Buyer-Seller Communications: Trusted Advisor Constructs and Measurement

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Cover Page Footnote

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Abstract — Attainment of the "trusted advisor" role for sales representatives in a complex sales environment is considered the pinnacle of buyer-seller relationships. This study also examines whether pervasive smartphone use particularly among the millennial generation has substantially altered behaviors in the form of communications in the buyer-seller relationship. Does replacement of face-to-face and direct verbal communications by impersonal technology based communications that removes verbal and non-verbal or behavioral forms of communications have an impact on perceptions of communication quality and trust building among the parties. As use of smartphones for text based communications is more prevalent among younger generations, can generational differences provide insight into any change in the underlying information exchanges and supportive behaviors expected in development of a "trusted advisor" relationship. In order to examine this question, the study sought to measure antecedents of the "trusted advisor" construct including communications quality (Neu, Gonzales & Pass, 2011), trust in an organizational setting (Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995) and a nominal scale of trusted advisor roles based on the work of Maister, Green and Galford (2000). Survey results confirm the antecedents as components and propose a regression model for measurement of the presence of the "trusted advisor" construct.

Keywords — Buyer, Seller, Buyer-Seller, Buyer-Seller Communications, Sales Roles, Trusted Advisor, Millennials

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and Practitioners — Not addressed by author.

Introduction

The role of the sales representative in organizational buying behavior has been a subject of previous studies since the mid-20th century. An unbiased information exchange between the buyer and seller is an integral part of a long-term customer relationship. Personal selling literature suggests that successful business-to-business (B2B) salespeople evolve their role to a business advisor to their customers (Thull, 2007). However, the internet represents an alternative source of product, industry and competitive information normally included in a seller-buyer relationship. Personal technology behaviors have spilled over into the business environment often replacing personal communications with customers and colleagues with impersonal electronic exchanges (Bulik, 2004).

Each new generation brings new expectations to the marketplace. While prior research insight is based on a specific context, a major generational change is underway. Baby Boomers are retiring and leaving the workforce in record numbers. Gen X salespeople have moved into senior management or consulting positions, Millennial as well as Gen Y men and women are in sales roles in significant numbers. The challenge is to capture whether generational change is bringing about a fundamental change in our understanding of the buyer-seller communications and therefore, a change in the buyer-seller relationship (Carlson, 2016). The output of this exercise is to develop a measurement model that will achieve three purposes;

- Support assessing the communications practices and preferences between sales representatives and buyer representative,

- Identify the extent to which those practices contribute to a trust relationship between individuals and organizations, and

- Differentiate responses by generational group on each side of the buyer – seller relationship.
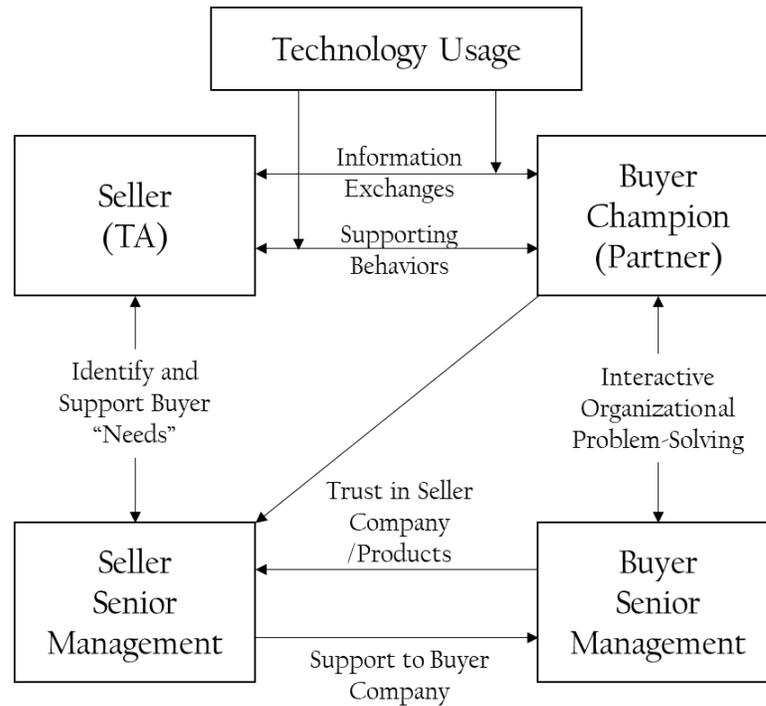
A Conceptual Model

A conceptual model of the impact of technological change on the communication behaviors in the buyer–seller relationship and its impact on the "trusted advisor" role, shown in Figure 1, captures the characteristics of inter-firm interpersonal communications behaviors in the buyer-seller relationship, listening behaviors, trust, and perceptions regarding roles appropriate to the buyer-seller relationship.

