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Article

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Insurance company's salespersons' lead qualification skills and salespersons' performance: moderated-mediation model of salespersons' adaptive selling behavior and salespersons' gender

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to discover the intervening role of Salesperson Adaptive Selling Behavior (SPASB) in the relationship between Salesperson Lead Qualification Skills (SPLQS) and Salesperson Performance (SP), in addition to the potential moderating effect of Salesperson Gender (SPG) on this relationship in the insurance industry in Uganda. A total of 346 salespeople in the Ugandan insurance industry were identified using appropriate stratified simple random sample technique. Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire, then descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, factor analysis, and conditional process analysis were employed to analyze the data. The results showed that SPLQS and SP are partially mediated by SPASB. The mediating influence is contingent on the level of SPG, with a stronger mediation effect observed at higher levels of gender equality. By adding to the body of current literature, this study examines the complex relationships between SPLQS, SPASB, SP, and SPG. These findings highlight the importance of considering the role of SPASB and gender dynamics in optimizing SP. The results provide valuable insights for sales organizations to develop strategies to enhance SP in uncertain business environments. Additionally, this study sheds light on the gender-specific factors that influence SP, challenging traditional stereotypes in the sales profession.

IMPACT STATEMENT

The importance of insurance salespeople performance cannot be understated in today's society, where insurance products play a vital role in ensuring financial and health well-being of society. This research project examines the function of ASB as a mediator and SPG as a moderator in the relationship between insurance company's SPLQS and SP. Insurance companies are crucial in providing coverage and protection against unforeseen risks, and their effectiveness is essential in ensuring that customers receive appropriate policies and drive business growth. SPLQS plays a crucial role in identifying potential customers, although its influence on SP may not be immediate. The study suggests that SPLQS has a positive effect on SP, which is partially mediated by SPASB. Enhancing SPLQS and fostering SPASB can be facilitated by promoting gender equality among salespeople, which can ultimately help insurance companies to better meet customer needs, drive business growth, and contribute to overall financial well-being of clients.

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SUBJECTS

Business, Management and Accounting; Marketing; Marketing Management

1. Introduction

An important part of the world economy is the insurance sector, and salespersons are vital to driving revenue and growth of insurance companies (Binder & Mußhoff, 2017). Salespeople's performance is largely determined by their ability to meet an organization's sales goals (Firew, 2022). Given the increasing complexity of the business environment and the resulting pressure on sales managers,

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understanding the factors that contribute to salesperson success has become a primary focus for both scholars and practitioners (Abu ELSamen & Akroush, 2018; Charoensukmongkol, 2024; Mwesige et al., 2024). Salespeople are not only responsible for obtaining fresh clientele, holding onto existing ones, and expanding a firm's market share, but they also play a crucial role in devising effective sales strategies (Abu ELSamen & Akroush, 2018). However, with rapidly changing consumer demands, lifestyles, and purchasing behaviors, salespeople face challenges in effectively managing their sales tasks (Charoensukmongkol, 2024; Mwesige et al., 2024).

Therefore, possessing certain skills is essential for salespeople to achieve superior performance. It is crucial for sales organizations to understand the skills that contribute to the success of their salespeople in uncertain business environments. This knowledge will enable management to identify domains for developing competencies that optimize the accomplishments of their salespersons. Moreover, as a significant number of women have been successfully employed in the field of professional selling over the past few decades, it is imperative for researchers to explore possible distinctions between male and female salespeople and their performance (Macintosh & Krush, 2014).

The existing body of literature typically focuses on the direct effect of SPLQS on SP (Román & Rodríguez, 2015; Sujan et al., 1988; Román & Iacobucci, 2010; Ohiomah et al., 2019; Mwesige et al., 2024). However, the literature has produced inconsistent results. Several studies suggest a positive relationship between SPLQS and SP, highlighting the advantages of focusing on prospects that have a higher chance of converting and providing customized sales pitches (Sujan et al., 1988; Mwesige et al., 2024). Conversely, other studies have shown an insignificant association between SPLQS and SP (Magatef & Momani, 2016; Poor et al., 2013).

The role of SPASB in the relationship between SPLQS and SP has also yielded mixed findings in the literature. Mwesige et al. (2024) argue that SPASB partly mediates this relationship, suggesting that salespeople must adapt their selling styles to meet diverse customer demands. Franke and Park (2006) emphasized the importance of client-focused sales, which is only effective in improving SP mediated by SPASB. However, other studies have not shown any noteworthy association between SPASB and job or objective performance (Limbu et al., 2016; Ahearne et al., 2005; Pettijohn et al., 2000).

Previous studies have investigated the impact of both direct and indirect relationships of SPLQS and SASB on SP. However, there is a lack of literature on whether these effects vary according to SPG. This is an important question because assuming that all individuals benefit equally from these abilities could be misleading. Therefore, this study examines whether SPG moderates the connection between SPLQS, SPASB, and SP in the insurance industry in Uganda. This study addressed the complex interrelationships among these constructs using a moderated-mediation model. By investigating the moderating function of SPG, this study provides a unique contribution to both academia and the insurance industry. Furthermore, this study validates Russ and McNeilly (1995) by exploring the moderating role of SPG in SP, shedding light on gender-specific factors that impact SP. Additionally, this research uses data from a developing country such as Uganda. The findings of this study are of pragmatic importance to sales supervisors, as they might utilize the understanding of the impact of employing both male and female salespeople as sales executives in the insurance sector to improve SP.

This paper is structured in a logical manner, with sections comprising an overview of the literature, formulation of hypotheses, methodology, findings, discussion, conclusions, implications, limitations, and recommendations for additional study.

2. Literature review

The literature review examines the integration of Vroom's expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964), Weitz et al. (1986), Adaptive Selling theory, Szymanski (1988) categorization theory, and homophily theory (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1964). Vroom (1964) proposes that the behavior of a salesperson is influenced by his/her anticipation of how a specific action will lead to a particular outcome. This theory was developed to predict the extent to which employees are devoted to completing job tasks. While this theory aims to predict employee dedication to job-related tasks, it does not adequately account for other factors that may motivate salespeople, such as possessing the necessary selling skills and adaptability.

