How Do Political Skills Affect Attitude of Clients in Real Estate Industry?

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This study, which is based on the social capital theory, explores how the political skills of salespersons (which include interpersonal influence (II), social astuteness (SA), networking ability (NA), and apparent sincerity (AS)) affect the trust of their clients in order to increase their loyalty. By incorporating the concept of political skills into research on real estate sales behavior, this study addresses the literature gap on the lack of discussion of the social abilities of salespersons in the real estate industry. To validate this theoretical model, this study targets real estate salespersons and buyers in Taiwan, by using questionnaires to collect dyadic data, and linear regression modeling to test the relevant hypotheses. The results indicate that among the political skills, II and SA are positively significant, thus indicating that salespersons with high degrees of II and SA are capable of increasing the trust of their clients, which in turn increases client loyalty. Moreover, the interaction effects on client trust are all negative and significant, which suggest that self-efficacy has a crucial moderating role. Salespersons with low self-efficacy who have NA and AS can enhance client trust. The findings of this study can be considered as constructive advice for the real estate industry in their training of salespersons.

Keywords

Political Skills, Social Capital Theory, Client Trust, Self-efficacy, Client Loyalty, Salespersons

1.   Research Background and Objective

Real estate is the driver of a nation's economy. The construction of buildings and real estate further leads to the development of related industries such as the cement, steel and building material industries, and other services, and becomes the impetus for the creation of the social economy. However, "information asymmetry" between buyers and sellers is usually observed in the real estate industry. Sellers obtain more information than buyers, for e.g., the living environment, quality of the house, and previous transaction records (Lin and Hsu, 2020). Real estate sales are mainly conducted through individuals (brokers) who are the gatekeepers of properties and serve as the middle person in real estate transactions to earn a commission. With the relaxation and establishment of various laws and regulations, the Ministry of Economic Affairs of Taiwan eventually permitted the establishment of real estate companies, thus ushering in the era of the brokerage industry. The primary task of real estate salespersons is to act as an intermediary between buyers and sellers and provide accurate real-time information, which in turn, promote activity in the real estate market. Therefore, real estate salespersons play a crucial role in the interactions between buyers and sellers in the real estate market. They are the first line of staff who come into contact with clients. In addition to professional knowledge, they must be highly enthusiastic about providing service, which make for a challenging profession. Furthermore, real estate salespersons work in an industry that requires them to closely interact with people, develop favorable interactive relationships with others in addition to having social skills, and conduct appropriate social interactions and resource use, so as to demonstrate the type of behavior that is widely expected of them.

Salespersons are the main source of revenue of real estate companies. They coordinate matters, serve as outstanding middle persons in brokering successful transactions, and generate revenue for their companies. Hence, salespersons can be regarded as the greatest asset of the real estate industry. Therefore, scholars have been interested in the elements that enhance the abilities of salespersons to improve sales performance. For example, Follain et al. (1987) reveal that brokers in nonrural areas have a higher job performance compared with those in rural areas. Stribling (1985) shows that salespersons who are not married and have more weekly work hours have higher gross commissions. Chinloy (1988), Crellin et al. (1988), and Glower and Hendershott (1988) find factors such as weekly work hours and education influence sales performance. Abelson et al. (1990) indicate that salespersons with a higher sense of accomplishment are more likely to be successful. Additionally, vocational training and organizational factors such as satisfaction with managers, managerial quality, and organizational reputation influence salesperson performance (Abelson 1989; Abelson et al. 1990; Chinloy 1988; Follain et al. 1987).

Although the factors that influence the sales performance of salespersons have been extensively examined, the most relevant literature has focused on the effects of their personal characteristics and organizational support on sales performance. Literature that explores the abilities and skills of salespersons remains scarce, especially regarding social abilities. Marketing scholars have indicated that the actions adopted by salespersons in their organizations and their influence affect their sales performance (e.g., Gonzalez et al. 2014; Üstüner and Godes, 2006). Accordingly, marketing scholars have begun to apply theories such as the social exchange, social capital, and social network theories to internal relationships within corporate entities (Üstüner and Iacobucci, 2012) to provide companies with applications that concern internal strategic development and inform them of behaviors that influence organizations (Plouffe and Barclay 2007). Consequently, social networks have come to be valued, thus demonstrating their crucial role in quantifying the internal dynamics of sales organizations (e.g., Ahearne et al. 2013; Gonzalez et al. 2014; Üstüner and Iacobucci, 2012).

