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Salesperson moral identity and value co-creation

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Purpose – The primary goal of this study was to examine the role of salesperson moral identity centrality in value co-creation. This study identified and tested an extended identity-based formation process of selling orientation, customer orientation, and value co-creation. This was accomplished by examining the role of inclusion of other in the self and circle of moral regard in the mechanism through which moral identity centrality impacts selling orientation, customer orientation, and value co-creation, taking into account the contingency role of salesperson self-construal.

Design/methodology/approach – An extended identity–behavior model grounded in identity theory and the social-cognitive perspective of moral identity centrality was tested. The study utilized survey data from business-to-business salespeople. Data collected were analyzed using structural equation modeling.

Findings – The results show that a central moral identity to a salesperson's self drives higher expansion of the salesperson's circle of moral regard. This process facilitates the mechanisms for salesperson moral identity centrality to decrease selling orientation and increase customer orientation and value co-creation, leading to higher sales performance. Independent self-construal is found to deteriorate the positive effects of salesperson moral identity centrality on inclusion of other in the self, expansion of the circle of moral regard, and customer orientation.

Practical implications – Findings have implications for the human resource side of sales organizations in the areas of recruitment, mentoring, coaching, and training. Moral identity centrality plays a vital role in the interface between salespeople and customers, leading to improved behavioral and sales outcomes. Sales managers must look for their salespeople's moral identity centrality to improve morality in the attitudes and decision-making of their salesforce.

Originality/value – This study is the first to uncover the vital impacts of salesperson moral identity centrality on selling orientation, customer orientation, and value co-creation. Through the conceptualized and tested framework, the study opens the door for additional research to inspect the role of moral identity centrality in sales.

Keywords – Salesperson, moral identity centrality, customer orientation, selling orientation, value co-creation, sales performance, independent self-construal

Salesperson Moral Identity and Value Co-creation

Introduction

"Two things awe me most, the starry sky above me and the moral law within me."

Immanuel Kant

In today's market, selling right is no longer just about persuading; it is becoming more about the value to be co-created between sellers and buyers. Accordingly, salespeople have a vital role in supporting organizations to co-create value with customers (Agnihotri *et al.*, 2012a; Manning *et al.*, 2011). Salespeople looking to achieve their sales targets must focus on buyers through value co-creation (Kaski *et al.*, 2018; Viio and Grönroos, 2014). Especially in business-to-business (B2B) markets, salespeople must work with buyers to provide timely solutions to their problems and support them with maximized value offerings (Hartmann *et al.*, 2018). This calls for more scholarly attention to broaden the knowledge on the role of salesperson-self in B2B value co-creation.

Salesperson value co-creation refers to the behaviors a salesperson exhibits to engage customers and work with them through a service exchange that maximizes value. There exists a rich body of literature focused on the drivers of salespeople's value co-creation. However, studies examining the antecedents to salesperson value creation predominantly focus on learned behaviors and managerial contingencies. A literature review involving salesperson value creation in B2B contexts reveals that little (if anything) is known about the relationship between moral aspects of the salesperson-self and value co-creation (see Table 1). This is surprising given the link between salespeople's moral judgments and their behaviors, such as customer-oriented selling and relational pursuits (Agnihotri and Krush, 2015; Schwepker and Good, 2011). In addition, morality plays a critical role in "developing mutually beneficial relationships with two critical stakeholders—customers and salespeople" (Evans *et al.*, 2012, p. 97). Therefore, a moral

salesforce can be a boon to firms in their efforts to sustain and grow relationships with customers

(Ingram *et al.*, 2007). Despite that, there remains critical research gaps in understanding the

impact of morality on value co-creation in B2B sales.

Prior studies have focused on sales- and organization-based drivers of value co-creation

and overlooked personal, specifically moral, drivers related to the salesperson's self as

antecedents of value co-creation (see Table 1). This study examined a personal variable of

salesperson—moral identity centrality—as a driver of value co-creation through the

salesperson's self–other perspective and psychological state at work. We grounded our study in

identity theory and the notion of moral identity centrality, with its social-cognitive perspective,

to examine the process through which salesperson moral identity centrality affects value co-

creation.

Place Table 1 about here

The social-cognitive perspective suggests that moral identity centrality inspires moral

attitudes and actions through self-consistency and responsibility (Stets and Carter, 2011). It

increases one's concern for other individuals (Aquino and Reed, 2002; Hardy *et al.*, 2010) and

respect for their rights and wellbeing (Youniss and Yates, 1999). We put forward that the

salesperson moral identity centrality concept is relevant to the sales literature, especially in the

salesperson–buyer relationship domain. Accordingly, we seek to extend an identity–behavior

process to understand the mechanisms of moral identity centrality's influences on selling

orientation (SO), customer orientation (CO), and value co-creation while considering the role of

salesperson self-construal.

Sales research investigating moral identity centrality is scarce. Yet our findings show that moral identity centrality is essential to study in sales research. It influences how salespeople approach customers (i.e., SO and CO) and work with them (i.e., value co-creation) to drive performance. We suggest that moral identity centrality (Aquino and Reed, 2002) motivates salespeople to feel concern for the welfare of customers by increasing (decreasing) a salesperson's CO (SO) (e.g., Zablah *et al.*, 2012a), which then leads to an increase in value co-creation.

The core of both CO and SO rests on a set of values and beliefs that are deeply rooted in the self (e.g., moral identity centrality) (Deshpandé *et al.*, 1993) and emphasizes actions directed toward satisfying the needs of customers (Goad and Jaramillo, 2014; Itani *et al.*, 2019). While CO focuses on selling *with* customers by focusing on their needs, SO focuses on selling *to* customers. Further, moral identity centrality involves a concern for the welfare of others (e.g., customers) and the need to build interpersonal relationships with them. Moral issues are predominantly relevant to the sales profession because salespeople constantly face moral dilemmas and ethical challenges (Valentine, 2009). Thus, the study of moral identity centrality adds an ethical dimension that is, at best, implied in SOCO.

With this research, we seek to make several contributions to the B2B sales literature. To begin, the study brings the concept of moral identity centrality to the sales research and examines its role in significant concepts, such as SO, CO, and value co-creation. Second, we identify, and test extended psychological mechanisms of SO, CO, and value co-creation that are characterized by an identity-based formation process. We do so by examining the roles of *inclusion of other in the self* and the *circle of moral regard*, through which moral identity centrality impacts SO, CO, and value co-creation, while considering the contingency effect of self-construal. Although a

concept like SOCO has sparked much interest from researchers and practitioners (Bagozzi *et al.*, 2012), there remains a need for "compelling evidence regarding why and when salespeople engage in these orientations" (Goad and Jaramillo, 2014, p. 288). As such, we offer moral identity centrality as another major driver of SOCO and value co-creation.

Theoretical background

Individuals identify themselves with moral traits integrated into the self to form a moral identity (Aquino and Reed, 2002). Accordingly, moral identity centrality "reflects individual differences in the degree to which being moral is a central or essential characteristic of the sense of self" (Shao *et al.*, 2008, p. 514). Although early literature established "internalization" (private/inward focus) and "symbolization" (public/outward focus) as two aspects of moral identity centrality, Aquino and Reed (2002) show inconsistency in their outcomes. These authors and others have selected to employ the internalization concept to denote moral identity centrality (e.g., Aquino *et al.*, 2009; Hannah *et al.*, 2020; Skarlicki *et al.*, 2016). Other literature reviews on moral identity centrality confirm that internalization produces consistent conclusions (e.g., Hertz and Krettenauer, 2016; Jennings *et al.*, 2015).

Prior studies have examined moral identity centrality's influences on employees' attitudes and behaviors. Findings show that moral identity centrality is positively related to work engagement (He *et al.*, 2014), cooperation (Sachdeva *et al.*, 2009), and citizenship behaviors (McFerran *et al.*, 2010). Conversely, moral identity centrality is negatively associated with employees' moral disengagement (Zheng *et al.*, 2019) and self-interest behaviors (DeCelles *et al.*, 2012).

Most individuals develop a moral identity with different levels of centrality to the self. The more self-important or central to the self an identity is, the more a salesperson will be

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become committed to this identity (Rapp *et al.*, 2015). Moreover, in such a situation, the

salesperson will have to make more vigorous efforts to enact the identity (Gabler *et al.*, 2014). A

salesperson who centers her/his self-concept on moral identity derives higher levels of

psychological involvement and satisfaction in activities that respond to others' needs, as those

activities are consistent with the salesperson's self-concept (Mulder and Aquino, 2013).

According to the social-cognitive perspective, moral identity is stored in memory as a

composite knowledge structure comprising moral values, traits, and behavioral scripts (Aquino *et*

al., 2009). Along these lines, moral identity centrality is a central element of a salesperson's

social schema, and it organizes the self around a set of moral traits (Wang *et al.*, 2019). The more

central moral identity is, the more it will influence the salesperson's affective, cognitive, and

behavioral states.

Moral identity centrality requires salespeople to commit their sense of self and align their

activities to promote others' welfare. Failing to do so could result in adverse outcomes that harm

the self. Individuals with predominantly self-centered moral identities invest in and identify

themselves as righteous and act in a moral way toward others to promote their moral identities

(Hardy *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, customer-facing employees who count moral identity an

essential aspect of their social schema are more likely to show concern for customers by

respecting their rights and wellbeing (Wang *et al.*, 2019). Accordingly, we build on existing

research on moral identity centrality in marketing and management literature to examine its role

in value co-creation in the B2B sales context.

