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Selma Kadić -Maglajlić  
*University of Sarajevo*

Adriana Espinosa  
*CUNY City College*

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## Facilitating of Emotions in Sales Interactions May Hinder Performance

Selma Kadić-Maglajlić<sup>1</sup> & Adriana Espinosa<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>School of Economics and Business, University of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

<sup>2</sup>The Colin Powell School, Department of Psychology, City College of New York, New York, United States

Correspondence: Selma Kadić-Maglajlić, School of Economics and Business, University of Sarajevo, Trg oslobodjenja 1, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

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### Abstract

This article analyzes the relationship between facilitating of emotions, a branch of emotional intelligence, and salesperson performance. We employ an ability-based measure of facilitating of emotions on a sample of salespeople from Croatia (N = 245), and use structural equation modelling to test a linear versus non-linear relationship. We find that facilitating of emotions and salesperson performance share a relation that is modeled by a downward turning parabola. These findings contradict a linear relationship assumed in the conventional literature, and suggest that too little or too much facilitating of emotions may be detrimental to salesperson performance. These results provide new insights for sales personnel selection, the development of training agendas, and add an international dimension to the literature on personal selling from the point of view of an emerging market. The implications that emanate from our results have the potential of being useful for those interested in sales training.

**Keywords:** Facilitating of emotions, emotional intelligence, salesperson performance, training

### 1. Introduction

Over the past decade the discipline of personal selling and sales management has matured, and its importance as a sub-discipline of marketing has increased considerably (Asare, Yang, & Alejandro, 2012). However, Jones, Bush and Dacin (2003) note that most academic knowledge of sales rests on models and assumptions, which are decades old, and should be revised in light of the rapidly evolving demands of the marketplace. Recent articles (Asare et al., 2012; Evans, McFarland, Dietz, & Jaramillo, 2012; Geiger & Guenzi, 2009; McClaren, 2013) have focused in defining the areas where future research should go, and special attention is given to the role of Emotional Intelligence (EI) - the ability to understand, express, control and use emotions - on salesperson performance (Lassk & Shepherd, 2013).

The construct of EI has frequently been used in educational (Parker, Saklofske, Wood, & Collin, 2009), management (Luu, 2014), leadership (Kafetsios, Nezlek & Vassiou, 2011), and psychology (Petrides, Pita, & Kokkinaki, 2007) studies. While the empirical literature discussing EI in the area of sales management is limited, the unifying conclusion suggests that an incremental increase in EI has a positive and constant effect on salesperson performance. In other words, the relation between the two should be linear and positive. Recently, researchers have paid more attention to the direction and shape of the relation between EI and performance. In particular, some authors have argued that salespeople who use their own and others' emotions at great length can be construed as manipulative (Jordan, Dasborough, Daus & Ashkanasy, 2010; Le et al. 2011; Lindebaum & Cartwright, 2011), which may hinder their sales performance. Nevertheless, to the best of our knowledge, no empirical evidence confirms or refutes this claim. In this paper we aim to close the gap by testing the non-linearity of the relationship between facilitating of emotions - the dimension of EI which focuses on the use of emotions to achieve a particular goal - and salesperson performance. Our results show that the relationship between facilitating of emotions and salesperson performance is modeled by a downward turning parabola. This suggests too much facilitating of emotions could hinder a salesperson's performance, which in turn contradicts the "more is better" argument suggested in the conventional literature.

We should note that most of the existing research on personal selling is generally based on the sales industry from developed Western societies such as the United States of America (USA) and the European Union (EU-15), with only a few articles from other nations (Baldauf & Lee, 2011; Geiger & Guenzi, 2009; Panagopoulos et al., 2011). As such, the extent to which conclusions drawn from data collected in developed markets can generalize to the sales industry from

emerging markets has not been well established. This study is a step in this direction, as it is based on a sample from an emerging economy, and therefore brings insights from a new research context.

In sum, the contributions of the present study are twofold. First, it provides evidence towards the existence of a non-linear effect of emotional facilitating on salesperson performance. This provides new insights for practitioners as well as the literature on sales personnel selection and training (Lassk, Ingram, Kraus & Di Mascio, 2012; Boudreau, 1991; Coward & Sackett, 1990; Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). Second, it adds a new insight to the literature on EI and personal selling from the point of view of an emerging nation.