Ferris et al. (2007) state that political skills are a concept that combines multiple dimensions such as interpersonal influence (II), social astuteness (SA), networking ability (NA), and apparent sincerity (AS), which have specific attributes but are correlated with one another. Political skills show how one understands social dynamics and organizational settings and applies this knowledge to influence others to achieve individual or organizational goals (Ferris et al. 2005). Empirical findings suggest that political skills are significantly related to job performance (Munyon et al. 2015). The comprehensive nature of political skills is conducive to establishing interpersonal networks (Wei et al. 2012). Munyon et al. (2021) confirm that salespeople can improve their performance with political skills since these skills enhance the quality of their social capital. Bolander et al. (2015) show that the political skills of salespersons indirectly influence their sales performance through their position in network relationships. Guo et al. (2020) discuss how psychological capital in entrepreneurial circumstances can impact new venture performance through the functionality of political skills. Grosser et al. (2018) show that political skills enable employees to take advantage of the innovation-enhancing potential of certain social network positions and increase innovation involvement. McAllister et al. (2018) develop a theoretical framework by synthesizing past literature findings and explain how the individual dimensions of political skills affect the social influence process. Thompson et al. (2017) show that political skills indirectly predict organizational commitment via participation in decision-making. The political skills of leaders who encourage followers to participate in the decision-making process are augmented by their ability to build strong and valuable partnerships, which result in increased social capital and even greater influence.

The literature review in this study shows that there is a lack of discussion on the abilities of salespersons and client loyalty in real estate sales, particularly

regarding social abilities. To bridge this knowledge gap, a relevant study - Bolander et al. (2015), is referenced, which categorizes political skills into four dimensions, namely, II, SA, NA, and AS, and examines their influence on client trust, which in turn increases client loyalty. In addition, this study further assesses whether personal differences exist in the effect of political skills on client trust, and includes self-efficacy as a crucial moderator variable to examine whether the effect varies with different levels of self-efficacy, which enhances the general explanatory power of the theoretical model.

The results indicate that among the different political skills, II and SA are positively significant, which show that salespersons who are trustworthy and have high degrees of II and SA, are capable of increasing the trust of clients, which in turn, increases client loyalty. Moreover, the interaction effects on client trust are all negative and significant, thus suggesting that self-efficacy plays a crucial moderating role. The NA and AS of salespersons with low self-efficacy can also enhance client trust. The research results help to expand existing knowledge on real estate sales, or specifically, how client loyalty is influenced by the political skills of salespersons.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides the relevant references and hypotheses; Section 3 describes the methods and data collection process; Section 4 presents the empirical analysis results; and the final section contains the research findings and the implications for academic research and management practices.

2.   Literature Review and Research Hypotheses

2.1   Conceptual Framework

A review of the relevant literature on real estate reveals that scholars have mostly examined different dimensions of salespersons such as personal characteristics, psychological factors, and organizational support, but few studies feature in-depth discussions on the relationship between social ability and sales performance of real estate salespersons. Accordingly, this study adopts the social capital theory (SCT) as the basis to examine the effects of the political skills of real estate salespersons on the attitude of real estate buyers, as well as on client trust and client loyalty. Political skills involve obtaining resources through interpersonal networks and providing skills that are personally beneficial. This in turn positively influences an organization, which is the optimal arena for showcasing political skills (Mintzberg 1983). Political skills include four dimensions, namely II, SA, NA, and AS (Bolander et al. 2015). This study posits that the II, SA, NA, and AS of a real estate salesperson can effectively enhance client trust (H1–H4), which in turn secures client loyalty (H5). Furthermore, to enhance the general explanatory power of our findings, we include the self-efficacy of salespersons as a moderator variable

and anticipate that the positive effect of political skills on client loyalty is influenced by self-efficacy, an effect that is expected to be more apparent when self-efficacy is low (H6a–H6d). Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework.

