

Marketing social selling jobs: a re-labelling strategy

Yuna Kim

*Department of Marketing, California State University,
Fullerton, California, USA, and*

John S. Talbott

*Department of Marketing, Kelley School of Business,
Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, USA*

2

Received 20 March 2017
Revised 10 June 2017
15 August 2017
Accepted 15 August 2017

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to investigate whether communicating recent changes in the sales profession, shifting from a performance-focused model to a customer need-focused model, to job candidates by re-labelling job descriptions can increase job candidates' interest in pursuing sales jobs.

Design/methodology/approach – Two experiments using job candidates (undergraduate business students) were conducted at two public US universities to examine: whether job candidates use job title or job description to determine their interest in pursuing jobs and whether terminology used in the job description affects job candidates' interest in pursuing sales jobs.

Findings – Results show that job candidates' interest in pursuing jobs are affected by job titles more than the actual job responsibilities. Further, job candidates' interest in pursuing sales jobs is affected by terminology used in the job descriptions, where customer need-focused (selling-focused) terminology increases (decreases) interest in pursuing a sales job.

Practical implications – Sales jobs have been recognized as one of the hardest job positions to fill. Results from this paper can help recruiters develop effective strategies to improve job candidates' interest in pursuing sales jobs, especially the emerging social selling jobs.

Originality/value – Contrary to most extant research that investigates resistance toward sales jobs by examining job candidates' idiosyncratic characteristics, this paper adopts a branding and consumer learning perspective and examines how job candidates' interest in pursuing a job is influenced by their ability or willingness to process job information.

Keywords Information processing, Customer need-focussed, Re-labelling, Rebranding, Sales jobs, Social selling jobs

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

While the struggle to positively position sales jobs in the minds of job candidates has been a topic of interest for many years (e.g. Dubinsky, 1981; Cummins *et al.*, 2015; Peltier *et al.*, 2014; Spillan *et al.*, 2007; Stevenson and Paksoy, 1983), the rapidly evolving sales environment calls for a need to address this issue more than ever. Specifically, by facilitating the content publishing and diffusion process, advances in technology have enabled consumers to obtain and share information more easily, quickly, and in large volumes using various online platforms. Armed with information and knowledge, consumers are no longer satisfied with merely accepting products and services created by firms and sold by salespeople, but often find or demand better value.

For example, the role of car dealers is changing as consumers no longer make purchase decisions at the dealership, but go fully prepared with detailed information on best prices, deals, and rates. To satisfy the “new consumers,” automotive dealerships are moving away from the typical “performance-focused” sales model to a “customer need-focused” sales model. In contrast to typical car dealers, who are often described as those “[who] want to make the most money on the car” (Montoya, 2013), BMW dealerships are hiring “product geniuses” whose role is to help “customers better utilize and configure products in accordance with their particular needs” (Archer, 2012). Similarly, Tesla relies on customers



to conduct their own research and simply provide “product specialists,” who “are not on commission and will never pressure [customers] to buy a car” and whose “goal and the sole metric of success is to [help customers] enjoy the experience of visiting [Tesla’s showroom] so much that [they] look forward to returning again” (Musk, 2012).

The objective of this paper is to investigate how firms can effectively communicate these changes occurring in the sales profession and increase job candidates’ interest in pursuing the emerging “social selling” jobs, especially during the early stages of their job search process. Social selling jobs refer to the new sales jobs that focus on understanding customer perspective and pain points, while leveraging new media channels to interact with customers. This paper proposes that just as new products need to be branded or promoted to consumers, the new social selling jobs should also be (re)branded. Specifically, firms that have adopted the new customer need-focused sales model should start re-labeling job descriptions by using customer need-focused (vs selling-focused) terminology. Job candidates may not be opposed to sales jobs, especially the new social selling jobs, but may continue to avoid these jobs based on negative associations attached to the term “sales.” Therefore, re-labeling terminology in job descriptions may deter job candidates from immediately rejecting job prospects. In other words, job candidates’ interest in pursuing sales jobs may increase if they are motivated to evaluate the actual job rather than prior associations attached to the job.

Theoretical background and hypotheses development

Many studies investigating negative perception toward the sales profession have focused on undergraduate students since sales-related jobs are an important career entry point for this population and understanding resistance from this population can provide important insights. Studies have examined whether individual characteristics, such as gender, race, or cultural background affect student perception toward sales jobs. Mixed results are reported, where some studies find a difference while others do not (e.g. Allen *et al.*, 2014; Honeycutt *et al.*, 1999; Lysonski and Durvasula, 1998; Muehling and Weeks, 1988; Sojka *et al.*, 2000; Spillan *et al.*, 2007). Scholars also examined whether exposure to sales jobs through personal or family work experience or sales-related courses influences interest in sales as a career. Results suggest that students who are exposed to sales jobs through personal or family work experience have more positive perception toward sales jobs since their attitude is based on what they actually know about a sales job rather than what they think they know (Allen *et al.*, 2014). There is also a significant difference between non-business majors and business majors in their desire to enter the selling field (Spillan *et al.*, 2007). Specifically, students who take sales-related courses view sales jobs to be rewarding, satisfying, exciting, and challenging (Bristow *et al.*, 2006; Sojka *et al.*, 2000).

Despite mixed results, a common theme is that the studies focus on the idiosyncratic characteristics of the “job candidate” to determine the candidate’s likelihood to pursue a sales job. However, scholars have suggested that external marketing factors may also influence the job candidate’s evaluation of a job (Hawkes and Weathington, 2015; Pavur, 2010). Extending this research stream, this paper investigates resistance toward sales jobs from a branding and consumer learning perspective. Specifically, this paper conceptualizes job titles as the “brand name” and job descriptions as the “product information” processed by consumers (job candidates) when making purchase decisions for a product (job).