### *1.1 Emotional Intelligence in Context*

All relationships, business and personal, contain emotional facets. Although interest in the interaction of emotions and intelligence began much earlier (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Lazarus, 1982; Thorndike, 1920), Mayer and Salovey (1990) coined the concept of EI as the ability to monitor one's and others' feelings and emotions, for the purpose of guiding one's thinking and actions. A few years later, the authors further specified that EI consists of two main parts: experiential; the ability to perceive, respond, and manipulate emotions without essentially understanding them, and strategic; the ability to understand and use emotions without essentially perceiving or fully experiencing feelings (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). EI quickly became popular, as it brought focus to aspects that individuals can change within themselves to improve performance in everyday life. Mayer and Salovey (1997) present a four-dimensional model for measuring EI as a function of individual ability. These four areas are: perception, integration, understanding, and facilitating. The first dimension, emotional perception, is the ability to be self-aware of emotions as well as emotional needs, and communicate them accurately to others. This dimension also includes the ability to distinguish between honest and dishonest expressions of emotion. The second dimension, emotional integration, is the ability to distinguish among different emotions, and identify those that influence his/her thinking process. Emotional understanding is the ability to understand complex emotions such as feeling two emotions at the same time, acknowledging the transition from one emotion to another. Facilitating (or using) emotion is the ability to access, generate, and use emotions to enable thought. It allows the person to focus his/her attention only on emotions that lead to the achievement of a particular goal. More specifically, an individual with a high ability to facilitate emotions is one who always knows which emotions are appropriate for a given interaction, and uses them accordingly.

Recently researchers have highlighted the importance of EI as a means by which salespeople can accurately understand the buyers' needs (Manna & Smith, 2004; Kidwell, Hardesty, Murtha & Sheng, 2011) and increase their sales outcomes (Kidwell, McFarland & Avila, 2007). Specifically, research by Kidwell et al. (2007) argues that salespeople who are able to correctly perceive and use emotions in any situation (i.e. facilitate emotions) are likely to accomplish their goals more efficiently and effectively than those who do not possess such ability. In other words, salespeople who have a high ability to facilitate emotions are more aware of buyers' needs and can therefore communicate more effectively with them. This in turn, increases the likelihood of higher sales performance.

One can therefore conclude that the analysis of a salesperson's ability to facilitate emotions as it relates to his/her sales performance is a natural progression of existing research in the area of EI and personal selling (Lassk, Ingram, Kraus, & Di Mascio, 2012; Lassk & Shepherd, 2013; Rozell, Pettijohn, & Parker, 2004). We should clarify that the competitive advantage lies not only in being able facilitate emotions, but also in the ability to facilitate emotions accurately. Therefore facilitating of emotions would result in higher salesperson performance only when it is appropriate in a given circumstance.

### *1.2 Emotional Intelligence and Performance*

The existing empirical literature on EI and salesperson performance suggests the following key results. First, salesperson performance increases with EI (Kidwell et al., 2011; Lassk & Shepherd, 2013; Prentice & King, 2013; Rozell, Pettijohn, & Parker, 2006). Second, EI has been found to improve customer oriented selling behavior (Kidwell et al., 2011; Pettijohn, Rozell, & Newman, 2010; Rozell, Pettijohn & Parker, 2004) and creativity (Lassk & Shepherd 2013). These findings have greatly influenced the way in which salespeople are selected, trained and evaluated in the work force (Boudreau, 1991; Coward & Sackett, 1990; Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). Nonetheless, as stated, these studies are based on the assumption that effect of increasing EI on performance is always positive and constant. In short, the relation is assumed to be linear. Nevertheless, after careful review of the literature, we find that this underlying assumption was not consistently demonstrated, particularly within the facilitating of emotions dimension.

Other authors have argued that an assumption of linearity is likely to be overly simplistic (Jordan, Dasborough, Daus & Ashkanasy, 2010; Le et al., 2011; Lindebaum & Cartwright, 2011; Shipper, Kincaid, Rotondo & Hoffman, 2003). In particular, these authors claim that facilitating of emotions may have a non-linear effect because salespeople, who use and facilitate their emotions at great length, could be construed as manipulative. This suggests that too much EI would

lead to an ultimate decrease in salesperson performance, and therefore implies a relation more closely modeled by a downward turning parabola.

