STORYTELLING BY THE SALES FORCE AND

ITS EFFECT ON PERSONAL SELLING AND

BUYER-SELLER RELATIONSHIPS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Interest in buyer-seller relationships represents one of the important streams of research in the marketing literature over the past quarter century (Dwyer, Schurr and Oh 1987; Morgan and Hunt 1994). Postulated outcomes from good relationships include expectation of continuity, word of mouth advertising, customer loyalty, improved seller objective performance, and cooperation between buyer and seller (Palmatier, Gopalakrishna, and Houston 2006). Communication skills help sellers develop both a business and a personal relationship with buyers (Crosby, Evans, and Cowles 1990). One important communication skill for managers and salespeople is storytelling (Boje 1991; McKee 2003). Humans find stories compelling in a way that a simple presentation of the facts often cannot match (McGregor and Holmes 1999). Successful storytelling will help the sales force to reap the rewards arising from initiating and building strong buyer-seller relationships.

Storytelling as both a tool and subject of research gained widespread currency during the twentieth century as the social, behavioral and business sciences all adopted stories as a mode of inquiry, understanding and explanation (Wyer 1995). Scientists attribute a pervasive role to stories in our cognitive and social functioning (Polkinghorne 1988; Schank 1990).

Management researchers have examined functional storytelling as a way of handling change (Heracleous and Barrett 2001), facilitating knowledge transfer (Connell, Klein, and Meyer 2004), enhancing leadership (Forster et al. 1999), and for its role in entrepreneurial endeavors (Lounsbury and Glynn 2001) among other uses. Likewise there is a significant practitioner literature for using storytelling in managerial settings (Denning 2005; Neuhauser 1993). In marketing, research on storytelling often centers around its use in advertising (Escalas and Stern 2003; Mattila 2000) or brands (Woodside, Sood, and Miller 2008). No literature stream exists that investigates the functional use of storytelling in the personal selling environment.

The lack of inquiry into storytelling as even a tactical tool in personal selling, much less as a strategic tool for relationship building, is an oversight. Without this knowledge, salespeople operate in the dark when employing one of the most powerful and ubiquitous forms of human communication (Schank 1990). Stories not only pervade communication in general but also serve a fundamental role in forming opinions about ourselves and others (McAdams 1993). The opinions formed from integrating stories of self and others serve as the building blocks of human relationships (McGregor and Holmes 1999).

Marketing researchers cannot simply pave over this gap in the sales literature with material from other disciplines. The functional storytelling described in the management literature, the largest existing literature in business research about storytelling, differs significantly from that used by boundary spanners. One important element of storytelling in organizations is that they are repeated within the organization, modified, and may eventually take on the role of guideposts to organizational values and aspirations (Barry and Elmes 1997). This is not the case with boundary spanner storytelling where the hearer typically repeats the story only a few times, if at all, and likely not within the teller's organization.

Thus, the management literature on storytelling may serve as an example but not a direct guide for storytelling in sales. This lack of transferability necessitates research specific to the dyadic persuasion and information sharing environment of communication in personal selling to facilitate efficient use of storytelling in building buyer-seller relationships.

The Research

Attempting to fill this gap in the literature presents challenges. The very rudimentary scientific knowledge about storytelling in the selling domain placed this research in the exploratory stage. Topics at this stage of development often defy hypothesis formation and testing, so researchers frequently choose to employ qualitative methods of investigation in early inquiries (Bonoma 1985). In order to better understand the nature of buyer-seller relationship building through storytelling, combining a review of the salient literature with field work provided a productive starting point (Homburg, Workman, and Jensen 2000). The literature on storytelling is diverse and spans the humanities, social, and behavioral sciences, as well as management and marketing. This literature informed field work consisting of depth interviews of buyers, purchasing managers, salespeople, and sales managers followed by objective observation of salespeople calling on buyers in the field. The field work in turn informed a reevaluation of elements of the literature through the prism of the personal selling environment and relevant themes emerged (Workman, Homburg, and Gruner 1998). Recently, Ahearne, Jelinek, and Jones (2007) employed a similar literature review and qualitative study combination in a sales context.

The research questions addressed during the qualitative study were purposefully broad to prevent premature closure of interesting avenues of inquiry (Miles and Huberman 1984). Even with an expansive literature search, the driving forces of storytelling within the personal selling context remained unclear. Discovering the fundamental aspects of whether and how the sales force tells stories to existing and potential clients and the resulting effects drove the qualitative portion of the research. Some original lines of questioning proved less fruitful than expected while interviewee comments spawned ideas worthy of further investigation. This flexible research path in which questions change over time reflects the emergent characteristics of most qualitative work (Creswell 2009). The earliest efforts focused not only on the effects of storytelling but also on more descriptive issues such as establishing that salespeople consciously tell a significant number of stories and that they are perceived as stories by buyers.

The qualitative inquiry helped to establish ideas about how the sales force employs storytelling and how buyers perceive it. With the basic outline of storytelling in place, the themes extracted during the qualitative study helped to pinpoint and develop possible constructs and variables of interest in buyer-seller relationship building. The themes came from an industrial business-to-business selling environment and would possibly suit any relationship phase (Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh 1987).

One important element of the qualitative study was to test the definition of story selected from the various literatures: Bruner (1986, p. 13) but also Cohan and Shires (1988), Leitch (1986), and Prince (1980) – a story is a discourse dealing with interrelated actions and consequences in chronological order. The definition needed to be minimally ambiguous when classifying borderline cases, broad enough to capture the specific examples of stories

that buyers and sellers might report, and yet not so broad as to capture more than a modest portion of the total speech between buyers and sellers. Field work observing salespeople actually telling stories to buyers confirmed the definition as workable.

The quantitative study addressed more specific research questions made accessible by information gleaned from the qualitative study:

What effect do different types of stories have on the buyer's perceptions of the salesperson and the product?

The question addresses topics of storytelling in sales and relationships about which little is known, but the answers could prove quite useful to salespeople in situations where relationship selling provides strong returns on investment (Palmatier, Gopalakrishna, and Houston 2006).

The development of a framework for storytelling by the sales force using information from the qualitative study was crucial for the design of the quantitative study. The framework relies on the story elements of point of view and topic from the humanities literature search. The point of view revolves around the personal versus business story theme from the qualitative study. The topics are entity (salesperson or firm), product, and digression; the interviews and observations done in the qualitative study suggested these as the dominant topics of stories told by salespeople.

The quantitative study consisted of three experimental studies. Groups of participants viewed a short video of a salesperson pitching a cell phone to prospective customers. Afterward, the participants filled out questionnaires on what they viewed. All studies examined business versus personal stories. The first study examined the manipulation of disclosures of self versus disclosure about the firm in a sales pitch as it affects attitude toward the salesperson, attitude toward the product, and then consequent effects on purchase

intentions; relationship orientation was proposed to moderate the relationship between the type of story and the attitudes (Palmatier, Scheer, Evans and Arnold 2008). The second and third studies were similar and examined the manipulation of personal versus business stories about product and digression topics respectively.

Results And Contributions

The qualitative study. The results of the qualitative study indicated that salespeople do employ stories in a purposeful way. Eight themes emerged. Salespeople and buyers agreed that many of the stories assisted in building relationships of both a personal and business orientation. The study revealed a disagreement in that buyers stress the primacy of the business relationship while most salespeople thought the personal relationship was paramount. Stories also proved quite useful when problems arise as it is difficult to discuss problems and potential solutions without both members of the dyad telling stories. One aspect that interviewees stressed was the importance of stories being relevant to the hearer and the situation at hand. Story quality and storytelling ability also emerged as key parameters. Other themes included the ubiquity of icebreaker stories and the awareness that some stories yield negative consequences. These basic themes provide salespeople and buyers alike a glimpse at storytelling as it applies to personal selling and buyer-seller relationships and the prospect that this knowledge will yield more fruitful and lasting relationships for both parties. Further, they served as a foundation for the ensuing quantitative study.

The quantitative study. The results of analyzing the models in the quantitative study presented in Chapter IV provided more specific knowledge about the particular elements of stories and storytelling that make stories appealing to buyers. By specifically addressing the above research question, the quantitative study was intended to provide information of use to researchers, managers, and salespeople. The results were less clear cut than might have been hoped. The effects of the personal versus business story dichotomy are not significant in the main studies and post study analysis indicates that, if present, they are quite small. The post study did have interesting results on the unhypothesized mediation of the effect of attitude toward the salesperson on purchase attentions by attitude toward the product. Finally, there were indicators that story topic may be an important determinant of story effects.

The quantitative study makes a number of contributions including examining the themes uncovered in the qualitative study, placing storytelling in an established experimental framework examining attitudes and intentions but within the sales domain, and employing the relatively new construct of relationship orientation in a study.

Organization Of The Dissertation

The dissertation consists of five chapters. Chapter I, Introduction, provides an overview of the entire dissertation.

Chapter II, Conceptual Development, surveys the salient works from the humanities, psychology, sociology, management, and marketing literature. This includes descriptive, theoretical and empirical elements of concern to stories, storytelling and buyer-seller

relationships. The ideas accumulated from the literature review serve as a sounding board for the subsequent studies.

Chapter III, Qualitative Study, details the collection of data during field work and the analysis of the data. The analysis is examined in light of the earlier literature review to form a set of themes.

Chapter IV, Quantitative Study, builds off the literature review, qualitative study and the resultant themes to propose models and test hypotheses relating to the research question. Each individual study and the chapter conclude with a discussion of the results.

Chapter V, Discussion and Conclusion, reviews the results of efforts to address the research questions in both the qualitative and quantitative studies, discusses the theoretical and managerial implications of the research, points out some limitations of the research, suggestions for possible future research, and an overall conclusion.

CHAPTER II

CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT

We can be certain humans have made liberal use of stories for at least as long as we have known how to draw. The pictographs covering the walls of caves in southern France are believed to date from 40,000 years ago (Guthrie 2006). Once humans settled into more civilized circumstances, stories told in pictures or ancient script often decorated their public buildings, earthenware and monuments. These stories depicted aspects of daily life, but more often they related dramatic events from great hunts to battles to succession in dynasties.

Speculation about the role of stories in prehistoric human life credits them with a central role in communication. Prior to the development of reliable and portable writing instruments, oral communication dominated as it still does in undeveloped aboriginal tribes (Ong 2002). During and after the age of exploration, exposure of post enlightenment westerners to nonliterate aboriginal tribes provided a view into human history and our expansive use of stories for daily communication. This gives strong evidence about story use during human evolution. Anthropologists and other social scientists today also use ethnography, which amounts to recording respondents' stories, as a tool for inquiry as storytelling represents a form of communication that is very familiar to humans and is perhaps the most common way to reveal information about oneself (Jahandarie 1999).

One need only join a group of friends around a campfire to realize that the blaze does more than render marshmallows into delectable treats. It evokes stories in a way we can only surmise our nonliterate ancestors felt as well; they discussing wooly mammoths as we do sasquatch (McAdams 1993). In this chapter literature spanning the humanities and social sciences yields clues about the long running love affair between humans and our stories. In particular I attempt to illuminate how stories affect our view of ourselves and the world around us as it relates to building relationships in a sales environment.

Characteristics of Stories

Definition. To restate the goal outlined in the introduction, the definition of story must be broad enough to capture the great majority of speech acts reported by informants as stories, yet not so broad as to become meaningless by capturing the majority of all communication. The definition of story is not universal across all domains (see for instance McGregor and Holmes 1999) but fortunately there is a definition widely held by narrative theorists (Ryan 1985). Consequently, I will espouse a fairly open convention based on Bruner (1986, p. 13) but also Cohan and Shires (1988), Leitch (1986), and Prince (1980): a story is a discourse dealing with interrelated actions and consequences in chronological order. Hereafter actions and consequences are 'events' and may be understood as processes, situations or states as one of these typically implies another in basic story grammar (Ryan 1985). To illustrate:

> Our company had fallen behind the competition in digital controls for milling machines. But two years ago we built a new electronics factory. Because of this our Nebula line of controllers is the best on the market.

passes as a story by this definition, albeit a short one. It links the event (or state) "inferior

controllers" to the event "best controllers on the market" via the causal process of "building a

new factory". On the contrary:

The Nebula line of controllers is built in our new electronics factory.

is a disclosure or factual statement, but not a story as it fails to causally link events.

Those of a literary bent naturally wish to discuss deeper material pertaining to

character development and a complication along with its attending resolution in stories

(Martin 1986; Truby 2007). It is easy to see why: the story above would be a poor piece of

literature. But these elements are not as often observed in conversation and are certainly not

required for a minimal story. Minimal or terse stories dominate interpersonal spoken

narrative (Denning 2004). Minimal stories do share the basic framework of more

sophisticated stories. Aristotle wrote of stories as consisting of a beginning, a middle, and an

end (Toolan 1988). Though he was referring to complex written, narrated or dramatically

performed stories, this three part design prevails in minimal stories too. Thus minimal stories

exhibit a beginning initial state, followed by a middle process of change, and finally an end

state.

Sequential ordering. Hearers expect stories to unfold in an interpretable sequence.

Chronological ordering in story grammar of the beginning, middle and end allows the hearer

to comprehend the all important causal links within stories (Bal 1985). Most stories about

real occurrences remain faithful to the actual chronology and the teller's failure to do so will

usually cause confusion for the hearer. When telling a story where suspense or surprise enters

to achieve an entertaining effect, strict chronology may be violated without causing

misunderstanding. The teller may withhold key information till the end or foreshadow future

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events (Chatman 1978). This facilitates making the hearer wonder, "and then what happened," which can make the story much more interesting (Leitch 1986). So adherence to chronology can legitimately vary with the goal of the teller, but careless ordering of events will lead to confusion as, "our minds inveterately seek structure (Chatman 1978, p. 45)."

Omission. Omission of events and processes occurs in telling all stories so it is the degree of omission that differs. A teller does not begin a story about a recent vacation with his favorite uncle by describing the uncle's birth but rather by saying the uncle owns a cottage on a lake. Stories reduce and highlight data mostly through selective omission of nonessential details (Schank and Abelson 1977). What is omitted often provides as much information as what is included in communicating what the teller feels is important. Omissions by the teller do increase the likelihood of miscommunication if the teller misapprehends the hearer's background knowledge or if the story fails to activate the intended thought in the hearers mind (Georgakopoulou and Goutsos 2004). Omission thus acts as both the key to the development of a story and a possible cause of any misunderstanding.

Implication and inference. Because of omission, implication and inference become important, especially in spoken stories (Gerrig 1993). In stories between persons who work in the same industry or frequently talk about the same topics together, much of the common knowledge or items discussed in prior conversations might be left out of a story. The initial state might be omitted and only implied:

> Two years ago we built a new electronics factory. Now our Nebula line of machine controllers is the best on the market.

and the hearer will infer that the controllers used to have problems (Ryan 1985). The initial state of the company having had inferior controllers is implied; in fact the story is

nonsensical if the initial state consisted of superior controllers. This modified story simply does what all stories do by taking advantage of background or common knowledge to compress information through omitting what can be implicitly understood. Furthermore, note that the causal relation is more indirectly implied here as well: "because of this" (an explicit statement of causality in the earlier story) has become "now" (a temporal ordering which is only one aspect of causality) in describing the final state. Using background knowledge, story content and a working knowledge of story grammar the hearer will infer causality for if there is no causal link the story reduces to a relatively meaningless jumble of unrelated facts in violation of what Chatman (1978, p. 48) calls our sense of "narrative coherence" (or as Toolan (1988, p. 33) says, "the narrative 'competence'" we share; see also Gerrig 1993). Observations conducted later in the qualitative study of Chapter III revealed that buyers and sellers with long term relationships can communicate with very terse stories.

Embellishment. The minimal story can naturally expand to meet different storytelling goals via a process counter to omission, namely embellishment. Embellishment commonly occurs in stories told in the sales setting. Embellishments may be entirely true or not, just as the assertions made about events and causal links in a minimal story can vary in truthfulness (Escalas 2004a). Interestingly, hearers do not mind and even expect some puffery or poetic license in stories, especially those told in a persuasive setting like politics or sales (Green and Brock 2000). In written narrative, historical novels labor under an expectation of "allegiance to reality – truth" while on the contrary a romance novel demands "allegiance to ideal – beauty or goodness" instead (Martin 1986, p. 36). Likewise, the purpose of a spoken story, perhaps enlightenment versus entertainment, might cause a hearer to display higher expectations of truthfulness in a product success story than in a story about a fishing trip.

The example above might be embellished by adding information about the new electronics factory to make the process seem even more likely to have caused the claimed change in the performance of the controllers:

> Our company had fallen behind the competition in digital controls for milling machines. But two years ago we built a new electronics factory. It cost over $400 million to build and utilizes the technologically superior Xenex manufacturing machinery from Switzerland. Now our Nebula line of controllers is the best on the market.

Obviously the salesperson could also wax eloquent about hiring the best engineering firm to design the controllers or offer proofs of the claim the controllers are the best on the market. The patience of the listener in having their turn to speak suspended represents the practical limit to embellishment.

Turn-taking. At any given moment when we are having a conversation with another, one person takes the role of the speaker and the other the hearer in a one after the other turn-taking procedure; otherwise the talk becomes unintelligible. Most people consider serious violations of turn-taking norms in conversation to be rude (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974). The temporary primacy of one speaker during the recounting of a story represents a unique aspect of storytelling as communication for it is a departure from the typical turn-taking practiced by speakers (Toolan 1988). Interruptions by the hearer are permissible for indicating the hearer is attending to the story, exclamations of disbelief or requests for clarification such as:

I see.

Really, oh my goodness I can't believe that!

You mean Bob? Bob was the one who missed his flight?

But both parties know that the teller should immediately resume the story afterwards and in general the teller is allowed to suspend turn-taking until the conclusion of the story. Long winded tellers who include trivial details or add tangentially related events may find the hearer interrupting to urge them on to the conclusion:

> I don't understand, did you make the sale or not?

> Yes, yes I know, but what finally happened?

This is especially likely to occur when the teller does not know what background knowledge the hearer possesses as the teller is then handicapped in assessing what events and processes can be omitted without compromising understanding.

Tense. Stories can be about the past, present or future. Perhaps most stories concern the past as people possess vast stockpiles of memories about events that have already occurred to draw on (Georgakopoulou and Goutsos 2004). People do discuss things that are presently occurring and hoped for future events in story form, such as when they describe next year's vacation plan. When telling stories during a single sales encounter, all three tenses might prove useful. The salesperson might discuss past successes other customers have experienced with a product, design changes that are presently being made to improve the product, and plans to boost future production capacity with a factory addition next year. Sales stories about the benefits of using a product are frequently set in the future tense.

It is also a good sign when a customer tells a positive story in future tense; a salesperson may be close to making a sale when the customer begins telling stories of hoped for successful outcomes of using the product:

> If we install six new Super 1000 grain augers in the Harrisburg facility, we could increase throughput there by thirty percent. That would allow us to close the old Kirkville plant and save over one million dollars per year in operating costs.

The customer might tell this story to a coworker or to the salesperson. Briefly analyzing this story, we infer the initial state is that the Harrisburg facility does not presently have Super 1000 grain augers, as the hypothetical event of installing them would be ridiculous otherwise. The causal process leading to the next event, closing the Kirkville plant, is the increase in throughput potentially caused by such an installation. The monetary savings represents another event caused by the process of closing the Kirkville plant. Finally, the supposed end state consists of six Super 1000 augers installed and operating at Harrisburg with thirty percent higher throughput, the Kirkville plant closed, and the firm pocketing a million dollars a year in cost savings.

Had the customer omitted mention of the cost savings from closing Kirkville, some cost savings would likely have been inferred by the hearer as the likely outcome of closing the plant (Chatman 1978); further, since the teller and hearers probably know the cost of installing six Super 1000 augers in Harrisburg, they can easily infer the return on investment from a one million dollar a year cost savings even though the teller omitted mention of the return on investment. Stories compact information by embedding information within the content (Schank and Abelson 1977). For example, the salesperson might conclude that the company considers the Harrisburg facility a better place for investments than the Kirkville plant. Though this is not explicitly stated one might infer it from the firm's willingness to close the Kirkville plant if its output can be replaced at Harrisburg. Compact information transfer remains a central aspect of storytelling regardless of what tense the teller chooses for the story.

Psychological Mechanisms of Storytelling

Stories serve as data reduction devices by portraying reality in a simplified way. Storytellers employ various devices such as common scripts to reduce the amount of information required for complete explication (Bettman 1979; Schank and Abelson 1977). Stories and story skeletons further serve as simplifying frameworks around which to organize the perception of the exterior world (Bruner 1986; Weick 1995). This reduces the overwhelming task of sorting and absorbing complex arrays of information. Research into jury decision making in felony trials has shown that a narrative story sequence represents the most persuasive way to order evidence for jurors (Pennington and Hastie 1992). Jurors made decisions more strongly and with more confidence in the direction of the evidence when the presentation was narrative versus organized by legal issue or by witness. When faced with the very complex task of evaluating a salesperson, buyers may naturally employ the stories told by the salesperson in developing heuristic devices to evaluate the individual either positively or negatively. People may mesh such stories, both self-created and heard, into an amalgam through which to view the past, present and future. This serves as the raw material for self-image and our images of others such that, "We create a self that is whole and purposeful because it is embedded in a coherent and meaningful story (McAdams 1993, p. 91)."

The disclosure needed to form personal stories or self-narratives need not be strictly based on intimate social disclosure, as rapport can spring from task oriented mutual disclosures (Jacobs et al. 2001). Jacobs et al. (2001) demonstrated that in a sales setting, simple task oriented disclosures can be effective relationship building tools, particularly

when the disclosures are reciprocal in nature. Scholars of sales have long asserted that mutual disclosure is an important part of the buyer-seller bond (Crosby, Evans, and Cowles 1990). Researchers in psychology have also demonstrated that disclosure of personal events can have a profound effect on relationships (Ensari and Miller 2002; Gable, Gonzaga, and Strachman 2006). Naturally many disclosures may take the form of stories about either the past or hoped for future events. Forming disclosures as stories may make them shorter and more memorable, and also more effective in eliciting reciprocation as stories often remind hearers of a tale of their own (Boje 1991).

McGregor and Holmes (1999) work on storytelling and relationships suggests that two mechanisms are at work when we tell stories: one causes biased memory in favor of evidence consistent with the story, the second does not employ evidence memory but rather gains impetus from the gist or skeleton of the story and is used as a heuristic. Contrary to factual lists of information, stories have an easily encoded, holistic plausibility that lends credence to the associated truth claims. As time goes by, persons flesh out the story skeleton by retaining new information that is consistent with the story they have told or heard and discarding information that is not (Schank and Abelson 1995).

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Narrative Transportation Theory

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Another stream of research ties storytelling to persuasion via narrative transportation theory or NTT (Gerrig 1993). Persons are presumed to be transported to the world of the narrative where they employ an aesthetic based narrative processing rather than paradigmatically oriented analytical processing (Gerrig 1994). This transportation occurs as a

distinctive mental process in which hearers or readers are absorbed into the setting, characters, and action of the story world (Green and Brock 2000). Green and Brock (2000) demonstrated that transportation can have effects on real world beliefs, and further assert that during transportation individuals loose contact with some aspects of the real world.

