Humor Usage by Salespeople: A Socio-Psychological Inquiry of Antecedents and Outcomes in Professional Selling

A dissertation presented to
the faculty of
Ohio University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Valerie L. Wang
August 2017

© 2017 Valerie L. Wang. All Rights Reserved.
This dissertation titled
Humor Usage by Salespeople: A Socio-Psychological Inquiry of Antecedents and
Outcomes in Professional Selling

by

VALERIE L. WANG

has been approved for
the E.W. Scripps School of Journalism,
the College of Business,
and the Graduate College by

Gregory Newton
Associate Professor of Communication

Joseph Shields
Dean, Graduate College
Abstract

WANG, VALERIE L., Ph.D., August 2017, Individual Interdisciplinary Program, Marketing and Digital Media Management

Humor Usage by Salespeople: A Socio-Psychological Inquiry of Antecedents and Outcomes in Professional Selling

Director of Dissertation: Gregory Newton

As a cue for laughter in interpersonal communications, humor has been observed in various professional selling occasions. This dissertation aims at quantitatively investigate the antecedents and outcomes of salespeople’s humor usage in sales communications. A research framework with ten hypotheses is built to describe why or when humor messages are created by salespeople, and then why or how humor messages, as an interpersonal sales communication tool, influence various performance outcomes in professional selling. It is proposed that humor usage by salespeople is positively influenced by higher creativity, stronger learning orientation, greater sales effort, and a higher degree of role stress represented by role ambiguity, role conflict, and task overload. In turn, humor usage by salespeople may positively influence customer relationship quality in terms of trust, commitment, and relationship satisfaction, as well as salespeople’s job performance.

To test the hypotheses, a series of multiple regression analyses are performed using survey data collected from 407 salespeople. The results provide insights about salespeople humor usage in a number of aspects. First, creative salespeople are more likely to find the appropriate and actionable contextual cues to form humor messages in
professional selling. Second, with higher learning orientation through routine observation and interaction with customers, peers, and competitors, salespeople can become more adept at creating humor messages for particular customers and situations. Third, humor usage is a stress reliever for stressed salespeople who encounter role ambiguity. Fourth, through improving customers’ cognitive and affective experiences, salespeople’s humor usage in sales communications ultimately enhances customer relationship quality and job performance. Overall, the findings suggest that salespeople humor usage in sales communications act as a useful marketing mechanism that produces positive organizational outcomes. The new knowledge created by this dissertation not only offers a fresh perspective for researchers, but also shed light on sales management practices and marketing communications.
Dedication

to my dear daughter Ava

with all my love
Acknowledgments

I sincerely thank my dissertation committee members, Dr. Gregory Newton, Dr. Catherine Axinn, and Dr. Parul Jain, for their support during my dissertation research. I also extend my gratitude to the Director of the Individual Interdisciplinary Program, Dr. Kamile Geist.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: Introduction</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual Background</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of Problem</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribution of Research</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outline of Dissertation</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: Literature Review</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundamentals of Humor Theories</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research on Humor in Psychology and Sociology</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research on Humor in Marketing</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Literature Review</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: Research Framework</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antecedents to Salespeople’s Humor Usage</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning orientation</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales effort</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role stress</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes of Salespeople’s Humor Usage</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship quality</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salespeople’s job performance</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: Research Methodology</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Instrument</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection Procedure</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistical Procedure</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5: Results</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptive Statistics and Correlations</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis Testing on Humor Usage Antecedents</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis Testing on Humor Usage Outcomes</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Hypotheses Testing</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6: Discussion</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion of Findings</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings on antecedents to salespeople humor usage</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings on outcomes of salespeople humor usage</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managerial Implications</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations and Future Research Recommendations</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References .................................................................................................................. 100

Appendix 1: Announcement on Mechanical Turk ......................................................... 117

Appendix 2: Research Questionnaire ........................................................................... 118

Appendix 3: Institutional Review Board Approval ....................................................... 147
# List of Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1</td>
<td>Measure of Creativity</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2</td>
<td>Measure of Learning Orientation</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3</td>
<td>Measure of Sales Effort</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4</td>
<td>Measure of Role Stress</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5</td>
<td>Measure of Humor Usage</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6</td>
<td>Measure of Relationship Quality</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 7</td>
<td>Measure of Job Performance</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 8</td>
<td>Measures of Customer Orientation and Sales Orientation</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 9</td>
<td>Sample Characteristics</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 10</td>
<td>Results of Validity and Reliability Tests</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 11</td>
<td>Descriptive Statistics of Variables</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 12</td>
<td>Correlation Matrix for Independent and Dependent Variables</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 13</td>
<td>Correlation Matrix for Humor Usage and Control Variables</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 14</td>
<td>Model Fit for Regression Model One</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 15</td>
<td>Multiple Regression Analysis Results on Humor Usage</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 16</td>
<td>Model Fit for Regression Model Two</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 17</td>
<td>Multiple Regression Analysis Results on Trust</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 18</td>
<td>Model Fit for Regression Model Three</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 19</td>
<td>Multiple Regression Analysis Results on Commitment</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 20</td>
<td>Model Fit for Regression Model Four</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 21: Multiple Regression Analysis Results on Relationship Satisfaction .......... 79
Table 22: Model Fit for Regression Model Five ............................................. 80
Table 23: Multiple Regression Analysis Results on Job Performance .................. 81
Table 24: Model Fit for Regression Model Six .................................................. 82
Table 25: Modified Multiple Regression Analysis Results on Job Performance ....... 83
Table 26: Summary of Hypothesis Testing ......................................................... 84
List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1:</td>
<td>Benign Violation Theory</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2:</td>
<td>Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3:</td>
<td>Validated Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1: Introduction

Conceptual Background

Consider this anecdote in professional selling. Having to stop at the bathroom, a salesperson named Bob walked in five minutes late to his appointment at a prospect’s office. As expected, the prospect stared at the salesperson with irritation. Bob quickly glanced around the prospect’s office, and found the prospect is a big football fan. Grinning at the aggravated prospect, Bob explained, “Sorry sir, I really had to drop the Browns off at the Super Bowl before I came in.” In a few seconds, the prospect started laughing, “It’s alright! It didn’t take long.” In a softened atmosphere, Bob managed a pleasant sales call with the prospect.

Often, outcomes turn out to be better when salespeople use humor in sales calls. In the example above, if Bob simply asked for forgiveness after his late arrival at the prospect’s office by saying the routine verbiage, “Sorry sir, I apologize for being late, but I really needed to go to the bathroom,” it would have been hard for the prospect to continue with a good mood. The follow-up sales conversation may be ruined. Instead, “dropping the Browns off at the Super Bowl” as an alternative for going to the bathroom elicited the prospect’s laughter. Bob used humor to turn the negative situation around into a positive kickoff in the beginning of the sales call.

Another example can be found at the closing stage of a sales call. Tom was negotiating with a buyer from Texas on a supplier contract. After some long hours of negotiation, the sales call broke off at the warranty clause. The buyer hesitated to sign. “It has been a long day, so let’s talk about it at another time,” the buyer expressed with some
suspicion, “I want to add some stuff on the warranty clause.” Tom responded, “My boss reminds us all the time – Don’t mess with Texas. Do you think we really need an additional warranty?” The buyer started to laugh and finally signed.

In this example, Tom created peace of mind through humor, eased the buyer’s hesitation to close a sales contract. “Don’t mess with Texas” is a famous anti-litter slogan that people see alongside the Texas highways. This slogan is used to advise tourists not to dirty the land in Texas, referring to the original meaning of the word “mess.” Tom twisted the meaning of “mess” in the slogan to “mess with somebody” in a relationship context to humorously demonstrate a mental warranty to the buyer. Otherwise he would have to spend more time on the warranty clause, with risk of not closing the sale. Across the two examples, humor can be seen as a powerful tool for salespeople when it is used on the right person at the right time.

Humor is commonly understood as “the tendency of particular cognitive experiences to provoke laughter and provide amusement” (Sharma, 2011, p. 14). Extending the concept to interpersonal communications that have implications for professional salespeople, researchers defined humor as “amusing communications that produce positive emotions and cognitions in the individual, group, or organization” (Romero and Arendt, 2011, p. 649). To differentiate this type of humor from mockery- and irony-type of actions that may have humorous outcomes in a negative way, previous research usually regards this positive type of humor as “adaptive humor” (Kuiper et al., 2004; Klein and Kuiper, 2006).
Humor has been studied from socio-cultural and psychological perspectives for over a century, with a shared understanding that humor is used as a unique cue for laughter in interpersonal communications in all societies (Feinberg, 1971; Apte, 1985; Ruch, 1992; Chen and Martin, 2007). In psychology and psychiatry, humor has long been known for its various psychological benefits, for both the humorous person and the audience (Dixon, 1980; Ziv, 1984; Feingold, 1992; Martin, 2007).

Statement of Problem

Although humor has been celebrated as an effective stimulus in communications (Kuiper et al., 2004; Martin, 2007), previous research is incomplete regarding how humor is generated and used by professional salespeople. A few humor-related concepts, such as attractiveness (McColl and Truong, 2013) and playfulness (Maxwell et al., 2005), have received research attention in the study of salespeople’s behavior. However, the understanding of salespeople’s use of humor has not yet become a research focus, which leaves two significant research gaps: (1) what factors influence humor usage in the sales process; and (2) how humor usage in sales communications affects key outcomes that are strategically important to salespeople and their organizations.

This dissertation aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the behavior of those professional salespeople with a sense of humor, in respect to how their humorous communication takes effect in the sales process. Based on the research gaps, this dissertation will construct and empirically test a theoretical framework that incorporates the antecedents and outcomes of humor usage by salespeople. This theoretical framework will be based on extant theories founded in humor psychology and sociology, and built
on a set of variables grounded in the marketing and sales literature. A quantitative methodology will be used to validate the theoretical framework. The empirical findings are expected to offer insights into improving sales communication outcomes.

**Research Question**

The main research question for the dissertation is set as follows: What are the antecedents and outcomes of salespeople humor usage in sales communications? The research question establishes a linear view on why or when humor messages are created by salespeople, and then why or how humor messages as an interpersonal sales communication tool influence various performance outcomes in a professional selling context. Aiming to theoretically install new dependent relationships in this respect, the body of the research framework consists of the following two components:

1. How do socio-psychological variables determine humor usage by professional salespeople? This study seeks to expand the knowledge of salespeople behavior with support from sociological and psychological foundations.

2. How does humor usage in sales communications influence key outcomes that are strategically important for salespeople? This study aims to theoretically explain the linkage between humor usage and field sales results that managers constantly focus on.

Statistically speaking, the research question is two-fold:

1. What are the directions and magnitudes of the parameters for the effects of antecedent variables identified in the theoretical framework on humor usage?

2. What are the directions and magnitudes of the parameters for the effects of humor usage on the outcome variables identified in the theoretical framework?
In summary, this dissertation seeks to identify the antecedents and outcomes of humor usage in a comprehensive theoretical framework to describe how a sense of humor works in professional selling. The theoretical framework will be built and tested through a quantitative research procedure involving multiple steps, and will be based on extant humor theories in psychology and sociology.

**Contribution of Research**

The dissertation may potentially contribute to multiple research disciplines. Primarily, marketing research can benefit from the research findings. If the research gap is bridged, researchers and practitioners in marketing can learn how humor functions in the sales process, and how to promote the creation and usage of humor by salespeople. The empirical approach based on quantitative measures potentially offers a much clearer picture to inform researchers and practitioners about the strengths of quantifiable linear relationships between the key variables studied. Thus, this approach is more advantageous than many reported cases, interviews, and anecdotes about humor usage in sales often published in trade journals and newspapers. Based on the research findings, business managers, especially those in charge of sales, can obtain useful information about how to enhance the performance outcomes by the sales force. Additionally, in the areas of sociology, organizational communication, or personnel psychology, a study about the application of humor in field sales communications may not only broaden the extant studies of humor as hedonic stimulus in communications, but also add rich information into the understanding of sales force emotional intelligence.
Outline of Dissertation

The rest of the dissertation is organized as follows. After the introductory Chapter 1, Chapter 2 provides a literature review of humor theories and their applications in psychology, sociology, and marketing. Chapter 3 contains the theoretical framework built with a series of hypotheses linking humor usage to its antecedents and outcomes in professional selling. Chapter 4 describes the research methodology used in subsequent quantitative analysis. Chapter 5 details the statistical results. Chapter 6 provides a detailed discussion of findings, together with theoretical and practical implications, limitations, and future research recommendations.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Humor theories are rooted in anthropology, sociology, and psychology (Feinberg, 1971; Ziv, 1984; Apte, 1985), while applied humor frameworks can be found in communications and marketing since many decades ago (e.g., Speck, 1991; Eisend, 2009). In this chapter, basic humor theories are first reviewed, followed by key findings and noteworthy frameworks in sociology, psychology, and marketing that were built upon the basic humor theories.

Fundamentals of Humor Theories

Based on Incongruity Theory developed by Berlyne (1960), Incongruity-Resolution Theory explains how messages and cues are processed by recipients as humorous (LaFave, Haddad, and Maesen, 1976; Duncan, Smeltzer, and Leap, 1990). According to Incongruity-Resolution Theory, a message recipient experiences humor when she or he first cognitively recognizes the incongruity in the message, followed by accurate interpretation of the message. Following this format of incongruity creation and resolution, the message recipients may feel amused upon perceiving various ideas of the “unexpected” (Speck, 1991; Alden, Hoyer, and Lee, 1993; Elpers, Mukherjee, and Hoyer, 2004; Lee and Lim, 2008). Thus, to deliver messages in the selling process evaluated by customers as humorous, a salesperson must identify and manifest verbal cues that are inconsistent with customers’ routine expectations for the interaction.

Warren and McGraw (2014) identified a broad range of humorous stimuli, including a variety of visual, intellectual, and physical elements. For example, a comedy book can be a visual stimulus, or a joke being told can be an intellectual stimulus,
whereas tickling can be a physical stimulus. They further articulated that, when a stimulus is perceived to be humorous, individuals usually have up to three simultaneous responses: cognitive responses, such as comprehension of the humorous message; emotional responses, such as feeling positive emotions; and behavioral responses, such as laughter. As humorous stimuli vary, the responses vary as well.

