Mexican Students' Attitudes Toward Personal Selling: An Exploratory Investigation

DOI: 10.26573/2007.3.3.4
Volume 3, *Number* 3
September 2009, pp. 221-240

Kishwar Joonas
Department of Management and Marketing
Prairie View A & M University
Prairie View, TX 77446
(kajoonas@pvamu.edu)

Ricardo Caballero
Institute Technology de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey, Marketing Department
Campus Estado de México
(rcaballe@itesm.mx)

The purpose of this exploratory study was to measure Mexican students' attitude toward personal selling as a career. A modified questionnaire developed by Kavas (2003) was used in this study of 500 undergraduate students at a large Mexican university. The study supports and extends current research on attitudinal differences toward personal selling. Overall attitude toward personal selling was evidenced to be negative. Out of 16 attitudinal items toward personal selling as a career, significantly more negative attitude was found among females, non-business majors, and freshmen business majors. Further, a higher level of interest in personal selling as a career was found among business students. Moreover, this research for the first time investigates and establishes that students with a family member in the sales profession have more positive attitude as well as higher interest in relation to a selling career. Finally, study limitations, contributions, as well as practitioner and research implications, are discussed.

Keywords: Attitudes, Personal Selling, Marketing Education, Mexico

1. Introduction

The economy of Mexico is one of the largest in the world, described as "a free market economy in the trillion dollar class". Mexico has a domestic product ranked twelfth globally, growing at a real annual rate of 3.7 per cent. (CIA, The World Factbook 2007). Membership of the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has fueled Mexico's export orientation, to make it a major middle-income nation with an advanced economy. Mexico stands out among its Latin American neighbors, with the highest per capita income, the highest purchasing power parity of its currency, and the sole member of the Organization for Economic Development (OECD). A recent study projected that by 2050, Mexico will be a global economic leader, along with China, Japan, U.S., Brazil, and India. (Economy Watch 2007). This growth would call for a substantial increase in the Mexican population involved generally with promoting products and services, and particularly with personal selling.

The sales field offers an entry to the workforce for many students in the U.S. As a result, much research has been directed toward evaluating the perceptions of

personal selling as a career among students. Although personal selling is associated with attractive rewards, it is also perceived by many in a negative light. Recent decades have witnessed a paradigm shift in the field, with the advent of concepts such as partnering and relationship selling (Futrell 2006, p. 21), customer-oriented thinking (Futrell 2006, p. 27), and team selling (Futrell 2006, p. 57). However, the *caveat emptor* or "buyer, beware" idea associated with the sales field of yesteryears, seems to have remained ensconced in public memory. A few studies have evidenced more positive attitude toward personal selling as a career (Dubinsky 1980; Fossum & Moore 1975; Kavas 2003); however, some might not consider a career in sales due to negative connotations reinforced by word of mouth and various media. It is of note that, whereas many studies have been conducted in the U.S., there is scant research attention on Mexican students' perceptions and projected behavior.

Specifically, the first objective of this study is to evaluate Mexican student's attitude toward personal selling as a career, and to examine the impact on these perceptions, of some demographic characteristics such as gender, major field of study, academic level of business majors, or having a family member employed in personal selling. The second objective is to ascertain the level of interest among Mexican students in pursuing a sales career, and to investigate whether the level of interest is impacted by gender, major field of study, academic level among business majors, or having a family member employed in personal selling.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses

2.1 Overall Attitude and Interest

Research on student attitude toward personal selling as a career can be traced back to the advent of marketing in the 1950s. Numerous early studies address negative images, due in large part to salesperson stereotypes in media (such as *The American Salesman* 1958; Ditz 1967; Jolson 1972; Paul & Worthing 1970; *Sales Management* 1962; Thompson 1972). Subsequent research indicated generally more positive attitude (DelVecchio & Honeycutt 2002; Dubinsky 1980; Dubinsky 1981; Dubinsky & O'Connor 1983; Lagace & Longfellow 1989; Swenson, et al. 1993; Swinyard 1981; Weeks & Muehling 1987). However, a more recent study (Kavas 2003) evidenced high negative attitude in the U.S. While few studies are available on countries outside the U.S., Honeycutt et al. (1999) found negative attitude to industrial selling among business students in New Zealand and Philippines. Moreover, it is well documented that interest in personal selling as a career has declined (Bellenger et al 1974; Dubinsky 1980, 1981; Dubinsky & O'Connor 1983; Kavas 2003, Paul & Worthing 1970; Swenson et al 1993; Weeks & Meuhling1987; Swinyard 1981). For example, it was found that less than 17% of respondents would prefer a selling job after graduation, while almost two-thirds would not like such a job; the mean (1.8 on a 3-point scale) showed a moderate level of interest in personal selling as a career (Kavas 2003).

