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Allocation of Salespeople's resources for generating new sales opportunities across four types of customers

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ABSTRACT

This investigation seeks to (1) identify various external and internal resources available to salespeople and (2) discern which resources are most likely use during the interest generation stage within each customer type. Employing a panel of experienced salespeople, the study identifies three external firm-based resources (firm tangible, firm-intangible, and firm-market based) and four internal salespeople based resources (personal, knowledge, skills, and accumulated success). By examining salespeople-level variance on resource allocation within new, short-, long-, and win-back customers, the findings suggest that salespeople adaptively utilize different resources for each type of relationship quality. Successful strategies in identifying new sales opportunities while initiating, developing, maintaining and reviving satisfaction and trust depend on the magnitude and kind of relational resources allocation.

1. Introduction

Salespeople span boundaries, coordinate internal and external expertise, leverage social capital, mobilize tangible and intangible resources, and position the cost/benefit trade-off in each interaction with their customers. They "must draw on a diverse set of organizational members to create a compelling value proposition for the customer" (Steward, Walker, Hutt, & Kumar, 2010), and they need "access to the right information, the ability to disseminate it to the right people, and the power to coordinate the efforts of groups of people to deliver value to the customer" (Üstüner & Godes, 2006). To accomplish their tasks, salespeople rely on their knowledge (Sengupta, Krapfel, & Pusateri, 2000a), social networks, and company resources to understand customers' problems and articulate their firms' solutions to those problems. They take the role of entrepreneurs, locating and deploying personnel and other resources necessary to generate profitable returns (Plouffe, Sridharan, & Barclay, 2010; Sengupta, Krapfel, & Pusateri, 2000a). They must have insight to categorize customers by types, adapt selling strategies (Beverland & Lockshin, 2003; Coelho & Augusto, 2010), and discern selling contexts, characteristics of recipients, and relationship cycles to arrive at effective selling strategies (Spiro & Weitz, 1990).

Effective selling strategies are those that enable both buyers and sellers to co-create value in each stage of the sales process *or* the buyer-seller relationship. The value co-creation process consists of a buyer framing an expectation of values and a seller using appropriate resources to create expected values (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). It occurs either when salespeople interact with their customers or when salespeople work behind the scenes on behalf of their customers. In either case, salespeople seek to garner the right resources to help create value for customers and generate results (Plouffe & Barclay, 2007). Further, different buyers may be at dissimilar points in the buyer-seller exchange process (Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987; Jap & Ganesan, 2000), and the ambience of each exchange catalyzes the interactive role of both parties in creating values (Haas, Snehota, & Corsaro, 2012; Hohenschwert & Geiger, 2015; Lacoste & La Rocca, 2015).

Because a buyer's expectation of values are idiosyncratic, contextual, and heterogeneous (Vargo & Lusch, 2004), such factors may depend on where the buyer and seller are in the exchange process. Furthermore, value creation can become complex when salespeople target an organizational buying unit having multiple participants with diverse influences and interests (McQuiston, 1989). Member concerns may extend beyond product quality reputation and/or sales call frequency for any purchase situation. Thus, to participate in the value-creating process, sellers forge roles as knowledge brokers (Verbeke, Dietz, & Verwaal, 2011), resource navigators (Plouffe & Barclay, 2007), relationship managers (Crosby, Evans, & Cowles, 1990;

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Weitz & Bradford, 1999), intelligence generators (Slater & Narver, 2000), and internal expertise coordinators (Steward, Walker, Hutt, & Kumar, 2010), as well as value translators (Woodruff, 1997), drivers (Ulaga & Eggert, 2006), and creators (Blocker, Cannon, Panagopoulos, & Sager, 2012).

Buyer-seller relationships have been investigated extensively and found to be multi-stage in nature (e.g., Dubinsky, 1981; Moncrief & Marshall, 2005; Rentz, Shepherd, Tashchian, Dabholkar, & Ladd, 2002). Examples of these stages include prospecting, pre-approach, approach, presentation, handling objections, close, and follow-up (e.g., Dubinsky, 1981; Moncrief & Marshall, 2005; Rentz et al., 2002); awareness-exploration-expansion-commitment-decline-dissolution (Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987); initiation-maintenance-termination (Heide, 1994); and exploration-buildup-maturity-decline (Jap & Ganesan, 2000). As buyer-seller relationships move through these stages, salespeople generate customer interest, present potential offerings, propose solutions, negotiate contracts, and close sales (Üstüner & Iacobucci, 2012). Irrespective of the conceptualization, the first stage often is the interest-generation stage, where salespeople prospect and approach customers to identify and qualify new sales opportunities (Rentz et al., 2002; Üstüner & Iacobucci, 2012; Weitz, Castleberry, & Tanner, 2004). Activities revolve around identifying *new* prospects for existing and/or new solutions, new solutions for *existing* customers, and new solutions for *win-back* customers. From a buyer's perspective, the interest-generation stage is part of the acquisition process (Livne, Simpson, & Talmor, 2011). The acquisition process is the main gateway to create customer value for sellers (Ulaga & Eggert, 2006)—the core of the marketing function (Guenzi & Troilo, 2007; Homburg & Pflesser, 2000). Focusing on this stage of the sales cycle (new sales opportunity identification), this study adds to the literature by looking at *multiple* dyads between one seller and four types of buyers (i.e., new, short-term, long-term, and win-back [lost] customers). As such, "…we underscore the importance of separating customers by relationship phase" (Mullins, Ahearne, Lam, Hall, & Boichuk, 2014, p. 54).

We focus on the foregoing four types of customers (Parasuraman, 1997) and take the position that a salesperson is likely to have a portfolio of customers that he/she manages at any point in time. This portfolio is likely to include new customers (those who are still in the initial engagement of the relationship), short-term customers (those who have had a successful engagement with the seller and are presumed to have developed a relationship with the seller), long-term customers (those who are in the maintenance stage of the relationship), and win-back (those who are in the dissolution stage). Depending on a salesperson's assessment of the type of a particular buyer, various relationship mechanisms, including resources and strategies, are deployed (Zhang, Watson, Palmatier, & Dant, 2016). This necessitates salespeople's classifying purchase propensity, strategically expending efforts, and prioritizing resources efficaciously (Wieseke, Homburg, & Lee, 2008), as only a finite pool of resources exists for salespersons (Steward et al., 2010).

Recognizing the shortage of resources in a hypercompetitive selling environment and the importance of selling, Evans, McFarland, Dietz, and Jaramillo (2012) call for more research on salespersons' ability to navigate and coordinate resources. Lassk, Ingram, Kraus, and Di Mascio (2012) emphasize the need to train salespeople on usage of skills, knowledge, people, strategies, and expertise to produce results. Other researchers acknowledge a gap in knowledge about how salespeople successfully utilize available resources to produce superior returns (Evans et al., 2012; Lassk et al., 2012; Walker, Churchill, & Ford, 1977). The present study responds to these calls by (1) identifying various resources available to salespeople and (2) examining how salespeople allocate these resources to each of four customer types during the *interest-generation stage* of the buyer-seller interaction. For theoretical background, it draws on a resource-based view of the firm (Barney, 1991; Wernerfelt, 1984), as well as work in resource advantage (Hunt & Morgan, 1996, 1997; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978), relationship marketing (Anderson & Narus, 1990; Dwyer et al., 1987; Mohr & Nevin, 1990; Morgan & Hunt, 1994), inter-organizational governance (Heide, 1994), social exchange (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), and conservation of resources (Hobfoll, 1989).

The subsequent sections discuss existing resources identified in the literature, corroborate existence of seven types of salespeople's resources, describe relationship stages that correspond to the four customer types, and hypothesize the types of resources mostly used for each customer type. Next, the paper introduces steps entailed in developing a resource utilization scale, and then findings from hypothesis testing are offered. The contributions, implications, and limitations of the study conclude the work.

2. Literature review of Salespeople's resources

Sales literature has discussed many types of salespeople's resources using heterogeneous terminology. Resources that are derived specifically from the firm—and not from the salesperson—afford sales personnel to use inducements (Ahearne, Jelinek, & Jones, 2007), pricing discount policy (Cron, Baldauf, Leigh, & Grossenbacher, 2014), and technology (Ko & Dennis, 2004) to foster relationships with customers. Firm knowledge and processes from customer retention, customer service support, and technology support are invaluable competitive advantages (Cron et al., 2014). In addition, brand image and company reputation have been found to be positively related to customer value and customer loyalty (Cretu & Brodie, 2007). Partnerships and alliances with external firms, as well as a substantive customer base, market share, and range of product offerings, are important competitive advantages (resources) for salespeople to utilize during customer engagements (Cron et al., 2014).

The preponderance of germane sales literature, however, has focused on resources directly associated with salespeople. Scholars have demonstrated that sales call frequency (Román & Martín, 2008), number of hours worked (Jelinek & Ahearne, 2010), appearance, dress (Crosby, Evans, & Cowles, 1990), physical attractiveness (Reinhard, Messner, & Sporer, 2006), and regional dialect (Mai & Hoffmann, 2011) have influences on salespeople's job-related outcomes. Salespeople's knowledge and skills, however, have received the most attention in the literature. Nomenclature such as declarative knowledge (Szymanski, 1988), technical skills (Wachner, Plouffe, & Grégoire, 2009), perceptions of relationship quality (Mullins, Ahearne, Lam, Hall, & Boichuk, 2014), consultative selling (Newell, Belonax, McCardle, & Plank, 2011), and product and industry expertise (Crosby et al., 1990) all refer to salespeople's knowledge of their customers, competitors, industry, products, and territory. Accordingly, knowledge has been discerned to have a significant association with relationship quality (Newell et al., 2011), probability of closing sales (Crosby et al., 1990), profitability (Mullins et al., 2014), and identification of new opportunities (Szymanski, 1988).

In addition, other critical salesperson skills (resources) include salespeople's verbal and nonverbal communication proficiency (Wachner, Plouffe, & Grégoire, 2009), emotional intelligence (Rozell, Pettijohn, & Parker, 2004), empathic ability, cue perception capacity (Giacobbe, Jackson, Crosby, & Bridges, 2006), intuitive judgement capability (Hall, Ahearne, & Sujan, 2015), and strategic acuity (Sengupta, Krapfel, & Pusateri, 2000b), and have been found—save for verbal and nonverbal communication proficiency—to be positively related to performance. Interestingly, salespeople's accumulation of past successes also plays a role in their current performance, as does their biographical information (Ford, Walker, Churchill, & Hartley, 1987). Furthermore, legitimate and expert power can enhance their ability to navigate their firm internally (Plouffe, Sridharan, & Barclay, 2010), and coordination acumen can improve their prowess to close the sale and augment sales performance (Plouffe & Barclay, 2007). Also, internal and external networking relationships (Cron et al., 2014; Steward et al.,

Table 1
Past theoretical and empirical studies of salesperson resources.

