

Perceptions of Professional Sales Careers: The Impact of Various Sources for Information

By Nancy E. Waldeck, Ellen Bolman Pullins and Mary Jean Blink

Despite huge annual investments by employers attempting to recruit students for professional sales careers, success has been questionable (e.g., Harvard 2015). Recent research suggests that popular media may be to blame for some of these employer difficulties (e.g., Weber 2015). This paper expands on studies in management, sales, and media disciplines to explore both the factors in student use of media for career information and the implications of this use on the perceptions of professional sales as a career. A sample 232 university business students were surveyed. Findings show that age, perceived accuracy, and an information motive will predict media use for career information. Perceptions of the career opportunities afforded by professional sales were influenced by television, YouTube and career websites, while the image of salespeople is predicted by the use of television and YouTube. Implications for recruiters are explored.

At present, almost eight hundred thousand professional sales positions representing over forty-nine thousand employers remain unfilled (www.salesjobs.com 2016). Recruitment for professional sales will continue to be a challenge for many firms despite high earning potential and potential advancement (Harvard, 2015). A recent article in *The Wall Street Journal*, entitled “Why It’s So Hard to Fill Sales Jobs,” proposes that sales recruiters may face difficulties in recruitment of students due to negative stereotypes portrayed in feature films such as “Death of a Salesman” and “Glengarry Glen Ross” (Weber 2015). Weber elaborates that students may be prone to the “huge stereotype” that employment in professional sales simply “isn’t a career.” This may be problematic for recruiters since, in recruiting young adults, perceptions of the sales profession may influence student interest and the likelihood of obtaining student interviews (Wiles and Shapiro, 2004). Recruiters may find themselves competing against preconceptions of

sales careers, derived from the media, which may or may not be accurate and positive.

Research to date has focused on demographic factors that can contribute to sales perceptions, including personality (Stevens and Macintosh, 2003), culture (Karakaya et.al, 2014) and education (Allen, et.al., 2014). Less common is research on external contextual factors, as media, that can contribute to student perceptions of professional sales (Waldeck, Pullins and Houlette, 2010). This is an important omission. Media sources are commonly used by university students for career information when making decisions (Bright, et.al, 2005). The pervasiveness of media use may also underscore its possible relevance as a source of career information. Students have access to information, including career-related information, through a variety of media sources on a 24/7 basis. The average American spends twenty-three hours a week online, with 70% reporting checking YouTube at least twice daily (Mielach, 2013). Likewise, mobile devices have opened up access and internet content through Smartphones and tablets (Nielsen, 2014). The extent to which students have used media for as career information has not been examined to date, nor have the implications of media use on career perceptions.

Media provides a mixed-bag of positive and negative information about sales careers. In addition to more benign images, salespeople have been found to be vilified as characters over decades of television programs and movies (Hartman, 2006). Weber (2015)

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supports this contention, citing negative representations of professional sales persons in popular movies. The internet also provides both positive and negative information about professional sales. Fertig (2015) suggests that “virtually every company” has a part of their website devoted to material about specific careers, such as sales. The internet has been embraced by such employers as Eli Lilly (www.lilly.com) and Proctor and Gamble (www.us.pgcareers.com) to promote both the potential of sales careers within their corporations. Professional associations as the American Marketing Association (www.ama.com) and global career websites (www.salesjobs.com) enthusiastically portray professional sales as a dynamic and lucrative career path. These websites can provide important sources of career information for young adults (Fertig, 2015). In contrast, student viewed websites, such as YouTube.com may include both stereotypical sales images, as well as instructional videos aimed at professionals.

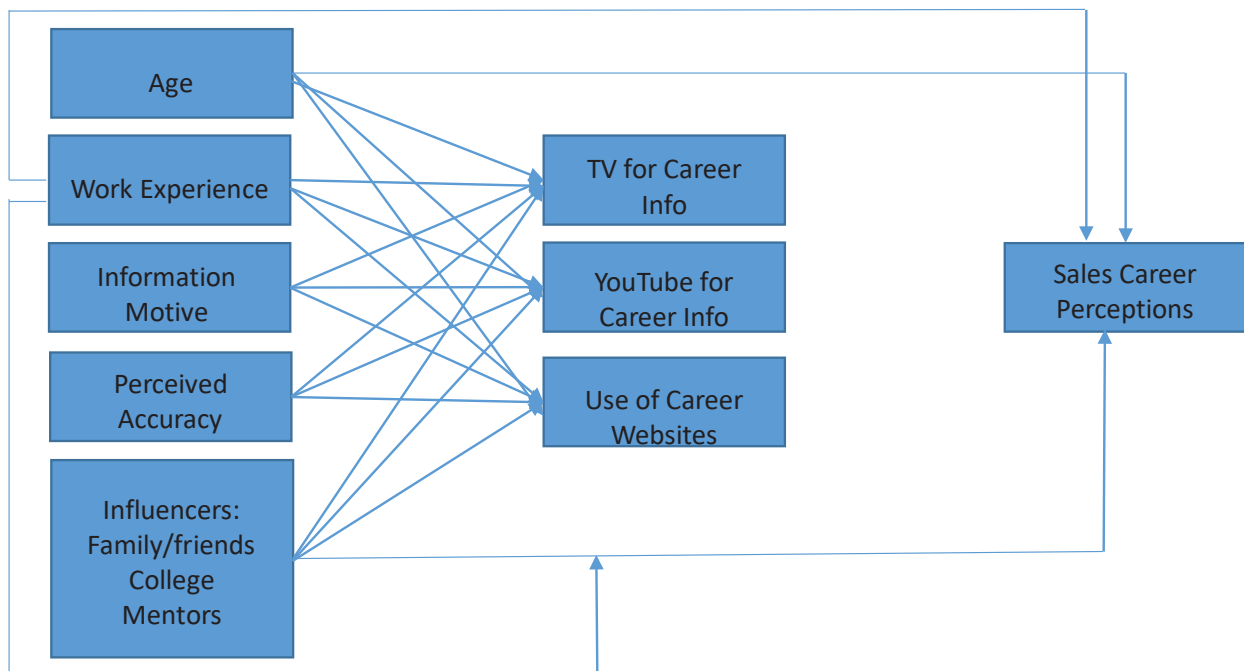
Our intent is to expand on previous research about student use of media for work information. We will