Applying a rebranding approach to market social selling jobs

The new customer need-focused sales model requires completely different skills and mindsets compared to the traditional performance-focused sales model. Nowadays, more than 65 percent of businesses and consumers conduct their own research prior to making a purchase decision and/or leverage their personal, professional, and social networks for

information and advice (Hutchison, 2014; IDC Report, 2014). Therefore, in the new business landscape, salespeople who are able to engage digitally or leverage social and professional networks are more likely to be successful. Indeed, to satisfy the digital content- and social-driven consumers, many salespeople have started to focus on providing the “right content to the right buyers at the right time through the right channel” (Hutchison, 2014). This approach is significantly different from the traditional performance-focused model, where the emphasis was placed on “selling one more product,” which often involved aggressive selling tactics (Strout, 2002; Tom, 2006).

In order to market social selling jobs, firms must first communicate the changes. We propose that an effective way to communicate the new identity of sales jobs is through rebranding. Rebranding refers to “getting a new name, term, symbol or design or a combination of more than one of these to develop a new or differentiated position” (Muzellec and Lambkin, 2006, p. 805) to modify consumers’ attitude toward a brand. Rebranding is often necessary for firms to “respond to the dynamics in its business environment by changing its self-identity in order to survive and thrive” (Tevi and Otubanjo, 2013, p. 92). For instance, changing market dynamics in the external environment, such as changes in consumer demand patterns, competitive conditions, or globalization, may force firms to reposition and rebrand (Muzellec and Lambkin, 2006; Stuart and Muzellec, 2004; Tevi and Otubanjo, 2013).

Rebranding can improve consumers’ perceived brand equity and attitude toward the brand by aligning the brand’s new identity and consumers’ knowledge of the brand (Roy and Sarkar, 2015). Scholars have suggested that effective use of marketing communications, such as advertising, publicity, or interactive marketing, can modify consumers’ knowledge of the brand by informing, persuading, and reminding consumers of the brand salience, brand performance, brand imagery, brand judgments, and brand feelings (e.g. Keller, 2009). Similarly, firms can modify job candidates’ knowledge of sales jobs by disconnecting the link between traditional selling jobs and social selling jobs and providing information about the new social selling jobs through re-labeled job titles and job descriptions.

Job titles used as heuristic cues

Consumers are known to be cognitive misers who limit their effort in processing information (Urbany, 1986). Heuristic cues are used by consumers to help make decisions more quickly and frugally by replacing complex attributes with simple ones (Gigerenzer and Gaissmaier, 2011; Kahneman and Frederick, 2002). Brand names are often used as heuristic cues when evaluating products (Aaker and Keller, 1990) since brand names allow consumers to make decisions without extensively processing or analyzing specific product attributes (Maheswaran *et al.*, 1992). In other words, consumers may purchase products based on the reputation of the brand rather than the actual quality of the product.

Job candidates may go through a similar decision-making process when evaluating jobs. Especially during the early stages of the job search process, they may use job titles as heuristic cues to determine whether a job is worth pursuing or not. Since heuristics cues are developed from accessible information that require little cognitive effort to process (Chaiken, 1980) and job candidates encounter a plethora of negative attitude toward sales jobs in their everyday lives, a sales job title is likely to be used as a negative heuristic cue. For example, insurance and car sales are consistently ranked as the most unethical occupations (Bahouth *et al.*, 2013), salespeople rank slightly higher than elected officials in terms of trustworthiness (Sojka *et al.*, 2000), and there are many online forums, reviews, and social media sites discussing negative experiences with a salesperson (Waldeck *et al.*, 2010). Salespeople are also typically portrayed as manipulative, unethical, and incompetent in popular media (Sojka *et al.*, 2000; Waldeck *et al.*, 2010).

Therefore, we hypothesize that job candidates will use the sales job title as a negative heuristic cue and automatically exclude the job from further consideration regardless of the actual job responsibilities:

- H1. Job candidates will use job titles to evaluate jobs, where a job presented with a “sales” job title will negatively affect interest in pursuing the job compared to a job presented with a “non-sales” job title.

Re-labeling job descriptions

In addition to job titles, job descriptions can also affect job candidates' interest in pursuing a job. Job descriptions provide important information, such as the firm's organizational structure or its attitude toward its employees and often form the job candidates' first impression of the firm and job (McGinty and Reitsch, 1992). For example, a competency-focused organization will likely emphasize its focus on individuals' skills and potential, opportunities to learn and grow, and long-term goals, while a job-focused organization will likely emphasize the tasks and activities (Lawler, 1994). Since job candidates likely use job descriptions to gauge their fit with a firm and determine their interest in pursuing a job, properly designed job descriptions will enable firms to attract the right job candidates (Lawler, 1994; McGinty and Reitsch, 1992; Pavur, 2010).

Prior studies have shown that sales job descriptions contribute to creating negative perceptions toward sales jobs. For example, Honeycutt *et al.* (1999) examined the effect of job descriptions by asking undergraduate students to rate positive and negative job descriptors and found that sales jobs are viewed as less appealing compared to other business jobs. However, significant changes have been made in the sales profession, moving from a performance-focused sales model to a customer need-focused sales model. Therefore, similar to firms that implement a rebranding strategy to signal any changes or improvements made to contents of products and services, sales job descriptions should also be re-labeled to reflect the changes in the sales profession.

A successful re-labeling exercise can improve external and internal perceptions toward a business field. For example, the human resource management field was able to successfully rebrand its image to enhance credibility, status, and fashionability by re-labeling the term “people” to “talent” in its descriptions (Iles *et al.*, 2010). While some scholars and practitioners criticize that rebranding human resource management as talent management is merely repackaging old ideas under a new name (Adamsky, 2003), others argue that such rebranding or re-labeling exercises provide a valuable opportunity to review existing organizational structure and philosophy (Warren, 2006). For instance, rebranding to talent management enabled firms to focus on the “mindset” of recognizing outstanding talent in a knowledge economy, while moving away from the bureaucratic emphasis on systems and structures typically associated with human resource management (Iles *et al.*, 2010).

