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How is marketers' credibility construed within the sales-marketing interface?

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ABSTRACT

Extant sales-marketing interface research has ignored how salespeople interpret marketers' credibility. This paper integrates interdisciplinary research on credibility and the sales-marketing interface with interview data from 33 informants to expound three components of this phenomenon; expertise, trust, and interpersonal proximity. Explication of this construct's nuances thus helps to better understand at a micro-level, the potential but sometimes non-apparent cause of some of the problems within sales-marketing interface, and also highlights many avenues to optimize this interface based on the understanding of its inner workings. The findings also expand the repertoire of tools managers may use to harmonize this interface.

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1. Introduction

The interdependent nature of marketing strategy creation and execution processes necessitates that sales and marketing (henceforth S&M) functions work well together so that firms can deliver superior customer value (Guenzi and Troilo, 2007; Kotler et al., 2006; Krohmer et al., 2002). Extant research on sales-marketing interface, however, indicates that many times, S&M do not share a cordial relationship, and that conflict, non-cooperation, and mutual negative stereotyping afflict this interface (Dewsnap and Jobber, 2000, 2002; Montgomery and Webster, 1997).

Among the many factors that may contribute to the sub-optimal sales-marketing interface, physical separation and differences between S&M personnel in their windows on the world (Cespedes, 1996; Homburg and Jensen, 2007) may create a challenge for S&M personnel to appreciate how (and whether) their counterparts' activities contribute to the broader strategic process and their own success (Rouziès et al., 2005). As a result, many times, salespeople view marketers as being ensconced in their ivory towers and out of touch with reality (Beverland et al., 2006; Homburg et al., 2008; Lorge, 1999). This raises questions in their minds about marketers' credibility as strategy creators and in many instances; they ignore marketing initiatives (Aberdeen Group, 2002; Strahle et al., 1996).

Extant sales-marketing interface literature has neither assessed how salespeople come to interpret marketers' credibility nor offered marketers any solution as to how they may enhance their credibility in salespeople's eyes. This paper fills that gap by explicating how

marketers' credibility is construed within the sales-marketing interface, thereby offering managers guidance on this issue. Given the paucity of guiding theoretical frameworks in this area, this study uses the discovery-oriented methodology and depth-interview data from 33 sales professionals to investigate this issue.

This paper is organized as follows. The next section presents a brief review of the relevant literature on sales-marketing interface and the notion of credibility. Following that is a discussion of study methodology and findings. The paper concludes with highlighting study contributions, implications, limitations, and future research directions.

2. Background

2.1. Sales-marketing interface

While Montgomery and Webster (1997) highlighted a greater need to examine sales-marketing interface long ago, academic research on this interface has recently started to expand (Kotler et al., 2006). The extant literature in this area has focused on (a) what may drive S&M apart from one another (e.g., conflicts, interfunctional differences, cultural mismatch), and (b) what may help build stronger connections between S&M (e.g., integration, collaboration, alignment). The following key ideas emerge from this body of work.

Scholars note that goal differences, turf barriers (Hutt, 1995), or lack of alignment (Guenzi and Troilo, 2006) may lead to interfunctional conflict or lack of cooperation between S&M (Dawes and Massey, 2005). Further, aspects such as cultural differences (Beverland et al., 2006; Kotler et al., 2006), physical separation (Lorge, 1999), or thought world differences (Cespedes, 1996; Homburg and Jensen, 2007) between S&M personnel can result in prejudice, disrespect, and distrust toward the other function, leading them to accuse the other function for strategy failure (Matthyssens and Johnston, 2006).

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To bridge this divide and forge greater integration across S&M, firms create opportunities so that both S&M personnel understand how the other function's activities contribute to their own (Ingram, 2004; Oliva, 2006). For example, firms institute cross-functional processes, create joint sales-marketing taskforces (Piercy, 2006; Piercy and Lane, 2003; Ruckert and Walker, 1987), or work toward removing turf barriers, and reducing intergroup differentiation between S&M (LeMeunier-FitzHugh and Piercy, 2007; Massey and Dawes, 2007).

