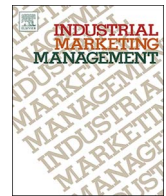




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Cooperation in B2B relationships: Factors that influence customers' perceptions of salesperson cooperation

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ABSTRACT

A wealth of research indicates that cooperation is vital to the outcomes of relationships, particularly in B2B selling. Drawing from social exchange theory and research on social perception, we explore cooperation in B2B relationships from a dyadic perspective. Analyzing the responses of both salespeople and their customers, we demonstrate that customers do not always perceive salespeople's cooperation (e.g., efforts, behaviors); rather, salesperson and relationship characteristics can also influence perceived cooperation. Specifically, perceived cooperation is increased (e.g., higher regardless of actual cooperation) when a salesperson possesses a customer orientation or in a long-term salesperson-customer relationship. Conversely, perceived cooperation is decreased (e.g., lower regardless of actual cooperation) when a salesperson possesses high levels of self-efficacy. Furthermore, perceived cooperation's positive influence on relationship outcomes is enhanced when customers also perceive the salesperson as an expert.

1. Introduction

In business-to-business (B2B) selling, salespeople are entrusted with acquiring and managing one of the organization's most important assets, customers, with the purpose of building and maintaining long-term, profitable relationships (Palmatier, Scheer, & Steenkamp, 2007). To accomplish this, organizations have invested significant amount of time and resources as > 3.6 million salespeople in the U.S. are involved in B2B selling (Zoltners, Sinha, & Lorimer, 2008) which accounts for approximately \$22.7 trillion in 2016 (Skousen, 2016), more than the U.S. gross domestic product (~\$18.2 trillion).

Consequently, researchers have also been increasingly attentive to the B2B selling context, mainly to understand the underlying mechanisms and processes to build and maintain business relationships (Palmatier, Dant, & Grewal, 2007). An important factor in the B2B selling research stream is *cooperation*—[defined as the coordinated and complementary actions between the partners in an exchange to achieve mutual goals (Palmatier, Dant, Grewal, & Evans, 2006, p. 139)—given its central role in building strong business relationships (Anderson & Narus, 1990; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Yen & Barnes, 2011). Considering its importance to the practice and the literature, our research investigates B2B relationships from the perspective of cooperation between salespeople and their customers in order to better

understanding the process through which salesperson cooperation influences business relationships.

Research on salesperson-customer cooperation indicates that cooperation is a critical, if not the most important, factor for success in relationships (Palmatier et al., 2006). This is significant because cooperation can complement each firm's weaknesses and enhance its strengths (Jap, 1999), thereby providing both firms with increased efficiency and performance (Kim, Kim, Pae, & Yip, 2013). In fact, cooperation leads to mutual outcomes (with expected reciprocation over time) that exceed what one would achieve if each firm acted solely on its own (Anderson & Narus, 1990). This is at least partially because a cooperative salesperson—with his or her collaborative-focused approach—can use complementary actions with his or her customers to achieve mutual outcomes, with expected reciprocation over time.

In spite of the importance and promise of cooperation in B2B relationships, empirical research in this area has lacked consistency. Specifically, findings of results from salesperson-customer cooperation on positive relationship outcomes have varied greatly, with effect sizes ranging from 0.24 to 0.73. The lack of consistency in findings creates a problem for managers to assess the true importance of how cooperation impacts relationship outcomes. A possible cause for this lack of consistency is that cooperation has been investigated from one side of the relationship or the other, from customers or salespeople, but not from

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both (with one exception, Anderson & Narus, 1990). Even though cooperation involves both parties, a dyadic perspective has also been mostly overlooked in the literature. A dyadic approach will provide insight on why and when cooperation reported by a salesperson or perceived by the customer translates to positive outcomes. In our research, we aim to address the inconsistent findings in prior literature by disentangling views of cooperation from both the salesperson and customer. In doing so, we explore why and when cooperation in B2B selling impacts relationship outcomes.

To investigate cooperation in B2B relationships, we take a dyadic view of cooperation, particularly looking at how customers perceive salespeople's cooperation, which we term *perceived cooperation*. We developed an integrative framework that examines both the antecedents of the extent to which perceived cooperation and the consequences of perceived or actual salesperson cooperation. For antecedents, we draw from perceptual accuracy research in psychology (Ickes, 1983) and marketing (Mullins, Ahearne, Lam, Hall, & Boichuk, 2014) to uncover salesperson and relationship characteristics that can influence perceived cooperation. For consequences, we draw from social exchange theory (SET) (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), particularly reciprocity, to understand how a customer's perception of salesperson cooperation translates into relationship outcomes.

Operationally, our framework highlights the process (i.e., mediation and moderation) through which salesperson cooperation may impact business relationships by influencing customers' perceptions. In doing so, we aim to uncover salesperson and relationship characteristics that influence perceived cooperation. Then, we are able to provide guidance to the literature and practice on whether salesperson cooperation and/or perceived cooperation impacts relationship outcomes. We conduct our study with survey data collected from 175 B2B salesperson-customer dyads, with responses from salespeople about their cooperation efforts with a particular customer and responses from customers about their perceptions of the level of salesperson cooperation. This research makes three unique contributions to the literature.

First, it demonstrates that salesperson cooperation does not always translate into positive relationship outcomes. We find that salesperson cooperation leads to positive relationship outcomes only when the customer perceives it. In addition to being an important theoretical contribution, this offers important implications to sales managers and organizations as perceptions are more important (e.g. diagnostic) than the truth of actions (Alavi, Wieseke, & Guba, 2016; Mullins et al., 2014). This is highlighted in our data—the correlation of perceptions with actual salesperson cooperation was only 0.61. Stated differently, only 37% of the variance in perceived cooperation is explained by the salesperson's actual cooperation. Furthermore, when perceived cooperation is included with salesperson cooperation, salesperson cooperation no longer influences relationship outcomes. This result strongly suggests that perceptions (e.g., perceived cooperation) are fundamental in examining business relationships. Second, individual characteristics of salespeople and the stage of the salesperson-customer relationship can also influence perceived cooperation. Perceived cooperation is increased (e.g., higher, regardless of actual cooperation) when a salesperson possesses high levels of customer orientation or in long-term salesperson-customer relationships. In contrast, perceived cooperation is reduced (e.g., lower, regardless of actual cooperation) when salespeople possess high levels of self-efficacy. This is important because we offer new insight into different drivers of business relationships that can be applied by both organizations and academia to increase sales force effectiveness and to develop more comprehensive research models (Kumar, Venkatesan, & Reinartz, 2008). Third, even when customers perceive salesperson cooperation, they do not always reciprocate with positive relationship outcomes. We find that customers reciprocate to perceived cooperation when they view the salesperson as an expert. Using SET as a backdrop, we provide evidence that when a salesperson explicitly invests in cooperating with a customer, the customer will not necessarily respond in kind unless the salesperson is

perceived as competent. Hence, we offer insight to sales organizations in (maintaining) investing in value-based selling to increase customer-perceived product-related and relationship value (Terho, Haas, Eggert, & Ulaga, 2012). These key findings shed light on the large variance in prior empirical research on the effect of salesperson cooperation on positive relationship outcomes.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Salesperson cooperation