Four dyadic relationships are incorporated in the conceptual model. First is the Sales Representative to Buyer / Champion and the reciprocal viewpoint of Buyer / Champion to Sales Representative. Next is the Senior Sales Manager to Sales Representative and, lastly, the Buyer's Senior Manager to the Buyer / Champion.

"Trusted advisor" literature posits that sales representatives achieving this designation must demonstrate trustworthiness, provide timely and unbiased information exchanges and demonstrate a willingness to invest in the success of their buyer / champion and their client company (Maister, Green and Galford, 2000). As the quality of communication, information exchange, and interpersonal relationship develops, the role of "trusted advisor" emerges. The Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995) trust model is central to the reciprocal trust / trustworthiness component of the trusted advisor–partner relationship model (Neu, Gonzalez and Pass, 2011).

Figure 1: Conceptual Model

Our conceptual model is a derivative of the trusted advisor – partnership model (Neu, Gonzales and Pass, 2011) with the addition of the influence of technology usage as it may moderate information exchanges and supporting relationship behaviors. Effective communication of relevant unbiased information for decision-making is the critical flow of the model. When operationalizing this model, we addressed several scenarios that influence the potential outcome.

These include a setting where a "trusted advisor" role is established with a client organization and the "partner" is still in play;

- Has buyer access to internet resources eliminated or altered the information exchange in the buyer-seller relationship?
- If so, how has the relationship changed for the buyer? ...for the sales rep? ... for the selling company?

When a trusted advisor role is established and the "partner" is no longer in play opens additional questions;

- Does the new buyer view the "trusted advisor" as an important contributor to organizational problem solving?
- Does the selling company view the trusted advisor role as a viable approach to nurturing and maintaining a long-term buyer-seller relationship?
- Does the attitude of senior management influence the buyer's behaviors?

The playing field is significantly altered where both buyer and seller representatives have changed since the business-to-business relationship was established;

- What is the nature of the information exchange component between the players?

- How has the information exchange component been influenced by technology?

In a complex sales environment, given the generational / technology driven changes, has the information exchange component substantially been altered or replaced?

- Does the selling company view the trusted advisor role as a desirable goal for the relationship?
- Does the trusted advisor role change? If so, how? What are its "new" characteristics?

Development of a Measurement Model:

In the quest to quantify the evolution of a trusted advisor relationship, we seek to find the constructs what contribute to an understanding of the different dimensions. Prior research has been incorporated in our model that addressed the perception of roles and outcomes, the level of trust building exchanges. Our proposed measurement model tracks the four dyadic relationships outlined in the conceptual model. Each part of the model and the associated items and scales employ existing instruments and scales where possible. While the items associated with the communication preferences scale incorporate business scenarios related to a typical complex sales relationship, respondent choices for this new set of items reflects use of traditional as well as technology driven communication methods.

The communications and role measurement model measures quality of information exchanges and supporting relationship behaviors in three dyadic relationships;

- Dyad 1: Sales representative (rep) to buyer / champion and the reciprocal buyer to sales representative.
- Dyad 2: Sales rep to senior sales manager and the reciprocal manager to sales rep relationship.
- Dyad 3: Buyer / champion to senior company manager and the reciprocal senior company manager to buyer / champion relationship.

Information Exchanges

Communications theory provides the foundation for questions regarding forms of communication, information exchange, and personal interaction between buyer and seller representatives. Two different scales are in the communication quality component of the model.

- **Communications Quality**: Inter-firm interpersonal communications are measured using 14 Likert items. The communication inventory focuses on the quality of information exchange with these constructs; relevance, bias, completeness, timeliness, frequency, and responsiveness (Neu, Gonzalez and Pass, 2011).

- **Listening Behaviors:** Effective communication also includes proactive listening behaviors. These are measured using 12 Likert items organized around three constructs; sensing, evaluating, and responding (Ramsey and Sohi, 1997)

- **Communication Preferences:** This set of items posit a set of situations or circumstances describing communications between a buyer and the sales representative. In each item, the respondent indicates their level of preference for the mode or form of that communication. Options for response range from traditional letters and printed material to texting and video conferencing. The communication scenarios draw heavily on the typical touchpoints evident in a long-term buyer-seller relationship in the work of Maister, Green and Galford (2000).