While a total rebranding of the sales profession may take some time to complete, re-labeling terminology in job descriptions can help disconnect social selling jobs from prior negative associations attached to certain terminology. Specifically, we hypothesize that job candidates will show stronger interest in pursuing a sales job if salespeople roles are described using customer need-focused terminology (which invokes active, empowering responsibilities) compared to when the roles are described using selling-focused terminology (which focus on selling responsibilities) in job descriptions. In other words, we hypothesize that the “terminology” used in a job description will affect job candidates' interest in pursuing the job:

- H2. Job candidates will indicate higher interest in pursuing sales jobs described with “customer need-focused” terminology more than sales jobs described with “selling-focused” terminology.

By re-labeling job descriptions and providing more accurate information about social selling jobs, firms will be able to guide job candidates to make new connections between their knowledge of sales jobs and the social selling jobs. However, even if firms provide information, job candidates' individual differences may affect how they process the information. Research in consumer learning has shown that consumers learn through exposure to external information, where prior knowledge influences consumers' ability or willingness to learn from the information (e.g. Brucks, 1985; Gregan-Paxton and John, 1997; Hoch and Deighton, 1989; Johnson and Russo, 1984; Wood and Lynch, 2002). Consumers can be categorized into two groups based on the level of knowledge, where experts represent consumers that have high level of product category knowledge and novices represent consumers that have low level of product category knowledge (e.g. Alba and Hutchinson, 1987; Mitchell and Dacin, 1996).

Consumers with high-product category knowledge have high level of confidence in their knowledge, which motivates them to uphold their existing knowledge base (Alba and Hutchinson, 1987). Therefore, they may selectively search for information that aligns with their existing knowledge or distort newly received information to confirm their current beliefs based on their biased rules and importance weights (Alba and Hutchinson, 1987, 2000). This behavior stems from their confidence that processing beyond what they believe is relevant will not provide new insights (Alba and Hutchinson, 1987). While this behavior may increase processing efficiency, it can also lead these consumers to prematurely truncate information processing and thus inhibit them from subsequent learning of new knowledge (Johnson and Russo, 1984).

On the other hand, consumers with low-product category knowledge are biased toward accepting new information, whether it matches their existing knowledge or not, due to the low level of confidence in their existing knowledge (Sujan and Bettman, 1989). They are also highly motivated to engage in broader scope information processing in an effort to reduce uncertainty associated with their lack of confidence (Alba and Hutchinson, 2000; Brucks, 1985). Specifically, their high level of motivation leads to generation of more hypotheses, active search for information, and more encoding of the information (Hoch and Deighton, 1989).

The differential effects of level of product category knowledge on information processing and performance outcome have also been examined within a pedagogical context. For example, studies examining engineering students' design process found that seniors produced more creative and higher quality design solutions than sophomores (Cross *et al.*, 1994) or freshmen (Atman *et al.*, 1999). Seniors were also more confident in their design solution and critical of the design problem compared to freshmen (Atman *et al.*, 1999). A study examining pediatric interviewing skills of medical students found that freshmen obtained more interpersonal information while seniors obtained more factual information during the interview (Helfer, 1970). Differences were also observed between freshman and senior police college students, where seniors showed lower levels of authoritarianism and tendency to value toughness as a virtue compared to freshmen (Guller, 1972). Despite investigating different fields of study, these studies agree that the differences between lower-level and upper-level undergraduate students are caused by the amount of educational experiences and exposure to the field of study. Specifically, students focused on "what they know" as the best solution to a problem.

We also propose that the information processing behaviors of lower-level and upper-level business students will differ based on their knowledge of the business field. Many business programs in universities and colleges require students to complete introductory classes before taking advanced classes. This process allows students to gain exposure to the foundations of business before making a decision on their future academic and career path. Since students in the advanced stages of their academic career have taken more business

classes and have gained more experience and exposure of the business field, they may believe that they have a high level of knowledge about the business field and consider themselves to be experts. Therefore, when evaluating job descriptions, these students may believe that they have sufficient knowledge to be able to determine what is a “desirable” job trait vs a “less desirable” job trait. As a result, they may focus on specific terminology used in the job descriptions and stop processing the job description, or actual job responsibilities included in the job description, once they identify certain terminology because they believe that they already know their preference toward the job trait associated with the terminology. Conversely, students in the early stages of their academic career may consider themselves to be novices in terms of their knowledge of the business field. Therefore, we hypothesize that these students, with less knowledge and experience with the business field, will be more willing to accept, process, and learn information included in the job description. In other words, they will focus on the actual job responsibilities of the job description. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

- H2a.* Job candidates in the advanced stages of their academic career will evaluate jobs based on terminology used in the job descriptions more than actual responsibilities listed.
- H2b.* Job candidates in the early stages of their academic career will evaluate jobs based on actual responsibilities listed in the job descriptions more than terminology used.

Methodological procedures

Study 1

Study design. The purpose of Study 1 is to investigate the effect of job titles on interest in pursuing a job. A paper-and-pencil survey was conducted at a large West coast public university. A total of 98 undergraduate business students were recruited from a “Principles of Marketing” course to participate in the study. Since it is a required course, all business majors were represented in the study. In all, 63 percent of the participants were juniors, 33 percent were seniors, and 4 percent were sophomores. Prior to the main study, a pre-test was conducted to measure student preference toward a variety of marketing-related jobs where students were presented (in random order) with 12 job titles (sales, branding, content marketing, direct marketing, global marketing, analytics, marketing communications, research, online, product, retail, and social media) and were asked to rate their level of interest in pursuing each job using a six-point scale (1 – “not at all likely” to 6 – “very likely”). Based on the results of the pre-test, three jobs were selected from the top-tier (branding; $M = 4.12$), middle-tier (global marketing; $M = 4.02$), and bottom-tier (retail; $M = 3.07$) to be included in the main study along with sales (see Table I for job descriptions).

