THE CONSEQUENCES OF OPEN VERSUS CLOSED INFLUENCE STRATEGIES OF SALESPEOPLE IN A DEVELOPING ECONOMY

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The sales representatives of a pharmaceutical manufacturer in India were surveyed to explore the effects of influence strategies on customer oriented selling, adaptive selling, and sales performance, and to examine the relationships among sales performance, job satisfaction, and propensity to leave. Of the 253 salespeople surveyed, complete responses were received from 146 respondents, providing a response rate of 57.7 percent. Results indicated that salespeople using open influence strategies were more customer oriented, more adaptive, and performed better. Further, for closed influencers, job satisfaction fully mediated the effect of sales performance on propensity to leave. Based on these findings, managerial implications for US firms who have entered or are planning to enter India were discussed.

INTRODUCTION

In order to achieve the goals of the selling firm, salespeople are given the responsibility of nurturing the most valuable asset of the firm, its customers. The manner in which salespeople interact with customers is likely to have a profound effect on sales revenues, profitability, and the long-term success of the selling firm. Consequently, the selling behaviors of salespeople, such as, customer orientation (Saxe and Weitz 1982), adaptive selling (Spiro and Weitz 1990), and influence strategies (Spiro and Perreault, Jr. 1979) have drawn significant research attention in the personal selling and sales management literature (e.g., Plouffe, Hulland and Wachner 2009; Franke and Park 2006). However, scholars have not addressed two major research questions regarding these selling behaviors. First, what are the inter-relationships among these behaviors? Specifically, does the choice of an influence strategy affect the degree to which salespeople are customer oriented or adaptive?

How do influence strategies affect sales performance and what are the consequences of these performance differences?

The second research question involves the context of these studies. Research on selling behaviors has been conducted entirely in the Western markets, such as, US and Europe. In a global economy, many US firms are entering Asian markets, such as, India. US continues to be one of India's major trading partners with bilateral trade in merchandise and commodities totaling US$ 50 billion in 2010. With India's middle class exceeding 200 million, US companies represent the largest share of foreign firms operating in India. US Fortune 500 firms in India include Microsoft, American Express, IBM, McDonald's, Procter and Gamble, Pfizer, General Electric, Ford etc. With the slowing growth of the US economy, many US firms are looking to Asian markets, such as India, for additional sales and profits. Consequently, academicians and practitioners are likely to be interested in knowing whether the theories of selling, which have been developed primarily in US can explain sales performance in Asian markets, such as India. The current study addresses whether influence strategies affect

customer oriented selling, adaptive selling, and sales performance in developing economies, such as India, among a sample of pharmaceutical salespeople.

The business environment in India is an appropriate context to examine the consequences of influence strategies. Professionals in India interpret ethical norms much less strictly than their US counterparts (Paul, Roy and Mukhopadhyay 2006). Even business students in India perceived ethical problems less seriously than students from the US and New Zealand (Marta et al., 2000). Patwardhan, Noble and Nishihara (2009) found evidence of strategic deception by call center employees in India, and Sadri (2009, p. 85) found that "unethical practices are plentifully involved in marketing of life insurance in India." The pharmaceutical industry in India also faces "challenges with respect to ethical marketing and promotional practices" (Bhangale 2008, p. 208), and the German pharmaceutical company Bayer has recently filed a patent infringement lawsuit in India where the Office of the Drug Controller General of India has been accused of giving marketing approval to a generic drug that violates Bayer's patent (Ollier 2009). Consequently, pharmaceutical marketing in India is a suitable context for studying the implications of salespersons' use of influence strategies.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
AND HYPOTHESES

Influence Strategies

An influence strategy can be defined as the manner in which salespeople use their bases of social power in customer-salesperson interactions. Spiro and Perreault, Jr. (1979, p. 437) identified five different influence strategies, namely, Legitimate, Expert, Referent, Ingratiation, and Impression Management. Legitimate influence uses the "feelings of shared values" (Spiro and Perreault, Jr. 1979, p. 437) between salespeople and customers. Expert influence uses

salespersons' "knowledge, information, and skills" in satisfying customer needs (Busch and Wilson 1976, p. 3), whereas referent influence uses salespersons' personal affiliation to their customers.

