

# BUYER–SELLER RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN A MULTISOURCE CONTEXT: UNDERSTANDING CUSTOMER DEFECTION AND AVAILABLE ALTERNATIVES

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The purpose of this study is to develop and test a customer defection model describing an organizational buyer's propensity to stop purchasing from a supplier within a multisource buyer–seller relationship. A total of 168 employees who worked in purchasing using multiple suppliers in procurement were used for this study. Findings provide strategies for the salesperson to utilize in order to reduce the customer's perception of available alternatives (e.g., increase trust in the salesperson) and defection (e.g., increase customer satisfaction and commitment). Findings also show that the relationship between satisfaction and commitment is fully mediated by trust within a multisource relationship.

Customer retention is viewed as a significant issue within the sales and marketing literature (e.g., Anderson and Sullivan 1993; Hellier et al. 2003; Morgan and Hunt 1994). Johnson, Barksdale, and Boles (2001) emphasize that the importance of understanding customer retention is twofold: (1) loyal customers are more profitable than newly acquired customers, and (2) the retention of customers can act as a competitive advantage. Further, Reichheld and Sasser (1990) indicated that customer retention can boost firm profits nearly 100 percent by retaining an additional 5 percent of their customer base.

While customer retention is viewed as a key issue from the sales organization's perspective, organizational buyers often engage multiple suppliers for a single product or service. By engaging in multisource procurement, the balance of power within buyer–seller relationships can change. Changes in the balance of power can create the potential to reduce the level of profitability of the relationship for the selling firm. For many firms, the decision to engage in a multisource procurement strategy is a means of enhancing their sense of bargaining power (Doney and Cannon 1997). The buying organization's power within a multisource procurement setting is a function of their ability to leverage available alternatives. Therefore, if a salesperson can reduce the buyer's intention to leave a buyer–seller relationship, as well as reduce the buyer's perceived availability of alternatives, then the supplier organization can

maintain profitability within these long-term buyer–seller relationships.

Despite trends in which many companies have strategically decided to limit the number of suppliers they do business with, environmental conditions, such as advancements in information technology, have provided organizational buyers with easier access to a greater number of suppliers. Together, these trends and their implications may be among the reasons that procurement strategies have recently become strategic boardroom topics (Leach 2009).

Based on the prevalence of the multisource purchasing strategy, a customer defection model examining the perceptions of multisource purchasing managers needs to be developed and tested. Rutherford et al. (2006) specifically point to the potential impact and the need to examine differences based on procurement strategies. However, several gaps within the research on customer defection in buyer–seller relationships exist, including studies that either have not fully controlled for buyer's sourcing strategy within their developed models (e.g., Johnson, Barksdale, and Boles 2001) or models that have included sourcing strategy have only analyzed its effect on a few direct relationships (e.g., Rutherford et al. 2008). This paper aims to provide a more comprehensive customer defection model that includes availability of alternatives within the multisource procurement framework (see Figure 1).

The current study has two purposes: (1) examine factors that reduce the buyer's perceived availability of alternatives within a multisource procurement setting, and (2) examine factors that reduce customer defection within a multisource procurement setting. First, this study provides an overview of the relevant constructs. Second, formal hypotheses to examine key relationships between relevant constructs are developed. Next, the paper discusses the methods used to conduct this

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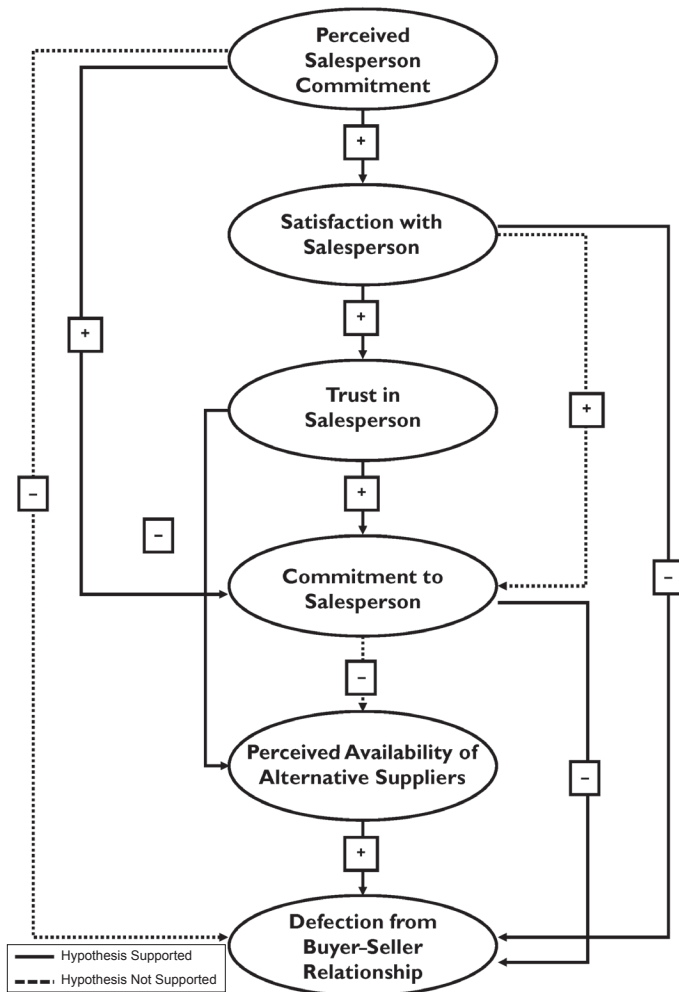
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**Figure 1**  
**Hypothesized Model of Buyer's Propensity to Defect in a**  
**Multisource Supplier Relationship**



study. Finally, results, implications, avenues for future research, and conclusions are provided.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Multiple Sourcing Versus Single Sourcing