Model development

Moral identity and salesperson value co-creation behavior

Moral identity centrality is unity between morality and self-system (Hardy and Carlo, 2011).

Hence, moral identity centrality is known to affect individuals' interpersonal focus, whether

toward the moral self or others' wellbeing, emphasizing the needs of others. Frontline employees

who count moral identity as central to themselves are likely to show superior concern for human

welfare than those who do not (Wang *et al.*, 2019). A salesperson who counts moral identity as

fundamental to the self is known for being kind, helpful, hardworking, and morally concerned

about customers, which results in better collaboration with customers.

A salesperson with strong moral identity centrality will try to maximize the benefits of

their customers to achieve moral identity goals. Self-achievement and self-interest goals are the

opposite of self-transcendent moral goals and values (Grouzet *et al.*, 2005; Schwartz, 1994). For

that reason, when solving customers' problems and earning their expressions of gratitude, some

employees sense greater self-esteem and feelings of accomplishment (Wang *et al.*, 2011).

Sales and value creation are embedded in broader social systems (Ancillai *et al.*, 2019).

The exchange of resources between salespeople and buyers allows the co-creation of value

(Hartmann *et al.*, 2018). In chorus, moral identity centrality pushes people to exchange more

particularistic resources, such as love, status, and service with different others (Reed and Aquino,

2003). Consequently, the self–other relationship is vital to those who deem moral identity a

central component of overall personal identity (Youniss and Yates, 1999).

Moral identity centrality amplifies one's concern for others (Aquino and Reed, 2002) and

respect for their rights and wellbeing (Youniss and Yates, 1999). It supports individuals'

effectiveness at socializing (Brown and Treviño, 2009), which is important for better interaction

and value co-creation with buyers. McFerran *et al*. (2010) find that moral identity centrality

drives employees to engage in organizational citizenship behaviors. In another study, Sachdeva

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et al. (2009) demonstrate that employees' cooperative behaviors are triggered by moral identity centrality. As such, moral identity centrality drives salespeople to be sensitive to buyers' needs and concerned about their welfare, thus increasing salespeople's support, collaboration, and working with buyers to co-create value. Moral identity centrality will motivate salespeople to exchange more resources (social, knowledge, and time) with buyers. Thus, we advance the following:

   H1: Salesperson moral identity centrality is positively related to value co-creation.

Moral identity centrality and salesperson's orientation

Psychology research suggests two dimensions of interpersonal conduct: *concern for others* and *concern for self* (Thomas, 1976). These dimensions of interpersonal conduct align with CO and SO, respectively (Bagozzi *et al.*, 2012; Goad and Jaramillo, 2014). According to Saxe and Weitz (1982), high CO is related to high concern for others, whereas low CO is related to low concern for others. For Zablah *et al*. (2012b), CO is set when salespeople value customers more than sales. By contrast, salespeople who prioritize sales more than the welfare of customers are known to be selling-oriented, which contradicts what moral identity centrality prioritizes.

        CO requires salespeople to focus on customers and avoid interpersonal conduct that could sacrifice customers' interests to make a sale (Saxe and Weitz, 1982). We suggest that this theorizing is consistent with salespeople defining themselves in terms of moral identity. Therefore, CO is, to a great extent, driven by moral identity centrality in the sales context. Individuals who deem moral identity an important facet of the self can better understand others' thoughts and feelings by placing themselves in their positions, thus allowing themselves to perform more actions that support others (Hardy *et al.*, 2012).

SO is less likely to be the kind of job orientation that salespeople with stronger self-centered moral identity possess because such orientation is expected to accompany self-interest temptations and less concern for customers (Bagozzi *et al.*, 2012; Singh and Koshy, 2011). SO requires salespeople to forgo their moral goals to carry out misleading actions, such as *painting too rosy a picture of the product* and *stretching the truth* (Saxe and Weitz, 1982). Thus, SO is seen as contradictory to the values of moral identity centrality. Aquino and Becker (2005) reveal through controlled experiments that workers who place high importance on moral traits would sacrifice financial gain to compensate for assumed misbehaviors at work. Salesperson moral identity centrality prohibits selfishness in sales and directs the salesperson to satisfy customers' needs. Salespeople who count moral identity as principal to themselves are less likely to follow their temptations and ignore customers' interests. They may suffer from feelings of self-inconsistency and self-betrayal caused by a selling-oriented mindset. Building on the arguments above, the following relationships are advanced:

H2: Salesperson moral identity centrality is positively related to CO.

H3: Salesperson moral identity centrality is negatively related to SO.

The role of inclusion of other in the self

The concept of inclusion of other in the self refers to one's perceptions of closeness to others (Aron *et al.*, 1992). It is associated with a sense of connection, increased perceptions of similarity with others, and responsibility for their welfare (Levine *et al.*, 2005). Inclusion of other in the self guides a person to include the perspectives and aspects of others in the self (Aron *et al.*, 2004).

The inclusion of other in the self affects a salesperson's orientation toward customers. Previous research has settled that moral identity centrality increases the inclusion of other in the

self through self-expansion (Choi and Winterich, 2013; Winterich *et al.*, 2009). This is because

moral identity centrality highlights social responsibility, other perspective-taking, and balancing

self-interests with others' needs (Reimer and Wade-Stein, 2004). For that, the inclusion of other

in the self is a major agent of the effects moral identity centrality (Choi and Winterich, 2013;

Hardy *et al.*, 2010) has on one's proclivities and behaviors. Hence, moral identity centrality

drives salespeople to reduce the psychological distance they have with others, including

customers.

Moral identity centrality drives salespeople to build closer relationships with customers

by including them in the self. For example, moral identity is found to get salespeople to have

higher levels of psychological proximity with customers (Itani *et al.*, 2021). Meanwhile, the

more others are involved in the self, the scarcer self-centered behaviors an individual exhibits

toward them (Bandura, 1999). For example, sharing resources with others is based on including

those others in the self (Aron *et al.*, 1991). We expect a salesperson to hold a certain level of

inclusion of other in the self, driven by moral identity centrality, thus influencing how a

salesperson deals with customers. Salespeople will be prone to better serving customers and

satisfying their needs because of such inclusion. Consequently, the following relationships are

postulated:

  H4: Moral identity centrality is positively related to the inclusion of other in the self.

  H5: The inclusion of other in the self is positively related to CO.

  H6: The inclusion of other in the self is negatively related to SO.

Role of the circle of moral regard

Moral identity centrality motivates salespeople to hold and express moral obligations to out-

groups. It motivates them to expand their circles of moral regard to include a larger set of

different social groups (Reed and Aquino, 2003). Hardy *et al*. (2010) define the circle of moral regard as "the boundary that defines the individuals and groups for whom a person is willing to exhibit moral concern" (p. 112). According to Reed and Aquino (2003), when individuals expand their circles of moral regard, they will spread the degree of moral concern for the welfare and needs of others. Moral regard is used as an aspect of one's moral relationship with others and is similar to concepts like the moral circle (Singer, 2011) and the "scope of justice" (Opotow, 1996). Unlike the circle of moral regard, the inclusion of other in the self is not directed toward an individual's moral aspects.

The circle of moral regard is expandable and has different consequences for one's judgments of others' moral worth (Laham, 2009). According to Singer (2011), expansion of the circle of moral regard is seen as the opening out of one's mental lines that hold other individuals from being well thought-out for moral consideration. Such expansion of the circle of moral regard has been shown to increase with higher moral concern for the welfare of others (Aquino and Reed, 2002).

Salespeople hold different expansion degrees of the circle of moral regard. A reason for this difference is the centrality of moral identity to the self (Hardy *et al.*, 2010). Accordingly, to the enlargement of the circle of moral regard is a key mean for moral identity centrality effects (Smith *et al*., 2014),. Moral identity centrality obliges salespeople to think about others for moral consideration, leading to increased concerns about serving customers and satisfying their needs. This expansion of the circle of moral regard creates moral constraints that prohibit salespeople from showing deep concern for their own interests and temptations at the expense of customers' needs. Therefore, we argue that the expansion of the circle of moral regard caused by moral

identity centrality has a positive (negative) effect on customer (selling) orientation. Thus, we

hypothesize the following:

H7: Moral identity centrality is positively related to the circle of moral regard.

H8: The circle of moral regard is positively related to CO.

H9: The circle of moral regard is negatively related to SO.

Salesperson's orientation and value co-creation behavior

CO "refers to the degree to which salespeople practice the marketing concept by trying to help

their customers make purchase decisions that will satisfy customer needs" (Saxe and Weitz,

1982, p. 344). It requires salespeople to interact *with* customers, unlike SO that underpins selling

to customers (Bagozzi *et al.*, 2012). The main goal of customer-oriented salespeople is to satisfy

consumers' needs by working with them to optimize benefits and reduce costs (Cross *et al.*,

2007; Kemp *et al.*, 2013). For them, the way of making a sale is more important than making the

sale itself. They trust that customer-centric approaches, such as value co-creation behavior, fulfill

customers' needs.

From a service-centered view, value co-creation is relational, customer-oriented (Vargo

and Lusch, 2008), and is amenable to salesperson's behaviors that compose part of the service

exchange (Itani *et al.*, 2020). According to Jolson (1997), CO relies on customer-driven value

creation. Moreover, CO is related to the desire to maintain long-term relationships with

customers (Franke and Park, 2006). It describes the extent to which salespeople hold value-

expressive attitudes (Wilcox *et al.*, 2009) that show an underlying concern for customers'

welfare (Zablah *et al.*, 2012b). Thus, value co-creation allows customer-oriented salespeople to

practice the marketing concept of helping customers make the best decisions to meet their needs

and maximize value (Terho *et al.*, 2015).

