



2020 National Conference in Sales Management  
Norfolk, VA  
April 1-3, 2020

Norfolk Waterside Marriott  
235 East Main Street  
Norfolk, VA 23510

## PROCEEDINGS

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## **National Conference on Sales Management Mission Statement**

The mission of the National Conference on Sales Management (NCSM) is to create and disseminate knowledge on professional selling and sales management. This mission has three legs: Research, PSE, and Business Involvement.

**Research** – The conference should be a focal point for the development and transfer of knowledge on sales and sales management. We should provide a forum for the development of quality research in the sales and sales management area.

**PSE** – A related leg is to encourage growth that strengthens PSE and its educational component. The NCSM should be designed whenever reasonable to support the PSE faculty advisors. Our activities should be structured in a fashion that recognizes their important role in the dissemination of sales and sales management knowledge as advisors to students.

**Business Community Involvement** – The final leg consists of our role in recognizing the opinions and contributions of the people who are working in the field of sales and sales management. Business people can make an important contribution in evaluating the research we are doing and in sharing ideas on trends in sales management and selling. NCSM seeks to enhance the practice of professional selling and sales management by fostering the dialogue between academicians and practitioners.

Through adherence to the mission, the National Conference on Sales Management (NCSM) exists to create the premier national conference for disseminating knowledge in the areas of sales management and professional selling.

## FOREWORD

This thirty-fifth volume of the Proceedings from the National Conference in Sales Management contains articles and abstracts of presentations scheduled at the 2020 Conference held April 1-3 at the Norfolk Waterside Hotel in Norfolk, VA. Each article was selected after a blind competitive review process and will be presented at the conference by at least one author. In addition, the three-day Conference devotes three sessions to The University Sales Center Alliance (USCA) sponsored Best Sales Teaching Innovation methods. Based on the success of the Research Round Table this session continues at this year's conference, as well as five very interesting special session presentations/panel discussions. As always, the 2020 Conference continues to provide the outstanding socializing and networking opportunities that are hallmarks of the NCSM.

As interest in sales research and education has significantly expanded over the years, Conference attendance by both academics and practitioners continues to be strong.

Special recognition for this 2020 Conference goes to:

- Joan Rogala, Executive Director of Pi Sigma Epsilon for her expert support and guidance throughout the conference planning process, and all the staff of Pi Sigma Epsilon for all they do behind the scenes.
- The NCSM Executive Board – Lisa Simon of Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo for her leadership and guidance as the Executive Director of the NCSM; Christine Lai of Emlyon Business School and Gregory Rich of Bowling Green University for serving as Competitive Sessions Chairs; Bryan Hochstein of The University of Alabama and Catherine Johnson of the University of Toledo serving as Co-chairs of the Doctoral Student Sales Research Program; Rebecca Dingus of Central Michigan University for serving as Sales Education Track Coordinator; Stefanie Boyer of Bryant University for serving as Special Sessions Coordinator; Aaron Arndt of Old Dominion University for serving as member at large and assisting with program development.
- All the paper reviewers (see list in separate document) for their constructive feedback to help authors advance their research.
- And all of the contributors and supporters of the Conference who put their valuable time into making this Conference a success.

The goal of the National Conference in Sales Management is to serve as a forum for professionalizing selling and sales management by bringing together a broad spectrum of academics and practitioners. Thanks to the support and effort of everyone associated with this thirty-fifth event, this goal continues to be met.

David Fleming  
Program Chair  
Indiana State University

Stacey Schetzle  
Proceedings Editor  
University of Tampa

## HERITAGE OF LEADERSHIP FOR NCSM

<b>Year</b>	<b>Program Chair</b>	<b>Proceedings Editor</b>
1986	E. James Randall <i>Georgia Southern University</i>	E. James Randall <i>Georgia Southern University</i>
1987	E. James Randall <i>Georgia Southern University</i>	E. James Randall <i>Georgia Southern University</i>
1988	E. James Randall <i>Georgia Southern University</i>	David J. Good <i>Central Missouri State University</i>
1989	David J. Good <i>Central Missouri State University</i>	David J. Good <i>Central Missouri State University</i>
1990	David J. Good <i>Central Missouri State University</i>	James B. Deconinck <i>Central Missouri State University</i>
1991	E. James Randall <i>Georgia Southern University</i>	Roberta J. Good <i>Central Missouri State University</i>
1992	Ramon A. Avila <i>Ball State University</i>	Dan C. Weilbaker <i>Northern Illinois State University</i>
1993	Ramon A. Avila <i>Ball State University</i>	Dan C. Weilbaker <i>Northern Illinois State University</i>
1994	Dan C. Weilbaker <i>Northern Illinois State University</i>	Rick E. Ridnour <i>Northern Illinois University</i>
1995	Dan C. Weilbaker <i>Northern Illinois State University</i>	Timothy A. Longfellow <i>Illinois State University</i>
1996	Timothy A. Longfellow <i>Illinois State University</i>	Michael R. Williams <i>Illinois State University</i>
1997	Timothy A. Longfellow <i>Illinois State University</i>	Michael R. Williams <i>Illinois State University</i>
1998	Michael R. Williams <i>Illinois State University</i>	Michael A. Humphreys <i>Illinois State University</i>
1999	Michael R. Williams <i>Illinois State University</i>	Michael A. Humphreys <i>Illinois State University</i>
2000	Michael A. Humphreys <i>Illinois State University</i>	Jon M. Hawes <i>The University of Akron</i>
2001	Michael A. Humphreys <i>Illinois State University</i>	Jon M. Hawes <i>The University of Akron</i>

2002	David A. Reid <i>The University of Toledo</i>	Jon M. Hawes <i>The University of Akron</i>
		Scott A. Inks <i>Middle Tennessee State University</i>
2003	David A. Reid <i>The University of Toledo</i>	Scott A. Inks <i>Middle Tennessee State University</i>
2004	Scott A. Inks <i>Ball State University</i>	C. David Shepherd <i>Kennesaw State University</i>
2005	Scott A. Inks <i>Ball State University</i>	C. David Shepherd <i>Kennesaw State University</i>
2006	C. David Shepherd <i>Kennesaw State University</i>	Mark C. Johlke <i>Bradley University</i>
2007	Mark C. Johlke <i>Bradley University</i>	C. David Shepherd <i>Georgia Southern University</i>
2008	Mark C. Johlke <i>Bradley University</i>	Ellen Bolman Pullins <i>The University of Toledo</i>
2009	Mark C. Johlke <i>Bradley University</i>	Ellen Bolman Pullins <i>The University of Toledo</i>
2010	Ellen Bolman Pullins <i>The University of Toledo</i>	Concha R. Neeley <i>Central Michigan University</i>
2011	Ellen Bolman Pullins <i>The University of Toledo</i>	Concha R. Neeley <i>Central Michigan University</i>
2012	Concha Allen <i>Central Michigan University</i>	Michael L. Mallin <i>The University of Toledo</i>
2013	Concha Allen <i>Central Michigan University</i>	Michael L. Mallin <i>The University of Toledo</i>
2014	Michael L. Mallin <i>The University of Toledo</i>	Scott M. Widmier <i>Kennesaw State University</i>
2015	Michael L. Mallin <i>The University of Toledo</i>	Scott M. Widmier <i>Kennesaw State University</i>
2016	Scott M. Widmier <i>Kennesaw State University</i>	Lisa R. Simon <i>California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo</i>
2017	Scott M. Widmier <i>Kennesaw State University</i>	Lisa R. Simon <i>California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo</i>
2018	Lisa R. Simon <i>California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo</i>	David E. Fleming <i>Indiana State University</i>

2019

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## National Conference in Sales Management 2020 Reviewers

**Conference Chair:** David E. Fleming, *Indiana State University*

**Competitive Papers Chair:** Christine Lai, *Emlyon Business School*

### Reviewers:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>
Andy Wood	James Madison University
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David Locander	University of Tennessee, Chattanooga
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# 2020 NCSM Competitive Papers & Abstracts

## CAN SOCIAL SELLING LEAD TO SOCIAL MEDIA INDUCED–TECHNOSTRESS?

Hayam Alnakhli (Central Michigan University)

A sales job, by nature, is one of the more stressful jobs in business. Salespeople are susceptible to stress (Tanner et al., 1993; Sparks et al., 2001) due to several job-related circumstances: (1) the boundary roles they play; (2) the multiple internal and external groups they service, and; (3) the dynamic environment in which they operate (Tarafdar et al., 2014). In addition, they are on the frontline gathering important customer and competitor data that facilitate sales and marketing decisions. They also are involved in building and managing customer relationships. Over the years several studies have tracked the positive impact of social media technologies on various aspects of the sales domain (e.g., Trainor, 2012; Agnihotri et al., 2016). Consequently, sales scholars are encouraging the leverage of social media (hereafter as, social selling) as a new element to the traditional promotion mix sales tools (Itani et al., 2017; Mangold and Faulds, 2009).

Practitioners and academics alike have been investigating social selling as a prominent contemporary selling approach with considerable potential in the B2B sales domain. With regard to practitioners, Minsky & Quesenberry (2016) indicate that using social media to perform sales activities is the strategy of including social media in the salesperson's toolbox for the purposes of researching, prospecting, networking, and building relationships by sharing content and answering questions. Social selling can be defined as “the practice of leveraging social networks and the associated tools in the overall sales function, from lead generation to closed deal to account management” (Hudson, 2014, p. 56). Despite promised benefits, social media tools have been found to be fraught with pitfalls (Brooks, 2015). In the IT literature, empirically social media has been linked to technostress (Brooks and Califf, 2017).

Technostress has been viewed as a variation of salespeople role stress (Tarafdar et al., 2011). Though role stress has been shown to impact salesperson outcomes in a variety of different studies (e.g., Singh 1998; Tarafdar et al., 2014; Alnakhli, 2019), only a few studies have looked at the connection of technology and stress in sales context, despite the central role, the role stress constructs have been given in other aspects of understanding salesperson performance. For example, Rangarajan et al., (2005), examined technology task complexity as it impacted technology-specific role ambiguity and technology-specific role conflict. They found that as task complexity increased, both role ambiguity and role conflict increased. Sales technology could thus place unreasonable demands on salespeople, increasing job demands and changing role perceptions. Which may be a potential reason of why salespeople remain infrequent social media users. In fact, academic literature keeps reporting a low average of social media use by salespeople (Bill, Feurer, & Klarmann, 2020). Taken in total, the current literature is ripe for the introduction of social media –induced technostress and it makes sense to consider it in conjunction with social selling.

As there is a need for more research to find ways to use social media tools effectively and efficiently (Guesalaga, 2016; Ruuskanen, 2019), this research draws from the Person-Environment Fit theory (French et al., 1982), to investigate salesperson-social selling interaction. In particular, this study proposes that social selling will act as a stressor which in turn, leads to social media induced– technostress. This study also performs a multi-group analysis to test if pre-defined data groups (gender and age) have significant differences in perceiving social media–induced technostress.

Our empirical investigation reveal that social selling has a positive relationship with technostress. Specifically, social selling has a significant positive relationship with SMT-Overload and SMT–Invasion. Surprisingly, social selling found to be negatively related to SMT–Complexity. We also find that the effect of social selling on SMT–Insecurity was not supported. The results also show that there is a difference between males and females in perceiving social media–induced technostress. Particularly, our findings indicate that females perceived social media–induced technostress more than males with respect to all dimensions but not

significant for SMI-insecurity. We find also that younger salespeople perceived social media–induced technostress more than seniors. However, perceiving SMI–technostress was significant with respect to social SMI– complexity only.