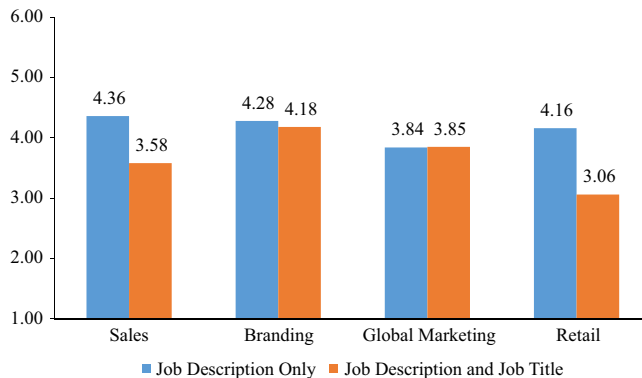
In the main study, participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions. In the description-only condition, participants were asked to rate their preference for the four jobs after reading the job descriptions only (without the job titles). In the description-title condition, participants were presented with both the job descriptions (the same ones used in the description-only condition) and the job titles of the four jobs. Actual job descriptions were collected from a widely used online marketing job search website. After reading the job information of the four jobs, all participants were asked to rate their level of interest in pursuing each job using a six-point scale (1 – “not at all likely” to 6 – “very likely”). Additional control variables such as personality and sales-related work experience were also included in Study 1.

Analysis and results. To measure a within-subject effect on multiple dependent variables (interest in the sales job and the non-sales jobs) a one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted (see Figure 1). Results show that the overall MANOVA tests of

Table I.
Job description
(Study 1)

Job title	Job description
Sales	Develop and analyze programs and retention strategies for maximum customer satisfaction and retention Play a key partnership role to the fields sales team as a strategic advisor Perform analysis of sales trends and performance to identify greater efficiency
Branding	Develop growth strategies for the brands and fostering happy consumer experiences Work with cross-functional teams to achieve business objectives, communicating the vision of the brand Must be able to cultivate an attitude of continuous improvement with regard to their work and within the company as a whole, which values problem identification and problem solving
Global marketing	Expand the customer base and create partnership-level relationships with organizers Conduct client checkpoint outreach throughout service deliverable and obtain client feedback Analyze and report on the overall market, including competitors' strengths and weaknesses, economic trends, etc., and develop strategies and tactics
Retail	Lead in-store and external marketing programs including advertising, graphics, and presentation preparation, implementation of seasonal initiatives, and point of purchase displays/merchandising Identify new product needs, develop effective new product launches Provide insights regarding POS information and e-retail metrics that drive increased effectiveness

Figure 1.
Student preference
toward job (Study 1:
main study)



Pillai's Trace (0.85) and Wilks' λ (0.15) are significant, indicating that the presentation of the job information does make a difference in job interest. To examine in which direction the MANOVA main effect was significant, separate ANOVA results were examined for each job. Results revealed that the presentation of the job information has a significant effect on interest in the sales job ($F(1, 56) = 4.72, p < 0.05$) and the retail job ($F(1, 56) = 7.57, p < 0.01$), but not for the branding job and global marketing job. Specifically, interest in pursuing the job was significantly lower when the job title was attached to the job description for the sales job ($M_{\text{description-only}} = 4.36$ vs $M_{\text{description-title}} = 3.58$). Therefore, $H1$ is supported. Of the control variables (e.g. personality, demographic, major, and work experience), only prior experience working in a sales job had a marginally significant effect ($p = 0.07$) on interest in pursuing sales jobs. None of the other control variables had a significant effect.

A *post-hoc* analysis examined the effect of switching job titles between the sales job and non-sales jobs (see Figure 2). For example, the branding job was presented to participants as a sales job and vice versa. Results reveal that when compared to a baseline interest in a sales job when a sales job title is attached to the sales job description ($M = 3.56$), participants show higher interest in a sales job when a branding job title is attached to the sales job description ($M = 3.78$) and show lower interest when a retailing job title is attached to the

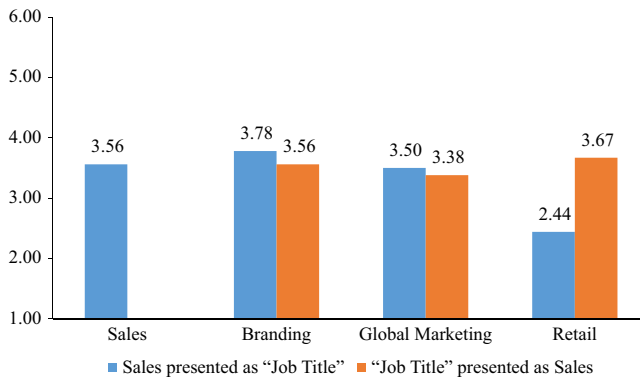


Figure 2.
Student preference
toward switched job
(Study 1: *post-hoc*
analysis)

sales job description ($M = 2.44$). Participants also show lower interest in a global marketing job when it is presented as a sales job ($M = 3.38$). In other words, the same job description is evaluated differently based on the job title attached to the description. Results from Study 1 and the *post-hoc* analysis suggest that job candidates do indeed use job titles as heuristic cues to evaluate job preference. Specifically, the sales job title, rather than the actual job responsibilities associated with the job, is used as a negative heuristic cue that decreases participants' interest in pursuing a sales job.

Study 2

Study design. The purpose of Study 2 is to examine whether using "customer need-focused" terminology (vs "selling-focused" terminology) in the job description of a sales job increases participants' interest in pursuing the job. An online survey was conducted at a large Midwestern university. A total of 286 undergraduate business students were recruited from an introductory business program and an advanced business program for course credit. The introductory business program is a freshman level program which is comprised of classes co-taught by professors across four departments (marketing, operations/supply chain, finance, and management). The advanced business program is offered to students during their junior year. In all, 53 percent of participants were freshmen and 47 percent of participants were juniors. All business majors were represented in the study. The survey asked participants to read job descriptions for two business-related job positions (sales and business analyst) and rate their interest in pursuing each job using a four-point scale (1 – "not interested at all" to 4 – "very interested"). Job descriptions for both jobs were pulled from real company job postings listed on the university's online career services website (see Table II for job descriptions). To control for any external influences, participants were informed that both jobs are open to any major, are posted from the same company, and the location and starting salary of both jobs are the same. The job descriptions were also presented in random order to control for any order effects.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions, where the sales condition used selling-focused terminology and the customer condition used customer need-focused terminology in the job description for the sales job. For example, the sales condition used the job title "sales representative" and the actual job description posted by the company. In the customer condition, the job title "sales representative" was modified to "solution consultant" and terminology such as "sales effort" was modified to "client engagement effort" to reflect the consultative and problem solving roles emphasized in social selling jobs.