investigate the factors of student use of media sources for career information (Bright et.al., 2005) and the implications of that use on their perceptions of professional sales careers (Hartman, 2006; Waldeck, Pullins and Houlette, 2010). Do perceptions of accuracy and motivation for using influence the use of a source for career information? Does the availability of non-media sources influence the extent of media use? Finally, to what extent does media used for work information influence student perceptions of professional sales? We study these questions using a sample of 232 undergraduate students taking business courses in the Midwest. We begin by reviewing the pertinent literature, the develop hypotheses, and follow with our results. Implications to recruiters are also provided.

MEDIA AS AN INFORMATIONAL SOURCE FOR CAREERS

Figure 1 depicts the proposed relationships which are supported in the following review.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model for the Study



In our model, we begin by considering how much various sources of information are used (these sources being TV, YouTube and Career Websites). The extent to which different sources are used may be different depending on how many influencers/role models might have relevant information (e.g., family members, college professors, etc.), on how accurate students perceive the source to be, and the motive to use the source for sales career information. Age and work experience have been found related to media use (Nielsen, 2014). In turn, these variables may also have a direct impact on sales career perceptions due to expanded work experiences. Further, we see influencers and role models as providing a direct source of information about sales careers, along side the use of the media sources. Finally, we propose that work experience may moderate the impact of influencers and role models on perceptions of sales careers, due to direct experience with salespeople. We further explain how these relationships have been studied and propose hypotheses in the following sections.

1.1 Factors of media use

Previous work by Bright and colleagues (2005) indicates that students commonly use media sources for information in making job decisions. Despite the significance of findings, research has not elaborated on the influences which influence student choice of media sources for job decisions. Information is actively sought by job seekers through the process of “anticipatory socialization” in which individuals gather and evaluate work information prior to job entry (Feldman, 1976). The accuracy of student career information can promote more informed job decisions (Breaugh and Starke, 2000; Rynes and Gerhart, 1991), however, applicants may not always be in the best position to judge the accuracy of the source (Ryan, Horvath and Krishka, 2005). This may be particularly true of media sources. In a large-scale study, Flanagin and Metzger (2000) found that all media sources (television, internet and print) were perceived as credible (which includes measurement of accuracy) by undergraduate students, with the Internet perceived more likely to provide reference or factual information. Flanagin and Metzger suggest that the internet, with its constantly changing content and limited editorial policies may be particularly difficult for students to evaluate for credibility. Despite difficulties

in assessment, we propose that a student’s perception of the accuracy of a media source should influence its use for career information. We propose that this relationship will hold whether a student uses primarily entertainment sources or career websites for information. For example, imagine that a student believes that the way work is portrayed in a sitcom is accurate. This makes the use of television as a sources more likely.

Communications researchers suggest that users have different motives for media use and that these motives will translate into different uses for media content (Curnalia and Mermer, 2013). Commonly identified motives for media use include entertainment, information, to pass the time and as a social activity (Bondad-Brown, Rice and Pearce, 2012). In a study of voting, Brubaker (2010) found that users with an “information motive” for media use were more likely to use the content in making serious voting decisions. To date, research has not examined the role of motives to predict the use of media for career information. However, the findings of Brubaker (2010) may suggest that accessing media with the intent of finding information may promote student use for career information.

Access to non-media sources of work information may also influence student use of media sources for career information. Both direct (i.e., job experience) and indirect (i.e. family and friends) provide important information to job seekers (Kahn and Low, 1990). Work experience has been shown to have both an impact on student perceptions of sales jobs (Hayes, 1973) and an improvement on the accuracy of views regarding sales jobs (Bristow et.al, 2006). Early research indicates that students involved in occupational experiences were found to have a greater understanding of job conditions and lifestyle implications (Hayes, 1973). Extended internships have been found to promote greater understanding of task and social components of work (Spooner et.al. 2008). It would be expected that work experience would act as an important source of work information for many students. Students that have greater work experience would be expected to rely on such background for career information rather than media sources, particularly those related to “entertainment” such as television or YouTube. Students with limited work experience may be expected to rely more on media sources for career

insights, in particular, those related to “entertainment” such as television and YouTube (Waldeck, Pullins and Houlette, 2010). Likewise, the source of media used for career information may be influenced by the age of the student. The use of career websites may be projected to be influenced by age or significant work experience due to enhanced familiarity with their existence as well as the employers and associations that support them. Younger students have greater acquaintance with entertainment media, such as television and YouTube, and less with other sources and may be apt to rely on these sources for career information.

As suggested by Kahn and Low (1990), indirect sources, such as family/friends and mentors, may provide additional sources of work information. Extending this to the context of professional sales, researchers propose that student perceptions of the career may be developed through “influencers and role models” (Waldeck, Pullins and Houlette, 2010). These sources can include family and friends, college activities, and mentors. As suggested by their framework, it is suggested that the student use of these sources will be negatively related to the use of media sources for career information. It is possible, however, that “influencers and role models” may direct students to useful media sources, as when a mentor suggests a beneficial employer website and thus increase the use of these media sources.