Figure 1   Conceptual Framework
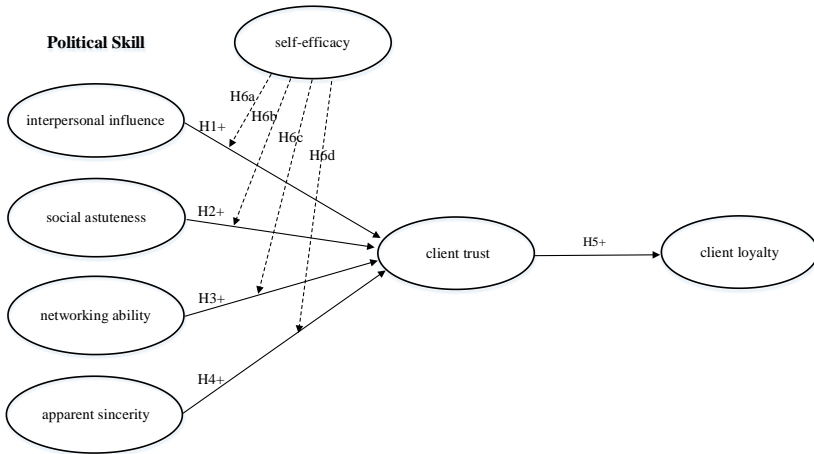
2.2   Social Capital Theory

The SCT (Lin 1986; 1999) originates from the classical capital theory (Lin 1999), where capital is defined as a valuable resource input that is expected to be recovered. The focus of social capital is social resources and investment in the social environment to generate returns, or tools that enable people to realize their needs. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1977) proposes that social capital is the adaptation to the structure of the social world and the specific actions of its members. He believes that social capital is a resource found in the social structure, which through trust, understanding, and commitment between people and the exchange of resources and information, enables society and its members to realize their expected goals. The SCT posits that the social structure generates value and, by obtaining resources such as knowledge and power, becomes embedded in social networks. These resources can be passed on to individuals, and individuals can apply them to complex problems (Burt 1997). The measurement of social capital involves three elements: (1) the number of people who are willing or obliged to provide assistance, (2) the strength of relationships, and (3) the resources owned by the obligors. From these three elements, social capital research can be further explored from two perspectives, namely from that of social resources (resources of the network contact persons) and the perspective of the social structure (the number of relationships and its strength; Lin 1999). From the perspective of social resources, studies have examined how resources can be embedded in social

networks through personal characteristics of social relations (e.g., income, reputation, and educational attainment) and understood how these resources work in the network (i.e., the last item of the aforementioned three elements). By contrast, social structure scholars have focused on the form of social relations and evaluated the opportunities and limitations that the various forms face. The premise of this view assumes that this structure provides a competitive advantage for people who are in strategic positions in the social network. Hence, the social structure scholarship focuses on the first two aforementioned elements of SCT, namely the number of people who are willing or obliged to provide assistance and the strength of their relationships (Lin 1999).

Intuitively, the perspectives around social structures and social resources should be interrelated. Research studies by well-known scholars explore the interactive effect of personal resource characteristics (e.g., political skills, tenure, extroversion, and gender) and network structure resources (e.g., Borgatti and Foster 2003; Brass and Halgin 2012; Brass and Krackhardt 1999; Burt 1997). In short, the SCT proposes two key points: (1) the acquisition of internal resources enhances the effectiveness of sales efforts (Lin 1999), and (2) social status determines access to resources. Therefore, the social capital of an individual can be derived from the characteristics of his/her social network (Burt 2000).

2.3   Political Skills

The core of the SCT is that people have the ability to obtain value of use from their social background. These values arise from the social resources owned by an individual and his/her position in the social structure, which in turn, reflects the opportunities and limitations in the said structure. Social capital emphasizes investment in social networks (time and effort) to maintain social network connections. Although relevant studies indicate that social status has a significant and positive effect on social networks (Brancaleone and Gountas 2007; Goldsmith et al. 2006), political skills are the most crucial influencing factor. Mintzberg (1983) suggests that organizations are political entities; hence, political skills are a key element in maintaining social organizations. According to Ferris et al. (2007), political skills consist of four main dimensions, namely II, SA, NA, and AS, which explain how individuals achieve their personal and organizational goals through political skills (Ferris et al. 2005). II indicates the ability to be convincing enough to gain the trust of others, through which personal goals can be achieved. SA is defined as the skill of understanding people, or social awareness and sensitivity to the needs of others. A high degree of SA means a better ability to recognize information and messages exchanged in social settings and interpret behaviors, which enable the highly astute individual to receive more support in social organizations (Brass and Krackhardt 1999). NA indicates the ability of individuals to recognize and leverage information, support and resources, through which they can form

effective relationships to deal with situations efficiently and effectively (Ferris et al. 2007). AS is the show of sincere and genuine behavior, which influences other parties, and in turn, achieves results that are self-benefiting.