To determine whether the modification of the terminology altered perception toward the job function itself, a separate post-test was conducted. Participants ($n = 18$) were recruited to

Table II.
Job description
(Study 2)

Job title	Job description
Sales representative (sales condition)	Services existing accounts, obtains orders, and establishes new accounts by planning and organizing daily work schedule to call on existing or potential sales outlets and other trade factors Adjusts content of sales presentations by studying the type of sales outlet or trade factor Focuses sales efforts by studying existing and potential volume of dealers Provides historical records by maintaining records on area and customer sales Required skills include customer service, meeting sales goals, closing skills, territory management, prospecting skills, negotiation, self-confidence, product knowledge, presentation skills, client relationships, motivation for sales
Solution consultant (customer condition)	Interface with channel partners to obtain orders, and develop new channels by planning and organizing daily work schedule to communicate with existing or potential channel partners and other channel intermediaries Develop custom presentations explaining company solutions based on careful analysis of segment differences Prioritize client engagement efforts by studying existing and potential revenue capacity of channel partners Provides historical records by maintaining records on area and customer revenues Required skills include customer service, meeting revenue targets, territory management, self-starter, negotiation, self-confidence, product knowledge, presentation skills, client relationships, highly motivated
Business analyst	Manage and allocate inventory to all stores using state-of-the-art systems Negotiate and maintain business relationships with the largest vendors in the industry Formulate in-depth inventory forecasts Apply strong financial, analytical and communication skills to impact the bottom line

read the job descriptions for the sales job, where participants were randomly assigned to read the job description used in the sales condition ($n = 9$) or the job descriptions used in the customer condition ($n = 9$). After reading the job descriptions and completing a filler task (watching videos of several Super Bowl advertisements and answering questions about them), all participants were asked to describe the job responsibilities in their own words. Two independent coders who were blind to the purpose of the study evaluated whether the participants were describing a similar job or a different job. Specifically, each independent coder was presented with nine pairs of job responsibility descriptions, where each pair consisted of one participant description of the sales condition job responsibility and one participant description of the customer condition job responsibility. The coders were then asked to rate whether the pair of descriptions are describing a similar job on a four-point scale (1 – “not similar at all” to 4 – “very similar”). Interrater reliability (80 percent) shows that the coders agreed that the participants from the two groups were describing a similar job. Therefore, although different terminology was used in the job descriptions, the perception of core responsibilities of the job was not altered in the job descriptions used in the sales condition and customer condition.

Analysis and results. To test $H2$, a one-way MANOVA was conducted to measure a within-subject effect on multiple dependent variables (interest in the sales job and the business analyst job). Results show that the overall MANOVA tests of Pillai's Trace (0.93) and Wilks' λ (0.07) are significant, indicating a difference in job interest. To examine in which direction the MANOVA main effect was significant, separate ANOVA results were examined for each job description. Results revealed that using selling-focused vs customer need-focused terminology has a significant effect on interest in pursuing a sales job ($F(1, 284) = 14.97, p < 0.0001$). Specifically, interest in the sales job was significantly higher when customer need-focused terminology was used ($M_{\text{customer}} = 2.89$) compared to when selling-focused terminology was used ($M_{\text{sales}} = 2.51$) to describe the job. Therefore, $H2$ is supported.

To test *H2a* and *H2b*, a 2 (job description: selling-focused vs customer need-focused) \times 2 (academic career: intro stage vs advanced stage) between-subjects analysis for the sales job only was conducted. Participants recruited from the introductory business program were assigned to the intro stage condition and participants recruited from the advanced business program were assigned to the advanced stage condition. Students in the advanced business program are exposed to more business classes and experiences (e.g. career fairs, mock interviews, internships). Therefore, students in the advanced business program are expected to demonstrate a higher-level understanding of the different functions of business compared to students in the introductory business program.

Results from ANOVA reveal a significant interaction effect ($F(1, 282) = 2.70, p < 0.01$). Simple effect tests revealed a significant difference between intro and advanced stage conditions when participants are exposed to selling-focused terminology ($M_{\text{intro}} = 2.75, M_{\text{advanced}} = 2.34; F(1, 282) = 9.08, p < 0.01$), with interest in the sales job in the intro stage condition being significantly higher. Simple effects test also showed that the effect of customer-focused terminology on interest in the sales job was not significantly different between the intro stage and advanced stage conditions. Additional simple effect tests revealed a significant difference between the selling-focused terminology and customer-focused terminology in the advanced stage conditions ($M_{\text{sales}} = 2.34, M_{\text{customer}} = 2.85; F(1, 282) = 11.81, p < 0.001$), with interest in the sales job in the customer-focused terminology condition being significantly higher. However, there was no significant difference between the customer-focused terminology and selling-focused terminology in the intro stage condition (see Figure 3). These results suggest that advanced stage participants focus on terminology used in the job descriptions while intro stage participants focus on the actual job responsibilities when evaluating jobs.

Discussion and implications

Theoretical contribution

Most, if not all, studies examining perception toward sales jobs have focused on examining how idiosyncratic characteristics of the job candidate (e.g. gender, race, or cultural background) determine the candidate's likelihood to pursue a sales job. We contribute by shifting the focus to examine how external marketing factors, such as a rebranding strategy, may also influence the job candidate's evaluation of a job.