These three influence strategies share a common theme. The salesperson using these influence strategies does not hide his/her motives from the customers. Customers expect salespeople to use legitimate influence, such as, the salesperson's experience, his/her firm's reputation, and the quality of his/her products to persuade them since that is a norm of customer-salesperson interactions. Similarly salespeople need to use their expertise on products/services to explain to customers how these products/services will satisfy customer needs. Consequently, when salespeople discuss the technical characteristics of their products/services with customers, the customers know exactly what they are trying to accomplish. Further, when salespeople are friends with their customers, customers expect them to use this friendship to their advantage. Thus, the purpose of using referent influence is also clear to the customers. Since the use legitimate, expert, and referent influences do not involve any hidden agenda, "there is no explicit deception intended in the use of such strategies" (Spiro 1977, p. 64). Therefore, these three strategies can be construed as "open" or above board (Spiro and Perreault, Jr. 1979, p. 438) and salespeople who use these strategies can be called open influencers.

On the contrary, the motives for using ingratiation and impression management are hidden. Salespeople using ingratiation attempt to "develop an obligation and compliance on the part of customers by providing personal favors" (Spiro and Perreault, Jr. 1979, p. 437). Similarly, salespeople using impression management strategies try to manipulate customers by creating false or deceptive impressions "in order to achieve a favorable response" from them. (Spiro and Perreualt, Jr. 1979, p. 438) Consequently, the purposes of using ingratiation and impression management strategies are to manipulate and deceive

customers, and these are closed influence strategies (Brown 1990). Thus, salespeople using these strategies can be called closed influencers.

Customer Oriented Selling

According to Saxe (1979), "high customer orientation can be viewed as an extension of the marketing concept from the level of the firm to the level of the individual salesperson and customer" (pp.15‑16). Highly customer oriented salespeople attempt to increase long-term customer satisfaction and avoid behaviors and actions that sacrifice customer interest (Saxe and Weitz, 1982). By improving salespersons' customer need knowledge, customer oriented selling is expected to enable salespeople to satisfy customers in the long run (Homburg, Wieseke and Bornemann 2009).

Since highly customer oriented salespeople "engage in behaviors aimed at increasing long-term customer satisfaction" (Saxe and Weitz 1982, p. 344), open and closed influencers are expected to differ in their levels of customer orientation. Specifically, since closed influencers attempt to manipulate and deceive customers to create a favorable impression, they are expected to engage in lower levels of customer orientation than open influencers. Manipulating and deceiving customers to achieve hidden objectives is contrary to the values espoused by customer orientation. Thus, it is hypothesized:

Hypothesis 1**:** Open influencers will be more customer oriented than closed influencers.

Adaptive Selling

Weitz, Sujan, and Sujan (1986) defined adaptive selling 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" (p. 175). Salespeople engaged in adaptive selling use different sales presentations for different customers. They customize their sales strategy to fit the needs of the customer and the sales situation. When

salespeople adapt to selling situations, they are expected to act in the best interests of their customers. Adaptive selling "forces the salesperson to practice the marketing concept" by emphasizing "the importance of satisfying customer needs" (Weitz, Castleberry and Tanner 2009, p. 151). Recent studies have concluded that adaptive selling enables salespeople to become more customer oriented (Franke and Park 2006).

Open influencers rely on their expertise to present product-specific information to customers and demonstrate how these products can satisfy customer needs. Since customer needs vary, open influencers may need to adapt more in order to successfully use their "business-oriented influence strategies" (Spiro and Perreault, Jr. 1979, p. 437). In contrast, closed influencers ingratiate and impress customers to manipulate them. Since they are really adapting to achieve their own hidden agenda, they may need to adapt less than open influencers. Doing special favors for customers and offering them gifts to obligate them (closed influence strategy) does not require adaptive selling skills to the same degree compared to using open influence strategies, where altering sales presentations based on the perceived nature of the selling situation and tailoring the sales strategy to match the uniqueness of each sales call is an absolute necessity. Formally stated:

Hypothesis 2: Open influencers will be more adaptive than closed influencers.