On the other hand, Szymanski,(1988) categorization theory emphasizes the importance of understanding clients' needs to accurately categorize sales prospects at different phases included in the sales process (Mwesige et al., 2024; Sujan et al., 1988). Effective categorization allows salespeople to change their sales strategies to accommodate various client requirements. However, this theory does not consider the competitive and dynamic nature of the sales environment, wherein adaptability is crucial for successful sales outcomes. For instance, salespeople who can adapt their selling styles in diverse situations are more likely to accomplish the desired rewards in their duties.

Weitz et al. (1986) argued that a general strategy to sell is inadequate in an ever-changing environment with diverse consumer needs. Salespeople must adapt and tailor their sales approach to unique client characteristics and various selling situations (Viio & Grönroos, 2016; Mwesige et al., 2024; Román & Iacobucci, 2010). This theory aligns with the idea that sales professionals must possess the required selling abilities and flexibility in their selling approach to achieve their expected rewards.

In contrast, the homophily theory, proposed by Lazarsfeld and Merton (1964), suggests that people are naturally inclined to stay drawn to those who share similar characteristics, such as gender, ethnicity, and social class (Prendergast et al., 2014). This theory emphasizes the significance of shared values and beliefs in forming connections and relationships. However, homophily theory ignores additional variables that could have an impact on a salesperson's success, such as the capacity to modify their selling approach and possessing selling abilities.

To enhance our understanding of the influence of SPLQS, SPASB, and SPG, this study exploits categorization, adaptive selling, and homophily theories to validate the Vroom expectancy theory. This study aimed to elucidate the moderated-mediation role of SPG in the link between SPLQS, SPASB, and SP.

In the context of personal selling, effective lead qualification skills are crucial for sales professionals to make informed decisions. This includes classifying leads according to how well they fit a particular service or product. Sales professionals necessitate the use of a tailored strategy when selling by considering numerous elements, such as the type and gender of customers, sales circumstances, and the comments obtained. Therefore, it is necessary to modify communication styles, plans, and techniques to satisfy each customer's unique wants and preferences. When considering the gender of sales professionals who possess LQS, show ASB, and anticipate receiving compensation for their work, it is plausible that they are driven to prioritize and modify their strategy for high-potential leads. This could result in an enhanced overall performance and conversion rates.

2.1. Salespersons performance (SP)

The concept of a salesperson's performance can be understood from multiple perspectives, including productivity, effectiveness, and efficiency. Productivity refers to a salesperson's output in terms of sales revenue or units sold. Effectiveness, however, focuses on the attainment of sales objectives and meeting customer needs. Efficiency considers the cost-effectiveness of sales activities and the optimal use of resources (Cravens et al., 2016).

One of the widely used definitions of a salesperson's performance is by Andzulis et al. (2009), who defines it as 'the extent to which a salesperson fulfills the aims and objectives of the selling firm.' It emphasizes the alignment between specific sales objectives and organizational goals. Churchill et al. (2008) define a salesperson's performance as 'the degree to which a salesperson achieves personal and organizational objectives through sales behaviors.' This definition acknowledges both the personal and organizational aspects of performance. Moreover, Basir et al. (2010) and Firew (2022) view salesperson performance as inspiration for salespeople to reach the firm's sales targets. This perspective emphasizes the role of salespeople's actions and endeavors in realizing the desired sales outcomes. Salesperson performance is crucial for achieving sales objectives and overall organizational success.

Román and Iacobucci (2010) and Anderson and Oliver (1987) consistently describe salesperson effectiveness as the result of a salesperson's application of effort and skill. They argue that salesperson effectiveness pertains to outcomes stemming from a salesperson's proficiencies. According to their perspective, salesperson effectiveness is closely related to the abilities and capabilities of salespeople as well as their performance in achieving desired sales results. This study presents a definition of salesperson

effectiveness as a quantifiable measure of a salesperson's capacity to reach sales goals, create proceeds, cultivate, and maintain customer connections while supporting the sales department's goals. This comprehensive definition encompasses numerous facets of a salesperson's influence on driving sales and achieving an organization's sales goals.

2.2. Salesperson lead qualification skills (SPLQS)

The lead qualification process involves identifying different client groups and understanding their specific needs (Ohiomah et al., 2019). This categorization of leads helps salespeople tailor their sales approach and provide customized solutions for each potential customer. By gaining a deep understanding of their customers' needs, salespeople can effectively address customer inquiries and objections and ultimately close sales (Zhou & Charoensukmongkol, 2021; Olariu, 2016; Gopalakrishna et al., 2022; Sabnis et al., 2013; Pullins et al., 2017). Acquiring new customers is also a vital aspect of salesperson lead qualification skills. By employing various strategies and techniques such as prospecting, cold calling, and networking, salespeople can expand their customer base and generate potential leads (Román & Iacobucci, 2010). However, it is important to note that merely acquiring new customers is not sufficient; salespeople must also have the ability to qualify these customers by understanding their needs and determining whether they fulfill the requirements needed to qualify as leads (Thorne & Quinn, 2017). The ability to qualify leads is crucial in sales and marketing because it helps salespeople prioritize their efforts and allocate their resources effectively. By focusing on qualified leads, salespeople can increase their conversion rates and maximize sales opportunities. This process also enables salespeople to avoid unnecessary time and effort spent on leads that are unlikely to result in sales (Román & Rodríguez, 2015).

Various studies have explored different aspects of salesperson lead-qualification skills. For example, Román and Iacobucci (2010) identified four key dimensions of lead qualification skills: qualification, targeting, strategic selling, and relationship building. They emphasized the importance of qualifying leads based on their specific needs and developing a targeted sales strategy. Moreover, their research highlights the significance of creating strong bonds by fostering confidence and enhancing the sales process. It is essential to note that the process of lead qualification is challenging. Salespeople often face objections and inquiries from potential customers regarding proposed solutions. Effective lead-qualification skills require the ability to address these objections and provide persuasive responses that overcome potential barriers to the sale (Sabnis et al., 2013).

