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Competitive Cohesion: Success in the Sales Force

Alec Pappas, PhD, Wyatt Schrock, PhD, Manoshi Samaraweera, PhD, and Willy Bolander, PhD

Effects of Depression on Salesperson Performance

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Competitive Cohesion: Success in the Sales Force

Alec Pappas, PhD, Wyatt Schrock, PhD, Manoshi Samaraweera, PhD, and Willy Bolander, PhD



A competitive personality is often seen as a key factor in the success of salespeople. Salespeople who are competitive are driven to win and achieve their goals, which is associated with high sales performance. However, competition can also be a threat to cohesion because salespeople may become more focused on their own individual success than on the success of the team. Sales managers face the challenge of creating a work

environment that fosters both competitiveness and cohesion. When salespeople feel supported and connected to their team, they are more likely to share best practices, collaborate on deals, and help each other succeed. This cohesion can lead to significant improvements in the performance and retention of the sales force.

For our research, we tested the effects of trait competitiveness on work-group cohesion, along with subsequent effects on individual sales performance and turnover. In this study, we challenge the traditional view that competitiveness and cohesion are mutually exclusive.

Trait Competitiveness and Group Cohesion

Trait competitiveness is defined by a strong desire to achieve and succeed—often in comparison to others—and has been shown to have a direct positive effect on salesperson performance. Salespeople who are high in trait competitiveness are more motivated to achieve sales goals, engage in behaviors that lead to high sales performance, such as prospecting, networking, and following up with leads.

On the other hand, work-group cohesion refers to how members of a work group bond together and commit to working toward common goals. Sales teams that are more cohesive are more likely to be supportive and collaborative, and salespeople in these teams are also more likely to share ideas and help each other succeed.

Our Study and Findings

Our study was conducted with 358 salespeople working at 86 offices of a large company. The salespeople completed a survey that measured their trait competitiveness and work-group

cohesion. We combined the survey data with archival performance data from company records. We also matched the survey data with objective data capturing salesperson turnover. We aimed to discover the relationship between trait competitiveness and work-group cohesion in a sales force, expecting a negative relationship between competitiveness and cohesion. Our results contradicted this expectation, providing surprising and important implications for sales managers.

In analyzing the survey results, we found 1) a *positive* relationship between trait competitiveness and work-group cohesion, 2) a positive relationship between trait competitiveness and salesperson performance, and 3) a negative relationship between work-group cohesion and salesperson turnover (i.e., improving retention). In other words, trait competitiveness (through increased work-group cohesion) contributed to reducing turnover, while also contributing directly to increased salesperson performance. Given these counterintuitive findings, we suspected there was more to this story to be uncovered.

Salesperson Performance and Competitive Focus

To further explore the relationship between trait competitiveness and work-group cohesion, we conducted a follow-up qualitative study on competitive focus (interpersonal, intergroup, or intrapersonal) to understand if this aspect of competition moderates the relationship between trait competitiveness and work-group cohesion. In other words, the type of competition on which salespeople focus can influence how trait competitiveness affects relationships with colleagues.

Salespeople who had a focus on interpersonal competition were more likely to have lower work-group cohesion. On the other hand, salespeople who had a focus on intergroup competition or intrapersonal competition were more likely to have higher work-group cohesion. That is, salespeople who focused on competing against themselves (intrapersonal; e.g., competing against one's past production) or improving overall group performance (intergroup; e.g., competition between offices for the number of cold calls made) also had strong group identity and cohesion. Salespeople who have a focus on *interpersonal* competition are more likely to view their colleagues as rivals and compete with them for resources, recognition, commissions, etc. This type of competition can lead to conflict, resentment, and a lack of trust within the sales team. As a result, salespeople who have a focus on interpersonal competition are less likely to form strong bonds with their colleagues or experience high work-group cohesion.

Salespeople who have a focus on *intergroup* competition or *intrapersonal* competition are more likely to view their colleagues as teammates and partners in success. These types of competition can promote teamwork, collaboration, and support within the sales team. As a result, salespeople who have a focus on intergroup competition or intrapersonal competition are more likely to form strong bonds with their colleagues and experience high work-group cohesion. These salespeople were also found to have lower turnover intentions than salespeople focused on interpersonal competition.

Real Estate Implications

Our findings show that competitive focus plays an important role in the relationship between trait competitiveness and work-group cohesion. Sales managers should be aware of the different types of competitive focus (interpersonal, intergroup, or intrapersonal) and how this focus can impact work-group cohesion. With this understanding, sales managers can develop strategies to promote a more cohesive work environment either through intergroup or intrapersonal competitive focus. Real estate team leaders and managers should set clear and ambitious goals for the team, provide opportunities for collaboration and teamwork, reward and recognize personal and team success, create a culture of support and encouragement, and organize social events and team-building activities. A key discovery is that rewards that are not scarce contribute to a culture of abundance where everyone is encouraged to improve and succeed. This type of culture is a strong contributor to cohesion and performance. By following these tips, firms can create sales teams that are both competitive and cohesive, leading to improved sales performance, reduced turnover, and a more positive and productive workplace.