Deciding whether to utilize a single source or multiple sources for procurement is crucial (Thompson 1990). A buyer's sourcing preference is a measure of his or her generalized preference of sourcing for all products (Swift 1995), and can leverage operation expenditures, increase profitability, and facilitate the ease of tactical marketing strategies (Thompson 1990). The main benefit of a single supplier purchasing strategy is the opportunity to develop a mutually beneficial, long-term relationship with the selling firm. In this type of relationship, both firms can take advantage of synergies between the two

firms and coordinate resources, knowledge, and people to maximize profitability. It is in these kinds of relationships that firms experience relational rents, the supernormal profits only achievable between two firms in a coordinated partnership (MacNeil 1981). Additional benefits include the buyer's reduced risk of contamination from differences in supplied product characteristics (Swift 1995), substantial price quantity discounts on behalf of the supplier, and better service quality (Segal 1989).

The benefits of a multisupplier sourcing strategy include a stronger sense of bargaining leverage for the buyer, operating through an enhanced level of competition among suppliers, and the promotion of antimonopolistic economics (Segal 1989; Swift and Coe 1994). The hallmark of a multiple supplier strategy is the reduction of risk. Risk-averse buyers prefer to forgo the additional profits, synergies, and resource advantages that come with an exclusive partnership for the security of knowing that in the event of a service failure, there are other options available (Weitz, Castleberry, and Tanner 2007). This is why availability of alternative suppliers needs to be considered as an outcome variable of interest within a multisource buyer-seller context.

### Defining the Constructs

#### *Buyer's Perception of Salesperson Commitment*

Anderson and Weitz (1992) introduced the concept of perception of commitment within the marketing literature. Using the Anderson and Weitz study as a foundation, Rutherford et al. define a buyer's perception of salesperson commitment as "[t]he buyer's belief about the salesperson's desire to develop a stable relationship, willingness to make short-term sacrifices to maintain the relationship, and confidence in the stability of the relationship" (2008, p. 248). A buyer's perception of a salesperson's level of commitment to a relationship can act as an accurate indicator of the actual level of his or her commitment (Jap and Ganesan 2000; Ross, Anderson, and Weitz 1997). Further, a buyer's perception of the salesperson's level of commitment to a relationship has reciprocal effects on the level of a buyer's actual relationship commitment (Anderson and Weitz 1992) and performance outcome evaluations (Ross, Anderson, and Weitz 1997).

#### *Buyer's Satisfaction with the Salesperson*

Satisfaction is a concept that takes a relational perspective of a buyer's perception and evaluation of a supplier's offering (Fornell et al. 1996), resulting in a positive affective state based on experiences over an extended period of time (Ganesan 1994). This study adopts the Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh (1987) definition of buyer satisfaction with the salesperson, which

comprises a positive affective state caused by a buyer's evaluation of all aspects of his or her working relationship with a salesperson. A buyer's level of satisfaction with a salesperson has been noted for its impact on sales force compensation (Brewer 1993), propensity to stay (Oliver and Swan 1989a), relationship development (Longfellow 1995), and product satisfaction (Oliver and Swan 1989b).

#### *Buyer's Trust in the Salesperson*

A buyer's trust in a salesperson is the buyer's belief that his or her needs will be fulfilled by the actions undertaken by the salesperson (Anderson and Weitz 1989). Similarly, Moorman, Zaltman, and Deshpande (1992) would contextualize trust as the organizational buyer's willingness to rely on the seller in whom he or she has confidence. Trust has been commonly studied in the context of a buyer's future purchase intentions, and plays a central role in influencing constructs central to building long-term relationships with customers (Doney and Cannon 1997). Specifically, Doney and Cannon provide justification for the importance of this individual-level construct by stating:

The salesperson, as the primary contact with the buying firm, provides valuable information and consultation to members of the buyer center. To make current purchase decisions and long-term relational commitment, buyers must determine the extent to which they can trust suppliers and their salespeople. (1997, p. 36)

#### *Buyer's Commitment to the Salesperson*

Sales researchers have focused a large amount of attention on understanding a buyer's commitment to the salesperson (e.g., Hansen and Riggle 2009; Johnson, Barksdale, and Boles 2001). According to Johnson, Barksdale, and Boles, buyer's commitment to the salesperson is defined as "[a] long-term orientation that includes a willingness to make short-term sacrifices to maintain the relationship with the salesperson" (2001, p. 126). Due to the buyer defection model largely being built from employee turnover models, the importance of commitment in the turnover literature (Mathieu and Zajac 1990) serves as an indication of the impact of this construct. Commitment has further been cited for its impact on the development and maintenance of successful long-term relationships based on its association with reduced defection intentions (Morgan and Hunt 1994).