For simplicity, we use the general term cooperation also to encompass cooperation efforts, behaviors, investments, etc. Cooperation is central in the relationship marketing literature (Anderson & Narus, 1990; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Research in this domain has consistently shown that cooperation results in business success, including customer relationship quality, trust, satisfaction, and commitment (Palmatier et al., 2006; Payan, Hair, Svensson, Andersson, & Awuah, 2016; Yen & Barnes, 2011). In fact, Palmatier et al.'s (2006) meta-analysis indicates that cooperation may be the most critical success factor for relationship marketing efforts in salesperson-customer encounters.

On the basis of this premise, we explore salesperson cooperation in the context of B2B selling to examine why and when customers respond to salesperson cooperation (see Figure 1). In the next two sub-sections, we draw from SET to theorize the relationship outcomes of a salesperson's cooperation (H1 and H5). Then, we conclude our theoretical background by introducing perceptual accuracy research from social psychology to explain why customers may or may not perceive salesperson cooperation (H1) and other factors that influence perceived cooperation (H2–H4).

2.2. SET

Social exchange theory (SET)—which explains cases in which two actors are involved and one of which has something that the other party values (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Homans, 1958)—suggests that the salesperson-customer interaction is a process whereby resources are mutually exchanged through the various activities of the involved parties (Anderson & Narus, 1990; Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987). Thus, SET may be useful for examining how customers respond to salesperson cooperation in repeated encounters, such as B2B sales. Prior relationship marketing research has used SET to provide insights into the development and maintenance of relationships over time in salesperson-customer exchanges (Anderson & Narus, 1990; Dwyer et al., 1987; Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

A fundamental premise of SET is reciprocity, which dictates that when “a person supplies a benefit, the receiving party should respond in kind” (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005, p. 876). In other words, reciprocity refers to the rule of returning favors (Yen & Barnes, 2011). As one party often receives its portion of the value earlier (e.g., salesperson making a sale), the other party (e.g., the customer) is indebted and thus will desire to return the value. Thus, when interacting with a cooperative salesperson who provides coordinated and complementary efforts to his or her customers to achieve a mutual goal, a customer is likely to reciprocate in the product or service offered by the salesperson (Yen & Barnes, 2011), mainly because the customer perceives he or she received product-related and relationship value (Terho et al., 2012). We contend that when a salesperson explicitly invests in cooperating with a customer, the customer will respond in kind, leading to positive relationship outcomes.

2.3. Perceived salesperson cooperation

Although research clearly shows that salesperson cooperation leads to positive relationship outcomes (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Palmatier et al., 2006; Payan et al., 2016), the effect of salesperson cooperation on

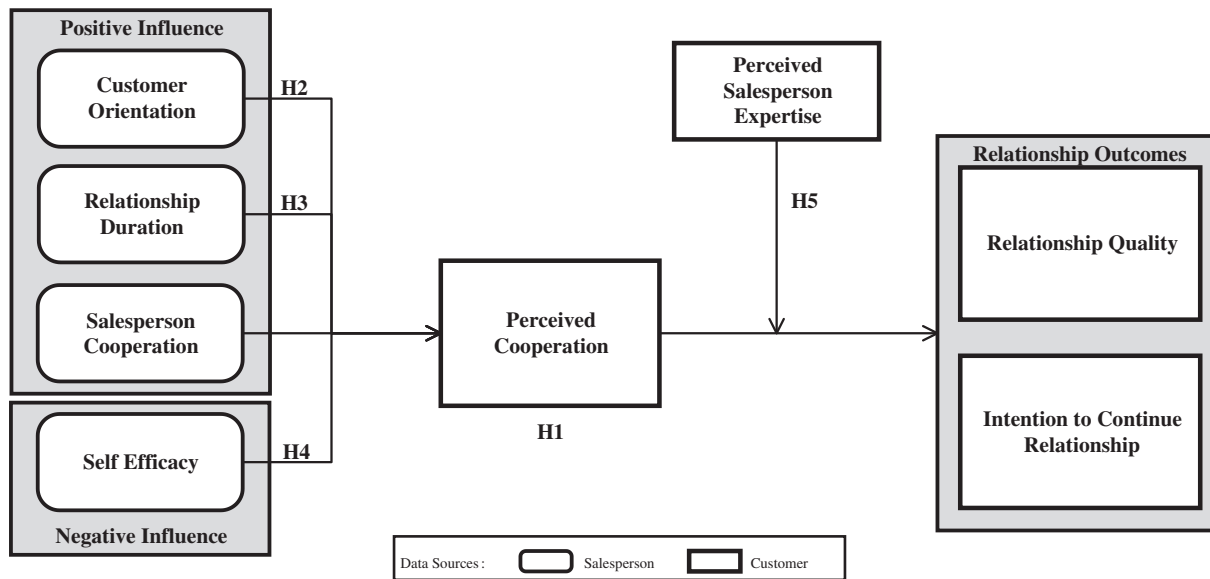


Fig. 1. Antecedents and consequences of customer perceived salesperson cooperation.

Table 1
Studies on salesperson cooperation.

