Why Industrial Salespeople Dread Selling Digital Innovations: Understanding the Role of Fear of Losing Face

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Erklärung zu Co-Autorinnen und Co-Autoren

Kapitel 3 dieser Dissertation wurde zusammen mit Bianca Schmitz in Co-Autorenschaft verfasst (Eigenanteil 50%) und baut auf einer Research Note von Schmitz (2021) auf. Alle weiteren Teile dieser Dissertation sind ohne das Mitwirken von Co-Autorinnen und Co-Autoren verfasst worden.

Publikationen

Teile dieser Dissertation sind als zusätzliche Publikationen in Fachzeitschriften geplant:

"The Dark Side of Innovation Selling – Introducing Salespeople's Fear of Losing Face", to be submitted

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Abbreviations and Symbols

α	Cronbach's alpha
AVE	average variance extracted
β	beta, standardized regression coefficient
B	vector of regression coefficients
B2B	business to business
CEO	chief executive officer
CFA	confirmatory factor analyses
CFI	comparative fit index
CR	composite reliability
d.f.	degrees of freedom
ϵ	error term
e.g.	exempli gratia
et al.	et alii
ECF	expected consultation failure
EFA	exploratory factor analysis
ENG	expected negative generalization
FAQ	frequently asked question
FOLF	fear of losing face
GE	General Electrics
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
HR	human resource
i.e.	id est
IIoT	industrial internet of things
Inc.	incorporated

IP	internet protocol
ISP	industrial service provider
IT	information technology
M	mean
N	sample size
n.s.	not significant
p	significance level
p.	page
pp.	pages
P	proposition
PERF	sales performance
plc	public limited company
r	Pearson correlation coefficient
RMSEA	root mean standard error of approximation
R&D	research and development
SD	standard deviation
SE	standard error
SEM	structural equation modeling
SRMR	standardized root mean square residual
TIU	theories-is-use
TLI	Tucker-Lewis index
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
X	vector of control variables
χ^2	chi-square value of chi-square test statistic

1 Introduction

1.1 Practical and Theoretical Relevance

Industrial salespeople are increasingly tasked with selling digital innovations in addition to their traditional product portfolio (Guenzi and Habel 2020; Roland Berger 2020; Singh et al. 2019). Digital innovations consists of hardware products that incorporate digital capabilities (e.g., Kohtamäki et al. 2019; Liozu and Ulaga 2018) as well as stand-alone software products (e.g., Nambisan et al. 2017). For example, agricultural machinery manufacturer John Deere introduced Operations Center, a software that allows customers to access farming information at any place from various devices (Deere & Company 2021; see Table 1 for examples). For manufacturers, the commercialization of such digital innovations is pertinent as they are key in helping customers digitalize their companies (e.g., Bornemann and Bokeria 2019; Roland Berger 2020; Sebastian et al. 2017; Steiber et al. 2021). As John Chambars, former executive chairman and CEO of Cisco Systems, posited, "At least 40% of all businesses will die in the next 10 years […] if they don't figure out how to change their entire company to accommodate new technologies" (Ross & Ross International 2015).

Company	**Traditional hardware-based products**	**Digital innovations**	**Reference**
General Electric	Energy technologies	*GE Digital Power Plant:* IIoT system to combine power assets with highspeed, intelligent digital infrastructure	GE Digital (2019)
Honeywell	Aviation parts	*Honeywell Analytics Platform:* Support tool for business aviation operators	Honeywell International Inc. (2020)
John Deere	Agricultural machinery	*John Deere Operations Center:* An online farm management system	Deere & Company (2021)
Linde	Gases and equipment	*DIGIGAS:* A sensor technology that enables customers to manage gas supply remotely	Linde plc (2021)
Siemens	Drive technologies	*SINAMICS DriveSim:* Virtualization solution for digital twins	Siemens (2021)

Table 1: Examples of digital innovations

In recent years, industrial salespeople have experienced a continuous expansion of their product portfolios. Servitization has given rise to new offerings beyond traditional hardware-based products, for example industrial services (Eggert et al. 2011), hybrid offerings (Ulaga and Reinartz 2011), and solutions (Tuli, Kohli, and Bharadwaj 2007). In turn, salespeople have had to continuously learn and adapt their selling approaches to these new market offerings (Steenburgh and Ahearne 2018). Manufacturers seem to be well underway in this respect as in

2018 they generated 23.6% of their revenue with services, a 48.3% increase compared to 2005 (Wellener et al. 2020).

Selling digital innovations, however, requires more than adaptations; it forces industrial salespeople to venture into unknown ground. For example, when promoting digital innovations, salespeople encounter new customer employees such as IT or legal experts. These experts aim to understand specifications such as interconnectivity and compatibility with established systems, cloud services used, protocols for user access, measures to ensure data security types, as well as accuracies of machine learning algorithms—specifications which are vastly different from those in non-digital products that established salespeople are used to selling. As a consequence, many industrial manufacturers struggle to bring digital innovations to their markets and are unhappy with their market penetration (e.g., Anding 2019; Dietz, Khan, and Rab 2020; Gebauer et al. 2020). In a recent survey of 31 managers from manufacturing companies (details in Appendix 1), only 9.7% were satisfied with their sales force's digital innovation selling performance, and 70% stated that established salespeople fall behind expectations. Of the respondents, 64.5% considered the selling of digital innovations to be an unprecedented challenge, and 71% were unsure how to overcome the challenge.

1.2 Goals and Research Design of the Thesis

We are intrigued by salespeople's challenges with selling digital innovations because in the past, salespeople have often been challenged to sell new offerings—so what differentiates selling digital innovation from other offerings? Therefore, the objective of this research work is to examine (1) why especially established salespeople struggle to sell digital innovations and (2) what managerial levers exist to address this challenge. In addition, to gain a deeper understanding, we examine (3) whether and how the results can be expanded beyond the digital innovation context.

To this end, as shown in Figure 1, we begin in Chapter 2 by conducting a literature review on the disconnected research areas of innovation selling and digital innovations. By discussing the focus of previous research in these fields, we define the foundational research void of our research work. Subsequently, the second part of the literature review is devoted to understanding our key construct and its origin from a general conceptual standpoint and discuss its adjacent concepts.

In Chapter 3, for a first exploratory study, we employ the theory-building theories-in-use (TIU) approach to tap into new mechanisms of digital innovation selling (e.g., Argyris and Schon 1974; Houston et al. 2018; Khusainova et al. 2018; Ulaga and Reinartz 2011; Zeithaml et al. 2020). Building on a research note from Schmitz (2021) and in accordance with Zeithaml et al. (2020) we aim to learn about individuals' mental processes in a specific context or a specific conditions. Zeithaml et al. (2020) describe the TIU approach as "ideally suited to surface interesting, novel theories and concepts that can advance both marketing practice and scholarship" (p. 48). Drawing from 59 interviews with subject matter experts from two international manufacturers, we identify a surprising mechanism: Established salespeople dread selling digital innovation because they exhibit a *fear of losing face* vis-à-vis customers. That is, salespeople who have been successfully serving their customers, thereby building up an image of high expertise, fear damaging this self-representation when selling digital innovations. This fear results from salespeople's knowledge gaps in understanding digital innovations and in understanding customers of digital innovations compared to non-digital innovations.

Based on the findings from our initial exploratory study in Chapter 3 and our literature review in Subchapter 2.2, we conduct a second qualitative study in Chapter 4 to gain a deeper understanding of salespeople's fear of losing face. In addition, we aim to identify whether this concept is generally applicable in broader contexts beyond selling digital innovations. As in Chapter 3, we apply the TIU approach and carry out 10 in-depth interviews and iterations with a global construction supplier. The results provide insights into how fear of losing face is constituted and what contingencies facilitate its emergence. Specifically, we identify a mental process that begins with salespeople expecting a consultation failure, leading to an expected negative attribution as well as negative generalization by the customer. This process ultimately results in salespeople's fear of losing face. Moreover, findings imply fear of losing face can occur in a specific sales situation as well as in general.

Building on the findings from both qualitative studies, we conduct a third empirical study in Chapter 5 to make our key concept of fear of losing face measurable and test whether our conceptual proposition can be confirmed on quantitative bases. Therefore, by performing a rigorous scale development approach (e.g., Churchill 1979), we set out to develop a validated measure for salespeople's fear of losing face. Drawing on prior literature, expert judgment samples, and a survey with 204 salespeople, we conduct both an exploratory and a confirmatory

factor analysis. Our results indicate that salespeople's fear of losing face is operationalizable via a distinct measurement scale that is novel to sales research. In addition, by estimating a path model, we test our conceptual propositions and find to a great extent support for our proposed process of the emergence of salespeople's fear of losing face.

Finally, in Chapter 6, in accordance with each chapter summary, we present our findings in a general discussion. We begin by summarizing the key results of our studies. Furthermore, we present possible research issues and our contribution to sales literatures in detail. We also extensively elaborate on the managerial implications that can be drawn from the results. Finally, we discuss general limitations as well as directions for future research that can be derived from our findings.

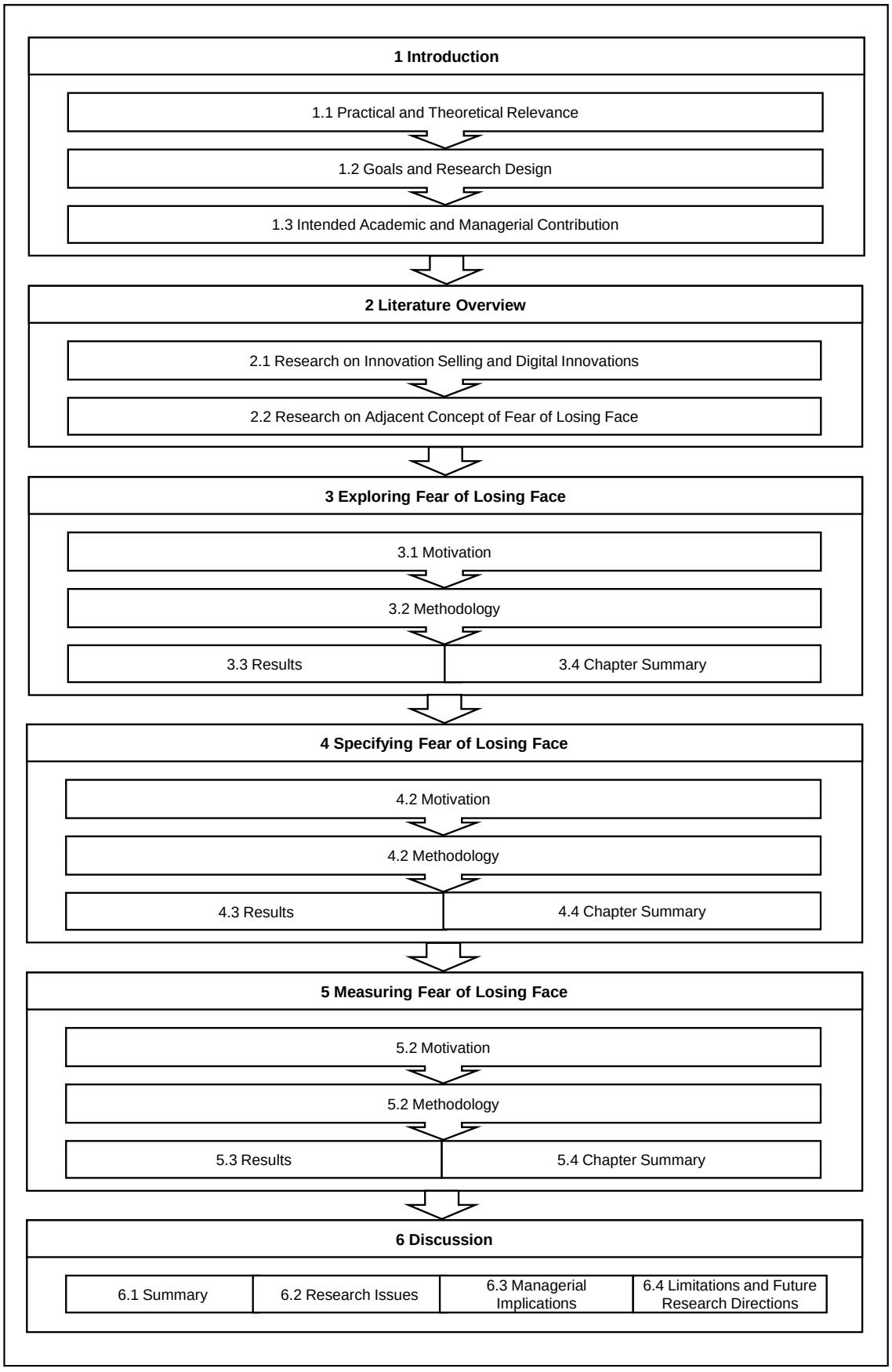


Figure 1: Research design of the thesis (adapted from Eggert 1999)

1.3 Intended Academic and Managerial Contribution

The concept of salespeople's fear of losing face is both novel and interesting. While literature has long shown that salespeople's adoption of innovations hinges on factors such as their motivation and skills (e.g., Fu et al. 2010), the fact that industrial salespeople exhibit the strong emotional reaction of *fear* in the context of digital innovation selling came as a surprise to us and opens an intriguing perspective on salespeople's challenges when selling these innovations. Uncovering such novel concepts for highly relevant managerial problems is what the TIU approach strives for and what marketing scholars have been encouraged to do (Zeithaml et al. 2020). To ensure a valuable contribution to the literature, we carefully integrate the concept of fear of losing face with prior literature, examine its antecedents and contingencies, and thereby lay fruitful ground for future research.

In addition, we aim to apply this concept to a broader context so that our results can contribute to literature on innovation selling in general. In doing so, we intend to define and quantitatively test general types of innovations that can foster fear of losing face, including but not limited to digital innovations. Moreover, to gain a thorough understanding of this concept, we focus on the mental process that underlies salespeople's fear of losing face. By carefully integrating the processes of metaperception and negative self-conscious emotions, we aim to determine and test all relevant steps in the emergence of fear of losing face that salespeople experience when selling digital innovations. Thus, our goal is to offer a theoretical and empirical well-grounded conceptual model that contributes to future innovation selling research.

Finally, due to the novelty of fear of losing face in the context of innovation selling, prior literature offers no sufficient measurements with which to collect quantitative data on that matter. Thus, we propose a new scale to measure salespeople's fear of losing face and consequently offer a reliable base for future research work. In addition, we employ this measure to test our conceptual propositions and therefore offer quantitatively validated results for sales research.

Beyond our contribution to academia, our research work also aims to provide concrete guidance for manufacturers that are troubled by digital innovation selling and innovation selling in general. Specifically, to reduce the likelihood that salespeople's fear of losing face impedes selling success, managers should (1) close gaps in salespeople's understanding of digital innovations and customers thereof, (2) compensate for prevailing gaps that they cannot close, and (3) motivate salespeople to sell digital innovations despite their fear of losing face.

First, in order to close gaps, managers should provide dedicated in-depth sales training and explain quality standards of digital innovations. Second, to reduce the likelihood that prevailing gaps lead salespeople to fear losing face, managers should ensure that sufficient assistance is provided to salespeople, all necessary information is available, and distinct communication measures are in place. Third, in order to motivate salespeople to sell digital innovations *despite* the fear of losing face, manufacturers need to convey the strategic importance of digital innovations to salespeople and adapt existing incentive systems.

In addition, we provide further implications for managers on how they can specifically impact the fear of losing face in their salespeople. We recommend that managers (4) create effective support structures for their salesforce, (5) distinctively train their salespeople regarding their new roles, (6) select the right salespeople, and (7) develop sales teams for digital innovation selling. First, when salespeople fear that a sales consultation failure for digital innovation can go wrong, it is important that they have the right contact person and expert to turn to. Second, as selling digital innovation often comes with a role change or adjustment, it is important that salespeople receive effective communication and sales training that delivers them an appropriate understanding of their new role. Third, it appears to be beneficial when sales managers focus on salespeople who are especially well-suited to selling digital innovation rather than pushing all salespeople to sell the same portfolio. Fourth, due to the fact that digital innovations often possess higher complexity, assembling sales teams with salespeople as well as technical sales and technology experts promises a positive effect in terms of salespeople's risk of losing face in front of customers.

2 Literature Overview

2.1 Research on Innovation Selling and Digital Innovations

To build a sound foundation for our empirical studies, we review three important literature steams. First, we review literature on *innovation selling* and *digital innovations*. To the best of our knowledge, with the exception of initial reflections from Schmitz (2021), neither stream has yet to be connected, and no reliable insights are provided into why digital innovation selling challenges established salespeople and how to alleviate these issues. Our first qualitative study in Chapter 3 is positioned at the intersection of these two literature fields. Second, we examine literature on the concept of *face* to obtain a better understanding of its origin and application. Moreover, we examine prior research on concepts adjacent to *fear of losing face* to distinctively

integrate our key concept into the current sales literature landscape. In what follows, we summarize both literature fields of innovation selling and digital innovation and identify the pivotal research void.

Prior research on *innovation selling* provides important indications on how companies can successfully sell innovations. As depicted in Figure 2 (see also the literature table in Appendix 2), studies on innovation selling have focused on (1) approaches of sales force steering (e.g., Ahearne et al. 2010; Hohenberg and Homburg 2016; Steenburgh and Ahearne 2018), (2) sales force motivation and skills (e.g., Fu et al. 2010; van der Borgh and Schepers 2018), and (3) innovation adoption by the sales force (e.g., Hultink and Atuahene-Gima 2000). In terms of sales force steering, researchers have examined management instruments that affect salespeople's innovativeness (Chen, Peng, and Hung 2015a) as well as the sales performance of innovations (Homburg, Hohenberg, and Hahn 2019). For example, studies show that outcome-based control systems are more effective than behavior-based control systems to increase innovation sales performance (Ahearne et al. 2010). Second, studies examined the role of sales force motivation and found that salespeople's effort and intention to sell innovation are crucial success factors (e.g., Fu et al. 2010; van der Borgh and Schepers 2018). For example, Fu, Richards, and Jones (2009) found that goal setting and self-efficacy strongly affect salespeople's efforts to sell innovation. Third, studies analyzed salespeople's innovation adoption and showed that salespeople's commitment to innovation is determined by their learning style, problem-solving style, and performance orientation (Atuahene-Gima 1997).

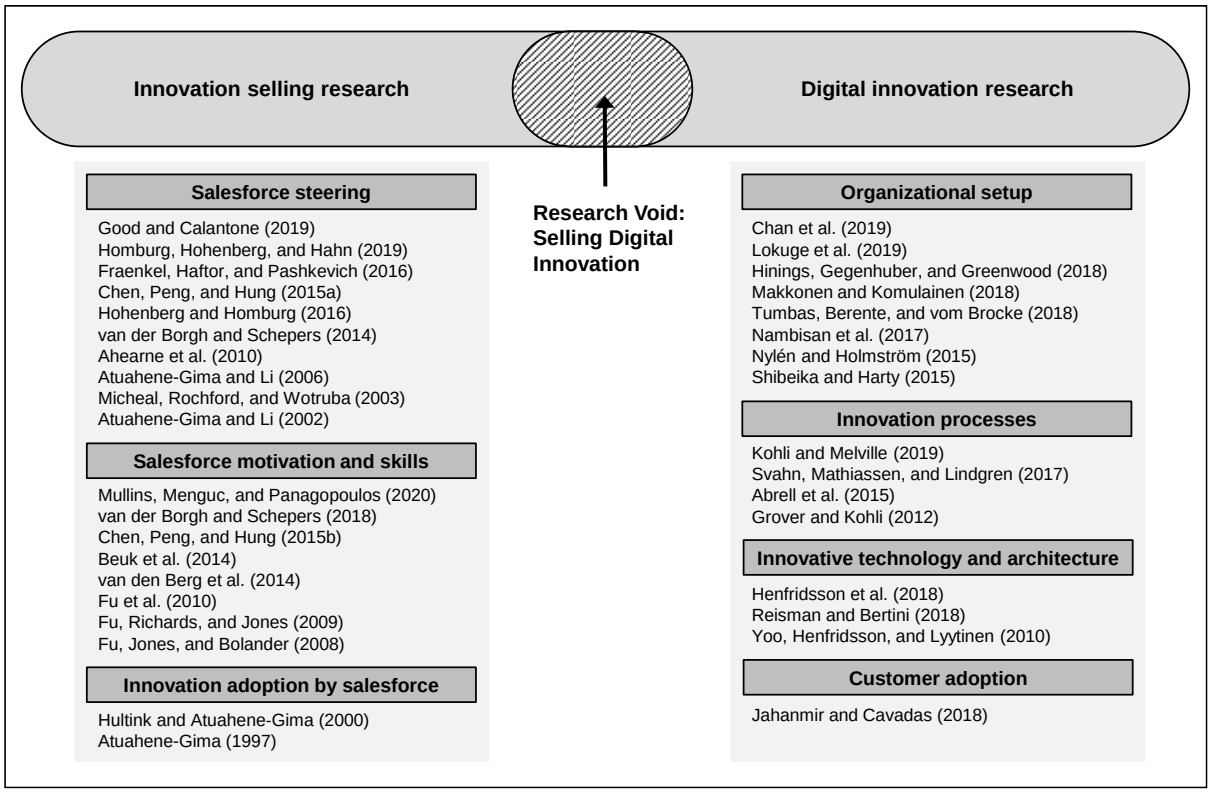


Figure 2: Research streams and research void

To the best of our knowledge, none of these studies have examined the selling of *digital* innovations. As digital innovations are radically different from other kinds of innovation and bring unprecedented challenges (e.g., Lokuge et al. 2019; Makkonen and Komulainen 2018; Nambisan et al. 2017), it is questionable whether extant sales studies can be generalized to the selling of digital innovations. This notion is reflected in an emerging research stream on digital innovations (see literature table in Appendix 3). For example, researchers found significant differences in organizational setups needed for digital innovations in terms of resources, staffing, remuneration, and culture (e.g., Chan et al. 2019; Nylén and Holmström 2015). Other studies examined the nature of digital innovation processes, demonstrating the importance of collaboration, governance, and customer knowledge incorporation (e.g., Abrell et al. 2016; Svahn, Mathiassen, and Lindgren 2017).

However, studies in this research stream have not examined challenges in *selling* digital innovations. In other words, while literature on *innovation selling* has neglected to examine the selling of *digital* innovations, literature on *digital innovations* has neglected to examine the *selling* of digital innovations. Therefore, both research streams remain largely disconnected (see Figure 2) and provide no distinct understanding of possible issues that occur in selling

digital innovation and how to address such challenges. Our exploratory study in Chapter 3 is designed to offer initial insights into this research void.

2.2 Fear of Losing Face and its Adjacent Concepts in Sales Literature

In the following, we aim to closely examine the concept of *salespeople's fear of losing face*. As a first step, we introduce the concept of *face* (see Table 2) and how *losing face* is defined. In addition, as shown in Figure 3, we present an overview of adjacent concepts of fear of losing face applied in sales literature (see also literature table in Appendix 4).

The social concept of "face" was developed in the Confucian era and is deeply rooted in Asian culture; it describes a specific image of an individual that plays an important role in social interactions and/or status evaluations (Goffman 1956; Ho 1976; Lin 1935). Goffman (1955) defined the concept of face as "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" (p. 213). As shown in Table 2, this concept has been featured in several research works from different academic fields such as sociology (e.g., Goffman 1955), psychology (e.g., Ho 1976), anthropology (e.g., Ho, Fu, and Ng 2004), market research (e.g., Li and Su 2007), and organizational behavior (e.g., Miron-Spektor, Paletz, and Lin 2015). For example, Hu (1944) studied cultural differences of face and describes how different criteria of face affect prestige and status. The author especially focuses on the Chinese culture where face has a long history and high relevance in society. In another study, Ho, Fu, and Ng (2004) thoroughly examined the concept of face and describe it as "the projection of one's self in the public domain" (p. 79) that is based on self-perceptions and metaperceptions. The authors additionally discussed face's association with the emotions guilt, shame, and embarrassment and conclude that these emotions can lead to a loss of face.

Authors	Topic	Content	Academic field
Goffman (1955)	The concept of face in social interactions	The author describes face as "the positive social value" of a person referring to how a person represents itself in terms of profession or religion	Sociology
Ho (1976)	Describing the concept of face	The author describes similarities and differences of the concept of face with other related concepts such as honor or status	Sociology
Ho, Fu, and Ng (2004)	How the emotions guilt, shame, and embarrassment are associated with face	Researchers examine the concept of face in the relation to negative social-conscious emotions such as shame in the context of Asian culture	Psychology
Hu (1944)	The concept of face in Chinese culture	Foundational work on the concept of face distinguishing it into two parts: *mien-tzŭ* which is related to prestige and *lien* which is related to personal integrity	Anthropology
Li and Su (2007)	The role of face in Asian consumer behavior	The authors describe why consumers in Asian countries are intrigued to buy luxury goods to gain face even if they can barely effort them	Market Research

Miron-Spektor, Paletz, and Lin (2015)	The role of face in creativity	The study examines cultural differences in terms of creativity that can be explained through the concept of face	Organizational Behavior

Table 2: Examples of literature from different academic fields on the concept of face

The concept of face is closely connected to the issue of *losing face* which is defined "as a damaging social event, in which one's action is publicly given notice and negatively judged by others, resulting in a loss of moral or social standing" (Ho, Fu, and Ng 2004, p. 70). Psychological studies show that avoiding losing face plays an important role for individuals in any culture in maintaining effective social functioning (Ho 1976; Zhang, Cao, and Grigoriou 2011). Avoiding losing face seems to be even more important than gaining face as the downsides of losing face appear to be more serious than the upsides of gaining it (Ho 1976). Moreover, results in terms of the social aspect of face indicate that it drives individual behavior such as conflict and learning behavior (Hwang, Francesco, and Kessler 2003; Ting-Toomey 1988; Ting-Toomey and Kurogi 1998; Zhang, Cao, and Grigoriou 2011).

In sales research, several adjacent concepts regarding losing face and its resulting fear of losing face can be found. To obtain a better understanding of the theoretical landscape in which salespeople's fear of losing face is positioned, we introduce these concepts in the following. As shown in Figure 3, we allocate this collection of research into four categories: (1) performance goal orientation, (2) prevention focus, (3) social anxiety, and (4) other actor's fear of losing face (see also literature table in Appendix 4).

First, performance goal orientation refers to a person's motivation to receive approval for their own abilities by seeking positive and avoiding negative evaluations by others (e.g., Dweck 1986; VandeWalle et al. 1999). For example, research found that the fear of performing poorly can motivate salespeople and thereby drive sales behavior and performance (Silver, Dwyer, and Alford 2006). Second, prevention focus describes the omission of certain actions to avoid making a social mistake (e.g., Crowe and Higgins 1997; Hamstra et al. 2018; Higgins 1997). For example, Hamstra et al. (2018) demonstrated that salespeople's focus on preventing mistakes by not acting in sales encounters negatively affects sales performance. Third, sales research showed that salespeople's social anxiety regarding being negatively evaluated by customers affects the salespeople's behavior and ultimately their performance (e.g., Bagozzi, Verbeke, and Gavino 2003; Chen, Peng, and Hung 2015b; Verbeke and Bagozzi 2000, 2002). Specifically, Verbeke and Bagozzi (2000) refer to this performance-affecting phenomenon as "sales call anxiety" that salespeople express in terms of psychological responses (e.g.,

appearing nervous) and protective behavior (e.g., speaking too fast). Fourth, research examined how actors other than salespeople are afraid to lose face and how this can be measured (e.g., Ndubisi and Moi 2005; Wang et al. 2020; White et al. 2004; Zhang, Cao, and Grigoriou 2011). For example, White et al. (2004) examined the impact of face threats in negotiation situations and concluded that when negotiators experience face threats, they are less likely to achieve a positive agreement. In addition, Ndubisi and Moi (2005) evaluated how consumers' repurchasing behavior is affected by promotional tools such as coupons or free samples and found that this effect hinges on consumers' fear of losing face (or being embarrassed).

However, sales literature has not adapted fear of losing face to the sales context from salespeople's perspective—neither in a conceptual way nor by explicit measurements. Therefore, we conduct extensive qualitative and quantitative studies to shed light on this research gap.

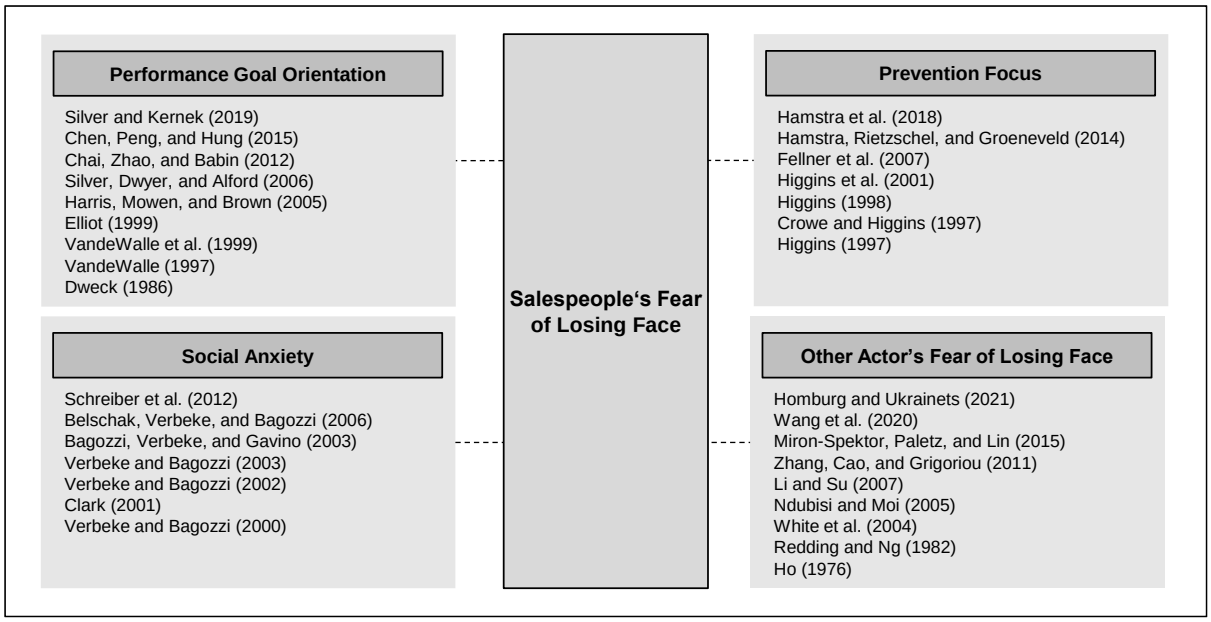


Figure 3: Research overview of adjacent concepts to fear of losing face

3 Exploring Fear of Losing Face[1]

3.1 Motivation

Selling digital innovations and the manifold challenges it incorporates form a crucial part of today's business for manufactures and is represented in various industry examples, reports, anecdotal evidence, and the previously mentioned studies. Based on this apparent practical relevance as well as the increasing attention received in the academic world, we seek to shed light on why established salespeople struggle with selling digital innovations. Therefore, in this chapter, we conduct an extensive global explorative study to understand the landscape of selling digital innovations. The goal is to identify phenomena that explain established salespeople's challenges in terms of digital innovations. In doing so, we aim to fill the research void between digital innovation and innovation selling and provide the foundation for the following empirical chapters. We use the TIU approach and answer Zeithaml et al.'s (2020) call for more "home-grown" theories that are native to the marketing and sales discipline. Drawing on the data, we also aim to generate insights for sales practice and provide a set of management levers to improve digital innovation sales.

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 The Theories-in-Use Approach

To answer the broad research question of why established salespeople are lacking success in selling digital innovation, we decided to apply an extensive qualitative research approach. For this purpose, the TIU approach appears most promising as it is "especially well-suited to identifying and defining important constructs that reflect the practical world of marketing, including antecedents and consequences of marketing phenomena" (Zeithaml et al. 2020, p. 35). As demonstrated by Zeithaml et al. (2020), the marketing discipline often borrows theoretical concepts from other fields, and it lacks a theory that is home-grown in the discipline of marketing. We therefore consider the TIU approach as highly valuable in broadening perspectives and guiding future empirical efforts in digital innovation selling.

Within the TIU approach, participants are active partners in a co-creational theory development process, allowing researchers to work closely with participants to tap into implicit and explicit

[1] This chapter was written in co-authorship with Bianca Schmitz and builds on a research note from Schmitz (2021).

causal thinking that can be extracted to develop theoretical propositions (Zeithaml et al. 2020). The aim is to learn about the mental models of participants regarding how processes work in a specific context or situation (Argyris and Schon 1974; Zeithaml et al. 2020). For this reason, the TIU approach has two main process steps that are executed in an iterative manner. First, through qualitative data analysis, key constructs are carved out and cross-checked with participants. Second, these constructs are placed in relation so as to form propositions and arguments about the direct and indirect effects they have on one another. This procedure leads to a full conceptual model that is presented to the participants in a feedback loop to derive the final model and the resulting theory.

3.2.2 Research Context

For this study, we collaborated with two global manufacturers that had developed digital innovations to complement their traditional hardware-based products and enable a future-oriented portfolio. Bringing these digital innovations to market has proven to be challenging but is perceived to be crucial for the companies' future market success. By studying two companies, we aim for a high generalizability of our findings.

Company A is a globally operating machine tools manufacturer with more than 70 subsidiaries and extensive expertise in high-technology markets. It currently generates revenues of around €4 billion annually. Their product portfolio includes machine tools as well as repair and maintenance services. The company also added digital innovations such as machine planning software and Industry 4.0 solutions. Around 10,000 employees worldwide serve B2B customers from industries such as automotive, metal and steel manufacturing, and aerospace.

Company B is a globally operating manufacturer for multidimensional measuring machines. It is represented in more than 100 sales and service centers with manufacturing sites in four countries. It offers a broad portfolio ranging from bridges, horizontal arms, and in-line measuring machines to shape-, contour-, and surface-measuring machines. The offering is complemented by customer service, contract measurements, part inspection using computed tomography, and online services to ensure optimal machine uptime. Furthermore, the company markets digital innovations, such as optical sensors and measurement software. More than 2,400 employees predominantly serve global customers from the automotive industry and its suppliers.

3.2.3 Procedure

Our research procedure is based on Zeithaml et al. (2020; see Figure 4). that is, we begin by collecting and analyzing data to define key constructs. In a second step, we analyze the data and iterate our findings with the participants to define propositions and arguments for the defined constructs. Finally, we conduct foundational and advanced testing to validate our conceptual model.

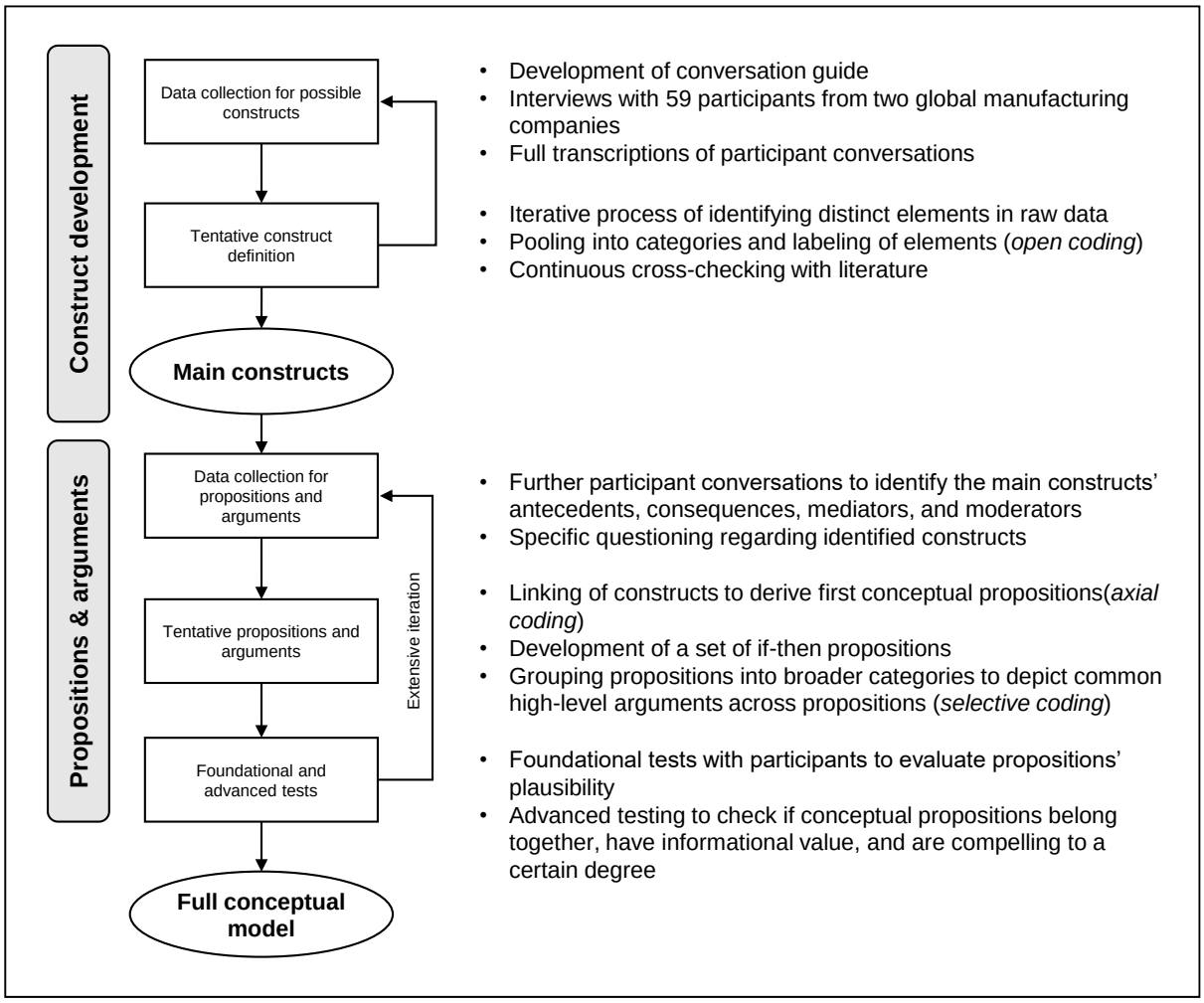


Figure 4: Process chart of the theories-in-use research procedure (adapted from Zeithaml et al. 2020)

Data collection. For the purpose of theory development, we conducted interviews with 59 practitioners representing a broad range of experience and perspectives in management and sales (see Appendix 5). Of the 59 participants, there were 35 mangers, 12 salespeople, nine customers, and three digital innovation specialists. The majority of our participants were active in the markets of Europe, the Middle East, and North America. To collect data, we developed a conversation guide consisting of different theme areas with open questions (see Appendix 6).

All interviews were conducted by at least two researchers to tap into all relevant aspects of participants' lived experience and to reduce subjectivity. All interviews were fully recorded and transcribed verbatim to achieve a sound base for initial data analysis.

Construct development. In line with Zeithaml et al. (2020), we identified distinct elements in the raw data that explains why established salespeople struggle at selling digital innovations. These elements were then grouped into a higher-order category and labeled by various codes (open coding). After cross-checking with current literature, we discussed our first results with selected interviewees and thereby derived the first set of constructs.

Propositions and arguments. We then revisited the interview data to identify the main constructs' antecedents, consequences, and contingencies. As a next step, these findings were verified by targeted questioning of selected interviewees regarding our identified constructs. Afterwards, we linked the constructs to one another to develop tentative conceptual propositions and arguments derived from the interviewees' mental models (axial coding). This led to the development of a set of if-then propositions that we grouped into broader categories to depict common high-level arguments across propositions (selective coding).

Validation. In a final step, we conducted foundational tests with the interviewees to evaluate the propositions' plausibility and alignment with the definitions and arguments. Furthermore, in accordance with Zeithaml et al. (2020), we evaluated the rigor and trustworthiness of our study using five criteria (credibility, transability, dependability, conformability, and distinctiveness; see Appendix 7). We also checked whether our derived propositions were interesting enough, added informational value, and had common themes (Zeithaml et al. 2020).

3.3 Results

3.3.1 Overview of the Model

Figure 5 presents the final conceptual model of this chapter and provides a distinctive explanation of why established salespeople often fail to successfully market a manufacturer's digital innovations. Specifically, when selling digital innovations, these salespeople experience *gaps* in understanding digital innovations and the customers of these innovations. These gaps lead salespeople to fear losing face vis-à-vis customers, ultimately harming their sales performance. Moreover, the extent of the fear of losing face hinges on perceptibility and compensation for gaps and the extent to which this fear affects sales performance and hinges

on intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. These contingencies as well as the antecedents of fear of losing face are promising starting points for remedying managerial levers.

The following in-depth discussion of the model is structured as follows. We first present the central concept of salespeople's fear of losing face when selling digital innovations and its effect on sales performance. We then discuss the drivers that lead salespeople to experience such fear of losing face. Last, we explain contingency factors. Possible managerial levers to alleviate the challenges presented are elaborated in the final discussion (Subchapter 6.3).