#### *Buyer's Perception of Available Alternative Suppliers*

A buyer's perception of available alternatives is representative of the buyer's belief that there are alternative suppliers who might offer comparable or better service (Johnson, Barksdale, and

Boles 2001). An organizational buyer's perception of available alternative suppliers is partially driven by the benefits necessary to consider switching to a new supplier (Johnson, Barksdale, and Boles 2001). The benefits provided by a supplier impact the buyer's likelihood of switching suppliers. This comparison of alternatives is common to the relationship marketing literature (Wilson 1995), which postulates that the greater the comparative benefits that can be obtained from alternative suppliers, the higher the tendency for the buying organization to leave the existing relationship (Rutherford et al. 2006). Thus, if a buyer perceives that there are better options in the market than his or her current supplier, then the likelihood that the buyer will defect from the relationship should increase.

#### *Buyer's Defection Intentions*

"Propensity to leave (defect) is the perceived likelihood that a partner will terminate the relationship in the (reasonably) near future" (Morgan and Hunt 1994, p. 26). Research examining defection intentions has shown the construct to be a strong predictor of actual turnover (e.g., Johnston and Futrell 1989; Porter et al. 1974). Bluedorn (1982) cited 23 studies that reported finding significant positive relationships between leaving intentions and actual leaving behaviors.

## HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

### **Outcomes of Buyer's Perception of Salesperson Commitment**

Previous research has studied the impact that the buyer's perception of supplier commitment to a relationship has on relational variables within a buyer-seller relationship model (e.g., Jap and Ganesan 2000; Ross, Anderson, and Weitz 1997). Specifically, a buyer's perception of the supplier's commitment to the relationship has been shown to affect the level of satisfaction with the supplier (e.g., Jap and Ganesan 2000), commitment to the supplier (e.g., Anderson and Weitz 1992; Ross, Anderson, and Weitz 1997), and propensity to defect from the relationship (e.g., Anton, Camarero, and Carrero 2007; Rutherford et al. 2008).

When a buyer perceives a supplier to be committed to the relationship, the buyer in turn believes that the supplier is willing to maintain stability within the relationship. These associations generate notions of obtaining higher returns and higher-quality products, service, and support, meaning an overall improved level of satisfaction with the relationship (Jap and Ganesan 2000).

*Hypothesis 1: There is a positive relationship between buyer perceptions of salesperson commitment and buyer satisfaction with the salesperson.*

The relationship between a buyer's perception of salesperson commitment to a relationship and his or her actual level of commitment is based on the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner 1960). The norm of reciprocity is a socialized response that compels individuals to respond to others in kind. Based on the norm of reciprocity premises, Anderson and Weitz (1992) suggest that a relationship between the buyer's perception of the supplier's commitment and the buyer's actual level of commitment exists. Further, empirical results support perceived commitment as an antecedent to actual commitment (e.g., Anderson and Weitz 1992; Jap and Ganesan 2000; Ross, Anderson, and Weitz 1997).

*Hypothesis 2: There is a positive relationship between buyer perceptions of salesperson commitment and buyer commitment to the salesperson.*

A relationship between buyer's perception of the supplier's commitment and buyer defection has been established in previous research (Tellefsen and Eyuboglu 2002). Anton, Camarero, and Carrero (2007) found that a customer's perception of a reduced level of commitment in a buyer-seller relationship affected the customer's willingness to remain in a relationship. Rutherford et al. (2008) found that buyers with a higher perception of their salesperson's commitment were more likely to stay in the relationship. Rutherford et al. (2008) also found differences between buyers using a sole-sourcing versus a multiple-sourcing strategy in the linkage between buyers' perception of the salesperson's commitment and intentions to stay in the relationship. If a buyer does not perceive his or her salesperson to be committed, or committed enough based on expectations (Oliver and Swan 1989b), the buyer will have little expectations that the salesperson will desire to develop a stable relationship, make short-term sacrifices to maintain the relationship and have confidence in the stability of the relationship (Jap and Ganesan 2000). The buyer will likely then seek out alternative suppliers who might offer better service and have a higher level of perceived commitment (Johnson, Barksdale, and Boles 2001).

*Hypothesis 3: There is a negative relationship between buyer perceptions of salesperson commitment and buyer propensity to defect from the buyer-seller relationship.*

### **Outcomes of Buyer's Satisfaction with the Salesperson**

The buyer's level of satisfaction/dissatisfaction influences a number of the relational outcomes (Geyskens, Steenkamp, and Kumar 1999; Mobley 1977). When buyer's expectations regarding performance and service levels are met, satisfaction typically occurs (Oliver and Swan 1989b). Further, trust in a trading partner is developed by consistently meeting performance expectations (Doucette 1997). When buyer's expectations of performance and service are not met, dissatisfaction

typically occurs (Smith and Hunt 1987). Consequently, trust is decreased when there is disconfirmation of expectations (Vlaar, van den Bosch, and Volberda 2007). Geyskens, Steenkamp, and Kumar (1999) not only empirically demonstrated satisfaction's indirect effect on commitment through trust but also note that a buyer's noneconomic satisfaction with a supplier is positively related to the buyer's level of trust in the supplier.

*Hypothesis 4: There is a positive relationship between buyer satisfaction with the salesperson and buyer trust in the salesperson.*

Satisfaction with a salesperson's performance is viewed as a benefit to the buyer-seller relationship and contributes to the buyer's commitment to the salesperson (Doucette 1997). The positive relationship between satisfaction and commitment has been supported with regard to organizational turnover (Williams and Hazer 1986), salesperson turnover (Boles et al. 2007; Brown and Peterson 1993; Jaramillo, Mulki, and Solomon 2006), and buyer-salesperson relationships (Johnson, Barksdale, and Boles 2001; Roman and Ruiz 2005).