Sales Performance

Achieving high sales performance and attaining the goals of the selling organization are the key measures of success of salespeople. Based on Behrman and Perreault, Jr.'s (1982) conceptualization, sales performance can be defined as the degree to which salespeople achieve their overall sales objectives, possess technical knowledge, provide information to the selling organization, control expenses, and make effective sales presentations to customers. Closed influencers are expected to perform more poorly than open influencers for several

reasons. For example, customers may perceive that the ingratiating salesperson (closed influencer) has a hidden agenda and are "most likely to attribute influence tactics to ulterior motives precisely when the salesperson has the most to gain through such tactics" (Brown 1990, p. 21).

By relying on manipulation and deceit, closed influencers, who use ingratiation and impression management, will fail to thoroughly research each customer and implement a sales presentation that is maximally effective for that customer. Salespeople who use high levels of referent power bases (open influence strategies) have been perceived by customers as "more trustworthy", have been "more effective in producing an intended attitude change," and have been "more effective in producing the intended behavioral changes in a customer" (Busch and Wilson 1976, pp. 7-8).

Closed influencers will also fail to control expenses since rendering personal favors and providing promotional items to gain customer compliance costs money. In addition, since closed influencers do not rely on product knowledge to persuade customers, they may not keep up with the latest developments in technical knowledge compared to open influencers. Consequently, open influencers are expected to outperform closed influencers. Therefore, the following is hypothesized:

> Hypothesis 3: Open influencers will achieve higher sales performance than closed influencers.

Job Satisfaction and Propensity to Leave

The poor performance of closed influencers is likely to have some unintended consequences. For example, closed influencers may become dissatisfied with their jobs and leave the selling organization. On the contrary, open influencers may become satisfied with their jobs and have a lower propensity to leave. The relationships among sales performance, job satisfaction, and propensity to leave have been extensively studied in the US context (e.g., Brown and Peterson 1993; Futrell and Parasuraman 1984).

Although scholars agree that job satisfaction causally precedes propensity to leave, the role of sales performance is less obvious. Empirical evidence exists for sales performance as an antecedent to job satisfaction (Jones et al., 2007; MacKenzie, Podsakoff and Ahearne 1998; Bagozzi 1978), as a consequence of job satisfaction (Podsakoff and Williams 1986), unrelated to job satisfaction (Brown and Peterson 1993; Dubinsky and Hartley 1986), and a moderator of the relationship between job satisfaction and propensity to leave (Futrell and Parasuraman 1984). The current study investigates whether influence strategies have a bearing on this issue, especially in developing economies.

Following Bagozzi (1978), sales performance was posited to be an antecedent to job satisfaction. Sales performance should also have a direct effect on propensity to leave as low performers are expected to have a high turnover (McEvoy and Cascio 1987). Since job satisfaction negatively affects propensity to leave, sales performance will also have an indirect effect on propensity to leave by affecting job satisfaction. Consequently, job satisfaction will mediate the effects of sales performance on propensity to leave. Since closed influencers are expected to perform poorly, the mediating effect of job satisfaction on the relationship between sales performance and propensity to leave should be significant among closed influencers. Therefore,
Hypothesis 4: For closed influencers, job satisfaction will mediate the effects of sales performance on propensity to leave.
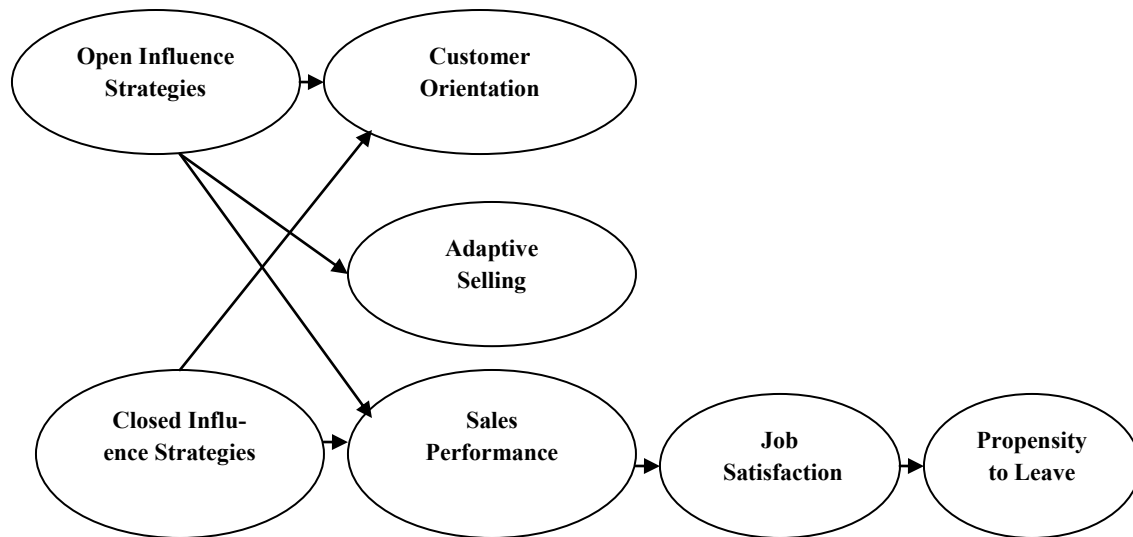
Figure 1 summarizes the research hypotheses.