In fact, some authors allude to the existence of a “dark side” to facilitating of emotions. For example, in the context of leadership, the research article by Antonakis, Ashkanasy and Dasborough (2009) discusses a possible “curse of emotion”, where a leader’s over attentiveness towards maintaining agreeable emotions might be conducive to less effective leadership. The clinical psychology literature has similar results. For example, Barlow (1988) argues that individuals who self-direct themselves to pay attention to distress emotions, typically experience higher anxiety themselves. Similarly, researchers have found a link between excessively focusing on the emotions of distress (i.e. rumination) and negative affect such as stress, anger, contempt, and anxiety, among others (Blagden & Craske, 1996; Nolen-Hoeksema, Wisco & Lyubomirsky, 2008).

It is clear that salespeople have to pay attention to and express certain emotions in order to engage buyers and achieve a given sales goal. However, in trying to enhance the buyer-seller relation, and achieve the goal, they may suppress and further manage their true thoughts and emotions. This suppression and management of thoughts and emotions can increase the chances of rumination or excessive self-focused attention (Wegner & Zanakos, 1994; Erber & Wegner, 1996). In this way, too much facilitating of emotions may thwart the emotional well-being of the salesperson, and their performance. Moreover, the article by Jordan, Dasborough, Daus and Ashkanasy (2010) argues that suppression of emotions, for the sake of increasing facilitating of emotions, can lead buyers to perceive the salesperson as dishonest and deceptive. Such perceptions from buyers would highly likely hinder salesperson performance.

Taken together, these lines of reasoning suggest that facilitating of emotions and salesperson performance share a relationship that is not constant. There is an optimal level of facilitating of emotions upon which performance reaches its maximum. After this level, salesperson performance declines. To our understanding, no empirical research supports or invalidates this claim. We thus propose the following research hypothesis:

The relationship between facilitating of emotions and salesperson performance is modeled by a downward turning parabola; initially increasing, but decreasing after a certain level of facilitating of emotions.

## **2. Method**

### *2.1 Participants*

To test our hypothesis we collected survey data via an Internet-based self-reported questionnaire. A total 1,000 B2B salespeople in various industrial sectors within Croatia received E-mail invitations to participate in the study. Due to the lack of existence of a secondary contact database that would dictate the sampling frame for this study, we generated a sampling frame according to official country statistics of industrial structure. This same issue of not having a secondary contact database was discussed by other scholars (Panagopoulos et al., 2011), who concluded that the use of contact lists may not be appropriate for data collection in many emerging countries.

Our questionnaire included four statements by which respondents self-rated themselves with regards to their competence to participate in the study. Inclusion of items such as “My colleagues would describe me as an expert in sales” or “My job role qualifies me to answer questions about sales” in the questionnaire is aligned with the previous literature (Boso et al., 2013, Homburg & Jensen, 2007). Each of these questions had options ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). We aggregated self-ratings across all four statements, and eliminated respondents who obtained a mean score lower than 4.0. This process guaranteed a sample of individuals who were the most qualified to answer the questionnaire. In the end, we obtained a total of 245 usable questionnaires, achieving an effective response rate of 24.5%.

We used the time trend extrapolation test suggested by Armstrong and Overton (1977) to examine non-response bias, a problem common to mail surveys in which respondents significantly differ from non-respondents. The results show t-values ranging from -0.62 to 0.93, thereby confirming that no statistical differences between respondents and non-respondents were evident.

### *2.2 Measures*

#### *2.2.1 Facilitating of Emotions*

The concept of EI is characterized by different operational definitions and measurement approaches (Walter, Cole & Humprehy, 2011) such as a mixed model proposed by Bar-On (2000), and an ability-based model proposed by Mayer and Salovey (1997). In this paper, we employ the Emotional Intelligence in Marketing Exchange (EIME) ability-based measure developed by Kidwell et al. (2011) to measure facilitating of emotions. Specifically, we borrow four items which, according to these authors, are predetermined to measure the construct of facilitating of emotions. Each question had options ranging from 1 (Not at all Useful) to 5 (Extremely useful), and are presented in detail on Table 1.

We must note that the EIME measure we discuss herein was developed and validated using real estate and insurance agents from the United States. It is well understood that the expression and use of emotions varies across cultures (Matsumoto, 1993; Hofstede, 2001; Moran, Diefendorff, & Greguras, 2013), and therefore EI is likely to vary as well (Tang, Yin & Nelson, 2010). According to an article by Shipper, Kinkaid, Rotondo and Hoffman (2003) such variation is explained by (a) cultural differences in characteristics related to self-awareness, and (b) cultural variations in the effectiveness of managerial behaviors and skills. As such, we expect some items from the subset measuring facilitating of emotions to be irrelevant for this study. Along these lines, we add that this study can be seen as a test of transferability of selected items from EIME to a different cultural setting.