*Hypothesis 5: There is a positive relationship between buyer satisfaction with the salesperson and buyer commitment to the salesperson.*

Satisfaction is among the various antecedents of buyer relationship continuance (e.g., Hellier et al. 2003; Oliver 1980). For example, Anderson and Sullivan (1993) demonstrated that satisfaction with the selling firm had a positive effect on repeat purchase intention, and Abdul-Muhmin (2005) showed a significant negative relationship between satisfaction and propensity to terminate a relationship. Therefore, while the impact of satisfaction with the salesperson on the buyer's defection intentions has received less attention in the business-to-business literature (Johnson, Barksdale, and Boles 2001; Rutherford et al. 2006), support exists that indicates a relationship between the two constructs. A positive relationship between satisfaction and relationship continuance has been demonstrated in several contexts (e.g., Boles et al. 2007; Patterson and Spreng 1997; Ping 1993), including in the buyer-supplier framework as an indirect path operating through trust (e.g., Geyskens, Steenkamp, and Kumar 1999) and commitment (e.g., Johnson, Barksdale, and Boles 2001), as well as a direct path (Rutherford et al. 2006).

*Hypothesis 6: There is a negative relationship between buyer satisfaction with the salesperson and buyer propensity to defect from the buyer-seller relationship.*

### **Outcomes of Buyer's Trust in the Salesperson**

Trust is included in this model based on the construct's noted centrality to building long-term buyer-seller relationships

(e.g., Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh 1987; Ganesan 1994; Morgan and Hunt 1994). Morgan and Hunt (1994) have indicated that the relationship between trust and commitment plays a mediating role in one's propensity to defect from a relationship. Trust has been identified as an antecedent to commitment between trading partners (e.g., Hansen and Riggle 2009; Moorman, Zaltman, and Deshpande 1992). As the buyer's level of trust in the supplier increases, the likelihood that a buyer will become committed to a relationship also increases (Doucette 1997; Geyskens, Steenkamp, and Kumar 1999; Moorman, Zaltman, and Deshpande 1992; Morgan and Hunt 1994).

*Hypothesis 7: There is a positive relationship between buyer trust in the salesperson and buyer commitment to the salesperson.*

Ganesan states, "a buyer/seller relationship is a function of two main factors: mutual dependence and the extent to which they trust one another" (1994, p. 1). Increasing levels of trust within a buyer-seller relationship can act as an organizing principle that can balance the levels of dependence (McEvily, Perrone, and Zaher 2003). In addition, if a buyer intends to repurchase from a supplier, then there is little need to become involved in the process of searching for alternatives (Johnson, Barksdale, and Boles 2001). Therefore, the buyer's trust in a salesperson affects the perceived benefits necessary to switch sales representatives and leads to a decrease in the buyer's perception of acceptable alternatives.

*Hypothesis 8: There is a negative relationship between buyer trust in the salesperson and buyer perception of available alternative suppliers.*

### Outcomes of Buyer's Commitment to the Salesperson

Commitment is a key construct determining the continuance of the relationship (Morgan and Hunt 1994). Turnover models have demonstrated the impact of commitment on one's propensity to quit (e.g., Mobley 1977). Specifically, Mobley (1977) found that when employees are not committed to the organization, the employee will begin the process of searching for a new job. Buyers do not invest their time or energy in evaluating alternatives until they are no longer committed to the salesperson (Johnson, Barksdale, and Boles 2001).

*Hypothesis 9: There is a negative relationship between buyer commitment to the salesperson and buyer perception of available alternative suppliers.*

The relationship between commitment and propensity to defect (Abdul-Muhmin 2005; Johnson, Barksdale, and Boles 2001; Morgan and Hunt 1994) or propensity to stay (Gounans 2005) is well established. Johnson, Barksdale, and Boles (2001) found that the buyer's level of commitment negatively affected the buyer's defection intentions.

*Hypothesis 10: There is a negative relationship between buyer commitment to the salesperson and buyer propensity to defect from the buyer-seller relationship.*

### Outcomes of Buyer's Perception of Available Alternative Suppliers

Availability of alternatives is related to turnover intentions (Hom et al. 1992). This relationship is derived from the concept of dependence, which implies that as a buyer's perception of acceptable alternatives decreases, the buyer becomes more dependent on their partner and less likely to defect. Johnson, Barksdale, and Boles (2001) demonstrated a significant positive relationship between a buyer's perception of available suppliers and the buyer's defection intentions.

*Hypothesis 11: There is a positive relationship between buyer perception of available alternative suppliers and buyer propensity to defect from the buyer-seller relationship.*

## METHODOLOGY

### Sample

Employees that worked in purchasing were asked to participate in the study. Respondents were recruited for this study using an online panel. Within this panel, respondents were classified based on their employment position. For the present study, it was specified that potential respondents had to (1) have purchasing authority within their given firm, and (2) have face-to-face contact with a given salesperson. If respondents did not meet both requirements, they were not allowed to complete the survey. In total, 635 potential respondents visited the site where the questionnaire was posted. A total of 334 respondents started the questionnaire, of which 229 completed it. The number of suppliers used in procurement for the selected product/service was assessed. If respondents used only one supplier, they were removed from the analysis. In total, 178 respondents used multiple suppliers. Of the 178 respondents, 9 of them failed to answer all items needed in the analysis and were therefore removed. After removing the 9 respondents, 169 remained.