In spite of these efforts, many times, the divide between S&M remains. Salespeople continue to harbor prejudice, disrespect, and distrust about marketers and do not look up to them to provide consistent strategic directions (Yandle and Blythe, 2000); thereby disregarding many marketing initiatives (Strahle et al., 1996) since they do not perceive their marketing colleagues as credible partners.

2.2. Credibility

Scholars have examined the notion of credibility on the individual level in the context of interpersonal communication credibility (cf. Hovland et al., 1953), as well as on the supra-individual level in the context of advertiser credibility (MacKenzie and Lutz, 1989), merchant credibility (Lichtenstein and Bearden, 1989), and corporate credibility (Lafferty and Goldsmith, 1999). Credibility refers to whether the receiver views the source of information as believable (Belch, Belch, and Villarreal, 1987; Bettinghaus, 1969). Credibility construct consists of cognitive and affective dimensions; with the former referring to the source's perceived *expertise*, while the latter representing its perceived *trustworthiness* in the eyes of the recipient (Dholakia and Sternthal, 1997; LaBarbera, 1982; Newell and Goldsmith, 2001; Sharma, 1990). As such, research indicates that trustworthiness and expertise are the two important mainstays of this concept.

Business literature has interpreted trust as confidence in an exchange partner's reliability and integrity, and a combination of dependability, competence, integrity, and responsiveness (Doney and Cannon, 1997; Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002). Expertise, the other component of this construct, refers to the perceived level of contextually relevant knowledge of the source (Sharma, 1990). Extant research suggests that the receiver's perception that the source possesses higher levels of expert power enhances the source's trustworthiness (and thereby credibility) in the eyes of the receiver (Moorman et al., 1993; Palmatier et al., 2006).

Overall, the above literature review highlights that S&M share less than optimal rapport and the existence of the many divides between S&M may lead salespeople to constantly assess marketers' credibility. While scholars have examined credibility as a construct in different

Table 2
Themes, definition/explanation, and frequency of occurrence.

Theme	Definition/explanation	Frequency
Value creation/addition	Marketers are able to enrich and simplify salespeople's jobs; provide constant support	23
Business savvy	Marketers as a comprehensive resource for a specific product with respect to customer issues, product, pricing, channels, and competitive knowledge	19
Trench experience	Marketers actively gaining sales experience through fieldwork; if possessed, making it known to the sales force that they have walked in their shoes	21
Leadership and resource commitment	Marketers' ability to provide strategic leadership and secure resources from top management for their strategies	20
Keeping promise	Marketers keeping their word – for example, product launch dates, specific field initiatives; and not backing out at the last moment	21
Common fate	Goal and compensation alignment between sales and marketing functions	18
Sales advocacy	Marketers getting things done for sales force within the company; advocating for them in front of top management	19
Social distinction	Marketers treating salespeople as belonging to a different social class; marketing making hierarchical distinction between them and sales	22
Reverence and understanding	Marketing appreciating the hard work of the sales force; empathizing with them	24

contexts such as advertising or corporate credibility, they have not yet teased out the specific sales-marketing interface issues related to this construct. This highlights the dire need for in-depth investigation of this issue within the sales-marketing interface, which makes qualitative inquiry an appropriate approach in this paper.

3. Methodology

This study used interview data collected using theoretical sampling (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p201). Since this study pertains to how marketers' credibility is construed within the sales-marketing interface, the data came from a diverse group of sales professionals (see Table 1 for informant profile). In addition, the informants represented firms that had both cordial and problematic sales-marketing interfaces. These steps maximized the discovery of variations among concepts (Creswell, 2007, p. 240–41).

The interviews were discovery-oriented (Deshpande, 1983), lasting between 40 min and over 65 min. While using a pre tested interview protocol, the author also encouraged informants to offer additional examples as they spoke, and clarified ambiguities to insure that no interviewer induced bias crept in (McCracken, 1988). Data collection stopped upon reaching theoretical saturation (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

NVivo software was used in data management and analysis. The analysis started with open coding (Corley and Gioia, 2004) where the focus was on the language used by informants to identify first-order codes. The next step was axial coding, which examined the relationships among the first-order codes, and assembled them into higher-order themes. Last, these themes helped to produce the emergent framework. Table 2 shows examples of the first-order categories, a brief explanation of that category, and also how frequently that category appeared in the data.