As done in Kidwell et al. (2011), we also used expert scores to rate each salesperson's response to the construct. Namely, we asked a panel of 24 experienced experts in psychology, psychotherapy and psychoanalysis from the Balkan region to answer the questionnaire. Their responses reflect the proportion of experts who endorsed each answer. For example, if 95% of the experts answered one question in a particular way, respondents whose answer was in accordance received a score of 0.95 for that question.

### 2.2.2 Salesperson Performance

We adopted the measure of salesperson performance developed by Behrman and Perreault (1982), and redefined by Miao and Evans (2007). This measure, while subjective, is generalizable, reliable, and considers varying aspects of performance, all which can be compared across industries (Homburg, Müller & Klarmann, 2011). We follow the approach suggested by Dillman (2007) of asking questions in the third person in order to obtain a more sincere response. Specifically, salespeople rated their performance from the point of view of their supervisor, based on the following scenario:

“Think how your supervisor would rank your selling achievements over the last 12 months, relative to the selling achievements of other salespeople in your company”.

The rating scale constituted a 7-point Likert format, ranging from 1 (much worse than the other salespeople in my company) to 7 (much better than the other salespeople in my company).

### 2.2.3 Covariates

We included several demographic variables, which according to previous studies are relevant in the context of personal selling (Sears & Holmvall, 2010; Frino & Desiderio, 2013). Specifically, we control for gender (1 = male; 2 = female), education (1 = high school diploma to 4 = Doctoral or other advanced graduate degree), time spent within the firm, and firm size. We apply guidelines from the European Commission (2005) to generate categories of firm size: micro company (less than 10 employees), small (between 10 and 50 employees), medium (between 51 and 250 employees) and large (more than 250 employees). Finally, we control for industry type as suggested by the previous literature (Guenzi, Baldauf & Panagopolous, 2014; Franke & Park, 2006; Jaramillo & Grisaffe, 2009).

Table 1 lists all variables included in the study, and described in the sections above.

Table 1. Variables Included in the Study

<b>Facilitating of Emotions</b>		<b>Variable Categories</b>
How useful might it be to feel "hostility" when interacting with an angry supervisor?		(1) Not at all
How useful might it be to feel "anxiety" when determining the needs of a customer?		(2) Slightly
How useful might it be to feel "guilt" when persuade someone to make an expensive purchase?		(3) Moderately
How useful might it be to feel "frustration" when negotiating compensation issues with your supervisor?		(4) Quite Useful
		(5) Extremely
<b>Sales Performance</b>		
My performance to sell products with higher "profit" margins.		(1) Much worse than the other salespeople in this company
My performance to generate a high "dollar" amount of sales in my territory.		(7) Much better than the other salespeople in my company
My performance to "quickly" generate sales of new company products.		
My performance to produce a high "market share" for my company in my territory.		
My performance to exceed the sales "targets" and objectives that are assigned to me.		
<b>Covariates</b>		
Gender	(1) Male; (2) Female	
Education	(1) High school diploma; (2) Bachelor degree; (3) Master degree; (4) Doctoral / advanced graduate degree	
Firm size	(1) Micro <10; (2) Small- from 11-50; (3) Medium - from 51-250; (4) Large > 250	
Time within the firm	Open-Ended	
Industry Type	Open-Ended	

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Descriptive Statistics

The sample was well balanced in terms of gender (51% females; 49% males). Almost half of the respondents had a high school diploma (45.3%), and 40% received a Bachelor's degree. Only thirteen percent of the sample had a Master's

degree, and 1.6% had a Doctoral or other advanced degree. Respondents on average spent 5.7 (S.D. = 0.97) years working for the same company. The majority of respondents (59%) were employed in small and medium-sized enterprises (between 11-250 employees); followed by respondents employed in large firms (25%) while 16% were employed in micro firms (under 10 employees). While respondents worked in various industrial sectors (IT, textiles and garments, fast moving consumer goods, construction, agriculture, automotive, tobacco, financial services, pharmaceutical and energy), the majority worked in the service industry (56.7%).

### 3.2 Construct Validity

To further assess the psychometric properties of the variables, we performed a single confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with maximum likelihood estimation (ML) using the sample covariance matrix as input.