Just under 60 percent of the respondents were female, and the average respondent was just over 47 years old. The average annual compensation of the respondents was just over \$58,000, with a median of \$50,000. The median purchases from the selling firms were \$250,000, the median number of suppliers used for procurement of this type of product/service was 4, and the mode was 3.

While respondents were typically responsible for procuring a variety of products/services, respondents were asked to provide a specific company that provided the product/service and the type of products/services procured from the given firm. They were then asked to focus their attention

**Table 1**  
**Types of Products/Services Procured**

Type of Industry	Percent of the Sample
Manufacturing/Production Equipment	16.0
Office Supplies/Office Service/Printing	13.6
Electronic	11.8
Retail Products	7.1
Construction/Home Components	5.3
Food/Restaurant/Hospitality	5.3
Shipping/Shipping Supplies	5.3
Medical/Health Care	4.7
Information Technology Services	4.1
Lab/Science	4.1
Gears/Lubrications	3.0
Maintenance, Repairs, and Operations	3.0
Auto/Marine	2.4
Janitorial Suppliers	2.4
Aviation	1.8
Drilling	1.2
Furniture	1.2
Other	7.7

on the salesperson from the given firm. Table 1 provides a profile of the products and services that were procured by the respondents.

### Measurement

To examine the constructs used in this study, established scales were used and adapted where needed to apply to a buyer–salesperson context. All items were measured on seven-point Likert-type scales and reliabilities were assessed using Cronbach's alpha. While longer versions of the scales were collected, the current study uses three items from each scale due to low factor loading, low Cronbach's alphas, and the limited sample size. Specifically, all but one item in the final measurement model (Trust3) produced a completely standardized loading greater than 0.70. In addition, the final measurement model produced a respondent to item ratio of almost 9.5:1. The final versions of all instruments were above the Cronbach alpha level of 0.70 recommended by Nunnally (1978).

Three items from Anderson and Weitz (1992) were used to measure perceived commitment. The scale provided a reliability of 0.90. Satisfaction with the sales representative was based on Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh (1987). Three items were used to measure the construct and produced a reliability of 0.96. Trust was measured using three items from Doney and Cannon (1997). The scale reliability was 0.84. Three items

from Anderson and Weitz (1992) were used to measure commitment. The scale provided a reliability of 0.90. Three items from Ping (1993) were used to measure available alternatives; scale reliability was 0.89. Three items from Ping (1993) were used to measure propensity to defect; scale reliability was 0.94. Table 2 provides correlations, means, standard deviations, and variances for each construct. See the Appendix to view each item included in this study.

### Analytic Approach

The data were analyzed using LISREL 8.52. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to evaluate whether items loaded on their respective constructs. Following the CFA, convergent validity, discriminate validity, common method bias, and average variance extracted were examined. Finally, the structural model was examined. Goodness of fit was assessed using multiple indicators (i.e., standardized root mean square residual [SRMR], comparative fit index [CFI], and root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA]). Hair et al. (2010) provides guidelines for goodness of fit using a sample of less than 250 respondents with 12 to 30 variables. Specifically, CFI and RFI (related fit index) should be at or above 0.95, SRMR should be 0.08 or less (with a CFI of 0.95 or higher), and RMSEA should be less than 0.08 (with a CFI of 0.95 or higher).

SRMR is sensitive to errors in structure. If a model or the paths within it are misspecified, SRMR will be out of line. RMSEA and CFI are sensitive to errors in factor loadings. RMSEA measures how well a model fits the data, whereas CFI compares how well a model fits in comparison to a nested, baseline model.

## RESULTS

### The Measurement Model

The measurement model contained 18 items and was analyzed using LISREL 8.52. Results from the measurement model showed adequate fit. The model had a chi-square of 267 with 120 degrees of freedom (SRMR = 0.06, CFI = 0.98, and RMSEA = 0.08). All items had significant loadings and demonstrated convergent and discriminant validity. Average variance extracted from each construct ranged between 0.68 and 0.90.

### Common Methods

Considering that all constructs are reported by the buyers, this has the potential to create a common method variance (Podsakoff et al. 2003). In order to test for common method variance, two exploratory tests were run. The first test was

**Table 2**  
**Construct Correlations, Reliabilities, Means, Standard Deviations, and Variances**

	X1	X2	X3	X4	X5	X6	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance
Buyer's Propensity to Defect (X1)	0.94						1.82	1.38	1.92
Buyer's Perception of Available Alternative Suppliers (X2)	0.470	0.89					2.86	1.27	1.62
Buyer's Satisfaction with the Salesperson (X3)	-0.534	-0.370	0.96				6.00	1.12	1.26
Buyer's Perception of Salesperson Commitment (X4)	-0.363	-0.384	0.719	0.90			5.56	1.26	1.58
Buyer's Commitment to the Salesperson (X5)	-0.408	-0.268	0.618	0.754	0.90		5.51	1.29	1.66
Buyer's Trust in the Salesperson (X6)	-0.637	-0.452	0.766	0.675	0.624	0.84	5.90	1.19	1.42

*Note:* Reliabilities are shown on the diagonal.