In summary, research indicates several potential factors in the use of media for student career information. The perception of a source as accurate should be a factor in the use of all three sources of media for career information. Students that actively look to media for career information (“information motive”) are more likely to adopt it for this use. The role of “influencers” and role models” may have a positive or negative influence on the use of media for career information. Age and work experience are expected to be negatively related to the use of “entertainment” (i.e., television) media and positively related to career website use. Therefore:

H1a: The use of Television for career information is predicted to decrease with increases in student age, work experience, use of influencers and role models, an information motive and increase with perceptions of its accuracy.

H1b: The use of YouTube for career information is predicted to decrease with student age, work experience, use of influencers and role models, an information motive and increase with perceptions of its accuracy.

H1c: The use of Career Websites for career information is predicted to increase with student age, work experience, use of influencers and role models, an information motive and the perceptions of its accuracy.

1.2 Media sources as predictors of career perceptions

Communications research supports the role of media sources to influence student attitudes towards occupations. Media researchers long-contend the importance of media as a source of socialization (Gerbner et al., 2002; Potter, 1990). Drawing on Social Modeling Theory, researchers propose that higher levels of exposure to television can promote the acceptance of media images as realistic through a “cultivation effect” (Bandura, 2002; Gerbner, et.al., 2002; Potter, 1986). Research indicates cultivation effects between television exposure and workplace attitudes for young viewers (Signorelli, 1993). A subsequent relationship was found between television exposure and expectations for undergraduates towards their first professional jobs after college (Waldeck, 2009). In both studies, television exposure was related to inflated expectations for pay and reduced work requirements. Although not related to work attitudes, cultivation effects have been found for the use of internet in two studies (Braun-Courville and Rojas, 2009; Peter and Valkenburg, 2008). Internet ads were found to raise the image of presidential candidates among young adults (Kaid and Postelnicu, 2005).

As a socialization agent, media provides workplace messages that are repetitive, consistent and stable over years (Potter, 1990). Unfortunately for sales recruiters, the messages provided in the traditional media (television and movies) often represent professional sales in terms that are often inaccurate and stereotypical (Hartman, 2006). In extensive analysis covering decades of television and movies, Hartman identified consistent salesperson archetypes, including the common “villain” character that cheated customers and misrepresented products. Likewise, the requirements for sales careers

were found to be narrow which may further reduce the image of the career. She concluded that critical concerns about occupational negativity were justified; although some more benign salesperson characterizations exist within traditional media. The consistency of adverse images may result in negatively skewed career perceptions for many high-level users of television.

The internet provides a diversity of messages about professional sales from the enthusiastic to the stereotypical. Career information provided through employer and professional websites (“career websites”) may be expected to provide positive perspectives about professional opportunities. In contrast, websites with satirical content as “The World’s Worst Salesman” on *YouTube.com* may result in less positive student perspectives about sales as a profession. While provided for humor, such videos may reduce the appeal of sales as a professional career. Likewise, these entertainment videos often portray non-professional sales careers which may further reduce student perceptions as a career option. Although sales skill-building videos exist on *YouTube.com*, it would not be expected that most undergraduate students would access videos targeted towards professional development. For this study, *YouTube.com* will be used to represent “entertainment websites” in contrast to “career websites” such as the American Marketing Association or those of employers.

H2a: Use of Television negatively impacts perceptions of sales careers

H2b: Use of YouTube negatively impacts perceptions of sales careers

H2c: Use of Career Websites positively impacts perceptions of sales careers

Previously identified factors of media use may also provide insights into student perceptions of sales careers. Student age may be expected to influence career perceptions, with older students more likely to be exposed to knowledge about careers and greater access to work information. Total work experience can provide information regarding positive worker attributes and clearer perspectives about the accuracy of media information to actual work behaviors (Waldeck, Pullins and Houlette, 2010). Work experience would be expected to effect media use on work perceptions

as students would more likely to use job experiences to draw conclusions about what is probable in the workplace. Students with greater work experience may also be better able to assess workplace outcomes and stereotypes than those with less work experience.

H3: Age positively impacts sales career perceptions across dimensions.

H4: Work Experience positively impacts sales career perceptions across dimensions.

Previous discussion suggests the importance of access to non-media sources in developing accurate perceptions about sales careers (Waldeck, Pullins and Houlette, 2010). Sources such as family/friends, college and mentors may be an important source of , especially for younger students. We propose that accessibility of these sources may supplement or even reduce reliance on media to form perceptions. As such there is an interaction between work experience and use of influencers and role models for career experience. These influencers should inform student attitudes about sales careers. Mentors and family/friends may impact the direction of student perceptions based on positive or negative experiences within professional sales. College career activities may be expected to promote positive career perceptions as recruiters endorse the benefits of employers and careers. There may be a synergistic effect of influencers with work experience, given that may increase the exposure to influencers.

H5: Influencers and role models positively impacts sales career perceptions across dimensions.

H6: Work experience will moderate the impacts of influencers and role models on sales career perceptions across dimensions.