METHOD

Sample

The sample consisted of 253 missionary salespeople employed for a pharmaceutical manufacturer in India who represented the selling firm to physicians, retail pharmacies, distributors, and wholesalers across the entire nation. The study variables were measured by a

FIGURE 1
Hypothesized Model

self-report mail questionnaire and the respondents were promised anonymity and confidentiality. Completed questionnaires were received from 146 respondents, thereby providing a response rate of 57.7 percent. Non-response bias was unlikely to affect the study results since early and late respondents did not differ significantly on the study variables (Armstrong and Overton 1977). Regarding subject characteristics, 92 percent of the respondents were male, 78 percent were college graduates and 12 percent had post-graduate degrees. On average, they were 28.5 years old and had six years of selling experience. Consequently, the respondents were predominantly male, highly educated, young and relatively less experienced.

Measures

Pre-existing measurement scales for which validity and reliability was already established was used to measure the study variables. Influence strategies were measured by the 20-item scale developed by Spiro (1977). Customer oriented selling was measured as a surface trait (Brown, Mowen, Donavan and Licata 2002) with six items adapted from Saxe

and Weitz's (1982) SOCO scale. The scale anchors were 1 (true for none of your customers) to 9 (true for all of your customers). Adaptive selling was measured by the 5-item ADAPTS-SV scale developed by Robinson et al. (2002). Job satisfaction was measured by a 7-item scale (Bagozzi 1978) where each item represented a facet of job satisfaction, such as, pay, co-workers, promotion, etc. Propensity to leave was measured using a 3-item scale developed from Bluedorn (1982). The endpoints of these scales were 1 (very strongly disagree) to 9 (very strongly agree). Finally, sales performance was measured by the 31-item scale developed by Behrman and Perreault, Jr. (1982) where the scale anchors were 1 (your performance is very low compared to an average salesperson) and 9 (your performance is very high compared to an average salesperson). The descriptive statistics of these measurement scales are displayed in Table 1.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Measure Validation

First, psychometric properties of the measures were assessed by computing reliabilities and

TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Influence Strategies	1.00					
2. Customer Oriented Selling	0.19	1.00				
3. Adaptive Selling	0.20[*]	0.47[**]	1.00			
4. Sales Performance	0.07	0.14	0.17	1.00		
5. Job Satisfaction	0.15	0.36[**]	0.34[**]	0.44[**]	1.00	
6. Propensity to Leave	-0.18	-0.25[**]	-0.28[**]	-0.21[*]	-0.49[**]	1.00
Mean	5.58	6.94	6.80	6.71	7.15	3.16
SD	0.71	1.31	1.32	1.29	1.31	1.89
Cronbach's alpha	0.45	0.68	0.69	0.95	0.83	0.76

[**] Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level. [*] Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.

assessing convergent and discriminant validity. Since the sample size of 146 may be insufficient to assess the measurement models simultaneously, a confirmatory factor analysis with partial disaggregation (Bagozzi and Heatherton 1994) was used to confirm the measurement properties of the 31-item sales performance scale. Following Bagozzi and Heatherton (1994), two or three composite indicators were formed for each dimension of the 31-item scale (sales objectives, providing information, etc.) by randomly aggregating two to three items that relate to a specific dimension. Thus, the 31-items were reduced to 14 item parcels measuring the five dimensions of sales performance. A confirmatory factor analysis of the covariance matrix of the 14 item parcels yielded a satisfactory measurement model of sales performance ($\chi^2 = 70.81$, df = 77, p > 0.10, GFI = 0.90, RMSEA = 0.00).