Harman's single-factor test and the second test involves comparing two CFAs. The results of the Harman single-factor test show that the data can be broken into multiple components. The CFAs had a chi-square of 1,389 with 135 degrees of freedom (SRMR = 0.13, CFI = 0.82, and RMSEA = 0.26). The resulting chi-square difference gleaned from the comparison of the two measurement models found a difference of 15 degrees of freedom and a difference in chi-square of 1,122, indicating that common method bias is not an issue. Further, a third more rigorous test was run.

The third test, involving a marker variable, was run in accordance with the procedure laid out by Lindell and Whitney (2001). The hypothesized model was re-run with the addition of a marker variable: a variable that is thought to have no relationship with, or impact on, any of the variables in the study. The marker variable is linked to all other endogenous constructs in the study, and set to covary with all the exogenous constructs in the study. If the marker variable shows a significant parameter estimate, there may be an issue with common methods variance (Williams, Hartman, and Cavazotte 2010).

The marker variable selected was age of the buyer. Using age as a marker variable has an established basis in marketing research (Griffith and Lusch 2007). The results indicate that all five paths between the marker variable age and the endogenous constructs in the study were nonsignificant: satisfaction ( $t = -1.25$ ), trust ( $t = 1.34$ ), commitment ( $t = 0.34$ ), available alternatives ( $t = 1.59$ ), and propensity to leave ( $t = 0.96$ ). This indicates that common method variance is likely not an issue.

### The Structural Model

The proposed structural model was tested using LISREL 8.52. The model yielded a chi-square of 267 ( $p < 0.05$ ) with 124 degrees of freedom (SRMR = 0.06, CFI = 0.98, and RMSEA = 0.08). The chi-square/degrees of freedom ratio is in line with what was suggested by Hair et al. (2010) and the individual indicators all meet what Hu and Bentler (1999) term "adequate fit." Table 3 provides a summary of the results, completely standardized parameter estimates, and  $t$ -values.

Individual results found support for 8 of the 11 hypothesized paths. Buyer's perception of salesperson commitment was found to increase buyer's level of satisfaction ( $\gamma 11 = 0.77$ ; 10.80), yielding support for H1. Buyers that perceived their salesperson as committed to the relationship were significantly more satisfied with the salesperson. Buyers' level of satisfaction was found to increase their trust in the salesperson ( $\beta 21 = 0.86$ ; 14.24), yielding support for H4. Buyers that were more satisfied with their salesperson had a significantly higher level of trust. Buyers' level of commitment was found to be increased by their perception of salesperson commitment ( $\gamma 31 = 0.75$ ; 6.87) and their trust in the salesperson ( $\beta 32 = 0.34$ ; 2.63), which yield support for H2 and H7. However, buyers' level of satisfaction with the salesperson ( $\beta 31 = -0.23$ ; -1.52) was found not to affect their commitment to the salesperson, failing to yield support for H5. Buyers' perception of available alternatives was significantly affected by their trust in the salesperson ( $\beta 42 = -0.49$ ; -4.46), but was not significantly affected by their commitment to the salesperson ( $\beta 43 = 0.01$ ; 0.05), yielding support for H8, but not H9. Buyers' propensity

**Table 3**  
**Model Hypotheses and Results**

Multisourcing Hypotheses		Completely Standardized Parameter Estimates	t-Values	Results
H1	Buyer perception of salesperson commitment → Buyer satisfaction with the salesperson	0.77	10.80	Supported
H2	Buyer perception of salesperson commitment → Buyer commitment to the salesperson	0.75	6.87	Supported
H3	Buyer perception of salesperson commitment → Buyer propensity to defect from the buyer–seller relationship	0.51	3.44	Not Supported
H4	Buyer satisfaction with the salesperson → Buyer trust in the salesperson	0.86	14.24	Supported
H5	Buyer satisfaction with the salesperson → Buyer commitment to the salesperson	−0.23	−1.52	Not Supported
H6	Buyer satisfaction with the salesperson → Buyer propensity to defect from the buyer–seller relationship	−0.59	−5.33	Supported
H7	Buyer trust in the salesperson → Buyer commitment to the salesperson	0.34	2.63	Supported
H8	Buyer trust in the salesperson → Buyer perception of available alternative suppliers	−0.49	−4.46	Supported
H9	Buyer commitment to the salesperson → Buyer perception of available alternative suppliers	0.01	0.05	Not Supported
H10	Buyer commitment to the salesperson → Buyer propensity to defect from the buyer–seller relationship	−0.31	−2.71	Supported
H11	Buyer perception of available alternative suppliers → Buyer propensity to defect from the buyer–seller relationship	0.38	5.10	Supported

to defect was affected negatively by their satisfaction with the salesperson ( $\beta_{51} = -0.59; -5.33$ ) and their commitment to the salesperson ( $\beta_{53} = -0.31; -2.71$ ), yielding support for H6 and H10. Buyers' propensity to defect was positively affected by their perceived available alternatives ( $\beta_{54} = 0.38; 5.10$ ) and their perception of salesperson commitment ( $\gamma_{51} = 0.51; 3.44$ ), yielding support for H11, but not H3 because of the positive parameter estimate.