Having recognized the complexity of the humor mechanism, Warren and McGraw (2014) further proposed four conditions for a humorous stimulus to take effect: (1) surprise, (2) simultaneity, (3) a violation, and (4) a benign appraisal. Surprise occurs when individuals feel something is unexpected. It is in line with the cognitive incongruity concept. Simultaneity as a condition requires the interpretation of the incongruity to take place at the same time as it occurs. A violation requires a negative condition, often indicated by the breaches of a variety of social, cultural, linguistic, and logical norms. For example, an accent can be considered a breach of linguistic norm. However, all the first three conditions are necessary but not sufficient conditions for the humor message to take effect. Lastly, a benign appraisal must appear. A benign appraisal by the recipients appears via one of the following conditions: play, resolution, misattribution, safety, distance, or low commitment.

According to Warren and McGraw (2014), play is a condition in which individuals are disengaged with thinking over serious matters. For example, violent fighting between two individuals is usually accompanied by negative emotions such as confrontation or anger, but sometimes people may fight each other just for fun. Resolution is understood as a condition in which surprises are explained or resolved. For
example, an illogical action is featured in a movie, and when additional clues are offered at the end of the movie, the illogical action is well explained. Misattribution is understood as a condition in which a violation becomes socially acceptable. For example, an aggressive comment about a manager from his subordinate is perceived as reasonable because the subordinate has been mistreated by the manager. Safety is understood as a condition in which a threatening stimulus becomes unthreatening. For example, an innocent kid is bullied by his school mates but the assault ends with no harm. Distance is understood as a condition in which a violation is perceived as physically, socially, or temporally remote. For example, a person does not feel overwhelmed about a car accident happened to him when the accident is viewed retrospectively about twenty years later. Low commitment is understood as a condition in which individuals do not follow a norm such that a violation of norm is of no personal relevance. For example, when a trusted politician is found corrupted, people often find that making fun of him is appropriate.

Based on the understanding of McGraw and Warren’s (2014) Benign Violation Theory, individual differences in humor message processing can be explained. McGraw and Warren’s (2014) argued that humor takes effect when the following three conditions are met:

1. A violation exists in information processing,
2. The violation is appraised as benign,
3. Violation and benign appraisal occur simultaneously.
In the example of the opening story in the introduction, Bob was late to his appointment at a prospect’s office. Instead of telling the prospect that he spent some time in the restroom, Bob said “I really had to drop the Browns off at the Super Bowl before I came in.” After thinking about what “dropping the Browns off at the Super Bowl” means, the prospect realized this verbiage is another expression for “bowel movement.” The expression became a violation of an expected social norm. Yet, as a football fan, the prospect appraised the message as benign due to the descriptive connotation of the verbiage. When violation and benign occur at the same time, the prospect started laughing. Thus, Bob effectively created a humor message that is a benign violation of a social norm. McGraw and Warren’s (2014) *Benign Violation Theory* is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Benign Violation Theory (taken from McGraw and Warren, 2014, p. 75).
Research on Humor in Psychology and Sociology

The different facets of humor’s psychological benefits have been studied in research. Previous research found that humor not only is used for relieving intrinsic stress (Dixon, 1980), but also helps build personal relationships and cope with interpersonal tension (Ziv, 1984). Many studies have highlighted the positive role of humor in effectively building and maintaining interpersonal relationships (Li et al., 2002; Sprecher and Regan, 2002; McGee and Shevlin, 2009; Cann, Zapata, and Davis, 2011). A good sense of humor can elicit many positive signals, therefore inducing personal appeal and enhanced interpersonal communications (Cann, Calhoun, and Banks, 1997; Martin, 2007). In particular, individuals appear to be creative and intelligent when using humor in relationship building (Miller, 2000; Cann and Calhoun, 2001). Individuals equipped with a good sense of humor are also viewed as sociable and self-confident (Chafe, 2007).

Humor has been widely used across diverse cultures. Feinberg (1971) found that in many well-known cultures, humor is manifested through techniques commonly known as exaggeration, disguise, and unforeseen changes of reasoning, to name a few. Based on the evidence collected from hundreds of ethnic groups, Apte (1985) stated that humor is widely used in interpersonal communications to achieve positive outcomes. In empirical research, Ruch (1992) found that people from the U.S., Europe, and the Middle East use humor in similar ways. Other studies also found a great similarity in the use of humor by people from Asia and North America (Nevo, Nevo, and Yin, 2001; Chen and Martin, 2007). At the same time, social and cultural differences in the use of humor have been recognized by other researchers (e.g., Toncar, 2001; Lee and Lim, 2008; Hatzithomas,
Zotos, and Boutsouki, 2011; Laroche et al., 2011; Cruthirds et al., 2012). For example, the British people are found to use more subtle, understatement-type humor because the culture is more tolerant of ambiguity, while Americans like to employ more straightforward, ludicrous humor because of the high uncertainty-avoidance culture (Toncar, 2001). Another study found that it is common for Arab men to use aggressive humor in jokes with women because of the male-dominant culture (Kalliny, Cruthirds, and Minor, 2006). Interpersonal relationship characteristics in a culture silently influence how humor is expressed between individuals. Humor usage tends to be culturally bound because the cognitive meaning of humor messages is rooted in the cultural environment people live in (Martin et al., 2003).

From a socio-psychological perspective, Martin et al. (2003) specified four humor styles: affiliative humor, self-enhancing humor, aggressive humor, and self-defeating humor. The Affiliative Humor Style is portrayed by jokes and flirts in a social setting where the entertainer attempts to amuse others in exchange for acceptance. The Aggressive Humor Style is portrayed by mockery, sarcasm, irony, or teasing that tends to amuse others without considering the consequence. The Self-Enhancing Humor Style is described as an optimistic viewpoint on life through coping and fun seeking. The Self-Defeating Humor Style is described as self-mockery or self-downgrading by those who tend to be self-perceived as inferior or incompetent. The humor styles typology developed by Martin et al. (2003) illustrates the different positive and negative humor styles used in interpersonal communications.
Research on Humor in Marketing

In the professional selling field of marketing research, Wagle (1985) suggested that humor be employed to achieve improved results in the industrial selling process, particularly by improving the sales presentation and advancing the buyer-seller relationship. However, little has been done about humor in sales research since then. Considered “the highest form of language mastery,” humor has been regarded as a useful technique in professional selling (Gitomer, 2004). As Gitomer (2004, p. 17) underscored, “If you can make ’em laugh, you can make ’em buy.” The recommendation has shed light on what a sense of humor does for salespeople. In general, being fun loving is associated with greater sales ability for professional salespeople (Maxwell et al., 2005). Given that humor is useful in face-to-face communications (Galloway, 2010; Cann, Zapata, and Davis, 2011), it is expected that humor can be used as a valuable technique in the various occasions of professional selling.

On the other hand, abundant literature about humor can be found in the advertising field in marketing research. In the past decades, researchers have focused on humorous advertising in understanding the humor effect in marketing (Eisend, 2009). In empirical and experimental research in marketing, a general premise about the humor effect in marketing is that humorous messages can create positive emotional reactions through surprising the audience (Elpers, Mukherjee, and Hoyer, 2004). From this perspective, humor in advertising and other types of marketing communications has been shown to have high effectiveness in stimulating consumers’ positive psychological responses (Eisend, 2009). In greater detail, humorous advertising is found to have
positive effects in creating awareness and attention (Lee and Mason, 1999), positive attitudes toward the ad (Cline, Altsech, and Kellaris, 2003), positive attitudes toward the brand (Weinberger and Gulas, 1992), positive attitudes toward the product advertised (Chung and Zhao, 2003), and ad memorability (Cline and Kellaris, 2007). Humorous advertising is also a popular technique across countries (McCullough and Taylor, 1993; Laroche et al., 2011; Cruthirds et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2014).

In advertising research, Speck’s (1991) typology of humorous advertising styles, which consists of incongruity-based, arousal-safety-based, and disparagement-based humor, has been used in many studies dealing with humorous advertising (Spotts, Weinberger, and Parsons, 1997; Beard, 2008; Lee and Lim, 2008; Hatzithomas, Zotos, and Boutsouki, 2011). The humor styles typology developed by Martin et al. (2003) provided a greater discernment into the use of humor in advertising. While sharing a lot in common with Speck’s (1991) theoretical foundation, Martin et al.’s (2003) humor style typology defines the different types of humor styles as tactics of humorous advertising. In addition, Martin et al.’s (2003) humor style constructs have demonstrated high reliability when examined by other researchers (Kazarian and Martin, 2006; Galloway, 2010). The Humor Styles Questionnaire in Martin et al.’s (2003) study that contains four dimensions of humor has been applied in advertising to explain how the different types of humorous advertisements affect consumer responses from a psychological perspective (Cruthirds et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2014). Yet, none of the humor styles typologies has been applied in the field of professional selling.
Summary of Literature Review

Humor has been studied from many different angles in the literature. Linking “surprise” with “laughter,” the humor mechanism creates remarkable benefits for human beings. Across the theoretical and empirical paradigms established in sociology, psychology, and marketing, humorous stimuli have been found to enhance the cognitive and affective outcomes in various circumstances of interpersonal communications. Over the past decades, the use of humorous marketing messages has been incessantly accentuated for achieving better consumer responses in field marketing. Nonetheless, how to use humor still demands greater attention in the professional selling field of marketing research.
Chapter 3: Research Framework

Based on the rich description of salesperson behavior generated by sales researchers, a set of key variables are identified. The hypothesized relationships are then elaborated. Extant psychological and sociological paradigms are used in theoretical construction of the hypotheses. The theories help to clarify how socio-psychological factors influence humor usage in the sales process, and how humor usage in sales communications, in turn, influences a number of strategic outcomes.

In this chapter, a research framework that consists of a total of ten hypotheses is elaborated. The first group of hypotheses describes the effects of the antecedents to salespeople humor usage, followed by the second group of hypotheses that investigates the outcomes of humor usage.

Antecedents to Salespeople’s Humor Usage

Creativity. Creativity is understood as novel ideas that are valuable in problem solving (Amabile, 1983; Lassk and Shepherd, 2013). As Lassk and Shepherd (2013) pointed out, creativity is represented by those ideas that are not only new and innovative, but also “appropriate,” which means they “must be useful and actionable” in the work process (p. 26). Previous research has found that salespeople’s creativity is crucial in achieving superior performance in the professional selling process (Wang and Netemeyer, 2004; Agnihotri et al., 2013).

A creative salesperson handles sales tasks better through “making unique and useful adjustments” (Lassk and Shepherd, 2013, p. 29). The essence of humor lies in the idea of “incongruity,” which is reflected by unusual, unexpected, or surprising
occurrences, most of which are verbal in the professional selling environment. Under this umbrella, an extended version of this humor theory may illustrate how salesperson creativity induces the creation of humor. In the study of linguistic humor, McGraw and Warren’s (2010) *Benign Violation Theory* explains how a humor message is produced in new dimensions. According to this theory, humor occurs when a “benign situation” and a “violation situation” are created simultaneously. Thus, no humor is in effect if an intended message is too benign, or likewise, if it is too much of a violation. In reality, a “benign situation” and a “violation situation” do not simultaneously occur. Thus, to manifest such an overlapping condition, it requires a person to be creative.

Similarly, previous research has employed Fauconnier and Turner’s (2002) *Conceptual Integration Theory* in explaining humor creation (Dzanic and Berberovic, 2010). Dzanic and Berberovic (2010) suggested that humor is created as a product of conceptual integration, or the “blended space” (as compared to the “generic space”). For example, In the first sales humor example provided in the introduction section, “dropping the Browns off at the Super Bowl” and “going to bathroom” are blended to create a sense of incongruity. In this circumstance, humor is effectively produced in the “blended space.” In order to successfully create incongruity in the “blended space,” salespeople are likely to be creative and go beyond the routine “generic space” of thinking.

Empirical results have also revealed a positive relationship between intellectual ability and the sense of humor, insisting that humor accounts for an integral part of a creative mind (Shade, 1991; Howrigan and MacDonald, 2008). Based on the theoretical
and empirical evidence, salespeople’s creativity and their humor tendency are closely associated, and the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H1:** Salespeople’s creativity positively influences their humor usage in sales communications.

**Learning orientation.** Learning orientation is understood as salespeople’s engagement in improving their skill set in sales (Ahearne et al., 2010). Through self-motivated acquisition of new knowledge, learning orientation helps salespeople to achieve continuously improved results in the professional selling process (Sujan, Weitz, and Kumar, 1994; Wang and Netemeyer, 2002). Does learning also help a salesperson to form and advance his or her body of humor?

Humor has long been known to be a high-context cue communicable by the in-groups only (Wolosin, 1975; Hall, 1976). In addition, the positive effects of an expressed humor message can be situational and perishable (Carroll, 1989). Thus, humor is often situated in the buyer’s context and embedded in defined relationships. Although humor can be taught (Ziv, 1984), it is difficult for a salesperson to come up with ways to deliver the “fresh” and the “right” humor without understanding the buyer’s social and communication styles, the relational boundaries, and the business context.

Previous research has found that individuals with openness- and extraversion-type of traits are more capable of producing humor (Greven et al., 2008; Greengross, Martin, and Miller, 2012), implying that the intention to use humor is a matter of social interaction and learning. Bandura’s (1963) *Social Learning Theory* holds that, through active observation and imitation of others, an individual’s learning takes place in a social,
interpersonal context. In view of this theory, salespeople’s motivation to develop useful interpersonal communication skills drives active social learning. A learning orientation helps salespeople to adopt novel and different approaches in sales, and to acquire knowledge from mistakes and failures (Sujan, Weitz, and Kumar, 1994). Since humor cannot be easily “copied,” a salesperson grows his or her own body of humor through an adaptive learning process, particularly based on how peers use humor and how customers react to different types of humor. Furthermore, a learning orientation may prompt a salesperson to frequently test the usefulness of his or her humor messages in different selling situations or through “humor failures.” Consequently, she or he can become better at reacting to sophisticated and unanticipated selling situations by effectively incorporating humor in sales communications, and the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Salespeople’s learning orientation positively influences their humor usage in sales communications.

