IJACT 21-9-13

The Effect of Salesperson's Guanxi on Sale Performance :
A Comparison with Customer Orientation

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Abstract

   In this research, it was investigated the competence of Korean salesmen in the insurance business(B2C, consumer goods marketing) and information communication industry(B2B, industrial goods marketing) at the individual level rather than the organizational level. The salesperson's Guanxi ability means the salesperson's ability to create, maintain, develop the Guanxi ability. Namely, it was investigated whether the Korean salesman's Guanxi ability is the effective and persuasive concept in explaining the sales performance(company performance, business performance). The purpose of this paper was to verify which variables, among Guanxi ability and customer orientation, better explain the sales performance of salespeople. The Western concept of marketing that is closest to Guanxi is the concept of the customer-orientation that is based on the theory of relationship exchange. Confucian culture in the East is the construct concept, Guanxi is the measurement. The relational exchange theory in the West is the construct concept, customer orientation is the measurement.

   As the result of the analysis, we found that the Guanxi proved a greater correlation with sales performance than customer orientation. In the information technology industry, there was a big difference compared to insurance industry, whereas Guanxi and customer orientation had a similar level of correlation with sales performance. In the case of the insurance industry, we found that the Guanxi and sales performance were significant but the customer orientation and sales performance were not. This means that sales performance can be accurately and sufficiently explained only by adding the Guanxi ability in addition to customer orientation. The result of analyzing the mediating effect of the Guanxi ability between customer orientation and company performance, customer orientation was significant with Guanxi, and customer orientation and company performance were also significant. But, when the Guanxi was used as the parameter, the Guanxi was significant with company performance, but the customer orientation was not. Even when the dependent variable was business performance, when the Guanxi was used as the parameter, we found that the Guanxi was significant with the business performance, but the customer orientation was not. Namely, it proved Guanxi ability and customer orientation are completely independent concepts.

   In addition, we found that the information technology industry, unlike the insurance industry, mediated the Guanxi ability between customer orientation and sales performance. We confirmed that in the future, salespeople should not only rely on rational methods to maintain and reinforce customer relationships, but must consider the emotional factors through empathy with customers.

   Keywords: Guanxi, Social Capital, Social Network Theory, Relationship Marketing, Customer Orientation

1. INTRODUCTION

As we enter the 21st century, the quantitative and qualitative importance of China in the global economy is increasing significantly. In particular, the share of China's G.D.P(Gross Domestic Product) in global G.D.P has greatly increased from 4.3% in 2003 to 16.3% in 2019 [1]. As the global business environment changes rapidly, competition among companies is becoming increasingly competitive. In particular, as the service industry enters the maturity stage, global companies in each country are focusing their internal core competencies on customer relationship management as a means of differentiated competitive advantage compared to the past [2]. In summary, companies are trying to understand their current customers accurately by practicing relationship marketing through C.R.M(Customer Relationship Management). In addition, in order to realize customer satisfaction, various sales, marketing strategies, tactical activities are integrated in all [3].

Modern customer relationship management theory can be defined as a series of sales and marketing processes in which a company builds, maintains, and strengthens relationships with consumers that provide practical help to the company by providing excellent customer value and customer satisfaction compared to other competitors. For that reason, CRM is the most important concept and tool in modern marketing strategy activities. As the proportion of the Chinese economy increases rapidly in the global competition environment, academic interest in China's sales and marketing business methods is gradually increasing, and related academic research is also increasing explosively. In the Chinese business field, success can only be achieved by making good use of social networks. The social network referred to in the article refers to a sales and marketing method that is unique to China, namely, Guanxi. Guanxi has been recognized as one of the driving forces driving Chinese business in recent years to the extent that it is said to be a key to success or a trade secret in China [4].

In China, very difficult tasks can be easily solved with Guanxi, and very easy tasks cannot be solved without Guanxi. In the case of the Chinese, it is difficult for them to take actions to pursue only selfish interests in the Guanxi network. This is because the moment an individual exhibits selfish behavior, the member is immediately expelled from the Guanxi Network. Guanxi is an essential sales and marketing concept and communication negotiation term in China. Guanxi is a special and unique, cultural term that cannot be replaced by other sales and marketing concepts. However, in a strict sense, even in the academic section, the definition and concept of Guanxi are not clear, so systematic studies have not been conducted [5]. Another reason to pay attention to Guanxi is that it is a valid concept for accurately understanding the marketing phenomenon in Asia, which has emerged as the center of the newly reorganized global business environment. In the meantime, Western business circles have interpreted Guanxi simply as the result of a transitional phenomenon in which China transitioned from communism to modified capitalism. In terms of customer relationship management, a general concept compared to a salesperson's Guanxi ability is the salesperson's customer orientation. Saxe and Weitz developed the S.O.C.O(Selling Orientation Customer Orientation) scale to measure the customer orientation of salespeople [6].