Table 2. Standardized Factor Loadings and Reliability Tests

Item description (composite reliability/average variance extracted)	Factor loadings (T-values)
<b>Facilitating of emotions (Kidwell et al., 2011), Likert scale from 1-5: CR = 0.776; AVE = 0.548</b>	
How useful might it be to feel "hostility" when interacting with an angry supervisor?	.814 (Fixed)
How useful might it be to feel "anxiety" when determining the needs of a customer?	.852 (8.37)
How useful might it be to feel "guilt" when attempting to persuade someone to make an expensive purchase?	.504 (7.17)
How useful might it be to feel "frustration" when negotiating compensation issues with your supervisor?	-*
<b>Salesperson performance (Behrman and Perreault, 1988), Likert scale from 1-7: CR = 0.766; AVE = 0.524</b>	
My performance to sell products with higher profit margins.	.796 (Fixed)
My performance to generate a high dollar amount of sales in my territory.	.657 (8.07)
My performance to exceed the sales targets and objectives that are assigned to me.	.711 (8.23)
Model Fit	
$\chi^2 = 8.437$ ; $df = 8$ ; $p = 0.598$ ; $RMSEA = 0.011$ ; $NFI = 0.984$ ; $GFI = 0.991$ ; $AGFI = 0.977$ ; $SRMR = 0.021$	

\*Item eliminated during the purification procedure

As shown on Table 2, this model showed a very good fit to the data ( $\chi^2 (8) = 8.437$ ,  $p = 0.598$ ;  $RMSEA = 0.011$ ;  $GFI = 0.991$ ;  $AGFI = 0.977$ ;  $NFI = 0.984$ ;  $SRMR = 0.021$ ). All factor loadings of the indicators on their respective latent constructs were significant. We further analyzed composite reliability as well as discriminant validity. All the constructs exceeded the 0.60 threshold value for construct reliability (CR) proposed by Bagozzi and Yi's (1988) suggesting that scales are internally consistent. In order to assess convergent validity we calculated the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct. As shown, all constructs had AVE values above the recommended threshold of 0.50, which implies that convergent validity was achieved (Fornell & Larcker 1981). In addition, Cronbach's Alpha reliabilities for facilitating of emotions and salesperson performance were 0.762 and 0.796, respectively. These values exceed a threshold of 0.70 as suggested by Nunnally (1978, p. 245), suggesting adequate reliability.

We further assess discriminant validity by following the procedure suggested by Fornell and Larcker's (1981), which compares all constructs' AVE scores with the square of the correlations between constructs.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics, Correlation Matrix and Discriminant Validity

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Facilitating of Emotions	2.67	1.19	<b>0.557</b>	0.001	0.016	0	0.002	0.002	0.007
2. Salesperson Performance	5.36	1.02	0.038	<b>0.505</b>	0	0.027	0	0.026	0.013
3. Gender	1.48	0.5	0.126	-0.007	N/a	0.095	0.041	0.017	0.067
4. Education	1.71	0.75	0.006	0.164	0.309	N/a	0.02	0.057	0.008
5. Firm size	2.67	1.02	-0.039	-0.012	0.202	0.141	N/a	0.011	0.02
6. Time Within Firm	5.63	4.97	0.047	0.16	0.129	0.239	0.103	N/a	0.02
7. Industry Type	9.09	4.14	-0.083	-0.115	-0.259	-0.088	-0.14	-0.143	N/a

Notes: Correlations appear below the diagonal line, and the squared correlation appears above the diagonal. AVE values applicable to latent variables are listed along the diagonal in bold.

As shown in Table 3, all construct AVE scores (.557 and .505) are greater than the square of the correlation (.001), thereby implying that discriminant validity was obtained.

Lastly, we test for the threat of Common Method Variance (CMV), typical in studies involving self-reporting questionnaires, by applying Harman's single factor test. The results indicate the single factor did not fit the data well ( $\chi^2 (10) = 266.79$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ;  $RMSEA = 0.324$ ;  $CFI = 0.313$ ;  $GFI = 0.733$ ;  $NFI = 0.314$ ; Standardized RMR = 0.232), which suggests that CMV is not a major concern in this study.