However, selling-oriented salespeople exert high self-serving temptations, behaviors, and low concern for customers (Goad and Jaramillo, 2014; Saxe and Weitz, 1982). SO is related to salespeople attaining self-serving goals, and specifically sales goals. It drives salespeople to focus more on increasing sales and less on satisfying customers. Such a focus is not aligned with value co-creation that requires salespeople to put sales goals and invest more time and effort into collaborating and working with buyers to meet their needs. Based on the above discussion, we hypothesize:

H10: CO is positively related to value co-creation.

H11: SO is negatively related to value co-creation.

Value co-creation behavior and sales performance

Value creation has a favorable impact on various sales outcome metrics, such as acquiring new accounts, higher closings rates, and sales revenue (Sullivan *et al.*, 2012). Prior studies have argued that value co-creation, specifically value-based selling embedded within the value co-creation notion, is a direct driver of sales outcomes (e.g., Schwepker and Schultz, 2015; Terho *et al.*, 2017). Value-based selling requires salespeople to work with customers to identify their needs and support their business objectives proactively (e.g., Terho *et al.*, 2017). Salespeople who work with customers to provide optimal solutions, serve customers better, and maximize the value experienced by customers are likely to be strong performers. Terho *et al.* (2015) find that B2B salespeople who apply value-based selling achieve higher selling performance. Another study identifies B2B salespeople who engage in value-enhancing behaviors to drive higher sales outcomes (Schwepker and Schultz, 2015). Accordingly, we advance the following:

H12: Value co-creation is positively related to sales performance.

The moderating role of salesperson self-construal—chronic self-construal

Self-construal helps in assessing the extent to which others are part of one's self-concept or identity (Cross *et al.*, 2000). More so, one's active self-concept functions through the interaction of moral identity centrality and self-interest promoting factors (Aquino *et al.*, 2009). The significant role of self-construal is related to its effects on individuals' motivational and cognitive processes (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). Recent studies have found that self-construal has genetic/heritable components (Kitayama and Park, 2014) and influences individuals' neural progression (Han and Humphreys, 2016). Dissimilarities in self-construal elicit multiple issues concerning self-concept-related processes (Cross *et al.*, 2000). This results in elements that arouse the moral self-schema, leading to increased or decreased salience of moral identity within one's self-concept.

Individuals with predominantly independent self-construal stand out, define themselves as superior to others, and maintain a positive success-to-aspirations ratio to promote a positive view of the self (Harter, 1993). They view themselves as self-sufficient, skilled, and unique (Aaker and Williams, 1998). They rationalize the relationships they have with others by conducting cost-benefit analyses (Singelis *et al.*, 1995) and behave in favor of self-attitudes rather than other norms (Triandis, 2001).

Individuals with predominantly interdependent self-construal view themselves "as part of an encompassing social relationship" and recognize that their behavior "is determined, contingent on, and, to a large extent organized by what the actor perceives to be the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others in the relationship" (Markus and Kitayama, 1991, p. 227). They share a socio-centric identity (Bochner, 1994) that drives them to be worried about the wellbeing of others (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). Interdependent individuals avoid social disapproval and seek social consent (Lalwani, 2009). Such individuals deliver normatively appropriate responses

and perform greater impression management (Lalwani, 2009). They try to maintain harmony

with others and adapt to their demands (Markus and Kitayama, 2003).

Individuals with predominantly independent self-construal consider internal attributes

central to their sense of self (Giacomin and Jordan, 2017). Additionally, they may be less

sensitive to social identity (e.g., moral identity) (Kim and Hyun, 2013). On the contrary,

individuals with predominantly interdependent self-construal base their sense of self on close

social roles and group membership (Giacomin and Jordan, 2017). Interdependent individuals are

more cooperative than independent individuals in social dilemmas (Utz, 2004). Interdependent

self-construal can be relational, leading individuals to include others in the self and hold

empathic concern for them (Cross *et al.*, 2000). Interdependent individuals will have more

information and better elaborative cognitive representation of others (Giacomin and Jordan,

2017). Social unity and close interpersonal relationships, driven by interdependence and

collectivism, are roots for a context that allows identity-promoting behaviors (Lam *et al.*, 2012).

Moral identity centrality is evidenced despite differences in self-construal between

salespeople. Nevertheless, it could be argued that the more independent or less interdependent a

salesperson is, the weaker the effects of moral identity centrality will be because independence

will blur the focus driven by moral identity on others' needs at the expense of self-interest.

However, Henrich *et al.* (2010) argue that the moral identity centrality concept is entrenched in

Western cultures, where independent self-construal predominates. Hertz and Krettenauer (2016)

posit that independent-self and individualism may motivate an individual to act morally because

of the need to be consistent with his or her self-concept.

The discrepancy found in how self-construal interacts with moral identity centrality

underscores the importance of examining the moderating role of salesperson independent self-

construal. The self-construal construct plays a vital role in this study because it affects the

cognitive processing style and social context sensitivity of salespeople and how they construe

themselves (e.g., Giacomin and Jordan, 2017). A salesperson who is high (low) in independent

self-construal will represent the self as distinct from (connected to) others, including customers

(e.g., Cross *et al.*, 2011). The same salesperson will highlight her/his unique abilities (uniqueness

and separateness) and overlook interpersonal relationships and social obligations (e.g., Giacomin

and Jordan, 2017), even when holding a central moral identity. While the importance of self–

other relationship is linked to high moral identity centrality (Youniss and Yates, 1999), this link

is contingent on self-construal, affecting how a salesperson construes her/his identity. The

discussion above suggests that independent self-construal may weaken the positive effects of

moral salesperson identity centrality. In our study, we assume salespeople with lower (higher)

independent (interdependent) self-construal are more likely to be affected and guided by moral

identity centrality in their orientations and behaviors toward customers. In sum, the above

discussion advocates that the impacts of moral identity centrality are moderated by salesperson

self-construal. Thus, we advance the following:

   H13: Independent self-construal will weaken (strengthen) the positive (negative) relationship

   between moral identity centrality and (a) value co-creation, (b) customer orientation, (c)

   selling orientation, (d) inclusion of other in the self, and (e) the circle of moral regard.

Method

Sample

To test the hypothesized relationships (see Figure 1), data were collected online with the help of

a market research company that provides data collection services in the US. The salesperson

represents the seller in B2B relationships and is responsible for most of the interactions with

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buyers. The characteristics of a salesperson, including traits, identity, and orientation, have a significant impact on performance outcomes in B2B settings (e.g., Deeter-Schmelz and Sojka, 2007; Shannahan *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, the B2B context seems relevant to test the proposed model.

Place Figure 1 about here

A web-based survey was prepared and shared by email with an online panel of salespeople. Respondents were incentivized to participate. A link was shared by email with 3,367 salespeople. Two reminders were sent to drive additional involvement. There were 642 respondents (19.1% response rate). Filtering questions were included to check the eligibility of salespeople to participate in the study. Only B2B working salespeople (322 respondents) were allowed to complete the survey. Incomplete responses and respondents who failed the attention checks were eliminated (9 responses), leaving a final sample of 313 B2B salespeople (9.3% effective response rate). We also checked for "straight-line" responses, unrealistic answers, and inconsistent responses. Nonresponse bias was not an issue after comparing early and late respondents across the study and demographic variables (Armstrong and Overton, 1977). The final sample details are summarized in Table 2.

Place Table 2 about here

Measures

The measures employed were adapted from prior studies. Moral identity centrality is operationalized as the degree to which traits such as caring, compassionate, fair, friendly, generous, helpful, hardworking, honest, and kind are important to a salesperson's identity (e.g.,

Aquino and Reed, 2002; Hardy and Carlo, 2011). The adapted measure captures the

salesperson's internalization of these moral traits into the self. Scholars have mainly applied the

internalization dimension to characterize moral identity centrality (e.g., Aquino *et al.*, 2009;

Hannah *et al.*, 2020; Skarlicki *et al.*, 2016).

To measure the salesperson's inclusion of other in the self, a single item pictorial

measure (Venn-like diagram) was adopted from Aron *et al*. (1992). This measure comprises

seven pairs of circles; the first circle is labeled *self* and the second is labeled *other*. The pairs of

circles are with various levels of overlap to symbolize the levels of closeness respondents have

with others. Respondents were directed to choose the pair that most accurately resembles the

degree of closeness between the *self* and *other*. The circle of moral regard measure developed by

Reed and Aquino (2003) was adapted. Respondents reported the extent to which they believe

they have a "moral or ethical obligation to show concern for the welfare and interests" of

different groups, such as "people of different ethnicities". SOCO measures were based on the

scales developed by Saxe and Weitz (1982). A five-item measure was adapted to collect

information about salesperson value co-creation behavior (O'Cass and Ngo, 2012).

Salesperson self-construal was measured using a shortened measure of the original

measure developed by Singelis (1994). A higher score on this measure indicates the respondent's

stronger (weaker) independent (interdependent) self-construal. On average, we found

respondents to be quite independent, as our sample was collected in the US. Average percentage

of the sales quota achieved based on the assigned quota was collected to measure sales

performance (e.g., Lussier *et al.*, 2021; Mulki and Lassk, 2019).