The purpose of this research was to verify which variables, among Guanxi ability and customer orientation, better explain the sales performance of salespeople. The Western concept of marketing that is closest to Guanxi is the concept of the customer-orientation that is based on the theory of relationship exchange. Confucian culture in the East is the construct concept, Guanxi is the measurement. The relational exchange theory in the West is the construct concept, customer orientation is the measurement. In this research, the concepts of marketing(Guanxi and Customer-orientation) were directly compared. Whether or not the Guanxi of Eastern is a completely independent or encompassing concept of customer orientation in the West. However, if Guanxi is simply understood as a Chinese or Chinese character culture, many limitations are found in the interpretation of the concept of Guanxi. Representative Chinese or Chinese-speaking countries are China, Taiwan, and the overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia. However, as in Guanxi, personal network management using blood ties, academic ties and so on. Guanxi is a sales skill that can be easily found in other Asian countries besides China, such as Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. We can easily confirm that Guanxi, the subject of this study, is still operating even today as a product of collectivist culture within the Confucian culture. Human relationships in the Confucian culture are more informal and private than formal business relationships. This can be extended and applied to relationships with superiors, colleagues, subordinates, and customers. For this reason, Guanxi should be interpreted and applied as a cultural code for understanding consumers in individual countries such

as China, Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and Vietnam, which are Confucian cultural spheres, and sales and marketing skills accordingly. In the 21st century, with the rise of China, many business and economists predict that East Asian Confucianism will become the center of the world economy. At such an important point, the need to study Guanxi, an important construct based on Confucian culture, in a Western scientific way is emerging. It is necessary to compare and verify whether the Eastern Guanxi is a construct that is completely independent of the Western concept of customer orientation or is a construct that is encompassed. Western customer orientation is based on an individualistic culture and focuses on the formal problem-solving process. On the other hand, Guanxi in the East contains many emotional elements based on the emotional exchange between people in the collectivist culture. This paper was conducted based on the necessity of such research, and was intended to directly compare and verify the concept of customer orientation in the East and the West. Relational exchange theory in the West is a construct concept and customer orientation is a measurement. On the other hand, the relationship of Confucianism in the East is a construct concept and Guanxi is a measurement. In this research, we tried to find out which of the concepts of Guanxi ability and customer orientation better explains the current sales and marketing phenomena in Korea. Such theoretical verification is expected to provide an important opportunity for Guanxi to understand the sales and marketing phenomena of East Asia beyond China. This study examines the effect of Korean salesperson Guanxi ability on sales performance. In other words, we found whether the Guanxi ability mediates between customer orientation and sales performance, or whether the Guanxi ability alone can completely explain the sales performance. Additionally, the correlation between Guanxi ability and sales performance was confirmed according to the differences between industries(B2B, B2B). Through this, this study will be of practical help in improving the responsiveness of domestic salespeople and marketers to the increasingly demanding domestic consumers in the rapidly changing sales and marketing environment of Korea.

2. THEORECTICAL BACKGROUND

2.1   Social Capital and Social Network Theory

Guanxi is a sub-concept among a kind of social capital that creates economic value. According to political and economic development, culture is shifting from the monopoly of a certain class to what the masses enjoy [7]. Social capital is particularly important in these changes. Social capital is a completely different concept from economic capital. Economic capital refers to capital or goods that are mobilized in the production cycle to earn more money. On the other hand, social capital refers to the total amount of resources that are actually obtained or are likely to be obtained through a continuous network of relationships. In modern management, the analysis of the behavior of creating relationships or networks between organizations is one of the important factors influencing the success or failure of a company. Networks can enhance company competitiveness by helping members of other groups within the organization access internal resources. In a strongly global market where core technology and competitiveness are essential, the role of social networks for companies and organizations is becoming more important than in the past. Guanxi has all the advantages of Western networks mentioned above [8].