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# **ANALYSIS OF CONTEMPORARY SALES POSITIONS: KEY COMPETENCIES FOR B2C VS B2B SALESPEOPLE**

Allison Crick, David E. Fleming, J. Ricky Fergurson (Indiana State University) and Brian Lambert (Growth Matters)

## **PURPOSE**

The literature assumes that business-to-business (B2B) sales roles and business-to-consumer (B2C) sales roles are different and that the knowledge in one area is not necessarily transferable to the other. Likewise, the sales literature often works under the assumption that competencies in outside sales transfer to inside sales. There is little empirical evidence to support these notions and none that specifically compare the competencies that drive success in each of these roles. This paper revisits the foundational competencies that Lambert et al. (2014) identified as paramount for new salesperson success. The study examines the similarities and differences in competencies that appear to be needed for roles of B2C and B2B inside sales and B2C and B2B outside sales based on a review of existing literature and sets the stage for an empirical exploration of the critical competencies in each. These identifications allow salespeople to understand what skills/knowledge is necessary for them to succeed in their early career depending on the role they are entering and for management to understand what competencies are key to success when hiring, training and coaching employees in different sales roles. For sales practitioners and researchers, the successful competencies can then be incorporated in training programs in the workplace and existing models of salesperson performance to optimize salesperson outcomes and overall organization success. These competencies can also be taught in the classroom for our sales students to enter the workforce more prepared and ready to begin more advanced training.

Sales is required for a business to survive and salespeople are the primary link between companies and customers (Shaw, 2007). Sales skills are multifaceted as it involves learning complex techniques and skills (Michaels & Marshall, 2002). Lambert et al. (2009) defined sales competency simply as the knowledge, skills, and abilities of salespeople. The competencies for the different sales positions need to be understood because a key factor for management to assess and develop employees is using a competency-based approach (Racz, 2000). Although competencies in sales literature for both academic and practitioners exist and are of great importance, it is very limited (Lambert et al., 2014). As stated by Moncrief, Marshall, and Lask (2006), similarities and differences in jobs and activities of different sales positions has yet to be identified. Sales roles are not currently as clearly defined as when research began years ago.

Our rationale for this research is that there is a blurring of lines with customer types and sales roles that would benefit from the creation of a continuum schema by identifying the competencies in each quadrant. The customer type is measured on the continuum of business-to-business and business-to-consumer sales. The location of seller is based on the continuum of inside versus outside sales. The use of the continuum approach is to include to overlap of sales roles such as:

### **Business-to-Consumer Inside Sales**

Business-to-consumer inside sales would be retail selling. Retail sales includes the activities of selling goods and services for personal use by the purchaser rather than for resale (Vaja, 2015). Examples of retail goods range from a stove to apparel. A retail services example is a meal at a restaurant. The field of retail sales has a large impact on the economy and is the final stage of the distribution channel (Vaja, 2015).

### **Business-to-Consumer Outside Sales**

In business-to-consumer outside sales, the seller is reaching out for sales out in the field (Narus & Anderson, 1986). Examples of B2C outside sales would be door-to-door sales of a product to consumers or landscaping company providing residential services (Narus & Anderson, 1986).

### **Business-to-Business Inside Sales**

Business-to-business inside sales is a business selling to another known business (Zallocco, 2009). B2B sales includes selling products to meet a business's needs or to be a component of what will be manufactured. An example of a B2B sales would be a call center engaging in inbound and outbound calling to other businesses.

### **Business-to-Business Outside Sales**

With outside sales, the salesperson first prospects for customers to then open the relationship with the prospect (Marshall & Vredenburg, 1991). Once the salesperson qualifies the prospect, they then present the sales message and close the sale (Marshall & Vredenburg, 1991). Examples of B2B outside sales would be prospecting for event sales to other companies or a wholesaler selling to a retailer.

### **Sales Position Similarities**

In the 21st century, all sales positions have evolved as a result of rapidly changing environmental factors. Environmental factors include technology advancements, increased focus on developing and maintaining customer relationships, and more competition with additional globalization (Moncrief, Marshall, & Lassk, 2006). These factors have changed the role of salespeople in all positions. In all sales positions, individuals utilize technology in order to access and organize information to increase efficiency, communication, and overall success. (Moncrief, Marshall, & Lassk, 2006). Across the sales positions, the more complex and expensive products or services result in a longer sales cycle. There is a high expectation of ethical behavior for all sales positions (DeConinck & Good, 1989). The change in trends has also increased buyer expectations across all sales positions as they have become increasingly informed and knowledgeable (Lambert, Ohai, & Kerkhoff, 2009). In all sales positions, the ultimate goal is to close the deal and inside and outside sales often work in a complimentary way (Narus & Anderson, 1986).

### **Sales Position Differences**

Although the sales positions have similarities, it is also important to understand the differences. The positions have different audiences they interact allowing us to refer to this as the location of the seller for the creation of our continuum schema. As business-to-consumer involves selling to the final consumer for personal use, business-to-business involves one business selling to another (Marshall & Vredenburg, 1991). Inside sales consist of receiving inbound orders, whereas outside sales consist of being out in the field seeking sales with existing and prospective customers (Narus & Anderson, 1986). B2B sales can be considered as more challenging as they are selling to other professionals either products or services that are more expensive than your typical consumer purchase. Therefore, B2B salespeople recognize higher salaries and commissions due to larger sales (Zallocco, 2009). In sales positions selling to businesses, there is more of an emphasis on maintaining relationships (Zallocco, 2009).

### **Competencies for the Sales Position**

Lambert et al. (2009) identified competencies as clusters of knowledge, skills, abilities and behaviors required for success that have many applications for individuals and organizations. The competencies that are foundational to all salespeople are clustered into the four following groups: partnering, insight, solution, and effectiveness (Lambert et al., 2009). The purpose of this research is to then identify which of the foundational competencies are most important for the three identified sales positions.

The first set of competencies labeled as partnering deals with some aspect of an interdependent work environment with interactions and collaboration. This includes spanning boundaries, communication, partnership alignment, setting expectations, negotiation, and building partnerships (Lambert et al., 2009).

The second set of competencies labeled as insight deals with analytic activity. This includes understanding how to achieve synergy based on understanding the business context, customer analyzing

capacity, evaluating customers, intelligence gathering, option identification, stakeholder needs, and building a business case (Lambert et al., 2009).

The third set of competencies labeled as solution deals with providing a solution in a sales role. This includes facilitating change, formalizing commitment, resolving issues, managing projects, leveraging success, and articulating value (Lambert et al., 2009).

The fourth set of competencies labeled as effectiveness deals with personal effectiveness of the salesperson. This includes building business skills, solving problems, embracing diversity, making ethical decisions, managing knowledge, using technology, accelerating learning, executing plans, maximizing personal time, and aligning to the sales process (Lambert et al., 2009).

### **Propositions**

***Proposition 1: For employees in B2C inside sales, the following five competencies will be most important for success: building business skill, managing knowledge, communication, solving problems, and option identification.***

Building business skill includes the use and development of understanding general business acumen and understanding processes. Managing knowledge includes proactive knowledge transfer in addition to communicating well under different situations. Communication includes ensuring all messages are clear. Solving problems includes the use of creative approaches to provide solutions. Option identification includes using creativity to explore options in order to make the best decision (Lambert et al., 2009).

***Proposition 2: For employees in B2B inside sales, the following five competencies will be most important for success: embracing diversity, executing plans, maximize personal time, building a business case, and leveraging success.***

Embracing diversity is valuing diversity and leveraging the insights and experiences of others. Executing plans is the ability to organize tasks and resources to work efficiently. Maximizing personal time is ensuring time and efforts align with goals to work effectively. Building a business case is justifying the investments required to close the deal. Leveraging success is the ability to share positive results to build or advance a relationship (Lambert et al., 2009).

***Proposition 3: For employees in B2C outside sales, the following five competencies will be most important for success: negotiation, setting expectations, facilitating change, formalizing commitment, and evaluating customers.***

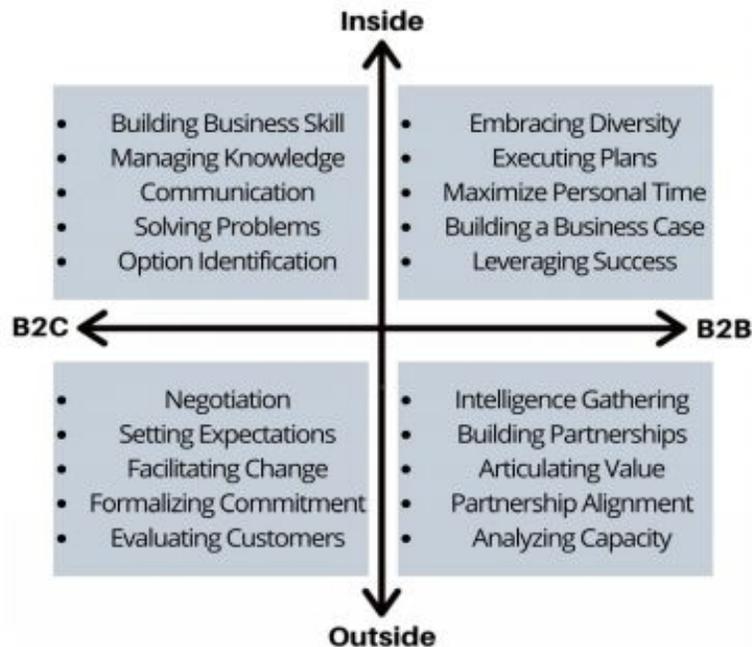
Negotiation is the ability to reach beneficial outcomes based on commitment and consensus. Setting expectations includes going beyond communicating the expectations by ensuring understanding of the stakeholders' responsibilities and providing solutions to obstacles. Facilitating change includes having an adaptive and optimistic perspective. Formalizing commitment includes implementing plans that are clear and can move forward. Evaluating customers includes the analysis of the impact of solutions and communication to stakeholders (Lambert et al., 2009).

***Proposition 4: For employees in B2B outside sales, the following five competencies will be most important for success: intelligence gathering, building partnerships, articulating value, partnership alignment, and analyzing capacity.***

Intelligence gathering includes systematically assessing potentially competing or collaborative needs to prioritize actions. Building partnerships includes developing and nurturing them to build trust and commitment. Articulating value includes messages are adapted to share valid solutions are provided. Partnership alignment includes contributing to customer satisfaction and providing advocacy within the organization. Analyzing capacity includes risk and resource assessment (Lambert et al., 2009).

### **Competencies by Seller Location and Customer Type**

In order to measure competencies for the four identified sales positions, we created a continuum schema based on seller location as inside and outside and customer type as business-to-business and business-to-consumer. From our literature review, we then made our four propositions of the top five competencies for each of the four sales positions as displayed in our classification grid below.



### Conclusion

The literature shows the importance of competencies in sales and what competencies are best for sales professionals overall, but what competencies are most important for success in the different sales positions has yet to be explained. The propositions and classification grid above describe what we believe to be the most important competencies for each sales position based on a literature review. A limitation of this context is that direct selling does not fit. Further research suggestions include empirically verifying the competencies with the identified sales positions. Salespeople and managers will benefit from having a more thorough understanding of what competencies are most important for success. Those that are in blurred sales roles can understand the competencies needing further development. The next step for research includes empirically investigating our propositions in order to verify which competencies are most important for the four described sales positions.