Recommended Reading

Pappas, Alec, Wyatt Schrock, Manoshi Samaraweera, and Willy Bolander (2023), “A Competitive Path to Cohesion: Multilevel Effects of Competitiveness in the Sales Force,” *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 43(3), 222-240. DOI: 10.1080/08853134.2023.2170237

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Dr. Alec Pappas’ (PhD – Florida State University) research focuses on social dynamics (e.g., intraorganizational social networks) in sales and sales management, and how these factors affect performance and turnover. He has published in the *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *Journal of Retailing*, and *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*. Prior to academia, he worked as an account manager for MotionPoint Corporation, responsible for managing the relationships with various Fortune 1000 companies expanding to new international markets.

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Effects of Depression on Salesperson Performance

Bruno Lussier, PhD, Lisa Beeler, PhD, Willy Bolander, PhD, and Nathaniel N. Hartmann, PhD

Due to its prevalence, depression has been called the “common cold” of mental health. About 4% of the global population, or around 280 million people, experience depression, according to the World Health Organization.¹ This estimate is likely a conservative one given the varied reporting and diagnostic standards around the globe. In any event, depression—described as a negative affective condition marked by sadness, inactivity, and a lack of interest²—is undoubtedly a significant problem in society. Moreover, its effects are exacerbated in high-stress occupations like sales, where individuals are arguably more vulnerable to mental health disorders resulting from isolation, uncertain income, and the constant threat of failure.

Depression has direct negative effects on employees such as increased deviant workplace behavior and decreased productivity, and this relationship extends to the salesperson role.

Moreover, global crises like the COVID-19 pandemic have further intensified the negative effects of depression, as the transition from in-person to remote workplaces deprived employees of potential mental health support, leaving them susceptible to the



pressure of enormous change with little guidance. Because of this situation, the potential for future crises, and the constant pressure that salespersons face daily, we studied how certain personal resources—work adaptability and family work support—along with supervisor support can mitigate the consequences of depression on salesperson performance.

The Workplace in a Crisis

The modern workplace can be an extremely stressful environment that places high demands on employees. For employees experiencing depression, this can often lead to decreased employee confidence, decision-making, planning, and problem-solving. The start of the pandemic left salespeople with little guidance—they were forced to handle an entirely new sales environment, some having to relocate to maintain relationships with clients or maintain sales quotas without direct access to clients.³ COVID-19 made us consider how salespeople with higher levels of depression would respond in crisis situations.

Due to the lack of structural resources in a virtual, restricted workplace, we explored personal resources, as previously mentioned. First, among these, is work adaptability. With a known positive impact on performance, adaptability refers to an individual's ability to be flexible and to alter his or her behaviors based on perceived information about the work situation to meet the demands of change.⁴ Second, a more well-known factor is family work support, referring to whether salespeople have family members who provide encouragement, understanding, attention, positivity, and guidance regarding an employee's work role.⁵ This one is likely the most critical due to the preventative effect that a strong family support structure has against mental health disorders. Lastly, a personal but also structural aspect is supervisor support—defined as the supervisor's willingness to provide feedback, assist in learning and improvement, and provide useful information.⁶ Since supervisors are often the direct contact for work, they can be a great resource in times of crisis, depending on the relationship between the employee and supervisor. We wanted to understand the influence these resources had on salesperson performance for salespeople facing depression in a crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our Study

To study the relationship between the identified resources, depression, and sales performance, we collected data from a large North American B2B financial organization. We measured salespeople's depression along with the availability of the previously mentioned personal resources, and we then matched these measures to actual sales performance over time. This matching allowed us to investigate the impact of the three kinds of personal resources on performance during the pandemic and to determine which personal resources could actually mitigate the effects of depression.

As anticipated, we found that higher levels of depression led to larger declines in sales performance as the COVID-19 pandemic progressed. Additionally, out of the personal resources we studied, work adaptability and family work support decreased the negative effects of depression in a crisis. As expected, work adaptability in highly depressed salespeople led to easier adaptation to the situation as seen in sales performance. Likewise, highly depressed salespeople with greater family work support performed better at the beginning of the crisis than colleagues with less family work support, but, unfortunately, family work support has little effect on depression overall. What was unexpected was how supervisor support initially detracted from performance during the pandemic but was later instrumental in supporting performance over time. These results indicate how external actors and a salesperson's personal characteristics can affect sales performance in a time of crisis.

Real Estate Implications

During the pandemic, residential real estate demand severely increased in suburbs and less populated areas around the country, while commercial real estate supply drastically outpaced demand, as many firms transitioned to remote workplaces. This situation illustrates how crises

can alter the sales landscape and the workplace, forcing firms to adapt. Real estate agents face the same pressures, if not more, as salespeople in other industries, due to trust placed in real estate agents by their clients.

To address sales performance in times of crisis, especially when mental health issues arise, real estate firms should develop resources to ensure that employees receive support. We find that it is essential that firms raise awareness of depression, provide self-assessment tools, and provide access to mental health professionals. Such early investment can pay off in the long run, as salespeople perform better with reduced depression. Work adaptability



can be fostered through training and workshops that build confidence and abilities, thus enhancing salespeople's adaptability in a rapidly changing world. Additionally, there is potential in training supervisors through information sessions or guides on how to best support the mental health of salespeople, providing another source of support in the stressful real estate environment.

We believe that combatting depression is a necessary step for a real estate firms and leaders. Salespeople will feel more satisfied with their jobs, creating a more positive work environment that supports productivity. Customers will likely notice the difference and prefer firms with happier, more satisfied employees.

Recommended Reading

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Knowledge is Power: Can Consumer Knowledge Limit Perceptions of Sales Pressure?

