

**EMOTIONS, EXPECTATIONS AND SALES PERFORMANCE:
A LONGITUDINAL STUDY**

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes emotional and cognitive drivers of sales force performance. Starting from the study by Brown, Cron and Slocum (1997) our research expands their model by including positive and negative anticipatory emotions, expectations, desire to act and control on actions. We also demonstrate that the efficacy of affective variables in motivating salespeople is moderated by empathy. Furthermore we verify the existence of a rational mental process, based on expectations and independent from emotions, that motivates salespeople. Our findings are based on a longitudinal study on a sample of 154 salespeople in a pharmaceutical company.

KEYWORDS

Salespeople; Performance; Emotions; Cognitions; Motivation.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

Emotions pervade many aspects of sales force behavior (e.g. Lewin and Sager, 2008) and play a role in influencing sales performance (e.g. Verbeke and Bagozzi, 2002; 2000; Bagozzi, Verbeke and Gavino, 2003). With this regard, Brown, Cron and Slocum (1997) suggested that emotions are an important driving force behind sales force motivation, tested a model based on cognitive theory of emotions and explained the driving force behind salesperson motivation as a function of goal-directed emotions. Their model is an interesting expansion of the dominant theories of motivation in the marketing literature (eg. Expectancy theory) that typically focus on the rational mental processes as the one and only driver of salesperson motivation. The authors demonstrated that the personal stakes that salespeople have in a goal situation elicit anticipation of emotions that come from achieving or failing to achieve their performance goal. Anticipatory emotions, in turn, affect volitions and mediate the relationship between personal stakes and volitions. The latter determine goal directed behaviors that, in turn, affect goal attainment. Eventually the attainment (failure) of performance goal elicits positive (negative) emotions. Their framework suggests further research questions: under which conditions does this affective route work best? Does this emotional path coexist with a more rational one in determining sales performance?

Our study starts from Brown, Cron and Slocum (1997) model and tries to answer the above questions. Namely, our research extends their model in six directions. First, Brown, Cron and Slocum (1997) theoretically distinguished between two kinds of personal stakes (financial and psychological), different volitions and goal directed behaviors (territory planning and account specific planning) but their model did not empirically investigate such distinctions, thus narrowing the managerial implications of the framework. Our model takes into account these differences. Second, their definition of anticipated emotions includes both anticipated and anticipatory emotions: however, these two affective dimensions may be characterized by a different efficacy in stimulating motivation. Third, we propose that desire to act mediates the impact of anticipatory and anticipated emotions on volitions. Fourth, we introduce control on action as a further possible determinant of motivation. Fifth, we maintain that the motivational impact of the affective variables in the model is moderated by empathy. Finally, while Brown, Cron and Slocum (1997) model focused only on the role of emotions in determining sales performance, we build a framework that integrates the relationship between emotion and motivation with the traditional rational thought process based on expectations. In fact, our model includes both the rational and the emotional determinants of sales performance, thus developing a more comprehensive view of the psychological forces that determine goal-directed behaviors and performance of the sales force. In the next paragraph we discuss our model in detail.

OVERVIEW OF THE MODEL

Brown, Cron and Slocum (1997) model of motivation starts from the concept of a goal situation: the salesperson assesses whether a certain situation can promote or obstruct the pursuit of a specific objective (Scherer, 1988). The importance of this antecedent of emotions has been highlighted by Lazarus (1991) who defined this appraisal as “goal congruence/incongruence”, i.e. an evaluation which considers “the extent to which a transaction is consistent or inconsistent with what the person wants – that is, it either thwarts or facilitates personal goals” (Lazarus, 1991, p.150). Appraisal has been called “goal/path obstacle” (Smith and Ellsworth, 1985), “desirability” (Ortony, Clore and Collins, 1988) and “motive consistency” (Roseman, 1991).

