

Attitudes, Opinions, and Characteristics: Creating a Profile of Sales Students

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This study was conducted with the objective of identifying and assessing factors that influence students to have a disposition toward a sales career as well as positive attitudes toward salespeople. Two studies were conducted to measure the impact of different treatments. Data were collected from 263 undergraduate students in marketing and/or sales-related classes, in order to empirically test two experiments. The results of ordinary least-squares regression analysis indicate that students enrolled in sales-related classes are much more likely to have a disposition toward a sales career and to have a positive attitude toward salespeople, while simply reading a passage describing the sales profession and how it is likely for many college graduates to have a career in sales had little impact. The implications include the development of a sales students' profile, which describes students who are likely to pursue sales as a career and to have a positive attitude toward salespeople. This profile can be important in identifying potentially successful members of professional sales forces while they are still in our universities and by doing so, enable sales educators to properly prepare them for their careers.

Keywords: sales profile, marketing education, sales performance, sales professionals, attitudes toward sales

Introduction

College students, in and out of the United States, tend to have negative attitudes toward sales as a career, and this attitude has existed for almost 50 years (e.g. Amin, Hayajneh, & Nwwakanma, 1995; Mason, 1965; Weeks & Muehling, 1987). Sales career preferences were generally negative in a study that encompassed students from the United States, New Zealand, and the Philippines (Honeycutt et al., 1999). While the job market for sales people grows each year, companies experience increased difficulty in filling open sales positions. Given that less than 50% of college graduates will have a job offer when graduating, it is important to note that 90% of graduates from collegiate sales programs will have at least one offer. Furthermore, it is estimated that 70% of business school graduates will work in sales (Sales & Marketing Management's SMM, 2011; Sales Education Foundation, 2011; University Sales Center Alliance, 2011). Studies have tested for differences in various student populations (such as gender, geography, ethnicity, education), but the overall perception that sales is not a desirable career still exists.

As marketing educators, especially those who are also sales educators, we are aware of the implications of the numbers reported above for our students. This recognition is indicated by the review of literature by Cummins et al. (2013). This review used only four common outlet journals for sales education research

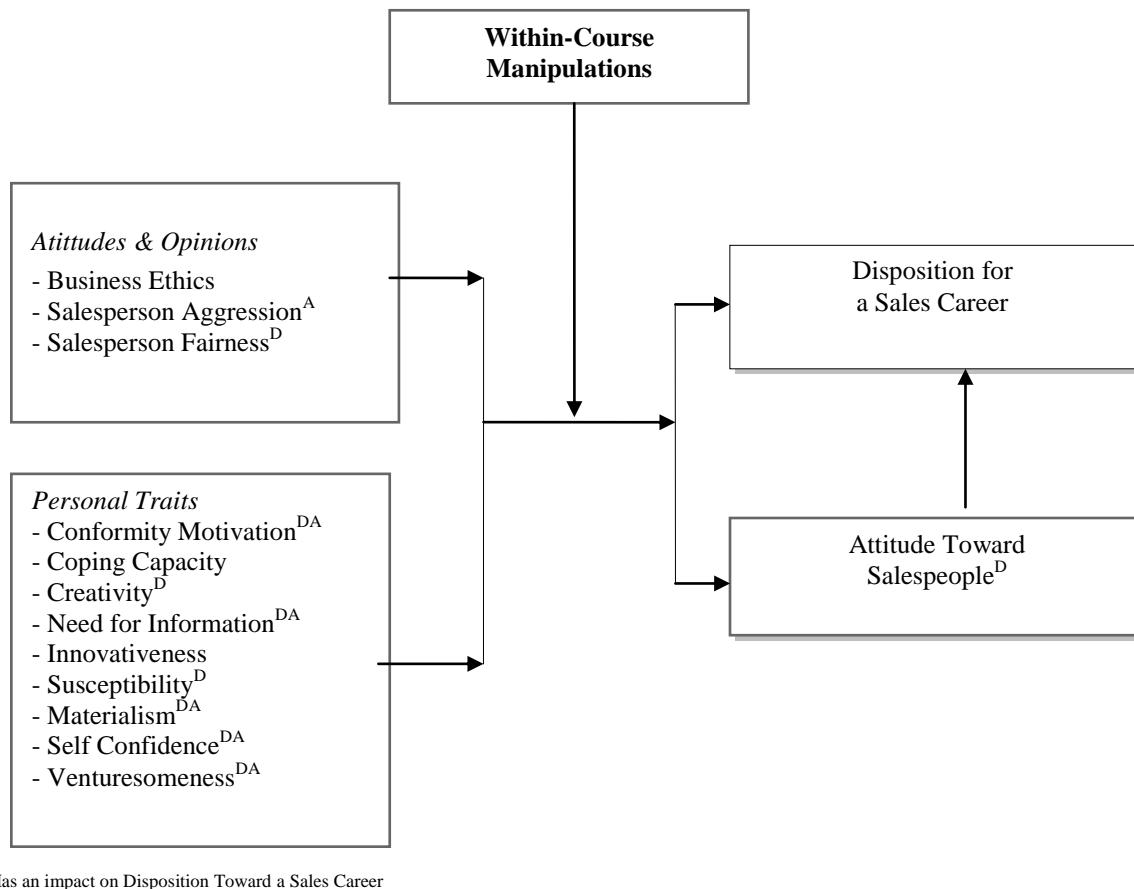
and found 107 articles. If all possible academic journals were to be reviewed, much more research on sales education would surely be revealed. Despite this volume of research, there are still some significant gaps that scholars continue to identify and fill. For example, recent research found gender differences in how sales ethics scenarios are evaluated (Donoho et al., 2012).