James J. Zboja, PhD, Susan Brudvig, PhD, Mary Dana Laird, PhD, and Ronald A. Clark, PhD

Steve confidently walks up to the open house. He has done his homework and knows precisely what he wants. He has also used the Internet to look up selling prices of comparable homes in the area. The well-seasoned real estate agent approaches with a friendly style, aware that this sales interaction will be a bit different from those in years past. The advantage of information asymmetry long enjoyed by salespeople has given way to a more knowledgeable customer. Can this be a good thing? If so, what does this mean for salespeople?



Although some salespeople still apply high-pressure sales tactics, most academics and marketers agree that “pressure is an effective strategy for producing managerially undesirable consequences.”¹ In fact, consumer perceptions of sales pressure (POSP) have been found to negatively impact both satisfaction with and trust in the salesperson,² which can impact desirable outcomes such as loyalty and repurchase.³ Given the importance of these outcomes, our research seeks to better understand an understudied area—consumer perceptions of sales pressure. We explore the roles of consumer entitlement, self-perception of high levels of product knowledge and persuasion knowledge, awareness of sales persuasion tactics, and how these influence consumer POSP. We also examine the degree to which consumer product knowledge strengthens or weakens these relationships. Specifically, we test whether product knowledge can enhance the negative impact of persuasion knowledge on perceived sales pressure, while also mitigating the positive impact of consumer entitlement. Hopefully, this understanding will help firms prevent situations in which consumers feel pressured to buy and instead will create mutually beneficial sales exchanges.

Consumer Entitlement and Perceived Sales Pressure

Large-scale research has documented an increase in entitlement in the last few decades,⁴ which has led the popular press to suggest that younger generations are more entitled than older generations.⁵ Some have argued that entitlement may be partially to blame for a declining resilience among younger Americans.⁶ This, coupled with the finding that consumer entitlement

can mitigate the relationship between value and satisfaction,⁷ could suggest that entitled consumers are more likely to perceive pressure during a sales interaction. Meanwhile, consumers have more resources than ever to learn about products before buying them. As consumers become more sophisticated and knowledgeable about their purchases, it stands to reason that knowledge plays a role in sales interactions. Product knowledge has been found to influence the extent of a consumer's sense of perceived pressure in a buying situation. For example, perceived product knowledge of the salesperson has been found to reduce felt sale pressure.² Meanwhile, the same study found that perceived persuasion knowledge of the consumer also minimized perceptions of sales pressure. In other words, knowing that someone is attempting to persuade you tends to soften the intensity of pressure you may feel. Our research seeks to explore the interaction of a consumer's product knowledge with the impacts of both entitlement and persuasion knowledge on perceptions of sales pressure.

Research Findings

We tested our hypotheses via a survey of 347 adult consumers. Our results were mostly confirmed. Consistent with our hypotheses, we found that a higher level of consumer entitlement was related to a higher level of perceived pressure in the sales interaction. In comparison, a higher level of persuasion knowledge resulted in lower perceived pressure. Further, product knowledge was found to moderate the relationship between persuasion knowledge and perceived pressure. Specifically, the mitigating impact of persuasion knowledge on perceptions of pressure was not realized at low levels of product knowledge but increased with consumer product knowledge. So, where reducing felt pressure is concerned, knowledge is indeed power.

Implications for Reducing Perceptions of Sales Pressure in Real Estate

Considering these findings, it would behoove real estate agents not only to encourage, but also actively enable, clients to be more informed in their buying efforts. This could be accomplished through many means. Agents can make a concerted effort to ensure that their customers are more knowledgeable about their products and services. Firms could provide informative website content or host seminars/webinars that offer in-depth training on the real estate market or other home buying-related subjects. As a result of their enhanced product knowledge, these enabled consumers will feel less pressured in a buying situation, resulting in a more satisfying and trusting interaction with their agent. To help reduce perceived pressure via enhanced persuasion knowledge, transparency in the selling process should be the standard. The buying process will feel like more of a buyer-seller partnership, with the goal of a high-quality purchase and experience for all involved. Even though the moderation of product knowledge was insignificant where consumer entitlement is concerned, including the client in a partnership will certainly also appeal to the ego of the more entitled consumer. Given the extent to which entitled consumers value their opinions and input, it seems likely that the more that buyers feel heard and valued by the agent, the more responsive they will be with their purchases. This is universally true of

consumers, but even more so with entitled consumers. Purchasing a home is a deeply personal and likely emotional endeavor, so putting the client at ease is vital.

Lastly, the firm's efforts to educate the customer should begin with their human resource management. Hiring the right people in customer contact roles is essential. For instance, in many cases, the agent may be the only customer contact with the firm. Further, buying a home is almost certainly the biggest purchase an individual or family will make, so the emotions and anxiety that often accompany the ride should always be acknowledged and managed. It is essential that the right people are trained to be experts in product knowledge and information management to help the customer parse through the volumes of data available to them with only a few clicks of a mouse. Through training of both client and agent, a win-win situation should emerge in which a relationship between buyer and seller can grow.