The goals of individuals can be classified as interests concerning one's person (for example, survival) or relations (for example, belonging to a group). According to Brown, Cron and Slocum (1997) personal stakes that might be involved in a sales context include goals that belong both to the former class (e.g. income or chances for career development) and the latter (e.g. recognition or respect of others). From a managerial point of view, this distinction is relevant: the debate about the efficacy of these two types of incentives in influencing salesperson motivation is inconclusive (e.g.

Tyagi, 1982; Baker, Jensen and Murphy, 1982) and, in order to verify their distinctive importance in motivating salespeople, we incorporated both classes of stakes in our model.

As Brown, Cron and Slocum (1997) suggested, the type of appraisal described above makes it possible to distinguish positive emotions from negative ones (Weiner, 1985). In accordance with cognitive theory, emotions are elicited in circumstances that have special significance for a person's well-being, such as reflections on personal stakes by salespeople. Our model follows previous works on the cognitive determinants of emotions in assuming that appraisals, in a goal situation, give rise to two classes of emotional experience of salespeople: anticipated and anticipatory emotions. Brown, Cron and Slocum (1997) in their model aggregated these two classes of future-oriented emotions. With the exception of Baumgartner, Pieters and Bagozzi (2008), anticipatory and anticipated emotions have not been compared in a single study, and they have never been compared in a sales context. Thus, their relative effectiveness in stimulating salespeople goal-directed behavior is uncharted.

Anticipated emotions are "emotions experienced in anticipation of imagined future goal success/failure" (Bagozzi, 2006, p.26). They refer to prefactual evaluations about how one would feel in future situations, after something desired happens or not. Bagozzi, Baumgartner and Pieters (1998) maintain that people consider the prospects of both goal success and goal failure: this appraisal generates anticipated emotional responses. Imagined goal achievement elicits positive emotions such as happiness, while an imagined goal failure generates negative emotions such as sadness.

Anticipatory emotions, in contrast, represent a different kind of future-directed emotions. While anticipated emotions are generated in conditions of certainty (the mental simulation described before draws a certain situation of success or failure) a "defining character of anticipatory emotions is their dependence on the probability of an event happening" (Bagozzi, 2006, p.27). Like anticipated emotions they could be positive or negative: hope is a prototypical emotion of the former class, fear of the latter.

Baumgartner, Pieters and Bagozzi (2008) maintain that positive anticipated emotions, negative anticipated emotions, positive anticipatory emotions, and negative anticipatory emotions may have different influence on goal directed behaviors. Notably, they verified their hypotheses in the context of millennium transition (Y2K problem), demonstrating that both types of negative emotions and the positive anticipated one play a role in predicting goal directed behaviors. Because of the specific context they considered, new research should explore whether this is a general results and our study aims to expand their findings to a sales context. In particular, we maintain that the four classes of future oriented emotions have distinctive motivational implications for salespeople in the sense that may separately and differently influence the desire to perform actions. This study aims to examine their relative impact on motivation.

While Brown, Cron and Slocum (1997) demonstrated a direct causal path between future oriented emotions and volitions, we maintain that desire to act mediates this relationship. Bagozzi (1992; 2006) defines desires as psychological states that are necessary to convert reasons for actions into intention to act. Such desires can be termed behavioral desires because they refer to the desires to act. Bagozzi proposed that desires provide the motivational impetus for developing intentions to act and suggested that desires mediate the effect of anticipatory and anticipated emotions on volitions. A growing body of research has confirmed this transformative role of desires (e.g. Perugini and Bagozzi, 2001; Bagozzi, Dholakia and Basuroy, 2003; Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006) but no research tested this mediating role in a sales context. Our study tries to fill this gap.

According to Bagozzi (2006) volitions entail an element of planning, particularly with respect to the formulation of the steps needed to achieve a goal. Brown, Cron and Slocum (1997) suggested that, with regard to salespeople, planning general strategies for working in a sales territory and specific strategies for approaching particular accounts exemplify the directive components of volitions. Knowing their relative contribution to performance may be important from a managerial point of view, e.g. to better train salespeople to effectively plan their activities. Thus, our model

distinguishes the relative effects of territory and account planning volitions on actual territory and account management behaviors. In fact, in order to realize the desired goals, salespeople must translate their volitions into accomplished actions and, with regard to the activities planned, our model investigates the translation of volitions into behaviors. In keeping with Brown, Cron and Slocum (1997), we maintain a positive relationship between planning and goal directed behaviors.