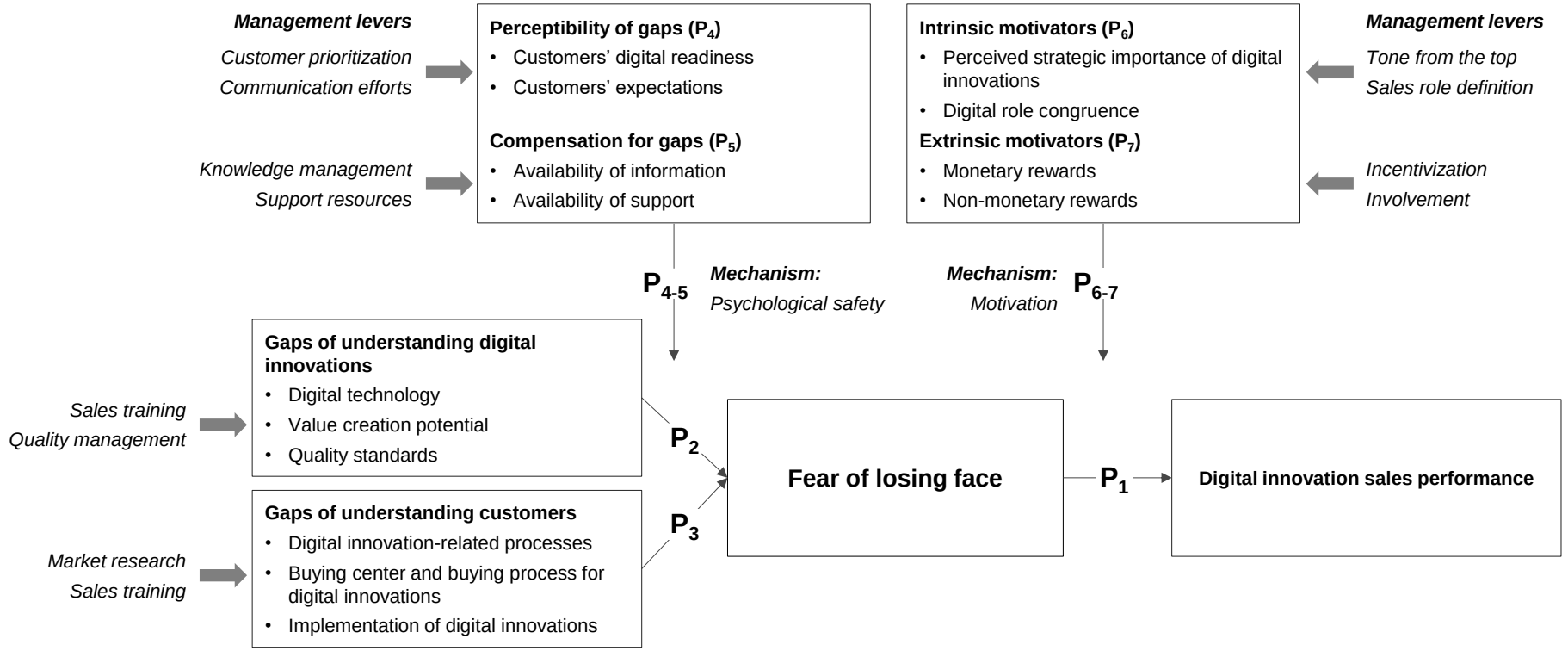


Figure 5: Conceptual model of Chapter 3: Exploring fear of losing face

3.3.2 Digital Innovation Sales Performance Suffers Because Established Salespeople Fear Losing Face

Our interviews showed that established salespeople avoid promoting digital innovations to customers and thus achieve poor selling performance. As several managers stated,

> *The classical salesperson, who has been on the road for 20 years, rather does not sell [digital innovations] if he doesn't have to. [A16]*
>
> *Salespeople are still reluctant to talk about [digital innovations]. [A2]*
>
> *From the five salespeople in my circle, only a few are confident enough to [sell digital innovations], and it is the same thing among our area sales managers. They are interested in that topic, but that doesn't mean that they trust themselves to really support and advise the customer in that regard. I think it will take time until they develop self-confidence for this topic. [B33]*

Interviewees consistently pointed out that established salespeople avoid selling digital innovations because they fear that doing so causes them to lose face in front of their customers. In this regard a managing director of a sales subsidiary [A12] stated with respect to selling digital innovations:

> *I think the sellers in general are all prima donnas. They never want to stand in front of the customer and look stupid and say: I have no idea. So that's indispensable for them to really save face with the customer.*

Another sales manager [A2] further explained,

> *It is just not an ideal situation; if you try to make somebody do something he struggles with, is uncomfortable and does not want to be in because he is afraid of losing his face in front of the customer. This is just not good.*

In a vivid manner, he highlighted how strong salespeople's aversion to losing face is when it comes to selling digital innovations:

> *He would lose his face, and this is what every salesperson hates. They hate it like poison, and managers need to support their salespeople to make sure that this never happens.*

As described in the previous literature review in Subchapter 2.2, "face" describes a public image of a person that is important for social interactions and maintaining a specific social status (Goffman 1956; Lin 1935; Zhang, Cao, and Grigoriou 2011). In other words, "face" depicts a public image and its evaluation by others in specific social encounters. Public image also plays a crucial role in digital innovation-related sales encounters between salespeople and customers. Our interviews indicate that in these encounters, salespeople are concerned about their public image (hence, their face) in terms of the *expertise* they project to customers. Expertise refers to salespeople's knowledge and abilities (e.g., Bédard 1991; Bonner, Baumann, and Dalal 2002; Ko and Dennis 2004). In fact, customers often evaluate salespeople based on their expertise, for example their knowledge of products or solutions (e.g., Kreindler and Rajguru 2006; Ou et al. 2012), making expertise an important success factor in selling situations (e.g., Curtis 2018; Ko and Dennis 2004). Consider the following statements:

> *If a salesperson does not understand [digital innovations], it makes a really bad impression at the customer, and that is something [that leads] to the customer saying: Oh, he has no idea what he's doing. [A2]*
>
> *The customer asks questions, and these questions are tough. The [salespeople] can't answer them, and therefore the [salespeople] are forced to gain this expertise from their [expert] colleagues to be able to keep their face in front of the customers. [A12]*
>
> *[A salesperson] always tries to look good in front of the customer and will avoid everything that might make him look bad. [A1]*
>
> *The salesperson only talks about things he feels secure with. That means you have to bring the salesperson into a position where he at least can answer basic questions. If the smallest question already forces him to say, "I have to ask someone, "I must call someone," or "I will send you the answer later," then he will stop addressing the [digital innovations] topic because he doesn't want lose his face. [B32]*

> *Well, everyone thinks there is an issue with our competence, meaning that we the people do not feel comfortable to address the [digital innovations] topic. [B14]*

In other words, salespeople want customers to perceive them as having high expertise and therefore nurture their public image accordingly. Thus, if salespeople are in situations in which their public image is threatened, they fear losing face. Building on the previous elaborations, we formally define fear of losing face at this point as a salesperson's deeply rooted aversion to being negatively evaluated by customers due to a perception of low expertise.

While it is reasonable to assume that any salesperson can experience fear of losing face, our results indicate that this fear is especially significant among *established* salespeople. The reason is that established salespeople have typically nurtured their public image of high expertise over years of sales experience and therefore feel that they have more to lose. To exemplify, a seasoned salesperson who has been successfully selling non-digital innovations for decades, always appearing to the customer as having high expertise, is particularly more fearful of losing their longstanding face compared to a new or inexperienced salesperson who has yet to build up a strong face.

To the best of our knowledge, the concept of fear of losing face has never been conceptualized and applied in the context of selling digital innovations. Because our interviews show that the concept plays a dominant role in established salespeople's performance issues when selling digital innovations, we place it in the center of our theory development:

P1: The greater established salespeople's fear of losing face, the lower is their sales performance with digital innovations.

As our previous elaborations show, established salespeople fear losing face when selling digital innovations because customers might question their expertise. However, why do they experience such fear, particularly when it comes to *digital* innovations? Our interviews provide fine-grained answers to this question. Established salespeople often experience gaps in their understanding of (1) digital innovations and (2) customers of such innovations. We elaborate on these key drivers of salespeople's fear of losing face in the following.

3.3.3 Gaps in Understanding Digital Innovation

One key antecedent of established salespeople's fear of losing face when selling digital innovations is that they struggle to reach the same level of product understanding they have

regarding non-digital innovations. Specifically, when manufacturers introduce non-digital innovations such as machines and tools, the salespeople can more easily adapt their existing product expertise in selling these innovations. In contrast, when firms introduce digital innovations, the radically different nature of these innovations renders it difficult if not impossible for the salespeople to easily build on their existing expertise. They then experience knowledge gaps regarding (1) digital technology, (2) value creation potential, and (3) perceived quality.

Understanding digital technologies. Established salespeople who usually sell non-digital products such as machines possess a deep expertise regarding the features of these products such as speed, error margin, and setup time. They can draw on this domain-specific expertise to understand a non-digital innovation (e.g., a new machine with improved features) introduced by their company. This finding is well in line with educational research that shows that individuals can more easily build up additional expertise if they already have relevant domain-specific knowledge (e.g., Alexander and Judy 1988; Newell 1980; Resnick 1982). However, established salespeople can hardly transfer their domain-specific knowledge to digital innovations because these comprise entirely different technological features such as software tools, apps, cloud services, big data, Internet of Things, as well as interconnectivity and compatibility. Furthermore, many salespeople in traditional roles cannot easily build new expertise on these features because doing so requires a deep foundational understanding of information technology (IT). As a result, established salespeople's knowledge of digital innovations lags behind, causing face-threatening situations with the customer. As managers A2 and B5 stated,

> *If [the salesperson] is not good with software and a [customer] asks: So, with this software, which data can be extracted, and can I link these data, and what button do I have to press? Well, then the salesperson surrenders, and this gives such a bad impression in front of the customer.*
>
> *With the broader portfolio, [the salespeople] have to learn more technical information and so on. Otherwise, they go to the customer; they have no answers, and the customer says, "I don't need you."*

In order to avoid revealing their knowledge gap and thus losing face, established salespeople often omit talking to their customers about digital innovations:

> *If after the first question, he [the salesperson] already has to say, "I have to ask someone," I have to call someone," or "I have to send it to you later," then he will stop addressing this topic because he doesn't want to lower his guard like that. [B32]*
>
> *Well, our established salespeople really struggle with [digital innovations]. They lack expertise. Technology plays a big role, and you need to have a strong technical background, so we realized very quickly that there is no way they will cope with [digital innovations]. [A12]*

Prior research has shown that salespeople fear appearing incompetent and experiencing negative judgement from the customer, but research has not examined the antecedents of this fear (Chen, Peng, and Hung 2015b; VandeWalle, Cron, and Slocum 2001). Our results indicate that fear emerges from gaps in understanding digital technologies and the resulting threat of appearing incompetent in customer encounters.

Value creation potential. Value creation potential is the extent to which offerings can deliver an economic impact on the customer (Cooper 1994), for example the potential to increase output or reduce costs. For non-digital innovations, established salespeople are well trained to understand and verbally transport the value creation potential. In our empirical context, salespeople can explain in detail how and why a new machine produces more quickly, is cheaper, or runs more reliably. In other words, the value creation potential of non-digital innovations is largely quantifiable.

In contrast, the value creation potential of digital innovations rests on the integrated combination of digital resources (Henfridsson et al. 2018) including data, software-based services, storing and processing capabilities, and the connection of soft- and hardware (e.g., Baskerville, Myers, and Yu 2020; De Luca et al. 2020). Moreover, these digital resources often create no value on their own but through their interconnections in the specific context in which they are deployed (Henfridsson et al. 2018). Therefore, the value creation potential of a digital innovation is more difficult to quantify, which makes it difficult for salespeople to entirely understand and articulate the full value creation potential (Chowdhury, Haftor, and Pashkevich 2018; Liozu and Ulaga 2018).

For example, a salesperson for machinery who sells an innovative machine can address the same value-creating features as before (e.g., speed, reliability, and costs). In contrast, if the salesperson is required to sell a new software for AI-based smart machine networks, value arises from the connection of various machines, their data exchange and analysis, as well as continuously improving decisions for the production lane. Thus, established salespeople have to "focus more on components like machine networks and interlinkages [of software] and less on the single machine" [A22]. To fully uncover the value creation potential of this digital innovation, the salesperson must therefore understand digital connectivity of production processes, data exchange through the Internet of Things, and data security standards. Consequently, understanding the value creation potential of digital innovations requires established salespeople to change their thinking:

> *All of a sudden you need to think differently; things that were not relevant before are important now. If you want to sell a machine now, you need to think about system integration for example, […] and this definitively demands some kind of rethinking. [B3]*

> *It is essential to show the customer the value and how his requirements are met. What would be the sales story we are telling the customer? We are not there yet. We have a big room for improvement. [B13]*

In general, the interviews paint a picture of established salespeople deeply troubled by the different value creation potential of digital innovations compared to non-digital innovations. Their gap in understanding the value creation potential of digital innovations puts these salespeople in face-threatening situations during customer encounters since "it is difficult to show the customer the benefit" [B16].

The importance of salespeople's gaps in understanding the value creation potential of digital innovations is supported by studies on new product selling in general. Studies have shown that effectively communicating the value of a new product increases customers' perceived meaningfulness of certain value characteristics, is positively related to willingness to buy, and ultimately contributes to the success of new products (Good and Calantone 2019; Sweeney, Soutar, and Johnson 1999). Our study in this chapter extends this notion by showing that a gap in understanding value creation potential can lead salespeople to fear losing face and therefore negatively affect sales success.

Understanding quality standards. The final gap in understanding digital innovations pertains to the quality standards of digital compared to non-digital innovations. In contrast to non-digital innovations, digital innovations are often continuously developed, rapidly reconfigured, and evolve over time even after they are brought to market (e.g., Nambisan et al. 2017; Nylén and Holmström 2015; Ross, Beath, and Mocker 2019). It is even common practice to launch a digital innovation that is unfinished and has only basic functions and to provide continuous updates based on customer feedback (e.g., Ries 2014; Ross, Beath, and Mocker 2019; Tripathi et al. 2019). For non-digital innovations like new machines or tools, such a procedure is uncommon or not even feasible, for example due to regulatory norms or safety concerns. Thus, non-digital innovations are frequently characterized by low error rates, low downtime, high safety standards, and high output quality.

Our interviews consistently indicated that established salespeople often hold digital innovations to the high-quality standards they are accustomed to using for non-digital innovations. Because digital innovations do not live up to these standards, salespeople perceive them to be of intolerably low quality. In the words of one salesperson,

> *Well, with the software we are never satisfied. There are huge gaps, so [the company] has to do way more. [A12]*

This quote illustrates that the disparity in quality perception leads established salespeople to lack confidence in digital innovations. Therefore, these salespeople are afraid of experiencing unpleasant situations during a customer encounter, which might cause them to lose face. As one manager put it, "The salespeople certainly and justifiably have the fear […] to burn themselves with immature software products with their customers" [A20].

In summary, our study shows that gaps in understanding digital innovations compared to non-digital innovations may expose established salespeople to face-threatening customer encounters and ultimately evoke their reluctance to sell digital innovations. Thus, we propose the following:

P2: When selling digital innovations, salespeople fear losing face because they experience gaps in understanding (a) digital technology, (b) digital value creation potential, and (c) digital quality standards.

3.3.4 Gaps in Understanding Customers

Salespeople also fear losing face because they struggle in understanding potential customers of digital innovations compared to customers of non-digital innovations. This is because they

experience gaps in understanding (1) how digital innovations improve customers' processes, (2) customers' buying centers and buying processes for digital innovations, and (3) the implementation of digital innovations. We elaborate on this in the following sections.

Digital innovation-related processes. When selling an innovation, salespeople need to understand what problem the innovation solves for a customer (e.g., Christensen et al. 2016; Rackham 1988). Salespeople understand this problem well for non-digital innovations, which in our empirical context consists of industrial machines. As respondents told us, machines often fulfill a specific purpose in the production of goods or services, rendering the problem to be solved obvious (e.g., shaping sheet metal in the form needed). On the contrary, digital innovations typically aim to improve customers' internal processes, for example by connecting hardware-based products with purchasing processes, automating operations while reducing workers' involvement, or collecting, analyzing, and visualizing data from various devices to deduce meaningful results. To gauge the suitability of digital innovations for customers, salespeople need to understand these processes in depth. Consider the following exemplary quote by sales manager [B26]:

> *This also requires the salesperson to understand customer processes and to be able to analyze them. Only then are you in a position to sell the customer benefits on an equal footing because the customer benefits in digital innovations usually lie in the process and less in a feature. […] You have to be able to show this to the customer by basically opening up your computer and saying, "Look, in your environment this is roughly how it would work."*

However, understanding customers' processes in such depth is difficult as it requires foundational knowledge in operations and pronounced analytical skills to transfer this knowledge to a particular customer. Established salespeople frequently do not possess these skills, which increases their risk of exposing their lack of competence and losing face in front of the customer:

> *Historically seen, our salespeople are machine sellers and […] do not have […] the focus on the value chain process of our customers. [A6]*

> *If I don't understand the process and I tell them anything, they will realize relatively quickly that my digital innovation may not fit their process at all. [B30]*

> *Frequently, we had a rude awakening when realizing that there was little fit between what the digital innovation can achieve and what the customer really needs. In simple words, it feels really bad when you say the system costs 4,000 euros, and in the end it costs 20,000 or 30,000 for the implementation because there are still some requirements unfulfilled that need to be added. [B9]*

Notably, the need for salespeople to develop a deep understanding of customers' processes is not unique to digital innovations; it likewise pertains to solution selling (e.g., Panagopoulos, Rapp, and Ogilvie 2017; Tuli, Kohli, and Bharadwaj 2007). It would thus be interesting to examine whether established salespeople also fear losing face when selling non-digital solutions.

Buying center and buying process. The interviews also revealed that it is more complex for established salespeople to sell digital innovations because more and new stakeholders are involved in the buying process than with non-digital innovations. Consider the following quote by sales manager B12:

> *If digital innovation is used, a single department can no longer initiate the procurement. It is not possible anymore to coordinate the entire range of elements, such as digital innovation data, or its interpretation without the involvement of other departments.*

Our interviews suggest that customers frequently involve four additional business functions. First, because the implementation of digital innovations requires using a company's IT infrastructure (e.g., solution architecture and data storage), the *IT department* participates in the purchasing process. Second, because digital innovations often track employee data, the *HR department* audits solutions and needs to secure the buy-in from (third) the *workers' council*. Additionally, HR needs to set up training for users of the digital innovation. Fourth, the *legal departments* often check whether data protection is granted, for example through a safe cloud server location and appropriate access rights to sensitive data:

> *In the course of a [digital innovation] introduction, everyone has to agree: intellectual property, legal, IT security, export control, works council, purchasing. They all have their own checklists. When the checklists are all approved, only then may purchasing procure the digital innovation. [B12]*

To examine digital innovations from their respective angles, these stakeholders ask detailed questions that a salesperson usually does not need to answer when selling non-digital innovations (see Table 3).

Buying center stakeholder	**Exemplary question for non-digital innovations**	**Exemplary question for digital innovations**
Production	What can the product accomplish in terms of productivity, process reliability, and flexibility?	What can the product accomplish in terms of connectivity, process automation, and performance increase?
Purchasing department	What does the product cost, and how much discount can we get?	What does the product cost, and how much discount can we get?
Top management	What is the value/cost ratio?	What is the value/cost ratio?
IT department	—	Is the digital innovation compatible with our ERP system? How can the data be transferred to another machine? Are cloud services available?
HR department	—	What training do we need to implement the innovation? What do we need to clarify with the workers' council?
Workers' council	—	What employee-specific data is collected? Can the data be used to monitor employees' behavior/performance?
Legal department	—	Are our data protection rules fulfilled? How is data protection assured? Where is the data stored, and who has access?

Table 3: Exemplary questions from buying centers when purchasing non-digital vs. digital innovations

The interviews revealed that salespeople are afraid of not being able to answer these questions and thereby lose face. Consider the following exemplary quotes:

> *On the customer side people change, and a different language is spoken; there is a different culture, and [the salesperson] does not understand the language and culture. [B4]*

> *You need to talk to the IT guys. And you need to understand the language of the IT guys, which is sometimes for me non-understandable because it's a kind of world apart. [B17]*

> *I have to be able to talk to an IT boss, to a CTO, to a COO. I have to be able to talk in their language. It's insanely difficult for salespeople to meet all these requirements. [B27]*

> *I have to talk with totally different people at the customer. As a salesperson, if I talk about [digital innovations], I will have a responsible person from IT in front of me, and he now asks me about firewalls and servers and so on. [A1]*

Our findings add to literature that emphasizes the increasing importance of the purchasing department in the buying process and implications for salesperson behavior (Paesbrugghe et al. 2017; Paesbrugghe et al. 2018; Paesbrugghe et al. 2020). When it comes to digital innovations, the IT and the HR departments, rather than the purchasing department, seem to gain in influence.

Implementation of digital innovations. After the buying decision, suppliers implement digital innovations in a customer company. Such an implementation comprises (1) granting customers access to the digital innovation (e.g., installing it on customers' servers), (2) integrating the digital innovation with customers' existing systems (e.g., connecting it with customers' ERP systems and machines), (3) configuring the digital innovation in line with customers' processes (e.g., aligning it to the process steps of the production), and (4) supporting customers in generating value when using the digital innovation (e.g., analyzing the data to optimize processes). These implementation steps can once more evoke legal or technical challenges, as the following quotes illustrate:

> *They're using [the digital innovation]; they're installing it in more plants; it is a success story, but they have a number of issues with it that they've had for a long time. For example – this may sound like a silly little thing, but it's very important – the login for [our digital innovation] is 8 characters. There's a government restriction it has to be 16. [B18]*

> *They first verify it for […] half a year and then […] data security is a very big issue. Where is the data located, how safe is the data, etc., and until it is implemented and launched it is always a very, very lengthy process and that always makes it difficult to introduce this in the short term. [B2]*

> *There are certain conditions that have to be met. So you have to know a bit about the law to exactly understand what is required, when is*

> *cloud a possibility or when is it not, about data protection regulations, where is the data stored, etc. [A12]*

As in the buying process, salespeople need to find answers to the questions of the involved stakeholders of the customer in the implementation process. Again, salespeople fear not finding the right answer and hence losing face. In summary, our study shows that gaps in understanding digital-innovation customers compared to non-digital customers may expose salespeople to face-threatening customer encounters and ultimately evoke their reluctance to sell digital innovations. Thus:

P3: When selling digital innovations, salespeople fear losing face because they experience gaps in understanding (a) digital innovation-related processes, (b) buying centers and processes, and (c) the implementation of digital innovation.

3.3.5 Contingencies Reducing the Fear of Losing Face

As previously described, gaps in understanding digital innovations and customers lead established salespeople to fear losing face when selling digital innovations. However, our interviews suggest that these gaps are less likely to induce fear of losing face when salespeople experience *psychological safety* (e.g., Edmondson 1999), that refers to "perceptions of the consequences of taking interpersonal risks in a particular context" (Edmondson and Lei 2014, p. 24). Such psychological safety arises when established salespeople do not expect their gaps in knowledge to be exposed to customers. In this respect, our interviews reveal two concepts that decrease customers' *noticing* of these gaps (digital readiness and realistic expectations) and two concepts that allow salespeople to *compensate* for their knowledge gaps (availability of information and support).

Customers' digital readiness. A customer's readiness for purchasing digital innovations involves the customer's willingness and ability to invest in digital innovations. Customers with high digital readiness more easily understand the value of a digital innovation and thus require little guidance from the salesperson, rendering the exposing of knowledge gaps and thus the emergence of fear of losing face less likely. Conversely, customers with low digital readiness require more guidance from the salesperson, leading salespeople to fear exposing their knowledge gaps and thereby losing face. Consider the following quotes:

> *Of course, you have to show to your counterpart the advantages of your solution compared to the competition's solution, but the counterpart needs to be skilled enough to really understand, to really*

> *see, what are the advantages and to really evaluate the added values of some features that maybe are missing in the solution of your competitor. [B17]*
>
> *It is difficult to explain the benefit that customers have from digital innovations. To succeed, customers need to be interested in it, be open for it, accept it. [B15]*

Prior literature conceives of digital readiness as a key facilitator to a company's or individual's adoption of digital technologies (Nasution et al. 2018). Our study adds an intriguing dyadic perspective to the concept of digital readiness: Customers' digital readiness leads salespeople to experience psychological safety when selling digital innovations and thereby reduces their fear of losing face despite their knowledge gaps. On the contrary, it is also possible that an extremely high digital readiness on the customer side might result in an expertise or educational disparity between customer and salesperson that could reverse this effect. Nonetheless, our data does not support this notion.

Customers' expectations. A second contingency affecting how likely customers are to notice knowledge gaps that cause salespeople to lose face is the degree to which customers have realistic expectations of digital innovations. In fact, in our sample, customers often seem to harbor exaggerated expectations:

> *The customers take the [digital innovation] and think everything is plug and play, but that is just not the case. A lot of process knowledge needs to be put in, own brainpower, how to realize the processes in the company. [A10]*
>
> *For the digital innovation, the customer roughly knows what they want, but they don't know exactly what they want. And if a customer doesn't know exactly what they want, basically, they want it all. They want everything. [B13]*

Interestingly, sales managers from both companies held that such exaggerated customer expectations were also caused by their own companies' overpromising:

> *So, the customer is standing at the trade show and says, "I would like to have the [digital innovation], but this and that doesn't work for me." And then someone says, "Yes, that's what we're working on. In a*

> *few months, with the next release we will have that." And then it often just doesn't happen. [B14]*

> *We exaggerated with our communication and generated inflated customer expectations which as of today we cannot fulfill. If we then send the salesperson to the customer to sell software, there's a problem. [A22]*

The last quote hints at the challenges for salespeople resulting from unrealistic expectations. Such expectations lead salespeople to be particularly worried that customers will notice inferior quality in digital compared to non-digital innovations, which would cause the salesperson to lose face (see "Understanding quality standards" section). In summary, we propose the following:

P4: Gaps in understanding digital innovations and customers are less likely to increase fear of losing face (a) the higher is customers' digital readiness and (b) the more realistic are customers' expectations with regard to digital innovations.

Availability of information. The extent to which gaps manifest in a fear of losing face also depends on how easily salespeople feel they can *compensate* for knowledge gaps. Such compensation can take the form of valuable and easy-to-access information with respect to digital innovations such as how-to lists for digital innovation selling, frequently asked questions and corresponding answers, reference cases, and overviews of potential personas in the buying process. When salespeople can quickly access this information in preparation for or during customer interactions and compensate for their gaps in knowledge, they are less likely to fear losing face. For example, a manager stated as follows:

> *We should give them more and more reference cases so that they can take them with them. With those, they don't have to have a huge know-how themselves, but can rely on good material. [A22]*

Our findings support prior literature that highlights the importance of sales information and knowledge (e.g., Leigh et al. 2014; Leong, Busch, and John 1989). While prior literature mostly conceives of such information as an enabler of selling (e.g., Rangarajan et al. 2020), our findings emphasize the intriguing psychological effects of such information on salespeople.

Availability of support. Availability of support—that is access to other employees with in-depth knowledge—also allows salespeople to compensate for knowledge gaps and thus reduces their fear of losing face when selling digital innovations. Examples of support resources mentioned

in our interviews are employees from IT support, software development, and dedicated salespeople specializing on digital products. Access to these employees allows established salespeople to quickly find answers to difficult customer questions. Salespeople feel particularly safe when these employees take a more active role and accompany them to customer sites in order to provide consultation on digital innovations. Thereby, salespeople can simply "defer to our expert," [B17] which protects their knowledge gaps from being exposed and allows them to save face:

> *When you talk about anything with a customer, you are much more relaxed if you know that behind you there is someone who can support you, just in case the topics get too deep for your knowledge. […] As soon as the customer goes little bit deeper into technical details, you're lost. So, it's much safer for you if you have someone you can rely on. [B17]*

Our findings contribute to literature on sales teams or selling centers (Edmondson 1999; Hutt, Johnston, and Ronchetto 1985), that is employees "from different functional areas such as physical distribution, R&D, manufacturing and technical service [who] accompany salespeople and help them respond to special requirements of buying firms" (Yang, Alejandro, and Boles 2011, p. 153). Prior studies on sales teams have typically examined how characteristics of these teams affect selling effectiveness and thereby sales performance (e.g., Gupta et al. 2019; Schmitz 2013). Building on Edmondson (1999) our findings add an important facet to this literature: Industrial sales teams might be an important source of psychological safety and thereby reduce the emergence of salespeople's fear of losing face when selling digital innovations.

P5: Gaps in understanding digital innovations and customers are less likely to increase fear of losing face the higher the availability of (a) information and (b) support with respect to digital innovations.

3.3.6 Contingencies Reducing the Negative Performance Implications of Fear of Losing Face

As previously described, fear of losing face negatively affects established salespeople's digital innovation sales performance. Nonetheless, our results indicate that established salespeople are less likely to give in to their fear of losing face and still sell digital innovations if they are motivated accordingly. Salesperson motivation plays an important role in sales research (e.g.,

Brown et al. 2013; Delpechitre et al. 2020; Khusainova et al. 2018) and has been defined as "the amount of effort the [salesperson] desires to expand on each of the activities or tasks associated with his job" (Walker, Churchill, and Ford 1977, p. 162) and "a psychological state that instigates behavior" (Delpechitre et al. 2020, p. 270). Recent studies have adopted the perspective of Deci and Ryan (1985), which holds that motivation can be intrinsic as well as extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation emerges from a task itself, while extrinsic motivation refers to motivation that arises from reinforcement or reward and not the task itself (Deci and Ryan 1985; Ryan and Deci 2000). Most studies on salesperson motivation have shown a positive effect of salespeople's extrinsic and intrinsic motivation on outcomes such as selling behavior and performance (e.g., Ingram, Lee, and Skinner 1989; Jaramillo and Mulki 2008; Miao, Evans, and Zou 2007).

In accordance with prior literature, we found that established salespeople sell digital innovations despite their fear of losing face when they are *intrinsically* or *extrinsically* motivated (Delpechitre et al. 2020). Our interviews revealed two concepts that serve as intrinsic motivators and two concepts that act as extrinsic motivators.

Perceived strategic importance of digital innovations. Strategic importance refers to a manufacturer's degree of commitment regarding digital innovations. When manufacturers assess, treat, and communicate digital innovations as crucial facilitators to overcome contemporary challenges such as sustaining competitive advantage, they demonstrate strategic importance. In contrast, for example, if established salespeople perceive financial and personnel resources devoted to digital innovations as insignificant, they are less likely to consider digital innovations as strategically important. Consider the following quotes from a salesperson:

> *I think if [digital innovations] were of greater importance, there would be more resources dedicated to it. [B20]*
>
> *We say that one of our core principles is digital. But I am the only salesman in the United States […] that is dedicated to software of any kind. So I can't say that it's a huge objective. [B20]*

Established salespeople who perceive the strategic importance of digital innovations as high also show higher intrinsic motivation to sell them and are thus more likely to achieve digital innovation sales performance despite their fear of losing face. Conversely, a lack of perceived

strategic importance has the opposite effect and reduces established salespeople's intrinsic motivation, rendering it more likely that these salespeople give in to their fear of losing face and refrain from selling digital innovations. This finding is in line with Tyagi (1985), who showed that when salespeople perceive tasks as unimportant, their intrinsic motivation to carry out these tasks is low.

Digital role congruence. According to role theory, a role is a set of given norms, expectations, and responsibilities involved in a certain position (Hall 1972; Levinson 1959). Role congruence refers to "the amount of congruence between the level of participation in [a] role and the level of commitment to and valuing of that role" (Perrone, Webb, and Blalock 2005, p. 226). Accordingly, we define *digital role congruence* as the fit between the manufacturers' expectations of salespeople to sell digital innovations and the salespeople's level of commitment to fulfilling these expectations.

Prior research on role theory, congruence, and motivation has shown that individuals with high role congruence are more intrinsically motivated and thus show favorable job performance (Mcintyre, Beauvais, and Scholl 1999; Miner, Crane, and Vandenberg 1994). Adapting this to the context of digital innovation selling, we argue that high digital role congruence increases established salespeople's intrinsic motivation and can thereby alleviate the effect of fear of losing face on sales performance. In contrast, if established salespeople have low digital role congruence, they tend to be less intrinsically motivated, have little counterbalance to mitigate their fear of losing face, and therefore are less likely to sell digital innovations. For example, low digital role congruence can emerge in cases where established salespeople perceive themselves as "machine sellers" even though their role demands them to be digital innovation sellers as well. Consider the following quotes:

> *They consider themselves as machine salespeople. And most of those people that have years of technical [hardware] experience are really good in explaining how machines work. But they are not good [at selling digital innovations] because the software topic just became relevant in the last 10 to 15 years. [A2]*

> *Some salespeople reckon that [digital innovations] are just a trend. Sooner or later this trend is over and what stays are our machines. But the old times won't come back. [A12]*

Thus, we propose the following:

P6: Fear of losing face is less likely to reduce digital innovation sales performance when (a) perceived strategic importance of digital innovations and (b) digital role congruence are stronger.

Monetary rewards. Beyond intrinsic motivators, we found monetary rewards to be an important extrinsic motivator that can reduce the negative performance implications of fear of losing face. Monetary rewards such as sales commissions and their positive influence on salespeople's performance are well established in sales literature (e.g., Bommaraju and Hohenberg 2018; Habel, Alavi, and Linsenmayer 2021; Hohenberg and Homburg 2016). In accordance with prior literature, our results show that monetary rewards are important to established salespeople and in addition are generated predominantly by the non-digital hardware products. As a result, salespeople often lack extrinsic motivation to sell digital innovations:

> *Well, salespeople are really, well, how should I put it? Really incentive oriented, and hardware is currently still 95% of the […] whole business. [A3]*

> *Salespeople are always commission driven, and as soon as […] they don't get [enough] commission on [digital innovations], they immediately lose interest in these innovations. [A21]*

These findings are in line with literature showing that monetary rewards have a positive influence on innovation-selling motivation and ultimately on innovation sales performance (Alavi et al. 2021; Hohenberg and Homburg 2016). Therefore, we argue that monetary rewards for digital innovations can extrinsically motivate salespeople to sell these innovations and decrease the likelihood that they give in to their fear of losing face. Sales manager B20 expounds as follows:

> *I think that there are definitely salesmen in [this company] that don't really bother to sell [digital innovations] […] They're not going to make much money on it. And it's just [safer] to try to sell what they know.*

Non-monetary rewards. In addition to monetary rewards, our results indicate that non-monetary rewards can help mitigate the negative effects of fear of losing face on sales performance. Non-monetary rewards such as recognition, involvement, and appreciation have been found to positively influence salespeople's motivation and performance (e.g., Hohenberg

and Homburg 2016; Tumi, Hasan, and Khalid 2021). In our study, such non-monetary rewards can come from outside or inside the firm. First, if salespeople feel appreciated by their customers, their motivation increases. Consider the following quote from a salesperson *[A21]*:

> *To be honest, I don't get my motivation from commissions. I see the long-term relationship to my customer. [A21]*

Second, managers argued that a "recognition program for digital innovation selling" [B28] might motivate salespeople to increase their digital innovation sales performance. Similar to monetary rewards, such non-monetary rewards might push salespeople to sell digital innovations despite their fear of losing face. In summary, we argue that intrinsic and extrinsic motivators can mitigate the negative effect that fear of losing face has on digital innovation selling behavior. In other words, salespeople might show favorable selling behavior despite their fear of losing face when they are intrinsically or extrinsically motivated.

P7: Fear of losing face is less likely to reduce digital innovation sales performance the more digital-innovation specific (a) monetary rewards and (b) non-monetary rewards are offered.

3.4 Chapter Summary

The qualitative study in this chapter provided viable insights into the issue that manufacturers are increasingly offering digital innovations, yet their established salespeople frequently dread selling them. We identified an intriguing mechanism that has not been explored in extant literature: Industrial salespeople often refrain from selling digital innovations because they fear losing face during customer interactions; that is, they are afraid to embarrass themselves, leading customers to negatively evaluate their expertise. This fear of losing face results from salespeople's gaps in understanding the digital technologies embedded in innovations, the respective value creation potential, the perceived quality of digital innovations compared to non-digital products, as well as their customers' processes and purchasing organizations. The results further indicate the extent to which fear of losing face emerges and the extent to which this fear affects sales performance hinges on factors related to salespeople's psychological safety and motivation.

Due to the exploratory nature of this study, the results offer only initial insights toward a profound understanding of fear of losing face and are based solely on two companies with an exclusive focus on digital innovation. These issues are addressed in a second qualitative study in Chapter 4 to obtain a deeper and more generalizable understanding of our key concept.

4 Specifying Fear of Losing Face

4.1 Motivation

Building on the previous findings, in this chapter we set out to gain a better understanding of the mechanism of fear of losing face and conduct a second qualitative study. Our aim is to generate further knowledge of fear of losing face to offer reliable results for academia and practice. Therefore, we seek to identify (1) whether fear of losing face only emerges for established salespeople in the context of digital innovation selling or whether if also occurs in other contexts. In this way, we can evaluate whether a higher degree of generalization is possible. In addition, we aim to understand (2) how fear of losing face emerges in detail on the individual salesperson level in the context of selling innovation and what are the specific process steps and influence factors of its emergence. As a result, we seek to carve out a distinct depiction of our key mechanism to offer a grounded concept to sales research. To that end, we again employ the TIU approach since it has proven to be an effective method to identify and define important mechanisms that exist in the real world of marketing (Zeithaml et al. 2020). Furthermore, we view the iterative approach of co-creation with the participants as very rewarding because it offers an effective way to discover mental models for theoretical proposition development (Zeithaml et al. 2020).

4.2 Methodology

4.2.1 Research Context

For the empirical research in this chapter, we collaborated with another global manufacturer (Company C) that has introduced a set of digital innovations to its international markets as an addition to the hardware-based core business. Company C considers the digitalization of its product portfolio as one of its top strategic priorities and has founded several dedicated departments to enable market success in digital innovations. We chose this additional business-to-business (B2B) company as a third collaboration partner to expand our industry focus and achieve validation and generalization of our results.

Company C is a globally operating manufacturer for construction and industrial assembly and has more than 10,000 employees in 60 subsidiaries worldwide. It employs around 500 salespeople for direct sales as its main sales channel. The company generates an annual revenue of around €1.7 billion through sales, rentals, and services. The product portfolio includes scaffolding and formwork products, engineering services, and digital innovations such as

planning tools, real-time sensor data, and material management software. The company serves customers from various construction and industry segments such as civil engineering, infrastructure, and industrial plants.

4.2.2 Procedure

As in Chapter 3, our research procedure for the second qualitative study is based on Zeithaml et al. (2020) and the TIU approach (see Subchapter 3.2.1). Accordingly, we began by generating data through expert interviews and analyzed it to define possible main constructs in the context of fear of losing face. Based on the initial data analysis, we iteratively reengaged with participants to carve out and validate propositions and arguments for the identified constructs. In a final step, we validated our conceptual model by foundational and advanced testing.

Data collection. With a strong focus on sales in the context of selling digital innovations, we conducted interviews with 10 practitioners (see Appendix 8). Six were selling digital innovation in traditional sales, technical sales support, or as a manager, and three were global managers with strong connections to sales and digital innovations. Finally, to gain a broad perspective on the company's salespeople from different global markets, we interviewed an experienced internal sales trainer. Our participants were active in markets in North America, Northern Europe, the Middle East, or worked internationally. We used semi-structured interview guidelines with open questions (see Appendix 9). All interviews and follow-up discussions were completely recorded and transcribed verbatim using MS Teams and Trint as a base for the development of a conceptual model.

Construct development. Based on line-by-line coding (Charmaz 2014) and in accordance with Zeithaml et al. (2020), we identified several emerging elements that shed light on how salespeople's fear of losing face occurs. In an open coding process accompanied by constant memo writing, we grouped these elements into categories of higher order. We discussed our initial results with selected participants, cross-checked the insights with current literature, and developed a first set of constructs.

Propositions and arguments. In a following step, we revisited the data to develop an overview on how salespeople's fear of losing face emerges. We discussed this overview with several participants using targeted questioning to verify our constructs and link these constructs to each other using axial coding. Based on this, we then created a first conceptual model with linked

constructs and arguments derived from our practitioners' mental models. Focusing on the derived constructs and their linkages, we developed a set of if-then propositions using selective coding.

Validation. In a final step, for foundational testing, we discussed our conceptual model with selected interviewees to evaluate whether the derived propositions are plausible and accurately represent underlying mental models. Furthermore, we evaluated our study in terms of rigor and trustworthiness criteria (see Appendix 10). We also controlled for whether our results are perceived as interesting and add substantial value for our theme (Zeithaml et al. 2020).

4.3 Results

4.3.1 Overview of the Model

Figure 6 depicts the conceptual model presented in this chapter and shows an enhanced argumentation of how the mechanism of fear of losing face emerges. First, the model offers a broader characterization of innovations that can cause fear of losing face. Building on the context of digital innovations, we found that the degree of technology newness in combination with the degree of target group newness offers a more general context for fear of losing face. Second, our model depicts the distinct process that ultimately leads to salespeople's fear of losing face. When selling innovations with a high degree of technology newness and/or target group newness, established salespeople are likely to expect a consultation failure. Specifically, salespeople expect to provide incorrect information, lack answers to customer questions, and break promises. Moreover, the level of the expected consultation failure is affected by moderating factors such as salespeople's change readiness and experience. In a next step, the occurrence of an expected consultation failure can lead to expected negative attribution from customers. Thus, established salespeople fear that customers perceive their own and the company's competence as lower in terms of innovations. Moreover, if salespeople fear that these competencies can be negatively assessed by the customer not only in terms of innovation selling but in terms of the whole product portfolio, they will expect negative generalization. For established salespeople, a negative generalization means that a customer deduces from a consultation failure regarding an innovation that the salesperson is of low competence for all other offerings as well. Both constructs, expected negative attribution and expected negative generalization, are explained through the theoretical approach of metaperception. This approach describes how individuals infer what other people might think of them and their behavior (Albright, Forest, and Reiseter 2001). Our model also shows that the emergence of

these constructs is moderated by several factors such as the relationship between customer and salespeople and the company's standing. In a final step, the model shows that expected negative attribution and generalization results in salespeople's fear of losing face. More specifically, expected negative attribution can result in fear of losing face in the situation, while expected negative generalization can lead to fear of losing face in general. For this, we draw on the theoretical concept of negative self-conscious emotions, which refers to emotions that rely on self-representation and self-awareness (Tracy and Robins 2004).

In the following, we discuss the results of our second empirical study in detail. We start by explaining a general innovation context that promotes the mechanism of fear of losing face. We then discuss salespeople's expected consultation failure, negative attribution, and generalization that results from innovations with a high degree of technology and target group newness. We also elaborate on the contingency factors in this process. Lastly, we discuss the emergence of fear of losing face in a specific situation and in general.