Literature	Study sample	Conclusion	Authors
Sales call frequency	357 customers of one industrial supplier	Increase in call frequency has positive effect on sales volume, perceived service quality, perceived value, and customer satisfaction	Roman & Martin (2007)
Long hours	160 salespeople from multi companies and industries that work with a university's sales program	Hours worked are positively related to deceptive sales tactics, ignoring customer codes and rules.	Jelinek and Ahearne (2010)
Appearance, dress, mannerisms similarity	296 insurance panel members reflect on their insurance sales representative	Positively related to closing sales	Crosby, Evans & Cowles (1990) (replicated by Boles, Johnson & Barksdale, Jr., 2000)
Professional attire	Experimental study	Positively related to trust worthiness, capability, and dependability	Leigh and Summers (2002)
Physical attractiveness and likeableness	Experimental study using 50 students	Salesperson's attractiveness moderates the impact of persuasive intents	Reinhard & Messner (2006)
Regional dialect	92 salespeople and 126 customers	Regional dialect improves customers satisfaction with salespeople	Mai and Hoffmann (2011)
Declarative knowledge	Theoretical	Antecedents of effective of new sales opportunity identification	Szymanski (1988)
Technical skills	398 salespeople from three different firms	Has significant relationship with sales performance	Wachner, Plouffe & Gregoire, 2009
Salesforce knowledge	74 executives were interviewed for an average of 49 min	Strategic concepts that provide salesforce competitive advantages	Cron, Baldauf & Leigh, 2014
Perceptions of relationship quality	Matched survey of 132 salesperson-customer dyads at a Fortune 1000 company	Accurate perception of relationship quality has positive impacts on profitability	Mullins, Ahearne, Lam, Hall & Boichuk, 2014
Consultative task behaviors	4333 members of the Institute for Supply Management	Positively related to salesperson expertise and trust, which leads to relationship quality	Newell, Belonax, Jr., McCardle & Plank, 2011
Salesforce knowledge	74 executives were interviewed for an average of 49 min	Strategic concepts that provide salesforce competitive advantages	Cron, Baldauf & Leigh, 2014
Products and industry expertise	296 insurance panel members reflect on their insurance sales representative	Positively related to closing sales	Crosby, Evans & Cowles, 1990 (replicated by Boles, Johnson & Barksdale, Jr., 2000)
Verbal and nonverbal communication proficiency	398 salespeople from three different firms	Has no significant relationship with sales performance	Wachner, Plouffe & Gregoire (2009)
Emotional intelligence, dispositional affectivity	103 salespeople of a national medical device company	Positively related to sales performance	Rozell, Pettijohn, & Parker (2004)
Adaptive selling behaviors such as empathic ability, cue perception ability, modify self-presentation ability	380 sales representatives and managers of two companies	Significant determinants of sales performance through intention to use adaptive selling behaviors and actual usage of adaptive selling behaviors	Giacobbe, Jackson, Crosby & Bridges (2006)
Intuitive judgments	330 salespeople of a large specialty retailer	Positively related to selling effectiveness	Hall, Ahearne & Sujan (2015)
Sales presentation abilities	398 salespeople from three different firms	Has significant relationship with sales performance	Wachner, Plouffe & Gregoire (2009)
Strategic ability	176 key account salespeople from 52 US firms across many industries	Significant determinant of key account salesperson effectiveness through communication quality and customer trust	Sengupta, Krapfel & Pusateri (2000a,b)
Biographical	Experiences		Ford et al. (1987)
Internal working relationships such as reputation, diversity, and tie strength	Qualitative interviews with 17 sales managers who evaluated 60 salespeople's performance	Positively related to coordination of expertise	Steward, Walker, Hutt & Kumar (2010)
Legitimate power	315 salespeople from one high-tech and one financial services Fortune 500 companies	Legitimate power significantly enhances salespeople navigation internally	Plouffe, Sridharan & Barclay (2010)
Expert power	315 salespeople from one high-tech and one financial services Fortune 500 companies	Expert power significantly enhances salespeople navigation internally	Plouffe, Sridharan & Barclay (2010)
Sales/service network density	74 executives were interviewed for an average of 49 min	Strategic concepts that provide salesforce competitive advantages	Cron, Baldauf & Leigh (2014)
Experience	380 sales representatives and managers of two companies	Strong determinant of sales performance	Giacobbe, Jackson, Crosby & Bridges (2006)
Social capital	Employees of a large multinational electronics company	Significantly related to interunit resource exchange and product innovation	Tsai and Ghoshal (1998)
Work networks	295 employees at an electronics components distributor	Significantly related to closing the deal	Ustuner & Iacobucci, 2012
Salesperson navigation	Conceptualize this concept as an intraorganizational dimension of the sales role	Theoretical discussion of positive impacts on sales performance	Plouffe, Sridharan, & Barclay, 2010
Intrapreneurial ability	176 key account salespeople from 52 US firms across many industries	Significant determinant of key account salesperson effectiveness through communication quality and customer trust	Sengupta, Krapfel & Pusateri (2000a,b)
Social networks	295 employees at an electronics components distributor	Significantly related to opportunity identification	Ustuner & Iacobucci (2012)
Inducements such as lunch and gifts	358 physicians evaluated salesperson's service behaviors	Inducements positively related to share of customer	Ahearne, Jelinek & Jones, 2007

(continued on next page)

Table 1 (*continued*)

Literature	Study sample	Conclusion	Authors
Pricing discount policy	74 executives were interviewed for an average of 49 min	Strategic concepts that provide salesforce competitive advantages	Cron, Baldauf & Leigh (2014)
Brand image and company reputation	377 hair salons in New Zealand evaluated three different brands of multinational firms	Positively related to customer value and customer loyalty	Cretu and Brodie (2007)
Company equity	74 executives were interviewed for an average of 49 min	Strategic concepts that provide salesforce competitive advantages	Cron, Baldauf & Leigh (2014)
Partnerships and alliances	74 executives were interviewed for an average of 49 min	Strategic concepts that provide salesforce competitive advantages	Cron, Baldauf & Leigh (2014)
Customer base, dominant market share, product range	74 executives were interviewed for an average of 49 min	Strategic concepts that provide salesforce competitive advantages	Gupta & Lehmann (2003) Cron, Baldauf & Leigh (2014)
Salesforce automation	1340 salespeople of a pharmaceutical company	Higher usage of the system positively correlates to higher sales performance	Ko and Dennis (2004)
Customer retention	74 executives were interviewed for an average of 49 min	Strategic concepts that provide salesforce competitive advantages	Cron, Baldauf & Leigh (2014)
Customer service support, technology support	74 executives were interviewed for an average of 49 min	Strategic concepts that provide salesforce competitive advantages	Cron, Baldauf & Leigh (2014)

2010; Üstüner & Godes, 2006) and intrapreneurial proficiency improve sales effectiveness and customer trust (Sengupta, Krapfel, & Pusateri, 2000b). Additionally, social networks (i.e., social capital) are related positively to resource exchange and product innovation (Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998; Üstüner & Iacobucci, 2012). These immediate foregoing concepts describe salespeople's professional reputation, position, power, responsibility, and networking relationships inside and outside the firm—and all are redolent of other kinds of salesperson resources. Shown in Table 1 is a summary of resources that have been discussed in the literature.

3. Conservation of resource model and salespeople's seven kinds of resources

To start, we delineate the resources available to salespeople when attending to different customer types. Sales scholars have utilized the Conservation of Resource (CoR) model to explain attribution of failure among salespeople (Mallin & Mayo, 2006; Mayo & Mallin, 2010). The CoR model implies that (1) salespeople strive to obtain, retain, foster, and protect their pool of internal and external resources; (2) salespeople must expend other resources in order to acquire resources; (3) perceived appraisals of resources and willingness to spend them are not homogenous; and (4) salespeople with large reservoirs of resources are able to select and/or substitute the appropriate resource to meet needs better than salespeople with small pools of resources (Hobfoll, 1989, 2011).

According to the CoR model, accessibility of resources and costs of obtaining and using these resources are not commensurate with expected returns on investment (Hobfoll, 1989). Moreover, resources are not distributed equally, and low cost/value resources are spent more willingly than high cost/value resources (Hobfoll, 1989). Salespeople thus need to discern whether certain types of customers are worth specific kinds of resources and whether such resources are accessible to the salesperson.

In a selling context, resources available can be internal or external to salespeople. Salespeople's *internal resources* refer to their cognitive, physical, and behavioral resources (Richter & Hacker, 1998). *External resources* are tangible and intangible resources located in the selling firm (Barney, 1991; Wernerfelt, 1984) and can be firm based or market based (Srivastava, Shervani, & Fahey, 1998). Below, we define and detail the specifics of different types of resources that salespeople can tap. Consistent with germane literature, we categorize previously discussed salespeople's resources and broadly classify them into external or internal to the salesperson.

3.1. External resources of salespeople—firm-based tangible

Firm-based tangible resources include company financial (e.g., relationship initiation and development expenses—enticements such as gifts, favors, holiday cards, entertainment—leasing offers, R & D investment), physical (e.g., meeting facilities, computers, state-of-the art machinery, production facilities, transportation), and human (i.e., expertise of personnel) resources (Barney, 1991; Wernerfelt, 1984). Usually, physical and financial resources are relatively easily accessible to salespeople. In regards to expertise of personnel, if salespeople do not have embedded intra-organizational networks, expertise of intra-firm personnel may not be available to salespeople (Plouffe & Barclay, 2007). Therefore, human resources are excluded from firm-based tangible resources. Relying on Barney (1991) and Wernerfelt (1984), this study uses selling expenses, physical infrastructure, and plants and buildings as elements of *firm-based tangible resources*.

