groups included customer satisfaction, account profitability, sales competencies, and the tenure of the customer-salesperson relationship. A full account of the codes used to analyze the data is in Appendix D.

Description of the Participants

Participants in this study all worked in a casino in the slot machine department and had direct contact with a slot machine sales representative within the three months prior to the interview. All interviewees were located in Las Vegas, Nevada, and all were men. This is due to the fact that there are few women who work in positions that manage the slot divisions. Participants were hand-selected by the researcher based on the criteria of being able to communicate effectively as well as their availability to take part in the study.

The average age of the participants was forty-nine with an average of 6 years in their current position and an average of 23 years overall experience in the gaming industry. The average time per interview was 19 minutes.

Participants (n=10) held various positions within the casinos (10%) Slot Director, (20%) Casino Manager, (20%) Assistant Slot Director, (20%) Vice President of Casino Operations and

(30%) Director of Casino Operations. Specific details of the participant demographics are

illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Demographics, Study 1

Customer Pseudonym	Age	Title	Years in Current Position	Years in Industry	Interview Duration (Minutes)
Andre	61	Casino Manager	3	24	14
Rob	53	VP Casino Operations	10	25	23
Alex	31	Director of Casino Operations	2	9	15
Shane	45	Director of Casino Operations	3	25	18
Jim	62	Casino Manager	17	25	16
Gregg	56	Assistant Slot Director	6	28	30
Aron	53	Vice President Casino Operations	2	28	21
Buz	41	Director of Casino Operations	1	20	27
Dan	41	Assistant Slot Director	14	20	15
Josh	42	Slot Director	2	23	14

Note. Names used are pseudonyms.

Research Themes

The goal of the qualitative segment of the research was to discover and to identify

aspects of the customer-salesperson relationship, including not only the length of the relationship

but also the traits of the salesperson, which could lead to higher profitability of the customer

account. The overarching research question supplying foundation for Study 1: *Which sales*

competencies have the greatest influence on customer satisfaction and account profitability? A

secondary research question further drove the investigation, *how does the tenure of the customer-*

salesperson relationship impact customer satisfaction and account profitability? A third

research question emerged with the interviews, *how do demographic characteristics affect*

customer satisfaction and account profitability?

Based on prior research and a comprehensive literature evaluation, 4 domains emerged

from the data: Sales Competencies, Customer Satisfaction, Account Profitability and Customer-

Salesperson Lifecycle. The model of the 4 domains is detailed in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Salesperson-Customer Relationship Model
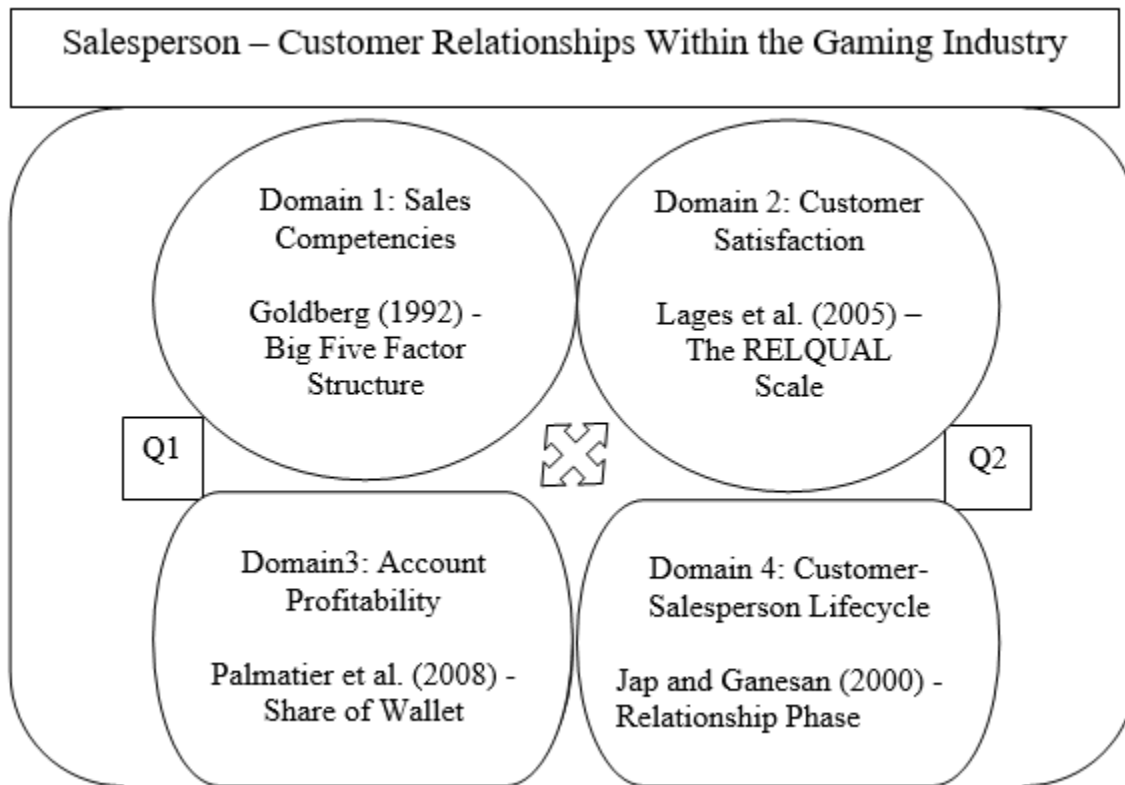
Consequently, the research questions expected to expose customer viewpoints regarding

their salespeople's primary competencies. Numerous themes evolved from the interviews as they

were analyzed. As themes and domains progressed, the findings focused on both the salesperson – customer relationship and the relationship's impact on how satisfied a customer is with the salesperson as well as setting up if and how competencies increase the value of an account.

Holistically, the findings confirmed a highly positive opinion of the customer's primary slot salesperson and their relationship with that person with all 10 customers stating they would not switch their salesperson given the chance.

Research Question One: Sales Competencies

Content analysis for data collected revealed several key themes applicable to research question one: *Which sales competencies have the greatest impact on customer satisfaction and account profitability?* These findings supplied viewpoints on what transpired within the one-on-one interviews pertaining to the customer-salesperson relationship. Recalled accounts uncovered meaningful customer-salesperson interactions including the impact of salesperson competencies on account profitability and customer satisfaction. Not all responses were positive with many of the accounts including negative sales traits.

Customers revealed in the interviews that salesperson competencies and their relationship with their salesperson were important because they created trust, partnership, and led to a professional friendship in which the customer and the salesperson participated in activities such as attending concerts and sporting events outside of working hours. The following subsections provide visual and verbal explanations and viewpoints of customers' perceptions of salespeople including key sales competencies, how satisfied a customer is with the salesperson and if satisfaction leads to an increase in purchasing.

Following the groundwork established in the literature review, 4 domains guided the research and analysis. The domains included sales competencies, customer satisfaction, account

profitability and tenure of the customer-salesperson relationship. Figure 5 below demonstrates

the domain analyses for research question 1, sales competencies.

Figure 5

Sales Competencies Domain Analysis
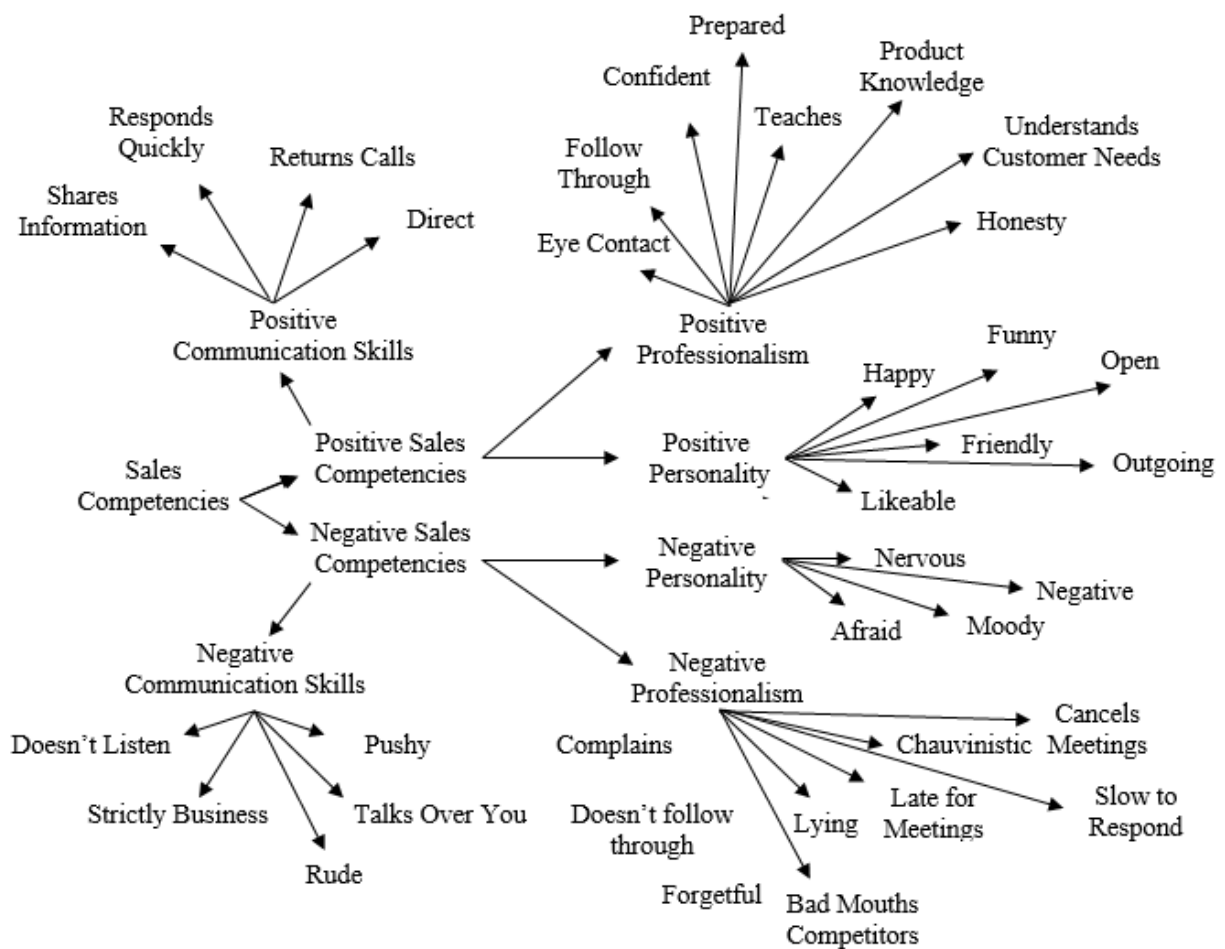
Sales Trait– Product Knowledge

A primary recurring theme which surfaced from the interviews was product and aspects

related to product such as product performance, product quality, product placement and product

pricing.   While product is not a sales competency, salesperson product knowledge is a necessary

sales competency for success.

Customer-participant Aron shared the following relating to his primary salesperson's

skills including product knowledge:

> She **gets back to me at once** and **understands the business** kind of holistically on not
> only what **products** work from her company, but what's trending and doing well,
> industry wide. [Aron, Vice President]

One General Manager of a casino goes into detail of how a salesperson can take

ownership of their product. Andre reveals:

> Of a salesperson's ideal traits, for me, it is **managing your product** on my floors. Maybe
> not just following through with the next sale but **going back to the games that we**
> **purchased the last few years and making sure we have them set up correctly**. Like,
> are there some themes that that she has seen fail nationally and being honest, like hey,
> this game is kind of dying, you should get ahead of it and really **manage the content.**
> [Andre, General Manager]

Often times, customers do not have the time nor the means to research competitive

product. Customers look to their salesperson to be an expert in their field and in their product.

Rob offered his opinion on the relevance of product knowledge:

> The number one important sales trait is **product knowledge**. When our salesman went to
> present us a new theme or cabinet or whatever else, he had **thorough detail of that**
> **cabinet and performance numbers, the expertise behind knowing how it's doing in**
> **other markets, and being able to reassure us that, hey, this is going to be successful**.
> In our area, and we know in Las Vegas versus other markets, performance is very
> different. And **I don't always have the time to do that kind of product research**.
> That's what I appreciate about my salesperson, he is always prepared. [Rob, Vice
> President of Casino Operations]

Sales Trait – Understanding Needs of the Customer

Understanding the customer's needs was another prominent theme which received emphasis in the interviews.   Alex recounted his experience with his salesperson understanding his property:

> I think what I appreciate most about my rep, is that **he understands the needs of the property, of what I expect**, and that makes it a great partnership. [Alex, Director of Gaming]

Vice President, Josh, shared a mutual sentiment with Alex on the importance of understanding the needs of the customer; however, he added as part of understanding needs of the customer in part is collaboration and sharing information. Josh revealed:

> I would say my sales rep was **collaborative**. Yes, he would be **informative**. First, of course, you got **to have the information** versus all the details, but then he was willing to obviously **be collaborative to understand our needs and wants, and what we're looking for**. [Josh, Slot Director]

Sales Trait – Pushy

When a salesperson is not listening or working to understand the needs of a customer, the salesperson may be seen as pushy and pitching a sales agenda. Buz shared his first experience with what he perceived to be a pushy salesperson:

> Initially, I was kind of **turned off**, like I **didn't want to hear** about the product. **They were a little bit too aggressive on how they were trying to sell their products**. I haven't thought about like not wanting to take that person's call or email until this company. And that is mostly because **they were too aggressive**. **It was as if I wasn't given enough time to kind of process their sales pitch.** Sure, you have the initial sales pitch, right? **I was turned off by that** but at the same time I was looking into their product because I needed it. I looked at it like hey, listen, I need your product and to get it, **I have to put up with the aggressiveness**. [Buz, Director of Casino Operations]

Another fellow operator, Shane shared a similar experience regarding the style his salesperson had in always pushing for more sales:

She is always pushing for more and more and more, buy more. And, you know, basically doing what she's supposed to do for her company, but **that's how it's made may come across on the other side right now. Don't pitch me, I got it. [Shane, Director of Casino Operations]**

Being pushy or aggressive, and giving a sales "pitch", had a negative connotation with

customers. Another event collaborating previous customers' experiences with aggressive and

pushy salespeople was shared by Alex:

It's just a sales thing. **You've given me your pitch**. I tell you what I want and **you're going to do with that what you want anyway.** [Alex, Director of Gaming]

While product, collaboration, understanding customer's needs and not appearing pushy,

are imperative to a salesperson's success, there are other primary competencies that were

revealed through the interview analysis.

Sales Trait – Honesty and Trust

Honesty and trust are two interrelated skills that were important to customers. Gregg

commented on the topic of trust and honesty:

My salesperson seems to always be **straightforward and honest about their products**, about the pluses of their products and **to be honest, the negatives of their products**. When they have a problem with timelines, he reaches right out **he doesn't try to smooth it over and hope things turn out better**. **He lets us know exactly what's going on.** Trying to just rip their band aid right off. [Gregg, Assistant Slot Director]

Conversely, lying can be detrimental to the customer-salesperson relationship and leave lasting

negative impressions on the customer.

You know, the salesman that we were talking about how his stuttering made me laugh? He didn't care that **he was lying to me**. And **I knew he knew he was lying to me**. Okay, we got through that eventually. But you know**, if a salesperson comes up here to meet with me and lies to me, I'm gonna let you know that you lied and it's going to take a long time before I trust you again.** [Jim, Casino Manager]

Sales Trait – Communication

Communication is essential in all relationships and even more so in a customer-salesperson relationship (Pauwels, Erguncu & Yildirim, 2013). Customers shared their experiences on the effectiveness of the communication received with their primary salesperson.

At times, there is not enough communication and at other times, there is too much. Buz revealed frustration with his salesperson and the level of communication. He said:

> If I could change one thing about my salesperson, I would say I need **less communication. He overcommunicates**. I mean, like, I will come in for my day and I will already have **five emails** from him. And it is **just too much information**. He is highly informative, which is a good thing. **But too much of communication might be a little bit off-putting.** [Buz, Director of Casino Operations]

Whereas, other customers, such as Shane, appreciated copious communication and being updated throughout the sales process.

> For me being as busy as I am, **I can rest assured in a way knowing that my salesperson always keeps me updated**. When I make an order, he immediately sends me the counter-signed agreement along with an estimated delivery date. **He also communicates regularly about new product releases and product performance. Communication is really one of the reasons I rate him so highly and as one of the top salepeople in our industry.** [Shane, Director of Casino Operations]

While the primary and aforementioned competencies of product knowledge, understanding the needs of the customer, not being pushy, honesty, trust and communication were repetitive in the interviews; other competencies were also mentioned, such as spending quality time together, empathy, preparedness, professionalism, and productivity to name a few. To help integrate the other competencies customers mentioned, the researcher created a graphic picture synthesizing all the competencies shared in the interviews which is depicted in Figure 6.

Figure 6

Salesperson Competencies Word Art

Summary of Research Question One

The preceding sections provided clarification and evidence of both sales traits and actions affecting customer satisfaction and account profitability.   Sales competencies were identified in four areas: positive and negative sales competencies, positive and negative communication, positive and negative professionalism, and positive and negative personality traits. Sales traits having the greatest positive effect on both customer satisfaction and account profitability were product knowledge, understanding the needs of the customer, being honest and trustworthy and having high-level communication skills.   Conversely, content analysis showed when a salesperson is pushy and/or aggressive, this trait has a negative effect on customer satisfaction and account profitability.

The next section will provide findings for research question two focused on customer-salesperson lifecycle, customer satisfaction and account profitability.

Research Question 2: Customer-Salesperson Lifecycle

While the first research question addressed the key sales competencies, the second research question investigates the relevance of the tenure of the customer-salesperson relationship and the impacts the tenure has on customer satisfaction and account profitability. The research question guiding the analysis was, *how does the tenure of the customer-salesperson relationship impact customer satisfaction and account profitability?*

Figures 7 and 8 illustrate the domains of customer satisfaction and account profitability analyzed to answer research question two.

These findings provided viewpoints on what transpired within the one-on-one interviews pertaining to the tenure of the customer-salesperson relationship, also referred to as length or lifecycle of the relationship.

All relationships experience highs and lows and some relationships improve while others decline.

Recalled accounts uncovered meaningful customer-salesperson interactions including the duration of the relationship, background of the relationship (such as when and how the customer was first introduced to the salesperson), the quality of the relationship, the current rating of the relationship, the customer's evaluation of satisfaction and the customer's intent for future purchases with their primary slot machine salesperson.