Job satisfaction was included to the model as a covariate to control its possible impact on

SOCO and value co-creation behavior (e.g., Alnakhli *et al.*, 2020; Pettijohn *et al.*, 2007). Further,

salesperson experience, age, and education level were added to the model as covariates (e.g.,

Agnihotri *et al.*, 2017; Gabler *et al.*, 2017; Jaramillo and Grisaffe, 2009). Finally, we checked for

any confounding effect that could result from social desirability response bias. For this, we used

a shortened measure of social desirability (Reynolds, 1982). The analysis shows that no concern

was found when controlling for the impact of social desirability on all endogenous variables.

Correlations, descriptive statistics, reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE) of the

constructs are included in Table 3. Measures of the constructs with their items, loadings,

variance inflation factor (VIF), weights, and scale points are summarized in the Appendix.

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Results

Measurement model

The conceptual model was tested using partial least squares-structural equation modeling (PLS-

SEM). PLS-SEM supports the analysis of complex models that include single-item measures and

multiple interaction effects (Chin *et al.*, 2003). PLS-SEM has advantages when testing non-

normal data and a small sample size relative to the number of constructs and items included in

the model (Hair *et al.*, 2011). PLS-SEM is appropriate for B2B populations and is a suitable

method to achieve convergence (Hair *et al.*, 2019). In reporting the findings, we follow the

guidelines suggested by Benitez *et al.* (2020). In our analysis, we first examined the

psychometric properties of the measures by checking Cronbach's Alpha (α), composite

reliability, and AVE to assess reliability and validity before testing the structural model.

In the first measurement model we ran, one of the items in the moral identity centrality

measure was of poor loading and, thus, was removed. After running the model for the second

time, we checked again and found that all items to load significantly ($p < .05$) on their

corresponding measures. We used the bootstrapping method with 5,000 subsamples to assess the

significance levels of the loadings and coefficients. We did not find any indication of high

problematic cross-loading items (Gefen and Straub, 2005). These results provided evidence of

convergent validity.

For all multi-item measures, α was greater than .7, and CR was greater than .8,

supporting the reliability and internal consistency of the measures. The lowest AVE was equal to

.53—self-construal scale. We compared correlations among constructs to the square root AVE in

line with the Fornell-Larcker criterion. None of the correlations was greater than the square root

AVE compared to, providing evidence of discriminant validity. We also utilized the heterotrait–

monotrait ratio test (HTMT) recommended by Henseler *et al.* (2015). The HTMT compares "the

indicator correlations between constructs with the correlations within indicators of the same

construct" (Hair *et al.*, 2019, p. 571). None of the HTMT pairs was higher than .85, indicating

discriminant validity (Henseler *et al.*, 2015). Further, the bootstrapped confidence interval for

HTMT values did not include the threshold value (Hair *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, the absence of

problematic items that cross-loaded on constructs other than the one assigned to provide

evidence supported the discriminant validity found (Chin, 1998).

While common method bias is less likely to be found in the presence of valid and reliable

measures (Fuller *et al.*, 2016), we used multiple techniques to check and control for such bias. To

check for common method variance, procedural remedies based on the work of Podsakoff *et al.*

(2003), including measures separation, different scale points, and utilization of well-established

measures, were in place during data collection. For example, the measure of moral identity

centrality, a focal construct in the study, was presented as a personal factor, not specifically

related to sales, on a separate survey webpage. The separation method was used with other sales-related constructs. Specifically, separation between predictor and criterion variables was taken into consideration. In addition, different response formats (see Appendix) were utilized to avoid the use of common, single-scale anchors (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003).

Harman's single factor technique was utilized by running an exploratory factor analysis with one-factor model. The findings suggest that a single-factor model is not better than a multiple-factor model. Next, a full collinearity assessment test was conducted. None of the constructs and items held at a variance inflation factor greater than the 3.3 (Kock, 2015). Moreover, we followed the marker variable criterion advanced by Lindell and Whitney (2001) using "survey completion duration" as the marker variable, which theoretically is not linked to other variables in the model. We found survey completion duration to have nonsignificant correlations with the variables in the model. The path model showed consistent results with and without the inclusion of the marker variable. Moreover, consistent results were replicated when partialling the effect of social desirability on the model variables (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). In sum, the procedural steps and statistical analyses conducted evinced no common method bias concerns.

Structural model

Multiple structural models were tested by observing the standardized path coefficients of the links postulated and their significance levels using the bootstrapping method with 5,000 subsamples. Results from the three models tested are summarized in Table 4, which also includes the goodness-of-fit measures (SRMR < .08, d_{ULS} < HI_{95}, and d_G < HI_{95}). The measures are in line with suggested decision criteria (e.g., Benitez *et al.*, 2020; Hu and Bentler, 1999), offering support for the good fit of the models.

We tested multiple models starting with the *direct effects model*. We included the control variables and direct effects of moral identity centrality on all endogenous variables (i.e., the circle of moral regard, the inclusion of other in the self, SO, CO, value co-creation, and sales performance). In addition, we included the effects of the circle of moral regard and inclusion of other in the self on SO, CO, and value co-creation. The results support the positive relationship (H_1) between moral identity centrality and value co-creation behavior ($\beta = .58, p < .01$).

Findings from the *direct effects model* support H_2 and H_3, in which moral identity centrality was found to positively impact CO ($\beta = .57, p < .01$) and negatively impact SO ($\beta = -.19, p < .01$). Moreover, moral identity centrality increased salesperson inclusion of other in the self ($\beta = .26, p < .01$) and expanded her/his circle of moral regard ($\beta = .50, p < .01$). These outcomes support H_4 and H_7. Further, these results demonstrate that the inclusion of other in the self has a nonsignificant effect on SO and CO. Thus, H_5 and H_6 are not supported. Regarding the impacts of the circle of moral regard, the expansion of this circle led to an increase in salesperson CO ($\beta = .22, p < .01$) and decrease in SO ($\beta = -.21, p < .01$). This supports H_8 and H_9. Moreover, findings show a positive relationship between value co-creation and sales performance ($\beta = .37$, $p < .01$), supporting H_{12}. Other findings show a positive relationship between the expansion of the circle of moral regard and inclusion of other in the self ($\beta = .23, p < .01$). CO positively influenced sales performance ($\beta = .17, p < .05$) and job satisfaction was positively related to CO ($\beta = .21, p < .01$), value co-creation ($\beta = .27, p < .01$), and sales performance ($\beta = .21, p < .01$). Finally, salesperson age has a positive relationship with CO ($\beta = .07, p < .05$) and a negative relationship with SO ($\beta = -.19, p < .01$).

Next, we tested the *extended model*. In this model, besides the relationships examined in the *direct effects model*, we included links from salesperson inclusion of other in the self, circle

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of moral regard, SO, and CO to value co-creation. While we did not hypothesize any effect of the

inclusion of other in the self and circle of moral regard on value co-creation behavior, testing

these links is important to provide a comprehensive perspective of the moral identity-based

process proposed. In the *extended model*, results show that the influence of moral identity

centrality on value co-creation dropped to $\beta = .18$, $p < .05$ from $\beta = .58$, $p < .01$ in the *direct

effects model* ($\Delta\beta = .4$; $p < .01$). To further examine the process linking moral identity centrality

and value co-creation, we examined the effects of other variables on value co-creation. We found

that both the circle of moral regard ($\beta = .13$, $p < .05$) and inclusion of other in the self ($\beta = .13$, $p

< .05$) had positive effects on value co-creation. These additional links provide a better

understanding of how moral identity centrality and value co-creation are directly and indirectly

related. The results support H_{10}, with a positive effect of CO on value co-creation ($\beta = .48$, $p <

.01$). The negative relationship between SO and value co-creation (H_{11}) is not supported. The

results from the *direct effects* and *extended models* provide sufficient support for the proposed

process (i.e., identity→ self other perspective→ psychological state→ outcomes) linking

salesperson moral identity centrality to SOCO, value co-creation, and performance.

Finally, to examine how salesperson self-construal moderates the effects of moral identity

centrality (H_{13}), we tested a *full model* (Table 4) including all hypothesized relationships. The

full model consists of the independent self-construal construct and an interaction term between

moral identity centrality and independent self-construal, with links between the interaction term

and the endogenous variables. Findings from the *full model* support the relationships found in the

direct effects and *extended models*.

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Our findings validate that salesperson self-construal moderated three of the five effects of

moral identity centrality examined concerning the interaction effects tested. Specifically, we

found that independent self-construal dampened the positive effects of moral identity centrality

on CO (H_{13b}), the inclusion of other in the self (H_{13d}), and the circle of moral regard (H_{13e}). This

is evident in the negative interaction effects of moral identity centrality and independent self-

construal on CO ($\beta = -.09$, $p < .05$), inclusion of other in the self ($\beta = -.16$, $p < .05$), and circle

of moral regard ($\beta = -.12$, $p < .05$). The results do not support H_{13a} and H_{13c}. Therefore, this

research finds that higher independent self-construal works as a boundary form to the favorable

effects of moral identity centrality. For additional examination of the interaction effects found,

we followed the techniques recommended by Aiken *et al.* (1991) to plot these effects in Figures

2(a), (b), and (c). The significant interaction effects show independent self-construal acting as an

inhibitor of the positive effects of salesperson moral identity on the expansion of the circle of

moral regard, the inclusion of other in the self, and CO. Figure 2(a) evinces that salespeople who

hold low independent self-construal focus more on customer-oriented selling. Figure 2(b) reveals

that moral identity centrality has a limited effect in increasing the inclusion of other in the self

when a salesperson holds high independent self-construal. Low independent self-construal makes

moral identity centrality more effective in driving a salesperson to include other in the self.

Finally, Figure 2(c) shows a negative moderating effect of independent self-construal on the

relationship between salesperson moral identity centrality and the circle of moral regard. The

circle of moral regard is mostly expanded when a salesperson holds low independent self-

construal.