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Zboja, James J., Susan Brudvig, Mary Dana Laird, and Ronald A. Clark (2021), "The Roles of Consumer Entitlement, Persuasion Knowledge, and Perceived Product Knowledge on Perceptions of Sales Pressure," *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 29(4), 435-447. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10696679.2020.1870239>

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Dr. Jim Zboja’s (PhD – Florida State University) research generally focuses on interpersonal influence in selling interactions and in organizations. Much of Jim’s work has also focused on consumer perceptions of sales pressure, including the development of a scale to measure the same. He has been published in *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Journal of Services Marketing*, *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, and *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, among others. Jim’s teaching has included courses on personal selling, services marketing, and is currently focused on marketing research. Jim has industry experience in sales and merchandising roles with Campbell Soup Company, BellSouth Mobility, among others. Finally, Jim obsessively enjoys watching live music with his wife Mary Dana and daughter Julie.

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Dr. Ronald A. Clark’s (PhD – Florida State University) research has focused on understanding consumer responses to social influence in retail, sales, and social contexts. Dr. Clark has published articles on consumer psychometrics/scale development, social influence, persuasion, group dynamics, consumer models of social response, consumer personality and individual differences, consumer self-concept, and consumer responses to sales pressure. Dr. Clark’s research has been published in *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *Psychology & Marketing*, *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, *Journal of Social Psychology*, *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*, *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *Journal of Promotion Management*, *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, *Social Behavior and Personality*, *Journal of International Consumer Marketing*, *International Journal of Logistics Management*, *Journal of International Business and Cultural Studies*, *Journal of Applied Marketing Theory*, and others.

Facial First Impressions: The Influence of Babyface Overgeneralization on Agents' Online Profiles

Alexis Yim, PhD, Brad Price, PhD, Raj Agnihotri, PhD, and Annie Peng Cui, PhD

Have you ever noticed how platforms like Zillow and Rover prominently display profile pictures? It's no accident. Our faces are powerful communicators, even online. In the world of real estate, a profile picture might be your only chance to make a good first impression, and research shows it can significantly influence how clients perceive you. Online profile pictures on Zillow, Realtor, or a real estate company's website, often the only pre-interaction glimpse of a real estate agent, significantly influence consumer decisions, such as whether to leave online reviews.

Facial cues act as potent first impressions, shaping judgments of trustworthiness, competence, and likeability. We investigated whether online profile photos have this facial first impression effect, demonstrating how perceived facial characteristics influence consumer engagement with real estate agents.



There is an interesting phenomenon called the "babyface overgeneralization effect," which suggests that individuals with childlike features are attributed certain personality traits. For example, prior research shows that narrower jaws, smaller noses, and rounder eyes are perceived as a "babyface." Such individuals are perceived as kind and warm, while mature faces imply competence and intelligence. Our research delves into this effect by testing its impact on the number of online reviews received by real estate agent based on their profile picture facial maturity. Furthermore, we explore whether this effect is different for men and women. We explore this effect for both high involvement services (real estate) and low involvement services (prepaid phone plan).

Our Study

Leveraging real-world data and cutting-edge AI facial recognition technology, we test if there is a link between profile picture facial maturity, gender, and the number of online reviews real estate agents receive. We analyzed real-world data from Zillow, studying 1,000 real estate agents' profile pictures to understand the impact of a "babyface" on the number of salespeople's online review numbers. Is there a correlation between a real estate agent's perceived babyface and their reviews on Zillow?

Using Microsoft facial recognition technology, specifically Azure, we assessed each agent's facial features and assigned "babyface" scores while controlling for factors such as real estate agents' attractiveness, age, and local demographics (e.g., median household income).

Our analysis revealed a negative relationship between a real estate agent's "babyface" score and the number of online reviews they received. Additionally, "babyface" features had a negative effect on review numbers for male agents, whereas it had no significant impact on female agents' online review numbers. Overall, our findings suggest that having a more mature appearance in online profile pictures may lead to higher review numbers, particularly for male agents operating in high-involvement contexts such as real estate sales.

In a subsequent study involving over two hundred consumers, we investigated consumer intent to leave online reviews based on perceptions of salespersons' babyfaces ("babyface" vs. "mature"). Interestingly, for high-involvement purchases like car insurance, consumers expressed a tendency to leave more reviews for salespeople with mature faces. Conversely, for low-involvement purchases such as a one-time prepaid phone plan, consumers were more inclined to leave reviews for salespeople with babyfaces.

Real Estate Implications

In the online platform realm, consumer reviews wield considerable influence, making our research particularly pertinent for platform managers. We have shed light on the significant impact of real estate agent profile pictures on review acquisition. When consumers search for real estate services online, their first impression is often based on visual cues, with the profile picture playing a crucial role.

Our research has revealed that for high involvement services, such as real estate transactions, profile pictures conveying maturity tend to attract more online reviews. This not only benefits the platform by driving increased traffic but also enhances its appeal compared to competitors. Platforms like Zillow and Realtor.com could strategically encourage real estate agents to adopt mature-looking profile photos to boost review numbers and enhance their online presence. For real estate agents aiming to project maturity, professional attire can play a pivotal role in shaping their image. Conversely, platforms like Fiverr, which primarily cater to low-involvement services, might suggest a more youthful appearance for freelancers to encourage review engagement. It's important to note that this distinction primarily impacts men.

The difference between a "babyface" and a mature face transcends cultural and age boundaries, making our recommendations universally applicable. This emphasizes the importance of our findings in guiding platform managers and real estate professionals toward effectively optimizing their online presence.