Study	Journal	Sample size	Market type	Estimates with positive relationship outcomes
Studies with customer perception of SP cooperation: customer perceived salesperson cooperation				
Crosby, Evans, and Cowles (1990)	<i>Journal of Marketing</i>	151	B2C	Trust ($r = 0.56$) Satisfaction ($r = 0.56$) Continue relationship ($r = 0.40$) Total sales ($r = 0.29$) Cross-sell ($r = 0.24$)
Leonidou, Paliwadana, Chari, and Leonidou (2011)	<i>Journal of World Business</i>	167	B2B	Trust ($r = 0.65$) Commitment ($r = 0.64$) Adaptation ($r = 0.48$) Relationship effect. ($r = 0.73$) Relationship efficiency ($r = 0.63$)
Morgan and Hunt (1994)	<i>Journal of Marketing</i>	204	B2C	Trust ($r = 0.65$) Commit ($r = 0.64$)
Yen and Barnes (2011)	<i>Industrial Marketing Management</i>	208	B2B	Satisfaction ($r = 0.56$) Performance ($r = 0.40$) Long-term orientation ($r = 0.29$) Opportunism ($r = 0.24$)
Studies with self-reported (salesperson or manager) cooperation: salesperson cooperation				
Anderson and Narus (1990)	<i>Journal of Marketing</i>	1365	B2B	Trust ($r = 0.73$) Satisfaction ($r = 0.35$)
Kim et al. (2013)	<i>Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing</i>	301	B2B	Joint benefit with supplier ($r = 0.30$)
Ernst, Hoyer, and Rübsaamen (2010)	<i>Journal of Marketing</i>	424	B2B/B2C	Sales/MS Performance conc. ($r = 0.26$) Performance dev. ($r = 0.36$) Performance impl. ($r = 0.29$)
Payan, Hair, Svensson, Andersson, and Awuah (2016)	<i>Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing</i>	285	B2B	Trust ($r = 0.58$) Satisfaction ($r = 0.39$) Commitment ($r = 0.48$)
Sharma, Young, and Wilkinson (2015)	<i>Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing</i>	160	B2B	Trust ($r = 0.52$) Affective commitment ($r = 0.30$) Behavioral commitment ($r = 0.25$) Relationship value ($r = 0.27$)

Note: B2C = business-to-consumer.

relationship outcomes varies greatly. As Table 1 shows, the association of cooperation with relationship outcomes ranges from 0.24 to 0.73. Further investigating prior empirical studies, we found a notable pattern—the relationship between cooperation and relationship outcomes differs depending upon whether the respondent is the salesperson or the customer. That is, the effect of cooperation on relationship outcomes was significantly lower when the salesperson responded directly about his or her salesperson behaviors with the customer than when the customer responded about the salesperson's behaviors. Specifically, the

median relationship between cooperation measured by the salesperson was almost half that measured by the customer (0.30 vs. 0.56). We distinguish between these terms by using the two conceptualizations of cooperation as *salesperson cooperation* and *perceived cooperation*, respectively. We use these conceptualizations of cooperation as our focal constructs to develop the hypotheses.

2.4. Empathic perceptual accuracy and customer perceived salesperson cooperation

To understand how perceived cooperation functions, we draw from research from social psychology on perceptual accuracy research—namely, the extent to which a judgment about another person is accurate (Ickes, 1983)—given its point of interest in sales research. Specifically, recent research has focused on the accuracy of salespeople's judgments of their customers' relationship quality (Mullins et al., 2014), shopping-related needs (Hall, Ahearne, & Sujan, 2015), and price importance (Alavi et al., 2016). Mullins et al. (2014) present a full review on perceptual accuracy in the relationship marketing domain.

In our study, we follow the principles of empathic perceptual accuracy, or empathic accuracy for short. Empathic accuracy is the ability to accurately interpret the thoughts and feelings of the other person (Ickes, 1983). This accuracy is dependent on the person's ability to read cues from the other individual as well as to adopt that individual's perspective. A common theme of perceptual accuracy research, as Mullins et al. (2014) indicate, is that people can accurately perceive characteristics and behaviors of those they interact with; however, many factors can influence these perceptions.

In our context, we investigate the extent to which customers accurately perceive salesperson cooperation. That is, we are interested in the extent to which a perceived cooperation matches salesperson cooperation. The foundation of our theorizing is that salesperson and relational characteristics influence the cues (i.e., cooperation signaling cues) that salespeople display and customers receive. As a result, these cues influence perceived cooperation. In our investigation, we examine actual salesperson cooperation as one of the cues for the salesperson's level of cooperation. While controlling for salesperson cooperation, we also investigate other relational and salesperson factors that could influence perceived cooperation.

3. Model development

We aim to further delineate the effects of explicit salesperson cooperation and perceived cooperation on relationship outcomes (see Fig. 1). We complement prior research on salesperson cooperation by focusing on (1) the mediating role of customer perceived salesperson cooperation between salesperson cooperation and relationship outcomes, (2) the influence of individual salesperson and relationship characteristics on customer perceived salesperson cooperation, and (3) the moderating effect of perceived salesperson expertise on the relationship between customer perceived salesperson cooperation and relationship outcomes.

3.1. Salesperson cooperation and customer perceived salesperson cooperation

As previously mentioned, prior research on salesperson cooperation has found that the association of perceived cooperation with relationship outcomes is approximately twice as strong as that of salesperson cooperation. We posit that the reason for this is that salesperson cooperation does not directly influence relationship outcomes.

First, these efforts precede perceived cooperation. Specifically, before a customer can choose to reciprocate, he or she must first observe cooperative behaviors. A salesperson's actual cooperation will provide cues to the customer on the extent of the salesperson's cooperation. Second, salesperson cooperation (or cooperation cues) is not always perceived by the customer. That is, perceived cooperation is not always accurate. Indeed, the ability to perceive behaviors or emotions of others is not an easy task (Kidwell, Hardesty, Murtha, & Sheng, 2011). Recent research in sales echoes this sentiment; Alavi et al. (2016) find that after interacting with a customer, a salesperson's perception of the customer's importance of price was not very accurate ($r = 0.21$). In a B2B context,

the agreement between the salesperson and the customer on the quality of their relationship was similarly low ($r = 0.20$) (Mullins et al., 2014). Last, relationship outcomes are typically conceptualized from customers' perceptions of their own behaviors, actions, or feelings (e.g., customer satisfaction, expectation of continuity). According to SET, when a customer believes that a salesperson is cooperative, thus providing something of value, he or she reciprocates the behavior in the form positive relationship outcomes (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

Thus, we propose that salesperson cooperation does not have a direct effect on relationship outcomes; rather, perceived cooperation mediates the effect of salesperson cooperation on relationship outcomes.

H1. Perceived cooperation mediates the association between salesperson cooperation and relationship outcomes.

3.2. Factors influencing perceived cooperation

Next, we aim to investigate why and when salesperson characteristics influence perceived cooperation. As previously mentioned, a customer's perception of a salesperson's behaviors may or, in most cases, may not match the salesperson's intended behavior. In this section, we propose three important factors that should influence a perceived cooperation: salesperson's customer orientation, the duration of the customer's relationship with the salesperson, and salesperson's self-efficacy.