Place Figure 2 about here

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The variance explained (R^2) of the latent factors is as follows: circle of moral regard = .39; inclusion of other in the self = .14; CO = .63; SO = .16; value co-creation = .59; and sales performance = .41. Additional findings show a negative effect of independent self-construal on a salesperson's inclusion of other in the self ($\beta = -.13$, $p < .05$). Table 5 includes a summary of the findings.

Place Table 5 about here

Discussion

Moral issues are relevant to sales contexts, as salespeople convey many ethical dilemmas in their work (Valentine, 2009). Developing an understanding of the salesforce's moral self and behaviors is vital for managers because their salespeople often encounter conditions that challenge them to balance several goals associated with personal interests, the firm's objectives, and customers' interests. This study investigated the relationship between salesperson moral identity centrality and value co-creation, considering the process through which this relationship takes place.

Salespeople who count moral identity as key to self-definition are motivated to keep customers' best interests in mind while sacrificing their self-interest. They follow a customer-centric approach to complete their job tasks and avoid misleading and pressure selling. While value co-creation behavior requires significant resources, moral identity centrality helps salespeople in the make-or-break moment. In addition, customer-oriented salespeople can show their value expressive attitudes toward buyers by exhibiting value co-creation behavior to maximize the benefits buyers derive from an exchange.

Moral identity centrality has a positive effect on value co-creation even after accounting for the impact of circle of moral regard, inclusion of other in the self, and CO. As such, a salesperson's behaviors are to a great extent driven by the salesperson identity. Specifically, a salesperson's moral identity centrality is more than a self-system; it is the salesperson's mental model of self. Moral identity centrality drives salespeople to have buyers' best interests in mind. Our study suggests that value co-creation is a moral identity-promoting behavior that can enhance sales performance. This adds to previous literature highlighting the vital role salesforce morality plays in developing quality relationships between customers and salespeople (Evans *et al.*, 2012; Ingram *et al.*, 2007).

The mechanisms through which moral identity centrality increases a salesperson's value co-creation behavior are proposed to manifest through an *identity→ self other perspective→ psychological states→ behavioral outcomes process*. Specifically, the process shows that identity (moral identity) acts as a self-definitional factor that guides individuals' (salespeople) interpretation of their moral obligation and relationships with others. As a result, this influences their psychological states and the way they approach (SOCO) others (customers), leading to behavioral outcomes (value co-creation) and sales outcomes (sales performance). The process developed and supported in this study can be used in the ongoing research stream of identity-based marketing.

The expansion of the circle of moral regard is a vital mechanism of how moral identity centrality drives salespeople to focus on customers first and resist ceding to their self-interests, leading to increased value co-creation. Besides, the circle of moral regard has a direct favorable influence on value co-creation. Therefore, the moral obligation and concern a salesperson has for the welfare of others stimulate additional cooperation with buyers to drive mutual co-creation of

value. While salesperson moral identity centrality positively affects the inclusion of other in the self, our findings regarding the inclusion of other in the self construct show that it directly influences value co-creation behavior. Our findings also show the inclusion of other in the self and circle of moral regard to be positively related.

Although we suggested that salesperson SO would be negatively related to value co-creation, our findings provide no support for this effect. Therefore, it could be that selling-oriented salespeople have no interest in co-creating value, as their focus is on making the sale. Our study supports the notion in B2B sales that CO is the preferred orientation owing to its favorable outcomes for buyers, salespeople, and selling organizations compared to SO.

Theoretical implications

From a theoretical perspective, our research has several implications. First, developing a better understanding of the moral identity centrality construct is essential for theory because salespeople regularly face moral dilemmas as they try to balance multiple interests concerning their job objectives, organization's goals, and customers' interests (Agnihotri *et al.*, 2012b). Shao *et al*. (2008) suggest that moral identity centrality is a crucial driver of moral motivation and behavior and can determine moral actions in an organization. Despite the natural alignment of the moral identity centrality construct in the salesperson context, there has been minimal scholarly exploration in this area.

The focus on identity-based marketing can be extended to sales research, as salesperson identity can be a crucial factor affecting how salespeople approach and behave with buyers. The salesperson's moral identity centrality has been found to increase CO and value co-creation behavior, leading to improved sales performance. These favorable consequences are driven by the moral concern and obligations moral identity holds. We believe that our developed model is a

valuable step toward understanding the role of moral identity centrality in sales. This process

applies to identity-based marketing and sales studies in the areas of relationship marketing and

value-based selling.

Second, we believe our findings add to the understanding of SOCO's embeddedness in

psychological mechanisms (Saxe and Weitz, 1982; Zablah *et al.*, 2012b). Overlooking the moral

identity centrality concept in sales research undermines the development of a better

understanding of the role identity plays in explaining salesperson orientations and behaviors. We

found that a salesperson's SOCO is highly affected by moral identity centrality, which is related

to the salesperson's sense of self, and is developed across different life stages, particularly during

early ones. We have also shown that value co-creation is an outcome of the personal identities

and psychological states of salespeople. This adds to our understanding of why salespeople differ

in their engagement in value co-creation.

Third, the moderating role of salesperson self-construal in moral identity centrality

effects advances the sales theory. This study provides a better understanding of the role of the

self in driving salespeople to interact with others, specifically customers (e.g., Lam *et al.*, 2012).

Due to the discrepancy found in the literature and the possible interplay between moral-self and

self-construal (e.g., Henrich *et al.*, 2010; Hertz and Krettenauer, 2016), we examined how likely

it is that salesperson self-construal moderates the effects of moral identity centrality. While our

study offers evidence that moral identity centrality has positive outcomes in sales, our

moderation analysis results show that self-construal plays an important role in moral identity

research. Salesperson independent self-construal has been found to suppress the positive effects

of salesperson moral identity centrality on the inclusion of other in the self, expansion of the

circle of moral regard, and CO. Thus, independent self-construal acts as a boundary factor that

undermines the favorable effects of moral identity centrality has.

Managerial implications

The increase in business scandals, and more specifically in occupations involving sales, has

brought salespeople's moral conduct into question. Therefore, studies aimed at understanding

how salespeople can prioritize customers' needs over their own interests and act morally to

satisfy these needs offer valuable contributions. This study provides support for the importance

and applicability of moral identity centrality within sales. Contemporary research has validated

that "moral identity is neither a holistic identity structure nor a fixed trait"; instead, it is

"structured within social roles, whereby individuals tend to form distinct moral identities for

each of their various work, family and personal roles" (Wang *et al.*, 2019, p. 16). Keeping in

mind the malleable nature of moral identity, managers should try to shape the salesperson's role-

based moral identity through developmental interventions.

Managers recruiting salespeople to manage B2B relationships need to consider moral

identity centrality as a distinguishing requirement. When drafting a recruitment proposal to

attract salespeople, the HR and sales departments should consider using the "interview measure"

established by Frimer and Walker (2009) as a rich narrative assessment of moral identity

centrality. More so, organizations should consider incorporating selection methods that assess

the self-construal orientation of salespeople.

A primary concern for managers lies in their ability to influence salesperson moral

identity. According to Aquino and Reed (2002), people internalize moral traits, which are

influenced by symbolism. For that, sales managers, acting as leaders, portray the "right"

symbolic image. Sales managers create a sensory experience that might invoke attitudinal and

behavioral change. The job of sales managers is, then, to make the internalized moral traits of a

salesperson more centralized to her/himself. As leaders, sales managers can convey to

salespeople ways of navigating those politics without breaching moral principles. For example,

acting as servant leaders (Grisaffe *et al.*, 2016), sales managers promote the welfare of their sales

representatives. In addition, they work to expand the sales manager–salesperson moral circle by

including other stakeholders and creating a mutual understanding of the sales role among all

parties.

Prior studies have demonstrated that moral identity centrality can be identified, to a great

extent, through an individual's experience of community and volunteering activities (Hart *et al.*,

1998; Pratt *et al.*, 2003). Managers can attempt to upturn the stimulation of moral identity

centrality by offering salespeople several situational cues in the workplace that can direct their

devotion toward the moral facets of their self-concept (Aquino *et al.*, 2009; Mulder and Aquino,

2013). For example, sales organizations need to implement identity-based ethics training and

support their salespeople in providing community and civic-related services that are known to

keep moral identity centrality more salient. Neesham and Gu (2015) recommend an "appeal to

self-perceptions of moral identity" as a teaching/learning process and a leverage strategy that can

strengthen moral judgment.

One of the strengths of moral identity centrality is that it leans toward self-reinforcing

and other-reinforcing. As such, salespeople acting morally toward customers and peers are likely

to reinforce their moral identity centrality. We believe that managers, peers, and organizational

culture can play a role in strengthening a salesperson's moral identity. Salespeople may develop

multiple self-conceptual identities due to specific normative requirements, such as moral identity

centrality, professional identity, and gender identity. However, leaders need to provide an

environment for their salesforce that makes moral identity more salient. They must lead as moral

exemplars to improve morality in the attitudes and decision-making of their salespeople.

Likewise, management must recognize salespeople's moral decisions and behaviors to reinforce

the salespeople's moral identities.

Limitations and future research

Owing to the lack of similar research on moral identity in sales, we call for more studies to

investigate the role of salesperson moral identity centrality. We encourage future studies to test

the relations between salesperson moral identity centrality and other sales concepts, such as

adaptability, emotional intelligence, emotional labor, and service provision. Future studies must

further clarify the different processes through which salesperson moral identity centrality can

drive proactive outcomes and performance. Researchers can build on the present research results

to examine the role of moral identity in business-to-consumer (B2C) contexts.