The literature consistently shows that, with a few exceptions, students have a predominately negative attitude towards professional selling as a career. In a world of stagnant job growth, sales positions go unfilled. Yet, for over 50 years, students' perceptions have remained predominately unchanged. In this study, we seek to investigate the relationship between students' attitude towards sales careers and their personal traits, as well as measure the impact of different treatments on students' dispositions to a sales career.

As discussed earlier, there are several studies that have looked at the relationship between the attitude towards the sales career and students' demographic factors. Though one study used a student sample and these students' personal, non-demographic traits to help develop a measurement to assess attitudes toward salespeople (Black & Sherwood, 2011), there is no known study that has explored the impact of personal traits on students' attitude towards a sales career. Due to the lack of literature directly related to the current study, authors looked at areas where the relationship between

personality and sales performance were measured. The two seminal meta-analyses (Ones et al., 1994 and Tett, Jackson, & Rothstein, 1991) on the relationship between personality and job performance used the five factor personality model (Goldberg, 1990), and suggested that many attempts struggle with validity issues. Barrick, Stewart, and Piotrowski (2002) found that striving for status mediates the effects of extraversion and conscientiousness on ratings of sales performance while neither agreeableness nor communion striving was related to success in sales job. Therefore, this study is a first look at whether certain personal traits, rather than

demographic factors, affect students' attitude toward salespeople and a disposition for a sales career. Personal characteristics such as conformity motivation, coping capacity, creativity, need for information, innovativeness, susceptibility, materialism, self-confidence, and venturesomeness (see Figure 1) can help determine a specific profile of a sales student today. This will give us significant insight into what characteristics sales students embody before going into the workplace, and how we can help them develop through their sales and marketing education to aid them in their future careers.



^DHas an impact on Disposition Toward a Sales Career
^AHas an impact on Attitude Toward Salespeople

Figure 1. Hypothesized model

Literature review and hypotheses development

The disposition of students toward a sales career has been studied by academics using many attributes. Several studies determined students' interest in a sales career was influenced by their perception that sales had low social prestige (e.g. Mason, 1965; Hayes 1969, 1973). Mason (1965) observed that

students did not consider a sales career because sales suffered from low occupational prestige. According to Hayes (1969, 1973) personality needs affect occupational choice and perceptions of occupations can change after students have begun their career. Compared to other white collar occupations, sales lacked both formalized curriculum and educational requirements.

Based on the discussion above and represented in Figure 1, the following hypothesis is developed:

- H₁: Students' attitudes and opinions (as listed in the sub-hypotheses below) have positive influences on both their attitudes toward salespeople and their dispositions for a sales career:
- a. Student attitude toward business ethics;
 - b. Student opinions about salesperson aggression; and
 - c. Student opinions about salesperson fairness.

Occupational prestige was linked to specific job titles and to the presence (or absence) of specific behavioral characteristics such as truthfulness, competence, and altruism (Adkins & Swan, 1981-82; Swan & Adkins, 1980-81). Research by Swenson et al. (1993) showed that preference for a sales career is a different behavioral response than perceptions of selling as a career. They noted a decline in students' preferences for a sales career occurred from 1980 to 1990. They also found that financial benefits and decision-making power influenced preference for a sales career. Differences in attitude between African-American and Caucasian students also showed that African American students consider sales to be a low prestige career (DelVecchio & Honeycutt, 2000, 2002; Kavas, 2003).