3.2. External resources of salespeople—firm-based intangible resources

Firm-based intangible resources encompass unique process capabilities, knowledge capital, and core competencies of the firm in terms of customer intelligence, customer relationship management, enterprise resource planning, technology, security, supply chain management, and disaster and recovery (Dumitrescu, 2012; Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Wernerfelt, 1984). These assets are information and knowledge based. Empirical work has shown the positive impact of sales force automation (Rivers & Dart, 1999), customer relationship management (Raman, Wittmann, & Rauseo, 2006), and supply chain management (Lambe & Spekman, 1997) on sales performance, thus inferring the implicit value of firm-based intangible resources. Relying on Dumitrescu (2012), Vargo and Lusch (2004), and Wernerfelt (1984), this study uses customer relationship management, customer intelligence and knowledge development processes, and other unique processes, such as supply chain management, enterprise resource planning, human resources, technology, and security management, to capture *firm-based intangible resources.*

3.3. External resources of salespeople—market-based intangible resources

Market-based resources are intangible and external to the firm. Intangible market-based resources can be categorized into relational and intellectual types. Relational assets include a firm's relationships with existing customers and partners, as well as alliances (Dumitrescu, 2012; Srivastava, Shervani, & Fahey, 1998), customer satisfaction, and customer referrals (Fornell, Mithas, Morgeson, & Krishnan, 2006; Grewal, Chandrashekaran, & Citrin, 2010; Gruca & Rego, 2005; Walter, Ritter, & Gemünden, 2001).

A firm's reputation in the marketplace and brand equity represent intellectual assets. The value of these resources is contextually dependent on the particular recipient (customer). During the selling process, for example, propitious use of market-based intangible resources occurs when customers place value on these resources over those of the company's competitors' (Srivastava, Fahey, & Christensen, 2001). Positive reputation fosters trust in buyer-seller relationships (Smith & Barclay, 1997) and can generate perceived customer value (Cretu & Brodie, 2007). Relying on Dumitrescu (2012) and Srivastava, Fahey, and Christensen (2001), this study uses brand reputation, partnerships and/or alliance reputations, and market share position as elements of *market-based intangible resources.*

3.4. Internal resources of salespeople—personal tangible resources

Tangible resources of salespeople are their physical attributes, appearance, and selling time. Sales personnel strategically manage their nonverbal behaviors to shape favorable impressions and attributions toward themselves from customers (Bloom & Reve, 1990). They use certain images, appearance cues, and clothing to project professionalism (Knoll Jr. & Trankersley, 1991); promote expertise, competency, credibility, and status (Goffman, 2002); enhance perceived capability of their firm (Wood, Boles, & Babin, 2008); and facilitate similarity with customers (Crosby et al., 1990). Such efforts can have a fructuous effect on customers (Crosby et al., 1990).

In addition, time could also be an internal tangible resource. Although conceptualizing selling time as a tangible resource may seem curious, it is consistent with our view of the *quantifiable* aspects of *tangible* resources. Time spent on identifying and qualifying opportunities with one customer takes away available time for other customers, as well as from personal activities, thus suggesting an opportunity cost of time. Collectively, we conceptualize *personal tangible resources of salespeople* to include physical features, professional appearance, standard working time, and personal time.

3.5. Internal resources of salespeople—personal knowledge

Knowledge resources of salespeople include erudition of the firm's offerings, markets, competitors, and customers, including customers of customers, suppliers of customers, and competitors of customers (Slater & Narver, 1998; Tuli, Kohli, & Bharadwaj, 2007). Demonstrating this type of knowledge informs customers of the perceived expertise and competence of salespeople (Crosby et al., 1990). Such knowledge—which essentially is “declarative” knowledge—is in contradistinction to “procedural” knowledge—which refers to salespeople's *skills* in commanding influence techniques (e.g., how to handle objections, manage time, analyze selling situations) (Verbeke, Dietz, & Verwaal, 2011).

During the selling process, declarative knowledge assists in use of procedural knowledge (Szymanski, 1988). For example, attribute-based information (declarative) can be obtained through reading, but handling objections (procedural) is gained through both reading and practice. Successful salespeople use both types of knowledge to ask the right questions to the right customers at the right time (Tuli, Kohli, & Bharadwaj, 2007). In this study, we use knowledge of assigned products/services, assigned customers, competitors, assigned industry, and assigned territory as elements of *personal knowledge resources*.

3.6. Internal resources of salespeople—personal skills

Skill resources represent procedural competence in selling tactics, selling techniques, and selling strategies. Skillful salespeople can parlay resources available to them in order to employ various strategies, techniques, and tactics to achieve their desired objectives. Skill resources, especially procedural knowledge (Verbeke et al., 2011), enable salespeople to assess effectively customer purchase potential, identify customer needs, and qualify new sales opportunities. Adroit use of skill resources assists salespeople to devise appropriate adaptive selling strategies for different customer types in various selling situations (Szymanski, 1988; Weitz, Sujan, & Sujan, 1986) and use apposite selling techniques (Dubinsky, 1981; Dwyer, Hill, & Martin, 2000).

Customers place high value on these skills (Comer & Drollinger, 1999; Giacobbe, Jackson, Crosby, & Bridges, 2006; Widmier, 2002). Similar to knowledge resources, skill resources are idiosyncratic to each salesperson. Although very effective, these skills are developed over a period of time and are rare and expensive resources (Dietvorst et al., 2009). Relying on Verbeke et al. (2011), Weitz, Sujan and Sujan (1986), and Szymanski (1988), we use selling skills, selling techniques, and selling strategies and tactics as elements of *personal skills*.

3.7. Internal resources of salespeople—personal accumulated success

Accumulated success-anchored resources include salespeople's social networks within and outside the firm, power, position, and reputation. Researchers also suggest individuals' social networks induce a sense of obligation, indebtedness, or gratitude to the actors (Bourdieu, 2008). Internally, sales subalterns can develop social capital through organizational socialization opportunities (Hartline, Iii, & McKee, 2000) and use of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1998) and persuasion principles (Cialdini, 2001). Social capital has a positive impact on sales performance (Moran, 2005; Mulki, Jaramillo, & Marshall, 2007), strengthens supplier relationships (Baker, 1990), facilitates knowledge acquisition (Yli-Renko, Autio, & Sapienza, 2001), and creates value within the firm (Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998). Salespeople are known to use their social network resources to strategically acquire and align appropriate resources to influence the sales outcome (Plouffe & Barclay, 2007) and garner customer support (Tuli et al., 2007).

Similarly, power and reputation, grounded in past successes or competencies, can also be effective resources. Power has an impact on supply chain relationship satisfaction (Benton & Maloni, 2005), trust (Doney & Cannon, 1997), and loyalty (Morris & Holman, 1988) in buyer-seller relationships. Further, reputation brings credibility, which is a desired characteristic of effective salespeople (Deeter-Schmelz, Goebel, & Kennedy, 2008). Favorable reputations have a positive effect on the quality of the relationship between salespeople and customers (Boles, Johnson, & Barksdale Jr., 2000). This study uses professional reputation, position, power, responsibility, and networking relationship inside and outside the firm as elements of *personal accumulated resources*.

3.8. Summary of salesperson resources

Summarizing the foregoing disquisition, we assert that the seven broad kinds of resources differ in terms of domain, ease of accessibility, costs of obtaining and expending, and relative expected return on investment. Firm-based tangible, firm-based intangible, and firm market-based intangible resources are *external* to the salesperson; personal tangible, personal knowledge, personal skills, and personal accumulated success are *internal* to the salesperson. A summary of resources available to salespeople with their respective definition, components, and pertinent source are presented in Table 2.

We subsequently detail the types of customers salespeople manage and the resources they employ in dealing with these different customers. This is important because misalignment of resources with a given customer type can have serious negative consequences for salespeople. Prior to this discussion, though, we present our overarching theoretical framework—social exchange theory—to anchor hypothesis development.

Table 2
Summary of seven types of resources available to salespeople.

Resources		Definition	Components	References
Salesperson's external resources	FTANGIBLE Firm-based tangible resources	Tangible or quantifiable assets of the firm	• Selling expenses • Physical infrastructure • Plants, buildings	• Barney, 1991 • Wernerfelt, 1984
	FINTANGIBLE Firm-based intangible resources	Unique process capabilities, knowledge-based capital, and core competencies of the firm	• Customer relationship management • Customer intelligence • Unique processes (e.g. supply chain management, enterprise resource planning, human resources, technology, and security management) • Knowledge development	• Wernerfelt, 1984 • Dumitrescu, 2012 • Vargo & Lusch, 2004
	FMARBAS Firm market-based intangible resources	Intangible and external to the firm and not quantifiable on the balance sheet of the firm	• Brand reputation • Partnership and/or alliance reputations • Market share position	• Dumitrescu, 2012 • Srivastava, Shervani, & Fahey, 1998
Salesperson's internal resources	MTANGIBLE Personal tangible resources	Quantifiable or tangible elements of the salesperson	• Standard working time • Personal time • Professional appearance • Physical features	• Knoll & Transkersley, 1991 • Bloom & Reve, 1990 • Burgoon & Hoobler 1994
	MKNOWLED Personal knowledge	Knowledge of the salesperson	• Knowledge of assigned products/services • Knowledge of assigned customers • Knowledge of competitors • Knowledge of assigned industry • Knowledge of assigned territory	• Slater & Narver, 1998 • Tuli, Kohli, & Bharadwaj, 2007 • Wietz et al. 1996
	MSKILLS Personal skills	Procedural competence of the salesperson	• Selling skills • Selling techniques • Selling strategies and tactics	• Verbeke et al., 2011 • Weitz, Sujan, & Sujan, 1986 • Szymanski, 1988
	MSUCCESS Personal accumulated success	Social networks, power, position, and reputation of the salesperson	• Professional reputation • Professional position • Professional power • Professional responsibility • Professional networking relationship inside the firm • Professional networking relationship outside the firm	• Plouffe & Barclay, 2007 • Tuli et al., 2007 • Benton & Maloni, 2005 • Bourdieu, 2008

4. Social exchange theory and relationship stages

Social exchange theory posits that “relationships grow, develop, deteriorate, and dissolve as a consequence of an unfolding social-exchange process, which may be conceived as a bartering of rewards and costs both between the partners and between members of the partnership and others” (Huston & Burgess, 1974, p. 4). They begin small and continue to develop based on the individuals' satisfaction and their comparison of alternatives (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). During this process, the involved parties constantly compare benefits and costs of their relationship in terms of what they believe they deserve (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978).

Similarly, buyer-seller relationships evolve through stages (Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987; Jap & Ganesan, 2000). From relationship initiation to development, maintenance, and dissolution, various relationship mechanisms—including resources and strategies—are deployed (Ford, 1980). Essentially, the buyer-seller relationship starts small, and relationship satisfaction is based on cost/benefit trade-offs. If the perceived benefits exceed perceived costs, both parties are motivated to continue investing resources in the relationship to perpetuate receipt of those benefits. Continuing to receive benefits exceeding costs deepens the buyer-seller relationship, which then progresses from relationship initiation to relationship development, and then relationship maintenance (Ford, 1980). If costs surpass benefits, though, relationship dissolution could occur (Dwyer et al., 1987). Desired satisfaction in previous stages of a relationship encourages increased levels of resource investment in the relationship (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959).