3.2.1. Customer orientation

Customer-oriented salespeople are better able to understand needs and wants (Saxe & Weitz, 1982), genuinely care about customers (Jaramillo & Grisaffe, 2009), and are careful not to put unwanted pressure on their customers (Homburg, Müller, & Klarmann, 2011). In other words, customer-oriented salespeople try to better understand their customers, thoroughly attempt to identify potential customer concerns and demands, and are careful to avoid behaviors that might harm the customer relationship (Lussier & Hartmann, 2017; Mullins et al., 2014). These salespeople actively exchange information and identify mutually beneficial solutions (Jaramillo & Grisaffe, 2009). Prior research has uncovered how customer orientation (vs. product orientation) is positively related to the quality of the cooperation (Homburg & Jensen, 2007). Related to the customer's perception of the level of cooperation, Mullins et al. (2014) find that a salesperson's customer orientation upwardly or positively biases the customer's perceptions. Similarly, Lussier and Hartmann (2017) show that salesperson customer orientation has a positive influence on the customer's perceptions in a B2B sales context. Customer-oriented salespeople's prioritization of a customer's needs will provide customers' cues that the salesperson is working towards a collaborative goal and as a result, positively affect perceived cooperation. That is, customers will perceive a salesperson as more cooperative regardless of the salesperson's actual cooperation; as a consequence, we expect customer orientation to improve perceived cooperation. Thus:

H2. Salespeople's customer orientation is positively related to perceived cooperation.

As with customer orientation, we expect the amount of time the customer has worked with the salesperson (relationship duration) will also improve the perceived cooperation. In support of this claim, recent relationship marketing research has shown that later relationship stages create inertia or lead to little information search on the part of customers (Mullins et al., 2014). This is because earlier in the relationship, the parties have more uncertainty while they try to figure out each other's goals and expectations. Similarly, B2B research has shown a positive linear relationship between relationship duration and cooperation (Yen & Barnes, 2011). Over time, salespeople have been able to demonstrate, or provide cues, of collaboration and cooperation.

Specifically, a longer relationship duration between the salesperson and the customer will provide customers' cues that the salesperson is working towards a similar or common goal; and as a result, this will increase perceived cooperation. In summary, we expect customers to perceive salespeople as more cooperative during later relationship phases. Thus:

H3. Relationship duration is positively related to perceived cooperation.

Prior research provides strong support for a positive link between salesperson self-efficacy and outcome performance (Ahearne, Mathieu, & Rapp, 2005; Brown, Jones, & Leigh, 2005; Fu, Richards, Hughes, & Jones, 2010; Sujun, Weitz, & Kumar, 1994). However, we propose that self-efficacy can also have a downside. While self-efficacy is important to overcome customer demands and adversity, highly self-efficacious salespeople are more self- than cooperative-focused (Gist & Mitchell, 1992). This self focus reduces perceived cooperation for two reasons.

First, self-efficacious salespeople work harder (exert more effort) to meet their own personal goals (Ahearne et al., 2005; Sujun et al., 1994). As a result, these salespeople display self-focused cues rather than cooperative cues to their customers since the salespeople appears to be as working towards a self-interest goal over a mutually beneficial goal. Second, self-efficacy also influences the feedback that salespeople choose to receive. Specifically, highly self-efficacious salespeople are more self-focused in their perspective taking, leading them to be selective in the feedback that they receive from customers (Gist & Mitchell, 1992). Thus, customers will notice (e.g., by perceiving cues) that these salespeople have only listened to some of their feedback that the customer has provided while ignoring other important points. Together, highly self-efficacious salespeople possess self-interested goals and fail to receive all feedback from their customers. This reduces perceived cooperation as these self-interest cues conflict with those that would signify cooperation from the salesperson. Therefore:

H4. Salespeople's self-efficacy is negatively related to perceived cooperation.

3.3. Impact of perceived cooperation on relationship outcomes

Thus far, we have proposed that perceived cooperation mediates the effect of actual salesperson cooperation on outcomes of the relationship. We rooted this proposal in SET, focusing on the notion that customers will reciprocate a salesperson's cooperation in the form of positive relationship outcomes. In addition, we now propose that customers are likely to reciprocate more in relation to certain types of salespeople. That is, we argue that customers will reciprocate more to salespeople they view as experts.

First, consistent with reciprocation, customers who perceive salespeople as experts value the benefits these people provide more than do other customers, and these customers feel obligated to give more back to the salespeople. When interacting with expert salespeople viewed as reliable, credible, knowledgeable, and responsive (Palmer & Bejou, 1994), customers receive more value and their relationship with the salesperson becomes stronger (Crosby, Evans, & Cowles, 1990). Second, within SET, a norm of social exchange reflects status consistency, or the allocation of beliefs and actions based on one's social standing (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Thus, a customer who views a salesperson as an expert in the field will hold that salesperson in greater esteem. Correspondingly, the customer will believe that the salesperson deserves more in terms of reciprocation. Last, when a customer perceives a salesperson as an expert, he or she will want to maintain a relationship with that salesperson, leading him or her to invest more in the relationship. In other words, SET explains the relationship between expertise and relationship outcomes by allowing customers to reciprocate through customer-focused outcomes. Thus:

H5. The positive effect of perceived cooperation on relationship outcomes is enhanced when perceived salesperson expertise is high.

4. Method

4.1. Dyadic data collection and sample

We collected dyadic data from 175 B2B salespeople and their customers from 17 firms representing four major industries (i.e., financial services, food and beverage, industrial, and pharmaceutical). Before collecting unique salesperson-customer dyadic matched surveys, we conducted 30 in-depth interviews with sales professionals (i.e., two directors, seven managers, one business analyst, 10 salespeople, and 10 customers). As with other dyadic modeling research (Ahearne et al., 2005), the objective of these interviews was to evaluate and refine the conceptual model. In addition, given the implication regarding the length of survey administration, these interviews guided our choice of which constructs to assess and which scales to employ in measuring these constructs. Moreover, because of concerns from sales managers about survey length, the interviews were particularly insightful in selecting the proper items and questionnaire materials. Using our review of the literature and these interviews, we developed two distinct surveys for salespeople and customers. Next, we carried out a pretest with 26 paired B2B salesperson-customer dyads.

The paired salespeople-customer dyadic data collection followed several steps. First, we contacted lead executives at various North American-based sales organizations to request their collaboration in this market research initiative. Of the 49 targeted sales organizations, 17 participated in this research. From these 17 sales organizations, 210 salespeople were contacted to participate in gathering data for a B2B sales force effectiveness study. As a result, from these firms we collected survey data from 185 salespeople (with a response rate of 88.1%), who were responsible for a given portfolio of customers in an assigned territory, to participate in the research. To minimize the possibility that firms would self-select customers with whom they had an optimal relationship and to increase variability in the data, we asked the firms to provide a list of their visited targeted customers for each designated salesperson. Then, using this list, we randomly identified and matched only one customer with the selected salesperson. After a scheduled sales encounter, we administered the surveys simultaneously to the salesperson and matched customer using paper or online surveys, depending on the selling environment. Both parties (i.e., the salespeople and the customers) were assured that their responses would be kept confidential. Salespeople were instructed to think back to their last sales visit. Customers were instructed to think back to the last visit they had with their salesperson. Last, in exchange for their participation in the study, sales firms were told that they would be provided with a written report of the study results upon request. We employed listwise deletion for the surveys with missing values. As a result, 175 of the 185 unique paired B2B salesperson-customer dyads remained. We used these salesperson-customer dyads to test the hypotheses.