Figure 7

Customer Satisfaction Domain Analysis
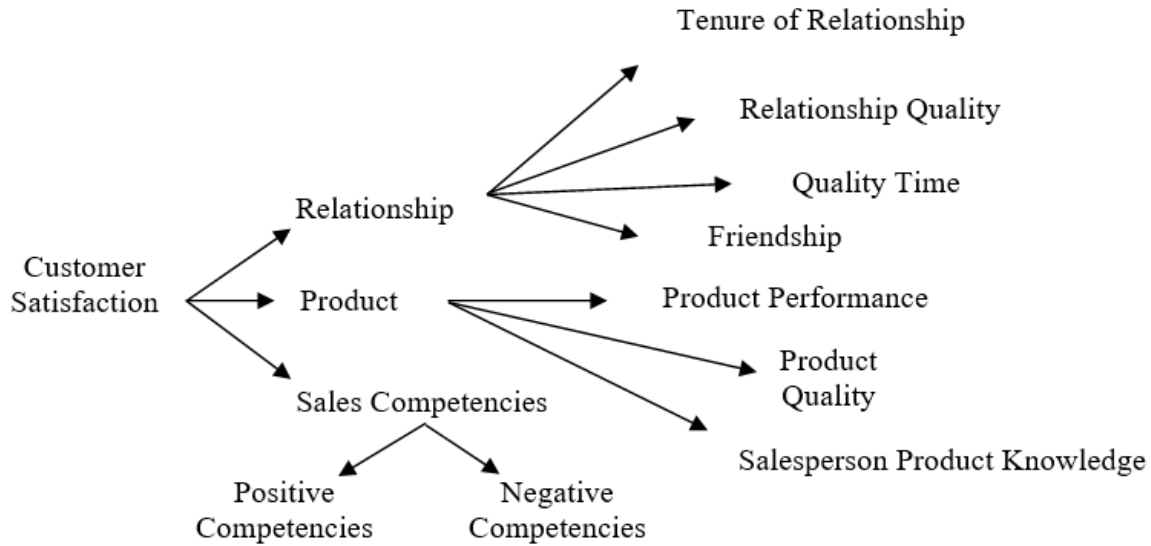
Tenure of Relationship – Customer Satisfaction and Relationship Quality

Content analysis helped explain how the length, or lifecycle of the customer-salesperson relationship impacted areas of customer satisfaction as well as how a customer experiences the quality of the relationship.

Dan, who works for a major casino enterprise, spoke on the importance of having an established relationship during his interview. He shared:

> **I describe our working relationship as comfortable** long term and **cooperative**. I have a very comfortable **established relationship** with this person. [Dan, Assistant Slot Manager]

Time spent together in a working partnership is essential to the health of the customer-salesperson relationship. All relationships evolve over time, some worsen, and some improve.

Shane shared his experience on the evolution of the relationship with his primary slot

salesperson.

> Our **relationship has evolved very well**. I think that over the years, **we've learned how to work well together**. And when the plan isn't working as advertised, we plug it right down, and **everything gets done quickly**. In evaluating the quality of our working relationship, it is safe to say **our relationship has gotten better over time, and that makes me feel satisfied.** [Shane, Director of Casino Operations]

Many of the interviews revealed a more intimate type of relationship in which a

friendship had been established. One customer, Jim, explored the importance of a having a

friendship with his salesperson. He narrated:

> I mentioned it before, but I think probably the thing that draws me to this person more than anything is their **genuineness and sincerity**. I think and I believe this comes natural with this individual more than does selling. To me **our relationship and friendship is more important than the product** in this case, and so it's a **true friendship** that we've established and so that makes **purchasing the products and all that much** easier**.** [Jim, Casino Manager]

Friendship was a recurring theme throughout the interviews; however, friendship was not

a primary indicator of customer satisfaction or relationship quality. Friendships naturally evolved

and were more of a byproduct of the relationship as expressed by Buz:

> At first when I started working with my sales rep, our relationship was **serious and professional** but overtime, **we have become friends**. I'm pretty sure a friendship wasn't my sales rep's intention; it is more of a byproduct of our years working together. **After you know someone for 5 or more years, a friendship just naturally develops and that makes the relationship better overall.** [Buz, Director of Casino Operations]

Figure 8

Account Profitability Domain Analysis
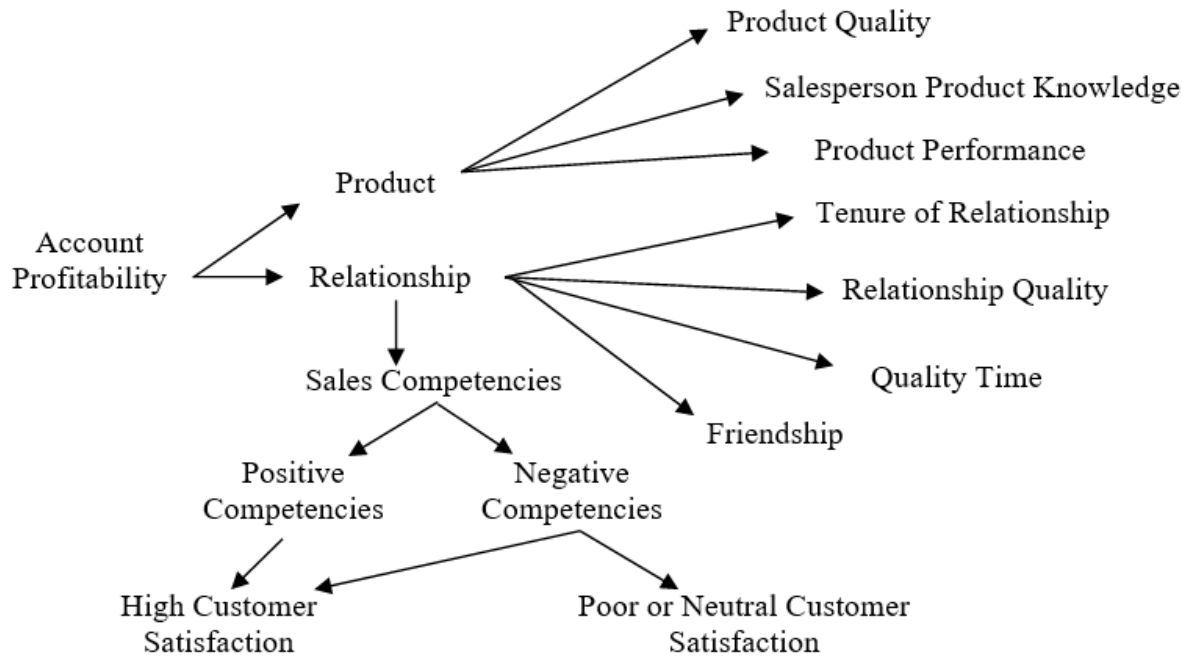
Tenure of Relationship – Purchasing Behavior

Another important facet of the tenure of the relationship relates to a customer's

purchasing behavior. The interviews explored how the relationship impacts purchase.

The interview with Aron revealed that although his relationship might not lead to a sale,

it would have him try out a new product which could indirectly lead to a sale. He said:

> Sometimes, you know, salespeople will have direction from upper management, perhaps,
> you know, **trying to get new product out in the field**. And **I'm very much open to**
> **helping people** that I have established relationships with. [Aron, Vice President Casino
> Operations]

Buz expressed a likeminded sentiment with Aron on trying new products:

Our relationship would allow me to probably give something to a try, but if it did not work, it just did not work. But at least **they could get something on the floor** with me and **give it a try**. [Biz, Director of Casino Operations]

Customers and salespeople spending time together may indirectly influence the customer

to purchase a salesperson's product. Shane explained further on this topic:

I think, and this is just, these are thoughts, just personal thoughts. I know that I have sales account executives that think that you know, I don't want to use the word **"perks"**, but you know, **concerts and things of that nature are big influences with me.** And they're nice, but **it's the product that really is the deciding factor on whether we make a purchase**. [Shane, Director of Casino Operations]

Purchasing, according to Rob, should be a strictly professional and business decision

regardless of the length and quality of the relationship. He informed:

There is a certain amount of trust and loyalty when it comes to the relationship. I would say **our relationship opens me up to trying new or different things** and may get product on the floor on a trial basis. But as far as I see things, even though you have a great personal relationship, I believe **purchases should be based solely upon, you know, good business decisions**. **Is this a product that works? Is it something that's needed or wanted by my customers to help with our business? [Rob, Vice President of Casino]**

Findings revealed strong relationships between the customer and the salesperson.

Despite, in many cases having extended working relationships (and in many instances-

friendships), the customer-salesperson relationship itself did not directly alter customer

purchasing decisions but instead had an indirect effect on customer purchasing. In the examples

cited prior, because of the strength of the relationship, a customer would try a new product. If

the product performed to the casino's standards, only then would they consummate the

purchase.

Summary of Research Question Two

The previous sections provided justification and indication that customer satisfaction was comprised of two factors, product, and relationship. These two factors had the greatest influence on customer satisfaction. Additionally, the analysis of the interviews conducted indicated the customer-salesperson relationship positively and indirectly influenced the customer's purchasing decisions. The longer the duration of the relationship, the more satisfied customers were with many stating that the time spent with their salesperson led to a friendship and improved trust, hence, leading to a higher state of customer satisfaction.

Study 2 – Quantitative Results

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to describe and to explore which sales competencies had the greatest impact on customer satisfaction and account profitability when moderated by the duration of the customer-salesperson relationship. Three research questions with accompanying hypotheses were as follows:

RQ1: Which sales competencies have the greatest effect on customer satisfaction and profitability?

H1: The greater the number of competencies a salesperson possesses, the stronger the effect on customer account profitability.

H2: The greater the number of competencies a salesperson possesses, the stronger the effect on customer satisfaction.

RQ2: How does the customer salesperson lifecycle impact customer satisfaction and profitability?

H3: The longer the tenure of the customer-salesperson relationship, the stronger the effect on customer account profitability.

H4: The longer the tenure of the customer-salesperson relationship, the stronger the effect on customer satisfaction.

RQ3: How do demographic characteristics affect customer satisfaction and account profitability?

H5: Age, gender, education level, years in the industry, and years of professional selling experience significantly and positively affect customer satisfaction and account profitability.

Descriptive Statistics

One hundred nine participants had worked for their current employer for six to 10 years (21.5%). Three hundred-five participants (59.5%) were within the age range of 30-54. Additionally, 397 participants identified as male (77.4%), and 111 participants identified as female (21.6%). One hundred fifty-seven participants had worked in the casino gaming industry for more than 26 years (32.5%). Fifty participants had a professional degree (10.4%). Two hundred forty-seven participants had worked with their primary IGT slot salesperson for zero to two years (53.2%). See Table 2 and Appendix G.

Table 2

Participant Demographics, Study 2

	Frequency	Percent
Years of professional selling experience		
1 - 5 years	149	29.4
6 - 10 years	109	21.5
11 - 15 years	76	15.0
16 - 20 years	63	12.4
21 - 25 years	57	11.2
26 or more years	53	10.5
Age		
18-29	22	4.3
30-54	305	59.5
55-70	171	33.3
71 or older	15	2.9
Gender identification		
Male	397	77.4
Female	111	21.6
Prefer not to disclose	5	1.0
Years of work experience in the casino gaming industry		
Less than 1 year	4	.8
1 - 5 years	46	9.5
6 - 10 years	54	11.2
11 - 15 years	63	13.0
16 - 20 years	67	13.9
21 - 25 years	92	19.0
26 + years	157	32.5
Education Level		
GED	14	2.9
High school graduate	133	27.7
Trade School	49	10.2
2-year degree	95	19.8
4-year degree	137	28.5
Professional Degree	50	10.4
Doctorate	3	.6
How many years have you worked with your primary IGT slot salesperson?		
0 -2	247	53.2
3 - 5	90	19.4
6 - 10	60	12.9
11 - 15	29	6.3
16 or more	38	8.2

Additional Descriptive Statistics

Table 3 shows descriptive statistics. Profitability has a mean of 1.18 and a standard deviation of 1.23 (range = 0-4.40). Customer satisfaction has a mean of 5.56 and a standard deviation of 4.53 (range = 0-11.18). Salesperson Competency Group 1 includes Q29_1 - Q29_10. Salesperson Competency Group 1 (i.e., communication and professionalism) has a mean of 2.67 and a standard deviation of 2.75 (range = 0-5.50). Salesperson Competency Group 2 includes Q 12_1 - Q12_16. Salesperson Competency Group 2 (i.e., big five-factor structure) has a mean of 4.20 and a standard deviation of 3.62 (range = 0-9.00 Salesperson Competency Group 3 includes Q 21_1 - Q21_14. Salesperson Competency Group 3 (i.e., trustworthiness and performance) has a mean of 2.78 and a standard deviation of 2.82 (range = 0-7.00). Salesperson Competency Group 4 includes Q23_1 - Q23_10. Salesperson Competency Group 4 (i.e., comfort) has a mean of 1.37 and a standard deviation of 1.42 (range = 0-4.60). Sales competency 5 includes Q13_1 - Q13_9. Salesperson Competency Group 5 (i.e., customer-focused extra-role behaviors and information use behaviors) has a mean of 6.27 and a standard deviation of 5.13 (range=1-12).

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Profitability	.00	4.40	1.1845	1.23325
Customer Satisfaction	.00	11.18	5.5647	4.53323
Salesperson Competency Group 1 (i.e., communication and professionalism: Q29_1 - Q29_10)	.00	5.50	2.6720	2.75150
Salesperson Competency Group 2 (i.e., big five-factor structure: Q 12_1 – Q12_16)	.00	9.00	4.2003	3.62105
Salesperson Competency Group 3 (i.e., trustworthiness and performance: Q 21_1 - Q21_14)	.00	7.00	2.7861	2.82137
Salesperson Competency Group 4 (i.e., comfort: Q23_1 - Q23_10)	.00	4.60	1.3784	1.42575
Salesperson Competency Group 5 (i.e., customer-focused extra-role behaviors and information use behaviors: Q13_1 - Q13_9)	.00	12.00	6.2747	5.13341

Table 4 presents descriptive statistics for each question in Salesperson Competency Group 1 (i.e., communication and professionalism). Salesperson Competency Group 1 includes Q29_1 - Q29_10. Q29_10 (Extroverted.) has the highest mean ($M = 4.63$, SD = 4.83) among Salesperson Competency Group 1.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics - Salesperson Competency Group 1

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Listening	0	9	1.81	2.297
Empathetic	0	10	3.35	3.817
Communication	0	10	1.61	2.131
Responsiveness	0	9	1.72	2.244
Agreeable (Easy-going, likeable)	0	10	3.28	3.644
Intelligent	0	10	2.46	2.949
Professionalism	0	10	2.42	3.009
Trustworthy	0	10	1.81	2.601
Conscientious	0	10	3.63	4.007
Extroverted	0	10	4.63	4.834

Table 5 presents descriptive statistics for each question in Salesperson Competency Group 2 (i.e., big five-factor structure). Salesperson Competency Group 2 includes Q 12_1 - Q12_16. Q12_15 (i.e., likeability) has the highest mean ($M = 4.58$, SD = 4.03) among Salesperson Competency Group 2.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics - Salesperson Competency Group 2

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Introverted: Extroverted	0	9	4.03	3.563
Silent: Talkative	0	9	4.13	3.619
Unassertive: Assertive	0	9	3.80	3.349
Cold: Warm	0	9	4.27	3.750
Unkind: Kind	0	9	4.48	3.928
Selfish: Unselfish	0	9	4.25	3.769
Disorganized: Organized	0	9	4.21	3.776
Lazy: Hardworking	0	9	4.26	3.810
Tense: Relaxed	0	9	4.18	3.694
Emotional: Unemotional	0	9	3.44	3.130
Unintelligent: Intelligent	0	9	4.45	3.898
Serious: Lighthearted	0	9	3.78	3.452
Unprofessional: Professional	0	9	4.44	3.940
Untrustworthy: Trustworthy	0	9	4.41	3.950
Unlikeable: Likeable	0	9	4.58	4.030
Late: Punctual	0	9	4.49	3.967

Table 6 presents descriptive statistics for each question in Salesperson Competency Group 3 (i.e., trustworthiness and performance). Salesperson Competency Group 3 includes Q 21_1 - Q21_14. Q21_12 (My salesperson does not badmouth competitive reps or their products.) has the highest mean ($M = 3.04$, $SD = 3.09$) among Salesperson Competency Group 3.

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics - Salesperson Competency Group 3

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
The purchases of slot machines from our primary slot salesperson have increased over the last three years.	0	7	2.32	2.524
I am satisfied with the relationship I have with my salesperson.	0	7	2.97	3.065
I am willing to go "the extra mile" to work with my salesperson.	0	7	2.89	2.949
I have a high-quality relationship with my salesperson.	0	7	2.87	2.977
My salesperson openly shares confidential information with me.	0	7	1.82	2.120
My salesperson returns calls promptly when he/she is unavailable.	0	7	2.93	3.040
My salesperson keeps good records of our past meetings.	0	7	2.77	2.887
My salesperson frequently uses data to support his/her claims.	0	7	2.76	2.891
I believe over the long run, my relationship with my salesperson will be profitable.	0	7	2.92	3.019
My salesperson acknowledges the strengths and weaknesses of his/her machines.	0	7	2.78	2.883
My salesperson always demonstrates a sincere interest in people.	0	7	2.90	2.992
My salesperson does not badmouth competitive reps or their products.	0	7	3.04	3.099
My salesperson is trustworthy.	0	7	3.03	3.111
My salesperson instills confidence in his/her integrity.	0	7	2.99	3.082

Table 7 presents descriptive statistics for each question Salesperson Competency Group 4 (i.e., comfort). Salesperson Competency Group 4 includes Q23_1 - Q23_10. Q23_10 (I am

comfortable where I am in my professional relationship with my salesperson.) has the highest

mean ($M = 2.01$, $SD = 2.09$) among Salesperson Competency Group 4.

Table 7

Descriptive Statistics - Salesperson Competency Group 4

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I have known my salesperson for many years.	0	5	1.87	2.063
I have spent time with my salesperson's family and friends and vice versa.	0	5	1.09	1.344
I visit with my salesperson outside of work.	0	5	1.11	1.356
Sometimes I find it hard to say no to my salesperson because we are friends.	0	5	.89	1.077
My professional relationship with my salesperson has declined over time.	0	5	1.00	1.229
Because my salesperson and I feel so comfortable around each other, he/she no longer tries to be professional.	0	5	.91	1.107
Because my salesperson and I feel so comfortable around each other, he/she no longer tries to sell me as much as he/she did at the beginning of our relationship.	0	5	.93	1.129
I consider my salesperson also my friend.	0	5	1.58	1.723
My personal relationship with my salesperson has improved over time.	0	5	1.73	1.844
I am comfortable where I am in my professional relationship with my salesperson.	0	5	2.01	2.097

Table 8 presents descriptive statistics for each question Salesperson Competency Group 5 (i.e., customer-focused extra-role behaviors and information use behaviors). Sales competency 5 includes Q13_1 - Q13_9. Q13_7 (Maintaining a long-term relationship with my salesperson is important to me.) has the highest mean ($M = 6.61$, $SD = 5.45$) among customer-focused extra-role behaviors and information use behaviors.