The preceding discussion suggests key features of a buyer-seller relationship. First, supplier-buyer relationships are not stagnant; they change over time (Jap, 2001; Jap & Ganesan, 2000). They typically begin with transactional focus and then gradually evolve to relational exchanges (Williamson, 1979) and value creation (Vargo & Lusch, 2004) as the underlying reasons (Dywer et al. 1987; Jap & Ganesan, 2000; Wilson, 1995). Second, relationships are composed of distinct stages (Dwyer et al., 1987). Third, each stage requires different relationship management strategies (Srivastava et al., 1998). Finally, the value of the relationship at each stage (Niraj, Gupta, & Narasimhan, 2001), as well as contextual characteristics (Reinartz, Krafft, & Hoyer, 2004), varies.

Although scholars use different terms, the buyer-seller relationship stages seemingly can be subsumed under the following: exploration, development, maintenance, and dissolution. Arguably, the notion of stages implies a longitudinal framework. In this study, though, we argue that this phenomenon could manifest itself with all four types of customers (Bolton, 1998; Woodruff, 1997) present concurrently in a salesperson's portfolio of buyers. In other words, if we take the entire set of customers in a salesperson's portfolio at one point in time, we are likely to find existence of all four types of customers (i.e., customers are not homogeneous [Bolton, 1998; Woodruff, 1997]), thus requiring the seller to juggle demands of these variegated customers by strategically acquiring and aligning needed resources and capabilities to influence the sales process (Plouffe & Barclay, 2007).

5. Types of customers and resource utilization strategies during interest-generation stage: study hypotheses

Consistent with the sales literature, four customer types were used in the present investigation: new customers, short-term customers, long-term customers, and win-back (lost) customers (Bolton, 1998; Woodruff, 1997). Moreover, buyer-seller relationship models either explicitly or implicitly allude to these four types of customers (Dywer et al., 1987; Ford, 1980; Heidi, 1994; Jap & Ganesan, 2000; Wilson, 1995; Zhang et al., 2016). These customers differ in their needs and the manner in which salespeople approach them (Bolton, 1998; Woodruff, 1997). They also vary in their expectations of value and relationship ambience (Dywer et al., 1987; Ford, 1980; Heidi, 1994; Jap & Ganesan,

Table 3
Summary of relationship stages and customer types.

New customer		Short-term customer		Long-term customer		Win-back customer	
Exploration		Development		Maintenance		Dissolution	
Customer ● Be aware of attraction (Heidi, 1994)	*Salesperson* ● Impress (Leigh & Summers, 2002) ● Socialize (Leigh & Summers, 2002)	*Customer* ● Monitor and measure performance against expectation (Garbarino & Johnson, 1991) ● Explore new capabilities (Jap, 2001)	*Salesperson* ● Exceed expectations (Dwyer et al., 1987) ● Demonstrate flexibility, adaptability, and accommodation (Challagalla et al., 2009; Dwyer et al., 1987) ● Provide assurance (Berverland et al., 22,007) ● Demonstrate expertise (Ustuner & Iacobucci, 2012b)	*Customer* ● Continue to monitor and measure performance against expectation (Dwyer et al., 1987) ● Rely on salesperson as expert and friend (Dwyer et al., 1987; Jap & Ganesan, 2000)	*Salesperson* ● Expand beyond original terms (Bolton, 1998; Homburg et al., 2002) ● Adjust inequity (Bolton, 1998; Homburg et al., 2002) ● Expand social networks	*Customer* ● Monitor new attraction (Heidi, 1994)	*Salesperson* ● Utilize mutual social networks (Tokman, Davis, & Lemon, 2007) ● Impress (Leigh & Summers, 2002) ● Socialize (Leigh & Summers, 2002)
*Lowest ROI (Griffin & Lowenstein, 2002)		*Highest ROI (Griffin & Lowenstein, 2002)		*Highest ROI (Griffin & Lowenstein, 2001)		*Higher ROI than new customers (Griffin & Lowenstein, 2002)	

(continued on next page)

Table 3 (*continued*)

2000; Wilson, 1995; Zhang et al., 2016). In fact, from a salesperson's perspective, the four customer types differ in the probability of successful sales closing. For example, a firm has a 60 to 70% chance of successfully selling to existing customers; 20 to 40%, to lost customers; and 5 to 6%, to new prospects (Griffin & Lowenstein, 2002). Furthermore, dealing with each customer type may require alternative strategies and resources. In addition, salespeople conceivably would spend more resources on a prime prospect with a higher propensity of buying than on a new prospect with lower purchase potential (e.g., Dubinsky & Skinner, 2002).

Next, we expatiate on each customer type and develop hypotheses capturing the alignment between resources used by salespeople and customer type. A summary of the relationship stage, corresponding customer type, and pertinent resource type is presented in Table 3.

5.1. Allocation of resources to new customers

New customers in this study are defined as customers who have had no prior relationship with the firm. They conceivably are in the exploration stage of the relationship. Drawing on Dwyer et al.'s (1987) conceptualization of relationship stages, the initial stage of the relationship is where no prior interactions have taken place and awareness of the value potentially offered by the other party catalyzes the inception of the relationship. From the customer's point of view, relationship attractiveness comes from two sources: the selling firm and the representatives of the selling firm. A firm's brand reputation, alliances and partnerships, and extant customers are indicative of the capacity for attractiveness of the selling firm during the awareness phase of relationship initiation (Dwyer et al., 1987; Srivastava et al., 1998). In addition, the potential to have a fruitful and desirable relationship with the representatives of the selling firm offers another source of value (Reinhard, Messner, & Sporer, 2006).

From the perspective of salespeople, the purpose of initial engagement is to attract prospects and elicit their willingness to continue the interaction. Salespeople may well spend more time educating new customers on the capabilities of the selling firm than with other kinds of customers. Salespeople may engage in impression management, rapport building, and socialization processes to create a positive image of the selling firm and of themselves. One way to accomplish this is to disclose as much information about the firm and themselves as possible. However, this strategy can backfire if the disclosure is not reciprocated by customers (Crosby et al., 1990; Macintosh, Anglin, Szymanski, & Gentry, 1992). Thus, high-performance salespeople often strategically structure the flow of communication so that new prospects disclose information initially (Macintosh et al., 1992).

Compared with sales calls to existing customers, sales calls to new prospects are often "cold" (vs. "warm") and business oriented (vs. relational) and present a greater risk of rejection and ego depletion (Leigh & Summers, 2002; Lewandowski, Ciarocco, Pettenato, & Stephan, 2012). Moreover, at this juncture salespeople likely have minimal role in influencing and developing relationship satisfaction (Jap, 2001). Faced with high uncertainty, reduced probability of closing the sale, minimal influence, and augmented risk of perceived objections, salespeople are likely to have decreased proclivity to call on new prospects (Fu, Jones, & Bolander, 2008). Indeed, they putatively would rather call on existing clients than on "cold" prospects, as making new contacts is replete with salesperson anxiety (Verbeke & Bagozzi, 2000). If required, salespeople tend to use direct and expeditiously available resources with new prospects because such resources consume less time and effort (Mohr & Nevin, 1990).

As such, salespeople would generally utilize resources that are relatively abundant *and* easily accessible. Of the seven types of resources, we argue that firm-level resources—especially market-based ones—are more likely to be easily and evenly available to all salespeople. Although professional appearance and physical attributes may help build rapport and positively affect relationship quality (Crosby et al., 1990; Leigh & Summers, 2002; Nickels, Everett, & Klein, 1983; Reinhard et al., 2006), time is a perishable commodity. Thus, salespeople are less likely to invest their personal resources in new customers, save for their knowledge which could be accessed and manifested efficaciously. Hence, we propose the following:

H1. a: When approaching new customers during the interest-generation stage, salespeople are more likely to utilize the following *external* resources: (a) firm market-based vis-à-vis firm-based intangible or firm-based tangible resources.

b: When approaching new customers during the interest-generation stage, salespeople are more likely to utilize the following *internal* resources: (b) personal knowledge vis-à-vis personal skills, personal tangible, or personal accumulated success resources.

5.2. Allocation of resources to short-term customers

In this study, short-term customers are those who have had some purchase experience with the seller, and seemingly their perceptions of the salesperson's performance exceed their expectations. At this stage, most likely "development," relationships with salespeople are emerging but have not yet evolved to the maintenance stage (Dwyer et al., 1987). The main source of value and relationship satisfaction for these customers stems from salespeople's exceeding buyer expectations (Dwyer et al., 1987; Garbarino & Johnson, 1999). Expectations of past purchases, performance of salespeople, and capabilities of the selling firm serve as a base line for future interactions. Moreover, shared interests and commitment intentions serve as a foundation for further relationship development (Dwyer et al., 1987).

From the customer's perspective, the relationship is blossoming. Initial investments during the awareness stage have proven to be fruitful. This likely results in greater investment in the relationship and exploration for new engagement opportunities, given that expectations of future value are greater than the costs incurred (Jap, 2001). The short-term nature of the relationship, though, still implies insufficient knowledge and understanding of the value of the other party (compared with long-term or even win-back customers). Conceivably, short-term customers perceive a higher degree of relational uncertainty than do long-term customers (Young, Curran, & Totenhagen, 2013).

The goals of salespeople at this stage are to deepen the relationship and to identify more sales opportunities by satisfying customers with their prior purchases and by continuously projecting a profitable future relationship. Rejections are less likely, and relationship ambience is warmer than with new prospects. The probability of successfully selling to short-term customers is second highest (only lower than to long-term customers) (Griffin & Lowenstein, 2002). Given the short duration of the relationship, appropriate strategies seek to provide assurances and reduce uncertainties in order to foster relationship quality (Beverland, Farrelly, & Woodhatch, 2007; Challagalla, Venkatesh, & Kohli, 2009). Strategic usage of personal self-disclosure through open communication, assurances through frequent communication, and interdependence through development of networks of relationships are among the most successful relationship enhancement strategies (Dindia, 1991; Dindia & Baxter, 1987; Stafford & Canary, 1991). However, misuse of these selling strategies (skills) can contribute to relationship deterioration (Guerrero, Eloy, & Wabnik, 1993). After all, trust has not yet developed, but satisfaction remains a key value driver for short-term customers (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999). Conceivably, resources are used to build relationship satisfaction, not trust, with short-term customers.