4.2. Measures

All measures used in our study are well-established in the sales and marketing literature. Before answering the survey, the respondent saw the following statement printed before each construct in the salesperson survey: "Please rate the extent to which you agree with the following statements about your sales exchanges." For cooperation, the salesperson was asked to think back to his or her last sales visit with the customer. Likewise, the following statement was printed prior to each construct in the customer survey: "Please rate the extent to which you agree with the following statements about this salesperson." We measured experience as the amount of time in years that the salesperson had worked in a sales position in the industry. We measured

Table 2
Intercorrelations and descriptive statistics.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 Relationship quality	0.93								
2 Intention to continue relationship	0.68	0.89							
3 Salesperson cooperation	0.50	0.42	0.92						
4 Perceived cooperation	0.77	0.60	0.61	0.90					
5 Customer orientation	0.33	0.24	0.46	0.35	0.79				
6 Relationship duration	0.26	0.13	0.25	0.26	0.21	NA			
7 Self-efficacy	0.20	0.10	0.48	0.20	0.54	0.27	0.94		
8 Perceived salesperson expertise	0.75	0.57	0.48	0.63	0.33	0.29	0.39	0.88	
9 Salesperson experience	0.11	0.02	0.15	0.06	0.28	0.52	0.37	0.15	NA
M	4.12	4.52	4.45	4.12	4.65	3.58	4.45	4.33	
SD	0.72	0.66	0.56	0.75	0.44	3.56	0.72	0.69	
CR	0.95	0.91	0.95	0.93	0.87	NA	0.95	0.92	NA
AVE	0.68	0.76	0.79	0.76	0.62	NA	0.81	0.72	NA

Notes: Correlations greater than $|0.15|$ are significant at $p < 0.05$. Cronbach's alpha is along the diagonal in bold.

relationship duration as the number of months the customer had been doing business with the salesperson.

For our latent constructs, we adapted our measures—customer orientation (Saxe & Weitz, 1982), self-efficacy (Sujuan et al., 1994), cooperation (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Sibley & Michie, 1982), relationship quality (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999), intention to continue relationship (Ramsey & Sohi 1997), and perceived salesperson expertise (Doney & Cannon, 1997)—from established scales to match our context. All measurements used a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *totally disagree*; 5 = *totally agree*).

We measured cooperation in two ways: the salesperson's self-reported behaviors and the customer's perception of the salesperson's cooperation. Salespeople were asked about the extent to which they undertake cooperation behaviors with their specific customer accounts; we termed this *salesperson cooperation*. As one customer was randomly selected from the research team from the target lists provided by the sales firms, the salespeople were asked about the extent to which they undertake cooperation behaviors with their specific customer account after the sales encounter. In this way, the salesperson could not know ahead of time which customer would be matched to him or her. Similarly, customers were asked about their perception of the given salesperson's cooperation; we termed this *perceived cooperation*.

We measured the salesperson's expertise from the customer's perspective termed *perceived salesperson expertise*. Following Mullins et al. (2014), we measured relationship quality as a unidimensional construct comprising customer trust, customer satisfaction, and customer commitment. We tested whether a unidimensional construct was appropriate. In support of this, our data set confirmed that relationship quality could be modeled as a single factor (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.93$; $\chi^2/df = 1.98$; comparative fit index [CFI] = 0.98; root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = 0.08). The one-factor construct yielded $\chi^2(20) = 31.40$ compared with $\chi^2(17) = 29.49$ for the three-dimensions construct. Because the three-factor relationship quality construct is significantly worse than the one-factor construct ($\Delta\chi^2 = 1.91$; $\Delta df = 3$; p for nested comparison = 0.59), we use relationship quality as a single-factor in this study.

Each latent construct showed acceptable reliability with each Cronbach's alpha coefficient, and composite reliabilities were > 0.70 . All latent constructs demonstrated acceptable average variances extracted (AVE) and divergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). We also examined the variance inflation factors of all variables and interaction terms to check for multicollinearity. We found no indications of multicollinearity, as the variance inflation factors were all below 10, ranging from 1.0 to 1.72.

4.3. Common method variance

Multiple respondents and/or multiple data sources are among the best methods to use to diminish the possibility of common method

variance (CMV) (Hulland, Baumgartner, & Smith, in press). Building on this recommendation, we used two different sources of data (matched salespeople and customer responses). Despite this, our data still had moderate correlations for the customer variables.

To reduce the likelihood of CMV on our customer variables, we followed the marker variable approach (Lindell & Whitney, 2001). A marker variable (i.e., a variable theoretically unrelated to at least one of the central variables) extracts the variance that may result from using a common method. This method has been previously used in sales research (Fang, Palmatier, & Evans, 2004; Jaramillo, Mulki, & Boles, 2011). We use frequency of visits as perceived by the customer (Crosby et al., 1990) as a marker variable in our analyses.

We adjusted our correlations to account for our marker variable in order to minimize CMV. The correlations remained significant after the adjustment. Specifically, our marker variable's correlation with all customer perceived variables as an estimate of method variance was $rm = 0.01$. This provided empirical support for the argument that CMV does not inflate the relationships among the constructs in our model. As a next step, we included our marker variable as a control in our subsequent analyses.

Table 2 reports the descriptive statistics and correlations among the latent constructs along with construct reliabilities. A full description of our constructs and items is available in the Appendix A. We have also included a modified correlation table in the Appendix A that accounts for partial correlations for our marker variable (i.e., frequency of visits).

5. Hypotheses testing and results

We tested our hypotheses in two ways. First, we tested H1 following the PROCESS bootstrapping method for testing the indirect effects in mediation models (Preacher & Hayes, 2004, 2008). Then we tested the remaining hypothesized relationships using a structural equation model with MPlus Version 8. The structural model provided satisfactory structural fit indices ($\chi^2 = 1214.19$; $df = 598$; CFI = 0.88; RMSEA = 0.07).

In H1, we proposed that salesperson cooperation would result in favorable relationship outcomes only when these behaviors lead to perceived cooperation. To test this, we examined whether perceived cooperation mediates the effects of salesperson cooperation benefits on two relationship outcomes—relationship quality and intention to continue relationship—using an indirect-effects model with bootstrapping methods (Preacher & Hayes, 2004, 2008). Focusing on the indirect effects, we found that perceived cooperation mediates the relationship between salesperson cooperation and relationship quality (total indirect effect = 0.264, 95% confidence interval [CI]: [0.161, 0.385]) and intention to continue relationship (total indirect effect = 0.187; 95% CI: [0.046, 0.330], in support of H1. In both cases, the direct effect of salesperson cooperation on relationship quality (total direct

Table 3
Mediation results for perceived cooperation.