**Sales effort.** Sales effort is characterized by “the force, energy, or activity by which work is accomplished” (Brown and Peterson 1994, p. 71). Sales effort underlies an intrinsic, deep-down motivation to achieve better sales results (Dubinsky and Skinner, 2002; Jaramillo and Mulki, 2008), and acts as a critical internal driver for salespeople to perform above and beyond average (Krishnan, Netemeyer, and Boles, 2002; Jaramillo and Mulki, 2008; Badrinarayanan and Laverie, 2011).

From the customer’s perspective, customer decision making may be altered by the effort of a salesperson (Mohr and Bitner, 1995). In professional selling, exerting effort often means a salesperson is self-motivated to approach the buyer, and keenly attain the
buyer’s trust and commitment. According to Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1982), interpersonal connections are built upon the emotional bonds and once built successfully, interpersonal attachment can last for a long period. This theory further contends that, when attempting to create and secure interpersonal attachment, an individual usually experiences attachment anxiety, a fear that a proposed relationship would be rejected (Brennan, Clark, and Shaver, 1998).

This theory helps to explain why salespeople tend to use humor when taking part in the sales effort. In an attempt to form an attachment with a buyer, humor can provoke laughter and positive reactions, which foster the emotional bond. Via the entertaining mechanism, humor can serve as a key to emotionally turn a distant prospect back on when this prospect experiences attachment anxiety. When humor is present in the selling or relationship building process, a salesperson’s effort tends to result in creating pleasant feelings for the buyer, establishing emotional bonds with the buyer, and ultimately “entice” the buyer into commitment and a long-term relationship. Therefore, the willingness to use humor tends to be an expected outcome of salespeople’s effort in establishing interpersonal connections, expressed as:

H3: Salespeople’s sales effort positively influences their humor usage in sales communications.

Role stress. Role stress in salespeople is understood as the psychological tension made up of role conflict, role ambiguity, and task overload (Singh, 1998; Johnson and Sohi, 2014). Role ambiguity, or a lack of role clarity, refers to salespeople’s weak understanding of his or her job requirements, job responsibilities, and/or job expectations
Role conflict refers to salespeople’s inability to meet the requirements and expectations of customers and supervisors simultaneously (Flaherty, Dahlstrom, and Skinner, 1999). Task overload refers to salespeople’s inability to leverage limited resources to meet all the requirements ranging between servicing current customers and engaging in boundary spanning tasks. A salesperson’s job performance outcomes depend on if he or she can effectively overcome the three “role stressors,” which have been shown to have negative impacts on a salesperson’s emotional stability in the completion of sales tasks (Behrman and Perreault, 1984; Goolsby, 1992; Johnson and Sohi, 2014).

Individuals have been known to utilize humor for the relief of inner stress (Dixon, 1980; Ziv, 1984; Kuiper and Martin, 1998). The relief effort, which is “the effort to manage psychological stress” (Lazarus, 2001, p. 45), is commonly referred to as coping. Coping Theory, also called Cognitive Stress Theory, describes the stress coping process, in which psychological stress brings forth a response in the individual for him or her to better adapt to the stressful situation such that potential negative consequences can be prevented (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). The stress coping process via the expression of humor, according to Abel (2002), is based on the “cognitive-affective shift” mechanism generated by humor. As he explained, humor “…afford(s) the opportunity for exploring cognitive alternatives in response to stressful situations and reducing the negative affective consequences of a real or perceived threat” (Abel, 2002, p. 366). From this perspective, the “incongruity” produced by a salesperson is a reaction that helps him or her to create a positive and realistic strategy in managing the work surroundings. The
stressful internal status experienced by salespeople may become less intimidating cognitively and affectively.

To remain at a high level of performance, salespeople who experience role ambiguity, role conflict, and task overload tend to find ways to effectively cope with these role stressors. When they face uncertainty in job requirements, customer and supervisor expectations, and limited resource allocation, using humor in sales communications can be considered a natural way of resolving the internal inconsistency. Thus, humor usage reflects the common sense of salespeople in mentally challenging selling situations. The following hypotheses related to salespeople’s use of humor are proposed:

H4: Salespeople’s role ambiguity positively influences their humor usage in sales communications.

H5: Salespeople’s role conflict positively influences their humor usage in sales communications.

H6: Salespeople’s task overload positively influences their humor usage in sales communications.

Outcomes of Salespeople’s Humor Usage

Relationship quality. Relationship quality is understood as “the degree of appropriateness of a relationship from the customer’s perspective” (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, and Gremler, 2002, p. 231). Relationship quality has been considered an analytic, multi-dimensional measure of business relationship (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, and Gremler, 2002). Previous research has included trust,
commitment, and relationship satisfaction as the three key dimensions of relationship quality (Crosby, Evans, and Cowles, 1990; Dant and Schul, 1992; Gundlach, Achrol, and Mentzer, 1995; Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, and Gremler, 2002; Palmatier et al. 2006).

As a core dimension of relationship quality, trust is understood as the customers’ “confidence in an exchange partner’s reliability and integrity” (Morgan and Hunt, 1994, p. 23). Customers usually develop trust after making positive cognitive assessment of the current and future relationship with a seller (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). If the seller can demonstrate accountability and positive outcomes when addressing the customer’s concerns, the customer tends to perceive the seller to be trustworthy (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, and Gremler, 2002).

The second dimension, commitment, is understood as “an enduring desire to maintain a valued relationship” by the customers (Moorman, Zaltman, and Deshpande, 1992, p. 316). Customers’ commitment to a business relationship with a seller has been considered a consequential step after developing trust of the seller (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). As such, commitment is also a cognitive process in the evaluation of a business relationship with the seller.

The third dimension of relationship quality, relationship satisfaction, is understood as the customers’ “positive affective response to cumulative assessments of prior interaction experiences with their partner” (Dant, Weaven, and Baker, 2013, p. 283). As an affective dimension, relationship satisfaction determines if the customers are emotionally prone to continuing the business relationship with a seller by upholding necessary relational effort (Dant, Weaven, and Baker, 2013).
Previous research in psychology has portrayed the positive role of humor in relationship outcomes, such as those in romantic relationships (Feingold, 1992; Sprecher and Regan, 2002; Cann, Zapata, and Davis, 2011). Individuals with a good sense of humor are often expectantly considered self-confident (Chafe, 2007) and intelligent (Cann and Calhoun, 2001). How does the use of humor influence the cognitive and affective dimensions of relationship quality can be explained by two theoretical perspectives.

Uncertainty Reduction Theory (Berger, 1987) suggests that the reduction of relationship uncertainty in cognitive perceptions causes a decrease of relational distance. Based on this theory, Graham (1995) found that humor usage in interpersonal communications helps to improve relationship quality through uncertainty reduction. In the initial stage of a relationship, a buyer’s uncertainly about the salesperson is likely to be high. In this circumstance, the enjoyment elicited by the expression of humor can facilitate the buyer’s understanding of the salesperson’s charming characteristics. According to the theory, relationship distance between the two parties decreases due to better understanding. As a result, the buyer becomes more well-informed about the salesperson’s abilities, and senses the salesperson to be more accountable. Through this mechanism, the salesperson gains greater trust from the buyer. When the buyer feels more comfortable in working with the salesperson, greater commitment to the buyer-seller relationship takes place.

From an affective perspective, Aronson’s (2011) Reward Theory of Attraction helps to elucidate how humor improves relationship quality. According to this theory, an
individual is attracted to another who brings social benefits at little or no cost. In other words, a buyer inclines to develop interpersonal relationships with those who offer the best rewards without requesting anything in return. By bringing a buyer amusement and laughter, a salesperson’s humor offers an emotional reward to the buyer, evoking the buyer’s relationship satisfaction as well as the tendency for closer relationships (Martin et al., 2003; Miczo, Averbeck, and Mariani, 2009). Therefore, it is expected that a good sense of humor seen in a salesperson influences buyers’ cognitive and affective processes through which relationship is developed over time.

As such, it may be faster and easier for buyers to develop trust and commitment in the business relationship when being approached by humorous salespeople. After the business connections are established, buyers may also feel more pleased by the humorously entertaining salespeople in routine communications. Therefore, the following hypotheses related to humor and elements of relationship quality are proposed:

H7: Salespeople’s humor usage in sales communications positively influences customers’ trust.

H8: Salespeople’s humor usage in sales communications positively influences customers’ commitment.

H9: Salespeople’s humor usage in sales communications positively influences customers’ relationship satisfaction.

**Salespeople’s job performance.** Salespeople’s humor usage can enhance sales performance through improving the buyer’s affective and cognitive experiences. Derived from the early thoughts of Spencer (1860) and Freud (1905), Relief Theory holds that
humor produces laughter, which triggers a recipient’s instantaneous release of psychological tension. The relief effect has been considered the primary benefit of humor (Schaeffer, 1981). Along this line of thinking, it becomes clear that humor expressed by salespeople in the selling process acts as an ice breaker, and through creating laughter, salespeople can reduce the buyer’s tension and form a pleasant atmosphere in the negotiation room. As a result, salespeople are more likely to make a sale.

In addition to the affective mechanism, humor may also have utility in the buyer’s cognitive information processing during the selling process. The Elaboration Likelihood Model, or the ELM, (Cacioppo and Petty, 1984; Petty and Cacioppo, 1986) provides an explanatory base for a buyer’s cognitive process during a sales call. The ELM describes a dual-process of persuasion — central route (high elaboration) and peripheral route (low elaboration). Elaboration denotes the intellectual process of reasoning over an argument (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). According to the ELM, when a buyer’s elaboration is low, his or her cognitive status remains unchanged via the peripheral route. When the elaboration is high, the buyer engages in the processing of arguments provided by the salesperson, possibly leading to cognitive changes in the attitude toward the product.

In view of Incongruity-Resolution Theory, when salespeople deliver an effective humor piece embedded in the argument message, the buyer first recognizes the incongruity in the message, and then accurately interprets the argument message in the cognitive process. Thus, humor causes a higher degree of information processing presented by the central route in the ELM, in which the buyer cognitively judges the rationality in salespeople’s argument message. When humor is present during a sales
presentation, the buyer is more likely to engage in elaboration of the salesperson’s argument and logic, leading to a greater chance of attitude changes and a buying decision. Along the incongruity-resolution line of effect, salespeople are more likely to make a sale to the buyer.

The influences of humor usage on salespeople’s job performance may also be explained from a behavioral perspective. In order to be a master of sales, salespeople are expected to recognize the subtle differences among customers (Spiro and Weitz, 1990; Sujan, Weitz, and Kumar, 1994; Franke and Park, 2006). This premise has been highlighted as adaptive selling, which is “the altering of sales behaviors during a customer interaction or across customer interactions based on perceived information about the nature of the selling situation” (Spiro and Weitz, 1990, p. 62). If a salesperson understands how to communicate in the unique situations presented by his or her customers, he or she can serve customer needs in a better way than others do and better sales performance will follow (Spiro and Weitz, 1990; Roman and Iacobucci, 2010).

Humor messages are said to be situational, high-context cues (Wolosin, 1975; Carroll, 1989). In applying Benign Violation Theory, McGraw and Warren (2014) proposed that each individual customer is situated in unique conditions when encountering humor messages. Salespeople with stronger skills in humorous communications are more adept at customizing humor in different sales situations and applying suitable humor messages in different contexts to achieve better results in sales communications. These humor messages created and expressed by salespeople tend to be more effective in helping salespeople adapt to customers’ unique situations because the
messages are based on the knowledge of each customer and a good understanding of each situation. When salespeople adapt more effectively to customer needs and styles, higher sales volume and better performance can be accomplished. Overall, from affective, cognitive, and behavioral perspectives, it is logical to establish the causation between the use of humor and salespeople’s job performance, as expressed below:

H10: Salespeople’s humor usage in sales communications positively influences their job performance.

Summary of Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework containing the ten hypotheses is presented in Figure 2. The most important antecedents and outcomes of salespeople humor usage are drawn from the marketing and sales literature. It is argued that humor usage by salespeople is positively influenced by higher creativity (H1), stronger learning orientation (H2), greater sales effort (H3), and a higher degree of role stress represented by role ambiguity (H4), role conflict (H5), and task overload (H6). At the other end, humor usage by salespeople may positively influence customer relationship quality in terms of trust (H7), commitment (H8), relationship satisfaction (H9), as well as salespeople job performance (H10).
Figure 2. Theoretical framework.

**Antecedents**
- Creativity (H1)
- Learning Orientation (H2)
- Sales Effort (H3)
- Role Stress
  - Role Ambiguity (H4)
  - Role Conflict (H5)
  - Task Overload (H6)

**Outcomes**
- Relationship Quality
  - Trust (H7)
  - Commitment (H8)
  - Relationship Satisfaction (H9)
- Job Performance (H10)
Chapter 4: Research Methodology

Research Instrument

To examine the directions and magnitudes of hypothesized relationships, a research instrument was developed, and then used as an online questionnaire on Qualtrics.com. The research instrument contained selected questions soliciting respondents’ quantitative evaluation of the variables studied. According to Miller and Salkind (2002), adopting measurement scales from previous studies is a viable way to ensure the validity of the measures. If a number of expert researchers have already used a set of questions to measure a concept in a reputable publication, this measurement scale is more likely to be reliable and valid. Thus, measurement scales used previously that are relevant and applicable in this research context were identified. All the measurement items are based on 5-point Likert-type scales, with 1 indicating “Strongly Disagree” and 5 indicating “Strongly Agree.”