2.2 Role of Gender

Studies in the U.S. have shown mixed results regarding the impact of gender on attitude toward personal selling. Dubinsky's (1980) study evidenced a marginally more positive perception of personal selling among males. O'Connor & Dubinsky (1983) found no significant differences in attitude toward personal selling, based on

gender. According to one study, there was similarity on 21 out of 26 attributes of personal selling; however, females were less likely to take up a sales career (Cook & Hartman 1986). Muehling & Weeks (1988) indicated that females hold more positive perceptions of sales than do males. Stevens & Macintosh (2002-2003) found a relationship between gender and attractiveness of sales activities. More recent research found that male students had higher negative attitude to personal selling compared with females (Kavas 2003). These assumptions led to the development of **Hypothesis H1:**

$H_0$1 (a): There will be no difference in the attitude toward personal selling as a career, between male and female students.
$H_1$1 (a): There will be a difference in the attitude toward personal selling as a career, between male and female students.
$H_0$1 (b): There will be no difference in the level of interest in personal selling as a career, between male and female students.
$H_1$1 (b): There will be a difference in the level of interest in personal selling as a career, between male and female students

2.3 Role of Being Business versus Non-Business Majors

A few studies have examined the differences between the business and non-business majors in relation to personal selling. In general, business majors have a curricular exposure to the contribution of personal selling at within the marketing function, the firm, and the economy as a whole. Further, based on the classroom experience, they might appreciate the role of selling in implementing customer orientation, and show a high interest in pursuing personal selling as a career. Business students revealed more positive attitude toward personal selling than non-business students (Kavas 2003). According to a survey by Paul & Worthing (1970), contrary to the above discussion, students across different majors have negative attitude toward personal selling. More recent studies (such as Kavas 2003) indicate that business majors showed higher interest in getting a selling job after graduation, compared to non-business majors. Thus, it is submitted that:

$H_0$2 (a): There will be no difference in the attitude toward personal selling as a career, between business and non-business students.
$H_1$2 (a): There will be a difference in the attitude toward personal selling as a career, between business and non-business students.
$H_0$2 (b): There will be no difference in the level of interest in personal selling as a career, between business and non-business students.
$H_1$2 (b): There will be a difference in the level of interest in personal selling as a career, between business and non-business students.

2.4 Role of Academic Level of Business Majors

Research results relating to the effect of students' academic level in the program, are equivocal. For example, Bellinger, Bernhart & Wayman (1974) found no significant differences among perceptions of personal selling among upperclassmen (sophomores, juniors, and graduating seniors). Swenson et al. (1993) conducted a time-series replication of an earlier study (Swinyard 1981) through a survey of 1203 undergraduate business students from 13 universities. The preference for personal selling as a career was found to be inversely related to students' academic level

(progressing to upper level course work comprising sophomores, juniors and senior students). A call was given for the investigation of the link between students' academic level, and attitude toward personal selling (Kavas 2003). Therefore, **Hypothesis H3** is offered:

$H_0$3 (a): Among business majors, there will be no difference in the attitude toward personal selling as a career, between freshmen and upper-level students.
$H_1$3 (a): Among business majors, there will be a difference in the attitude toward personal selling as a career, between freshmen and upper-level students.
$H_0$3 (b): Among business majors, there will be no difference in the level of interest in personal selling as a career, between freshmen and upper-level students.
$H_1$3 (b): Among business majors, there will be a difference in the level of interest in personal selling as a career, between freshmen and upper-level students.

2.5 Role of Having a Family Member in Sales

Prior research calls for an investigation of the impact of having a family member with a career in personal selling. For example, it was suggested that future studies "might also examine the differences in attitude toward personal selling based on…. whether they have a family member in a sales career" (Kavas 2003). It was theorized that students having a family member in sales would be exposed to positive information about the sales field, as well as exposure to the benefits of being in the selling profession. These, in addition to providing positive role models, would result in more positive attitude toward personal selling. Responding to this call, the following **Hypothesis H4** is formulated:

$H_0$4 (a): Among business majors, there will be no difference in the attitude toward personal selling as a career, between students having a family member in sales, and students without a family member in sales.
$H_1$4 (a): Among business majors, there will be a difference in the attitude toward personal selling as a career, between students having a family member in sales, and students without a family member in sales.
$H_0$4 (b): Among business majors, there will be no difference in the level of interest in personal selling as a career, between students having a family member in sales, and students without a family member in sales.
$H_1$4 (b): Among business majors, there will be a difference in the level of interest in personal selling as a career, between students having a family member in sales, and students without a family member in sales.

3. Methodology

3.1 Instrument

A modified questionnaire based on an existing study (Kavas 2003) was used. In the first part, students were asked to rate personal selling on a scale of 16 attitudinal statements. The statements captured negative characteristics, for example, "I associate personal selling with…. insincerity and deceit; low status/low prestige." Respondents' level of agreement was measured on a five-point Likert type scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). Thus, higher agreement with a scale item would evidence that the respondent has a more negative attitude towards that characteristic of personal selling. The second part of the questionnaire measured the respondent's interest in taking up personal selling as a career. A five-

point Likert type scale ranging from "definitely would not like a selling job after graduation" (1), to "definitely would like a selling job after graduation" (5). A higher rating would reflect a higher interest in a selling job after graduation, and therefore, a higher interest in personal selling as a career. The final part of the survey dealt with respondents' socio-demographic characteristics comprising categorical items.

3.2 Sample

The sampling frame comprised undergraduate business and non-business classes/sections at a large urban university in Mexico. From this sampling frame, a simple random sample of 500 students was selected to administer the survey. Of these, 250 were business majors, and 250 were non-business students (including 132 humanities majors and 118 engineering majors). About 56 percent of the respondents were male; 82 percent were upper level business majors, and 49 percent had a family member with a career in personal selling.

3.3 Data Collection

A Spanish version of the questionnaire was created, and refined with the use of back translation as prescribed in the literature (Brislin, Lonner, & Thorndike 1973). A pilot survey was conducted among 100 students, to ensure that students had an understanding of the questionnaire. The surveys were completed and collected in class, in the absence of the instructor. Care was taken to ensure that respondents were not in the researcher's class while completing the survey. Very few students declined to participate.