Predictor (X)	Mediator (M)	Outcome (Y)	X → M	M → Y	Total direct effect	Total indirect effect	Confidence interval
Salesperson cooperation	Perceived cooperation	Relationship quality	0.621*** (0.082)	0.704*** (0.058)	0.069 (0.074)	0.264*** (0.074)	(0.161, 0.385)
Salesperson cooperation	Perceived cooperation	Intention to continue relationship	0.621*** (0.082)	0.301*** (0.079)	0.143 (0.097)	0.187** (0.065)	(0.046, 0.330)

Notes: Each model controls for duration, experience, perceived salesperson expertise, and the marker variable, frequency of visits.

* $p < 0.10$ (two-tailed).

** $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed).

*** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed).

effect = 0.069, *ns*) and intention to continue relationship (total direct effect = 0.143, *ns*) was not significant when taking into account perceived cooperation (see Table 3).

Our data suggest that salesperson cooperation does not always translate into perceived cooperation (pairwise correlation $\rho = 0.61$), indicating that customers do not always perceive salesperson behaviors. Thus, we proposed that three additional factors would also influence perceived cooperation. As Table 4A shows, we find that perceived cooperation is higher when salespeople possess a customer orientation ($b = 0.475, p < 0.05$) and have a longer relationship duration with the customer ($b = 0.024, p < 0.05$). These findings provide support for H2 and H3. For H4, we theorized that the salesperson characteristic of self-efficacy would lead to lower perceived cooperation. In support of H4, we find that salesperson self-efficacy ($b = -0.230, p < 0.05$) is negatively related to perceived cooperation.

For consequences of cooperation, our findings echo the results of our mediation test. When we do not account for perceived cooperation, the effect of salesperson cooperation on relationship quality ($b = 0.024, p < 0.01$) and intention to continue relationship ($b = 0.022, p < 0.01$) is significant and positive. However, when we

include perceived cooperation, the path of salesperson cooperation on relationship quality ($b = -0.107, ns$) and intention to continue relationship ($b = -0.022, ns$) is no longer significant. In H5, we investigated a boundary condition of the effect of perceived cooperation on relationship outcomes. We proposed that perceived cooperation would lead more often to positive relationship outcomes when the customer perceives the salesperson as an expert in the industry. As shown in Table 4B, we find partial support for H5. Perceived cooperation and perceived salesperson expertise interactively influence relationship quality ($b = 0.081, p < 0.05$). However, though in the hypothesized direction, perceived cooperation and perceived salesperson expertise do not interactively influence intention to continue the relationship ($b = 0.037, ns$).

6. Discussion

The aim of this article is to decompose the influences of salesperson cooperation and perceived cooperation on relationship outcomes in a B2B selling context. Specifically, we examine salesperson cooperation as well as other factors (i.e., customer orientation, relationship

Table 4
SEM result for antecedents and outcomes of perceived cooperation.

A: antecedents of perceived cooperation						
Dependent variable	Perceived cooperation				Hypothesis	
	Standardized Path	SE				
Salesperson cooperation	0.672***	0.089			H1 Supported	
Customer orientation	0.475**	0.181			H2 Supported	
Relationship duration	0.024**	0.012			H3 Supported	
Self-efficacy	-0.230**	0.090			H4 Supported	
Controls						
Salesperson experience	-0.006*	0.006				
B: consequences of perceived cooperation						
Dependent variable	Relationship quality		Intention to continue relationship		Hypothesis	
	Standardized path	SE	Standardized path	SE		
Salesperson cooperation	-0.107	0.076	-0.022	0.103	H1 Supported	
Perceived cooperation	0.677***	0.082	0.449***	0.116	H1 Supported	
Perceived salesperson expertise	0.704***	0.108	0.521***	0.145		
Interactive effects						
Perceived cooperation × Perceived salesperson expertise	0.081**	0.041	0.037	0.059	H5 Partially supported	
Controls						
Customer orientation	0.033	0.071	0.046	0.098		
Relationship duration	-0.021	0.056	-0.040	0.077		
Self-efficacy	-0.127*	0.072	-0.164*	0.099		
Experience	0.089*	0.053	-0.055	0.075		
Frequency of visits	-0.171*	0.095	-0.099	0.130		

* $p < 0.10$ (two-tailed).

** $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed).

*** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed).

duration, and self-efficacy) that might influence perceived cooperation. Moreover, we examine the consequences of perceived cooperation. With the exception of H5, which is partially supported, all our hypotheses are supported. These findings have several implications for scholars and practitioners.

6.1. Theoretical implications

6.1.1. Perceptions matter in relationships

This study sheds new light on the importance of perceptions in B2B salesperson-customer relationships. We find that the extent to which customers perceive salespeople to be cooperative (perceived cooperation) matters more than actual cooperation. Specifically, we find salesperson cooperation impacts relationship outcomes through the extent it is perceived. This contributes to a growing body of literature on the importance of perceptions in selling (e.g., Alavi et al., 2016; Hall et al., 2015; Mullins et al., 2014).

Our focal hypothesis, H1, complements prior research that shows that cooperation results in favorable business relationships (e.g., Anderson & Narus, 1990; Morgan & Hunt, 1994), including customer relationship quality, trust, satisfaction, and commitment (Palmatier et al., 2006; Payan et al., 2016; Yen & Barnes, 2011). Customers who perceive salespeople as cooperative engage in increased levels of collaboration that are mutually beneficial and complementary for both parties (Dwyer et al., 1987; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). In a B2B sales context, in which transactions are much larger in terms of sales volumes, these transactions take more time to unfold, are more relationship-based, and are more critical to the success of firms (Palmatier, Scheer, Evans, & Arnold, 2008). In this kind of situation, sales organizations can gain a competitive advantage by having sales forces with cooperative capabilities.

We also find that perceived cooperation mediates salesperson cooperation on intention to continue the relationship in a B2B sales dyad context (H1). Our findings suggest that salesperson cooperation has a positive influence on customer behavioral intentions only when the customer perceives the salesperson as cooperative. In turn, such a perception has a favorable impact on the customer's behavior, such as intention to continue the relationship.