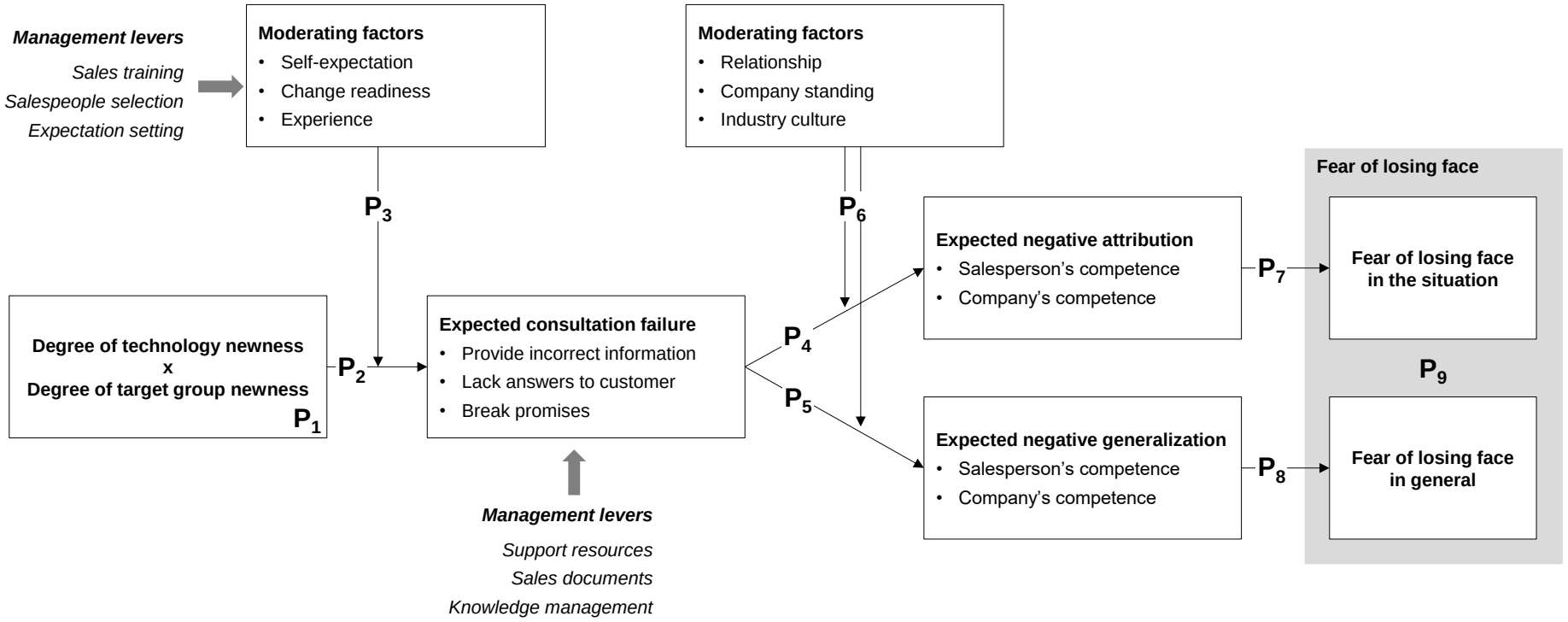


Figure 6: Conceptual model of Chapter 4: Specifying fear of losing face

4.3.2 Technology Newness and Target Group Newness

Based on the results of the initial qualitative study in Chapter 3 showing that fear of losing face emerges in the context of digital innovations, we first set out to examine whether this phenomenon also applies on a broader scope. Our interviews show initial evidence supporting this assumption. Amongst others, interviewee C9 stated,

> *I think [fear of losing face] can definitely be an issue with other innovations as well. I don't think it's solely a digital issue.*

Our interviews indicate that technology newness and target group newness are potential dimensions with which to define an innovation context that is likely to foster fear of losing face among established salespeople. We elaborate on these two aspects and their combination in the following.

Technology newness. Our interviews identified that established salespeople in general struggle with substantial changes in their product portfolio. Referring to a previous market launch of an innovative physical product that was based on completely different and more advanced material compared to the existing portfolio, interviewee C8 addressed the effect on established salespeople: "Everything that somehow challenges the status quo seems to be difficult at first." This issue that a different product character poses problems to salespeople becomes evident among digital innovations that cause the aforementioned challenges to the status quo. For example, C10 stated that due to its technology, a digital innovation is "not as tangible" and added,

> *I think this is where it's difficult [for the salespeople]. It's not as tangible as a panel or a girder.*

Interviewee C7 exemplifies how offerings based on intangible technology can challenge salespeople:

> *The biggest difference is, if I'm a salesman and I sell you a scaffold, then I can put the scaffold right in front of you and say touch it. Everyone understands that immediately [...] Even if one or the other handle is different. And of course, I can also demonstrate the new handle much faster in traditional sales than I can now with any digital innovations. With digital topics I have a significantly higher*

> *complexity because they have a much more holistic effect than the physical product does.*

Prior research has shown that due to innovations being more complex and difficult to understand for salespeople, innovation selling in general is very different from selling established offerings (Atuahene-Gima 1997; Hohenberg and Homburg 2016; Rackham 1998). Based on these findings and the results from our interviews, we propose that introducing a new product (goods or services) that differs from existing products in terms of *technology* challenges the established sales force—including but not limited to digital technology (Atuahene-Gima 1997; Ericson and Kastensson 2011; Hultink and Atuahene-Gima 2000). While some researchers summarize this difference between new and existing products in accordance with Ansoff's (1957) product-market matrix simply as products offering newness (e.g., Jacoby and Rodriguez 2007), others refer to this dimension more specifically as "technology newness" (Jacoby and Rodriguez 2007; Kleinschmidt and Cooper 1991; Schilling 2017). The authors argue that higher technology newness can lead to a higher likelihood that new products will fail. In this context, technology newness is described as a product being new to the company (and its salespeople) in terms of the technology that the product consists of or incorporates, thus differing from established products in the company's portfolio (Kleinschmidt and Cooper 1991; Roberts and Berry 1985). We deem this description to be a suitable classification for innovations that evoke fear of losing face. Thus, we argue that *technology newness* is an important dimension in terms of how much new products challenge the established sales force and can ultimately promote fear of losing face (see Figure 7).

Target group newness. In addition to technology newness, our interviewees indicated a second aspect that stimulates challenges for established salespeople in terms of innovation selling. As interviewee C9 stated regarding selling innovation, "The sales setting changes, and maybe we have another target group with new requirements." This indication was further supported, showing that target groups for established products are not automatically the right ones for innovations: "I've had scaffold companies [as existing customer] in the past where our [digital innovation] as a prime example was too much of a large program for that customer" [C1]. In addition, C2 indicated a target group shift:

> *[With digital innovations] there's still value to the contractor. I just think that there's more value to the owner.*

Further, C7 stated,

> *Is the customer I'm talking to even the right one for something like this? […] Because it's often the case that I'm now putting up a scaffold and perhaps he could be a [target] customer for our [digital innovations] as well, but he isn't. It's rather the owner behind it who is the [actual target] customer now.*

Product innovation literature often uses market newness as a dimension to classify new products (e.g., Booz, Allen, and Hamilton 1982; Danneels and Kleinschmidt 2015). In this way, a new product is assessed based on its newness to potential customers and users (Danneels and Kleinschmidt 2015; Ericson and Kastensson 2011). This classification appears to be valuable to evaluate the innovativeness of a new product from a firm's perspective. Nonetheless, from the salesperson's point of view, we consider the newness of the *target group* as more suitable for assessing the challenging potential of an innovation. For example, a salesperson who is used to selling material to a jobsite now offers a material management software package. His target group changes from the jobsite's material purchasing department to the managers responsible for the material process and work phase planning. Interviewee C4 vividly described this shift of his target group:

> *It's much harder. I mean, the sales cycle is so much longer than a [physical product] sales cycle. I can't just walk up to a jobsite trailer, drop off a brochure and a business card. I wouldn't get through a gate. And even if I got through the gate, I'd have two miles to get to where I need to be on the jobsite. And I never find where I actually need to be because they have 200 trailers. You have to start in office settings, and just getting into that office setting is very hard to do as well.*

Based on our interviews, we assume that established salespeople who need to approach different target groups to sell innovations tend to be more challenged in doing so:

> *If the target group is suddenly different, and the salesperson knows that the target group is perhaps educated differently, has a different background, or has a deeper understanding, then maybe it's another multiplier or another setting for fear of losing face. [C9]*

This notion is supported by prior studies showing that selling to a different customer group can be a source of failure (e.g., Fu, Jones, and Bolander 2008; Morris, LaForge, and Allen 1994). Therefore, we deem *target group newness* as the second dimension to generally classify innovations in terms of their potential for causing established salespeople to fear losing face (see Figure 7).

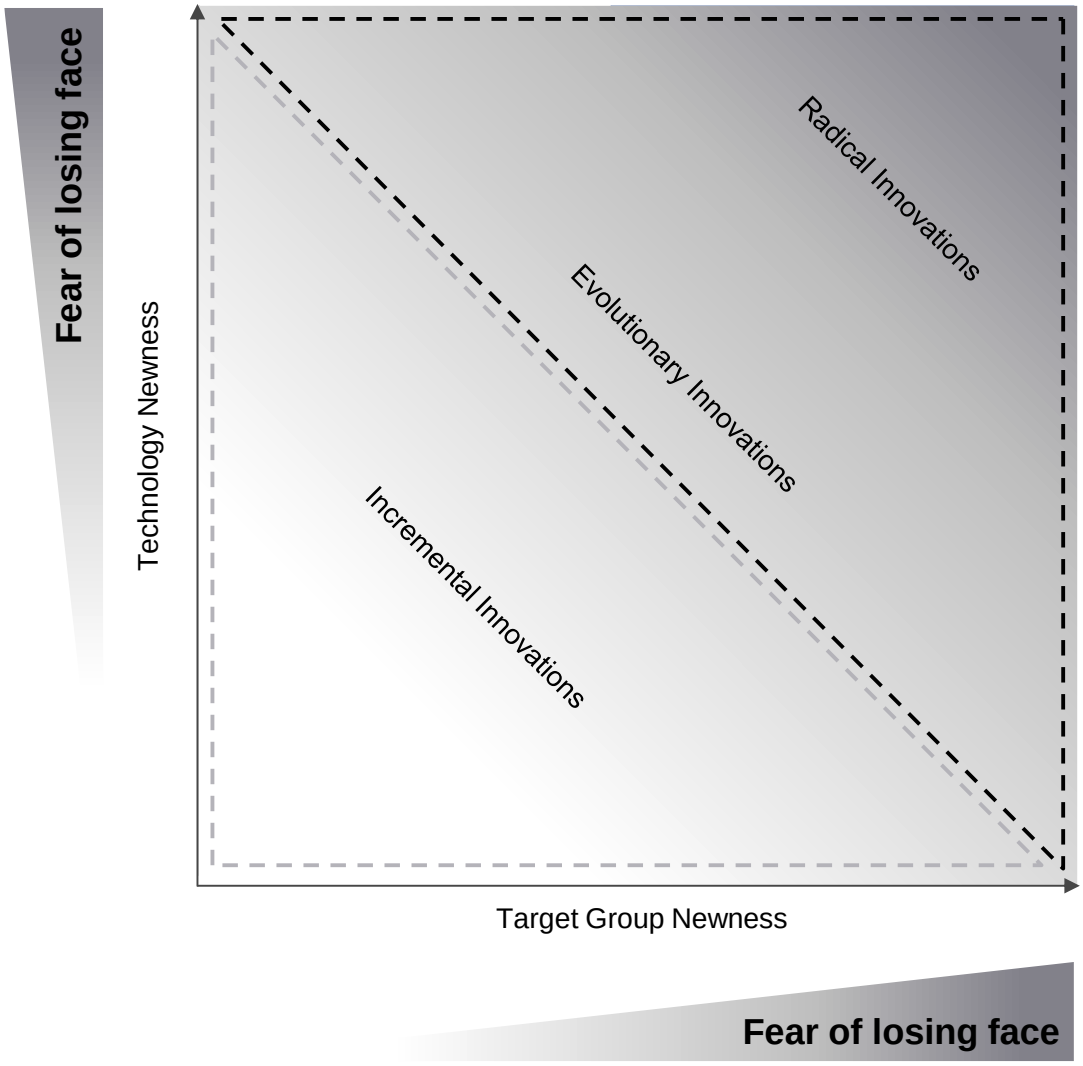


Figure 7: Innovations based on degree of technology newness and degree of target group newness

Degree of technology newness and degree of target group newness. In Figure 7, we plot both dimensions and argue that a greater degree of combination of technology newness and target group newness leads to a higher potential for established salespeople to experience fear of losing face. To generally distinguish between different combination categories, we adapt Jacoby and Rodriguez (2007) and Ericson and Kastensson (2011) to define three types of innovations. We label innovations with a low degree of combination as *incremental*, middle

degree as *evolutionary*, and high degree as *radical*. In other words, radical innovations offer the highest likelihood that established salespeople will experience fear of losing face. To illustrate this distinction in our research context, a new scaffold system offered to industrial service providers (ISP) for complex industrial structures instead of simple façades represents an incremental innovation with low potential for losing face. In contrast, a radical innovation that the same salespeople are asked to offer would be process management software for industrial scaffolds that helps owners of large plants maintain cost efficiency and transparency on large-scale industrial projects as well as transparency of subcontractors (i.e., ISPs).

We conclude that an innovation with a high degree of technology newness as well as target group newness promotes the mechanism of fear of losing face. As interviewee C8 stated,

> *With new offerings, I'm in the position of lacking knowledge and expertise, and I believe that this generates insecurity, which is the classic roadblock or prevention of change because salespeople simply avoid the new, the unfamiliar just out of ignorance, insecurity, or fear, so to speak.*

From this point on, our focus is on the range of evolutionary-to-radical innovations, which we refer to in the following as *digital innovations*. We propose the following:

P1: When selling innovation with a high degree of technology newness and target group newness, established salespeople fear losing face.

4.3.3 Expected Consultation Failure

As shown in Subchapter 3.3, digital innovations that are substantially different from existing products can create gaps in understanding among established salespeople that ultimately lead to fear of losing face. However, how do these innovations distinctively trigger salespeople's fear of losing face? Our interviews offer detailed insights into this question. In the beginning, salespeople expect a consultation failure when faced with selling digital innovations. In other words, salespeople are afraid that a sales pitch for digital innovations can go wrong since a salesperson is selling a product with a new technology and/or to a new target group. We characterize an expected consultation failure based on Morris, LaForge, and Allen (1994) as a salesperson anticipating an "inability […] to fulfill realistic performance expectation" (p. 7). Drawing from his own digital innovation selling experience, interviewee C4 illustrated how such a failure presents itself:

> *I'm embarrassed once again because we're bombing our presentation, and then ultimately, when we get in with these customers, and this was the first time we were presenting to them, that's the first impression we make, which is bad.*

Overall, our interviews reveal three important contributors to an expected consultation failure: Established salespeople expect to (1) provide incorrect information, (2) lack answers to customer questions, and (3) break promises. In the following, we elaborate on these aspects and relate them to existing literature.

Provide incorrect information. A first reason why established salespeople might expect a consultation failure when selling digital innovation is insufficient information validity. If salespeople have this feeling, they can fail to successfully deliver the correct information to the customer in terms of a digital innovation, and they are likely to expect the whole sales pitch to be unsuccessful. Consider this statement by interviewee C6:

> *To some salespeople, [the digital innovation] is a bit of a dark arts. They've not [used] it themselves, and it is a labyrinth; it is a huge thing when you go down the rabbit hole, but it's nothing to be scared of as long as they can just do the high-level presentation.*

However, from the perspective of interviewee C2, being able to deliver the correct information on a high level is a bit difficult:

> *You know our [digital innovation] presentation, I don't think it's very good. I think it's very difficult to follow. I think that process needs to be improved on the presentation side of it because to me presentations on something like [digital innovations] needs […] to give a big picture of it, and then you funnel down to the smaller pieces of it. And I think sometimes we have a tendency just to jump straight into the details on the presentations that we have, and so I definitely think that we could be presenting digital offerings in a much easier way.*

Personal selling literature states that having the appropriate presentation and being able to communicate correct information in a sales pitch are important factors for sales success (e.g., Hershey 2011; Ingram, Schwepker, and Hutson 1992; Johlke 2006). For example, Hershey (2011) concluded that a presentation that communicates correct information is a tactical tool to

influence sales success. Conversely, we reason that if salespeople assume they are providing incorrect information to the customer in terms of digital innovations, they tend to expect a consultation failure.

Lack answers to customer questions. In addition, we found that selling digital innovations can be troublesome for established salespeople in terms of being able to appropriately answer customer questions regarding these new products:

> *They just need to understand a high level of [the digital innovation], which can be sometimes challenging for them. If they're asked questions, a lot of questions, always and up you know, they're meant to graze the surface and stay high level. But a lot of questions lead into new questions which end up being very deep in detail, which could be a problem for the sales guy because he's not going to be able to answer a lot of those types of things. [C1]*

Interviewee C9 pointed out how this issue of not being able to answer questions can lead to a possible consultation failure:

> *It's very bad to not have the answers. And I mean if [the salesperson] doesn't have an answer to the question now, it can lead to the case that the customer says, "I'm sorry, but I need it now and so you are out!"*

C2 added with a bit of frustration that salespeople are required to build up the knowledge needed to adequately answer digital innovation questions in a sales pitch:

> *So, for me, it's you have to do your homework. You have to understand what you're talking about.*

In accordance with the initial findings in Subchapter 3.3.5, our interviews further support prior research on the importance of sales knowledge to sales success (e.g., Ben Amor 2019; Leigh et al. 2014). Ben Amor (2019) indicates that technology skills and knowledge possession are important for salesperson performance and supported Johnston, Hair, and Boles' (1989) findings that insufficient product knowledge leads to sales failure. Extending this conclusion, our findings indicate that not being able to appropriately answer customer questions due to a knowledge deficit can evoke an expected consultation failure among established salespeople when selling digital innovations.

Break promises. Finally, our interviews emphasized that established salespeople often fear being unable to keep their promises in terms of digital innovations. Consider the following statement: "[The customer] said the perception is that we are a company that sells the [digital innovation] and promises the dream and then walks off into the sunsets and we've been left with all this" [C6]. Our interviews showed that in contrast to physical products, established salespeople often doubt that they can follow up on the promises they make regarding digital innovations. He added,

> *I can sit there and tell the clients that we can do this. We can do that. It's easy. You just do that. We can train one of your guys to do it or we'll have people available. This and that. Once we press go and our customer says, right, we want to go with it; that's where I'm a little bit nervous of the backup of [our company].*

Interviewee C8 endorsed that notion and stated regarding digital innovations, "You might be worried that our company can't deliver what the customer somehow wants." In addition, interviewee C7 stated:

> *If I offer something like [digital innovations], it needs to work. In software even more than elsewhere. For example, if someone says [to the salesperson] you need to wait, I have to program this, but I don't have any resources now and the capacity is not available until May 2028, then it shouldn't even be offered.*

In addition, interviewee C1 exemplified how in terms of digital innovation such an inability to deliver a promise might look:

> *[The customer] might already be in a meeting where they got to pull a report [from the digital innovation] right away, and all of a sudden, you're trying to pull a report where all the answers that you need to give right now are in and you get an error. That's very difficult. […] It becomes really, really easy to lose face. […] As a salesperson, that in itself is a huge face let-down.*

Prior research showed that the ability to deliver on offerings by having the right organization, infrastructure, and technology is an important factor to avoid sales failure (McGowan 2021; Morris, LaForge, and Allen 1994). Based on our interviews, we consequently argue that

expecting to break promises can cause an expected consultation failure when established salespeople fear they might promise too much to the customer. In that regard, interviewee C10 stated that salespeople should "rather underpromise and overdeliver than overpromise and underdeliver."

In summary, our interviews indicate that in the context of digital innovation selling, an inability in terms of correct information, answering questions, or keeping promises creates an expected consultation failure for established salespeople when selling digital innovations. Therefore, we propose the following:

P2: When selling innovation with a high degree of technology newness and target group newness, salespeople expect a consultation failure because they fear (a) providing incorrect information, (b) lacking answers to customer questions, and (c) breaking promises.

4.3.4 Contingencies Reducing the Emergence of Expected Consultation Failure

Our interviews also revealed several salespeople-related factors that moderate how strongly the degree of technology newness and target group newness induces an expected consultation failure. We elaborate on these factors in the following.

Self-expectation. First, our interviews revealed that salespeople's self-expectation, that is their belief or judgment of how they should perform (Trinidad 2019), is an important factor regarding the challenges of selling digital innovations. Salespeople often expect to have the same role in digital innovation selling that they perform in selling traditional products:

> *Our salespeople could always service at a higher level because they understand how the product is really physically put together, how you build physically. So we didn't always need to bring technical guys in. The salesperson could say, "Listen guys, this is where you do it wrong, you know?" But now the market has moved. [C10]*

In addition, interviewee C8 pointed out how salespeople's expectation is shaped by their role in the past:

> *We call our salespeople "sales engineers," and we say we offer solutions; we help the customer. So, I think this creates the self-expectation that I consult you, dear customer, with your problem, and I am, so to speak, the one who can also solve your problems, and I deliver what is necessary myself. So I act from a position of expertise,*

> *strength, and competence. But now, when I'm on the road with these [digital innovations], it is not given at first. Now I'm in a place of some kind of non-knowledge and non-expertise.*

C8 also stated that salespeople need to know that their expectations should be different in terms of digital innovations:

> *First of all, I think no one likes to stand in a sales pitch and say, "I can't do this" or "I don't know that." But on the other hand, no one can seriously expect you [the salesperson] to cover the whole range of our portfolio in all details.*

Therefore, a misguided or unrealistic self-expectation can influence what salespeople view as sales failure. Surprisingly, salespeople's self-expectations have been largely neglected in the context of selling new products. However, drawing from psychology research that highlights the importance of self-expectation in evaluating situations or behavior in general (Sparks, Meisner, and Young 2013; Trinidad 2019) as well as tentative insights in sales literature (Johnston and Kim 1994; Lyngdoh et al. 2021), we assume that it is important that salespeople have realistic self-expectations. Salespeople who consider it acceptable if they do not know all aspects of digital innovations are less likely to expect a sales pitch to go wrong because not being able to answer certain questions would not be seen as a sales failure per se. Therefore, based on our interviews, we predict that salespeople's self-expectation is an important moderator for salespeople's expected consultation failure.

Change readiness. Another relevant moderator is salespeople's change readiness, that is the "willingness and ability of individuals in the organization to move into a new state resulting from the change event" (Rusly, Corner, and Sun 2012, p. 331). Our interviews show that some salespeople are open to moving into such a new state, that is selling digital innovation. Consider the following statements:

> *There are salespeople who see the [introduction of digital innovations] as an opportunity and say, "I'm pushing this. I'm driving this because I think I can deliver some new value to the customer." [C8]*

> *So yes, ultimately it is important how open am I towards the [digital innovations]. Towards these developments. For me that's an important driver. [C9]*
>
> *I know that some salespeople are really embracing [digital innovations]. [C10]*

However, our interviews also indicated that when established salespeople do not embrace changes in terms of digital innovation technology, they are likely to be less receptive to new products and fear that their usual selling success might suffer. To a certain extent, prior research supports this notion by showing that especially technology-induced changes can challenge salespeople (Hunter and Panagopoulos 2015) because "change threatens one's stability and continuity" (Weeks et al. 2004, p. 8). Therefore, we conclude that low change readiness can intensify the effect a new product has on salespeople's expected consultation failure. In contrast, a high degree of change readiness can mitigate this effect because if established salespeople are open to change, that is offering digital innovations, they are more likely to deal with the uncertainty of these new products in a sales pitch. Hence, we predict change readiness to be a relevant moderator in the context of digital innovations.

Experience. Finally, another factor affecting how intensely salespeople expect a consultation failure is sales experience. We refer to salespeople's experience as "the number of years the salesperson has spent in his/her current job" (Atuahene-Gima 1997, p. 504). Our interviews indicate the influence of experience in digital innovation selling. Interviewee C1 vividly stated,

> *That's one of the good things about my background: I have a lot of past experience understanding why or how things always manage to go south. And you know, being able to work with a lot of technical people, developers and such for digitalization is really, really helpful to me.*

Morris, LaForge, and Allen (1994) found that in general, salespeople with long experience are more tolerant of sales failure. In other words, salespeople with long-term experience have seen many different sales situations and are therefore more adaptive in avoiding sales failure compared to unexperienced colleagues. In addition, Atuahene-Gima (1997) proposed that salespeople's experience has a positive effect on the adoption of new products. We consequently assume that this greater adoption of innovations also decreases the emergence of

expected consultation failures within the context of digital innovation selling. We conclude that the effect of digital innovations on salespeople's expected consultation failure is moderated by salespeople's experience.

In summary, our interviews show that several factors can moderate the effect that the degree of technology newness and target group newness have on established salespeople's expected consultation failure when selling digital innovations. Therefore, we propose the following:

P3: Innovations with a high degree of technology newness and target group newness are less likely to evoke fear of losing face the more realistic salespeople's (a) self-expectation regarding digital innovation selling and the higher salespeople's (b) change readiness and (c) experience.

As demonstrated in Subchapter 4.3.3, we found that expected consultation failure is an important intermediate stage within the emergence of salespeople's fear of losing face, and it possesses various moderators. In a next step, we show that an expected consultation failure can subsequently lead salespeople to expect negative attribution and negative generalization from their customers, which ultimately leads to fear of losing face. We elaborate on these two phenomena and the underlying theoretical concept in the following sections.

4.3.5 Expected Negative Attribution and Generalization

Our interviews indicated that before experiencing fear of losing face, established salespeople are likely to expect negative attribution or negative generalization from their customer, and this is driven by an expected consultation failure; that is, salespeople are likely to expect that a consultation failure regarding digital innovations can make customers evaluate the salespeople's and the company's competence negatively and thus think less of them. A psychological concept connected to this question of how individuals assess how they are seen by others is called *metaperception* (e.g., Albright, Forest, and Reiseter 2001; Kenny and DePaulo 1993; Laing, Phillipson, and Lee 1966; Tissera et al. 2021; Vorauer and Kumhyr 2001). The concept of metaperception describes the process of individuals judging what impressions others may have of them personally as well as of their behaviors (Laing, Phillipson, and Lee 1966; Wirtz et al. 2013). Typical questions in this regard are: How does another person see me? Do others have a negative impression of me or my surroundings? (Carlson 2016; Tissera et al. 2021).

The concept of metaperception has gained some attention in service and consumer research (e.g., Austin and Huang 2011; Brumbaugh and Rosa 2009; Wirtz et al. 2013). For example, Wirtz et al. (2013) showed that within referral reward programs, recommendation behavior is

driven by the recommending individuals' metaperceptions regarding how they will be seen by the receiving end. In another study, Brumbaugh and Rosa (2009) found that customers' use of coupons and how embarrassed or confident they feel about using them depends on their metaperception of the cashier's attitude. Nonetheless, beyond the application of this concept in consumer research, the theoretical concept of metaperception has been largely neglected in B2B sales literature, especially in innovation selling. However, we deem this concept to be a valid explanation mechanism to describe how the emergence of fear of losing face develops. We integrate this mechanism in our process of salespeople's fear of losing face and propose that expecting a consultation failure can subsequently lead salespeople to fear that their customers will have a negative impression of them or their company, especially as prior research has shown that in general, expecting negative evaluations can play an important role in sales calls (e.g., Verbeke and Bagozzi 2000). In the following, we discuss two important manifestation of negative customer impressions that established salespeople are likely to expect.

Expected negative attribution. First, our interviews showed that salespeople expecting a consultation failure in selling digital innovations are likely to fear customers' negative attribution in terms of their own and their company's competence. In general, competence is reflected by a combination of ability, knowledge, and skills and is usually positively related to an individual's performance (Dubois 1998; Teodorescu 2006). By *attribution* we refer to individuals systematically assigning causal explanations for behavior based on available information (Jones et al. 1972; Teas and McElroy 1986). In our context, this implies that salespeople expect that their customer ascribes their consultation failure to a low competence in digital innovations. Salespeople anticipating such a negative attribution by the customer reflects the salespeople's metaperception and can at first occur regarding the salespeople's competence. Consider the following statement by interviewee C8:

> *The salesperson fears that he or she is not seen as the competent go-to person by the customer […] and not being able to appropriately solve the problem [in terms of digital innovations].*

Interviewee C9 illustrates from the view of a customer how negative attribution regarding digital innovation selling expresses itself:

> *The customer thinks, "Great, no one knows the physical products as well as you do, but it's not beneficial enough for me. It seems like I*

> *can't track my physical products and display them within my software systems." […] So, if the salesperson says, "Oh, that's something I don't know right know," he gets lost and is likely to fear leaving a really bad impression.*

Especially due to the increasing importance of digital innovations in winning projects, salespeople want to be seen as competent counterparts for such topics and avoid negative attribution that can occur based on consultation failures. Therefore, it is likely that expecting a consultation failure leads established salespeople to expect a negative attribution from the customer in terms of their competence. In addition, our interviews indicate that they not only expect customers' negative attribution regarding their own competence but also the perceived competence of the salespeople's company. Consider the following statements:

> *I have to be competent as a salesperson, but I can be as competent as I want; if the company's digital innovations simply don't deliver what the customer wants […] [the company] will look bad. [C9]*

> *I don't know if it's really the problem that the salesperson is perceived as not competent or rather that he or she is worried that [the company] cannot deliver what the customer wants. [C8]*

Thus, the company's competence is a possible second aspect of customers' negative attribution that is expected by the salespeople. To conclude, an expected consultation failure in selling digital innovations can lead salespeople through the thought process of metaperception to expect negative attribution from the customer in terms of their own competence and to a certain degree towards the company's competence:

> *It comes more to a personal thing than it does a professional thing. It's both, but I feel worse about the view of myself than customers' view of [the company]. [C4]*

Therefore, we propose the following:

P4: The more established salespeople expect a consultation failure, the more they expect a negative attribution by their customers.

Expected negative generalization. Second, our interviews revealed that in addition to expecting a negative attribution, established salespeople also fear a negative generalization by their customers. *Generalization* refers to the evaluation of one stimuli being passed on to another

similar stimuli (Fields et al. 1991; Högden, Stahl, and Unkelbach 2020; Medin, Goldstone, and Gentner 1993). In terms of our research context, an expected negative generalization is the fear that a negative consultation will lead not only to a negative judgement regarding digital innovations through negative attribution; it will also affect the customer's general assessment of the salespeople's and company's competence. In other words, a salesperson who expects a digital innovation consultation failure is likely to fear or metaperceive that low performance in that specific domain will be generalized by the customer so that the competence of the company and the salesperson will be seen as low overall and not solely in terms of digital innovations. In that respect, our interviews showed that salespeople first and foremost worry how their own competence will be perceived by the customer:

> *You know, I'm not just thinking of [the company]. I'm thinking of myself as well. For your own integrity, isn't it? [C6]*

> *The sales guys at some level they have to make sure that their reputation, their look, in the end needs to be where it's at or where it should be for them. [C1]*

Moreover, our interviews indicated two specific reasons why established salespeople fear a negative generalization by their customers. First, salespeople are afraid that a negative generalization will lead to losing entire projects in which digital innovations are often just one element of the offering and physical products are the larger part. Consider the following statement of interviewee C9:

> *There is the fear that the customer will drop out completely for the project or also for the whole business that the salesperson is initiating.*

Second, salespeople fear that a negative generalization will damage future job opportunities. Our interviews showed that in our research context, a customer is often not seen solely as a business partner but also as a possible future employee:

> *We have salespeople that are working with [our company] today that used to work with [a customer]. Do you think their reputation matters? 100% it does. Who knows if they'll be back with [the customer] in 5 years or 10 years? So, on a personal level at the end of the day, the reputation means a lot. [C4]*

As mentioned previously, we found that a negative generalization can also be formed in terms of perceived company competence, and a salesperson might expect to suffer in general based on a consultation failure: "The salesperson might lose the customer completely, and then [the company] does lose its perceived competence as well" [C9]. Nonetheless, our interviews implied that the expectation of a negative generalization is made stronger through personal competence evaluation by the customer than the competence of the company. Consider the following statements:

> *At the end of the day, salespeople truly do look out for themselves and as a salesperson they do look at their own reputation more. [C2]*
>
> *I care about people's perception of [the company] because ultimately that's who I work for, but what people think of me personally hurts me more than what they think of the company. [C4]*
>
> *Nobody wants a customer to look at you and say, "OK, you've dropped the ball." They didn't say [the company] dropped the ball. They will say you dropped the ball. And I think this is a big fear for salespeople. [C10]*

In summary, expected negative generalization arises from an expected consultation failure via the metaperception of the salespeople, which is predominantly focused on personal competence. Consequently, we propose the following:

P5: The more established salespeople expect a consultation failure, the more they expect a negative generalization by their customers.

4.3.6 Contingencies Affecting Expected Negative Attribution and Generalization

As previously described, an expected consultation failure can lead to expected negative attribution and expected negative generalization. However, our interviews also reveal several factors that can moderate these effects and make a consultation failure less or more severe by causing expected negative attribution and generalization. These factors are (1) the customer relationship, (2) industry standing of the company, and (3) industry culture. We postulate that these factors moderate the main effects as they affect customer clemency, that is how tolerant or forgiving a customer reacts toward failures in sales consultations. We elaborate on these three factors in the following.

Customer relationship. First, our interviews show that a strong customer relationship can mitigate the effects a consultation failure has on expected negative attribution and generalization. Consider the following statements:

> *If you have a very good relationship with your customer, then usually things are forgiven much easier. The customer won't say, "You have no idea at all," but will rather give you a leg up in these situations. [C9]*

> *If you promise something that's maybe not fully delivered, I think the relationship is normally strong enough to be able to mitigate that. [C10]*

In addition, C1 illustrated how his good relationship with a customer prevents him from experiencing negative evaluations:

> *I have a very strong connection with [my customer]. So, for me to talk to [my customer] and say, "We have an issue today. We're working on it. I'm going to fix it," is so much easier and I could see [my customer] is OK with it. He's not [resentful] but to talk to some other clients could be totally different.*

Prior research on customer relationships generally considers a strong customer-salesperson or customer-company relationship to have positive effects on sales performance and organizational outcomes (e.g., Bateman and Valentine 2015; Ghanadiof and Sanayei 2021; Keillor, Stephen Parker, and Pettijohn 2000; Palmatier et al. 2007). Specifically, Palmatier et al. (2007) show by applying social judgment and attribution theories that the relationship is an important factor in terms of the customer's perception of the salesperson and their company and ultimately impacts sales performance. In that regard, our results add an interesting perspective on the role of the customer relationship in digital innovation selling: A strong relationship between salespeople and customers reduces expected negative attribution and negative generalization that are caused by expected consultation failures and makes an expected consultation failure less fatal in the salesperson's perception. Thus, the relationship can play a positive role from the salesperson's perspective due to the assumption of a more clement customer and therefore mitigate the emergence of negative attribution and generalization.

Company standing. A second moderating factor that we found is the standing of the salesperson's company within the whole industry or segment. This refers to how well the company's reputation is perceived and whether the company is seen as a relevant industry player:

> *[The company] got their name so good that I can tell, you have to be very hard pressed to find somebody to say anything bad about [the company]. [C1]*

Our interviews implied that selling digital innovations in a segment where the company has no relevant standing and is not well-known is likely to cause issues for the salespeople. As interviewees C6 and C9 stated in that regard,

> *It's definitely a harder sell […]. Before I joined [the company], I never heard of [the company]. And look, I've been in the industry since '97, and I faced basically every [product in the market].*
>
> *I believe that the level of digitization in the industry [segment] is higher than elsewhere and the expectations are also way higher. There are fewer small players like there are perhaps in [another] segment.*

In general, prior research has indicated that company reputation can be relevant for sales success or failure (e.g., Agostini and Nosella 2016). For example, Leigh (1982) argues that a company's reputation can influence the effectiveness of the selling process. In addition, Agostini and Nosella (2016) show that reputation affects customer satisfaction. Based on our interviews, we further assume that a low standing of the salesperson's company can make the customer less indulgent toward a consultation failure and thus intensify the emergence of negative attribution and generalization. In other words, there is no real need for the customer to be tolerant of a consultation failure with a salesperson of a rather minor company compared to a large industry player that dominates a market.

Industry culture. Finally, our interviews showed that the culture prevalent within an industry also plays a moderating role regarding how clement customers are. The interviews in our research context paint a picture of an industry with relatively large projects in terms of personnel and revenue volume where the pressure is high, failures are barley tolerated, and a certain rigorousness is prevalent. Consider the following statement:

> *We're talking about projects that when things go south, you have to be able to be proactive to take care of those things today, not tomorrow, not the next day. Projects have up to 6,000 people on there and they're not about to wait for [our company] to deliver or wait for somebody for something. It's like the old saying the project must go on. [C1]*
>
> *It's a construction environment. It's not like working in our office where everything is, you know, as it is. It's a very rough world that we're entering when we're on the job sites. [C4]*
>
> *The industry is a very, very challenging. It's challenging for everybody because it's so demanding. [C1]*

In addition, our interviews portrayed an industry with a certain degree of defamation, making it more likely that salespeople expect a consultation failure leading to negative attribution and generalization. In that regard, interview C4 vividly stated:

> *It's a massive industry, but surprisingly everybody kind of knows everybody, and outside of like some real housewives of a reality show, there is nothing more gossipy than industrial construction.*

We assume that such an industry culture can cause salespeople to be more likely to expect negative attribution and generalization from a consultation failure due to lower customer clemency.

In summary, we propose the following:

P6: An expected consultation failure is less likely to cause an expected negative attribution and an expected negative generalization (a) the stronger the salesperson-customer relationship, (b) the better the company standing, and (c) the better the industry culture.

4.3.7 Fear of Losing Face

As shown in the previous sections, a high degree of technology and target group newness can lead to an expected consultation failure, which in turn induces expected negative attribution and generalization. Our interviews show that this process ultimately leads to salespeople's *fear of losing face*. In this final subchapter, we illustrate why this is the case and provide a better understanding of the key mechanisms of fear of losing face by introducing the process of negative self-conscious emotions. In addition, we demonstrate certain emotional observations

that can express fear of losing face. Finally, two specific forms of fear of losing face are discussed: fear of losing face *in a situation* and fear of losing face *in general.*

To begin, our interviews reinforced the notion that fear of losing face as a psychological mechanism plays a significant role in the challenges of selling digital innovation. Consider the following statement:

> *This issue of fear of losing face is brutal. Nothing is worse to a salesperson who wants to sell something to the customer to be seen as someone who has no idea of what he is selling to you. [C9]*

Specifically, we find that when established salespeople expect negative evaluations from their customers in the form of negative attribution or negative generalization, they can experience fear of losing face. As described in Subchapter 2.2, the concept of *face* refers to a social self-projection, and in that respect, *losing face* represents a loss of social standing through negative evaluations by others (Goffman 1955; Ho, Fu, and Ng 2004). Our interviews show that in the sales context, expecting negative evaluations from customers evokes salespeople's fear of losing face:

> *I assume that with digital topics an essential feeling is fear [to lose face]. Fear to be seen as not being able to do something. Fear of not knowing something. Fear of somehow not being the competent contact person. [C8]*

> *One could lose [face] if that [failure] happens often. Then it becomes really, really easy to lose face. [C1]*

We expect that the reason behind this relation is the process of *negative self-conscious emotions* (e.g., Fischer and Tangney 1995; Tangney 1995, 1999; Tracy and Robins 2004; Verbeke and Bagozzi 2003). In contrast to basic emotions (e.g., sadness or anger), negative self-conscious emotions, for example shame and guilt involve self-representation and self-awareness (Tracy and Robins 2004). These kinds of emotions appear when individuals "become aware that they have […] failed to live up to, some actual or ideal self-representation" (Tracy and Robins 2004, p. 105). We deem this concept as a suitable theoretical foundation for our key mechanism as fear of losing face as well relies on self-representation and arises from failure. To exemplify, salespeople who experience negative evaluations from customers due to a failed sales pitch are aware that they did not live up to an ideal self-projection, which results in fear of losing face.

Prior sales research has mainly focused on basic emotions (Verbeke and Bagozzi 2003). However, to some extent, the concept of negative self-conscious emotions has been examined in sales research that offers additional evidence that these self-reflecting emotions can play an important role in personal selling (e.g., Bagozzi 2006; Lyngdoh et al. 2021; Verbeke and Bagozzi 2002, 2003). Similar to salespeople's fear of losing face, Verbeke and Bagozzi (2003) suggest that negative self-conscious emotions in sales initially begin with a failure such as a salesperson doing something wrong in a sales interaction with a customer. In addition, Lyngdoh et al. (2021) outline a variety of negative emotional states in the sales context, finding, for example, embarrassment and wounded pride as relevant factors in sales. Our interviews add to that finding by showing that fear of losing face can semantically be associated with other negative self-conscious emotions. To some extent, interviewees paint a picture that fear of losing face can express itself in terms of embarrassment or "looking stupid." In that regard, when asked for his understanding of fear of losing face, interviewee C4 replied,

> *[It's being] embarrassed. I hate being embarrassed. I don't want it. It's a personal blemish on myself for [the customer] to say yeah, I remember that guy from [the company]. We're not going to talk to him. […] So, my main driver is just not to look stupid.*

In addition, we found that salespeople's pride plays an important role, as interview C7 pointed out: "The salesguys are pride people that want to show what they are able to do." The interviews indicated that in return, wounded pride can be seen similarly to fear of losing face. Therefore, we deem wounded pride as another expressional form of fear of losing face. In general, we assume the mechanism of fear of losing face to be a beneficial addition to the landscape of negative emotional states in sales. Therefore, we conclusively define salespeople's fear of losing face as follows: salespeople's aversion to experiencing a negative self-conscious emotional state based on negative judgement by customers accompanied by a loss of standing and perceived competence.

Furthermore, our interviews offered indications of two distinct subcategories of fear of losing face triggered by expected negative attribution and negative generalization. These two specific forms of fear of losing face are fear of losing face in a situation that occurs only in terms of a specific digital innovation selling interaction and fear of losing face in general, which goes beyond a single face loss in a specific selling interaction. In the following, we elaborate on these aspects.