Proactively, salespeople can reach out to other participants of the buying team to develop shared interests and solicit feedback (Beverland, Farrelly, & Woodhatch, 2007). Feedback seeking gives salespeople opportunity to empathize with customers if they encounter difficulties in using the firm's products (Anderson, Dubinsky, & Mehta, 2008). Projecting shared interests and communicating frequently with customers can enable salespeople to uncover new challenges and new desired value changes in the customer's environment (Challagalla, Venkatesh, & Kohli, 2009). However, there is also a danger that salespeople may become complacent with short-term customers and take them for granted. They might think that these customers are already in the bag and so do the bare minimum to maintain the relationship. This may be further reinforced by short-term customers showing eagerness to strengthen relationship (Jap, 2001). Yet, additional sales opportunities can be identified from understanding the business and personal environment challenges, as well as opportunities of the multiple stakeholders of the buying firm (Ustuner & Godes, 2006). Engagement of other expertise within the selling firm broadens the customer's social networks (Ustuner & Iacobucci, 2012). These efforts infer salesperson use of a network of relationships derived from the accumulated success resources of salespeople.

In addition to strategic communication and social network extension, inducements (e.g., a firm's financial resources) can help build personal relationships with customers. Examples of inducements include entertainment, gifts, lunch, and special favors that can demonstrate salespeople's personal interests in customers (Goodwin & Gremler, 1996; Price & Arnould, 1999). Such incentives can develop and maintain relationships with customers by providing positive experiences and favorable impressions (Bird, 1989; Crosby et al., 1990; McMaster, 2001). The foregoing disquisition allows the following hypotheses to be posited:

H2. a: When approaching short-term customers during the interest-generation stage, salespeople are more likely to use the following *external* resources: (a) firm tangible vis-à-vis firm intangible and firm-market-based resources.

b and c: When approaching short-term customers during the interest-generation stage, salespeople are more likely to utilize the following *internal* resources: (b) personal skills and (c) personal knowledge vis-à-vis personal tangible and personal accumulated success resources.

5.3. Allocation of resources to long-term customers

Long-term customers have had a longer relationship than a short-term customer and are interested in deepening the relationship. Compared with new and short-term customers, relationships with long-term customers are more enduring. They are most likely to be in the maintenance stage (Dwyer et al., 1987). Recent work suggests that the longer a customer knows a salesperson, the greater the likelihood that the buyer will negotiate for a discount and be granted one (Wieseke, Alavi, & Habel, 2014a; 2014b).

According to Dwyer et al. (1987), a relationship evolves to the maintenance stage when previous engagements have proved to be successful. In addition, social exchange theory predicts that investment sizes, previous outcomes in the relationship, and paucity of readily available sound alternatives serve to enhance relationship interdependence (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). Repeated purchases of long-term customers create relationship-specific resources (e.g., time, effort, procedures, knowledge of the selling firm's offerings, affective states, skills, site resources) (Anderson & Narus, 1990; Williamson, 1979). These increase switching costs for long-term customers owing to idiosyncratic investments they have made in the business relationship (Heide & John, 1990; Heide & Weiss, 1995; Williamson, 1979).

Specifically indicative of relationship quality with long-term customers are trust and commitment (Ford, 1980), whereas short-term customers rely on satisfaction (Dwyer et al., 1987; Garbarino & Johnson, 1999). Long-term customers also expect salespeople to be their experts and friends (Dwyer et al., 1987). Long-term customers value intensive communication-sharing activities and knowledge of salespeople (Bolton, 1998; Homburg, Workman Jr., & Jensen, 2002; Swan, Bowers, & Richardson, 1999). Knowledge can confer industry expert status and is a predictor of customer trust (Crosby et al., 1990; Doney & Cannon, 1997). Given the duration of the relationship, long-term customers enjoy special treatment, such as selection of provision of processes, customization of offerings, or joint coordination of workflow (Bolton, 1998; Homburg, Workman, & Jensen, 2002). These privileges stem from the internal processes of the selling firm (firm-based intangible resources).

From the salesperson's perspective, long-term customers are most lucrative having the highest return on investment. They have the highest probability of generating new sales opportunities (Griffin & Lowenstein, 2002). On-going opportunities to identify new sales opportunities depend on the quality of the current relationship (Crosby et al., 1990). As such, salespeople conceivably will use all available resources to identify and qualify new opportunities with long-term customers, provided the customers value such resources. Strategic use of selling- related strategies, skills (e.g., adaptability, dependability, likeability), and knowledge fosters trust (Swan, Bowers, & Richardson, 1999). The preceding dialectic thus leads to the following hypotheses:

H3. a: When approaching long-term customers during the interest-generation stage, salespeople are more likely to utilize the following *external* resources: (a) firm-based intangible vis-à-vis firm-based tangible and market-based intangible resources.

b, c, and d: When approaching long-term customers during the interest-generation stage, salespeople are more likely to utilize the following *internal* resources: (b) personal knowledge, (c) personal skills, and (d) personal accumulated success vis-à-vis personal tangible resources.

5.4. Allocation of resources to win-back customers

Win-back (lost) customers are former customers of the firm who have switched to competitors for some reasons. The salesperson may be interested in reviving the relationship or has been told to revive it (Dywer et al., 1987; Heidi, 1994, Jap & Ganesan, 2000). Ganesh, Arnold, and Reynolds's (2000) work shows that these lost customers can be satisfied or dissatisfied with the firm. If they are dissatisfied with the firm, they are most likely to be active in establishing relationships with competing firms. Dissatisfied erstwhile customers tend to exhibit higher levels of satisfaction in their new relationships with competitors than when they were with their former supplier, as they try to convince themselves that they made the right decision to switch (Ganesh, Arnold, & Reynolds, 2000). This group of lost customers is difficult to win back (Jones & Sasser, 1995). If they are satisfied lost customers, they are likely to have changed for better value offered by competitors (Naumann, Haverila, Sajid Khan, & Williams, 2010). Such customers tend to become price sensitive (Thomas, Blattberg, & Fox, 2004), and pricing incentives may work for these win-back customers (Rigby & Ledingham, 2004). Engaging in a price war, though, is detrimental to the economic value for the firm. Recognizing the cost of a price war, firms attempt to limit their salespeople's pricing authority and encourage them to sell on value rather than solely on price (Kissan, 2001). Thus, to some extent, salespeople experience constraints when they try to win back this group of price-conscious customers.

Based on Dwyer et al.'s (1987) conceptualization, the relationship with win-back customers is in the dissolution stage. Empirical work suggests that extra support, attention, and mutual social capital afforded win-back customers are perceived as value in retail settings (Tokman, Davis, & Lemon, 2007). Though the relationship between lost customers and the selling firm is likely adverse—suggesting a possible rejection of firm-based resources— firms do try to win back lost customers. While wining lost customers may prove to be expensive, the return on investment (ROI) of win-back customers has been discerned to be 214% compared with an ROI of 23% for new prospects (Stauss & Friege, 1999).

Win-back customers were once familiar with the firm-based resources of the selling firm, owing to previous interactions. Notwithstanding their familiarity, the relationship was dissolved. The presumptions here are that the firm has not changed ownership, but a new salesperson has been assigned to the win-back customer. Moreover, reviving and rebuilding relationships with win-back customers are, to some extent, similar to building new relationships, but on wonkier ground. Therefore, initial attraction is still needed to establish rapport similarity, reliability, and status (Leigh & Summers, 2002; Nickels, Everett, & Klein, 1983). However, the source of this attraction now stems mainly from the newly-assigned salesperson rather than from the selling firm. In addition, win-back customers are similar to new prospects in that they require a certain amount of "hunting" activities (Sinha & Zoltners, 2001). Arguably, hunting, or acquiring win-back customers, is likely to exhaust more resources than retaining short- and long-term customers.

This suggests that salespeople are more likely to use internal resources to attract and revive relationships with win-back customers. Conceivably, the extra support and services applied to previous engagements may be useful. After all, the erstwhile relationship was terminated because of unsuccessful previous engagements. Obviously, there are reasons beyond a firm's control for losing satisfied customers. The focus in this study, though, is on lost customers who have switched to competitors due to controllable factors. Approaching win-back customers with the intent of reviving them and overcoming previous failures or clearing up previous misunderstandings requires a high level of problem-solving skills, emotional intelligence, and empathic ability (Kidwell, Hardesty, Murtha, & Sheng, 2011). The preceding discussion leads to the following hypothesis:

H4. When approaching win-back customers during the interest-generation stage, salespeople are more likely to utilize internal than external resources.

5.5. *Summary of relationship stages and customer types*

Interaction between a customer and salesperson—even in a pure transaction (Anderson and Narus, 1990)—typically reflects a relationship-building process (e.g., Dwyer et al., 1987; Jolson, 1997; Zhang et al., 2016). During the relationship-building process, different relationship-migration mechanisms are deployed (Zhang et al., 2016), which implies utilization of various resources.

6. Method

Following Churchill (1979), Nunnally (1978), and Gerbing and Anderson (1988), development of the resource utilization scale followed three distinct stages. First, an extensive review of the literature identified seven types of resources at the disposal of salespeople during the selling process. Then, each resource was listed on a separate index card for seven MBA students performing the Q-sorting function (Walsh & Beatty, 2007). The use of students in pretesting stages of scale development is common in the literature (e.g., Bush & Ingram, 2001; Mitrega, Forkmann, Ramos, & Henneberg, 2012); to be compatible with that extant work, then, students were utilized in this study. The students were instructed to sort all resources into seven categories, as the objective was to identify ambiguous descriptions of the resources. Resources classified in multiple categories were removed (e.g., "research and development" was sorted into firm market-based, firm intangible, and firm tangible categories and was, therefore, removed). Once categorization of resources was completed, thirty-one statements were created using the remaining resource cards. These were reviewed by two marketing professors and two experienced salespeople for face validity and content validity. Their feedback was used to reword some of the statements for enhanced clarity.

Next, the thirty-one items were given to 653 undergraduate students with instructions to use the resources across all four types of customers as if they were salespeople attempting to identify new sales opportunities. The responses to the items were measured using a five-point Likert scale, with 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. Only surveys completed by those with selling experience ($n = 77$) were retained for pre-test analyses.