METHOD

2.1 Sample

A sample of 232 undergraduate students enrolled in two Midwest universities completed an online survey regarding their media use, demographics and their perceptions regarding professional sales careers. A pilot study was administered using a panel of undergraduate students to assess survey clarity and ease of online use. A series of Levene tests indicated no significant

differences between students at the universities. After deleting incomplete cases and those respondents not deemed “young professionals” (over 35 years of age), there were 208 usable responses. The average age of the students was 22.3 years with 60.4% of the sample being male. The average reported weekly consumption of television was 13.1 hours and an average weekly use of internet of 21.5 hours. Over sixty-five (65.4) percent of students currently worked with an average of 5.6 years total work experience. Over fifty percent (51.7) reported working in retail sales at some time. Out of the 159 students that provided their majors, 37% were Management or Finance, 24.5% were Sales/Marketing, 12% were Science and 2.9% were Liberal Arts.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Perceptions of professional sales

Fifteen items based on the work of Bristow, Amyx and Slack (2006) were used to examine student perceptions of professional sales. Factor analysis identified three scales measuring the extent (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree) to which students agreed with statements about non-retail (professional) sales. The *sales career opportunities* scale consists of five five-point Likert items that measured agreement that sales careers would be rewarding, satisfying, offer opportunities, provide fun and offer challenges. The scale had an eigenvalue of 5.399 with 35.992% total variance explained and a Cronbach alpha of 0.938. The *negative stereotypes* scale consisted of six Likert scale items measuring agreement that students agreed that professional salespeople misrepresent products, take advantage of buyers, sell unneeded products, make up answers and stretch the truth. The scale eigenvalue was 3.416 with a 22.774% total variance explained. The scale Cronbach alpha was 0.865. The three Likert item *career image* scale included items the extent to which salespersons were admired/respected, perceived favorably and were trustworthy. The eigenvalue was 1.563 with total variance explained of 10.417%. The Cronbach alpha for the scale was 0.787.

2.2.2 Media accuracy, motive and use

Three media sources (television, career-websites, YouTube.com) were measured separately in this study.

A single-item 7-point Likert item was used to measure to the extent (1= strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree) to which a media source was used to gain information about jobs and career. The *perceived accuracy* of individual media sources was assessed through the use of one 7-point (1= strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree) Likert item which measured the extent to which students agreed that each media source provided accurate information about careers. An *information motive* was measured by a three-item scale taken from the work of Rubin (1983) which measures the extent (1=not at all to 5=exactly) to which subjects agreed with statements that media sources helped them to learn about themselves, things not done before and what can happen in the future. Scales were developed separately for television and Internet. The eigenvalue for the *NetMotive* scale is with total variance explained of 71.639 and a Cronbach alpha of 0.801. The *TVMotive* scale has an eigenvalue of 2.149 with total variance explained of 78.631 and a Cronbach alpha of 0.864.

2.2.3 Demographics and influencers

The variables of *age* and *total work experience* were measured by single items asking for the subject age and total years of work experience, respectively. Each of the three influencers (i.e., family/friends, mentors and college activities) was assessed by asking student their perceived accuracy and their use of the media for career information. The *perceived accuracy* of each influencer was measured by a single 7-point (1=never to 7=always) Likert item which measured the extent to which students believed each provides accurate information about careers. The extent (1=never to 7=always) to which students used each of three influencers (i.e., family/friends, mentors, college activities) for *career information* was measured by a single 7-point Likert item (1=never to 7=always) used separately for each.

RESULTS.

Two sets of analysis were conducted using the same data set. The scales used in both sets of analyses are provided above. The first set of analyses examines the factors which predict media use for work information by students. The second set of analyses examined the predictors of student perceptions of professional sales careers. Separate results will be presented for each.

3.1 Predicting media use for work information

3.1.1. Means and bivariate correlations

Means and bivariate correlations for all variables measuring media use as are provided in Table 1. Results for means indicated that the average use of individual “influencers” for work information, such as family/friends (3.91), college activities (3.41) and mentors (3.23) was greater than the use of television (2.72) and YouTube (2.37). The relatively low mean for career websites (2.97) may relate to a lower awareness of useful sites. The means for perceived accuracy of non-media sources were college events (4.16), mentors (3.96), and family and friends (3.79). For media sources, career websites (3.84) had a higher mean than television (2.84) or YouTube (2.53). With the exception of career websites, students reported non-media sources (“influencers”) as having higher accuracy of work information.

Bivariate correlations provided support for some relationships. Perceived accuracy was correlated to use television ($r=.340, p<.01$), career websites ($r=0.396, p<.01$), and YouTube ($r=.540, p<.01$). The

latter result may indicate that students will strongly discern accuracy of YouTube before using it to provide career information. The relationship between perceived accuracy and non-media sources were found for college activities ($r=.453, p<.01$), mentors ($r=.455, p<.01$) and family and friends ($r=.455, p>.01$). Bivariate correlations indicate that using television to provide work information is negatively related to age ($r=-.243, p>.001$), total work experience ($r=-.192, p>.001$) and an information motive ($r=-.257, p<.257$). The latter result may indicate that younger and less experienced students may not specifically seek on television but use the content seen. The use of YouTube to provide work information is negatively correlated with age ($r=-.176, p<.05$), total work ($r=-.197, p<.001$) and an information motive ($r=-.195, p<.001$). The use of career websites to provide was positively correlated with age ($r=.182, p<.001$). As for non-media sources, the use of family/friends to provide work information was negatively correlated ($r=.180, p<.001$) to age. This may indicate that the older the student, the more likely they will rely on their own experience rather than family/friends for information. Table 1 provides this information.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics of study variables related to use of media sources as career information