Fear of losing face in a situation. First, our interviews indicate that an expected negative attribution is likely to result in fear of losing face in a specific situation such as selling digital innovation. Thus, established salespeople fear losing face in terms of selling digital innovations when they are unable to live up to their ideal self-representation. Nonetheless, they keep their face in general, so other domains such as selling traditional products is not affected by a situational loss of face. With respect to a digital innovation sales pitch that went wrong, interviewee C10 stated: "That's why it's so important for a salesperson not to lose face, not to feel OK you're not the [digital innovation] expert." In addition, interviewee C9 referred to a sales situation in which a salesperson was unable to perform appropriately in terms of digital innovations: "It seemed [to the customer] she just hasn't the right expertise for [digital innovations], and this is where she would lose her face." Nonetheless, interviewee C9 pointed out that the salesperson was able perform in the same meeting in terms of traditional product selling and therefore did not fear a general loss of face. Overall, our interviews indicate a type of fear of losing face that is merely situational and does not necessarily threaten the general self-representation of a salesperson.

We assume that established salespeople expecting negative attribution from their customer due to a sales consultation failure can experience fear of losing face that is limited to a specific situation. Consequently, we propose the following:

P7: The greater the expected negative attribution, the greater salespeople's fear of losing face in specific situations.

Our interviews indicated that this manifestation of fear of losing face appears to be less fatal compared to fear of losing face in general, which we discuss in the following.

General fear of losing face. Second, we found that expected negative generalization triggered by an expected consultation failure can lead established salespeople to fear losing face in general. This type of fear of losing face refers to a face loss that is not limited to a specific situation but to an overall context in which salespeople's self-representation is threatened in general. We assume this is because if established salespeople expect they are negatively evaluated in general by their customers due to being unable to perform in the domain of digital innovations, they fear that their overall self-representation will be damaged as well. In other words, they are afraid that a customer will think less of them in all domains since they failed in one specific domain. In that regard, interviewee C7 vividly explained, "[Failing at digital innovations] is very dangerous because then the salesperson can be burned permanently and

[the customer] says, You screwed up once; you will screw up again." Such an event would then result in salespeople's fear of losing face in general, especially since a negative generalization can cause salespeople to lose business in general and not only in terms of digital innovations. As interviewee C9 stated,

> *[The salesperson fears] that he could be out in general. So that would mean that the customer is lost for good. I'm as a salesperson are not just out with regards to [digital innovations], I'm out of it at all.*

In summary, we predict that established salespeople expecting negative generalization from their customer based on a sales consultation failure can experience fear of losing face that is not limited to a specific situation but promotes a face loss in general, thus affecting their whole selling portfolio. We assume that this type of face loss is feared most by salespeople since it threatens their overall self-projection vis-à-vis their customers. We propose the following:

P8: The greater the expected negative generalization, the greater salespeople's fear of losing face in general.

In conclusion, our interviews showed that overall fear of losing face and its specific manifestations—fear of losing face in a situation and fear of losing face in general—are caused ultimately by the degree to which established salespeople expect negative attribution and negative generalization from their customers. Therefore, we propose the following:

P9: The greater the expected negative attribution and expected negative generalization, the greater salespeople's fear of losing face.

4.4 Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 provided a distinct understanding of salespeople's fear of losing face and its development process. We identified that this mechanism is not limited to the context of digital innovations but can also appear in a broader context of innovation selling. Specifically, innovations that possess a high degree of target group newness and technology newness provide a setting that is likely to evoke fear of losing face. Moreover, our results introduce a mental framework for the emergence of fear of losing face. First, established salespeople are likely to expect a sales consultation failure when selling innovations with a high degree of target group newness and technology newness. At the same time, they can benefit from their self-expectation, change readiness, and experience as mitigating factors. Second, by integrating the concept of metaperception, we showed that an expected consultation failure can lead to expected negative attribution and expected negative generalization. In addition, our results

demonstrated that this relation is moderated by customer relationship, company standing, and industry culture. Third, drawing from the psychological concept of negative self-conscious emotions, we offered an explanation of how expected negative attribution and negative generalization lead to salespeople's fear of losing face. Specifically, the results revealed that fear of losing face can be subdivided into fear of losing face in a situation and fear of losing face in general.

In conclusion, this chapter offered an in-depth explanation for the process of salespeople's fear of losing face and added this mechanism as a novel negative emotional state to sales research. Nonetheless, due to the conceptual nature of the empirical study in this chapter, the results offer solely qualitative insights into fear of losing face. This issue is addressed in Chapter 5 to offer an operationalizable mechanism for future research.

5 Measuring Fear of Losing Face

5.1 Motivation

Building on the qualitative findings from Chapters 3 and 4 revealing salespeople's fear of losing face as an important mechanism impeding the selling of digital innovation, we set out to develop a measurement for this fear and quantitatively test our conceptual propositions. We deem this to be important for three reasons. First, as our interviews indicated, gathering data on negative emotions in face-to-face conversations is limited to a certain extent as salespeople often refrain from opening up directly regarding the emotions involved. Consider the following statement:

> *I'm sure there is such a phenomenon [as fear of losing face]. I haven't kind of heard anyone say that directly to me, but that's the issue that probably no one would admit it directly. [C7]*

Second, to enable future research to examine and apply our conceptual findings, it is essential to have a validated measure that represents our mechanism. Third, we aim to provide quantitative evidence for our postulated model to offer a nomological validated concept to academia.

In this chapter, we address these issues. We employ established scale development processes (Churchill 1979; DeVellis 2003) to create and validate a scale for the operationalization of

salespeople's fear of losing face. In addition, we test our conceptual propositions using a path model analysis.

5.2 Methodology

5.2.1 Contextual Integration

As shown in Subchapter 2.2, salespeople's fear of losing face is related to several adjacent concepts in psychology and sales research. These concepts are (1) performance goal orientation, (2) prevention focus, (3) social anxiety, and (4) other actors' fear of losing face. All these concepts have been operationalized in prior research via different scales (see Table 4; see also Appendix 13 for full scales). In the following, we review these measures to illustrate the conceptual surroundings in which our concept of salespeople's fear of losing face is embedded.

First, the concept of performance goal orientation has been applied in several empirical studies (e.g., Silver, Dwyer, and Alford 2006; VandeWalle et al. 1999). Derived from achievement motivation theory, this concept describes "how individuals interpret, evaluate, and act in pursuit of their task" (Silver, Dwyer, and Alford 2006, p. 27). Specifically, it can be used to describe performance-avoidance orientation, that is an individual's motivation to avoid negative outcomes such as failure (Dixon, Spiro, and Jamil 2001; Silver, Dwyer, and Alford 2006). Adapted to the sales context, Silver, Dwyer, and Alford (2006) operationalized a performance goal orientation scale (Elliot and Dweck 1988) with six items that focuses on performance avoidance. They measured this construct on a seven-point Likert scale (e.g., "I just want to avoid doing poorly in my job") and stated that the scale had acceptable validity as well as significant factor loadings without offering further detail.

The concept of prevention focus has been applied in several sales studies (e.g., Hamstra et al. 2018; Hamstra, Rietzschel, and Groeneveld 2014). Prevention focus refers to an individual's attempt to avoid negative and unpleasant events (Crowe and Higgins 1997; Higgins et al. 2001); the concept was widely operationalized in Higgins et al.'s (2001) regulatory focus questionnaire. This questionnaire consists of 11 items on a five-point Likert scale with five items measuring individual's prevention focus (e.g., "Not being careful enough has gotten me into trouble at times"). This scale achieved sufficient internal reliability and possessed factor loadings from .55–.84. as well as good internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha: $\alpha = .80$). Building on these findings, Fellner et al. (2007) introduced a set of revised items to measure

prevention focus in a further developed regulatory focus scale. A set of 10 items was measured on a seven-point Likert scale; five items aimed at individual prevention focus (e.g., "I always try to make my work as accurate and error-free as possible"). The scale showed a good model fit and factor loadings ranging from .52–.74 (Cronbach's alpha was not reported).

A similar concept related to salespeople's fear of losing face is social anxiety, which has been applied as sales call anxiety in a set of sales studies (e.g., Belschak, Verbeke, and Bagozzi 2006; Verbeke and Bagozzi 2000, 2002, 2003). Based on psychological research (Clark and Wells 1995), Verbeke and Bagozzi (2000) defined sales call anxiety as "the fear of being negatively evaluated and rejected by customers, which is accompanied by urges to avoid contact with customers" (Verbeke and Bagozzi 2000, p. 88). Verbeke and Bagozzi (2000) developed an extensive set of 54 items divided into four categories to measure the concept of sales call anxiety. We deem the category that refers to salespeople's perceived negative evaluation from customers in closing situations as closest to the concept of salespeople's fear of losing face. This dimension is measured on an eight-item scale (e.g., "The customer will think that I am an insecure person") that has good reliability, factor loadings ranging from .42–.98., and internal consistency with $\alpha = .91$.

Finally, studies on consumer research have tentatively applied the concept of fear of losing face (e.g., Ndubisi and Moi 2005). Ndubisi and Moi (2005) empirically examined how fear of losing face moderates the effect that promotional sales tools have on consumer's product trials. However, the specific measurement of consumers' fear of losing face was not shown. Nonetheless, in a psychological study, Zhang, Cao, and Grigoriou (2011) developed a scale that addresses individuals' fear of losing face: consciousness of social face. This scale comprises 11 items on a five-point Likert scale with five items measuring individual's fear of losing face (e.g., "I do my best to hide my weakness before others"). These items possess factor loadings from .55–.78, and the scale offers an internal consistency of $\alpha = .74$.

As shown in Table 4, to a certain extent these different concepts are contextually close and exhibit certain similarities to our key concept. For example, the concept of performance avoidance orientation similar to fear of losing face builds on a fear of failure and shows a negative effect on sales performance (Silver, Dwyer, and Alford 2006). In contrast, the adjacent concepts also show conceptual differences with salespeople's fear of losing face (see Table 4). For example, compared to fear of losing face prevention focus is concerned with the attitude

of a salesperson (i.e., eagerness to prevent unpleasant events) rather than a self-conscious emotional state (i.e., the fear of unpleasant events).

In general, prior research offers no sufficient measurement scale thus far that can be applied to distinctively operationalize our concept of salespeople's fear of losing face. Therefore, in the following, we aim to develop such a measure and enhance the previously described conceptual landscape.

Concept	Description	Operationalized	Items*	α	Loadings	Similarity with fear of losing face	Differences from fear of losing face	Sources
Performance avoidance orientation	Motivational-driven behavior to avoid negative outcomes such as failure	yes	six items	—	—	Negative influence on sales performance and the incorporation of the fear of failure	Focus on salespeople's avoidance behavior rather than on their emotional state. Not applied in B2B focus	Silver, Dwyer, and Alford (2006)
Prevention focus	Attitude-based behavior to avoid negative and unpleasant events	yes	11 items	.80	.55–.84	Negative influence on sales performance. History of success plays a role	Rather an attitude than a self-conscious emotional state. No B2B focus	Higgins et al.'s (2001)
Sales call anxiety	Salespeople's fear of being negatively evaluated by customers	yes	Eight items	.91	.42–.98.,	Perceived negative evaluation from customers plays an essential role. Negative influence on performance.	Focus on salespeople's functional actions (e.g., nervousness). No B2B focus	Verbeke and Bagozzi (2000)
Other actors' fear of losing face	How conscious are individuals regarding their face and how fearful are they to lose it	yes	11 items	.74	.55–.78	The social concept of face plays a center role	Different conceptualization. Not applied in sales context. Mixed with the concept "desire to gain face"	Zhang, Cao, and Grigoriou (2011)

* Full scales with all items are shown in Appendix 12

Table 4: Overview of operationalized adjacent concepts

5.2.2 Procedure

To develop a measure to operationalize salespeople's fear of losing face, we follow established scale development procedures (Churchill 1979; DeVellis 2003). In addition, the new measure for salespeople's fear of losing face is employed to test our conceptual propositions. In what follows, we illustrate our research procedure (see Figure 8) in the following order: (1) construct definitions and item generation, (2) item assessment and refinement, (3) survey development, (4) measures, and (5) data collection and sample.

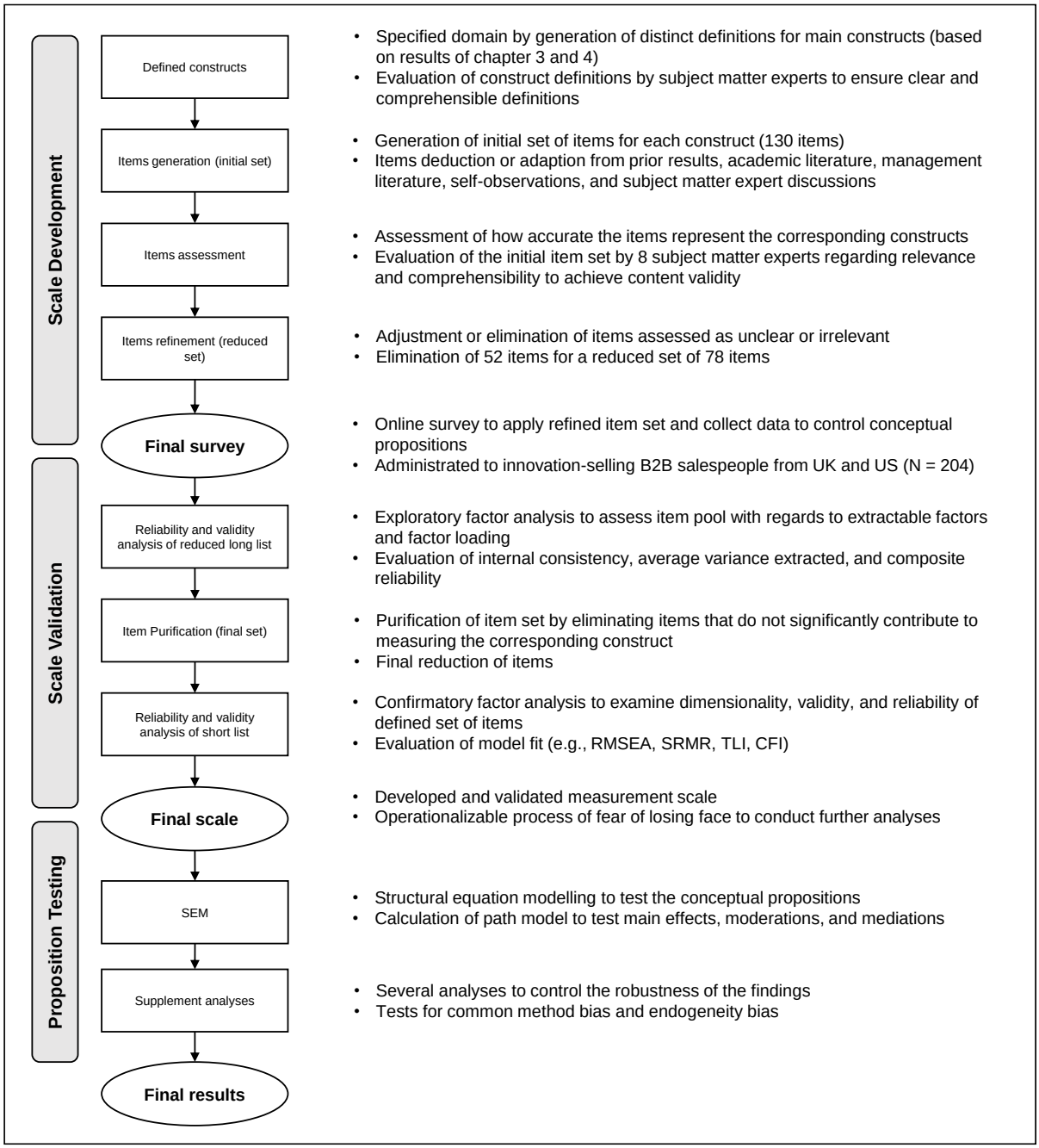


Figure 8: Process chart of research procedure for scale development (adapted from Churchill 1979) and proposition testing

Construct definitions and item generation. To develop a measure for fear of losing face, we draw on the established contextual domain specified in the previous chapters and the main construct definitions of our model from Chapter 4 (Churchill 1979). These constructs are fear of losing face (in the situation and in general), expected consultation failure, expected negative attribution, and expected negative generalization. On the basis of the definitions, we developed an initial pool of items drawing on our previous results, an extensive review of prior academic literature (e.g., Cravens et al. 1993; Johnson and Grayson 2005; Oetzel and Ting-Toomey 2003; Teodorescu 2006; Wang et al. 2017; Zane and Yeh 2002), management literature (e.g., Hu-Chan 2019; Vorhauser-Smith 2012), discussions with sales academics, and self-observations (Churchill 1979). As a result, we generated an initial set of 130 items (see Appendix 11) in line with DeVellis' (2003) recommendation to have a large pool of items as an "insurance against poor internal consistency" (p. 66). Specifically, we ensured a rich and wide initial item set to tap into all relevant facets of the constructs and facilitate the development of a final measurement scale (DeVellis 2003).

Item assessment and refinement. In a next step, we ensured content validity; that is, we assessed how adequately the items represent our constructs (Churchill 1979). As suggested by DeVellis (2003), we used subject matter experts (four academics and four practitioners) in a two-step approach to evaluate the items from the initial item pool in terms of their relevance and comprehensibility. Therefore, anchored on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree, we first asked six experts to evaluate how relevant each item is in terms of measuring the given constructs as well as how comprehensible each item is. We also encouraged the experts to comment on the items to gain additional feedback regarding wording, clarity, and relevance issues. Based on this first judgment sample, we refined our item list by carrying out several wording adjustments and eliminating 52 items that appeared to be unclear, difficult to comprehend, or of low relevance to measure the corresponding construct. Thus, leaving a set of 78 items. In addition, to ensure face validity, we checked how well the experts understood each construct definition (1 = "I don't understand at all" to 7 = "I fully understand"). While the definitions of salespeople's fear of losing face (M = 6.33) and expected consultation failure (6.50) received high ratings, expected negative attribution (4.17) and expected negative generalization (5.50) were adjusted afterwards to achieve better ratings by using definitions that are simple and easy to understand (see Appendix 13 for final definitions). In a second step, we asked two additional experts to rate our revised set of items and the improved construct definitions. The definition evaluations showed high ratings for all

constructs (> 6.50). In addition to certain wording adjustments, we eliminated 36 additional items from the item pool for a remaining set of 42 items (see Appendix 12 or the final set of items). Finally, we ensured that these items possessed varying verbalization to avoid measurement errors when collecting data at a later stage.

Survey development. To examine whether the refined set of items could validly measure the assumed underlying variables (DeVellis 2003) and to control our conceptual propositions, we developed an extended online survey. This survey consists of four parts. First, we created a multi-step pre-screening section to ensure that only salespeople who sell innovations in B2B markets participated (see "Data collection and sample" section below for a detailed overview of participants). Second, we asked participants for a specific innovation that their company last introduced to the market and that they sell. We asked specifically for the last innovation from the company to avoid a reporting bias. In addition, participants had to assess the technology newness and target group newness of the respective innovation. The innovation then became the basis for the following questions. Third, in the main part of our survey, we asked participants to answer questions regarding our main constructs based on the 42 generated and refined items. We also collected data on several adapted measurement scales to fully test our conceptual propositions. Fourth, we asked our participants to answer questions regarding adjacent concepts, and we implemented additional measures to collect data on various control and instrumental variables.

In general, we designed our survey in a way that effectively reduces common method biases. We applied several remedy measures offered by Podsakoff et al. (2003) to ensure high data quality and avoid common method biases. Specifically, in addition to thorough item construction, we used different scale formats, ensured participants' anonymity, and counterbalanced the measurement order of our main constructs (Podsakoff et al. 2003). In addition, as recommended by Simmering et al. (2015), we implemented a marker variable to distinctively check for common method variance.

Finally, before distributing the survey, we conducted a pre-test with 10 participants consisting of seven sales experts and three academics. We incorporated the participants' feedback to obtain a clear and error-free survey. In addition, we ensured that the duration corresponded to what the participants were told. The final survey is provided in Appendix 13.

Measures. We operationalized fear of losing face with 15 items using a seven-point Likert scale. Participants were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed with each item, ranging

from 1 = totally disagree to 7 = totally agree. Specifically, five items addressed generic salespeople's fear of losing face (e.g., "When selling this innovation, I fear to lose my face in front of the customer"). Five items referred to salespeople's fear of losing face in a sales situation for the specific innovation (e.g., "I'm fearful to look stupid with respect to this innovation"), and the remaining items addressed salespeople's fear of losing face that goes beyond selling innovations (e.g., "I'm anxious that my professional image in general will suffer"). To measure expected consultation failure, we deployed nine items (e.g., "I think my customer will ask questions that I cannot answer") that address the dimensions providing incorrect information, lacking answers to customer questions, and breaking promises. Expected negative attribution and expected negative generalization were measured by nine items per construct, where six items focused on salespeople's competence (e.g., "I assume my customer sees me as under-qualified regarding this innovation"), and three items assessed company's competence (e.g., "I expect that my customer thinks my company is not a good supplier"). To check for convergent and discriminant validity toward adjacent concepts of salespeople's fear of losing face (see Subchapter 5.2.1), we also measured performance-avoidance orientation (Silver, Dwyer, and Alford 2006), prevention focus (Fellner et al. 2007), sales call anxiety (Verbeke and Bagozzi 2000), and consciousness of face (Zhang, Cao, and Grigoriou 2011).

To examine our conceptual propositions regarding the mechanism of fear of losing face and test for nomological validity (Hair et al. 2014), we included additional measures for degree of technology newness (e.g., "Compared to our traditional products, this innovation possesses a high technology newness") and target group newness (e.g., "This innovation addresses new, unserved target groups"). As shown in Subchapter 4.3.2, we combine these measures to obtain the independent variable, which from here on we refer to as *newness*. We measured our proposed moderators such as change readiness (e.g., "I embrace changes in terms of new products"), overambitious self-expectations (e.g., "It is important to know as many aspects of this innovation as I know of other products"), and industry culture (e.g., "My industry has a supportive culture"). For that purpose, we adapted existing measurement scales (e.g., Clauß 2017; Daley 1991; Jin 2000; Palmatier et al. 2007; Wallach 1983). We also included a measure for innovation sales performance to assess the influence of salespeople's fear of losing face (e.g., "Compared to your peers in sales, how would you rate your performance selling this innovation?; Pilling, Donthu, and Henson 1999). In addition, we used a face sensitivity measure to partial out effects originating from respondents' receptivity to face threats rather than from experienced fear of losing face (Tuncel et al. 2020). Lastly, we included measures for the

overall industry degree of target group newness and technology newness (e.g., "Innovations in our industry are usually very advanced in terms of their technology capabilities") as instrumental variables to alleviate potential endogeneity in our independent variable (e.g., Pearl 2000, 2009; Rossi 2014). From here on, we refer to the combination of these two measures as *industry newness*. The full set of all scales is provided in Appendix 13.

Data collection and sample. We administrated the survey to 3,524 respondents from the UK and the US via an international online market research company. Through the pre-screening process, we collected complete data from 1,263 respondents; that is, 2,261 respondents were not eligible since they were not salespeople selling innovations in B2B markets. To ensure high-quality data, we also eliminated inaccurate responses. Such inaccurate respondents were characterized by unusually fast responses that needed less than 50% of the median time (i.e., seven minutes). Also, responses with inconsistent or meaningless open-ended questions as well as repetitions (e.g., exact same answers, same IP and geo location) were excluded. We obtained a final data set with 204 B2B salespeople who actively sell innovations (33% female; 67% male; mean age = 43.18). On average, the respondents had been selling the respective innovations for 4.44 years and had worked in sales for 13.65 years, thus representing established salespeople. Respondents were all English speaking (32% UK; 68% US); 28% worked as field sales representatives, 29% in the office, and 43% were active in both sections. The respondents came from a wide range of industries such as finance, service, technology, and manufacturing, with an average company size of 6,272 employees. On average, respondents had over 12 years of industry experience, and more than 75% possessed a bachelor's or professional degree. A detailed sample overview is presented in Table 5.

Variable	**Characteristics**	
Age (years)	M	43.18
	SD	11.82
Gender	Female	33%
	Male	67%
Country	UK	32%
	US	68%
Education	Less than high school diploma	2%
	High school diploma	20%
	Bachelor's degree	42%
	Professional degree	33%
	Other	3%
Salesperson type	Field salesperson	28%
	Office salesperson	29%

	Both	43%
Sales experience (years)	M	13.65
	SD	11.06
Industry experience (years)	M	12.64
	SD	10.40
Selling experience with specific innovation (years)	M	4.44
	SD	4.05
Market availability of specific innovation (years)	M	4.67
	SD	4.97
Company size (employees)	< 100	21%
	100 – 1,000	38%
	1,001 – 5,000	29%
	5,001 – 10,000	4%
	> 10,000	8%
Industry	Aerospace	1%
	Automotive	4%
	Chemical	2%
	Construction	3%
	Finance	10%
	Food	4%
	Healthcare	5%
	Manufacturing	6%
	Service	21%
	Technology	16%
	Telecommunication	4%
	Wholesale	15%
	Other	8%

Note: N = 204; M = mean; SD = standard deviation.

Table 5: Overview of data sample

In the following, we present the results of the exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses to purify and validate our measure of salespeople's fear of losing face. Afterwards, we examine our conceptual proposition via a structural equation modeling analysis.

5.3 Results

5.3.1 Scale Purification and Validation

To purify and validate our measure, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis (EFA; e.g., Churchill 1979; Hinkin 1998). First, we examined (1) the adequacy of the data sample, (2) the extracted underlying factors, and (3) the assessed factor loadings. Next, we performed a confirmatory factor analysis to (4) finalize our measures, (5) assess the model fit, (6) control

for construct validity, and (7) check the postulated influence of fear of losing face on sales performance. In the following, we present the results of these analyses.

Exploratory factor analysis. The exploratory factor analysis was performed with RStudio version 4.2.1. An overview of the results is shown in Table 5. First, we checked whether the sample was appropriate to perform an EFA. An overall Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of .96 indicates low partial intercorrelation and strongly exceeds the minimum value of .60 (Hair et al. 2014; Kaiser and Rice 1974). Additionally, the anti-image correlation matrix indicates a high sample adequacy by its diagonal values (> .60). Bartlett's test of sphericity is significant ($\chi^2_{(41)} = 103.69$, $p < .001$), representing sufficient correlation between the items (Bartlett 1951). Finally, the item communalities representing the explained variance by each item exceed the threshold of .50 recommended for sample sizes above 200 (Hair et al. 2014; MacCallum et al. 1999). Therefore, the data appears to be appropriate for further factor analysis.

Item	**Expected Consultation Failure**	**Expected Negative Generalization**	**Fear of Losing Face**	Anti-image metrics	Communalities
[ECF1_1]*	.72			.97	.74
[ECF1_2]	.73			.95	.85
[ECF1_3]	.75			.96	.87
[ECF2_1]	.79			.95	.76
[ECF2_2]	.85			.96	.86
[ECF2_3]	.92			.97	.84
[ECF3_1]	.98			.95	.85
[ECF3_2]	.91			.96	.86
[ECF3_3]	.82			.97	.86
[ENASC_1]*		.62		.98	.88
[ENASC_2]*		.70		.97	.91
[ENASC_3]*		.63		.97	.85
[ENASC_4]*		.74		.95	.93
[ENASC_5]*		.69		.98	.90
[ENASC_6]*		.71		.98	.92
[ENACC_1]*		.78		.97	.87
[ENACC_2]*		.76		.96	.87
[ENACC_3]*		.87		.96	.87
[ENGSC_1]		.88		.97	.92
[ENGSC_2]		.88		.95	.84
[ENGSC_3]		.90		.95	.86
[ENGSC_4]		.90		.98	.89

[ENGSC_5]		.87		.96	.91
[ENGSC_6]		.92		.97	.93
[ENGCC_1]		.94		.95	.88
[ENGCC_2]		.93		.96	.88
[ENGCC_3]		.93		.92	.91
[FOLF_1]*			.69	.97	.74
[FOLF_2]*			.74	.97	.79
[FOLF_3]*			.87	.96	.89
[FOLF_4]*			.82	.97	.89
[FOLF_5]*			.85	.97	.86
[FOLFS_1]			.89	.95	.92
[FOLFS_2]			.88	.95	.92
[FOLFS_3]			.95	.97	.91
[FOLFS_4]			.96	.98	.93
[FOLFS_5]			.90	.98	.90
[FOLFG_1]			.93	.96	.88
[FOLFG_2]			.95	.97	.88
[FOLFG_3]			.93	.95	.87
[FOLFG_4]			.96	.97	.92
[FOLFG_5]			.83	.97	.90
Cronbach's alpha	.96	.99	.98		
Variance expl. (%)	.16	.30	.28		

Note: All items measured on a seven-point Likert scale. N = 204. Rotation method = Promax. Coefficients below .30 are suppressed. All items marked by * are excluded from further analysis. KMO = .96. $\chi^2_{(41)} = 103.67$, $p < .001$.

Table 6: Results of exploratory factor analysis

In a next step, we used the eigenvalue method to identify how many factors can be extracted from the data sample (Kaiser 1960; see Figure 9). According to the Kaiser rule, three factors with an eigenvalue above 1 were extracted (Kaiser Rule; see Appendix 14 for further details). As shown in Table 6, the factor analysis with a Promax rotation revealed factor loadings of each item on its corresponding factor ranging from .62–.99, and all cross-loadings were below .30. With Cronbach's alpha above .95, each factor also possessed excellent internal consistency (Nunnally 1978). However, our conceptual model proposed four constructs that were not confirmed by the EFA with only three extractable factors. Results show that expected negative attribution and expected negative generalization are closely interrelated and cannot be distinguished via different factors. Due to the factor loadings and a conceptual reassessment, we eliminated all items for expected negative attribution and excluded them from further analyses. Based on the results, we also excluded the generic items for fear of losing face and one item for expected consultation failure from further analysis (see Table 6).

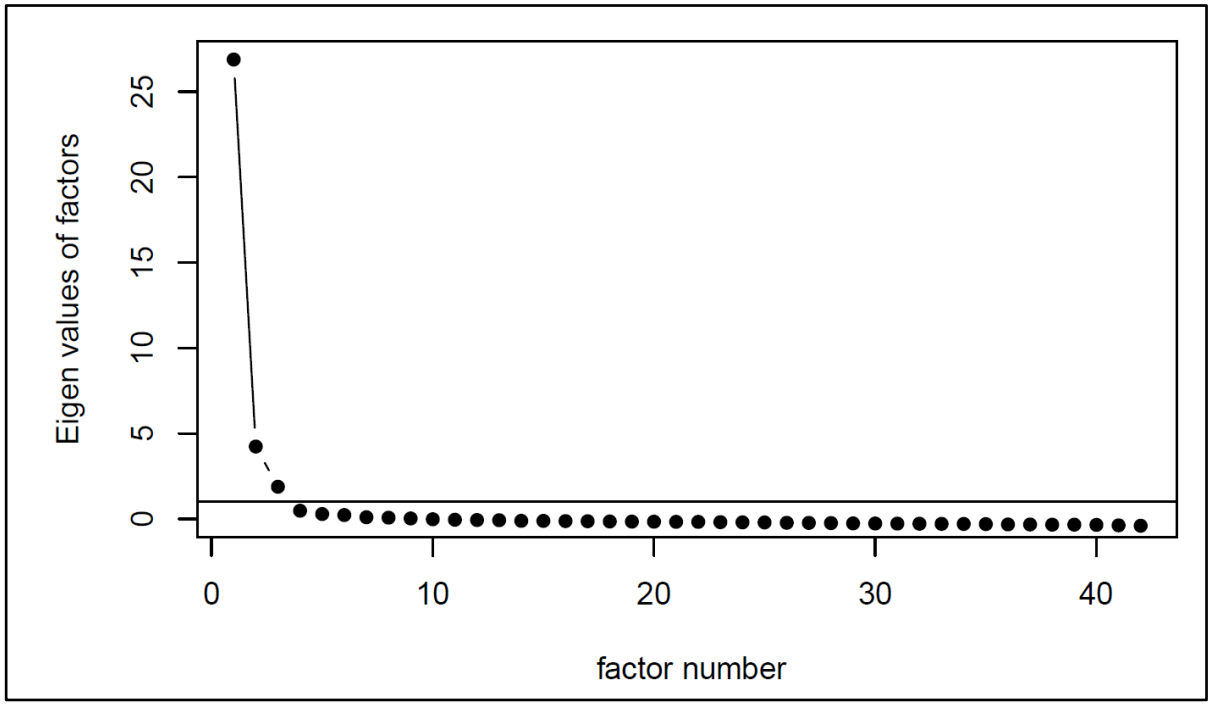


Figure 9: Scree plot

Confirmatory factor analysis. In a next step, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to finalize our measure and test its validity (see Figure 10). Based on first CFA results, we eliminated two additional items from the construct of expected consultation failure that had lower loadings and had strong textual similarity to other items. In a second iteration, the CFA results indicated a good model fit with root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .10, Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) = .91, comparative fit index (CFI) = .92, standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = .04, and chi square $\chi^2_{(321)} = 986.26$ ($p < .001$). The results also conveyed discriminant validity due to composite reliability (CR) values above .70 (Nunnally and Bernstein 1994) and average variance extracted (AVE) higher than the squared construct correlations (Fornell and Larcker 1981; see also Appendix 15 for in-depth results). In addition, convergent validity was given with AVE higher than .50 for all three factors, and all items loaded above .86 (Hair et al. 2014). The factors' covariances ranged from .58–.77. The internal consistency was also high with Cronbach's alpha > .95.

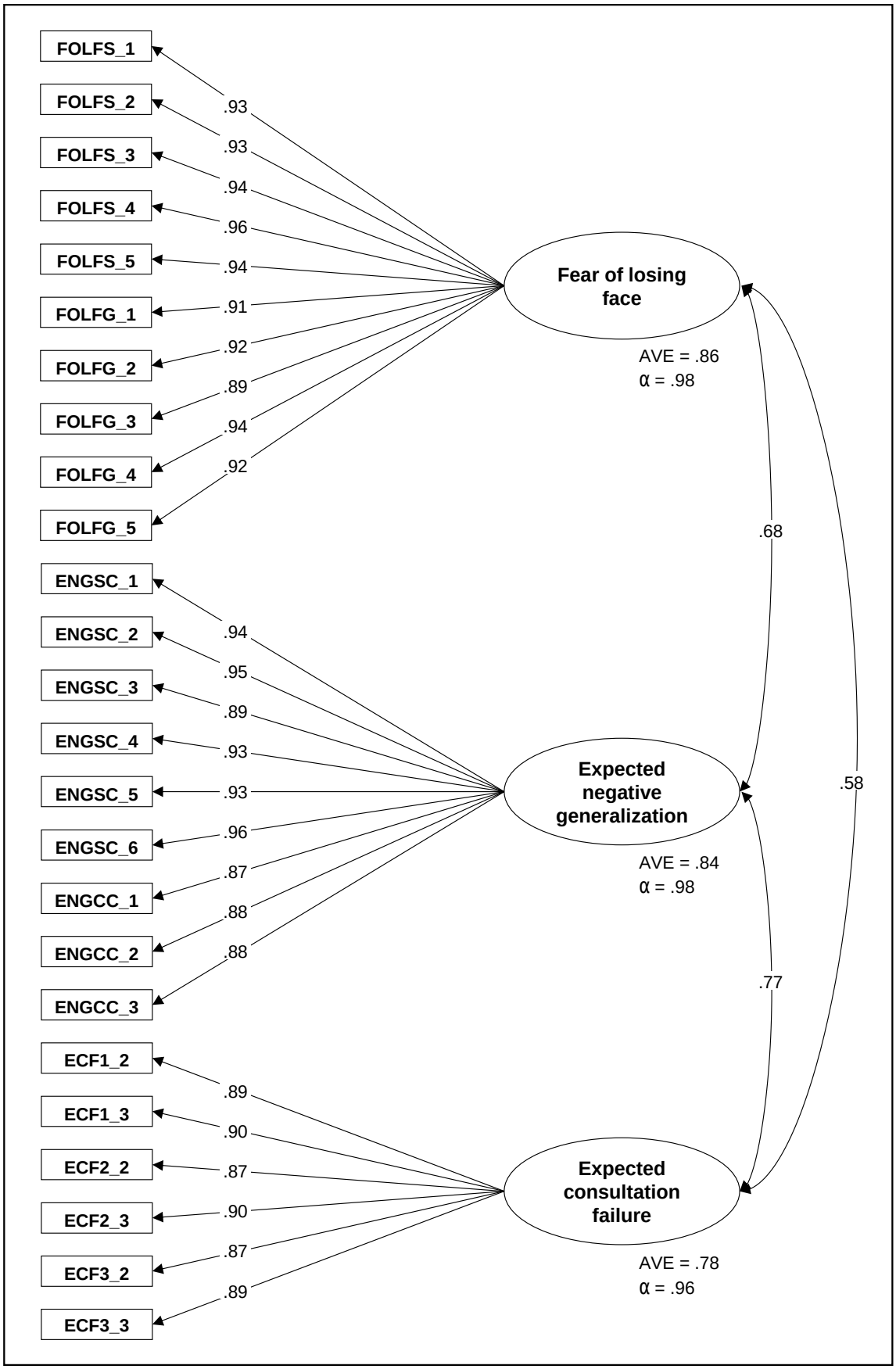


Figure 10: Results of confirmatory factor analysis

The final measures for fear of losing face, expected consultation failure, and expected negative generalization are shown in Table 7. For salespeople's fear of losing face, we propose 10 items (five items refer to fear of losing face in sales situations and five to fear of losing face in general). Expected negative generalization is measured via nine items (six items refer to negative generalization in terms of salespeople's competence and three in terms of the company's competence). Lastly, the measure of expected consultation failure consists of six items (two items each refer to providing incorrect information, lacking answers to customer questions, and breaking promises).

Fear of losing face
[FOLFS_1] I fear to lose face in front of the customer with respect to this innovation.
[FOLFS_2] I'm afraid to embarrass myself as a seller of this innovation.
[FOLFS_3] I'm fearful to look stupid with respect to this innovation.
[FOLFS_4] I'm anxious that my image as a seller of this innovation will suffer.
[FOLFS_5] I'm very worried that my customer will think less of me with respect to this innovation.
[FOLFG_1] I fear losing face in front of the customer as a salesperson in general.
[FOLFG_2] I'm afraid to embarrass myself as a sales professional.
[FOLFG_3] I'm fearful of looking stupid as a salesperson in general.
[FOLFG_4] I'm anxious that my professional image in general will suffer.
[FOLFG_5] I'm very worried that my customer will think less of me as a sales professional.
Expected negative generalization
When selling this innovation…
[ENGSC_1] … I expect that my customer sees me as incompetent.
[ENGSC_2] … My customer might think that I'm not a competent salesperson.
[ENGSC_3] … My customer probably sees me as a salesperson who is not well qualified.
[ENGSC_4] … I expect that my customer perceives me as a salesperson who doesn't know the product portfolio very well.
[ENGSC_5] … My customer probably assumes I don't have a high ability as a salesperson.
[ENGSC_6] … My customer will perceive me as an incapable salesperson.
[ENGCC_1] … I expect that my customer thinks my company is not a good supplier.
[ENGCC_2] … My customer might think my company is not capable.
[ENGCC_3] … My customer probably sees my company as an incompetent supplier.
Expected consultation failure
When selling this innovation…
[ECF1_2] … I anticipate that I won't be able to deliver the correct information to my customer.
[ECF1_3] … I expect that I'm unable to communicate the right information to my customer.
[ECF2_2] … I assume that I will lack the right answers to my customer's questions.
[ECF2_3] … I expect that I lack the necessary knowledge to sufficiently answer my customer's questions.
[ECF3_2] … I anticipate being unable to meet my customer's expectations.
[ECF3_3] … I think it is likely that I will fall short on what I promise my customer.

Table 7: Final measurement of fear of losing face, expected consultation failure, and expected negative generalization

We also controlled for discriminant validity toward the adjacent concepts of fear of losing face (i.e., performance-avoidance orientation, prevention focus, sale call anxiety, and consciousness of face). All constructs possessed AVE ranging from .55–.72 and positive correlations with fear of losing face (r = .14–.53), thus confirming a certain conceptual closeness. Fear of losing

face appears to be related closest to the concept of sales call anxiety (r = .53; Verbeke and Bagozzi 2000). The squared correlations between fear of losing face and the adjacent concepts are smaller than the AVE of each compared construct, indicating discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker 1981; see Appendix 15 for in-depth results). In other words, results show that salespeople's fear of losing face is distinct to its adjacent concepts. Additionally, fear of losing face shows higher factor loadings, stronger internal consistency, and higher AVE than the adjacent concepts (see Subchapter 5.2.1 and Appendix 15).

Finally, we used regression analysis to determine whether fear of losing face influences sales performance. We controlled for respondents' age, gender, education, industry, and country of origin. That is, we estimated the following model:

$$SalesPerformance = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * FOLF + B * X + \epsilon,$$

where β are regression coefficients; B is a vector of regression coefficients; X is a vector of control variables, and ϵ is the error term. Results show that fear of losing face has a significant negative effect on sales performance ($\beta = -.10$, $p < .01$).

5.3.2 Structural Equation Modeling

Model specification. Based on the results of the exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, we partially adjusted our proposed model from Chapter 4. As shown in Figure 11, we excluded expected negative attribution as the factor analyses offered no support for this construct as a separate construct next to expected negative generalization. Therefore, we focused on expected negative generalization as a driver of fear of losing face. In addition, the EFA and CFA results provided no evidence that fear of losing face is fully distinguishable as fear of losing face in the situation versus fear of losing face in general. Results rather indicate that fear of losing face incorporates both manifestations. Therefore, we use fear of losing face as an overall construct in our adjusted model. At this point, we reject propositions P_4, P_7, and P_9.