Supporting Relationship Behaviors

Supporting relationship behaviors incorporated in the measurement model include a scale for

Figure 2: Communications and Role Measurement Model

measurement of trust building behaviors and perceptions of role behaviors whether in-role or extra-role. An integrative trust model (Mayer, Davis and Schoorman, 1995) provides the basis for questions that measure four components of trust; ability, benevolence, integrity, and propensity to trust. A "trusted advisor" model (Maister, Green and Galford, 2000) serves as the framework for assessing the seller's effectiveness in meeting expectations in the buyer-seller relationship.
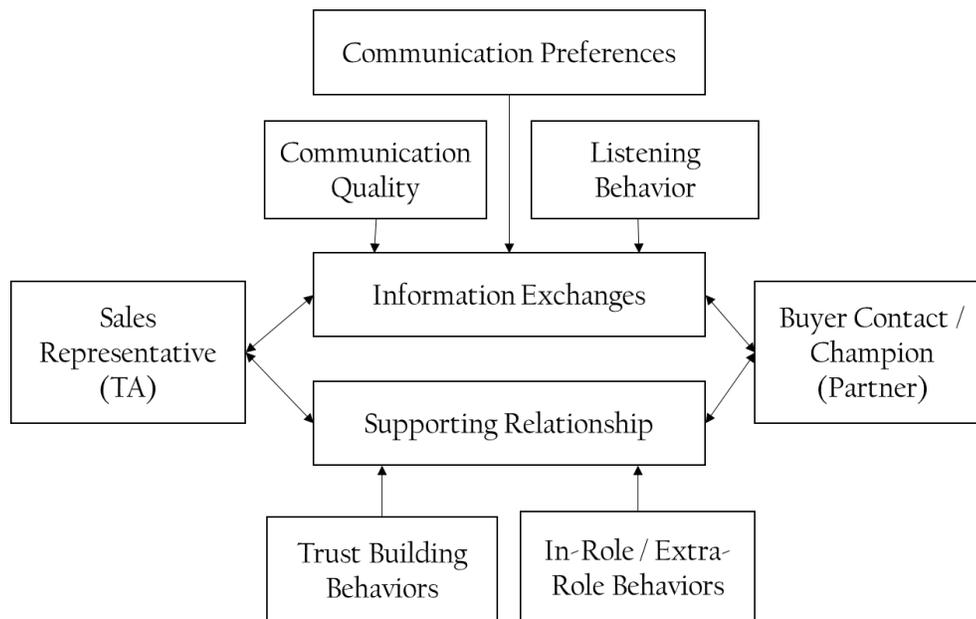
- **Trust Building Behaviors**: The inter-organizational interpersonal trust scale uses five to six Likert items for each of the constructs within the Mayer, Davis and Schoorman trust model (1999). These include; ability, benevolence, integrity, and propensity to trust.

- **In-Role / Extra-Role Behaviors:** We have drawn from Maister, Green and Galford (2000) to create 16 items that describe the level and nature of the role of a sales representative. Choices for response to each set of role expectations represents one of the four levels on the journey to a "trusted advisor". Constructs include; focus, energy, value received, and measures of success derived from the inter-firm interpersonal relationship.

Method

Designing a Survey Instrument

Designing a survey instrument to test the model represents significant challenges. Three dyadic relationships are key to understanding the information exchanges and supporting relationship behaviors incorporated in the conceptual model. Phrasing of the items must represent the role and perception of each dyad. Use of established scales for four of the constructs included in the model results in a total of 75 items. Add demographic profile items and the survey contains 80 items (75 for measurement, 5 for profile) raising potential issues of response rate and abandonment.

Communication Quality and Listening Behaviors

Our measurement model contained a version of the 14 items for measuring sales rep / buyer communications (Neu, Gonzalez and Pass, 2011) and 12 items for measuring sales representative listening skills (Ramsey and Sohi, 1997) reflecting the role of the respective party. Two forms of question were included in the survey. First was the buyer champion's assessment of the communication qualities and listening behaviors of the sales representative. A reciprocal set of items were cast in terms of the sales representative's perception of the buyer contact or champion's communication qualities and listening behaviors.