Others have also used NTT to examine how stories work in a persuasion environment. Escalas has done so in ad, brand, and product evaluation settings. Regarding ads and brands, narrative processing induced less critical evaluations of propositions due to lower negative cognitive response, increased realism of experience and greater affective response (Escalas 2007). She also demonstrated that narrative transportation plays a role in mental simulation of product use and resulting ad and brand evaluations (Escalas 2004a).

Transportation thus factors into mental simulations in which persons imagine sometimes fanciful situations by combining past events, possible future events and alternate possible outcomes. This can lead to more positive appraisals of the likelihood of the imagined events occurring, improved attitudes and even actual behavior changes (Escalas 2004a). All of these mechanisms could prove useful in personal selling and relationship development by storytelling. Properly used, a salesperson's stories that promote such daydreaming may have a positive effect on relationship building through the hearer's thoughts about the tellers social network, inclusion of the teller in the hearer's self-narrative, and the resulting reduction in uncertainty such familiarity can bring.

Another group using NTT in persuasion research notes that it is difficult to counterargue the actual experiences of a person, be they real or fictional (Dal Cin, Zanna, and Fong 2004). This gets at plausibility, i.e. the fictional may be deemed true if plausible, but the story presented as nonfiction may not be held as true if implausible. They believe "…that

the cognitive and emotional demands of absorption into a narrative leave readers with little ability or motivation to generate counterarguments, (p. 178)." Narrative messages are thus potentially less threatening than analytical arguments and allow stealthy insertion of persuasive messages that are actually counter-attitudinal without arousing the usual suspicion by flying "under the radar" of attitude protection (p. 179). In support of these notions, Green and Brock (2000, p. 707) found that, "Furthermore, individuals did not appear to be differentially persuaded by factual versus fictional narratives."

NTT presents researchers with a foundation for explaining the mental processes of those hearing stories in persuasion settings. It treats narrative as a special form of processing outside other explanations such as the dual process models (Bruner 1986; Chaiken 1980; Petty and Cacioppo 1986b). Elaboration involves piecemeal evaluation of arguments against prior knowledge whereas narrative processing relies on story world facts for evaluation (Gerrig 1993). Heuristic processing relies on contextual cues or facile rules counter to the often consuming attention people pay to a story. In fact, story gists or skeletons may often serve as a way of creating or altering heuristics for future use (McGregor and Holmes 1999).

Storytelling in Management and Organizations

Management researchers credit storytelling with many uses. Executives navigating today's turbulent markets find stories help them win buy-in from employees for needed change (Heracleous and Barrett 2001). The ability of stories to make information compact and memorable makes them ideal for knowledge transfer (Connell, Klein, and Meyer 2004). Those researching leadership see stories as a critical tool in the kit of any leader (Forster et

al. 1999). Entrepreneurs often find that articulating their story is critical to both capital acquisition and early success in the marketplace (Lounsbury and Glynn 2001). The extensive practitioner literature on storytelling details ways to build trust, build brands, instill values, motivate effort and spur collaboration among other goals (Denning 2005; Neuhauser 1993)

Disclosure also occurs at the organization to person interface. Value revelation through exemplars is an important means by which organizations transfer their distinct practices and traditions to new members (Taylor et al. 2002). Storytelling naturally plays a vital role in this process of organizational learning. "Organizations are seen as learning by encoding inferences from history into routines that guide behavior (Levitt and March 1988, p. 319)." New members learn and existing members are reminded about who we are and how we do things by these stories, something that political and religious groups have exploited for millennia (Denning 2004; Louis 1980). Embedded in the explicit details of the story lie the implicit morals and values that represent what is unique and vital about the organization (Martin et al. 1983).

Storytelling is in fact widely acknowledged within the management literature as a fundamental aspect of organizational development and strategic operations (Barry and Elmes 1997; Pentland 1999). This extends well beyond specific activities such as knowledge sharing or venture capital acquisition mentioned earlier (Connell et al. 2004; Heracleous and Barrett 2001; Lounsbury and Glynn 2001). Some go so far as to say that organization represents the fundamental purpose of the firm and that narration is organization, "In other words, stories are everything (Weick and Browning 1986, p. 249)." This narrative view of strategy predicts the creation of a discourse that serves as a direction outlining where the firm has been, where it is and where it is likely to go; the particular language of the discourse

serves to influence the choices made by stakeholders (Barry and Elmes 1997). A recent discursive model of institutionalization begins with actions which produce texts as moderated by sense-making and legitimacy, then texts become embedded in discourse as moderated by characteristics of the text, and finally institutions arise from discourse as moderated by the structure and coherence of the discourse and by competing discourse (Phillips et al. 2004).

Communication in Relationships and Personal Selling

Communication in Relationships. When theorizing about buyer-seller relationships, marketing researchers have postulated a significant role for communication in the initiation and maintenance of relationships. Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh (1987, p. 17) suggests that communication facilitates bargaining in the exploration and expansion phases of the relationship saying "…a relationship seems unlikely to form without bilateral communication of wants, issues, inputs, and priorities." Crosby, Evans, and Cowles (1990) states that mutual disclosures and keeping communication channels open through frequent contact are critical relational selling behaviors; this helps reduce the customer's perception of uncertainty about doing business. Salespeople thus use communication to relate critical facts such as the trustworthiness of the company, the suitability of the product, and the expertise of the salesperson to make the value proposition clear to the buyer and to build relationships.

Attempts to place communication within various relationship models are common. Morgan and Hunt's (1994) proposed model demonstrated that communication (operationalized by measures like "keeps us informed of new developments") was positively related to trust. Their rival model, however, found a significant relationship between

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communication and functional conflict (i.e. successful resolution of conflicts) but not

acquiescence, propensity to leave, cooperation or uncertainty reduction. In testing

relationship models as diverse as commitment-trust, dependence, transaction cost economics,

and relational norms, Palmatier, Dant, and Grewel (2007) also found linking communication

(operationalized by "prompt and timely", "complete", "well understood", and "accurate") to

proposed relational constructs difficult. They found significant relationships with customer

trust and seller relationship specific investments but not to customer commitment,

interdependence, seller opportunistic behaviors, customer relationship specific investments

(except in a later resource based view model), or relational norms.

Some have even called into question the directionality of the communication to trust

relationship saying that increased trust also causes better communication (Anderson and

Narus 1990; Leonidou, Palihawadana, and Theodosiou 2006). They hypothesize that prior to

the establishment of trust, actors are careful about sharing information with sellers who very

likely also supply competitors. Anderson and Narus (1990) concludes that at any given point

a static model can capture the effect of past communication on present trust, even though the

actual operation is a dynamic process where increasing trust leads to better communication

and vice versa.

More recently, others have taken different approaches to modeling communication in

relationships. Pappas and Flaherty (2008) successfully modeled communication frequency

and amount of information sharing (with measures adapted from Cannon and Homburg

2001) as moderators of the relationship between supervisee trust and strategic behaviors in

relations between customer contact employees and their supervisors. Ahearn, Jelinek, and

Jones (2007) modeled information communication (operationalized by specific activities like

"uses company brochures to emphasize points") as an antecedent of satisfaction with the buyers-seller relationship that in turn led to trust and finally share of customer.

Another approach was Joshi (2009) in which the more nuanced construct of collaborative communication had a positive impact on desired manufacturer-supplier outcomes. Collaborative communication was modeled as a second-order factor of frequency of face-to-face, telephone and written communication; reciprocal feedback measured by items like " the customer responds promptly to communication from us"; formality or routinization of communication; and, perhaps most importantly, rationality of communication measured by items like "this customer provides justification for a particular course of action through research findings that they make available to us." The rationality dimension is reminiscent of Mohr and Spekman (1994) adding credibility to the rather mechanistic items of the "timely", "accurate", "adequate", and "complete" communication quality scale to help explain what kind of communications are persuasive. Together these authors have refined the operationalization of communication constructs and the placement within the nomological net to create better specified and more successful models of communication in relationships much as the present research attempts to do.

In summary, researchers continue to place communication as an important antecedent in relationship models in spite of the mixed results from early empirical studies. They do so no doubt in response to the strong intuitive appeal of the communication construct; as Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh (1984) remarked, it is hard to imagine relationships forming without communication. The recent successful modeling of communication as a moderator by Pappas and Flaherty (2008), with the mediator of satisfaction by Ahern, Jelinek, and Jones (2007), and with the nuanced collaborative communication construct by Joshi (2009) indicates that

more refined models can demonstrate a significant role for communication in relationships. The examination of storytelling herein represents a continuation of these attempts at refinement that should contribute to better understanding the role of communication within buyer-seller relationships.

Communication in Personal Selling. Researchers have also explored communication in the personal selling context. Williams and Spiro (1985) looked at the effect of various communication styles of both buyers and sellers plus the resulting interaction of styles. Adding a discussion of code (storytelling might be considered a type of code) and rules (a customer might adhere to the rule that "telling lots of stories is acceptable in a sales setting") to the conception of communication as a function of content and style developed in Sheth (1976), Williams and Spiro (1985) proposed three styles of communication orientations: task, self, and interaction. A salesperson might exhibit any of these orientations when telling a story. For instance, a product success story might reveal a task orientation while a story about an upcoming festival in town might be motivated by an interaction orientation.

Williams and Spiro (1985) found that the buyer's orientation was particularly important and urged salespeople to be sensitive and adapt accordingly; it thus might be unwise for a salesperson to tell a story about a recent vacation to a highly task oriented customer. Using cluster analysis, a more recent examination of the task/self/interaction orientation framework found, "…that buyers are more complex than originally presumed, (McFarland, Challagalla, and Shervani 2006)." That is to say buyers appear to be composites of the various orientations. There is also a strong possibility that the buyer's orientation is context dependent, as reflected in the discussion of relationship orientation below.

Just as some researchers in the relationship literature assume various mechanistic models of communication, some model communication as frequency, mode, content, and bidirectionality in the sales literature (Krone, Jablin, and Putnam 1987). It has been used in models of supervisor-employee communications for the sales force (Johlke, Duhan, Howell, and Wilkes 2000; Johlke and Duhan 2001). This is the same model employed by Mohr and Nevin (1990) in an examination of communication in marketing channels. Mechanistic models have the merit of facilitating measurement but may miss some of the more subtle aspects of communication. Mechanistic measures of stories like the number told per sales encounter might also prove interesting but could fail to capture subtle yet important elements about stories.

Some have focused their work on the particular outcomes communication can achieve. Kasouf, Celuch and Bantham (2006) used this approach to look at individual level interorganizational communication, particularly self disclosure and editing (emphasizing courtesy and politeness), as they relate to problem solving efficiency. Claycomb and Frankwick (2004) had done so earlier in a supply-chain setting by looking at the effect of communication on various conflict resolution mechanisms (notably, the qualitative study of Chapter III finds a relation between stories and explaining problems). Areni and Sparks (2005) used experiments to look at the effects of powerful and powerless language on attitudes toward a new product, which is similar to the approach used in Chapter IV of this paper. This is an attempt to use more specific communication constructs and outcomes variables to accurately model the effect of communication within personal selling. These efforts parallel the work in the relationship literature by moving toward a finer grained understanding of communication in sales and relationships. The present research continues

this effort by examining storytelling as a more specific communication construct and later introducing more specific outcome variables than earlier ones like trust.

Storytelling in Marketing

Analysis of storytelling within the marketing literature occurs mostly in research on advertising and brands. Polyorat, Alden, and Kim (2007) examined narrative versus argument (also called factual or list) ad copy effects on product evaluation. They found that narrative print ad copy created higher levels of ad message involvement and consequently better product evaluations. They proposed that narrative copy induced more positive feelings than arguments and were especially preferable for hedonic products. Mattila (2000) writes that stories are intended to relate experiences and are thus also preferable for advertising experiential services. Polyorat and colleagues conjecture that the ability of stories to assist in mentally simulating consumption of the service aids in consumer processing and ultimately in decision making. Escalas (2004a) also touts the positive affect and mental simulation evoked by stories.

Adaval and Wyer (1998) looked at print ads as well in the form of brochures based either on a narrative or argument. Narratives again showed significantly greater power to persuade compared to arguments. One important conclusion holds that holistic processing of narratives assists in smoothing over inconsistencies in information as the hearer ignores or interprets in relation to other context any elements that do not fit in the final story gist. Analytical processing involves piecemeal processing of facts with less regard to a plausible whole, but holistic processing requires adjustments of information to lead to a plausible final

story. They demonstrate that stories can actually cause readers to ignore undesirable product features whereas arguments do not, which is an important indication of how powerful stories can be in a persuasion context.

Spanning ads and brands by addressing the use of stories to advertise for brand image, Padgett and Allen (1997) place heavy emphasis on the causal aspects of stories. They postulated that stories are powerful because, "The ad demonstrates rather than explains the functional elements of the service …, but also prompts the consumer to construct symbolic meanings …(p. 57)." In a brand environment, Escalas (2004b, p. 176) came to a similar conclusion that narrative processes help consumers connect to brands saying, "The meaning of a brand is often the result of it being part of a story."

The research within marketing on narratives is not extensive nor does it extend into the personal selling or relationship building literature. Yet it does address stories within a persuasion context and thus offers some hints for addressing other types of persuasion. This has interesting managerial implications that will be addressed in the quantitative study of Chapter IV.

Relationship Marketing

Social Exchange Theory, Reciprocity, and Relationship Marketing. Social Exchange Theory (SET) dates from the 1920's with elements from anthropology, social psychology, and sociology and is commonly used in marketing, especially relationship marketing research (Bottom et al. 2006; Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005). The foundations of modern SET took shape in the 1950's and 1960's in the psychology and sociology literature (Blau 1964;

Homans 1958; Thibaut and Kelley 1959). SET has basic tenants extracted from

reinforcement psychology and microeconomics; these include concepts like utility, cost,

reward and opportunity working together in two-way, mutually contingent, mutually

rewarding transactions in which players use reciprocity to maximize mutual outcomes

(Emerson 1976).

Other authors expanded SET (Bagozzi 1975; Kelley and Thibaut 1978), postulated

that social exchange has genetic roots (Cosmides 1989), included more recent developments

from economics like rational choice (Cook and Whitmeyer 1992), discussed the effects of

affect (Lawler 2001; Lawler and Thye 1999), investigated the issue of governance

mechanisms of relational exchange in business settings (Dwyer et al. 1987; Morgan and

Hunt 1994), and used SET in empirical work in marketing (Anderson and Narus 1990;

Crosby et al. 1990). Actors thus focus on reciprocity and the anticipation of benefits from

future exchange in addition to benefits from current transactions (Emerson 1976; Gouldner

1960).

Transaction cost economics highlights the possibility of opportunism in exchange

relationships (Heide and John 1992). But the norm of reciprocity has built in mechanisms to

deter opportunism (Fehr and Gachter 2000). Actors fear the loss of goodwill built up during

earlier transactions and resulting forfeiture of future benefits. The slighted party may also

retaliate to punish the offender, even to the point of harming themselves in doing so (Falk

and Fischbacher 2006). Also, the offender risks losing face in the marketplace where their

defection may mark them as an untrustworthy partner. The norm of reciprocity within social

exchange thus provides a counterbalance to the risk of opportunism from partners so that

actors may reap the rewards offered by relationships (Lambe et al. 2001).

In exchange settings, trust is often assumed to be a key variable (Flaherty and Pappas 2000). Trust presumably opens up communication and information flow, smoothes over areas of conflict, and contributes to objective performance (Hunt and Morgan 1994). But trust is not always linearly associated with positive outcomes and also is costly to develop. Trust may reach a certain level at which the salesperson and product have entered the consideration set and then the incremental additions to trust beyond that point are overwhelmed by other aspects of the transaction such as price or delivery (Doney and Cannon 1997). Thus the trust building activities of higher performing salespeople may be well suited to the early phases of awareness and exploration, but less important in more established relationships (Dwyer, Schurr and Oh 1987; Macintosh, Anglin, Szymanski, and Gentry 1992). In the exploration phase when trust is as yet low, the salesperson must handle potentially contentious objections from customers that naturally pertain to perceived problems with the product (Campbell, Davis, and Skinner 2006). The qualitative study in Chapter III links storytelling and the explanation of problems and solutions.

Loyalty to the salesperson is both valuable to the firm in inducing repeat business and represents a latent risk as customers may follow a defecting worker to a new firm (Palmatier, Scheer and Steenkamp 2007). Palmatier and colleagues also assert that loyalty to the salesperson is subject to relationship-enhancing activities by the salesperson. Such relationship marketing tactics rely on convincing customers it is in their best interest to continue the relationship. Customer relationship management (CRM), a group of relationship marketing techniques leveraging modern technologies, relies on efficient information transfer and relational sensitivity, such as not sending offers to customers who would not be interested (Boulding, Staelin, Ehret, and Johnston 2005; Zablah, Bellenger and Johnston

2004a). But just as in face-to-face relationship marketing tactics, practitioners of CRM find that the devil is in the details of execution (Colgate and Danaher 2000; Zablah, Bellenger and Johnston 2004b). Clearly relationship marketing tactics must be properly executed to achieve the intended results and this is not easy to do.

Recent Developments: The Dark Side and Networks. After substantial work on the positive aspects of relationships, it is not surprising that researchers noticed that relationships can have negative aspects as well (Moorman, Zaltman and Deshpande 1992). Grayson and Ambler (1999, p. 139) suggest that relationships can have "dark side constructs" such as opportunism/loss of objectivity and rising expectations that grow as a relationship ages and can undermine positive constructs such as trust, though the actual relationships between the constructs remain unclear. Relationship marketing tactics can also have a dark side. Colgate and Danaher (2000) found that a poorly executed personal banker effort was more harmful than no personal banker at all; further they found that the negative impact of badly executed relationship marketing strategies was greater than the positive impact of a well executed strategy.

Dyadic analysis is common in buyer-seller relationship studies, but when the focus is on the interorganizational aspects of relationship marketing, recent analysis has expanded to a network view (Achrol 1997). Achrol (1997) argues that the leaner, more decentralized modern organization interfaces with more strategic partners while focusing internally on a few core competencies. A more recent network study of customer value by Palmatier (2008) used the concept of tie strength developed by Granovetter (1973) and others to link social networks and their various charaterisitics such as contact density and authority to exchange theory and customer value. However, another recent work states, "an estimated 60% of

business partnerships fail", which could call into question the viability of a network perspective in such a volatile milieu for relationships, or at least spur inquiry into Dwyer, Shurr and Oh's (1987) somewhat neglected final phase of the relationship: dissolution (Ritter, Wilkinson, and Johnston 2004, p. 175). That is to say, the very turbulence that Achrol (1997) cites as spurring organizations to rely on networking may carry the seeds of the new paradigm's own destruction. It seems likely that future research seeking to explore buyer-seller relationships, particularly those in the early phases of development, will continue to use dyadic approaches at times while studies of highly integrated interfirm relationships such as those found in supply chain research may find the network more approach successful (Houston et al. 2004).

Relationship Orientation. The customer's relationship orientation (RO) can affect the success of relationship marketing efforts (Palmatier, Scheer, Evans, and Arnold 2008). Palmatier et al. (2008, p. 175) defined RO as the "desire to engage in a strong relationship with a current or potential partner to conduct a specific exchange." They specify that RO is not a personality trait or general tendency but rather something that reflects the perceived value of benefits versus costs of a relationship within the given exchange situation.

This is an extension of an idea established in both the business-to-consumer and business-to-business literature. Johnson and Sohi's (2001) used the construct of relational proclivity to look at interfirm relationships and demonstrated that firms do indeed vary in this aspect. They call relational proclivity a predisposition or characteristic exhibited by the firm that shows the firm seeks relationships because they view relationships as advantageous, i.e. that the rewards outweigh the costs and risks of the relationship. Like many who write about relationships, they cite reciprocity and its expectation of future benefits as a key motivational

factor. This indicates that the social niceties and approval seeking may take a back seat to economic calculation in social exchange.

Similarly, research has demonstrated that retail consumers vary in their desire to have a relationship with a salesperson or organization (Beatty et al. 1996; Garbarino and Johnson 1999). De Wulf, Oderkerken-Schroder, and Iacobucci (2001) successfully modeled consumer relationship proneness as a moderator between perceptions of relationship marketing efforts by retail salespeople and the resulting relationship quality. In doing so, they found that interpersonal communication determined how the relationship marketing efforts were perceived by consumers. They recommended the disclosure of "warm and personal feelings towards customers (p.46)." Stories may serve as a vehicle for such disclosures.

Relationship orientation as used by Palmatier et al. (2008) combines earlier thinking with new aspects. They assert that this variation in desire for relationships occurs within as well as between customers depending on the particulars of the product and elements of the specific exchange; they say relationship orientation is "an assessment of relational value in a given exchange context (Palmatier et al. 2008, p. 175)." Thus they extend earlier thinking on relationship tendencies to include aspects specific to the current exchange. Their results indicated that relationship orientation does moderate the effects of relationship marketing activities on customer evaluations of the salesperson.

Summary

The foregoing discussion reveals several streams of research from different disciplines that highlight the potential link between personal sales, relationship building and

storytelling. They illustrate the importance storytelling has in our daily lives and organizations; particularly as we attempt to form opinions of ourselves and others. Psychologists have also outlined specific mechanisms such as ease of encoding, development of scripts and heuristics, and narrative transportation to help explain the power of stories (Gerrig 1993; Schank 1990). Together these divergent streams of literature serve as both motivation and touchstone for an inquiry into storytelling and relationship building in personal selling.

CHAPTER III

QUALITATIVE STUDY

No research stream exists in marketing to delineate the functional use of storytelling by the sales force. The aforementioned practitioner and peer reviewed management literature can serve as a jumping off point. The efforts of psychologists, findings from research in advertising, and guidelines from the humanities can also form a basis for the present inquiry.

Yet, the initial outline remains blurred and untested, placing the project in the developmental stage. Qualitative techniques often serve well during exploration and conceptualization where the accumulated knowledge is insufficient to support hypothesis formation; this is particularly true in areas which are difficult to quantify, dynamic, highly contextually dependent, and socially complex (Bonoma 1985; Eisenhardt 1989). Storytelling embodies these research challenges (Boje 1991). Each telling is in effect a onetime only performance: the teller cannot exactly repeat the telling, and the hearer will never again be ignorant of the story's outcome – a necessary condition for the story to have the intended effect (Leitch 1986).

Research Method

The intention of this research is to begin work toward a generalizable theory that will yield testable hypotheses. The qualitative methods must be carefully chosen to accomplish this goal (Eisenhardt 1989). I meld earlier ideas from the relevant literature with those expressed by practitioners during field work. Others have blazed the trail for this type of research. "We sought to develop a holistic framework that integrates insights from our fieldwork with existing literature (Workman et al. 1998, p. 26)." A review by Homburg et al. (2000) of the qualitative work used between 1984 and 1999 in the Journal of Marketing and the Journal of Marketing Research resulted in further distillation of these qualitative techniques.

Beatty et al. (1996) use a similar combination of a priori literature themes and qualitative work in exploring customer-to-salesperson relationships in a retail setting. Ahearne, Jelinek, and Jones (2007) employed a similar literature review and qualitative study combination in a sales context. Additional guidance in conducting qualitative research in a manner compatible with a positivist/realist epistemology comes from the extensive work in this vein by Miles and Huberman (Miles and Huberman 1984, 1994). This approach will later facilitate a smooth transition from qualitative to quantitative methods.