Because each participant was instructed to use the resources across all four types of customers (to simulate four customer types faced by a salesperson), this procedure produced 308 (77×4) responses for each resource. This new dataset ($n = 308$) was used to factor analyze the thirty-one items. After two iterations, 25 items were retained based on high correlations within constructs and no cross loadings above 0.50. These analyses resulted in six factors instead of seven. The eight items measuring knowledge and skills resources were grouped into one factor. The remaining factors were personal tangible, accumulated successes, firm tangible, firm-based intangible, and market-based intangible resources. All six factors achieved an acceptable Cronbach alpha (> 0.70) (Nunnally, 1978). After additional review and feedback, three items were added to constitute a total of 28 items. These 28 items were used for the main study.

6.1. *Sample*

Respondents for the final study came from a panel of participants at an established and reputable research firm. Data were collected online. Each participant—a salesperson in product or services selling—was randomly assigned to one of the four types of customers (new, short-term, long-term, and win-back customers) with instructions to write the name of the assigned customer type prior to answering the resource utilization questions. This was done to ensure that participants mentally stayed connected to that specific customer type when completing the questionnaire. If participants did not insert the customer type, the survey was omitted. A total of 346 usable questionnaires were obtained. Of the 346 participants, 60.7% were male. Average age was 45 years; mean work experience, 24.76 years; and 92.6% worked for companies with revenues of less than $10 billion. Portrayed in Tables 4a and 4b are the demographic characteristics of the respondents and their firms.

The 28 items were subjected to principal components factor analysis with Varimax rotation to ensure that correlation-based grouping yielded seven factors with the new data, and they did. Four items measured salesperson tangible resources ($\alpha = 0.78$); 5, salesperson knowledge resources ($\alpha = 0.85$); 3, salesperson skills resources ($\alpha = 0.91$); 6, salesperson accumulated success resources ($\alpha = 0.88$); 3, firm-based tangible resources ($\alpha = 0.79$); 3, market-based intangible resources ($\alpha = 0.83$); and 4, firm-based intangible resources ($\alpha = 0.89$). The factors loadings were acceptable (Churchill, 1979;

Table 4a
Respondent demographic characteristics.

Respondent's age in years	Mean (Std. Dev.)	45.33 (13.04)
Total sales work experiences in years	Mean (Std. Dev.)	17.75 (11.16)
Total work experiences in years	Mean (Std. Dev.)	24.76 (13.15)
Gender	Male	60.7%
	Female	39.3%
Sales position	Inside sales	22.3%
	Account representative	19.8%
	Account manager	26.9%
	Sales supervisor	20.7%
	Customer support	5.6%
	Other	4.6%
Annual income	< 50 K	17.3%
	50 K– < 70 K	24.3%
	70 K– < 90 K	20.2%
	90 K– < 120 K	19.9%
	120 K– < 150 K	9.2%
	150 K– < 200 K	4.9%
	> 200 K	4.0%

Table 4b
Respondent firm demographic characteristics.

Company type	Original manufacturers/service providers	38.4%
	Intermediaries/distributors/wholesalers	33.4%
	Other	28.2%
Company revenue	< 1 M	13%
	1 M–10 M	22.9%
	10 M–50 M	17%
	50 M–100 M	12.1%
	100 M-1B	16.7%
	1B-10B	10.8%
	10B-50B	3.1%
	More than 50B	4.3%

Nunnally, 1978).

This was followed by a confirmatory factory analysis (CFA) using Lisrel 9.2 *without* common factor loadings (Table 5). Following Hu and Bentler's (1999) combination rule, multiple global fit indices were used to assess the fit of the CFA model. The results revealed an acceptable fit for the measurement model: χ^2 (329) = 861.68, goodness of fit index (GFI) = 0.85, adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI) = 0.81, confirmatory fit index (CFI) = 0.98, normed fit index (NFI) = 0.96, non-normed fit index (NNFI) = 0.97, standardized root mean square (SRMR) = 0.07, and root mean square error of approximation RMSEA = 0.069, with 90% CI (0.063; 0.074) at $p < 0.05$ (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Iacobucci, 2010; Sharma, Mukherjee, Kumar, & Dillon, 2005). Finally, a second CFA was conducted to assess the presence of common method bias (CMB) by including a common factor, and all item variances for the common factor were set to unity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). This analysis resulted in the following fit indices: χ^2 (294) = 662.00, (CFI) = 0. 98, (GFI) = 0.88, (AGFI) = 0.83, (NFI) = 0.97, (NNFI) = 0.98, (SRMR) = 0.042, and (RMSEA) = 0.060, with 90% CI (0.054; 0.066) at $p < 0.0.05$. The $\Delta\chi^2$ of 199.68 (df = 35) was significant at $p < 0.05$. In addition, Harman's single-factor test indicated that the variance explained by one factor was < 50% (42.7%). Together, these indicate the presence of common method bias, especially in the internal resources, but not too markedly (Carson, 2007).

All items loaded significantly on the seven hypothesized resource utilization constructs. Composite reliability values of all seven constructs were above 0.7, thus supporting convergent validity. All average variance extracted (AVE) values were above 0.5 and exceeded the corresponding squared phi coefficients, thus supporting discriminant validity. In addition, the square of the correlation between each pair of constructs was smaller than the AVE for each associated construct, which further supported discriminant validity of the scale (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Together, these results offered support for convergent, discriminant, and construct validity (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Details of these analyses are presented in Tables 6 and 7.

7. Results

The general linear model and Tukey test were used to test all hypotheses. Tukey was chosen because the test adjusts for multiple comparisons (Dunnett, 1955). Because all hypotheses stated that a particular *type of resource* would be utilized more than the *other type(s) of resources*, the mean of the resource type(s) of interest must be significantly different *and* greater vis-à-vis the mean of the other type(s) of resources (i.e., the "comparison" group[*s*], per each hypothesis) for a hypothesis to be supported.

When approaching *new customers* during interest generation stage, H1a stated that salespeople are more likely to utilize firm market-based external resources than firm-based intangible or firm-based tangible external resources. H1b proposed that sales personnel would use personal knowledge internal resources more than personal skills, personal tangible, and personal accumulated success internal resources when approaching new customers during the interest generation stage. For *external* resources, the model was significant (M = 4.98, df = 81, $p < 0.01$) for new customers. The results showed that Fmarbas (M = 5.35) was significantly different from Fintangib (M = 5.01, $p < 0.05$) and Ftangible (M = 4.57, $p < 0.01$)—so, H_{1a} was supported. For *internal* resources, the model was also significant (M = 5.19, df = 82, $p < 0.01$). The findings revealed that Mknowled (M = 5.45) was not significantly different from Mskills (M = 5.55, $p = 0.87$) or Msuccess (M = 5.16, $p = 0.09$), but significantly different from Mtangible (M = 4.62; $p < 0.01$). As such, H_{1b} received partial supported.

Table 5
Confirmatory factor analysis of resource utilization constructs.

Items	Without common factor		With common factor	
	Std λ	*t*-value	Std λ	*t*-value
Salespeople tangible resources: MTANGIBLE				
My standard working time	0.47	8.52	0.23	3.69
My personal time	0.56	10.81	0.45	6.81
My professional appearance	0.86	17.52	0.81	10.19
My physical features	0.88	λ set to 1	0.96	λ set to 1
Salespeople knowledge: MKNOWLED				
My knowledge of my assigned products/services	0.69	12.86	0.43	4.72
My knowledge of my assigned customers	0.77	λ set to 1	0.57	λ set to 1
My knowledge of my competitors	0.7	13.12	0.65	5.85
My knowledge of my assigned industry	0.76	14.38	0.67	6.18
My knowledge of my assigned selling territory	0.75	14.29	0.57	5.74
Salespeople skills: MSKILLS				
My professional selling skills	0.89	24.3	0.86	11.91
My professional selling techniques	0.91	λ set to 1	0.88	λ set to 1
My professional selling strategies and tactics	0.86	22.44	0.70	10.84
Salespeople accumulated successes: MSUCCESS				
My professional reputation	0.79	15.32	0.57	7.45
My professional position	0.82	16.18	0.98	8.18
My professional power	0.77	λ set to 1	0.86	λ set to 1
My professional responsibility	0.76	14.71	0.43	5.77
My professional networking relationships inside the firm	0.66	12.66	0.28	3.57
My professional networking relationships outside the firm	0.66	12.46	0.24	3.13
Firm tangible: FTANGIBLE				
My firm's selling expenses	0.49	9.72	0.43	6.62
My firm's physical infrastructure	0.92	λ set to 1	0.79	λ set to 1
My firm's plant and/or building	0.87	18.97	0.86	12.39
Firm market base: FMARBAS				
My firm's brand reputation	0.73	14.95	0.46	7.22
My firm's partnerships and/or alliances reputations	0.82	17.39	0.62	9.16
My firm's market share of products/services position	0.84	λ set to 1	0.90	λ set to 1
Firm intangible: FINTANGIB				
My firm's unique processes in customer relationship management	0.85	λ set to 1	0.81	λ set to 1
My firm's unique processes in customer intelligence	0.87	20.42	0.81	13.29
My firm's unique processes (SC; ERP; HR; Fin, Tech & Security Mgmt.)	0.78	17.76	0.68	10.81
My firm's unique processes in knowledge development	0.81	15.42	0.58	10.01

Lead in question: "Compared with other types of customers (items above) is (are) used the most when I identify and qualify new opportunities with this type of customer…".
Note: SC, supply chain; ERP, enterprise resource planning; HR, human resources; Fin., financial; Tech., technological.

Table 6
Mean, standard deviation, alpha, AVE, CR, and correlation for the resource utilization construct.

	Mean	Std. Dev.	α	AVE	CR	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. MTANGIBLE	4.49	1.29	0.78	0.51	0.68	<u>0.72</u>	0.24	0.16	0.26	0.26	0.18	0.22
2. MKNOWLED	5.41	1.06	0.85	0.54	0.76	0.50	<u>0.73</u>	0.39	0.49	0.10	0.36	0.29
3. MSKILLS	5.41	1.18	0.91	0.79	0.90	0.38	0.72	<u>0.89</u>	0.39	0.11	0.26	0.19
4. MSUCCESS	5.14	1.10	0.88	0.56	0.81	0.50	0.81	0.69	<u>0.75</u>	0.23	0.32	0.36
5. FTANGIBLE	4.37	1.42	0.79	0.62	0.75	0.47	0.40	0.39	0.55	<u>0.78</u>	0.23	0.29
6. FMARBAS	5.13	1.28	0.83	0.64	0.77	0.48	0.69	0.56	0.63	0.58	<u>0.79</u>	0.56
7. FINTANGIB	4.98	1.37	0.89	0.69	0.86	0.48	0.62	0.49	0.66	0.61	0.86	<u>0.83</u>

√AVE is reported along the diagonal.
CR composite reliability.
Phi matrix ᶲ are reported in the lower half of the matrix.
Phi squared are reported in the upper half of the matrix.