The model also suggests that the same items should be used to obtain perceptions of sales representative behaviors from the buyer's manager as well as the representative's manager to triangulate an organization context for the observed communication quality. When deploying as a questionnaire seeking responses from peers of the sales representative as well as senior managers within the respective buyer and seller organizations, the same item will appear with minor revision of the statements to reflect the respective respondent's role. However, the fundamental intent of the item remains the same.

Communication Preferences

Communication preferences are solicited from both buyer and seller with eight items reflecting different situations that communication would be expected in any business-to-business complex sales environment. This scale describes a set of scenarios encountered in a typical B2B sales environment. Communication modes used include face-to-face communications, video conferencing, phone / voice mail, text, and e-mail. Exchange of documents and product marketing materials is assumed through e-mail therefore a mail / courier option was not among the choices available. No external source is cited for this scale beyond the author's direct professional experience in sales.

Trust Building and Role Behaviors

Constructing a survey instrument for trust building behaviors and in-role / extra-role behaviors followed the same process used for communication quality and listening behaviors. same process. Our measurement model contains 25 items used to measure the four components of the trust model (Mayer, Davis and Schoorman, 1995) reflect the viewpoint of the respondent to the person being assessed (sales representative or buyer contact / champion). Role behaviors are presented with similar adjustments. This set of statements assess perceptions of the sales

representative as he / she progresses from subject matter expert to trusted advisor in the relationship with the buyer (Maister, Green and Galford, 2000).

Survey Process

The survey for this study was conducted over a three-month period and garnered fifty-eight (58) responses using Google Forms as the data collection vehicle. For each respondent, questions were presented covering basic demographic data as well as scale items about communication quality, choices in communication methods, expectations of seller roles, and interpersonal interorganizational trust.

As a convenience sample, e-mail invitations and referrals were distributed among researcher contacts in business-to-business sales environments. Two-thirds of the responses (67.2%) were active sales representatives while the remainder were split among peers of the sales representative (10.3%) and senior managers in the seller's company (22.4%). No buyers or senior managers of a buyer's company represented in the survey results.

With the snowball / referral aspects of the survey, a total response rate could not be calculated. Thirty direct e-mails with links to the survey instrument were distributed by the principle researcher at the beginning of the survey with a request to share the link with associates. Survey links were also distributed by a co-researcher to recent graduates of a personal selling and sales management class. Attempts to relaunch the survey in September produced an additional half-dozen responses.

Data Collection and Preparation

Data was collected via Google Forms and stored in spreadsheet format on Google Sheets. Age distribution of the sample was 70.6% within the Generation X and Baby Boomer age group while 29.3% were from the Millennial group. A similar distribution of gender was reflected in the survey sample. Males comprised 77.6% while female respondents were 19%. Two respondents preferred not to specify gender. Given the length of the survey instrument (66 items), it is likely that abandonment rates were high. However, Google Forms does not provide tracking of "views" versus survey completion. Therefore, abandonment rates would not be calculated.

Subsequently, data was downloaded to Microsoft Excel for data cleansing. This included recoding literals to numeric values and realignment of responses by type of respondent to common columnar containers. Grouping codes were created for age groups as well as respondent type to facilitate group level analysis. Missing values were identified and recoded. After data cleaning, the data set was loaded to SPSS (Version 23). Simplified variable names were applied for easy identification of each variable. SPSS was used as the principal statistical analysis tool for this study.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Using confirmatory factor analysis, we found support for the scales for communications quality (Neu, Gonzales and Pass, 2011), trust in an organizational setting (Mayer, Davis and Schoorman, 1995) and a scale of trusted advisor roles based on the work of Maister, Green and Galford (2000). While listening behavior is represented in our model (Ramsey and Sohi, 1997), we chose not to incorporate this scale in our survey instrument as the items are based on face-to-face encounters and did not accommodate the range of other communication choices that were the focus of this study.

Communication Quality

Neu, Gonzales and Pass (2011) identified 14 Likert items for measuring interpersonal communications in a business-to-business environment. The resulting scale uses latent variables of relevance, bias, completeness, pro/activeness / timeliness, frequency and responsiveness. When adapting the scale for our survey instrument, four (4) item were removed prior to deployment. This effort including deletion of or merger of single item dimensions with other closely related dimensions (completeness and responsiveness; timeliness and frequency). All but one of the sub-scales meet the benchmark criteria of .70 for Cronbach's Alpha. Neither variance explained nor Cronbach's alpha would improve by removing any item.