As provided in Table 1, the measure of Creativity was adapted from Zhou and George (2001). They used this thirteen-item scale to assess salespeople’s ability in the generation of novel and useful ideas at work. This scale has been frequently used in other studies on salespeople creativity (Rego et al., 2007; Lassk and Shepherd, 2013).
Table 1

| Measure of Creativity |  |  |
|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Creativity            |  |  |
| CRE1                  | I often suggest new ways to achieve goals or objectives. |
| CRE2                  | I often come up with new and practical ideas to improve performance. |
| CRE3                  | I always search out new technologies, processes, techniques, and/or product ideas. |
| CRE4                  | I often suggest new ways to increase quality. |
| CRE5                  | I am a good source of creative ideas. |
| CRE6                  | I am not afraid to take risks. |
| CRE7                  | I always promote and champion ideas to others. |
| CRE8                  | I always exhibit creativity on the job when given the opportunity to. |
| CRE9                  | I always develop adequate plans and schedules for the implementation of new ideas. |
| CRE10                 | I often have new and innovative ideas. |
| CRE11                 | I often come up with creative solutions to problems. |
| CRE12                 | I often have a fresh approach to problems. |
| CRE13                 | I often suggest new ways of performing work tasks. |

As provided in Table 2, the measure of *Learning Orientation* was adapted from Sujan, Weitz, and Kumar (1994). This seven-item scale reflects salespeople’s continuous attempt to update skills and knowledge about customers. This perspective has been
adopted by other sales researchers (e.g., Wang and Netemeyer, 2002; Ahearne et al., 2010).

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure of Learning Orientation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning Orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOR1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOR2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOR3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOR4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOR5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOR6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOR7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Reverse-coded questions.

As provided in Table 3, the measure of Sales Effort was adapted from Brown and Peterson (1994). Sales effort is understood as the outcome of intrinsic or extrinsic task motivation found in salespeople (Sujan, Weitz, and Kumar, 1994; Jaramillo and Mulki, 2008). Brown and Peterson’s (1994) measure is a self-reported assessment of the amount of overall effort in sales, number of hours worked, and number of calls made compared to
a reference point. This three-item scale has been used by other sales researchers (e.g., Wang and Netemeyer, 2004; Badrinarayanan and Laverie, 2011).

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure of Sales Effort</th>
<th>Sales Effort</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EFT1</td>
<td>My overall sales effort is among the most in my company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFT2</td>
<td>The number of hours I use at work every week is among the most in my company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFT3</td>
<td>The number of customer calls I make every week is among the most in my company.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The measures for the three role stressors – role ambiguity, role conflict, and task overload – were adapted from Johnson and Sohi (2014). The first two dimensions were originally developed by Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman (1970). The three measures are provided in Table 4.
Table 4

Measure of Role Stress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role Ambiguity</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RAM1</td>
<td>I am certain about how much authority I have in my position.*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAM2</td>
<td>I know what my responsibilities are.*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAM3</td>
<td>I know exactly what is expected of me.*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAM4</td>
<td>My goals and objectives have been clearly defined.*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAM5</td>
<td>I am certain how frequently I should call on my customers.*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role Conflict</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RCO1</td>
<td>I work under incompatible policies and guidelines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCO2</td>
<td>I receive incompatible requests from two or more people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCO3</td>
<td>I have to work under vague directives and orders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCO4</td>
<td>I have to do things that should be done differently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCO5</td>
<td>I have to work on unnecessary things.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task Overload</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TOV1</td>
<td>I do not have enough time to identify and search for new customers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOV2</td>
<td>I do not have enough time to call on potential customers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOV3</td>
<td>With my current workload, I am unable to generate an adequate amount of new business.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOV4</td>
<td>My customers would like me to call on them more frequently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOV5</td>
<td>I am able to maintain adequate after-sales service for all my customers.*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4: continued

TOV6 My customers are extremely happy with the level of service that I provide.*

TOV7 I do not have enough time to collect information about competitors’ activities.

TOV8 I need to be more responsive in dealing with competitive action.

TOV9 I need to react more quickly to competitors’ moves.

* Reverse-coded questions.

A three-item scale was developed for self-assessment of salespeople humor usage. Based on behavioral measurement of intended actions (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980), this study used three questions to measure the frequency of intended humor usage through salespeople’s self-assessment. The measure of humor usage is reported in Table 5.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure of Humor Usage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Humor Usage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HUM1</th>
<th>I frequently use humor in communicating with customers.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HUM2</td>
<td>I always use humor in interacting with my customers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HUM3</td>
<td>Humor is rarely used in my interactions with customers.*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Reverse-coded questions.
Relationship quality measures were adapted from Dant, Weaven, and Baker (2013), who used six items to measure trust, eleven items to measure commitment, and seven items to measure relationship satisfaction. The measurement items are provided in Table 6. Altogether, relationship quality is a second order construct consisting of trust, commitment, and relationship satisfaction measures. The scales were developed based on previous findings in relationship marketing (Crosby, Evans, and Cowles, 1990; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Palmatier et al., 2006).

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure of Relationship Quality</th>
<th>Trust</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TRU1</td>
<td>I can count on my customers to be honest in their dealings with me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRU2</td>
<td>My customers stand by their words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRU3</td>
<td>I can rely on my customers to keep the promises they make to me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRU4</td>
<td>My customers are sincere in their dealings with me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRU5</td>
<td>My customers can be counted on to do what is right.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRU6</td>
<td>I have great confidence in my customers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commitment</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CMT1</td>
<td>My customers and I have a mutually beneficial relationship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMT2</td>
<td>I enjoy working with my customers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMT3</td>
<td>It feels like my customers and I are constantly doing something for each other.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6: continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CMT4</th>
<th>I feel as though my customers and I are “in it together,”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CMT5</td>
<td>I feel that the values of my customers match my own.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMT6</td>
<td>My customers and I get along well together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMT7</td>
<td>My customers and I tend to share similar values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMT8</td>
<td>I am very committed to the relationship with my customers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMT9</td>
<td>I intend to continue doing business with my customers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMT10</td>
<td>I try my best to maintain relationship with my customers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMT11</td>
<td>I feel proud to belong to the relationship with my customers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship Satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RSA1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSA2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSA3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSA4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSA5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSA6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSA7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Objective measures have been less used to assess salesperson performance in behavioral research because sales numbers are hard to compare across companies or positions (Wang and Netemeyer, 2002; Homburg, Muller, and Klarmann, 2011; Johnson and Sohi, 2014). In view of previous suggestions, this study used self-reported salesperson performance measures. In this study, the job performance measure is adapted from Sujan, Weitz, and Kumar’s (1994) 7-item scale of self-reported salespeople job performance. The measurement items are provided in Table 7.

Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure of Job Performance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Job Performance</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PFM1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PFM2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PFM3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PFM4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PFM5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PFM6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PFM7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, measures of humor styles, sales orientation and customer orientation (SOCO), job satisfaction, customer service, and selling behavior were included in the research instrument. While others were primarily included as diagnostic measures, sales orientation and customer orientation were designed to be control variables for testing the
effect of humor usage on job performance (H10) due to their eminent role in salespeople performance (Leigh, Pullins, and Comer, 2001; Homburg, Wieseke, and Bornemann, 2009; Bagozzi et al., 2012). In this study, customer orientation and sales orientation were adapted from the refined 10-item SOCO scale created by Periatt, LeMay, and Chakrabarty (2004). The measurement items are provided in Table 8.

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures of Customer Orientation and Sales Orientation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Customer Orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COR1 I try to figure out what customer needs are.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COR2 A good employee has to have the customer's best interest in mind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COR3 I try to bring a customer with a problem together with a product/service that helps solve that problem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COR4 I offer the product/service that is best suited to the customer's problem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COR5 I try to find out what kind of products/services will be most helpful to a customer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales Orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOR1 I try to sell as much as I can rather than to satisfy a customer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOR2 It is necessary to stretch the truth in describing a product to a customer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOR3 I try to sell a customer all I can convince them to buy, even if I think</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8: continued

it is more than a wise customer would buy.

SOR4  I paint too rosy a picture of my product/service to make them sound as good as possible.

SOR5  I decide what product/service to offer on the basis of what I can convince customers to accept, not on the basis of what will satisfy them in the long run.

Additionally, the research instrument also includes the 32-item Humor Styles Questionnaire (Martin et al., 2003), a three-item job satisfaction measure (Netemeyer et al., 1997), a 6-item customer service measure (Jasmand, Blazevic, and de Ruyter, 2012), and a 6-item up-selling behavior measure (Jasmand, Blazevic, and de Ruyter, 2012), all of which are based on 5-point Likert-type scales. These additional measures are included for the purpose of respondent screening. Besides the Likert-type questions, 11 demographic questions are added. The research instrument contains a total of 147 questions.

Before the online questionnaire was launched, a pilot test was conducted on 25 MBA students who had previous sales experience. The respondents all reported that they fully understood the questions in the research instrument. Therefore, the pilot test indicated that the research instrument is satisfactory for field use with professional salespeople.
Data Collection Procedure

The empirical testing of the hypotheses required an appropriate sample of professional salespeople who were able to provide their self-assessment of interpersonal humor usage in the sales process. To achieve a good effect size, a target sample size of 400 to 500 was established. In addition to good effect size, a large sample size has statistical benefit. The inclusion of a large number of cases can increase the statistical robustness of the results from the research model, which consists of over ten latent variables. Thus, with 400 to 500 cases, a high case-to-variable ratio can be attained for statistically significant results (Hair et al., 2013). Lastly, a large sample size also helps resolve statistical issues caused by missing data. The statistical procedure is more tolerant of missing data using a larger sample size (Hair et al., 2013).

One type of referral sampling technique called respondent-driven sampling was used for the data collection (Salganik and Heckathorn, 2004). The referral sampling technique is a non-probability sampling technique based on respondents recruited through existing relationships (Burns, Veeck, and Bush, 2017). Based on surveys initiated through a social network, respondent-driven sampling is considered most useful for recruiting participants who form a specific group or population (Salganik and Heckathorn, 2004). In this study, the salespeople population is a specific population whose jobs and behavioral characteristics differ from the general population. Thus, respondent-driven sampling can help to obtain the insights from the salespeople population that are hard to obtain elsewhere. The respondent-driven sampling technique, which is based on requests for collaboration in a social network, may be advantageous over the traditional top-down
approach to referral sampling. If a researcher requests corporate managers to administer the survey in their organizations, salespeople respondents may respond to the survey with answers reflecting high social desirability. For example, respondents may be more likely to report that they have higher sales effort and better relationship quality with customers.

Following Burns, Veeck, and Bush’s (2017) computer-administered survey procedure, the research instrument was hosted on Qualtrics.com, a widely used online professional survey platform. Mechanical Turk, a major specialized survey research service that relies on the respondent-driven approach, was used as the referral platform. The participant network on Mechanical Turk includes hundreds of thousands of people who are consumers or business professionals (Rouse, 2015). More importantly, data collected through Mechanical Turk have been considered reliable (Rouse, 2015), and equivalent to other types of online surveys in terms of data quality (Casler, Bickel, and Hackett, 2013). Upon request, Mechanical Turk announced the survey in its participant network. Basically, affiliated salespeople who became interested in participating in the study after they noticed the announcement had the chance to fill out a questionnaire electronically by accessing the Qualtrics.com survey link provided at the end of the announcement. The announcement requesting research participation stayed on the message board of Mechanical Turk until it was removed a month later.

The announcement requesting for participation on Mechanical Turk is provided in Appendix 1, while the full online questionnaire is provided in Appendix 2. The Institutional Review Board Approval Certificate regarding the research instrument and the data collection procedure is provided in Appendix 3. In a one-month period from
mid-January to mid-February 2016, 525 respondents filled out the questionnaire on Qualtrics.com.

Prior to statistical analysis, data screening is a critical step to ensure only usable responses are included for further analysis (Hair et al., 2013). After the self-reported responses were examined, 407 of them are retained. The other 118 respondents were removed from the sample based on four reasons:

First, 75 respondents were dropped due to having a large portion of missing data. They have not provided either at least 80 percent of answers in the survey (that is, having missed 30 or more questions on the questionnaire) or any demographic information.

Second, after the positive and negative humor styles reported in the Humor Styles Questionnaire were compared, 17 respondents who reported extremely high negative humor styles together with extremely low positive humor styles were dropped. They did not qualify because this study essentially examines positive humor usage in sales communications.

Third, 13 respondents who reported extremely low job satisfaction, extremely low customer service, or extremely low up-selling behavior were dropped. These respondents were omitted because these conditions do not support positive humor usage in sales communications.

Fourth, after reverse-coded values were compared with the rest of the values in the questionnaire, 13 respondents who provided contradictory answers on over 50 percent of the reverse-coded measurement items were identified and then excluded, owing to their lip service.
Finally, 407 questionnaires were usable. Statistical analysis in this dissertation is based on a sample size of 407.

**Sample**

Based on the demographic questions in the research instrument, the characteristics of the 407 respondents are reported in Table 9. A total of 10 demographic and work-related psychographic variables are reported. Table 9 revealed that the sample obtained a large demographic variance in all the demographic variables and work-related psychographic variables.

**Table 9**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Characteristics</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Variable</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>46.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>34.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>10.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61-70</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>57.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>42.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidential</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9: continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>42.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>52.58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5.16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High School Graduate</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>19.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Degree</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>65.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Graduate Degree</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>14.99%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position Level</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entry-Level</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>31.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-Level</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>60.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior-Level</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>8.60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>62.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>24.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>7.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-35</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-40</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.49%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9: continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sales Job Intensity</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some Sales</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>22.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainly Sales</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>57.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Sales</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>20.64%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sales Job Complexity</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inside Sales</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>43.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside Sales</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>26.54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>30.46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Salary</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than $10,000</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>10.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10,000-29,999</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>25.31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$30,000-49,999</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>36.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000-69,999</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>15.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$70,000-89,999</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>8.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$90,000-109,999</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$110,000-129,999</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$150,000-199,999</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$200,000 and Above</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.49%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Industrial</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>17.44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Services</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5.90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9: continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Services</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>13.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharmaceutical and Healthcare</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>8.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reseller, Channel, and Wholesale</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>41.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Technology</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>13.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undisclosed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Statistical Procedure**

First, statistical tests were used at first to assess the randomness of missing values found in the dataset. Missing values were coded as zero and valid values were coded as one. Low correlation between missing values and valid values indicates that missing values were random. Next, Little’s (1988) Missing Completely at Random (MCAR) test produced a non-significant result, showing that the pattern of missing values was random. Thus, missing values were considered acceptable in the following statistical steps.