Sample and Data Collection

To begin the field research, I interviewed 6 buyers (2 female and 4 male) and 1 purchasing manager (male) from a privately owned, medium sized manufacturer of industrial equipment located in the south central United States. Buyer informants were selected purposively ("theoretical" sampling procedure as in Tuli, Kohli, and Bharadwaj 2007) based

on the likelihood that they had ongoing contact with multiple salespersons for the same item. The interviews lasted an average of 45 minutes (35 to 75 minutes) and were conducted at the interviewees' offices by the author. After spending a few minutes on open ended questions about their relationships with salespersons, the interviews became increasingly structured to ensure that the researcher gathered information believed to be relevant to storytelling as determined in the literature search. The interviews were audiotape recorded and immediately transcribed. Similar interviews were conducted with 11 salespersons and 1 sales manager (all male) of the same firm who interacted with national accounts or supported dealers. There were 18 interviews overall at this firm. Additionally, a buyer and a sales manager (both male) from a much smaller, family owned industrial and commercial supply house located in the south central United States were interviewed using the same process. There were a total of 21 interviews.

The interviews were followed by two days of "ride along" observation of two previously uninterviewed salespeople (both male) from the small family owned supply house (the second firm). The author spent one day with each salesperson as they meet with established clients. Each day the salesperson called on 13 buyers for a total of 26 sales encounters lasting on average 20 minutes each. Buyers were asked no questions by the researcher to minimize interference with the sales encounter and maintain natural conversation. Field notes were discretely taken during the encounter or immediately afterwards if discretion was not possible. The ride along observations served the purpose of seeing that the sentiments expressed in the interviews corresponded with what was actually observed in the field. This was done to uncover possible bias or oversight on the part of the

interviewees in reporting their storytelling and listening activity. No storytelling activities were observed that contradicted the information disclosed in the interviews.

There were 13 salespeople and sales managers plus 8 buyers and purchasing managers interviewed. With the 2 ride along salespeople and their 26 customers, a total of 15 sellers and 34 buyers were interviewed or observed, for a grand total of 49 people in the study. See table 1 for a breakdown of participant characteristics.

Table 1 – Participant Characteristics

Participant Group	Total Number	Firm*	Career Stages	Gender
Buyers	6	A – 6	Junior – 1 Middle – 3 Senior – 2	M – 4 F – 2
Purchasing Managers	2	A – 1 B – 1	Middle – 1 Senior – 1	M – 2
Salespeople	11	A – 11	Junior – 2 Senior - 9	M – 11
Sales Managers	2	A – 1 B – 1	Middle – 1 Senior – 1	M – 2
Salespeople on Ride Along Observation	2	B – 2	Middle – 1 Senior – 1	M – 2
Customers on Ride Along Observation	26	B – 26	All Stages Represented	
Totals **	49	A – 19 B – 30	Junior – 3 Middle – 6 Senior – 14	

* Firm A – medium sized manufacturer of industrial equipment
   Firm B – small commercial supply house
** Customers on Ride Along Observation not included in Career Stages totals

Analysis

Comparison and reasoning played important roles in the iterative process of data reduction and the amalgamation of resulting themes (Miles and Huberman 1994). The method does not rely entirely on quantitative analysis of coding (Homburg et al. 2000),

which sometimes highlights frequency as a surrogate for importance . Though frequency of

mention remains important (Bendapudi and Leone 2002), in addition to frequency of

mention, the author also considered the strength of the interviewees' conviction and

reasoning, and a judgment about his or her apparent experience and powers of observation in

deciding how to weight comments. This involves frequently stepping back to ask, "What's

going on here (Miles and Huberman 1984, p. 27)?" This goes beyond a simple tabulation of

codes and involves extrapolation of evidence in light of what is already known to form the

big picture of storytelling during sales encounters.

Table 2 – Data Collection and Analytical Process

Purpose	To outline the basic parameters of storytelling by salespeople within the sales environment and ascertain buyers' reactions to storytelling.
Data Collection	Depth Interviews – Average 45 minute interviews at two firms of 13 sellers and 8 buyers at the participants' location. Interviews began with open questions and became more structured. Over the course of the study questions were added to explore freshly exposed areas of interest. Ride Along Observation – Conducted to determine if the sentiments expressed in the interviews could be observed in the field. Two days of ride along observation of sales encounters with previously uninterviewed salespeople from a small commercial supply house. 13 established customers were met each day for a total of 26. Encounters averaged 20 minutes and were all at the customer's location. Researcher interaction with customers was minimal.
Data Analysis	The data were analyzed in light of the earlier literature review (Workman et al. 1998; Homburg et al. 2000). Two researchers independently reviewed the interview transcripts to code them and amalgamate themes. The researchers then compared themes and found minor incongruencies that were resolved.

The transcripts of the interviews were independently analyzed by two researchers,

one of whom was the author. Each researcher separately coded the transcripts into important

comments that were then amalgamated into themes (Miles and Huberman 1994). Afterwards

the researchers compared the independent themes to form agreed on themes. There was agreement on all themes after resolution of minor differences on some themes (Bendapudi and Leone 2002). The data collection and analytical process is summarized in table 2.

The Interviews

In this section, the themes which emerged during the interviews are expounded. Though the themes are arranged roughly in order of emphasis that does not necessarily imply order of importance, particularly in any specific context. Each theme is followed by quotes from the interviewees that serve as exemplars for that theme's origin. The names of all interviewees have been changed to protect their identity.

1) Stories Are Powerful Tools

Salespeople believed that stories provide a powerful communication tool applicable to many situations. They expressed confidence in the ability of stories to entertain, persuade and relax prospects and customers, even when told with only modest skill. They believed stories were very useful for establishing credibility. They used stories to disclose information about themselves and their companies. Buyers agreed that stories represent an acceptable and useful sales tool within the limits described below in succeeding themes. Interestingly, it appeared that buyers were surprised by how often they told stories in explaining their needs and problems to salespeople. Perhaps buyer stories are not engendered by persuasion attempts or used as a tactical tool, and thus buyers may place little cognitive effort into forming or telling the stories so they pass unnoticed as natural conversation.

A veteran salesperson thought stories were credibility builders as they gave empirical evidence of expertise.

> I think stories are very important and they can give you credibility if you are talking business and you can share experience and validate your expertise about what you have done or seen and that has helped in our business a lot since we do a lot of different processes. (Larry)

Stories play a role for salespeople in explaining what is unique about their company or product that a buyer might relate to their own situation, like the company history.

> Yes, because it comes up in conversation because they might say something like 'how did you get the name _____' and most want to know if we are a publicly traded company so I tell them ____ and give them a little background and to a lot of people that is big. (Manny)

A mid-career buyer was busy expressing that she was more interested in the business than the personal side of the relationship, a theme that arises later, but her comments reveal how important stories can be, particularly as they relate to sharing company values and norms.

> Oh tremendously, I like to hear about their values and see if they are in line with this company more than anything else. I want to know if they have had one owner or traded hands a million times, that is very important, even more so than the personal. (Gert)

2) Appropriate Stories Can Be Persuasive and Build Relationships

Both groups agreed that stories are compelling and help in building relationships, especially when they are definitely applicable to the hearer's situation. So for a success story to be deemed applicable, the buyer must be able to see themselves replicating the success. For the company history story to be applicable, the buyer must gather that the selling organization's origin, size, characteristics or values are somehow germane to fulfilling the buyer's needs. Personal stories told by either member of the dyad should resonate with personal or at least general human interest to be most effective.

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A junior salesperson used personal stories to help build relationships by becoming

embedded in the buyer's personal narrative.

> I think it helps cement the relationship, for example [I] was with a
> customer and we were talking about business and after that all wrapped
> up I asked him about his new baby , his favorite football team that was
> playing that weekend and that is how we ended and I think that helps
> cement that relationship. (Moe)

A sales manager had similar feelings when asked about stories and relationships.

Note he includes second hand stories told about the salesperson, an interesting addition to the

risk reduction aspect of stories.

> I think in our business they [stories] are very important, whether they
> are stories that you have told or stories that have been told about you I
> think the _____ [specific industry] industry as a whole thrives on
> success stories. Like stories where people are doing unattainable acts
> with our equipment or kind of like legend stories. It gets back to I have
> a few guys that can walk back into a dealership and have credibility
> because of the stories that have been told about that person and what
> they can accomplish. The things that get us excited are the stories that
> get brought back from the field. (Barton)

A veteran salesperson related why he thought that disclosure was an important part of

building relationships. Notice the mention of honesty, a frequent occurrence when

salespeople discussed storytelling.

> Sure, the things that are important to me I do share that. I think that is
> part of revealing yourself to them and that is part of that relationship. It
> is important to be very forth coming to have an honest relationship.
> (Matt)

3) Stories Are Useful when Problems Arise

Another particular type of story involves an explanation of how a problem occurred.

Salespeople apparently underestimate the power of a story when problems occur. This may

result from fear of an explanatory story sounding like an excuse to the buyer. Some

salespeople even stated they specifically avoid stories about problems and simply tell buyers

they will fix it. Buyers on the other hand declared that a plausible story about the cause can

reassure them that the trouble had a unique source and will not recur.

Though many sales people simply wanted to address problems by saying they would

just take care of it, some did realize that an appropriate and well timed story could defuse a

difficult situation when a problem occurred.

> Absolutely, I think that is when oral communication is important and
> sometimes you have to let them vent first and then explain. I never take
> it personal. (Lee)

Two mid-career buyers summed up the general feeling among buyers that knowing is

better than not knowing the root cause of a problem in that it helps to reduce uncertainty.

> Well I think the explanation is important and the more you can learn
> about the issue the better you have with dealing with it and it could be
> something that we caused and maybe we can come to a mutual
> agreement. (Leo)

> The explanation is very important, if you went to someone and said I
> have a problem with this part and they say trash it and we will credit
> you then they are not trying to find a solution. But someone with an
> explanation seems like they are trying to help you find a solution. (Joe)

4) Salespeople and Buyers Disagree on the Primacy of Personal Relationships

One key area of disagreement between salespeople and buyers was on the importance

of the personal relationship versus the business relationship. Salespeople believed that the

personal side of the relationship should come first chronologically and that it was generally

more important overall. Buyers were even more adamant that the business relationship was

crucial, as it was the entire point of the association. In fact, the personal side is optional to

most buyers, though they acknowledge that personal relationships can improve the

interpersonal comfort level and assist in opening communications. One female buyer related that the salesperson she had the best relationship with had called on her frequently for fourteen years yet she was unaware of what the salesperson's hobbies where or if they had children. Personal disclosure is not needed up front by buyers, and more appropriately comes over time as a byproduct of building the business relationship. Buyers were in fact indignant at the thought that they choose products based more on personal relationships than business necessity. It may be that rather than buying things from people we like, in truth we like people we buy things from, which has very different implications for salespeople. So while salespeople are frantically scanning buyers' offices looking for evidence of a shared hobby, similarly aged children or a common vacation experience from which to weave a story, buyers are waiting in vain for a cogent explanation of the value they might receive from doing business with this salesperson. Buyers further complained somewhat bitterly about how generic and unsubstantiated most of the value propositions made by salespeople where when they did get around to business topics. Buyers did not mind a little small talk as a social nicety, but what they really desired was an efficient discovery of their needs by the salesperson and a credible explanation of how the salesperson could cost effectively meet them.

One junior salesperson had a strong but not atypical view among salespeople as to whether the personal or the business relationship should come first.

For me it is absolutely personal [first]. (Martin)

A sales manager concurred.

Correct, they need the personal relationship before they are effective with the business relationship, because a lot of times those dealers have invested in the dealership with personal capital. It is very important we don't move the sales guys around to get to know their territory. (Burton)

One veteran buyer immediately began discussing the business side of the equation when asked about storytelling building business or personal relationships. Note also the mention of knowledge exchange.

> On the business end, there are instances where buyers don't have a lot of understanding about their products and the processes that go into them. Through the relationships built, we come to understand that I do understand the process they go through and their product. It's a communication and knowledge exchange. Both of us are very eager to learn about each other's company and what they do. (Ruth)

Another veteran buyer questioned the value of trying to establish a personal relationship for its own sake.

> Over the course of time anyone that spends any time together is going to naturally develop a relationship with one another. If I know a person, I don't even have to like them, and they are calling on me and we have expressed interest we can begin talking about that and find common ground but I don't know how fruitful that is and how much can grow out of that seed. If we worked together and both invested time then there is probably more value in that relationship. (Phil)

One mid-career buyer put it bluntly when asked about the effect of a successful personal relationship he had with a favored salesperson.

> As far as business decisions it really doesn't have an effect on it, it is just making a connection or breaking the ice for conversations.
> Yes I can be a business friend but I am going to make the decision not based upon the relationship but what is best for our company overall through the whole process. (Leo)

5) Stories Must Be Relevant to the Buyer

Buyers were quite adamant that for a story to be effective it must be clearly relevant to the buyer's case. This is true of stories about products, customer success, company history or personal anecdotes. Salespeople seemed aware of this and often added that the story should be interesting to the buyer and that brevity substantially improves chances for successful storytelling.

A junior salesperson felt relevance was a critical element of a good story so that the buyers could relate and incorporate the gist of the story into their schema.

> It really has to relate to the customer, if the customer is a _____[specific industry] and you tell a story about a _____ [different specific industry] then he doesn't care. You have to qualify the customer before anything. (Moe)

A veteran salesperson brought the idea of appropriateness and relevance into sharp focus from a tactical viewpoint. Stories out of left field simply do not mesh with any existing schema and may require as much cognitive effort to incorporate as factual statements do.

> Don't bore the customer, don't be too long, and always tune in on what they want to hear. Typically you are not in a position to tell a story until you know that customer and what they like to do. (Matt)

One veteran salesperson who indicated he believed he was a good storyteller thought that making the story relevant to the listener was in fact the main element of a good story.

> I think it is the ability to identify the key points of that listener and to relate to them. (Tony)

A veteran buyer revealed that stories can have a very different impact due to changing relevance as the relationship progresses and disclosures are made.

> That is what I mean, it should be relevant. If they come in for a first meeting and start sharing their success stories with what they have done with company 'xyz' I am not with them. Anybody can do that and that is what I expect a salesman to do. However, if I have a need and I met with them a couple of times and they tell me what their company can do and share how they have helped someone else in a similar situation I am now listening and now I am attentive. Same success stories but different results. (Phil)

6) Icebreaker Stories Are Common and Accepted within Limits

Salespeople said they sought to establish common ground through observation of personal items in the buyer's office that would allow them to remark about a mutual interest.

Some buyers had initial meetings in a open area to avoid this, but that was the exception, perhaps for practical reasons. Buyers acknowledged awareness that this icebreaker story is a tactical tool but that they do not mind it within reasonable bounds. Salespeople seemed fully aware of this acquiescence by buyers, with some even saying it was a game and everyone involved knew this.

Two mid-career buyers reflected the general attitude among buyers toward salespersons' tactical efforts to find common ground at the beginning of an encounter.

> Sure, it is just something to break the ice and to get into a business mode after that and they are trying to have a personal connection with you too. (Leo)

> Yes I have seen that a lot, but granted we don't take a lot of vendors to our desk, but when we did I did see that a lot. I don't have a problem with it but I also know what it is. (Gert)

7) Story Quality and Storytelling Ability Affect How Stories Are Received

They may have curvilinear effects, becoming noticeably more powerful at higher levels. Salespeople feel high story quality and storytelling ability are very helpful but not absolutely necessary to experience benefits from telling stories. Buyers were more inclined to discount the effects of varying story quality or delivery skill, except perhaps at high levels. Both do agree that an exceptionally strong ability to tell a story can be an advantage in communication and buyers admitted it might make a salesperson more persuasive at times. It seemed possible that buyers were reluctant to admit they were persuaded by stories, as this stood in contrast to salespeople expressing the opposite sentiment by saying stories can be quite compelling. The groups agreed that story content trumps storytelling style and that humorous stories are a good thing in measured quantities.

Speaking on story quality versus storytelling ability, one veteran salesperson thought story quality was more important.

> I think the story is the most important thing but it [storytelling ability] can help emphasize the story if they are interesting and can present it well. (Curtis)

A sales manager expressed the belief that a strong correlation exists between storytelling skills and both good communications and sales success.

> I don't know that is something we look for when we hire, but I do know that in the long run those people in sales and in the marketing department have to be good at communicating and the ones that are most successful probably have the highest degree of story skill. (Burton)

A junior salesperson related his feelings on storytelling eloquence and its effects, including the ability to persuade.

> Yes it is important, the smoother you are the more you can hold their attention. (Moe)

8) *Stories Can Have Negative Effects*

Stories can have a downside, particularly when they are interminable, irrelevant or irreverent. Buyers assert and salespeople seem conscious that there are topics that are best eschewed with religion, sex and politics being specifically mentioned. Salespeople tried to steer clear of almost any sensitive topic with customers they did not know extremely well. Still, buyers mentioned cases where salespeople had crossed the line in topic choice. Most salespeople indicated they had made mistakes in the past in choosing stories and felt that the reaction of the customer made it easy to see when this happens. One critical but unanswered question is how often salespeople commit a miscue without realizing it.

One junior salesperson claimed he always knew when he had erred in telling a story, and admitted he had done so more than once. Others agreed with his ideas on body language and some mentioned tone of voice.

> Oh yes a 100%. If you can read body language at all you can tell unless they try to hold back their feelings. (Martin)

A mid-career buyer was unsure why salespeople launch into inappropriate stories but she was certain that there were negative consequences for doing so.

> I don't know, maybe they just feel comfortable sharing that and yes I do think there are downsides to it because this is a business and we are trying to have a business relationship. (Gert)

Summary

The qualitative study shed light on a previously unexplored area. Establishing basic facts such as that salespeople do intentionally tell stories, that they do so for specific effects like breaking the tension in a conversation or attempting to demonstrate a product's capabilities, and that buyers perceive these communications as stories and find them acceptable were necessary starting points in building the theoretical foundations for further research. The themes also exposed deeper issues, such as the difference of emphasis on the personal and business sides of the relationship by sellers and buyers respectively.

The qualitative study thus begins to fill in the gaps in understanding we have about the unique use of stories in a sales setting. The themes extrapolated in the qualitative study will serve to help build a framework for the quantitative studies of Chapter IV. From this framework, a set of hypotheses are proposed and tested in three separate studies.

CHAPTER IV

QUANTITATIVE STUDY

The qualitative study in Chapter III addressed broad questions concerning the effects of storytelling in a sales setting in general and also on buyer-seller relationships specifically. The data analysis resulted in the extraction of eight general themes. In the quantitative study, these themes served as a guide for creating a framework for storytelling by the sales force that can be a basis for models that test the effects of storytelling. As stated in Chapter I, the research question for the quantitative study is:

> What effect do different types of stories have on the buyer's perceptions of the salesperson and the product?

Answering this question will shed light on the effects of storytelling as a tactical sales tool and also its impact on buyer-seller relationships. This will provide information that is useful to sales researchers for developing future studies, to managers for selection and training, and to salespeople in honing persuasion tactics and building relationships.

This chapter is organized as follows. First I discuss stories and develop a framework for storytelling by the sales force followed by a series of hypotheses and models relying on the earlier literature search and qualitative study. Three studies are then described in detail. An overall summary of the quantitative studies together concludes the chapter.

Storytelling

Humans are inveterate storytellers and frequently employ stories as a way to reveal information about themselves (Jahandarie 1999). We use stories to point out key information about our environment too (Levitt and March 1988). Stories allow easy communication partly because of the dense amount of embedded information they contain, which hearers extract through inference (Chatman 1978; Schank and Abelson 1977). Sequential ordering in stories from beginning to middle to end implies causality and also allows the hearer to accurately interpret stories via story grammar (Bal 1985). Employing our sense of narrative coherence (i.e. that the story must hang together as a coherent whole) we mix background knowledge, story content and a working knowledge of story grammar to infer causality in stories and extract the embedded information (Chatman 1978; Gerrig 1993). In fact, stories are such a "basic mental structure" that children in most cultures begin to grasp story grammar by three years of age (Green and Donahue 2009, p. 241). Salespeople can use stories to convincingly demonstrate important personal and product traits by revealing what they and their products have, can, and will do more effectively than by argument, i.e. by facts or lists of information. Stories express causality and allow people to answer the 'why' questions about their environment in a compact, holistic and easily digested manner (Schank and Abelson 1995).

This data reduction capability of stories helps us to simplify reality. Story skeletons or the gist of stories allow the construction of frameworks for organizing perception of the environment helping us to deal with an information intensive world (Bruner 1986). Pennington and Hastie (1992) demonstrated that jurors found evidence presented in story

form more persuasive and conducive to decision making than when presented as an argument in factual or list form. It seems probable consumers would also find that stories facilitate complex evaluations of salespeople and products. Psychologists propose that people fold together stories in forming a view of their past, present and future that informs their self-image and their image of others for relationship purposes; it also informs the view of our environment for evaluative purposes (Gergen and Gergen 1988; McAdams 1993). Stories may thus play a role in evaluations of salespeople and products as customers absorb the experiences of others vicariously by hearing them recounted.

Narrative transportation theory (NTT) helps to explain this vicarious knowledge acquisition (Gerrig 1993). Narration or narrative refers to the telling of a story. NTT was developed to broaden the understanding of narrative processing beyond that provided by dual process models like the elaboration likelihood model (Phillips and McQuarrie 2010). NTT presumes that people are transported to the world of the narrative where they employ aesthetically based narrative processing rather than paradigmatically oriented analytical processing (Gerrig 1994; Green and Brock 2000). Researchers have shown that narrative processing leads to less critical product evaluations due to lower negative cognitive response, increased realism of experience, and greater affective response (Escalas 2007).

Aesthetically based narrative processing is holistic in nature versus the more piecemeal or "logico-scientific" orientation of analytical processing; narrative processing encapsulates the "particulars of experience" in that, "It deals with human or human-like intention and action and the vicissitudes and consequences that mark their course (Bruner 1986, p. 13)." That is, narrative processing allows people to operate and make decisions, often by the construction of causal models and heuristics, in a world fraught with ambiguity,

vagueness, uncertainty, and a general lack of information (Robinson and Hawpe 1986). We use stories to grasp the big picture, "Narrative structuring draws on the arguments of action: the agent, the action itself, the situation, the intention or goal, and the instruments of action (Zukier 1986, p. 475)." Zukier counters that paradigmatic or analytical processing of arguments on the other hand addresses truth in terms of verifiability or falsifiability.

In interpreting stories through narrative processing, we thus have a tendency to think holistically rather than to conduct a piecemeal evaluation of each statement as typically occurs in evaluation of a list or argument via analytical processing (Adaval and Wyer 1998). Such holistic narrative processing may produce the reduced counter arguing postulated by narrative transportation theorists (Escalas 2004a). Narrative processing of stories seemingly accepts the bounded rationality of human cognition, constructs the most plausible inferences from available information, at least partially discounts some contradictory evidence, and finally produces a reduced narrative or story gist that can then be used in forming heuristics and direct decision making (Bruner 1986; McGregor and Holmes 1999; Gerrig 1993). Arguments on the other hand lack the contextual aspects and assertions of causality in stories that are grist for the narrative processing mill, and so customers have little recourse when presented with an argument than to resort to analytical processing (Zukier 1986).