3.4 Data Analysis

The method of analysis for hypotheses testing is described below. Mean values for the various attitudinal items on a five-point Likert type scale (not a categorical scale) were obtained. The interpretation of mean values for agreement was: up to 1.00=very positive, 1.01-2.00= positive, 2.01-2.99=indifferent (neither positive nor negative), 3.01-4.00=negative, and 4.01 or more=very negative. For interest in a selling job after graduation, the interpretation was: up to 1.00=very low, 1.01-2.00=low, 2.01-3.00=moderate (neither low nor high), 3.01-4.00=high, and 4.01 or more=very high. Further, following the literature (Kavas 2003), hypothesis testing was done by using two-tailed t-tests to compare group mean values based on gender, major, academic level of business majors, and having a family member in sales. Finally, mean values were found for interest in a selling job after graduation, on a five-category Likert type scale (again, not a categorical scale). Hypothesis testing was done by using two-tailed t-tests with confidence interval of 95 per cent to compare mean group values, based on gender, major, academic level of business majors, and having a relative with a career in personal selling (Kavas 2003). A p-value≤ 0.05 was used in testing hypotheses and evaluating the significance of all comparisons.

4. Results and Hypothesis Testing

4.1 Personal Selling As a Career: Mexican Students' Attitude and Interest

Figure 1 shows a diagrammatic representation of overall means and standard deviations for the 16 items of attitude towards personal selling. Table 1 shows the mean value for each attitudinal statement, for the overall sample, as well as for

demographic variables. Overall, the mean agreement on negative attitudinal items ranged from neutral to very strong.

[a] *1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree. Higher rating relates to more negative attitude.*

Figure 1 *All students- Means and Standard Deviations of Attitudinal Items toward Personal Selling*

This means that Mexican student's attitude on 16 items was indifferent, negative or very negative. There was a very strong agreement with the negative characteristic "personality is crucial" (mean=4.05), which means there is very negative attitude on this item. In addition, there was a strong agreement with negative items such as "high pressure/forces people to buy unwanted goods" (mean=3.46), "low job security" (mean=3.24), "much traveling (mean=3.22), "just a job, not a career" (mean= 3.21), "interferes with home life" (mean=3.08), and "salespeople being money-hungry" (mean=3.01). This reveals a negative attitude toward the above characteristics of personal selling. On nine of the 16 items, the mean agreement was neutral, showing that the attitude toward personal selling was indifferent. It can be said that the overall attitude toward personal selling is negative.

In addition, 27.8% of respondents stating they would "definitely" or "probably" like a selling job after graduation, and 51.2% stating they would "definitely not" or "probably not" like a selling job after graduation (see Figure 3). The overall level of interest in a personal selling job after graduation was moderate (mean=2.57, SD=1.210) (see Figure 4, Table 5); Based on the mean score, it is stated that overall, respondents showed moderate interest in pursuing personal selling as a career. The impact on interest of each demographic variable is discussed below.

Table 1 *Differences in Attitude toward Personal Selling based on Gender*

	Male			Female			df	t-value	p-value
I associate a selling job with ….	N	Mean[a]	SD	N	Mean[a]	SD			
Frustration	275	2.79	1.101	219	2.89	0.983	492	-1.151	0.250
Insincerity and deceit	276	2.69	1.162	216	2.73	1.075	490	-0.422	0.673
Low status, low prestige	269	2.65	1.095	216	2.74	0.960	483	-0.942	0.347
Much traveling	275	3.28	1.070	216	3.15	0.993	489	1.350	0.178
Salespeople "money hungry"	274	3.03	1.097	215	3.00	1.043	487	0.214	0.831
Low job security	275	3.21	1.079	216	3.28	1.068	489	-0.722	0.471
High pressure /forces people …	274	3.37	1.152	214	3.57	1.004	480	-1.977*	0.049
"Just a job" not a "career"	274	3.22	1.136	214	3.21	1.095	486	0.049	0.961
Uninteresting/ no challenge	272	2.46	1.099	215	2.47	1.031	485	-0.152	0.879
No need for creativity	274	2.06	1.084	216	2.18	1.112	488	-1.224	0.222
Personality is crucial	271	4.01	1.109	211	4.09	1.092	480	-0.771	0.441
Too little monetary reward	274	2.88	1.060	215	3.06	0.967	476	-1.967*	0.050
Interferes with home life	272	3.11	0.987	215	3.04	0.971	485	0.776	0.438
"Easy to get" job	275	2.99	1.034	215	2.88	0.914	488	1.229	0.220
Inappropriate career option	276	2.93	1.063	218	3.04	0.964	492	-1.102	0.271
Difficult to advance to …	277	2.68	1.161	218	2.70	0.992	493	-0.198	0.843

*[a]1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree. Higher rating relates to more negative attitude. *significant at p≤.05 (two-tailed test)*

4.2 Differences Based on Gender

On all selling characteristics, the average rating ranged from "neutral" to "strongly agree" (reflecting indifferent, negative, or very negative attitude) among both males and females. A look at attitudinal item means shows that females have stronger agreement with negative items relating to personal selling, compared to males. T-test results showed a significant difference between male and female students in the mean level of agreement for two of the 16 negative items, "high pressure/force the sale of unwanted goods" (t=1.977, p=0.049) and "too little monetary reward" (t=1.967, p=0.050) (Table 1, Figure 2). In addition, the mean level of agreement for females was stronger on nine of the 16 items, in comparison with males. Taken in totality, results point to rejection of null Hypothesis $H_0$1 (a), and support for Hypothesis $H_0$1(a). The conclusion is that there is a significant difference in attitude toward personal selling, between male and female students.