3.3 Structural Equation Modeling of Facilitating of Emotions and Sales Performance

This section is concerned with the shape of the relation between facilitating of emotions and salesperson performance (PERF). We introduced in the model a linear variable for facilitating of emotions (FACI) as well as a quadratic term (FACI<sup>2</sup>). In addition, as suggested by Little, Card, Bovaird, Preacher and Crandall (2007), we used an orthogonalized (residual-centered) value of FACI<sup>2</sup>. To estimate the quadratic relationship we used Ping’s (1995, 1996) product-term analysis, which uses a curvilinear latent variable with a single indicant. In so doing, we reduce model complexity, by using only one observed score for the quadratic term. This in turn, fixes the path between FACI<sup>2</sup> and its single observed score to 1. In addition, we computed error variance of FACI<sup>2</sup> using the equation suggested by Ping (1996), as follows:

$$EV = [(1-\alpha) * \delta^2] \tag{1}$$

In equation (1), the parameter  $\delta^2$  is obtained using the standard errors from the data, and  $\alpha$  corresponds to construct reliability of the variable. As recommended by Steenkamp and Van Trijp (1991), we assumed a critical ratio of 0.7 for  $\alpha$ . We note that while we hypothesize the path for the conceptual model to be FACI<sup>2</sup> → PERF, we also maintain the path FACI → PERF as suggested by Ping (1995; 1996).

Because the quadratic effect was nested in the baseline model, we first estimated the baseline model followed by estimations of the constrained model. In the constrained model we allow the main effects to be estimated freely, but the quadratic term (FACI<sup>2</sup>), while included, is fixed at zero. Then, we estimate an unconstrained model, which allows the quadratic term to be freely estimated.

Table 4. Fit Indices of the Model with Nested Quadratic Relationship

Model	$\chi^2$	DF	$\chi^2 / DF$	RMSEA	NNFI	GFI	SRMR	PNFI	CFI
Constrained	38.77	33	1.17	0.026	0.976	0.975	0.034	0.466	0.988
Unconstrained	34.87	32	1.08	0.019	0.982	0.977	0.031	0.454	0.991

As shown in Table 4, the reduction in  $\chi^2$  from the constrained to the unconstrained model is significant, ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 3.96 \Delta df = 1$ ), suggesting the unconstrained model is a better fit. In addition, the unconstrained model produced smaller values of RMSEA (0.019) and SRMR (0.031) than the constrained model (RMSEA= 0.026, SRMR = 0.034). We then computed the parsimony fit index (PNFI) to assess the most parsimonious model. The rule of thumb suggests that the model with lowest PNFI value is more parsimonious. As shown, the model with the lowest PNFI is the unconstrained model (0.454). We therefore used the unconstrained model to estimate the quadratic term, since it not only proved to be the more parsimonious, but also returned good fit indices.

Table 5. Results of the Model with Nested Quadratic Relationship

Hypothesis	Relationships	Unstd. Estimate	Std. Estimate	t-value	Result
H1	FACI <sup>2</sup> → PERF	- 0.14	-0.19	-2.09**	Supported
Control	FACI → PERF	0.06	0.07	0.71	-
Control	Gender → PERF	-0.95	-0.29	-0.95	-
Control	Education → PERF	0.52	0.33	1.67**	-
Control	Time within the firm → PERF	0.02	0.10	1.21	-
Control	Firm Size → PERF	0.03	0.03	0.21	-
Control	Industry type → PERF	-0.03	-0.14	-1.20	-

R<sup>2</sup>=0.284

Note: \*\*\*p<0.01 \*\*p<0.05 \*p<0.1  $\alpha$  =critical t-values are 1.282, 1.645 and 2.325 for  $\alpha = 0.1, \alpha = 0.05$  and  $\alpha = 0.01$  respectively

Table 5 presents estimates for the paths of the quadratic model, which we estimate following the Ping (1995; 1996) procedure. The model controls for gender, education, time spent within the firm, firm size and industry type, and explains 28.4% of the variance in salesperson performance. According to the results, performance is not significantly impacted by gender, firm size or industry type. In contrast, education of the sales person positively and significantly influences his or her performance, and the effect size is moderate ( $\beta = 0.33, p < 0.005$ ). This result is not surprising. Education is, at the very least, a signal for ability, which in turn is highly related to productivity (Chevalier, Harmon, Walker, & Zhu, 2004). Furthermore, it is not unlikely that firms further invest in their employees’ human capital and tailor their education to meet the needs of the firm. This too would increase their productivity.