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About the Authors

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As a marketing researcher, Dr. Alexis Yim (PhD – West Virginia University) has explored the effects of cuteness in marketplaces and factors influencing salespeople's performance. These works have been presented at the American Marketing Association (AMA) Conference and Decision Science Conference and published in the *European Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, and the Handbook of Cross-Cultural Marketing Research. Her work has won Best Overall Paper at Proceedings of the International Roadside Safety Conference and the AMA Sales SIG's Doctoral Dissertation Proposal Competition. She also contributed to research at the Midwest Roadside Safety Facility, the Nebraska Manufacturing Partnership Extension, and the Nebraska Center for Entrepreneurship. Professor Yim worked for Fortune 100 companies, including Dell and Pfizer, before earning her doctorate.

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Dr. Brad Price’s (PhD – University of Minnesota, Statistics) research interests are in developing novel machine learning and statistical computing methodologies, theory, and applications, most recently with specific applications in healthcare and business operations. Dr. Price has published in top journals such as the *Journal of Machine Learning Research*, *Journal of Computational and Graphical Statistics*, *Production and Operations Management*, *European Journal of Marketing*, *INFORMS Journal of Applied Analytics*, *Journal of Trauma and Acute Care Surgery*, *Information and Technology Management*, among other top tier outlets in statistics, machine learning, business, and healthcare. His research has also been externally funded by external entities such as the National Institute of Health, the National Science Foundation, and the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources. Price has also won awards for teaching, research, and service, including a Department of Army Civilian Service Medal for his role in West Virginia’s COVID-19 pandemic response. He advises numerous student projects in the Master of Science in Business Data Analytics programs. Dr. Price serves as Co-Director of Biostatistics, Epidemiology, and Research Design Core at West Virginia Clinical and Translational Science Institute, where he works with a team to utilize machine learning, data, and technology to impact healthcare outcomes in rural America. He also assists in Data-Driven WV, a student experiential learning and engagement center around data analytics, machine learning, and technology.

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Dr. Annie Peng Cui's (PhD – Kent State University) research focuses on firms' branding, pricing and international marketing strategies. Her scholarly contributions have been published in reputable journals such as *Journal of International Marketing*, *Journal of Business Research*, *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, *Industrial Marketing Management*, among others. She is a co-author of *International Marketing*, 11th ed. Dr. Cui's approach to her role as a marketing researcher is marked by her commitment to bridging the gap between academic insights and practical business applications. Her focus lies in pioneering cutting-edge research that directly engages with and resolves real-world business challenges. She provides service to the marketing profession by serving as the Managing Editor for *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice* and a board member on American Marketing Association's Global SIG (SIG Chair 2014-2017).

Crafting Connections: The Impact of Slogans on Brand Identity Alignment

Mayukh Dass, PhD, Chiranjeev Kohli, PhD, and Manaswini Acharya, PhD

The role of brand identity in strengthening the brand-customer connection has become increasingly critical in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.¹ As consumers' perceptions of



brand messages evolve, advertisers respond by revisiting their messages and investing more heavily, with North American advertising spending projected to exceed \$370 billion by 2024.² In this context, brand name, logo, and slogan's semiotic components gain strategic importance in enhancing brand equity. This paper focuses on slogans and examines slogan-related factors that enhance alignment with brand identity.

The word "slogan," derived from the Celtic word "slaugh," meaning "war cry," underscores the influential role of words in slogans, perceived as powerful weapons in the competitive realm of brands.³ In the advertising war among brands, slogans serve as short, memorable phrases that represent brands and aid customers in recalling brands.⁴ In brand advertising, slogans play a substantial role, capturing the essence of brands and distinguishing them in a crowded market.⁵ However, their effectiveness extends beyond mere recall; slogans enhance brand image and equity, reflecting the brand's identity and marketing efforts.⁶

The Study and its Implications

The study at the core of this article investigates the nuanced art of slogan design, specifically exploring factors that influence the alignment between slogans and brand identity. Drawing from a comprehensive analysis of slogan data, the research identifies critical determinants of alignment. Message clarity and creativity enhance alignment, creating a cohesive brand narrative. However, the study issues a cautionary note against using jingles and rhymes, suggesting that these elements weaken the alignment between slogans and brand identity, despite of their extensive use by advertisers.

Implications for the Real Estate Industry

Our findings have direct relevance in the context of the real estate business because property purchases involve substantial emotional and financial considerations. Real estate agents frequently want assistance in developing a brand identity that resonates with clients and

distinguishes them in a competitive market. Slogans, as short statements of a brand's core, are essential in molding perceptions and influencing buyer and seller decision-making.

Enhancing Message Clarity

In the real estate sector, where transparency and clarity are paramount, the study emphasizes the critical role of message clarity in slogans. Real estate slogans that convey information clearly and concisely can instill confidence in clients. For instance, a slogan like "Your Dream Home, Our Commitment" communicates an explicit promise to potential buyers, aligning the brand with buyers' aspirations. Real estate professionals can leverage this insight to craft slogans that capture the essence of their services and provide a transparent and straightforward message to clients.

Using Creativity to Forge Connections

In the real estate market, creativity in slogan design has emerged as a significant technique for forging client connections. Creative slogans can elicit good thoughts and make a lasting impact in a setting where emotions frequently determine property decisions. For example, a phrase like "Turning Houses into Homes, One Dream at a Time" gives a unique touch to the brand narrative, infusing warmth and relatability. Real estate professionals can use slogan development to elicit emotions, promote brand affinity, and establish a distinctive presence in clients' minds.