Actions leading to attainment of goal must themselves be considered intermediate goals with their own potential problems of execution (Bagozzi and Warshaw, 1990; Ajzen, 2002). Therefore, the concept of perceived behavioral control is introduced in our model to accommodate the nonvolitional elements inherent in all behaviors (Ajzen, 2002). Perceived behavioral control refers to a person's confidence in his/her ability to perform well in a task domain threatened by unforeseen obstacles (Bandura, 1997). The relevance of this belief was analyzed in different contexts such as health promotion (Bandura, 2002), body weight regulation (Perugini and Bagozzi, 2001) and brand behavior (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006). In the sales context, it reflects the perceptions of control over actions salespeople will perform in order to achieve their goal. Some research demonstrated its direct and indirect effects on sales performance (e.g. Brown, Cron and Slocum, 1998; Frayne and Gringer, 2000). With regard to the latter effects, we maintain that perceived behavioral control is likely to affect motivation which, in our model, is represented by desires. Hence this causal relationship, that was already tested in contexts different from the sales one (e.g. Perugini and Bagozzi, 2001; Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006), is included in our model.

Following Brown, Cron and Slocum (1997), our model also hypothesizes a relationship between goal-directed behaviors and degree of goal attainment: the more planning salespeople are involved in, the more likely they are to reach their goals. Furthermore, through appraisal processes, the degree of goal attainment elicits goal-outcome positive and negative emotions.