In a next step, to test our final proposition regarding the emergence of fear of losing face, we conducted a path model approach. We estimated all effects simultaneously using RStudio 4.2.1. For the main effects, we examined the impact that newness has on expected consultation failure (P_1; P_2). In model 1a, we operationalized newness as a multiplicative combination (Technology newness * Target group newness; Müller, Habel, and Stierl 2017; Unsworth et al. 2012) and in model 1b as an additive construct (Technology newness + Target group newness). Furthermore, we investigated how expected consultation failure affects expected negative

generalization (P_5) and how expected negative generalization affects salespeople's fear of losing face (P_8). We completed the main effect path by examining the influence of fear of losing face on sales performance.

We integrated self-expectations, change readiness, and experience ($P_{3a\text{-}c}$) as well as customer relationship, company standing, and industry culture ($P_{6a\text{-}c}$) into our model as moderators for the main effects. For this purpose, we mean-centered the moderators as well as the main constructs (Aiken and West 1991) and specified several interaction effects (e.g., Newness × Self-expectation → Expected consultation failure; Expected consultation failure × Customer relationship → expected negative generalization). We controlled for face sensitivity (Tuncel et al. 2020), industry, country, age, and gender. That is, we specified the following path model:

$$ECF = \beta_{10} + \beta_{11} * Newness + \beta_{12} * SelfExpectation + \beta_{13} * ChangeReadiness + \beta_{14} * Experience + \beta_{15} * Newness * SelfExpectation + \beta_{16} Newness * ChangeReadiness + \beta_{17} * Newness * Experiece + B * X + \epsilon_1$$

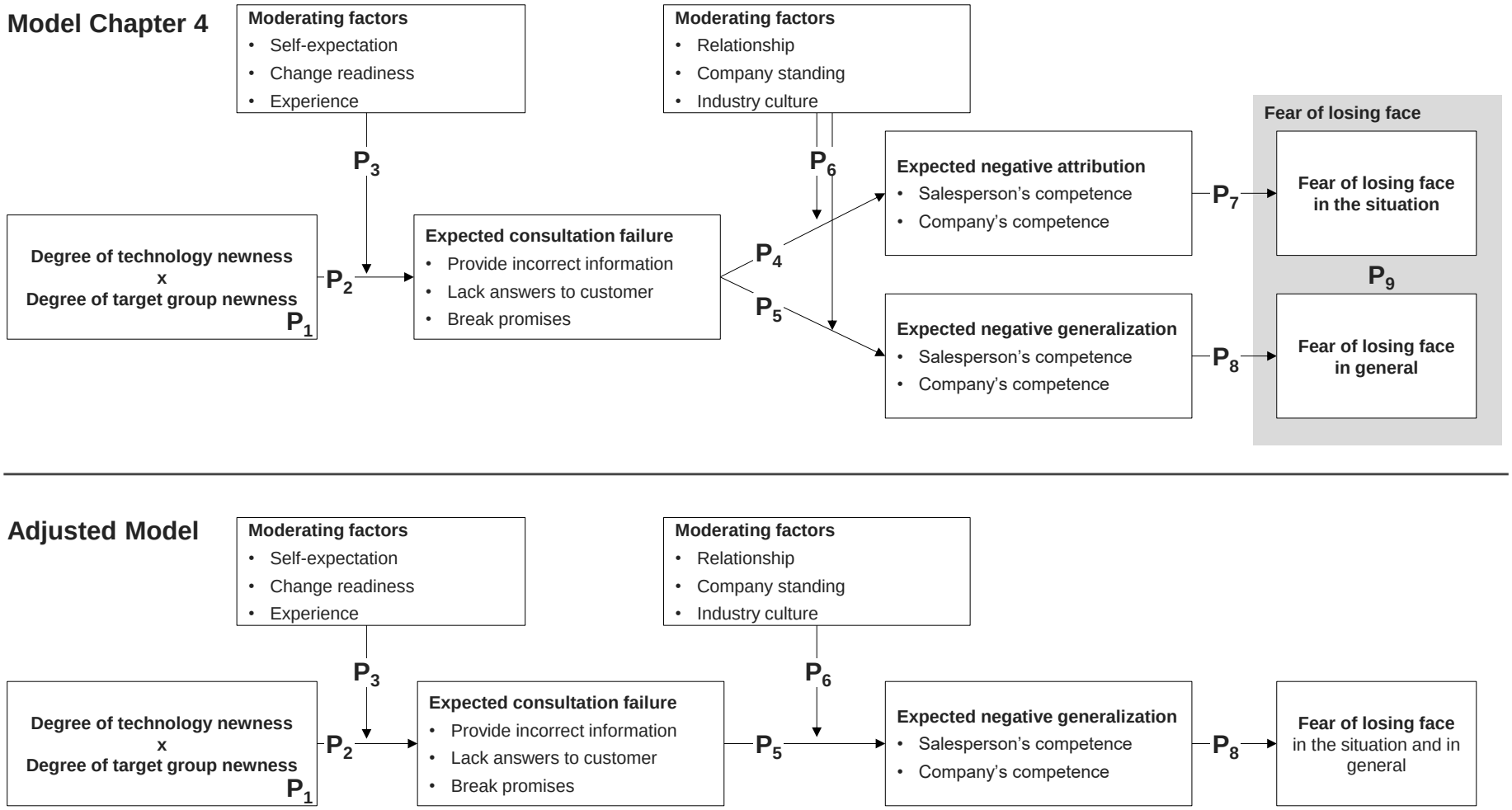
$$ENG = \beta_{20} + \beta_{21} * ECF + \beta_{22} * Newness + \beta_{23} * Relationship + \beta_{24} * CompanyStanding + \beta_{25} * Culture + \beta_{26} * ECF * SelfExpectation + \beta_{27} * ECF * ChangeReadiness + \beta_{28} * ECF * Experiece + B * X + \epsilon_2$$

$$FOLF = \beta_{30} + \beta_{31} * ENG + \beta_{32} * ECF + \beta_{33} * Newness + B * X + \epsilon_3$$

$$PERF = \beta_{40} + \beta_{41} * FOLF + \beta_{42} * ENG + \beta_{43} * ECF + \beta_{44} * Newness + B * X + \epsilon_4$$

Third, to assess how robust model 1a and 1b are, we tested additional model versions (e.g. without interactions) and employed the multiplicative and additive combination of industry newness (industry technology newness and industry target group newness) as an instrumental variable to control for endogeneity bias (Pearl 2000, 2009; Rossi 2014).

Our full model achieved reasonable global fit (RMSEA = .07, SRMR = .02, CFI = .97 $\chi^2_{(24)}$ = 45.89, $p < .001$), indicating that the proposed model fits the data. In addition, all robustness check models possessed good fit.



Note: For better legibility control paths are not displayed.

Figure 11: Adjusted research model of Chapter 5: Measuring fear of losing face

Measures. In addition to Subchapter 5.2.2, Table 8 reports the correlations as well as the descriptive statistics and psychometric quality of each variable included in our structural equation model. All measurement scales possess satisfactory internal consistency (α = .79–.98) by exceeding the .70 threshold value for Cronbach's alpha (Nunnally, 1978). In addition, the composite reliabilities exceed the threshold of .70, therefore indicating reliable constructs (Bagozzi and Yi 1988). The AVE of all measures is above the recommended value of .60 (Bagozzi and Yi 1988), and comparing the AVE values with the respective squared correlations of each variable combination indicates discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker 1981). Next, we present the results of the specified path model.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
1. Technology newness																		
2. Target group newness	.58***																	
3. Expected consultation failure	–.07	–.05																
4. Expected negative generalization	.03	.00	.73***															
5. Fear of losing face	–.02	.02	.56***	.67***														
6. Sales performance	.53***	.39***	–.09	–.02	–.12*													
7. Self-expectation	.23***	.17*	–.36***	–.28***	–.25***	.30***												
8. Change readiness	.37***	.18**	–.03	.04	.01	.46***	.20**											
9. Experience	–.19**	–.06	–.25***	–.28***	–.25***	–.21**	.11	–.19**										
10. Customer relationship	.22**	.25***	–.29***	–.26***	–.27***	.28***	.69***	.15*	.12*									
11. Company standing	.21**	.27***	–.25***	–.21**	–.24***	.19**	.60***	.16*	.16*	.76***								
12. Industry culture	.38***	.36***	–.21**	–.15*	–.20**	.46***	.54***	.24***	–.01	.71***	.62***							
13. Industry technology newness	.75***	.51***	–.02	–.01	–.03	.54***	.24***	.40***	–.04**	.31***	.24***	.47***						
14. Industry target group newness	.63***	.66***	.00	.04	–.04	.60***	.23***	.39***	–.24***	.29***	.22**	.44***	.69***					
15. Face sensitivity	–.02	.01	.36***	.45***	.55***	.01	–.04	.01*	–.11	–.11	–.08	–.03	–.02	–.03				
16. Country	.32***	.25***	.15*	.18**	.10	.41***	–.01	.25***	–.34***	.00	.04	.24***	.32***	.41***	.00			
17. Age	–.10	.02	–.10	–.10	–.14	–.19	.01	–.18	.76***	.06	.10	–.05	–.18**	–.19**	–.10	–.21**		
18. Gender	.03	.03	–.08	–.08	–.08	–.10	.02	–.08	.19**	–.07	–.03	–.10	.03	–.06	–21**	–.06	.18**	
M	5.73	5.83	2.46	2.01	2.65	5.84	6.03	5.33	13.65	6.00	4.58	5.71	5.64	5.57	3.38	__	43.18	__
SD	1.22	1.20	1.72	1.48	1.80	.92	1.08	1.40	11.08	.99	.75	1.14	1.27	1.26	1.69	__	11.82	__
Cronbach's alpha	.83	.82	.96	.98	.98	.80	.90	.80	__a	.98	.87	.86	.87	.76	.81	__a	__a	__a
AVE	.62	.69	.78	.84	.86	.58	.71	.77	__a	.68	.70	.61	.87	.77	.61	__a	__a	__a
CR	.83	.82	.96	.98	.98	.80	.91	.86	__a	.98	.88	.89	.70	.63	.82	__a	__a	__a

Notes: M = mean; SD = standard deviation; AVE = average variance extracted; CR = composite reliability. Two-tailed tests of significance.
* p < .10.
** p < .01.
*** p < .001.
[a] Constructs are measured by a single item.

Table 8: Correlation matrix, descriptive statistics, and psychometric properties

Proposition testing. Our path model results are shown in Table 9. In the following, we interpret the results of model 1a with a multiplicative combination for our independent variable since results for model 1b do not substantially differ from those for model 1a. Our results offer support for the proposed process of fear of losing face. We posited that expected consultation failure leads to expected negative generalization failure (P_5). This proposition is supported by the data ($\beta = .63$, $p < .01$). In addition, the effect of expected negative generalization on fear of losing face is positive and significant ($\beta = .41$, $p < .01$). Thus, the proposition that expected negative generalization leads to salespeople's fear losing face (P_8) is supported. Additionally, our results show that fear of losing face negatively impacts sales performance in innovation selling ($\beta = –.17$, $p < .05$), which is in line with our proposition in Chapter 3 that fear of losing face negatively influences sales outcome.

Turning to our propositions $P_{3a\text{-}c}$, we stated that self-expectation, change readiness, and experience moderate the effect that newness has on expected negative generalization. The interaction effect of newness and self-expectation is significant and positive ($\beta = .13$, $p < .05$; see Figure 12). Thus, high self-expectations strengthen the effect of newness on expected consultation failure, thus supporting P_{3a}. Results also show that the interaction effects of newness and change readiness ($\beta = –.15$, $p < .05$; see Figure 13) as well as newness and experience ($\beta = –.14$, $p < .05$; see Figure 14) are negative and significant. Thus, the results support P_{3b} and P_{3c} that change readiness and experience moderate the effect newness has on expected consultation failure. In contrast, all moderators of the effect expected consultation failure has on expected negative generalization (relationship, company standing, and industry culture) are non-significant. Therefore, $P_{6a\text{-}c}$ are not supported.

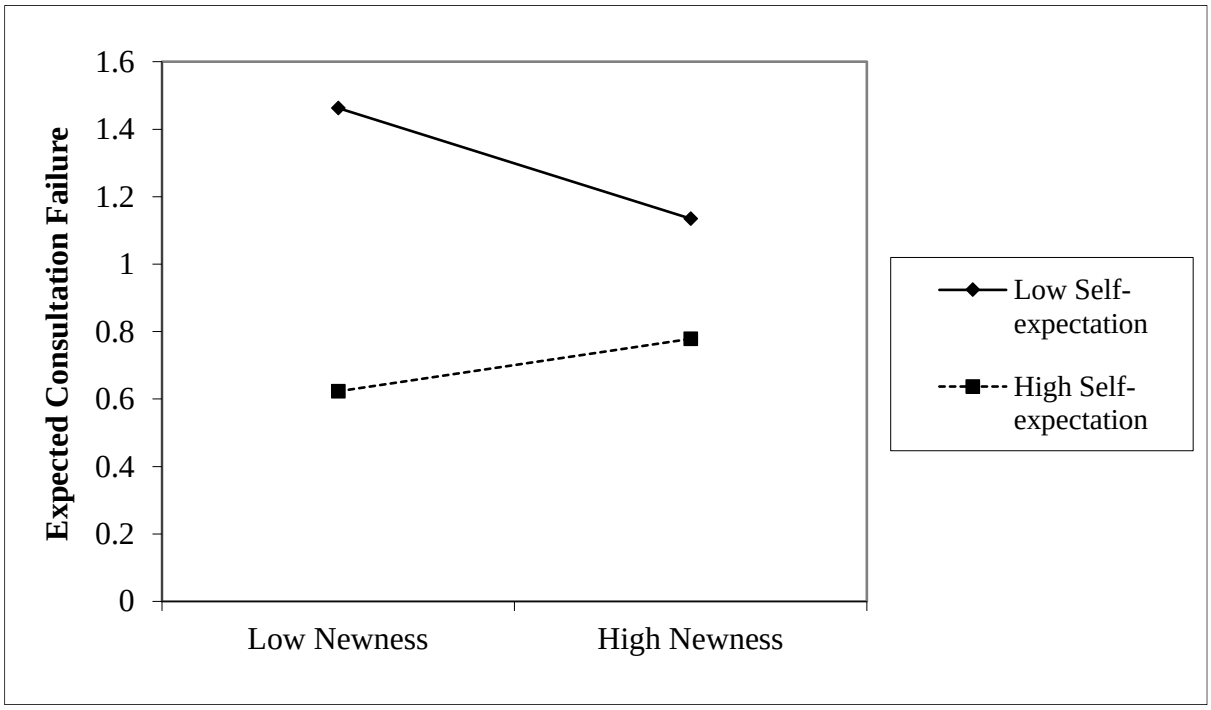


Figure 12: Interaction plot of newness × self-expectation

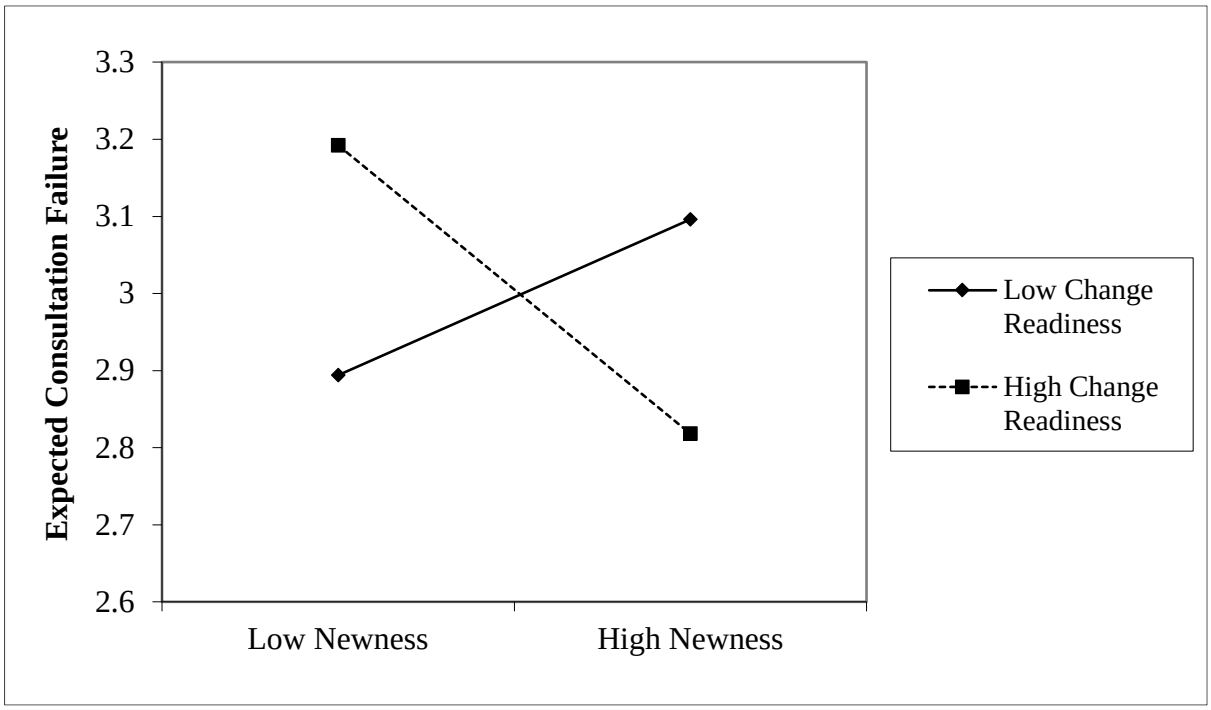


Figure 13: Interaction plot of newness × change readiness

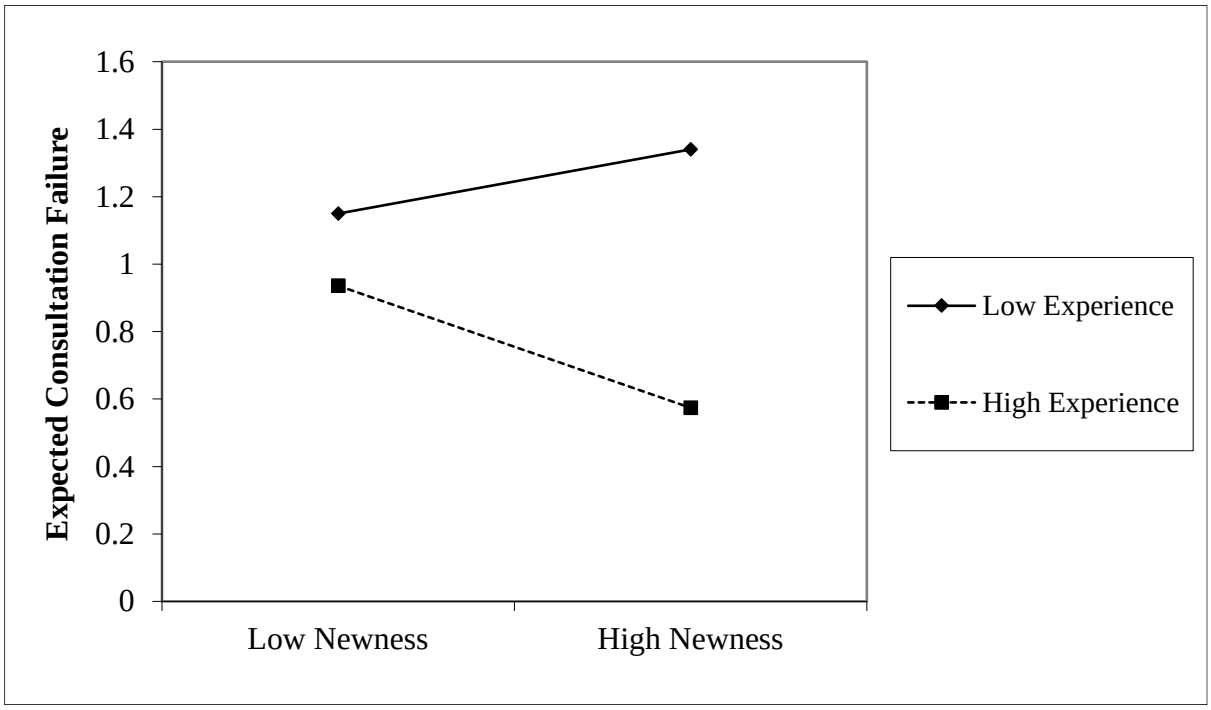


Figure 14: Interaction plot of newness × experience

Furthermore, we posited the contextual proposition that newness (technology newness and target group newness) positively impacts expected consultation failure (P_2). This proposition is not supported ($\beta = -.02$, $p > .10$). However, for a low level of change readiness and experience as well as a high value of self-expectations, the simple slopes become positive and significant (Aiken and West 1991). This means that when salespeople are resistant to change and have little experience and high self-expectations (i.e., unrealistic expectations), an increase in target group and technology newness leads to an increase in expected consultation failure. In contrast, for high values of change readiness and experience and low values of self-expectation, the simple slopes are not significant.

Lastly, we tested for indirect effects by conducting a mediation analysis to test whether expected consultation failure and expected negative generalization are intermediate stages of the emergence of fear of losing face. To estimate indirect effects, we used bootstrapping with 500 iterations. Results show that the indirect effect is not significant for average values on the moderators. In addition, we estimated the indirect effects for moderator values with disadvantageous levels (high [i.e., M+SD] self-expectation, low [i.e., M–SD] change readiness, and low experience) and advantageous levels (low self-expectation, high change readiness, and high experience). Results show a positive and significant indirect effect of newness on fear of losing face for all moderators at disadvantageous levels ($\beta = .91$, $p < .05$) and a negative

significant effect for all moderators at advantageous levels ($\beta = -.95$, $p < .10$). Thus, if self-expectations are high, and change readiness and experience are low or vice versa, the model shows a significant mediation. This result supports the proposition that fear of losing face can generally emerge in contexts of high degree of technology newness and target group newness (P_1).

		Full model		Robustness checks			
Paths	**Propositions**	**Model 1a:** Multiplicative, with interaction	**Model 1b:** Additive, with interaction	**Model 3:** Multiplicative, with interactions, with instrument	**Model 4:** Additive, with interactions, with instrument	**Model 5:** Multiplicative, no interactions, no instrument	**Model 6:** Additive, no interactions, no instrument
Main effects							
Newness → Expected consultation failure	P_1: + P_2: –	–.04 n.s.	–.04 n.s.	.04 n.s.	.04 n.s.	–.07 n.s.	–.07 n.s.
Expected consultation failure → Expected negative generalization	P_5: +	.64***	.64***	.64***	.63***	.59***	.59***
Expected negative generalization → Fear of losing face	P_8: +	.42***	.42***	.43***	.41***	.43***	.42***
Fear of losing face → Sales performance		–.16**	–.16**	–.16**	–.18**	–.16**	–.16**
Interaction effects							
Newness × Self-expectation → Expected consultation failure	P_{3a}: +	.15**	.15**	.14**	.14**	–	–
Newness × Change readiness → Expected consultation failure	P_{3b}: +	–.17***	–.15**	–.17***	–.13**	–	–
Newness × Experience → Expected consultation failure	P_{3c}: +	–.15**	–.16**	–.14**	–.14**	–	–
Expected consultation failure × Customer relationship → Expected negative generalization	P_{6a}: –	.04 n.s.	.04 n.s.	.04 n.s.	.02 n.s.	–	–
Expected consultation failure × Company standing → Expected negative generalization	P_{6b}: –	.06 n.s.	.06 n.s.	.06 n.s.	.04 n.s.	–	–
Expected consultation failure × Industry culture → Expected negative generalization	P_{6c}: –	–.06 n.s.	–.06 n.s.	–.06 n.s.	–.03 n.s.	–	–
Main effects of moderators							

Self-expectation → Expected consultation failure	–.30***	–.29***	–.32***	–.31***	–.30***	–.30***
Change readiness → Expected consultation failure	.01 n.s.	.01 n.s.	.02 n.s.	.02 n.s.	.02 n.s.	.02 n.s.
Experience → Expected consultation failure	–.25***	–.25***	–.23***	–.24***	–.30***	–.39***
Relationship → Expected negative generalization	–.05 n.s.	–.05 n.s.	–.07 n.s.	–.07 n.s.	–.07 n.s.	–.07 n.s.
Company standing → Expected negative generalization	–.01 n.s.	–.01 n.s.	–.02 n.s.	–.02 n.s.	–.01 n.s.	.00 n.s.
Industry Culture → Expected negative generalization	–.03 n.s.	–.03 n.s.	–.04 n.s.	–.04 n.s.	–.03 n.s.	–.03 n.s.
Instrument						
Industry newness → Newness	–	–	.77***	.78***	—	—
Controlled effects						
Face sensitivity → Excepted consultation failure	.40***	.40***	.40***	.40***	.40***	.40***
Face sensitivity → Excepted negative generalization	.21***	.21***	.21***	.21***	.21***	.21***
Face sensitivity → Fear of losing face	.31***	.31***	.31***	.31***	.31***	.31***
Face sensitivity → Sales performance	.06 n.s.	.06 n.s.	.06 n.s.	.06 n.s.	.07 n.s.	.07 n.s
Gender → Excepted consultation failure	.04 n.s.	.04 n.s.	.04 n.s.	.04 n.s.	.02 n.s.	.02 n.s.
Gender → Excepted negative generalization	.02 n.s.	.02 n.s.	.02 n.s.	.02 n.s.	.03 n.s.	.03 n.s.
Gender → Fear of losing face	.03 n.s.	.03 n.s.	.03 n.s.	.03 n.s.	.03 n.s.	–03 n.s.
Gender → Sales performance	–.03 n.s.	–.03 n.s.	–.03 n.s.	–.03 n.s.	–.05 n.s.	–.06 n.s.
Age → Excepted consultation failure	.14 n.s.	.14 n.s.	.13 n.s.	.13 n.s.	–.02 n.s.	–.02 n.s.
Age → Excepted negative generalization	.01 n.s.	.01 n.s.	.01 n.s	.01 n.s.	.00 n.s.	.00 n.s.
Age → Fear of losing face	–.03 n.s.	–.03 n.s.	–.03 n.s.	–.03 n.s.	–.07 n.s.	–.07 n.s.
Age → Sales performance	–.05 n.s.	–.05 n.s.	–.05 n.s.	–.05 n.s.	–.01 n.s.	.00 n.s.

Self-expectation → Fear of losing face	–.03 n.s.	–.03 n.s.	–.03 n.s.	–.03 n.s.	–.03 n.s.	–.03 n.s.
Self-expectation → Sales performance	.11*	.11 n.s.	.11*	.11 n.s.	.11*	.11 n.s.
Change readiness → Fear of losing face	.03 n.s.	.03 n.s.	.03 n.s.	.03 n.s.	.03 n.s.	.03 n.s.
Change readiness → Sales performance	.24***	.26***	.24***	.26***	.24***	.26***
Experience → Fear of losing face	–.08 n.s.	–.07 n.s.	–.08 n.s.	–.07 n.s.	–.08 n.s.	–.07 n.s.
Experience → Sales performance	–.03 n.s.	–.04 n.s.	–.03 n.s.	–.04 n.s.	–.03 n.s.	–.04 n.s.
Relationship → Fear of losing face	–.02 n.s.	–.02 n.s.	–.02 n.s.	–.02 n.s.	–.02 n.s.	–.02 n.s.
Relationship → Sales performance	.06 n.s.	.06 n.s.	.06 n.s.	.06 n.s.	.06 n.s.	.06 n.s.
Company standing → Fear of losing face	–.03 n.s.	–.03 n.s.	–.03 n.s.	–.03 n.s.	–.03 n.s.	–.03 n.s.
Company standing → Sales performance	–.16**	–.16**	–.16**	–.16**	–.16**	–.16**
Industry Culture → Fear of losing face	–.17 n.s.	–.18 n.s.	–.17 n.s.	–.18 n.s.	–.17 n.s.	–.18 n.s.
Industry Culture → Sales performance	.16**	.18**	.16**	.18**	.16**	.18**
Newness → Expected negative generalization	.10 n.s.	.10 n.s.	.10 n.s.	.11 n.s.	.10 n.s.	.11 n.s.
Newness → Sales Performance	.30***	.27***	.30***	.27***	.30***	.27***
Expected negative generalization → Sales performance	.00 n.s.	.00 n.s.	.00 n.s.	.00 n.s.	.00 n.s.	.00 n.s.
Expected consultation failure → Fear of losing face	.14 n.s.	.14 n.s.	.14 n.s.	.14 n.s.	.14 n.s.	.14 n.s.
Expected consultation failure → Sales performance	.03 n.s.	.03 n.s.	.03 n.s.	.03 n.s.	.03 n.s.	.03 n.s.
Country fixed effects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Industry fixed effects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Indirect effects						
Newness → Fear of losing face	–.02 n.s.	–.02 n.s.	.02 n.s.	–.02 n.s.	–.04 n.s.	–.04 ns.
Newness → Fear of losing face (disadvantageous moderators)[a]	.91**	.97*	.91**	.96*	—	—

Newness → Fear of losing face (advantageous moderators)[b]	–.95 *	–1.01*	–.87 *	–.92*	–	–
Model fit						
RMSEA	.07	.08	.07	.07	.00	.00
SRMR	.02	.02	.02	.02	.00	.00
CFI	.96	.95	.95	.95	1.00	1.00
Chi-Square (d.f.)	45.89 (24)	51.38 (24)	856.11 (100)	76.55 (36)	484.75 (30)	475.41 (30)

Notes: One-tailed tests of significance. n.s. = not significant. All coefficients are standardized. P_4, P_7, and P_9 were rejected at an earlier stage (see Subchapter 5.3.1).
* $p < .10$.
** $p < .05$.
*** $p < .01$.
[a] Level of self-expectation high, change readiness and experience low
[b] Level of self-expectation low, change readiness and experience high

Table 9: Estimated path coefficients

Supplement analyses. To check the robustness of the results, we performed several additional analyses. First, for models 3 and 4, we estimated them with an instrumental variable to control for endogeneity biases. Specifically, newness might be endogenous and thus correlated with the error term of expected consultation failure. Such endogeneity might arise, for example, if both perceptions of newness and expected consultation failure are driven by an omitted third variable such as salespeople's cognitive abilities. To control for endogeneity bias, we use salespeople's perception of industry newness as an instrument. This instrument is likely to fulfill the relevance criterion because in highly innovative industries, a focal company is more likely to introduce innovations with a high degree of newness as well. In fact, the correlations between newness and industry newness are positive and significantly, thus supporting this notion (see Table 8). At the same time, the instrument is likely to fulfill the exclusion restriction because the newness of industry players other than a focal company should not affect salespeople's expected consultation failure. We thus included a path from industry newness on newness in our path model ($\beta = –.77$, $p < .01$) and correlated the error terms of newness and expected consultation failure, thereby parceling out the potential endogenous component of the newness measure and estimating unbiased standard errors (Pearl 2000, 2009; Rossi 2014). All effects in our model remained stable, supporting the proposed causality of the main effect of newness on expected consultation failure.

Second, for models 5 and 6, we estimated without interaction effects and instrument variable. In doing so, results of the main effects remained substantially unchanged, thus indicating that our main model possesses robustness. Additionally, the model fit of this version increased, thus showing a fully identified model. We controlled for face sensitivity, industry, country, gender, age, and the moderators.

Third, to test a potential short scale of fear of losing face that will be easier to use in future survey studies, we estimated all our model versions with only five items for fear of losing face (i.e., fear of losing face in general). Results remained stable and differed only marginally.

Fourth, we checked for common method bias. In addition to our ex ante measures (see Subchapter 5.2.2.), we conducted ad hoc tests by performing Harman's one-factor test (Habel et al. 2020; Jayachandran et al. 2005; Ramani and Kumar 2008) and a marker-variable approach (Lindell and Whitney 2001). First, results of the model estimation with only one factor for all items revealed an explained variance below .40 and showed a poor model fit (e.g., CFI = .38, TLI = .36, RMSEA = .15, SRMR = .20). Thus, results of Harman's one-factor test

indicate that our results are not impacted by common method. Second, we performed the marker variable approach using Miller and Simmering's (2022) *attitude toward the color blue* scale as a marker variable. We corrected the correlations of all key measurement combinations of our model by the smallest positive correlation of the marker variable ($r = .05$, $p > .10$). Results revealed no consequential changes to the correlations of key measurement pairs and thus provide further support that the common method does not unduly bias the results.

5.4 Chapter Summary

Drawing on established scale development processes, we created and validated a new measurement for salespeople's fear of losing face. Specifically, we developed a robust 10-item scale to operationalize fear of losing face. The results indicate good internal consistency and offer strong construct validity (i.e., discriminant validity, convergent validity, content validity, and face validity) as well as a negative significant influence on sales performance. Findings also show that this new scale measures a distinct construct that is related to but significantly different from adjacent concepts. In addition, we created new measurements for the entire process of salespeople's fear of losing face that were subsequently used to perform a path model analysis to examine the conceptual propositions regarding the emergence of fear of losing face and examine its nomological validity. We found strong support for the main effects of our proposed fear of losing face model and evidence that fear of losing face also occurs in different innovation contexts beyond selling digital innovations. The results provided support for indirect effects indicating that expected consultation failure and expected negative generalization mediate the emergence of fear of losing face. Moreover, results show that self-expectation, change readiness, and experience moderate the effect technology newness and target group newness have on expected consultation failure. Finally, a series of supplement analyses indicate reasonable robustness of our findings.

6 Discussion

6.1 Summary

As addressed in previous chapters, the growing importance of digital innovations in industrial markets introduces various challenges for manufacturers (Guenzi and Habel 2020). One crucial challenge regarding the market success of these innovations is how the existing salesforce adopts these new offerings. Though salespeople have grown accustomed to adjusting to new

additions to their product portfolios that go beyond traditional hardware-based products (e.g., Eggert et al. 2011), differences emerge regarding selling digital innovations. Therefore, this research work set out to understand why established salespeople struggle to bring digital innovations to industrial markets. In doing so, our objective was to understand why some salespeople lack success in selling digital innovations and to identify possible leverage points that managers can address to counteract this lack of success. In addition, we intended to learn whether and how our findings are generalizable to a broader innovation context. Our literature review revealed a foundational research void: explorations of digital innovation have largely neglected examining the sales part of these innovations while vice versa innovation sales literature has not specifically examined digital innovations (Subchapter 2.1). We therefore conducted three extensive empirical studies to answer our focal research questions. In the following section, we summarize the key findings of these studies. First, we illustrate the key results of the first empirical study, identifying fear of losing face as an important mechanism in salespeople's challenges regarding selling digital innovations (Chapter 3). We subsequently summarize the findings of our second study, acquiring a more extensive understanding of this mechanism (Chapter 4). In addition, we highlight the findings of our third empirical study, developing a measurement of fear of losing face and empirically testing our conceptual propositions (Chapter 5). In Subchapter 6.2, we then elaborate on our academic contribution and subsequently illustrate the resulting managerial implications in Subchapter 6.3. Finally, we conclude this research work by discussing possible limitations and future research avenues in relation to selling digital innovations in industrial markets and selling innovations in general.

In an initial step toward investigating why established salespeople dread selling digital innovations, we interviewed 59 experts from two globally operating manufacturers. By employing Zeithaml et al.'s (2020) theories-in-use approach, we found that salespeople fear losing face in front of the customer when selling digital innovations. The concept of *face* we described in Subchapter 2.2 originates in Asian culture and describes the public image of an individual (e.g., Ho 1976). In that regard, losing face refers to a damaged public image through negative evaluations from others (Ho, Fu, and Ng 2004). Thus, in the context of selling digital innovation, we view salespeople's fear of losing face as an aversion to being negatively evaluated by customers due to a perception of low competence. Our data indicated that salespeople's fear of losing face plays an important role in salespeople's lack of success when selling digital innovations. Therefore, we placed this fear at the center of the development of

our conceptual model. As we describe in the following section, drawing from our interviews, we also derived several propositions with regard to salespeople's fear of losing face.

We found that fear of losing face can negatively influence salespeople's performance in selling digital innovations, therefore rendering fear of losing face a crucial factor in the failure and success of selling digital innovations. In addition, our results offered two types of motivators that influence this effect. On the one hand, salespeople's perception of the strategic importance of digital innovation and the congruence with their expected role in selling digital innovations serve as intrinsic motivators. On the other hand, monetary and non-monetary rewards are extrinsic motivators that decrease the effect fear of losing face has on sales performances regarding digital innovations. Furthermore, salespeople's fear of losing face is driven by two types of knowledge gaps. The first gap indicates salespeople's struggle to understand digital innovations to the same degree as non-digital innovations. Specifically, this gap expresses itself through a lack of understanding the technologies embedded in digital innovations, the respective value creation potential, and the perceived quality of digital innovations. The second knowledge gap appears in terms of understanding the customers. We found that, in comparison to non-digital innovations, salespeople lack understanding regarding the customer processes digital innovations address, the new buying centers and processes, and the implementation of such innovations. Moreover, salespeople's potential fear of losing face grows in relation to the size of such gaps. Nonetheless, in terms of the perceptibility of and compensation for these gaps, our results also offered contingencies that mitigate the effect of these gaps on salespeople's fear of losing face. Results showed that the level of customers' digital readiness and how realistic customers' expectations are toward digital innovation affect how strongly these knowledge gaps lead to fear of losing face. In addition, we found that the availability of appropriate information and support for salespeople regarding selling digital innovations can also compensate for existing knowledge gaps.

Building on our results from the first empirical study, we then focused on gaining a deeper understanding of the concept of salespeople's fear of losing face. Our goal was to understand how fear of losing face mentally develops on the level of an individual salesperson. Moreover, we examined whether salespeople's fear of losing face is applicable beyond the specific context of selling digital innovations. To that end, we conducted an additional qualitative study with 10 experts from another global manufacturer. Our results offered valuable insights that allowed us to gain a more extensive understanding of fear of losing face.

By employing the TIU approach, we identified a mental process that underlies the emergence of fear of losing face. This process starts with salespeople expecting a consultation failure; that is, salespeople anticipate being unable to fulfill a customer's performance expectation within a sales consultation. This expectation stems from three sources: when selling digital innovations, salespeople expect a consultation to fail if they assume they will (1) provide incorrect information, (2) lack answers to customer questions, and (3) break their promises. Furthermore, by integrating the psychological concept of metaperception, we revealed that an expected consultation failure can lead to salespeople expecting a negative attribution from their customers. This means that a salesperson assumes that the customer ascribes a sales consultation failure to the salesperson's lack of competence regarding digital innovations. In addition, we found that an expected consultation failure is likely to evoke salespeople expecting a negative generalization in which a customer ascribes the consultation failure to a lack of competence that goes beyond digital innovations. Finally, the results indicated that these expectations of negative attribution and generalization result in a negative self-conscious emotion: salespeople's fear of losing face. Specifically, we found that expected negative attribution can trigger fear of losing face occurring in a specific sales situation. This fear in a situation appeared to be the less harmful form of salespeople's fear of losing face. In addition, triggered by an expected negative generalization, fear of losing face can also occur in a general form. This type of fear of losing face is not limited to a specific situation but extends to an overall context in which salespeople's self-representation is damaged over a longer term. This form of fear of losing face appeared to be the more harmful form.

In addition, we examined whether salespeople's fear of losing face is limited to selling digital innovations or whether it can be contextually extended. Drawing from our interviews and prior innovation research (e.g., Jacoby and Rodriguez 2007), we found two dimensions that describe a general innovation context in which fear of losing face is likely to occur. The first dimension we identified is the degree of a technology newness referring to how different an innovation is from traditional products. In addition, we identified the degree of target group newness as the second dimension. This dimension describes how much customers of an innovation differ from existing customers. Based on these dimensions, we categorized innovations into three different types—incremental, evolutionary, and radical—with radical innovations possessing the highest likelihood of salespeople experiencing fear of losing face. Thus, we assume the mechanism of fear of losing face is not limited to the context of digital innovations but can also be applied to

other innovations that possess a high degree of technology and target group newness regardless of whether they are based on digital technologies.

Finally, in a third empirical study, we aimed to test our conceptual results. First, as prior research offered no specific measure for the novel concept of salespeople's fear of losing face, we started by developing and validating a new scale to quantify this concept. Applying established scale development processes (e.g., Churchill 1979), we generated a rich pool of potential items to measure fear of losing face. We iteratively refined this item pool with input from subject matter experts and conducted an extensive survey with 204 business-to-business salespeople from the UK and US. Based on the acquired data, we performed an exploratory factor analysis to further purify the item set by extracting underlying factors and assessing factor loadings. Based on the results, the initially proposed construct of expected negative attribution was eliminated, as it failed to constitute a separate factor. Several additional items were eliminated at this stage due to low factor loadings. To conclude the scale development process, we then performed a confirmatory factors analysis assessing the model fit, the scale's construct validity as well as the influence that the operationalization of fear of losing face has on sales performance. We consequently obtained a 10-item scale to quantify salespeople's fear of losing face and additional measures to operationalize all elements of its emergence process.

Based on the developed measurements we specified a path model to test the proposition regarding the emergence of fear of losing face. Results support our proposed mental process of salespeople developing fear of losing face. The foremost effects of an expected consultation failure that leads to an expected negative generalization that ultimately results in fear of losing face were empirically strong. As proposed, the effect on the sales performance outcome variable was affected negatively. In addition, we found support for fear of losing face existing in general innovation contexts. Specifically, when salespeople's self-expectations, change readiness, and experience are at a disadvantageous level (i.e., overambitious self-expectations, not ready for change, and unexperienced), innovations with a high degree of technology and target group newness initiate fear of losing face by evoking an expected consultation failure. To exemplify, if salespeople have overambitious self-expectations, high degrees of newness are more likely to evoke an expected consultation failure compared to realistic self-expectations that decrease the likelihood of salespeople expecting a consultation failure (see Figure 12). The results also provided support for indirect effects that support the existence of the proposed process steps of fear of losing face's emergence. However, we found no support

for the proposed moderators of the effect of expected consultation failure on expected negative generalization. Thus, implying the importance of the expected consultation failure because once it is formed there appears to be no mitigation measure to lower its effect. Finally, we conducted a series of supplement analyses to test the robustness of our model. We estimated several additional models and received stable results, indicating a certain robustness of the main model. Specifically, we estimated the model with an instrument variable that supported the proposed causality of the main effect. Finally, tests for common method variance indicated that our results are not unduly biased.