Framework for Storytelling by the Sales Force

Theme four from the qualitative study, *salespeople and buyers disagree on the primacy of personal relationships*, revealed a fundamental dichotomy in how salespeople and buyers view relationships. The salespeople envisioned personal connections as the

foundation of all relationship dimensions. As related in Chapter III, one common view was

expressed succinctly by a junior salesperson.

> For me it is absolutely personal [first]. (Martin)

Buyers on the other hand said that the relationship existed for business reasons and that any

personal matters were secondary to the point of being unnecessary in some cases. One mid-

career buyer put it bluntly when asked about the effect of a successful personal relationship

he had with a favored salesperson.

> As far as business decisions it really doesn't have an effect on it, it is
> just making a connection or breaking the ice for conversations.
> Yes I can be a business friend but I am going to make the decision not
> based upon the relationship but what is best for our company overall
> through the whole process. (Leo)

This called into question the efforts salespeople expend in making personal connections with

buyers and this question certainly extends to storytelling efforts.

The humanities literature recognizes the point of view from which a story is told as a

fundamental aspect of a story which addresses the spatiotemporal placement of events

(Toolan 1988). "The problem of point of view is narrative's own problem, one that it does

not share with lyric or dramatic literature, (Scholes and Kellogg 1966, p. 240)." This point of

view or perspective or voice, represents part of the narrative mode the speaker uses to deliver

the story and whether the story is delivered in first or third person is the most obvious sign of

point of view; note that stories are seldom delivered in second person (Cohan and Shires

1988; Kercheval 1997). An important outcome of stories necessarily being told from a point

of view is that we are never dealing with raw observations but rather observations after

passing through a certain prism (Todorov 1981). So a salesperson delivering a story from a

personal point of view would employ the first person and when delivering a story from the business's point of view they would use the third person.

Another fundamental aspect of a story is the topic (Truby 2007). Potential topics are naturally extremely varied and can span all of human experience (Kercheval 1997). Dividing these topics into three broad categories will help make storytelling by the sales force accessible to analysis, the natural point of making a framework (Bailey 1994). Though many topics and genres are recognized in narratology, poetics, movie criticism, and advertising, the qualitative study and objective observation of salespeople in the field helped to determine which topics are critical in the sales setting. Described and motivated below are three topics of interest in the sales setting: the entity, the product, and digression. Table 3 shows the topics as they relate to each point of view and the cells contain the types of stories that would be expected to result.

Table 3 – Framework for Storytelling by the Sales Force

Topic Point of view	Entity	Product	Digression
Personal	Disclosure of self	Product success – 1st person	Human interest – 1st person
Business	Disclosure of firm	Product success – 3rd person	Human interest – 3rd person

Stories about the entity topic are either about the self if told from a personal point of view or the firm if told from a business point of view. These often take the form of direct disclosures of values, goals, ideas, experiences, capabilities, etc. about the person or the firm (Taylor, Fisher, and Dufresne 2002). In the qualitative study, salespeople said they recognized how important disclosures can be, particularly early in a relationship.

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> Sure, the things that are important to me I do share that. I think that is
> part of revealing yourself to them and that is part of that relationship. It
> is important to be very forth coming to have an honest relationship.
> (Matt)

Such disclosures can have a powerful impact on the buyer-seller relationship (Crosby, Evans, and Cowles 1990).

Stories about the product topic are either about product success known to the salesperson and told in the first person, or product success known to the business told in the third person. Salespeople felt strongly that product success stories were a key type of story and salespeople were often observed using such stories.

> I guess where we use stories is in examples of our equipment from
> demonstrations or good customer experiences and we relate that to what
> is going on with the customer at that time. (Tony)

Product success is defined broadly as stories relating a product's potential usefulness given its particular genesis and characteristics, or relating actual events in which the product performed well. First person product success stories could be testimonials of personal use or relate observation of customer use. Third person product success stories could be second hand stories of customer use passed on from other firm employees or reports from the firm's product experience.

Digression topics focus on human interests in the first person if told from a personal point of view and about human interests in the third person if told from the firm's point of view. Human interests 1st person includes small talk, current events and tales that relate aspects of the human condition. Human interests 3rd person could include stories about the economy, the industry, what competitors and business acquaintances are up to, etc. Salespeople said they recognized the values of all types of stories, even those on digression topics.

> …but they have to be appropriate to that person and sometimes they
> aren't even business related. (Matt)

Other salespeople commented that such stories were a great way to take a break and relax the

atmosphere, and salespeople were especially likely to be observed using these stories before

and after the core business discussions of the sales encounter. Casual banter or "water cooler

talk" like this makes up a substantial part of human communication about our environment

and plays a role in developing self image, other image, and in relationship building

(McAdams 1993).

HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Figure 1 – Theoretical Model for Study 1
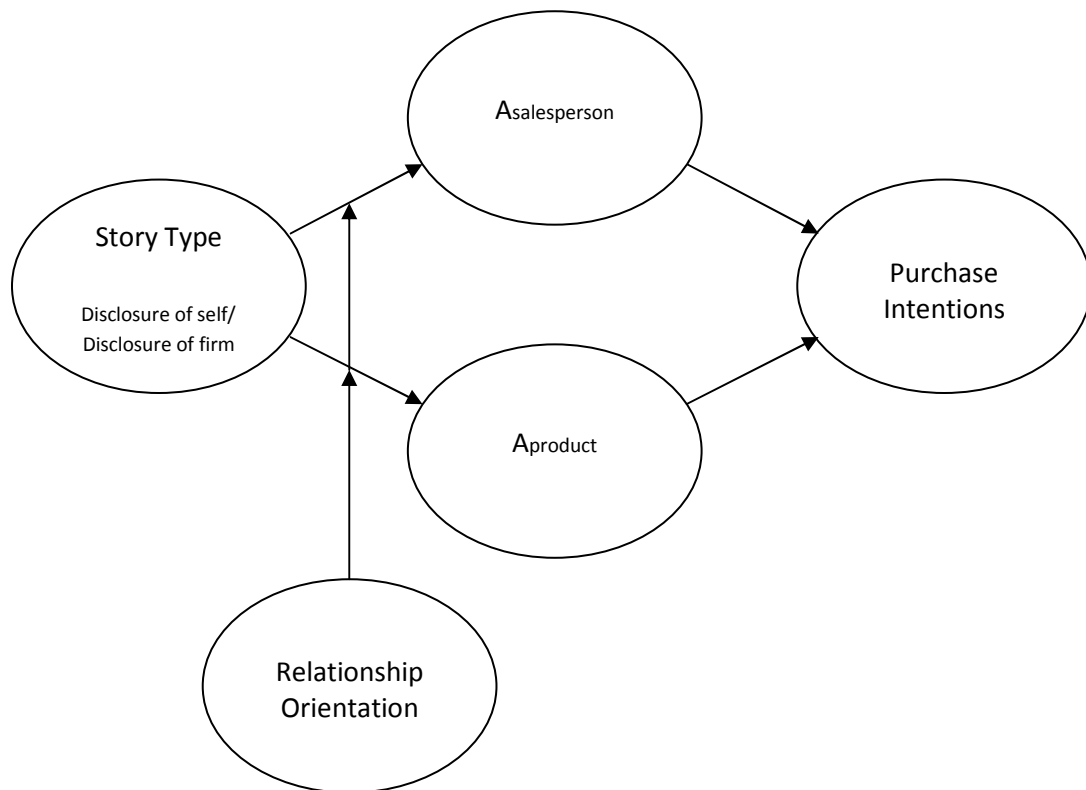
The research question for the quantitative study concerns possible differential effects for different types of stories. Theme 4, *salespeople and buyers disagree on the primacy of personal relationships*, suggests that buyers differentiate between business oriented and personally oriented material. The framework for storytelling by the sales force developed above will help determine if the business and personal stories the salesperson tells have different effects. Attempts by the salesperson to establish personal relationships may be less effective in influencing evaluations of products, and conversely attempts at establishing firm information may be less effective in influencing evaluations of the salesperson. Adapting sales tactics to meet the customer's communication desires is certainly a common practice, and may be most critical during early encounters (Roman and Iacobucci 2009). Divining the nature of the differential effect of business and personal stories can help salespeople communicate more effectively with the buyer.

The psychological mechanisms driving this differential effect could be as simple as exposure to personal stories gaining access to the customer's schemas and scripts about the salesperson but not as readily those of the product, while business stories gain access to the customer's schemas and scripts about the product but not as readily those about the salesperson (Bornstein 1989; Schank and Abelson 1977). Another mechanism rests on the widely held view of attitudes that evaluations rely on cognition in addition to affect (Eagly and Chaiken 1993). Further, reliance on and accessibility of cognitive and affective attitudes may not be consistent across our evaluations of people and things (Haddock and Zanna 2000). "In sum, it has been found that individuals differ in their reliance on cognition versus affect as determinants of attitude, and that the two components also take on different degrees of importance for different attitude objects (Ajzen 2001, p. 35)." Differing levels of reliance

on affect and cognition for evaluations of salespeople and products could explain the differential effects proposed for business versus personal stories. Hence, the affective nature of stories from a personal perspective may be more useful in influencing A$_{salesperson}$ than business stories. It may also simply be the case that the association between personal stories and salespeople is so close that they appear more pertinent to evaluation of the salesperson than the product with the same being true for business stories and products (Ajzen 2001).

Further, the effect stories have on our self narrative and our consequent relation to others and the environment may be different for personal and business stories (McAdams 1993). People find that, "such creations of narrative order may be essential for giving one's life meaning and direction, (Gergen and Gergen 1988, p. 19)." Thus a personal story may have a differential impact on evaluations from a business story as the two types will have a different relation to the customer's self narrative.

Personal stories thus more readily access interpersonal scripts and schemas, are more pertinent to and diagnostic of the salesperson than the product as an attitude object, and are more easily connected to the customer's self narratives than are business stories. A sales pitch in story form will have a differential impact on evaluations of salespersons and products depending on the type of story.

H 1a: Personal stories that make a disclosure about the salesperson will have a greater positive effect on the attitude toward the salesperson than do stories from a business point of view.

Business stories access the cognitive schemas and scripts the customer already holds about the product class and its potential use plus the possible benefits, thus allowing the sales pitch to become embedded in the customer's view of the product (Schank and Abelson 1977). Via the reduced negative cognitive responding predicted by narrative transportation

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theory, customers should produce fewer counter arguments during cognitive processing about the product when communication is in story form (Green 2005). Stories from a business point of view may thus be more effective in influencing the cognitive efforts customers make in evaluating products than are more affective personal stories. Further, the business story may seem more pertinent to and diagnostic of the product than of the salesperson as an attitude object (Ajzen 2001). Finally, business stories will affect the customer's self narrative differently than personal stories (Gergen and Gergen 1988; McAdams 1993).

H 1b: Business stories that make a disclosure about the firm will have a greater positive effect on the attitude toward the product than do stories from a personal point of view.

Given the extensive literature on relationship marketing and the evidence that relationships can reduce costs and provide valuable sales related benefits, it is not surprising that some believe more extensive relationships are better relationships (Palmatier et al. 2006). But not all customers seek strong relationships (Crosby et al. 1990). Some researchers have found that this variation in desire for relationships exists not only between customers, but also varies within customers given the particulars of the product and elements of the specific exchange; thus the relationship orientation of the customer is "an assessment of relational value in a given exchange context (Palmatier, Scheer, Evans and Arnold 2008, p. 175)." According to Palmatier et al. (2008), relationship orientation addresses a high Marketing Science Institute research priority for discovering what customers desire in a relationship.

Relationship orientation follows De Wulf, Oderkerken-Schroder, and Iacobucci's (2001) construct of relationship proneness in the business-to-consumer realm, and Johnson and Sohi's (2001) construct of relational proclivity from business-to-business studies.

However, relational orientation extends these by adding "exchange-specific factors" that might affect perceptions of salesperson's activities (Palmatier et al. 2008, p. 175). Relationship orientation expresses the customer's determination of where he or she wants the buyer-seller relationship to go and reflects the "need for relational governance (Palmatier et al. 2008, p 174)." Thus, it determines the degree to which the customer will seek an interpersonal connection with the salesperson and the processing of information from the sales encounter to achieve this connection.

Palmatier et al. (2008) demonstrated that the mechanism of varying relational desire moderates the effects of the salesperson's relationship marketing activities on evaluations of the salesperson. Sales encounters and relationship building impose social, time, and monetary costs on the customer (Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh 1987). These costs include time spent listening to personal stories and the "interpersonal reciprocity obligations of the buyer" especially since "An unreciprocated debt can cause the buyer personal discomfort," (Palmatier et al. 2008, p. 180). High relationship orientation customers thus willingly shoulder the added social costs of listening to personal stories as they are repaid in increased comfort with the transaction. Low relationship orientation customers may penalize a salesperson for imposing such costs as they do not receive compensatory comfort from a personal relationship with the salesperson. The mechanism of varying relational desire should thus moderate the effect of the salesperson's storytelling activities on $A_{salesperson}$.

H 2a: The relationship orientation of the customer will moderate the effect of story type on salesperson evaluations. The differential effect of personal stories versus business stories on the attitude toward the salesperson will be greater when the relationship orientation of the customer is high than when it is low.

As relationship orientation is specific to particular exchange circumstances, it already incorporates the customer's perceptions of the product and purchase decision environment (Palmatier et al. 2008). The customer's perceptions of the particular product along with situational and personal elements are factored into the customer's decision as to how important the product is to them (Bloch and Richins 1983). Customers may consider among other issues: hedonic and utilitarian aspects, whether the product is consumed socially or not, what signals the consumption sends to others, their own need for cognition and expertise, the likelihood of making a bad choice decision or the performance ambiguity of the product, and how unpleasant the resulting regret would be (Bloch and Richins 1983; Evrard and Aurier 1996; Nyer 1996; Voss, Spangenberg, and Grohmann 2003). The customer considers the resulting dependence on the product when forming a relationship orientation (Palmatier et al. 2008).

Varying degrees of relationship orientation will be reflected in substantially different evaluations of products and purchase situations. Low relationship orientation customers find the revelation of information about the firm helpful in discovering whether the transaction will be profitable and do not feel burdened by social costs for having listened to a business disclosure; they appreciate this disclosure (Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh 1987). High relationship orientation customers find that business stories do not provide as much comfort with the transaction as personal stories, i.e. they wished to make a social connection and incurred costs attempting this, but the opportunity to connect was not presented by a business story so these costs were not repaid. Thus, the moderating effect of relationship orientation should also extend to the effect of story type on $A_{product}$.

H 2b: The relationship orientation of the customer will moderate the effect of story type on product evaluations. The differential effect of business stories versus personal stories on the attitude toward the product will be greater when the relationship orientation of the customer is low than when it is high.

Research seeking to link personal attitudes to behavioral intentions has a long history and this relationship has an intuitive appeal (Alpert and Kamins 1995; Alwitt and Pitts 1996). Favorable attitude seems a natural precursor to forming behavioral intensions (Ajzen 2001). Modeling attitude toward products or brands as causal mechanisms for purchase intentions continues in recent research (Voss et al. 2003). Noriega and Blair (2008) modeled attitude toward fictional restaurant brands as a precursor to purchase intentions. Having a favorable attitude toward the brand or product should positively influence the customer's purchase intentions.

As a preamble to the discussion of the hypotheses on attitudes, it is important to note that the attitude toward the ad/brand literature makes a number of different hypotheses concerning possible mediation effects between these two constructs (MacKenzie, Lutz, and Belch 1986). A meta-analysis by Brown and Stayman (1992) showed some support for mediation of effects on attitude toward the brand by attitude toward the ad. It is unclear what this may imply for mediation between attitude toward the salesperson/product, but this literature combined with field observation implies it is quite possible that post hoc analysis will show that mediation does occur though it is difficult to accurately predict its form a priori.

DeCarlo (2005) modeled a link between attitude toward the salesperson and purchase intentions in a study of suspicion of ulterior motives and salesperson tactics. Relying on the work of Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) and Petty and Cacioppo (1986a) to develop their

hypothesis, they found a significant relationship. As is the case for favorable attitudes toward the product, favorable attitudes towards the salesperson should positively influence the customers purchase intentions.

In linking attitudes to purchase intentions, researchers following Ajzen and Fishbein (1975, 1980) rely on the beliefs→attitudes→intentions→behavior psychological model of behavior and accept, "… that the most immediate precursor of behavioral intention is attitude… (Oliver 1980, p. 461)." Attitudes are general evaluations of the attitude object and may have a behavioral, affective or cognitive base – as such they, "… are capable of influencing or guiding behavioral, affective, and cognitive processes (Petty and Cacioppo 1986b, p. 127)." Thus, attitudes are presumed to impact behavioral intentions. Thus, improved attitudes toward the agent selling the product will increase the customer's purchase intentions.

H 3a: Attitude toward the salesperson will be positively related to purchase intentions of the customer.

Improving the customer's attitude toward the product is a significant goal of both marketing and personal selling. Improved attitude toward the product should result in increased purchase intentions by the customer.

H 3b: Attitude toward the product will be positively related to purchase intentions of the customer.

Figure 1a – Expected results of study 1 for A_{salesperson}
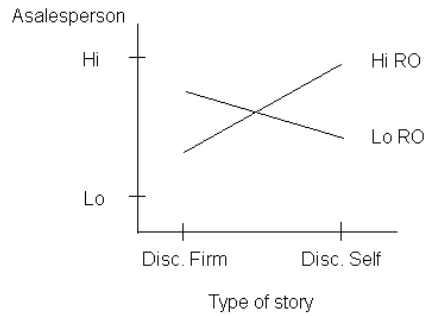
Hi RO customers desire the relationship building engendered by personal disclosures and find that business disclosures do not provide the same social comfort; they willingly shoulder the social costs of personal stories to obtain the relationship they want. Lo RO customers appreciate the salesperson relating information in a business story that will allow them to determine if the transaction will benefit them, but do not receive comfort from personal stories adequate to cover the social costs they impose; they may penalize the salesperson for telling personal stories.

Figure 1b – Expected results of study 1 for A_{product}
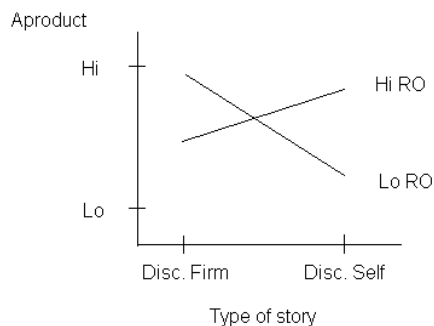
Hi RO customers prefer the personal connection afforded by the disclosures about the salesperson and don't mind social costs. Lo RO customers want the facts and prefer the more

product relevant nature of disclosures about the firm to the product and the low costs imposed by disclosures of the firm.

Figure 2 – Theoretical Model for Study 2
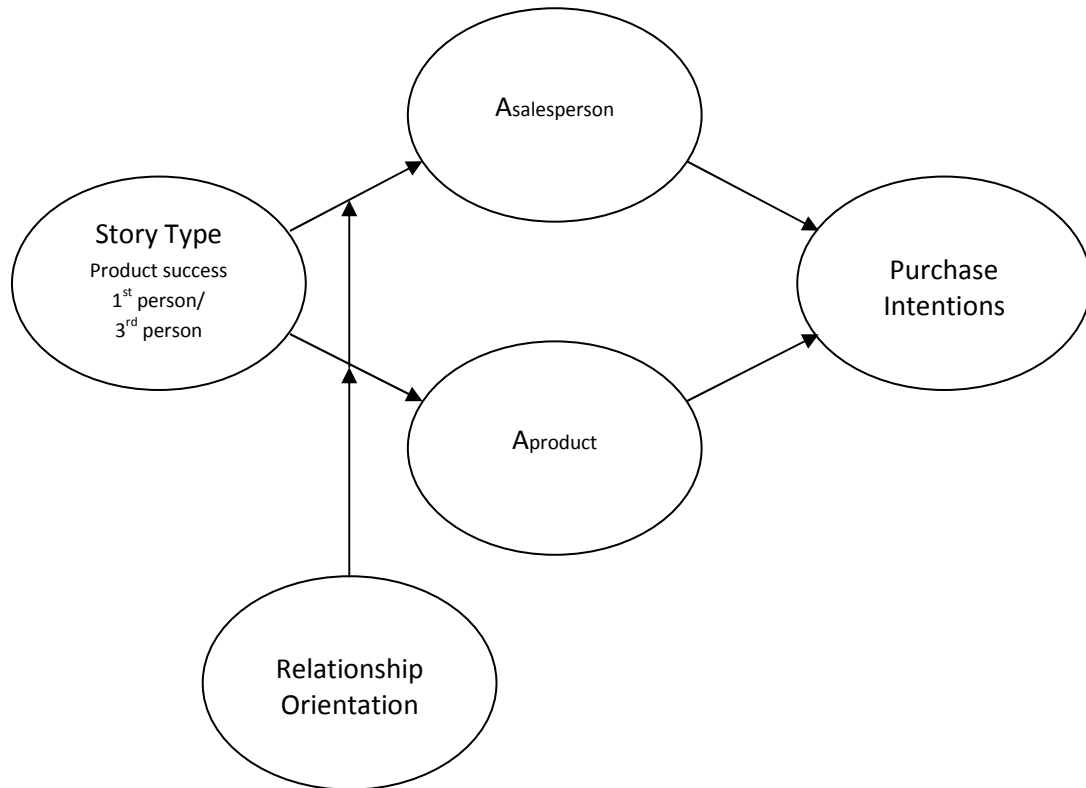
The qualitative study confirmed that salespeople frequently tell stories about the product and that they are effective in delivering information to the buyer. Product success stories may imply superiority over competitors because of peculiarities in design genesis such as patents, greater manufacturing capabilities due to newer factories, or a greater focus on customer needs through higher levels of interaction, among many other possible reasons.

Buyers seemed to expect and appreciate the delivery of these stories as an efficient way to communicate information so they could evaluate the transaction.

Stories about products were typically observed during the core of the sales encounter and constitute a top priority for both members of the dyad – the customer wants to find out about the details of the transaction and the salesperson is paid to complete a transaction. The product success story is at the heart of the transaction. Stories are naturally used to determine causality in our environment and serve to build a general framework for decision making and as fodder for heuristic development for easy decision making (McGregor and Holmes 1999; Schank and Abelson 1995). Customers use product success stories to position the salesperson, the product and the overall transaction relative to their own situation and self narrative (Gergen and Gergen 1988; McAdams 1993). In doing so they may incorporate ideas from the product story into their own self narrative and the other narrative they have of the salesperson.

This represents the typical holistic thinking that stories promote about causality involving self, other, and environment. As opposed to the context-free, abstract and scientifically testable nature of analytical thinking, "The product of narrative thought, story, is context-bound, concrete, and testable though ordinary interpersonal checking, (Robinson and Hawpe 1986, p. 114)." This interpersonal checking may result in changes in scripts, schemas, and self narratives. So the mechanisms described in H 1a apply to H 4a as well. Thus the product story from the personal point of view can serve as an important evaluation tool for the customer in determining $A_{salesperson}$.

H 4a: Personal stories about the salesperson's direct product success knowledge (1st person) will have a greater positive effect on the attitude toward the salesperson than do business stories about the firm's product success knowledge (3rd person).