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# **STANDING OUT IN THE CROWD: A TYPOLOGY OF DIRECT SALES SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGIES**

Erin Adamson Gillespie (University of North Alabama), Alisha Horky (Columbus State University)

## **INTRODUCTION**

Direct selling seems to have become even more widespread (or at least more visible) with the advent of social media. Direct selling is a sales channel away from a traditional retail setting where sales are placed primarily through an individual distributor, whether in-person or through the use of technology (e.g., the salesperson's social media page) (Ferrell and Ferrell 2012; Peterson and Wotruba 1996). Social media seems to serve as a very useful tool in direct selling by allowing more frequent touchpoints with potential customers and recruits.

Social media usage in the broader sales context has been examined in previous research (e.g., Moore et al. 2013; Marshall et al. 2012). However, very little research was found that related specifically to the usage of social media within the direct selling sales context. An exception is Ferrell and Ferrell's research (2012) on the use of social media among direct selling companies, where the focus was not on the individual sales representatives but instead on the perspective of executives in these companies. This context should be studied specifically because there are key differences between direct selling and other types of sales. Notably, direct selling representatives recruit primarily from family and friends, depending heavily on personal relationships and family ties to a greater extent (Koehn 2001). Pratt and Rosa (2003) found in their research of three network marketing companies that these companies highly encouraged their distributors to recruit from these personal relationships and placed high importance on its members' personal lives. These differences between direct selling and other forms of selling highlight the need for research into this specific context. In this research, we seek to better understand this gap. Specifically, we examine how direct sales representatives are using social media through the analysis of their social media posts.

## **METHOD**

To understand how direct sales representatives are using social media, we perform a content analysis of Facebook posts of direct sales representatives. A convenience sample of individuals from a variety of direct sales firms and with a variety of experience was used. Screenshots of all Facebook posts made by the individual representatives within a 6-month period were captured and uploaded to the Dedoose online qualitative software. These posts were then coded and re-coded by the researchers according to standard grounded theory method (Goulding 2005).

Products sold range broadly from children's books to health supplements. The proportion of firm-related posts in relationship to other types of posts on each page varied among salespeople, as did the number of posts per day/week. Hence, during the same six-month period, there was a large range in the number of firm-related posts per salesperson. This variation could be due to the varying degrees of commitment to the brand. While some salespeople seem to view their direct sales jobs as a full-time commitment and career, others mention using their direct sales positions as a "side hustle." For each post, we code the message content, image (if present), and other features (emojis, links, etc.), in addition to the general purpose and tone of each post to develop themes surrounding the strategies employed. The general purpose and types of brand-related posts included event invitations, promotional posts, and educational posts, among others.

## **RESULTS**

We find that many salespeople employ traditional promotional tactics, including creating a sense of urgency (limited time offers, limited supply) and emotional appeals (testimonials of individuals who had been impacted by their products). Some salespeople focus primarily on product features, while others regularly mention the benefits of their products for their family and themselves. They also employ popular social media

marketing strategies, including soliciting direct feedback on posts (“Which one is your favorite? Comment below”) and engaging with their potential and existing customers both publicly and privately. Other social media strategies, such as the use of emojis and hashtags, are evident in many posts.

Images are used in a variety of ways; however, among the most successful representatives (noted by their self-documented performance), images are used in most posts. Some salespeople use stock product photos supplied by the firm, while others feature products being used in their daily lives, including the salespeople using (and sometimes consuming) the products themselves, and sometimes the product being displayed in the salesperson’s home and their spouses and children using the products. The representatives that seem to be the most successful, based on self-report and follower engagement, seem more likely to use personal photos than stock images. However, stock photos are more commonly used overall.

Some of the unique features of the direct selling model are also evident in these posts. For example, we note that some representatives create posts specifically for the recruitment of team members and extoll the benefits of becoming a salesperson for their firm in an effort to recruit their friends. To this end, we see many posts which focus on the rewards (e.g., trips, empowerment, friendship) that the salesperson earns through selling the product. In the current analysis, posts that focus on rewards seem to garner the most engagement from followers (based on the amount of likes and comments). The four most used tactics include using hashtags/emojis, sharing inspirational stories, touting feelings of empowerment and entrepreneurship, and creating a sense of urgency to purchase.

### **CONTRIBUTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

Our results show the strategies currently being used as well as document which strategies seem most successful based on follower engagement. These results inform direct selling companies regarding strategy choice in social media use. Further, as these sales representatives often have downlines (other sales representatives below whose sales contribute to the higher sales representative’s performance), this research will serve to provide better tools to prescribe in their roles as sales managers.

Of interest is the marked difference observed between firm-provided posts (e.g., stock images) versus more personal posts (e.g., pictures of self or family with product). These firm-provided posts resulted in fewer reactions than personal imagery or messaging, but there were overall a higher number of firm-provided posts used. This may be due to a lack of confidence in the salesperson and an overreliance on firm-provided materials. Overall, it seems that the more personal and genuine a salesperson’s message, the more reactions that person gained on their posts. These preliminary results provide companies with much needed guidance on how to improve their social media strategies and how to better guide their sales representatives.

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# THE IMPACT OF SALESPERSON MORAL IDENTITY CENTRALITY ON EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL CUSTOMERS

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In today's marketplace, salespeople are being tasked with not only achieving sales targets but also increased responsibility of building relationships with both external customers and internal coworkers in order to enrich customer and job-related outcomes. The formation and maintenance of these salesperson relationships are heavily based and dependent on one's personal identity (e.g., Steward et al., 2009) and social identity (e.g., Beeler et al., 2019). Personal identity and social identification are where the sense of "self" comes from, which is the driving force behind individual attitudes and behaviors (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995). The significant role of identity in sales settings is evident in research that underscores the profound impact of salesperson identification (e.g., with an organization) on customer-related outcomes and job performance (Ahearne et al., 2013; Wieseke et al., 2009).

In the literature, salesperson identity as well as identification are emerging as important considerations and factors when it comes to job success (Ahearne et al. 2013; Kalra et al., 2017). For example, a recent study by Beeler and her colleagues (2019) examines the impact of salesperson organizational identification on job-outcomes (i.e., turnover intention, sales performance) and customer responses (i.e., acquisition, salesperson trustworthiness) when it comes to selling to friends in a direct selling context. While extant research has primarily focused on the role of salesperson identification as it relates to aspects of the job (e.g., customer identification), scholars have neglected to consider other prevailing and arguably important types of identity that are anticipated to have an impact on how salespeople behave and react. In particular, moral identity, which is defined as "the degree to which being a moral person is important to an individual's identity" (Hardy & Carlo, 2011, p. 12), is believed to have a prominent role in sales settings, which, surprisingly, up to this point has not been examined in the sales management literature.

While the notion of moral identity centrality has gained recent interest in the marketing literature (Choi & Winterich, 2013; Fajardo, Townsend & Bolander, 2018) and management literature (Bavik & Bavik, 2015; Welsh & Ordóñez, 2014), it has largely been overlooked in the sales literature despite the potential value of its implications. This role of moral identity centrality is especially critical for salespeople, who not only have to constantly overcome negative stereotypes about being unethical (e.g., Sparks & Johlke, 1996), but also face ethical dilemmas on a regular basis (Hoffman, Howe, & Hardigree, 1991). Furthermore, morality is essential when it comes to "developing mutually beneficial relationships with two critical stakeholders—customers and salespeople" (Evans et al., 2012, p. 97).

The objective of this study is to explore the role of salesperson moral identity centrality as it relates to important job-related behaviors. Specifically, we take a moral agency perspective in an attempt to describe and understand the driving force behind salesperson-customer identification and salesperson-organization identification and resulting customer- and team-based behaviors – namely, customer service provision and teamwork.

We leverage a social-cognitive approach of moral identity and social identity theory (Aquino & Reed, 2002) to examine the process through which salesperson moral identity centrality affects customer service provision and teamwork through social identification. We argue that salesperson moral identity centrality serves as an important two-sided moral agent that drives salespeople, on one side, to focus on better serving their customers by means of identifying with them even further. On the other side, we contend that salesperson moral identity centrality impacts teamwork with coworkers, by way of higher levels of organizational identification. In other words, we suggest that moral identity centrality plays a chief role in motivating salespeople to show concern and better serve the internal business team and external business partners (e.g., Plouffe et al., 2016). This is especially important for today's selling organizations, where salespeople are expected to deliver their sales in a service centric approach to create additional value (Hartmann, Wieland, & Vargo, 2018).

In this study, we sought to examine salesperson moral identity centrality, which has not been previously examined in the literature. Grounded in social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), we developed a model that includes consequences and underlying mechanisms. Our empirical investigation of professional B2B salespeople reveals that moral identity centrality has both direct and indirect effects on customer- and team-based behaviors. Specifically, our results show that salesperson moral identity centrality positively affects both customer-identification and organizational-identification, which, in turn, impact customer service provision and teamwork behaviors.

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### **EMOTIONAL BEHAVIORS IN SUCCESSFUL AND FAILED SALES INTERACTIONS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY BASED ON A C.I.T. SURVEY**

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Emotions and the management of emotions have a key role in sales (e.g., Mulki, Jaramillo, Goad, and Pesquera, 2015), but critical affective processes in personal selling and sales management have not been studied enough (Erevelles and Fukawa, 2013). The objective of our qualitative study is to understand and explain the impact of salespeople's emotional labor (i.e. emotion management) on success and failure in sales interactions. This critical incident technique (C.I.T.) survey has collected accounts of salespeople's and customers' emotional behaviors during 454 either successful or failed sales interactions, i.e. involving or not a subsequent buying decision.

### **THE IMPACTS OF BUSINESS OBJECTIVE AND LEEWAY LEFT TO SALESPEOPLE ON NEGOTIATION OUTCOMES**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

B2B selling is a complex negotiation process involved with multiple issues. Buyers and sellers often have opposing sets of interests and goals on a set of issues such as price, delivery, guarantee, and payment term. A satisfactory resolution helps both parties achieve a competitive advantage over their opponents.

In sales negotiations, the seller organization relies on granting its salespeople a certain level of authority to secure bargaining terms in pursuit of its business objectives. Delegating authority to salespeople exerts beneficial effects on achieving optimal and customized prices and solutions because they have a better boundary position than their managers. Thus, centralizing authority – limited delegation may restrict salespeople, which does not help in reaching a deal and may lower the customer's perception (Mishra and Prasad 2004). However, full delegation may result in a high cost (high discount), limited sales effort and low profit (Joseph 2001).

The firm's business orientations may also affect this leeway effect in sales negotiations (Brooks and Rose 2008). For example, when the company has a sales-oriented objective, salespeople are asked to pursue a competitive goal, they are likely to enhance profits at the expense of the other party by reassessing the bargaining zone. When granted to bargain with customers, salespeople may set up a high target point. Contrarily, salespeople may set up a low target point if the company's goal is relationship oriented.

The objective of this research is to investigate whether the level of leeway assigned to salespeople affects negotiation outcomes and how. Further, the seller's business objective may directly and indirectly affect negotiation outcomes through the leeway granted. Negotiation outcomes are measured using the presence or absence of the agreement and the buyer's gain/loss. This research tests the hypotheses using a 3x 3 between-subject scenario-based experimental study. This is a work-in-progress paper. Participants negotiate in a buyer-seller dyad.

In sales literature, the majority of the studies focused on single issue negotiation – pricing. Little research investigates sales force leeway in the multiple issues negotiation context. Thus, we set out this study to

bridge this literature gap. In addition, a company's orientation, known as its business objective is hypothesized to strengthen or weaken how salespeople's leeway affects the negotiation outcomes. The findings may provide guidelines to managers about how to optimize negotiation outcomes by using the level of leeway granted to sales negotiators according to the company's current business goal. For example, when a collaborative orientation is adopted by the firm, the salesperson looks for a mutual benefit and aims to maintain a good relationship, greater leeway allows to strategically making concessions, which in turn increases the possibility for both parties to reach an agreement. When the seller's business goal is transactional, limited leeway assigned to salespeople may result in the buyer's loss. The scope of this study is limited to the one-shot negotiation. Investigating other potential variables in a sequential setting is a worthwhile direction for future research.