When dealing with *short-term* customers, H2a posited that salespeople are more likely to utilize firm tangible external resources compared with firm intangible and firm market-based external resources. Also, personal skills (H2b) and personal knowledge (H2c) internal resources were posited as being more likely to be used compared with personal tangible and personal accumulated success internal resources. For *external* resources, the model was significant (M = 4.52, df = 88, $p < 0.01$). Findings revealed that Ftangible (M = 4.00) was significantly different from Fintangib (M = 4.73, p < 0.01) and Fmarbas (M = 4.82, p < 0.01). However, Ftangible had the *lowest* mean (M = 4.00), indicating that it was the least likely resource to be used vis-à-vis the other two external resources. So, H_{2a} did not receive support. For *internal* resources, the model was significant (M = 4.89, df = 89, $p < 0.01$). The results demonstrated that Mskills (M = 5.24) was significantly different from Mtangible (M = 4.34, $p < 01$) and Msuccess (M = 4.87, $p < 0.01$). Thus H_{2b} received support. Also, Mknowled (M = 5.12) was significantly different from Msuccess (M = 4.87, $p < 0.01$) and Mtangible (M = 4.34, p < 0.01), thus leading to support for H_{2c}.

When managing *long-term* customers, H3a proposed that salespeople are more likely to utilize firm-based intangible external resources compared with firm-based tangible and market-based intangible external resources. H3b, H3c, and H3d, respectively, stated that salespersons are more likely to employ personal knowledge, personal skills, and personal accumulated success compared with personal tangible internal resources. For *external* resources, the model was significant (M = 4.98, df = 87, $p < 0.01$). Fintangib (M = 5.17) was not significantly different from Fmarbas (M = 5.26, p = 5.26) but was significantly different from Ftangible (M = 4.50, $p < 0.01$). Thus, H_{3a} received partial support. For *internal* resources, the model was significant (M = 5.16, df = 88, p < 0.01). Mknowled (M = 5.56) was significantly different from Mtangible (M = 4.54, p < 0.01). Thus, H_{3b} was supported. Mskills (M = 5.23) was significantly different from Mtangible (M = 4.54, p < 0.01). So, H_{3c} received support. Msuccess (M = 5.33) was significantly different from Mtangible (M = 4.54, p < 0.01), thus leading to acceptance of H_{3d}.

H4 propounded that salespeople are more likely to utilize internal than external resources when approaching *win-back customers* during interest-generation stage. This hypothesis was tested by comparing the average of *external* resources with the average of *internal* resources. The results showed that Minternal (M = 5.21) was significantly different from Fexternal (M = 4.84, p < 0.01). Thus, H_4 was supported. Shown in Tables 8 and 9 is a summary of the hypotheses and results. Depicted graphically in Fig. 1 are means of each kind of resource by customer type.

8. Discussion

Successful salespeople are required to deliver superior value to their customers and to produce profitable outcomes for their firm while enveloped by ever-increasing customer expectations, intense competition, and finite resources. They likely have different types of customers in their portfolio—new, short-term, long-term, and win-back. As such, utilizing the appropriate resources for the right customers to gain desired outcomes is a challenge for salespeople. To achieve these sometime conflicting goals, salespeople take on the role of entrepreneurs, evaluate the availability of resources to them, assess the importance of resources to each customer, perform benefit/cost analyses, and weigh the expected returns for the resources used.

Against this backdrop, this investigation ascertained seven types of resources available to salespeople for use in generating new sales opportunities during initiating, developing, maintaining, or reviving relationships with customers. Utilization of these seven kinds of resources within the four types of customers was examined using the general linear model and Tukey test. Findings revealed that salespeople do employ different sets of resources for different types of customer. Findings thus lend support to the social exchange theory conceptualization of relationship stages (Dwyer et al., 1987; Hobfoll, 1989; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), as well as the conservation of resources model (Hobfoll, 1989).

In general, firm tangible and market-based resources seem to get used more for new than for the other customer types. However, salesperson's tangible resources apparently are least used among the set of internal resources with new customers. Short-term customers, on the other hand, receive mostly firm intangible and market-based resources as opposed to firm tangible resources. In regard to internal resources,

Table 7
Correlation matrix of the seven resources.

	MPRESEN	MKNOWLED	MSKILLS	MSUCCESS	FTANGIBLE	FMARBAS	FINTANGIBLE
MPRESEN	1.00						
MKNOWLED	0.494	1.00					
MSKILLS	0.412	0.639	1.00				
MSUCCESS	0.519	0.704	0.636	1.00			
FTANGIBLE	0.516	0.338	0.342	0.481	1.00		
FMARBAS	0.430	0.602	0.518	0.571	0.484	1.00	
FINTANGIBLE	0.476	0.548	0.447	0.609	0.547	0.751	1.00

All correlations are significant at the 0.01 level.

Table 8
GLM and Tukey results.

	GLM model of external resource						Mean of resources	Types of resources	Tukey comparison lines with *p*-value			
	Source	df	Sum of squares	Mean square	F-value	p-value						
New customers									FINTANGIBLE	FMARBAS	FTANGIBLE	
	Model	81	308.4	3.8	5.18	< 0.0001	5.01	FINTANGIBLE				
	Error	18	116.11	0.73			5.35	FMARBAS	0.0338			
	Corrected Total	239	424.52				4.57	FTANGIBLE	0.0043	< 0.0001		
									MKNOWLED	MPRESEN	MSKILLS	MSUCCESS
	Model	82	269.27	3.28	5.03	< 0.0001	5.45	MKNOWLED				
	Error	237	154.84	0.65			4.62	MPRESEN	< 0.0001			
	Corrected Total	319	424.11				5.55	MSKILLS	0.8739	< 0.0001		
							5.16	MSUCCESS	0.0954	0.0002	0.0123	
Short-term customers									FINTANGIBLE	FMARBAS	FTANGIBLE	
	Model	88	452.37	5.14	7.33	< 0.0001	4.73	FINTANGIBLE				
	Error	172	120.55	0.7			4.82	FMARBAS	0.7449			
	Corrected Total	260	572.92				4	FTANGIBLE	< 0.0001	< 0.0001		
									MKNOWLED	MPRESEN	MSKILLS	MSUCCESS
	Model	89	395.51	4.44	9.34	< 0.0001	5.12	MKNOWLED				
	Error	258	122.701	0.47			4.34	MPRESEN	< 0.0001			
	Corrected Total	347	518.22				5.24	MSKILLS	0.6308	< 0.0001		
							4.87	MSUCCESS	0.0891	< 0.0001	0.0026	
Long-term customers									FINTANGIBLE	FMARBAS	FTANGIBLE	
	Model	87	315.65	3.62	4.14	< 0.0001	5.17	FINTANGIBLE				
	Error	170	148.87	0.87			5.26	FMARBAS	0.7877			
	Corrected Total	257	464.53				4.5	FTANGIBLE	< 0.0001	< 0.0001		
									MKNOWLED	MPRESEN	MSKILLS	MSUCCESS
	Model	88	365.71	4.15	6.35	< 0.0001	5.56	MKNOWLED				
	Error	255	166.84	0.65			4.54	MPRESEN	< 0.0001			
	Corrected Total	343	532.55				5.23	MSKILLS	0.0388	< 0.0001		
							5.33	MSUCCESS	0.2362	< 0.0001	0.8567	
Win-back customers									FINTANGIBLE	FMARBAS	FTANGIBLE	
	Model	94	395.23	4.2	5.67	< 0.0001	5	FINTANGIBLE				
	Error	184	136.44	0.74			5.09	FMARBAS	0.7327			
	Corrected Total	278	531.68				4.44	FTANGIBLE	< 0.0001	< 0.0001		
									MKNOWLED	MPRESEN	MSKILLS	MSUCCESS
	Model	95	402.4	4.23	6.9	< 0.0001	5.52	MKNOWLED				
	Error	276	169.32	0.61			4.49	MPRESEN	< 0.0001			
	Corrected Total	371	571.72				5.63	MSKILLS	0.7956	< 0.0001		
							5.22	MSUCCESS	0.0429	< 0.0001	0.0024	

Table 9
Summary of hypotheses and results.

Resources	New customers	Short-term customers	Long-term customers	Win-back customers
	H1	H2	H3	H4
FTANGIBLE (Firm-based tangible resources)		√a (ns)		
FINTANGIBLE (Firm-based intangible resources)			√a (ps)	
FMARBAS (Firm market-based intangible resources)	√a (s)			
MTANGIBLE (Personal tangible resources)				√4 (s)
MKNOWLED (Personal knowledge)	√b (ps)	√c (s)	√b (s)	√4 (s)
MSKILLS (Personal skills)		√b (s)	√c (s)	√4 (s)
MSUCCESS (Personal accumulated success)			√d (s)	√4 (s)

Note: (s) = supported; (ns) = not supported; (ps) = partially supported.

salespeople's knowledge and skill resources are most often employed with short-term customers.

With long-term customers, salespeople tend to utilize more personal knowledge and personal accumulated resources, along with firm intangible and market-based resources. In terms of win-back customers, salespeople seemingly opt for internal resources more than external resources, perhaps indicating salespeople's opinion that win-back customers place reduced value on such resources. The findings that personal skills and knowledge appear to be the most important resources for win-back customers seems to be at odds with the notion that salespeople have minimal influence in shaping relationship satisfaction at this stage of the exchange (Jap, 2001). We speculate that perhaps

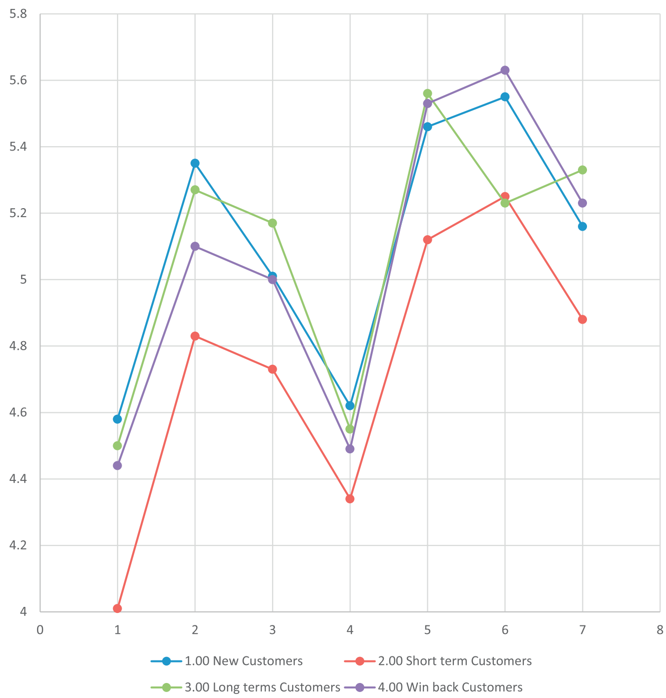

Fig. 1. Resource type and customer type alignment.
1. Firm tangible
2. Firm market-based intangible
3. Firm intangible
4. Personal tangible
5. Personal knowledge
6. Personal skills
7. Personal accumulated success

skill and the knowledge can serve to help salespeople understand why a customer left the firm in the first place, and how to get him/her back with new offerings. Time spent on educating such a customer, reducing relationship uncertaintities, and disclosing mutually germane information are thought to foster relationship satisfaction (Beverland & Lockshin, 2003).