1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree. Higher rating relates to more negative attitude.

Figure 2 *Means of Attitudinal Items based on Gender*

Further, of the males in the sample, 30.4% reported they would "definitely" or "probably" like a selling job after graduation, compared to only 24.6% of females (Figure 3). Both males (mean=2.63, SD=1.268) and females (mean=2.47, SD=1.120) showed moderate interest in pursuing personal selling as a career (see Figure 4, Table 5). The difference between the two group means was not significant (t=1.536, p=1.131) (Table 5). This signals support for null Hypothesis $H_0$1 (b). Alternate Hypothesis $H_1$1 (b) is rejected, and it is concluded that no significant difference in the level of interest in personal selling as a career stems from a student's gender.

Table 2 *Differences in Attitude toward Personal Selling based on Major*

I associate a selling job with ….	Business major			Non-business major			df	t-value	p-value
	N	Mean[a]	SD	N	Mean[a]	SD			
Frustration	241	2.81	1.042	242	2.85	1.071	481	-0.395	0.693
Insincerity and deceit	242	2.66	1.071	239	2.79	1.173	479	-1.266	0.206
Low status, low prestige	235	2.58	0.977	239	2.79	1.072	472	-2.250*	0.025
Much traveling	240	3.29	1.053	240	3.15	1.032	478	1.444	0.149
Salespeople "money-hungry"	239	2.98	1.067	239	3.06	1.089	476	-0.849	0.396
Low job security	240	3.22	1.130	240	3.25	1.026	478	-0.338	0.735
High pressure/forces people …	240	3.44	1.081	237	3.48	1.118	475	-0.390	0.697
"Just a job" not a "career"	238	3.05	1.152	239	3.35	1.058	475	-2.891*	0.004
Uninteresting/no challenge	237	2.33	1.067	239	2.62	1.058	474	-2.892*	0.004
No need for creativity	240	1.97	1.034	239	2.26	1.145	477	-2.937*	0.003
Personality is crucial	239	4.16	1.086	232	3.91	1.111	469	2.506*	0.013
Too little monetary reward	239	2.94	1.110	239	2.99	0.930	476	-0.536	0.592
Interferes with home life	236	3.07	1.002	240	3.08	0.971	474	-0.079	0.937
"Easy to get" job	238	2.88	0.993	242	3.00	0.981	478	-1.353	0.177
Inappropriate career option	240	2.81	1.012	243	3.16	1.008	481	-3.741*	0.000
Difficult to advance to …	241	2.52	1.041	243	2.84	1.107	482	-3.283*	0.001

*[a]1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree. Higher rating relates to more negative attitude. *significant at p≤.05 (two-tailed test)*

4.3 Differences between Business and Non-Business Majors

On 15 negative items, the level of agreement among business majors as well as non-business majors ranged from "neutral" to "strong", which reveals indifferent,

negative, or very negative attitude (see Table 2). In general, non-business majors showed a higher negative attitude, with significantly stronger agreement on six negative items, compared to business majors. Some items were "inappropriate career option" (t=3.741, p=0.000), and "difficult to advance into upper management positions" (t=3.283, p=0.001). Other items included "no need for creativity" (t=2.937, p=0.003), "uninteresting/no challenge" (t=2.892, p=0.004), "just a job, not a career" (t=2.891, p=0.004), and "low status and low prestige" (t=2.250, p=0.025). Only on one item, "personality is crucial", business majors had a stronger level of agreement with a negative item (which means a higher negative attitude) toward personal selling (t=2.506, p=0.013). The above results, taken together, indicate rejection of null Hypothesis $H_0$2 (a), and favor acceptance of alternative Hypothesis $H_1$2 (a); there was a significant difference in the mean attitude toward personal selling as a career, between business and non-business majors.

Figure 3 *Interest in a Personal Selling Job after Graduation*

Additionally, a response of "definitely/probably would like a selling job" (very high or high interest in a selling) was given by 32.3% of business majors, as compared to 23.8% of non-business majors (Figure 3). For both groups, the mean interest level in a selling job after graduation was moderate; but interest was higher for business majors (mean=2.68, SD=1.215) than non-business majors (mean=2.45, SD=1.199) (Figure 4, Table 5). The difference between the two group means was significant (t=2.051, p=0.041) (Table 5). The above pattern of results of t-tests rejects null Hypothesis $H_0$2 (b), and supports alternative Hypothesis $H_1$2 (b). It is concluded that there is a significant difference in the level of interest in a selling career among business majors, compared to non-business majors.