As we explained in the Introduction, prior research indicates various effects of salesperson cooperation; our research helps explain this wide variance. In brief, our findings indicate that customer-perceived, but not actual salesperson cooperation is a stronger predictor of relationship outcomes. Empirically, we found that the effect of salesperson cooperation disappears when perceived cooperation is included in the model. In other words, investigating only actual salesperson cooperation can lead to misleading results.

6.1.2. Salesperson and relationship factors as cues for cooperation

Prior research has investigated factors that influence customers' perceptions of salespeople (Mullins et al., 2014). In our study, we find that salesperson and relationship characteristics can also influence perceived cooperation. Referring to empathic accuracy research, we suggest that salesperson and relationship characteristics influence the cues salespeople send and what customers receive regarding the level of cooperation.

We find that customer orientation and relationship duration improve customers' perceptions of salesperson cooperation efforts, but salesperson self-efficacy reduces customers' perceptions. Customer orientation and relationship duration both foster cooperative cues from the salesperson, improving perceptions of cooperation. In contrast, salespeople with high self-efficacy display more self-interest cues, which conflict with cooperation cues and decrease perceived cooperation. This is important theoretically because previous research shows that the effect of salesperson-customer cooperation on positive relationship outcomes varies greatly. Our research suggests that salesperson and relational characteristics significantly influence the link

between actual and perceived cooperation by providing insights into why (e.g., cues displayed by salespeople and received by customers) salesperson cooperation may not translate into positive relationship outcomes.

6.1.3. Importance of expertise for reciprocation

We find that perceived salesperson expertise plays an important role in the consequences of perceived cooperation. In particular, perceived salesperson expertise has a positive influence on the relationship between perceived cooperation and relationship quality. This is important because expertise is a robust sales construct that has been studied extensively (Doney & Cannon, 1997; Palmatier et al., 2006; Palmer & Bejou, 1994); yet, to date, its interacting effect with cooperation has not been examined. The following question needs to be asked: Is perceived cooperation enough to drive strong business relationships over time? Our research shows that both salesperson expertise and cooperation may be among the most important drivers of strong business relationships. In line with this logic, our results provide evidence that both perceived salesperson expertise and perceived salesperson cooperation interactively influence relationship quality. This is an important contribution because it shows theoreticians why and when perceived cooperation may positively influence relationship outcomes in a B2B selling context.

However, our results show that perceived cooperation and perceived salesperson expertise did not interactively influence intention to continue a relationship. This finding suggests that customers who perceive salesperson cooperation and expertise simultaneously are willing to invest in building the relationship. Yet, the combined effect of perceived cooperation and perceived salesperson expertise is not enough to influence their actual behaviors (i.e., intent to invest in the relationship). In their meta-analysis, Palmatier et al. (2006) argue that relationship quality is a mediator of customer-focused behaviors. In addition to its positive effect on sales performance, relationship quality has a positive influence on expectation of continuity (Palmatier et al., 2006). Perhaps intention to continue the relationship may take more time to acquire than initial business relationship building. Exploring the interactive role of perceived salesperson expertise and perceived cooperation in other relationship outcomes could be a worthwhile avenue to investigate.

6.2. Managerial implications

Researchers and managers clearly understand that effective B2B relationships require a certain level of cooperation from salespeople. Our research echoes this sentiment, showing that salespeople's explicit cooperation behaviors have a strong positive correlation with relationship outcomes in a B2B context. However, the association between cooperation and relationship outcomes is not as straightforward. Our findings provide guidance to managers on how to maximize relationship outcomes as well as on how to increase customers' perception of their salespeople's cooperation.

6.2.1. Managing perceptions in B2B relationships

The first piece of guidance for managers is that customer perceptions are more powerful than reality. Although this notion is at the heart of marketing, it seems to get lost in sales research. In our study, our results show that the effect of actual salesperson cooperation disappears when perceptions of cooperation are included. We find that perceived cooperation is the primary driver of relationship outcomes while actual cooperation is a driver of perceived cooperation. However, actual cooperation only explains 37% of the variance in perceived cooperation. Together, our findings suggest that managers should invest in training or coaching their salespeople to heighten not only actual cooperation, but also their ability to manage perceptions.

One means for improving perception management is through investments in salespeople's emotional intelligence. In line with prior relationship marketing research (Kidwell et al., 2011), we suggest that incorporating emotional intelligence—because it can be learned (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004)—in sales training programs would help salespeople manage their own emotions and, in turn, positively affect others' perceptions. Additionally, recent sales research has shown that using humor wisely may be central for developing strong relationships (i.e., perceived customer trust) in a B2B setting (Lussier, Grégoire, & Vachon, 2017), as this soft skill can be linked to emotional intelligence (Yip & Martin, 2006).

Sales research has suggested that managers should increase their salespeople's self-efficacy levels by developing positive attitudes and incorporating more practice in selling techniques (i.e., increasing sales expertise) (Fu et al., 2010). Nevertheless, in line with our results (i.e., self-efficacy has a negative impact on perceived cooperation), we propose that managers should first incorporate emotional intelligence training so that the salesperson will invest in identifying, understanding, using, and managing coordinated and complementary actions involved in the salesperson-customer encounter to achieve mutual goals (Anderson & Narus, 1990; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Emotional intelligence ability and training should enhance the effects of positive influences of perceived cooperation while dampening the negative influences of factors such as self-efficacy.

6.2.2. Allocating cooperation efforts

While implementing customer-oriented behaviors can be costly for salespeople (Franke & Park, 2006), the task of cooperating with customers in terms of the salespeople's time, effort, or even investment in other resources may be costly. Our findings shed light on how managers can instruct their salespeople to manage their cooperation to improve their productivity and account profitability. Indeed, the return on investment of cooperation efforts must be weighed against its costs for managers; factors such as the time salespeople spend identifying coordinated and complementary actions may actually result in less time spent in “closing” the sale or visiting other customers.

We find that salespeople can improve perceptions of cooperation outside of actual cooperation. For example, a salesperson's customer orientation positively influences perceived cooperation. That is, when a salesperson possesses high levels of customer orientation, the customer's perception of cooperation is higher regardless of actual cooperation. Thus, salespeople who display more customer-oriented behaviors can actually invest *less* time and/or company resources in cooperating across customer accounts. In this case, customer orientation can substitute for actual cooperation efforts/resources.

Similar to customer orientation, relationship duration also increases perceived cooperation. Although we did not investigate the causality of this relationship, it is suggested that early in the relationship, salespeople must invest more in cooperating with customers for customers to perceive their cooperation behaviors. However, as the relationship matures, salespeople can temper their cooperation behaviors without damaging customer perceptions.