2.3. Salespersons adaptive selling behavior (SPASB)

According to Spiro and Weitz (1990), SPASB describes the degree to which salespeople modify sales behaviors in client interaction to suit the perceived customer's needs. This definition emphasizes the importance of customization and flexibility in sales interactions, suggesting that it involves altering one's approach to meet the specific requirements of each customer. Similarly, Franke and Park (2006) define SPASB as the degree to which salespeople possess the knowledge and skills essential to adjusting their sales behaviors to the exceptional characteristics of each customer. This definition highlights the significance of a salesperson's ability to understand and interpret buyer cues, enabling them to effectively tailor their selling strategies.

2.4. Salesperson gender (SPG)

The notion of 'gender' encompasses a multifaceted interplay among biological, cultural, and individual identity aspects. Gender has a major impact on the standards and expectations of society, which, in turn, influences consumer perceptions and behaviors. Literature suggests that gender is distinct from sex, which is an inherent biological characteristic that pertains to the cultural and social implications associated with these distinctions (Mason, 2020).

Gender stereotypes are deeply ingrained in society and can significantly influence consumer behavior. According to Eagly and Wood (1991), individuals tend to equate particular qualities and attributes to particular genders. For instance, females are normally perceived as nurturing, empathetic, and

trustworthy, whereas males are often associated with assertiveness, confidence, and competence. These stereotypes can shape consumer expectations and influence salespeople's perceptions. In a study conducted by Bem (1974), it was found that individuals tend to evaluate salespeople based on their conformity to gender stereotypes. Consumers often expect saleswomen to be more empathetic and helpful, whereas salesmen are expected to be more assertive and knowledgeable. These gender-based expectations can influence consumers' evaluations of salespeople and, subsequently, affect their purchase decisions.

2.5. SPLQS and SP

According to research conducted by Román and Rodríguez (2015), Román and Iacobucci (2010), and Mwesige et al. (2024), salespeople with strong LQS possess a thorough comprehension of client needs and can accurately differentiate between different customer types. This enables them to participate in customer-focused sales by offering tailored clarifications that meet each customer's specific needs, which are related to salesperson effectiveness (Zhou & Charoensukmongkol, 2021).

Ahearne et al. (2005) and Sujan et al. (1988) assert that organizing and sorting consumers can simplify sales proposals and communication. Salespeople with robust client qualification abilities and a clear information structure regarding customer groups can use prior data to ascertain the appropriate period and energy to invest in different types of customers. This leads to improved comprehension of the clientele, allowing it to progress in the sales funnel and eventually close sales successfully. By dedicating more time and effort to selling to the most lucrative customers, salespeople can improve their overall efficiency (Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016). On the other hand, Järvinen and Taiminen (2016) and Monat (2011) emphasize that failing to qualify customers or focusing on less-profitable consumers can result in a loss of revenue from sales and resource waste.

2.6. SPASB and SP

According to numerous studies, including Bagus et al. (2019), Mwesige et al. (2024) and Hu et al. (2021), sales representatives who modify their sales techniques according to the evolving needs of their clientele usually result in higher sales outcomes. Implementing adaptive selling requires sales representatives to consider various factors such as a customer's disposition, values, and information requirements. As demonstrated by Porter et al. (2003), this approach leads to increased sales. In fact, research by Spiro and Weitz (1990) revealed a positive correlation between SPASB and SP. Salespeople who quickly transform into changing circumstances tend to perform better, as indicated by Udayana et al. (2019). Singh and Das (2013) provide evidence that adaptive selling practices can enhance a salesperson's effectiveness.

It is critical for salespeople to use appropriate techniques when implementing adaptive selling, as Porter et al. (2003) suggest. Even minor adjustments to sales exchanges in response to body expression during inquiries and criticism can significantly enhance communication and lower objections, as stated by Spiro and Weitz (1990). These findings highlight the significance of adaptive selling for achieving better sales results.

2.7. SPG and SP

Numerous studies have investigated the potential gender differences in sales performance. A study conducted by Swan et al. (1978) suggests that gender may have an impact on sales performance. However, several other studies, including those by Wachner et al. (2009), Piercy et al. (2012), Palmer and Bejou (1995), and Siguaw and Honeycutt (1995), found no discernible difference between male and female sales reps' self-reported sales performance. Despite this, stereotypes portray female sales representatives as poorer performers than their male counterparts (Swan et al. (1978) ; Mwesige et al., 2024).

Furthermore, a study by Swan et al. (1978) suggests that female sales representatives demonstrate lower levels of product expertise, technical proficiency, activity reporting, geographic reach, and general performance. Nevertheless, it is important to note that female sales representatives may excel in

relationship performance because of their inherent traits such as empathy, warmth, nurturing, and supportive roles (Palmer & Bejou, 1995; Siguaw & Honeycutt, 1995; Russ & McNeilly, 1995).

It is important to note that the conventional stereotype of female sales representatives as poor performers compared to their male counterparts may no longer be valid in many countries. This is because equal access to education for both genders leads to no significant disparity between male and female educated workers' job performances (Okan, 2024). Additionally, Zhou and Charoensukmongkol (2021) contended that gender is insignificant to salesperson performance, based on demographic data. This finding supports the explanation that there is no substantial affiliation between SPG and SP, especially when both male and female sales representatives have received higher education.

2.8. SPLQS and SPASB

Leigh et al. (2014) and Mwesige et al. (2024) found that sales professionals who possess exceptional information and capabilities are more effective in rapidly and precisely classifying customers according to their business challenges and the specific solutions they require. For instance, salespeople should highlight the savings that come from combining all insurance with their company if affordability is a concern for the customer. In addition, if the customer is worried about their spouse's benefits in the event of death, the salesperson should focus on discussing the care and education of children.

Furthermore, according to Anglin et al. (1990), Because they can adapt to the needs of their clients and solve their difficulties, extraordinarily gifted salespeople are better equipped because they have a long-term memory of 'if then' rules. Zhou and Charoensukmongkol (2021) found a positive correlation between the SPLQS and SPASB. Salespeople with a thoroughly thought-out category structure have also been found to display an advanced frequency of ASB (Sharma & Levy, 1995). These findings were confirmed by Román and Iacobucci (2010), who revealed a significant relationship between SPLQS and SPASB. Overall, these studies imply that the SPLQS can serve as an antecedent to ASB.