The eleven measures were assessed by validity and reliability tests in the second step. Following Churchill (1979), the measurement items were subject to investigation regarding whether they collectively represent the measure correctly. As a construct validity test, item-total correlation analysis was used to examine if any measurement item was inconsistent with the rest of the items. The results of the eleven item-to-total correlation analyses showed high coefficients above 0.70 for all the measurement items. The results provided strong evidence that the measurement items and their corresponding
measures correlate well, and thus, no measurement items needed to be eliminated (Field, 2005).

Construct validity was also assessed by items’ factor loadings, which are indicators of the amount of variation one measurement item captures for the scale (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). High factor loadings with significant $t$ values were sought when assessing construct validity of the measures (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). Confirmatory factor analysis was used to assess how well the measurement items load on their scale. The analysis was performed on each measure. In the eleven confirmatory factor analyses, factor loadings of all items were above 0.70 with significant $t$ values, revealing high construct validity of the eleven measures.

The reliability of the measures was tested by calculating the Cronbach $\alpha$ value (Cronbach, 1951). The Cronbach $\alpha$ values for the eleven measures were higher than the recommended point of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978). High reliability of the eleven measures was demonstrated. Together, through item-to-total correlation analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, and Cronbach $\alpha$ tests, the eleven measures demonstrated excellent properties of validity and reliability. The tests confirmed a good condition for subsequent statistical estimations. The results of the validity and reliability tests for the eleven measures are reported in Table 10.
Table 10
Results of Validity and Reliability Tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item-to-Total</th>
<th>Factor Loading</th>
<th>Reliability (Chronbach α)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creativity (CRE)</td>
<td>0.981</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRE1</td>
<td>0.896</td>
<td>0.913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRE2</td>
<td>0.908</td>
<td>0.923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRE3</td>
<td>0.860</td>
<td>0.881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRE4</td>
<td>0.906</td>
<td>0.922</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRE5</td>
<td>0.898</td>
<td>0.915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRE6</td>
<td>0.760</td>
<td>0.791</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRE7</td>
<td>0.886</td>
<td>0.903</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRE8</td>
<td>0.906</td>
<td>0.921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRE9</td>
<td>0.847</td>
<td>0.870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRE10</td>
<td>0.910</td>
<td>0.925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRE11</td>
<td>0.921</td>
<td>0.933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRE12</td>
<td>0.915</td>
<td>0.928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRE13</td>
<td>0.915</td>
<td>0.929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Orientation (LOR)</td>
<td>0.953</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOR1</td>
<td>0.852</td>
<td>0.897</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOR2</td>
<td>0.879</td>
<td>0.918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOR3</td>
<td>0.872</td>
<td>0.911</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 10: continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>LO</th>
<th>RO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LO4</td>
<td>0.894</td>
<td>0.929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LO5</td>
<td>0.658</td>
<td>0.729</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LO6</td>
<td>0.883</td>
<td>0.918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LO7</td>
<td>0.878</td>
<td>0.916</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sales Effort (EFT)</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.922</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFT1</td>
<td>0.823</td>
<td>0.921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFT2</td>
<td>0.851</td>
<td>0.935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFT3</td>
<td>0.852</td>
<td>0.935</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role Ambiguity (RAM)</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAM1</td>
<td>0.882</td>
<td>0.924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAM2</td>
<td>0.930</td>
<td>0.957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAM3</td>
<td>0.937</td>
<td>0.961</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAM4</td>
<td>0.924</td>
<td>0.953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAM5</td>
<td>0.877</td>
<td>0.921</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role Conflict (RCO)</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCO1</td>
<td>0.823</td>
<td>0.889</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCO2</td>
<td>0.866</td>
<td>0.917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCO3</td>
<td>0.835</td>
<td>0.896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCO4</td>
<td>0.844</td>
<td>0.903</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCO5</td>
<td>0.797</td>
<td>0.869</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Task Overload (TOV)</td>
<td>0.957</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 10: continued

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TOV1</td>
<td>0.857</td>
<td>0.891</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOV2</td>
<td>0.855</td>
<td>0.890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOV3</td>
<td>0.864</td>
<td>0.897</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOV4</td>
<td>0.784</td>
<td>0.830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOV5</td>
<td>0.801</td>
<td>0.845</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOV6</td>
<td>0.845</td>
<td>0.881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOV7</td>
<td>0.809</td>
<td>0.851</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOV8</td>
<td>0.811</td>
<td>0.850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOV9</td>
<td>0.775</td>
<td>0.820</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Humor Usage (HUM)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HUM1</td>
<td>0.864</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HUM2</td>
<td>0.811</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HUM3</td>
<td>0.761</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trust (TRU)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TRU1</td>
<td>0.909</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRU2</td>
<td>0.927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRU3</td>
<td>0.910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRU4</td>
<td>0.917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRU5</td>
<td>0.940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRU6</td>
<td>0.915</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commitment (CMT)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 10: continued

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CMT1</td>
<td>0.897</td>
<td>0.917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMT2</td>
<td>0.891</td>
<td>0.911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMT3</td>
<td>0.874</td>
<td>0.895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMT4</td>
<td>0.877</td>
<td>0.899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMT5</td>
<td>0.875</td>
<td>0.896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMT6</td>
<td>0.895</td>
<td>0.915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMT7</td>
<td>0.881</td>
<td>0.902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMT8</td>
<td>0.889</td>
<td>0.909</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMT9</td>
<td>0.900</td>
<td>0.919</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMT10</td>
<td>0.884</td>
<td>0.906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMT11</td>
<td>0.906</td>
<td>0.923</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship Satisfaction (RSA)</th>
<th>0.976</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RSA1</td>
<td>0.905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSA2</td>
<td>0.923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSA3</td>
<td>0.921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSA4</td>
<td>0.908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSA5</td>
<td>0.923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSA6</td>
<td>0.916</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSA7</td>
<td>0.879</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Performance (PFM)</th>
<th>0.957</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PFM1</td>
<td>0.856</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 10: continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PFM</th>
<th>Pillai's Trace</th>
<th>Wilks' Lambda</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PFM2</td>
<td>0.847</td>
<td>0.889</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PFM3</td>
<td>0.898</td>
<td>0.927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PFM4</td>
<td>0.871</td>
<td>0.907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PFM5</td>
<td>0.857</td>
<td>0.897</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PFM6</td>
<td>0.842</td>
<td>0.885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PFM7</td>
<td>0.795</td>
<td>0.848</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this study, the questionnaire was evaluated by a single source, which is each salesperson respondent. In this situation, common method bias may pose a threat for the data (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Following Harmon’s single factor test (Podsakoff et al., 2003), this study examined if common method bias existed. An exploratory factor analysis performed on all the measurement items combined shows that the first factor explains 40.15% of the variance. The result does not suggest common method bias using the dataset (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986; Podsakoff et al., 2003).
Chapter 5: Results

To examine the dependent relationships identified in the hypotheses, multivariate inquiries via multiple regression analysis were employed in this study (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). To examine the different phases of dependent relationships described in the hypotheses, separate multiple regression models were estimated using maximum likelihood regression approach by IBM SPSS Version 19. The first phase involved the dependent relationships between the antecedents of humor usage and self-reported humor usage by salespeople (H1 to H6). In the second phase, a number of multiple regression analyses were performed to examine the dependent relationships between the self-reported humor usage by salespeople and its outcomes, respectively (H7 to H10). In each multiple regression model, key control variables were included. Except for the demographics-type control variables, all the values were mean-centered to mitigate the influence of multicollinearity (Aiken and West, 1991). If a variance inflation factor (VIF) from a multicollinearity diagnosis test is larger than 10 in a multiple regression analysis, high multicollinearity arises as a concern for the corresponding variable (Hair et al., 2013). Thus, a multicollinearity diagnosis test was included in the statistical settings when performing each multiple regression analysis using SPSS.

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

As summarized in Table 11, the descriptive statistics of the variables used in multiple regression analysis were calculated. The variables included independent, dependent, and control variables. For variables measured by measurement scales, summated scores of the measurement scales were used.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Minimum Value</th>
<th>Maximum Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>CRE</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>LOR</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales Effort</td>
<td>EFT</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Ambiguity</td>
<td>RAM</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>3.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Conflict</td>
<td>RCO</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task Overload</td>
<td>TOV</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>4.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humor Usage</td>
<td>HUM</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>TRU</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>CMT</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>RSA</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Performance</td>
<td>PFM</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age*</td>
<td>AGE</td>
<td>33.55</td>
<td>9.66</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex*</td>
<td>SEX</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education*</td>
<td>EDU</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position Level*</td>
<td>POS</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 11: continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>EXP</th>
<th>SJI</th>
<th>SJC</th>
<th>COR</th>
<th>SOR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Years of Experience*</td>
<td>6.17</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>2.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales Job Intensity*</td>
<td>5.67</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales Job Complexity*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Orientation*</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales Orientation*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Control variables

After the descriptive statistics for the variables, two correlation matrices were estimated for this study, both using the two-tailed Pearson correlations measure. The first correlation matrix was calculated for all the variables tested for the hypothesized relationships, based on summated scores of the measurement scales. The second correlation matrix was calculated based on the correlation between humor usage by salespeople and all the control variables used in the multiple regression analysis. The two correlation matrices are provided in Table 12 and Table 13, respectively.
Table 12

Correlation Matrix for Independent and Dependent Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CRE</th>
<th>LOR</th>
<th>EFT</th>
<th>RAM</th>
<th>RCO</th>
<th>TOV</th>
<th>HUM</th>
<th>TRU</th>
<th>CMT</th>
<th>RSA</th>
<th>PFM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LOR</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>p</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFT</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>p</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAM</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>p</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCO</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>p</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOV</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>p</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HUM</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>p</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRU</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>p</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMT</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>p</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSA</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>p</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p* values: 0.00
Table 12: continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PFM</th>
<th>0.89</th>
<th>0.86</th>
<th>0.87</th>
<th>0.70</th>
<th>0.69</th>
<th>0.72</th>
<th>0.79</th>
<th>0.83</th>
<th>0.88</th>
<th>0.87</th>
<th>1.00</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlation Matrix for Humor Usage and Control Variables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HUM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 13: continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>COR</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SOR</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The correlation matrices showed that the independent and dependent variables were significantly correlated, humor usage and some demographic variables did not exhibit a significant correlation pattern.

**Hypothesis Testing on Humor Usage Antecedents**

To test the hypotheses related to the antecedents of humor usage, a multiple regression analysis was performed with *Humor Usage* as the dependent variable. The independent variables included *Creativity, Learning Orientation, Sales Effort, Role Ambiguity, Role Conflict, and Task Overload*. In addition, age, sex, education level, position level, years of experience, sales job intensity, and sales job complexity were included in the multiple regression model as control variables.

The multiple regression model was named Model One. In Model One, $R = 0.826$, $R^2 = 0.683$, and Adjusted $R^2 = 0.672$. The significant $F$ value indicated that $R^2$ is reliable and the model fit is good. Thus, the proposed relationships between the dependent variable and the group of independent variables was statistically robust. The model fit estimates are provided in Table 14.
It showed that around 67 percent of the variance in salespeople humor usage can be explained by all the independent variables, including six demographic variables used as control variables. None of the control variables established a significant statistical relationship with salespeople humor usage ($p > 0.05$ for all control variables). Creativity had a positive influence on humor usage ($\beta = 0.16, p < 0.05$). Thus, H1 was supported. Learning orientation also had a positive influence on humor usage by salespeople ($\beta = 0.55, p < 0.01$). So, H2 was also supported. Sales effort did not show a significant influence ($p > 0.10$). Thus, H3 was not statistically supported. For the three role stressors, only role ambiguity showed a positive influence on salespeople humor usage ($\beta = 0.16, p < 0.05$). The effects of role conflict and task overload were both non-significant ($p > 0.10$). The results indicated that H4 was supported, while H5 and H6 were not. Overall, creativity, learning orientation, and role ambiguity were shown to be positively related to salespeople humor usage. In addition, learning orientation appeared to be the strongest predictor for salespeople humor usage, judged by the Beta values. Multiple regression results from Model One is provided in Table 15.

**Table 14**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model Fit for Regression Model One</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>d.f.</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>478.61</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>36.82</td>
<td>65.05</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>222.41</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>701.02</td>
<td>406</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 15

Multiple Regression Analysis Results on Humor Usage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable: HUM</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>VIF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CRE</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>5.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOR</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>8.83</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>4.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFT</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>3.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAM</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>4.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCO</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>4.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOV</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>-1.23</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>7.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGE*</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>1.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEX*</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>-0.72</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDU*</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.19</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POS*</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.22</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXP*</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>1.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJI*</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>-1.78</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJC*</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Control variables

Hypothesis Testing on Humor Usage Outcomes

To test the hypotheses related to the outcomes of humor usage, a number of multiple regression models (named Model Two to Model Six, respectively) were estimated to examine the dependent relationships between humor usage and the different
outcomes proposed. In each regression model, a set of control variables were included together with *Humor Usage* as predictors for the outcome variable. These control variables included six demographic variables as well as *Customer Orientation* and *Sales Orientation*.

In Model Two, the dependent variable was *Trust*. As summarized in Table 16, Model Two showed a significant $F$ value in model fit. The predictive power of the independent variables was high ($R = 0.877$, $R^2 = 0.769$, and Adjusted $R^2 = 0.763$).

Table 16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model Fit for Regression Model Two</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>d.f.</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>$F$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>523.61</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>52.36</td>
<td>131.51</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>157.67</td>
<td>396</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>681.27</td>
<td>406</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It shows that 76 percent of the variance in customer trust can be explained by the independent variables in Model Two. The results revealed significant impacts of two control variables, customer orientation ($\beta = 0.70$, $p < 0.01$) and sales orientation ($\beta = 0.12$, $p < 0.01$), on customer trust. Another demographic control variable, salespeople’s position level, also had positive influence on trust ($\beta = 0.06$, $p < 0.05$). More importantly, a positive influence of salespeople humor usage on customer trust was found ($\beta = 0.12$, $p < 0.01$). The variance explained by humor usage was not accounted for by the control
variables. Thus, H7 was statistically supported. The results based on Model Two are summarized in Table 17.