Due to the lack of studies on the relationship between personal traits and the attitude towards sales, authors explored various academic areas including consumer behavior, psychology, organizational behavior, and marketing strategy in order to build the hypotheses. The first personal trait of interest is conformity motivation in that the negative perceptions of salespeople mainly stem from social influence, rather than actual knowledge of the sales industry. Conformity motivation in this study assesses the degree to which a person looks to others to determine how to behave and desires to act in accordance with group norms (Bearden, et al. 1989). The level of conformity motivation differs by age group, and the population of interest in this study, college students, is strongly influenced by peers (Mandrik et al, 2005).

Coping mechanisms can be categorized as avoidance or confrontative and subcategories are psychological or behavioral (Holahan and Moos 1987). One study pointed out that consumers use a variety of coping methods, such as pre-acquisition avoidance, confronting by pretesting or extended decision making, consumption avoidance after purchase, partnering, and mastering (Mick and Fournier, 1998). Another study used a coping in a sales situation and found that confrontive coping was not significantly related to sales presentation effectiveness (Strutton and Lumpkin 1994).

However, confrontive coping is defined as a salesperson using confrontational tactics to cope with stressful customer sales presentations. The coping scale used in this study (referred to as non-coping by the originators) is defined as the degree to which people (students, in this case) feel they are not coping with changes occurring in society (Lumpkin and Hunt, 1989). Thus, the authors expect to find that coping and conformity motivation are negatively correlated.

A positive relationship between creativity and job performance, particularly related to sales performance, has been investigated and confirmed in the management and organizational behavior journals over time (Gong et al, 2009; Atuahene-Gima, 1997; Van Dyne et al, 2002). In this study, creativity captures a person's tendency to use a product to its fullest and in numerous ways (Price and Ridgway, 1983). A rationale for adding the creativity variable is that students would have more positive attitudes towards something that they have a high potential to succeed in. Thus, it is expected that there will be a positive correlation between creativity and self-confidence. Self-confidence, defined in terms of both performance expectancies and self-evaluations of abilities and completed performance (Lenney, 1977), is expected to be positively related to attitude towards sales as a career in that self-confidence and high in achievement are highly correlated (Maccoby and Jacklin, 1974). Common associations related to sales jobs in terms of compensation include commissions, markups or incentives and students who believe themselves as high in achievement would see the financial benefits in commission-based environment.

Need for information or information seeker is a scale that measures the degree to which a person expresses the tendency to seek information about products by observing others' behavior or asking for their opinions (Bearden et al, 1989). As discussed earlier, many college students form negative attitudes towards sales from negative perceptions of sales that exist socially, not from accurate facts related to sales. Thus, it is likely that people who are high in need for information have less negative attitude towards sales while having knowledge acts as a mediator (Baron and Kenney, 1986). In addition, the link between need for information on salespeople and sales careers and actual information acquisition needs to be investigated. A similar but essentially different concept is innovativeness or 'new product seeker'. The concept used in this study is high for people who like to buy new and different things, early adopters, and those who take chances (Oliver and Bearden). Theoretically, attitude towards sales would be less negative if the sales career is an area that is new to the participants and considered risky. However, innovativeness tends to be highly domain specific,

not general traits and thus needs to be empirically tested (Citrin et al, 2000).

Susceptibility is another variable that measures the influence of others, and is assumed to be a general trait that varies across individuals (Bearden et al, 1989). Bearden and colleagues (1989) note that "susceptibility to interpersonal influence is a general trait that varies across persons and that a person's relative influenceability in one situation tends to have a significant positive relationship to his or her influenceability in a range of other social situations." Thus, the authors expect a high correlation between susceptibility and conformity motivation.

Materialism assesses the degree to which a person is oriented towards possessing goods and money as a means of personal happiness and social progress (Moschis 1981). Similar to high in achievement, materialism is expected to have a positive influence on sales in general when the possibility to make more money than regular fixed salary-based jobs is established, because people who are high in materialism tend to view acquisition itself as a pursuit of happiness (Richins and Dawson, 1992).

Lastly, venturesomeness refers to the degree to which a person expresses enjoyment with taking risks (Bruning et al, 1985). It is expected to be correlated with innovativeness in that the core of the innovativeness scale is the level of taking risks in terms of trying new things (Oliver and Bearden, 1985). Also, it is important to note that venturesomeness can be negatively related to need for information because it is likely that less information about sales can exacerbate the negative perceptions related to sales. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H_2 : The personal traits of students (as listed in the sub-hypotheses below) have positive influences on both their attitudes toward salespeople and their dispositions for a sales career:

- a. Student motivation to conform;
- b. Student coping capacity;
- c. Student creativity;
- d. Student need for information;
- e. Student innovativeness;
- f. Student susceptibility to interpersonal influence;
- g. Student materialism;
- h. Student self-confidence; and
- i. Student venturesomeness.