In summary, our results begin to fill the important research gap regarding why industrial salespeople are often challenged to sell digital innovations. Specifically, some salespeople could fear face threatening situations when selling digital innovations. In the following subchapter, we elaborate on the academic implications that our results offer.

6.2 Research Issues

We provide several important contributions to academia by exploring, specifying, and measuring salespeople's fear of losing face. Based on the previous chapters, we were able to (1) connect the research field of digital innovation with the field of selling innovation. In addition, we (2) employed the social concept of face to a new context and (3) introduced fear of losing face as a novel mechanism for challenges in selling digital innovations. Moreover, we (4) revealed a theoretically and empirically grounded and qualitatively validated process of the emergence of fear of losing face as well as its contingencies and (5) made the construct available for a broader context of selling innovation. Finally, we (6) offered a new and validated measurement concerning fear of losing face and (7) answered Zeithaml's (2020) request for more distinct marketing theories and concepts. In the following subchapter, we discuss these contributions to academic research.

First, our research work merges the largely unrelated literature streams of digital innovation and innovation selling. Though both research streams offer an extensive body of work, these two streams have been largely disconnected and did not provide insights on the issues that occur in the field of selling digital innovations (see Subchapter 2.1). Building on initial insights from Schmitz (2021), we shed light on this research void by focusing on the established salesforce of industrial manufactures and examined their issues regarding selling digital innovations. We deem this consolidation highly important to current sales research due to the

increasing practical importance of digital innovation selling in industrial markets (e.g., Gebauer et al. 2020). Moreover, prior research on digital innovation suggests that these innovations are radically different from other new products (e.g. Nambisan et al. 2017). Therefore, merely adapting current research regarding innovation selling appears to be insufficient.

Second, we extend the social concept of face to the context of innovation selling. Other than initial insights from consumer research (e.g., Ndubisi and Moi 2005; Wang et al. 2020), this concept has lacked attention in sales research. One possible reason for this lack is that this concept is deeply rooted in Asian culture and thus might appear as a regional phenomenon. Nonetheless, in accordance with Goffman (1955) and Ting-Toomey and Kurogi (1998), Zhang, Cao, and Grigoriou (2011) pointed out that face "is not only salient in Asia, but is also of universal nature" (p. 146). Our results indicate that this concept is indeed universal and applicable in broader business contexts beyond the Asia region.

Third, in accordance with the concept of face, our findings introduce fear of losing face as a new mechanism to explain specific challenges involved in selling digital innovation. Besides Schmitz's (2021) initial work, fear of losing face has never been conceptualized and operationalized in the context of selling digital innovations. We deem this novel mechanism relevant to understanding established salespeople's performance issues. On the one hand, in accordance with prior research on general innovation selling (e.g., Chen, Peng, and Hung 2015b; Homburg, Hohenberg, and Hahn 2019), we demonstrate that avoiding unpleasant situations when selling digital innovations—that is, not losing face—impacts salespeople's performance. In that regard, we also demonstrate the moderating impact of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, adding to prior research's notion that motivation plays an important role in sales performance (e.g., Jaramillo and Mulki 2008; Miao, Evans, and Zou 2007). On the other hand, our findings extend perspectives concerning possible antecedents of this behavior. We introduced the conceptualization of two types of knowledge gaps that play a determining role for fear of losing face. Our results illustrate that gaps in understanding digital innovations and their customers can render salespeople reluctant to sell digital innovations. These findings contribute to the literature stream on new product adoption (Atuahene-Gima 1997; Fu et al. 2010; Hultink and Atuahene-Gima 2000), supporting Homburg, Hohenberg, and Hahn's (2019) assumption that a product's novelty can increase salespeople's uncertainty, leading to a lower adoption of new products. In that regard, adding to applied psychology research, we

also find that psychological safety (Brown and Leigh 1996; Edmondson 1999) can be a relevant factor in mitigating the negative effects of knowledge gaps.

Fourth, in addition to our initial explorative model, we provide a theoretically and empirically grounded in-depth model to explain the underlying process of how fear of losing face emerges on the individual salesperson level when selling digital innovation. We consider this a relevant contribution to sales literature, as prior research offers no explanation of how fear of losing face constitutes itself among salespeople. Specifically, our research is the first to integrate the concept of metaperception into the field of digital innovation selling and therefore contribute to research regarding the role and impact of salespeople's perceptions. Prior research has revealed that salespeople perceiving negative evaluations from others can lead to adverse sales performances (e.g., Belschak, Verbeke, and Bagozzi 2006; Hamstra et al. 2018; VandeWalle et al. 1999). Our results add to this understanding by indicating that negative evaluations can be crucial to the emergence of salespeople's fear of losing face. Moreover, we were able to confirm that fear of losing face represents itself as a negative self-conscious emotion (e.g., embarrassment). Compared to basic emotions, self-conscious emotions have garnered less attention in sales literature (Tracy and Robins 2004; Verbeke and Bagozzi 2003). We address this gap by applying the concept of self-conscious emotions to the context of business-to-business selling in general and digital innovation selling in particular. By empirically and theoretically grounding our conceptualization of fear of losing face, we add to the landscape of emotional and behavioral research related to sales (e.g., Hamstra et al. 2018; Silver, Dwyer, and Alford 2006; see Subchapter 2.2), offering a new explanation as to why salespeople's performances might suffer. Lastly, by testing the propositions underlying this explanation, we provide additional validation of our findings. In doing so, this research work is the first to quantitatively examine under what circumstances fear of losing face can occur in innovation selling and which moderating factors provide useful bases alleviating its emergence. Even though fear of losing face might not be an issue for all salespeople our results illustrate the importance of several contingencies that facilitate the fear of losing face process. Specifically, we introduce self-exceptions, change readiness, and experience as relevant aspects in digital innovation selling that promote the emergence of salespeople's fear of losing face and play a role for their sales performance.

Fifth, our conceptualization of fear of losing face appears to not only be applicable to the specific research field of selling digital innovations but also to innovation selling in general.

We derived a two-dimensional categorization to determine innovations that possess a high likelihood of evoking fear of losing face among salespeople. Based on the degrees of technology and target group newness, fear of losing face can also be relevant to selling radical innovations (Bourreau, Gensollen, and Moreau; Christensen 1997; Henderson and Clark 1990). Therefore, we qualitatively demonstrate that innovations causing fear of losing face are not limited to digital products. We add to this assumption by quantitatively testing our propositions, revealing that technology and target group newness can trigger fear of losing face given disadvantageous levels of self-expectation, change readiness, and experience. Furthermore, the sample acquired to test these assumptions came from several industries and included a variety of innovations that were non-digital. Therefore, we deem fear of losing face to be a relevant mechanism and research issue for other innovations based, for example, on physical products, industrial services, hybrid offerings, or solutions (Eggert et al. 2011; Tuli, Kohli, and Bharadwaj 2007; Ulaga and Reinartz 2011).

Sixth, our results offer a new and validated measurement of salespeople's fear of losing face. Though academia has focused on behavioral and emotional concepts regarding salespeople (e.g., Hamstra et al. 2018; VandeWalle 1997; see Subchapter 2.2 and 5.2.1), these concepts provided no distinct scale to measure salespeople's fear of losing face. To fill this gap, we thoroughly created such a measure through established scale development processes (e.g., DeVellis 2003). As a result, to measure salespeople's fear of losing face, we provide a 10-item scale with strong validity for sales research. In this scale, five items refer to fear of losing face in the specific sales context and five to fear of losing face in general. In addition, our results offer additional measurements capable to operationalize the complete fear of losing face process.

Finally, we contribute to Zeithaml et al.'s (2020) request for more genuine marketing theories and concepts. Based on the theories-in-use approach, our results confirm Zeithaml et al.'s (2020) proposition that this approach is well suited to identifying new and relevant concepts in marketing practice. Moreover, our research procedure and extensive collaboration with our participants supports Zeithaml et al.'s (2020) indication that practitioners are excited to be substantial partners in research procedures and help in developing new ideas and uncovering issues yet to receive scientific attention.

6.3 Managerial Implications

Our results illustrate that some salespeople are likely to dread selling digital innovations due to the fear of losing face. In accordance with the initial research goal, this pivotal finding offers several actionable implications for managerial practice (see Figure 5 and Figure 6). These implications are focused on established salespeople. We consider this focus fruitful, as established salespeople usually account for the larger part of companies' revenue and are thus crucial to bringing digital innovations successfully to market. Subsequently, we elaborate on the following implications for practice: managers should (1) reduce and (2) compensate for knowledge gaps in salespeople's understanding of digital innovations and customers to reduce the likelihood that salespeople's fear of losing face prevents successful sales. Furthermore, managers should (3) motivate salespeople to sell digital innovations despite their fear of losing face and (4) reduce salespeople's expectations of consultation failures by creating effective support structures for their salesforce. Moreover, we recommend: (5) training salespeople to prepare them for their new role and evoke realistic self-expectations. Finally, we discuss (6) the selection of salespeople and (7) the development of sales teams to collectively address the challenges of digital innovation selling.

Reduction of knowledge gaps. First, based on our findings and in accordance with Schmitz (2021), managers should reduce the gaps in salespeople's knowledge between digital innovations and traditional products. Since manufacturers often experience established salespeople struggling to sell digital innovations, these knowledge gaps appear to provide an important starting point to address these challenges. In terms of gaps of understanding digital innovations and their respective customers, we recommend dedicated educational approaches. For example, managers should offer in-person sales training to thoroughly explain the digital technologies embedded in the innovation and communicate the value potential of these innovations. Here, personal contacts between salespeople selling these innovations is highly valuable because they foster a professional exchange of experience. Moreover, to further close these knowledge gaps, webinars and online tutorials also appear to be particularly appropriate for digital innovations. In that regard, aspects specific to digital innovation, such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) or liability issues, should be explained.

Training measures should also provide a fundamental understanding of the customer processes addressed by the digital innovations and offer a basic understanding of how implementing such innovation essentially functions. In that regard, salespeople should also be provided with a

basic understanding of the quality standards regarding digital innovation. For example, a number of digital innovations are introduced to market at an early developmental stage as so-called minimum viable products (MVP), and additional features are added after a product is already launched. These kinds of idiosyncrasies are important to be understood by the salespeople because they differ from traditional physical products.

In addition, salespeople should be trained to comprehend the different compositions of buying centers and buying processes when selling digital innovations. These centers and processes often differ from those related to selling physical products due to new stakeholders such as IT, HR, and legal departments. In particular, discussions with IT personnel can cause certain issues due to a different level of technical expertise. Here, market research can help to more extensively understand the different buying center structures for selling digital innovations, offering established salespeople the opportunity to prepare a targeted sales pitch.

In general, we recommend not offering merely occasional training but rather a fully developed digital innovation educational program that includes certification courses, expert networks, regular updates, online training, and knowledge databases. Notably, our exchanges with practitioners indicated that salespeople often feel somewhat overlooked regarding the market launches of digital innovations. It seems as there is often a preparation gap in the go-to-market process when product development hands over digital innovations to the sales organization. We therefore urge manufacturers to offer dedicated market-launch training programs to their salesforces before introducing digital innovations. This recommendation is in line with several prior indications of the strong effect of sales training in reducing sales failure (e.g., Lassk et al. 2012; McGowan 2021; Singh, Manrai, and Manrai 2015).

Compensation for knowledge gaps. Second, managers will presumably not always be able to fully close salespeople's knowledge gaps regarding digital innovations. Therefore, our results offer several options concerning how managers can lessen the emergence of salespeople's fear of losing face despite such knowledge gaps. In general, we found that knowledge gaps are less likely to cause fear of losing face if salespeople feel psychologically safe. To obtain this psychological safety, managers should prioritize customers with a high level of digital readiness. Salespeople can then target the customers that thoroughly understand digital innovations and require less guidance. In this way, established salespeople are less exposed to face threatening situations. In addition, manufacturers should manage customers' expectations by carefully communicating what digital innovations can and cannot do. Thus, established

salespeople are less likely to face uncomfortable sales situations with customers who have exaggerated expectations.

Moreover, in accordance with Schmitz (2021), managers should ensure established salespeople have access to all the information required to compensate for their knowledge gaps and offer a distinct contact for salespeople to turn to for questions related to digital innovation. Overall, managers should contribute to a culture of psychological safety. For example, the top management might serve as role models and engage in selling digital innovations themselves by supporting important sales pitches. This might signal to established salespeople that the management is dedicated to and supportive of selling these innovations.

Motivation of salespeople. Third, even when fear of losing face cannot be eliminated, managers can at least alleviate its negative effect by motivating salespeople adequately. Therefore, we encourage managers to foster intrinsic and extrinsic motivators through the following measures. For example, with the right tone from the top, managers can increase the perceived strategic importance of digital innovations among established salespeople. Therefore, top managers should make the topic of digital innovation a priority, communicate it accordingly, and desist from solely delegating it to middle or lower management. Moreover, managers should present success stories, such as the acquisition of larger projects with the help of digital innovations. Further, managers could present certain market scenarios illustrating the importance of digital innovations to staying competitive in the future and thereby motivate salespeople to sell digital innovations despite the fear of losing face.

Additionally, managers should thoroughly review the incentivization of their salespeople. In our interviews, we noticed that established salespeople are occasionally demotivated to sell digital innovations because their commission is revenue-based and digital innovations often account for only a minor share of this revenue. Therefore, we suggest setting the appropriate monetary incentives (e.g., special bonuses or higher commission rates for digital innovations) to increase established salespeople's motivation in overcoming their fear of losing face. Finally, managers should not solely rely on monetary rewards to increase motivation but also consider non-monetary rewards. We suggest that, through higher involvement, supervisor recognition, or appreciation, managers can motivate their established salespeople and thus mitigate the negative effect fear of losing face can have on sales performances concerning digital innovation.

Provision of support structures. Fourth, our results indicate that salespeople are likely to expect a consultation failure when selling digital innovations; they particularly expect to provide incorrect information, lack answers to customer questions, or break their promises towards customers. Results indicate that an expected consultation failure is crucial to salespeople's fear of losing face and their sales performance, particularly because it appears that, once a consultation failure is expected, there are few opportunities to enact countermeasures. Therefore, to reduce such expectations of a consultation failure, managers should construct a reliable support structure for their salespeople. For that reason, we recommend managers provide dedicated experts in digital innovation who are known to salespeople and straightforward to contact. From our experience, salespeople might feel a lack of support if they cannot find or get through to a respective digital innovation expert. In that regard, it appears to be effective when, for example, product managers of digital innovations proactively approach salespeople to support them in selling and understanding such innovations.

In addition, we suggest offering constantly available frequently-asked-question (FAQ) sections and online information that includes videos of digital innovation experts introducing and explaining products. Managers should also provide salespeople with material appropriate to conducting initial sales presentations. Our discussions with practitioners revealed that the pitch decks used to present digital innovations to customers are often too detailed, hard to comprehend, and ineffective at communicating key benefits of the digital innovation.

This issue of providing sufficient support to salespeople is even more critical for companies with a global sales organization and international subsidiary structures. In such organizations, we found digital innovation expertise to be largely prevalent only in the companies' headquarters, leading to salespeople experiencing a certain detachment from the necessary expertise. In that regard, we recommend ensuring that the support structure is not only prevalent at the headquarters level but also on the market division level or, if possible, even directly in each subsidiary.

Preparation for new role and self-expectation. Fifth, the role of salespeople often changes as a consequence of introducing digital innovations. Our results disclosed that an accurate understanding of their new role can help salespeople develop appropriate self-exceptions that, in turn, have a positive impact on salespeople's fear of losing face. Managers should clearly define the role they expect salespeople to live up to; for example, by explicitly defining the selling of digital innovations as a critical task. Moreover, salespeople often become a "door

opener" for digital innovations instead of a permanent consultant to the customer, which is often the case for traditional products. We suggest that managers explicitly communicate this role adjustment to ensure salespeople understand what is required of them. We consider this an effective approach to ensure salespeople have realistic self-expectations when selling digital innovations. This is particularly important because salespeople might assume that they have to approach digital innovations in the same manner as traditional products—by acting as a key source of expertise rather than just giving high-level presentations to acquire new sales prospects. Such unsuitable self-expectations can facilitate salespeople's fear of losing face and should therefore be avoided.

Selection of salespeople. Sixth, our results suggest that certain traits are particularly beneficial in reducing salespeople's fear of losing face when selling digital innovations. Specifically, salespeople who have high change readiness and experience are less likely to experience fear of losing face when selling digital innovations and vice versa. For example, if salespeople are open to change and embrace new products, they are more effective at addressing potential face threatening situations. Therefore, when bringing digital innovations to market, we recommend that managers focus on salespeople who excel in these requirements because they potentially offer higher adoption rates. This might even help to relieve other salespeople who are more challenged by selling digital innovations. In addition, change readiness might be reinforced through additional training measures, such as change management and transformation training.

Development of sales teams. Finally, we recommend the implementation of sales teams to collectively address the challenges of digital innovation selling. Companies from our research context gained positive experiences deploying sales teams for digital innovations that consist of a lead salesperson, a technical salesperson, and a specialist to address detailed questions regarding implementation or legal issues. However, this approach appears to be particularly fruitful if established salespeople do not feel threatened that their commission could be diminished by including more stakeholders in the sales process.

6.4 Limitations and Future Research Directions

As with all other empirical studies, our results possess several limitations and open interesting directions for future research. One foundational limitation of our research work is that both qualitative studies in Chapters 3 and 4 were conducted with manufacturers from Germany. Even though all three companies in our empirical studies operate globally and generate substantial revenue outside Germany, the results might reflect that business operations are run

by German headquarters. Therefore, we encourage future research to replicate our findings outside Germany. In that respect, we consider the Asian region as an interesting research context, since the concept of face plays a significant role in this cultural area (e.g., Ho 1976; Zhang, Cao, and Grigoriou 2011).

Moreover, our research work focuses on the negative effect of fear of losing face and thus the reluctance to sell digital innovations. Nonetheless, it is reasonable to assume that there is also a positive aspect to this phenomenon. For example, salespeople who fear losing face could possess stronger motivation to undertake sales training. Furthermore, fear of losing face could increase salespeople's willingness to collaborate in sales teams and thus adopt more effectively to new sales structures (e.g., Weinstein and Mullins 2012).

In addition to the concept of losing face, which draws from negative social evaluations, academic literature also describes a notion of *gaining face* concerned with the effects of positive evaluation (Hwang 2006; Zhang, Cao, and Grigoriou 2011). Zhang, Cao, and Grigoriou (2011) stated that face can "be gained when one's social performance goes above and beyond social expectations" (pp. 130–131). Adapting this complementary concept to sales research might uncover an additional mechanism for success in selling innovation or selling in general.

Our research particularly focuses on established salespeople in the context of selling digital innovations. Future research could broaden the perspective by extending the focus to include *new* salespeople. In addition, researchers could examine the concept of fear of losing face not merely on the individual level but also on the collective or team level. (e.g., Auh et al. 2014). We also recommend broadening the investigatory perspective to address the question of whether salespeople can lose face *vis-à-vis* actors other than customers. These additional actors could be supervisors, colleagues, or peers (e.g., Dierdorff, Surface, and Brown 2010; Homburg, Hohenberg, and Hahn 2019; VandeWalle et al. 1999).

Moreover, our research is based on industries that predominantly feature male salespeople and customers. Prior research on attribution theory has indicated that an individual's attribution of failure and success can be subject to gender-based biases (e.g., Agthe, Spörrle, and Försterling 2008; Ashkanasy 1994). Therefore, we encourage future research to examine whether our propositions regarding fear of losing face are also valid for female salespeople or female-dominated industries. Moreover, the majority of our study's participants had jobs in industries

requiring a high level of education, which might bias the results and limit its generalization to industries and job profiles with lower educational requirements.

Finally, prior research has indicated the relevance of sample size to scale development, suggesting 10 respondents per scale item (Nunnally 1978). Though our sample size and reliability appears to be sufficient (DeVellis 2003) future research could test the validity of our measurement with larger sample sizes. In general, we encourage researchers to employ our measurement scale regarding salespeople's fear of losing face in further quantitative research, as it offers a fruitful starting point for examining challenges in selling digital innovation and selling innovation in general.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Pre-study manager survey

Item No.	Item	Scale	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
1	Across all digital innovations, how satisfied are you with their current market success?	1 = not satisfied, 7 = very satisfied	1	6	2.97	1.27
2	Selling digital innovations is more challenging than selling non-digital products.	1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree	3	7	5.55	1.35
3	Selling digital innovations is an unprecedented challenge.	1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree	2	7	4.74	1.56
4	Our company is unsure how to overcome the challenge of selling digital innovations.	1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree	1	7	5.03	1.43
5	How important is the sales force for the market success of digital innovations?	1 = not important, 7 = very important	2	7	5.81	1.22
6	How satisfied are you in general with the performance of your sales force in terms of selling digital innovations?	1 = not satisfied, 7 = very satisfied	1	5	3.07	1.06
7	How much do you rely on established salespeople to sell digital innovations?	1 = not at all, 7 = very much	1	7	5.00	1.63
8	In terms of selling digital innovations established salespeople fall behind expectations.	1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree	1	7	4.90	1.16
9	In terms of selling digital innovations new salespeople fall behind expectations.	1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree	1	7	4.11	1.12
10	Salespeople who have focused on selling traditional hardware-based products for a long time seem particularly troubled when selling digital innovations.	1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree	1	7	5.04	1.50

Notes: Percentage values shown in the manuscript are calculated by the sum of responds that rated 5 or higher for item no. 3, 4, 6, and 8.
n = 31, 17 different companies, Ø age = 45.5, 6.5% female, 93.5% male; Ø company employee size = 28,563.

Appendix 2: Literature overview of innovation selling

Authors	Study Setting	Scope	Key Construct	Obstacles for Innovation Selling	Empirical Strategy & Method	Qualitative	Innovation Focus
Ahearne et al. (2010)	Single firm - pharmaceutical company	US	Behavior-based and outcome-based management control systems	Negative or low customer's perception of the new product	Longitudinal quantitative survey with 226 sales reps and ratings from 428 customers. Partial least square (PLS)	No	Hardware/Physical
Atuahene-Gima (1997)	No empirical study	-	Sales force new product adoption (commitment x effort) and dysfunctional behavior (and their antecedents)	Lack of commitment and dysfunctional behavior	No empirical study	No	Hardware/Physical
Atuahene-Gima and Li (2002)	Multiple firms - high-tech industry	China and US	Control mechanism and supervisee trust	Insufficient supervisee trust	Quantitative questionnaire with 308 salespeople. Hierarchical moderated regression analysis	No	High Tech Products
Atuahene-Gima and Li (2006)	Multiple firms - high-tech industry	China	Control mechanism and supervisee trust	Manager's orientation and participative supervision styles	Pre-study with 20 in-depth interviews sales manager and salesperson. Quantitative questionnaire with 170 salespersons. Hierarchical regression analysis	Partially	High Tech Products
Beuk et al. (2014)	Single firm - industrial company	North America	Financial incentives to sell new product and long-term orientation	Low sales effort	Quantitative survey with 129 salespeople	No	Hardware/Physical
Chen, Peng, and Hung (2015a)	Electric product manufacturers	Taiwan	Salespeople innovativeness and management control systems	Lack of salespeople's innovativeness	Quantitative questionnaire with 315 salespeople. Structural equation modeling	No	Electronic Products
Chen, Peng, and Hung (2015b)	Electric product manufacturers	Taiwan	Goal orientation and new product selling self-efficacy	Lack of or low new product selling self-efficacy	Quantitative questionnaire with 158 salespeople. Partial least square (PLS)	No	Electronic Products

Authors	Study Setting	Scope	Key Construct	Obstacles for Innovation Selling	Empirical Strategy & Method	Qualitative	Innovation Focus
Fraenkel, Haftor, and Pashkevich (2016)	Multiple firms - pharmaceutical industry	Sweden	Set of individual factors and their unique configuration for successful sales force management practices	Static markets and sales representatives with systematic (well-structured) personality types, rather than innovative (creative)	Quantitative questionnaire with 100 salespeople or managers. Multivariate data analysis	No	Hardware/Physical
Fu et al. (2010)	Single firm - global, industrial tool company	n.a.	Development of selling intentions	Low selling intentions of salesperson	Quantitative questionnaire with 308 salespeople and company records. Longitudinal nonlinear growth curve model	No	Hardware/Physical
Fu, Jones, and Bolander (2008)	Single firm - multinational tool company	North America	Intention to sell a new product	Low selling intentions of salesperson	Time-lagged study with 800 salespeople. Structural equation modeling	No	Hardware/Physical
Fu, Richards, and Jones (2009)	Single firm - multinational tool company	North America	Self-Efficacy and Self-Set Goals	Low selling effort	Data from 143 industrial salespeople combined with company records. Seemingly unrelated regressions (SUR)	No	Hardware/Physical
Good and Calantone (2019)	Multiple firms - biochemical industry	n.a.	Customer meaningfulness	Outsourcing of sales force	Surveys with 229 managers. Least squares structural equation modeling	No	Chemicals
Hohenberg and Homburg (2016)	Single firm - global chemical supplier	Global focus	Motivation of sales reps and steering instruments (moderated by culture)	Steering instruments that do not correspond closely with sales reps' national culture	Quantitative questionnaire in two waves (471 sales reps in wave 1 and 406 in wave 2). Hierarchical linear modeling	No	Hardware/Physical
Homburg, Hohenberg, and Hahn (2019)	Single firm - Global chemical supplier	Global focus	New product selling motivation	Lack of (internalized) new product selling motivation	Two workshops with 3 senior managers questionnaire with 471 sales reps. Structural equation modeling	Partially	Hardware/Physical
Hultink and Atuahene-Gima (2000)	High technology firms	Netherlands	Sales force adoption of new products	Lack of sales force new product adoption	Quantitative questionnaire with 97 salespersons. Moderated regression analysis	No	High Tech Products

Authors	Study Setting	Scope	Key Construct	Obstacles for Innovation Selling	Empirical Strategy & Method	Qualitative	Innovation Focus
Mullins, Menguc, and Panagopoulos (2020)	Single firm - manufacturing and services provider	US	Salesperson's Value-based Selling	Low Promotion Focus and salesperson-perceived empowering leader behaviors	Quantitative surveys with 433 salespeople and 70 managers. Multilevel structural equation modeling	No	Hardware/Physical
Micheal, Rochford, and Wotruba (2003)	Multiple manufacturing firms	Australia	Changes of sales management strategy	Sales strategy that doesn't fit the product innovation type	Quantitative questionnaire with 187 sales managers. Variance analysis	No	Hardware/Physical
van der Borgh and Schepers (2014)	Single firm - subsidiary of consumer electronics	Norway	Managerial selling orientation	Singular-oriented managers	Quantitative questionnaire with 104 sales representatives. Time-lagged partial least squares analysis	No	High Tech Products
van der Borgh and Schepers (2018)	Single firm - information communications technology company	Global	Conservative selling behavior	Lack of effort	Quantitative questionnaire with 172 sales managers, 31 managers, and performance data. Multi-level structural equation modeling	No	High Tech Products
van den Berg et al. (2014)	n.a.	Europe	Internal knowledge brokering	Salespeople with the a special gene variant (DRD2 A1)	DNA data and self-reports from 170 salespeople. Genetic analysis and mediation analysis	No	n.a.
Our Study	**Three international B2B manufacturers**	**Global**	**Salesperson's fear of losing face**	**Gaps of understanding digital innovations and gaps of understanding customers**	**Qualitative studies based on 59 and 10 expert interviews (managers, salespeople, and customers). Theories-in-use**	**Yes**	**Digital Innovations**

Appendix 3: Literature overview of digital innovation

Authors	Study Setting	Scope	Key Construct	Empirical Strategy	Qualitative	Innovation Focus
Abrell et al. (2016)	Three firms for heavy manufacturing industry, B2B environment	Europe	Leveraging customer knowledge and user knowledge for digital innovation	Semi-structured interviews with 30 experts. Multiple holistic case study design and qualitative data analysis	Yes	Digital
Chan et al. (2019)	Software Provider from Singapore	Asia	Agility to respond to digital disruptive innovation	Interviews with 22 mangers and specialists. Case study approach and qualitative data analysis	Yes	Digital
Grover and Kohli (2012)	Literature review	n.a.	Cocreation of IT-based value	not empirical	No	Digital
Henfridsson et al. (2018)	Literature review	n.a.	Design recombination and use recombination	Not empirical	No	Digital
Hinings, Gegenhuber, and Greenwood (2018)	Literature review	n.a.	Novel and existing institutional arrangements	not empirical	No	Digital
Jahanmir and Cavadas (2018)	B2C customers	n.a.	Customer's adoption of digital innovations	Quantitative questionnaire with 114 customers. Exploratory Factor Analysis and Binomial logit regression	No	Digital
Kohli and Melville (2019)	Literature review	n.a.	Digital Innovation Actions	not empirical	Not empirical	Digital
Lokuge et al. (2019)	9 private, public and non-profit organizations	Global	Organizational Readiness for digital Innovations	Study 1: Interviews with 18 experts (e.g., CIOs, IT Mangers) Study 2: Quantitative survey with 378 persons (mainly CIOs). Qualitative data analysis for item creation, scale development, and instrument testing	Partially	Digital
Makkonen and Komulainen (2018)	Retailers and technological companies	Scandinavia	Need-solution coupling	Interviews with retailers, technological companies, and users of mobile advertising solutions. Longitudinal case study	Yes	Digital

Authors	Study Setting	Scope	Key Construct	Empirical Strategy	Qualitative	Innovation Focus
Nambisan et al. (2017)	Literature review	n.a.	New logics of theorizing about digitization of innovation	not empirical	Not empirical	Digital
Nylén and Holmström (2015)	Literature review	n.a.	Managerial framework for digital innovation process	not empirical	Not empirical	Digital
Reisman and Bertini (2018)	not empirical	n.a.	Empowerment, dialog, and reputation	not empirical	Not empirical	Digital
Shibeika and Harty (2015)	Single firm - Engineering company	UK	Diffusion of digital innovation	28 interviews with professionals of different levels plus company data. In-depth case study	Yes	Digital
Svahn, Mathiassen, and Lindgren (2017)	Global car manufacturer	n.a.	Capability, focus, collaboration, and governance for digital innovations	Longitudinal case study combined with extant literature	Yes	Digital
Tumbas, Berente, and Vom Brocke (2018)	Multiple firms from different industries	n.a.	"Digital" logics of CDOs	Interviews with 35 CDOs. Qualitative data analysis	Yes	Digital
Yoo, Henfridsson, and Lyytinen (2010)	not empirical	n.a.	Layered Architecture of Digital Innovations, research agenda of digital strategy and corporate IT infrastructures	not empirical	Not empirical	Digital
Our study	**Three international B2B manufacturers**	**Global**	**Salesperson's fear of losing face**	**Qualitative studies based on 59 and 10 expert interviews (managers, salespeople, and customers). Theories-in-use**	**Yes**	**Digital Innovation**

Appendix 4: Literature overview of adjacent concepts to fear of losing face

Authors	Sales Context	Study Setting	Scope	Adjacent Construct	Empirical Strategy	Qualitative	Focus
Chai, Zhao, and Babin (2012)	Yes	Chinese health and life insurance industry	China	Performance goal orientation	Structural equation modeling based on survey data from 256 insurance salespeople	No	Salespeople
Chen, Peng, and Hung (2015b)	Yes	Electronic product manufacturers	Taiwan	Performance goal orientation	Structural model based on survey data from 158 salespeople	No	Salespeople
Dweck (1986)	No	Literature Review	n.a.	Performance goal orientation	Not empirical	No	Individuals (Children)
Elliot (1999)	No	Literature Review	n.a.	Performance goal orientation	Not empirical	No	Individuals
Harris, Mowen, and Brown (2005)	Yes	Six companies from the real estate industry	United States	Performance goal orientation	Exploratory factor analysis and SEM based on data from 190 real estate agents	No	Salespeople
Silver and Kernek (2019)	Yes	Literature Review	n.a.	Performance goal orientation	Not empirical	No	Salespeople
Silver, Dwyer, and Alford (2006)	Yes	Life insurance industry	United States	Performance goal orientation	Structural equation modeling based on survey data from 238 insurance agents	No	Salespeople
VandeWalle (1997)	No	Different university business courses	United States	Performance goal orientation	EFA/CFA based on survey data from 556 students	No	Individuals (Students)
VandeWalle et al. (1999)	Yes	Medical supplies distributor	United States	Performance goal orientation	Longitudinal field test with multivariate regression analysis based on survey data from 183 salespeople	No	Salespeople
Bagozzi, Verbeke, and Gavino (2003)	Yes	Dutch and Filipino financial service companies	Netherlands and Philippines	Social anxiety	Structural equation models based on survey data from 511 financial salespersons	No	Salespeople

Authors	Sales Context	Study Setting	Scope	Adjacent Construct	Empirical Strategy	Qualitative	Focus
Belschak, Verbeke, and Bagozzi (2006)	Yes	Companies from business-to-customers selling environment	Netherlands	Social anxiety	Regression analysis, common method variance, confirmatory factor analysis based on survey date from 171 salespeople	No	Salespeople
Clark (2001)	No	Literature Review	n.a.	Social anxiety	not empirical	No	Individuals
Schreiber et al. (2012)	No	German secondary schools	Germany	Social anxiety	Study with 567 adolescents	No	Individuals (Adolescents)
Verbeke and Bagozzi (2000)	Yes	Subdivision of a large Dutch bank	Netherlands	Social anxiety	Exploratory factor analysis and regression based on focus group interviews with managers and salespeople questionnaires for scale development	partly	Salespeople
Verbeke and Bagozzi (2002)	Yes	Dutch financial organizations	Netherlands	Social anxiety	Structural equation modelling based on survey data of 458 salespeople	No	Salespeople
Verbeke and Bagozzi (2003)	Yes	Industrial, financial, fast moving consumer goods and healthcare companies	Netherlands	Social anxiety	Test of differences and structural model based on experimental and survey data	No	Salespeople
Crowe and Higgins (1997)	No	Undergraduates from Columbia University	United States	Prevention focus	Multiple regression analysis based on data from two experimental studies with 203 students	No	Individuals (Students)
Hamstra et al. (2018)	Yes	International field marketing company	Netherlands	Prevention focus	Multiple regression analysis based on firm's performance data and data from a survey with 156 sales agents	No	Salespeople
Higgins (1997)	No	Literature Review	n.a.	Prevention focus	Not empirical	No	Individuals
Higgins (1998)	No	Literature Review	n.a.	Prevention focus	Not empirical	No	Individuals
Homburg and Ukrainets (2021)	Yes	Customers with average or above-average incomes and customers of discount store	International	Other actor's fear of losing face	Structural equation modeling based on data from 1675 customers	No	Consumer
Li and Su (2007)	Yes	American university and Chinese university	United States and China	Other actor's fear of losing face	Correlation analysis and multivariate analysis of covariance based on survey data from 220 full-time undergraduate students	Partly	Consumer

Authors	Sales Context	Study Setting	Scope	Adjacent Construct	Empirical Strategy	Qualitative	Focus
Miron-Spektor, Paletz, and Lin (2015)	No	Several Universities	Japan, Israel, and United States	Other actor's fear of losing face	Regression models based on experimental data from three studies with 169-173 students	No	Individuals
Ndubisi and Moi (2005)	Yes	Supermarkets	Malaysia	Other actor's fear of losing face	Multivariate analysis based on data from 312 customers	No	Consumer
Redding and Ng (1983)	No	Commercial, trading, and engineering companies	Hong Kong	Other actor's fear of losing face	Individual interview analysis and descriptive analysis based on survey data from102 middle-level executives	Partly	Individuals (Managers)
Tuncel et al. (2020)	No	Native English Speaker recruited from Prime Panels and Mturk	United States	Other actor's fear of losing face	Confirmatory factor analysis based on data from three studies with 79, 301, and 1073 participants	No	Individuals
White et al. (2004)	Yes	Students from a graduate negotiation course	United States	Other actor's fear of losing face	Confirmatory factor analysis based on data from two studies with 435 and 146 students	No	Individuals (Students)
Zhang, Cao, and Grigoriou (2011)	No	Several Universities and a telecom company	China	Other actor's fear of losing face	Exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis based on data from three studies with173, 201 and 264 participants	Party	Individuals (students and managers)
Our Study	**Yes**	**International B2B Manufacturers**	**International**	**Salesperson's fear of losing face**	**Qualitative studies based on 59 and 10 expert interviews (managers, salespeople, and customers). Theories-in-use**	**Yes**	**Salespeople**

Appendix 5: Interview participants of qualitative study in exploring fear of losing face

Company	ID	Gender	Job title	Role	Age	Experience with employer	Experience in current position	Region
A	1	Male	Managing Director Sales & Services	Manager	49	24	7	International
	2	Male	Managing Director Germany	Manager	50	15	0.6	EMEA/ Germany
	3	Male	Managing Director China	Manager	45	4.5	1	Asia/ China
	4	Male	Vice President Sales & Marketing USA	Manager	56	17	5	USA
	5	Female	Smart Factory Consultant	Specialist	29	2	2	EMEA/ Germany
	6	Male	Director Software Product	Manager	38	2.5	2.5	International
	7	Male	Sales Manager	Sales Rep	45	8	8	EMEA/ Spain
	8	Female	Head Of Software Product China	Manager	37	8	2	Asia/ China
	9	Male	Sales Director	Sales Rep	41	15	1.5	USA
	10	Male	Area Sales Manager	Sales Rep	42	0.5	0.5	EMEA/ Germany
	11	Male	Sales Representative	Sales Rep	43	5	5	EMEA/ Netherlands
	12	Female	Managing Director Italy	Manager	54	29	8	EMEA/ Italy
	13	Male	Managing Director Iberia	Manager	49	11	2	EMEA/ Spain and Portugal
	14	Male	Head of Software Product	Manager	48	29	1	EMEA/ Germany
	15	Male	Managing Director Netherlands	Manager	49	22	5	EMEA/ Netherlands
	16	Male	Head of After Sales	Manager	58	30	5	EMEA/ Germany
	17	Male	Co-Owner Dutch Welding Company	Customer	25	4	2	EMEA/ Netherlands
	18	Male	Head of Product Marketing	Manager	52	15	5	Asia/ China
	19	Male	Managing Director	Customer	49	16	16	EMEA/ Netherlands
	20	Male	Head of Technical Consulting	Manager	44	16	3	EMEA/ Germany
	21	Male	Sales Representative	Sales Rep	58	26	18	EMEA/ Netherlands
	22	Male	Head of Software Consulting and Software Sales	Manager	35	6	3	EMEA/ Germany
B	1	Male	After Sales	Manager	50	5	25	USA/ Canada
	2	Male	Regional Sales Manager Asia Pacific	Manager	42	23	8	Asia/ South East Asia
	3	Male	Sales Manager Guardos	Sales Rep	40	4	10	EMEA/ Germany
	4	Male	Head of Business Unit	Manager	49	22	22	International
	5	Male	After Market Sales Manager	Manager	46	24	24	USA/ Canada
	6	Male	Regional Sales Manager EMEA	Manager	40	12	15	EMEA
	7	Male	General Manager GOM	Manager	55	29	29	EMEA/ Germany
	8	Male	Regional Sales Manager Asia Pacific	Manager	38	13	13	Asia/ South East Asia
	9	Male	Digital Product Development	Specialist	45	20	20	International
	10	Male	Programmer	Customer	54	37	14	International
	11	Male	Head of part control	Customer	52	35	10	International
	12	Male	Senior Manager Measurement	Customer	55	40	15	International

13	Male	Technical Head China	Manager	50	12	25	Asia/ China
14	Male	Senior Director	Manager	32	9	9	EMEA/ Nordics
15	Male	Regional Sales Manager	Sales Rep	37	7	2	EMEA/ Germany
16	Male	After Sales Engineer	Specialist	27	5	9	Asia/ China
17	Male	Technical Head in Italy	Manager	50	3	21	EMEA/ Italy
18	Male	Head of Sales	Manager	59	7	30	USA/ Canada
19	Male	Product Manager Quality Intelligence	Sales Rep	27	2	0	EMEA
20	Male	Software Sales Manager	Specialist	37	3	10	USA/ Canada
21	Male	Sales Software	Specialist	30	13	5	Asia/ India
22	Male	Sales Head Austria	Manager	45	14	12	EMEA/ Austria
23	Male	Software Sales Development Manager APAC	Manager	30	1	6	International
24	Male	Key Account Manager	Sales Rep	58	34	15	International
25	Male	Sales Head Global	Manager	56	30	30	International
26	Male	Sales Vice President APAC	Manager	57	30	20	Asia/ Asia Pacific
27	Female	Managing Director	Manager	50	17	17	EMEA/ Germany
28	Male	Technical Head Korea	Manager	52	1	20	Asia/ Korea
29	Male	Key Account Manager	Sales Rep	45	4	20	International
30	Male	Sales director	Sales Rep	50	1	21	EMEA/ Germany
31	Male	Vice President Sales Germany	Manager	64	40	37	EMEA/ Germany
32	Male	General Manager	Manager	55	32	32	EMEA/ Austria, Hungary and Yugoslavia
33	Male	Vice President Sales EMEA	Manager	49	21	16	EMEA
34	Male	Master craftsman	Customer	33	16	6	International
35	Male	KMG programmer	Customer	46	31	17	International
36	Male	Head of measurement room application	Customer	50	24	1	International
37	Male	Head of project management	Customer	54	25	10	International

Appendix 6: Interview guidelines of qualitative study in exploring fear of losing face

Challenges in selling digital offerings

Herausforderungen im Vertrieb von digitalen Angeboten

General Information:

1. The interview is **strictly confidential** and all results will be **anonymized**. We are particularly interested in general themes that emerge from all interviews combined.
   Das Interview ist **streng vertraulich** und alle Ergebnisse werden **anonymisiert**. Wir interessieren uns sich für Einzelantworten, sondern für Themenblöcke, die sich aus der Summe der Interviews ergeben.