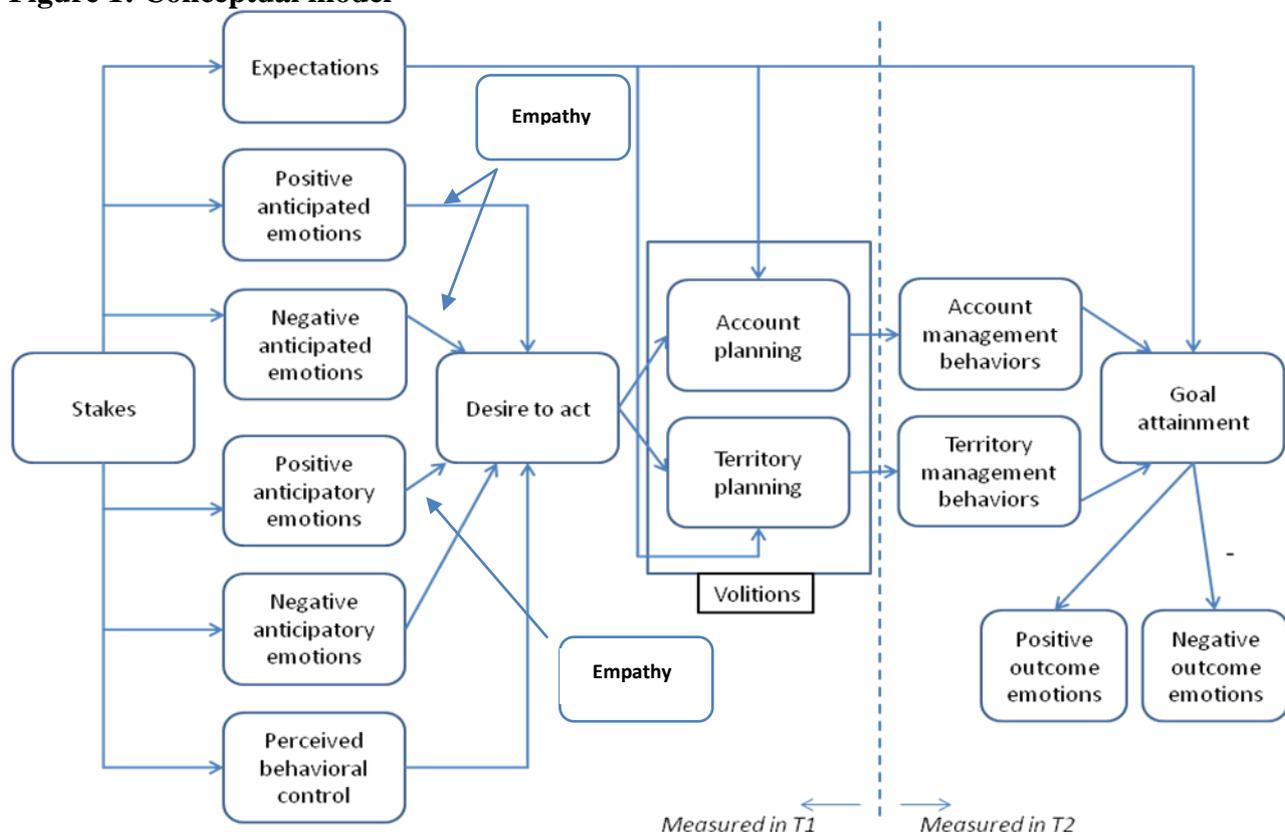
Brown, Cron and Slocum (1997) model focused on the emotional path predicting sales performance, but it did not simultaneously consider both the emotional and the rational paths which may affect sales force motivation and ultimately performance. According to the theory of reasoned behaviors, the second one is not negligible: in fact, actions for goal achievement may be preceded by deliberative process culminating in conscious and rational decisions. Following this perspective, expectations of success or failure in goal achievement may determine both volitions and goal attainment (Carver and Scheier, 1998). In fact, any goal involving "doing" can have an expectancy, and if expectations of success are sufficiently positive, the person makes an effort to succeed, while if they are negative, the result is an impetus to disengage from further effort and potentially to disengage from the goal itself (Carver and Scheier, 1998, p.180-181). Carver and Scheier (1998) clarified the distinction between perceived behavioral control and outcome expectancies: while the first construct refers to personal capabilities, the latter concerns causal factor outside the person. They maintain that both variables affect goal achievement.

This proposition was tested by Frayne and Geringer (2000) in a sales context: the authors demonstrated that outcome expectancies influence goals attainment. Starting from this finding, our model aims to predict sales performance by integrating the traditional, "rational thought" process based on expectations framed by Frayne and Geringer (2000) and the affective one suggested by Brown, Cron and Slocum (1997). Thus, in order compare the predictive power of the two theories, our model includes the two paths, the rational one and the emotional one. All the paths hypothesized above are summarized in Figure 1.

Finally, with regard to the affective path that links future-oriented emotions (i.e. anticipated and anticipatory emotions) and desire to act, the aim of our study is to understand under which conditions affect plays a motivational role in the sales context. We maintain that anticipated and anticipatory emotions can successfully influence desire to act only for the less empathetic salespeople. In fact, empathy is regarded as an important element of effective selling, but studies of this affective dimension have yielded conflicting findings regarding its effectiveness in improving sales. On the one hand, salespeople's empathy enhances customer trust (Ahearne, Jelinek and Jones, 2007) and it is considered by sales managers as a trait possessed by successful salespeople

(Lockeman and Hallaq, 1986). On the other side, other scholars demonstrated that empathy is negatively related to sales performance (Dowson, Soper and Pettijohn, 1992) or at least that not all empathetic abilities have a positive effect on sales performance (McBane, 1995). To the best of our knowledge, no research focused on the efficacy of empathy in motivating salespeople. According to the psychology literature, we hypothesize that this trait negatively moderates the energizing force of emotions in fueling salespeople's desire to act. In fact, more empathetic salespeople, compared to less empathetic ones, are less focused on their own emotions (Green and Sedikides, 1999; Wood et al., 1990; Eisenberg, 2000), which are affective states that may play an important motivational role (Baumgartner, Pieters and Bagozzi, 2008). Because empathy and emotions negatively interacts, for empathetic salespeople the transformational role of emotions in motivation is weakened. In line with these conclusions, we maintain that for empathetic salespeople the motivational power of their future oriented emotions is impoverished and thus we hypothesized that empathy moderates the relationship between anticipatory and anticipated emotions and desire to act.