Table 8

Descriptive Statistics - Salesperson Competency Group 5

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
The level of professionalism my salesperson has strongly influences the amount of purchases I make.	0	12	5.97	5.094
My salesperson goes "above and beyond" the call of duty when serving my needs.	0	12	6.32	5.287
My salesperson can link his/her products to my services and needs.	0	12	6.34	5.242
My salesperson can handle objections that I raise.	0	12	6.40	5.314
My salesperson can differentiate his/her products from the competition.	0	12	6.43	5.304
My salesperson does his/her homework before our meetings.	0	12	6.41	5.330
Maintaining a long-term relationship with my salesperson is important to me.	0	12	6.61	5.454
The relationship I have with my salesperson strongly influences the number of purchases I make.	0	12	5.83	5.119
My salesperson voluntarily assists me even if it means going beyond his/her job requirements.	0	12	6.17	5.235

Reliability and Validity Results

The alpha coefficients of the Salesperson Competency Group 1-5 were .95, .99, .99.,.96, and .99, respectively. The alpha coefficient of the customer satisfaction scale was .98. The alpha coefficient of the profitability scale was .90. The alpha coefficients were higher than .70 (Nunnally, 1978). Therefore, the scales showed high reliability. The data had high construct

validity in the study because there were high correlations between most variables for the same

construct (p<0.05).

Statistical Assumptions

The data must not show multicollinearity to conduct multiple regression. The researcher

tested multicollinearity by inspecting Tolerance/VIF values. VIF *values* < 10 did not show

multicollinearity among continuous variables (e.g., salesperson competencies; Appendix H).

The assumption of normality should be satisfied to conduct multiple regression and

structural equation modeling (SEM). The skewness and kurtosis for normal variables should be

within the values range of -2 through +2. Skewness is an asymmetry deviating from the normal

distribution. It is skewed if the curve is shifted to the right or left. Kurtosis measures if the data

have light tails. Therefore, data that have high kurtosis have heavy tails or outliers.

In contrast, if data have low kurtosis, they have light tails or lack of outliers. In the study, the

skewness and kurtosis for the independent and dependent variables were between -2 and +2.

Therefore, the distribution was normal. In addition, the histogram and normal P-Plot also showed

that the distribution was normal (Figures 9-12). Therefore, the assumption of normality was met.

Table 9

Normality: Skewness and Kurtosis

	Skewness		Kurtosis	
		Std.		Std.
	Statistic	Error	Statistic	Error
Profitability	.52	.106	-.99	.212
Customer Satisfaction	-.30	.106	-1.75	.212
Salesperson Competency Group 1 (i.e., communication and professionalism)	.05	.106	-2.00	.212
Salesperson Competency Group 2 (i.e., big five-factor structure)	-.16	.106	-1.77	.212
Salesperson Competency Group 3 (i.e., trustworthiness and performance)	.13	.106	-1.81	.212
Salesperson Competency Group 4 (i.e., comfort)	.23	.106	-1.63	.212
Salesperson Competency Group 5 (i.e., customer-focused extra-role behaviors and information use behaviors)	-.33	.106	-1.77	.212

Figure 9

Histogram of Profitability

Histogram
Dependent Variable: Profitability

Mean = 8.88E-16
Std. Dev. = 0.989
N = 473
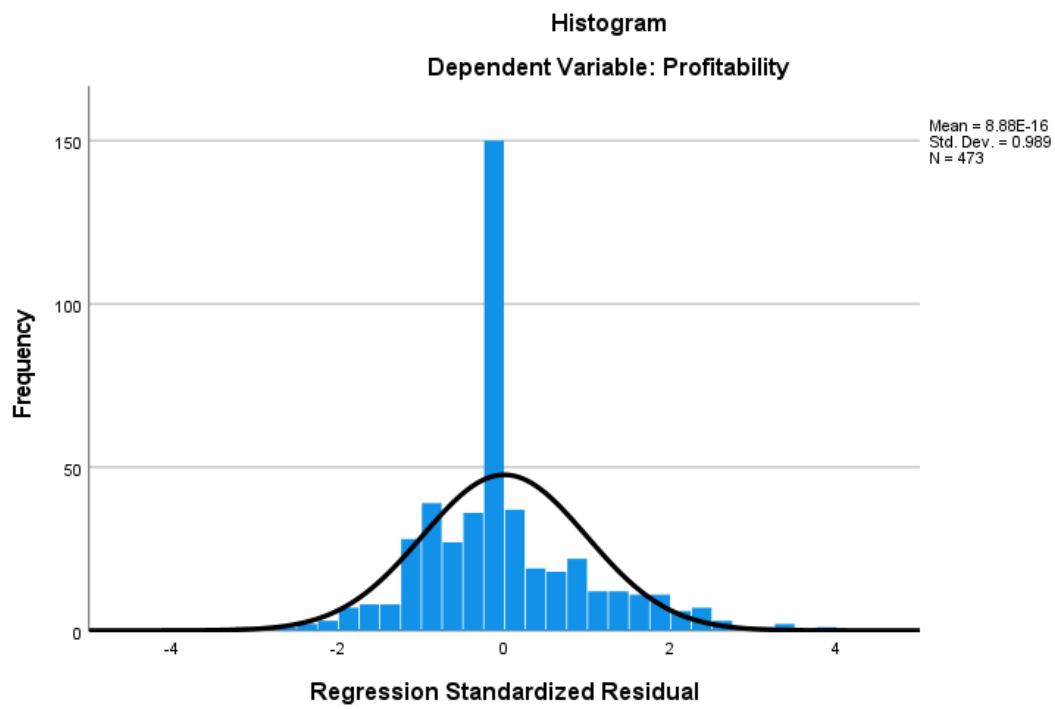
Figure 10

Normal P-P Plot of Profitability

Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual

Dependent Variable: Profitability
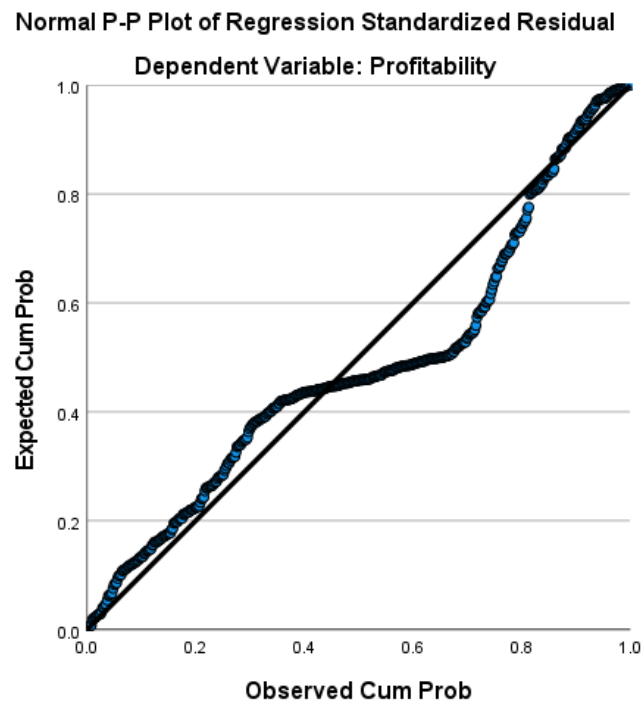
Figure 11

Histogram of Customer Satisfaction

Histogram

Dependent Variable: Customer_Satisfaction

Mean = -4.92E-16
Std. Dev. = 0.989
N = 473
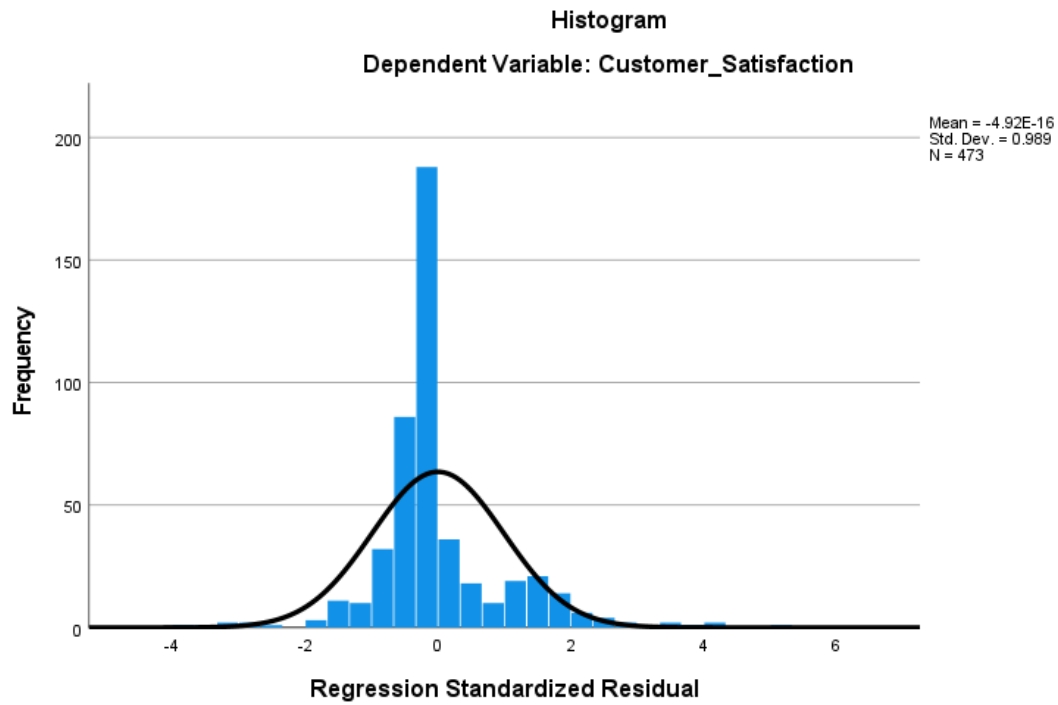
Figure 12

Normal P-P Plot of Customer Satisfaction

Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual
Dependent Variable: Customer_Satisfaction
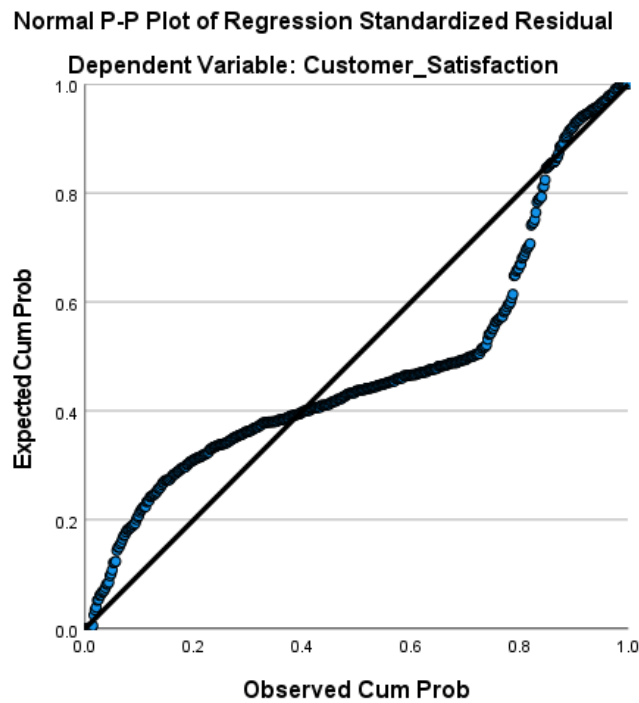
The assumption of linearity should be satisfactory to conduct multiple regression. A straight-line relationship between variables establishes linearity. The researcher used Bivariate scatter plots to confirm linearity (Appendix I). Linearity between most variables is apparent. However, the linearity between gender identification and the dependent variables is unclear. Thus, we transformed gender identification by rank transformation. Rank transformation is most appropriate for converting a nonlinear relationship between variables to a linear relationship.

The dataset should have independence of observations to conduct multiple regression. The researcher checked independence of observations by utilizing the Durbin-Watson statistic. The Durbin-Watson statistic should be between 1.5 and 2.5. In the study, The Durbin-Watson statistic was between 1.5 and 2.5 (Appendix J). The assumption of homoscedasticity should be satisfactory to conduct multiple regression. The researcher checked the assumption of homoscedasticity by using scatterplots (Appendix K). The assumption of homoscedasticity was satisfactory.

Hypothesis Testing

The researcher conducted multiple regression to examine research questions 1-3. Multiple regression is most appropriate for measuring the effects of two or more independent variables on the continuous dependent variable. Salesperson Competency Group 5 (i.e., customer-focused extra-role behaviors and information use behaviors) had the greatest effect on customer account profitability ($\beta = .93$, $p = .011$). The customer salesperson lifecycle moderated the effect of Salesperson Competency Group 1 (i.e., communication and professionalism) on customer account profitability ($\beta = -.46$, $p < .001$). The longer the customer salesperson lifecycle, salespersons with a competency of communication and professionalism were less likely to have customer account profitability than those without this competency.

Tenure of the customer-salesperson relationship (i.e., years customers have worked with their primary IGT slot salesperson) moderated the effect of Salesperson Competency Group 1 (i.e., communication and professionalism) (11-15 years: $\beta = .29$, $p = .006$), Salesperson Competency Group 2 (i.e., big five-factor structure) (0-2 years, $\beta = .81$, $p = .010$; 3-5 years, $\beta = 1.01$, $p = .001$; 6-10 years, $\beta = .71$, $p = .014$), and Salesperson Competency Group 5 (i.e., customer-focused extra-role behaviors and information use behaviors) (0-2 years, $\beta =$

-.75, p =.019) on customer account profitability. Consequently, the longer the tenure of the customer-salesperson relationship, the stronger the effect of salesperson competencies 1 and 2 on customer account profitability. Specifically, the longer customers have worked with their primary IGT slot salesperson, salespersons with competencies of communication and professionalism and big five-factor structure were more likely to have higher customer account profitability than those without these competencies. The longer the tenure of the customer-salesperson relationship, the weaker the effect of Salesperson Competency Group 5 (i.e., customer-focused extra-role behaviors and information use behaviors) on customer account profitability. Specifically, the longer customers have worked with their primary IGT slot salesperson, salespersons with competencies of customer-focused extra-role behaviors and information use behaviors were less likely to have higher customer account profitability than those without these competencies. Age (β = .03, p = .350), gender (β = -.02, p = .388), education level (β = -.01, p = .704), years in the industry (β = -.06, p = .104), and years of professional selling experience (β= .01, p =.668) did not affect account profitability. The model accounted for 63.2% of the variance.

Table 10

Account Profitability Coefficients

Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
1	(Constant)	.261	.308		.849	.396
	Age	.061	.065	.030	.935	.350
	Gender	.000	.000	-.025	-.864	.388
	Education Level	-.009	.024	-.011	-.381	.704
	Years in the industry	-.042	.026	-.060	-1.630	.104
	Years of professional selling experience	.010	.024	.014	.430	.668
	SC_1	.078	.077	.175	1.017	.310
	SC_2	-.292	.135	-.843	-2.171	.030
	SC_3	.022	.244	.050	.089	.929
	SC_4	.353	.504	.410	.701	.484
	SC_5	.231	.090	.936	2.560	.011
	0-2 years	.013	.173	.005	.074	.941
	3-5 years	.021	.272	.007	.078	.938
	6-10 years	-.039	.325	-.010	-.119	.905
	11-15 years	.071	.526	.014	.135	.893
	X6WD1	.112	.073	.197	1.533	.126
	X6WD2	.074	.091	.115	.818	.414
	X6WD3	.152	.090	.196	1.693	.091
	X6WD4	.317	.115	.293	2.765	.006
	X7WD1	.344	.132	.819	2.601	.010
	X7WD2	.458	.142	1.017	3.221	.001
	X7WD3	.380	.153	.719	2.478	.014
	X7WD4	.506	.301	.716	1.681	.093
	X8WD1	.114	.202	.192	.563	.574
	X8WD2	-.156	.217	-.253	-.721	.471
	X8WD3	-.081	.241	-.111	-.336	.737
	X8WD4	-.133	.273	-.138	-.488	.626
	X9WD1	-.603	.357	-.481	-1.691	.092
	X9WD2	-.063	.385	-.049	-.163	.871
	X9WD3	-.407	.435	-.286	-.935	.350

X9WD4	-.210	.433	-.118	-.486	.627
X10WD1	-.210	.089	-.756	-2.353	.019
X10WD2	-.244	.097	-.765	-2.503	.013
X10WD3	-.170	.112	-.451	-1.527	.128
X10WD4	-.377	.212	-.768	-1.779	.076
W	.427	.250	.481	1.708	.088
X1W	-.076	.018	-.469	-4.130	<.001
X2W	-.021	.024	-.184	-.878	.381
X3W	.070	.059	.472	1.188	.236
X4W	.005	.101	.019	.052	.958
X5W	-.017	.018	-.214	-.956	.339

Salesperson Competency Group 5 (i.e., customer-focused extra-role behaviors and information use behaviors) had the greatest effect on customer satisfaction (β =.96, p < .000). In addition, the customer salesperson lifecycle and tenure of the customer-salesperson relationship did not moderate the effect of salesperson competencies 1-5 on customer satisfaction. Age (β = .00, p =.741), gender (β= .00, p = .809), education level (β= -.00, p =.625), years in the industry (β = -.00, p = .072), and years of professional selling experience (β= -.00, p = .724) did not affect customer satisfaction. The model accounted for 99.7% of the variance.

Table 11

Customer Satisfaction Coefficients

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	.188	.092		2.050	.041
	Age	.006	.019	.001	.331	.741
	Gender	2.451E-5	.000	.001	.243	.809
	Education Level	-.004	.007	-.001	-.489	.625
	Years in the industry	-.014	.008	-.006	-1.806	.072
	Years of professional selling experience	-.003	.007	-.001	-.353	.724
	SC_1	-.003	.023	-.002	-.152	.879
	SC_2	.008	.040	.007	.208	.836
	SC_3	.095	.073	.061	1.307	.192
	SC_4	-.122	.150	-.040	-.815	.416
	SC_5	.855	.027	.969	31.855	<.001
	0-2 years	-.029	.051	-.003	-.562	.575
	3-5 years	-.063	.081	-.006	-.773	.440
	6-10 years	-.068	.097	-.005	-.700	.484
	11-15 years	-.027	.157	-.001	-.170	.865
	X6WD1	.035	.022	.017	1.586	.113
	X6WD2	.025	.027	.011	.919	.359
	X6WD3	.006	.027	.002	.226	.822
	X6WD4	.051	.034	.013	1.485	.138
	X7WD1	.009	.039	.006	.220	.826
	X7WD2	.020	.042	.012	.467	.641
	X7WD3	-.054	.046	-.029	-1.190	.235
	X7WD4	-.004	.090	-.002	-.046	.963
	X8WD1	-.015	.060	-.007	-.249	.803
	X8WD2	.043	.065	.019	.660	.510
	X8WD3	.042	.072	.016	.585	.559
	X8WD4	-.046	.081	-.013	-.566	.572
	X9WD1	.145	.106	.032	1.362	.174
	X9WD2	.002	.115	.000	.013	.989
	X9WD3	.073	.129	.014	.564	.573
	X9WD4	.162	.129	.025	1.258	.209

X10WD1	-.043	.027	-.044	-1.639	.102
X10WD2	-.046	.029	-.040	-1.585	.114
X10WD3	-.003	.033	-.002	-.098	.922
X10WD4	-.042	.063	-.024	-.668	.504
W	-.132	.074	-.042	-1.775	.077
X1W	.001	.005	.001	.148	.882
X2W	-.001	.007	-.002	-.115	.909
X3W	.026	.018	.050	1.500	.134
X4W	.003	.030	.003	.093	.926
X5W	.002	.005	.008	.431	.667

The researcher performed structural equation modeling (SEM) in the study to further examine research questions 1 and 2. SEM is most appropriate for measuring moderating effects and the relationships between the independent and dependent variables. Fit indices for the two SEM models appear in Table 12. Both models showed a perfect fit: CFI = 1.00 (i.e., > .90), TLI = 1.00 (i.e., > .90), RMSEA = .00 (i.e., < .08), SRMR = .00 (i.e., < .08). The model with the lowest AIC is preferred (Kline, 1998). As a result, the researcher chose Model 1 with the lowest AIC and based further analyses on that model.