Table 3 *Differences in Business Students' Attitude toward Personal Selling based on Academic Level*

I associate a selling job with ….	Freshmen			Upper level			df	t-value	p-value
	N	Mean[a]	S.D	N	Mean[a]	S.D			
Frustration	44	2.80	1.173	196	2.82	1.015	238	-0.149	0.882
Insincerity and deceit	44	2.55	1.088	197	2.69	1.069	239	-0.810	0.419
Low status, low prestige	42	2.64	0.958	192	2.57	0.984	232	0.450	0.653
Much traveling	44	3.36	1.014	195	3.27	1.065	237	0.550	0.583
Salespeople "money-hungry"	44	3.23	1.031	194	2.92	1.072	236	1.713	0.088
Low job security	43	3.12	1.117	196	3.24	1.137	237	-0.674	0.501
High pressure /forces people …	44	3.25	1.144	195	3.49	1.062	237	-1.319	0.188
"Just a job" not a "career"	42	3.38	1.103	195	2.99	1.146	235	1.993*	0.047
Uninteresting/no challenge	42	2.79	1.071	194	2.24	1.042	234	3.049*	0.003
No need for creativity	43	2.12	1.028	196	1.93	1.038	237	1.046	0.296
Personality is crucial	42	4.07	1.156	196	4.18	1.074	236	-0.579	0.563
Too little monetary reward	44	3.05	1.033	194	2.92	1.129	236	0.661	0.509
Interferes with home life	42	3.29	0.864	193	3.03	1.028	233	1.524	0.129
"Easy to get" job	43	2.98	0.988	194	2.87	0.988	235	0.665	0.507
Inappropriate career option	44	3.00	1.057	195	2.78	0.994	237	1.314	0.190
Difficult to advance to …	44	2.57	1.021	196	2.52	1.045	238	0.305	0.761

*[a]1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree. Higher rating relates to more negative attitude.*significant at p≤.05 (two-tailed test)*

4.4 Differences between Freshmen and Upper-Level Business Majors

Among both freshmen and upper level business majors, on 15 characteristics, rating ranged from "neutral" to "strongly agree" (corresponding to indifferent, negative, or very negative attitude). Among business students, it was found that freshmen business majors have a significantly stronger mean level of agreement (i.e., higher negative attitude), as compared to upper class level students on two of the 16 items,

Table 4 *Differences in Attitude toward Personal Selling based on a Family Member in Sales*

I associate a selling job with ….	Family member in sales			No family member in sales			df	t-value	p-value
	N	Mean[a]	S.D.	N	Mean[a]	S. D			
Frustration	243	2.83	1.072	240	2.85	1.042	481	-0.151	0.880
Insincerity and deceit	243	2.56	1.117	238	2.84	1.116	479	-2.758*	0.006
Low status, low prestige	240	2.50	1.043	234	2.86	1.001	472	-3.866	0.000
Much traveling	242	3.32	1.044	238	3.14	1.017	478	1.907	0.057
Salespeople "money-hungry"	239	3.01	1.115	239	3.03	1.018	476	-0.214	0.831
Low job security	243	3.14	1.105	237	3.34	1.032	478	-2.068*	0.039
High pressure/forces people …	243	3.41	1.162	235	3.50	1.014	476	-0.907	0.365
"Just a job" not a "career"	243	3.03	1.181	234	3.39	1.027	475	-3.507*	0.000
Uninteresting/no challenge	243	2.26	1.085	235	2.64	1.004	476	-3.961*	0.000
No need for creativity	243	1.89	1.056	237	2.30	1.076	478	-4.176*	0.000
Personality is crucial	239	4.18	1.101	232	3.94	1.074	469	2.312*	0.021
Too little monetary reward	241	2.80	1.010	237	3.12	1.007	476	-3.529*	0.000
Interferes with home life	241	3.17	0.982	235	3.01	0.961	474	1.768	0.078
"Easy to get" job	242	2.87	0.988	237	2.99	0.983	477	-1.329	0.184
Inappropriate career option	242	2.73	1.046	241	3.21	0.930	481	-5.286*	0.000
Difficult to advance to …	243	2.45	1.114	241	2.89	1.004	482	-4.515*	0.000

*[a]1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree. Higher rating relates to more negative attitude. *significant at p≤.05 (two-tailed test)*

"uninteresting/no challenge" (t=3.049, p=0.003), and "selling is just a job, not a career" (t=1.993, p=0.047) (Table 3). The above evidence indicates rejection of null Hypothesis $H_0$3 (a), and support for alternate Hypothesis $H_1$3 (a). It can be stated that, considering all items together, there is a significant difference in means of the two groups.

The percentage of business majors that were "definitely/probably interested" in a sales job was higher among freshmen students (35.71), compared to upper level students (31.28) (Figure 3). The level of interest was moderate in both groups, but was marginally higher among freshmen (mean=2.79, SD=1.180) compared to upper level business students (mean=2.65, SD=1.224) (Figure 4, Table 5). However, no significant difference was evidenced between the two groups (t=.675, p=0.501) (Table 5). Following the results of the t-test, the authors fail to reject Hypothesis $H_0$3(b); there is no difference in pursuing a personal selling career, between freshmen and upper-level business majors.

4.5 Differences based on Having a Family Member in Sales

Results indicate that regardless of whether a student had a family member in sales, the agreement with negative characteristics ranged from "neutral" to "strongly" (i.e., attitude being indifferent, negative, or very negative) (Table 4). Evidence from the two group means suggests that not having a family member in sales is related to a higher negative attitude towards personal selling, compared to having a family member in sales.

1=definitely wouldn't like a selling job, 2=probably wouldn't like a selling job, 3=don't know, 4=probably would like a selling job, 5=definitely would like a selling job.