Table 1: Confirmatory Factor Analysis – Communication Quality

Scale / Subscale	Items	% Variance Explained	Cronbach's Alpha	
			Alpha	Standardized
Communication Quality				
Relevance	3	83.490	0.901	0.901
Bias	2	72.727	0.624	0.625
Complete	2	85.444	0.830	0.83
Timely	3	61.189	0.681	0.68

Trust

The interpersonal trust scale is based on the Mayer, Davis and Schoorman trust model (1999) and uses three to five items for each of the constructs of ability, benevolence, integrity, and propensity to trust. Confirmatory factor analysis yields a single component solution for three of the four constructs. However, analysis of the propensity-to-trust items yielded a two-factor solution. The first three-item sub-scale relates to general attitudes of trust toward others while the second sub-scale focuses on specific interaction with others. Cronbach's alpha scores for all sub-scales explain 70% or more of the variance and all meet the 0.70 threshold of reliability (Nunnally, 1978).

Table 2: Confirmatory Factor Analysis - Trust

Scale / Subscale	Items	% Variance Explained	Cronbach's Alpha	
			Alpha	Standardized
Trust				
Abilities	5	85.619	0.957	0.958
Benevolence	5	79.957	0.937	0.937
Integrity	5	72.408	0.890	0.897

Propensity (General)	3	71.094	0.796	0.797
Propensity (Specific)	2	77.583	0.711	0.711

In-Role / Extra-Role Behaviors

Confirmatory factor analysis of the 16 items for roles produced a four component solution with four items each. This is consistent with Maister, Green and Galford (2000) where the items for each component begin with a common phrase (My rep focuses on..., My rep's energy is spent on..., What we receive from our rep..., Indications of we view as success...). For simplicity, the components are labeled focus, energy, delivery, and success.

In subsequent analysis of each component to verify a sub-scale, one item was removed for maximize percentage of variance explained by the subscale and maximize Cronbach's alpha. All but one of the sub-scales meet the benchmark criteria of .70 for Cronbach's Alpha. The exception was the sub-scale for Role Definition – Delivery where the computed alpha was .69 versus .70. With only 1/100 difference in outcome, we chose to keep the sub-scale as part of the overall measuring a "trusted advisor" role. Results are summarized in Table 1.

Table 3: Confirmatory Factor Analysis – In-Role / Extra-Role Behaviors

Scale / Subscale	Items	% Variance Explained	Cronbach's Alpha	
			Alpha	Standardized
Role Relationship				
Focus (3)	3	71.114	0.790	0.797
Energy (3)	3	78.793	0.858	0.865
Role Outcome				
Deliver (3)	3	61.979	0.690	0.692
Success (3)	3	62.918	0.702	0.705

We conclude that the role model (Maister, Green and Galford, 2000) adequately describes the level and nature of the role of a sales representative and serves as the framework for assessing the seller's effectiveness in meeting expectations in the buyer-seller relationship. The model uses the constructs of focus, energy, value delivered, and measures of success derived from the inter-firm interpersonal relationship.

Communication Methods

Preference in communication method is hypothesized as a differentiator between Millennial and Generation X / Baby Boomer age groups. We address this issue by constructing a set of choices that reflect differences in technology as well as immediacy of the communication. In rank order, the choices are;

- Face-to-face meeting (1) and video conference (2) provide both verbal and non-verbal communication.

- Phone and / or voice mail (3) for audio only technology for verbal communication
- E-mail (4) and text messaging (5) technologies for written communication.

Rank order values were reverse coded to generate a scale of relative importance with the choice. We chose to assign highest level of importance to approaches that support both verbal and non-verbal communication.

Communication preferences also vary according to the situation. We test this assertion by constructing eight different business situations that generation communication between buyers and sellers in a business-to-business sales environment. We rank ordered the scenarios based on a perceived level of importance to the organization in the overall sales cycle. A respondent's choice of communication method becomes the value for rating the importance of the communication in each business-to-business scenario.