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# **PROTECTING AGAINST THE UNDESIRABLE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL ANXIETY ON SALES PERFORMANCE: EXPLORING THE ALLEVIATING ROLE OF MINDFUL ACCEPTANCE AND PERCEIVED SUPERVISOR SUPPORT**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Research shows that social anxiety is associated with a number of adverse job-related outcomes, yet little is known about the resources that can alleviate such negative impact—particularly on the negative relationship between social anxiety and salesperson performance. Drawing from comfort theory, this study investigates how personal (i.e., mindful acceptance) and social (i.e., perceived supervisor support) resources can serve as safeguarding mechanisms that salespeople can leverage when experiencing high levels of social anxiety. Findings, derived from survey-based data collected from B2B salespeople matched with objective sales performance data, show that social anxiety is negatively associated with sales performance but that high levels of mindful acceptance or perceived supervisor support alleviate this relationship.

## **Protecting Against the Undesirable Effects of Social Anxiety on Sales Performance: Exploring the Alleviating Role of Mindful Acceptance and Perceived Supervisor Support**

### **1. Introduction**

Social anxiety affects salespeople—anxiety resulting from the prospect or presence of personal evaluation in real or imagined social situations (Schlenker & Leary, 1982). The sparse research in this area is limited to examining anxiety that is specific to a sales call interaction or the firm’s assessment of the salesperson (Agnihotri, Vieira, Senra, & Gabler, 2016). Such research links sales call anxiety to lower self-reported performance overall (Verbeke, Bagozzi, van den Berg, Worm, & Belschak, 2016). To address this, the current research investigates how resources such as mindful acceptance—defined as an attitude of acceptance or compassion toward oneself and one’s experience as they arise (Roemer & Orsillo, 2003)—and perceived supervisor support—defined as the extent to which supervisors value employee contributions and care about their well-being (DeConinck & Johnson, 2009), can serve as safeguarding mechanisms that salespeople can leverage when experiencing high levels of social anxiety.

### **2. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses**

For salespeople, the risk of social anxiety may originate from a variety of factors, including the high stress levels associated with the sales profession (Jaramillo, Mulki, & Boles, 2011); the complex portfolio of relationships that salespeople have to manage including internal teams, business partners, and customers (Plouffe, Bolander, Cote, & Hochstein, 2016); the fact that approximately 50% of salespeople fail to reach their annual sales targets (Ahearne, Boichuk, Chapman, & Steenburgh, 2012); and that salespeople consistently have to face failure (Boichuk et al., 2014). Thus, we posit that greater levels of social anxiety will diminish sales performance. Formally stated:

*H1: Social anxiety is negatively associated with salesperson sales performance.*

Consistent with comfort theory—where comfort comes from the relief, easing, and transcendence of the stress and anxiety of a negative psychological, physical, social, or environmental situation (Kolcaba, 2003; Kolcaba & Kolcaba, 1991)—we argue that increased mindful acceptance (i.e., personal resource) will attenuate the negative effect of social anxiety on sales performance. Given that mindful acceptance can aid with transcending and mitigating initial feelings and judgements, high mindful acceptance may be helpful to recognizing and

managing the psychological and physical reactions to discomfoting social situations. More formally:

*H2: Mindful acceptance attenuates the negative association between social anxiety and sales performance.*

Comfort theory also identifies social resources (e.g., supervisor support) as an important source of comfort and research emphasizes that an individual's positive social circle can assist in relieving, easing, and transcending discomfort (Kolcaba, 2003; Kolcaba & Kolcaba, 1991). Hence, a supportive supervisor would be available to help support their salespeople to alleviate discomfort stemming from uncomfortable situations in work-related social situations (DeConinck & Johnson, 2009). Recent research shows that supportive supervisors attenuate the negative association between emotional exhaustion and work-related outcomes including unethical behaviors (Lussier, Hartmann, & Bolander, 2019). We therefore posit that:

*H3: Perceived supervisor support attenuates the negative association between social anxiety and sales performance.*

### **3. Method**

The hypotheses were tested on 135 B2B salespeople. The established measurement scales assessed the latent constructs social anxiety (Schlenker & Leary, 1982), perceived supervisor support (DeConinck & Johnson, 2009), and mindful acceptance (Liang et al., 2018). All the above measurement scales used a 7-point Likert scale (1 = totally disagree; 7 = totally agree). Salesperson objective sales performance—which represents the actual sales performance as a percentage of quota—was obtained for each salesperson over a one-month timeframe. The monthly timeframe is a common measure of sales performance in sales academic research (Ahearne, Lam, Mathieu, & Bolander, 2010). Given its ability to overcome some identification issues associated with co-variance based SEM, PLS-SEM is well suited to estimate complex models that include the use a small sample (Hair, Hult, Ringle, Sarstedt, & Thiele, 2017).

### **4. Results**

Social anxiety is negatively associated with salesperson sales performance ( $b = -.19, p < .05$ ). Hence, H1 is supported. Overall, the hypothesized main and control effects only model explains 30.0% of the variance in sales performance. Also, in support of H2, the interaction term between social anxiety and mindful acceptance is significant and positive ( $b = .21, p < .05$ ). H3 is also supported. The interaction term of social anxiety and perceived supervisor support is significant and positive ( $b = .29, p < .01$ ).

### **5. Discussion**

This research makes several unique theoretical contributions to the literature. First, the findings show that social anxiety is negatively associated with sales performance. Notably, the majority of the work on the influence of anxiety examines its effect on self-reported performance (Verbeke et al., 2016), our work addresses methodological concerns by collecting objective sales performance data directly from the firm. This helps demonstrate the influence of social anxiety on sales performance while reducing common-method and social desirability biases.

Second, the results of the current study provide evidence that these beneficial effects extend to the sales context, where mindful acceptance attenuates the negative social anxiety-sales performance relationship. Managers, looking to help salespeople with social anxiety, can provide resources that aid salespeople in developing mindful awareness. Such resources include meditation rooms and mindfulness training programs.

Third, this research identifies perceived supervisor support as a valuable social resource capable of mitigating the negative social anxiety-sales performance relationship. Supportive supervisors are perceived by salespeople as managers that generally foster positive working environments while giving encouragement, recognition, valuable feedback, and positive reinforcement (Kemp, Leila Borders, & Ricks, 2013). Sales managers should consider directing more quality time and support to salespeople with higher levels of social anxiety.

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# FIRST IMPRESSIONS IN INITIAL BUYER-SELLER ENCOUNTERS: USING HAPTIC FEATURES TO SIGNAL SELLER QUALITY AND ENHANCE THE ENCOUNTER

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Customers depend heavily on non-verbal cues in the initial encounter because they have no experience with the salesperson's sincerity and efficacy (Swan, Bowers and Richardson 1999). Instead, they rely on subconsciously processed holistic assessments of a salesperson (Liu and Leach 2001; Monteparre 2003). Evolutionary psychology suggests that individuals rely on nonverbal behavior to immediately assess trust and competence, and trust is more important than competence (Cuddy 2015; Montepare 2003). This research examines the role of one cue—a high quality and novel business card used by a salesperson in an initial encounter—in forming the customer's first impression. Signaling theory research shows us that favorable tactile dimensions affect attitudes and perceptions of an unrelated item (e.g. the buyer seller-dyad). Secondly, we examine how the quality of a business card interacts with a firms' corporate image.

Sales research on non-verbal cues in initial sales encounters has centered on gender, race, attractiveness, nonverbal communication styles, body language, experience, empathy and professionalism. However, consumer behavior research has focused on other nonverbal cues that can influence perceptions such as the feel and weight of an object. Job applications attached to a heavy clipboard result in applicants being judged as more qualified for a position when compared to those on a light clipboard (Ackerman, Nocera and Bargh 2010). Heavier versus lighter menus have been found to create a perception of greater selection and higher service quality for a restaurant (Magnini and Kim 2016). When individuals read information on a heavier object, they invest more cognitive effort in addressing abstract issues such as importance, competency of an individual, fairness, and the monetary value of an object (Jostmann, Lakens and Schubert 2009).

Some companies have created novel business cards by placing differing images or graphics to spark conversation and connection and have increased sales (Bennett 2012; Pennington 2007; Shellenbarger 2018). The tactile effect of using different materials, designs, and shapes can make the initial interaction more meaningful and memorable (Shellenbarger 2018).

## Conceptual Background

Signaling Theory helps to explain how one party can judge the quality of another party's offer when asymmetrical information exists (Connelly et al. 2011; Kirman and Rao 2000; Spence 1973; 2002; Scott and White 2016; Arnold et al. 2007; Boulding and Kirmani 1993). Marketers have used signaling theory in B2B sales where organizational buyers lack knowledge of a supplier's financial position, capabilities, flexibility or long-term commitment to their customers (Stump and Heide 1996).

Signaling carries a cost to the signaler (Connelly et al. 2011). When consumers perceive a firm's higher than ordinary marketing effort, they attribute that increased effort to a higher quality product (Kirmani and Wright 1989). However, conflicting information about the firm can make buyers suspicious because it suggests opportunistic behavior (Cohen and Dean 2005) or erode consumer perceptions of the quality (Kirmani and Wright 1989; Kirmani 1990).

Therefore, we submit the following hypotheses:

**H1:** Customers will perceive higher salesperson expertise when the initial sales communication is accompanied by a high-quality business card versus an average quality business card.

**H2:** Customers will have higher trust in the salesperson when the initial sales communication is accompanied by a high-quality business card versus an average quality business card.

**H3:** Customers will have higher perceived trust of the selling firm when an initial sales communication is accompanied by a high-quality business card versus an average quality business card.

**H4:** Customers will perceive no differences in the following when a high quality card versus an average card accompanies an initial sales communication, if the firm has a low reputation:

- a) the effectiveness of the salesperson
- b) the trust of the salesperson
- c) the trust of the selling firm

**H5:** If firm reputation is unavailable and an average card accompanies an initial sales communication, customers will have higher perceptions of the following, as compared to when the firm reputation is low and accompanied by a high-quality card:

- a) the effectiveness of the salesperson will be higher for the average card.
- b) the trust of the salesperson will be higher for the average card.
- c) the trust of the selling firm will be higher for the average card.

**H6:** If a firm has a high reputation and an average card accompanies an initial sales communication, it will result in the same perceptions as compared to when there is no reputation information and a high quality card accompanies the sales message, such that:

- a) the effectiveness of the salesperson will be the same
- b) the trust of the salesperson will be the same.
- c) the trust of the selling firm will be the same.

**H7:** If a firm's reputation is high and a high quality card accompanies an initial sales communication, customers will have higher perceptions of the following, as compared to when the firm reputation is high and accompanied by an average card, such that:

- a) the effectiveness of the salesperson will higher.
- b) the trust of the salesperson will be higher.
- c) the trust of the selling firm will be higher.

## **Methodology**

A pen and paper survey was developed that was accompanied with an actual business card. Participants were upper level students in marketing classes at southern California university received extra credit. The study produced 348 usable surveys. To make the situation relevant to students and generalizable to other populations, participants were given a situation where with their graduation approaching and a relative or family friend had offered to pay for a career consulting service that specializes in placing graduates in their first job. The participants would make the final selection of the firm. Next, they read a letter from a fictitious career consulting firm explaining the services offered and making marketing claims about the individual's expertise in this field. Surveys were randomly assigned. Participants were told to read the letter and material enclosed in the envelope, and then respond to the measures that assessed their attitude towards both the selling consultant and the firm.