2.4   Client Trust

Morgan and Hunt (1994) define trust as the comprehensive evaluation process of reliability and integrity of clients toward companies. Moorman et al. (1993) consider trust to be the willingness of clients to believe in the company itself or its trustworthiness and should involve both trustworthiness and trust behavior. Specifically, trustworthiness is a belief, whereas trust behavior is the willingness to take risks because there is trust (Smith and Barclay 1997). Many studies in the literature argue that trustworthiness is a necessary and critical condition for the existence of trust (Anderson and Narus 1990; De Wulf et al. 2001); hence, this study defines trust as a kind of trustworthiness that a real estate buyer has for a real estate salesperson.

Empirical studies have found that trust is a crucial factor in creating, developing, and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships between transaction parties (Ganesan 1994), and considerably influences relationship performance (e.g., client loyalty and relationship continuity; Dwyer et al. 1987) and company financial performance (Palmatier et al. 2006). Other scholars have stated that trust is the foundation of marketing in the service industry. For example, Berry (1995) notes that because of the intangible characteristics of services, it is difficult for clients to assess service performance before consuming or experiencing services. For some services, it is difficult to evaluate the quality even after they are consumed or experienced. Therefore, the maintenance of client relations in the service industry (such as in a real estate company) relies heavily on the establishment of client trust.

Real estate salespersons who are equipped with political skills use their power and emotion recognition ability to adjust their own behavior astutely so that they meet the needs of various client groups under different circumstances. When their behavior is considered to be authentic, genuine, and sincere, they inspire the trust and confidence of others in the organization. In addition, those who are familiar with using political skills have characteristics such as remaining calm when handling matters and self-confidence (Ferris et al. 2007; 2012). Therefore, this study proposes the following hypotheses that concern the impact of political skills on client trust:

Hypothesis 1 (H1):
Salespersons with greater II will be more trusted by real estate buyers.

Hypothesis 2 (H2):
Salespersons with a high degree of SA will be more trusted by real estate buyers.

Hypothesis 3 (H3):
Salespersons with exceptional NA will be more trusted by real estate buyers.

Hypothesis 4 (H4):
Salespersons with a high level of AS will be more trusted by real estate buyers.

2.5   Client Loyalty

Client loyalty is one of the most researched topics of interest for both academics and the industries because it impacts the survival of businesses and their growth. Oliver (1999) suggests that the internal commitment of clients to continue purchasing the products or services of their favorite brand, unaffected by the external environment or other marketing activities, can increase the sales volume and market share of the company, and ensure its long-term profits if the service cost of client loyalty is low, the price that clients are willing to pay is high, and clients show high repurchase intention (Reichheld and Teal 1996; Zeithaml et al. 1996). Client loyalty can be divided into two factors, namely behavior and attitude. Loyalty behavior emphasizes the repeat purchase behavior of clients for preferred brands, and uses the number of purchases, frequency, and share of wallet for a specific brand as the indicators for evaluating client loyalty. However, the most criticized aspect of this behavior viewpoint is the inability to distinguish between genuine and spurious loyalty (Dick and Basu 1994); that is, repeated purchases may not necessarily be attributed to loyalty to specific brands, and repeat purchase behavior may have arisen from having considered various factors such as switching costs or convenience (Reichheld, 2003; Yi and Jeon 2003). Therefore, scholars suggest that the attitude viewpoint can be used to measure client loyalty (Amine, 1998; Dick and Basu 1994), thereby effectively distinguishing genuine from spurious loyalty.