The use of three techniques insured data trustworthiness and analytical rigor (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). First, two knowledgeable, independent judges evaluated the coding of 13 randomly selected interviews and assessed their agreements and disagreements with the author's coding. Second, an independent qualitative researcher conducted an audit of the field notes, interview protocol, coding schemes, and random samples of interview transcripts to assess

Table 1
Informant characteristics.

Level within sales hierarchy	Gender		Industries represented	Job titles
	Male	Female		
Junior	7	3	IT, pharmaceuticals, healthcare, industrial products, engineering products, telecom	Manager—field sales, sales executive, sales representative
Middle	5	7	IT, medical devices, telecom, pharmaceuticals, industrial products	Regional sales manager, account sales manager, account manager, district sales manager, national accounts manager, sales manager
Senior	5	6	Telecom, industrial products, engineering products, healthcare, IT, medical devices, pharmaceuticals	Director—sales, director—SBU sales, manager—institutional sales, national sales manager, VP—sales

whether the conclusions reached were plausible. Last, the use of member checks (Creswell, 2007, pg. 208), wherein sixteen randomly selected study informants vetted the author's interpretations, insured the accuracy and credibility of the findings.

4. Findings

Fig. 1 represents an overview of the emergent themes. Specifically, nine themes revealed how salespeople construe marketers' credibility. Further analysis helped in grouping these nine themes across three main categories: Expertise, Trustworthiness, and Interpersonal Proximity. Each theme is discussed below.

4.1. Expertise themes

The category of Expertise refers to whether marketers have the proficiency to provide ongoing support to the sales personnel. As the data suggest, marketers are able to show their expertise, thereby establishing credibility through (a) creating or adding value to salespeople's activities, and (b) serving as a readily available source of product and customer knowledge for salespeople.

Value creation/addition: A majority of informants note that to be perceived as credible, salespeople must clearly understand the value marketers create for them and also feel the impact of marketers' initiatives in their daily activities. The informants characterize value creation/addition in terms of marketing bringing out superior products that address *customer pains*, or providing useful customer insights. Further, when marketers, in response to salespeople's requests, create customized strategies for certain problem territories, salespeople see the value marketers bring to the table. In addition, salespeople view marketers' being accessible and approachable; especially when salespeople are dealing with major accounts, as adding value to their efforts. The quote below is pertinent.

If salespeople see that millions of dollars are being spent on marketing, and if they do not see marketing adding any value to what they do... in terms of creating winning products, smarter strategies, innovative campaigns... they are going to ask, where does all that money go? What do these people do in those offices? How big is that organization? Unless people see that marketing is helping them with major accounts, unless they experience the benefit of a marketing function in their work, and unless it becomes personal, people are going to laugh about them. [Dan, Telecom]

The second theme, *Business Savvy*, suggests that salespeople expect marketers to possess the *savoir faire* in areas including, but not limited to, product knowledge, pricing, channel management, or broader strategic issues. Specifically, salespeople expect marketers to serve as the *go to people* who may provide timely responses to

their queries. Further, they expect marketers to procure additional information for them when needed and keep such information ready for salespeople to use.

To tell you the truth, salespeople do not expect miracles... they do expect new products to not go so well initially... they are pretty pragmatic about that... however, they have to have a place to go if there's a problem. They also have to know that whenever they go [to marketers] with their problem, the people there are going to own the problem and do something about it to help them out. They want to feel confident that their complaints will not end up somewhere in the black hole. [Zack, Medical device]

Another way in which marketers can show their business expertise and enhance their credibility is by making efforts to be *close to market reality*. They may achieve this by proactively building and/or highlighting their *trench experience*. Specifically, marketers with no sales experience may spend time working with salespeople, whereas those with prior sales experience can make that history known to salespeople; that they know what being in the trenches—that is, out in the field in front of the customer, is like. Kim notes below:

If you have sales background, make it known from the very beginning that you have walked in our shoes, and that you understand what it is like to be in the trenches. You are taken much more seriously...further, if we see that your goal is to not only drive the marketing strategy, or develop the kinds of products the company needs, but also understand what we [sales force] need to meet our sales targets, you have already won half the battle. [Kim, Engineering products]

As Jillian notes below, if salespeople understand that certain marketing managers have no prior sales experience, that lessens their perceived credibility in salespeople's eyes.