2. The interview is **temporarily taped** for transcription. The tapes are **deleted** right after transcription. The transcripts are the basis of our data analysis, but will remain **confidential** and will not be shared with [the company] or any third parties.
   Das Interview wird **vorübergehend** zur Abschrift **aufgezeichnet**. Die Aufzeichnung wird direkt nach der Abschrift **gelöscht**. Die Transkripte bilden die Basis unsere Datenanalyse; sie bleiben **vertraulich** und werden weder [dem Unternehmen] noch dritten Parteien zugänglich gemacht.

3. There are **no right or wrong answers** – we are interested in your **personal opinion**.
   Es gibt **keine richtigen oder falschen Antworten** – wir sind an Ihrer **persönlichen Meinung** interessiert.

Opening Questions (Ice-Breaker):

1. Please describe the **range of goods and services** that you typically sell.
   Bitte beschreiben Sie die **Bandbreite von Gütern und Dienstleistungen**, die Sie typischerweise verkaufen.
   a) Which **machines** and which **services** (incl. software) do you sell?
      Welche Maschinen und welche Services (inkl. Software) verkaufen Sie?
   b) What is the **usual process** of converting a lead to a customer?
      Was ist der **übliche Prozess**, um einen Lead zu einem Kunden zu machen?
   c) **To whom** do you talk during this process and **about what**?
      Mit wem sprechen Sie in diesem Prozess und **worüber**?
   d) What would you consider as a **typical working day**?
      Wie würden Sie einen **typischen Arbeitstag** beschreiben?

Bestandsaufnahme zum Vertrieb digitaler Angebote:

In the following, we would like to learn more about the selling of [the company]'s digital offerings.
Im Folgenden würden wir gern mehr über den Verkauf von digitalen Angeboten bei [dem Unternehmen] erfahren.

1. What do you think how **important** are digital offerings for [the company]?
   Was glauben Sie wie **wichtig** digitale Angebote für [das Unternehmen] sind?
   a) How important are digital offerings for [the company]'s **competitive position** and **market performance**?
      Wie wichtig sind digitale Angebot für die **Wettbewerbsposition** und **Marktperformance** von **[dem Unternehmen]**?
   b) How does this importance become **apparent** to you (e.g., [the company]'s expectations or measures taken)?
      Wie **äußert** sich diese Wichtigkeit für Sie (z.B. bzgl. Erwartungen seitens [dem Unternehmen])?

2. As a [the company] salesperson, how **important** are these digital offerings for **you**?
   Wie **wichtig** sind diese digitalen Angebote für **Sie** als Verkaufsberater bei [dem Unternehmen]?
   a) What is the impact of these digital offerings on your **selling practice**? Could you give us examples?
      Welchen Einfluss haben diese digitalen Angebote auf Ihre **Verkaufspraxis**? Könnten Sie Beispiele nennen?
   b) To what extent do you aim to **actively sell digital offerings**? Could you give us examples?
      Inwiefern versuchen Sie, digitale Angebote **aktiv zu verkaufen**? Könnten Sie Beispiele nennen?

Open investigation of causes:

1. **Why** do you see digital offerings in this way? *(Laddering: repeatedly ask „why", to understand reasons in detail)*
   Warum sehen Sie digitale Angebote so**?** *(Laddering: wiederholt „warum" fragen, um die Gründe im Detail zu verstehen)*

2. What are the **major roadblocks** for selling digital offerings?
   Was sind die **größten Hindernisse** für den Verkauf von digitalen Offerings?
   a) How do you resolve them?
      Wie lösen Sie diese?
   b) Do you have ideas how these could be resolved?
      Haben Sie Ideen, wie diese gelöst werden könnten?

3. What are the **biggest opportunities** when selling digital offerings?
   Was sind die **größten Chancen** für den Verkauf von digitalen Offerings?

Hypothesis-driven investigation of causes:

1. What is your **attitude** toward these digital offerings? Why?
   Wie **stehen** Sie grundsätzlich zu den digitalen Angeboten?
   a) How do you evaluate the **quality** and **reliability** of these digital offerings?
      Wie bewerten Sie die **Qualität** und **Zuverlässigkeit** der digitalen Angebote?
   b) To what extent do you believe these digital offerings **create value** to your customers? Do you perceive the digital offerings as **useful** for your customers?
      Inwiefern glauben Sie, dass diese digitalen Angebote einen **Kundennutzen** haben? Halten Sie die digitalen Angebote für **nützlich** für Ihre Kunden?
   c) To what extent do you perceive them as **easy to implement and to use**?
      Inwiefern erachten Sie die digitalen Angebote als **einfach zu implementieren und zu nutzen**?
   d) To what extent do you perceive that your **job profile might change** when [the company] will not only sell machines but solutions? Please give examples of what might change/ changes or has changed and how you feel about it?
      Inwiefern glauben Sie, dass sich Ihr **Jobprofil verändert**, wenn [das Unternehmen] nicht nur Produkthersteller, sondern Lösungsanbieter wird? Geben Sie uns gern konkrete Beispiele und wie sie dem gegenüberstehen?

2. To what extent are you **motivated** to sell digital offerings? Why?
   Inwiefern sind Sie **motiviert**, digitale Angebote zu vertreiben?
   a) To what extent does selling digital offerings contribute to meeting your sales goals?
      Wie beeinflusst der Vertrieb digitaler Angebote Ihre Möglichkeit, Ihre Ziele zu erreichen?
   b) How are you **incentivized** (e.g., bonus, commission) to sell digital offerings? How motivating is this incentive?
      Wie sind Sie incentiviert (z.B. Bonus, Provision) um digitale Angebote zu verkaufen? Wie motivierend ist dieser Incentive?

c) How does selling digital offerings affect your possibility of getting **recognition** from your supervisor? How motivating is this recognition?
Inwieweit ermöglicht es Ihne der Vertrieb digitaler Angebote, **Anerkennung** von Ihrem Vorgesetzten zu erlangen? Wie motivierend ist die Anerkennung?

d) To what extent do you **enjoy selling** digital offerings? Do you enjoy the **challenge**? Is it **interesting**?
Inwiefern **genießen** Sie es, digitale Angebote zu verkaufen? Mögen Sie die **Herausforderung**? Ist es **interessant**?

e) To what extent does selling digital offerings help you **improve your sales skills**? How motivating is this?
Inwiefern ermöglicht Ihnen der Vertrieb digitaler Angebote, Ihre **Verkaufsfähigkeiten zu verbessern**? Wie motivierend ist dies?

f) What is **missing** to increase your motivation to sell digital offerings?
Was **fehlt**, um Ihre Motivation zum Verkauf digitaler Angebote zu steigern?

3. How **competent** do you feel to sell the digital offerings? Why?
Wie **kompetent** fühlen Sie sich darin, digitale Angebote zu verkaufen? Warum?

a) Which **differences** do you see between selling digital offerings and selling physical product? (e.g., sales process, sales cycle, explanation/demonstration, after-sales, internal coordination – e.g., with software sales? Could you give us examples?
Welche **Unterschiede** sehen Sie beim Vertrieb digitaler Angebote verglichen mit dem Vertrieb von Maschinen (z.B. Vertriebsprozess, Vertriebszyklus, Erklärung/Demonstration, After-Sales, interne Koordination – z.B. mit Softwarevertrieb)? Warum? Könnten Sie uns Beispiele geben?

b) To what extent to you think you have the **skills to cope with these differences**?
Inwiefern glauben Sie, dass Sie die **Fähigkeiten besitzen, mit diesen Unterschieden umzugehen**?

c) How do you **get the knowledge** to sell digital offerings (e.g., trainings, tests, coaching on the job, best-practice exchange with colleagues, self-initiative)? Which **learning opportunities** are there and how frequently can you use them?
Wie **erhalten Sie das nötige Wissen**, um digitale Angebote zu verkaufen (z.B. Trainings, Tests, Coaching on the Job, Best-Practice-Austausch mit Kollegen, Eigeninitiative)? Welche Lernmöglichkeiten gibt es und wie häufig können Sie diese nutzen?

d) How **quickly do you get new information** about updates/ new possibilities/ new software that support you in selling digital offerings?
Wie schnell erhalten Sie für den Verkauf digitaler Lösungen **notwendige Informationen** hinsichtlich Updates, neuer Software, neuen Funktionen etc?

e) Would you like to have **more opportunities**? What is missing?
Hätten Sie gern **mehr Möglichkeiten**? Was fehlt?

4. How do the **circumstances / framework conditions** foster or impede the selling of digital offerings?
Inwiefern begünstigen oder behindern Gegebenheiten / Rahmenbedingungen den Verkauf von digitalen Angeboten?

a) How do you evaluate the **market demand** for digital offerings? Could you give us some concrete examples?
Wie beurteilen Sie die **Marktnachfrage** nach digitalen Angeboten?

b) How do you evaluate the **internal support** that you require for selling digital offerings?
Wie beurteilen Sie den internen Support, den Sie für den Verkauf von digitalen Angeboten benötigen?

5. In your experience, how do different **stakeholders** perceive digital offerings and act upon them?
Wie nehmen verschiedene **Stakeholder** ihrer Erfahrung nach digitale Angebot wahr und verhalten sich in Bezug darauf?

a) How do you think your **colleagues** perceive the digital offerings and act upon them? Could you give us an example?

Wie **nehmen** Ihre **Kollegen** digitale Angebote wahr und verhalten sich in Bezug darauf? Können Sie uns ein Beispiel nennen?

i) How does a colleague's **age / generation** affect his or her selling of digital offerings? Why?
Welchen Einfluss haben **Alter / Generation** eines Kollegen auf den Verkauf von digitalen Angeboten? Warum?

ii) How does **experience** affect a colleague's selling of digital offerings? Could you give us an example?
Welchen Einfluss hat **Erfahrung** eines Kollegen auf den Verkauf von digitalen Angeboten? Können Sie uns ein Beispiel geben?

b) How do your **supervisors** perceive the digital offerings and act upon them? How do they perceive the offerings differently than you? Why?
Wie nehmen Ihre **Vorgesetzten** die digitalen Angebote wahr und wie verhalten sie sich in Bezug darauf? Inwiefern nehmen Sie die Angebote anders wahr als Sie? Warum?

c) How do **customers** react? Why?
Wie reagieren **Kunden**? Warum?

i) To what extent are your customers pushing, **willing or hesitant** to request and purchase digital offerings? Why? Could you give us examples?
Inwiefern fordern Ihre Kunden bzw. sind Ihre **Kunden bereit oder zögerlich**, digitale Produkte anzufragen und zu erwerben? Warum? Könnten Sie uns Beispiele nennen?

ii) How does this differ for **different segments** (e.g., new versus existing customers, change of customer base)? Why?
Wie unterscheiden sich Kundenreaktionen in **verschiedenen Segmenten** (z.B. neue versus bestehende Kunden)? Warum?

iii) To what extent are you afraid to **endanger your customer relationships** when selling digital offerings? Why (e.g., loss of trust due to low quality)?
Inwiefern haben Sie **Angst,** existierende Kundenbeziehungen **zu gefährden** durch den Vertrieb digitaler Angebote? Warum (z.B. Vertrauensverlust wegen niedriger Qualität)?

iv) To what extent could selling digital offerings foster long-term customer relationships?
Inwiefern glauben Sie, dass der Vertrieb digitaler Angebote einen positiven Effekt auf Ihre langfristige Kundenbeziehung haben könnte?

d) How do **competitors** proceed regarding digital offerings? Could you give us examples?
Wie agieren **Wettbewerber** hinsichtlich digitaler Angebote? Können Sie uns Beispiele nennen?

6. To what extend to you **actively ask for support** from other colleagues, functions and/or departments? Why? Why not? In which situations?
Inwiefern **fragen** Sie **aktiv nach Unterstützung** von anderen Kollegen, Funktionen und/oder Bereichen? Warum? Warum nicht? In welchen Situationen?

a) Do you **actively ask for support** from different functions? When and for what? Whom do you address and include?
Involvieren Sie aktiv auch **andere Bereiche zur Unterstützung**? Wenn ja, wann und wozu? Wen sprechen Sie an/ involvieren Sie?

b) Why would you **not ask for additional support (e.g., loss of exclusive customer relation)?**
Warum würden Sie **keine zusätzliche Unterstützung** aus anderen Bereichen in Anspruch nehmen (z.B. Verlust exklusive Kundenbeziehung)?

c) Do/Would you perceive the integration of other functions in the sales process **as sensible?**
Wäre die **Unterstützung** aus anderen Bereichen aus Ihrer Sicht sinnvoll?

d) To what extent do you receive enough **support from the different functions**/ departments to sell digital offerings? Do you perceive that there are enough **capacities** to support you within [the company]?
Inwiefern haben Sie den Eindruck, dass Sie **ausreichend Unterstützung** von den verschiedenen Funktionen und Bereichen erhalten beim Vertrieb von digitalen Lösungen? Haben Sie den Eindruck, dass es ausreichend **Kapazitäten** für Unterstützung innerhalb [des Unternehmens] gibt?

Ending

1. What do you **wish [the company] would do** regarding the selling of digital offerings?
   Was **wünschen Sie sich, was [das Unternehmen] tun sollte** bezüglich des Verkaufs von digitalen Angeboten?

2. Is there **anything else** you would like to tell me?
   Gibt es **sonst irgendetwas**, was Sie mir mitteilen möchten?

Demographic questions

- **Job title**
  Stellenbezeichnung
- **Gender**
  Geschlecht
- **Age**
  Alter
- How long have you been working **for [the company]** (tenure in company - in years)?
  Wie lange arbeiten Sie bereits für [das Unternehmen] (Verweildauer im Unternehmen - in Jahren)?
- What is your **current position**, in which **country** are you working and **how long** have you been working in it (in years)?
  Wie lautet Ihre **aktuelle Position**, in **welchem Land** sind Sie tätig und **wie lange** arbeiten Sie bereits in dieser (in Jahren)?
- How much **work experience** do you already have in sales (in years)?
  Wie viel **Berufserfahrung** haben Sie bereits im Vertriebsbereich (in Jahren)?

Appendix 7: TIU rigor of qualitative study in exploring fear of losing face (adapted from Zeithaml et al. 2020)

Type of TIU rigor	Method of ensuring rigor criteria
Credibility Degree of acceptability of if-then propositions	▪ A team of two doctoral students and two professors conduced 59 face-to-face and telephone interviews ▪ For 1,5 years a broad range of salespeople, managers, and experts as well as customers that are relevant for digital innovations were interviewed ▪ An extensive interview guide was created and constantly developed during the interview process to ensure an extensive explorational data collection from the field of digital innovation selling
Transferability Degree to which the propositions are valid in other research contexts	▪ At two global companies several participants from different hierarchies were interviewed ▪ Similar insights came from different countries and business units
Dependability Degree to which other researchers would extract similar concepts and hypothesis from data	▪ Results were extracted from interviewees from different industries, experiences, hierarchies and represented the gender spread of the company ▪ Constructs and propositions were discussed and continuously compared within the researcher team
Confirmability Degree to which the objectivity of the results can be certified independently	▪ Open questioning was used to make sure results emerge from the data and not from the interviewer ▪ Results were extensively discussed within the researcher team and with external researchers ▪ Results were refined through several iteration with participants in person
Distinctiveness Degree to which the results are distinguishable from existing constructs and propositions	▪ An extensive literature review was conducted to carve out similarities and differences from existing constructs and propositions in sales literature ▪ Several research fields were reviewed to check if constructs or propositions occur in other academic fields

Appendix 8: Interview participants of qualitative study: specifying fear of losing face

Company	ID	Gender	Job title	Sells digital offerings?	Age	Experience with employer	Experience in current position	Sales experience	Region
C	1	Male	Senior Consultant Digital Products & Services	Yes	42	13	5	10+	North America/ Canada
	2	Male	Sales Engineer - Industrial Business	Yes	60	6	6	20+	United States
	3	Male	Sales Engineer - Industrial Business	Yes	50	18	5	20+	Canada
	4	Male	Director Industrial Business Unit - Sales	Yes	38	16.5	2	12	North America/ Canada
	5	Male	Industrial Scaffold Manager - Sales	Yes	54	5	5	9	Denmark
	6	Male	Business Development Manager Industry	Yes	42	4	2	5	MEA
	7	Male	Head of Digital Products and Services	Yes	36	10	2	2	Global
	8	Male	Head of Digital Transformation & Corporate Development	No	38	7	2	0	Global
	9	Male	Owner & Deputy Chairman of the Board (Former Managing Director Sales and Marketing)	No	48	23	8	4	Global
	10	Female	International Sales Trainer	No	54	10	3	8	Global

Appendix 9: Interview guidelines of qualitative study in specifying fear of losing face

Fear of losing face at selling digital offerings
Die Angst sein Gesicht zu verlieren beim Vertrieb von digitalen Angeboten

General Information:

4. The interview is **strictly confidential** and all results will be **anonymized**. We are particularly interested in general findings that emerge from all interviews combined.
   Das Interview ist **streng vertraulich** und alle Ergebnisse werden **anonymisiert**. Wir interessieren uns sich für Einzelantworten, sondern für Gesamtergebnisse, die sich aus der Summe der Interviews ergeben.

5. The interview is **temporarily taped** for transcription. The tapes are **deleted** right after transcription. The transcripts are the basis of our data analysis, but will remain **confidential** and will not be shared with [the company] or any third parties.
   Das Interview wird **vorübergehend** zur Abschrift **aufgezeichnet**. Die Aufzeichnung wird direkt nach der Abschrift **gelöscht**. Die Transkripte bilden die Basis unsere Datenanalyse; sie bleiben **vertraulich** und werden weder [dem Unternehmen] noch dritten Parteien zugänglich gemacht.

6. There are **no right or wrong answers** – we are interested in your **personal opinion**.
   Es gibt **keine richtigen oder falschen Antworten** – wir sind an Ihrer **persönlichen Meinung** interessiert.

Opening Questions (Ice-Breaker):

1. Which physical products do you mainly sell and what digital offerings do you offer your customer?
   Welche physischen Produkte verkaufen Sie hauptsächlich und welche digitalen Angebote bieten Sie Ihren Kunden an

2. What is your **educational Background**?
   Was ist **Ausbildungshintergrund**?

Key Questions:

4. How do you approach the sales of digital offerings?
   Wie gehen Sie an den Verkauf digitaler Angebote heran?

5. To what extend does selling digital offering cause you or the sales team problems? *(Laddering: repeatedly ask „why", to understand reasons in detail)*
   Inwiefern bereitet der Verkauf von digitalen Angeboten dem Vertrieb / Ihnen als Vertriebsmitarbeiter Probleme? (Laddering: wiederholt „warum" fragen, um die Gründe im Detail zu verstehen)

6. What emotions do you experience when talking about digital offerings with the customer?
   Welche Emotionen erleben Sie, wenn Sie mit Kunden über digitale Angebotesprechen?
   a) When do these emotions appear during the sales process?
      In welchen konkreten Phasen des Verkaufsprozesses treten diese Emotionen auf?
   b) What exactly triggers these emotions?
      Was genau löst diese Emotionen aus?
   c) What does the emotion contain or how does this emotion show?
      Was genau beinhaltet diese Emotion? Wie stellt sie sich dar?
   d) What results from these specific emotions?
      Was resultiert aus diesen spezifischen Emotionen?

e) To what extend do these emotions differ compared to selling physical products?
Inwiefern unterscheiden sich diese Emotionen vom Verkauf physischer Produkte? Warum ist das so?
f) In comparison, how is it among your colleagues? (Juniors/Seniors)
Wie sieht es zum Vergleich bei Ihren Kollegen (Anfänger/Veteranen) aus?

7. Are you afraid to lose your face in front of the customer when selling digital offerings?
Haben Sie beim Verkauf digitaler Lösung Angst vor Kunden Ihr Gesicht zu verlieren?
a) In your own words, what do understand by this? Was genau verstehen Sie darunter?
Laddering: wiederholt „**warum**" fragen, um die Gründe im Detail zu verstehen
b) Does the fear to lose face when selling digital offerings rather appear at junior or senior salespeople?
Kommt die Angst sein Gesicht zu verlieren beim Verkauf digitaler Lösungen eher bei neuen oder bei erfahrenen Vertrieblern vor? (warum?)

8. Are you at some point during a sales pitch worried regarding the following aspects when selling digital offering…
Haben Sie manchmal Sorge, dass bei einem Verkaufsgespräch, in dem es um digitale Produkte geht,
g) That the customer **evaluates** you **negatively**?
Sie von Kunden **negativ beurteilt** werden?
h) Your **personal reputation** suffers?
Ihre **persönliche Reputation oder Ansehen** leidet? (warum?) (Status, Image)
i) The **reputation of your company** could suffer?
Die **Reputation Ihrer Firma** leidet (warum?)
j) Your **expertise** is seen as low?
Ihre **Expertise** geringer bewertet wird? (warum?) (Kompetenz, Performance)
k) That you could **fail**?
Sie **versagen** könnten? (warum)?
l) That you could **embarrass** yourself?
Sie sich **blamieren**? (warum?)
m) The you could experience **rejection**?
Sie auf **Ablehnung** stoßen? (warum?)
n) You don't appear as **trustworthy**?
Sie nicht **vertrauensvoll** erscheinen? (warum?) (Glaubwürdigkeit)
o) You are perceived **worse than other salespeople**?
Sie schlechter wahrgenommen werden als **andere Vertriebler**? (warum?)
p) You are perceived worse **than salespeople from a competitor**?
Sie schlechter wahrgenommen werden als die **Vertriebler anderer Unternehmen**? (warum?)
q) That the **reputation** of the **whole sales force** suffers?
Das **Ansehen** des gesamten Vertriebs Ihres Unternehmens leidet (warum?)
r) You have to sell something you are **not fully convinced** by?
Sie etwas verkaufen, von dem sie nicht **überzeugt** sind? (warum?)

9. Are there **additional worries** you have when selling digital offerings?
Haben Sie noch **weitere Sorgen** beim Verkauf digitaler Lösungen?

10. How do you evaluate fear of losing face **beyond the context of digital innovation**?
Wie beurteilen Sie die Angst sein Gesicht zu verlieren **über den Kontext digitaler Angebote hinaus**?

Demographic questions

- **Job title and Duration**
Stellenbezeichnung und Dauer

- **Gender**
  Geschlecht
- **Age**
  Alter
- How long have you been working **for [the company]** (tenure in company - in years)?
  Wie lange arbeiten Sie bereits für [das Unternehmen] (Verweildauer im Unternehmen - in Jahren)?
- How much **work experience** do you already have in sales (in years)?
  Wie viel **Berufserfahrung** haben Sie bereits im Vertriebsbereich (in Jahren)?

Appendix 10: TIU rigor of qualitative study in specifying fear of losing face (adapted from Zeithaml et al. 2020)

Type of TIU rigor	Method of ensuring rigor criteria
Credibility Degree of acceptability of if-then propositions	▪ Face-to-face and online interviews at a global company with a broad representation of sales responsible persons were conducted during the course of six month ▪ An extensive interview guide was created and constantly developed during the interview process to ensure an extensive data collection in the field of interest (innovations and digital offerings)
Transferability Degree to which the propositions are valid in other research contexts	▪ Several participants from different hierarchies were interviewed and supported the theoretical concept ▪ Similar insights came from different countries and business units
Dependability Degree to which other researchers would extract similar concepts and hypothesis from data	▪ Results were extracted from interviewees from different industries, experiences, hierarchies and represented the gender spread of the company ▪ Constructs and propositions were discussed within the researcher team
Confirmability Degree to which the objectivity of the results can be certified independently	▪ Open questioning was used to make sure results emerge from the data and not from the interviewer ▪ All interviews were conducted separately ▪ Results were extensively discussed and refined through several iteration with participants
Distinctiveness Degree to which the results are distinguishable from existing constructs and propositions	▪ An extensive literature review was conducted to carve out similarities and differences from existing constructs and propositions in sales literature ▪ Several research fields were reviewed to check if constructs or propositions occur in other academic fields

Appendix 11: Initial item collection

1. Fear of losing face

When selling these offerings …

[FLF1] … I fear to lose my face in front of the customer
[FLF2] … I fear to be seen as incompetent by the customer
[FLF3] … I fear to be negatively evaluated by the customer
[FLF4] … I fear a bad judgement from my customer
[FLF5] … I fear to be seen as someone with low expertise
[FLF6] … I fear that may self-projection suffers
[FLF7] … I fear to be negatively judged by my customer
[FLF8] … I fear to look stupid
[FLF9] … I fear that my public image can be damaged
[FLF10] … I fear to embarrass myself
[FLF11] … I fear that my pride suffers
[FLF12] … I fear that my reputation suffers
[FLF13] … I fear the representation of my competence is threatened
[FLF14] … I fear to feel ashamed *(adapted from Vorhauser-Smith 2012)*
[FLF15] … I fear to humiliate myself *(adapted from Vorhauser-Smith 2012)*
[FLF16] … I am concerned with not looking stupid
[FLF17] … I fear to not come across as competent
[FLF18] … I am anxious that my customer will think less of me
[FLF19] … I fear to suffer a face loss
[FLF20] … I am afraid that my self-image is at stake or threatened
[FLF21] … I fear that my status will suffer *(adapted from Hu-Chan 2019)*
[FLF22] … I fear to be seen as a failure *(adapted from Hu-Chan 2019)*
[FLF23] … I fear to show my weaknesses *(adapted from Zhang, Cao, and Grigoriou 2011)*
[FLF24] … I fear to be embarrassed by simple mistakes I make in front of the customer *(adapted from Zhang, Cao, and Grigoriou 2011)*
[FLF25] … I fear to appear ignorant in front of the customer *(adapted from Zane and Yeh 2002)*
[FLF26] … I fear to make mistakes in front of the customer *(adapted from Zane and Yeh 2002)*
[FLF27] … I am concerned about the customer's expectations of me *(adapted from Zane and Yeh 2002)*
[FLF28] … I fear that my image as an expert will suffer *(adapted from Zhao, Chen, and Li 2020)*
[FLF29] … I am concerned with not bringing shame to myself *(Oetzel and Ting-Toomey 2003)*
[FLF30] … I am concerned with protecting my self-image *(Oetzel and Ting-Toomey 2003)*
[FLF31] … I am concerned with not appearing weak in front of the customer *(Oetzel and Ting-Toomey 2003)*
[FLF32] … I am concerned with protecting my personal pride *(Oetzel and Ting-Toomey 2003)*
[FLF33] … I fear to not be able to demonstrate my competence in front of the customer *(adapted from Ho 1976)*
[FLF34] … I fear to feel uncomfortable in front of the customer

Fear of losing face in the situation

[FLFS1] … I fear to lose my face in front of the customer in the actual sales situation
[FLFS2] … I fear to be seen as incompetent by the customer in the actual sales situation
[FLFS3] … I fear to be negatively evaluated by the customer in the actual sales situation

Fear of losing face in general

[FLFG1] … I fear to lose my face in front of the customer not only in the actual sales situation but in general
[FLFG2] … I fear to be seen as incompetent by the customer not only in the actual sales situation but in general
[FLFG2] … I fear to be negatively evaluated by the customer not only in the actual sales situation but in general

2. Expected consultation failure

When selling these offerings …

[ECF1] … I expect a consultation failure with my customer
[ECF2] … I expect that I will fail
[ECF3] … I anticipate the sales call will go wrong
[ECF4] … I expect the sales call to be a failure
[ECF5] … I have the feeling I am bidding for a sales that I won't get (*adapted from Johnson et al. 2016)*
[ECF6] … I anticipate a bad sales performance from myself
[ECF7] … I expect to make less sales *(adapted from Morris, LaForge, and Allen 1994)*
[ECF8] … I expect to not make a sale *(adapted from Morris, LaForge, and Allen 1994)*

Provide incorrect information

When selling these offerings …

[ECFI1] … I expect to provide incorrect information
[ECFI2] … I fear to that I won't be able to deliver the correct information to the customer
[ECFI3] … I fear that the customer thinks my information is wrong
[ECFI4] … I expect to not be able to communicate the right information
[ECFI5] … I don't have the right material to provide sufficient information to the customer
[ECFI6] … I assume to not have the proper information
[ECFI7] … I expect to not be an excellent source of information for these offerings *(adapted from Cravens et al. 1993; Johnson and Grayson 2005)*
[ECFI8] … I expect to be unable to provide accurate and concrete information about these offerings *(adapted from Behrman and Perreault 1982; Cravens et al. 1993)*

Lack answers to customer questions

When selling these offerings …

[ECFA1] … I expect that customers will ask questions that I cannot answer
[ECFA2] … I presume that the customer will perceive me as incompetent
[ECFA3] … I carefully plan what I am going to say or do to minimize mistakes *(Zane and Yeh 2002)*
[ECFA4] … I say I may be in error before commenting on something *(Zane and Yeh 2002)*
[ECFA5] … I expect to show a lack of knowledge *(adapted from Ho 1976)*
[ECFA6l … I expect to not be able to demonstrate subject matter expertise *(adapted from Gartner 2019)*
[ECFA7] … I expect to not have the necessary knowledge
[ECFA8] … I expect to not have the right answers to customer's questioning
[ECFA9] … I expect to be unable to sufficiently answer questions regarding specifications, application and functions of these offerings *(adapted from Behrman and Perreault 1982; Cravens et al. 1993)*

Break promises

When selling these offerings …

[ECFP1] … I expect that I cannot deliver what I promise
[ECFP2] … I presume that the customer will not receive what I promised
[ECFP3] … I assume that my company cannot follow up on my promises
[ECFP4] … I offer something that we cannot deliver
[ECFP5] … I feel like selling rather a dream than something we can actually deliver
[ECFP6] … I have to underpromise because otherwise I feel we won't be able to deliver
[ECFP7] … I downplay my and the company's abilities so that the customer doesn't have unrealistically high expectations *(adapted from Zane and Yeh 2002)*
[ECFP8] … I expect to sell a wrong product *(adapted from Morris, LaForge, and Allen 1994)*

3. Expected negative attribution

When selling these offerings goes wrong …

[ENA1] … I expect negative evaluations from my customer in terms of these offerings
[ENA2] … I think the customer assumes a certain inability on our side in terms of these offerings
[ENA3] … the customer assigns this to a low competence in terms of these offerings
[ENA4] … my perceived competence in terms of these offerings suffers more than the company's competence
[ENA5] … I expect a negative assessment from the customer only terms of these offerings

Salesperson's competence

When selling these offerings goes wrong …

[ENAS1] … my customer will think I am not competent in terms of these offerings *(adapted from Wang et al. 2017)*
[ENAS2] … my customer will think I am not well-qualified in terms of these offerings *(adapted from Teodorescu 2006)*
[ENAS3] … my customer will think I don't know these offerings very well *(adapted from Cravens et al. 1993; Johnson and Grayson 2005)*
[ENAS4] … my customer will think I don't have a high ability in terms of these offerings *(adapted from Cravens et al. 1993; Johnson and Grayson 2005)*
[ENAS5] … my customer will think I am not capable in terms of these offerings *(adapted from Wang et al. 2017)*
[ENAS6] … my customer will think I am not skillful in terms of these offerings *(adapted from Wang et al. 2017)*
[ENAS7] … my customer will think I don't possess expert selling' skills in terms of these offerings *(Cravens et al. 1993)*
[ENAS8] … my customer will think I don't possess detailed knowledge of these offerings *(Cravens et al. 1993)*
[ENAS9] … I expect my customer will think I am lacking skills in terms of these offerings *(adapted from Teodorescu 2006; Wang et al. 2017)*
[ENAS10] … I expect my customer will think I am not a professional in terms of these offerings (*adapted from Verbeke and Bagozzi 2000)*
[ENAS11] … I expect my customer will think I am not able to sell these offerings (*adapted from Verbeke and Bagozzi 2000)*
[ENAS12] … I expect my customer will think I am not reliable in terms of these offerings (*adapted from Verbeke and Bagozzi 2000)*
[ENAS13] … I expect my customer will think I am not the right salesperson for these kinds of offerings

Company's competence

When selling these offerings goes wrong …

[ENAC1] … my customer will think my company is not competent in terms of these offerings *(adapted from Wang et al. 2017)*
[ENAC2] … my customer will think my company is not capable in terms of these offerings *(adapted from Wang et al. 2017)*
[ENAC3] … my customer will think my company doesn't have a high ability in terms of these offerings *(adapted from Cravens et al. 1993; Johnson and Grayson 2005)*
[ENAC4] … my customer will think my company has no experts in terms of these offerings *(Cravens et al. 1993)*
[ENAC5] … I expect my customer will think my company is not professional in terms of these offerings (*adapted from Verbeke and Bagozzi 2000)*
[ENAC6] … I expect my customer will think my company is not able to sell these offerings (*adapted from Verbeke and Bagozzi 2000)*

[ENAC7] … I expect my customer will think my company is not reliable in terms of these offerings (*adapted from Verbeke and Bagozzi 2000)*
[ENAC8] … I expect my customer will think my company is not the right address for these kinds of offerings (*adapted from Verbeke and Bagozzi 2000)*

4. Expected negative generalization

When selling these offerings goes wrong …

[ENG1] … I expect negative evaluations from my customer in general and not only in terms of these offerings
[ENG2] … I think the customer assumes a certain inability on our side in general and not only in terms of these offerings
[ENG3] … the customer assigns this to a low competence in general and not only in terms of these offerings
[ENG4] … my perceived competence in general and not only in terms of these offerings suffers more than the company's competence
[ENG5] … I expect a general negative assessment from my customer
[ENG6] … I expect from my customer a negative assessment overall

Salesperson's competence

When selling these offerings goes wrong …

[ENGS1] … my customer will think I am not competent in general and not only in terms of these offerings *(adapted from Wang et al. 2017)*
[ENGS2] … my customer will think I am not well-qualified in general and not only in terms of these offerings *(adapted from Teodorescu 2006)*
[ENGS3] … my customer will think I don't know all the offerings I sell very well *(adapted from Cravens et al. 1993; Johnson and Grayson 2005)*
[ENGS4] … my customer will think I don't have a high ability in general and not only in terms of these offerings *(adapted from Cravens et al. 1993; Johnson and Grayson 2005)*
[ENGS5] … my customer will think I am not capable in general and not only in terms of these offerings *(adapted from Wang et al. 2017)*
[ENGS6] … my customer will think I am not skillful in general and not only in terms of these offerings *(adapted from Wang et al. 2017)*
[ENGS7] … my customer will think I don't possess expert selling' skills in general and not only in terms of these offerings *(Cravens et al. 1993)*
[ENGS8] … my customer will think I don't possess detailed knowledge of all the offerings I sell *(Cravens et al. 1993)*
[ENGS9] … I expect my customer will think I am lacking skills in general and not only in terms of these offerings *(adapted from Teodorescu 2006; Wang et al. 2017)*
[ENGS10] … I expect my customer will think I am not a professional in general and not only in terms of these offerings (*adapted from Verbeke and Bagozzi 2000)*
[ENGS11] … I expect my customer will think I am not able to sell in general (*adapted from Verbeke and Bagozzi 2000)*

[ENGS12] … I expect my customer will think I am not in general and not only in terms of these offerings (*adapted from Verbeke and Bagozzi 2000)*
[ENGS13] … I expect my customer will think I am not the right salesperson in general

Company's competence

When selling these offerings goes wrong …

[ENGC1] … my customer will think my company is not competent in general and not only in terms of these offerings *(adapted from Wang et al. 2017)*
[ENGC2] … my customer will think my company is not capable in general and not only in terms of these offerings *(adapted from Wang et al. 2017)*
[ENGC3] … my customer will think my company doesn't have a high ability in general and not only in terms of these offerings *(adapted from Cravens et al. 1993; Johnson and Grayson 2005)*
[ENGC4] … my customer will think my company has no experts in general and not only in terms of these offerings *(Cravens et al. 1993)*
[ENGC5] … I expect my customer will think my company is not professional in general and not only in terms of these offerings (*adapted from Verbeke and Bagozzi 2000)*
[ENGC6] … I expect my customer will think my company is not able to sell in general (*adapted from Verbeke and Bagozzi 2000)*
[ENGC7] … I expect my customer will think my company is not reliable in general and not only in terms of these offerings (*adapted from Verbeke and Bagozzi 2000)*
[ENGC8] … I expect my customer will think my company is not the right address in general and not only in terms of these offerings (*adapted from Verbeke and Bagozzi 2000)*

Appendix 12: Final construct and item overview

Expected Consultation Failure

Definition: *Salesperson's anticipation to be unable to fulfill customer's performance expectation within a sales consultation (that is, providing incorrect information, lack answers to customer questions, and break promises).*

When selling this innovation…
[ECF1_1] … I will probably provide incorrect information to my customer.
[ECF1_2] … I anticipate that I won't be able to deliver the correct information to my customer.
[ECF1_3] … I expect that I'm unable to communicate the right information to my customer.

[ECF2_1] … I think my customer will ask questions that I cannot answer.
[ECF2_2] … I assume that I will lack the right answers to my customer's questions.
[ECF2_3] … I expect that I lack the necessary knowledge to sufficiently answer my customer's questions.

[ECF3_1] … I expect to be unable to deliver on my promises.
[ECF3_2] … I anticipate being unable to meet my customer's expectations.
[ECF3_3] … I think it is likely that I will fall short on what I promise my customer.

Expected Negative Attribution (Salesperson's competence)

Definition: *Salespeople's expectation that the customer ascribes a sales consultation failure to a lack of competence regarding a specific product.*

When selling this innovation …
[ENASC_1] … I expect my customer thinks I'm not competent regarding this innovation.
[ENASC_2] … I assume my customer sees me as under-qualified regarding this innovation.
[ENASC_3] … my customer probably thinks I don't know this innovation very well.
[ENASC_4] … I expect that my customer perceives me as someone who is unable to sell this innovation.
[ENASC_5] … my customer might think that I lack the ability to sell this innovation.
[ENASC_6] … my customer is likely to think that I lack the skills to sell this innovation.

Expected Negative Attribution (Company's competence)

Definition: *Salespeople's expectation that the customer ascribes a sales consultation failure to a lack of competence regarding a specific product.*

When selling this innovation …
[ENACC_1] … I expect that my customer thinks my company is not competent regarding this innovation.

[ENACC_2] … my customer might think my company has little expertise regarding this innovation.
[ENACC_3] … my customer probably sees my company as the wrong supplier for this innovation.

Expected Negative Generalization (Salesperson's competence)

Definition: *Salespeople's expectation that the customer ascribes a sales consultation failure to a lack of competence that goes beyond a specific product.*

When selling this innovation…
[ENGSC_1] … I expect that my customer sees me as incompetent.
[ENGSC_2] … My customer might think that I'm not a competent salesperson.
[ENGSC_3] … My customer probably sees me as a salesperson who is not well qualified.
[ENGSC_4] … I expect that my customer perceives me as a salesperson who doesn't know the product portfolio very well.
[ENGSC_5] … My customer probably assumes I don't have a high ability as a salesperson.
[ENGSC_6] … My customer will perceive me as an incapable salesperson.

Expected Negative Generalization (Company's competence)

Definition: *Salespeople's expectation that the customer ascribes a sales consultation failure to a lack of competence that goes beyond a specific product.*

When selling this innovation…
[ENGCC_1] … I expect that my customer thinks my company is not a good supplier.
[ENGCC_2] … My customer might think my company is not capable.
[ENGCC_3] … My customer probably sees my company as an incompetent supplier.

Salespeople's Fear of Losing

Definition: *Definition: Salespeople's expectation that the customer ascribes a sales consultation failure to a lack of competence.*

[FOLF_1] I fear to lose my face in front of the customer.
[FOLF_2] I'm anxious to suffer a loss of face.
[FOLF_3] I'm afraid that my image will suffer.
[FOLF_4] I'm very worried that my customer will think less of me.
[FOLF_5] I fear to be embarrassed in front of the customer.

Salespeople's Fear of Losing in the Situation

Definition: *Salesperson's aversion to be negatively evaluated by customers with respect to the specific innovation.*

[FOLFS_1] I fear to lose face in front of the customer with respect to this innovation.
[FOLFS_2] I'm afraid to embarrass myself as a seller of this innovation.
[FOLFS_3] I'm fearful to look stupid with respect to this innovation.
[FOLFS_4] I'm anxious that my image as a seller of this innovation will suffer.
[FOLFS_5] I'm very worried that my customer will think less of me with respect to this innovation.

Salespeople's Fear of Losing in General

Definition: *Salesperson's aversion to be negatively evaluated by customers beyond the specific innovation.*

[FOLFG_1] I fear losing face in front of the customer as a salesperson in general.
[FOLFG_2] I'm afraid to embarrass myself as a sales professional.
[FOLFG_3] I'm fearful of looking stupid as a salesperson in general.
[FOLFG_4] I'm anxious that my professional image in general will suffer.
[FOLFG_5] I'm very worried that my customer will think less of me as a sales professional.

Note: Bold markings indicate final items

Appendix 13: Survey to measure fear of losing face and test propositions

Study on Innovation Selling

Innovations are new offerings based on a new idea, design, business model or technology and can be of physical, digital or a service nature. They can range from incremental to radical innovations.

Please briefly **describe a specific innovation** that your company last introduced to the market and that you sell: *(open textbox)*

The above described **innovation** will be **the base** for the following questions and will be referred to as "***this innovation***". Please answer all following questions with **reference to** your described innovation.

Technology Newness (adapted from Clauß 2017; Jin 2000)
To what extent would you agree with the following statements regarding this innovation?
(7-point scale: 1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree)

- Relative to the competitors this innovation is technically very new.
- This innovation is very advanced in terms of its technology capabilities
- Compared to our traditional products this innovation possesses a high technology newness.

Target Group Newness (adapted from Clauß 2017; Jin 2000)
To what extent would you agree with the following statements regarding this innovation?
(7-point scale: 1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree)

- This innovation is mainly purchased by old target groups of the organization
- This innovation addresses opportunities that arise in new target groups.
- This innovation addresses new, unserved target groups.

Industry Technology Newness (adapted from Clauß 2017; Jin 2000)
To what extent would you agree with the following statements if you think about **innovations in general in your industry?**
(7-point scale: 1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree)

- In general, innovations in our industry are technically very new.
- Innovations in our industry are usually very advanced in terms of their technology capabilities
- Compared to non-innovative products innovations in our industry possesses a high technology newness in general.