Figure 1: Conceptual model



METHOD

Data were collected at two points of time from salespeople in a pharmaceutical company. Each salesperson works in a specific geographical area and is responsible for building and maintaining relationships with specific doctors. The research was conducted in a specific quarter. At the beginning of the quarter (October) salespeople were encouraged by management to reach a specific sales target before the end of the quarter (January). At the beginning of the quarter (Time 1) when the target for that quarter was presented, salespeople were given a copy of the questionnaire and pre-stamped envelopes. Time 1 questionnaires included measures for psychological and financial stakes of salespeople, the positive (negative) emotions they anticipated experiencing at the end of the quarter in case they reached (or failed to reach) the goal, the anticipatory emotions they felt in relation to their perceived probability of goal attainment or failure, expectations regarding the possibility to reach the target, desires to perform the needed actions to reach the sales target, perceived behavioral control on those actions, volitions (i.e. account planning and territory

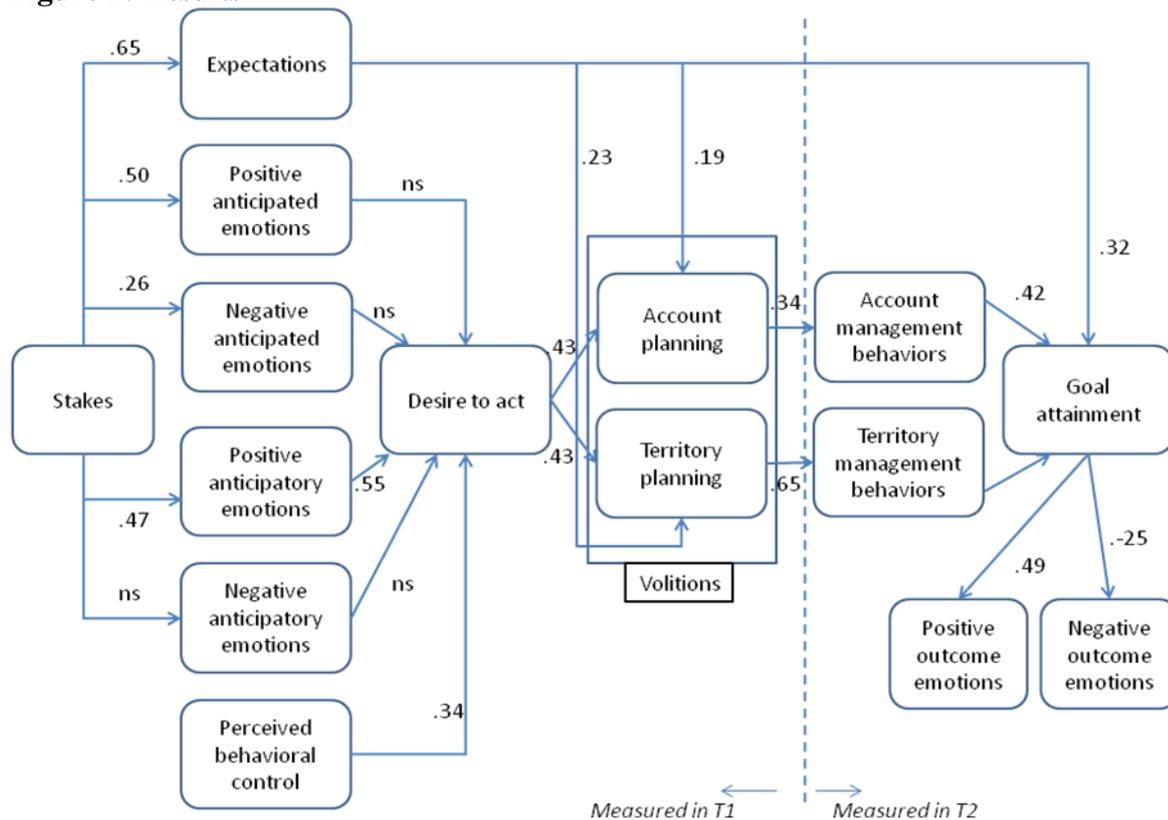
planning) and empathy. The second questionnaire was completed at the end of the quarter (Time 2) after the salespeople were informed by the management about the degree of their goal (sales target) attainment. Again, we distributed the questionnaires and the pre-stamped envelopes. Time 2 questionnaires included measures of actual goal-directed behaviors that salespeople performed during the quarter, the degree of goal attainment and outcome emotions.