The literature has generally supported a positive correlation between client trust and client loyalty. Sirdeshmukh et al. (2002) suggest that higher client trust means lower cognitive risk toward service providers (such as real estate salespersons). In this situation, clients may show their personal support for service providers through various means, such as positive word of mouth. Gwinner et al. (1998) state that trust enables the values of service providers and clients to converge; more similar values between buyers and sellers result in increased willingness of clients to demonstrate loyalty. Accordingly, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5 (H5):
Higher trust of clients in salespersons translates into higher loyalty.

2.6   Self-efficacy

The concept of self-efficacy in the social recognition theory in Bandura (1977) is crucial for its imperative role in influencing personal motivation and behavior. Self-efficacy means the willingness to take initiative, devotion to complete a certain task, and not giving up easily. Therefore, self-efficacy is an evaluation of self-ability to accomplish a task. Bandura (1982) finds that individuals with higher self-efficacy exhibit higher confidence in specific jobs, and thus have a higher performance. Gist and Mitchell (1992) suggest that those with higher self-efficacy have more confidence when facing different challenges and vice versa. Lent et al. (1994) indicate that individuals with high self-efficacy demonstrate higher performance in knowledge sharing and learning. Lu and Leung (2004) find that self-efficacy can promote knowledge sharing. Since real estate salespersons act as a bridge between their company and clients, and are also representative of their company's image, they must demonstrate self-confidence and confidence of their profession. Furthermore, their job involves close interaction with people. Hence, social skills are critical because they enable them to interact appropriately with clients, peers, and organizations and also to build personal social networks.

Self-efficacy is also an essential concept and the core of psychological health. Individuals with high self-efficacy set higher goals for themselves. Once they begin, these individuals invest more effort, persevere longer, can withstand greater pressure, and quickly recover from frustration. Self-efficacy is one's knowledge or belief in him/herself that s/he can adapt to the challenges faced in an environment and primarily drives motivation. Accordingly, this study proposes the following hypotheses on the moderating effect of self-efficacy:

Hypothesis 6a (H6a):
The effect of II on client trust is lower when real estate salespersons have a higher self-efficacy.

Hypothesis 6b (H6b):
The effect of SA on client trust is lower when real estate salespersons have a higher self-efficacy.

Hypothesis 6c (H6c):
The effect of NA on client trust is lower when real estate salespersons have a higher self-efficacy.

Hypothesis 6d (H6d):
The effect of AS on client trust is lower when real estate salespersons have a higher self-efficacy.

3   Method

This study explores the effects of the political skills of real estate salespersons on client loyalty, and posits that political skills, including II, SA, NA, and AS, all contribute to client trust and increase client loyalty. We also analyze whether this effect is influenced by the degree of self-efficacy of salespersons. To verify the aforementioned theory and test the related hypotheses, this study uses survey research and questionnaires to collect dyadic data on real estate salespersons.

3.1   Sample and Data Collection

This study uses real estate sales as the research background and explores how the political skills of salespersons may influence client loyalty. To verify the theoretical model, questionnaires are used to test the research hypotheses. Taking into account time and resource constraints, convenience sampling is used, in which Yung-Ching Realty Group, H&B Housing, Great Home Realty, and Fu Tian Real Estate Development Limited which are all in Taiwan, are targeted for data collection. In addition, relevant studies are referenced to reduce possible common method variance (CMV); hence, variable data from different sources are collected and then paired to form a complete questionnaire. Hence, the variable data in this study are divided into two sources (real estate salespersons and buyers) to lower the risk of CMV. To render data collection feasible, the land administration agent of this study has assisted in obtaining a list of contact information of real estate salespersons, who are then contacted by the research team members. The team members then explain to the salespersons the research purpose, state that the research content will be used for academic research only, and ask them to participate in the research. Salespersons who agree to participate in the research are then sent a print questionnaire by post. The questionnaires are divided into two versions, namely a salesperson version and a buyer version. The salespersons are requested to distribute the relevant questionnaires to buyers. To ensure the representativeness of the sample, the following principles are followed for sampling before splitting the test set: (1) the proportion of males or females shall not be less than 40%; (2) excessive concentration of respondents in a certain age group is avoided; and (3) the proportion of a single occupation is not to exceed 30%. The data collection period is 1 month, and 2 weeks after the questionnaires are sent, the respondents are reminded by phone or email. To increase the questionnaire response rate, a gift is provided to respondents for completing the questionnaire. In all, data from a total of 13 salespersons and 108 real estate buyers are collected.