Many marketing managers in this company do not have sales background... so they just send out some stuff saying do this, do that, and this is how it could be done. They do not understand on the gut-level what it means to carry out some of the instructions they send out to the field. No one takes our marketing department seriously and their plans are seldom implemented. A good marketing manager is someone who, in everything he/she does, remembers what it may be like to be a salesperson standing in front of your customers. [Jillian, IT]

4.2. Trustworthiness themes

Trustworthiness is the second category to emerge from the data. The informants interpret marketers' trustworthiness in terms of whether they can depend on marketers to keep their promises,

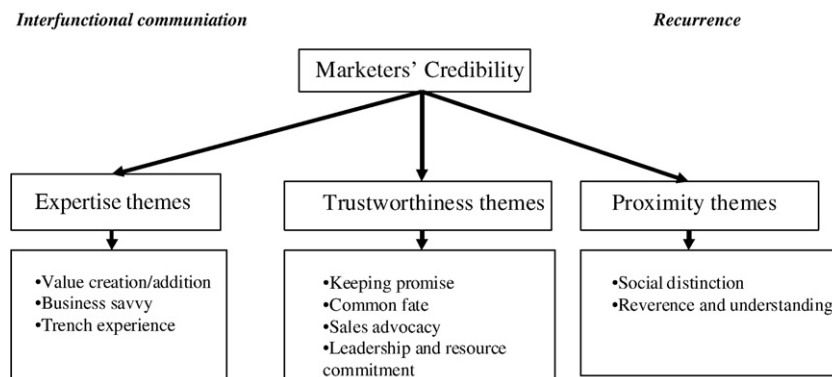


Fig. 1. Depiction of emergent themes.

and protect and advocate their interests. They also assess whether marketers align their own goals and compensation with those of the sales organization.

Salespeople emphasize that nothing hurts marketers' credibility more than when they do not *keep their promises*. Many informants had stories of broken promises; for example, marketers promised a specific product launch date and then delayed the launch, or they promised special campaigns for troubled sales territories and then backed out. In addition to not keeping their word, when marketers do not even provide any explanation for failing to honor their promises, their credibility suffers further. Such instances make getting salespeople onboard their subsequent strategies more difficult for marketers.

It is all about deadlines I guess. If there is a deadline, you meet the deadline. If you say that you will have a special campaign for my region, then you gotta do it. If you are going to have a product ready by a certain date, have it done... if you don't know the date, say you don't know the date. Be honest and open... don't give fluffy dates. Once we get a feeling that their promises are fluffy, we don't really care about them after that. [Katherine, Pharmaceuticals]

Not only do salespeople expect marketers to keep their promises, but they also want them to *provide a visible leadership and commit resources* to specific marketing strategies. Specifically, salespeople expect marketers to fight for their strategies and marshal the needed resources from the top management so that they could best support the field force. Instances such as when marketers drop certain strategies for the lack of resources, especially after salespeople have invested their time and energy into those strategies, hurts their credibility in salespeople's eyes.

Marketing designs the programs that we implement. If we start doubting whether marketing really knows what they're doing, or if they can provide the necessary leadership to our products, that is not a good thing... another question is if they are going to back it up with resources... if we do not feel confident about it, then we doubt the credibility of the plans and the people behind the plans. [JJ, Industrial products]

Sales advocacy, the third theme, refers to marketers either *fighting* for the sales force or *championing* their causes within the organization. Salespeople need support from various functions such as distribution, pricing, or PR while executing marketing strategies. In such cases, they expect marketers to be their ambassadors and represent their causes within the organization. The data show that if marketers are able to pool in diverse organizational resources and *get things done* for salespeople, they trust them a lot more and view them as credible partners. The following quote highlights this aspect.