Table 12

Fit Indices for SEM Models

Model	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR	AIC	BIC
SEM Model						
Model 1	1.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	1045.282	1365.606
Model 2	1.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	1046.375	1370.970

Notes. Model 1=hypothesized model, Model 2=the path from gender identification to profitability was added, CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = NNFI = nonnormed fit index; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation; SRMR = standardized root mean-square residual; AIC = Akaike information criterion; BIC = Bayesian information criterion.
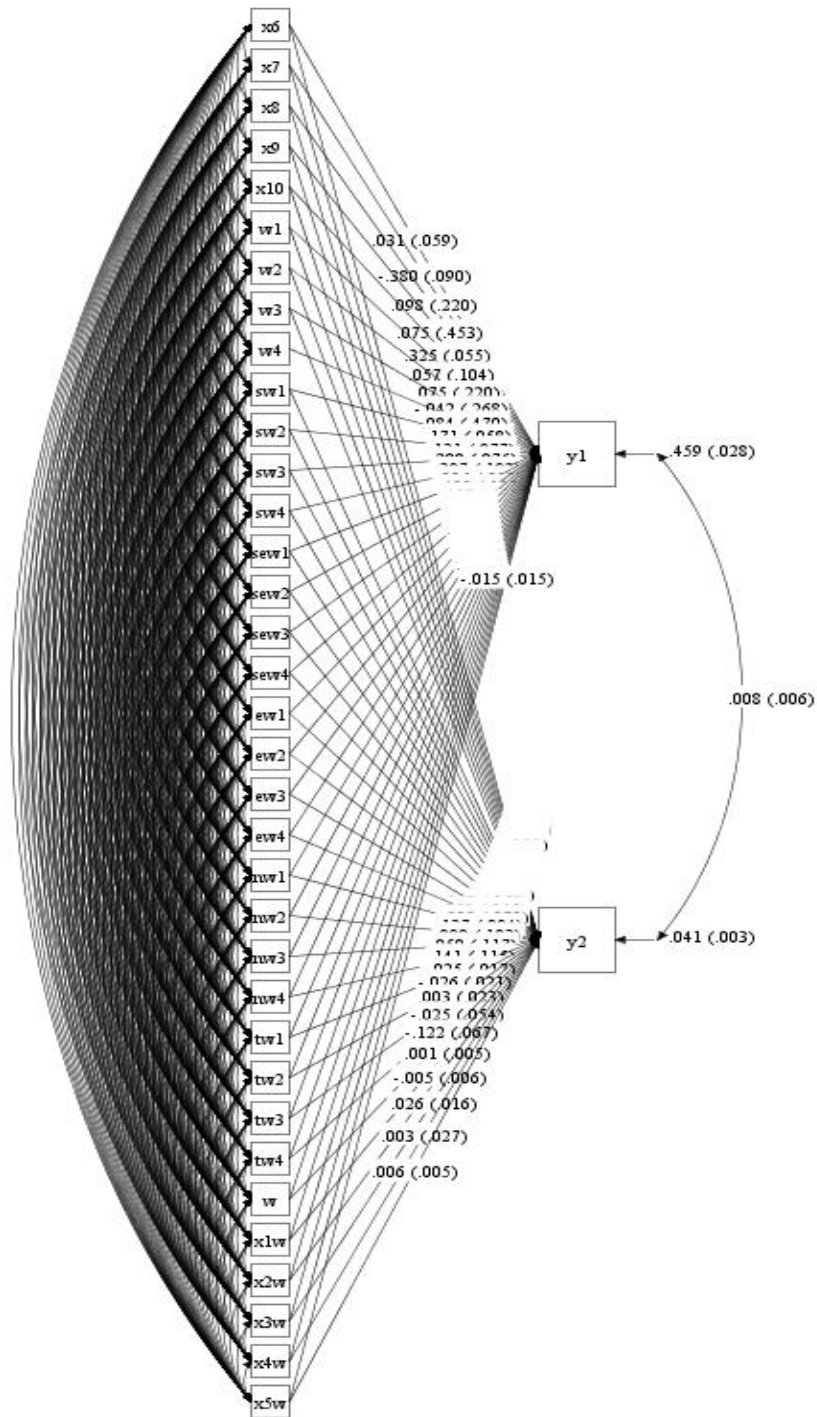
The path diagram for Model 1 appears in Figure 13. These findings partially support the model. Salesperson Competency Group 5 (i.e., customer-focused extra-role behaviors and information use behaviors) had the greatest effect on customer account profitability ($b = 0.32$, $p = 0.000$) and customer satisfaction ($b = 0.81$, $p = 0.000$). The customer salesperson lifecycle moderated the effect of Salesperson Competency Group 1 (i.e., communication and professionalism) on customer account profitability ($b = -4.92$, $p = 0.000$). Subsequently, the longer the customer salesperson lifecycle, the weaker the effect of Salesperson Competency Group 1 on customer account profitability. Specifically, with the longer customer salesperson lifecycle, salespersons with a competency of communication and professionalism were less likely to increase customer account profitability than those without this competency. The customer salesperson lifecycle did not moderate the effect of salesperson competencies 1 -5 on customer satisfaction.

Tenure of the customer-salesperson relationship (i.e., years customers have worked with their primary IGT slot salesperson) moderated the effect of Salesperson Competency Group 1 (i.e., communication and professionalism) (0-2 years: $b = 0.17$, $p = 0.003$; 6-10 years: $b = 0.20$, $p = 0.006$; 11-15 years: $b = 0.38$, $p = 0.000$), Salesperson Competency Group 2 (i.e., big five-factor structure) (0-2 years: $b = .03$, $p = 0.000$; 6-10 years: $b = 0.49$, $p = 0.000$; 11-15 years: $b = 0.40$, $p = 0.000$; b=0.55, p=0.031), Salesperson Competency Group 5 (i.e., customer-focused extra-role behaviors and information use behaviors) on customer account profitability (0-2 years: $b =- 27$, $p = 0.000$; 6-10 years: $b = -0.31$, $p = 0.000$; 11-15 years: $b = -0.22$, $p = 0.004$; b=-0.44, p=0.014). The longer the tenure of the customer-salesperson relationship, the stronger the effect of salesperson competencies 1 and 2 on customer relationship quality. Specifically, the longer customers had worked with their primary IGT slot salesperson, salespersons with competencies of communication, professionalism, and big five-factor structure were more likely to have high customer account profitability than those without competencies. The longer the tenure of the customer-salesperson relationship, the weaker the effect of Salesperson Competency Group 5 on customer relationship quality. The longer customers had worked with their primary IGT slot salesperson, a salesperson with competencies of customer-focused extra-role behaviors and information use behaviors were less likely to have customer account profitability than those without these competencies.

Tenure of the customer-salesperson relationship (i.e., years customers have worked with their primary IGT slot salesperson) moderated the effect of Salesperson Competency Group 2 (i.e., big five-factor structure) (6-10 years: $b = -0.07$, $p = 0.033$) on customer satisfaction. The longer the tenure of the customer-salesperson relationship, the weaker the effect of Salesperson Competency Group 2 on customer satisfaction. Specifically, the longer customers have worked

with their primary IGT slot salesperson, salespersons with a competency of big five-factor

structure were less likely to have customer satisfaction than those without competency.

Figure 13

Path Diagram of Model 1

Summary

Multiple regression was used to examine research questions 1-3. Multiple regression is most appropriate for measuring the effects of two or more independent variables on the continuous dependent variable. The researcher performed SEM to further examine research questions 1 and 2. SEM is most appropriate for measuring moderating effects and the relationships between the independent and dependent variables. Salesperson Competency Group 5 (i.e., customer-focused extra-role behaviors and information use behaviors) had the greatest effect on customer account profitability and satisfaction. The customer salesperson lifecycle moderated the effect of Salesperson Competency Group 1 (i.e., communication and professionalism) on customer account profitability. Tenure of the customer-salesperson relationship (i.e., years customers have worked with their primary IGT slot salesperson) moderated the effect of Salesperson Competency Group 1 (i.e., communication and professionalism), Salesperson Competency Group 2 (i.e., big five-factor structure), and Salesperson Competency Group 5 (i.e., customer-focused extra-role behaviors and information use behaviors) on customer account profitability. Tenure of the customer-salesperson relationship (i.e., years customers have worked with their primary IGT slot salesperson) moderated the effect of Salesperson Competency Group 2 (i.e., big five-factor structure) on customer satisfaction. Age, gender, education level, years in the industry, and years of professional selling experience did not affect account profitability and customer satisfaction.

Chapter 5 - Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this mixed-methods dissertation study was to determine which sales competencies had the greatest impact on customer satisfaction and account profitability and to exam the role of the customer-salesperson relationship tenure, or lifecycle. This chapter is comprised of three sections, (a) covers a review and discussion of the findings, (b) presents the theoretical and practical implications, and the study's conclusion, and (c) offers an analysis of the research limitations and directions for future research.

Review of Study 1 Findings

This section presents the results of the one-on-one interviews with customer-participants in which the researcher assessed which sales competencies had the greatest impact on customer satisfaction and account profitability as well as assessed the length and strength of the customer-salesperson relationship.

The researcher discovered facets of the customer-salesperson relationships which had meaning for the participants that heightened understanding of specific salesperson competencies influencing customer satisfaction and account profitability.

Findings illustrated confirmation of specific sales traits and behaviors that both positively and negatively affected customer satisfaction and account profitability. Following the groundwork established in the literature review, 4 domains guided the research and analysis. The domains included sales competencies, customer satisfaction, account profitability and tenure of the customer-salesperson relationship. Based on a thorough content analysis of the recorded interviews, the first domain, sales competencies were identified in four areas: positive and negative sales competencies, positive and negative communication, positive and negative professionalism, and positive and negative personality traits. Positive sales traits having the

greatest influence on both customer satisfaction and account profitability were product knowledge, understanding the needs of the customer, being honest and trustworthy and having high communication skills. These findings were in line with a study by Pettijohn et al. (2007) who observed that customers preferred salespeople who were experts in their company's product lines and their industry. Customers also prefer salespeople who can facilitate clear communication, expedite orders, resolve issues, understand their needs, and respond to their needs accordingly (Garver & Mentzer, 2000). Conversely, content analysis showed when a salesperson is pushy and/or aggressive, this negative trait has an adverse influence on customer satisfaction and account profitability (Lee et al., 2011).

Customer satisfaction as a domain is comprised of two primary factors: product, and the customer-salesperson relationship quality. The findings indicated that when a salesperson possessed a high level of product knowledge, customer satisfaction increased. Customers additionally offered insight regarding the quality of the customer-salesperson relationship. As the quality of the relationship improved, customer satisfaction also improved.

Account profitability, the third domain is comprised of two aspects, product and relationship quality. These findings were identical to the findings in the domain of customer satisfaction and align with prior studies have found that when a salesperson's product knowledge level is high, the salesperson closes more deals, increasing the value of the account (Mariadoss, Lee, & Sahaym 2014).

Lastly, the domain of tenure, or lifecycle of the customer-salesperson relationship indicated the length and strength of the customer-salesperson relationship positively and indirectly influenced the customer's purchasing decisions, with 9 out of the 10 customers stating they were in the maturity stage of the customer-salesperson relationship. This is in line with

findings from Jap (2001) which informs readers the longer the duration of the relationship, the more satisfied customers were with many stating that the time spent with their salesperson led to a friendship and improved trust, hence, leading to a higher state of achieved customer satisfaction. One customer, Shane, said it best,

> I've **known my sales rep for many years**, and **we have developed a friendship** over time. While our friendship does not dictate purchases, **our friendship does help me feel good about the relationship**, in that **I trust this person** and **I'm willing to go out of my way to try their newest products** and if we have capital that year, **I will buy their products** over another competitor's products. [Shane, Director of Casino Operations]

Review of Study 2 Findings

This section presents the results of the online survey sent to 4,500 customers who directly worked with a slot machine salesperson. Survey questions queried customers regarding their salesperson-customer relationship, evaluation of the salesperson and intention to purchase.

Salesperson Competency Group 5 (i.e., customer-focused extra-role behaviors and information use behaviors) had the greatest effect on customer account profitability and satisfaction. The customer salesperson lifecycle moderated the effect of Salesperson Competency Group 1 (i.e., communication and professionalism) on customer account profitability. Tenure of the customer-salesperson relationship (i.e., years customers have worked with their primary IGT slot salesperson) moderated the effect of Salesperson Competency Group 1 (i.e., communication and professionalism), Salesperson Competency Group 2 (i.e., big five-factor structure), and Salesperson Competency Group 5 (i.e., customer-focused extra-role behaviors and information use behaviors) on customer account profitability. Tenure of the customer-salesperson relationship (i.e., years customers have worked with their primary IGT slot salesperson) moderated the effect of Salesperson Competency Group 2 (i.e., big five-factor structure) on

customer satisfaction. Age, gender, education level, years in the industry, and years of professional selling experience did not affect account profitability and customer satisfaction.

RQ1: Which sales competencies have the greatest effect on customer satisfaction and profitability?

This question examined how the independent variables of salesperson competencies affected the dependent variables (i.e., customer satisfaction and account profitability). Salesperson Competency Group 5 (i.e., customer-focused extra-role behaviors and information use behaviors) had the greatest effect on customer account profitability and customer satisfaction. These findings align with the previous literature that salespeople with sales skills can increase customer satisfaction and account profitability (Michael, 2020). Similarly, Johnston and Lewin's (1996) findings suggest that buyers prefer communicative and flexible salespeople. Consistent with other studies, McFarland et al. (2006) indicated salesperson competencies enhance account profitability via improved customer satisfaction. In line with other studies, Jap (2001) notes that a salesperson is responsible for customer satisfaction.

RQ2: How does the customer salesperson lifecycle impact customer satisfaction and profitability?

This question examined how the customer-salesperson lifecycle moderated the effect of the independent variable (i.e., salesperson competencies) on the dependent variables (i.e., customer satisfaction and account profitability). The customer salesperson lifecycle moderated the effect of Salesperson Competency Group 1 (i.e., communication and professionalism) on customer account profitability. Tenure of the customer-salesperson relationship (i.e., years customers have worked with their primary IGT slot salesperson) moderated the effect of Salesperson Competency Group 1 (i.e., communication and professionalism), Salesperson

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Competency Group 2 (i.e., big five-factor structure), and Salesperson Competency Group 5 (i.e., customer-focused extra-role behaviors and information use behaviors) on customer account profitability. Tenure of the customer-salesperson relationship (i.e., years customers have worked with their primary IGT slot salesperson) moderated the effect of Salesperson Competency Group 2 (i.e., big five-factor structure) on customer satisfaction. These findings align with the previous literature that found that the customer-salesperson dyad moderates the relationship between trust, affective commitment, customer satisfaction, and the volume of services purchased (Verhoef et al., 2002). Similarly, Pilling and Eroglu (1994) note that within the salesperson-customer dyad, there is a positive correlation between customer satisfaction and salesperson competencies. In line with other studies, Boles et al. (1997) found that a relationship between buyer and salesperson resulted in customer retention.

In the study, the customer salesperson lifecycle moderated the effect of Salesperson Competency Group 1 (i.e., communication and professionalism) on customer account profitability. These findings align with the previous literature that found that positive interactions between customers and salespeople can result in account profitability (Boles et al., 1997). Johnston and Lewin (1996) showed that a customer buys from salespeople with whom they have a relationship when there are high-purchase risks. Consistent with other studies, Kalwani and Narayandas (1995) found that a long-term relationship between salespeople and customers was likely to result in sales growth.

RQ3: How do demographic characteristics affect customer satisfaction and account profitability?

This question examined how the independent variables (i.e., demographic characteristics) affect the dependent variables (i.e., customer satisfaction and account profitability). Age, gender,

education level, years in the industry, and years of professional selling experience did not affect account profitability and customer satisfaction. These findings do not align with the previous literature that found that demographic characteristics significantly affected customer satisfaction and account profitability (Kwok et al., 2016). Similarly, Mokhills (2011) found that gender significantly affected customer satisfaction. In line with other studies, Kim et al. (1997) found that gender and age significantly affected customer satisfaction. These findings might be specific to the casino gaming industry.

Limitations

This study primarily focused on customers in physical casinos and the salespeople who directly work with customers who work in physical casino operations in the United States. Accordingly, the findings are not generalizable to other countries (Vaishnavi & Kuechler, 2015).

A primary limitation is specific to multicollinearity among the variables. An absolute correlation coefficient of >0.7 among the continuous independent variables (i.e., sales competencies 1-5) indicates multicollinearity. Since there was multicollinearity among the five sales competency variables, only one variable should have been used, and the remaining four variables removed. However, the purpose of the study was to examine which sales competencies have the greatest effect on customer satisfaction and profitability. If one sales competency variable were used, the researcher could not have investigated which sales competencies have the greatest effect on customer satisfaction and profitability. Therefore, the researcher kept all five variables (i.e., sales competencies 1-5) to examine the purpose of the study. Keeping the five variables is important to the study because it aligns with the purpose of the study and the research question and hypothesis.

The researcher also did not control for covariates when measuring the effect of sales competencies on customer satisfaction and profitability. While a covariate is of no direct interest to the researcher, it may affect the dependent variable.

While the researcher observed how the customer-salesperson lifecycle moderated the effect of salesperson competencies on customer satisfaction and account profitability, the researcher did not examine a mediator variable. This may have caused mediation in the dependent and independent variables.

Another limitation is the history threat, which might be present as events that occurred in casino operations affected customer satisfaction and account profitability but did not relate to salesperson competencies (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). The researcher did not control for the history threat in the study.

In spite of the limitations within the study, the alpha coefficients of the variables were higher than .70 (Nunnally, 1978). This is why the scales showed high reliability. The data had high construct validity in the study because there were high correlations between most variables for the same construct.

Recommendations

Recommendations Based on the Discovered Limitations

In the study, there were threats to external validity (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). Therefore, the findings are not generalizable to casinos outside the United States (Vaishnavi & Kuechler, 2015). Future researchers should include other countries. The history threat also may happen (Cooper & Schindler, 2014; Vaishnavi & Kuechler, 2015). Therefore, researchers should control for the history threat in the future. Additionally, both studies focused on customers specific to the

casino gaming industry narrowing the responses. If a future study should commence, the researcher should focus on similar industries in which salespeople visit with customers on a regular basis such as medical sales and financial services.