3.2   Measurement Instruments

The variables measured in this study can be divided into two categories based on the data source. The first is the questionnaire survey of the salespersons.

After adapting the scales obtained from the relevant literature, a questionnaire survey is used to collect the responses to and opinions on the different research variable items, including political skills (II, SA, NA, and AS), self-efficacy, and demographic variables (e.g., job tenure, work hours, marital status, educational attainment, sex, and age). The second is the questionnaire survey of the buyers. Print questionnaires are used to survey client trust and loyalty, and collect the demographic data of the buyers. A detailed description of the operational definitions, measurement scales, and reference sources for each research variable is provided as follows.

To measure the political skills of the salespersons, this study adopts the measurement items in Bolander et al. (2015). The scale is adapted from the Political Skill Inventory in Ferris et al. (2005) and divided into four dimensions, namely, II, SA, NA, and AS. Each dimension comprises three items that assess the political skill level of the respondent. For self-efficacy, we reference the scale used by Wang and Netemeyer (2002) to ask whether the respondents are confident about performing their job as a salesperson well. Regarding client trust, this study revises the client trust scale in Lee (2012) to assess the level to which the buyers believe the products provided by the salespersons are reliable and well-intentioned; the present scale contains a total of eight items. As for client loyalty, we use the research items in Lee (2012) to measure attitude and purchase loyalties with the use of five items. The aforementioned items are measured by using a 7-point Likert scale to measure the views and perception of respondents on the various items. A higher value indicates that the respondent agrees more with the item description, and vice versa (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). A complete listing of the scale items is presented in Appendix 1 (for real estate salespersons) and 2 (for buyers).

When developing the questionnaires, this study adopts the translation–back translation method (van de Vijver et al. 1997) to ensure that the translated Chinese items are consistent with the meaning of the referenced English scales. Scholars and experts who are proficient in Chinese and English first translate the English scales into Chinese items, and then back-translate the items into English to compare the English items before and after the translation. When differences are found in the meaning of the items, the translation–back translation step is repeated until no difference exists between the Chinese and English versions of the items. To ensure that the items have content validity, two real estate scholars and experts have been recruited to assist in clarifying the semantic meaning of the items to avoid misunderstanding. In addition, we use suggestions in the literature (Podsakoff et al. 2012) and revise the questionnaire format to lower the risk of CMV. Specifically, the items that measure different variables are mixed together to collect data instead of being arranged in sequence to measure specific variables. Furthermore, we include reverse-coded items in the questionnaire. Finally, 30 questionnaires are distributed as a pilot before the formal questionnaire is distributed, and the

questionnaire content is revised according to the analysis results and feedback of the pilot respondents.

4   Results

This study adopts SPSS Version 23 to perform the descriptive statistics and validity and regression analyses to understand the sample characteristics, assess questionnaire quality, and perform hypothesis testing.

4.1   Sample Characteristics

This study focuses on real estate salespersons and buyers in Taiwan as the research subjects and uses questionnaires to collect data on the intentions of these salespersons as well as their clients. Appendix 3 presents the sample characteristics of this study, which show a total of 13 salespersons (10 men, 61.50% and 3 women, 38.50%) and 112 clients (62 men, 57.40% and 50 women, 42.60%), and their mean age is 50.15 years old. Regarding their marital status, four (30.8%) are single, seven (53.8%) are married, and two (15.40%) are divorced. As for educational attainment, two (15.40%) have a senior high or vocational high school diploma; seven (53.80%) have a university, college, or junior college degree; and four (30.80%) have a postgraduate degree or higher. Those with a job tenure that exceeds 10 years represent the largest majority (five, 38.50%), followed by those with 1–3 years (two, 23.1%). The mean hours of work is 43.77 hours each week.

Regarding the buyers, their mean age is 47.67 years old and 82 (79.60%) are married. As for their educational attainment, 24 (22.90%) have a senior high or vocational high school diploma; 65 (61.90%) have a university, college, or junior college degree; and 16 (15.20%) have a postgraduate degree or higher. Most of them (40, 37.70%) are employed in the service industry, followed by those who work as government employees (i.e., military officers, police officers, civil servants, and teachers; 19, 17.90%). A total of 101 buyers (94.40%) have a monthly income that exceeds NT\$25,001[1], and most (79, 73.80%) report self-occupation as the purpose of their real estate purchase.