Table 17

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable: TRU</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>VIF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HUM</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>2.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGE*</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-1.32</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEX*</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDU*</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.40</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POS*</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXP*</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-1.31</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>1.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJI*</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-1.17</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJC*</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COR*</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>16.30</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>3.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOR*</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>1.64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Control variables

Model Three was used to estimate the fit for dependent variable Commitment. As summarized in Table 18, Model Three showed a significant F value, which helps establish a robust model fit. In Model Three, R = 0.934, R² = 0.872, and Adjusted R² = 0.869, showing high predictive power of the independent variables.
Table 18

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model Fit for Regression Model Three</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>d.f.</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>523.85</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>52.39</td>
<td>269.84</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>76.88</td>
<td>396</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>600.73</td>
<td>406</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Model Three, 87 percent of the variance in customer commitment was explained by the independent variables. The results revealed significant impacts of two control variables, customer orientation ($\beta = 0.75, p < 0.01$) and sales orientation ($\beta = 0.12, p < 0.01$), on customer commitment in business relationship. Such strong relationships were consistent with previous studies. No demographic control variable was statistically related to commitment ($p > 0.05$). The result confirmed a positive relationship between salespeople humor usage and customer commitment ($\beta = 0.14, p < 0.01$). The variance explained by humor usage was not accounted for by the control variables. Thus, H8 was strongly supported. The multiple regression results produced in Model Three are summarized in Table 19.
### Table 19

#### Multiple Regression Analysis Results on Commitment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable: CMT</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>VIF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HUM</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>2.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGE*</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-1.48</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEX*</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDU*</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.49</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POS*</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXP*</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>1.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJI*</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-1.77</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJC*</td>
<td>-0.00</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COR*</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>23.41</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>3.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOR*</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>5.02</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>1.64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Control variables

In Model Four, *Relationship Satisfaction* was entered as the dependent variable.

As shown in Table 20, Model Four showed a robust model fit indicated by a significant $F$ value. The predictive power of the independent variables was high ($R = 0.955$, $R^2 = 0.912$, and Adjusted $R^2 = 0.910$).
Table 20

Model Fit for Regression Model Four

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>d.f.</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>543.55</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>54.36</td>
<td>410.25</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>52.47</td>
<td>396</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>596.02</td>
<td>406</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Model Four, 91 percent of the variance in relationship satisfaction was jointly explained by the independent variables. The results demonstrated that two control variables, customer orientation ($\beta = 0.82, p < 0.01$) and sales orientation ($\beta = 0.05, p < 0.05$), have strong positive influences on relationship satisfaction by customers. No demographic control variable was statistically related to relationship satisfaction ($p > 0.05$). The result showed a positive relationship between salespeople humor usage and relationship satisfaction ($\beta = 0.13, p < 0.01$). The variance explained by humor usage was not accounted for by the control variables. Therefore, H9 was supported. The multiple regression results for Model Four are summarized in Table 21.
Table 21

Multiple Regression Analysis Results on Relationship Satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable: RSA</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>VIF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HUM</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>5.10</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>2.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGE*</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>-0.94</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEX*</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDU*</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POS*</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXP*</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.48</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>1.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJI*</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJC*</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COR*</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>30.84</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>3.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOR*</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>1.64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Control variables

In Model Five, *Job Performance* was used as the dependent variable for the multiple regression analysis. Based on previous findings of the positive effects of relationship quality on sales performance (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, and Gremler, 2002; Park et al., 2010; Hughes, Le Bon, and Rapp, 2013), the three relationship quality variables were included in Model Five as additional independent variables. As summarized in Table 22, Model Five had good model fit indicated by a significant *F*
value. The predictive power of the independent variables was shown as follows: $R = 0.921$, $R^2 = 0.848$, and Adjusted $R^2 = 0.843$.

Table 22

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model Fit for Regression Model Five</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>d.f.</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>$F$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>531.77</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>40.91</td>
<td>168.39</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>95.47</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>627.24</td>
<td>406</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As indicated in Table 23, humor showed a positive impact on salespeople job performance ($\beta = 0.13$, $p < 0.01$). However, indicated by high VIF values from multicollinearity diagnosis test ($VIF > 10$), commitment, relationship satisfaction, and customer orientation suffered from high multicollinearity. The variance explained might be biased in this situation. Therefore, another multiple regression was performed after commitment and relationship satisfaction were dropped from Model Five.
Table 23

Multiple Regression Analysis Results on Job Performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable: PFM</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>VIF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HUM</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>3.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRU</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>7.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMT</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>14.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSA</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>15.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGE*</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-1.73</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>1.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEX*</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDU*</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.45</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POS*</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXP*</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>1.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJI*</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.67</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJC*</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COR*</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>11.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOR*</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>8.62</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>1.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Control variables

After removing the two variables that have high multicollinearity with customer orientation, Model Six was run against Job Performance. As shown in Table 24, a significant $F$ value was found, indicating robust model fit for Model Six. The predictive
power of the independent variables ($R = 0.916$, $R^2 = 0.839$, and Adjusted $R^2 = 0.835$) was comparable to that in Model Five.

Table 24

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>d.f.</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>$F$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>526.26</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>47.84</td>
<td>187.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>100.98</td>
<td>395</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>627.24</td>
<td>406</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After the modification, 84 percent of the variance in salespeople job performance was explained by the independent variables included in Model Six. Two control variables, customer orientation ($\beta = 0.44$, $p < 0.01$) and sales orientation ($\beta = 0.24$, $p < 0.01$), showed significantly positive impacts on salespeople job performance. Such results were consistent with previous studies. Position level showed a positive relationship with job performance ($\beta = 0.08$, $p < 0.05$). It is revealed that salespeople in higher positions are those who perform better than do subordinates. Other demographic control variables had non-significant relationships with job performance ($p > 0.05$). The result further demonstrated a positive impact of customer trust on salespeople job performance ($\beta = 0.18$, $p < 0.01$). Besides the influences of all these variables, a positive influence of salespeople humor usage on job performance was seen ($\beta = 0.17$, $p < 0.01$). Thus, H10 was strongly supported. Essentially, 17 percent of salespeople job performance can be
attributed to the use of humor in sales communication. The regression results produced in Model Six are provided in Table 25. The results are discussed in detail in the next dissertation chapter.

Table 25
Modified Multiple Regression Analysis Results on Job Performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable: PFM</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>VIF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HUM</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>4.84</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRU</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>4.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGE*</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>-1.87</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>1.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEX*</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDU*</td>
<td>-0.00</td>
<td>-0.16</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POS*</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXP*</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>1.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJI*</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.54</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJC*</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COR*</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>9.45</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>5.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOR*</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>9.08</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>1.71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Control variables
Summary of Hypotheses Testing

Based on the statistical results, a summary of hypotheses testing is provided in Table 26. Among the ten hypotheses, seven were empirically supported, while three were not. Statistical analyses on H3, H5, and H6 did not yield significant results to support the three arguments made.

Table 26

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Argument</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1</td>
<td>Salespeople’s creativity positively influences their humor usage in sales communications.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2</td>
<td>Salespeople’s learning orientation positively influences their humor usage in sales communications.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3</td>
<td>Salespeople’s sales effort positively influences their humor usage in sales communications.</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4</td>
<td>Salespeople’s role ambiguity positively influences their humor usage in sales communications.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H5</td>
<td>Salespeople’s role conflict positively influences their humor usage in sales communications.</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H6</td>
<td>Salespeople’s task overload positively influences their humor usage in sales communications.</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H7</td>
<td>Salespeople’s humor usage in sales communications</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 26: continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Salespeople’s humor usage in sales communications</th>
<th>Supported</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H8</td>
<td>positively influences customers’ trust.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H9</td>
<td>positively influences customers’ commitment.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H10</td>
<td>positively influences customers’ relationship satisfaction.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>positively influences their job performance.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 6: Discussion

Discussion of Findings

This dissertation aims to identify the antecedents and outcomes of salespeople humor usage in sales communications, and examine the magnitude of hypothesized relationships using empirical data. Built upon sociological and psychological foundations, six hypotheses were constructed on the antecedents to humor usage by salespeople in sales communications. Three out of the six hypotheses received empirical support. Next, four hypotheses were developed to describe how humor as an interpersonal sales communication tool influences two major aspects of strategic performance outcomes that matter to organizations. The results strongly supported the arguments that humor usage by professional salespeople enhances customer relationship quality outcomes as well as their job performance.

Following appropriate methodological procedures, all the ten dependent relationship parameters were produced by multiple regression analysis, taking control variables into consideration. Thus, when interpreting the results quantitatively, comparative insights on salespeople humor usage can be drawn from the causal, dependent relationships tested.

Findings on antecedents to salespeople humor usage. Salespeople’s creativity was found to be an important antecedent to their humor usage in sales communications. Benign Violation Theory and Conceptual Integration Theory were used as theoretical paradigms underlying the linkage between creativity and humor usage. The finding supports the key argument that creative salespeople are more likely to find the
appropriate, useful, and actionable contextual cues to form humor messages in the professional selling process. The finding echoes previous arguments that humor is produced through creativity of mind (Shade, 1991; Howrigan and MacDonald, 2008).

Salespeople’s learning orientation turned out to be the strongest determinant of their humor usage in sales communications. This finding highlights the importance of routine social learning for salespeople. When salespeople are active in acquiring and advancing the skills they desire, improvements in the professional selling process are usually witnessed (Sujan, Weitz, and Kumar, 1994; Wang and Netemeyer, 2002; Ahearne et al., 2010). In the professional selling process, it is not always easy to improvise “fresh” and the “right” humor messages without a good understanding of customers’ communication styles and expectations. With the motivation to learn, salespeople are more likely to explore the high-context cues suitable for particular customers’ situations, and then discretionally use the humor messages in the appropriate situations. Directed by *Social Learning Theory*, salespeople need to be open and learning-oriented. Through actively observing and researching customers, peers, and competitors, salespeople can create novel approaches in humor communications, and experiment with different humor messages in social interactions. Thus, learning in humor communications may slowly take effect through a proactive approach in a social context, and eventually helps salespeople form an advanced body of humor. Through continuous learning, salespeople’s humor usage in the professional selling process is expected to become more proficient. And through a long period of learning, salespeople can become more adept at using humor in critical and unpredicted situations.
Unfortunately, the positive relationship between sales effort and humor usage by salespeople was not supported empirically. Sales effort has been identified as a main reason for salespeople success (Krishnan, Netemeyer, and Boles, 2002; Jaramillo and Mulki, 2008; Badrinarayanan and Laverie, 2011). Attachment Theory provides insights on how humor usage can be connected to sales effort. With higher effort toward building interpersonal relationships, humor tends to be a useful tool in coping with the anxiety of being rejected. However, the social background of this theory may not fully capture the situation faced by salespeople. Humorous stimuli arise from high-context cues based on the recipients’ perceptions, and they may not be universally appreciated (Wolosin, 1975; McGraw and Warren, 2014). Although salespeople are keen to obtain buyer commitments to close a sale, they may not comprehend the subtle humorous cues or have obtained the skills in appropriately using the humorous cues with specific customers in this process. The results showed that humor usage in sales communications is not determined by the amount of routine work a salesperson puts into the relationship with customers. Without properly understanding when and how to use humor in customer relationship building, a salesperson’s effort may not create the “surprise” in buyers’ eyes. In other words, putting in more effort does not necessarily result in emotional attachment to customers. Therefore, salespeople should be aware that humor usage is not necessarily an expected product of sales effort. In establishing better interpersonal connections with customers, humor’s positive effects will not happen until a specific high-context humorous stimulus tickles the customers’ point of laughter.
Role stress in the sales literature consists of three dimensions – role conflict, role ambiguity, and task overload (Singh, 1998; Johnson and Sohi, 2014). The results clearly presented the causal linkage between role ambiguity and humor usage by salespeople, among other role stressors. Role ambiguity is understood as salespeople’s uncertainty about job requirements, job responsibilities, and/or job expectations. According to Cognitive Stress Theory, salespeople rely on humor as an alternative cognitive mechanism for the relief of stress. Thus, the finding suggests that humor usage be viewed as an adapting behavior for stressed salespeople to address the issue of role ambiguity. To alleviate the perceived negative impact of role ambiguity, salespeople tend to use humor in sales communications. Ambiguity is regarded as a substantial genre of incongruity by humor theorists (Duncan, Smeltzer, and Leap, 1990; Warren and McGraw, 2014). The finding implies that salespeople with an ambiguous role understanding tend to carry the ambiguity over into sales communications. For example, in the first humor example in the introduction section, the salesperson uses the incongruous statement “dropping the Browns off at the Super Bowl” to justify the reason for his tardiness, when he is not sure about the timekeeping expectations from the customer.

Nonetheless, the effects of role conflict and task overload on salespeople humor usage were not statistically significant. Role conflict is understood as the inability to satisfy a salesperson’s supervisor and his customer at the same time, whereas task overload is the inability to satisfy existing customers during new sales tasks (Johnson and Sohi, 2014). Although inner stress is found in these mental situations, the two role stressors do not appear to facilitate humor creation and usage in sales communications.
Compared to role ambiguity, the inner stress created by the two other role stressors is not related to perceptual uncertainty. The reason for the insignificant humor effects may be that these types of inner stress do not activate the feeling of uncertainty, and thus do not help elicit humorous stimulus for salespeople.

**Findings on outcomes of salespeople humor usage.** This dissertation established empirical evidence of the positive outcomes of humor usage. Rather than describe customers’ direct behavioral responses to humor, such as verbal agreement or order placement, the findings depicted a measurable and relationship-focused outcome pattern. The results demonstrated that salespeople’s humor usage positively affects the trust, commitment, and relationship satisfaction with customers, and increases job performance.

Organizations care about relationship quality with customers. From a customer’s perspective, relationship quality indicates the willingness to do business with the seller (Gundlach, Achrol, and Mentzer, 1995; Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, and Gremler, 2002; Palmatier et al., 2006). From a seller’s perspective, it defines the strength of inter-organizational bond, which eventually determines profit (Dant and Schul, 1992; Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, and Gremler, 2002; Dant, Weaven, and Baker, 2013). The findings demonstrate that salespeople find that humor usage in sales communications has strong impact on customers’ trust, commitment, and relationship satisfaction, which are the three key dimensions of customer-based relationship quality.