Variable	N	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Age	207	22.3	3.42	1.00												
2. Total Work	198	5.60	3.68	0.66**	1.00											
3. Use family/friends info	206	3.91	0.83	-0.18**	-0.12	1.00										
4. Use college info	207	3.41	1.14	-0.12	-0.23	0.09	1.00									
5. Use mentors	208	3.23	1.07	-0.43	0.07	0.17*	0.42**	1.00								
6. TV Motive	205	0.00	1.00	0.05	0.00	0.00	-0.28	-0.02	1.00							
7. Net Motive	201	0.00	1.00	-0.16	0.01	-0.10	-0.07	-0.01	0.38**	1.00						
8. Accuracy TV	207	2.84	0.89	-0.09	-0.11	0.00	0.06	0.11	-0.11	-0.04	1.00					
9. Accuracy YouTube	205	2.53	1.01	-0.19**	-0.21**	0.06	-0.06	-0.03	-0.26**	-0.24**	0.45**	1.00				
10. Accuracy Career web	207	3.84	0.75	-0.07	-0.06	0.10	0.10	0.03	0.05	-0.05	0.15*	0.04	1.00			
11. Use TV as info	207	2.72	1.13	-0.24**	-0.19**	0.11	-0.10	0.03	-0.25**	-0.04	0.34**	0.34**	0.08	1.00		
12. Use YouTube info	207	2.37	1.32	-0.17*	-0.19**	0.25**	-0.14*	0.02	-0.21**	-0.19**	0.16*	0.54**	0.01	0.37**	1.00	
13. Use Car Web info	208	2.97	1.15	0.18**	0.11	-0.03	0.20**	0.13	-0.07	-0.13	0.11	-0.00	0.39**	-0.05	-0.04	1.00

Note: All scales were developed using standardized variables with mean values of 0.0 and standard deviations of 1.0. (* $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$).

Findings from correlations indicate perceptions of accuracy were related to use of the source for career information. Students did not deem sources as equally accurate, with influencers deemed more accurate than media sources. The relationship between perceived accuracy of YouTube and its use was especially strong. This may indicate that students approach YouTube content critically before accepting it as accurate for providing work information. Age had the expected relationship to decreased reliance on entertainment media (i.e., television and YouTube) to provide work information.

3.1.2 Results of regressions for media as work information

A series of three regressions were conducted to further examine bivariate relationships and determine the importance of individual variables to predict student

use of individual media sources to provide career information. The use of each media source was regressed on the variables of age, total work, use of influencers, an “information motive” and the perceived accuracy of the media source. Results indicated a significant multivariate effect of the predictor variables on the use of television for career information, $F(7,184) = 8.17, p < .00$, accounting for 23.7% of the variability in television use for information. It was found that age ($\beta = -.18, p < .05$), not partaking in college career activities ($\beta = -.19, p < .00$), information motive ($\beta = .22, p < .00$) and the perceived accuracy ($\beta = .280, p < .00$) predicted the use of television as sales career information. Students that were young, uninvolved in college career activities, and perceived television as accurate were likely to use television to instruct them about careers.

Table 2

Hypothesis 1a: Hierarchical regression analysis predicting use of television

	B	SE B	β	Hypothesis Supported?
Control variables				
Age	-0.06	0.02	-0.18*	yes
Total work	-0.00	0.02	-0.02	no
Main effects				
Use Family	0.11	0.08	0.08	no
Use College	-0.18	0.07	-0.19**	yes
Use Mentors	0.05	0.07	0.05	no
TVmotive	-0.24	0.07	-0.22**	yes
Accuracy	0.35	0.82	0.28**	yes

Note: N=191, $R^2 = 0.237$. (* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$).

Findings for YouTube as providing career information indicated that the modeled variables accounted for 36.8% of total variability in its use with $F(7, 179) = 14.86, p < .00$. YouTube use was predicted by the use of family and friends for information ($\beta = .200, p < .00$), perceptions of accuracy ($\beta = .459, p < .00$) and non-involvement in college career activities ($\beta = -.216, p < .00$). Table 3 shows these results.

Table 3

Hypothesis1b: Hierarchical regression analysis predicting use of YouTube

	B	SE B	β	Hypothesis Supported?
Control variables				
Age	-0.00	0.03	-0.01	yes
Total work	-0.03	0.02	-0.08	yes
Main effects				
Use Family	0.30	0.09	0.20**	yes
Use College	-0.24	0.07	-0.21**	yes
Use Mentors	0.10	0.08	0.08	no
Netmotive	-0.07	0.08	-0.05	no
Accuracy	0.59	0.08	0.45**	yes

Note: N=179, $R^2 = 0.368$. (* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$).

Results indicated that the modeled variables predicted 24.9% of total variability in the use of career websites $F(7, 182) = 8.621$, $p < .00$. The three variables of age ($\beta = .245$, $p < .00$), involvement in college activities ($\beta = .174$, $p < .01$) and the perceived accuracy of the career website ($\beta = .376$, $p < .00$) predicted the use of career websites. Table 4 provides results.

Table 4

Hypothesis1c: Hierarchical regression analysis predicting use career websites

	B	SE B	β	Hypothesis Supported?
Control variables				
Age	0.08	0.03	0.24**	yes
Total work	-0.00	0.02	-0.02	no
Main effects				
Use Family	-0.12	0.09	-0.09***	yes
Use College	0.17	0.07	-0.17***	yes
Use Mentors	0.04	0.07	0.04***	yes
Netmotive	-0.12	0.07	-0.10	no
Accuracy	0.58	0.10	0.37**	yes

Note: N=182, $R^2 = 0.249$. (* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$), ***

Results indicate partial support for some of the predicted antecedents to media use. Students that were young, uninvolved in college career activities, perceived television as accurate and looked for information were likely to use television to instruct themselves about careers, supporting H1a. For students that used YouTube for sales career information, a perceived accuracy of the source was the single most important factor, partially supporting H1b. Career websites were used by students that were older, perceived the websites as accurate and were also involved in college career activities, providing partial support for H1c.