The holistic processing of a product success story also leads to evaluation of the product. The product constitutes the main deliverable of the transaction and is thus the focus of considerable attention. The product success story from the business perspective can play a pivotal role in that, "Narrative thinking consists of creating a fit between a situation and a story schema, (Robinson and Hawpe 1986, p. 111)." The customer has a situation which is creating a need they wish to fill and information about the maker of the product is more helpful than information about the salesperson in deciding if the product will meet the need. The mechanisms discussed earlier in H 1b may also impact H 4b. Consequently the customer should find business stories more useful in forming $A_{product}$ than personal stories.

H 4b: Business stories about the firm's product success knowledge (3rd person) will have a greater positive effect on the attitude toward the product than do personal stories about the salesperson's direct product success knowledge (1st person).

The explanation of relationship orientation and its associated mechanisms in H 2a and H 2b applies here as well. Palmatier et al. (2008) demonstrated that the mechanism of varying relational desire moderates the effects of the salesperson's relationship marketing activities on evaluations of the salesperson. Those with high relationship orientation will find that product success 1st person stories provide the material for connecting personally with the salesperson so they do not mind the costs imposed. Low relationship customers penalize the salesperson for imposing unreturned social costs. The mechanisms of varying relational desire should moderate the effect of the salesperson's product success 1st person stories on $A_{salesperson}$.

H 5a: The relationship orientation of the customer will moderate the effect of story type on salesperson evaluations. The differential effect of personal stories versus business stories on the attitude toward the salesperson will be greater when the relationship orientation of the customer is high than when it is low.

The explanation of relationship orientation and its associated mechanisms in H 2a and H 2b applies here as well. The varying desire for a relationship with the salesperson will cause customers to vary in whether they find product topic information of a personal or business nature more diagnostic of product characteristics. Those with a low relationship orientation will find that the attributions they can make about the product with business point of view stories are more compelling than those made with personal point of view stories. They appreciate being told and experience low costs. High relationship orientation people experience the time costs of listening to business related stories without having their social needs met.

H 5b: The relationship orientation of the customer will moderate the effect of story type on product evaluations. The differential effect of business stories versus personal stories on the attitude toward the product will be greater when the relationship orientation of the customer is low than when it is high.

The rational for H 6a is the same as that for H 3a.

H 6a: Attitude toward the salesperson will be positively related to purchase intentions of the customer.

The rational for H 6b is the same as that for H 3b.

H 6b: Attitude toward the product will be positively related to purchase intentions of the customer.

Figure 2a –Expected results of study 2 for A$_{salesperson}$
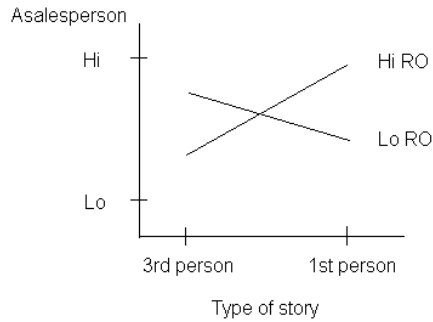
Hi RO customers are more concerned with the characteristics of the salesperson than the firm as try to form a relationship with the salesperson even though it imposes social costs. Lo RO customers desire the generalizable results of wider experience about the product and appreciate the salesperson relating them in a way that does not impose social costs. This helps Lo RO people have confidence the transaction will be successful.

Figure 2b –Expected results of study 2 for A$_{product}$
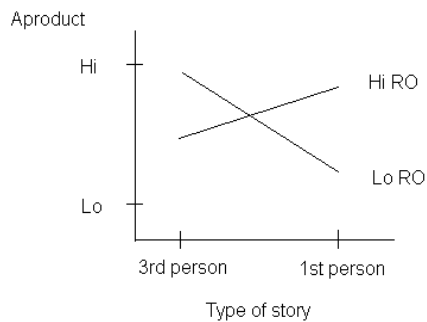
Lo RO customers consider 3rd person product success stories more useful in determining product performance as they are more generalizable to product characteristics than 1st person stories and come without social costs. Hi RO customers gain confidence in the product through hearing of personal experiences as this affords them the personal connection they desire in spite of social costs.

Figure 3 – Theoretical Model for Study 3
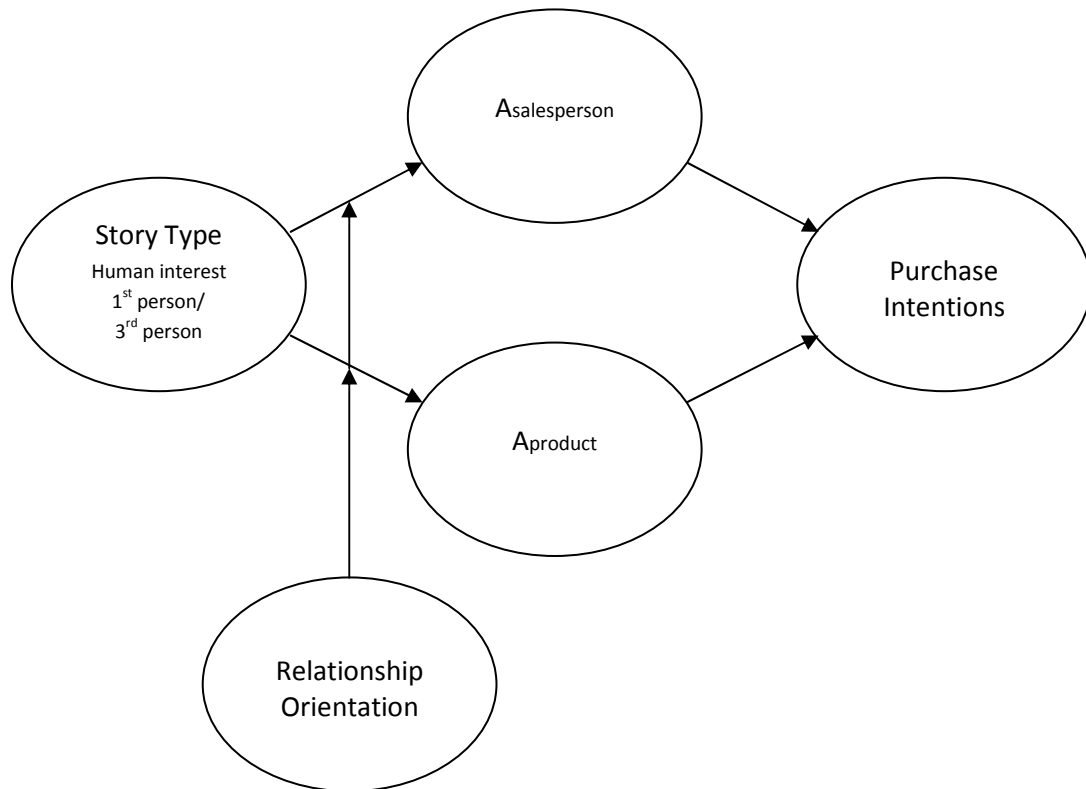
Storytellers weave stories on digression topics told from a personal point of view around their own worldview and a corresponding perception of their place in the world. This flows from aspects of the salesperson's own self narrative which in turn revolves around their own activities and experiences and the stories they have heard from others (McAdams 1993). Successful first person human interest stories thus give customers fodder to use in making positive attributions about "why the other is making an offer (Folkes 1988, p. 561)." When customers listen to salespeople tell stories they infer elements of the salespersons' self narratives and compare them to their own self narrative. In doing so they see commonalities with their self narrative and corresponding worldview as well as interesting dissimilarities

that the customer may weave into their own self narrative. Interaction that allows elements of each individuals self narrative to be absorbed by the other member of the dyad forms a key part of relationship building through becoming embedded in each other's social fabric (Polkinghorne 1988). Additionally, the mechanisms described in H 1a may apply to H 7a as well. First person human interest topic stories will thus positively affect $A_{salesperson}$.

H 7a: Personal stories concerning human interests will have a greater positive effect on the attitude toward the salesperson than do business stories concerning business interests.

When customers evaluate products they are naturally concerned with the benefits that will accrue to them from the transaction. Knowing that the worldview and resulting mission of the firm providing the product is compatible with the goals of the customer reduces uncertainty about the outcome of the transaction and ensuing product use by allowing customers to make positive attributions about the firm's intentions (Folkes 1988). Lowering uncertainty is a major goal of any selling effort or relationship building attempted by the sales force and stories can effectively accomplish this (Crosby, Evans, and Cowles 1994; Stern 1994). Third person human interest stories can help lower the customer's perceived risk and uncertainty thus improving $A_{product}$. The mechanisms discussed earlier in H 1b may also impact H 7b. Third person human interest stories will have a differential effect on $A_{product}$.

H 7b: Business stories about human interest told in 3rd person will have a greater positive effect on the attitude toward the product than do personal stories concerning human interests told in 1st person.

The explanation of relationship orientation and its associated mechanisms in H 2a and H 2b applies here as well. Palmatier et al. (2008) demonstrated that the mechanism of varying relational desire moderates the effects of the salesperson's relationship marketing activities on evaluations of the salesperson. Those with high relationship orientation will find

that human interest 1st person stories provide the material for connecting personally with the salesperson so they do not mind the social costs. Low relationship orientation customers will find the social costs of human interest 1st person stories exceed the benefit. The mechanisms of varying relational desire should moderate the effect of the salesperson's human interest stories on $A_{salesperson}$.

H 8a: The relationship orientation of the customer will moderate the effect of digression topic stories on salesperson evaluations. The differential effect of human interest stories versus business interest stories on the attitude toward the salesperson will be greater when the relationship orientation of the customer is high than when it is low.

The explanation of relationship orientation and its associated mechanisms in H 2a and H 2b applies here as well. The varying desire for a relationship with the salesperson will cause customers to vary in whether they find digression topic information of a personal or business nature more diagnostic of product characteristics. Those with a low relationship orientation will find that the attributions they can make about the product with human interest 3rd person stories are more generalizable and thus compelling than those made with human interest 1st person stories; additionally, they do not have to bear low costs when hearing business point of view stories. High relationship orientation customers will not find their social needs met by business stories but must bear the cost of listening. They would gain more confidence in the product by knowing about the salesperson's world view reflected in the human interest 1st person story which allows them a personal connection with the salesperson.

H 8b: The relationship orientation of the customer will moderate the effect of digression topic stories on product evaluations. The differential effect of business interest stories versus human interest stories on the attitude toward the product will be greater when the relationship orientation of the customer is low than when it is high.

The rational for H 9a is the same as that for H 3a.

H 9a: Attitude toward the salesperson will be positively related to purchase intentions of the customer.

The rational for H 9b is the same as that for H 3b.

H 9b: Attitude toward the product will be positively related to purchase intentions of the customer.

Figure 3a – {expected} Results of study 3 for $A_{salesperson}$
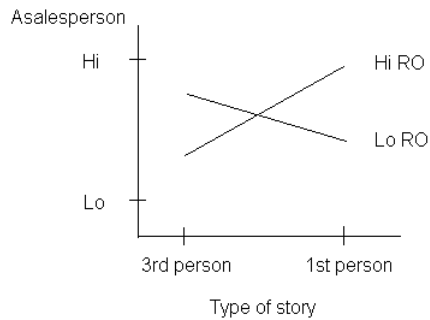
Hi RO customers are more concerned with the characteristics of the salesperson than the firm as try to form a relationship with the salesperson even though it imposes social costs. Lo RO customers desire information about the business and appreciate the salesperson relating them in a way that does not impose social costs. This helps Lo RO people have confidence the transaction will be successful.

Figure 3b – {expected} Results of study 3 for $A_{product}$
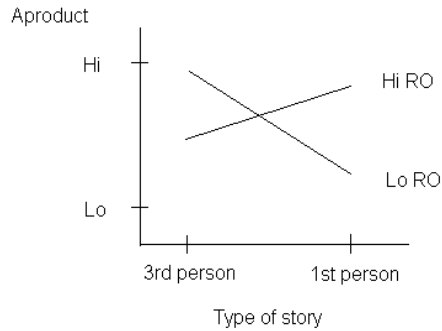
Lo RO customers gain confidence in the product through knowing about the source of the product not the salesperson and do so via what are for them low cost 3rd person stories. Hi RO customers gain confidence in the product by knowing about the salesperson's world view reflected in the story and they accept the social costs of personal stories because it allows them a personal connection with the salesperson.

STUDY 1

Study 1 tested hypotheses H 1a through H 3b. It explored an important finding of the qualitative study that suggests personal and business stories may have different effects. The study consisted of a sales pitch delivered for a product in a story form, with the story on the entity topic being either a personal story with a disclosure about the salesperson or a business story with a disclosure about the firm. The hypotheses proposed that the personal story type would have a greater impact on attitude toward the salesperson and the business type of story would have a greater impact on attitude toward the product. Relationship orientation would potentially moderate the effect of story type on attitude toward the salesperson and attitude

toward the product. Further, the attitude toward the salesperson and the product would positively impact purchase intentions.

Thus the experiment was a 2 (type of story: disclosure of self/disclosure of firm – between subjects manipulation) x 2 (relationship orientation: hi/lo – measured variable) design.

Method

Participants. 140 undergraduate students from a major university in the south central United States participated in return for extra credit in a course.

Procedure. Participants were told that they would be watching a video of a sales encounter and answering questions about what they thought. The phone description was based on what was then an upper-middle price point unit with the latest features in that class. This ensured the product was neither viewed as undesirable or extremely desirable.

Participants were then randomly assigned to see a one minute video of a sales pitch containing either a personal story or a business story. The salesperson in the video was an actor. Actor, setting, clothing, lighting, duration, etc. are the same across conditions and efforts were made to ensure that physical cues like smiling and voice pitch were the same as well. It was filmed in a studio made to resemble a retail store. The sales pitch consisted of a story along with some separate factual information as would be expected in a natural sales conversation. No brand of cell phone was mentioned during the experiment. Immediately after viewing the video, participants filled out a questionnaire measuring $A_{salesperson}$, $A_{product}$, and purchase intentions. Finally covariate measures, manipulation checks, demographic questions, probes for suspicion, and debriefing completed the experiment, which lasted about 15 minutes.

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Independent variables – see table 4 for a summary of items and assessment of relationship orientation.

  Story type. In the study this independent variable was manipulated. Story type (disclosure of self/disclosure of firm) refers to whether the salesperson told a story within the sales pitch on the entity topic from a personal or business point of view.

  Relationship orientation. This was a measured independent variable. Relationship orientation was defined as "the desire to engage in a strong relationship with a current or potential partner to conduct a specific exchange (Palmatier et al. 2008, p. 175)." It also mirrors De Wulf et al. (2001) construct of customer relationship proneness. The scale was adapted from Palmatier, Scheer, Evans and Arnold (2008).

  Dependent variables – see table 4 for a summary of items and assessment.

  A$_{salesperson}$. A$_{sp}$ (attitude toward the salesperson) measured the participants' post-exposure attitude toward the salesperson in the video. The scale was adapted from DeCarlo (2005) who followed the attitude work of Ajzen and Fishbein (1980).

  A$_{product}$. The marketing literature has a long history of interest in A$_P$ (attitude toward the product) (Voss, Spangenberg, and Grohmann 2003). This scale was adapted from Holzwarth, Janiszewski, and Neumann (2006) and Heijden, Verhagen, and Creemers (2003).

  Purchase intentions. PI (purchase intention) is another widely used construct in marketing and measures a fundamental goal in sales: convincing the consumer that they should buy the product.

  Potential covariates – see table 4 for a summary of items and assessment.

  Cell Phone involvement. CP (cell phone involvement) including both utilitarian and hedonic aspects.

Task involvement. TI (task involvement) measures how involved the participants were in the experiment.

Manipulation checks. To test the manipulation of different types of stories participants answered two questions on a 9-point Likert-scale anchored by strongly disagree/strongly agree: "The salesperson's story was about something that he or she did" and "The salesperson's story was about something that the cell phone maker did."

Results

The analysis began with multiple analysis of covariance (MANCOVA), which was chosen for its ability to handle multiple dependent variables simultaneously and provide a holistic analysis of the data.

MANCOVA assumptions testing. The testing of assumptions indicated that all MANCOVA assumptions were fulfilled, except for deviation from normality in the cell phone involvement (CP) covariate that was skewed left, i.e. it had a ceiling effect. Due to the difficulty of interpreting transformations, CP's status as a covariate rather than a variable of interest, and the robustness of MANCOVA to violations of normality, the analysis proceeded without any adjustment (Hair et al. 2006).

Dependent variable (DV) scale interval, independent variable (IV) categorical. 9-point Likert scales were considered to meet interval assumption for DV's. Manipulated IV was categorical.

Homogeneity. Slightly uneven cell sizes make the analysis sensitive to violation of the homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices across groups. The MANCOVA analysis included the multivariate Box's M test with F = .413, p = .871, so the null hypothesis of equal matrices cannot be rejected and thus homogeneity is supported. Each

dependent variable was also tested via analysis of variance (ANOVA). Univariate Levene's

tests were not significant at .05 (or even the .10 suggested by Keppel and Wickens 2004)

with A_{sp} (F = .085, p = .771), A_p (F = .000, p = 1.000), and PI (F = 2.639, p = .107), so the

null hypothesis of equal error variance cannot be rejected and the assumption of homogeneity

is met. Examination of box and whisker diagrams of the variances led to the same

conclusion.

   Normality. Q-Q plots and histograms of the residuals showed visual evidence

of normality except for CP. A Kolmogorov-Smirnov test showed p < .05 indicating a

possible problem with normality. Pillai's trace was included in the later analysis as a

precaution as it is robust to violations of normality. MANCOVA and ANOVA are also

relatively robust to violations of normality (Hair et al. 2006)

   Independence of responses. Randomization of assignment to conditions and

careful control of experimental procedures were used to ensure independence was not

violated.

   Other issues.

   Cell size. All cell sizes exceeded 20 as recommended by Hair et al. (2006) to

achieve adequate statistical power. Cell sizes were: personal story condition – 73; business

story condition – 67.

   Correlation of dependent variables. The Pearson partial correlation

coefficients for all possible pairs of DV's in study 1 ranged from .443 to .582. The DV's

should exhibit some but not extremely high correlation and this appears to be met. The

Bartlett's test for sphericity also checks intercorrelations with the result of rejecting the null

hypothesis that the residual covariance matrix is proportional to the identity matrix at p < .05

further indicating appropriate correlations (Hair et al 2006).

Missing data and outliers. Missing data was not a significant problem. The

item with the most missing data was TI 3 with 7 of 140 or 5.26% missing. The average for all

items was 1.08% missing. The missing data were replaced via mean imputation. There were

a small number of cases that could be considered outliers but none were deemed to be invalid

so none were removed.

Hypothesis guessing. There were no significant issues with hypothesis

guessing as revealed by analysis of the debriefing question. There were 2 correct answers out

of 140 participants in study 1 to the hypothesis guessing question (What did you think this

experiment was about?) or 1.4% of participants who guessed the true objective of the study.

Manipulation checks. The manipulation checks indicated that the manipulation of

story type was successful. For the manipulation of personal versus business story type,

participants in the personal story type condition had $M = 7.41$ on the item indicating the story

was personal, and for the item indicating the story was business related $M = 2.01$ ($F(1, 138)$

$= 247.73$, $p < .001$). Participants in the business story type condition had $M = 2.92$ on the

item indicating a personal story, and for the item indicating the story was business related M

$= 6.67$ ($F(1, 138) = 72.25$, $p < .001$).

Measurement model. All measures were adapted from existing scales. All were

measured on 9-point Likert-type scales anchored by strongly disagree/strongly agree, except

purchase intentions, cell phone involvement, and task involvement used 9-point semantic

differential scales.

To discover which items produce the most parsimonious yet accurate measurement scales several steps were taken (Hinkin 1998). First an examination of the item-to-total correlations was followed by consideration of the effects of deleting a poorly performing item on covering the entire domain of the construct as conceptualized for the study. No items were removed at this stage.

Afterwards items went through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) for standardized factor loading, crossloading, and dimensionality assessment. Item removal focused on weighing theoretical concerns and the redundancy of items as much as absolute factor loading size. CFA via LISREL 8.80 was used to examine the measurement model (Jöreskog and Sörbom 1993). The items from the scales for A_{sp}, A_p, RO, PI, CP, and TI were included. The CFA indicated fair to good fit of the measurement model: $\chi_2 = 440.48$ (d.f. = 237, $p <$ .01); χ_2/d.f. = 1.86; RMSEA = .076 (90% - .064; .087); CFI = .95; SRMR = .066. Though the initial CFA on all 24 items indicated adequate fit, five items were excluded to improve fit after examining modification indices: $A_{sp}2$, RO1, CP1, CP2, and CP3 (the CP items excluded represent the utilitarian portion of the involvement scale, the three hedonic items remained).

The CFA on the 19 remaining items indicated very good fit of the measurement model: $\chi_2 = 168.47$ (d.f. = 137, $p = .035$); χ_2/d.f. = 1.23; RMSEA = .036 (90% - .000; .057); CFI = .99; SRMR = .046. RMSEA was below .05, CFI above .95, and SRMR below .08 indicating a well fitting model. The χ_2 may be significant due to sample size. The ratio of χ_2 to d.f. ratio (1.23) is less sensitive to sample size than χ_2 and was less than 2, which is within the most restrictive suggested range (Byrne 1998, Kline 2005). The composite reliability, Cronbach's alpha, and average variance extracted were all above established standards of .7, .7, and .5 respectively (Fornell and Larcker 1981). All loadings were significant and of

Table 4 – Study 1 Constructs and Measures

Construct, Assessment, and Items	Std. load	t-value	Item-total	Mean
A_salesperson (Asp) − adapted from DeCarlo (2005) and Babin, Babin, and Boles (1999) (α = .947, CR = .95, AVE = 86%)				5.03
1. I like this salesperson	.93	--	.892	5.30
2. *The salesperson left me favorably impressed*	.92	*20.19*		
3. I find this salesperson appealing	.91	18.19	.879	4.73
4. I feel good about this salesperson	.94	19.93	.806	5.06
A_product (Ap) − adapted from Holzwarth, Janiszewski, and Neumann (2006) and Heijden, Verhagen, and Creemers (2003) (α = .941, CR = .94, AVE = 81%)				5.66
1. I like this cell phone	.86	--	.824	5.51
2. I have a favorable impression of this cell phone	.95	16.62	.908	5.61
3. The cell phone is appealing	.91	15.44	.886	5.54
4. It seems like a good cell phone	.87	13.90	.836	5.99
Purchase intentions (PI) – 9 pt. scale (α= .946, CR = .95, AVE = 85%) In the future if I need this product I would consider this one.				5.05
1. Unlikely Likely	.93	--	.833	5.10
2. Improbable Probable	.95	20.65	.911	5.20
3. Doubtful No doubt	.90	17.69	.868	4.85
Relationship Orientation (RO) – adapted from Palmatier, Scheer, Evans and Arnold (2008) (α= .910, CR = .91, AVE = 77%)				5.48
1. *A close relationship with this salesperson helps in buying this product*	.72	--		
2. I need a close relationship with this salesperson to be sure I get what I want	.86	--	.809	5.18
3. A close relationship helps me successfully buy this product	.96	14.72	.873	5.40
4. A strong relationship with the salesperson is very helpful when selecting this product	.82	12.31	.780	5.88
Cell Phone involvement (CP) – adapted from Voss, Spangenberg, and Grohmann (2003) using 3 utilitarian and 3 hedonic items (α = .932, CR = .93, AVE = .82) Do you feel that cell phones are:				7.48
1. *unnecessary necessary*	.51	--		
2. *not helpful helpful*	.74	*5.90*		
3. *impractical practical*	.58	*5.19*		
4. not fun fun	.90	--	.857	7.64
5. dull exciting	.95	17.38	.888	7.20
6. not enjoyable enjoyable	.87	15.06	.840	7.59
Task Involvement (TI) – adapted from Gammoh, Voss, and Chakraborty (2006) and MacKenzie and Lutz (1989) (α = .827, CR = .85, AVE = 65%) Which best describes your involvement while viewing the video:				6.34
1. uninvolved involved	.62		.581	6.12
2. concentrating very little concentrating very hard	.88	7.77	.744	6.24
3. paying very little attention paying a lot of attention	.89	7.76	.756	6.64

"α" is "Cronbach's alpha", "CR" is "Composite Reliability," "AVE" is "Average Variance Extracted," "Std. load" is "Standardized loading," and "Item-total" is "Item-to-total correlation,"   -- implies items fixed to one for model estimation purposes.
Items in italics were not included in the final scales. Loadings of retained items are from the final measurement model.

substantive magnitude (Byrne 2005). These results support unidimensionality, reliability, convergent validity, and divergent validity of the constructs and their measures. See table 4 for a summary of the assessment of the measures.