2.2   Western Relational Theory and Relational Marketing

In the context of sales and marketing, Eastern Guanxi can be directly compared with the Western concept of relationship exchange in relationship marketing. The fundamental difference between Guanxi and relational exchange is that Guanxi can have its origins in the collectivist culture of the East, and relational exchange in the individualistic culture of the West. Guanxi relies entirely on personal connections and is less visible because it is informal. However, the Western relationship exchange has a relatively clear, transparent, and open form of transaction. If we focus on the difference in relationship and directly compare the concept of Guanxi and relational exchange theory, the eastern Guanxi is long-term and emotional, and emphasizes intra-individual relationships within a group, whereas the western relationship exchange is short-term, rationalistic, and individualistic.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESIS

The purpose of this study is to confirm whether the Guanxi ability is a convincing, valid, and valid concept to explain sales performance in Korea. For this purpose, we investigated the relationship between Guanxi ability and sales performance targeting salespeople in the information communication business(B2B) and insurance business(B2C) of large domestic companies. In the B2B sales field, B2B salespeople need to provide more information to buyers compared to the past and switch to a sales method that can provide solutions that buyers have and solve problems. The Western marketing concept closest to Guanxi is customer orientation, which is based on the relational exchange theory. Confucianism in the East is a construct concept, Guanxi is a measurement, in the West, the relational exchange theory is a construct concept, and customer orientation is a measurement. This study tried to verify whether the Guanxi ability is a construct that is completely independent of the Western concept of customer orientation or is a comprehensive concept by using the customer orientation that is directly compared with the Guanxi ability. The hypothesis of this study is as follows.

H1: Guanxi ability will mediate customer orientation and sales performance.

Because customer orientation focuses on the ability to help customers, it is generally effective when the nature of the sales business is complex or the industry requires more cooperative customer relationships above [9]. However, according to the prior research, customer orientation is a valid concept to explain salesperson performance regardless of the business-to-business(B2B) or business-to-consumer(B2C) industry [10]. This has already been verified through previous studies. Since Guanxi is a concept that emphasizes private rather than public relations, it is assumed that it will be more effective in explaining salesperson performance in B2C than in B2B, and the following hypothesis was established.

H2: The impact of Guanxi ability or customer orientation on sales performance will differ depending on the industries(B2B, B2C). From below, the term Guanxi ability is used instead of the term Guanxi.

4. METHOD

In this research, information communication companies A representing B2B and insurance companies B representing B2C were selected for the research. In addition, the results were analyzed by measuring the Guanxi and customer orientation targeting the salespeople currently working in these companies, and linking them with their sales performance. This study investigated by randomly extracting salespeople working for company A and company B. As for the survey method, a total of 206 people were collected by visiting the company in person, answering the questionnaire in a one-to-one face-to-face manner. Excluding the 4 respondents who responded insincerely, data were collected and analyzed for 202 people. The Guanxi measurement scale was developed by Lin of Taiwan, and Saxe and Weitz' S.O.C.O(Selling Orientation Customer Orientation) were used for customer orientation. And sales performance was largely identified by dividing into company performance and business performance of salespeople. In the case of company performance are largely divided into four detailed measurement items. There are sales contribution, profit contribution, market share contribution, and new customers' achievements over the past three years. In the case of business performance, it was measured by dividing into four categories. There are past sales trend, business profit growth rate, market share, and current sales. Regardless of the differences by industries(B2B, B2C), all of the salespeople's company performance and business performance were asked the same using the Liked 5-point scale.

5. RESULT

5.1 Sample Characteristics

In this study, a total of 202 people's actual data were used for analysis targeting Korean companies A and B representing the information communication industry and insurance industry. In the information

communication industry, 35.3% were in their 20s, 48.3% in their 30s, 16.4% in their 40s, and men accounted for 93.1%. And in the insurance industry, 19.8% were in their 20s, 44.2% in their 30s, and 36.0% in their 40s, and males accounted for 54.7%, with a relatively equal male to female ratio. Relatively more males and 40s were extracted from the insurance industry. This difference in sample composition reflects the difference in demographic variables of salespersons between industries.

5.2   Reliability Verification of Measurement

A total of 13 questions were used to measure the Guanxi. Cronbach's α value of the scale composed of 13 questions was .87, which was reliable. For customer orientation, a total of 21 items were used by removing all items and three items with a low correlation coefficient among 24 items. Cronbach's α value is .94, ensuring reliability. In order to test hypothesis, the correlation coefficient between variables was analyzed for Guanxi, sales performance, customer orientation, and sales performance. In addition, after classifying by industry, the correlations were compared. Finally, if sales performance is measured in a subjective way, data analysis may have limitations. In this case, the same person responds to the independent variable and the dependent variable, resulting in a common method bias that increases the correlation [11]. To solve this problem, it was verified using Harman's single-factor test method.