## **Measures**

Multi-item measures from existing literature were used. To assess salesperson efficacy, two items were adapted from Comer et al.'s (1999) measures of Salesperson Service Performance and one additional item was adapted from Amyx and Bhuian's (2009) research on salesperson trust in B2B sales. To assess the firm's image, three items were adapted from the Comer et al. (1999) measures of Salesperson Service Performance. A 7-point Likert scale anchored by strongly disagree to strongly agree was used. To measure the perceived trust of the sales professional (consultant), we used Campbell and Kirmani's (2000) four-item, bi-polar 7-point semantic differential scale. To test the interaction effect of corporate reputation with the type of business cards, two independent variables were operationalized (high and low corporate reputation).

## **Manipulation Checks**

We conducted manipulation checks to ensure that respondents perceived the business card as either high-quality or average quality in all surveys. Of the 348 participants, 173 receiving a high-quality card and 175 receiving an average quality card. MANOVA using SPSS version 24 was used to analyze the results and relied on post hoc analysis (Sidak option) to minimize family-wise error. The results supported the operationalization

of both the average and the high quality card ( $p < 0.001$ ).

### Hypothesis testing

To test the hypotheses, MANOVA with SPSS version 24 was used with post hoc Sidak analysis to minimize family-wise error rate.

H1:	Supported	$p < .000$
H2:	Supported	$p = .027$
H3:	Supported	$p < .000$
H4:	<i>(Note: Non-significance is predicted)</i>	
a) salesperson's efficacy.	Unsupported	$p = .004$
b) trust of the salesperson.	Supported	$p = .538$
c) trust of the selling firm.	Supported	$p = .176$
H5::		
a) salesperson's efficacy.	Supported	$p < .000$
b) trust of the salesperson.	Unsupported	$p = .105$
c) trust of the selling firm.	Supported	$p < .000$
H6:	<i>(Note: Non-significance is predicted)</i>	
a) salesperson's efficacy.	Unsupported	$p = .001$
b) trust of the salesperson.	Supported	$p = .168$
c) trust of the selling firm.	Supported	$p = .626$
H7:		
a) salesperson's efficacy.	Unsupported	$p = .215$
b) trust of the salesperson.	Supported	$p < .001$
c) trust of the selling firm.	Supported	$p = .010$

### Discussion

This research used signaling theory to test customer's first time perceptions in a sales encounter when a salesperson uses business cards of differing quality. The data suggests that a strong asymmetrical relationship between positive and negative signals exists. When negative firm image is present, using a high-quality business card will not offset the negative perception of trust of the salesperson and the selling firm. Yet, when the firm's image is positive and a sales person uses a high-quality business card, favorable perceptions of the salesperson and the selling firm appears to increase. Second, we connect consumer behavior research on the influence of haptic features of an unrelated object to the B2B arena. We also confirm that haptic features of smoothness, weight, and sturdiness can positively affect perceptions of an unrelated object and can contribute to more pro-social behavior (Ackerman, Nocera and Bargh 2010).

This study provides specific strategies for increasing sales force success. First, for firms with no established reputation, using high-quality business cards can create a positive first impression and increased perceptions of the salesperson's efficacy and trustworthiness. These positive perceptions of the salesperson transferred to the selling firm as higher trust in the firm.

Second, firms must first consider their existing corporate image when contemplating using high-quality business cards. If they have a negative image, higher quality business cards did not ameliorate the negative attitudes related to both the trust of firm or the salesperson. Surprisingly, the results did show a positive significant difference in the perceptions of the salesperson efficacy, which was not predicted. This counterintuitive finding could be explained as a propensity for a customer to view a novel business card as something that the individual salesperson adopted and external to the firm reputation. This would be an area for future research.

Third, when a firm has a positive reputation, it can reap additional benefits using high-quality business

cards because it further increased both the trust of the salesperson and the selling firm when compared to using an average business card.

### **Limitations and further research**

The research focused on a service firm and results could vary if the offering was a product. Future research could also explore the lasting effect of a high-quality business card on customer perceptions and memory. The results of this study would be more meaningful if we could demonstrate ways that these first impressions accelerated or deepened the relationship. Finally, future research that could test the generalizability of the use of high-quality business cards in more complex or technical industries that require high salesperson knowledge.

*References available on request.*

# **USING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TO INCREASE PIPELINE PREDICTABILITY AND FORECASTING ACCURACY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

As artificial intelligence continues to evolve, there will be applications useful for the sales process. One such application currently being developed is the use of artificial intelligence programs, which are overlaid CRM platforms to create and maintain ongoing and dynamic best practices for managing the sales pipeline. The development of such technology will not likely eliminate such activities, which are used to enhance and improve the gaining of experience by salespeople to better do their job. But it will probably change them.

One company, CloudApps, has developed a program called SUMO, which is the first stage of this development toward artificial intelligence. SUMO links with Salesforce, a leading CRM platform, and provides data that can be analyzed by sales function managers to provide insights on how to improve sales processes through the pipeline. It can result in improvement in sales throughput as well as improving forecasting and related functions as well. The follow-up program Sensai, now getting ready for beta testing, uses three different machine learning algorithms to replace the essential analytical function of people and provides directions to salespeople within a live pipeline on how to proceed with the sales process. The analytical function can improve the likelihood of success in the individual sale, but also improve related processes such as forecasting as well. Many interesting research efforts may be made in conjunction with the technology.

## **INTRODUCTION**

As organizations continue to focus on the enablement of their sales organizations, part of this effort will be focused on how their salespeople gain experience to better execute in this function. The process of gaining work experience, in general, has had little research emphasis (Tesluk and Jacobs 1998). In the sales and business marketing literature experience has mostly been used as a moderator variable and has been found to moderate different relationships e.g., Mintu-Wimsat and Gassenheimer (2004). However, it has been defined and measured in terms of time and not the process or the outcomes of the process. Hence experience has been viewed as time spent rather than as a process whereby the experience leads to something other than just spending the time. For example, sensemaking as an outcome of experience has been proposed, and gaining improvements in sensemaking are suggested to lead to improvements in whatever process the experience is related to (Disdar and Essen 2016). Learning in general, has been the focus of several efforts related to salespeople as well e.g., Chonko et al., (2003), Hunter (2010).

Salespeople gain experience in a variety of ways. They can primarily work on their own and learn by doing as they go on. Or the organization can provide various forms of assistance, including supervision by a sales manager, a formal coaching program, a mentoring program, training of different types, and the like. Most organizations expend resources helping the salesperson learn and gain experience, although they provide less or more depending on a variety of factors. Most of this appears to be incremental or what can be referred to as muddling through (Rollins, Bellinger, and Johnston 2012).

Plank and Steinberg (1987) and Steinberg and Plank (1987) were among others who proposed that expert systems would provide benefits to sales and marketing activities. An expert system uses input from an expert, which is then coded into a software program to provide guidance on how to proceed in some action for a person with less expertise. A benefit is that over time, the user gains or can gain the increased level of knowledge the program provides. A disadvantage is the applications were static; that is what was the state of expertise at one time may not be the same as time goes on, but the program did not change unless the user changes it.

The purpose of this paper is to introduce a follow up to expert systems and provide a current example that is used to describe what the new methodology does and how it improves the process it is concerned with. The process is the sales pipeline, which mainly describes how a potential sales lead can eventually become a

sale. Organizations expend large amounts of resources getting this process done and much of it includes a salesperson who is responsible for much of the process.

The technology that is evolving is artificial intelligence and machine learning that is being applied to a large and broad area of applications. In the AI literature this is often referred to as “deep learning” and a many interesting applications related to marketing has been reported e.g., Liu, Lee, and Srinivasan (2019); Singh et al (2019). In this situation, a complex set of machine learning algorithms are implemented and overlaid on data from a CRM system that salespeople use to report sales effort and activity, such as Salesforce. While the application presented is not a panacea, but requires effort to make it work, it also suggests much research that can be done to help move the implementation along.

## **SuMo and Sensai**

Cloudapps, a company headquartered in the United Kingdom, has developed a computer program they refer to as SuMo (<https://www.cloudapps.com/>). The program works with data provided by Salesforce, one of the leading CRM programs, to provide a platform for analysis by internal company managers to improve the performance of salespeople in the sales pipeline. The analysis which can be done by different managers with different analysis needs can provide not only strategic insight but also help field sales managers in their coaching activities, primarily by identifying those behaviors that lead to better sales outcomes. Several case studies online are provided on how different types of organizations are using SuMo to improve their sales processes. A couple of points about SuMo are noteworthy.

The academic and practitioner literature is rife with examples, and both have noted the issues with getting salespeople to work within a CRM framework and provide accurate data. The analysis that must take place with SuMo is only going to be as good as the data it works with. To that end, SuMo has been gamified. That is, the program has provision for the user to create incentives for the salesperson to complete that data provision accurately. This area is relatively uncharted from a research perspective, at least as it relates to sales compensation. Even the Alexander Group, which does an annual sales compensation research study, has not documented what can be referred to as some form of compensation before the sale is completed. SuMo has provision for many types of compensation, and the website suggests some of them which are mostly noncash ([https://blog.cloudapps.com/20-inexpensive-sales-incentive-prize-ideas-that-work\\_](https://blog.cloudapps.com/20-inexpensive-sales-incentive-prize-ideas-that-work_)). Recent research (Viswanathan et al. 2018) suggests that non-cash incentives are useful because mental models are different from cash incentive models. However, the research could not establish any cause and effect. SuMo can only operate within the Salesforce CRM program. It is an add on to that program. Hence its market is limited to only firms that are using or will use the Salesforce CRM platform. Since SuMo only operates with Salesforce, it is limited to the ability of the user to configure the core program to collect what is necessary. Salesforce is broad and flexible, so that should not be an issue. Cloudapps suggests many new KPI's to help the customer configure their system to drive the performance within their context.

The application of artificial intelligence in a program that is similar is the SuMo platform involves incorporating a set of machine learning algorithms to continuously analyze the data and provide analytical updates as the data indicates changes. In the case of Sensai, a total of three algorithms are operating in concert, given the complexity of the sales pipeline. However, in addition to AI, the software is now open source, so it may be applied to any CRM platform with some work on making the linkage work. So essentially, Sensai provides the same output as SuMo, data to analyze, but also provides an ongoing analysis of the data as well. Thus, the user can and should continue to do an internal analysis of the data, but both the managers and the salespeople get continuous and regularly updated machine learning-based analysis to compare with what they have developed themselves.

Finally it should be noted that this program we are focusing is generally part of a large set of programs referred to as sales enablement platforms (<https://www.predictiveanalyticstoday.com/top-sales-enablement-platform/>). There are many competitors, and some are using some form of AI in the program. The programs that use AI are often lumped into a category called AI sales assistants (<https://www.g2.com/categories/ai-sales-assistant>).

## **Caveats**

While the application of artificial intelligence to managing sales performance of individual salespersons has potential, it is not without issues. As with any analysis, the outcomes are only as good as the data used and the assumptions the analysis is based on. The assumptions resident in the algorithms used in the program includes the notion of timeliness of the behavior. When one does a behavior is essential, and the idea of what actions need to be measured is variable depending on the firm, their CRM platform, and what they choose to collect. Quite simply, if the wrong data is collected, or some critical information is not within the learning model, then the output is suboptimal.