While our study focused on the interface between salespeople and buyers, we argue that

moral identity centrality plays a significant role in the interface between salespeople and their

managers, peers, and others in the organization. Thus, future studies must examine the role of

moral identity centrality in intra-organizational and external interfaces that affect the

performance of salespeople. We suggest that moral identity centrality supports the salesperson's

performance by facilitating the salesperson's relationships with colleagues and other employees.

Accordingly, moral identity centrality can support prosocial and teamwork behaviors and

prohibit corrupted ones in the workplace, leading to an increase in job outcomes. Similarly, it is

important to understand how managers and their leadership skills and organizational culture play

a role in supporting or prohibiting salespeople's dependence on moral identity to guide their

decisions and behaviors.

A recent study shows that organizations embrace moral identity centrality and this, together with employee moral identity centrality, drives citizenship behaviors and decreases unethical prosocial acts (Matherne *et al.*, 2018). This suggests that employees perceive organizations to hold moral identity centrality, which can affect their own moral identities. Similarly, sales organizations may utilize SO instead of CO. It is vital to understand how a salesperson reacts to such conflicting situations when moral identity is central to the self.

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Figure 1 Model

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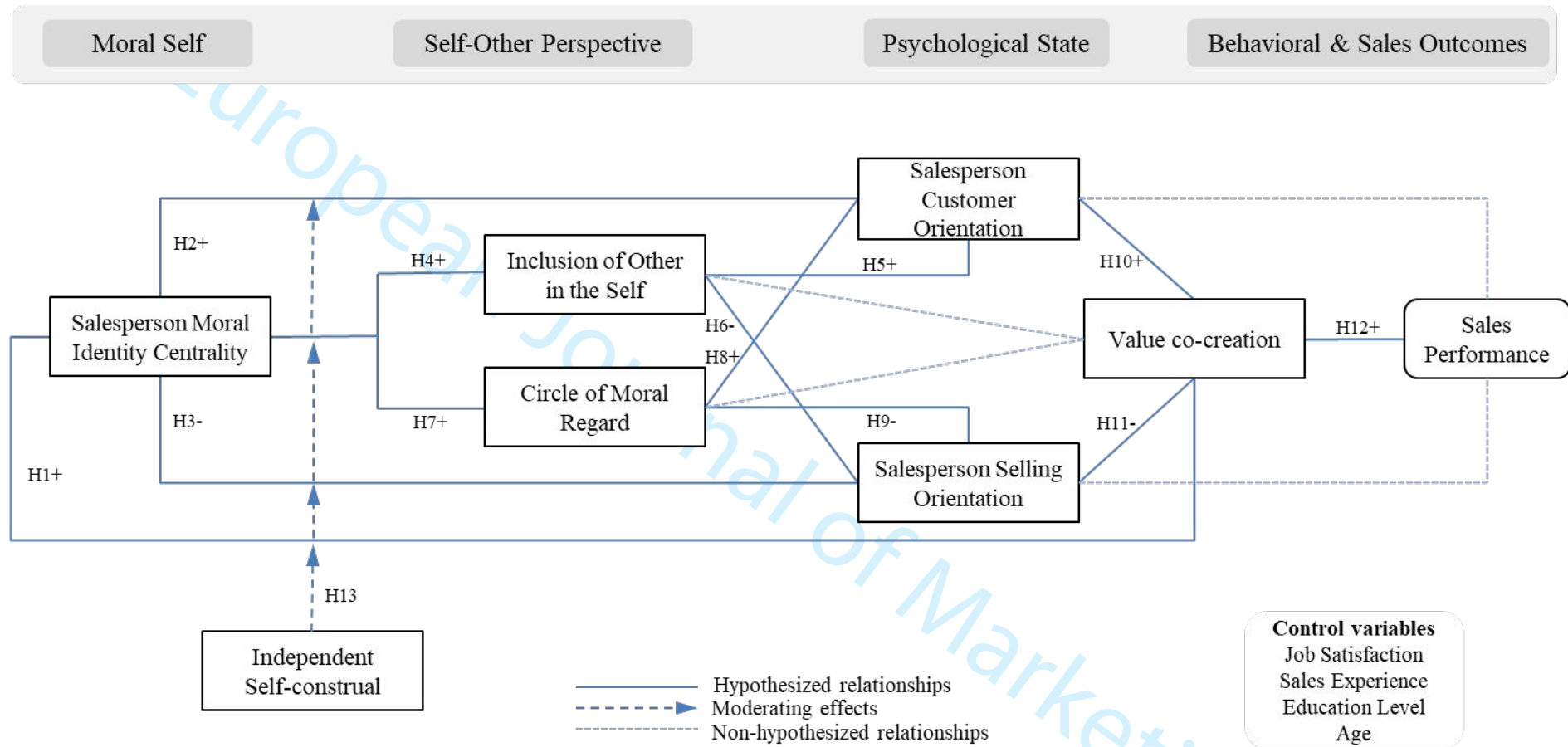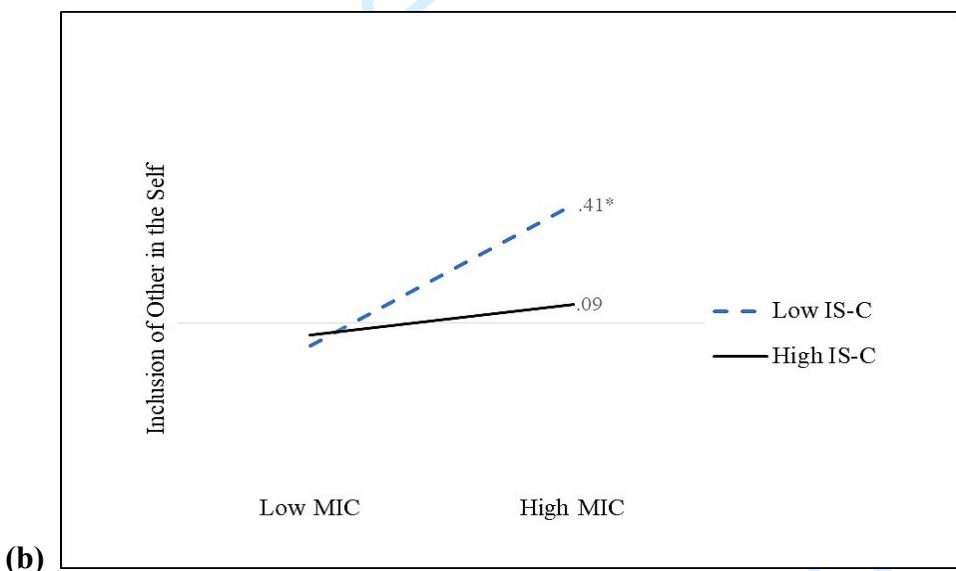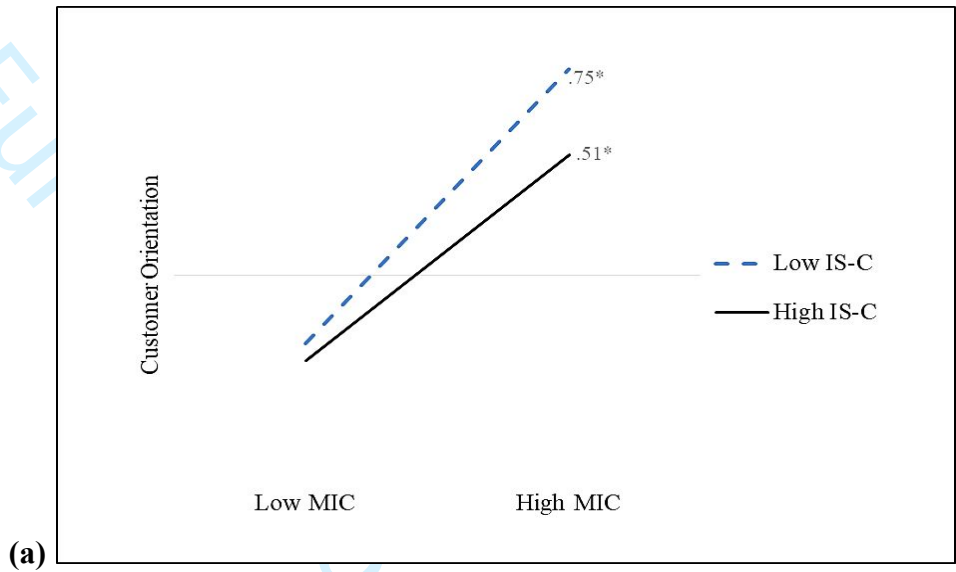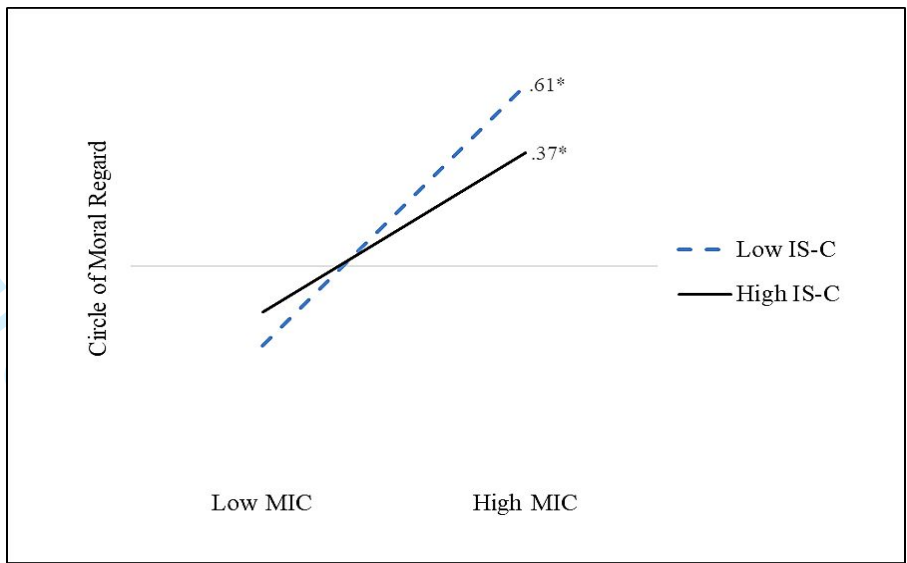44
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Figure 2 Interaction Effect of Moral identity Centrality (MIC) and Independent Self-construal (IS-C) on (a) Customer Orientation, (b) Inclusion of Other in the Self, (c) Circle of Moral Regard