5.3   Correlation between Quanxi, Customer Orientation, Sales Performance

The correlation coefficient between Guanxi and customer orientation was found to be significant at .25. This means that although there are differences the Guanxi and customer orientation, there are also commonalities. However, there was a difference between industries(B2B, B2C), and the correlation between customer orientation and Guanxi was high in the information communication industry, but it was analyzed to be almost nonexistent in the insurance industry. This can be interpreted as that in the information communication business, sales are performed by mixing Guanxi factors and Western relational marketing, whereas in the insurance business, sales are mainly made by Guanxi.

As a result of analyzing the correlation coefficient between variables to test hypothesis 1, it was found that the Guanxi and sales performance, customer orientation and sales performance were all significant. In addition, it was analyzed that the Guanxi has a greater correlation with sales performance than with customer orientation. The correlation coefficient between Guanxi and the sales performance was .25, and the customer orientation and sales performance were .16. The correlation coefficient between Guanxi and company performance was .40, and customer orientation and company performance were analyzed as .21. According to the meta-analysis result of mentioned in the prior research, the average correlation coefficient between customer orientation and sales performance was .14 [12]. However, as a result of analyzing the correlation coefficient using a subjective measure as a performance variable in this study, the average was found to be .17. As a result of the meta-analysis of correlation coefficient obtained in this research, compared with the average level obtained in the meta-analysis, the business performance was close. And the company performance was found to be higher than the average.

5.4   Comparison between Industries

As a result of the correlation analysis between variables in the information communication industry, it was found that both the Guanxi and the customer orientation had a significant effect on the sales performance(company performance, business performance). However, the correlation between company performance was expected to be greater than that of business performance, but it was found that this was not the case as a result of the analysis. The correlation with company performance was .33 for the Guanxi while the customer orientation was .33, which was almost the same. The correlation with the business performance was .33 for Guanxi and .43 for customer orientation, which was analyzed to be somewhat high in customer orientation. It was analyzed that there was a big difference in the insurance industry, whereas the information communication industry had a similar level of correlation with the sales performance between Guanxi and

customer orientation. In the insurance industry, the correlation coefficient between Guanxi and business performance was .23, but the correlation coefficient between Guanxi and customer orientation was -.05. The correlation coefficient between Guanxi and company performance was .31, but the correlation coefficient between customer orientation and company performance was .03. The correlation coefficient between sales performance(company performance, business performance) and Guanxi was significant, but the correlation coefficient between sales performance(company performance, business performance) and customer orientation was not significant.

5.5   Validation of Correlation between two Groups

In the correlation coefficient, it was checked whether there was a significant difference between the two groups(information communication industry and insurance industry). That is, the difference in the correlation coefficient between groups(the difference in correlation coefficient between Guanxi and customer orientation by group) was analyzed. When the Z value is obtained from Fisher z - Transformation and its Inverse, an appendix of [13]. The information communication industry showed Z 1=.54, Z 2=-.03, and was analyzed as u=3.90. As a result of the analysis, it was found that there was a difference between groups in the correlation coefficient. In the two groups, the difference in correlation coefficients between Guanxi and customer orientation, customer orientation and business performance, company performance and business performance was significantly verified. On the other hand, it was analyzed that there was no difference between the two groups in the correlation coefficients between Guanxi and business performance and between Guanxi and company performance.

5.6   Mediating Effect Analysis

5.6.1 Verification of the Mediating Effect between Customer Orientation and Business Performance

As a result of analyzing the mediating effect of Guanxi between customer orientation and business performance, customer orientation was found to be significant with Guanxi and customer orientation and business performance were also significant. However, when the Guanxi was used as a parameter, we found that the Guanxi was significant with the business performance but not the customer orientation. In addition, it was analyzed that, when no Guanxi was used as a parameter, the b value of customer orientation and company performance was .26, and when the Guanxi was used as a parameter, the b value was .17, indicating that the b value fell to .09. Finally, it has been confirmed that the Guanxi is completely mediating between customer orientation and business performance. When the dependent variable was business performance, customer orientation and Guanxi were confirmed to be completely independent concepts, and hypothesis 1(Guanxi will mediate customer orientation and sales performance) was accepted.