Surprisingly, short-term customers seem to receive the least resources vis-à-vis the other customer types. Perhaps they are taken for granted, which may be dangerous in the long run. Allocating relatively few resources for short-term clients is also counter-intuitive. After all, conceivably one would expect salespeople to invest their resources to develop these short-term customers to ultimately become long term—provided, of course, that the return on investment of these buyers is higher than for new and win-back customers (Griffin & Lowenstein, 2002). Perhaps the relationship with short-term customers is still somewhat new and uncertain compared with long-term customers; furthermore, the potential stakes for such customers have a greater risk of not being realized vis-à-vis new and win-back customers. Thus, salespeople might well feel limited in creating value for these short-term customers and resort to heuristic rules to guide their investment of resources toward them (Guercini, La Rocca, Runfola, & Snehota, 2015).

In regard to long-term customers, personal knowledge is especially valuable during customer-supplier exchanges. This finding is in line with previous work that has found that long-term customers rely on salespeole as friends and experts whereby the source of value creation for the realtionship is through salespeople's knowledge (Heidi, 1994). In addition, firm intangible and personal tangible usage is similar across all customer types. One possible explanation could be that personal appearance and time, as well as firm systems and procedures, are relevant for all customers.

9. Contribution

The study contributes to the personal selling literature mainly in the area of new business development and market expansion. Theoretically, to the best of the authors' knowledge, this study is the first to develop an opportunity identification resource utilization scale and to empirically link it to the four customer types. Sales scholars have essentially focused on customer relationship quality concomitant with outcome metrics (Hall, Ahearne, & Sujan, 2015; Heide & John, 1990; Mullins et al., 2014). However, the kinds of resources employed to identify new opportunities during interest-generation stage through initiating, developing, maintaining, and reviving relationships that foster salutary outcomes have not been given adequate empirical attention. Indeed, minimal effort has been directed at identifying salespeople's resources (Cron et al., 2014). Prior to the current investigation, no previously published work had distinctly explicated the types of resources used for each type of customer during interest-generation stage.

The study systematically aggregated and categorized different resources that have been discussed in various literatures under disparate terminologies. The goal was to provide a structural mapping of salespeople's resources that sales personnel could use differentially to enhance their effectiveness with dissimilar customers. For example, salespeople's internal resources differ from organizational resources in that the structural categories of an organization can create identity and, in turn, influence the effectiveness of resource usage and performance outcomes (Houston, Walker, Hutt, & Reingen, 2001). Understanding the types of resources and their potential effectiveness and constraints should have favorable influence on salespeople's resource utilization and performance. Thus, this study adds to the conservation of resource literature by suggesting that salespeople do not use all their resources to the same extent in all selling situations. From their portfolio of internal- and firm-anchored resources, they use some resources more than others when dealing with different types of customers, thus truly conserving their resources and perhaps getting an especially salutary outcome for the resources being employed.

There are palpable questions the current empiricism did not consider. For example, why do salespeople seem to allocate more resources to lower ROI new customers than higher ROI win-back customers? And why do short-term higher ROI customers receive the least amount of resources? Griffin and Lowenstein (2002), though, outline winning back customer strategies, including segmentation of lost-customers based on lifetime value. They further assert that not all customers should be won back, owing to their higher sensitivity to pricing. Other researchers inveigh against the lack of focus in customer win-back strategies in the marketing literature (Thomas, Blattberg, & Fox, 2004). Although customer acquisition has been shown to receive the largest proportion of resources in the marketing budget, research has tended not to address customer reacquisition resource allocations (Villanueva, Yoo, & Hanssens, 2008). Perhaps attention of top management on Wall Street expectations (Gupta & Lehmann, 2003) filters down to salespeople with the attendant excitement (Pearson, 1970) of acquiring new customers, thus inducing sales personnel to target new customers more heavily than win-back customers.

This paper also contributes to the social exchange literature (i.e., development and deployment of resources to generate interest [new sales in the case of a salesperson-customer relationship] in a differential manner for customers at different stages of a relationship [new, short-term, long-term, and win-back customers]). Anchored in conceptualization of inter-organizational governance (Heide, 1994), the current research specifies the types of resources used to identify new sales opportunities across four customer types embedded in the initiating, developing, maintaining, and recovering relationship stages. Here, relationships are referred to as exchange relationships, where the parties use resources to influence value exchange. Although Heide's conceptualization is based on the interfirm level, a relationship is initiated and sustained by individuals. As such, new prospects' relationships with salespeople conceivably are at the initiation stage; short-term customers, the development stage; long-term customers, the maintenance stage; and win-back customers, the dissolution stage (at least prior to the salesperson's recovery efforts). The present work thus complements inter-organizational governance literature by introducing the role of sales resources in marketing (sales) channels.

Results of the study are also concordant with resource advantage theory and service dominant logic (SDL) (Hunt & Morgan, 1996, 1997; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Resource advantage theory argues that resources are heterogeneous and imperfectly mobile and go beyond just the land, labor, and capital. SDL also avers that knowledge is the operant resource. It also alludes to the notion that firms and consumers together co-create value. Our study focuses on salespeople's resources that are both tangible and intangible, and are anchored within the salespeople and the firm. Further, this investigation explores how salespeople use these resources differentially across different customer types. Findings also highlight the import of human resources vis-à-vis the other types of resources. Salespeople may well be among the most valuable assets, a source of competitive advantage, and the engine of survival and growth for the firm. Indeed, "nothing happens until a sale is made."

10. Managerial implications

From a managerial perspective, resources are finite, pressures to gain or maintain market share are high, and salespeople are a key contributor to the firm. The study provides insights into the kinds of resources sales personnel use in the selective investment and development of customer types. More specifically, strategic territory assignments, resource allocation, recruitment, and training programs can benefit from the investigation by closely scrutinizing what resources are often allocated to the firms' customer portfolio. Depending on the current position of the firm in the marketplace and its strategic emphasis, effective resource utilization may prove invaluable for enhancing efficacy of an expensive resource—salespeople. The magnitude and kind of resources used to develop, maintain, or revive buyer-seller relationships by identifying new sales opportunities are critical for long-term survival of firms. However, not all resources are equally effective for all customer types vis-à-vis their usage pattern.

Buyers often face uncertainties stemming from information asymmetry and goal conflicts (e.g., Tan & Lee, 2015). Incertitude implies potential dissatisfaction and negative outcomes (Jensen & Meckling, 1976). As relationship managers, successful salespeople parlay available resources to reduce perceived uncertainties, while concurrently developing satisfaction and trust (e.g., Anderson, Dubinsky, & Mehta, 2008). For example,Anderson, Narus, and Wouters (2014, p. 93) propound that "[t]aking the time to understand the customer's business and priorities in order to identify the tiebreaking justifier…will seal the deal more effectively." The results from the present study suggest the type of resources that are used to manage such uncertainties. Moreover, such knowledge could be incorporated into sales training programs. Future exchange outcomes are in all probability an outgrowth of current relationship quality. A roadmap of resources dedicated to particular clients is a good starting point in relationship sales training. Conceivably, positive outcomes of managing incertitude can enhance salespeople's confidence in future performance because past relational issues are seemingly under control.

Overall, this study confirmed existence of differences in resource utilization in the interest-generation stage across four customer types. When hiring and training salespeople, assigning territories, or developing market strategies, firms should select and develop requisite resources for opportunity identification that meld into their customer portfolio.

11. Limitations and implications for future research

The current work has several limitations. First, respondents were recruited from different industries, thus perhaps inflating the variance and co-variance. However, diverse industry backgrounds conceivably enhanced generalizability of the study. Second, the research was based solely on cross-sectional data. Given that selling is a process consisting of multiple steps (e.g., Dubinsky, 1981; Moncrief & Marshall, 2005; Rentz et al., 2002), a longitudinal investigation would be valuable. Third, although the focus of the investigation was on the interest-generation stage, respondents may have responded to the survey thinking of all stages of the sales cycle. Therefore, investigation of resource usage across the other stages of the sales cycle is merited.

Fourth, the data appear to have some common method bias (Chin, Thatcher, & Wright, 2012; Podsakoff et al., 2003), especially in the domain of internal resources. Although the results make intuitive sense, respondents possibly saw overlap between their personal knowledge and skills. Also, maybe firm intangible and market-based intangible resources manifest some overlap. However, because our tests focused on differences in utilization of resources across dissimilar customer types (and not on the use of these constructs as predictors of some outcome variables), the confounding effect of CMB may not be a major concern. Nevertheless, a follow-up study bereft of this situation is desirable, the results of which could lead to confirmation or disconfirmation of the findings obtained here.

Fifth, the seven factors capturing the internal and external resources may not represent an exhaustive set of resources. There may be other resources, such as time allocated on each stage of the sales cycle or compensation structure of salespeople; such prospective resources could be included in subsequent empiricism. Finally, the study does not capture the dynamic nature of each buyer-seller exchange to explain various heuristic strategies salespeople might adopt in their territories (Guercini, La Rocca, Runfola, & Snehota, 2015).

Notwithstanding the aforesaid limitations, the current empirical effort provides a systematic view of the value-creation process during buyer-seller exchanges utilizing available internal and external resources. Arguably, most or all these resources identified in the new scale can be used with all customer types during other sales stages, such as presentation, negotiation, and closing. The limitations open gateways for future research.

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