2.9. Mediating role of SPASB

According to Udayana et al. (2019), salespeople's success is not exclusively reliant on their skills but also on their preparedness to take action and become accustomed to changing market conditions. To meet their clients' unique needs effectively, salespeople must be versatile and knowledgeable about various sales techniques. The ASB plays a vital role in enhancing LQS, leading to improved SP (Román & Iacobucci, 2010; Mwesige et al., 2024; Levy & Sharma, 1994; Verbeke et al., 2004; Spiro & Weitz, 1990).

According to Magatef and Momani (2016) and Poor et al. (2013), developing the LQS by itself might not always result in improved SP. This contradicts the notion that the LQS has a direct impact on ASB, which is a crucial determinant of SP. Instead, the authors proposed that the ASB drives the acquisition of the LQS. This perspective suggests that salespeople with a natural inclination toward ASB are more likely to invest both time and energy in developing their LQS, leading to superior SP.

The role of ASB in mediating the relationship between SPLQS and SP is influenced by the effective utilization of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems (Smith & Johnson, 2019). CRM systems are designed to assist salespeople in managing and analyzing customer data, monitoring interactions, and building better customer relationships. The perspective put forth is that Salespeople with strong SPLQS are more likely to effectively utilize CRM systems, resulting in enhanced SASB and, ultimately, higher SP (Smith & Johnson, 2019). However, the mediating role of SASB in the relationship between the SPLQS and performance is subject to other factors. (Brown & Anderson, 2018).

2.10. Moderating role of SPG

Gender has long been recognized as a significant factor that influences interpersonal interactions and communication styles. Studies have indicated that there are differences in communication approaches between men and women, with males often being more assertive and task-focused, while females tend to be more nurturing and relationship-focused (Eagly & Wood, 1991). These gender differences

can potentially influence how salespersons interact with customers, leading to variations in customer perceptions and sales outcomes. One area of interest is the impact of a salesperson's gender on customer perceptions and attitudes. Numerous scholars have examined the effects of SPG on customer trust, likability, and credibility. Ahearne et al. (2007) demonstrated that female salespersons were perceived as more trustworthy and likable than their male counterparts. This suggests that customers may respond differently to salespersons based on their gender, leading to varying levels of trust and rapport.

In addition to customer perceptions, salespersons' gender can also influence sales effectiveness. Research shows that SPG can act as a moderator in the sales process, affecting the effectiveness of sales techniques and strategies. Laroche et al. (2001) found that female salespersons were more effective in utilizing relationship-building strategies, such as empathy and rapport building, than male salespersons. On the other hand, male salespersons were more effective in utilizing assertive and persuasive techniques. These findings suggest that gender can influence the effectiveness of different sales approaches, and highlight the importance of aligning sales strategies with the gender of the salesperson.

Furthermore, the impact of salespersons' gender on customer satisfaction was also explored. Customer satisfaction is a crucial outcome of the sales process, as it can result in repeat business and positive word of mouth (WOM). Studies have shown that consumer contentment can be influenced by the gender of the salesperson, with customers having varying preferences based on their gender. Dubinsky et al. (1991) revealed that female customers reported higher satisfaction when interacting with female salespersons, whereas male customers reported higher satisfaction when interacting with male salespersons. This suggests that matching the gender of the salesperson to that of the customer can enhance customer satisfaction levels.

Previous studies have examined the impact of gender stereotypes in the workplace on the power and effectiveness of salespeople (Rick & Veneziano, 1998). Gender is a complex social construct that encompasses various aspects of human behavior (Palan, 2001). Consequently, researchers have observed the impact of gender on salesperson behavior, particularly in mixed-gender sales teams (Taeuber & Valdisera, 1986; Simiyu et al., 2020). Studies have shown that male and female salespeople may have different perceptions of their abilities; males are more prone to overestimate their abilities, whereas women are more likely to underestimate them (Lindeman et al., 1995). As a result, it is crucial to consider gender as a variable in studies of sales force behavior. Given these findings, it is probable that the impact of ASB on SP varies depending on SPG. Further research is necessary to explore this relationship and gain a better understanding of how SPG influences LQS on ASB and ASB on SP.

2.11. Current study main objective

Early research on the connection between dependent and independent variables has primarily focused on determining their direct connection. However, these studies yielded inconclusive results, leading to the emergence of indirect effect studies that examine the relationship between these variables through a third variable. Preacher et al. (2007) revealed that moderation occurs when a third variable has an impact on the degree of the link between independent and dependent variables. Recently, researchers have shown a growing interest in investigating the moderator's combined effect and mediator variables on the primary variables (Simiyu et al., 2020; Lwanga, et al., 2023).

The current investigation attempts to examine the moderating role of SPG on the relationship between SPLQS and SP through the SPASB. This research delves into the complex dynamics within the sales industry, specifically exploring how SPG, SPLQS, and SPASB interact and impact the overall SP. SPG serves as a moderator that influences the strength and direction of the relationship between the SPLQS and SP. Additionally, the SPASB functions as a mediator and is vital to the relationship between these variables. This study seeks to uncover the intricate interplay among SPG, SPLQS, SPASB, and SP, shedding light on the factors that contribute to successful sales outcomes in a gendered context. By understanding these dynamics, sales professionals and organizations can devise targeted strategies to optimize salesperson performance and create a more inclusive and effective sales environment.

2.11.1. Conceptual model

Figure 1 below, provides a visual representation of the conceptual framework of the study. Drawing from a literature survey, this research proposes the following hypotheses:

- H1: SPASB does not mediate the relationship between SPLQS and SP.
- H2: SPG does not moderate the relationship between SPLQS and SPASB
- H3: SPG does not moderate the relationship between SPASB and SP.
- H4: SPG does not moderate the relationship between SPLQS and SP via SPASB.

These hypotheses are based on the scrutiny of gender differences in selling behaviors and the impact of gender role stereotyping in the sales profession.

The categorization, expectancy, adaptive selling, and homophily theories all agree with our study, as follows.