5.6.2 Verification of The Mediating Effect between Customer Orientation and Company Performance

As a result of analyzing the mediating effect of Guanxi between customer orientation and company performance, customer orientation was found to be significant with Guanxi and customer orientation and company performance were also significant. However, when the Guanxi was used as a parameter, it was analyzed that the Guanxi was significant with the company performance, but the customer orientation was not significant. In addition, it was analyzed that, when no Guanxi was used as a parameter, the value of customer orientation and company performance was .18, and when Guanxi was used as a parameter, the value of b was .11, and the value of b dropped to .07. Therefore, we found that the Guanxi is perfectly mediated between customer orientation and company performance. Even when the dependent variable was company performance, we confirmed that customer orientation and Guanxi are completely independent concepts, just like business performance, and hypothesis 1(Guanxi will mediate customer orientation and sales performance) was accepted.

5.6.3 Verification of the Mediating Effect of Guanxi between Customer Orientation and Sales Performance according to Industry

The mediating effect of Guanxi between customer orientation and sales performance(company performance, business performance) according to industries(information communication business, insurance business) was analyzed. First, the mediating effect of Guanxi between customer orientation and sales performance in the insurance industry was analyzed. As a result of regression analysis on the effect of customer orientation and Guanxi as a parameter in step 1, the regression coefficients of customer orientation and Guanxi were analyzed to be insignificant(b=-.02, p<.80). As a result of the regression analysis of Guanxi and company performance as a dependent variable in step 2, Guanxi and company performance were significant(b=.37, p=.00). As a result of regression analysis on the effect of step 3, customer orientation and Guanxi on company performance, the independent variables, customer orientation and company performance, were analyzed as insignificant(b=.04, p<.71). Since the first stage, Guanxi and customer orientation, are not significant, it cannot be interpreted as having a mediating effect of Guanxi. Therefore, it was confirmed that there is no mediating effect between customer orientation and company performance in the insurance industry. In the case of business performance, it was analyzed that there was no mediating effect between customer orientation and business performance. In the insurance industry, it was analyzed that Guanxi did not mediate customer orientation and sales performance.

Second, the mediating effect of Guanxi between customer orientation and sales performance(company performance, business performance) in the information communication industry was analyzed. As a result of regression analysis on the effect of customer orientation as a parameter, Guanxi, in step 1, customer orientation and Guanxi were analyzed to be significant(b=.25, p=.00). As a result of regression analysis on customer orientation and company performance as a dependent variable in step 2, it was found that Guanxi and company performance were significant(b=.50, p=.00). As a result of a regression analysis on the effect of step 3 customer orientation and Guanxi on company performance, customer orientation was not significant(b=.12, p<.07) and the parameter, Guanxi, was analyzed to be significant(b=.37, p=.00). In the case of business performance, it was analyzed that there is a mediating effect between customer orientation and business performance. Namely, unlike the insurance industry in the information communication industry, it was found that the Guanxi, the relationship between customer orientation and sales performance was found to mediate.

6. CONCLUSION

We tried to verify whether the concept of Guanxi is the construct completely independent of customer orientation or a construct included in customer orientation. Western customer orientation is based on an individualistic culture and focuses on formal problem-solving processes. On the other hand, the ability of Guanxi in the East contains many emotional elements based on the emotional exchange between people in a collectivist culture. According to previous marketing studies on business administration, when promoting a business in China, Guanxi is an important business concept and sales and marketing tool that explains the sales performance(company performance, business performance) well even today. So far, our studies on Guanxi have been limited to Chinese people. Since Guanxi originated from a Confucian culture, it can explain sales and marketing performance and performance in other Asian countries including China. In order to verify this, we tried to check the effect of Guanxi on sales performance targeting Korean salespeople. As a result of the analysis, it was analyzed that the Guanxi has more influence on sales performance than customer orientation. In the analysis of sales performance and correlation, we found that there was a large difference between industries, and the Guanxi had an effect on sales performance in both insurance(B2C) and information communication(B2B) industries. In particular, unlike the insurance industry in the information communication industry, we found that customer orientation and sales performance are mediated, so that Guanxi can be another independent construct that explains sales performance along with customer orientation. The practical implication of this study is to verify that marketing performance can vary depending on how much cultural differences of the home country are reflected in accepting and using new, useful concepts and measurements developed in foreign countries. Individual salespeople and marketers must also consider the universality of marketing when executing sales and marketing strategies and tactics, but at the same time, they must also

consider the culture specifics of the country due to cultural differences. We confirmed that in the future, salespeople should not only rely on rational methods to maintain and reinforce customer relationships, but must consider the emotional factors through empathy with customers [14]. Also, it is important to reflect the culture of the specific country in accepting and using the construct concepts and measurement developed in foreign countries.

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