University sales programs have been cited as a means of improving the image of the sale's profession (Castleberry, 1990). In addition to academic certification programs (Sales Education Foundation, 2011; University Sales Center Alliance), professional certification programs have been offered as a means of encouraging professionalism and continuing education (Honeycutt, Attia, & D'Auria,

1996). Other research has shown that the perception of sales as a profession may be dependent upon six criteria. These include a base body of knowledge as provided by university sales programs, autonomy and public confidence evidenced by certification programs, service to society, organizational culture, an ethical code, and the exclusivity of sales skills (Hawes, Rich, & Widmier, 2004).

Dubinsky (1980) found that a majority of students in introductory and advanced marketing classes had a favorable image of a sales job. However, more in-depth research led to suggestions that students' negative perceptions might be based on several factors including: stereotypes of sales people in the mass media; negative experiences with salespeople; low prestige and status; and inadequate communication of sales job characteristics by recruiters (Dubinsky (1981). Therefore, we propose that:

H_3 : A student's attitude toward salespeople will have a positive impact on his or her disposition for a sales career.

How both traditional and new media portray the sales job appears to impact perceptions of students as well (Waldeck, Pullins, & Houlette, 2010). The ability of the corporate recruiter to influence student perceptions was the subject of several studies (Weilbacker & Merritt, 1992; Wiles & Spiro, 2004; Wotruba, Simpson, & Reed-Draznik, 1989). However, depending on the recruiter to create a positive spin on a sales job will only occur if the student is willing to interview for a sales position.

Other studies have examined male versus female perceptions of personal selling. Muehling and Weeks (1988) found mixed results for male and female attitudes toward sales, but overall, women viewed personal selling more favorably. However, Cook and Hartman (1986) found female students were less likely to pursue sales than male students. Another study found that female students and younger students had a more positive attitude toward sales (Sherwood et al., 2013).

Based on the Marketing Lens Model developed by Bristow (1998), students who have completed a sales course were more likely to have a favorable view of a sales career (Bristow, Gulati, & Amyx, 2006; Bristow, et al., 2006; Kimball, 1993). The course materials and teaching methods used in sales courses also affected students' perception (Deeter-Schmelz & Kennedy, 2011; Stevenson & Paksoy, 1983). Participative learning style classes seemed to improve students' attitudes when compared to lecture based classes (Lagace & Longfellow, 1989). Students who majored in marketing were more likely to have a positive perception of sales jobs in another study (Sojka, Gupta, & Hartman, 2000). However, another study found that marketing majors were less likely to

be inclined toward a sales career than other business majors or even majors from outside the business school (Sherwood et al., 2013). Based on the above discussion, our two final hypotheses are:

H₄: Two experimental treatments (Ex1 – exposing students to a positive description of sales and a sales career and Ex2 – enrolling in a sales-related class) intensify the impact that student's attitudes and opinions (as listed below) have on both their attitudes toward salespeople and their dispositions for a sales career:

- a. Student attitude toward business ethics;
- b. Student opinions about salesperson aggression; and
- c. Student opinions about salesperson fairness.

H₅: The same two experimental treatments intensify the influence that students' personal traits (as listed below) have on both their attitudes toward salespeople and their dispositions for a sales career:

- a. Student motivation to conform;
- b. Student coping capacity;
- c. Student creativity;
- d. Student need for information;
- e. Student innovativeness;
- f. Student susceptibility to interpersonal influence;
- g. Student materialism;
- h. Student self-confidence; and
- i. Student venturesomeness.

Methodology

Sample

Data were collected from a total of 263 undergraduate students who were enrolled in various marketing classes at a large university in the west. Instructors teaching these classes were asked to give

Table 1. Narrative used for experimental manipulation

The Sales Profession
According to the Sales Education Foundation, “selling skills drive our economy – from medical equipment and technology to industrial and engineered products – sales make things happen every day.” Each year, companies attempt to fill over 500,000 sales positions.
Today more than 50 universities offer sales programs that result in either a major, minor, or certificate. Over 90% of the sales programs’ 2,000 graduates each year have a job offer upon graduation. The National Association of Colleges and Employers reported that only 43.5% of graduates overall were offered jobs upon graduation.
While more than 50% of college graduates enter a career in sales, only a few are trained in college. For the employer, the benefits of hiring sales program graduates are clear. Sales grads ramp up to professional levels 50% faster. Turnover is 30% less. Savings per hire is \$180,000 within the first two years of employment.
A Sales Education Foundation/Careerbuilder Sales Survey in 2009 found 28% of sales reps earned \$50-\$75K, 19% earned \$75-\$100K, and 18% earned between \$100< and \$200K. Over 77% say they are satisfied or very satisfied with their career.
(University name) now offers a Sales Certificate. Students with any major can complete the certification.

their students a short survey (taking 10-15 minutes to complete) before the midterm. The reasoning behind this selection is that marketing principles classes introduce the chapter on personal selling after the midterm and this way we can capture their attitudes before they are exposed to any education related to the topic. Also, the survey was given at this point in the semester to assure that experimental conditions had an opportunity to be influential. Respondents consisted of both business majors (marketing and other business disciplines) and majors from other schools who may be either minoring in marketing or who are taking a marketing class as a general elective.