The entire sales force, totaling 316 salespeople, took part to the research: 294 members returned the first questionnaire and 243 the second. To match the questionnaire and, at the same time, to ensure anonymity, the salesperson was asked to indicate a code (i.e. initials of parents' first and last names) in both questionnaires. Finally, we could match 154 usable questionnaires. No item had to be dropped. Table 1 in the Appendix shows information on the scales used in our study. No item had to be dropped.

RESULTS

The model presented in Figure 1 was estimated with Lisrel 8.12. This estimation resulted in a fit of RMSEA=0.05, Standardized RMR = 0.08, CFI =0.95, NNFI=0.95. These indices suggests an excellent fit (Bollen, 1989). Standardized path coefficients for the model are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Results



All but 5 of the hypothesized paths were statistically significant. As Brown, Cron and Slocum (1997) pointed out, the direct paths from goal attainment to outcome emotions suggest that success is psychologically rewarding while failure psychologically damages salespeople. Moreover, account management behaviors positively affect goal attainment (whereas territory management doesn't) and planning significantly influences behaviors. In turn, desire to act represents the motivational force that induces planning and it is influenced by positive anticipatory emotions and perceived behavioral control. The former is elicited by stakes. Our model suggests that positive anticipatory emotions and desire to act mediate the relationship between stakes and volitions. On the other hand, as hypothesized, a more rational path positively influences planning and goal achievement: in fact also expectations play a role in determining volitions and goal attainment.

Interestingly, the impact of three types of emotions on desire to act is not significant. To test the role of empathy as a moderator in the relationship between anticipatory and anticipated emotions and desire to act, we analyzed the data using moderated regressions models. The dependent variable is desire to act. The independent variables are positive anticipatory emotions, negative anticipatory emotions, positive anticipated emotions, negative anticipated emotions, and the interactions between each of them and empathy.

To improve the interpretability of the main effects in the presence of interaction variables, we mean centered the independent and the dependent variables before computing the interactions (see Jaccard, Turrisi, and Wan, 1990). To estimate the unconditional main effects, we first examined the models lower in the hierarchy that do not include the interaction terms under consideration. Then, we included in the models two-way interactions between each of the four types of future oriented emotions and empathy. In three of the four cases, the joint effect of the future oriented emotions and empathy on desire to act was negative and significant (see Table 2): as predicted, empathy negatively moderates the energizing force of both types of anticipated emotions and positive anticipatory emotions in fueling salespeople desire to act.