(a)

(b)

(c)

Significance level: $^{*}p < .05$

Table 1 A Review of the Literature on Value Co-Creation in B2B Sales

Year	Authors	Nature	Drivers of Value Creation/Co-creation	Conceptualization of Value Creation/Co-creation
Current study		Empirical	Salesperson moral identity centrality has direct and indirect effect on value co-creation. Moral identity centrality expands the circle of moral regard, which facilitates salesperson moral identity centrality to decrease selling orientation and increase salesperson customer orientation and value co-creation. The indirect effect of moral identity centrality on value co-creation is attenuated by independent self-construal of salesperson.	Salesperson value co-creation refers to the behaviors salesperson takes to engage and work with customers during the product or service exchange process with of the objective of mutually maximizing the perceived value.
2021	Johnson *et al.*	Qualitative	Salesperson emotional behaviors can influence the co-creation of value propositions.	Value co-creation proposition refers to the join understanding between salesperson and customers on how to create value together through dialogues and interactions.
2020	Friend *et al.*	Empirical	Customer knowledge supports sales response in driving value co-creation.	Creation of value through sellers' and buyers' processes, practices, & resources.
2020	Liu & Zhao	Conceptual	Value co-creation is related to value-based selling.	Value-based selling includes value co-creation activities that take place with the seller, between the seller and the customer, and among various actors in a service ecosystem.
2020	Plouffe *et al.*	Qualitative	Value co-creation takes place through solutions selling.	Value co-creation is solution-based and relational in nature.
2020	Rusthollkarhu *et al.*	Qualitative	In B2B sales ecosystems, value (co-)creation takes place through value idea emergence with the process of value proposition creation.	Value is (co-)created when the processes of value proposition creation and value idea emergence are intertwined.
2020	Paschen *et al.*	Conceptual	Artificial intelligence enables value co-creation in B2B sales	Value co-creation in the interaction between activities, actors, and resources.
2018	Hartmann *et al.*	Conceptual	Salesperson's service exchange can affect value co-creation practices.	It is related to salesperson's service exchange.

2018	Delpechitre *et al*.	Empirical	Salesperson emotional intelligence drives customer value co-creation.	It includes customer citizenship behaviors and customer participation behaviors.
2018	Ulaga & Kohli	Conceptual	Salesperson solution selling supports value co-creation process.	It is based on salesperson solution selling.
2018	Kaski *et al*.	Qualitative	Rapport building skills help salespeople engage with prospective buyers in a collaborative, value co-creating sales.	Value co-creating interaction is based on rapport building and customer-engaging collaboration.
2017	Terho *et al*.	Empirical	Salesperson's learning orientation and networking abilities are drivers of salesperson's value-based selling.	It is related to value-based selling that focus on seller-buyer interaction for providing better solution and more value offerings.
2017	Pilon & Hadjielias	Qualitative	Customer-tailored value-added initiatives and relationship enhancers are two key dimensions that enable value co-creation.	It focuses on long-term productive, collaborative, and dialogic relationships between sellers and buyers.
2017	Kaski *et al*.	Qualitative	Salespeople's expectations to create value with buyers majorly result from their personal skills and behaviors as well as the solutions they sell.	It is an outcome of the joint activities between sellers and buyers including interactional exchanges of knowledge and other resources.
2016	Viio & Grönroos	Qualitative	Value-based buyer-seller business engagement occurs because of high relationship orientation for buyers and sellers.	Value-based business engagement or value co-creation is a combination of buyer-seller relationship orientations.
2016	La Rocca *et al*.	Qualitative	Salespeople can shape the buyer-seller interactions leading to increase buyer involvement and co-participation in new products development.	Customer value creation can take place through customer involvement in new product development & solution development.
2016	Liinamaa *et al*.	Qualitative	Contracts can support or hinder value-based selling.	It is associated with value-based selling processes and value-based pricing.
2016	Kohtamäki & Partanen	Empirical	Relationship learning allows sellers to co-create value with buyers.	A joint process in which sellers and buyers interact and create value.
2016	Marcos-Cuevas *et al*.	Qualitative	Sustained purposeful engagement supports sales organizations to co-create and capture value.	Value co-creative practices include "three categories - linking, materializing and institutionalizing - to provide coherence to practices such as co-ideation, co-design and co-launching." (p. 98)

2015	Terho et al.	Empirical	Customer orientation is a driver of value-based selling.	Value co-creation is related to value-based selling that focus on seller-buyer interaction for providing better solution and more value offerings.
2015	Töytäri & Töytäri	Qualitative	Sales opportunity management framework can support value co-creation.	Sales opportunity management supports and assess value co-creation and value capture potential in services.
2015	Hohenschwert & Geiger	Qualitative	Customer value perceptions can be expanded by increasing the salesperson attractiveness as future interaction partner.	Socio-cognitive construction of customer value.
2015	Schwepker & Schultz	Empirical	Servant leadership and the interaction between ethical climate and servant leadership drive salesperson value enhancing behavior performance.	Salesperson's value enhancing behavior performance that includes salesperson taking more accountability of customers' needs, understanding buyers, acting as advocate for buyers, and other service as well as relational behaviors.
2015	Töytäri & Rajala	Qualitative	Value-based selling including value proposition design, value quantification, & value communication.	Value-based selling is "a sales approach that builds on identification, quantification, communication, and verification of customer value." (p. 101)
2014	Baumann & Le Meunier-FitzHugh	Conceptual	Trust and relational exchanges play positive role in supporting value-generating processes.	It is interactive and interpersonal based (relational and trust) and includes co-creation and co-production.
2014	Viio & Grönroos	Qualitative	Adaptation and relationship orientation play positive role in driving value-based business.	Value-based business engagement that builds on strategic adaptation, high relationship orientation & strategic purchasing portfolio.
2012	Blocker et al.	Conceptual	Developing customer value knowledge and tracking, adapting, as well as anticipating value can drive value co-creation. Relationship dynamics and macro-contextual conditions can influence value buyer-seller value co-creation.	Value co-creation requires firm-customer dialogue, encounters & relational processes as well as buyer-seller ties.
2012	Hohenschwert	Qualitative	Salespeople need to act as advisors, brokers, secretaries, & friends to buyers to be able to create value.	Value creation is embedded within the relational exchanges in business relationships between salesperson and customer.

2012	Sullivan *et al.*	Empirical	_	The firm's ability to understand and transform customer needs into superior solutions for customers.
2012	Terho *et al.*	Conceptual	Understanding the customers' business model, crafting the value proposition, & communicating customer value.	Value-based selling is about understanding the business model of buyer, value proposition crafting and communicating buyer value.
2012	Haas *et al.*	Qualitative	Socio-cognitive construction supports value creation.	It is relational-based characterized jointness, balanced initiative, interacted value, & socio-cognitive construction.
2011	Singh & Koshy	Empirical	Customer orientation has positive impact on value creation.	Customer perceived benefits attributable to the salesperson, and the company.
2008	Sheth & Sharma	Conceptual	Customer oriented & relational strategies drive value co-creation.	_

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Table 2 Sample Characteristics

Exchange type %	
Services	18.8
Products	35.8
Both	45.4
Company Size (yearly revenues) %	
Less than $1 million	20.8
$1-10 million	38.3
$11-50 million	19.2
$51-100 million	12.8
More than $100 million	8.9
Average age (years)	33.3
Average sales experience (years)	10.05
Gender %	
Female	27.5
Male	72.5
Education level %	
College degree or above	85.3
Total Number of Salespeople	313

Table 3 Correlations Matrix, Descriptive Statistics, Reliability, and AVE

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Moral Identity Centrality	*.81*											
2. Circle of Moral Regard	.39*	*.79*										
3. Inclusion of Other in the Self	.20*	.37*	—									
4. Customer Orientation	.66*	.48*	.16*	*.86*								
5. Selling Orientation	-.24*	-.18*	.10	-.08	*.87*							
6. Value Co-creation	.56*	.57*	.38*	.65*	.07	*.82*						
7. Sales Performance	.39*	.38*	.27*	.53*	.08	.49*	—					
8. Self-construal	-.05	-.15*	-.19*	.01	-.06	.01	-.06	*.73*				
9. Job Satisfaction	.27*	.38*	.42*	.45*	-.11	.46*	.46*	-.05	*.94*			
10. Experience	-.11	.04	-.08	-.04	-.10	-.03	.01	.09	.01	—		
11. Education Level	-.05	-.03	.07	-.06	.07	-.06	-.03	-.15*	-.04	-.04	—	
12. Age	.13*	.12*	-.12*	.15*	-.22*	.06	.05	.03	-.03	.49*	-.11	—
Average	5.84	5.26	4.59	5.86	4.17	5.47	88.1	4.29	5.64	10.05	—	33.3
Standard Deviation	.99	1.1	1.63	1.08	1.68	1.04	32.7	.55	1.26	7.79	—	8.75
Cronbach's alpha α	.82	.89	—	.88	.89	.88	—	.79	.94	—	—	—
Composite reliability	.88	.91	—	.92	.93	.91	—	.87	.96	—	—	—
Average variance extracted	.65	.62	—	.75	.76	.67	—	.53	.89	—	—	—

Significance level: *p < .05; Numbers added along the diagonal are the square root average variance extracted; — Not applicable.