3.2. Results for predictors of sales perceptions

3.2.1. Means and bivariate correlations

Means and bivariate correlations for all variables in this analysis are provided in Table 5. Bivariate correlations indicated relationships between media variables and student perceptions of sales careers. Career *opportunities* were positively correlated with the use of all three media

sources as indicated by television ($r=.234, p<.01$), YouTube ($r=.263, p<.01$) and career websites ($r=.238, p<.01$). These marginal results still suggest that all media sources may relate to positive impressions of the potential of sales careers. Marginal but significant negative relationship was indicated between perceptions of *negative stereotypes* and use of career websites for work information ($r=-.146, p<.05$). This can indicate that use of career websites may be related to a reduction in *negative stereotypes* about sales careers. The use of YouTube ($r=.333, p<.01$) and television ($r=.160, p<.01$) were positively correlated with a positive career *image* of sales careers. Although not expected, results may suggest that students may have been exposed to positive images of professional sales on these media sources. Likewise, the positive images held by these students may have been influenced comments by an acquaintance or instructor which may not considered as a true “influencer.” The pattern of these results supports H2a-c. Table 5 provides this information.

Table 5

Descriptive statistics of study variables related to perceptions of sales careers

Variable	N	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Age	207	22.3	3.42	1.00								
2. Total Work	198	5.60	3.68	0.66**	1.00							
3. Use television	207	2.72	1.11	-0.24**	-0.19**	1.00						
4. Use YouTube	207	2.37	1.32	-0.17*	-0.19**	0.37**	1.00					
5. Use career websites	208	2.97	1.15	0.18*	0.11	-0.05	-0.47	1.00				
6. Sales opportunities	200	0.00	1.00	-0.11	-0.04	0.23**	0.26**	0.23**	1.00			
7. Negative stereotypes	200	0.00	1.00	-0.08	-0.06	0.02	0.06	-0.14*	-0.11	1.00		
8. Images	200	0.00	1.00	0.00	-0.07	0.16*	0.33**	0.03	0.41**	-0.16*	1.00	
9. Interaction term Total Work x Use of influencers	196	1029	845	0.57**	-0.92**	-0.18*	-0.18*	0.13	-0.03	-0.07	-0.04	1.00

Note: All scales were developed using standardized variables with mean values of 0.0 and standard deviations of 1.0. (* $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$).

A series of three regressions were conducted to determine the importance of individual variables on the student perceptions of professional sales careers. Each of the three perceptions (sales opportunities, negative stereotypes, sales images) were individually regressed on the variables of age, total work, use of three media sources (separately), total use of influencers and an interaction term (total work experience and total use of influencers).

Predictors of sales career opportunities

A multivariate effect of the predictor variables on *career opportunities* was found for the modeled relationships $F(7, 179) = 5.31, p < .00$, accounting for 17.2% of the variability in scores. Follow-up univariate analysis revealed that this effect was driven by use of career

websites ($\beta = .291, p < .00$). This suggests that career websites have a positive impact on student views about the rewards, mobility and growth opportunities of a sales career. In additional analyses, marginal but significant results were found for television ($\beta = .148, p < .00$) and the use of YouTube ($\beta = .194, p < .00$) as predictors of career opportunities. Previous research indicates that television may promote unrealistic expectations for work outcomes, including rewards and promotions (Waldeck, 2009). As television viewers, students may experience a higher overall view about work outcomes which may translate to any career. YouTube users in the sample may access the positive sales information available on the website. While this provides additional evidence for H2a, H3-H6 were not supported for career opportunities. Table 6 shows these results.

Table 6 Hypothesis 2-6: Hierarchical regression analysis for predicting sales career opportunities

	B	SE B	β	Hypothesis/ Supported?
Control variables				
Age	-0.05	0.02	-0.18	H3: no
Total work	0.05	0.09	0.18	H4: no
Main effects				
Use TV	0.13	0.06	0.14*	H2a: no
Use YouTube	0.14	0.05	0.19**	H2b: no
Use Career websites	0.24	0.06	0.29**	H2c: yes
Use of influencers (total)	0.00	0.06	0.02	H5: no
Interaction				
Total Work X Influencers	-0.00	0.00	-0.08	H6: no

Note: $N=179, R^2 = 0.172$. (* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$).

Predictors of negative stereotypes

None of the modeled relationships predicted student perceptions of negative stereotypes. Table 7 shows these outcomes. Thus H3-H6 are not supported for negative stereotypes.

Table 7
Hypotheses 2-6: Hierarchical regression analysis for predicting negative stereotypes

	B	SE B	β	Hypothesis/ Supported?
Control variables				
Age	-0.01	0.03	-0.04	H3: no
Total work	-0.06	0.10	-0.23	H4: no
Main effects				
Use TV	0.00	0.07	0.00	H2a: no
Use YouTube	0.04	0.06	0.05	H2b: no
Use Career websites	-0.10	0.06	-0.12	H2c: no
Use Influencers (total)	-0.06	0.06	-0.13	H5: no
Interaction				
Total Work X Influencers	0.00	0.01	0.23	H6: no

Note: N=179, $R^2 = 0.03$ (not significant). (* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$).