Three groups of students participated in this study. The first group (162 respondents) was the control group and was not exposed to any experimental conditions. Students in this control group were simply given the basic survey described above and were asked to read the instructions and respond to the items.

The second group (46 respondents) was exposed to the first experimental treatment. Students in this group were given a survey containing the same items, but preceded by a short narrative that included positive facts about the sales profession (see Table 1). Classes from which respondents were recruited for these first two groups were Principles of Marketing and Green Marketing.

The third group (55 respondents) was exposed to the second experimental treatment. This condition consisted of being enrolled in a sales-related class. Classes from which students in this group were asked to respond included Personal Selling, Sales Management and Sports Selling. Students in this group were given the same survey as the students in the control group.

Measures

A review of relevant literature suggested variables that are related to the phenomenon studied in this research and measures for these variables were included on the survey. Scales for these measures were adopted for this study, using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Marketing literature provided measures for many of these variables. All measures included multiple-items so data reduction could be performed using exploratory factor analysis and reliability analysis. During this process, each measure was reduced to a single factor with sufficiently high Eigenvalue (greater than 1.0) to simplify later analysis. The final step to prepare these measures for use in hypothesis testing was to perform reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951). See Table 2 for a summary of the measure development process.

Three variables representing respondent attitudes and opinions were included. These variables were attitude towards business ethics, opinion about

salesperson aggression and opinions about salesperson fairness. Nine additional variables were related to the personal characteristics of the respondents: conformity motivation, coping capacity, creativity, need for information, susceptibility to interpersonal influence, materialism, self-confidence, and venturesomeness.

The final two measures, the dependent variables in this study, were attitude toward salespeople and disposition toward a sales career. As can be seen in Table 2, with the exception of only a few measures, all were considered reliable with Cronbach's alphas greater than .70 (Nunnally, 1978). The few measures falling below this level still had Cronbach's alphas greater than .60, which is suggested as a minimum for exploratory research or if a measure is being used for the first time, as is the case with the measure for disposition toward a sales career (Barclay, Thompson, & Higgins, 1995). All other measures have been validated in previous studies, so their reliabilities were deemed high enough to use in this research.

Table 2. Measure development results

Variable Measured (Source)	# of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Eigenvalue
Disposition toward Sales as a Career (Newly Developed by Authors)	3	0.603	1.674
Attitude toward Salespeople (Moschis 1981)	2	0.681	1.519
Attitude toward Business Ethics (Lambert 1980)	2	0.818	2.202
Salesperson Aggression (Richins 1983)	5	0.811	2.868
Salesperson Fairness (Oliver and Swan 1989a & b)	2	0.917	1.847
Conformity Motivation (Lumpkin 1985)	3	0.800	2.146
Coping Capacity (Lumpkin and Hunt 1989)	3	0.832	2.247
Creativity (Childers 1986)	2	0.636	1.470
Need for Information (Bearden et al. 1989)	3	0.818	2.202
Innovativeness (Oliver and Bearden 1985)	2	0.085	1.069
Susceptibility (Bearden et al. 1989)	5	0.904	3.634
Materialism (Moschis 1981)	3	0.614	1.698
Self Confidence (Wells and Tigert 1971)	5	0.721	2.494
Venturesomeness (Bruning et al. 1985)	4	0.711	2.145

Results

Study 1: Hypotheses without experimental treatments

Table 3 shows results for the analyses of the model without the experimental treatments (H_1-H_3) using OLS regression. The full sample was included in these analyses with no distinction between the three groups of respondents. H_1 was partially supported. Though respondent attitudes toward salespeople had no impact on either attitude toward salespeople nor on disposition toward a sales career (H_{1a}), respondent opinions about salesperson aggression had an impact on attitude toward salespeople (partially supporting H_{1b}) and respondent opinions about salesperson fairness had an impact on disposition toward a sales career (partially supporting H_{1c}).