With regards to the hypothesized quadratic effect, the results show significance in the path between FACI<sup>2</sup> and PERF ( $\beta = -0.19; t = -2.09; p < 0.05$ ). Furthermore, the negative quadratic term (FACI<sup>2</sup>) combined with the linear positive term FACI ( $\beta = 0.07, t = 0.71, n.s.$ ) results in a downward facing parabola (Aiken & West, 1991).

4. Discussion

Salespeople constitute a crucial element in the development of buyer-seller relationships. As the price of top performing salespeople continues to rise, the demand for successful salespeople is growing stronger (Darmon, 2004). Consequently,

firms are increasingly concerned about enhancing the performance of their sales force (Jaramillo & Grisaffe, 2009). Nevertheless, empirical evidence about interrelations between individual psychological characteristics of salespeople and their performance is lacking. This study adds new knowledge by empirically investigating the relationship between a salesperson's ability to facilitate emotions and his/her performance.

Our results show that facilitating of emotions is an ability in which either too little or too much could be detrimental to salesperson performance. These results are in contrast to the present knowledge, which assumes that EI together with all of its dimensions, including facilitating of emotions, will always lead to higher salesperson performance. It is important to highlight that facilitating of emotions is just one small part of the puzzle. There are other variables that can be viewed as predictors of salesperson performance, which we do not consider in this study. Nevertheless, our findings suggest that within this context, training programs based on "more is better" may not be applicable to every setting. Sales managers should be more cognizant of their sales representatives' ability to facilitate emotions, and tailor company-sponsored training programs accordingly. Given the direct implication of these results on salespeople training, further research is needed in order to understand optimal levels of facilitating of emotions.

## 5. Conclusion

In this study we empirically assess the relationship between facilitating of emotions and salesperson performance. We find the shape of said relationship to be different from what is typically assumed in the literature on personal selling. As such, this study provides several key contributions to the literature of business psychology and sales management. First, it provides an argument, supported by empirical evidence, justifying the existence of a non-linear relationship. Second, it adds an international dimension to the literature by using a sample from an untapped population within a developing nation. As most research in this area is performed on data from Westernized societies, we believe this is a valuable addition to the field.

### 5.1 Limitations and Future Direction

The present study is not free from limitations. In particular, in generating the sample, we were faced with the problem of not having a clear sampling frame. Although we looked at the country's official statistics of industry structure to generate the sample, it would have been ideal to have a secondary contact database that would dictate the sampling frame. As discussed in the methodology section, this problem is common in studies using data from emerging countries. Moreover, our sampling process restricted data collection to B2B salespersons that had access to the Internet. Nonetheless, given the lack of knowledge that exists about the population studied, we believe that the benefits from the data collected outweigh the challenges of having a limited sampling frame restricted to salespeople with internet access.

Although we used a number of procedural and statistical tools against problems associated with CMV (Podsakoff, P.M., Mackenzie, Lee & Podsakoff, N.P., 2003) we acknowledge potential limitations of reliance on single informants for information on both the dependent and independent variables. Furthermore, this study used self-reported measures of performance, which can be subjected to various distortions. Podsakoff and Organ (1986) suggested that researchers should obtain multiple measures from different sources at different points in time in order to minimize the effect of CMV. Due to narrow financial resources and other issues, this suggestion was not considered. However, this could be seen as a potential source of further improvement. In particular, one can gather information on a salesperson's performance from varying points of view, including buyers and sales managers.

We also recognize that by examining only one of the dimensions of an integrated EI construct, we ignored all other magnitudes and directions associated with other dimensions. Unfortunately, due to the limited number of respondents and the model's complexity, it was not possible to explore other dimensions independently. Further, as Jordan et al. (2010) suggested, researchers should explore the relationship between all other dimensions of EI and salesperson performance within the same framework. A follow up study of the sort, would not only assess the generalizability of our results to the other three dimensions, but would also gauge differences resulting from aggregate versus disaggregate considerations of EI. Also, Van Rooy and Viswesvaran (2004) provide empirical evidence suggesting different EI measurement scales result in different levels of predictive validity for performance outcomes. Therefore, future studies could consider the same approach presented here, but using other EI scales. Finally, evidence suggests the existence of cultural differences in the use of, and perceived appropriateness of personal sales tactics (Elahee, Kirby, & Nasif, 2002; Volkema, 2004). As such, future studies could assess the cultural universality of EIME and other EI measures.

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