We also extend and contribute to rebranding research by examining how level of knowledge affects outcomes of a re-labeling exercise. Extant research in rebranding can be categorized into two broad streams: one that focuses on conceptual or case study discussions of the effect of rebranding (e.g. Lomax and Mador, 2006; Miller *et al.*, 2014; Muzellec and Lambkin, 2006; Stuart and Muzellec, 2004; Tevi and Otubanjo, 2013) and

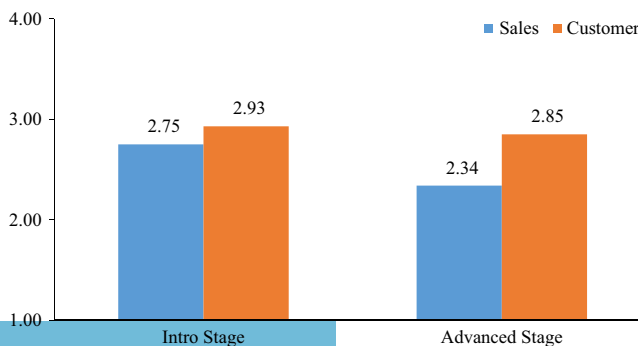


Figure 3.
Preference toward
job (Study 2)

another that empirically investigates the effect of different brand characteristics (e.g. market position, brand element, brand strength, property characteristics, university names) on rebranding success (e.g. Peluso and Guido, 2012; Roy and Sarkar, 2015; Tsai *et al.*, 2015). By applying a consumer learning perspective, we contribute by examining how consumers' willingness and ability to process product information may also determine rebranding success.

Within a sales research context, results from our study can help recruiters determine when to start the recruitment process (i.e. whether to target lower-level or upper-level students) or how to differentiate recruitment material (i.e. whether to emphasize certain terminology in job descriptions). Within a rebranding research context, our results suggest that in addition to modifying brand characteristics, firms should also consider factors that may affect their consumers' information processing behavior (e.g. level of knowledge, experience, loyalty) to determine when or how to implement a rebranding strategy.

Managerial implication

Salespeople have always played a critical role for US businesses, but the recent demographic changes and technological advancements have significantly increased the complexity of product and service solutions, creating new needs among businesses, governments, and consumers. These changes have generated a demand for specialized salespeople, who are able to adopt and adjust to the industry disruptions (Pullins, 2017; Thompson, 2016). Indeed, according to LinkedIn's 2017 Talent Pool Report, recruiting organizations have identified sales positions as the highest priority roles to fill. Yet, sales jobs are known to be the hardest positions to fill. According to a 2014 report from Harvard Business School's US Competitiveness Project, employers spent an average of 41 days trying to fill sales jobs, compared to an average of 33 days for all jobs during a 12-month period (Weber, 2015).

Scholars have shown that an effective recruitment strategy can increase the utility of selection systems by matching qualified job candidates with the right jobs (Boudreau and Rynes, 1985). Specifically, well-developed recruitment-related practices can positively affect the decision-making process of job candidates (Barber, 1998). For example, Collins and Stevens (2002) showed that advertising through job postings can help firms build a strong and consistent employment brand, which can create competitive advantage in the job market. Research has also shown that discussing a job description in great detail with a prospective job candidate can help improve the job candidate's understanding of, and intention to pursue, a job (Dubinsky, 1981). Recently, sales professionals have also emphasized the importance of more finely "spelling out" the changes that are occurring in sales roles in hiring profiles and position descriptions (e.g. Weinfurter, 2017).

To extend these discussions, we apply a branding and consumer learning perspective to sales recruitment strategy and show that job descriptions can be used as a rebranding tool, guiding job candidates (consumers) to process job responsibilities (product attributes) rather than using job titles or terminology (brand name) as heuristic cues to make premature decisions. Specifically, we empirically show that implementing a job description re-labeling exercise can increase job candidates' interest in pursuing sales jobs, especially the new social selling jobs, by motivating them to read the job description and consider the actual job responsibilities rather than immediately rejecting it based on typical sales job descriptors. Implementing changes based on these findings can help increase employment opportunities for both job candidates and employers and reduce the supply and demand gap currently observed in the sales job market.

Limitations and future research

In addition to the contributions, this paper also has limitations that should be addressed in future research. Most importantly, the research findings are based on studies that used a

student sample, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. For the purposes of our research, however, undergraduate business students may be an appropriate sample since the objective of our study was to understand how to increase interest in pursuing sales jobs for job candidates in the early stages of the job search process. In addition, with the changes occurring in the sales profession, universities are increasingly serving as the training ground for the future sales force. For example, DePaul University has started to revise its sales courses to emphasize critical thinking and collaboration to reflect the new reality of sales jobs (Weber, 2015) and University of Texas at Dallas is in the process of digitally morphing its sales curriculum (Dover, 2017). Therefore, recruiters will be able to hire high-quality job candidates by understanding how to effectively reach out to, and develop effective job descriptions for, undergraduate business students.

Nonetheless, future research will benefit by extending this study with a non-student sample. Specifically, this study focused on how to effectively communicate the changes occurring in the sales profession to new market entrant job candidates. In other words, this study focused on identifying ways to recruit job candidates who are prepared for the new sales environment. However, it will also be crucial to examine how to help experienced salespeople, who have been trained for the traditional selling model, to transition to the new model. This is important since salespeople who engage in social selling are 51 percent more likely to exceed quota, get promoted faster, produce 1.7 times more opportunities, and generate 1.2-5 times more revenue than those who do not (Dover, 2017).

Since in-house sales training has proved to be ineffective – 90 percent of all sales training has no lasting impact on professional behavior and 87 percent of knowledge learning in sales training is lost within 12 weeks (www.spisales.com) – other avenues should be explored. Educators and practitioners have suggested that encouraging collaboration between universities and corporations may be an effective strategy in advancing the sales profession by exposing students and experienced salespeople to the realities of the sales profession as well as the emerging trends in the field. For instance, studies have shown that inviting expert panel of sales professionals to deliver course content and share personal experiences from their sales careers are valued by both students and sales professionals (Cummins *et al.*, 2015). Developing programs that integrate collegiate sales competitions and corporate training programs can also inspire and motivate students and experienced salespeople to pursue a career in sales or develop new skills and capabilities. Since these discussions have just started to develop, research in this area provides great opportunities for future research.