Caution Against Jingles and Rhyme

In contrast to typical advertising methods, the study warns against employing jingles and rhymes in real estate slogans. Overly styled or gimmicky aspects may damage the brand's reputation in real estate, where professionalism and trust are essential. It is recommended that real estate professionals avoid jingles and rhymes that may damage the clarity and sophistication required in property transactions. Instead, the emphasis should be on balancing inventiveness and professionalism in slogan design.

Conclusion

Our study on slogan design and brand alignment resonates strongly with the real estate industry's imperatives. As real estate professionals negotiate an environment impacted by shifting consumer perceptions and market realities, slogans emerge as a powerful tool for brand distinction and client engagement.



Using our findings, real estate professionals may improve their advertising methods, inject creativity into their brand narratives, and create genuine connections with buyers and sellers. The

symbiotic relationship between good slogan design, message clarity, and brand alignment provides a roadmap for improving buyer-seller interaction in real estate and elevating real estate relationships.

As the sector adapts to shifting tides, the wise implementation of these insights can contribute to a real estate landscape in which brands transmit trust and trustworthiness and truly resonate with their clients' ambitions and emotions. Effective slogan design becomes a compass in real estate, as each transaction is a unique journey, guiding professionals toward long-term success in the buyer-seller connection.

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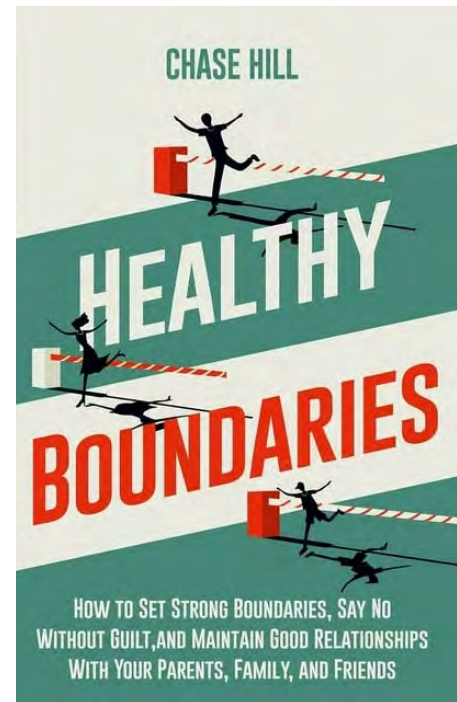
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Manaswini Acharya's research focuses on the intersection of branding, marketing strategy, and the technology-marketing interface, specifically for B2B firms. She aims to explore how these elements synergize to drive successful marketing campaigns and business growth in the B2B context.

INSIDER: Healthy Boundaries

Vineet Paidisetty, BBA

The modern individual has numerous relationships. While relationships range from important, such as a family member, to transient, such as a colleague, all of these relationships can have a significant impact on our lives. As social creatures, humans are most often enriched by the vibrancy of having social connections. Simultaneously, however, these connections on which we depend can also be detrimental to our well-being. Chase Hill, author of *Healthy Boundaries*, describes situations in which relationships are encroaching onto our lives and conditions under which they transition from beneficial to harmful. Hill outlines how to identify when boundaries are disregarded by our families, friends, and coworkers, and the author then offers solutions that can enable us to live healthier, more fulfilling lives.



THINK POINT #1: Identifying a Need for Boundaries

Boundaries can be categorized as physical, emotional, time, sexual, intellectual, or material. These categories are not a strict classification, nor do they need to be. The first step to achieving a more fulfilling life is to identify if there really is a need for certain boundaries. A common perspective might be that they are unnecessary; however, a simple list of questions in *Healthy Boundaries* can confirm or deny your belief. These questions range from simple, such as, “Do you regularly feel stressed, anxious or overwhelmed?” to more pointed questions like, “Do you resent your loved ones when they ask too much of you?” Taking time to answer each of these questions honestly will allow for careful consideration of one’s situation and determine if there are shortcomings troubling the relationship. One caveat of this is the influence that cultural differences can have on our answers to these questions. These differences may represent intrusions; others will be viewed as a normal, especially when it comes to family. It is important to consider these differences when determining if there is a need for boundaries.

THINK POINT #2: Workplace Boundaries for Positive Working Environments

The modern work environment is stressful, intensifying with the COVID-19 pandemic as companies transitioned to hybrid or remote work, which enabled professional lives to encroach onto personal lives. Regardless of the environment, the workplace is a well-known stressor for the American workforce with 39% of people indicating that their workload causes them stress and 35% identifying their bosses as the main cause. There are very few professions where excess

stress is justified, since it is a detriment to overall productivity and health. Thus, it is important that boundaries be established in the workplace to maintain a positive environment.

As a supervisor or an employee, it is vital to support boundaries that reduce the instances of racism, bullying, discrimination, unwanted sexual advances, unpaid labor, narcissism, and other aspects that can bring negativity into the office. Doing so will help employees feel comfortable and accepted, promoting cooperation and collaboration. A firm with established boundaries that intend to protect the well-being of its employees will fare better in the long-term and consistently attract talent, especially for younger generations who prioritize mental well-being enter the labor force.