	Direct Effects Model	Extended Model	Full Model
MIC → CMR	.50**	.50**	.49**
MIC → IOS	.26**	.26**	.25**
MIC → CO	.57**	.57**	.55**
MIC → SO	-.19**	-.19**	-.19**
MIC → VC-C	.58**	.18*	.18*
IS-C → CMR	—	—	-.04
IS-C → IOS	—	—	-.13*
IS-C → CO	—	—	.10
IS-C → SO	—	—	-.01
IS-C → VC-C	—	—	.07
IS-C ⨯ MIC → CMR	—	—	-.12*
IS-C ⨯ MIC → IOS	—	—	-.16*
IS-C ⨯ MIC → CO	—	—	-.09*
IS-C ⨯ MIC → SO	—	—	.06
IS-C ⨯ MIC → VC-C	—	—	.01
CMR → CO	.22**	.22**	.23**
CMR → SO	-.21**	-.20**	-.21**
CMR → VC-C	—	.13*	.14*
IOS → CMR	.23**	.23**	.21**
IOS → CO	-.06	-.06	-.05
IOS → SO	.09	.09	.09
IOS → VC-C	—	.13*	.14*
CO → VC-C	—	.48**	.46**
CO → SP	.17*	.17*	.17*
SO → VC-C	—	.05	.05
SO → SP	.06	.06	.06
VC → SP	.37**	.37**	.37**
JS → CO	.21**	.20**	.20**
JS → SO	.05	.05	.06
JS → VC-C	.27**	.08	.08
JS → SP	.21**	.21**	.21**
EXP → CO	-.03	-.03	-.04
EXP → SO	-.03	-.03	-.03
EXP → VC-C	.05	.05	.04
EXP → SP	.02	.02	.02
AGE → CO	.07*	.07*	.07*
AGE → SO	-.19**	-.19**	-.18**
AGE → VC-C	-.04	-.06	-.05
AGE → SP	.01	.01	.01
EDU → CO	.04	.03	.05
EDU → SO	.03	.03	.03
EDU → VC-C	-.01	-.03	-.02
EDU → SP	.01	.01	.01

Goodness of Fit Measures			
SRMR	.047 (H_{95} .051)	.043 (H_{95} .049)	.041 (H_{95} .047)
d_{ULS}	1.04 (H_{95} 1.46)	1.01 (H_{95} 1.33)	.949 (H_{95} 1.31)
d_G	.481 (H_{95} .581)	.455 (H_{95} .555)	.452 (H_{95} .539)

MIC = Moral Identity Centrality; CMR = Circle of Moral Regard; IOS = Inclusion of Other in the Self; CO = Customer Orientation; SO = Selling Orientation; VC-C = Value Co-creation; SP = Sales Performance; IS-C = Independent Self-construal; JS = Job Satisfaction; EXP = Experience; EDU = Education Level.
Significance level: * $p < .05$; ** $p<.01$

Table 4 Results

Table 5 Summary of the Findings

	Hypothesis	*Support*
H1	Salesperson moral identity centrality is positively related to value co-creation.	✓
H2	Salesperson moral identity centrality is positively related to CO.	✓
H3	Salesperson moral identity centrality is negatively related to SO.	✓
H4	Moral identity centrality is positively related to the inclusion of other in the self.	✓
H5	The inclusion of other in the self is positively related to CO.	✗
H6	The inclusion of other in the self is negatively related to SO.	✗
H7	Moral identity centrality is positively related to the circle of moral regard.	✓
H8	The circle of moral regard is positively related to CO.	✓
H9	The circle of moral regard is negatively related to SO.	✓
H10	CO is positively related to value co-creation.	✓
H11	SO is negatively related to value co-creation.	✗
H12	Value co-creation is positively related to sales performance.	✓
H13a	Independent self-construal will weaken the positive relationship between moral identity centrality and value co-creation.	✗
H13b	Independent self-construal will weaken the positive relationship between moral identity centrality and CO.	✓
H13c	Independent self-construal will strengthen the negative relationship between moral identity centrality and SO.	✗
H13d	Independent self-construal will weaken the positive relationship between moral identity centrality and inclusion of other in the self.	✓
H13e	Independent self-construal will weaken the positive relationship between moral identity centrality and the circle of moral regard.	✓

CO = Customer Orientation; SO = Selling Orientation

Appendix

| Measures	Item Loading*	Weight*	VIF
Moral Identity Centrality [a]			
Listed below are some characteristics that may describe a person:			
Caring, compassionate, fair, friendly, generous, helpful, hardworking, honest, and kind.			
The person with these characteristics could be you, or it could be someone else. For a moment, visualize in your mind the kind of person who has these characteristics. Imagine how that person would think, feel, and act. When you have a clear image of			
It would make me feel good to be a person who has these	.80	.34	2.69
Being someone who has these characteristics is an important part of	.87	.33	2.59
I would be ashamed to be a person who has these characteristics [(R)]			
Having these characteristics is not really important to me [(R)]	.62	.37	1.90
I strongly desire to have these characteristics.	.90	.14	1.32
Circle of Moral Regard [b]			
Report the extent to which you believe you have "a moral or ethical obligation to show concern for the welfare and interests" of the below groups:			
People from another country	.74	.17	2.32
Strangers	.77	.31	1.67
Your colleagues who you work with	.70	.13	1.85
People who practice a different religion than you	.84	.18	2.31
People of different ethnicities than you	.82	.26	2.14
People you deal with in your daily life	.86	.22	2.39
Customer Orientation [c]			
I try to help buyers achieve their goals	.86	.31	2.18
A good salesperson has to have the buyer's best interest in mind	.87	.29	2.37
I try to influence a buyer by information rather than by pressure	.88	.29	2.63
I try to figure out what a buyer's needs are	.86	.28	2.36
Selling Orientation [c]			
I try to sell as much as I can rather than satisfy buyers.	.87	.27	2.78
I paint too rosy picture of my products/services, to make them sound as good as possible	.88	.31	2.67
It is necessary to stretch the truth in describing a product/service to a	.84	.30	2.11
I begin the sales talk for a product/service before exploring the buyer's	.88	.27	2.78
Value Co-creation [a]			
I work together with buyers to produce offerings that mobilize them	.74	.24	1.66
I interact with buyers to design offerings (products and services) that meet their needs	.87	.27	2.45
I provide offerings for and in conjunction with buyers	.86	.28	2.44
I co-opt buyer involvement in providing offerings for them	.77	.21	2.19
I provide buyers with supporting offerings to help them get more value	.83	.24	2.47
Independent Self-construal [a]			
I would rather depend on myself than others	.72	.25	1.49

It is important to do my job better from others	.76	.23	1.56
Decisions reached in groups are better than those reached by single individuals[(R)]	.71	.32	1.78
I usually sacrifice my self-interest for the benefits of the group I am	.70	.18	2.09
I often do my own things.	.75	.23	2.48
It is important to be useful to others[(R)]	.73	.24	1.48

Job Satisfaction

Overall, I am satisfied with my job [a]	.94	.35	2.54
I find real enjoyment in my job [a]	.95	.35	2.82
How satisfied ae you with your overall job? [d]	.93	.36	2.66

Inclusion of Other in the Self [e]

Choose the pair of circles that best represents your closeness to other
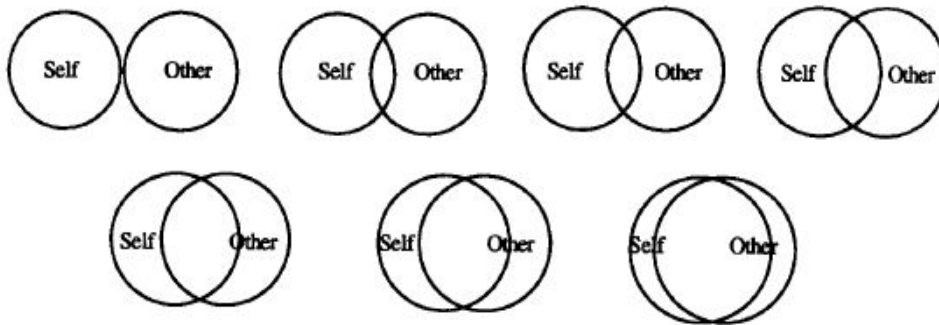
[a] Agreement Scale (1 = strongly disagree vs. 7 = strongly agree)
[b] Responsibility Scale (1= absolutely no obligation vs. 7 = very strong obligation)
[c] Frequency Scale (1= never vs. 7 = always)
[d] Satisfaction Scale (1 = extremely dissatisfied vs. 7 = extremely dissatisfied)
[e] Overlapping Scale (1 = no overlap vs. 7 = most overlap)
[(R)] reversed coded item
* Significance level = $p < .05$
Item in Italic was dropped
VIF: Variance Inflation Factor