3. Methodology

This study employed a cross-sectional explanatory design to collect and analyze information. A sample of 346 salespeople was selected from a population of 3278 insurance salespersons in Uganda (Insurance Regulatory Authority report, 2022). The sample size was determined using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) Table. A proportionate stratified random sampling method was employed to choose representatives from every insurance provider in Uganda to choose the final salesperson for large populations (Tharenou et al., 2007). A letter of consent for data collection was obtained from the Insurance Regulatory Authority of Uganda, and verbal consent for participation in the study was secured from participants, as the research study did not involve sensitive data or vulnerable populations and was deemed significant by both the insurance company and participants. A closed-ended questionnaire was used to gather data that yielded a high response rate of 95%, exceeding the accepted 50% threshold, and aligning with the majority of scholarly findings. Modifying the operational definitions and measurement scales from prior studies may have impacted the outcomes of the current research. The adjustments made to the item arrangement, clarity, and relevance aimed to set the measuring scale in context within the precise nation of the study. Employing the measurement scale used in other studies is believed to enhance the comparison of findings and standardize the measurement procedure within an exact field.

An eight-item scale adopted from Verbeke et al. (2011) and Behrman and Perreault (1982) were used to measure the performance of salespeople. A 5-point Likert scale-1 signifying strong disagreement and 5 representing strong agreement-was used to indicate how much they agreed with each statement.

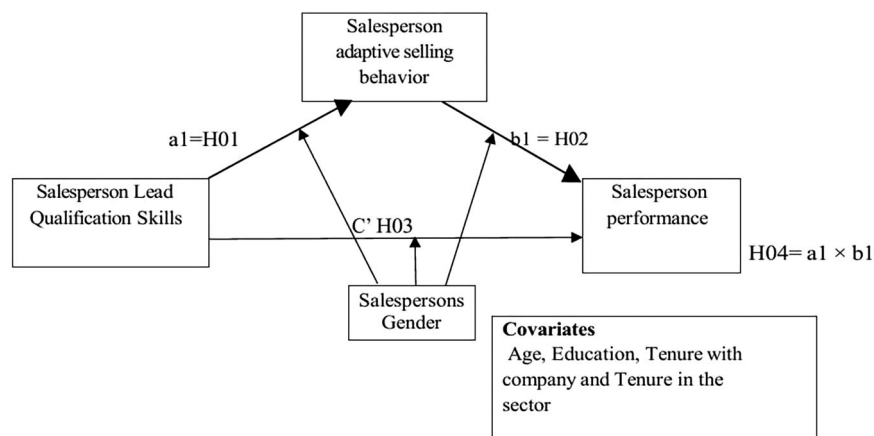


Figure 1. Conceptual framework.
Source: Hayes (2018) model 59.

Among the statements on the questionnaire, I generated a higher sales volume at every end of the quarter assessment and produced a high market share for the company.

Moreover, six items using a 5-point Likert scale were included in the construction of the SPLQS assessment (Román & Rodríguez, 2015; Zhou & Charoensukmongkol, 2021; Román & Iacobucci, 2010). The instrument's sample items evaluated the respondent's capacity to identify and evaluate the demands of the client, as well as their comprehension of the customer's purchasing motivations.

Based on Sipro and Weitz (1990), we used seven items from the SPASB. They included; 'I always change my selling methods,' 'My sales approach varies based on the circumstance' and 'I use the same selling technique with most customers,' 'I generally handle each client equally' and 'I enjoy experimenting with various sales strategies.'

SPG was measured based on the study by Adachi (2013). The items included questions concerning gender-related sales performance. Finally, the covariates of this study had three control variables: education level, tenure with the company, age, and tenure with the sector. Covariates help control for confounding variables and eliminate alternative explanations, thus obtaining reliable and meaningful results (Steiner et al., 2010).

3.1. Statistical analysis

Initially, statistical descriptions were computed for the study variables to describe or determine their characteristics, followed by correlation analysis to identify relationships among the study variables. Second, MacKinnon (2012) four-step procedure was adopted to examine the mediation effect. Third, this study explored the moderating effect of SPG on the affiliation between SPLQS and SP. Finally, we investigated whether the mediation process was moderated by SPG. Moderated mediation was used to determine if the degree of the mediation effect was contingent on the moderator's value (Hayes, 2018). This study employed Hayes (2018) PROCESS macro v4.0 (Model 15) to analyze the moderated mediation model. To estimate parameter robust standard errors, a bootstrapping method was used, and Hayes (2018) recommended using a bias-corrected 95% confidence interval based on 5000 resamples of the data effects were deemed noteworthy. at $\alpha = .05$ if the confidence interval did not include zero (0).

4. Results and discussion

This study sought to examine the potential role of SPASB as a mediator of the association between SPLQS and SP. Additionally, this study aimed to determine the moderating influence of SPG on the link between SPASB and SP. Additionally, this study aimed to examine whether the indirect relationship between SPLQS and SP via SPASB would be moderated by SPG.

4.1. Respondent's profile

A total of 346 questionnaires were administered, of which 328 were considered appropriate for examination following the removal of 10 that were not returned, 5 outliers, and 3 that were not correctly completed. The demographic information provided in Table 1 provides a comprehensive examination of the respondents across various demographic factors. Upon thorough analysis of the data, it was determined that 49.4% of the age group that the responders belonged to was 26–33 years, indicating a significant portion of individuals in the early to mid-career stage. This suggests that the workforce may possess a relatively youthful and dynamic composition with a substantial number of individuals poised for career growth and development opportunities.

Moreover, while the majority of respondents (59.8%) held diplomas, a noteworthy percentage of individuals had certificate qualifications (24.3%). This distribution reveals a diverse educational background within the surveyed population, which could potentially influence the skills and professional capabilities of the workforce.

Regarding tenure within the sector, the data indicate the prevalence of individuals with 6–10 years of experience, constituting 55.5% of the valid responses. This suggests that the workforce likely consists of a blend of seasoned professionals and those who are still in the early stages of their careers.

Table 1. Respondents' demographics.