An important salesperson characteristic, self-efficacy, lowers customer perceptions. That is, customers perceive these salespeople as less cooperative regardless of their actual cooperation. This creates a particular problem for managers as this characteristic is strongly tied to salesperson performance. As previously mentioned, because salespeople with high self-efficacy can come off as self-focused and display these cues to their customers, these salespeople will both need to learn to manage perceptions and to spend more time and effort displaying their cooperation.

6.2.3. Reaping the benefits of cooperation

Ultimately, managers want to realize the benefits of their investments. Our study shows that for managers to reap the benefits of salespeople's investments in cooperation, customers must perceive these investments. When customers do perceive cooperation, they will reciprocate with something of value—for example, relationship quality and/or intention to continue the relationship. As B2B selling is heavily predicated on maintaining long-term relationships, this finding highlights the importance of perceived cooperation. However, for relationship quality, customers reciprocated perceived cooperation more often when they viewed the salesperson as an expert, providing an opportunity for salespeople and sales managers. Thus, managers should continue to incorporate salesperson knowledge and competency training while emphasizing the importance of developing coordinated and complementary actions in the salesperson-customer encounter. Moreover, this continues to highlight the importance of managing perceptions. In our study, we measure expertise as a perception by the customer, not as experience or other measure from the salesperson. Thus, managers should continue to focus on how salespeople can come off as experts, as this will improve the extent that customers reciprocate perceived cooperation.

6.3. Limitations and opportunities for further research

Although this research shows that perceived cooperation is an important driver of relationship outcomes in a B2B selling context, some limitations should be acknowledged, in turn providing the basis for further research. Although a strength of our study is that it represents many B2B industry sectors, it was not possible to compare industries. Further research could obtain larger samples within or across sectors to investigate sector-specific relationships. Also, we focused on two important salesperson characteristics—customer orientation and self-efficacy; however, other characteristics could also affect customers' perceptions. We encourage researchers to examine the influence of other salesperson characteristics (e.g., adaptive selling, optimism) in investigations of customer perceived salesperson cooperation and relationship outcomes. Although we included experience as a control, our study is a cross-sectional design. A longitudinal study would allow for a more dynamic view of actual and perceived cooperation over time. That is, how does cooperation develop, is perceived cooperation stable, is there a threshold of perceived cooperation for optimal outcomes?

Our relationship outcomes were subjective measures from the perspective of the customer. This was a strength of our research because we were able to have data from multiple sources, but it also caused areas of concern for common method variance. We took steps to reduce this, but further research should investigate other outcomes, particularly objective outcomes, such as profitability, revenue, salesperson performance, and relationship duration. This would not only alleviate problems with CMV, but also provide a closer link to perceptions and tangible outcomes.

We investigated cooperation from the perspective of a salesperson's stated level of cooperation with a specific customer and that customer's perceptions of the salesperson's cooperation. While we used empathic accuracy to explain how salespeople provide cues that would influence customers' perceptions of cooperation, we did not, nor did we intend to, explicitly measure or focus on customers' accuracy of cooperation. Future research should investigate accuracy on both sides of the relationship, salesperson and customer. This research could investigate the dynamics of accuracy on both sides as well as the relational and financial outcomes.

Appendix A. Items and factor loadings

Item (respondent)	Factor loading
Self-efficacy (salesperson)	
I know the right thing to do in selling situations	0.78
Overall, I am confident of my ability to perform my job well	0.93
I feel I am very capable at the task of selling	0.93
I feel I have the capabilities to successfully perform my job	0.91
I am good at selling	0.94
Customer-orientation (salesperson)	
I have the customer's best interests in mind	0.71
I take a problem-solving approach in selling products or service	0.80
I recommend products or services that are best suited to solving problems	0.83
I try to find out which kinds of products or services would be most helpful to customers	0.80
Cooperation (salesperson)	
I am conscientious and responsive about maintaining a cooperative relationship with my customer	0.92
I am willing to collaborate with my customer regarding smooth operation of the relationship	0.92
I always act in ways that promote mutual interests and welfare in our relationship	0.92
I am interested in assisting my customer to achieve his/her business goals/objectives	0.88
There is a team spirit in the working relationship with my customer in tackling common problems	0.80
Experience (salesperson)	
How long have you worked as a salesperson in this industry? (years)	NA
Perceived cooperation (customer)	
This salesperson is conscientious and responsive about maintaining a cooperative relationship with me	0.89
This salesperson is willing to collaborate with me regarding smooth operation of the relationship	0.86
This salesperson always acts in ways that promote mutual interests and welfare in our relationship	0.81
There is a team spirit in the working relationship with this salesperson in tackling common problems	0.92
Perceived salesperson expertise (customer)	
This salesperson is very knowledgeable about his/her products	0.83
This salesperson is very experienced in his/her job	0.82
This salesperson is very competent	0.88
This salesperson is very knowledgeable about disease states (his/her product lines)	0.85
Perceived relationship quality (customer)	
This salesperson is reliable	0.80
This salesperson has my best interests in mind	0.81
This salesperson is genuinely concerned that our business succeeds	0.80
I am highly satisfied with my relationship with this salesperson	0.85
The relationship I have with this salesperson is valuable to my business	0.85
The quality of the relationship with this salesperson is consistently high	0.88
I care about the long-term success of this salesperson	0.80
I feel strongly motivated to continue my relationship with this salesperson	0.88
Perceived expectation of continuity (customer)	
It is probable that I will see this salesperson again.	0.84
I am willing to discuss business with this salesperson again.	0.91
I plan to continue doing business with this salesperson.	0.92
Perceived frequency of visits (customer)	
This salesperson wants to stay “in touch” and make sure I am still satisfied	0.77
This salesperson wants to keep abreast of changes in my family and practice	0.88
I have received something of a personal nature from this salesperson (e.g., birthday card, coffee, etc.)	0.66
Relationship duration (customer)	
How long has this salesperson called on you? (years)	NA

Intercorrelations: controlling for marker variable.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 Relationship quality	0.93								
2 Intention to continue relationship	0.65	0.89							
3 Salesperson cooperation	0.39	0.34	0.92						
4 Perceived cooperation	0.66	0.52	0.53	0.90					
5 Customer orientation	0.22	0.17	0.40	0.25	0.79				
6 Relationship duration	0.16	0.06	0.19	0.17	0.16	NA			
7 Self-efficacy	− 0.01	− 0.02	0.41	0.02	0.49	0.21	0.94		
8 Perceived salesperson expertise	0.58	0.50	0.34	0.42	0.21	0.19	0.23	0.88	
9 Salesperson experience	0.10	0.01	0.15	0.05	0.28	0.52	0.37	0.17	NA

Notes: Partial correlation controlling for marker variable, frequency of visits. Correlations greater than $|0.15|$ are significant at $p < 0.05$. Cronbach's alpha is along the diagonal in bold.

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