THINK POINT #3: Setting Boundaries with Family or in the Workplace

Setting boundaries with family members is a difficult process. Guilt and shame are common when setting boundaries with family, particularly parents (no matter your age!). There are numerous possible family relationships, but the most significant is the parent-child relationship. Many parents face challenges adapting to the reality of a grown child, even well into the child's adulthood. Parents are unable to imagine themselves with a hands-off approach. However, forgoing such change can result in suffocation and can have negative consequences for other relationships or parts of your life. Thus, it is vital to break control and establish boundaries between your adult life and your parents. The first step is to disrupt the control with disarming phrases such as "As an adult, I am no longer scared of you," or "My feelings are as equally important as yours." These seemingly harsh words can help establish your independence. Afterward, it is important to continue to the conversation with parents to build a new relationship, one that meets your needs and one that is accepted by them. Within this conversation are other considerations: empathize with your parents' feelings, maintain your stance, set consequences, stay persistent, and respect the differences between yourself and your parents. In time, this advice can help parent and child evolve into a productive and healthy relationship.

Workplace boundaries are valuable to maintaining a safe, positive, and productive environment. Boundaries with colleagues and superiors are integral to keeping peace in a stressful environment. The steps to establishing these boundaries are similar to those with family members: use direct statements to address situations that make you feel uncomfortable. At the same time, since this is a professional environment and since employees have responsibilities, it is necessary to determine if the situation is within the realm of your employment contract. If not, then definitely address the situation, even involving Human Resources if necessary. By taking

these steps, you are contributing to the creation of an openly communicative and collaborative workplace that is beneficial for all.

Real Estate Implications

A real estate firm is just like any other firm in that its employees need a safe, positive workplace. Therefore, it is important that having strong workplace boundaries that allow employees to provide the best services. This is especially important in real estate since it is primarily service based, thus, relying on personal interactions with



clients. A workplace that leaves agents dissatisfied will transfer these feelings to clients and prospects, thus driving them away. Therefore, supervisors must consistently maintain the state of the workplace and investigate complaints to prevent the alienation of employees. Doing so will keep employees happier, healthier, and more willing to dedicate themselves to a firm that they believe in, enhancing your firm's competitive advantage.

While it is important to separate personal and professional lives, advising employees on how they can maintain their personal boundaries too can compound the benefits of having boundaries in the workplace. By pursuing a workplace and environment in which employees can thrive, real estate managers can ensure that clients receive the best services and maintain the success of their firms.

Recommended Reading

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About the Author

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Vineet Paidisetty graduated from Baylor University with a Bachelor of Business Administration in Finance and Baylor Business Fellows. During his undergraduate tenure, he engaged in a research internship at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, Texas. Additionally, he served as a Venture Capital Research Intern with Bios Partners in Fort Worth, Texas. Vineet is currently a medical student at the Baylor College of Medicine with an interest in specializing in sports medicine and orthopedics while actively engaging in the healthcare startup arena.

INSIDER: Misbelief: What makes Rational People Believe Irrational Things

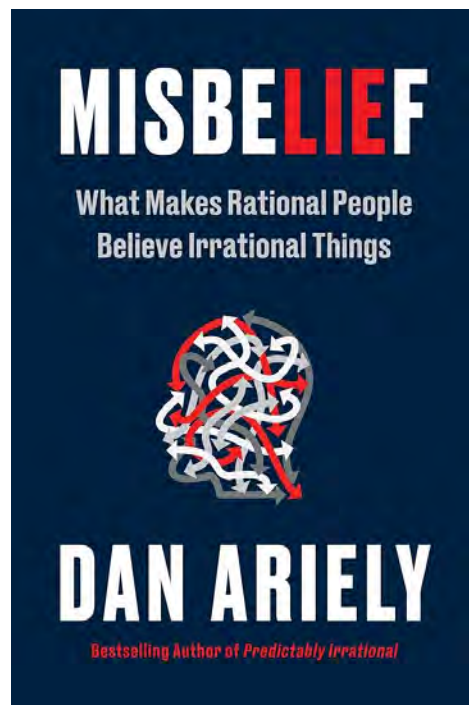
Dominic Alioto, MBA Candidate

Imagine a shocking headline that claims the impossible, such as: The world is actually being controlled by lizard people from underground! You might scoff, read a few sentences from the article, then shake your head in disbelief. How could rational people actually believe this? No doubt you've seen Facebook posts from relatives and friends arguing that the government has been covering up the existence of aliens since the 1940s. What causes people to believe such unlikely claims? Dan Ariely's newest book *Misbelief* was written to address this very phenomenon.

Ariely defines misbelief as two things: first, as a “distorted lens through which people begin to view the world, reason about the world, and then describe the world to others,” and second, as “process” and a funnel that draws people further in. The aim of Ariely's *Misbelief* is not to criticize people with outlandish beliefs, but rather to understand and emphasize with the emotional, cognitive, personal, and social elements that lead one to become a misbeliever.

While Ariely spends much of the book addressing different factors that contribute to someone falling down the “funnel of misbelief,” we will only briefly summarize this concept here. Ariely uses the term “funnel” to describe how conspiracy theories entrap people, who then spiral from rationality to posting about Flat Earth conspiracies in a short period of time. The funnel begins with an emotional response to some issue, often brought on by stress. After an emotional arrival at a conclusion, people rationalize their decision. Confirmation bias will often influence subsequent decisions here; we are more inclined to lend credence to research that supports our preexisting beliefs. Personality influences this process, as some people are more prone to mistrust institutions, exhibit stubbornness, or lack intellectual humility. These factors may prevent people from changing their mind once they have made a decision. Social circles often form around misbelief systems, where members reinforce favored ideas. The pull of community is incredibly powerful, especially for those otherwise ostracized from mainstream society.