We were competing for a very large piece of business with one of our key accounts. They wanted a special fiber optic network created so that their data center could be connected with their future expansion projects. The problem was it was outside of our territory. Also, the number of departments involved in the process was large... we had public policy, legal, marketing, project management, operations, attorneys... all these people involved. It was almost a \$50 million project and we had to get public policy approval, we had to get a competitor give up their territory... marketing really helped us put together a plan that included all these departments... they acted as our representatives within the company and got things to move... they also were able to pull in the legislature... it was a huge deal and marketing really helped us coordinate number of different activities... afterwards, when salespeople saw success stories like this, they started to trust

marketers more... it also took the load off of me because then I had a partner in marketing that I could depend on, should the need like this arise. [Arthur, IT]

Common Fate, the last theme, refers to marketers aligning their goals and compensation with that of the sales force for specific marketing initiatives—for example, new product launch; so that success or failure would affect both functions equally. Donath (1999) highlights how the marketing and sales metrics differ within many firms and how that difference creates a degree of jealousy between S&M. The data suggest that marketers' conscious efforts to remove such discrepancies send a strong signal to salespeople. As Tracy notes below, in her company, such a move changed salespeople's perception of marketers from being *the other function* to *being partners*, driving everyone's behavior.

When the new structure came about in our organization, marketing managers' performance and bonuses were paid out depending upon how much new retail business we got in the large market segments... so, a major part of their bonus was tied to our being successful and so it drove everyone's behavior... suddenly, they were not the *other function*... they became our partners, and that created a lot of trust in each other in getting things done... because we knew that they had an equal stake in our success. [Tracy, Pharmaceuticals]

4.3. Interpersonal proximity themes

Interpersonal proximity emerged as the third component of credibility. Such proximity refers to whether marketers and salespeople are able to establish and nurture personal rapport based on appreciation of each other's work. Specifically, when salespeople observed that their marketing colleagues were not keeping them at arm's length and were genuinely trying to know them, their work, and the daily challenges they face; that sent a signal that marketers cared for salespeople and that they wanted to see salespeople succeed. Two important themes emerged in this regard.

Social Distinction, the first theme refers to whether marketers treat salespeople as being lower in social hierarchy. This finding speaks to the well-documented perceived and real status differences between S&M (Beverland et al., 2006; De Long and Fahey, 2000). Specifically, the data indicate that if marketers make social distinction between themselves and salespeople, that gives rise to a greater psychological distance between S&M personnel (Dawes and Massey, 2005; Dewnap and Jobber, 2002) thereby hurting their credibility.

For example, as Nate indicates below, salespeople in his firm perceived marketers' exclusionary act as a presence of a class system that denied salespeople access to important strategic activities. As a result, they mocked marketers' new ideas since they believed that marketers, alone, did not possess adequate knowledge to come up with superior strategic ideas.

There is definitely a separation... kind of a class system, if you will, between these two functions. So suddenly, they [marketing] will go in the conference room, shut the door, and start talking... and next thing you know, we are coming up with a new product and the launch is just two months away. We would love to be employed in this process, if we are given an opportunity to give our perspectives. But it does not happen in our company. And that leaves us wondering how they cook up these ideas and what knowledge they have that they don't need us... it is ludicrous. [Nate, IT]

Extant sales-marketing interface literature highlights how the various differences between S&M personnel give rise to a sense of local rationality, which makes each function lose their objectivity and

empathy toward the other department (Matthyssens and Johnston, 2006). The second theme to emerge from interview data, *Reverence and Understanding* speaks to this aspect. Mariana's quote below indicates that when marketers stay away from such local rationality and empathetically appreciate how a failure on their part can create challenges for the sales force; or when they openly admit their mistakes and assure salespeople that such mistakes would not happen again, that brings them closer to sales force and enhances their credibility.

Respect and understanding are crucial in this relationship... if marketing screws up, they have to be open to saying, here is our learning from this experience and we will make sure it does not happen again... sometimes marketers do not realize all of the impact their screw ups can have in the field; like buyers screaming at salespeople or the amount of effort needed at having to redo something... so understanding how a lapse on their part negatively impacted people and respecting their hurt feelings is crucial... I think people are pretty quick to forget a mistake provided they feel that the other party feels for them. However, if we feel that they don't care, then they do not get our respect and get the same [treatment] in return. [Mariana, Healthcare]

4.4. Contextual conditions

Two variables: (a) Interfunctional Communication and (b) Recurrence emerged as contextual conditions in understanding this phenomenon.