Sales performance at the individual level of abstraction is very complicated. As Webster and Wind (1972) have noted about organizational buying the factors affecting buying or selling can be sorted into four groups, distinct, but interdependent; individual, group, organizational, and environmental (IGOE) is the grouping. What likely impacts buyers also impact sellers, so an understanding of how these types of factors alone or in some dependence relationship affect the success of the sale is essential. Collecting data which reflects how the salesperson deals with the various elements is critical, and then modeling them to understand how they all work together is just as crucial. So, this is no panacea that automatically provides the right answer, but it is an application of science that requires significant thought upfront and continuous evaluation to provide the most benefit. For example, the environment, such as the industry one is in or the level of intensity of competition, will likely vary, and these may well be critical situational elements in terms of what drives successful salesperson behaviors.

There is also the issue of the nature of the reporting of the behaviors. One can easily collect data that an action such as asking for the order was done at a time in the sales pipeline. But recording the quality of such behavior is difficult, and some academic research has indicated that it is quality of behaviors that drives performance as in many industries, everyone or almost everyone does the action, so the variance is minimal. Doing a behavior is much less predictive of sales success than the perceived quality of doing that behavior by the other in the buyer-seller dyad (Reid and Plank 1997).

While behaviors that salespeople do have been a focus (Walker Churchill and Ford 1980: Plank and Reid 1994), more recent work has seen the idea of more complex integrative concept referred to as competencies (Rosenbaum 2001). Within the sales role, the primary competency model that has been developed is by ASTD, now ATD, the Association for Talent Development, who focus on training (Lambert, Ohai, and Kirkhoff (2009). The competency movement was started by McClelland (1973), who asked the simple question of why measure intelligence when you can measure something more directly related to achievement; that is how competent you are. Sales competencies are defined as a cluster of related knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors that should correlate with and drive the performance of a salesperson. Lambert, Ohai, and Kirkhoff (2009) develop a model with some 27 fundamental competencies and a methodology for how to measure those. Given all this added complexity, the real question is, can the CRM program incorporate this in any way and if so, will it be an improvement in sales performance within the pipeline.

## **RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES**

The use of artificial intelligence, in this case in sales, can be viewed as the application of technology. In the language of Webster and Wind (1972), we have an environmental variable, a change in the environment being introduced, which like many such variables, can change what is being done and how it is being done in each situation. First, the methodology needs to be introduced into a firm, and this provides something of a case study such as done by Viswanathan et al. (2018). If one can get a large firm to experiment with this in only part of their salesforce, one can improve on the research output by assigning a control group and seeing cause and effect at some level as designed into the research. A real question is, what is the overall impact of implementing

AI in this application? While in the short run, we may see many individual successes and failures reported, over time, we will be able to ascertain some average results as well as explore why people had success or failure in the implementation.

There are several normative issues to be explored here. Currently, salespeople gain experience by working it out themselves or getting some help from their organization, such as coaching, mentoring, formal or informal training, or just the day to day supervision by a sales manager. Front line sales management is important and continues to evolve (Capon Turbidy, and Mihoc 2019). We now have a technological solution to what is the correct action or at least best probable decision to take that the salesperson has access to. How do we, as an organization, incorporate all of this and make the best use out of it together is a question for the future. There are many related issues, such as the sales compensation program. Given that reporting of data within the CRM is so critical, how can we make this a priority if we think that this is appropriate? As noted previously, gaming has been made a part of the program giving the user many options, but this ties into the extrinsic motivational nature of the salesperson, so a question to be asked is there any role for intrinsic motivation here and how we utilize it. Again, Viswanathan et al (2018) provides some possible insight.

Underlying this discussion is the notion of gaining experience on the part of the salesperson and the company by using AI to assist and maybe drive the process. However, research on gaining sales experience is non-existent, and research in general in gaining work experience is minimal (Tesluk and Jacobs 1998). And gaining experience is a more holistic and complicated construct, much like competencies are when compared to behaviors. However, this should not deter research into determining if such a view provides for more explanation and prediction as well as its broader implications such as being the focus to decide when to use what kind of experience gaining technique. Such research has also not been done in sales to any extent. Learning and learning theory should be able to provide insight into the process of gaining experience with and without AI technology.

Currently most if not all the current solutions are sales centric, that is they work from data provided by the salesperson. Over time these models are likely to advance to where they will include other types of data in the modeling process which will provide further advantages from the knowledge gained. One example might be the use of pre-employment testing that is often done by practitioners. One example of a recently developed test is provided by the Intrinsic Institute (<https://www.intrinsicinstitute.com/>). They have developed a 120-item scaling device that measures a set of what they call 12 non-cognitive factors, plus integrity, arguing that these are essentially for high level achievement in work environments. Creative researchers having access to firm raw data could develop their own AI models using, for example methodologies provided by SAS ([https://www.sas.com/en\\_us/solutions/ai.html](https://www.sas.com/en_us/solutions/ai.html)) that incorporates this and other types of data not provided by salespeople. We do suspect that over time competitors in the software industry will have this incorporated into their platforms. They will include a variety of individual difference variables into the analysis. Academic research has been strong in the individual difference area, not only for individuals, but for higher level difference variables concerning the firm or industry. Much progress can be made by incorporating AI methods to understand the impact of these variable.

Finally, a note on forecasting accuracy. It can be argued that forecasting is often one of the most difficult activities for many firms, yet it drives the entire firm and the supply and demand partners as well. In practice many firms regularly update forecasting models by attempting to estimate progress in the sales pipeline (Jordan 2016). As Jordan notes such activities are not a substitute for the sales forecasting process, but update progress toward a forecast target and are often used as part of the overall forecast. By increasing probabilities of activities toward the sale more accurate forecasts can be made or revised and this data can input to activities by the firm backward or forward in their supply chain.

What does not change appreciably is research aimed at many of the fundamental questions concerning the sales process. However, new technology can have a lot of impact on people and firms, and that is what must be ascertained. AI has been threatening to have a great deal of influence on our lives for some time, and there are many examples where it has. The application reported here has the same potential and over time is likely to

continue to evolve and provide firms with more control over their sales pipeline and positively impact their supply chain activities.

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# AN EXPLORATION OF COMPANY TRAINING BY SALESPERSON GENDER: THE PERCEPTION OF EFFECTIVENESS AND THE IMPACT ON PERFORMANCE AND JOB SATISFACTION

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The *Journal of Selling* call for papers on women in sales (CFP), highlighted a need for further understanding of differences between salespersons by gender.

In an earlier presentation at the NCSM (2017), the authors showed that sales training was a direct antecedent of selling success and job satisfaction, and impacted both indirectly through a reduced role ambiguity of the salesperson. Training in selling technology – specifically CRM use – had a positive direct effect on selling success but did not directly impact role ambiguity or job satisfaction.

Previous studies have found differences between male and female sales managers preferences for both training activities and focus. Women sales managers spend more time using behavior-based training activities than male sales managers (Piercy, Cravens, & Lane, 2003). Powers et al. 2010 showed that women sales managers placed more emphasis than men on training on (1) issues related to culture, (2) providing effective verbal feedback to a sales force, and (3) effective team dynamics for women.

## SURVEY

The surveys were administered by students in sales classes. Each student received human subject IRB training and followed explicit instructions on selecting suitable subjects and administration rules from the authors. In the initial batch of 266 surveys, 16 were eliminated for excessive missing data or as an unsuitable subject (less than one year of experience).

Perhaps because the surveys were administered in person, the remaining surveys averaged less than one missing data point per survey. The authors used mean substitution after checking to see that no more than one data point was missing per construct. The students had networked to find salespersons and indicated contacting an average of just over three individuals to get the two surveys – a high response rate on a convenient sample. Previous research indicates that sampling from a personal network affects the response rate but it does not bias responses (Hyman 2000).

Standard measures from previous studies (Schirr and Thakkar 2017) were used for the constructs of quality of sales training, role ambiguity, job satisfaction, and sales success. A new construct CRM orientation was employed to measure training effectiveness and attitude towards using that technology.

## RESULTS OF ORIGINAL FULL STUDY

Table 1: Complete Training/Role Model of Sales Performance and Job Satisfaction

Path	R <sup>2</sup>	Coefficient	STDEV	t- stats	p <
CRM Orientation -> Sales Performance	0.18	0.097	0.049	1.996	0.05
Role Ambiguity -> Job Satisfaction	0.25	-0.211	0.049	4.272	0.00
Role Ambiguity -> Sales Performance		-0.236	0.042	5.625	0.00
Sales Performance -> Job Satisfaction		0.165	0.043	3.871	0.00
Sales Training -> Job Satisfaction		0.274	0.047	5.844	0.00
Sales Training -> Role Ambiguity	0.16	-0.394	0.043	9.220	0.00
Sales Training -> Sales Performance		0.218	0.047	4.638	0.00

N=250

Two variables under the control of sales managers, sales training and CRM orientation, explained 18% of the variance in the sales performance and 25% in the job satisfaction (Schirr and Thakkar 2017).

## RESULTS BY GENDER

Table 2 shows no significant difference by gender in the sample by age, selling experience or selling performance. But Table 3 shows a significant difference in opinions of their sales training.:

Table 2: Subjects – Means by ANOVA

	Wome n	Me n	> <i>p</i>
N	80	134	
Age	37.2	36. 5	.70
Yrs Selling Experience	9.8	11. 6	.20
Relative Performance	5.3	5.5	.26
By commission	5.3	5.5	.38
Sales Performance	5.8	5.7	.52

Table 3: Rating Sales Training

	Women	Men	> <i>p</i>
Average Overall	4.67	5.11	.01
Continuous	5.06	5.43	.09
On sales techniques	5.35	5.89	.01
“World Class”	4.51	5.07	.01
Revamping (negative)	4.53	4.07	.08
Training is effective	4.91	5.27	.08

From Piercy et al. (2003) and Powers et al. (2010) we might infer that women salespersons might share the preference held by women sales managers for training in teamwork, communications and team dynamics for women. According to a 2017 study of job titles on LinkedIn, only 19% of sales managers are women (Mandelbaum, 2018).

The next exploration is whether there are gender differences in Training/Role Model of Sales Performance and Job Satisfaction. The results on the entire subject pool were very supportive of the model as shown earlier in Table 1. In Table 4 we show the model test results by the full group of gender-reporting salespersons and then divided by gender.

**Table 4: Testing Training/Role Model of Sales Performance & Job Satisfaction by Gender**  
(A) Coefficients and Significance

	M&F	> p	Female	> p	Male	> p
Sales Training -> Sales Performance	.13	.094	.21	.102	.10	.299
Sales Training -> Job Satisfaction	.24	<b>.001</b>	.26	<b>.030</b>	.20	<b>.043</b>
Sales Training -> Role Ambiguity	-.34	<b>.000</b>	-.35	<b>.015</b>	-.35	<b>.000</b>
Role Ambiguity -> Sales Performance	-.16	<b>.010</b>	-.12	.337	-.22	<b>.006</b>
Role Ambiguity -> Job Satisfaction	-.23	<b>.001</b>	-.20	.183	-.24	<b>.018</b>
CRM Orientation -> Sales Performance	.17	<b>.020</b>	.13	.413	.21	.299
Sales Performance -> Job Satisfaction	.13	.094	.16	.144	.17	<b>.017</b>

In the full sample all coefficients on the model had values that were significant at  $p < .10$  and five of seven at  $p < .05$ . The sample of men showed six of seven coefficients significant at  $p < .05$ . The sample of women salespersons had only two significant paths at  $p < .05$  or even  $p < .10$ . In addition, role ambiguity was not a significant antecedent of sales success or job satisfaction in the women salesperson sample.