H_2 was more strongly supported than was H_1 ; however, it was also not fully supported. Neither a

respondent's coping capacity nor innovativeness was shown through the analysis to have an influence on either of the dependent variables; thus H_{2b} and H_{2e} were not supported. Both H_{2c} (creativity) and H_{2f} (susceptibility to outside influences) was partially supporting when analysis indicated their impact on respondents' disposition toward a sales career, but not their attitudes toward salespeople. Analysis indicated that respondents' motivation to conform (H_{2a}), their need for information (H_{2d}), their materialism (H_{2g}), their self-confidence (H_{2h}), and their venturesomeness (H_{2i}) all impacted both attitude toward salespeople and disposition toward a sales career, fully supporting those hypotheses. Finally, a respondent's attitude toward salespeople was shown to have a positive influence on his or her disposition toward a sales career. Thus, H_3 was supported.

Table 3. Results of hypotheses testing

Independent Variable	t-Statistic for Disposition- Sales Career	t-Statistic for Attitude Toward Salespeople
Attitudes & Opinions (H_1)		
Business Ethics	1.324	0.199
Salesperson Aggression	0.952	1.959*
Salesperson Fairness	3.550***	0.207
Personal Characteristics (H_2)		
Conformity	2.370**	2.768***
Coping	0.211	1.205
Creativity	4.493***	1.228
Information Need	2.357**	2.665***
Innovativeness	1.169	0.148
Susceptibility	3.475***	1.387
Materialism	3.269***	2.088**
Self Confidence	5.789***	2.096**
Venturesomeness	5.042***	1.908*
Attitude Toward Salespeople (H_3)	3.098***	NA

* p ≤ .10

** p ≤ .05

*** p ≤ .01

Study 2: Hypotheses including experimental treatments

Assessing the impact of the experimental treatments on the two dependent variables (H_4 and H_5) required a two -stage analysis. First, OLS regression was used to determine the impact of each independent variable on the dependent variables among each group – the control group, experimental group 1 (students were exposed to the information about a

sales career) and experimental group 2 (students were enrolled in a sales-related class). Once these test values were determined for the three groups, t-tests were then used to compare the two experimental groups with the control group for each hypothesized relationship to determine if the experimental condition had an impact on the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Table 4 shows the results of these analyses.

Table 4. Results of experimental conditions analyses

Independent Variables & Test Groups^	Group	t-Statistic for		t-Statistic Comparison	
		Disposition	Attitude	to Control (Disposition)	to Control (Attitude)
Attitudes & Opinions (H4)					
Business Ethics	CG	0.706	0.706	-	-
	Ex1	0.733	0.610	0.054	0.207
	Ex2	2.706***	1.961*	4.244***	2.367**
Salesperson Aggression	CG	0.232	0.496	-	-
	Ex1	0.352	0.707	0.240	0.422
	Ex2	1.878*	2.743**	3.838***	3.817***
Salesperson Fairness	CG	0.320	0.169	-	-
	Ex1	1.370	1.446	2.790**	2.459**
	Ex2	4.216***	2.816***	4.517***	3.899***
Personal Characteristics (H5)					
Conformity	CG	0.886	0.798	-	-
	Ex1	1.886*	1.697*	2.455**	1.939*
	Ex2	2.191**	2.248**	2.684**	3.174***
Coping	CG	0.235	0.788	-	-
	Ex1	0.221	0.546	0.028	0.784
	Ex2	1.852*	1.538	2.902***	1.533
Creativity	CG	1.156	0.195	-	-
	Ex1	2.413**	0.382	2.663**	0.561
	Ex2	3.383***	1.578	4.140***	2.866**
Information Need	CG	1.090	0.790	-	-
	Ex1	1.373	2.299**	0.566	3.098***
	Ex2	2.450**	2.550**	2.679**	3.315***
Innovativeness	CG	0.488	0.054	-	-
	Ex1	1.583	0.278	2.382**	0.672
	Ex2	1.672*	0.486	2.512**	1.296
Susceptibility	CG	0.191	0.550	-	-
	Ex1	2.766**	0.689	3.008***	0.417
	Ex2	2.812**	1.346	4.166***	1.597*
Materialism	CG	1.704*	0.378	-	-
	Ex1	1.458	1.343	0.492	1.866*
	Ex2	3.413***	1.725*	1.439	2.626**
Self Confidence	CG	3.475***	0.672	-	-
	Ex1	3.498***	1.485	0.046	1.688*
	Ex2	3.761***	1.497	0.594	1.831*
Venturism	CG	1.214	0.243	-	-
	Ex1	3.266***	1.316	3.633***	2.249**
	Ex2	3.764***	1.860*	3.826***	3.122***

* $p \leq .10$

** $p \leq .05$

*** $p \leq .01$

CG: control group

Ex1: received short narrative with positive facts about a sales profession

Ex2: enrolled in a sales-related class

Analysis suggests partial support for H₄; the impact of students' attitudes and opinions on both attitude toward salespeople and disposition toward a sales career was intensified with the experimental treatments. The second experimental treatment (Ex2), enrollment in sales-related classes intensified the impact of students' attitudes toward business ethics, student opinions on salesperson aggression, and student opinions on salesperson fairness on both attitude toward salespeople and disposition toward sales careers. The first experimental treatment (Ex1), reading a description of sales careers, intensified only the influence of student opinions about salesperson fairness on the two dependent variables. Thus, H_{4a} and H_{4b} were partially supported, while H_{4c} was fully supported.