### Post Hoc Analysis

Two unexpected findings, the lack of support for H3 and H5, could potentially be explained by mediation in the model. To assess potential mediation of H3, a secondary structural model was created by removing the direct path between perceived commitment and propensity to leave. The resulting structural model was then compared to the original model via a chi-square difference test. The results of the chi-square difference test were a chi-square of 8.35 with 1 degree of freedom ( $p < 0.05$ ), indicating that there is a significant statistical difference between the two models. In essence, this indicates that the relationship between perceived commitment and propensity to leave is not affected by mediation within the model.

Given that mediation is not a factor, one would conclude that with three significant linkages to buyer's propensity to defect (H6, H10, and H11), the significant and negative linkage in H3 is spurious. Further, the negative correlation between the two constructs support this assertion.

H5 predicted that there would be a positive relationship between buyer satisfaction and buyer commitment. A secondary structural model was created by removing the direct path from satisfaction to commitment. The resulting chi-square difference test was nonsignificant ( $\chi^2 = 0.77$  with 1 df). Further, there was little change in the explained variance (0.67 to 0.65), indicating that the relationship between satisfaction and commitment is fully mediated by trust.

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

### Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study advances the current buyer–seller relationship literature and managerial directions in several ways. First, this study provides additional research examining buyer–seller relationships when buyers engage in the increasingly utilized multisource procurement strategy. Building on research which



suggests that the sourcing strategy has a moderating effect on the buyer–seller relationship, this study examines a customer defection model within this sample. A further understanding of buyers that engage in multisource procurement is important because by nature, this procurement strategy offers alternative suppliers that buyers can easily switch to or reduce the extent of their existing buyer–seller relationship. Therefore, the intended outcomes of a multisource procurement buyer–seller relationship model should be twofold: (1) reduce buyer’s perceived availability of alternative suppliers, and (2) reduce buyer’s intention to defect from a buyer–seller relationship.

Findings suggest that when organizational buyers within a multisource setting feel they have more alternative suppliers available, they are more likely to defect from the buyer–seller relationship. In order to offset the negative effect of alternative suppliers on defection intentions, salespeople should focus on methods to increase the buyer’s satisfaction and commitment within a relationship. A specific understanding of what leads to a customer’s perceptions of satisfaction and commitment within a given multisource context is key to consistently maintaining a customer’s decision to continue the business relationship.

This study further advances current literature by examining the antecedents of available alternatives. Buyers who remain in relationships in which they perceive greater available alternatives will likely be less dependent on the supplier and have greater negotiation power. Thus, from the salesperson’s perspective, these customers may be harder to keep in the buyer–seller relationship or less profitable. Our findings show that the buyer’s trust in the salesperson is the only variable that directly reduces this perceived availability of alternatives. Thus, by building trust within the buyer–seller relationship, suppliers will be less vulnerable to alternative suppliers. Overall, to meet the dual goals of reducing perceived alternatives and reducing the propensity to defect from a relationship, salespeople within a multisource setting should focus on increasing trust, as well as satisfaction and commitment, in order to fully realize the unique effects on both outcomes.

Consistent with the Jap and Ganesan (2000) study, the current study finds a relationship between buyer’s perception of salesperson commitment and satisfaction. However, unlike the Rutherford et al. (2008) study, buyer’s perception of salesperson commitment yields a lack of support with regard to buyer’s propensity to defect from the relationship. After running additional post hoc statistical tests, it was determined that mediation was not an issue. A potential explanation could be some small unexplained variance left after accounting for the effect that satisfaction, commitment, and available alternatives have on propensity to defect. An artifact of the data seems to be the case, as post hoc tests for mediation saw the explained variance for propensity to leave drop from 0.50 to 0.41 once the path between perceived commitment and propensity to

leave was removed. To further support this notion, the correlation between the two constructs was  $-0.36$ , suggesting the relationship is negative. Unfortunately, a thorough scouring of existing research—first specifically in sales and then more thoroughly in marketing—failed to yield any previous findings that can help explain the positive parameter estimate found in the model. Future research is needed.

Unexpectedly, there was no significant path between satisfaction and commitment. Results of a chi-square difference test indicate that the relationship between satisfaction and trust is fully mediated in the model. Therefore, a buyer using a multiple supplier strategy may be satisfied with the performance of a supplier, yet still unwilling to commit to said supplier. It is not until a degree of trust is developed between the buyer and seller that the buyer feels comfortable enough to be more committed to the buyer–seller relationship. In this sense, when buyers prefer multiple sources of supply, satisfaction is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for commitment to develop. Salespeople should instead focus on showing the buyer that they are trustworthy and reliable. If the salesperson can satisfy the buyer’s needs and establish a reputation for being trustworthy, then the buyer should become more committed to the relationship over time.

Full mediation is not surprising given that the sample involved buyers who use multiple suppliers. One of the hallmarks of having multiple suppliers is to reduce risk by spreading it around among multiple sources, therefore not becoming too committed to any one supplier. Those practicing a multisource strategy tend to be risk averse, preferring the assurance of alternative sources of supply in the event of a failure. This preference can even come at the expense of the benefits gleaned in a mutually beneficial long-term relationship, such as relational rents. This finding is also in line with previous research done by Garbarino and Johnson (1999).