Figure 3: Communication Preferences by Business Scenario
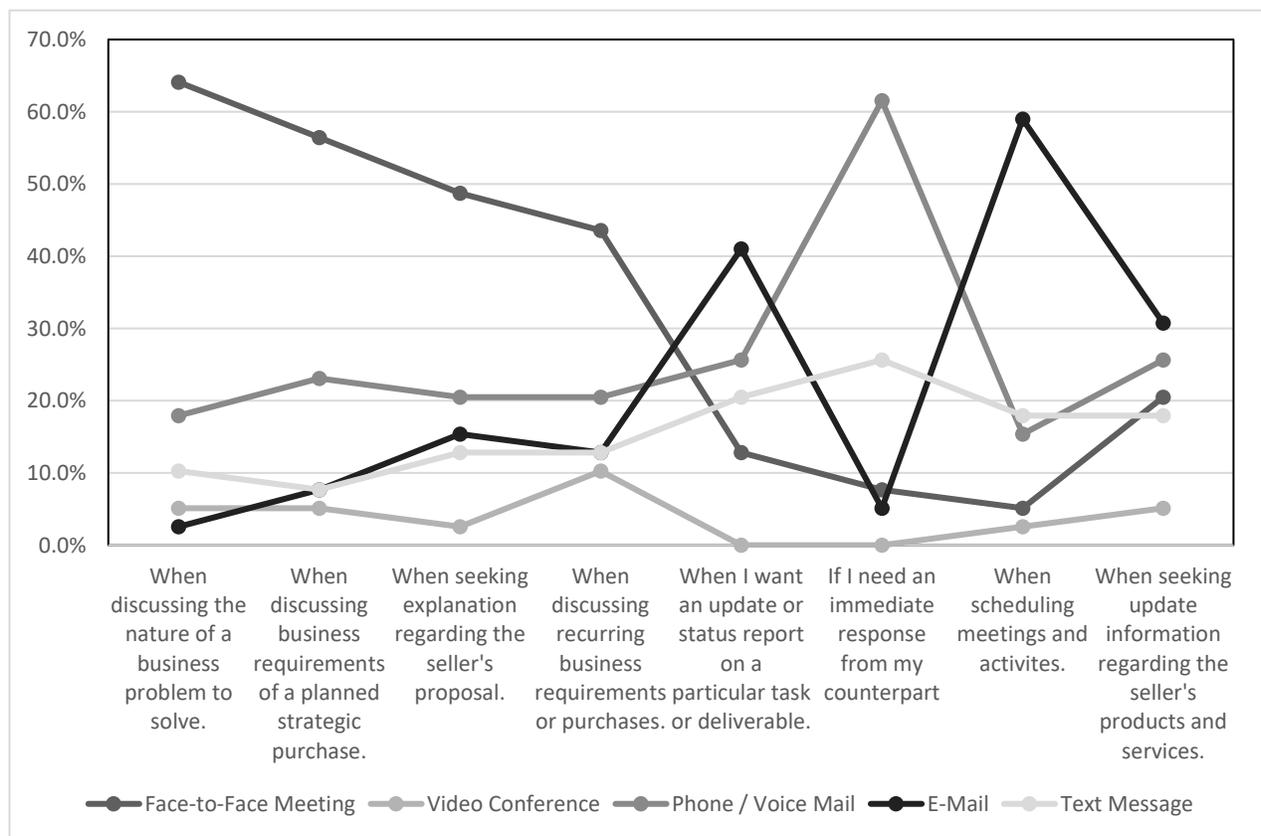
Trusted Advisor Model Testing

Second Order Scale Constructs

We created mean scores for communication quality, roles, and trust by adding the respective scores for each component in the respective construct and computing a mean for each respondent.

As noted, confirmatory factor analysis identified items identified with each component of the respective scales for a construct. Mean scores for each component were then used to compute a mean score for each of the second order latent variables. Reliability analysis results in Cronbach's alphas greater than .80 thereby meeting the minimum threshold of .70 for reliability (Nunnally, 1978)

Table 4: Factor Analysis - Second Order Scale Constructs

Construct	% Variance Explained	Cronbach's Alpha		Items
		Alpha	Standardized	
Role	49.24	0.808	0.808	4
Communication Quality	71.502	0.866	0.866	4
Trust	73.293	0.877	0.877	4

Regression Model

Using SPSS regression analysis, our three component model produced an R^2 of .964 and Adjusted R^2 of .962. The dependent variable was "Trusted Advisor" while the independent variables were the computed scale scores for communication quality, roles, and trust. The model produces an F statistic of 477.716 with a p-value of .000 at .05 level of significance. Collinearity tolerances have less than 20% shared variance among the three independent variables indicating low levels of multicollinearity. Tables 5 through 8 provide SPSS regression analysis results for our model.