Analysis. The data were first analyzed by MANCOVA and ANOVA. This allowed the simultaneous analysis of the basic storytelling and interaction effects on all attitudes and intentions.

In the MANCOVA, PI, A_{sp}, and A_p were used as dependent variables, Story Type as the independent variable, and RO, CP, and TI as covariates. Pillai's trace was examined first as a precaution because of its robustness to violations of the normality assumption. In the overall model, the main effect of story type Pillai's trace was statistically not significant ($F(3, 127) = .072$, $p = .975$). There were likewise no main effects of Story Type on any of the DV's individually: A_{sp} ($M_{pers} = 4.905$ versus $M_{bus} = 5.349$; $F(1, 129) = .006$, $p = .938$), A_p ($M_{pers} = 5.641$ versus $M_{bus} = 5.728$; $F(1, 129) = .032$, $p = .859$), and PI ($M_{pers} = 5.175$ versus $M_{bus} = 4.900$; $F(1, 129) = .200$, $p = .656$). Examination of Wilk's lambda, Hotelling-Lawley's trace, and Roy's greatest root confirmed these findings. Further multivariate tests revealed there were no significant interaction effects between the Story Type and any of the covariates.

Findings of non-significance at the multivariate level indicated that ANOVA and other further tests were likely unwarranted. None of the univariate ANOVA's showed significant results on variables or interactions of interest.

Hypothesis tests. The MANCOVA and ANOVA results of non-significance on all main effects of Story Type on attitudes implied that H 1a and H 1b were not supported in study 1. Further, the non-significance of the interaction effects of Story Type with RO

indicated that H 2a and H 2b were not supported in study 1. The MANCOVA and ANOVA also allowed the examination of an unhypothesized direct effect of Story Type on PI; the results did not support any direct effect.

To test H 3a and H 3b a regression analysis was used. In reviewing the MANCOVA assumptions evaluation above, it appears that the regression assumptions of constant variance of the error terms, independence of the error terms, normality, and adequate sample size are adequately met (Hair et al. 2006). When PI was regressed on A_{sp} and A_p, A_{sp} predicted PI ($\beta = .163$, t = 1.971, $p = .05$), and A_p predicted PI ($\beta = .600$, t = 6.059, $p < .001$). The adjusted R squared of the regression was .348. This provides support for H 3a, the direct effect of A_{sp} on PI. It also provides strong support for H 3b, the direct effect of A_p on PI.

Discussion

The CFA analysis indicated that the measurement model had very good fit. The assumptions for MANCOVA and ANOVA were met in spite of some concern about the normality of the CP construct. MANCOVA and ANOVA analysis of the data from study 1 indicated that while the manipulation of personal versus business story was quite successful, there were no main effects on the dependent variables. Furthermore there were no significant interaction effects at the multivariate or univariate levels. The overall MANCOVA analysis thus indicated that H 1a, H 1b, H 2a, and H 2b were not supported in study 1. The regression analysis of PI on Asp and Ap provided support for H 3a, and strong support for H 3b.

STUDY 2

Study 2 tested hypotheses H 4a through H 6b. It explored an important finding of the qualitative study that suggests personal and business stories may have different effects. The study consisted of a sales pitch delivered in a story form on the product topic, with the story type being on either a personal story about product success (1st person) or a business story about product success (3rd person). The hypotheses proposed that the personal story type would have a greater impact on attitude toward the salesperson and the business type of story would have a greater impact on attitude toward the product. Relationship orientation would potentially moderate the effect of story type on attitude toward the salesperson and attitude toward the product. Further, the attitude toward the salesperson and the product would positively impact purchase intentions.

Thus the experiment was a 2 (type of story: 1st person/3rd person – between subjects manipulation) x 2 (relationship orientation: hi/lo – measured variable) design.

Method

Participants. 132 undergraduate students from a major university in the central United States participated in return for extra credit in a course.

Procedure. The procedure was the same as study 1.

Independent variables – see table 5 for a summary of items and assessment of relationship orientation.

Story type. In the study this independent variable was manipulated. Story type (1st person/3rd person) refers to whether the salesperson told a story within the sales pitch on the product topic from a personal or business point of view.

Relationship orientation. Same as study 1.

Dependent variables – see table 5 for a summary of items and assessment.

*A*salesperson. Same as study 1.

*A*product. Same as study 1.

Purchase intentions. Same as study 1.

Potential covariates – see table 5 for a summary of items and assessment.

Product involvement. Same as study 1.

Task involvement. Same as study 1.

Manipulation checks. To test the manipulation of different types of stories participants answered two questions on a 9-point Likert-scale anchored by strongly disagree/strongly agree: "The salesperson's story was about something that he or she did" and "The salesperson's story was about something that another customer of the cell phone maker did."

Results

The analysis began with multiple analysis of covariance (MANCOVA), which was chosen for its ability to handle multiple dependent variables simultaneously and provide a holistic analysis of the data.

MANCOVA assumptions testing. The testing of assumptions indicated that all MANCOVA assumptions were fulfilled, except for deviation from normality in the cell phone involvement (CP) covariate that was skewed left, i.e. it had a ceiling effect. Due to the difficulty of interpreting transformations, CP's status as a covariate rather than a variable of interest, and the robustness of MANCOVA to violations of normality, the analysis proceeded without any adjustment (Hair et al. 2006).

Dependent variable (DV) scale interval, independent variable (IV)

categorical. 9-point Likert scales were considered to meet interval assumption for DV's.

Manipulated IV was categorical.

Homogeneity. Slightly uneven cell sizes make the analysis sensitive to

violation of the homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices across groups. The

MANCOVA analysis included the multivariate Box's M test with F =.539, $p = .736$, so the

null hypotheses of equal matrices cannot be rejected and thus homogeneity is supported.

Each dependent variable was also tested via ANOVA. Univariate Levene's tests were not

significant at .05 (or even the .10 suggested by Keppel and Wickens 2004) with A_{sp} (F =

.401, $p = 527$), A_P (F = .123, $p = .727$), and PI (F = .255, $p = .614$), so the null hypothesis of

equal error variance cannot be rejected and the assumption of homogeneity is met.

Examination of box and whisker diagrams of the variances led to the same conclusion.

Normality. Q-Q plots and histograms of the residuals showed visual evidence

of normality except for CP. Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests showed $p < .05$ indicating a possible

problem with normality. Pillai's trace was included in the later analysis as a precaution as it

is robust to violations of normality. ANOVA and MANOVA are also relatively robust to

violations of normality (Hair et al. 2006)

Independence of responses. Randomization of assignment to conditions and

careful control of experimental procedures were used to ensure independence was not

violated.

Other issues.

     Cell size. All cell sizes exceeded 20 as recommended by Hair et al. (2006) to achieve adequate statistical power. Cell sizes were: personal story condition – 63; business story condition – 69.

     Correlation of dependent variables. The Pearson partial correlation coefficients for all possible pairs of DV's in study 2 ranged from .443 to .729.   The DV's should exhibit some but not extremely high correlation and this appears to be met. The Bartlett's test for sphericity also checks intercorrelations with the result of rejecting the null hypothesis that the residual covariance matrix is proportional to the identity matrix at $p < .05$ further indicating appropriate correlations (Hair et al 2006).

     Missing data and outliers. Missing data was not a significant problem. The item with the most missing data was PI 3 with 6 or 4.54% missing. The average for all items was 1.38% missing. The missing data were replaced via mean imputation. There were a small number of cases that could be considered outliers but none were deemed to be invalid so none were removed.

     Hypothesis guessing. There were no significant issues with hypothesis guessing as revealed by analysis of the debriefing question. There were 5 correct answers out of 132 participants in study 2 to the hypothesis guessing question (What did you think this experiment was about?) or 3.8% of participants who guessed the true objective of the study.

     Manipulation checks. The manipulation checks indicated that the manipulation of story type was successful. For the manipulation of personal versus business story type, participants in the personal story type condition had $M = 8.10$ on the item indicating the story was personal, and for the item indicating the story was business related $M = 1.62$ ($F(1, 130)$

= 454.265, $p < .001$). Participants in the business story type condition had M = 2.67 on the item indicating a personal story, and for the item indicating the story was business related M = 7.71 (F(1, 130) = 119.12, $p < .001$).

Measurement model. All measures were adapted from existing scales. All were measured on 9-point Likert-type scales anchored by strongly disagree/strongly agree, except purchase intentions, cell phone involvement, and task involvement used 9-point semantic differential scales.

To discover which items produce the most parsimonious yet accurate measurement scales several steps were taken (Hinkin 1998). First an examination of the item-to-total correlations was followed by consideration of the effects of deleting a poorly performing item on covering the entire domain of the construct as conceptualized for the study. No items were removed at this stage.

Afterwards items went through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) for standardized factor loading, crossloading, and dimensionality assessment. Item removal focused on weighing theoretical concerns and the redundancy of items as much as absolute factor loading size. CFA via LISREL 8.80 was used to examine the measurement model (Jöreskog and Sörbom 1993). The items from the scales for A_{sp}, A_p, PI, RO, CP, and TI were included. The CFA indicated fair to good fit of the measurement model: $\chi_2 = 428.99$ (d.f. = 237, $p < .01$); χ_2/d.f. = 1.81; RMSEA = .073 (90% - .061; .085); CFI = .95; SRMR = .067. Though the initial CFA on all 24 items indicated adequate fit, five items were excluded to improve fit after examining modification indices: Asp 2, RO1, CP1, CP2, and CP3 (the CP items excluded represent the functional portion of the scale, the three hedonic items remained). These are the same five items that were excluded in Study 1.

Table 5 – Study 2 Constructs and Measures

Construct, Assessment, and Items	Std. load	t-value	Item-total	Mean
A_{salesperson} (Asp) – adapted from DeCarlo (2005) and Babin, Babin, and Boles (1999) (α = .940, CR = .94, AVE = 84%)				4.76
1. I like this salesperson	.88	--	.845	4.90
2. *The salesperson left me favorably impressed*	*.86*	*14.00*		
3. I find this salesperson appealing	.95	16.90	.906	4.60
4. I feel good about this salesperson	.92	15.78	.875	4.79
A_{product} (Ap) – adapted from Holzwarth, Janiszewski, and Neumann (2006) and Heijden, Verhagen, and Creemers (2003) (α = .962, CR = .96, AVE = 87%)				6.26
1. I like this cell phone	.91	--	.885	6.03
2. I have a favorable impression of this cell phone	.93	18.70	.913	6.15
3. The cell phone is appealing	.96	20.09	.933	6.22
4. It seems like a good cell phone	.92	17.94	.892	6.64
Purchase intentions (PI) – 9 pt. scale (α = .954, CR = .96, AVE = 88%) In the future if I need this product I would consider this one				5.48
1. Unlikely ___ Likely	.92	--	.889	5.63
2. Improbable ___ Probable	.97	21.76	.932	5.56
3. Doubtful ___ No doubt	.92	18.15	.888	5.25
Relationship Orientation (RO) – adapted from Palmatier, Scheer, Evans and Arnold (2008) (α = .924, CR = .93, AVE = 81%)				5.21
1. *A close relationship with this salesperson helps in buying this product*	*.77*	*--*		
2. I need a close relationship with this salesperson to be sure I get what I want	.85	--	.811	4.86
3. A close relationship helps me successfully buy this product	.98	15.19	.905	5.18
4. A strong relationship with the salesperson is very helpful when selecting this product	.86	13.11	.824	5.59
Cell Phone involvement (CP) – adapted from Voss, Spangenberg, and Grohmann (2003) using 3 utilitarian and 3 hedonic items (α = .900, CR = .90, AVE = 76%) Do you feel that cell phones are:				8.02
1. *unnecessary ___ necessary*	*.49*	*--*		
2. *not helpful ___ helpful*	*.51*	*4.51*		
3. *impractical ___ practical*	*.39*	*3.76*		
4. not fun ___ fun	.84	--	.786	8.14
5. dull ___ exciting	.84	11.73	.782	7.78
6. not enjoyable ___ enjoyable	.93	12.97	.852	8.15
Task Involvement (TI) – adapted from Gammoh, Voss, and Chakraborty (2006) and MacKenzie and Lutz (1989) (α = .848, CR = .86, AVE = 67%) Which best describes your involvement while viewing the video:				6.68
1. uninvolved ___ involved	.68		.635	6.42
2. concentrating very little ___ concentrating very hard	.89	8.51	.766	6.63
3. paying very little attention ___ paying a lot of attention	.87	8.51	.762	7.00

"α" is "Cronbach's alpha", "CR" is "Composite Reliability," "AVE" is "Average Variance Extracted," "Std. load" is "Standardized loading," and "Item-total" is "Item-to-total correlation," -- implies items fixed to one for model estimation purposes.
Items in italics were not included in the final scales. Loadings of retained items are from the final measurement model.

The CFA on the 19 remaining items indicated acceptable fit of the measurement model: $\chi_2 = 186.48$ (d.f. = 137, $p = .003$); χ_2/d.f. = 1.36; RMSEA = .040 (90% - .004; .060); CFI = .98; SRMR = .035. RMSEA was below .05, CFI above .95, and SRMR below .08 indicating a well fitting model. The χ_2 may be significant due to sample size. The ratio of χ_2 to d.f. (1.36) is less sensitive to sample size than χ_2 and was less than 2, which is within the most restrictive suggested range (Byrne 1998, Kline 2005). The composite reliability, Cronbach's alpha, and average variance extracted were all above established standards of .7, .7, and .5 respectively (Fornell and Larcker 1981). All loadings were significant and of substantive magnitude (Byrne 2005). These results support unidimensionality, reliability, convergent validity, and divergent validity of the constructs and their measures. See table 5 for a summary of the assessment of the measures.

Analysis. The data were first analyzed by MANCOVA and ANOVA. This allowed the simultaneous analysis of the basic storytelling and interaction effects on all attitudes and intentions.

In the MANCOVA PI, A_{sp}, and A_p were used as dependent variables, Story Type as the independent variable, and RO, CP, and TI as covariates. Pillai's trace was examined first as a precaution because of its robustness to violations of the normality assumption. In the overall model, the main effect of story type Pillai's trace was statistically not significant ($F(3, 125) = .741$, $p = .529$). There were likewise no main effects of Story Type on any of the DV's individually: A_{sp} ($M_{pers} = 5.010$ versus $M_{bus} = 4.502$; $F(1, 121) = 1.960$, $p = .164$), A_p ($M_{pers} = 6.104$ versus $M_{bus} = 6.353$; $F(1, 121) = 1.357$, $p = .246$), and PI ($M_{pers} = 5.377$ versus $M_{bus} = 5.521$; $F(1, 121) = .882$, $p = .35$). Examination of Wilk's lambda, Hotelling-

Lawley's trace, and Roy's greatest root confirmed these findings. Further multivariate tests revealed there were no significant interaction effects between the Story Type and RO.

Findings of non-significance at the multivariate level indicated that ANOVA and other further tests were likely unwarranted. None of the univariate ANOVA's showed significant results on variables or interactions of interest.

Hypothesis tests. The MANCOVA and ANOVA results of non-significance on all main effects of Story Type on attitudes implied that H 4a and H 4b were not supported in study 2. Further, the non-significance of the interaction effects of Story Type with RO indicated that H 5a and H 5b were not supported in study 2. The MANCOVA and ANOVA also allowed the examination of an unhypothesized direct effect of Story Type on PI; the results did not support any direct effect.

To test H 6a and H 6b a regression analysis was used. In reviewing the MANCOVA assumptions evaluation above, it appears that the regression assumptions of constant variance of the error terms, independence of the error terms, normality, and adequate sample size are adequately met (Hair et al. 2006). When PI was regressed on A_{sp} and A_p, A_{sp} was not a significant predictor of PI ($\beta = .006$, t $= .083$, $p = .934$), and A_p predicted PI ($\beta = .801$, t $= 10.331$, $p < .001$). The adjusted R squared of the regression was .532. Thus H 6a, the direct effect of A_{sp} on PI, was not supported. However, there was strong support for H 6b, the direct effect of A_p on PI.

Discussion

The CFA analysis indicated that the measurement model had very good fit. The assumptions for MANCOVA and ANOVA were met in spite of some concern about the normality of the CP construct. MANCOVA and ANOVA analysis of the data from study 2

indicated that while the manipulation of personal versus business story was quite successful, there were no main effects on the dependent variables. Furthermore, though there were some significant direct and interaction effects at the multivariate or univariate levels, none were of interest. The overall MANCOVA analysis thus indicated that H 4a, H 4b, H 5a, and H 5b were not supported in study 2. The regression analysis of PI on Asp and Ap provided no support for H 6a, and strong support for H 6b.

STUDY 3

Study 3 tested hypotheses H 7a through H 9b. It explored an important finding of the qualitative study that suggests personal and business stories may have different effects. The study consisted of a sales pitch delivered in a story form on a digression topic, with the story type being on either a personal story told in 1st person or a business story told in 3rd person. The hypotheses proposed that the personal story type would have a greater impact on attitude toward the salesperson and the business type of story would have a greater impact on attitude toward the product. Relationship orientation would potentially moderate the effect of story type on attitude toward the salesperson and attitude toward the product. Further, the attitude toward the salesperson and the product would positively impact purchase intentions.

Thus the experiment will be a 2 (type of story: 1st person/3rd person – between subjects manipulation) x 2 (relationship orientation: hi/lo – measured variable) design.

Method

Participants. 155 undergraduate students from a major university in the central United States participated in return for extra credit in a course.

Procedure. The procedure was the same as study 1.

Independent variables – see table 6 for a summary of items and assessment of relationship orientation.

Type of pitch. In the study this independent variable was manipulated. Type of pitch (1st person/3rd person) referred to whether the salesperson told a story within the sales pitch on a digression topic from a personal or business point of view.

Relationship orientation. Same as study 1.

Dependent variables – see table 6 for a summary of items and assessment.

$A_{salesperson}$. Same as study 1.

$A_{product}$. Same as study 1

Purchase intentions. Same as study 1.

Potential covariates – see table 6 for a summary of items and assessment.

Product involvement. Same as study 1.

Task involvement. Same as study 1.

Manipulation checks. To test the manipulation of different types of stories participants answered two questions on a 9-point Likert-scale anchored by strongly disagree/strongly agree: "The salesperson's story was about something that he or she did" and "The salesperson's story was about something that managers from the cell phone maker did."

Results

The analysis began with multiple analysis of covariance (MANCOVA), which was chosen for its ability to handle multiple dependent variables simultaneously and provide a holistic analysis of the data.

MANCOVA assumptions testing. The testing of assumptions indicated that all MANCOVA assumptions were fulfilled, except for deviation from normality in the cell phone involvement (CP) covariate that was skewed left, i.e. it had a ceiling effect. Due to the difficulty of interpreting transformations, CP's status as a covariate rather than a variable of interest, and the robustness of MANCOVA to violations of normality, the analysis proceeded without any adjustment (Hair et al. 2006).

Dependent variable (DV) scale interval, independent variable (IV) categorical. 9-point Likert scales were considered to meet interval assumption for DV's. Manipulated IV was categorical.

Homogeneity. Slightly uneven cell sizes make the analysis sensitive to violation of the homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices across groups. The MANCOVA analysis included the multivariate Box's M test with F =.721, $p = .633$, so the null hypotheses of equal matrices cannot be rejected and thus homogeneity is supported. Each dependent variable was also tested via ANOVA. Univariate Levene's tests were not significant at .05 (or even the .10 suggested by Keppel and Wickens 2004) with A_{sp} (F = .051, $p = .822$), A_P (F = .226, $p = .635$), and PI (F = 1.153, $p = .285$), so the null hypothesis of equal error variance cannot be rejected and the assumption of homogeneity is met. Examination of box and whisker diagrams of the variances led to the same conclusion.

Normality. Q-Q plots and histograms of the residuals showed visual evidence of normality except for CP. Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests showed $p < .05$ indicating a possible problem with normality. Pillai's trace was included in the later analysis as a precaution as it is robust to violations of normality. ANOVA and MANOVA are also relatively robust to violations of normality (Hair et al. 2006)

Independence of responses. Randomization of assignment to conditions and careful control of experimental procedures were used to ensure independence was not violated.

Other issues.

Cell size. All cell sizes exceeded 20 as recommended by Hair et al. (2006) to achieve adequate statistical power. Cell sizes were: personal story condition – 75; business story condition – 80.

Correlation of dependent variables. The Pearson partial correlation coefficients for all possible pairs of DV's in study 2 ranged from .581 to .693. The DV's should exhibit some but not extremely high correlation and this appears to be met. The Bartlett's test for sphericity also checks intercorrelations with the result of rejecting the null hypothesis that the residual covariance matrix is proportional to the identity matrix at $p < .05$ further indicating appropriate correlations (Hair et al 2006).

Missing data and outliers. Missing data was not a significant problem. The item with the most missing data was PI 1 with 10 or 6.45% missing. The average for all items was 2.83% missing. The missing data were replaced via mean imputation. There were a small number of cases that could be considered outliers but none were deemed to be invalid so none were removed.

Hypothesis guessing. There were no significant issues with hypothesis guessing as revealed by analysis of the debriefing question. There were 11 correct answers out of 155 participants in study 3 to the hypothesis guessing question (What did you think this experiment was about?) or 7.1% of participants who guessed the true objective of the study.

This was higher than in the other two studies and may indicate that participants found stories on the digression topic easier to recognize as being stories.

Manipulation checks. The manipulation checks indicated that the manipulation of story type was successful. For the manipulation of personal versus business story type, participants in the personal story type condition had M = 7.16 on the item indicating the story was personal, and for the item indicating the story was business related M = 1.41 ($F(1, 153)$ = 349.70, $p < .001$). Participants in the business story type condition had M = 2.16 on the item indicating a personal story, and for the item indicating the story was business related M = 6.266 ($F(1, 153) = 88.18$, $p < .001$).