References

- Aaker, D.A. and Keller, K.L. (1990), "Consumer evaluations of brand extensions", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 54 No. 1, pp. 27-41.
- Adamsky, H. (2003), "Talent management: something productive this way comes", available at: www.eremedia.com/ere/talent-management-something-productive-this-way-comes (accessed November 6, 2016).
- Alba, J. and Hutchinson, J.W. (1987), "Dimensions of consumer expertise", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 13 No. 4, pp. 411-454.
- Alba, J. and Hutchinson, J.W. (2000), "Knowledge calibration: what consumers know and what they think they know", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 27 No. 2, pp. 123-156.
- Allen, C., Kumar, P., Tarasi, C. and Wilson, H. (2014), "Selling sales: factors influencing undergraduate business students' decision to pursue sales education", *Journal of Marketing Education*, Vol. 36 No. 2, pp. 94-104.
- Archer, J. (2012), "BMW to add product 'geniuses' to dealerships", available at: www.autotrader.com/car-news/bmw-to-add-product-geniuses-to-dealerships-170053 (accessed March 28, 2016).

- Atman, C.J., Chimka, J.R., Bursic, K.M. and Nachtmann, H.L. (1999), "A comparison of freshman and senior engineering design processes", *Design Studies*, Vol. 20 No. 2, pp. 131-152.
- Bahhouth, V., Spillan, J. and Mensah, E. (2013), "Predictive power of personal factors in studying students' perception of sales profession in Ghana", *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, Vol. 4 No. 7, pp. 291-301.
- Barber, A.E. (1998), *Recruiting Employees: Individual and Organizational Perspectives*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Boudreau, B.W. and Rynes, S.L. (1985), "Role of recruitment in staffing utility analysis", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 70 No. 2, pp. 354-366.
- Bristow, D.N., Gulati, R. and Amyx, D. (2006), "A look at professional selling from the students' perspective: a replication and extension", *Marketing Management Journal*, Vol. 16 No. 1, pp. 88-103.
- Brucks, M. (1985), "The effects of product class knowledge on information search behavior", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 12 No. 1, pp. 1-16.
- Chaiken, S. (1980), "Heuristic versus systematic information processing and the use of source versus message cues in persuasion", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 39 No. 5, pp. 752-766.
- Collins, C.J. and Stevens, C.K. (2002), "The relationship between early recruitment-related activities and the application decisions of new labor-market entrants: a brand equity approach to recruitment", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 87 No. 6, pp. 1121-1133.
- Cross, N., Christiaans, H. and Dorst, K. (1994), "Design expertise amongst student designers", *International Journal of Art & Design Education*, Vol. 13 No. 1, pp. 39-56.
- Cummins, S., Peltier, J.W., Pomirleanu, N., Cross, J. and Simon, R. (2015), "Evaluating educational practices for positively affecting student perceptions of a sales career", *Journal of Marketing Education*, Vol. 37 No. 1, pp. 25-35.
- Dover, H. (2017), "Digitally morphing the sales curriculum", *Sales Education Annual*, Vol. 11, pp. 32-33.
- Dubinsky, A.J. (1981), "Perceptions of the sales job: how students compare with industrial salespeople", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 9 No. 4, pp. 352-367.
- Gigerenzer, G. and Gaissmaier, W. (2011), "Heuristic decision making", *Annual Review of Psychology*, Vol. 62, pp. 451-482.
- Gregan-Paxton, J. and John, D.R. (1997), "Consumer learning by analogy: a model of internal knowledge transfer", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 24 No. 3, pp. 266-284.
- Guller, I.B. (1972), "Higher education and policemen: attitudinal differences between freshman and senior police college students", *The Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology, and Police Science*, Vol. 63 No. 3, pp. 396-401.
- Hawkes, C.L. and Weathington, B. (2015), "Competency-based versus task-based job descriptions: effects on applicant attraction", *Journal of Behavioral and Applied Management*, Vol. 15 No. 3, pp. 190-211.
- Helfer, R.E. (1970), "An objective comparison of the pediatric interviewing skills of freshman and senior medical students", *Pediatrics*, Vol. 45 No. 4, pp. 623-627.
- Hoch, S.J. and Deighton, J. (1989), "Managing what consumers learn from experience", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 53 No. 2, pp. 1-20.
- Honeycutt, E.D. Jr, Ford, J.B., Swenson, M.J. and Swinyard, W.R. (1999), "Student preferences for sales careers around the Pacific Rim", *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 28 No. 1, pp. 27-36.
- Hutchison, D. (2014), "The future of sales is marketing", available at: www.forbes.com/sites/sap/2014/09/24/the-future-of-sales-is-marketing/#22efdb23fe29 (accessed November 6, 2016).
- IDC Report (2014), "New IDC study reveals that the most senior and influential B2B buyers use online social networks in their purchase process", available at: www.businesswire.com/news/home/20140915006303/en/IDC-Study-Reveals-Senior-Influential-B2B-Buyers (accessed June 1, 2017).
- Iles, P., Chuai, X. and Preece, D. (2010), "Talent management and HRM in multinational companies in Beijing: definitions, differences and drivers", *Journal of World Business*, Vol. 45 No. 2, pp. 179-189.