The findings are in accordance with *Uncertainty Reduction Theory*, and reveal that humor usage in sales communications reduces relationship uncertainty and moderates the psychological distance between a seller and a buyer. As an outcome of
appropriate humor usage by a salesperson, customer trust of a salesperson is expected to build up faster in the course of interaction. When the psychological distance closes up because of humor, it can be expected that the customer not only views the salesperson as highly approachable and competent, but also holds up a continued desire to grow the pleasant relationship with the salesperson. Humor usage by salespeople can also be viewed as creating exclusive emotional benefits for customers, according to the Reward Theory of Attraction. Essentially, humor acts as a differentiator for a salesperson in the competition. A good sense of humor found in a salesperson is part of the superior customer value buyers cannot always receive elsewhere. By amusing customers with humor and laughter, a salesperson generously delivers emotional rewards to the buyer with no request for return. The emotional rewards frequently result in customers’ satisfaction and commitment to a closer relationship. As such, it is reasonable to expect that those salespeople with a good sense of humor maintain greater relationship quality with customers than do their peers.

Last but not least, salespeople’s humor usage in sales communications ultimately enhances job performance. In hypotheses development, it was argued that humor improves job performance through three ways – via affective (via Relief Theory), cognitive (via Elaboration Likelihood Model), and behavioral routes. Humor messages created by a salesperson in the selling process help relieve the buyer’s tension such that the buyer is able to focus on the positive aspects of negotiation. Meanwhile, in the cognitive process, the buyers tend to think deeply and pay more attention to the highlighted points made by the salesperson because of the humor effect that promotes
information processing via the central route. By improving the affective and cognitive experiences of the buyer in the negotiation room, the salesperson is more likely to make a sale. Furthermore, humor can be considered a useful mode of adaptive selling. When a salesperson communicates with the buyer using humor messages rooted in the buyer’s situations, better sales performance tends to occur. Thus, salespeople with advanced humor communication skills are more likely to turn humor messages into a persuasive tool in the professional selling process. Such salespeople can put humor to better use in different sales situations where they eventually experience more sales and superior job performance.

Overall, the antecedents and outcomes of salespeople’s humor usage that showed statistically significant relationships in the hypothesis testing are described in Figure 3.

![Figure 3. Validated theoretical framework.](image)

**Managerial Implications**

The findings from the dissertation expand the extant knowledge of salespeople behavior. The new knowledge not only offers a fresh perspective for researchers, but also provides insights into sales management practices for salespeople and their business
managers. The causal pathways described in the theoretical framework shed light on how to improve the use of humor by salespeople and how to select the right type of salespeople for the purpose of better outcomes.

The findings suggest that salespeople humor usage in sales communications act as a functioning and useful marketing mechanism that produces important organizational outcomes. Organizations increasingly value customer relationship-based organizational culture (Mentzer, Min, and Zacharia, 2000; Rokkan, Heide, and Wathne, 2003), but not all organizations know how to build and maintain it. In addition, some organizations promote a cheerful and less structured approach in working with customers, while others do not uphold this type of customer relationship (Palmatier et al., 2009). Therefore, not every company sees humor usage as positive. Some organizations may have strict organizational policies regarding the formalities and communication styles with customers. Some managers may view jokes with customers as a negative signal and thus, post strict bans on such behavior. Since humor is shown to be an emotional connector between the seller and the buyer, business managers should encourage salespeople to use humor in sales communications whenever appropriate. A thorough consideration of the findings will let business managers better understand that positive humor styles fundamentally differ from negative humor styles, and adaptive humor messages should not be viewed as equivalent to negative humor styles such as mockery or teasing. Based on the findings of this dissertation, managers can show their salespeople why and when humor works, how to obtain humor skill sets, and how humor leads to better outcomes. In addition, managers should re-examine their organizational policies regarding customer
relationship management to allow the appropriate use of humor by salespeople and other frontline service employees.

Further, humor usage is shown to be a useful tactic in relationship building with customers. Strong customer relationships are hard to achieve in a short period of time, and many business managers lack insights about how to bring a customer relationship up to a higher level. In routine customer communications, humor usage may be used as a “sweetener” in managing customer relationship in sales. From both cognitive and affective perspectives, humor usage by salespeople results in higher customer trust, commitment, and relationship satisfaction. This is especially important for organizations whose revenue relies on long-term customer relationships. Based on the strong linkage between humor usage and customer relationship quality, this dissertation recommends that business managers create a humor-friendly organizational culture, and provide training to salespeople and other employees on how to use humor appropriately in sales communications. For example, managers can let experienced salespeople share about their good practices with humor usage in sales, or direct salespeople to study humor by intensive reading and practicing.

In sales force selection and recruiting, the implications from the findings can be drawn in at least two aspects. First, salespeople with high creativity are more likely to achieve customer relationship insights through the use of humor. As humor is a creative dimension of intelligence, selecting salespeople with high creativity is the first step toward customer relationship success. Second, humor will not make good sense if salespeople do not understand customers’ unique situations. Based on the role of learning
in effective use of humor, business managers should select learning-oriented salespeople for important tasks and can reasonably expect such personnel to effectively turn humor into better performance outcomes.

Nonetheless, the findings by no means suggest business managers make salespeople’s role more ambiguous. Although role ambiguity is positively related to salespeople humor usage, it is rather a psychological explanation. The findings only partially suggest that salespeople tend to relieve stress from negative outcomes of ambiguity through the use of humor. Thus, business managers should remind salespeople that, whenever a confusing situation arises, humor usage can be one of the many possible solutions to ambiguous expectations and requirements.

Overall, the research framework provides business managers with a causal view of humor usage in the professional selling context, and highlights the key outcomes of humor usage that are strategically important for the organizations. Theoretical insights gained over the hypothesized relationships need to be carefully interpreted by business managers, according to the different scenarios and requirements.

Limitations and Future Research Recommendations

The dissertation only utilizes cross-sectional data collected in the United States. Humor effect relies on culturally bound high-context cues (Wolosin, 1975; Hall, 1976). To ensure the findings are generalizable in a global context, future research should collect data in other countries for validation and/or cross-cultural comparison purposes. In addition, future research may compare data collected from relationship-oriented and transaction-oriented salespeople groups (e.g., supply chain salespeople vs. retail
salespeople) to examine if there is a difference in the influence of humor usage due to the role of business relationship in professional selling.

In this dissertation, humor usage by salespeople was considered a behavioral concept and explored mainly through quantitative analysis. The primary focus in this dissertation was the positive outcomes of positive humor in sales communications. Future research may investigate potential negative outcomes of positive humor. For example, are there circumstances in which positive humor can “backfire?” Do customers take advantage of salespeople who are humorous? In addition, according to Martin et al. (2003), there are different interpersonal styles of humor usage, such as aggressive style or self-deprecating style. Negative forms of humor, such as sarcasm or mockery, may take effect in the sales process at times. Future research may examine the antecedents to and outcomes of negative humor. Does higher creativity of salespeople lead to more frequent use of negative humor as well? Does role stress increase the usage of negative humor? Does negative humor affect the strategic outcomes and why? These research questions related to negative humor need further exploration.

A total of six antecedents were included in the dissertation based on extant marketing and sales literature. Although the antecedents jointly explained a large portion of variance in humor usage, personality and situational factors have not been included. Future research may examine additional determinants to salespeople humor usage by researching their personality traits and job specific factors (e.g., job autonomy, competitive intensity, customer sensitivity). By the same token, future research should measure other outcomes or consequences of humor usage. For example, salespeople’s job
satisfaction has been a key focus of business managers because it is related to turnover and job performance (Berhman and Perreault, 1984, Maxwell et al., 2005). Salespeople’s job satisfaction is commonly understood as a “positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job or job experiences” (Netemeyer et al., 1997, p. 86). Knowing that humor is accompanied by positive emotions for the humor generator (Abel, 2002), would the use of humor increase salespeople job satisfaction due to positive emotions?

In future research, a variety of research methods should be applied for the purpose of gathering richer insights about salespeople’s humor usage. Among them, qualitative methods can be primarily used to guide theoretical framework building (Eisenhardt, 1989; Kvale, 1996). A limitation of the survey approach is that the respondents only rate their overall past experiences related to humor usage in sales communications. Future studies based on observations and ethnography may be useful for describing salespeople’s actual humor expressions and outcomes during sales communications. Content analysis or textual analysis on sales instruments, such as sales letters, recorded cold calls or sales calls, e-mail messages to and from customers, and online sales contents, may be advantageous in evaluating the amount, frequency, intensity, and effectiveness of humor usage.

In this dissertation, a number of socio-psychological theories are employed as theoretical foundations guiding the hypothesis development effort. The theories are borrowed to explain the utility of humor usage for business purposes. However, fun-seeking through humor is rather a lifestyle, regardless of business outcome (Martin et al., 2003). Salespeople not only use humor for the sake of their profession, but also enjoy
humor as other human beings do. Other theories may offer new paradigms to the explanation of humor usage. For example, Positive Psychology Theory posits that individuals’ happiness and well-being are built upon positive emotions and positive experiences (Seligman et al., 2005). Thus, humor usage at work allows individuals to form a cheerful attitude toward work and social life (Martin, 2007). The positive emotional experience accompanying humor is usually called mirth, which results in improved work and life outcomes (Martin, 2007). Future research may investigate a broad sense of antecedents and outcomes related to humor usage, and apply the idea to other types of employees.

Data used in this dissertation were collected from a single source, salespeople, using self-reported measures. Although common method bias was found to have no threat to the results, the self-reported data may contain social desirability bias. Being humorous or witty is a desired personal quality for many people. Thus, the research participants tend to claim they use humor more often than they actually do, so that their image can look more favorably in others’ eyes. Multi-level data may be used to validate the hypothesized relationships in this dissertation. Future research should collect data from managers and customers. Managers are a good source for measures of salespeople creativity, sales effort, and job performance, whereas customers can provide a true evaluation of salespeople’s humor usage in sales communications and relationship quality. Multi-level data involving humor observers and humor recipients can be used to avoid salespeople’s social desirability bias in the self-evaluation of humor usage.
Overall, the results of this study have strongly supported the argument that humor usage by professional salespeople enhances customer relationship quality and their job performance. Due to the importance of humor as a useful sales communication tool, future research should continue.
References


Appendix 1: Announcement on Mechanical Turk

Dear Sir or Madam,

We are conducting an academic survey about salespeople’s use of humor in sales communication. If you are a salesperson or have full-time sales experience of more than a year, we need your input to understand how you use humor. Click the link below to complete the survey.

You must meet the following criteria:

- At least one year experience in sales is required to complete this survey.
- You must be 21 years or older.

The detail of this survey is as follows:

- This survey is anonymous, but contains questions about your sales positions and your demographic background.
- This survey contains 136 Likert-type questions (e.g., to agree or disagree) and some demographic questions. There is no right or wrong answer, but please provide your true evaluation of your sales experience.
- This survey takes roughly 15-30 minutes to complete.

Click the Survey Link Here.
Appendix 2: Research Questionnaire *

* Note: The questionnaire is generated by Qualtrics.com in a plain text format. The actual online questionnaire hosted on Qualtrics.com has color background and effects, and includes page transitions for every five to seven questions.

Salespeople Humor Usage Survey
This survey is about how salespeople use humor in sales communications.
1. You must be at least 21 years old and have had 1 year of full-time sales experience to answer the survey.
2. Questions are anonymous. You should answer all the questions.
3. There is no right or wrong answer. Please provide your true evaluation of your sales experience.
   Please click one of the five answers below.

Q1 I usually don't laugh or joke around much with other people.
   ○ Strongly Disagree (1)
   ○ Disagree (2)
   ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
   ○ Agree (4)
   ○ Strongly Agree (5)

Q2 I don't have to work very hard at making other people laugh--I seem to be a naturally humorous person.
   ○ Strongly Disagree (1)
   ○ Disagree (2)
   ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
   ○ Agree (4)
   ○ Strongly Agree (5)

Q3 I rarely make other people laugh by telling funny stories about myself.
   ○ Strongly Disagree (1)
   ○ Disagree (2)
   ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
   ○ Agree (4)
   ○ Strongly Agree (5)
Q4 I laugh and joke a lot with my closest friends.
☐ Strongly Disagree (1)
☐ Disagree (2)
☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
☐ Agree (4)
☐ Strongly Agree (5)

Q5 I usually don't like to tell jokes or amuse people.
☐ Strongly Disagree (1)
☐ Disagree (2)
☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
☐ Agree (4)
☐ Strongly Agree (5)

Q6 I enjoy making people laugh.
☐ Strongly Disagree (1)
☐ Disagree (2)
☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
☐ Agree (4)
☐ Strongly Agree (5)

Q7 I don't often joke around with my friends.
☐ Strongly Disagree (1)
☐ Disagree (2)
☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
☐ Agree (4)
☐ Strongly Agree (5)

Q8 I usually can't think of witty things to say when I'm with other people.
☐ Strongly Disagree (1)
☐ Disagree (2)
☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
☐ Agree (4)
☐ Strongly Agree (5)
Q9 If someone makes a mistake, I will often tease them about it.
* Strongly Disagree (1)
* Disagree (2)
* Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
* Agree (4)
* Strongly Agree (5)

Q10 People are never offended or hurt by my sense of humor.
* Strongly Disagree (1)
* Disagree (2)
* Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
* Agree (4)
* Strongly Agree (5)

Q11 When telling jokes or saying funny things, I am usually not very concerned about how other people are taking it.
* Strongly Disagree (1)
* Disagree (2)
* Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
* Agree (4)
* Strongly Agree (5)

Q12 I do not like it when people use humor as a way of criticizing or putting someone down.
* Strongly Disagree (1)
* Disagree (2)
* Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
* Agree (4)
* Strongly Agree (5)