In addition, the researcher did not control for covariates when measuring the effect of sales competencies on customer satisfaction and profitability. Future researchers should quantify the effect of sales competencies on customer satisfaction and profitability, controlling for potential confounders by using hierarchical regression analysis. Controlling for potential confounders can improve findings.   The researcher also did not consider a mediator variable. Future researchers should include a mediator variable to explain the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. Including a mediator variable can lead to a more robust study.

Implications

The findings detailed in the study are pertinent as they add to the body of knowledge by examining the research problem: business leaders and hiring managers are unclear about which sales competencies most impact customer satisfaction and account profitability within the casino gaming industry.

Salespeople benefit from this study by improving their competencies. Additionally, this information will influence salespeople by helping them understand how their relationship with their customers may improve customer satisfaction.

Employers benefit from the study by understanding the importance of hiring salespeople with skill sets that lead to higher profits and customer satisfaction. Management may also take this information and design training programs to improve best practices for salespeople. The

findings further inform employers about the importance of customer-salesperson lifecycle management by a focus on improving the customer-salesperson relationship.

Conclusion

Salesperson Competency Group 5 (i.e., customer-focused extra-role behaviors and information use behaviors) had the greatest effect on customer account profitability and customer satisfaction. These findings align with the previous literature. The customer salesperson lifecycle moderated the effect of Salesperson Competency Group 1 (i.e., communication and professionalism) on customer account profitability. Tenure of the customer-salesperson relationship (i.e., years customers have worked with their primary IGT slot salesperson) moderated the effect of Salesperson Competency Group 1 (i.e., communication and professionalism), Salesperson Competency Group 2 (i.e., big five-factor structure), and Salesperson Competency Group 5 (i.e., customer-focused extra-role behaviors and information use behaviors) on customer account profitability. Tenure of the customer-salesperson relationship (i.e., years customers have worked with their primary IGT slot salesperson) moderated the effect of Salesperson Competency Group 2 (i.e., big five-factor structure) on customer satisfaction. These findings align with the previous literature.

One unique finding related to research question 3 and hypothesis 5 is that the demographics of gender, education level, years in the industry, and years of professional selling experience did not affect account profitability and customer satisfaction. These findings are unique in that they do not align with the previous literature. The results of this study offer insights into salesperson competencies specific to the casino gaming industry. One interpretation is that in the casino gaming industry, salespeople are paired in long-term relationships with their customers which may contribute to the finding. Further, the study has indicated that within the

casino gaming industry there is a great deal of loyalty from the customers to the salesperson. These results may serve as a guide for salespeople in the casino gaming industry and direct future research studies to fill gaps in the literature regarding salesperson competencies and the impacts on various aspects of the business process.

Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter

UNLV

ORI-HS, Exempt Review
Exempt Notice
DATE: April 18, 2022

TO: Chih-Chien Chen
FROM: Office of Research Integrity - Human Subjects

PROTOCOL TITLE: UNLV-2022-153 SALESPERSON-CUSTOMER DYADS IN THE
CASINO GAMING INDUSTRY: HOW SALES COMPETENCIES AND RELATIONSHIP
LIFE CYCLES IMPACT CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND ACCOUNT PROFITABILITY
SUBMISSION TYPE: Initial

ACTION: Exempt
REVIEW DATE: April 18, 2022,
REVIEW TYPE: EXEMPT
REVIEW CATEGORY: Category 2. (i). Research that only includes interactions involving
educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview
procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording).
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the
human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the
subjects.
Category 2. (ii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive,
diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of
public behavior (including visual or auditory recording).
Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place
the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing,
employability, educational advancement, or reputation.

This memorandum is notification that the protocol referenced above has been reviewed as
indicated in Federal regulatory statutes 45 CFR 46 and deemed exempt under Category 2. (i).
Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic,
aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public
behavior (including visual or auditory recording).
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the
human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the

subjects.
Category 2. (ii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording).
Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation.

PLEASE NOTE:
Upon final determination of exempt status, the research team is responsible for conducting the research as stated in the exempt application reviewed by the ORI – HS, which shall include using the most recently submitted Informed Consent/Assent and recruitment materials.

If your project involves paying research participants, it is recommended to contact HSComp@unlv.edu to ensure compliance with the Policy for Incentives for Human Research Subjects.

Any changes to the application may cause this study to require a different level of review. Should there be any change to the study, it will be necessary to submit a **Modification** request for review. No changes may be made to the existing study until modifications have been approved/acknowledged.

All **unanticipated problems** involving risk to subjects or others, and/or **serious and unexpected adverse events** must be reported promptly to this office.

Any **non-compliance** issues or **complaints** regarding this protocol must be reported promptly to this office.

Please remember that all approvals regarding this research must be sought prior to initiation of this study (e.g., IBC, COI, Export Control, OSP, Radiation Safety, Clinical Trials Office, etc.).

If you have questions, please contact the Office of Research Integrity - Human Subjects at IRB@unlv.edu or call 702-895-2794. Please include your study title and study ID in all correspondence.

Office of Research Integrity - Human Subjects
4505 Maryland Parkway. Box 451047. Las Vegas, Nevada 89154-1047
(702) 895-2794. FAX: (702) 895-0805. IRB@unlv.edu

UNLV

INFORMED CONSENT

Department of Hotel Administration

TITLE OF STUDY: SALESPERSON-CUSTOMER DYADS IN THE CASINO GAMING INDUSTRY: HOW SALES COMPETENCIES AND RELATIONSHIP LIFE CYCLES IMPACT CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND ACCOUNT PROFITABILITY

INVESTIGATOR(S): Chih-Chien Chen, Ph.D.

For questions or concerns about the study, you may contact Dr. Chen at 702-895-4872 or email her at chih-chien.chen@unlv.edu. For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints, or comments regarding the way the study is being conducted, contact **the UNLV Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects at 702-895-2794, toll-free at 877-895-2794, or via email at IRB@unlv.edu.**

Purpose of the Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to determine which sales competencies have the greatest impact on customer satisfaction and account profitability as well as determine the appropriate length of the customer-salesperson relationship to assuage the law of diminishing returns.

Participants

You are being asked to participate in the study because you fit the following criteria: 1) you are 18 years old or above; 2) you work in an establishment with slot machines 3) you have directly interacted with a slot machine salesperson within the last 3 months.

Procedures

There are two portions to this research study. As a participant, you will be only participating in study 2, the online survey.

Study 1 (One-On-One Interview)

If you are invited and agree to participate in this portion of the study, you agree to answer questions in a one-on-one interview meeting with you and the researcher. This meeting may take

place virtually or in-person as agreed upon by you and the researcher. You do not have to answer any question you do not feel comfortable answering and you may terminate the interview at any time. If you agree to be recorded, your interview will be recorded and later transcribed.

Study 2 (Online Survey)

If you volunteer to participate in this portion of the study, you will be asked a series of questions via an online survey. You do not have to answer all the questions and you may exit the survey at any time.

Benefits of Participation

There may not be direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. However, through your participation in this study, you may be helping businesses learn which salesperson competencies most impact account profitability and customer satisfaction.

Risks of Participation

There may be some risks involved in all research studies. However, this study may include only minimal risks. You may feel emotionally uneasy when asked some questions, and you may choose "prefer not to answer" as your answer. Your participation is voluntary, and you may exit the survey or the one-on-one interview at any time.

Cost /Compensation
There will not be a financial cost to you to participate in this study. You will not be compensated for your time.

Confidentiality
All information gathered in this study will be kept confidential. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study. All records will be stored in a locked facility at UNLV for 3 years after completion of the study. After the storage time, the information gathered will be permanently destroyed.

Voluntary Participation:
Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study or any part of this study. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice to your relations with UNLV. By agreeing to participate, you acknowledge that your participation in the study is voluntary, you are 18 years of age, and that you are aware that you may choose to terminate your participation in the study at any time and for any reason.

Participant Consent:

I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I have been able to ask questions about the research study. I am at least 18 years of age. A copy of this form has been provided to me.

Signature _____

Date _____

For One-On-One Interviews ONLY – Study 1
Audio Taping:
I agree to be audiotaped for this research study.

Signature _____

Date _____

[] I agree to participate in this study

[] I do not agree to participate in this study

Appendix C: One-on-One Interview Protocol

<u>Contents</u>

C.1 - Data Collection Timeline

C.2 - Participant Recruitment Letter

C.3 – One-On-One Interview Questions

C. 1: Data Collection Timeline

- April 18, 2022: University of Nevada Las Vegas Institutional Review Board approval

- July 19, 2022: Recruitment email sent to participants. Email distributed by researcher

- July 19, 2022 – August 5, 2022: One-on-one interviews of ten participants

- August 6, 2022 – August 28, 2022 – Transcription and content analysis of interviews

C. 2: Interview Recruitment Letter

July 19, 2022

Dear Customer,

You are being asked to participate in a sales research study because you fit the following criteria: 1) you possess valuable casino gaming industry expertise, 2) you have directly interacted with your primary slot machine salesperson within the last 3 months and 3) you have a direct influence on slot machine purchases.

The purpose of this study is to determine which sales competencies have the greatest impact on customer satisfaction.

To participate in this study, you will be asked a series of questions by the researcher proving your opinion on specific topics.   The interview should take approximately 20 minutes of your time. The interview is completely optional and anonymous.

Your professional experience and expert input are invaluable to IGT, the researchers at UNLV, and the casino gaming industry. Through your participation, you will help sales organizations provide better sales support and service as well as become world-class leaders in the gaming industry.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this relevant study.

Sincerely,

Allie Lechtenberger

C. 3: One-On-One Interview Questions

Researcher Script:
As we begin, please think in your mind (do not tell me their name) of one primary slot machine salesperson from any of the Big 3 manufacturers, IGT, ATI, and SCI Games. Now, do you have that person in mind? Yes? Good. Now we will proceed to a series of questions that have no right or wrong answer. I may use the words traits, characteristics, and competencies interchangeably throughout the interview. Try to answer each question as authentically as possible. If you have any questions during the interview, please stop and ask me for clarification. Now are you ready to begin? Good.

1. In considering your professional relationship with your primary salesperson, how would you describe your working relationship?
2. How long have you worked with him/her?
3. Tell me your first impression of him/her.
4. Describe for me the top 3 positive sales traits he/she possesses?
5. Describe for me some of the off-putting traits he/she possesses?
6. If your salesperson had more positive traits would this make you want to purchase more from them?
7. If your salesperson had more positive traits would you feel more satisfied with your working relationship?
8. If your salesperson had more negative traits would this make you want to purchase more from them?
9. If your salesperson had more negative traits would you feel more satisfied with your working relationship?
10. How does your primary salesperson compare against your ideal of a "great" salesperson?
11. In general and in your opinion, what makes a salesperson "great"?
12. If you could secretly switch salespeople without this person ever knowing you were involved, would you and why or why not?
13. How do you feel your relationship with this salesperson has evolved? Is your relationship worse or better?
14. Has the length of your relationship impacted your purchases? How so?
15. Does your primary salesperson's characteristics or traits impact your purchasing decisions? If yes, give me an example?
16. How have the purchases you have made from your primary salesperson changed over time?
17. How satisfied are you currently with your primary salesperson?
18. If you could change something about your working relationship with your primary salesperson what would it be?
19. Now, just thinking overall of an ideal salesperson (not anyone you know), tell me the top 3 characteristics or traits they would have that would make them successful in working with you?
20. In all sales relationships there are several stages. I will read each one to you. Which one best describes where you are currently with your primary salesperson?

- *Exploration* – Both firms are discovering and testing the compatibility, integrity, and performance of the other as well as potential obligations, benefits, and burdens involved with working together on a long-term basis

- *Buildup* – Both firms are receiving increased benefits from the relationship and a level of trust and satisfaction has been developed such that they are more willing to become committed to the relationship on a long-term basis
- *Maturity* – Both firms have an ongoing, long-term relationship in which both receive acceptable levels of satisfaction and benefits from the relationship
- *Decline* – One or both members have begun to experience dissatisfaction and are contemplating relationship termination, considering alternative manufacturers or customers, and are beginning to communicate intent to end the relationship
- *Deterioration* – The firms have begun to negotiate terms for ending the relationship and/or are currently in the process of dissolving the relationship

21. Considering the 5 stages of a sales relationship, which one did you make the most purchases from your primary salesperson?
22. Considering the 5 stages of a sales relationship, which one do you think is the most important and why?
23. Is there anything else you would like to share or add?

Appendix D: Codes, Descriptions and Domains

Code	Description	Domains	Frequency
Product	Product performance leading to purchasing behavior	AP = Account Profitability	49
High relationship quality	Relationship between the customer and salesperson	CS = Customer Satisfaction	43
Honest	Positive sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	25
Personable	Positive sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	23
Understands needs of customer	Positive sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	23
Knowledgeable	Positive sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	22
Communication	Positive sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	22
Purchasing Behavior	Frequency of a customer's purchasing behavior	AP = Account Profitability	22
Follow Through	Positive sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	22
Trust	Positive sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	19
Product Knowledge	A salesperson's ability to know their product	CS = Customer Satisfaction	18
Events and Perks	Relationship between the customer and the salesperson	CST = Relationship Tenure	17
Customer Satisfaction	How satisfied the customer is with his salesperson	CS = Customer Satisfaction	16
Friendship	Friendship in the customer-salesperson relationship	CST = Relationship Tenure	14

Lying	Negative sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	14
Comfortable	Positive sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	12
Friendly	Positive sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	12
Partnership	Relationship between the customer and the salesperson	CS = Customer Satisfaction	12
Dependability	Positive sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	11
Selling Ability	Positive sales characteristic	AP = Account Profitability	11
Genuine	Positive sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	11
Proactive	Positive sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	11
Exceeds Expectations	Customer rating of salesperson	CS = Customer Satisfaction	11
Pitch - Being a typical salesperson	Negative sales characteristic	CS = Customer Satisfaction	10
Responsiveness	Positive sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	10
Passion	Positive sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	9
Pushy	Negative sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	8
Quality time	Relationship between the customer and salesperson	CST = Relationship Tenure	8
Professional	Positive sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	7

Sharing Information	Relationship-building oriented	CST = Relationship Tenure	7
Resilient	Positive sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	6
Aggressive	Negative sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	6
Prepared	Positive sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	6
Positive	Positive sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	5
Complaining	Negative sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	5
Confident	Positive sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	5
Effective	Positive sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	5
Integrity	Positive sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	5
Collaborative	Relationship between the customer and salesperson	CST = Relationship Tenure	5
Cooperative	Relationship between the customer and salesperson	CST = Relationship Tenure	4
Experience	Positive sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	4
Great	Positive sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	4
Improved	Positive sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	4
Listening	Positive sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	3

New	Relationship between the customer and salesperson	CST = Relationship Tenure	3
Moody	Negative sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	3
Energetic	Positive sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	3
Funny	Positive sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	3
Customer Dissatisfaction	Customer satisfaction rating	CS = Customer Satisfaction	3
Loyalty	Positive sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	3
Open	Positive sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	2
Nervous	Negative sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	2
Bond	Relationship between the customer and salesperson	CST = Relationship Tenure	2
Work Ethic	Positive sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	2
Competent	Positive sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	2
Unprepared	Negative sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	2
Annoying	Negative sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	2
Distracted/Off-Topic	Negative sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	2
Fast Talker	Negative sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	1

Chauvinistic	Negative sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	1
Analytical	Positive sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	1
Direct	Relationship between the customer and salesperson	CST =Relationship Tenure	1
Strictly Business	Relationship between the customer and salesperson	CST = Relationship Tenure	1
Caring	Positive sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	1
Afraid	Negative sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	1
Happy	Positive sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	1
Eye Contact	Positive sales characteristic	SC = Sales Competencies	1

Appendix E: Survey Participant Recruitment Letter

July 19, 2022

Dear Customer (personalized via customer database),

IGT has partnered with the University of Nevada Las Vegas in a collaborative research project, and we need your participation for it to be a success. You are being asked to participate in the study because you fit the following criteria: 1) you possess valuable casino gaming industry expertise, 2) you have directly interacted with your primary slot machine salesperson within the last 3 months and 3) you have a direct influence on slot machine purchases.

The purpose of this study is to determine which sales competencies have the greatest impact on customer satisfaction.

To participate in this study, you will be asked a series of questions via an online survey sent to your email. The survey should take approximately 10 -15 minutes of your time. We do ask that you complete the survey in its entirety for accurate data analysis. All survey responses are anonymous and will never link back to you or the person you are evaluating.

Your professional experience and expert input are invaluable to IGT, the researchers at UNLV, and the casino gaming industry. Through your participation, you will help IGT provide better sales support and service to you as we strive to be the world-class leader in our industry.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this relevant study.

Sincerely,

Ken Bossingham
SVP Sales, IGT

Appendix F: Online Survey Questions By Domain

Online Qualtrics Demographic Information for Adults (Casino Gaming Employees)

Please select the answer that best describes yourself from the following:
1. Are you currently employed at a casino? (Yes or No) *If not, the survey ends.*
2. Do you make purchasing decisions regarding your slot machine mix? (Yes or No) *If not, the survey ends.*
3. Do you work directly with an IGT slot sales representative? (Yes or No) *If not, survey ends.*
4. Age group (1 = 18-29, 2 = 30-54, 3=55-70, 4=71 or older)
5. Gender identification (1 = Female, 2 = Male, 3= Prefer not to disclose)
6. Race or Ethnicity (1 = non-Hispanic white, 2 = Latino or Hispanic American, 3 = Black or African American, 4 = native American, 5 = Asian American, 6 = Middle Eastern or Arab American, 7 = Multiracial, 8 = Other, 9 = Prefer not to disclose)
7. Total number of years of work experience in the casino gaming industry? _____
8. Current position (Executive Level, Director, Manager, Supervisor, Entry Level, Other)
9. In which city is your casino located? _____
10. Education Level (GED, High School Diploma, Trade School, Associates Degree, Bachelor's Degree, Master's Degree, Doctoral Degree, Other)

Domain 1: Sales Competencies

A. Big Five Factor Structure (Goldberg, 1992)
Please rate your primary IGT salesperson with the common human traits below as accurately as possible as you see this person at present. Review each trait, then select the number indicating how accurately the trait describes your IGT primary salesperson using the following rating scale: 1 = extremely, 2 = very, 3 = quite, 4= slightly, 5 = neither, 6 = slightly, 7 = quite, 8=very and 9= extremely.

introverted	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	extraverted
silent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	talkative
unassertive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	assertive
cold	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	warm
unkind	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	kind
selfish	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	unselfish
disorganized	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	organized
lazy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	hardworking
tense	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	relaxed
emotional	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	unemotional
unintelligent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	intelligent
unanalytical	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	analytical
uncreative	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	creative

B. Customer-Focused Extra Role Behaviors (Netemeyer et al. 2005)

Please rate accordingly the following questions: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 4= neither agree nor disagree, 5 = somewhat agree, 6 = agree, and 7 = strongly agree.
1. My salesperson goes above and beyond the "call of duty" when serving my needs
2. My salesperson voluntarily assists me even if it means going beyond job requirements
3. My salesperson helps me with problems beyond what is expected or required.

