

# AN EXPLORATORY ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF GENDER IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF BUYER-SELLER RELATIONSHIPS

David Bejou, University of North Carolina at Wilmington  
Adrian Palmer, De Montfort University - UK

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## ABSTRACT

The advantages of relational rather than transactional marketing exchange strategies are now widely recognized in many markets. This has triggered research to establish the antecedents of relationship quality, with sales personnel's level of customer orientation, trust and ethical credibility receiving attention.

This study adds to previous research by analyzing the role of gender in the development of buyer-seller relationships. There has been much research examining in isolation the effects of gender on buyer behavior and on the effectiveness of sales personnel. However, the effect of gender on the interaction of buyer and seller, and its contribution to relationship development has received little attention.

A survey of 568 customers of financial services brokers compared dyads defined by the gender of both the customer and their broker. To analyze customers' perceptions of relationship quality, a survey based on the previously validated SOCO scale was used. Many of the underlying dimensions of the scale correspond to constructs frequently cited in both the social psychology and relationship marketing literature, especially empathy, customer orientation and selling orientation.

The study hypothesized that relationship quality as perceived by customers is higher where the seller is female rather than male. This is in accordance with the gender literature assertion that among feminine traits is a greater concern for others and resolution of conflict by compromise and negotiation, compared to male traits of self-seeking goal orientation and resolution of conflict by confrontation.

The results indicate that dyads do exhibit significant differences in terms of buyers' perceptions of some aspects of relationship quality, especially sellers' empathy and perceived pressure. However, the expected result that female sellers were perceived as showing more empathy and less selling pressure does not occur in a simple manner, with differences in these constructs relating more to the gender combination of buyer and seller. A number of reasons for this are suggested, including the possibility that female financial brokers are acting outside of their feminine role, resulting in disconfirmation of buyers' expectations. Also, gender *per se* may be a less useful basis for comparison than self-perceived gender schema.

For more information, contact either author.