Measurement model. All measures were adapted from existing scales. All were measured on 9-point Likert-type scales anchored by strongly disagree/strongly agree, except purchase intentions, cell phone involvement, and task involvement used 9-point semantic differential scales.

To discover which items produce the most parsimonious yet accurate measurement scales several steps were taken (Hinkin 1998). First an examination of the item-to-total correlations was followed by consideration of the effects of deleting a poorly performing item on covering the entire domain of the construct as conceptualized for the study. No items were removed at this stage.

Afterwards items went through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) for standardized factor loading, crossloading, and dimensionality assessment. Item removal focused on weighing theoretical concerns and the redundancy of items as much as absolute factor loading size. CFA via LISREL 8.80 was used to examine the measurement model (Jöreskog and Sörbom 1993). The items from the scales for A_{sp}, A_p, PI, RO, CP, and TI were

Table 6 – Study 3 Constructs and Measures

Construct, Assessment, and Items	Std. load	t-value	Item-total	Mean
A_{salesperson} (Asp) – adapted from DeCarlo (2005) and Babin, Babin, and Boles (1999) (α = .907, CR = .91, AVE = 77%)				3.73
1. I like this salesperson	.83	--	.788	3.90
2. The salesperson left me favorably impressed	*.84*	*12.83*		
3. I find this salesperson appealing	.89	13.47	.833	3.59
4. I feel good about this salesperson	.90	13.52	.820	3.69
A_{product} (Ap) – adapted from Holzwarth, Janiszewski, and Neumann (2006) and Heijden, Verhagen, and Creemers (2003) (α = .941, CR = .94, AVE = 80%)				4.83
1. I like this cell phone	.89	--	.869	4.61
2. I have a favorable impression of this cell phone	.93	18.23	.877	4.67
3. The cell phone is appealing	.92	18.20	.889	4.72
4. It seems like a good cell phone	.84	14.55	.806	5.32
Purchase intentions (PI) – 9 pt. scale (α = .943, CR = .94, AVE = 85%) In the future if I need this product I would consider this one				4.30
1. Unlikely Likely	.96	--	.909	4.36
2. Improbable Probable	.92	21.73	.882	4.49
3. Doubtful No doubt	.88	19.05	.855	4.05
Relationship Orientation (RO) – adapted from Palmatier, Scheer, Evans and Arnold (2008) (α = .925, CR = .93, AVE = 81%)				4.55
1. A close relationship with this salesperson helps in buying this product	*.66*	*--*		
2. I need a close relationship with this salesperson to be sure I get what I want	.86	--	.827	4.41
3. A close relationship helps me successfully buy this product	.95	16.37	.881	4.45
4. A strong relationship with the salesperson is very helpful when selecting this product	.87	14.66	.833	4.80
Cell Phone involvement (CP) – adapted from Voss, Spangenberg, and Grohmann (2003) using 3 utilitarian and 3 hedonic items (α= .924, CR = .93, AVE = 80%) Do you feel that cell phones are:				7.75
1. unnecessary necessary	*.56*	*--*		
2. not helpful helpful	*.63*	*6.18*		
3. impractical practical	*.67*	*6.46*		
4. not fun fun	.90	--	.846	7.96
5. dull exciting	.92	16.55	.861	7.51
6. not enjoyable enjoyable	.88	15.51	.835	7.78
Task Involvement (TI) – adapted from Gammoh, Voss, and Chakraborty (2006) and MacKenzie and Lutz (1989) (α = .895, CR = .91, AVE = 77%) Which best describes your involvement while viewing the video:				6.19
1. uninvolved involved	.79		.752	5.79
2. concentrating very little concentrating very hard	.95	13.05	.861	6.15
3. paying very little attention paying a lot of attention	.88	12.48	.804	6.64

"α" is "Cronbach's alpha", "CR" is "Composite Reliability," "AVE" is "Average Variance Extracted," "Std. load" is "Standardized loading," and "Item-total" is "Item-to-total correlation,"   -- implies items fixed to one for model estimation purposes.

Items in italics were not included in the final scales. Loadings of retained items are from the final measurement model.

included. The CFA indicated good fit of the measurement model: $\chi_2 = 381.12$ (d.f. = 237, $p <$ .01); χ_2/d.f. = 1.61; RMSEA = .061 (90% - .049; .072); CFI = .97; SRMR = .057. Though the initial CFA on all 24 items indicated adequate fit, five items were excluded to improve fit after examining modification indices: Asp 2, RO1, CP1, CP2, and CP3 (the CP items excluded represent the functional portion of the scale, the three hedonic items remained). These are the same five items that were excluded in Study 1 and Study 2.

The CFA on the 19 remaining items indicated acceptable fit of the measurement model: $\chi_2 = 190.74$ (d.f. = 137, $p = .002$); χ_2/d.f. = 1.39; RMSEA = .036 (90% - .023; .062); CFI = .99; SRMR = .038. RMSEA was below .05, CFI above .95, and SRMR below .08 indicating a well fitting model. The χ_2 may be significant due to sample size. The ratio of χ_2 to d.f. (1.39) is less sensitive to sample size than χ_2 and was less than 2, which is within the most restrictive suggested range (Byrne 1998, Kline 2005). The composite reliability, Cronbach's alpha, and average variance extracted were all above established standards of .7, .7, and .5 respectively (Fornell and Larcker 1981). All loadings were significant and of substantive magnitude (Byrne 2005). These results support unidimensionality, reliability, convergent validity, and divergent validity of the constructs and their measures. See table 6 for a summary of the assessment of the measures.

Analysis. The data were first analyzed by MANCOVA and ANOVA. This allowed the simultaneous analysis of the basic storytelling and interaction effects on all attitudes and intentions.

In the MANCOVA, PI, A_{sp}, and A_p were used as dependent variables, Story Type as the independent variable, and RO, CP, and TI as covariates. Pillai's trace was examined first as a precaution because of its robustness to violations of the normality assumption. In the

overall model, the main effect of story type Pillai's trace was statistically not significant (F(3, 142) = .665, p = .575). There were likewise no main effects of Story Type on any of the DV's individually: A_{sp} (M_{pers} = 3.858 versus M_{bus} = 3.745; F(1, 144) = 1.134, p = .289), A_p (M_{pers} = 4.978 versus M_{bus} = 4.792; F(1, 144) = 1.599, p = .208), and PI (M_{pers} = 4.609 versus M_{bus} = 4.127; F(1, 144) = .291, p = .590). Examination of Wilk's lambda, Hotelling-Lawley's trace, and Roy's greatest root confirmed these findings. Further multivariate tests revealed there were no significant interaction effects between the Story Type and RO.

Findings of non-significance at the multivariate level indicated that ANOVA and other further tests were likely unwarranted. None of the univariate ANOVA's showed significant results on variables or interactions of interest.

Hypothesis tests. The MANCOVA and ANOVA results of non-significance on all main effects of Story Type on attitudes implied that H 7a and H 7b were not supported in study 3. Further, the non-significance of the interaction effects of Story Type with RO indicated that H 8a and H 8b were not supported in study 3. The MANCOVA and ANOVA also allowed the examination of an unhypothesized direct effect of Story Type on PI; the results did not support any direct effect.

To test H 9a and H 9b a regression analysis was used. In reviewing the MANCOVA assumptions evaluation above, it appears that the regression assumptions of constant variance of the error terms, independence of the error terms, normality, and adequate sample size are adequately met (Hair et al. 2006). When PI was regressed on A_{sp} and A_p, A_{sp} was not a significant predictor of PI (β = .181, t = 2.204, p = .029), and A_p predicted PI (β = .629, t = 8.562, p < .001). The adjusted R squared of the regression was .471. Thus H 9a, the direct

effect of A_{sp} on PI, was not supported. However, there was strong support for H 9b, the direct effect of A_p on PI.

Discussion

The CFA analysis indicated that the measurement model had very good fit. The assumptions for MANCOVA and ANOVA were met in spite of some concern about the normality of the CP construct. MANCOVA and ANOVA analysis of the data from study 3 indicated that while the manipulation of personal versus business story was quite successful, there were no main effects on the dependent variables. Furthermore, though there were some significant direct and interaction effects at the multivariate or univariate levels, none were of interest. The overall MANCOVA analysis thus indicated that H 7a, H 7b, H 8a, and H 8b were not supported in study 3. The regression analysis of PI on Asp and Ap provided support for H 9a, and strong support for H 9b.

POST STUDY ANALYSIS

Following the analysis of each individual study, several further analysis were undertaken to explore the data. This was done to reveal details about both proposed and unproposed effects. While some theoretically and managerially interesting insights may arise from this analysis, it is largely intended to guide future inquiry.

Extended Analysis of the Main Effects

The first post study analysis consisted of a regression wherein A_{sp} and A_p were regressed on the manipulation checks (MC1 asking if the salesperson told a personal story and MC2 asking if the salesperson told a business story). The manipulation check questions were on 9 point Likert scales and thus provided a continuous variable analogous to the dichotomous manipulated variable of Story Type used in the individual studies. Further, the entire 427 cases of the three studies combined were used in the regression. As each study does vary by topic, this data can no longer be said to come from a true experiment, but it may still provide considerable insight.

In reviewing the MANCOVA assumptions evaluation in each study above, it appears that the regression assumptions of constant variance of the error terms, independence of the error terms, normality, and adequate sample size are adequately met (Hair et al. 2006). RO, CP and TI were included as control variables in the regression. When A_{sp} was regressed on MC1 and MC2, MC1$_{personal}$ was a significant predictor of A_{sp} ($\beta = .070$, t $= 2.153$, $p = .032$), but MC2$_{business}$ was not ($\beta = .033$, t $= .980$, $p = .328$). The adjusted R squared of the regression was .098. Conversely, when A_p was regressed on MC1 and MC2, MC1$_{personal}$ was not a significant predictor of A_p ($\beta = .046$, t $= 1.428$, $p = .154$), but MC2$_{business}$ did predict A_p ($\beta = .064$, t $= 1.962$, $p < .050$). The adjusted R squared of the regression was .075.

The analysis lends support to the proposed main effects of personal versus business stories on A_{sp} and A_p. Here personal stories do impact A_{sp} more than business stories, and business stories do impact A_p more than personal stories. This post study support for H 1a, H

1b, H 4a, H 4b, H 7a and H 7b indicates that the proposed main effects are present in the studies but that they are likely very small.

It may be noted by looking at the scripts for the manipulations (Appendix A) that the conditions differ only by the use of first person pronouns in the personal story condition versus third person pronouns in the business story condition, along with the appropriate change in the associated verbs. While this controls for potential confounding variables quite well, it makes for a very subtle manipulation that could perhaps be made more powerful in future studies exploring the effect of personal versus business stories. It may likewise be the case that the effect becomes more pronounced with repeated encounters between buyers and sellers. Finally, the effect may vary depending on the stage of the buyer-seller relationship, type of product, or other variables. Thus, the effect may still have managerial significance since it may be heightened when the constraints of controlling for other confounds in the stories is removed, i.e. the stories are allowed to vary by more than simply first versus third person pronouns. The effect may also be enlarged over repeated sales encounters and may call for more or less attention depending on the stage of the relationship, etc.

Mediation Analysis

To test for a possible mediation of the effect of A_{sp} and A_p on PI, a regression and mediation analysis was used (Baron and Kenny 1986, Monga and John 2010).

In study 1: first, A_{sp} predicted PI ($\beta = .436$, t = 5.605, $p < .001$); second, A_{sp} predicted A_p ($\beta = .455$, t = 7.634, $p < .001$); and finally when PI was regressed on A_{sp} and A_p, the effect

of A_{sp} was turned marginally significant ($\beta = .163$, $t = 1.971$, $p = .051$), and the effect of A_p was significant ($\beta = .600$, $t = 6.059$, $p < .001$). This indicates partial mediation.

In study 2: first, A_{sp} predicted PI ($\beta = .423$, $t = 4.941$, $p < .001$); second, A_{sp} predicted A_p ($\beta = .520$, $t = 7.236$, $p < .001$); and finally when PI was regressed on A_{sp} and A_p, the effect of A_{sp} was turned not significant ($\beta = .006$, $t = .083$, $p = .934$), and the effect of A_p was significant ($\beta = .801$, $t = 10.331$, $p < .001$). This indicates full mediation.

In study 3: first, A_{sp} predicted PI ($\beta = .560$, $t = 6.692$, $p < .001$); second, A_{sp} predicted A_p ($\beta = .603$, $t = 7.948$, $p < .001$); and finally when PI was regressed on A_{sp} and A_p, the effect of A_{sp} was turned less significant ($\beta = .181$, $t = 2.204$, $p = .029$), and the effect of A_p was still significant ($\beta = .629$, $t = 8.562$, $p < .001$). This resulted in a change in R squared from .228 to .478 or .252 (F = 73.305, $p < .001$). Even though A_{sp} remained significant, the R squared change was also significant demonstrating partial mediation.

As in the individual studies above, the direct effects of A_p on PI proposed by H 3b, H 6b, and H 9b are supported. It again provides some support for H 3a, H 6a, and H 9a the direct effect of A_{sp} on PI. Finally, it provides support for a path that was suspected during model development but was not hypothesized: the partial or full mediation of the effect of A_{sp} on PI by A_p.

There is a reasonable argument explaining the mediation of the effect of A_{sp} on PI by A_p. Those who have high A_p are likely to develop purchase intentions regardless of their A_{sp} (remembering that the high A_p could have been caused by high A_{sp}). Further, a low A_p cannot be overcome by high A_{sp}, i.e. buyers are not likely to purchase a product solely because they like a salesperson. This is coherent with the buyer's assertions in the qualitative study of Chapter III that the business aspects of the relationship supersede the personal aspects. It may

also be true that in situations where a strong group of competing products have varying evaluations by the buyer in the marketplace, the A_p may well have a reciprocal impact on A_{sp}. Since no phone brands or actual phone models were mentioned in the manipulations, it was unlikely for A_p to affect A_{sp} in this study.

The Topic of the Stories

Each of the three experiments investigated the personal versus business point of view in a particular topic according to the framework developed early in this chapter. Study 1 investigated the entity topic, study 2 the product topic, and study 3 the digression topic. A MANCOVA was conducted again using A_{sp}, A_p, and PI as DV's plus RO, CP, and TI as covariates. The IV was Study which had three conditions representing the topic of each experiment: entity, product, or digression with cell sizes of 140, 132, and 155 respectively. Again this cross study analysis cannot be considered a true experiment but the analysis is informative, particularly in light of possible future inquiries.

The MANCOVA assumptions were again met as in the individual studies. Pillai's trace was examined first as a precaution because of its robustness to violations of the normality assumption. In the overall model, the main effect of Study was significant with Pillai's trace ($F(6, 840) = 9.171$, $p < .001$). The main effects of Study on the DV's individually were likewise significant: A_{sp} ($M_{entity} = 4.973$, $M_{product} = 4.681$, and $M_{digression} = 3.850$; $F(2, 421) = 15.989$, $< .001$), A_p ($M_{entity} = 5.681$, $M_{product} = 6.158$, and $M_{digression} = 4.895$; $F(2, 421) = 19.527$, $p < .001$), and PI ($M_{entity} = 5.057$, $M_{product} = 5.341$, and $M_{digression} =$

4.424; F(2, 421) = 8.708, < .001). Examination of Wilk's lambda, Hotelling-Lawley's trace, and Roy's greatest root confirmed these findings.

Post hoc analysis of the ANOVA results via Scheffe, Tukey HSD, and Duncan all yielded the same results. For A_{sp} and PI as DV's, the entity and product conditions varied significantly from digressions but not from each other. For A_p as the DV, all conditions were significantly different from each other.

These results indicate that topic is potentially an important predictor of attitudes and purchase intentions. Perhaps it is more important than personal versus business point of view, particularly in one time transactions as conducted here. The post hoc analyses indicate that digression is always the worst choice in this one shot encounter. For A_{sp}, the effect of entity topic is greater than product, but not significantly so. For A_p, the effect of product stories is significantly greater than entity stories. The implications are explored in Chapter V.

SUMMARY

The chapter began with a discussion of storytelling in the sales and buyer-seller relationship area. The preceding literature review of Chapter II and qualitative study of Chapter III were used to develop a framework from which eighteen hypotheses were proposed. The hypotheses were then tested via three experiments that examined the personal versus business dichotomy across three story topics. The results of the three experiments were presented in addition to a post study analysis. The three experiments provided support for H 3b, H 6b, and H9b or the effect of A_{sp} on PI. The direct effect of Asp on PI was only

supported in study 1, H 3a in the entity topic experiment. The remaining hypotheses we not supported.

Three post study analyses were conducted after the experimental results were given. The first examined the proposed main effect of Story Type on attitudes. By using the continuous manipulation checks in place of the dichotomous manipulated variable and using all 427 cases, a significant effect of Story Type on both A_{sp} and A_p was achieved. The conclusion was that the effect was likely present but small. The second post study demonstrated that the weak direct effect of A_{sp} on PI (H 3a, H 6a, and H 9a) sometimes seen in the analysis might be explained by A_p mediating the effect. Finally, the last study suggested that the topic may be a stronger determinant of the effect of stories than point of view.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This concluding chapter contains a synopsis of the dissertation, a discussion and synthesis of the findings from the qualitative and quantitative studies, the resulting theoretical and managerial implications, the limitations of the research, suggestions for future research, and a conclusion.

Synopsis of the Dissertation

This dissertation takes an exploratory look at storytelling in the personal selling environment, particularly as it relates to buyer-seller relationships. A literature review and qualitative study were undertaken to establish the essential outlines of storytelling by salespeople and the ensuing reactions of buyers. Depth interviews with buyers, purchasing managers, salespeople, and sales managers were followed by field observations of sales encounters. Coding of this data and comparison with the prior literature review resulted in the extraction of eight themes.

The literature review and themes from the qualitative study facilitated the construction of a framework for storytelling in the sales setting. The framework served as a basis for designing three experimental studies that addressed the following research question:

What effect do different types of stories have on the buyer's perceptions of the salesperson and the product?

Three experiments were used to test eighteen hypotheses. MANCOVA, ANOVA, and regression served as the major analytical techniques. The findings were discussed at the end of Chapter IV and are further expounded below.

Discussion

Qualitative Study

The qualitative study of Chapter III explored storytelling in the personal selling environment and the resulting effects on relationships in order to answer basic questions about story use, reception, and effect. A total of 49 participants from both the buying and selling sides of the dyad participated in depth interviews and field observation. This data was reduced and combined with prior knowledge of storytelling from other disciplines such as management and psychology to create a basic outline of how storytelling functions during a sales encounter and the resulting relationship development. Each of the eight themes extracted are discussed below.

Theme 1, Stories Are Powerful Tools, expressed the sentiments of buyers and sellers alike that stories are widely and effectively employed by salespeople. They are useful to entertain and influence and do not require great eloquence to be effective. Whether trying to

establish rapport and credibility or learn about customers and their needs, the salesperson's stories proved to be generally appreciated by buyers. Buyers often tell stories as well when explaining needs and problems, but they did not seem to be conscious that they were doing so. Telling about company history and abilities, product success, and personal experiences were common topics for salespersons' stories.

Theme 2, Appropriate Stories Can Be Persuasive and Build Relationships, was another theme on which buyers and sellers agreed. Appropriateness hinged on how easy it was for the listener to relate the story to their own situation. Hearing stories about similar companies experiencing similar problems seemed to be very persuasive and helped to build the salesperson's credibility. Disclosures via personal stories were acceptable as well when they had a general human interest angle or covered a narrower topic that happened to be of interest to the listener. Getting to know about the salesperson via stories likely helps to embed the seller in the buyer's personal narrative and to build credibility.

Theme 3, Stories Are Useful when Problems Arise, revealed that salespeople and buyers have somewhat different takes on telling stories to explain problems. Some salespeople feared that telling a story about the cause of a problem would only end up sounding like an excuse. Buyers on the other hand thought that believable stories about how a problem occurred helped them to understand the source of the problem and made it easier to believe that the problem would not happen again. Some salespeople acknowledged that a story could go a long way toward diffusing a bad situation. Interestingly, buyers seemed unaware that it is very difficult to explain a problem (of for that matter a need) without telling a story; this may prove to be a very fruitful area for further research.

Theme 4, Salespeople and Buyers Disagree on the Primacy of Personal Relationships, turned out to be the largest area of disagreement between buyers and sellers about storytelling in particular and relationships in general. Salespeople did not share the buyers' belief that the business relationship should come first and be most important. Buyers pointed to relationships that had gone on for years in which they knew little about the salesperson's personal life. This was particularly true in the early stages of the relationship were the buyer's focus in on determining if an economic logic exists for doing business with this new seller. Ironically, this is the point at which many salespeople were frantically scanning the buyer's office for personal photos and trophies about which they might start a conversation. This theme played a central role in the development of the framework for the quantitative study of Chapter IV. It also holds considerable promise for future research.

Theme 5, Stories Must Be Relevant to the Buyer, allowed buyers and sellers to once again agree on an important aspect of storytelling. Stories that were inherently relevant to the customer, regardless of what the story was about, always received a much warmer welcome and produced a better result. Stories that were irrelevant might not hurt if they were viewed as small talk or were very brief, but long winded stories about irrelevant topics were decidedly unwelcome. Salespeople felt that the better they knew a customer the easier this became even to the point that some simply would not tell a story unless they could first ascertain if it would be relevant to that particular listener. Generally, brevity was lauded regardless of how relevant the story was.

Theme 6, Icebreaker Stories Are Common and Accepted within Limits, gave salespeople some latitude in small talk and trying to relate to the customer's hobbies or family life, especially early in a visit or at the beginning of the relationship. Buyers were very

aware that this was largely a tactical maneuver but did not generally mind as long as it was reasonably limited; the salespeople generally knew this and regularly told icebreaker stories.

Theme 7, Story Quality and Storytelling Ability Affect How Stories Are Received, concerns two very interesting and elusive aspects of storytelling: quality and ability. It was clear that buyers and sellers alike felt that quality and ability mattered, but it was difficult for them to say exactly how. The comments also indicated that at very high levels these aspects might be much more powerful, that is they may exhibit curvilinear effects. It does seem that content is more important than style and that humor used sparingly can be very useful.

Theme 8, Stories Can Have Negative Effects, was strongly held by both sides of the dyad: some stories should not be told in a sales encounter. Most agreed that religion, sex, and politics were off limits and that it was best to be extremely careful with listeners whom the storyteller did not know well. In spite of this, buyers reported that some salespeople did broach inappropriate topics and were at a loss to explain why. Salespeople felt they knew when a story had backfired, but it remains unclear how accurate their perceptions were.

In summary, the qualitative study confirmed that stories are regularly told by salespeople and that on the whole they are well received and even reciprocated by buyers. Salespeople used stories with intent to transfer information, establish credibility, get acquainted, build rapport, break tension, and make buyers more comfortable and communicative among other goals. Buyers often told stories when describing their needs and the problems that they had with products or services to salespeople, but seemed to couch these in story form unintentionally simply as the most natural way to communicate the information. Storytelling thus plays a key role in personal selling and relationship building and certainly merits further study in this environment.

Quantitative Study

The qualitative study of Chapter IV explored aspects of storytelling in sales and buyer-seller relationships in the light of the literature review of Chapter II and the qualitative study of Chapter III.