C. Information Use Behaviors (Reid et al. 2002)

Please rate accordingly the following questions: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 4= neither agree nor disagree, 5 = somewhat agree, 6 = agree, and 7 = strongly agree.
1. My salesperson can link his/her products/services to my needs
2. My salesperson can handle objections that I raise
3. My salesperson can differentiate his/her products from the competition
4. My salesperson does their homework before visiting me

Domain 2: Customer Satisfaction

D. RELQUAL (Lages et al. 2005)

Please rate accordingly the following questions: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 4= neither agree nor disagree, 5 = somewhat agree, 6 = agree, and 7 = strongly agree.
1. My salesperson frequently discussed strategic issues with me.
2. My salesperson openly shares confidential information with me.
3. I believe that over the long run, my relationship with my salesperson will be profitable.
4. Maintaining a long-term relationship with my salesperson is important to me.
5. I focus on long-term goals in my relationship with my salesperson.
6. I am willing to make sacrifices to help my salesperson from time to time
7. My association with my salesperson has been a highly successful one.
8. My salesperson leaves a lot to be desired from an overall performance standpoint (R).
9. Overall, the results of my relationship with my salesperson were far short of expectations (R).

E. Relationship Satisfaction (Reukert and Churchill, 1984)

Please rate accordingly the following questions: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 4= neither agree nor disagree, 5 = somewhat agree, 6 = agree, and 7 = strongly agree.
1. I am satisfied with the relationship I have with my salesperson
2. I am displeased with the relationship I have with my salesperson
3. My relationship with the salesperson has more than fulfilled my expectations
4. My salesperson is not well organized.
5. My salesperson has my best interest in mind when they make suggestions.

F. Trust, Commitment and Customer Satisfaction (De Wulf et al. 2001)

Please rate accordingly the following questions: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 4= neither agree nor disagree, 5 = somewhat agree, 6 = agree, and 7 = strongly agree.
1. I have a high-quality relationship with my salesperson
2. I am happy with the relationship with my salesperson
3. I am satisfied with the relationship I have with my salesperson
4. I am willing "to go the extra mile" to work with my salesperson.

Domain 3: Account Profitability

G. Trust, Commitment and Customer Satisfaction (De Wulf et al. 2001)

Please answer each question below to the best of your ability when considering your primary IGT slot salesperson.
1. Of the potential products or services you could purchase from this salesperson, what percentage share does this salesperson's company (IGT) represent?
1= 1-10%   2= 11-20%   3= 21-30%   4= 31-50%   5= 51% or more
2. Of the potential products or services you could purchase from this salesperson, what percentage share do you estimate this salesperson's company (IGT) will have in 3 years?
1= 1-10%   2= 11-20%   3= 21-30%   4= 31-50%   5= 51% or more

H. Share of Wallet (Palmatier et al. 2008)

Please answer each question below to the best of your ability when considering your primary IGT slot salesperson.
1. Of all the electronic gaming devices available today, what percentage do you buy from your primary IGT slot machine salesperson?
1= 1-10%   2= 11-20%   3= 21-30%   4= 31-50%   5= 51% or more
2. Considering your slot machines purchases, is the amount you purchased from your primary IGT salesperson in 2022 as compared with your purchases made in 2021?
1 = More   2= Less
If 1 = question continues….
How much more did you purchase or plan to purchase as a percentage in 2022 compared with 2021?
1= 1-10%   2= 11-20%   3= 21-30%   4= 31-50%   5= 51% or more

J. Increased Customer Purchases (Fink et al. 2008)

Please rate accordingly the following questions: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 4= neither agree nor disagree, 5 = somewhat agree, 6 = agree, and 7 = strongly agree.

1. The purchases of slot machines from our primary slot salesperson have increased over the past three years.
2. The purchases of slot machines from our primary slot salesperson have decreased over the past three years.

Domain 4: Customer-Salesperson Lifecycle

K. Relationship Phase and Relationship Duration (Jap and Ganesan, 2000)

Relationships typically evolve through several phases over time. Which of the following best describes your firm's current relationship with this salesperson? (Check only one)
- *Exploration* – Both firms are discovering and testing the compatibility, integrity, and performance of the other as well as potential obligations, benefits, and burdens involved with working together on a long-term basis
- *Buildup* – Both firms are receiving increased benefits from the relationship and a level of trust and satisfaction has been developed such that they are more willing to become committed to the relationship on a long-term basis
- *Maturity* – Both firms have an ongoing, long-term relationship in which both receive acceptable levels of satisfaction and benefits from the relationship
- *Decline* – One or both members have begun to experience dissatisfaction and are contemplating relationship termination, considering alternative manufacturers or customers, and are beginning to communicate intent to end the relationship
- *Deterioration* – The firms have begun to negotiate terms for ending the relationship and/or are currently in the process of dissolving the relationship

1. How many years have you worked with your salesperson? (If <1, please round to 1)
1= 0-2 yrs,   2=3-5 yrs,   3=6-10 yrs,   4=11-15 yrs,   5=16 or more yrs

L. Salesperson-Customer Relationship Duration (De Wulf et al. 2001)

1. How long have you known your primary salesperson?
1= 0-2 yrs,   2=3-5 yrs,   3=6-10 yrs,   4=11-15 yrs,   5=16 or more yrs
2. How long have you had business dealings with this salesperson in your career?
1= 0-2 yrs,   2=3-5 yrs,   3=6-10 yrs,   4=11-15 yrs,   5=16 or more yrs

M. Degree of Familiarity within the Salesperson-Customer Relationship (Starzyk et al. 2006)

Please rate accordingly the following questions: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 5 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree.
1. I have known my salesperson for many years.
2. I have spent time with my salesperson's family and friends and vice versa.
3. My salesperson and I go way back.
4. I know my salesperson's friends.
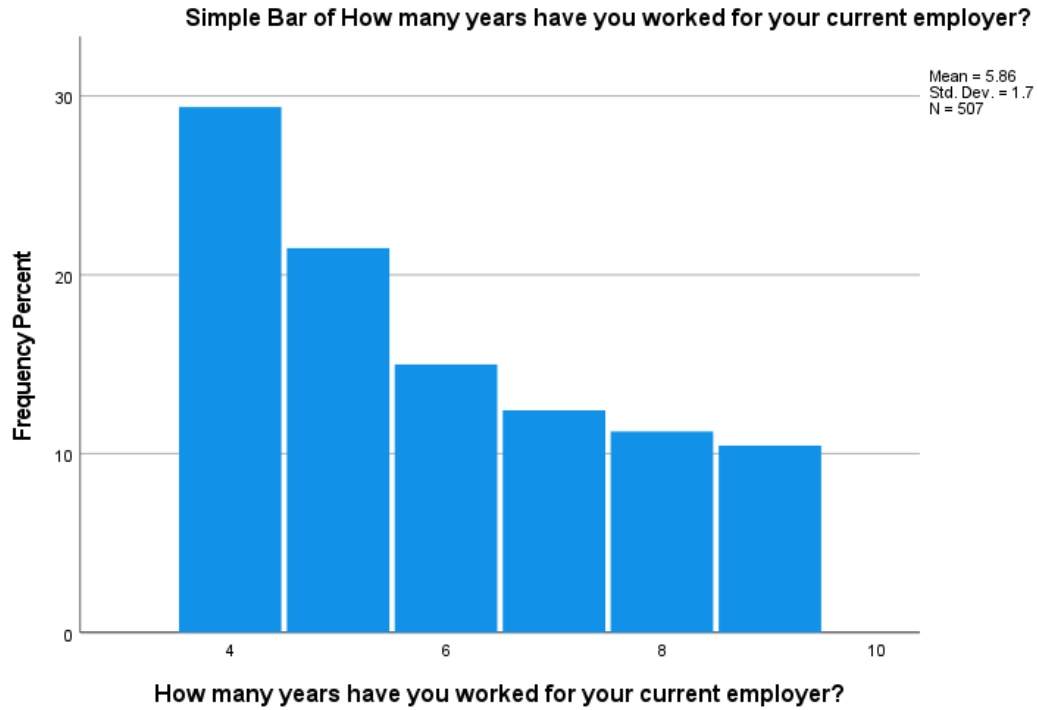5. I see my salesperson frequently outside of work.

N. Customer-Salesperson Lifecycle (No Scale)

Please rate accordingly the following questions: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 5 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree.
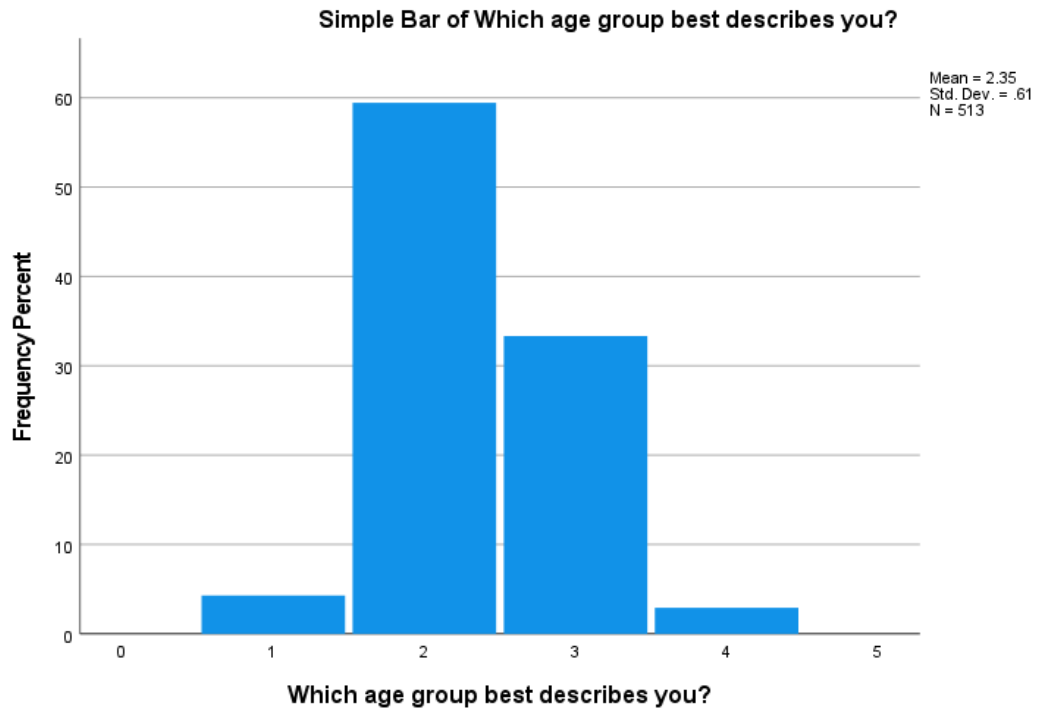1. My relationship with my salesperson has improved over time.
2. My relationship with my salesperson has declined over time.
3. Sometimes I find it hard to say no to my salesperson because we are friends.
4. I am comfortable where I am in my professional relationship with my salesperson.
5. Because my salesperson and I feel so comfortable around each other, he/she no longer tries to be professional.
6. Because my salesperson and I feel so comfortable around each other, he/she no longer tries to sell me as much as he/she did in the start of our working relationship.

Appendix G: Descriptive Statistics with Frequency Tables

Bar Chart

Simple Bar of How many years have you worked for your current employer?

Mean = 5.86
Std. Dev. = 1.7
N = 507

Notes. 4=1-5 years, 5=6-10 years, 6=11-15 years, 7=16-20 years, 8=21-25 years, 9=26 or more years.

Simple Bar of Which age group best describes you?

Mean = 2.35
Std. Dev. = .61
N = 513

Notes. 1=18-29, 2=30-54, 3=55-70, 4= 71 or older

Simple Bar of Gender identification

Mean = 1.24
Std. Dev. = .447
N = 513
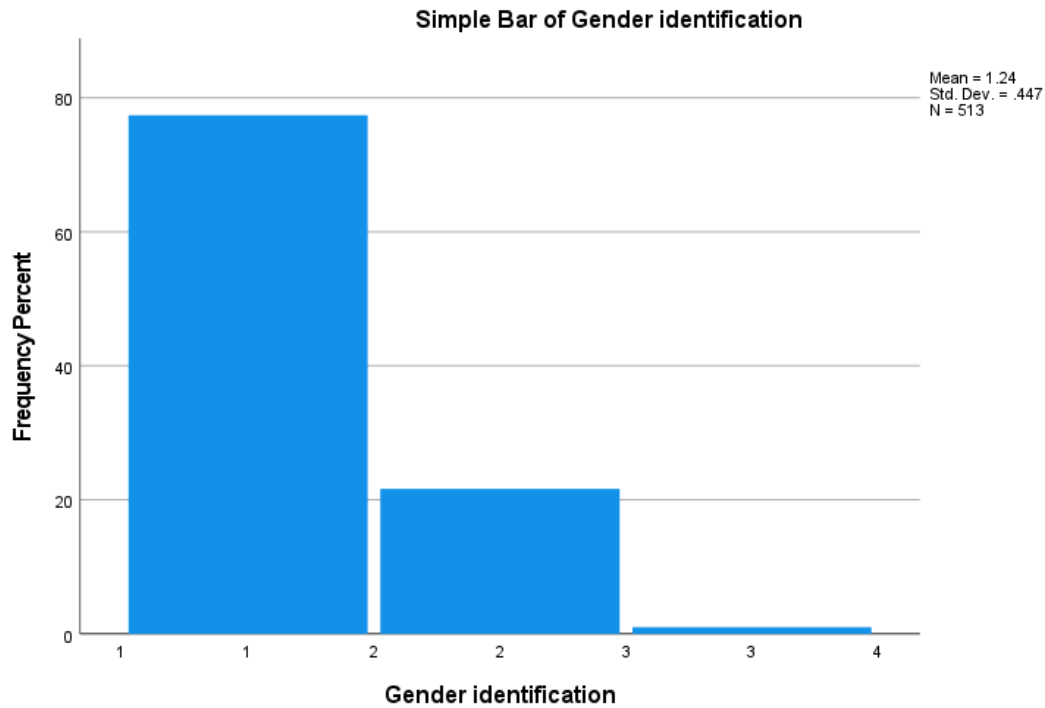
Notes. 1 =Male, 2=Female, 3=Prefer not to disclose.

Simple Bar of Total number of years of work experience in the casino gaming industry?

Mean = 8.17
Std. Dev. = 1.742
N = 483
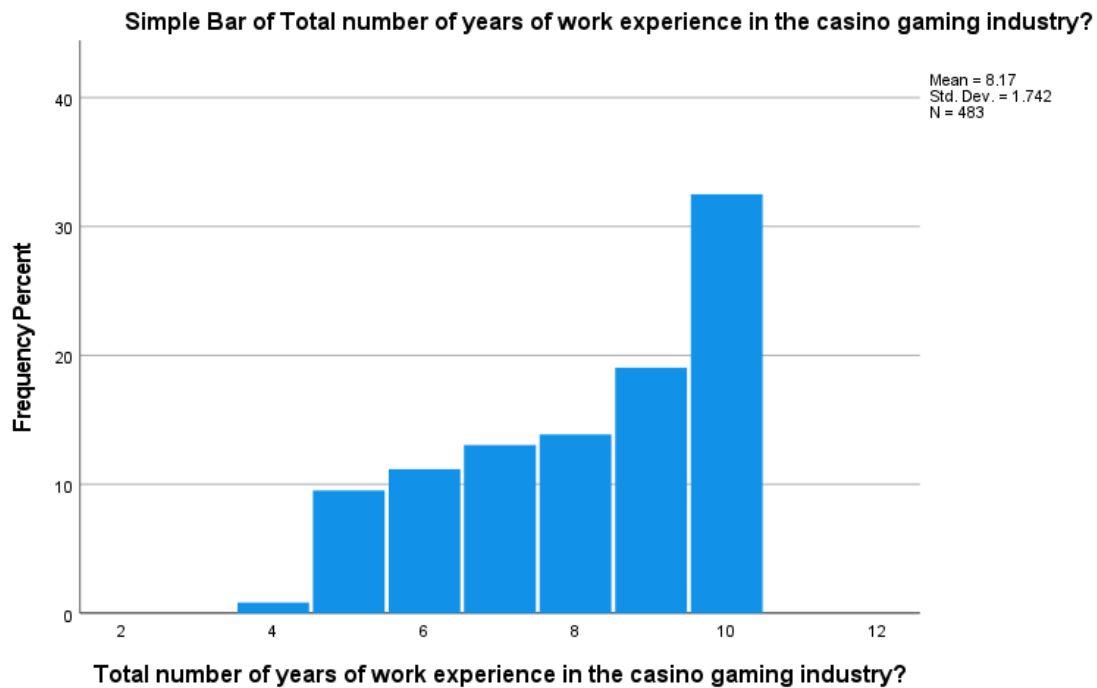
4=Less than 1 year, 5=1-5 years, 6=6=10 years, 7=11-15 years, 8=16-20 years, 9=21-25 years, 10=26+years

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Simple Bar of Education Level
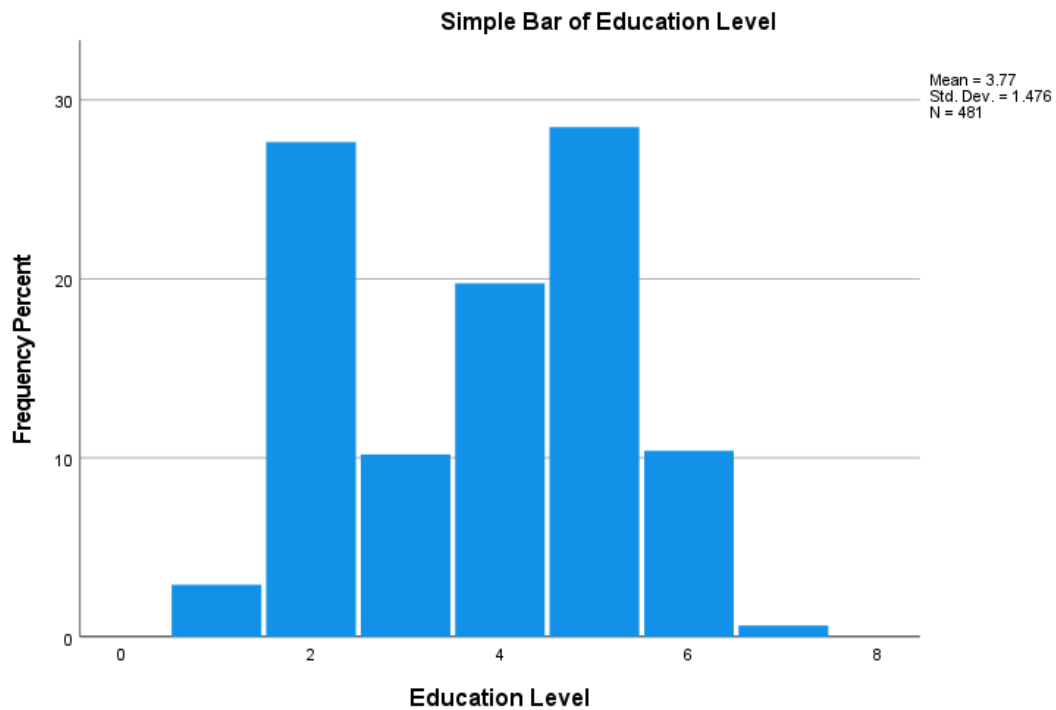
Notes. 1=GED, 2=High school graduate, 3=Trade school, 4=2-year degree, 5=4-year degree, 6=Professional degree, 7=Doctorate