Predictors of a sales career image

A multivariate effect of predictor variables on career image was found for the modeled relationships $F(7, 179) = 4.55$, $p < .00$, which accounted for 15.1% of the variability in scores. Subsequent univariate analysis indicated the use of YouTube ($\beta = .315$, $p < .00$) was a significant predictor of a positive image towards sales careers. Total work experience was a strong negative predictor ($\beta = -.946$, $p < .00$) as was the total use of influencers ($\beta = -.281$, $p < .05$) of sales career image. These results may indicate a bias by students and their influencers based on experiences in traditional student retail jobs which offer low pay and limited opportunities after graduation. The interaction of influencers and total work indicated a significant influence ($\beta = .885$, $p < .05$) on student perceptions about the images of sales careers. This may suggest that students with more total work experience can better filter out negative comments from influencers in making assessments of sales careers. H3 and H5 are supported for career image. H4 and H6 are not supported. Table 8 provides these results.

DISCUSSION

Research suggests that media is both a common source of student (Bright, et.al., 2005) and potential influence on their perceptions of professional sales careers (Dubinsky, 1981; Waldeck, Pullins and Houlette, 2010). However, limited data to date has examined the factors of student media use within this context and whether it translates into their perceptions of careers. This exploratory study examines the gaps in our understanding of these issues. Communications research suggests that accuracy of a media source (Flanagin and Metzger 2000) and an information motive for use Brubaker, (2010) may both influence the use of media content as information. Management researchers propose that the access to non-media information sources (or “influencers”) may diminish the reliance on media sources (Waldeck, Pullins and Houlette, 2010).

To date, limited empirical research has examined the impact the use of media as on the occupational perceptions of undergraduate students. The sales profession has useful properties for such study due to

Table 8
Hypotheses 2-6: Hierarchical regression analysis for predicting sales career image

	B	SE B	β	Hypothesis Supported?
Control variables				
Age	0.04	0.02	0.15	H3: no
Total work	-0.25	0.10	-0.94	H4: no
Main effects				
Use TV	0.05	0.06	0.06	H2a: no
Use YouTube	0.24	0.05	0.31**	H2b: yes
Use Career websites	0.06	0.06	0.07	H2c: no
Use Influencers (total)	-0.13	0.06	-0.28*	H5: no
Interaction				
Total work X Influencers	0.02	0.01	0.88*	H6: yes

Note: N=179, $R^2 = 0.15$. (* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$).

it ample representation on both televised and internet-based media. Hartman (2006) found images of sales people over decades of television and movie plotlines which included stereotypical portrayals as well as benign. Employers and professional associations trust that their investments into internet websites will translate into positive images of the career. However, these websites may be competing with popular student outlets, such as YouTube.com, which provide the stereotypical along with the instructional.

The findings of this study provide some insight into these issues. Means indicate that students have a preference for non-media sources ("influencers and role models") of information, such as family/friends, college activities and mentors, over that of television and the internet. This suggests that employers looking for young graduates should have a recognized presence during college activities such as job fairs. With the exception of career websites, students reported non-media sources as having higher accuracy than media sources. This is both good and bad news for employers. Students may have a natural bias to use family and

mentors when acquiring job information. So, accurate information on sales careers may need to target these sources as well.

The use of individual media sources was predicted by different factors. Television was used to provide career information by students that were younger; less involved in college career activities, believed it to be accurate and had an information motive. This may suggest that younger students, in lieu of outside information will actively look to television for career information. In contrast, career websites were used by students that were older, involved in college activities and believed the websites to be accurate. This is good news for recruiters who often seek this student profile. It also suggests that employers should make their websites known and appealing to students actively looking for career information. Employers should maintain a presence in all manners of Social Media and popular student internet spots to ensure that that their website information is readily accessible to both the student decided on a sales career and one that is still exploring. Finally, students that rely on YouTube to provide career information have limited involvement

in college career activities, make use of family and friends for information and believe YouTube to be accurate. This may suggest that students using YouTube for career information do so when they have additional information from influencers and if believe the content to be correct. There was also a strong relationship between student perceptions of the accuracy of a source and its use for career information. These results suggest the employer importance of connecting to students in a visible way, be it on the college campus or through a website seen as attractive and credible to students.

Student perceptions of the rewards, mobility and growth opportunities afforded by professional sales careers (or *sales career opportunities*) were influenced by their use of media for career information. The use of career websites was the largest predictor of a positive view of the opportunities of sales careers. This suggests that career websites are providing a good review of the potential benefits of professional sales. Smaller media effects were found for the use of television and YouTube to explain positive student perceptions towards sales careers. Previous research indicates that television can provide higher expectations overall for work rewards (Signorelli, 1993; Waldeck, 2009). This may suggest that students that use television may have elevated views of general career outcomes which could be applied to views of specific occupations.

The extent to which professional salespersons were viewed favorably and as trustworthy (*sales career image*) was predicted by the use of media and influencers as well as lesser work experience. The use of YouTube was a predictor of positive images of salespersons. This may indicate that students took advantage of content on the website which were hosted by confident professionals in the career. However, the use of career websites did not lead to positive images of salespersons. This is an interesting effect given the strong relationship between perceptions of sales opportunities and use of career websites. One possible explanation for these results may be that students with existing desire for a sales career may view career websites to affirm career opportunities afforded by the career. However, students looking for general information about professional sales as a career choice do not see positive images on these websites. This may suggest that professional sales recruiters

should ensure that affirming images of salespeople should be prominent along with information about sales opportunities on websites. The use influencers were found to have a negative effect on student view of salespeople which may result from their experiences as or with salespeople. Contrary to expectations, results indicated general work experience can have a positive effect on images of sales career. This may be the result of non-professional sales positions or interaction with those not positive about the career. Offering college internships and co-op experiences in professional sales may provide positive, accurate career information while encouraging new interest in the career.