Figure 4 *Means and Standard Deviation of Interest in a Personal Selling Job after Graduation*

Additionally, of the 16 negative items, students with no family member in sales had significantly stronger agreement in the case of nine items. These included "insincerity and deceit" (t=2.758, p=0.006), "low status and low prestige" (t=3.866, p=0.000), "just a job, not a career" (t=3.507, p=0.000), "uninteresting/no challenge" (t=3.961, p=0.000), "no need for creativity" (t=4.176, p=0.000), "too little monetary reward" (t=3.529, p=0.000), "inappropriate career option" (t=5.286, p=0.000), "difficult to advance into upper management positions" (t=4.515, p=0.000), and "low job security" (t=2.068, p=0.039). Only on one negative item "personality is crucial", students having a family member in sales had a stronger agreement (t=2.312, p=0.021). Based on the t-test results, the authors reject null Hypothesis $H_0$4 (a), and support alternate Hypothesis $H_1$4 (a); it is concluded that there is a difference in attitude toward personal selling between students having a family member in sales, compared to students that do not.

Table 5 *Differences in Interest in a Personal Selling Job based on Demographics*

	N	Mean[a]	Std. deviation	df	t-value	p-value
All students	493	2.57	1.210	-	-	-
Male	273	2.63	1.268	487	1.536	1.131
Female	216	2.47	1.120			
Business major	238	2.68	1.215	476	2.051*	0.041
Non-business major	240	2.45	1.199			
Freshmen	42	2.79	1.180	235	.675	0.501
Upper-level	195	2.65	1.224			
Family member in sales	241	2.71	1.235	476	2.871*	.004
No family member in sales	237	2.39	1.147			

*1=definitely wouldn't like a selling job, 2=probably wouldn't like a selling job, 3=don't know, 4=probably would like a selling job, 5=definitely would like a selling job. *significant at p≤.05 (two-tailed test)*

Further, moderate interest was found in a personal selling job after graduation in both groups. Among students with a family member in sales, 33.6% were "definitely/ probably interested" in a sales job, compared to 21.5% among students without such a family member (Figure 3). Having a salesperson in the family (mean=2.71, SD=1.235) contributed to a significantly higher interest in a selling job than not having a salesperson in the family (mean=2.39, SD=1.147, t=2.871, p=0.004) (Figure 4, Table 5). T-test results offer evidence to reject null Hypothesis $H_0$4(b), and to accept alternate Hypothesis $H_1$4(b); therefore it is stated that there is a difference in interest in a selling career among students having a family member in selling, compared to students without such a family member.

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1 Personal Selling: Mexican Students' Attitude and Interest

For the sample, not a single characteristic of personal selling reflected a positive or very positive attitude toward personal selling. The overall attitude toward personal

selling was found to be negative. These results confirm and extend past research findings (such as *The American Salesman* 1958; Ditz 1967; Honeycutt et al. 1999; Jolson 1972; Kavas 2003; Paul & Worthing 1970; *Sales Management* 1962; Thompson 1972). Common misperceptions relate to the importance of personality relative to training, ethical aspects of selling, career prospects, and rewards of personal selling in proportion to professional demands (such as travelling, and being away from home) that need to be addressed. Further, an examination of demographic groups revealed a lack of very positive or positive attitude on most of the personal selling characteristics (this will be discussed in further detail in subsequent sections).

In addition, overall there was a moderate interest in a personal selling career, with over half the respondents showing a very low or low interest. These results support and extend extant literature (Bellenger et al 1974; Dubinsky 1980, 1981; Dubinsky & O'Connor 1983; Kavas 2003, Paul & Worthing 1970; Swenson et al 1993; Weeks & Meuhling1987; Swinyard 1981). Further, interest was found to be higher among business majors and students having a family member in the sales field. Some reasons for unfavorable attitude and low interest might include lack of inputs such as knowledge about personal selling, information about opportunities in the sale field, and successful role models (Kavas 2003). Other reasons might include the nature of sales culture within the firm, policies related to recruitment and retention (Weeks & Meuhling 1987), and the perception of more attractive opportunities in other fields.

5.2 Role of Gender

Neither males nor females showed a very positive or positive attitude on any characteristic of personal selling. All selling characteristics reflected indifferent, negative or very negative attitude among both groups. The interpretation of support for Hypothesis $H_1$1(a) is that female students have more negative attitude toward personal selling than male students. This finding confirms earlier U.S. findings (such as Dubinsky 1980). Among females, barriers to choosing a selling career elate to compensation, and ethical aspects.

Interest in a personal selling career was moderate in both groups. The acceptance of null Hypothesis $H_0$1(b) reflects that no significant difference in the level of interest in personal selling as a career stems from a student's gender. These findings do not support existing studies (such as Cook & Hartman 1986; Stevens & Macintosh 2002-2003). It is of research relevance to investigate why interest in selling is lower among males, despite more positive attitude toward the field.

5.3 Role of Being Business versus Non-Business Major

From means of 15 attitudinal items, it is observed that business majors and non-business majors did not show very positive or positive attitude toward personal selling. On most characteristics of personal selling, both groups showed indifferent, negative, or very negative attitudes. Non-business majors had stronger negative attitude, as was concluded from acceptance of alternate Hypothesis $H_1$2(a). This finding supports and extends current studies (such as Kavas 2003). Knowledge of some aspects of personal selling seem lacking among non-business majors; these include desirability of sales as a career choice, opportunities for advancement, scope for creativity and challenge, and prestige attached to the field.

Furthermore, in both the groups, there was a moderate interest in a selling career. Support for Hypothesis $H_1$2(b) suggests a significantly higher interest in a selling career among business majors, compared to non-business majors. Further, the above findings confirms those of extant literature (such as Kavas 2003), and may be related to students' formal education, training and choice of major.