Variable	Factor	Frequency	Valid %
Age	18–25	64	19.5
	26–33	162	49.4
	34–41	91	27.7
	42–49	11	3.4
Education level	Certificate	80	24.3
	Diploma	196	59.8
	Undergraduate	45	13.7
	Postgraduate	7	2.2
Tenure with the sector	1–5	35	10.6
	6–10	182	55.5
	11–15	106	32.3
	16–20	5	0.15
Tenure with the company	Below 1 year	6	0.2
	1–5	96	29.3
	6–10	161	49.1
	11–15	49	14.9
	16–20	16	0.5
	Total	328	100.0

Source: Data, 2023.

Table 2. Mean, SD, reliability, validity and correlation.

Variable	Mean	SD	Reliability	CV1	1	2	3	3 4
Salesperson lead qualification skills-1	3.1	.612	.805	.780	1			
Salesperson adaptive selling behavior-2	3.3	.641	.817	.821	.316**	1		
Salesperson's gender –3	4.1	.462	.819	.706	.381	.391	1	
Salesperson's performance-4	2.3	.610	.828	.870	.571**	.318**	.382**	1

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

As for tenure at their current employers, the majority of respondents reported being with their companies for to 6–10 years, accounting for 49.1% of the responses. This finding implies a sense of loyalty and commitment among employees as well as potential opportunities for career advancement and retention strategies within the surveyed organizations. However, it is noteworthy that a major percentage of respondents (29.3%) had shorter tenures of 1–5 years, which could indicate either a certain level of turnover or a recent influx of new hires.

4.2. Mean, standard deviation (SD), reliability and correlation results

Table 2 provides a summary of the statistical measures and outcomes of the variables examined in the study. The findings reveal that the SPG exhibits the uppermost mean of 4.1, with an SD of 0.462. Conversely, salesperson performance had the lowest mean value of 2.3, with an SD of 0.610. Consequently, the reliability of the scale proved satisfactory, as indicated by Cronbach's alpha surpassing 0.7 threshold for all variables. It is vital to emphasize that the validity of all variables falls within an acceptable range, as confirmed by the CVI results.

Furthermore, correlation analysis revealed a positive link between all variables and SP. Among the variables investigated, SPLQS established the strongest relationship ($r=0.571$, $p<0.01$), followed by gender ($r=0.382$, $p<0.01$). Conversely, SPASB had the weakest positive relationship ($r=0.318$, $p<0.01$).

4.3. Factor analysis

Factor analysis was carried out using Principal Component Analysis and Varimax Rotation to assess the construct validity of the measures, prior to confirming the hypothesis through regression analysis. This ensured that the measures represented the given variables accurately. The assumptions of the factor analysis were satisfied, as shown by the significant chi-square value of 6512.100 ($df=498$, $p<.001$) obtained from Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. Furthermore, a measurement of .981 from the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test for sampling adequacy indicated that factor analysis was a suitable method.

Factor analysis showed four factors that reported a significant portion (82.319%) of the total variance. Every variable and its corresponding items demonstrated factor loadings above 0.5, indicating their reliability in measuring the construct under investigation. The first factor, labeled 'SPLQS,' had 6 items that explained 14.102% of the total variance. The 2nd factor, named 'SPASB,' consisted of seven items that contributed to 26.139% of the total variance. 3rd factor, named 'SP,' comprised eight items that reported 27.213% variance. Finally, the fourth factor, referred to as 'salesperson gender,' explained 14.865% of the total variance.

4.4. Testing mediation

To investigate the interconnectedness of variables, the researchers conducted a mediation test to gain a better understanding of intricate relationships and the role of a 3rd variable in explaining these relationships. The primary goal of this study was to evaluate the mediating effect of an SPASB on the relationship between their SPLQS and their performance in Ugandan insurance firms, specifically focusing on the 4th hypothesis. To achieve this, a 4-step procedure, by Baron and Kenny (1986) and MacKinnon (2012) was implemented, along with a 5th step that measured the total effect by evaluating all direct and indirect impacts. Some conditions must be fulfilled for this procedure.

The first condition was the presence of a significant link between the SPLQS and their flexible sales techniques (path 'a1'). The second condition was the presence of a significant connection between the SPASB and SP (path 'b1'). The third condition involved testing the association between SPLQS and SP, while controlling for SPASB (Path C). SPLQS had a significant indirect effect on SP through SPASB ($a1 \times b1$).

The bias-corrected percentile bootstrap approach was used to ascertain whether the final criterion (H04) was met. The formula $Y = C X + \varepsilon = (a1 \times b1) + C'$ reflects the entire effect I. As control variables, the study considered age, education level, time spent with the company, and tenure in the industry. For the multiple regression analysis, PROCESS Macro Version 4.0 (model 4) was used as guided by Hayes (2018). Preliminary findings demonstrated that the SPLQS had a major influence on SPASB. Except for age, all other factors were found to be negligible, and Model 1 explained 21% of the variation.

The findings indicated that salespeople's SPASB significantly influenced their productivity, as demonstrated by Model 2. The model also revealed that the SPLQS played an important role in influencing SP. No covariates had a significant impact. In Model 2, 18.9% of the variation was explained. Furthermore, bias-corrected percentile bootstrap analysis indicated that the mean indirect effect was statistically significant.

Table 3 demonstrates that the indirect effect of SPLQS on SP via SPASB was significant ($a1 \times b1 = .321 \times .340 = 0.109$, $SE = .0391$ $CI = .0311, .0391$). Given that path 'a1' and path 'b1' were both significant, we conclude that there was a partial mediating influence between SPLQS on SP via SPASB (Simiyu, 2019). Furthermore, Table 3 further shows (Direct+Indirect) the total effect $= .064 + .109 = .173$ was significant as shown by $\beta = 0.173$, $p = 0.000$. These outcomes also showed that the total effect accounted for 23% of the total change in the SP. All other covariates were not significant, except for the salesperson's age, suggesting that age has an effect on salesperson's performance. Based on these findings, the study did not support the initial hypothesis (Ho1) and proposed an alternative hypothesis.

4.5. Testing for moderation

The study employed Hayes (2018) process macro-V.4.00 (Model 59) to conduct a conditional process analysis, the results of which are shown in Table 4. In the multiple regression (Model 1), considered the likelihood of moderating result of salespersons' gender on the connection between SPLQS and SPASB (indicated in Figure 1 as path 'a1'). This model yielded an R² value of .152, suggesting that it explained 15% of the variance. Control variables were incorporated into the model, and the results indicated that the majority of them were not statistically significant, except for salesperson age.