The covariance matrix of the five latent constructs was input in LISREL 8.72 to assess validity, where each item was specified to load on its respective factor. Although one item measuring job satisfaction needed to be deleted, the measurement model fit the data well ($\chi^2 = 237.94$, df = 517, p > 0.10, GFI = 0.86, RMSEA = 0.00). Convergent validity was

established since the path estimate of each item to its respective latent construct was significant (Anderson and Gerbing 1988). Discriminant validity was also established since the $\Delta\chi^2$ values for the unconstrained and constrained (the correlation between each pair of constructs constrained to unity) models were significant for each construct (Bagozzi and Phillips 1982).

To identify open and closed influencers, salespeople were clustered based on their responses to the 20-item influence strategy scale. An agglomerative hierarchical clustering using Ward's method yielded a two cluster solution which was confirmed with a K-means clustering and a discriminant analysis where the 20 variables measuring influence strategies classified the respondents into the two clusters with 100 percent accuracy. There were 45 cases in cluster 1 (open influencers) and 63 cases in cluster 2 (closed influencers). Table 2 presents the final cluster centers.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 were tested by an ANOVA, where the effects of the clusters on customer oriented selling, adaptive selling, and sales performance showed that open influencers

TABLE 2
Final Cluster Centers

	Cluster 1	Cluster 2
I try to influence my customer by drawing on my expertise concerning the product.[1]	**8.22**	5.73
I stress the general quality of my products and services relative to that of other suppliers.[2]	**7.73**	6.30
Even when talking about important business topics, I am very friendly and personal with my customer.[3]	**7.07**	6.46
I exaggerate the extent to which I would have to bend company policy to help my customer.[4]	2.96	**5.59**
I go out of my way to do personal favors for my customer so that he/she would be indebted to me.[5]	2.51	**4.95**
Some of my comments appear to be made casually, but are actually "planted" with the intent of gaining favorable impressions.[4]	**5.24**	4.92
I do not use congenial relationship with my customer for my advantage.[3r]	**5.82**	4.84
I try to demonstrate my knowledge of how my product would be used in customer's company.[1]	**7.93**	6.03
I imply to my customer that I do special favors for him/her that I generally do not do for other customers.[5]	**5.20**	4.86
I do not stress my reputation, or how my experience would help my customer.[2r]	**5.71**	5.13
I do not use my friendship with my customer to get him/her to place orders with me.[3r]	**6.62**	4.43
I rarely make any effort to ingratiate my customer.[5r]	**6.96**	4.54
I do not compare the technical characteristics of my product with those of my competitors.[1r]	**7.53**	4.79
My customer is aware that I expect special consideration because of our friendship.[3]	3.89	**5.24**
I stress my company's reputation to my customer.[2]	**8.27**	6.78
I discuss quite a bit of technical information.[1]	**7.02**	5.27
I use more general than detailed facts in trying to sell my customer.[1]	**5.22**	5.16
I make efforts to entertain my customer or provide him/her with promotional items so that he/she feels an obligation to me.[5]	4.31	**5.44**
My customer thinks that my activities on his/her behalf require more effort than they really did.[4]	3.71	**5.44**
In sales calls it is useful to give my customer the impression that I did not have the authority to act on one of his/her requests.[4]	5.00	**5.78**

Expertise, [2] Legitimate, [3] Referent, [4] Impression Management, [5] Ingratiation, [r] Reverse worded.
Highest scores in bold, Cluster 1 = Open Influencers, Cluster 2 = Closed Influencers.

were more customer oriented and more adaptive than closed influencers, and outperformed them. Therefore, these three hypotheses were supported. Table 3 displays the ANOVA results.

Hypothesis 4 was tested with a series of OLS regressions where the summated scores of propensity to leave (criterion), sales performance (predictor), and job satisfaction (mediator) were used. For closed influencers, propensity to leave was regressed on sales performance and job satisfaction, followed by a regression of propensity to leave on sales performance after controlling for job satisfaction (Baron and Kenny 1986). The results are shown in Table 4.