Q13 Sometimes I think of something that is so funny that I can't stop myself from saying it, even if it is not appropriate from the situation.
* Strongly Disagree (1)
* Disagree (2)
* Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
* Agree (4)
* Strongly Agree (5)
Q14 I never participate in laughing at others even if all my friends are doing it.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q15 If I don't like someone, I often use humor or teasing to put them down.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q16 Even if something is really funny to me, I will not laugh or joke about it if someone will be offended.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q17 If I am feeling depressed, I can usually cheer myself up with humor.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q18 Even when I'm by myself, I'm often amused by the absurdities of life.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)
Q19 If I am feeling upset or unhappy I usually try to think of something funny about the situation to make myself feel better.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q20 My humorous outlook on life keeps me from getting overly upset or depressed about things.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q21 If I'm by myself and I'm feeling unhappy, I make an effort to think of something funny to cheer myself up.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q22 If I am feeling sad or upset, I usually lose my sense of humor.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q23 It is my experience that thinking about some amusing aspect of a situation is often a very effective way of coping with problems.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)
Q24 I don't need to be with other people to feel amused--I can usually find things to laugh about even when I'm by myself.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q25 I let people laugh at me or make fun at my expense more than I should.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q26 I will often get carried away in putting myself down if it makes my family or friends laugh.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q27 I often try to make people like or accept me more by saying something funny about my own weaknesses, blunders, or faults.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q28 I don't often say funny things to put myself down.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)
Q29 I often go overboard in putting myself down when I am making jokes or trying to be funny.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q30 When I am with friends or family, I often seem to be the one that other people make fun of or joke about.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q31 If I am having problems or feeling unhappy, I often cover it up by joking around, so that even my closest friends don't know how I really feel.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q32 Letting others laugh at me is my way of keeping my friends and family in good spirits.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q33 I often suggest new ways to achieve goals or objectives.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)
Q34 I often come up with new and practical ideas to improve performance.
☐ Strongly Disagree (1)
☐ Disagree (2)
☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
☐ Agree (4)
☐ Strongly Agree (5)

Q35 I always search out new technologies, processes, techniques, and/or product ideas.
☐ Strongly Disagree (1)
☐ Disagree (2)
☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
☐ Agree (4)
☐ Strongly Agree (5)

Q36 I often suggest new ways to increase quality.
☐ Strongly Disagree (1)
☐ Disagree (2)
☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
☐ Agree (4)
☐ Strongly Agree (5)

Q37 I am a good source of creative ideas.
☐ Strongly Disagree (1)
☐ Disagree (2)
☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
☐ Agree (4)
☐ Strongly Agree (5)

Q38 I am not afraid to take risks.
☐ Strongly Disagree (1)
☐ Disagree (2)
☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
☐ Agree (4)
☐ Strongly Agree (5)
Q39 I always promote and champion ideas to others.
• Strongly Disagree (1)
• Disagree (2)
• Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
• Agree (4)
• Strongly Agree (5)

Q40 I always exhibit creativity on the job when given the opportunity to.
• Strongly Disagree (1)
• Disagree (2)
• Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
• Agree (4)
• Strongly Agree (5)

Q41 I always develop adequate plans and schedules for the implementation of new ideas.
• Strongly Disagree (1)
• Disagree (2)
• Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
• Agree (4)
• Strongly Agree (5)

Q42 I often have new and innovative ideas.
• Strongly Disagree (1)
• Disagree (2)
• Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
• Agree (4)
• Strongly Agree (5)

Q43 I often come up with creative solutions to problems.
• Strongly Disagree (1)
• Disagree (2)
• Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
• Agree (4)
• Strongly Agree (5)
Q44 I often have a fresh approach to problems.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q45 I often suggest new ways of performing work tasks.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q46 Making a tough sale with a customer is very satisfying.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q47 An important part of being a good business professional is continually improving your sales skills.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q48 Making mistakes is just part of the learning process.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)
Q49 It is important for me to learn from each customer interaction experience I have.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q50 There really are not a lot of new things to learn about customers.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q51 I am always learning something new about my customers.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q52 It is worth spending a great deal of time learning new approaches for dealing with customers.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q53 My overall work effort is among the most in my company.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)
Q54 The number of hours I use at work every week is among the most in my company.
Ο Strongly Disagree (1)
Ο Disagree (2)
Ο Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
Ο Agree (4)
Ο Strongly Agree (5)

Q55 The number of customer calls I make every week is among the most in my company.
Ο Strongly Disagree (1)
Ο Disagree (2)
Ο Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
Ο Agree (4)
Ο Strongly Agree (5)

Q56 I intend to use humor in customer interactions.
Ο Strongly Disagree (1)
Ο Disagree (2)
Ο Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
Ο Agree (4)
Ο Strongly Agree (5)

Q57 I plan to use humor with my customers.
Ο Strongly Disagree (1)
Ο Disagree (2)
Ο Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
Ο Agree (4)
Ο Strongly Agree (5)

Q58 I do not want to use humor in interacting with my customers.
Ο Strongly Disagree (1)
Ο Disagree (2)
Ο Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
Ο Agree (4)
Ο Strongly Agree (5)
Q59 I frequently use humor in communicating with customers.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q60 I always use humor in interacting with my customers.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q61 Humor is rarely used in my interactions with customers.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q62 I can count on my customers to be honest in their dealings with me.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q63 My customers stand by their words.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)
Q64 I can rely on my customers to keep the promises they make to me.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q65 My customers are sincere in their dealings with me.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q66 My customers can be counted on to do what is right.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q67 I have great confidence in my customers.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q68 My customers and I have a mutually beneficial relationship.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)
Q69 I enjoy working with my customers.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q70 It feels like my customers and I are constantly doing something for each other.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q71 I feel as though my customers and I are “in it together,”
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q72 I feel that the values of my customers match my own.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q73 My customers and I get along well together.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)
Q74 My customers and I tend to share similar values.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q75 I am very committed to the relationship with my customers.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q76 I intend to continue doing business with my customers.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q77 I try my best to maintain relationship with my customers.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q78 I feel proud to belong to the relationship with my customers.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)
Q79 Overall my customers consider the relationship with me to be satisfying.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q80 Overall my customers consider the relationship with me to be fair.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q81 Overall my customers consider the relationship with me to be friendly.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q82 Overall my customers consider the relationship with me to be supportive.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q83 Overall my customers consider the relationship with me to be considerate.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)
Q84 Overall my customers consider the relationship with me to be healthy.
○ Strongly Disagree (1)
○ Disagree (2)
○ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
○ Agree (4)
○ Strongly Agree (5)

Q85 Overall my customers consider the relationship with me to be cordial.
○ Strongly Disagree (1)
○ Disagree (2)
○ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
○ Agree (4)
○ Strongly Agree (5)

Q86 I help my company to acquire a good market share.
○ Strongly Disagree (1)
○ Disagree (2)
○ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
○ Agree (4)
○ Strongly Agree (5)

Q87 I always sell high profit-margin products.
○ Strongly Disagree (1)
○ Disagree (2)
○ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
○ Agree (4)
○ Strongly Agree (5)

Q88 I always generate a high level of dollar sales.
○ Strongly Disagree (1)
○ Disagree (2)
○ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
○ Agree (4)
○ Strongly Agree (5)
Q89 I always generate sales on new products.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q90 I always identify major accounts and then sell to them.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q91 I always exceed sales targets.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q92 I always assist my supervisor in meeting his or her goals.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q93 I am certain about how much authority I have in my position.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)
Q94 I know what my responsibilities are.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q95 I know exactly what is expected of me.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q96 My goals and objectives have been clearly defined.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q97 I am certain how frequently I should call on my customers.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q98 I work under incompatible policies and guidelines.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)
Q99 I receive incompatible requests from two or more people.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q100 I have to work under vague directives and orders.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q101 I have to do things that should be done differently.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q102 I have to work on unnecessary things.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q103 I do not have enough time to identify and search for new customers.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)
Q104 I do not have enough time to call on potential customers.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q105 With my current workload, I am unable to generate an adequate amount of new business.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q106 My customers would like me to call on them more frequently.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q107 I am able to maintain adequate after-sales service for all my customers.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q108 My customers are extremely happy with the level of service that I provide.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)
Q109 I do not have enough time to collect information about competitors' activities.
☑ Strongly Disagree (1)
☑ Disagree (2)
☑ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
☑ Agree (4)
☑ Strongly Agree (5)

Q110 I need to be more responsive in dealing with competitive action.
☑ Strongly Disagree (1)
☑ Disagree (2)
☑ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
☑ Agree (4)
☑ Strongly Agree (5)

Q111 I need to react more quickly to competitors' moves.
☑ Strongly Disagree (1)
☑ Disagree (2)
☑ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
☑ Agree (4)
☑ Strongly Agree (5)

Q112 I feel well satisfied with my present line of work.
☑ Strongly Disagree (1)
☑ Disagree (2)
☑ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
☑ Agree (4)
☑ Strongly Agree (5)

Q113 I feel a great sense of satisfaction from my line of work.
☑ Strongly Disagree (1)
☑ Disagree (2)
☑ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
☑ Agree (4)
☑ Strongly Agree (5)
Q114 All things considered (i.e., pay, promotion, supervisors, coworkers, etc.), I am fairly satisfied with my present line of work.
☑ Strongly Disagree (1)
☑ Disagree (2)
☑ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
☑ Agree (4)
☑ Strongly Agree (5)

Q115 I try to figure out what customer needs are.
☑ Strongly Disagree (1)
☑ Disagree (2)
☑ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
☑ Agree (4)
☑ Strongly Agree (5)

Q116 A good employee has to have the customer's best interest in mind.
☑ Strongly Disagree (1)
☑ Disagree (2)
☑ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
☑ Agree (4)
☑ Strongly Agree (5)

Q117 I try to bring a customer with a problem together with a product/service that helps solve that problem.
☑ Strongly Disagree (1)
☑ Disagree (2)
☑ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
☑ Agree (4)
☑ Strongly Agree (5)

Q118 I offer the product/service that is best suited to the customer's problem.
☑ Strongly Disagree (1)
☑ Disagree (2)
☑ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
☑ Agree (4)
☑ Strongly Agree (5)
Q119 I try to find out what kind of products/services will be most helpful to a customer.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q120 I try to sell as much as I can rather than to satisfy a customer.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q121 It is necessary to stretch the truth in describing a product to a customer.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q122 I try to sell a customer all I can convince them to buy, even if I think it is more than a wise customer would buy.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q123 I paint too rosy a picture of my product/service to make them sound as good as possible.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)
Q124 I decide what product/service to offer on the basis of what I can convince customers to accept, not on the basis of what will satisfy them in the long run.
   ○ Strongly Disagree (1)
   ○ Disagree (2)
   ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
   ○ Agree (4)
   ○ Strongly Agree (5)

Q125 I usually try to calm complaining customers, so that we can jointly handle their complaints about their products.
   ○ Strongly Disagree (1)
   ○ Disagree (2)
   ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
   ○ Agree (4)
   ○ Strongly Agree (5)

Q126 I usually provide solutions to customers’ concerns related to the products they currently own.
   ○ Strongly Disagree (1)
   ○ Disagree (2)
   ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
   ○ Agree (4)
   ○ Strongly Agree (5)

Q127 Having identified the customers’ exact problem with their products, I solve it in a reliable way.
   ○ Strongly Disagree (1)
   ○ Disagree (2)
   ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
   ○ Agree (4)
   ○ Strongly Agree (5)

Q128 I usually listen attentively to customers in order to take appropriate action to handle their concerns regarding their products.
   ○ Strongly Disagree (1)
   ○ Disagree (2)
   ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
   ○ Agree (4)
   ○ Strongly Agree (5)
Q129 I usually pay attention to the customers' questions about their products to answer them correctly.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q130 Making sure that I fully understand the reason why the customers contact me allows me to better help them with their questions and concerns regarding their products.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q131 I usually explore potential matches between the customers' needs and the features of a product which they do not currently own.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q132 I usually gather as much customer information as possible to offer a suitable product to customers.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q133 I usually try to identify good ways of familiarizing customers with another product that can satisfy their needs.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)
Q134 I usually ask questions to assess whether the customers would be willing to buy an additional product.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q135 I hardly neglect a good opportunity to advise customers of a product which they could benefit from.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q136 I usually offer an additional product which meets the customers' needs best.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q137 Age:

Q138 Sex:
- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Confidential (3)

Q139 Marital Status:
- Married (1)
- Single (2)
- Other (3)

Q140 Education Level:
- High School or below (1)
- College Graduate or Attending College (2)
- Post-Graduate (3)
Q141 What is the level of your position in your company?
- Entry-Level Position (1)
- Mid-Level Position (2)
- Senior-Level Position (3)

Q142 Years of Sales Experience:

Q143 What is the description of your job?
- Some sales, and mainly other types of work duty (1)
- Mainly sales, with some other types of work duty (2)
- All sales (3)

Q144 What is the type of your sales position?
- Inside Sales (1)
- Outside Sales (2)
- Both Inside and Outside Sales (3)

Q145 What is your annual salary (in US Dollars)?
- <$10,000 (1)
- $10,000-$29,999 (2)
- $30,000-$49,999 (3)
- $50,000-$69,999 (4)
- $70,000-$89,999 (5)
- $90,000-$109,999 (6)
- $110,000-$129,999 (7)
- $130,000-$149,999 (8)
- $150,000-$199,999 (9)
- >$200,000 (10)

Q146 What is your industry?

Q147 Where are you located?
Appendix 3: Institutional Review Board Approval

A determination has been made that the following research study meets the criteria for exemption under the following category(ies):

Project Title: Using Humor in Sales Communications: Socio-Psychological Drivers, Multi-Dimensional Outcomes, and Key Moderating Effects

Primary Investigator: Valerie Wang

Co-Investigator(s):

Advisor: Greg Newton

Department: Graduate College/Media Arts & Studies

Office of Research Compliance Staff

Date

Rebecca Calle 11/9/15

The approval remains in effect provided the study is conducted exactly as described in your approved application. Any additions or modifications to the project must be reviewed and approved by the IRB (as an amendment) prior to implementation.

IRB approval does not supersede other regulatory requirements, such as HIPAA, FERPA, PPRA, etc.

Adverse events/unanticipated problems must be reported to the IRB promptly.