- Johnson, E.J. and Russo, J.E. (1984), "Product familiarity and learning new information", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 11 No. 1, pp. 542-550.
- Kahneman, D. and Frederick, S. (2002), *Representativeness Revisited: Attribute Substitution in Intuitive Judgment*, Cambridge University Press, New York, NY.
- Keller, K.L. (2009), "Building strong brands in a modern marketing communications environment", *Journal of Marketing Communications*, Vol. 15 Nos 2/3, pp. 139-155.
- Lawler, E.E. (1994), "From job-based to competency-based organizations", *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 15 No. 1, pp. 3-15.
- Lomax, W. and Mador, M. (2006), "Corporate re-branding: from normative models to knowledge management", *Journal of Brand Management*, Vol. 14 Nos 1/2, pp. 82-95.
- Lysonski, S. and Durvasula, S. (1998), "A cross-national investigation of student attitudes toward personal selling: implications for marketing education", *Journal of Marketing Education*, Vol. 20 No. 2, pp. 161-173.
- McGinty, R. and Reitsch, A. (1992), "Using student perceptions and job characteristics to recruit recent graduates", *Review of Business*, Vol. 14 No. 1, pp. 38-42.
- Maheswaran, D., Mackie, D.M. and Chaiken, S. (1992), "Brand name as a heuristic cue: the effects of task importance and expectancy confirmation on consumer judgment", *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, Vol. 1 No. 4, pp. 317-336.
- Miller, D., Merrilees, B. and Yakimova, R. (2014), "Corporate rebranding: an integrative review of major enablers and barriers to the rebranding process", *International Journal of Management Reviews*, Vol. 16 No. 3, pp. 265-289.
- Mitchell, A.A. and Dacin, P.A. (1996), "The assessment of alternative measures of consumer expertise", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 23 No. 3, pp. 219-239.
- Montoya, R. (2013), "Roles of the car dealership sales department staff", available at: www.edmunds.com/car-buying/roles-of-the-car-dealership-sales-department-staff.html (accessed March 28, 2016).
- Muehling, D.D. and Weeks, W.A. (1988), "Women's perceptions of personal selling: some positive results", *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, Vol. 8 No. 1, pp. 11-20.
- Musk, E. (2012), "The Tesla approach to distributing and servicing cars", available at: www.teslamotors.com/blog/tesla-approach-distributing-and-servicing-cars (accessed March 28, 2016).
- Muzellec, L. and Lambkin, M. (2006), "Corporate rebranding: destroying, transferring or creating brand equity?", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 40 Nos 7/8, pp. 803-824.
- Pavur, E.R. (2010), "Use job descriptions to support leadership", *The Psychologist-Manager Journal*, Vol. 13 No. 2, pp. 119-122.
- Peltier, J.W., Cummins, S., Pomirleanu, N., Cross, J. and Simon, R. (2014), "A parsimonious instrument for predicting students' intent to pursue a sales career: scale development and validation", *Journal of Marketing Education*, Vol. 36 No. 1, pp. 62-74.
- Peluso, A.M. and Guido, G. (2012), "Effects of geographical university names on users' perceptions", *Journal of Brand Management*, Vol. 19 No. 4, pp. 344-357.
- Pullins, E.B. (2017), "The future of professional selling meets the college classroom", *Sales Education Annual*, Vol. 11, pp. 6-7.
- Roy, S. and Sarkar, S. (2015), "To brand or to rebrand: investigating the effects of rebranding on brand equity and consumer attitudes", *Journal of Brand Management*, Vol. 22 No. 4, pp. 340-360.
- Sojka, J.Z., Gupta, A.K. and Hartman, T.P. (2000), "Student perceptions of sales careers: implications for educators and recruiters", *American Journal of Business*, Vol. 15 No. 1, pp. 55-64.
- Spillan, J.E., Totten, J.W. and Ziemnowicz, C. (2007), "What are students' perceptions of personal selling as a career?", *Journal of Advancement of Marketing Education*, Vol. 11, Winter, pp. 19-30.
- Stevenson, T.H. and Paksoy, C.H. (1983), "An experimental approach to improve student attitudes toward careers in selling", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 11 No. 1, pp. 29-39.
- Strout, E. (2002), "To tell the truth", *Sales & Marketing Management*, Vol. 154 No. 7, pp. 40-47.

- Stuart, H. and Muzellec, L. (2004), "Corporate makeovers: can a hyena be rebranded?", *Journal of Brand Management*, Vol. 11 No. 6, pp. 472-482.
- Sujan, M. and Bettman, J.R. (1989), "The effects of brand positioning strategies on consumers' brand and category perceptions: some insights from schema research", *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 26 No. 4, pp. 454-467.
- Tevi, A.C. and Otubanjo, O. (2013), "Understanding corporate rebranding: an evolution theory perspective", *International Journal of Marketing Studies*, Vol. 5 No. 3, pp. 87-93.
- Thompson, C. (2016), "8 jobs every company will be hiring for by 2020", available at: www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/01/8-jobs-every-company-will-be-hiring-for-by-2020/ (accessed June 1, 2017).
- Tom, J.A.B. (2006), "Disciplining top-performing unethical salespeople: examining the moderating effects of ethical seriousness and consequences", *Psychology & Marketing*, Vol. 23 No. 2, pp. 181-201.
- Tsai, Y.L., Dev, C.S. and Chintagunta, P. (2015), "What's in a brand name? Assessing the impact of rebranding in the hospitality industry", *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 52 No. 6, pp. 865-878.
- Urbany, J.E. (1986), "An experimental examination of the economics of information", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 13 No. 2, pp. 257-271.
- Waldeck, N.E., Pullins, E.B. and Houlett, M. (2010), "Media as a factor in student perceptions for sales job: a framework for research", *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, Vol. 30 No. 4, pp. 343-353.
- Warren, C. (2006), "Curtain call", *People Management*, Vol. 12 No. 6, pp. 24-29.
- Weber, L. (2015), "Why it's so hard to fill sales jobs", available at: www.wsj.com/articles/why-its-so-hard-to-fill-sales-jobs-1423002730 (accessed March 28, 2016).
- Weinfurter, D.J. (2017), "The future of selling 2017", *Sales Education Annual*, Vol. 11, pp. 2-5.
- Wood, S.L. and Lynch, J.G. (2002), "Prior knowledge and complacency in new product learning", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 29 No. 3, pp. 416-426.

Corresponding author

Yuna Kim can be contacted at: yukim@fullerton.edu

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:

www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm

Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com

Reproduced with permission of copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.