As Table 4 indicates, the direct effect of sales performance on propensity to leave was non-significant ($b = -0.27$, $t = -1.52$). However, the direct effect of sales performance on job satisfaction was significantly positive ($a = 0.35$, $t = 3.04$), and after controlling for sales performance, the direct effect of job satisfaction

on propensity to leave was significantly negative ($c = -0.84$, $t = -5.09$). Since there is a significant relationship between sales performance and job satisfaction, and between job satisfaction and propensity to leave, and sales performance does not explain any additional variance beyond job satisfaction ($b' = 0.13$, $t = 0.08$), job satisfaction fully mediated the effect of sales performance on propensity to leave (Schneider et al. 2005). The model explained 31 percent of the variance in propensity to leave and the mediating effect was significant ($z = -2.57$) (Sobel 1982). Consequently, hypothesis 4 was supported.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study have major implications for US firms planning to enter or those who have already entered India. Firms should encourage their salespeople to use open influence strategies to improve sales performance, since higher sales performance will lower their propensity to leave by increasing their job satisfaction. Sales training

TABLE 3
Analysis of Variance

Criterion	Mean$_{Open\ Influencers}$	Mean$_{Closed\ Influencers}$	F Statistic	Sig.
Customer Oriented Selling	7.26	6.37	$F_{1,104} = 12.74$	$p < 0.01$
Adaptive Selling	7.29	6.26	$F_{1,105} = 19.91$	$p < 0.01$
Sales Performance	7.14	6.33	$F_{1,104} = 9.77$	$p < 0.01$

TABLE 4
Results of Mediation Analysis

Predictor (X)	Mediator (M)	Criterion (Y)	$M = aX + e$	$Y = bX + e$	$Y = b'X + cM + e$
Sales Performance	Job Satisfaction	Propensity to Leave	$a = 0.35$ $t = 3.04^{**}$	$b = -0.27$ $t = -1.52$	$b' = 0.13$, $t = 0.08$ $c = -0.84$, $t = -5.09^{**}$

$^{**}p < 0.01$

and supervisory coaching should help salespeople develop the expertise needed to pursue open influence strategies, despite the temptations of the business environment. Open influencers were more customer oriented and more adaptive than closed influencers.

Sales managers can use the measures of selling behaviors (customer oriented selling, adaptive selling, etc.) and sales performance that have been developed in US markets to monitor and control salespeople in India. College graduates in India are proficient in English and the measures of latent constructs in selling and sales management seem to be readily transportable to the Indian market. The mediating effect of job satisfaction on the relationship between sales performance and propensity to leave is intriguing since in the US, the performance of pharmaceutical salespeople moderated the effect of job satisfaction on propensity to leave (Futrell and Parasuraman 1984). The exclusion of influence strategies may have resulted in the differences in causal relationships among sales performance, job satisfaction, and propensity to leave in past studies.

Salespeople should also be encouraged to be customer oriented and adapt their selling behaviors based on the selling situation, since these selling behaviors were significantly positively related to job satisfaction (see Table 1). Since job satisfaction reduces the propensity to leave, training and coaching salespeople to be customer oriented and adaptive will reduce salesperson turnover.

LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Limitations of the study include the low reliability of the influence strategy measure and the potential lack of generalizability since salespeople of a single firm was studied. Although maximally homogeneous respondents should be used for theory falsification procedures (Calder, Phillips and Tybout 1981), the results of this study should be interpreted with caution.

Since the entire data were collected from salespersons' perspective, there was a potential for common method bias. As recommended by Podsakoff and Organ (1986), the data was subjected to Harmon's one factor test, where all the manifest variables were specified to load on a single method factor in a confirmatory factor model. The fit of this one factor model worsened with $\Delta\chi^2 = 106.44$ for df = 10 and GFI = 0.81, indicating that the risk of common method variance bias was minimal. However, due to the cross-sectional nature of the data, caution should be exercised in inferring causality.

Future research should replicate this study across a range of industries in India and other developing economies such as China. The results will strengthen the generalizability of the effects (Calder, Phillips and Tybout 1981) and shed light on whether the relationships among sales performance, job satisfaction and propensity to leave are culture specific.

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