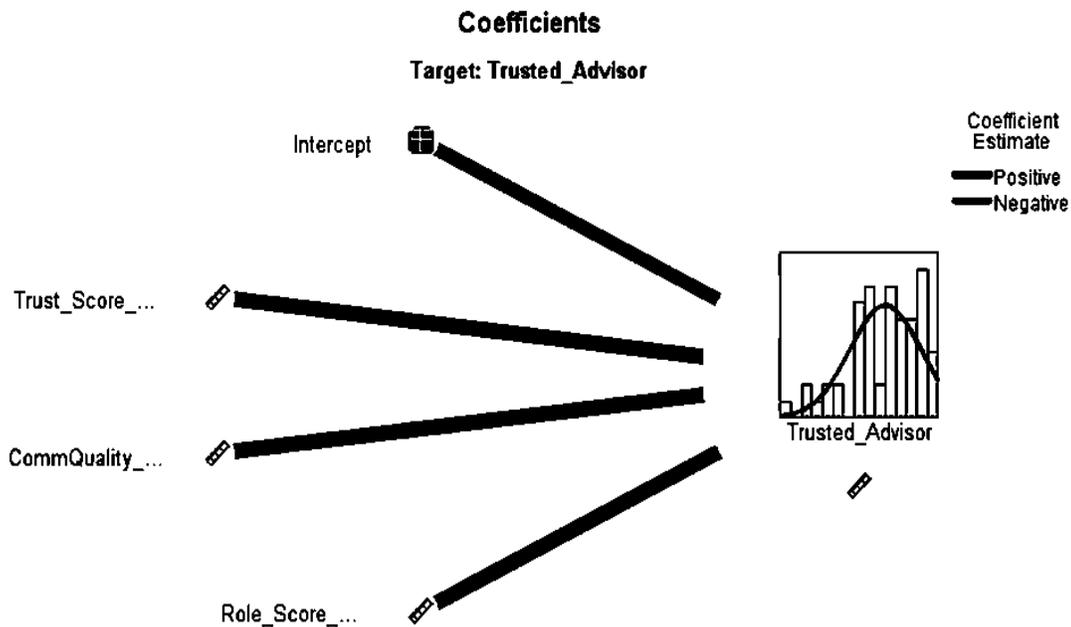### Figure 4: Trusted Advisor Regression Model

Table 5: Trusted Advisor Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.982[a]	.964	.962	.13275

Table 6: Trusted Advisor Model - ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	25.256	3	8.419	477.716	.000[b]
	Residual	.934	53	.018		
	Total	26.190	56			

a. Dependent Variable: Trusted_Advisor,

b. Predictors: (Constant), Trust_Score, Role_Score, CommQuality_Score

Table 7: Trusted Advisor Regression Model Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
1 (Constant)	-5.975	.215		-27.741	.000		
CommQuality_Score	.590	.031	.541	18.910	.000	.823	1.215
Role_Score	.397	.051	.215	7.845	.000	.899	1.112
Trust_Score	.594	.032	.530	18.481	.000	.818	1.223

Table 8: Trusted Advisor Correlation Matrix

		CommQuality	Trust	Role
CommQuality	Pearson Correlation	1	.389**	.259
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.003	.052
Trust	Pearson Correlation	.389**	1	.271*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003		.042
Role	Pearson Correlation	.259	.271*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.052	.042	

n= 58

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

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Hypothesis Testing

This study begins with the premise that technological change in the form of pervasive smartphone use particularly among the millennial generation has substantially altered behaviors in the form of communications between sales representatives and buyer champions / contacts. Current literature about the role of a "trusted advisor" in the buyer-seller relationship focuses on the quality of communications and resulting trust building between buyers and sellers. The question arises whether replacement of face-to-face and direct verbal communications by impersonal technology based communications that remove the verbal and non-verbal or behavioral forms of communications has an impact on perceptions of communication quality and trust building among the parties. As use of smartphones for text based communications is more prevalent among younger generations, can generational differences provide insight into any change in the underlying information exchanges and supportive behaviors expected in development of a "trusted advisor" relationship.

H1: There are distinct differences between age groups in the choices of communication methods to be used in interpersonal business communication between buyer and sellers in a business-to-business sales environment.

Respondents chose their preferred communication method from five communications choices in eight different but common business communication scenarios between buyers and sellers in each of two age groups; Millennials (ages 22-34) and Generation X / Baby Boomers (ages 35-75).