Results showed that SPLQS have a direct significant effect on SPASB with $coeff. = .324$ $CI = -.747, -.921$. Results additionally show that salespersons' gender has a significant direct effect on SPASB with $coeff. = .131$, $CI = .079, .518$. However, salesperson gender doesn't have a moderating impact on the link on SPLQS and SPASB with $coeff. = .016$, $CI = -.915, .105$. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was not validated, and an alternative was considered.

Table 3. Indirect effect of salesperson adaptive selling behavior on salespersons performance.

Variables	Dependent variable					
	SPASB model 1		SP model 2		Total effect model 3	
	Coef	T	Coef	T	Coef	T
Age	0.4122	6.0342	−0.0822	−3.0821	0.0313	4.7120
Tenure (sector)	−0.0420	−0.0830	0.0231	0.0127	0.2734	0.8140
Education	0.0210	0.5405	0.0413	0.2301	0.1832	0.3012
Tenure (Company)	0.0431	0.4701	0.0214	1.1032	0.1430	0.8120
Salesperson lead qualification	.321**	5.2002	.064*	11.9003	0.173*	0.0000
Salesperson adaptive selling			.340**	6.1320		
R2	.2128		.1401		.2321	
F	13.219**		18.912**		22.851**	
Bootstrap results	Co-eff	SE	T	p	LCI	UCI
Total-effect (Direct*Indirect)	0.173	0.0807	14.8152	***	0.8101	0.8900
Direct effect (X on Y)	0.064	0.0701	10.0310	***	0.5027	0.7913
Indirect effect(a1*b1)	0.109	0.0231		***	0.0311	0.0391

Notes: $p < .001$. LCI: lower confidence interval; UCI: upper confidence interval.

Source: Research Data, (2023).

Table 4. Moderating effect of salespersons gender on a salesperson adaptive selling behavior and salesperson performance.

Predictors	Model 1 Coeff	(SPASB) t	LLC1	ULC1	Model 2 Coeff	(SP) t	LLCI	ULCI
Age	−.069	−2.910	−.218	−.086	−.031	−7.731	−.131	−.091
Education	−.024	−.523	−.532	.098	−.043	−.961	−.043	.865
Tenure with co.	−.861	−.071	−.041	.951	−.037	−.734	−.0731	.751
Tenure with Sec.	−.034	−.823	−.831	.877	−.194	−.431	−.091	.820
SPLQS	.324***	6.818	−.747	−.921	.291***	6.028	.180	.373
SPASB	—	—	—	—	.202***	7.721	.175	.068
SPG	.131***	4.087	.079	.518	.129**	3.921	.078	.065
SPLQS × SPG	.016	1.081	−.915	.105	−.020*	−2.91	−.186	−.058
SPASB × SPG	—	—	—	—	.234**	2.871	.071	.275
R2	.152				.310			
F	13.873***				29.9021***			

Note.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

Source: Research data, 2023.

In Model 2, we established whether gender moderates the path from lead qualification skills to salesperson performance (represented as shown in Figure 1). In Table 4, Lead qualification skills (coeff.=.291, CI=.180, .373), Salesperson adaptive selling behavior (coeff.=.202, CI=.175, .068) and salesperson gender (coeff.=.129, CI=.078, .065), each of which had a direct, significant impact on SP. Furthermore, the interaction of salespersons gender on the relationship between SPLQS and SP (path C' in Figure 1) was statistically significant (coeff.=−.020, CI=−.186, −.058). This was done in the presence of the covariates with age showing a significant impact with coeff.=−.031, $p < .001$. With an R2 of .310, this model explained 31% of the total variance. Consequently, Hypothesis 3 is unsupported. and an alternative was considered.

In Model 2, we investigated whether salesperson gender moderated the link between SPASB and SP (represented as path 'b1' in Figure 1). The findings show that the interaction of salesperson gender on the link between SPASB and SP has a substantial impact on coeff.=.234, CI=.071, .275. Hypothesis 4 was not supported in this investigation because neither of the confidence intervals contained any zeros; therefore, an alternative was considered.

Finally, our study aimed to investigate the relationships among SPLQS, SPASB, SP, and the potential moderating effect of salesperson gender. Based on our hypotheses, we anticipated that these pathways would differ across varying salesperson gender levels.

To examine these relationships, we conducted tests using data gathered at three salesperson gender levels. The results in Table 5 show that, at a low level, there were no conditional indirect consequences between SPLQS and SP via SPASB (coeff.=.032, SE=.013, CI=−.019, .095). However, at a moderate level, a significant indirect effect was observed (coeff.=.030, SE=.034, CI=.061, .131). Furthermore, at higher salesperson gender levels, there was a significant indirect effect (coeff.=.142, SE=.037, CI=.062, .210).

Table 5. Conditional process analysis illustrating the three levels of indirect effects for salesperson gender.

Various moderator SG levels on the indirect effect	Coeff	SE	LLCI	ULCI
Low SPG	.032	.013	-.019	.095
Moderate SPG	.030	.034	.061	.131
High SPG	.142	.037	.062	.210

Note: The indirect effect's CI, or 95% confidence interval, indicates whether its statistically significant if there is no zero.

Source: Research data, 2023.

5. Discussion

The conclusions drawn from this investigation demonstrate that SPASB plays a partial mediating role in the relationship between SPLQS and SP, specifically in the insurance sector. This indicates that flexibility in one's sales strategy allows for effective utilization of lead qualification skills, resulting in improved salesperson performance. These findings align with the perspectives of Román and Iacobucci (2010) and Mwesige et al. (2024), who argue that possessing skills alone is insufficient for sales effectiveness; the ability to apply these skills adaptably is crucial. Consequently, the ability of salespeople to adjust to their markets becomes vital. Moreover, prior research posits that SPASB acts as a mediator in the association between the SPLQS and SP (Sujan et al., 1994; Spiro & Weitz, 1990; Levy & Sharma, 1994; Verbeke et al., 2004; Boorom et al., 1998; Park & Holloway, 2003). These results add to the body of existing literature by providing new insights.