### CONCLUSION

As noted this is a study to explore whether there might be gender differences in the perception and utility of company sales training. Based on the measured differences in the perception of sales training and results of the training/role ambiguity model of performance and of satisfaction the authors would suggest that it is worthwhile to pursue such study. As suspected, the survey pointed to differences by gender in the perception of the quality of sales training provided to the salespeople by their firm.

The results from testing the training/role ambiguity model of sales performance and satisfaction were puzzling to the authors: the relationship between the reduction of role ambiguity and sales performance/satisfaction was not supported in the sample of women sales professionals. Given substantial past empirical evidence that role ambiguity is a (negative) antecedent of sales success and job satisfaction (Singh, 1998) (Schaefer, 2014) (Yammarino & Dubinsky, 1990), it may be an anomaly resulting from a relatively small sample (80). This result is sufficiently surprising and interesting to merit further testing.

### LIMITATIONS

This was an exploratory look at the issue of gender within a model of sales success and satisfaction based on training and reduced role ambiguity. This study is subject to the limitations and biases common in single-responder surveys. Further study with success measures from third-party sources would be useful to verify the effects.

The results of the original study were largely supported by the results with male salespersons but the divergent results in the female sales professional group merits further study. There is a need for in depth, qualitative study to better understand the perceptions and needs of salespeople by gender. In addition, longitudinal study would also be useful to better understand the cumulative effect of training.

### FURTHER RESEARCH

As noted this research suggests a need for further understanding of the sales training perceptions and needs by the gender of a salesperson. Specifically, the authors would suggest:

- Studies of perceptions of sales training by gender within firms.
- In depth interviews of salespeople and their sales managers about sales training.
- Role ambiguity –the impact on success and job satisfaction by gender of salespeople.

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# SPLITTING GRIT: DIFFERENTIATING BETWEEN PERSEVERANCE AND PASSION ON SALES PERFORMANCE

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## ABSTRACT

Recently, the concept of grit, a measurable individual-level factor, has been proposed as a possible predictor of salesperson success (Duckworth, 2013). Initial evidence suggests grit, defined as “perseverance and passion for long-term goals” (Duckworth et al. 2007, p. 1087) may have efficacy in models of salesperson performance. For example, Grit has been shown to positively influence salesperson retention (Eskreis-Winkler et al., 2014), job satisfaction, and sales performance (Dugan et al. 2019). While research suggests salesperson perseverance has a direct effect on sales performance, passion’s effect on performance is unclear. Further, any positive effect of perseverance and passion on performance is likely conditional on other factors. Research has yet to fully identify other salesperson characteristics that may moderate the grit □ performance relationship. Motivation intensity theory may provide insight as to effect grit has on salespeople. The theory suggests that individuals expend effort based on how important they perceive end goals (Brehm & Self, 1989). Thus, grittier salespeople will work towards a goal with more intensity if they find the goal to be important and worth the expended effort. However, too much perseverance can hurt performance (e.g., Dugan et al. 2018), while being obsessively passionate about an activity can also be detrimental to performance (Vallerand et al., 2003).

The purpose of this paper is to expand on previous grit research by examining the effect that both first-order factors of grit (perseverance and passion) have on salesperson performance. Additionally, grounded in the entrepreneurial orientation (EO) literature, salesperson EO is proposed to moderate the perseverance □ sales performance relationship. Finally, grounded in goal orientation theory (e.g., Sujana et al., 1994), salesperson learning orientation is proposed to moderate the passion □ sales performance relationship. This manuscript contributes to the literature in several ways. First, it addresses calls in the literature (e.g., Crede et al., 2017) to examine both first-order factors of grit (perseverance and passion) independently. In the context of selling, there are unique theoretical explanations of the effect perseverance and passion have on salesperson sales performance. Second, this manuscript examines important boundary conditions (moderators) of grit’s effect on salesperson performance (Crede et al., 2017; Dugan et al., 2018). This manuscript also provides theoretical insights into the conditions where grit has the maximum positive influence on sales performance.

## Grit In The Sales Context

Gritty people are individuals characterized as being persistent and passionate toward achieving long term goals (Duckworth et al. 2007). Grit is typically conceptualized and measured as a second-order factor comprised of two lower-order facets: perseverance and passion. However, a recent meta-analysis on grit suggests that using grit as a second-order construct, characterized by two lower-order facets is unfounded (Crede et al., 2017). That is, combining perseverance and passion scores into one grit score appeared to result in a significant loss in predictive ability (Crede et al., 2017). The issue behind this result can be explained, as perseverance is a *personality trait* (Chaker & Noble, 2018), while Passion is a *cognitive state* (Cardon et al., 2009; Ho et al., 2011). Thus, one or both facets may serve as better predictors than the broader trait (grit), suggesting the need to revisit the scoring strategy of grit entirely (Crede et al., 2017). Conceptually, examining both facets, perseverance, and passion in the context of sales, may answer the call for a revised approach to studying grit’s effect on sales performance (Crede et al., 2017). From a managerial perspective, salespeople may have the same grit score, but possess two very different levels of perseverance and passion.

Importantly, however, there are likely distinct theoretical drivers and boundary conditions of the relationship between salesperson perseverance and sales performance and between salesperson passion and sales performance (Brown & Peterson, 1994; Dubreuil et al., 2004). Thus, sales managers would be well served in training their salesforce by knowing the salespeople who are strong in either passion or

perseverance. It thus appears appropriate to investigate grit along its two facets, perseverance, and passion, in studying grit's influence on salesperson success.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND MODEL DEVELOPMENT

This manuscript utilizes motivational intensity theory (Brehm & Self, 1989) to explain how gritty salespeople regulate their effort towards goals. Motivational intensity theory suggests that personality traits (such as perseverance), can affect one's effort based on a goal's importance (Dugan et al., 2018). Specifically, perseverance and passion can impact individual effort in selling scenarios (Silvia et al. 2013). Additionally, the literature uses perseverance and persistence interchangeably (Chaker et al., 2018), but their distinction is essential. Perseverance is a *personality trait* and has a primary use as a predictor variable (Chaker et al., 2018), while persistence is a *behavior*, often studied in situations where perseverance is more applicable (Chaker et al., 2018). This manuscript bases the use of persistence in previous studies as justification to explore the effects that perseverance has on other variables.

### Perseverance

Perseverance is a *personality trait* consistent over time (Chaker et al., 2018), a continuation of a goal-directed action despite obstacles, difficulties, or discouragement (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). While recent research has suggested that grit should only consist of the perseverance facet (Datu et al., 2015), others concur but argue that additional research should look at understanding perseverance further (Crede et al., 2017). A wide range of studies across various domains have examined how perseverance affects various levels of success, from educational success (Duckworth et al., 2007, 2009), to soldier and high school student retention (Eskreis-Winkler et al, 2014), suicidal behavior (Anestis & Selby, 2015), salesperson job performance (Chaker et al., 2018), and job satisfaction (Dugan et al., 2018). However, not all studies have suggested a positive link between perseverance and performance. Thus, the following proposition is offered:

**P1:** *The relationship between a salesperson's perseverance and their sales performance is curvilinear in the shape of an inverted U.*

### Passion

Passion completes the grit construct and is defined as a *cognitive state*, in which a strong inclination toward an activity is employed when individuals find an activity important and invest time and energy into that activity (Vallerand et al., 2003). Recent research has taken issue with the passion construct, indicating that passion does not predict outcomes any better than the "Big 5's" conscientiousness (Crede et al., 2017). Additionally, Datu et al. (2015) suggest that passion does not contribute to the generalizability of successful outcomes at all. However, the context of passion studies should be noted. Duckworth et al. (2007, 2009) focused on the individualistic context of passion, while Datu et al. (2015) focused on collectivist cultures. In fact, research suggests that it is the individualistic natures of salespeople that drive salesperson performance (Nursiha, 2008). Passion on an individualistic level focuses on the free choice regarding which activity to pursue (Vallerand et al., 2003), and the more autonomously integrated one's identity is to the activity, the more passionate that person will become (Vallerand & Miquelon, 2007). Thus, the following proposition is offered:

**P2:** *Passion is positively related to salesperson performance.*

### Entrepreneurial orientation

While salesperson perseverance is predicted to have a positive yet diminishing influence on sales performance, some factors may increase this optimal level of perseverance. We propose that salespeople who are entrepreneurially minded are more effective at transitioning their perseverance into performance. Entrepreneurship is a process of discovery, evaluation, and exploitation of entrepreneurial opportunities (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). Entrepreneurial orientation (EO) is defined as a propensity to be innovative, proactive, and open to taking constructive risks (Avlonitis & Salavou 2007). At the organizational level, the link between EO and firm performance has been established (e.g.,

Lumpkin & Dess, 1996; Rauch et al., 2009). Similarly, on the individual level, entrepreneurial characteristics include feelings of success and chasing the thrill to win (De Clercq et al., 2013). Thus, we offer the following proposition:

**P3:** *The relationship between perseverance and salesperson performance is positively moderated by entrepreneurial orientation.*

### **Learning orientation**

Passionate people invest energy in pursuing work-related goals for the sake of the joy that challenges bring (De Clercq et al. 2013). Salesperson's passion alone, however, may not be enough to ensure positive sales performance. In other words, the most successful salespeople are those who have appropriately directed passion. Learning orientation likely acts as a guide in this context. Learning orientation, defined as maintaining an intrinsic interest in one's work, being curious, and continuously searching for opportunities that permit independent attempts to master materials (Sujan et al., 1994), has been identified as a critical motivational item guiding salespeople's behavior. Learning orientation has been conceptualized as having the ability to seek out and acquire new information while simultaneously knowing when to reject information that is not useful for a specific situation (Slater & Narver, 1995). Thus, the following proposition is offered:

**P4:** *The relationship between passion and salesperson performance is positively moderated by learning orientation.*

## **DISCUSSION**

This manuscript addresses numerous concerns around the grit construct, specifically breaking down its facets and examining both constructs as first-order factors in the domain of sales. Further, this study specifically addresses calls for additional research around the potential negative effects that overly perseverant salespeople can have. The literature uses perseverance and passion in a positive context, but there are often downsides to too much of a "good thing." Thus, this study contributes to theory by highlighting the nuances in an individual's motivations, addressing how salespeople adapt to long-term goals, and examining how salespeople overcome adversity and challenge when behavioral characteristics overcome emotion.

**References available upon request.**

# 2020 NCSM Doctoral Papers & Abstracts

## SELLING WITH CONFIDENCE AND EMPATHY: UTILIZING IMPROVISATION TRAINING TO EXPLORE THE GENDER GAP IN B2B SALES

Jonathan Ross Gilbert (The University of Rhode Island)

Women are underrepresented in business-to-business (B2B) sales. Minimal research explores the use of sales education to help close this gender gap. The purpose of this study is to explore how different genders responded to a unique approach to teaching sales that prepares learners to adapt to the ever-changing needs and expectations of buyers: improvisational (improv) training. A content analysis (n=68; 32% F, 68% M) informed an exploratory study (n=48; 44% F, 56% M) and post hoc analyses that tested: (a) the efficacy of improv training on individual confidence and empathy; and (b) the moderated effect of learned confidence and empathy on adaptability. The findings suggest a global benefit of improv training for both women and men. Interestingly, women's confidence increased to a level above men post-intervention and their attitudes towards the sales profession improved.