We found no statistically significant support for the proposition that there was a difference between groups when applying a X^2 test. Totals by communication method were used as individual cells did not meet the frequency requirement. At a .05 level of significance and four (4) degrees of freedom, the test generated a X^2 statistic of 4.4229 with a p-value 0.3518 and a critical value of 9.4877.

Additional t-tests for a difference of means between age groups (22-34 vs. 35-75) for each of the three independent variables failed to find support for the alternative hypothesis that there was a difference. Similarly, there was no statistically significant difference in means between age groups with the dependent variable.

Given this finding, the next question is whether the proposed model has validity and a sufficient level of reliability for measurement of the quality of information exchanges between buyers and sellers as well as the degree to which trust building behaviors contribute to the evolution of a "trusted advisor" role in the buyer-seller relationship.

H2: Three of the major components of the constructs incorporated in the overall model demonstrate construct validity and do not overlap significantly in measuring behaviors within the buyer-seller relationship.

The constructs addressed in this proposition where derived from prior research and separately identified as communications quality (Neu, Gonzales and Pass, 2011), trust in an organizational setting (Mayer, Davis and Schoorman, 1995) and a scale of trusted advisor roles based on the work of Maister, Green and Galford (2000). Selection of preferred communications was defined as an ordinal variable with a relative weighting of the degree of verbal and non-verbal / behavioral content in the respective choices.

We found support for this proposition through confirmatory factor analysis and reliability analysis applied to the respective items for each of the three constructs. Second order factor analysis yields similar results. All sub-scales for each construct result in a single component as inputs to the second order scale. Correlation matrix for all three constructs reveals relatively low correlation coefficients (< 40%).

We conclude that there is support for hypothesis H2 in terms of construct validity. Additionally, we conclude that there is little overlap between the three major constructs as demonstrated through correlation analysis.

H3: Each of the constructs (communication quality, trust, and roles) are independent measures that when combined provide a means of quantifying the level of "trusted advisor" achieved in a buyer-seller relationship.

Through regression analysis we found support for H3 in finding a statistically significant relationship between each of these constructs and a latent variable identified as "trusted advisor". The model yields an adjusted R^2 of .962 with an ANOVA F statistic of 477.716 and a p-value of .000. Using SPSS regression output, we also established that the multicollinearity among the independent variables is extremely limited. Each value was less than 20% of shared variance.

Coefficients of the model indicate the strongest factor influencing a 'trusted advisor" role is the trust variable (.594) followed closely by the communication quality variable (.590). While perception of role as an indicator of how a representative focuses attention and energy, the quality of communication and the associated levels of trust reflected in perceptions of abilities, benevolence and integrity are far more important. Therefore, no matter what the difficulty or strategic importance of the task, a sales representative can build "trusted advisor" capital through the quality of communications and trust building behaviors.

Conclusions

Application

Identifying measurable components of the "trusted advisor" construct provides value to sales management in a complex sales environment where buyer-seller relationships are developed over time. The components of the scale are relatively easy to identify; communications quality, trust, and role behaviors. Our regression model provides an appropriate scaling approach for this latent variable that can be easily communicated to laymen in the business-to-business sales environment.

The final benefit is to provide feedback to field sales representatives and their managers in the quest to achieve improved buyer-seller relationships. We propose a summative scale scoring process to measure sales representative progress in the journey to a "trusted advisor". The summative scale begins with the addition of scores for sub-scale items in each of the following three scales: communication quality, trust, and role definition.

Further Research

The sample size for this study was limited (n=58). Follow-up research should seek sponsorship in a single large scale B2B sales organization. This would provide a common base of training, product / services, and managerial expectations for development of a long-term buyer-

seller relationship. A strategy for overcoming some of the difficulties in achieving greater response when using the survey instrument and model are;

Paired Reponses: Each invited participant is asked to forward a link to the reciprocal party of the dyad with a request to complete the survey. With confidentiality assurance, we believe the personal nature of the request will more likely be honored than a request from a third-party researcher.

Survey Length: While the survey is somewhat lengthy, several steps can be taken to increase response rate and reduce abandonment. Designing for an attractive physical appearance as well as survey support on a desktop, laptop, tablet, or smartphone may help obtain greater participation. A progress bar as one completes each section may discourage abandonment as one "sees light at the end of the tunnel".

Survey Content: While the number of items is relatively high for a survey (80 items), reliability and item analysis identified items that could be dropped from the survey instrument. Applying these changes results in a 15% reduction in survey items. Subsequent survey data should be tested with confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and reliability analysis for further assurance that the results are comparable.

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