The data suggest that open and respectful communication between S&M provides a platform for them to (a) clarify any misunderstanding, (b) ask for each other's feedback and help when needed, and (c) keep the other function abreast of what is happening on important market-related initiatives. The constant flow of information thus may bring greater transparency in their interaction thereby building trustworthiness within this interface. Further, open lines of communication allow marketers more opportunities to *showcase* their sales expertise, or their business savvy, thereby enhancing their credibility.

Recurrence is the other contextual condition. The data suggest that salespeople are not quick in making judgments about their marketing counterparts. Hence, a small lapse on marketing's part may not hurt their credibility immediately. However, repeating the same mistakes over time can damage their credibility. For example, if marketers repeatedly break promises, or treat salespeople indifferently, they are likely to lose credibility. What this suggests is that salespeople allow the marketers greater *freedom* initially to make up for their lapses. If they do not handle the problem areas quickly, they lose that freedom; with each subsequent lapse further hurting marketers' credibility.

5. Discussion, contributions, and implications

This paper contributes to sales-marketing interface literature on the following fronts. First, extant academic and trade literature indicate that salespeople do not perceive marketers as credible partners. While diverse domains have examined credibility as a construct, scholars have not teased out its specific nuances within the sales-marketing interface context. This paper integrates interdisciplinary research on credibility and sales-marketing interface to propose a unified thesis about how salespeople construe marketers' credibility. Specifically, while extant interdisciplinary research indicates that Expertise and Trust are important components of credibility, this paper explicates their underlying themes and offers a nuanced perspective on this construct within the sales-marketing interface context. Further, literature has referred to status differences and presence of local rationality within sales-marketing interface (Beverland et al., 2006; Matthyssens and Johnston, 2006). The study findings highlight how these aspects affect interpersonal proximity between S&M personnel; the third component of credibility.

Second, while scholars have highlighted overtly manifested problematic issues within this interface such as interfunctional conflicts, non-cooperation, and negative stereotyping (Homburg et al., 2008); there is a reason to believe that salespeople's unfavorable credibility assessment of their marketing colleagues may be the root cause of the abovementioned overt problems. Highlighting the nuances of this construct thus helps to better understand at a micro-level, the potential, but sometimes non-apparent cause of some of the problems observed between S&M. The study findings thus offer not only a micro-level perspective on this interface but also an insights into what could be done.

Third, extant research offers many suggestions about how to bring S&M closer; for example, through instituting cross-functional processes, creating joint sales-marketing taskforces, or removing intergroup differentiation (Piercy, 2006; Piercy and Lane, 2003; Ruekert and Walker, 1987; Massey and Dawes, 2007). Yet, nowhere is there an explicit mention of functional credibility enhancement as an approach that may bring these two functions closer. Explication of this construct's nuances thus advances sales-marketing interface literature by highlighting yet another avenue to optimize this interface based on the understanding of its inner workings, and expands the repertoire of tools that managers may use to harmonize this interface.

Today's competitive, fast-paced world requires effective teamwork and real time customer responses. In this regard, scholars have recommended approaches such as enhancing integration, communication, and collaboration between S&M (e.g. Rouziès et al., 2005; Dewsnap and Jobber, 2000). If one party does not perceive the other to be credible, that may hamper these approaches. The fourth contribution of this study thus lies in highlighting the role of perceived credibility as a potentially important precondition to these approaches.

Last, empirical studies of sales-marketing interface and especially those that employ qualitative methodology are scant. Hence, qualitative investigation of this area also constitutes theoretical and methodological contribution to the sales-marketing interface literature in particular and sales literature in general.