For example, take Chloe, a fictional young woman who distrusts the government, an attitude only amplified by the COVID pandemic and all the regulation surrounding that. In school, she learns of President John F. Kennedy and is enraptured by his youthful optimism and ideals but crushed that he was cut down in his prime. Chloe sees a video claiming the government withheld



the true story of his assassination, and that it was secretly a plot by the CIA. She does some Internet research, and feels confident in this new idea. She mentions this theory a few times to family and friends, who scoff at her. She is hurt, more hurt than they realize. She finds new friends online, who are supportive of her new beliefs. Within a few weeks of spending time with this new group and being surrounded by their coinciding misbeliefs, her former friends and family can barely recognize Chloe. This is the funnel of misbelief at work.

Interesting as this funnel of belief may be, its applications in the real estate industry are more nuanced and can be particularly seen in how clients form and cling to certain beliefs about property markets or investment opportunities. However, several ideas discussed throughout include how to interact with people who hold completely opposite views from yourself and strongly dislike you simply because of what you represent to them. While some of these ideas relate directly to selling, many more relate generally to interacting with people that hold contrary beliefs, perhaps held without much credibility.

THINK POINT #1: Cognitive Effects of Stress

As mentioned in the funnel, stress is a primary negative factor in every aspect of the misbelief funnel. One study by Dutton and Aron indicted that humans are generally unable to discern where our emotions come from, especially stress. This means we can be experiencing extreme stress and attribute it to things that have no bearing on our stress. For example, perhaps you know someone who has been reposting some misbelief-oriented content recently, and is subconsciously attributing his stress the workings of the world elite. However, you also know your friend is recently divorced, his kids left for college, and his job is uncertain. More than likely, the world's elite are not hellbent on his misfortune, but your friend is just having a rough go of things. This is the very example Ariely uses to emphasize how we often misattribute stress to unrelated forces.

Additionally, stress can have an extremely negative impact on cognitive abilities. Researchers from the University of Warwick performed a study in which a group of farmers took Raven's Progressive Matrices test twice, once before harvest, and again after harvest. Raven's Progressive Matrices is a nonverbal test to measure general intelligence and abstract reasoning capabilities. The pre-harvest testing was a proxy for stress, as farmers are experiencing economic insecurity, less income, and more responsibilities during this time. Post-harvest was baseline, and assumed no other effects on farmers. The results were astounding—the same group of farmers performed 25% worse pre-harvest, showing that stress has a negative effect on intelligence and reasoning. No doubt you've had experiences where you reacted to stress, like forgetting an appointment because you're preoccupied with performance reviews or being unable to focus on a conversation when a family member is in the hospital. It's important to limit or manage stressors well to improve cognitive health. For tips on how to do so, make sure to read our recent [“INSIDER: Stop Overthinking.”](#)

THINK POINT #2: Scout versus Soldier Mentality

Ariely also introduced the idea of being a scout rather than a soldier. The aim is not to defend your own beliefs, but rather to discover what the other person believes. For example, you show a newly married couple a beautiful four-bedroom house with a gorgeous kitchen, a spacious backyard, and large windows that capture the sunset. This house fits their family planning goals, is in their budget, and is close to an excellent school. By your estimation,



this house is a perfect fit. However, when the couple arrives at the house, they immediately do not like it. Perhaps they even voice strong opinions about the house's distance from a convenience store and the untended landscaping. Instead of becoming defensive and trying to persuade them to consider the house, you can pivot and ask them what they dislike so much. From there, your next recommendation will be more in line with their ideal home.

THINK POINT #3: Heuristics as Obstacles in Complex Decision-Making

Most people like to think of themselves as rational decision makers. If you inquire about the reasons for one of your friends spontaneously buying a new iPhone, he'll give you a detailed explanation on why he chose one model over another. "It's the best on the market," he tells you, and proceeds to tell you all the amazing things his phone can do. However, if you were with him when he actually purchased the phone, his decision-making process hinged more on what the attractive saleswomen had recommended. His ability to explain his past reasoning is an example of the hindsight bias, where people can give you precise reasons on why they did something despite not using those reasons at time of the decision. His decision-making process, where he was influenced by something other than the actual product, can be considered a heuristic: a sort of mental shortcut that allows us to make decisions easily without thinking too much about it.

Hundreds of years ago, when humanity made split-second decisions in the face of constant danger, heuristics were incredibly useful to make snap judgments. Nowadays, we rely on these same gut-reflex mechanisms when we should instead carefully weigh our beliefs. Your friend who purchased the phone may be confident in his decision even though it was shaped largely by the attractiveness of the saleswoman, when he should've considered other factors. Similarly, in real estate, a client's choice might seem based on thorough research, but often, it's influenced more by persuasive marketing or a charismatic agent's recommendations. Even in the example of

the young couple, though a house might appear ideal on paper, in practice, responses can vary wildly.

Conclusion

Dan Ariely's *Misbelief* provides valuable insight into the reasons why people fall into certain beliefs. With a combination of emotional, cognitive, personal, and social factors, it is possible for anyone to become a misbeliever. In the real estate industry, one can adopt some of these same strategies to get to the core of people's beliefs and desires in order to best serve customer needs.

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Dominic Alioto is currently pursuing his MBA in Healthcare Administration. He earned his BBA from Baylor University with majors in Business Fellows, International Business, and Economics, also completing the Honors Program and a minor in Mathematics. Dominic aims to work several years as a hospital executive, then return to school for a PhD in the health economics field.



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