Simple Bar of How many years have you known your primary IGT slot salesperson?
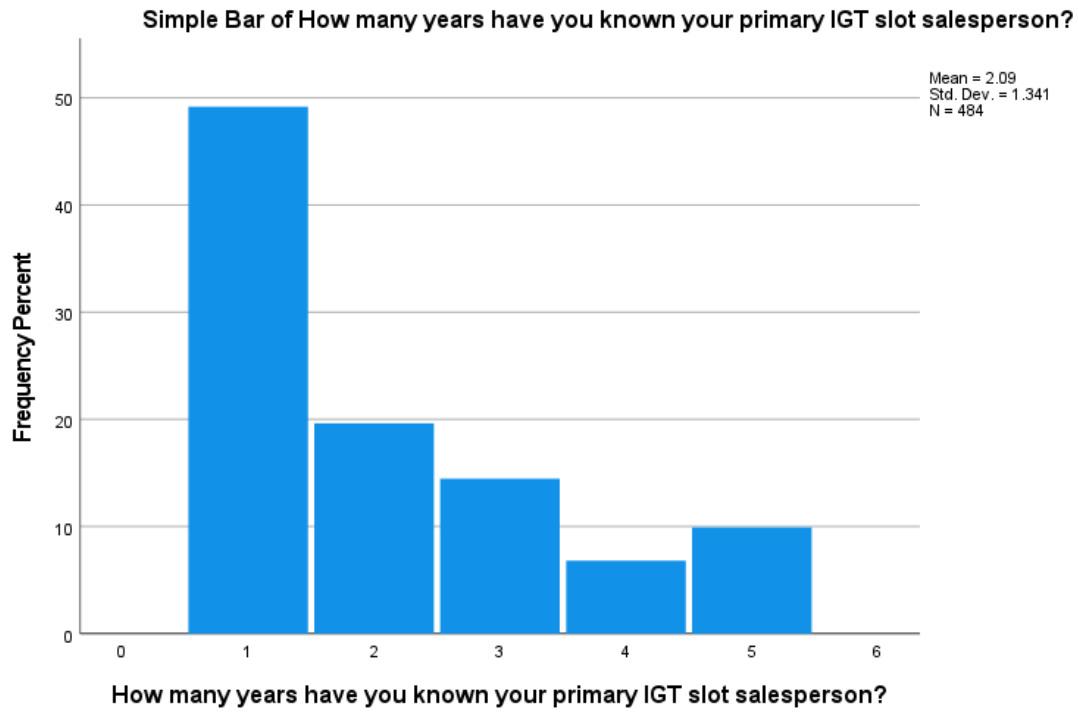
Notes. 1=0-2, 2=3-5, 3=6-10, 4=11-14, 5=16 or more.

Appendix H: Multicollinearity

Multicollinearity

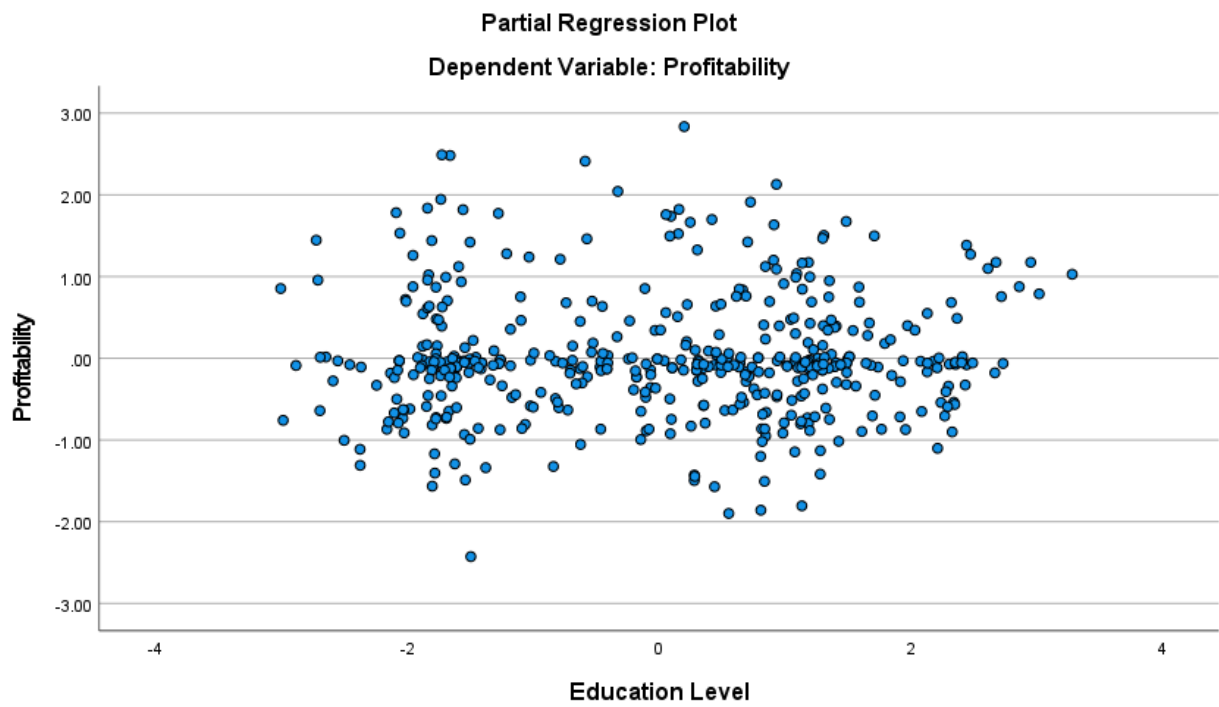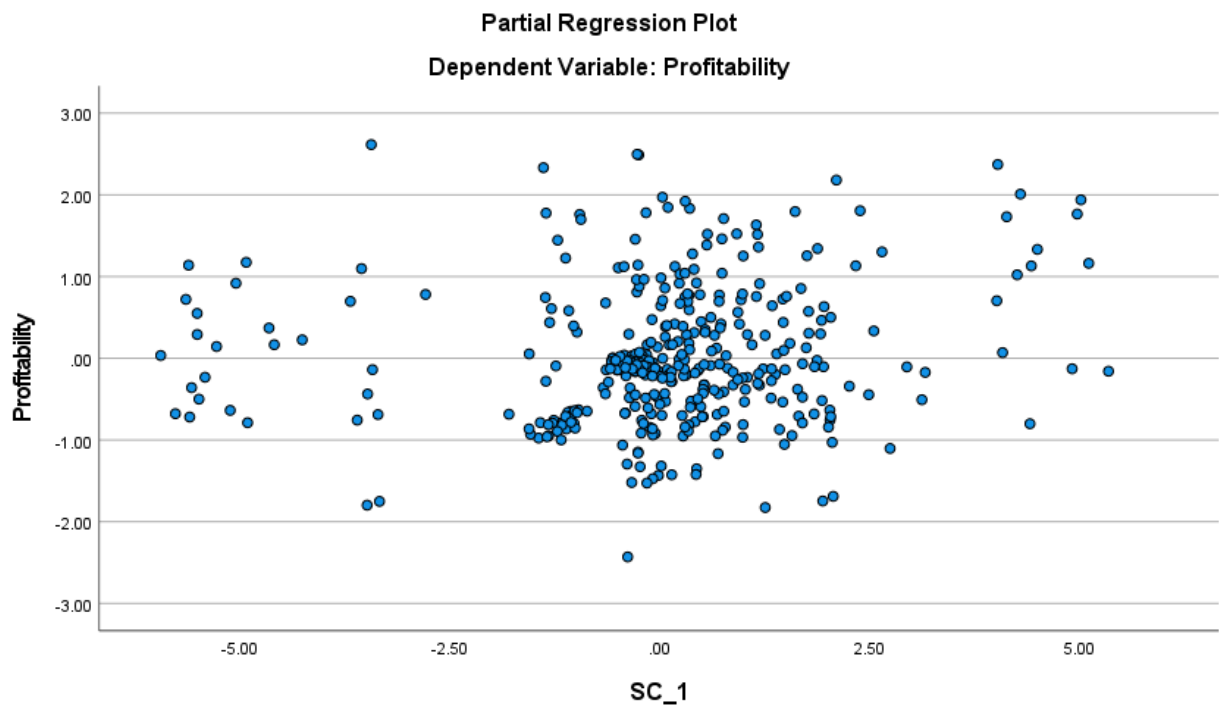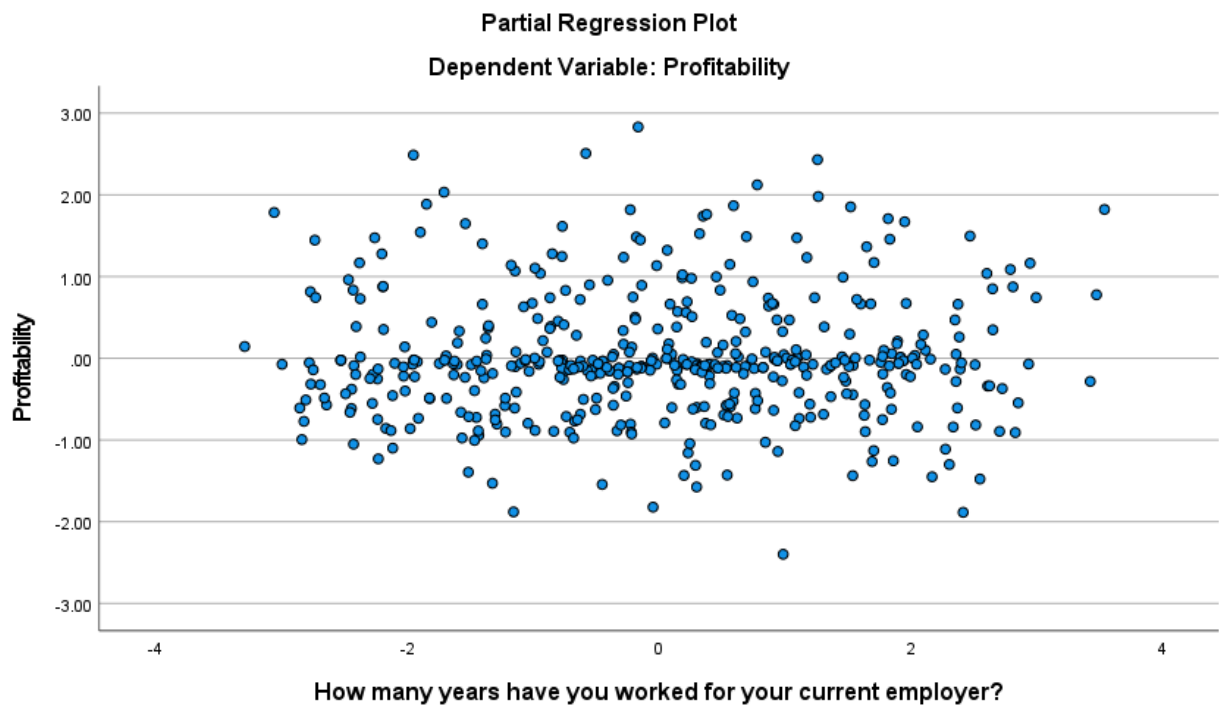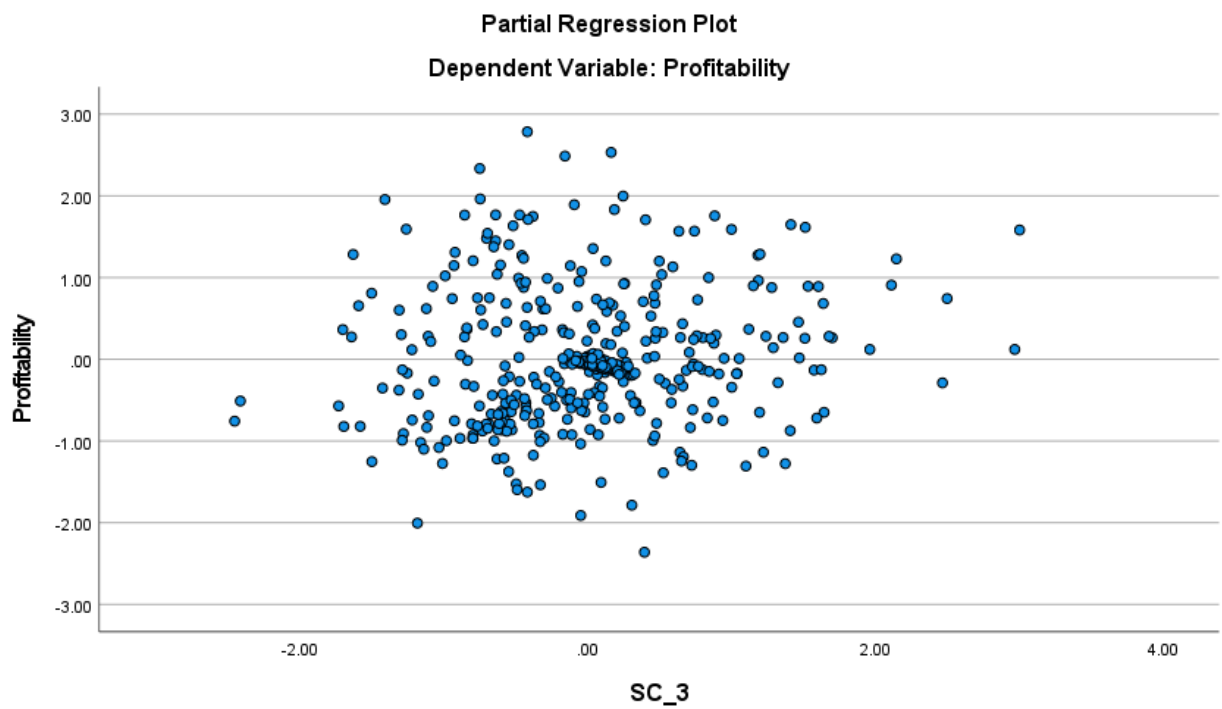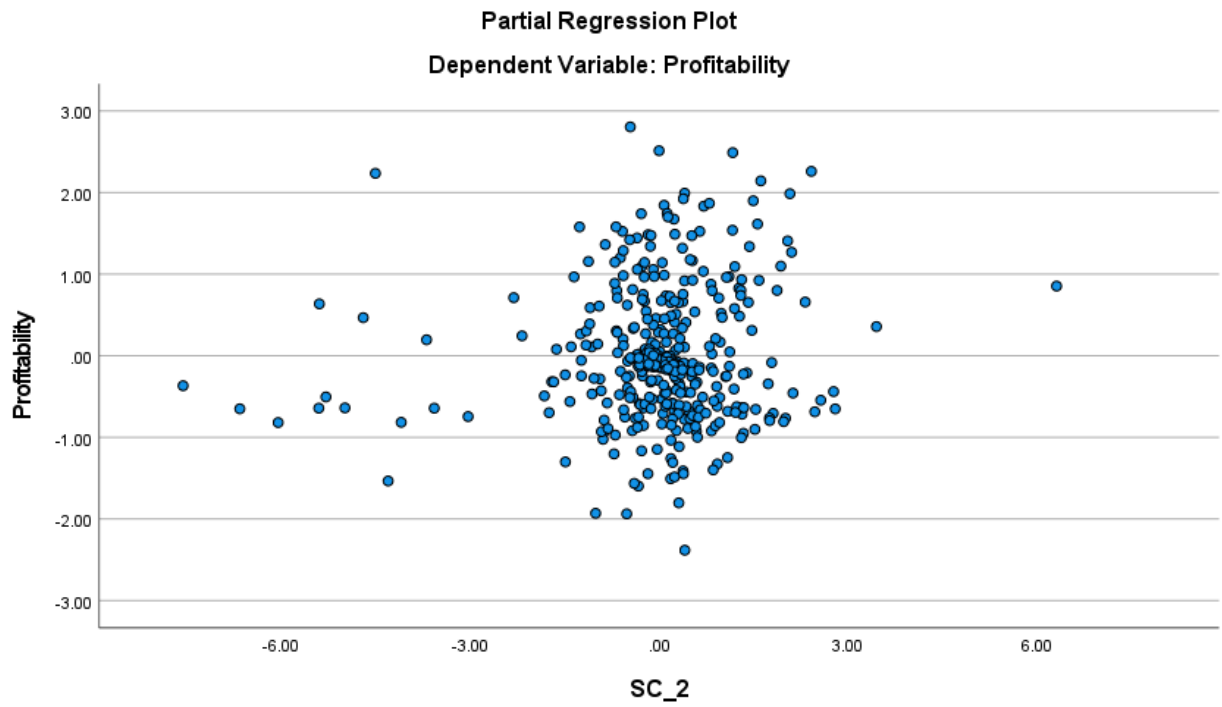| Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	-.063	.048		-1.310	.191		
	SC_1	.121	.018	.118	6.567	<.001	.360	2.781
	SC_2	.094	.024	.121	3.844	<.001	.118	8.476
	SC_4	1.512	.040	.764	37.690	<.001	.282	3.543
	SC_5	.007	.017	.014	.440	.660	.122	8.169

a. Dependent Variable: SC_3

Appendix I: Linearity

Linearity

Partial Regression Plot

Dependent Variable: Profitability

Partial Regression Plot

Dependent Variable: Profitability

Partial Regression Plot
Dependent Variable: Profitability

Education Level

Partial Regression Plot
Dependent Variable: Profitability

Total number of years of work experience in the casino gaming industry?

Partial Regression Plot

Dependent Variable: Profitability

How many years have you worked for your current employer?

Partial Regression Plot

Dependent Variable: Profitability

SC_1

137

Partial Regression Plot

Dependent Variable: Profitability

Partial Regression Plot

Dependent Variable: Profitability

Partial Regression Plot

Dependent Variable: Profitability

Partial Regression Plot

Dependent Variable: Profitability

Partial Regression Plot

Dependent Variable: Customer_Satisfaction

Which age group best describes you?

Partial Regression Plot

Dependent Variable: Customer_Satisfaction

Gender identification

Partial Regression Plot

Dependent Variable: Customer_Satisfaction

Partial Regression Plot

Dependent Variable: Customer_Satisfaction

Partial Regression Plot
Dependent Variable: Customer_Satisfaction

How many years have you worked for your current employer?