5.4 Role of Academic Level among Business Students

The present study sought to answer a call (Kavas 2003) to investigate the impact of business students' academic level in the context of personal selling, and the present study responds to this call. On almost all characteristics of personal selling, there was a lack of very positive or positive attitude among freshmen as well as upper level business students. Among both these groups, on 15 characteristics, students were indifferent, or had negative or very negative attitudes. Acceptance of alternate Hypothesis $H_1$3(a) indicates that among business students, freshmen had more negative attitude toward personal selling, as compared with upper level students. This finding is contrary to existing research (such as Bellinger, Bernhart & Wayman 1974), but confirms a more recent thesis (namely, Kavas 2003). Freshmen seem to face an information gap about two areas of personal selling, which include challenge, and career opportunities.

Both freshmen and upper level students were found to have moderate interest in pursuing a sales career. Support for null Hypothesis $H_0$3(b) means that academic level among business students does not impact interest in a selling career. This finding is contrary to Swenson et al. (1993), which evidenced preference for personal selling as a career to be inversely related to students' academic level (progressing to upper level course work comprising sophomores, juniors and senior students). However, the present research offers support for more current theoretical arguments (Kavas 2003). In this regard, it would be fruitful to research the anomaly that upper level business majors' more positive attitude do not translate into higher interest in a selling career.

5.5 Role of Having a Family Member in Sales

Kavas (2003) called for research into the role of having a family member in sales, in relation to personal selling. This study reveals that for both groups of students, the attitude toward characteristics of personal selling was indifferent, negative, or very negative. Both these groups revealed a lack of very positive or positive attitude toward selling. Support for alternate Hypothesis $H_1$4(a) suggests that not having a family member in sales contributes to a more negative attitude toward personal selling. Negative perceptions among students without a family member in sales relate to ethical aspects, prestige, promotion and advancement prospects, challenge and creativity, compensation, desirability of the field, and job security. On the other hand, students with a family member in sales give credence to personality as an important consideration (and not factors like training, sales information, and sales support systems). The above sales facets need to be further researched and promoted among undergraduate students.

Interest in pursuing a sales career was moderate among both groups, regardless of students' having a family member in sales. Acceptance of alternate Hypothesis $H_1$4(b) means that students having a family member in sales have a greater interest in

pursuing a selling career. Further, among the four demographic variables that were studied, the authors found that having a family member in sales results in the highest polarization in both, attitude and interest in relation to personal selling. The current study has addressed the gap in the literature, which was pointed out by Kavas (2003).

6. Limitations

However, it must be kept in mind that this study has some limitations. The sample comprised students of a single university in Mexico. It may not be representative of the entire body of Mexican students, thereby restricting the generalizability of results. Further, it is an exploratory study, and does not delve into deeper issues that might impact attitude and interest of Mexican students in relation to personal selling.

7. Contributions

This research makes some valuable contributions to the literature on attitude and interest in relation to personal selling. For instance, this research is based on valid, reliable scales from the literature. Moreover, a large sample size was selected, from a highly relevant student sample in Mexico, which has been neglected in earlier studies. Many of the research objectives have been fulfilled. The study confirms and extends existing research in several areas, and suggests there is a lack of positive attitude toward personal selling; moreover, interest in a sales career is limited. Demographics are seen to play an important role in creating perceptions of personal selling as a profession. Among these, gender appears to be a significant factor- being female contributes to higher negative perceptions of personal selling. On the other hand, more positive perceptions are created by being a male, a business major, particularly an upper level business major, as well as having a family member in the sales field. Further, the study confirms and extends current research on interest in a personal selling career. Interest is significantly higher for business majors, and students with a family member in the sales profession. In addition, we provide pointers as to areas of research that would bear closer scrutiny, as discussed below.

8. Practitioner and Research Implications

From the viewpoint of personal selling practitioners, there is a need to alter Mexican students' attitude toward personal selling, through concerted efforts by industry, academia, and sales professionals and institutions. Their focus should be on 360 degrees coverage of students and other stakeholders, such as advisors, counselors, parents and guardians, through an integrated communications program. Industry needs to examine corporate culture, and policies relating to recruitment and retention, to ensure that these factors are promoting a positive image and interest in the sales field. Industry should intensify campus communication and recruitment efforts, for co-operative opportunities, internships, and employment. High-profile sales personnel should maintain a high level of "face time" in community and university events. Efforts should be made to "bond" undergraduates with sales professionals, through interaction via student associations, and student chapters of collegiate bodies such as the American Marketing Association. University faculty and administrators need to encourage experiential and service-learning to bring the ground realities of the sales field into the classroom.

This study points to some research implications as well. Specifically, the authors identified numerous areas that would bear closer scrutiny. These include a significantly higher negative attitude on the item, "personality is crucial", among business majors, as well as students having a family member in sales. This would be subject of a deeper investigation in future studies. Additionally, research attention is needed to uncover possible reasons for females having more negative attitude toward selling. There should be a focus on attitude of women that have spent a few years in the personal selling field. Specific research questions might include the factors responsible for women's choice of the field, and factors contributing to retain them in the field. Another area of research interest would be the effects organizational variables such as sales culture, and policies relating to recruitment and retention of women.

In regard to the academic level of business students, the attitude of upperclassmen toward personal selling is relatively positive. However, interest in selling as a career does not increase with the students' progressing to higher level of course work. In order to resolve this anomaly, some further research is called for. Moreover, there is a need for further research into factors such as national culture, which may be responsible for overall low levels of interest in personal selling among undergraduate students in Mexico. Further, it is important to conduct a similar investigation among undergraduate students in the U.S., and compare results for the two countries. This is of particular relevance, given the status of the two countries as members of regional economic organizations such as NAFTA.