The framework. The earlier literature review and qualitative study facilitated the construction of a framework of storytelling in personal selling. The 2 x 3 matrix has the point of view down the left side and topic across the top. Stories about the entity topic are either about the self if told from a personal point of view or the firm if told from a business point of view. Stories about the product topic are either about product success known to the salesperson and told in the first person, or product success known to the business told in the third person. Digression topics focus on human interests in the first person if told from a personal point of view and about human interests in the third person if told from the firm's point of view.

The hypotheses. Using the framework, models were developed and hypotheses proposed for the effect of story type, personal or business, on attitude toward the salesperson and attitude toward the product with attitudes affecting subsequent purchase intentions. Relationship orientation was proposed as a moderator of the effect of story type on both attitudes. Thus, each model had six hypotheses and there was a model for each of the three story topics in the framework resulting in eighteen total hypotheses.

The studies. The hypotheses were tested in an experimental setting using videos of a salesperson presenting the six different point of view x story topic cells. Four hundred twenty seven students at a large university in the south central United States viewed one of the videos and answered a questionnaire. The results were analyzed using MANCOVA,

ANOVA, and regression. The only hypotheses fully supported were the effects of attitude toward the product on purchase intentions. The effect of attitude toward the salesperson on purchase intentions was supported in study one (entity stories). In summary, four of the eighteen hypotheses were supported.

The post studies. Further analysis was undertaken; there were three post studies. The first used the continuous manipulation check results in place of the dichotomous manipulated story type across all four hundred twenty seven cases to reveal an effect of story type on attitudes. While this was no longer a controlled experimental setting, it did indicate the likely presence of a small effect. Second, a mediation study indicated that the effect of attitude toward the salesperson on purchase intentions is partially or fully mediated by attitude toward the product. Finally, a MANCOVA analysis of topic (using study as the variable) across all studies indicated that topic may be a useful indicator of story effect.

In summary. While the results of the hypotheses testing were not clear cut, several useful results emerged from this exploratory research. First, as demonstrated in prior research, attitude toward the product was a reliable driver of purchase intentions. Second, the effect of story type, if present, was quite small in this one shot setting. Third, at least in this one shot setting, attitude toward the product may mediate the effect of attitude toward the salesperson on purchase intentions. Finally, story topic may be an important element of storytelling in a personal selling setting.

Theoretical Implications

Stories occupy a central place in human communication and this dissertation explores storytelling in the personal selling and buyer-seller relationship domain. The qualitative study demonstrated that storytelling does in fact play a substantial role within this domain and

provided a basic outline and fodder for the creation of an initial framework for storytelling in personal selling for the quantitative studies in Chapter IV. This framework should prove adaptable for further codification, modeling, and hypothesis building. As expounded in Chapter II in the discussion of existing communication and relationship research, storytelling and related variables may add specificity to these streams of research and increase the likelihood of successful modeling and achieving statistical significance in the ensuing empirical studies.

The selling domain also lacked a definition for story prior to this research. For at least twenty four centuries since Aristotle's *Poetics*, scholars have shown an interest in storytelling. Narrative theorists, grammarians, and psychologists may not have come to agree on exactly what a story is, but this dissertation used their work to formulate and test a definition for story within the personal selling domain. Field observation demonstrated that the definition was workable and it should serve as a useful definition of story for future research in the area.

Another key area of ignorance pertained to the relationship of storytelling within the sales setting to other previously researched settings. The literature review and field work demonstrated that while in the management setting stories tend to be told and retold as they build into guideposts for information transfer, acculturation, and values transmission, stories in the sales setting tend to be less rehearsed, repeated less often, idiosyncratic to the teller, typically far shorter, and more ad hoc. Within marketing, brand stories tend to resemble stories from management, i.e. they express 'who we are' and 'how we do things'. Advertising stories tend to be more similar to sales stories with the very notable exception that stories in ads are often presented as a drama, whereas sales stories never are. Drama

implies that the teller acts out the story as though the listener is not present as in a play, rather than telling the story directly to the listener as a narrator. Clarification of these relationships should help future researchers to more confidently generalize conclusions appropriately from one domain to the other.

One of the important goals of exploratory research is to propose potential elements of the nomological net. In expanding the idea of using sales stories as tactical tools for information transfer, eliciting reciprocal stories, etcetera, to the strategic use of stories to build relationships, a moderating situational variable should prove very useful. Relationship orientation was put forward in the quantitative study of Chapter IV as just such a variable. Its situational emphasis sets it apart as uniquely suitable for the highly contextual nature of storytelling, particularly in the sales arena where different buyers have widely variable motivations. When this research was undertaken, no other research using the relationship orientation construct had yet occurred outside the introductory article by Palmatier et al. (2008). The lack of main effects in the studies unfortunately prevented full assessment of the potential of relationship orientation as a moderator here.

Also, this research employs triangulation of methods to approach storytelling. Storytelling is both a highly socially contextual activity and resonates deeply within our individual psychology as we build self-narratives plus narratives about others and our environment. The qualitative approach of Chapter III presents an excellent way of approaching the difficult to capture contextual aspects of storytelling. Conversely, the quantitative study of Chapter IV embodies a traditional approach to inquiry into the psychological aspects of storytelling. Together the two studies were intended to overcome the weaknesses of each individual approach. It is also notable that experiments are far less

common in sales research than in some other areas of marketing research. The use of experiments in the quantitative study thus encourages researchers to broaden the methodological toolkit in this area.

Finally, a framework for storytelling in the personal selling area developed in Chapter IV may serve as a good starting point for mapping this phenomenon further. Point of view does not appear to provide a strong effect in one shot encounters, but may prove useful when repeated encounters are employed. The post studies indicated that topic may prove to be a more useful tool. Finally, the meditational effect of attitude toward the product warrants further study in other settings.

Managerial Implications

Managers can take away important lessons from this research in spite of the exploratory nature of the inquiry. They should, however, use caution in applying these ideas to their particular operation as some may be more suitable than others in any given instance. One possible avenue for better use of stories is the central collection of stories for use by salespeople. A natural for this is a story about the founding of the company, which should naturally present the values of the firm to the buyer. Product success stories can also be collected and passed around the sales force. When the story is being told second hand, salespeople must get plenty of details and tell the story honestly in order for it to appear genuine.

Though keeping the story genuine sounding is difficult with a centralized set of stories, it does facilitate overall marketing efforts. By having each salesperson on topic and telling the best available stories, other marketing materials can be made to match. Integrating

stories from salespeople with other marketing materials on the web or in brochures may create a more coherent and persuasive overall communication strategy.

There are a number of themes that may prove useful to the manager, but caution is needed until further research is completed. In the matter of icebreaker stories, it appears that they are useful and accepted but that they can easily be overdone. Buyers likewise should respond well to an emphasis on establishing the bona fides of the value proposition early in the initial encounter. Keeping stories short, relevant to the particular buyer, and using humor gently and sparingly are all likely to increase the chances for a positive reception. Finally it seems likely that some buyers are more likely than others to desire a relationship with the salesperson, and that those persons will be more receptive to personal stories.

Training in storytelling does not occur commonly in sales forces and may be very valuable. There are tentative indications that exceptionally high levels of storytelling skill and story quality may have exponentially greater effects, but this needs further research. Professional training in story creation and delivery may pay big dividends. It could also sensitize sales staff to the importance of timing, relevance, content, and knowing what not to tell. This could not only foster good storytelling but prevent bad storytelling, which may be just as important.

One of the surprising findings of the qualitative study was that it is common for buyers to express needs and problems through stories. Training of salespeople in storytelling is low but among buyers it is nonexistent; it does not appear to even cross their minds. Training for buyers in properly expressing their needs and problems via stories could help buyers achieve better service from their sellers and make improved purchase decisions.

Salespeople may benefit from training in how to interpret these stories or at least in learning to welcome them as valuable sources of information. Salespeople could also benefit from knowing how to express solutions to problems in terms of stories. Letting buyers understand the cause behind a problem and how the solution will prevent its recurrence can be powerful medicine when trouble arises.

The quantitative study indicated that the interaction between attitude toward the salesperson, attitude toward the product, and purchase intentions is complex and needs further study. For now it appears that the attitude toward the product dominates purchase intentions, and attitude toward the salesman may improve attitude toward the product. As regards story topic, it appears that digressions are the worst choice overall with product stories probably superior to entity stories in the one shot setting of the studies.

Limitations

As with all research this dissertation was subject to limitations. The qualitative study had inherent difficulties that include the limited number of settings which could be examined and the difficulty in establishing the generalizability of the qualitative findings. The industrial and commercial research conducted here may provide too narrow a view of storytelling in the sales setting. Because of this limitation, it could be difficult to generalize all of the findings of the qualitative study to other sales settings. The quantitative studies were undertaken in part to begin triangulation of methods to overcome this limitation, but only a small number of themes could be tested here and further efforts are needed.

The quantitative study was also limited by various factors. The participants were not in a natural sales setting but rather viewed a video of a sales pitch as a small group in a laboratory. The participants may have reacted differently to storytelling here because of

viewing a video instead of a live salesperson, being in a group of people, or not actually

having any interest in purchasing a cell phone at the time of the study. Finally, the

participants were a demographically homogenous group of traditional university students.

Their limited experience with salespeople is one reason why the results may not generalize to

other demographic groups.

Finally, the prior research on storytelling had not reached into personal selling. The

studies undertaken are intended to serve as a foundation for exploration of the area. As with

any good research agenda, replication of the preliminary findings put forward in this

dissertation are required.

Future Research

Future research could seek to address the limitations of this study. A continuation of

the qualitative study in other settings could broaden the generalizability of the themes

generated here and perhaps add new insights as well. The results from the industrial and

commercial settings here could be juxtaposed with those from softer areas like

pharmaceutical or business-to-consumer sales. An exploration of the effects of storytelling in

services settings such as financial and health care services could be particularly interesting.

Services suffer from intangibility, an experience and even credence good nature, and

difficulty in providing warrantees. Storytelling may be particularly useful in overcoming

these difficulties through providing vicarious insights from others as to the likely result of a

particular service.

Storytelling in general is quite amenable to inquiry by almost any method whether

qualitative or quantitative. Field observation of sales encounters offers an avenue of insight

into the subtle contextual cues of storytelling and the listener's reaction. Longitudinal survey

research on buyer-seller dyads could be very helpful in exploring relationship building via stories. Experiments promise further insight into the drivers of effective storytelling. Studies of how to most effectively use stories to elicit reciprocal stories from customers could prove particular helpful for salespeople in becoming acquainted with buyers and determining their attitudes and needs.

The qualitative study of Chapter III spawned a number of themes that could be further explored. The personal versus business primacy in relationships investigated in the quantitative study here appears to call into question fundamental assumptions of modern sales and relationship building practice. One outcome of freeing sales personnel to focus more on the business side of relationships is that this may prove less time consuming and foster increased efficiency. Likewise the effects of various ice breaker stories, the impact of story quality and storytelling ability, and what causes some stories to backfire remain essentially unknown.

Many of the questions raised in the quantitative study of Chapter IV remain unanswered and important. Further inquiry into the effect of story type in repeated encounters, the effects of story topic and relationship orientation, and the situational drivers of the mediation of the effect of attitude toward the salesperson on purchase intentions by attitude toward the product are needed.

Replication of the present studies will be necessary before the implications of this research can be fully considered. In replicating the studies, it will be important to triangulate the results with different methods and within different sales settings to increase confidence in the validity and generalizability of the findings. Storytelling in personal selling and buyer-seller relationships appears to be a fruitful area of research for the foreseeable future.

Conclusion

The present study offers an exciting first glimpse into storytelling in personal selling. Storytelling is certainly ubiquitous in human communication. For firms attempting to communicate effectively and build closer relationships with customers, storytelling appears to be a powerful yet poorly understood tool. As future research expands the findings of both the qualitative and quantitative studies undertaken in this dissertation, both salespeople and buyers should experience benefits. This will be especially true if researchers and practitioners focus on storytelling as a way build buyer-seller relationships through better communication of needs, problems, solutions, and ideas rather than merely as a tactical tool to influence buyers. Exploring and employing stories as a tactical tool for better communications can help practitioners achieve the strategic aims of the sales force, especially building better relationships.

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APPPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Video Scripts

Story Type Stimuli – varying personal versus business perspectives

Scene opens looking over customer's shoulder.
Laying down a clipboard she has been writing on, the salesperson begins to address the customer.

Salesperson – "Ok, we've got your service needs pretty much figured out, let's talk about a phone. In the price range you indicated you could get the Model 6000."

The salesperson takes a phone off the nearby rack and hands it to the customer.
The camera now moves until only the salesperson is in the scene and begins her pitch while facing the camera.
{The opening to here is common to all videos}

Salesperson –

1a) Personal Entity – "The Model 6000 represents a new way of designing phones that are both reliable and have lots of features. It was engineered with special heavy duty components to make it rugged and dependable. Dependability matters too. When I picked out a new car for going back and forth to work, I put dependability at the top of my list because I knew it would save me money in the long run. I checked out all the different auto makers to see how dependable their cars were and I chose the one with the highest rating and lowest repair costs. The model 6000 also has super reception, a touch screen, Bluetooth, mobile email and V cast for your music all included and a 3.0 mega pixel camera. What do you think?"

1b) Business Entity – "The Model 6000 represents a new way of designing phones that are both reliable and have lots of features. It was engineered with special heavy duty components to make it rugged and dependable. Dependability matters too. When this cell phone maker picked out new fleet cars for their representatives, they put dependability at the top of their list because they knew it would save them money in the long run. They checked out all the

different auto makers to see how dependable their cars were and <u>they</u> chose the one with the highest rating and lowest repair costs. The model 6000 also has super reception, a touch screen, Bluetooth, mobile email and V cast for your music all included and a 3.0 mega pixel camera. What do you think?"

{1a is a story disclosing how the salesperson feels about dependability and how she put those feelings into action.
1b is a story disclosing how the firm feels about dependability and how they put those feelings into action.}

2a) Personal Product – "The Model 6000 represents a new way of designing phones that are both reliable and have lots of features. It was engineered with special heavy duty components to make it rugged and dependable. <u>I</u> like to go sailing. One time <u>I</u> was out and a storm came up and it was really blowing so a friend and <u>I</u> capsized and fell into the lake. <u>My</u> model 6000 was in <u>my</u> pocket and got smacked on the side of the boat and dunked in the lake. It was fine but <u>my</u> friend's phone was toast. The model 6000 also has super reception, a touch screen, Bluetooth, mobile email and V cast for your music all included and a 3.0 mega pixel camera. What do you think?"

2b) Business Product – "The Model 6000 represents a new way of designing phones that are both reliable and have lots of features. It was engineered with special heavy duty components to make it rugged and dependable. <u>The company tells about a customer in Wisconsin who likes to go sailing. One time <u>he</u> was out and a storm came up and it was really blowing so a friend and <u>he</u> capsized and fell into the lake. <u>His</u> model 6000 was in <u>his</u> pocket and got smacked on the side of the boat and dunked in the lake. It was fine but <u>his</u> friend's phone was toast. The model 6000 also has super reception, a touch screen, Bluetooth, mobile email and V cast for your music all included and a 3.0 mega pixel camera. What do you think?"

{2a is a story about the salesperson's 1st person experience with the model 6000's ruggedness.
2b is a story about the firm's 3rd person experience with the model 6000's ruggedness.}

3a) Personal Digression – "The Model 6000 represents a new way of designing phones that are both reliable and have lots of features. It was engineered with special heavy duty components to make it rugged and dependable. <u>Gee, is it ever raining outside. A while back <u>I</u> was at a retreat in the mountains. <u>I</u> went for a hike in the valley one morning and <u>was</u> really enjoying the scenery when a storm came and the stream started to rise. By the time <u>I</u> got back to the crossing it was a raging torrent. <u>I was</u> stranded till after dark with only a granola <u>bar</u> and some water. The model 6000 also has super reception, a touch screen, Bluetooth, mobile email and V cast for your music all included and a 3.0 mega pixel camera. What do you think?"

3b) Business Digression – "The Model 6000 represents a new way of designing phones that are both reliable and have lots of features. It was engineered with special heavy duty components to make it rugged and dependable. Gee, is it ever raining outside. A while back some managers from this cell phone maker were at a retreat in the mountains. They went for a hike in the valley one morning and were really enjoying the scenery when a storm came and the stream started to rise. By the time they got back to the crossing it was a raging torrent. They were stranded till after dark with only granola bars and some water. The model 6000 also has super reception, a touch screen, Bluetooth, mobile email and V cast for your music all included and a 3.0 mega pixel camera. What do you think?"

{3a is a story that digresses about a storm from a personal perspective.
3b is a story that digresses about a storm from a business perspective.}

The shaded areas are the only variations between scripts. Underline shows variations between each a/b pair. Word count of shaded areas: 1a 66, 1b 65, 2a 61, 2b 69, 3a 71, 3b 76.

APPENDIX B

Qualitative Interview Questions

Unstructured interview questions for salespersons

1) Briefly tell me about your relationship with a customer you have a good relationship with?
2) How long have you been dealing with them?
3) Have you disclosed to each other a lot about your family? Hobbies? Vacations?
4) Is it important to them that they know about your life outside of work?

Semi-Structured interview questions for salespersons

Categories: 1) Do you tell stories 2) Are they good 3) What are the stories like 4) Are they effective 5) How do you feel about the stories 6) Are the stories natural conversation or are they tactical tools

1) Do you tell your customers stories?

2) Do you consider yourself a good storyteller?

 Is it important to be a good storyteller?

Is content or style more important?

Do you consciously try to improve your storytelling? How?

Have you received specific training in how to tell stories well?

3) Are your stories usually about business related topics? Pleasure? Something else?

Do you tell stories about clients successfully using your products?

4) Do customers respond well to your stories?

Are customers more persuaded by facts or stories?

Is there a single factor that is most important for telling a good story?

5) Do you ever regret telling a story?

Can you tell if a customer did not like a story?

Are there negative aspects about telling customers stories?

6) Are stories just a natural part of the conversation for you?

Do you tell some stories consciously, to accomplish a specific goal?

Would just presenting the facts work as well as a story to accomplish this?

Questionnaire for Quantitative Studies

Imagine you are buying a cell phone while you view this video and afterwards as you answer the questions in the attached survey.

This is an anonymous survey – do not write your name.
Circle the number that most accurately represents your level of agreement with the statements .
Please circle a number even if the question seems similar to another one so we know your answer.

I like this salesperson	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 strongly disagree strongly agree (Please **circle** the most accurate number)
The salesperson left me favorably impressed	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 strongly disagree strongly agree
I find this salesperson appealing	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 strongly disagree strongly agree
I feel good about this salesperson	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 strongly disagree strongly agree
I like this cell phone	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 strongly disagree strongly agree
I have a favorable impression of this cell phone	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 strongly disagree strongly agree
This cell phone is appealing	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 strongly disagree strongly agree
It seems like a good cell phone	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 strongly disagree strongly agree
A close relationship with this salesperson helps in buying this product	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 strongly disagree strongly agree
I need a close relationship with this salesperson to be sure I get what I want	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 strongly disagree strongly agree
A close relationship with the salesperson helps me successfully buy this product	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 strongly disagree strongly agree
A strong relationship with the salesperson is very helpful when selecting this product	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 strongly disagree strongly agree

In the future if I need this product I will consider this cell phone:	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 unlikely likely
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 improbable probable
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 doubtful no doubt
The salesperson's story was about something that he or she did	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 no yes
The salesperson's story was about something that the cell phone maker did	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 no yes
Do you feel that cell phones are:	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 unnecessary necessary
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 not helpful helpful
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 impractical practical
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 not fun fun
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 dull exciting
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 not enjoyable enjoyable
Which best describes your involvement while viewing the video:	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 uninvolved involved
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Concentrating very little Concentrating very hard
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Paying very little attention Paying a lot of attention
Please circle your gender:	Male Female
I was born in the year:	19 __ __
The last 4 digits of my CWID are:	__ __ __ __
Who paid for your current cell phone:	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Myself Parent/employer/other
What did you think this experiment was about?	

Thank you very much for your help!

Note that the above questionnaire was for Study 1. All other studies were identical except for the following items.

In Study 2 the second manipulation check question was replaced with:

The salesperson's story was about something that another customer of the cell phone maker did.

In Study 3 the second manipulation check question was replaced with:

The salesperson's story was about something that managers from the cell phone maker did.

APPENDIX D

IRB Approval

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Wednesday, September 22, 2010

IRB Application No   BU1030

Proposal Title.   Storytelling by the Sales Force

Reviewed and   Exempt
Processed as:

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved   Protocol Expires: 9/21/2011

Principal
Investigator(s):

David Gilliam   Karen Flaherty
101 Hanner   222 Business
Stillwater, OK 74078   Stillwater, OK 74078

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

☒ The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact: Beth McTernan in 219 Cordell North (phone: 405-744-5700, beth.mcternan@okstate.edu)

Sincerely

Shelia M. Kennison

Shelia Kennison, Chair
Institutional Review Board

VITA

David A. Gilliam

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis: STORYTELLING BY THE SALES FORCE AND ITS EFFECT ON PERSONAL
SELLING AND BUYER-SELLER RELATIONSHIPS

Major Field: Business Administration - Marketing

Biographical:

Personal Data:

Born and raised on a small farm in Ohio.

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Business
Administration at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2011.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Business Administration at Wright
State University, Dayton, Ohio in May, 2007.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Economics at Ohio
University, Athens, Ohio in May, 1989, *Summa Cum Laude*.

Experience:

2007-2011   Graduate Research and Teaching Assistant, Oklahoma State
University, Department of Marketing.

1990-2011   Founder and President of Gilliam Machinery Corporation.

1983-1987   Representative for Heidelberg Eastern Incorporated, Division
of East Asiatic Corporation, Copenhagen, Denmark.

Professional Memberships: American Marketing Association

Name: David A. Gilliam   Date of Degree: May, 2011

Institution: Oklahoma State University   Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: STORYTELLING BY THE SALES FORCE AND ITS EFFECT ON
            PERSONAL SELLING AND BUYER-SELLER RELATIONSHIPS

Pages in Study: 145   Candidate for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major Field: Business Administration - Marketing

Scope and Method of Study: Though often observed in the field, storytelling by the sales
        force in not widely studied in the marketing literature. Collection and analysis of
        data from interviews and field observation of forty nine buyers and sellers served
        as a starting point. By combining these initial results with what is known about
        storytelling in the humanities, psychology, management, and advertising
        literature, a basic framework for analyzing stories in the sales setting was
        developed. This led to the design of three experiments that compare stories from a
        personal versus business point of view across three potential topic areas covering
        the self or the firm, the product, and human interests. Relationship orientation
        served as a potential moderator of storytelling effects on customer attitudes
        toward the salesperson and the product. Purchase intentions also served as a
        dependent variable.

Findings and Conclusions: The analysis showed that the main effects of personal versus
        business story type, if present, were quite small. Moderation by relationship
        orientation was not significant. The effect of attitude toward the product was
        significant in all three studies. The effect of attitude toward the salesperson on
        purchase intentions was significant in only the first study, with the effect being
        fully or partially mediated by attitude toward the product in all three studies. Post
        study analysis also indicated that the topic of the story may be more important
        than the personal versus business story type, at least in the onetime encounter of
        these experiments.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: _Karen E. Flaherty_____Tom J. Brown_____