Industry Target Group Newness (adapted from Clauß 2017; Jin 2000)
To what extent would you agree with the following statements regarding this innovation?
(7-point scale: 1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree)

- Innovations in our industry usually address opportunities that arise in new target groups.
- Innovations in our industry are mainly purchased by target groups.
- Innovations in our industry usually address new, unserved target groups.

Effort
What **percentage of your time** do you spend selling this innovation?
(numerical box)

Extrinsic Motivation (adapted from Oliver and Anderson 1994)
(7-point scale: 1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree)
To what extent would you agree with the following statements regarding **selling this innovation?**

- If it weren't for the money, I would not be selling this innovation.
- I sell this innovation because I get paid to sell.
- After a long hard day, I realize that if it weren't for the money, I wouldn't put up with selling this innovation.

Intrinsic Motivation (adapted from Oliver and Anderson 1994)
(7-point scale: 1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree)
To what extent would you agree with the following statements regarding **selling this innovation?**

- When I perform well at selling this innovation, I know it's because of my own desire to achieve.
- I don't need a reason to sell this innovation; I sell it because I want to.
- Becoming successful at selling this innovation is something I want to do for me.
- If I were independently wealthy, I would still sell this innovation for the challenge of it.

Price (own operationalization)
In percent, how much **more or less** does this innovation **cost** compared to other typical products of your company?
(numerical box)

Quality and Value (Sweeney and Soutar 2001)
To what extent would you agree with the following statements regarding this innovation?
(5-point differential)
This innovation …
1. … has a very poor quality / … has a very high quality
2. … is inferior / … is superior
4. … has a very poor price-value ratio / … has a very high price-value ratio
5. … offers low value for money / … offers high value for money

Innovation Info (own operationalization)

- For how many years has this innovation existed?
  (numerical box)
- How many years of experience do you have with selling this innovation?
  (numerical box)

Sales Performance - Innovation Selling (adapted from Pilling, Donthu, and Henson 1999)

- How financially successful do you consider your selling of this innovation?
  (7-point scale: 1=very unsuccessful, 7=very successful)

- Rate your success as a salesperson selling this innovation compared to your peers in the industry.
  (7-point scale 1=much less successful, 7=much more successful)
- Compared to your peers in sales how would you rate your performance selling this innovation?
  (7-point scale: 1 =much lower than average, 7=much higher than average)

Attention check
(7-point scale: 1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree)
- Please choose „totally agree" here

Expected Consultation Failure (own operationalization)
To what extent would you agree with the following statements in terms of **selling this innovation**?
(7-point scale: 1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree)
When selling this innovation…
- … I will probably provide incorrect information to my customer.
- … I anticipate that I won't be able to deliver the correct information to my customer.
- … I expect that I'm unable to communicate the right information to my customer.

- … I think my customer will ask questions that I cannot answer.
- … I assume that I will lack the right answers to my customer's questions.
- … I expect that I lack the necessary knowledge to sufficiently answer my customer's questions.

- … I expect to be unable to deliver on my promises.
- … I anticipate being unable to meet my customer's expectations.
- … I think it is likely that I will fall short on what I promise my customer.

Expected Negative Attribution (Salesperson's competence) (own operationalization)
To what extent would you agree with the following statements in terms of **selling this innovation**?
(7-point scale: 1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree)
When selling this innovation …
- … I expect my customer thinks I'm not competent regarding this innovation.
- … I assume my customer sees me as under-qualified regarding this innovation.
- … my customer probably thinks I don't know this innovation very well.
- … I expect that my customer perceives me as someone who is unable to sell this innovation.
- … my customer might think that I lack the ability to sell this innovation.
- … my customer is likely to think that I lack the skills to sell this innovation.

Expected Negative Attribution (Company's competence) (own operationalization)
To what extent would you agree with the following statements in terms of **selling this innovation**?
(7-point scale: 1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree)

When selling this innovation …

- … I expect that my customer thinks my company is not competent regarding this innovation.
- … my customer might think my company has little expertise regarding this innovation.
- … my customer probably sees my company as the wrong supplier for this innovation.

Expected Negative Generalization (Salesperson's competence)
(own operationalization)
To what extent would you agree with the following statements in terms of **selling this innovation**?
(7-point scale: 1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree)
When selling this innovation…

- … I expect that my customer sees me as incompetent.
- … My customer might think that I'm not a competent salesperson.
- … My customer probably sees me as a salesperson who is not well qualified.
- … I expect that my customer perceives me as a salesperson who doesn't know the product portfolio very well.
- … My customer probably assumes I don't have a high ability as a salesperson.
- … My customer will perceive me as an incapable salesperson.

Expected Negative Generalization (Company's competence)
(own operationalization)
To what extent would you agree with the following statements in terms of **selling this innovation**?
(7-point scale: 1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree)
When selling this innovation…

- … I expect that my customer thinks my company is not a good supplier.
- … My customer might think my company is not capable.
- … My customer probably sees my company as an incompetent supplier.

Salespeople's Fear of Losing (own operationalization)
To what extent would you agree with the following statements in terms of **selling this innovation**?
(7-point scale: 1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree)
When selling this innovation…

- … I fear to lose my face in front of the customer.
- … I'm anxious to suffer a loss of face.
- … I'm afraid that my image will suffer.
- … I'm very worried that my customer will think less of me.
- … I fear to be embarrassed in front of the customer.

Salespeople's Fear of Losing in the Situation (own operationalization)
To what extent would you agree with the following statements in terms of **selling this innovation**?
(7-point scale: 1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree)

- I fear to lose face in front of the customer with respect to this innovation.
- I'm afraid to embarrass myself as a seller of this innovation.

- I'm fearful to look stupid with respect to this innovation.
- I'm anxious that my image as a seller of this innovation will suffer.
- I'm very worried that my customer will think less of me with respect to this innovation.

Salespeople's Fear of Losing in General (own operationalization)
To what extent would you agree with the following statements in terms of **selling this innovation**?
(7-point scale: 1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree)
When selling this innovation…

- I fear losing face in front of the customer as a salesperson in general.
- I'm afraid to embarrass myself as a sales professional.
- I'm fearful of looking stupid as a salesperson in general.
- I'm anxious that my professional image in general will suffer.
- I'm very worried that my customer will think less of me as a sales professional.

Change readiness (Daley 1991; Eby et al. 2000)
To what extent would you agree with the following statements?
(7-point scale: 1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree)

- I am resistant to change.
- I am an agent of change.
- I embrace changes in terms of new products.

Self-expectation (based on Trinidad 2019)
To what extent would you agree with the following statements in terms of **selling this innovation**?
(7-point scale: 1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree)

- I should perform well when selling this innovation.
- It is important that I sell this innovation as well as I sell other products.
- I should know all the aspects of this innovation.
- It is important to know as many aspects of this innovation as I know of other products.

Relationship (adapted from Palmatier et al. 2007)
To what extent would you agree with the following statements in terms of your **customer relationships?**
(7-point scale: 1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree)

- I have a strong relationship with my customers.
- I am happy with the relationship with my customers.
- I am satisfied with the relationship I have with my customers.
- My customers have a strong relationship with my company.
- My customers are happy with the relationship with my company.
- My customers are satisfied with the relationship they have with my company.

Company standing (adapted from Xie and Keh 2016)
To what extent would you agree with the following statements in terms of **your company's standing**?
(7-point scale: 1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree)

- My company is well known in the industry.

- My company is well respected in the industry.
- My company is an important player in the industry.
- My company is a successful company in the industry.

Industry culture (based on Wallach 1983)
To what extent would you agree with the following statements regarding **your industry**?
(7-point scale: 1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree)

- My industry has a supportive culture.
- I feel safe in my industry.
- I work in a trustful industry.
- My industry is very forgiving.

Attention check
(7-point scale: 1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree)

- Please choose „totally disagree" here

Gaps of understanding (digital) innovations (own operationalization)
To what extent would you agree with the following statements?
(7-point scale: 1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree)

- I understand the technology of the traditional products better than the technology of this innovation.

Gaps of understanding customers (own operationalization)
To what extent would you agree with the following statements?
(7-point scale: 1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree)

- I understand the customers' processes addressed by the traditional products better than the customers' processes addressed by this innovation.

Perceptibility of gaps (own operationalization)
To what extent would you agree with the following statements?
(7-point scale: 1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree)

- My customer understands this innovation.

Compensation of gaps (own operationalization)
To what extent would you agree with the following statements?
(7-point scale: 1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree)

- I receive all the necessary information from my company to sell this innovation

Prevention Focus (adapted from Fellner et al. 2007)
To what extent would you agree with the following statements?
(7-point scale: 1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree)

- When selling this innovation, I always try to make my work as accurate and error-free as possible.
- I often think about what other people expect of me regarding selling this innovation
- For me, it is very important not to do anything wrong when selling this innovation

- Rules and regulations are helpful and necessary for me when selling this innovation

Performance-Avoidance Orientation (Silver, Dwyer, and Alford 2006)
To what extent would you agree with the following statements?
(7-point scale: 1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree)

- My fear of performing poorly at selling this innovation is often what motivates me.
- I am afraid that if I ask my sales managers a "dumb" question regarding this innovation, they might not think I am very smart.
- I worry about the possibility of not meeting my sales goals or quotas for this innovation.
- I just want to avoid doing poorly at selling digital innovations.

Sales Call Anxiety (Perceived negative evaluation from customers during closing) (Verbeke and Bagozzi 2000)
To what extent would you agree with the following statements **when a sales call for this innovation would go wrong?**
(7-point scale: 1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree)
When a sales call for this innovation goes wrong the customer will think the following of me…

- …that I do not have authority.
- …that I am not professional.
- …that I am an insecure person.
- …that I am not able to sell.
- …that I am not reliable.
- …that salespeople from other companies are better salespeople than I.

When a sales call for this innovation goes wrong, I will think of the customer…

- …that they will laugh at me afterward.
- …that they will not do any more business with me at a later stage.

Consciousness of Face (Zhang, Cao, and Grigoriou 2011)
To what extent would you agree with the following statements?
(7-point scale: 1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree)

- I always avoid talking about my weakness in terms of selling this innovation
- I try to avoid letting others think that I am ignorant regarding this innovation even if I really am.
- I do my best to hide my weakness regarding selling this innovation before others.
- It is hard for me to acknowledge a mistake at selling this innovation even if I am really wrong.

Attitude Toward the Color Blue (Miller and Simmering 2022)
To what extent would you agree with the following statements?
(7-point scale: 1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree)

- Blue is a beautiful color.
- Blue is a lovely color.
- I like the color blue.

Face Sensitivity (Tuncel et al. 2020)
To what extent would you agree with the following statements?
(7-point scale: 1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree)

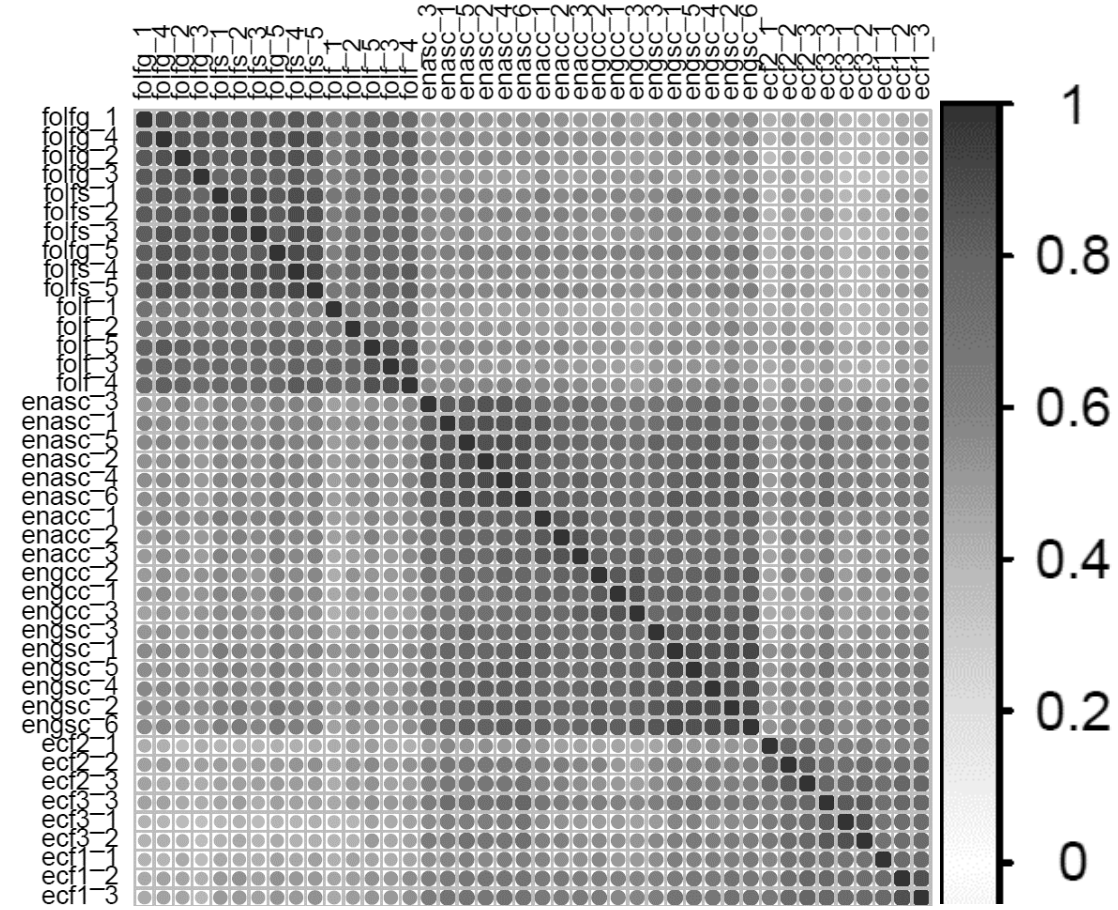
- I am hurt when others cannot accept who I am.
- My feelings get hurt easily.
- I am pretty thin-skinned

Demographics

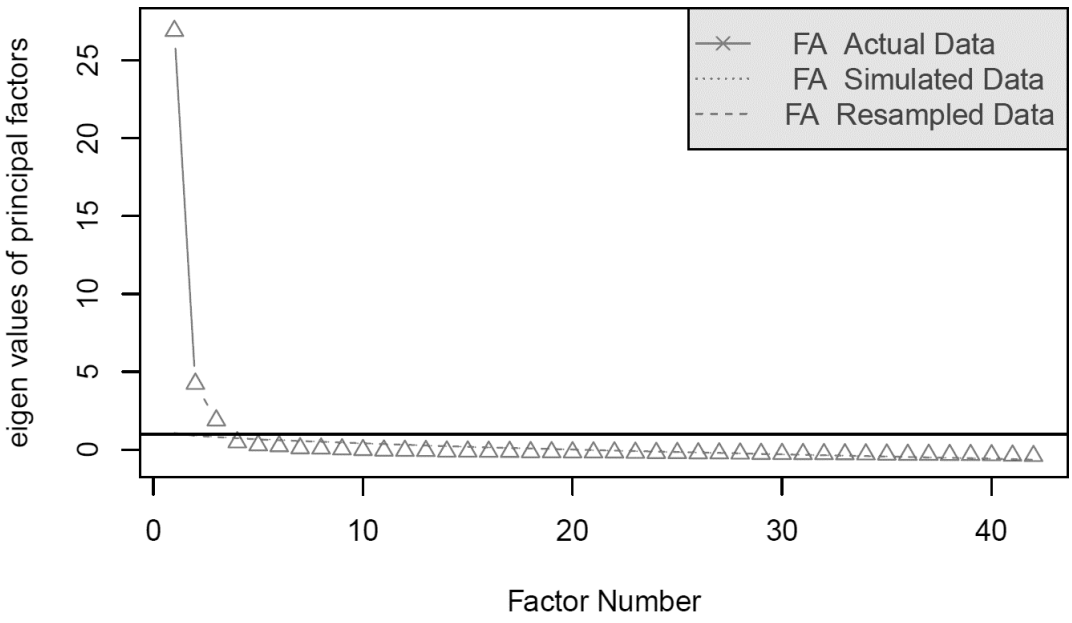
- What is your job title?
- In which industry do you work?
- Are you a sales representative in the field or a sales representative in the office?
- For how many years have you been working in sales?
- In what country do you work?
- For how many years have you been working in this industry?
- How many employees work in your company?
- How old are you?
- Your gender?
- What is your education level?

Appendix 14: Additional results exploratory factor analysis

Item correlation matrix



Parallel analysis scree plots



Factor extraction – Eigenvalues

[1] 27.23041098 4.61333079 2.29654199 0.78201788 0.71272584 0.56785528
[7] 0.52019550 0.48408770 0.35874015 0.33171294 0.29863009 0.29465002
[13] 0.26752851 0.24308375 0.23323321 0.20833612 0.19433890 0.17815599
[19] 0.17133300 0.16732524 0.14889637 0.14491446 0.13236846 0.12730391
[25] 0.11823210 0.11266786 0.10537806 0.09948790 0.09493342 0.09058573
[31] 0.08038131 0.07946222 0.06924504 0.06615837 0.06215323 0.05992114
[37] 0.05229556 0.05042452 0.04506934 0.04283231 0.03842042 0.02463441

Appendix 15: Additional results of confirmatory factor analysis

Model fit

ecf_cfa = Expected Consultation Failure
ene_cfa (eng) = Expected Negative Generalization
folf_cfa = Fear of Losing Face

70 iterations	
Estimator	ML
Optimization method	NLMINB
Number of model parameters	53
Number of observations	204
Model Test User Model:	
Test statistic	816.084
Degrees of freedom	272
P-value (Chi-square)	0.000
Model Test Baseline Model:	
Test statistic	8160.775
Degrees of freedom	300
P-value	0.000
User Model versus Baseline Model:	
Comparative Fit Index ()	0.931
Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)	0.924
Loglikelihood and Information Criteria:	
Loglikelihood user model (H0)	-6535.780
Loglikelihood unrestricted model (H1)	-6127.738
Akaike (AIC)	13177.560
Bayesian (BIC)	13353.420
Sample-size adjusted Bayesian (BIC)	13185.501
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation:	
RMSEA	0.099
90 Percent confidence interval - lower	0.091
90 Percent confidence interval - upper	0.107
P-value RMSEA <= 0.05	0.000
Standardized Root Mean Square Residual:	
SRMR	0.031
Parameter Estimates:	
Standard errors	Standard
Information	Expected
Information saturated (h1) model	Structured

Loadings

Latent Variables:

	Estimate	Std.Err	z-value	P(>|z|)	Std.lv	Std.all
ecf_cfa =~						
ecf1_2	1.000			1.720	0.891	
ecf1_3	1.012	0.051	19.894	0.000	1.740	0.904
ecf2_2	0.958	0.053	17.967	0.000	1.648	0.865
ecf2_3	1.014	0.052	19.468	0.000	1.744	0.896
ecf3_2	0.951	0.053	18.061	0.000	1.636	0.867
ecf3_3	0.912	0.048	19.076	0.000	1.569	0.888
ene_cfa =~						
engsc_1	1.000			1.460	0.939	
engsc_2	1.048	0.037	28.361	0.000	1.530	0.948
engsc_3	0.983	0.043	22.690	0.000	1.435	0.893
engsc_4	0.981	0.037	26.270	0.000	1.432	0.931
engsc_5	1.048	0.039	26.641	0.000	1.529	0.934
engsc_6	1.065	0.036	29.614	0.000	1.555	0.957
engcc_1	0.921	0.044	20.920	0.000	1.344	0.870
engcc_2	0.988	0.045	21.866	0.000	1.442	0.883
engcc_3	0.959	0.044	21.612	0.000	1.400	0.879
folf_cfa =~						
folfs_1	1.000			1.864	0.927	
folfs_2	0.989	0.040	24.967	0.000	1.845	0.930
folfs_3	0.977	0.038	25.656	0.000	1.822	0.936
folfs_4	0.963	0.034	28.197	0.000	1.796	0.959
folfs_5	0.945	0.037	25.627	0.000	1.762	0.936
folfg_1	0.909	0.040	22.867	0.000	1.694	0.906
folfg_2	0.917	0.039	23.719	0.000	1.711	0.916
folfg_3	0.945	0.044	21.366	0.000	1.762	0.886
folfg_4	0.958	0.037	25.731	0.000	1.786	0.937
folfg_5	0.947	0.039	24.136	0.000	1.766	0.921

Covariances:

	Estimate	Std.Err	z-value	P(>|z|)	Std.lv	Std.all
ecf_cfa ~~						
ene_cfa	1.933	0.240	8.058	0.000	0.770	0.770
folf_cfa	1.854	0.277	6.692	0.000	0.578	0.578
ene_cfa ~~						
folf_cfa	1.851	0.243	7.629	0.000	0.680	0.680

Variances:

	Estimate	Std.Err	z-value	P(>|z|)	Std.lv	Std.all
.ecf1_2	0.771	0.091	8.430	0.000	0.771	0.207
.ecf1_3	0.676	0.083	8.149	0.000	0.676	0.183
.ecf2_2	0.912	0.104	8.809	0.000	0.912	0.252
.ecf2_3	0.746	0.090	8.327	0.000	0.746	0.197
.ecf3_2	0.883	0.100	8.784	0.000	0.883	0.248
.ecf3_3	0.658	0.078	8.472	0.000	0.658	0.211
.engsc_1	0.286	0.033	8.748	0.000	0.286	0.118
.engsc_2	0.265	0.031	8.498	0.000	0.265	0.102
.engsc_3	0.522	0.056	9.388	0.000	0.522	0.202
.engsc_4	0.317	0.036	8.929	0.000	0.317	0.134
.engsc_5	0.343	0.039	8.864	0.000	0.343	0.128
.engsc_6	0.224	0.028	8.138	0.000	0.224	0.085
.engcc_1	0.582	0.061	9.541	0.000	0.582	0.244

.engcc_2	0.590	0.062	9.464	0.000	0.590	0.221
.engcc_3	0.575	0.061	9.485	0.000	0.575	0.227
.folfs_1	0.569	0.062	9.147	0.000	0.569	0.141
.folfs_2	0.536	0.059	9.108	0.000	0.536	0.136
.folfs_3	0.466	0.052	8.986	0.000	0.466	0.123
.folfs_4	0.283	0.034	8.313	0.000	0.283	0.081
.folfs_5	0.438	0.049	8.992	0.000	0.438	0.124
.folfg_1	0.629	0.067	9.389	0.000	0.629	0.180
.folfg_2	0.562	0.061	9.289	0.000	0.562	0.161
.folfg_3	0.854	0.090	9.534	0.000	0.854	0.216
.folfg_4	0.442	0.049	8.972	0.000	0.442	0.122
.folfg_5	0.561	0.061	9.233	0.000	0.561	0.153
ecf_cfa	2.958	0.365	8.111	0.000	1.000	1.000
ene_cfa	2.130	0.238	8.947	0.000	1.000	1.000
folf_cfa	3.476	0.397	8.746	0.000	1.000	1.000

Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, average variance extracted

	ecf_cfa	ene_cfa	folf_cfa
alpha	0.9558688	0.9791469	0.9833808
CR	0.9560815	0.9789539	0.9834413
avevar	0.7841802	0.8381475	0.8559928

Discriminant and convergent validity of factors

	folf_disc	ecf_disc	ene_disc
alpha	0.9833808	0.9558688	0.9791469
CR	0.9834413	0.9560815	0.9789539
avevar	0.8559928	0.7841802	0.8381475

	flf_ds	ecf_ds	en_dsc
folf_disc	1.000		
ecf_disc	0.334	1.000	
ene_disc	0.463	0.593	1.000

Discriminant and convergent validity towards adjacent concepts of fear of losing face

	folf	preventfocus	perfavoid	salescallanx	faceconscious
alpha	0.9833808	0.8236754	0.8417767	0.9356958	0.9023369
CR	0.9834433	0.8294797	0.8505855	0.9382221	0.9110098
avevar	0.8560038	0.5513953	0.5937491	0.7197697	0.7241754

	folf	preventfocus	perfavoid	salescallanx	faceconscious
folf	1.000				
preventfocus	0.019	1.000			
perfavoid	0.081	0.284	1.000		
salescallanx	0.278	0.044	0.004	1.000	
faceconsci	0.137	0.007	0.000	0.368	1.000

Appendix 16: Predictive validity of fear of losing face measurement scale

Predictive Validity of FOLF

Residuals:

Min	1Q	Median	3Q	Max
-3.1873	-0.3342	0.0779	0.5343	1.8459

Coefficients:

	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(>|t|)	
(Intercept)	6.112257	0.682416	8.957	3.78e-16	***
folf	-0.093149	0.033512	-2.780	0.00601	**
country2	0.744460	0.142048	5.241	4.37e-07	***
age	-0.008765	0.005150	-1.702	0.09047	.
gender	-0.091672	0.128136	-0.715	0.47526	
as.factor(education)2	-0.292682	0.404882	-0.723	0.47067	
as.factor(education)3	-0.074297	0.398772	-0.186	0.85240	
as.factor(education)4	0.147639	0.402603	0.367	0.71426	
as.factor(education)5	-0.320923	0.532158	-0.603	0.54722	
as.factor(industry)10	0.128695	0.502521	0.256	0.79816	
as.factor(industry)11	0.557124	0.547135	1.018	0.30990	
as.factor(industry)12	0.100553	0.559259	0.180	0.85751	
as.factor(industry)13	0.236459	0.518282	0.456	0.64876	
as.factor(industry)2	-0.365219	0.550076	-0.664	0.50756	
as.factor(industry)3	0.049312	0.518130	0.095	0.92428	
as.factor(industry)4	0.474405	0.599015	0.792	0.42940	
as.factor(industry)5	0.273134	0.586732	0.466	0.64211	
as.factor(industry)6	-0.438872	0.548257	-0.800	0.42447	
as.factor(industry)7	-0.045769	0.499504	-0.092	0.92709	
as.factor(industry)8	0.015294	0.536925	0.028	0.97731	
as.factor(industry)9	0.009653	0.498393	0.019	0.98457	

Signif. codes: 0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

Residual standard error: 0.8139 on 183 degrees of freedom
Multiple R-squared: 0.2884, Adjusted R-squared: 0.2106
F-statistic: 3.707 on 20 and 183 DF, p-value: 1.086e-06

Extended Abstract

Digital innovations have become a key addition to manufactures' product portfolios. However, established salespeople frequently dread selling them. This observation is surprising, as salespeople have often been challenged to sell new offerings in the past—so what differentiates selling digital innovation from other offerings? This study aims to understand why established salespeople lack success in selling digital innovations and to identify whether uncovered phenomena are expandable beyond the digital innovation context and if distinct measures can be developed in that regard. Finally, this research intends to offer managerial levers and insights to academia on how to alleviate potential issues in terms of selling digital innovations.

To this end, the study begins with a literature review on the research fields of digital innovation and innovation selling. Examining key results of extant research in these fields reveals the foundational research void of a large disconnect between these two streams. In addition, the second part of the literature review explains this study's key construct and its origin from a general conceptual standpoint and discusses its adjacent concepts. Three empirical studies are subsequently conducted.

First, Zeithaml et al.'s (2020) theory developing theories-in-use (TIU) approach is employed for an initial exploratory study. Drawing on 59 interviews with experts from two international manufacturers, this study identifies a mechanism that extant literature has not explored. That is, established industrial salespeople often refrain from digital innovation selling because they are afraid to lose their face when interacting with customers. Specifically, they are afraid to embarrass themselves, damage their social image, and receive negative customer evaluations. On the one hand, the findings indicate that this fear of losing face is driven by salespeople's gaps in understanding digital innovations compared to non-digital innovations in terms of the embedded technologies, value creation potential, and perceived quality. On the other hand, the findings reveal that salespeople's fear of losing face also results from gaps in understanding customers and purchasing organizations' processes in regard to selling digital innovation. In addition, the results indicate that the degree to which this fear emerges and affects sales performance is impacted by factors related to salespeople's psychological safety and motivation.

Second, drawing on 10 in-depth interviews with salespeople and managers from another global manufacturer, the subsequent empirical study provides an in-depth understanding of salespeople's fear of losing face and its development process. The study indicates that the mechanism of fear of losing face is not only limited to the context of digital innovations but also

appears in the broader context of innovation selling. Specifically, innovations that possess a high degree of target group newness and technology newness provide a setting that is likely to evoke a fear of losing face among established salespeople. Moreover, the results describe a detailed process for the emergence of fear of losing face. First, salespeople are likely to expect a sales consultation failure when selling innovations with a high degree of target group newness and technology newness. Simultaneously, they benefit from their experience, change readiness, and self-expectation as mitigating factors. Second, by integrating the concept of metaperception the results convey that salespeople who expect a consultation failure are likely to expect negative attribution and negative generalization from their customers. In addition, the findings demonstrate that this relationship is moderated by the customer relationship, company standing, and industry culture. Third, drawing from the concept of negative self-conscious emotions, the results explain how expected negative attribution and negative generalization lead to salespeople's fear of losing face. The results revealed that fear of losing face divides into fear of losing face in a specific situation and general fear of losing face.

Third, an additional study examines whether salespeople's fear of losing face can be distinctly measured and if the conceptual propositions are confirmable on quantitative bases. The study hence employs Churchill's (1979) established scale development process to create and validate a scale for the conceptualization of salespeople's fear of losing face. A survey of 204 participants from several industries in the United States and the United Kingdom was therefore conducted. Based on exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, the findings indicate that fear of losing face can be measured with strong construct validity by a scale of 10 items (i.e., five refer to fear of losing face in sales situations and five to fear of losing face that goes beyond the sales situation). In addition, the results of a structural equation modeling analysis offer nomological validity conveying that the conceptual propositions regarding the emergence of salespeople's fear of losing face are mainly confirmed.

Based on these empirical studies, this study offers several contributions to academia. First, it begins to close the relevant research gap in regard to why traditional manufacturers lack market success with digital innovation offerings (e.g., Anding 2019; Dietz, Khan, and Rab 2020; Gebauer et al. 2020; Kane et al. 2015): when selling digital innovations, some established salespeople fear unpleasant situations that lead to a loss of face. Second, this research employs the social concept of face to a new context; and third, introduced fear of losing face as a novel mechanism for challenges of digital innovation selling. Fourth, this research outlines a theoretically and empirically grounded and qualitatively validated understanding of the fear of

losing face process in sales and integrates the concepts of metaperception and negative self-conscious emotions. Fifth, by applying the concept of fear of losing to a broader context, the results also contribute to the literature on innovation selling in general. Sixth, this research offers a new and validated measurement for fear of losing face. Seventh and last, it addresses Zeithaml et al.'s (2020) request for more genuine marketing theories and concepts.

Additionally, the study provides concrete guidance for manufacturers that are troubled by digital innovation selling and innovation selling in general. First, to reduce the likelihood of salespeople's fear of losing face impeding selling success, managers should (1) close gaps in salespeople's understanding of digital innovations and customers, (2) compensate for prevailing knowledge gaps that they cannot close, and (3) motivate salespeople to sell digital innovations despite their fear of losing face. In addition, managers should aim to (4) reduce salespeople's expectations of consultations failures by creating effective support structures and (5) distinctively train salespeople for their new role and evoke realistic self-expectation, as well as (6) selecting the right salespeople and (7) develop sales teams to collectively address the challenges of digital innovation selling.

Finally, the present study offers several impulses for further research and possesses certain limitations. For example, future research could build on the novel conceptualization of salespeople's fear of losing face and its validated measurement. Since the qualitative studies were conducted with manufacturers headquartered in Germany, future research could test salespeople's fear of losing face in other national contexts. In addition, researchers could for example broaden the perspective by extending the focus to new salespeople and examining the concept of fear of losing face not solely on the individual salesperson level, but also the collective or team level.

Zusammenfassung

Herstellende Unternehmen bieten zunehmend neue komplexe Produkte an. Hierbei sind digitale Innovationen zu einer wichtigen Ergänzung des Produktportfolios der Unternehmen geworden. Dennoch haben etablierte Vertriebler häufig Angst davor, sie zu verkaufen. Diese Beobachtung ist überraschend, da Vertriebler in der Vergangenheit oft vor der Herausforderung standen, neue Angebote zu verkaufen - was also unterscheidet den Verkauf digitaler Innovationen von anderen Angeboten? Ziel dieser Arbeit ist es daher, zu verstehen, warum manche Vertriebler beim Verkauf digitaler Innovationen nicht erfolgreich sind, und herauszufinden, ob sich die aufgedeckten Phänomene über den Kontext digitaler Innovationen hinaus ausweiten und messen lassen. Zudem soll diese Studie Managementansätze für die Praxis liefern und der Forschung neue Erkenntnisse ermöglichen, wie potenzielle Probleme beim Verkauf digitaler Innovationen gemildert werden können.

Zu diesem Zweck beginnt diese Arbeit mit einer Literaturübersicht über die Forschungsbereiche „digitale Innovationen“ und „Vertrieb von Innovationen“. Die Untersuchung der wichtigsten Ergebnisse der bisherigen Forschungen in diesen Bereichen erarbeitet die grundlegende Forschungslücke. Darüber hinaus wird im zweiten Teil des Literaturüberblicks das zentrale Konstrukt dieser Studie und sein Ursprung aus einem allgemeinen konzeptionellen Blickwinkel erläutert und angrenzenden Konzepte diskutiert. Anschließend werden drei empirische Studien durchgeführt.

Zunächst wird der theorieentwickelnde Theories-in-Use-Ansatz (TIU) von Zeithaml et al. (2020) für eine erste explorative Studie verwendet. Auf der Grundlage von 59 Experteninterviews bei zwei internationalen herstellenden Unternehmen identifiziert diese Studie einen Mechanismus, der in der bisherigen Vertriebsliteratur nicht untersucht wurde. Etablierte Vertriebler in der Industrie verzichten häufig auf den Verkauf digitaler Innovationen, weil sie befürchten, bei Kundenkontakten ihr Gesicht zu verlieren. Insbesondere haben sie Angst, sich zu blamieren, ihr soziales Image zu beschädigen und negative Kundenbewertungen zu erhalten. Die Ergebnisse deuten einerseits darauf hin, dass diese Angst aus dem mangelnden Verständnis digitaler Innovationen im Vergleich zu nicht-digitalen Innovationen bezüglich der eingebetteten Technologien, des Wertschöpfungspotenzials und der wahrgenommenen Qualität resultiert. Andererseits zeigen die Ergebnisse, dass die Angst der Vertriebler vor einem Gesichtsverlust auch aus dem mangelnden Verständnis über die Kunden sowie deren Einkaufprozesse in Bezug auf digitale Innovationen resultiert. Außerdem deuten die Ergebnisse darauf hin, dass das

Ausmaß, in dem diese Angst auftritt und sich auf die Verkaufsleistung auswirkt, von Faktoren abhängt, die mit der psychologischen Sicherheit und Motivation der Vertriebler zusammenhängen.

Zweitens liefert die anschließende empirische Studie auf der Grundlage von 10 Experteninterviews mit Vertrieblern und Managern eines weiteren globalen herstellenden Unternehmens ein tieferes Verständnis der Angst von Vertrieblern vor einem Gesichtsverlust und dessen Entwicklungsprozesses. Die Studie zeigt, dass der Mechanismus der Angst vor einem Gesichtsverlust nicht nur auf den Kontext digitaler Innovationen beschränkt ist, sondern auch im breiteren Kontext des Innovationsvertriebs auftritt. Insbesondere Innovationen, die ein hohes Maß an Zielgruppen- und Technologie-Neuheit aufweisen, können ein Umfeld darstellen, das bei etablierten Vertrieblern die Angst vor einem Gesichtsverlust hervorrufen kann. Darüber hinaus beschreiben die Ergebnisse einen detaillierten Prozess für das Entstehen der Angst vor einem Gesichtsverlust. Hierbei erwarten Vertriebler zunächst das Scheitern der Verkaufsberatung, wenn sie Innovationen mit einem hohen Grad an Zielgruppen- und Technologie-Neuheit verkaufen sollen. Gleichzeitig können sie von ihrer Erfahrung, ihrer Bereitschaft zur Veränderung und ihrer Selbsteinschätzung als mildernde Faktoren profitieren. Zweitens vermitteln die Ergebnisse durch die Integration des Konzepts der Metaperception, dass Vertriebler, die einen Beratungsmisserfolg erwarten, mit hoher Wahrscheinlichkeit eine negative Attribution und negative Generalisierung durch ihre Kunden erwarten. Darüber hinaus zeigen die Ergebnisse, dass diese Beziehung durch die Kundenbeziehung, das Ansehen des Unternehmens und die Branchenkultur moderiert werden kann. Drittens erklären die Ergebnisse auf der Grundlage des Konzepts der negativen sozialbewussten Emotionen, wie die erwartete negative Attribution und die negative Generalisierung zu der Angst der Vertriebler vor einem Gesichtsverlust führen. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass sich die Angst vor einem Gesichtsverlust in die Angst in einer bestimmten Situation und die allgemeine Angst vor einem Gesichtsverlust unterteilen lässt.

Drittens wird in einer weiteren Studie untersucht, ob die Angst von Vertrieblern vor einem Gesichtsverlust eindeutig gemessen werden kann und ob die konzeptionellen Thesen auf quantitativer Basis bestätigt werden können. Die Studie verwendet daher den von Churchill (1979) entwickelten Skalenentwicklungsprozess, um eine Skala für die Konzeptualisierung der Angst von Vertrieblern vor einem Gesichtsverlust zu erstellen und zu validieren. Zu diesem Zweck wurde eine Umfrage unter 204 Teilnehmern aus verschiedenen Branchen in den Vereinigten Staaten und dem Vereinigten Königreich durchgeführt. Auf der Grundlage

explorativer und konfirmatorischer Faktorenanalysen zeigen die Ergebnisse, dass die Angst vor Gesichtsverlust mit einer Skala von 10 Items (d.h. fünf Items beziehen sich auf die Angst vor einem Gesichtsverlust in einer Verkaufssituationen und fünf auf die Angst vor einem Gesichtsverlust, der über die Verkaufssituation hinausgeht) mit starker Konstruktvalidität gemessen werden kann. Darüber hinaus bieten die Ergebnisse eines Strukturgleichungsmodells nomologische Validität und zeigen, dass die konzeptionellen Thesen zur Entstehung der Angst von Vertrieblern vor einem Gesichtsverlust im Wesentlichen bestätigt werden können.

Auf der Grundlage dieser empirischen Untersuchungen liefert diese Arbeit mehrere Beiträge für die Wissenschaft. Erstens beginnt sie, die relevante Forschungslücke zu schließen, warum herstellende Unternehmen mit digitalen Innovationsangeboten oftmals geringen Markterfolg haben (vgl. Anding 2019; Dietz, Khan und Rab 2020; Gebauer et al. 2020; Kane et al. 2015): Beim Verkauf digitaler Innovationen fürchten manche etablierten Vertriebler unangenehme Situationen, die zu einem Gesichtsverlust führen können. Zweitens wird in dieser Untersuchung das Konzept des Gesichtsverlustes auf einen neuen Kontext angewandt. Drittens wird die Angst vor einem Gesichtsverlust als neuer Mechanismus für die Herausforderungen beim Verkauf digitaler Innovationen eingeführt. Viertens umreißt diese Forschung ein theoretisch und empirisch fundiertes und qualitativ validiertes Verständnis des Prozesses der Angst vor einem Gesichtsverlust im Vertrieb und integriert die Konzepte der Metaperception und der negativen sozialbewussten Emotionen. Fünftens: Durch die Anwendung des Konzepts auf einen breiteren Kontext tragen die Ergebnisse auch zur Innovationsvertriebsliteratur im Allgemeinen bei. Sechstens bietet diese Arbeit eine neue und validierte Skala für die Angst vor einem Gesichtsverlust. Siebtens und letztens geht sie auf die Forderung von Zeithaml et al. (2020) nach mehr originären Marketingtheorien und -konzepten ein.

Darüber hinaus bietet die Studie konkrete Empfehlungen für Hersteller, die sich mit dem Verkauf digitaler Innovationen und dem Verkauf von Innovationen im Allgemeinen schwertun. Erstens: Um die Wahrscheinlichkeit zu verringern, dass die Angst der Vertriebler vor einem Gesichtsverlust den Verkaufserfolg behindert, sollten Manager (1) Lücken im Verständnis der Vertriebler über digitale Innovationen und Kunden schließen, (2) bestehende Wissenslücken, die sie nicht schließen können, kompensieren und (3) die Vertriebler motivieren, digitale Innovationen trotz ihrer Angst vor einem Gesichtsverlust zu verkaufen. Darüber hinaus sollten Manager darauf abzielen, (4) die Erwartung von Beratungsfehlern bei Vertrieblern durch die Schaffung effektiver Unterstützungsstrukturen zu reduzieren, (5) Vertriebler gezielt für ihre neue Rolle zu schulen und eine realistische Selbsterwartung zu wecken sowie (6) die richtigen

Vertriebler auszuwählen und (7) Verkaufsteams zu entwickeln, um die Herausforderungen des Vertriebs digitaler Innovationen gemeinsam zu bewältigen.

Schließlich bietet die vorliegende Studie mehrere Impulse für weitere Forschungen und weist gewisse Limitationen auf. Zukünftige Forschungen könnte auf der neuartigen Konzeptualisierung der Angst von Vertrieblern vor einem Gesichtsverlust und deren validierter Skala aufbauen. Da die qualitativen Studien mit traditionellen Herstellern, die ihren Hauptsitz in Deutschland haben, durchgeführt wurden, könnten zukünftige Forschungen die Angst von Vertrieblern vor einem Gesichtsverlust in anderen nationalen Kontexten testen. Darüber hinaus könnten Forscher beispielsweise die Perspektive erweitern, indem sie den Fokus auf neue Vertriebler ausweiten und das Konzept der Angst vor einem Gesichtsverlust nicht nur auf der individuellen, sondern auch auf der kollektiven Teamebene im Vertrieb untersuchen.