9. Conclusions

With projections that Mexico will soon be a global economic leader, a substantial increase will be required in its population involved generally with promoting products and services, and particularly with personal selling. Positive attitude toward the field would facilitate the emergence of a quality sales workforce. In this context, the current study aimed to evaluate Mexican student's perceptions of personal selling as a career, and to examine the role of some demographic characteristics. The study also aimed to ascertain the level of interest among Mexican students in pursuing a sales career, and to investigate whether it is impacted certain demographic characteristics. Many of these objectives were achieved. It was found that, despite major strides in the field sales field in recent years, traditional perceptions about personal selling persist among undergraduate students in Mexico. There is a lack of positive attitude toward personal selling, and interest in selling as a career is limited. The present study has made valuable contributions, and offered direction for sales research and practice.

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to place on record an appreciation of the reviewers of Association of Collegiate Marketing Educators, Federation of Business Disciplines Conference, 2009 Dallas, where the first version of this research was presented, and published in the Proceedings. The authors would also like to thank the reviewers of AIMS International Journal of Management for their valuable comments and suggestions for the final paper.

10. References

1. *The American Salesman* (1958), "What College Students Think of Selling as a Career," (February), 3, 48-61.
2. Bellenger, D., K. L. Bernhart, and W. S. Wayman, Jr. (1974), "Student Attitudes Toward Selling as a Career: Implications for Marketing Education," R.C. Curhan, (ed.), *Combined Proceedings*, Chicago: American Marketing Association.
3. Brislin, R.W., Lonner, W.J. and Thorndike, R.M. (1973). *Cross-cultural Research Methods.* New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons.
4. CIA, The World Factbook (2007), "Mexico Economy Overview," (accessed October 25, 2008), [available at https://www.cia.gov/library/ publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ mx.html #Econ].
5. Cook, R. W. and T. Hartman (1986), "Female College Student Interest in a Sales Career: A Comparison," *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 6 (May), 29-34.
6. DelVecchio, S. and E. D. Honeycutt, Jr. (2002), "Explaining the Appeal of Sales Careers: A Comparison of Black and White College Students," *Journal of Marketing Education*, 24 (April), 56-63.
7. Ditz, Gerhard W. (1967), "Status Problems of the Salesman," *MSU Business Topics*, 15 (Winter), 68-80.
8. Dubinsky, Alan J. (1980), "Recruiting College Students for the Sales Force," *Industrial Marketing Management*, 9 (January), 37-45.
9. Dubinsky, A. J. (1981), "Perceptions of the Sales Job: How Students Compare with Industrial Salespeople," *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 9 (Fall), 352-67.
10. Dubinsky, A. J. and P. J. O'Connor (1983), "A Multidimensional Analysis of Preferences of Sales Positions," *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 3 (November), 31-41.
11. Economy Watch (2007), "Mexico's Economy," (accessed October 27, 2009), [http://www.economywatch.com/world_economy/mexico/].
12. Fossum, J. and M. L. Moore (1975), "The Stability of Longitudinal and Cross-Sectional Occupational Prestige Ranking," *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 7* (December), 305-311.
13. Futrell, C. M. (2006), *Fundamentals of Selling: Customer for Service* Boston: McGraw-Hill Irwin.
14. Honeycutt, E. D., Jr., J. B. Ford, M. J. Swenson, and W. Swinyard (1999), "Student Preferences for Sales Careers Around the Pacific-Rim," *Industrial Marketing Management*, 28 (January), 27-36.
15. Jolson, Marvin (1972), "Direct Selling: Consumer vs. Salesman", *Business Horizons*, 15, 87-95.
16. Kavas, A. (2003), "African-American Students' Attitudes Toward Personal Selling as a Career," *The Negro Educational Review*, 54 (January-April), 31-38.

17. Lagace, R. R. and T. A. Longfellow (1989), "The Impact of Classroom Style on Student Attitudes Toward Sales Careers: A Comparative Approach." *Journal of Marketing Education,* 11 (Fall), 72-77.
18. Muehling, D. D. and W. A. Weeks (1988), "Women's Perceptions of Personal Selling: Some Positive Results," *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management,* 8 (May), 11-20.
19. O'Connor, P. J. and A. J. Dubinsky (1983), "Perceptions of Alternative Sales Positions: Implications for Sales Recruiting, *American Marketing Association Educators' Proceedings,* 49, 262-266.
20. Paul, G. W. and P. Worthing (1970), "A Student Assessment of Selling," *Southern Journal of Business,* 5 (July), 57-65.
21. Stevens, C. D. and G. Macintosh (2002-2003), "Personality and Attractiveness of Activities within Sales Jobs," *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management,* 23 (Winter), 23-37.
22. Swenson, M. J., W. R. Swinyard, F. W. Langrehr, and S. M. Smith (1993), "The Appeal of Personal Selling as a Career: A Decade Later," *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management,* 13 (Winter), 51-63.
23. Swinyard, W. R. (1981), "The Appeal of Retailing as a Career," *Journal of Retailing,* 57 (Winter), 86-97.
24. Weeks, W. A. and D. D. Muehling (1987), "Students' Perceptions of Personal Selling," *Industrial Marketing Management,* 16 (May), 145-151.