Partial Regression Plot
Dependent Variable: Customer_Satisfaction

SC_1

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Partial Regression Plot

Dependent Variable: Customer_Satisfaction

Partial Regression Plot

Dependent Variable: Customer_Satisfaction

Partial Regression Plot

Dependent Variable: Customer_Satisfaction

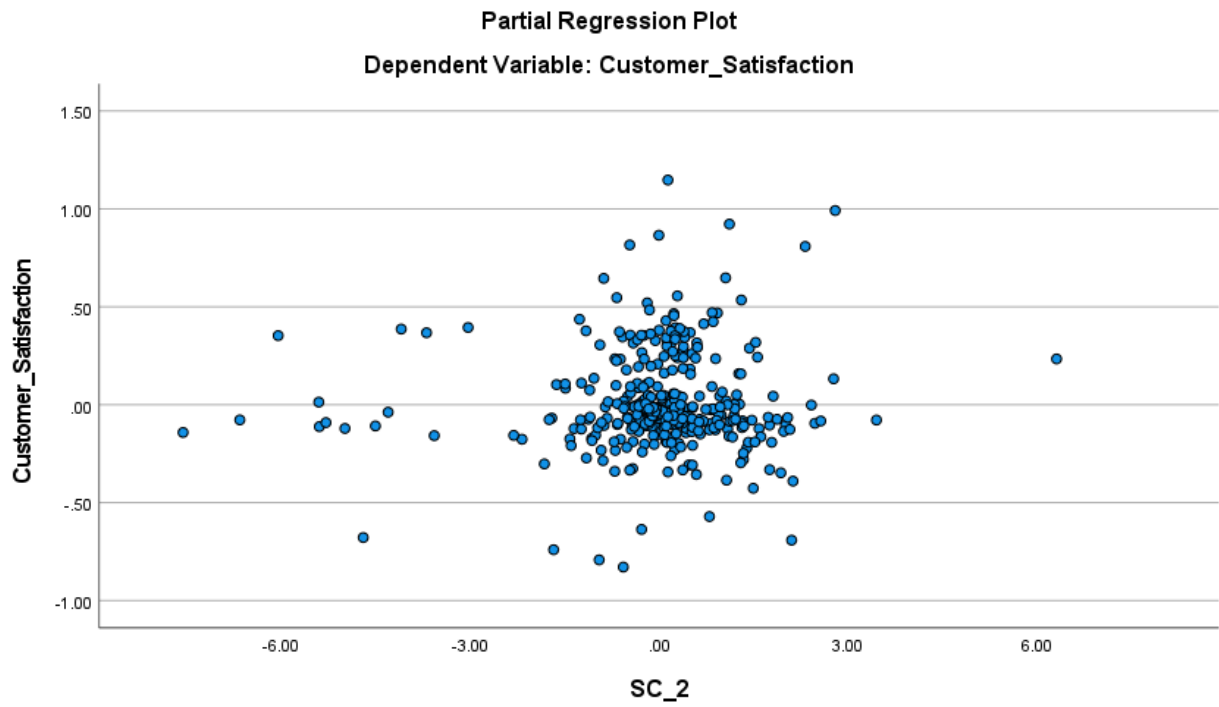
Partial Regression Plot

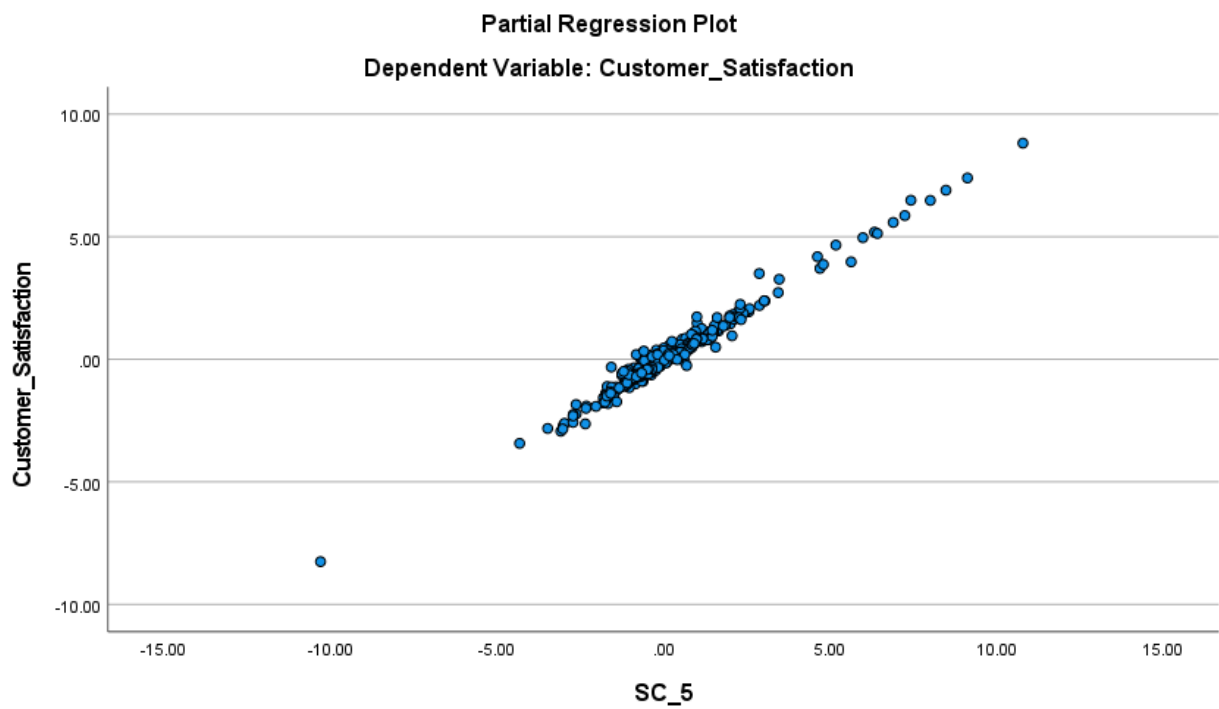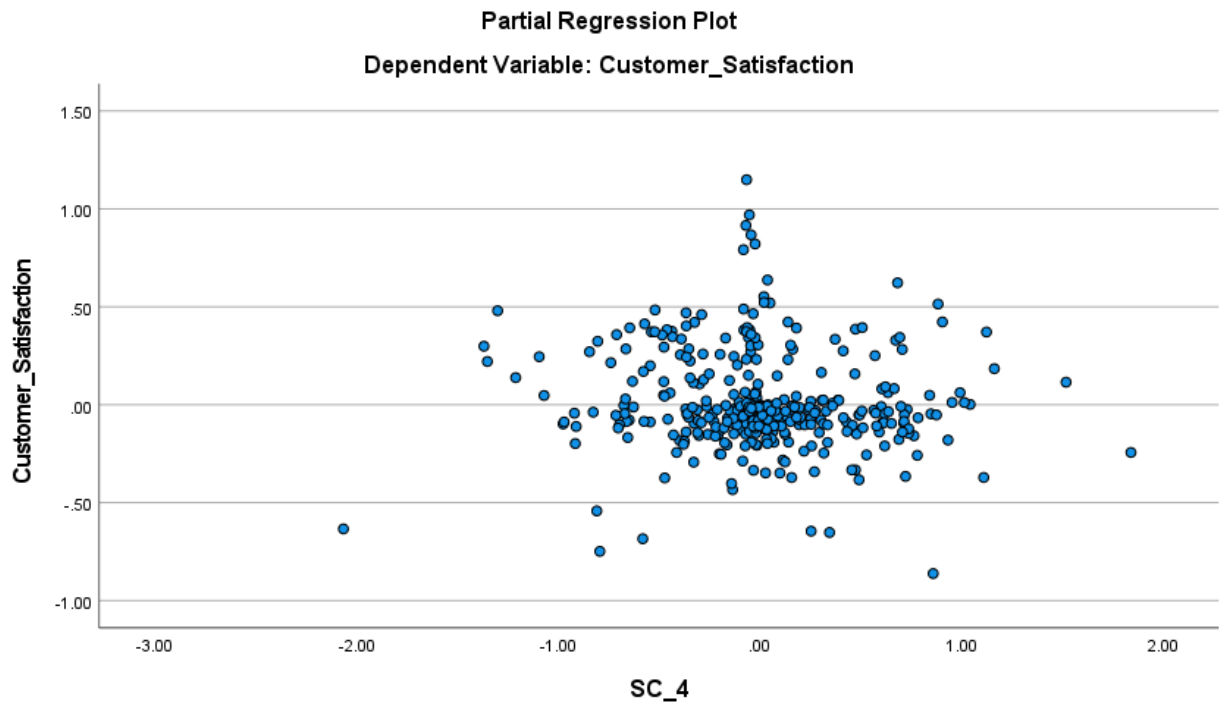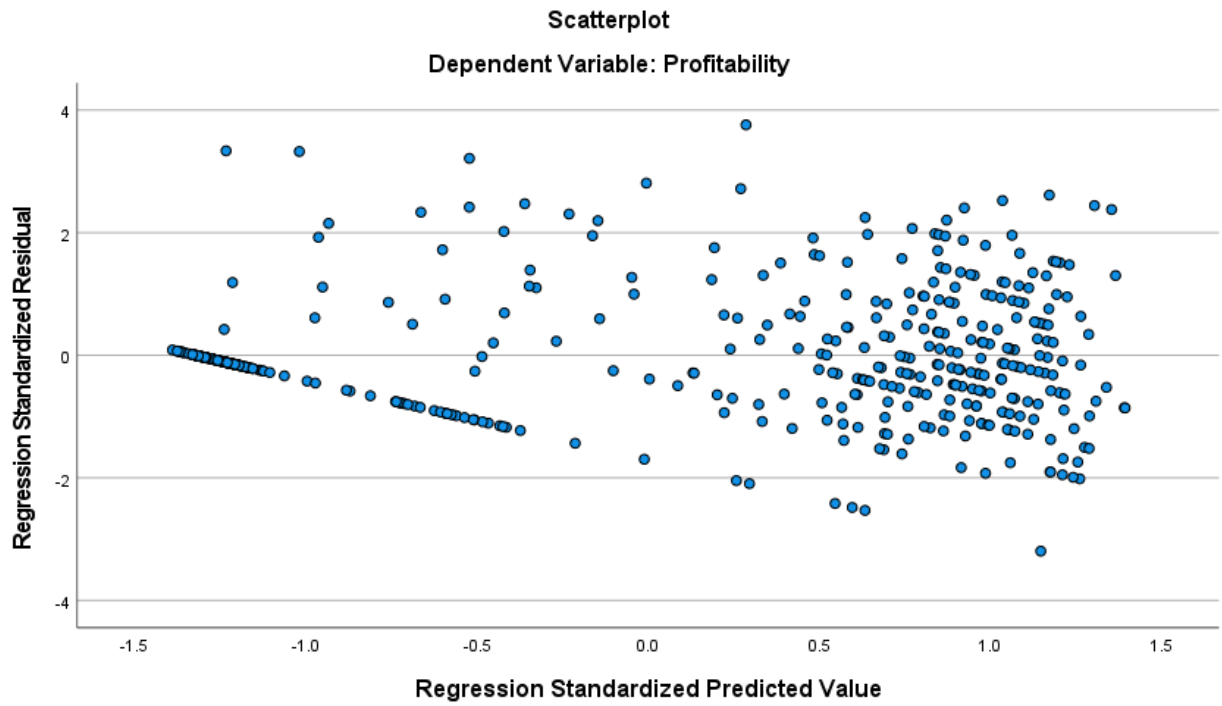**Dependent Variable: Customer_Satisfaction**

Appendix J: Independence of Observations

Independence of Observations

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin - Watson
Profitability	.795[a]	.632	.624	.75317	1.885
Customer Satisfaction	.999[a]	.997	.997	.22376	2.091

Homoscedasticity

Scatterplot

Dependent Variable: Customer_Satisfaction
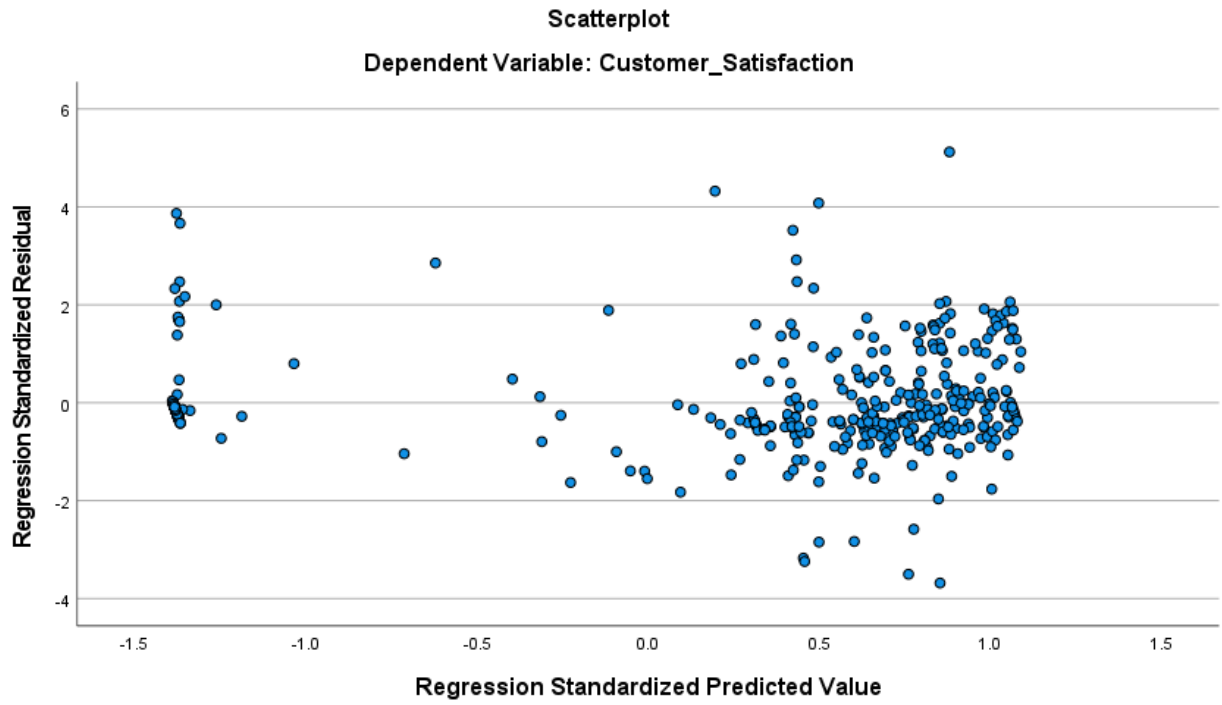
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alicia.lechtenberger@igt.com   www.linkedin.com/in/alicialechtenberger

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONAL

Perceptive, self-generating, and ambitious business professional with broad experience covering multiple industries including gaming, hotel technology, trade shows and corporate events with strong leadership acumen and a record of achieving targets, growing market share, and building relationships.

SELECT CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Australian Embassy – Acquired large international client for event management services. Client value per year: $1M
IGT Golden Slot Award for Exceeding Quota – 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022
Society for Marketing Advancement – 2017 Best Doctoral Student Paper – "The Incredible Shrinking Space"
Wheel of Fortune Themed Room Design and Implementation – 2022 at Oyo Hotel and Casino

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

IGT – Las Vegas, NV   **Current**
Senior Account Manager
� Build relationships with Presidents, GMs, VPs, Directors, and other representatives of casino customer base ensuring the protection and increase of IGT's game installation base
� Point of contact within IGT and responsible for facilitating communications and project management as it relates to all facets for each account
✖ Analyze customer's IGT performance and make strategic adjustments to increase revenue
✖ Evaluate competitive landscape to identify opportunities for IGT to add strategic value
✖ Responsible for meeting internal sales targets, goals, and forecasts

Global Experience Specialist – Las Vegas, NV   **2013- 2019**
Meeting & Event Planner
✖ Managed over 90 active corporate accounts
✖ Lead Account Executive for the pet industry trade shows
✖ GES Representative at social industry events such as IMEX International Convention in Frankfurt
✖ Built and developed relationships with C-level customers
✖ Project-managed all aspects of event from concept to production
✖ Prepared and presented client's design presentations and proposals to executive teams
✖ International travel to location and execution of project while overseeing laborers

Guest-Tek (Formerly known as iBahn) – Salt Lake City, UT　　　　**2012-2013**
Director of Gaming North America
✕ Managed vast territory of gaming accounts in North America from Native American to major corporations such as Station's Casinos, Caesar's Entertainment and MGM Resorts
✕ Wrote RFPs for major casino hotels and managed sales process
✕ Wrote a 2013 Marketing Plan for the new gaming vertical
✕ Sold Wi-Fi solutions, Video on Demand (VOD), IPTV systems to Starwood, Marriott, and Host
✕ Independently sold 500K IPTV system to Twin Arrows Navajo Casino for Grand Opening

Aruze Gaming America – Las Vegas, NV　　　　　　　**2011-2012**
Sales Operations Manager

✕ Increased monthly sales from 89% to 102% of quota via quarterly promotions
✕ Supervised a Sales Coordinator and a Sales Administrator
✕ Chaired monthly Sales Order Processing Meeting
✕ Worked directly with operations to manage stock and yield control of orders
✕ Facilitated implementation of Sales Force CRM software program to sales team

Konami Gaming and Systems, Las Vegas, NV　　　　　　**2005-2010**
Senior Sales Executive
✕ Managed 64 accounts and 3,500 Konami gaming devices in Nevada
✕ Managed 22 tribal accounts and 4,890 Konami gaming devices in the state of Arizona
✕ Achieved 5.2 million in sales in '07 and finished at 124% of sales quota
✕ Silver Sales Award – Increased sales by 18% from '07 to '08
✕ President's Club Award – Achieved over 25% of Quota '09

RESEARCH

Society for Marketing Advancement – 2017 Best Doctoral Student Paper – "The Incredible Shrinking Space"
Society for Marketing Advancement – 2017, Full Conference Presentation
Research Week, 2017 – Poster Presentation – "The Incredible Shrinking Space"
Research Week, 2018 – Poster Presentation – "The Unsexy Side of Sexual Harassment in Meetings and Events"
EUROCHRIE – Conference Presentation – 2018 – "The Unsexy Side of Sexual Harassment in Meetings and Events"

PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Faith Lutheran High School, Volunteer
Special Olympics of Southern Nevada, Volunteer Coach
Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, Tribal Member
Daughters of the American Revolution, Member
American Hotel and Lodging Association, Member

EDUCATION/CERTIFICATIONS

Doctor of Philosophy in Hospitality Administration – University of Nevada Las Vegas

Master of Business Administration - Western New Mexico University, Silver City, NM

Bachelor of Science in Education – Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, AZ

Certified Trade Show Marketer, CTSM - University of Illinois

Team, Management, & Leadership Program, Landmark Worldwide, Newport Beach, CA