Partial support was also found for H₅. In other words, the impact of students' various personal characteristics on the two dependent variables was intensified with the experimental treatments. First, Ex1 intensified the influence of students' motivation

to conform, need for information, materialism, self-confidence, and venturesomeness on their attitudes toward salespeople. In addition, Ex1 also intensified the influence of students' motivation to conform, creativity, innovativeness, susceptibility to interpersonal influence and venturesomeness on disposition toward a sales career. Second, Ex2 intensified the impact of students' motivation to conform, creativity, need for information, susceptibility to interpersonal influence, materialism, self-confidence, and venturesomeness on their attitudes toward salespeople. Further, Ex2 intensified the impact of students' motivation to conform, coping capacity, creativity, need for information, innovativeness, susceptibility to interpersonal influence, and venturesomeness on their disposition for sales careers. Thus, H_{5a} and H_{5i} were fully supported, while H_{5b-h} were all partially supported. Therefore, all of the parts of H₅ were at least partially supported.

Table 5. Results of sales student profiling

Independent Variables & Test Groups ^a	Overall Sample	Control Group	Ex1 Group	Ex2 Group
Attitudes & Opinions				
Business Ethics				X
Salesperson Aggression				X
Salesperson Fairness				X
Personal Characteristics				
Conformity	X		X	X
Coping				
Creativity				
Information Need	X			X
Innovativeness				
Susceptibility				
Materialism	X			X
Self Confidence	X			
Venturesomeness	X			X

Profile of a sales student

The results of the analysis above are necessary to formulate a profile of a sales student that has both a positive attitude toward salespeople and a disposition for a sales career. See Table 5 for a summary of the profiling results. The overall sample used in this research is similar to a typical student population that could be found in any comprehensive university. The

various undergraduate classes from which the respondents were drawn are representative of marketing classes that may be found in any marketing curriculum. In addition, students found in these classes may be marketing major or minors, students majoring in other business disciplines, or non-business majors or minors who are taking marketing classes for various reasons. Thus to begin the profiling process, examining the entire sample is

the starting point. For the overall sample, a sales student, as defined above, is a person who has a high motivation to conform, a high need for information, a high sense of materialism, a high level of self-confidence, and a high level of venturesomeness. All of these descriptive factors are personal characteristics of the students and none of their attitudes and opinions is significant in defining this profile.

When the experimental conditions are applied, however, the profile is quite different. Ex1 produces a profile that suggests sales students have a high motivation for conformity, with no other factor being statistically important in defining a sales student. However, when looking at students in the Ex2 group, sales students are those with a positive attitude toward business ethics, positive opinions about salesperson aggression and salesperson fairness, a high motivation to conform, a high need for information, a high level of materialism, and a high level of venturesomeness.

Discussion and conclusion

Organizations recruiting professional salespeople have long been using tools to screen potential recruits to their sales forces. These tools and the results are often proprietary and are difficult for researchers and professors to access. In addition, these tools are designed to be administered to adults who are already on the job market, either having already graduated from college or having gained other life experiences that have potentially prepared them for their professions (Wiles & Spiro, 2004). The results of this research, however, suggests students who are still preparing for the professional world can possibly be not only influenced toward a sales career, but also, as they get into sales specific classes later in their university experience, it is possible to identify characteristics that may lead to their careers in sales. Results of the first study revealed that certain student attitudes and opinions have an influence on disposition toward a sales career. Interestingly, student perception of the fairness of salespeople toward customers impacts their disposition toward a sales career, while their attitudes toward business ethics and their perceptions of salesperson aggression have no impact. This finding may be the result of the lack of ethical understanding that this sample of students had, and the fact that they may perceive aggressiveness as a positive characteristic of a salesperson today. Or it may be the result of some relic of the old attitudes that salespeople are not ethical, but they are aggressive; and that is okay, as long as they treat their customers fairly. Since customer-orientation and satisfaction have become increasingly more important, it is interesting that

these types of beliefs about salespeople still exist. This finding indicates that since salespeople have held this reputation in consumer's minds for so long, these customer attitudes are difficult to dispel (Fullerton & Punj, 2004).