Negative stereotypes viewpoints of professional sales careers were not predicted by any of the modeled variables, including the use of media sources for work information. This was somewhat unexpected, given the number of negative and stereotypical images reported by Hartman (2006) and suggestions (Dubinsky, 1981; Waldeck, Pullins and Houlette, 2010; Weber, 2015) that perceptions of sales careers may be tainted by media images. These results may have occurred for two reasons. The sampled students may not have been exposed to television and internet content that contains these negative images. Students may also have been sophisticated in their viewing habits enough to discern satirical images from those more realistic portrayals. There is also a possibility that other sources underlie the images including movies or previous viewing habits.

Study findings suggest several things to employers and recruiters for professional sales jobs. As purveyors of information, employers and professional associations related to sales careers may have an interest knowing if media sources promote the potential and rewards of sales careers to student users. As consumers of media, employers and recruiters are likely aware that professional sales careers are not always portrayed in the best light on media sources. However, this study suggests that there is some good news for employers and recruiters for sales positions. Career websites are viewed as accurate and provide a source of positive perceptions of the opportunities gained from professional sales careers. Student work experience can have a favorable impact on perceptions of sales career. Employers can work with College Career Centers to

develop co-op and internship experiences in professional sales to further enhance positive perceptions of working students. Employers should make sure that the images of salespeople portrayed on websites are attractive to student viewers.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDY

One limitation of this study was that the content of media as containing specific sales career images was not measured. This was, in part, based on research by Hartman (2006) suggesting widespread sales images in the mass media as well as the difficulty in measuring what content which students may view during the course of the day on all devices. Assumptions were also made about the motive for media used, with YouTube and television considered “entertainment” media for most students. However, results may suggest that some students may have taken advantage of more professional career content on YouTube. Likewise, television content may not fall neatly into “good” and “bad” categories about sales careers. Although Hartman (2006) found plenty evidence of negative sales stereotypes, the overall tendency for television to inflate expectations through unrealistic work images (Waldeck, 2009) may override the effect. This propensity for television to provide unrealistic work images may also explain the reason that television use impacted perceptions of sales career opportunities (i.e., rewards, career growth) and not the perceived images of a specific profession. It may be useful in future work to include measures for both general views about the workplace as well as specific perceptions about sales careers to examine this possible effect.

Future studies should assess whether negative sales stereotypes have diminished over time, both the students’ held perceptions, as well as portrayal by the various sources. Future research could also consider other potential contributors to negatively held stereotypes by students.

Likewise, future study should include the role of Social Media to influence student attitudes toward professional sales. Social Media is regularly used by organizations to promote products or benefits of the company. However, a quick search through Social Media indicates both positive and negative content. One blog, called “Why You Should Take That Sleazy Sales Job”, uses negative

initial attitudes as a basis for discussion of the positives of professional sales careers. One research study could be to examine how visits to particular Social Media influences overall perceptions about sales careers.

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APPENDIX

Survey Scales

Information motive

1. The following are reasons that you may watch television. Please select the response to indicate the extent to which each reason is like your own reason for watching television (1=Exactly 5=Not at all)

Because it helps me learn things about myself and others
So I can learn how to do things which I haven't done before.
So I could learn about what could happen to me

2. The following are reasons that you may use the internet. Please select the response to indicate the extent to which each reason is like your own reason for watching television (1=Exactly 5=Not at all)

Because it helps me learn things about myself and others
So I can learn how to do things which I haven't done before.
So I could learn about what could happen to me

Work information sources

People use many sources to learn about careers. To what extent do you use each of the following sources to gain information about jobs and careers (1=Never to 5=Always)

Career websites (ex. Monster.com, employer websites)
YouTube
Family and friends
Television programs
College career fairs or student groups
Work mentors

Perceived accuracy of source

Previously, you were given a list of possible career information sources. To what extent do you agree/disagree that each source provides accurate information about careers? (1=Strongly disagree to 5=Strongly agree)

Career websites (ex. Monster.com, employer websites)
YouTube
Family and friends
Television programs
College career fairs or student groups
Work mentors

Perceptions of professional sales

1. Sales career opportunities

The following are statements about professional (non-retail) sales careers. Please tell us the extent to which you disagree/agree with each statement. (1=Strongly disagree to 5=Strongly agree).

For me, a sales career would be rewarding.
A career in sales would offer me career opportunities.
A sales related career would offer me growth opportunities.
For me, a sales related career would be satisfying.
For me, a sales related career would be fun and exciting.
I would enjoy the challenges of a sales related career.

2. Negative stereotypes

The following are statements about professional (non-retail) sales careers. Please tell us the extent to which you disagree/agree with each statement. (1=Strongly disagree to 5=Strongly agree).

Salespeople often misrepresent guarantees and warranties.
Salespeople routinely take advantage of uneducated buyers.
Salespeople often exaggerate the benefits of products they sell.
Salespeople commonly sell products that people don't need.
Rather than admit that they don't know the answer to a buyer's question, salespeople often make something up.
Salespeople often stretch the truth to make a sale.

3. Career image

The following are statements about professional (non-retail) sales careers. Please tell us the extent to which you disagree/agree with each statement. (1=Strongly disagree to 5=Strongly agree).

In general, salespeople are admired or respected by others.
Most salespeople are perceived favorably by others.
Most salespeople are trustworthy and honest.

*Information to factor analysis and scale reliability are provided in text.