This study offers the following managerial insights. In order to enhance their credibility, marketers must not only possess superior business know how but they must also insure that they come across as authoritative knowledge sources. Further, marketers must appreciate that salespeople look up to them to create or add value to their daily activities. Importantly, salespeople may think about value in different ways. While some may expect marketers to bring to market winning products and strategies, and enrich their jobs; others may expect them to simplify their jobs by being responsive to their queries, and serve as the *go to person* for their informational needs. Accordingly, marketers must serve as a readily accessible information source that salespeople can *dip into* whenever they need. If marketers do not fulfill this expectation, they stand to lose credibility. In addition, marketers must work *shoulder to shoulder* with the field force, truly embrace the sales experience, and be willing to learn from salespeople and their customers if they want to enhance their credibility. Marketers with prior sales experience may let salespeople know that they understand the complexity of the sales job. In summary, this category suggests that marketers must both possess *and* show their business expertise through their words and actions to establish credibility in salespeople's eyes.

Marketers must understand that salespeople expect them to keep their promises. If marketers' backing out on a promise makes salespeople lose face in front of their customers, their perception of marketing's credibility takes a hit. This suggests that when marketers foresee challenges in keeping their promises, they must proactively alert the sales organization about those challenges to avoid any future misunderstanding. Further, salespeople expect their marketing colleagues to provide visible leadership and champion their causes within the organization. Marketers therefore must display conviction about their strategies, and be willing to fight for resources from the top management. Such actions make salespeople feel confident that marketers can

go out of their way to provide the best support to the field force. This enhances marketers' credibility in their eyes. Last, marketers may tie their fate with that of salespeople (through aligning goals and compensation for key strategies); since doing so builds salespeople's trust in marketers and they perceive them as credible partners.

The last facet, interpersonal proximity and its underlying themes such as social distinction, and reverence and understanding suggest that marketers must treat their sales colleagues as equal. Marketers must make genuine efforts to understand salespeople's work and the challenges involved therein, involve them in important strategic activities, and engage them in intelligent and respectful conversations. This may help reduce the social distinction between S&M, thereby helping marketers enhance their credibility.

Using the insight from the two contextual conditions—Communication and Recurrence, marketers may institute certain processes and systems that will build respectful communication between S&M and bring greater transparency in their interaction. Such open communication may give them greater opportunities to showcase their expertise in various areas, thereby helping them enhance their credibility. With respect to recurrence, marketers must keep in mind that salespeople are not quick to make judgments about their marketing counterparts. However, if marketers commit errors repeatedly, they stand to lose their credibility.

6. Limitations and future research

This study has the following limitations. First, data for the study came from depth interviews. Observing sales and marketing managers *in-situ* for extended time could have given a deeper insight into this phenomenon. One may view the sample size as the second limitation of this study. One must note, however, that qualitative studies in business literature (e.g. Beverland et al., 2006; Bush et al., 2007; Flint et al., 2002) have used similar sample sizes. Further, data collection stopped interviews upon reaching theoretical saturation, which, at times, may be reached after 20 to 30 interviews (Creswell, 2007, pg. 66–67). Third, given the qualitative nature of this research, study findings may not be generalizable. Selecting a diverse set of informants across industries and organizational hierarchy addresses this potential limitation. Fourth, the use of individual informant interviews to study organizational phenomenon may be a limitation. Use of individual informants, however, is a common practice in organizational research. Further, the use of member checks at the end of the study helped in vetting the study findings. Together, these measures adequately address the level of analysis issue.

Future research may focus on a variety of areas. First, scholars may develop a scale for marketers' credibility using the three proposed components and assess its validity using a survey methodology. Extant scales on credibility, trust, and expertise (Doney and Cannon, 1997; Lichtenstein and Bearden, 1989) may serve as a starting point in this regard. Further, using different methodological approaches, scholars may study if any additional components of this construct or contextual conditions emerge. Scholars may also assess how marketers construe salespeople's credibility within this interface. Comparing marketers' perspective of salespeople's credibility with the findings of this study will help us identify the extent of overlap and gaps in how these functions view their counterparts, which will help in forging stronger connection between the two. Scholars may also investigate how organizational structure and/or culture, or extraneous factors such as environmental uncertainty and/or competitive intensity may affect this phenomenon. Testing the findings of this study within new contexts such as services will also be helpful.

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