TABLE 2 : Results of regression model for desire to act

	Main effects only	Main Effects + two-Way Interactions
Independent variable		
Positive anticipatory emotions β	.37***	.37***
Empathy β	n.s.	n.s.
Positive anticipatory emotions X Empathy β		-.24**
Significance of F	.00	.00
R^2	.17	.22
Adjusted R^2	.15	.20
Independent variable		
Negative anticipatory emotions β	n.s.	n.s.
Empathy β	.17*	n.s.
Negative anticipatory emotions X Empathy β		n.s.
Significance of F	n.s.	n.s.
R^2	.03	.04
Adjusted R^2	.02	.02
Independent variable		
Positive anticipated emotions β	.32***	.32***
Empathy β	n.s.	n.s.
Positive anticipated emotions X Empathy β		-.19*
Significance of F	.00	.00
R^2	.13	.17
Adjusted R^2	.12	.15
Independent variable		
Negative anticipated emotions β	n.s.	n.s.
Empathy β	.17*	n.s.
Negative anticipated emotions X Empathy β		-.28**
Significance of F	n.s.	.00
R^2	.03	.09

DISCUSSION

Our findings suggest the existence of two different paths that explain sales performance. The first one is emotional in nature: it has its heart in desire to act. Desire to act plays a fundamental motivational role, since it stimulates volitions, goal directed behaviors and performance by mediating the impact of anticipatory positive emotions, i.e. an affective dimension elicited by stakes. The second path finds its keystone on expectations: as the emotional variables, they mediate the relationship between stakes and volitions. Therefore, results demonstrate that expectancy theory and the approach based on affect suggested by Brown, Cron and Slocum (1997) are not in conflict in explaining sales performance: they are just complementary instead. Furthermore, according to theories of reasoned behaviors, our analysis highlights the fundamental role of perceived behavioral control in motivating salespeople. Finally, our findings indicate different motivational implications of anticipated and anticipatory emotions for salespeople. It seems that the only affective state able to explain the driving force behind salespeople motivation is represented by positive anticipatory emotions. On the other hand, the joint effects of anticipated emotions and empathy plays a role in predicting desire to act. Our results seemingly suggest that the effect of future oriented emotions on desire to act is moderated by empathy. Our study inevitably has some limitations. First, we used self-declared measures of performance. Second, more types of volitions and behaviors may be investigated in the future.

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Table 1: Scales- reliability analysis

Concept	Scale	Source	Cronbach's alpha	M	SD
Financial Stakes	2 items, 7 points scale	Brown, Cron and Slocum (1997)	.85	4.23	1.39
Psychological Stakes	5 items, 7 points scale	Brown, Cron and Slocum (1997)	.84	4.12	1.20
Expectations	3 items, 7 points scale	Bagozzi and Warshaw (1990)	.89	4.04	1.22
Positive Anticipated Emotions	7 items, 7 points scale	Brown, Cron and Slocum (1997)	.88	5.40	1.03
Negative Anticipated Emotions	8 items, 7 points scale	Brown, Cron and Slocum (1997)	.90	3.02	1.42
Positive Anticipatory Emotions	5 items, 7 points scale	Perugini and Bagozzi (2001)	.90	5.21	1.10
Negative Anticipatory Emotions	4 items, 7 points scale	Perugini and Bagozzi (2001)	.87	3.83	1.44
Perceived Behavioral Control	3 items, 7 points scale	Trafimow et al (2002)	.86	5.02	0.82
Desire to Act	3 items, 7 points scale	Perugini and Bagozzi (2001)	.88	6.15	0.80
Account Planning	2 items, 7 points scale	Brown, Cron and Slocum (1997)	.74	6.27	0.75
Territory Planning	5 items, 7 points scale	Brown, Cron and Slocum (1997)	.87	5.39	0.97
Account Behaviors	2 items, 7 points scale	Brown, Cron and Slocum (1997)	.86	6.10	0.91
Territory Behaviors	5 items, 7 points scale	Brown, Cron and Slocum (1997)	.86	5.32	0.94
Goal Attainment	3 items, 5 points scale		.80	3.60	0.70
Positive outcome emotions	7 items, 7 points scale	Brown, Cron and Slocum (1997)	.92	4.20	1.28
Negative outcome emotions	8 items, 7 points scale	Brown, Cron and Slocum (1997)	.91	1.84	1.10
Empathy	2 items, 7 points scale	Bagozzi, Belschak and Verbeke (2010)	.71	5.47	0.80