This research also found that personal characteristics have an impact on student disposition toward a sales career. A student's creativity, need for information, susceptibility to others' influence, materialism, level of self-confidence, and venturesomeness all positively impact this disposition. Perhaps the most surprising finding here is that a student's motivation to conform positively impacts this disposition. Conformity seems to go against the creativity and individuality that successful salespeople seem to need to be successful (Sternberg & Lubart, 1995). However, maybe this finding should not be surprising when considering the high level of emphasis placed on recruiting and training new salespeople. At least in the beginning of their careers, salespeople may need to conform to company policies in order to succeed at their job.

Findings for the variables that have an impact on student attitudes toward salespeople are not as strong. Perceptions of how aggressive students think salespeople are impact this attitude, while their attitude toward business ethics and their perception of salesperson fairness have no impact. In addition, a student's motivation to conform, need for information, materialism, self-confidence and venturesomeness have no impact. The fact that the list of independent variables that influence the two dependent variables are different illustrates the point that disposition toward a sales career and a person's attitude toward salespeople are separate concepts, though they are likely correlated.

The second study found that certain treatments have an impact on the effects of the independent variables upon the dependent variables. Although the first treatment (having them read the passage) had little impact, this is expected because with a sample of students we cannot expect that they will read and absorb the passage quick enough to alter their beliefs. The second, stronger treatment (actual enrollment in a sales-related university course) did have a strengthening effect on many of the hypothesized relationships. This finding suggests that either through self-selection (choosing to enroll in a sales related class) or by the influence of the class itself (be it the influence of the professor or the material), we can project the profile of a sales student who is likely to pursue a career in the sales profession can be created.

The profile of this type of sales student who is enrolled in a sales-related class includes most of the variables that were originally hypothesized to have an

impact on dispositions to pursue a career in sales. The attitudes and opinions that are important in this profile lead students to have a positive attitude toward sales ethics, and have perceptions that salespeople are aggressive, but fair to their customers. Other personal characteristics that are important in this profile are having the motivation to conform (showing willingness to be trained and adhere to company policies), having a high need for information (showing a need for continuous learning), having a high tendency toward materialism (showing a willingness to work hard to obtain personal materialistic possessions), having self-confidence (indicating an ability and willingness to work independently of constant supervision), and having a tendency toward venturesomeness (possibly indicating a person's willingness to travel, be innovative, and to take risks in their work).

Implications

There are several implications for sales educators from the results of this research. Since a large percentage of marketing students will start their professional careers after graduation in sales positions (Murray & Robinson, 2001), it is possible to influence or at least identify these students as they make their way through a marketing/sales major or minor. If these students can be identified early enough, educators will have an opportunity to be sure these students have important knowledge and training by the time they graduate. They can receive non-specific sales training through role plays, case studies and sales presentations. They can be taught about different compensation plans and receive other important knowledge needed in their career. If these potential salespeople do not receive this training and knowledge before they graduate, the acquisition is sometimes delayed until they are well into their career. Acquiring these skills and knowledge as a student will make him or her much more valuable in their first sales job after graduation. This value will be recognized by companies recruiting students from your university and recruiting activities will increase. Starting salaries and opportunities for students from your particular program will likely increase as well. Therefore, we recommend that marketing departments and professors make more effort to draw students into sales courses to ensure that they receive the training they need for their future careers.

Limitations and future research

Limitations of any research project often lead to future research opportunities, and such is the case in

this instance. Data were collected from one university and one marketing program. Thus, future research will involve finding research partners at other schools that have a variety of sales-related classes and collecting data from those schools. This research also found that a weak experimental treatment had little or no impact on the hypothesized relationships; however, the stronger manipulation did have an impact. It is not clear if this impact is from the self-selection of students to be in the sales-related classes or if the impact is from having more exposure to sales because they are in the classes. Further research would be necessary to discover which one of the two was the cause of this finding. If it is found that the additional exposure to sales, rather than the self-selection of being in a sales class, is the cause, it would be useful to learn how strong the manipulation would have to be to change both the disposition toward sales as a career and attitudes toward salespeople. The required strength of the treatment would likely be somewhere between having the student read a passage about sales and actually being enrolled in a sales class to gain more exposure to sales.

This study was conducted to examine the disposition of students to a career in sales. Two studies were conducted to measure the impact of different treatments on students' disposition to a sales career. Results of these studies facilitate the creation of the profile of a sales student who is likely to pursue sales as a career. This profile can be important in identifying potentially successful members of professional sales forces while they are still in our universities and by so doing, enable sales educators to properly prepare them for their careers.

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