The findings also indicate that the influence of SPLQS on SP mediated by SPASB is contingent upon SPG. Specifically, the analysis reveals that the indirect relationship is insignificant when salesperson gender equality is low; it is moderately weak at moderate salesperson gender equality levels. Conversely, the association becomes notably stronger when the salesperson's gender equality is high. The relationship between the SPLQS and SP is weak at low levels of salesperson gender equality. However, as salesperson gender equality improves in sales teams, the link between SPLQS and SP increases.

Our study aligns with previous studies that equally believe that, as a result of increased acceptance and acknowledgment of women's skills in industrial selling, saleswomen are now encouraged to view their performance as being on par with that of salespeople. (Swan et al., 1978; Siguaw & Honeycutt, 1995; McNeilly & Goldsmith, 1991). These findings also provide valuable insight into gender in context sales, challenging traditional stereotypes that have long portrayed women salespeople as poorer performers than their male counterparts. With the increasing availability of education for both males and females in most countries, it has been argued that there is no discernible variation in work output between educated males and females. This finding aligns with earlier research by Swan et al. (1978), who found that female salespersons exhibited similar ratings to males in terms of readiness to put in a lot of effort, outlook in life, interpersonal skills, and capacity to plan. This suggests that women work hard and possess capabilities similar to their male counterparts.

Furthermore, the study's outcomes emphasize the importance of recognizing and understanding the consequences of gender dynamics on sales. This is supported by Lazarsfeld and Merton (1964) homophily theory, which suggests that individuals tend to associate with those who share similar traits such as gender. This theory highlights the significance of shared values and beliefs in the formation of relationships. Consequently, sales organizations should not assume that gender stereotypes are still valid and should instead create an inclusive environment in which both male and female sales representatives can flourish based on their individual abilities and talents. To accomplish this, organizations can implement tailored training and development programs that concentrate on enhancing SPLQS and SPASB while also promoting the diverse strengths and capabilities of their salesforce, regardless of gender.

6. Conclusion

To conclude, this study offers a valuable understanding of the intricate relationships between SPLQS, SPASB, and SP in the insurance industry. This study highlights the mediating role of SPASB in the relationship between SPLQS and SP, shedding light on the importance of salespeople's capacity to adjust their selling style to meet diverse customer demands. Furthermore, the study demonstrates the moderating role of salesperson gender in these relationships, emphasizing the need for sales organizations to create

an inclusive sales environment in which both male and female sales representatives can thrive. These findings contribute to both academia and the insurance industry by providing a deeper understanding of the reasons for successful sales outcomes in gendered contexts.

7. Study implications

This study findings have significant implications for both academia and the insurance industry. This study adds to the current body of literature by investigating the mediating and moderating effects of SPASB and gender on the link between the SPLQS and SP. It provides empirical evidence that expands our understanding of the complex interplay between these variables and sheds light on the factors that contribute to successful sales outcomes in a gendered context. Furthermore, this study validates and builds upon previous studies by investigating the moderating role of gender in the SP of insurance salespeople.

Theoretically, this study endorses the application of combined theoretical frameworks to account for salesperson performance in relation to expectancy theory by Vroom (1964), classification by Szymanski (1988), and adaptive selling, as discussed by Weitz et al. (1986) and Homophily, described by Lazarsfeld and Merton (1964).

From a practical standpoint, the study's conclusions have consequences for sales managers and administrations of insurance firms. First, sales managers must recognize the importance of SPLQS and SPASB in driving SP. By understanding the function of SPASB as a mediator, sales managers can emphasize the development of these skills in their training and development programs, which can lead to improved sales outcomes and better performance for individual salespeople. Second, sales organizations should pay attention to the influence of gender on SP. Although previous research has produced mixed findings on the association between gender and SP, this study suggests that gender can control for the relationship between SPLQS, SPASB, and SP. This implies that sales organizations must consider gender when designing sales strategies and allocating resources.

This study offers valuable insights into gender-specific factors that impact sales performance in the insurance industry. By gaining a deeper understanding of these factors, sales managers can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for both male and female salespersons, which can lead to a more diverse and effective sales force as well as improved customer satisfaction and overall organizational success.

Furthermore, the results of this investigation have important implications for the development of sales training programs. By considering the mediation function of SPASB and the moderating role of SPG, sales organizations can create training courses that emphasize improving these skills and addressing gender-specific challenges. This can enable salespersons to adapt better to the changing business environment, meet customer needs effectively, and achieve superior sales performance.

8. Limitation and future direction

This study focuses on the insurance industry in Uganda. Subsequent investigations may examine the function of contextual factors such as cultural norms, industry characteristics, and market dynamics in shaping the relationships between SPLQS, SPASB, and SP. This could help uncover the distinct difficulties encountered by salespeople in different contexts.

The current study employed a cross-sectional design, which limited its capacity to establish causal relationships. Subsequent investigations may adopt a long-term approach to observe the long-term effects of SPLQS and SPASB on SP. This offers perceptions of the sustainability and stability of these relationships over time.

While the present study explored the moderating function of SPG in the connection between SPLQS, SPASB, and SP, future research could delve deeper into gender differences and their impacts on sales outcomes. This could include investigating factors, such as gender stereotypes, unconscious biases, and the effectiveness of gender diversity in sales teams.

This study uses a quantitative approach. Therefore, merging quantitative and qualitative methods could provide a more thorough understanding of the intricate dynamics between the SPLQS, SPASB, gender, and SP. This could involve conducting interviews or focus groups with salespeople and sales managers to gain in-depth insight into their experiences and perceptions.

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Authors' contributions

Mr. Mwesige Richard was responsible for the manuscript's overall management, devised the research topic, penned the introduction, carried out the literature review, and conducted the statistical analysis. Dr. Situma Claire refined the language of the manuscript and contributed to quantitative data acquisition and analysis. Prof. Bonuke Ronald organized the discussion section. Ms. Kabasinguzi Brenda made substantial contributions to the study's conception, execution, and evaluation and responded to some of the reviewers' comments. All authors affirm their accountability for every aspect of the work.

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Data availability statement

Data can be accessed upon reasonable request from the corresponding author.

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