Finally, this study extends our understanding of buyer’s perception of salesperson commitment on the buyer–seller relationship. Building on the Anderson and Weitz (1992) model, which examined commitment within a distribution channel context, the current study examines the outcomes of buyer’s perception of commitment within a sales context. Consistent with the Anderson and Weitz study, the current study finds that buyer’s perception of salesperson commitment is related to buyer’s commitment. The significance level examined within this study is at the 0.05 level, versus that of the Anderson and Weitz study at the 0.10 level, yielding stronger support for the existence of the relationship. This example of Gouldner’s (1960) norm of reciprocity indicates that if buyers feel that salespeople are committed to them, their company, and the relationship, they will respond in kind by exhibiting their own commitment, which reduces their propensity to defect.

## Limitations and Future Research

This study provides several limitations, along with avenues for future research. Research specific to the multisource setting was needed to empirically test and understand the customer defection process specific to this context. However, in attempting to reach this specified audience, limitations concerning the single dyad sample, data collection methodology, and sample size are present within the existing study.

In order to overcome the limitation of collecting data only from the buyer's side of the dyad, future studies could conduct a multigroup analysis to compare perspectives of buyers and salespeople. In addition, data collection and analysis could focus on buyers engaging in sole-source procurement versus multisource procurement within the same study. This would potentially allow for a clearer comparison of differences between the two procurement strategies based on both alternatives available and relationship-building efforts. A further avenue for research within the multisource setting could be to expand beyond the focus of the buyer–salesperson relationship at the individual level and look at the buyer–selling firm relationship at the organizational level. This would potentially provide better clarification to the dual relationship that buyers have with their boundary-spanning salesperson and the selling firm.

Another concern for this study is potential common method variance. In addition to the numerous tests run within this study, another means of reducing this limitation is by collecting longitudinal data. Longitudinal data may be particularly useful to this study because a variety of the relational constructs within a multisource procurement setting may play out over time, as buyers continuously evaluate their alternatives and leverage their options. This type of research would also allow for further testing of the relationship between buyer's perception of salesperson commitment and buyer's propensity to leave the relationship. This model needs to be retested across additional, independent samples to determine whether the result is just an artifact of the data or whether the path holds across samples.

In addition, future research should also focus on the nonsignificant findings between commitment and available alternatives by splitting the construct into behavioral commitment and attitudinal commitment. Findings may show that while behavioral commitment does not affect perceived alternatives, attitudinal commitment provides a second means of reducing perceived alternatives. Such results would shed further light on this relationship and enhance the managerial understanding of how to best facilitate the dual goals within a multisource setting.

Finally, while this study was innovative in including the dual outcome variables of propensity to defect and perceived available alternatives, future multisource research could examine

additional outcome variables, such as buyer's share-of-wallet and buyer's word-of-mouth communications. This research would provide a further understanding of why buyers allocate a certain percentage of their purchase to one supplier versus another supplier. In turn, this type of study could provide selling firms a better understanding of how to balance inputs to maintain the relationship versus desired outcomes. With a better understanding about buyers engaging in multisource procurement, along with a better understanding of how buyers provide word-of-mouth communications or referrals about the salesperson, salespeople might be able to greatly expand their customer share-of-wallet and their customer base.

## Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to examine buyers' relationships with their salesperson when the buyer is engaged in a multisupplier procurement strategy. Unlike previous research, this study examines only buyers who engage in multisource procurement. Because buyers who engage in multisource procurement have access to alternative suppliers, it was the goal of this study to see how relational-based constructs, along with the buyer's perception of available alternatives, affected the buyer's propensity to defect. Findings from this study highlight the importance of buyers' perceptions of available alternatives when predicting propensity to defect. Further, this study provides additional clarification on the impact of buyer's perceptions of salesperson's commitment within the buyer–salesperson relationship. Findings from this study advance the buyer–seller literature by examining buyer–seller relationships and demonstrating the need for simultaneous goals of reducing the buyer's perceived availability of alternatives and defection intentions within the multisource context.

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## APPENDIX

### Buyer's Perception of Salesperson Commitment

1. My salesperson is willing to make a long-term investment in helping my firm.
2. My salesperson is willing to do whatever it takes to help my firm's sales grow.
3. My salesperson has a strong sense of loyalty to my firm.

### Buyer's Satisfaction with the Salesperson

1. In general, I am very satisfied with my firm's relationship with my salesperson.
2. Overall, my salesperson is a good person to do business with.
3. My salesperson provides my firm with a satisfactory level of service.

### Buyer's Trust in the Salesperson

1. My salesperson has been frank in dealing with my firm.
2. My salesperson does not make false claims.
3. My salesperson is only concerned about him- or herself. (reverse coded)

### Buyer's Commitment to the Salesperson

1. My firm expects to be using this salesperson's products for some time.
2. My firm is quite willing to make long-term investments in the relationship with this salesperson.
3. My firm's relationship with this salesperson is a long-term alliance.

### Buyer's Perception of Available Alternative Suppliers

1. Competitors to the selling firm have policies that would benefit my firm more than the selling firm's policies.
2. My firm would be more satisfied with the service available from competitors than the service provided by the selling firm.
3. Competitors to the selling firm would be better to do business with than the selling firm.

### Buyer's Propensity to Defect

1. My firm thinks about ending the business relationship with the selling firm.
2. My firm is not likely to continue the business relationship with the selling firm.
3. My firm will probably stop doing business with the selling firm in the near future.



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