## IMPACT OF B2B SALESPERSON'S SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE ON BUYER INTELLIGENCE COLLECTION - A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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### **Introduction:**

According to IBM 2010 CEO study, the top priority for a CEO is to get closer to the customer and stay connected (Baird and Parasnis, 2011). Here arises the need and significance of a salesperson getting closer to the buyer so as to stay relevant and connected. In today's highly competitive business scenario, salespeople need to be differentiators with understanding of their business clients and domain expertise so as to present tailor-made solution for the buyers and thereby creating relevance and delivering value to them. Along with the traditional methods, social media platforms play a vital role in eliciting information and knowledge about the buyer/buying centers of their clients.

### **2. Literature Review:**

In a broader sense, sales technology literature defines "salesperson's social media use" as integration and salesperson's utilization of social media technology to perform his or her job (Ahearne, Jelinek, & Rapp, 2005; Rapp, Agnihotri, & Forbes, 2008). Even though literature on social media emerges in the early 2000, here those studies pertaining to the antecedents and consequences of social media usage in B2B sales and selling process are given prime focus.

### **2.1 Research Gap:**

From the literature review one can understand that social media has a very significant role in value creation within the sales process both at organizational level and at individual level. But how do social media influencing the different selling behaviors of a B2B salesperson so as to stay close to the buyer still remains in the dark.

### **2.1.1 Research Questions:**

Though a plethora of research has been done on marketing intelligence, business intelligence and competitive intelligence segments but less focus is given on individual level buyer intelligence in B2B selling. Hence following are the research questions:

- What constitutes B2B salesperson's buyer intelligence at individual level?
- How does social media usage facilitate the collection of buyer intelligence?
- How use of buyer intelligence influences different selling behaviors like adaptive selling, customer orientation, consultative selling and relationship selling?
- How use of buyer intelligence helps the B2B salesperson to achieve efficient sales performance?
- What is the role of manager's autonomy on utilizing buyer intelligence for different selling behaviors?

### **3. Theoretical Background and Conceptual Model:**

The theoretical foundation for this study about collection of buyer intelligence using social media technology is built on the task-technology fit theory of Goodhue and Thompson (1995). Task-technology fit is defined as "the degree to which technology assists an individual in performing his or her portfolio of tasks" (Goodhue and Thompson, 1995, p. 216). Here it is reasoned that there is fit between a very important salesperson's task, namely buyer intelligence collection and social media technology which leads to social media technology utilization and sales performance.

#### **3.1 Buyer Intelligence Collection:**

Salesperson buyer intelligence is defined as the individual-level knowledge of the buyer's organization, industry, operational procedures of the buyer's company, and buying center (initiators, gatekeepers, users, influencers, decision makers, buyers) that can be used tactically to aid in enhancing individual sales performance. Here salesperson is seeing the buying world through the lens of the buyer.

#### **3.2 Social Media Usage and Buyer Intelligence Collection**

Along with the traditional means, modern B2B salesperson uses social media (LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Blogs, YouTube etc.) to gather relevant and important information about the buyer, buying center and buying environment so as to aid them in the tactical decision-making.

#### **3.3 Buyer Intelligence Collection and Use**

It seems self-evident that collection of Buyer intelligence will eventually lead to its use. This conjecture uncovers support from the concept of 'information use behaviors' introduced by Hughes et al. (2013).

#### **3.4 Influencing Selling Behaviors:**

##### **3.4.1 Buyer Intelligence Use and Adaptive Selling**

Adaptive selling is defined as "the altering of sales behaviors during a customer interaction or across customer interactions based on perceived information about the nature of the selling situation" (Weitz, Sujan, and Sujan 1986, p. 175). Through social media channels salesperson can utilize the various information, knowledge about the buyer so as to differentiate one buyer from another and strategize accordingly.

### **3.4.2 Buyer Intelligence Use and Customer Orientation**

Through customer orientation, salesperson keep the customers' best interest in mind and desire for a problem solving approach by evaluating all possible options so as to offer the befitting ones for the customer (Saxe and Weitz 1982, p. 343; Pelham, 2009). Social media channels help the salesperson to collect all necessary information required for a better evaluation leading to an effective client service and long term relation with the client.

### **3.4.3 Buyer Intelligence use and Consultative Selling Behavior**

Consultative task behavior is referred as helping "customers to take intelligent actions to achieve their business objectives" and involving the "proactive communication by salespeople with their customers to facilitate the identification and solution of customer problems" (Liu and Leach 2001). A salesperson performing the role of a consultant must be thorough with the industry, trends, probable future inclinations, growth pattern etc. so as to work in tandem for a better solution and win-win situation.

### **3.4.4 Buyer Intelligence use and Relationship Selling Behavior**

Relationship selling behavior comprises the activities and behaviors intended to build and maintain a strong and consistent buyer-seller relationship (Crosby et al., 1990) that are mutually beneficial. A salesperson with a better knowledge about the buyer/buying center would be able to initiate enjoyable interactions and build a rapport with them in a smooth and better manner compared to the competitors.

### **3.4.5 Linkages of selling behaviors to sales performance**

Sales performance is "behavior evaluated in terms of its contribution to the goals of the organization" (Johnston and Marshall 2006, p. 412). Though sales performance is categorized as relationship (behavior) and outcome-based performance, our focus is on to outcome-based performance. Past literature shows that the practice of adaptive selling behavior is positively associated to salesperson performance (Sujan, Weitz, and Sujan 1988; Weitz 1978; Weitz, Sujan, and Sujan 1986; Predmore and Bonnice 1994; Marks, Vorhies, and Badovick 1996; Anglin, Stolman, and Gentry, 1990; Boorum, Goolsby, and Ramsey 1998; Park and Holloway, 2003; Frank and Parke, 2006; Rapp et al.2015). Swenson and Herche (1994) noted that among industrial salespeople, customer oriented selling behaviors are positively related to salesperson performance. Consultative selling of a B2B salesperson builds trust with the buyers leading to an enhanced level of long-term partnering with the client leading to increased sales (Swan and Trawick 1987; Bigus 1972; Prus 1987). Several studies reveal that building and maintaining relationships with buyers is one way to improve sales performance and high performers in sales invest more time for building rapport with the buyer (Macintosh et al., 1992). Hence the use of buyer intelligence collection is expected to create a positive influence on the above-mentioned selling behaviors of a salesperson which has strong linkages towards positive sales performance.

### **3.4.6 Moderator**

It is the level of autonomy or freedom given to salespeople by their sales manager. Job autonomy generally defined as "the extent to which employees can decide what tasks to do and how to do them" (Stock and Hoyer 2005). Den Hartog and Belschak (2012) indicates that autonomy provides employees with independence, more power and ownership on field, and a sense of accountability that they have more responsibility on outcomes.

**4. Results:** Through this study, we reason out a relation between salesperson's social media usage and

buyer intelligence collection leading to an efficient sales performance.

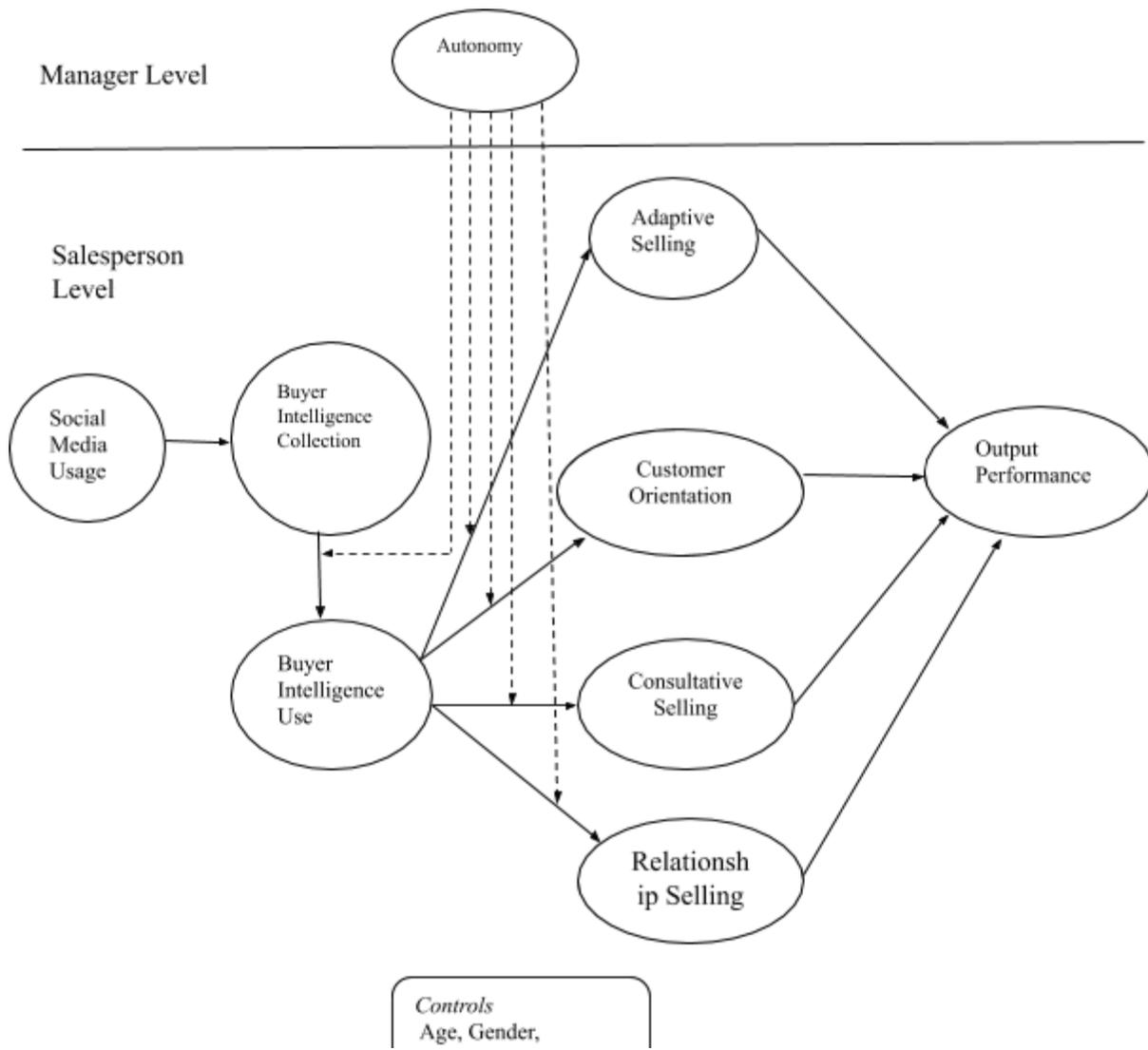
#### 4.1 Managerial Implications:

The current study focuses on the B2B salesperson's social media usage for collecting buyer intelligence at the individual level so as to enhance sales performance and deliver value to the client. It also considers the impact of the use of buyer intelligence collection on different selling behaviors like adaptive selling, customer orientation, consultative selling and relationship selling for an efficient sales performance. The effect of autonomy provided by manager to the salesperson on various aspects also provides valuable insights for industry practitioners as well as academicians.

#### 4.2 Theoretical Implications:

Buyer Intelligence collection being a novel concept, offers ample opportunities for theoretical development as well as empirical research in the social media arena of B2B selling. It is a unique study though the lens of a salesperson investigating the effects of buyer intelligence on different selling behaviors for an efficient sales performance and the impact of manager's autonomy on the same. Hence it adds on to the body of knowledge of the academicians and industry practitioners.

**Figure 1: Proposed Model: Effect of B2B Salesperson's Social Media Usage on Buyer Intelligence Collection, Selling Behaviors and Sales Performance.**



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