4.2   Reliability and Validity

This study performs reliability and validity tests on the research constructs: II, SA, NA, AS, client trust, client loyalty and self-efficacy based on Cronbach's α and expert validity results.

Table 1 presents the mean, standard deviation, Cronbach's α, and correlation coefficient values of the various research constructs. The correlation coefficient

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[1] NT\$28.5 = 1 USD, therefore NT\$25,001 is about USD877.

values range between 0.01 (NA and client loyalty) and 0.91 (NA and AS). Except for client loyalty and NA ($\gamma = 0.08$), SA ($\gamma=0.05$), NA($\gamma=0.01$), AS ($\gamma=0.15$) and self-efficacy ($\gamma=.18$) which are not significantly correlated, the remaining correlation coefficients are all statistically significant at the 0.01 level. In addition, the mean maxima of the constructs is 6.05, and the mean minima is 5.13. Furthermore, the standard deviation ranges between 0.81 (self-efficacy) and 1.14 (AS).

Table 1   Correlation Coefficient Matrix

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Mean	SD
1 II	**(0.90)**							5.79	1.01
2 SA	0.77***	**(0.92)**						5.79	0.98
3 NA	0.88***	0.88***	**(0.77)**					6.00	0.83
4 AS	0.89***	0.89***	0.91***	**(0.93)**				5.98	1.14
5 Client trust	0.51***	0.53***	0.46***	0.55***	**(0.98)**			5.48	1.08
6 Client loyalty	0.08	0.05	0.01	0.15	0.40***	**(0.95)**		5.13	1.08
7 Self-efficacy	0.42***	0.71**	0.37***	0.62***	0.38***	0.18	**(0.98)**	6.05	0.81

The bolded numbers are the Cronbach's α values
Notes: $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{***}p < 0.001$

Regarding the validity test, the Cronbach's α of the various constructs ranges between 0.77 and 0.98, thus satisfying the minimum level (> 0.7) recommended by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994). Hence, the measurement data of this study have excellent validity. Before distributing the questionnaires, experts—including those from the land administration agent associations, realtors, and university professors—are invited to evaluate the questionnaire to verify whether the questionnaire items accurately convey the information behind each construct.

4.3   Hypothesis Testing

This study uses SPSS Version 23 to perform the linear regression analysis and assess whether H1–H5 are supported. Table 2 presents the results. H1 posits that salespersons with greater II will be more trusted by real estate buyers. As shown in Table 2, II positively and significantly affects client trust ($\beta = 0.36$, $t = 1.76$, and $p < 0.1$); hence, H1 is supported. H2 states that SA positively affects client trust, which is supported by the analysis results ($\beta = 0.45$, $t = 2.20$, and $p < 0.05$); hence, H2 is supported. H3 anticipates that the salespersons with exceptional NA will be more trusted by real estate buyers. Table 2 shows that the correlation between NA and client trust is negative but not significant ($\beta = -0.36$, $t = -1.55$, ns); hence, H3 is not supported. H4 proposes that salespersons with a high degree of AS will be more trusted by real estate buyers. The analysis results do not support this hypothesis. AS is positively correlated with client trust but the correlation is not significant ($\beta = 0.19$, $t = 0.74$, ns); hence, H4 is not supported. H5 surmises that higher trust of clients in salespersons translates into higher loyalty. As indicated in Table 2, client trust significantly and

positively affects client loyalty ($\beta = 0.48$, $t = 5.60$, and $p < 0.001$); hence, H5 is supported.

Table 2   Regression Analysis Results

Independent variable		**Client trust**		**Client loyalty**	
		Standardized coefficient	t	Standardized coefficient	t
1.	II (H$_1$)	0.36*	1.76		
2.	SA (H$_2$)	0.45**	2.20		
3.	NA (H$_3$)	−0.36	−1.55		
4.	AS (H$_4$)	0.19	0.74		
5.	Client trust (H$_5$)			0.48***	5.60
R^2		0.41		0.23	
F		17.91***		31.29***	

Note: * denotes $p < 0.1$, ** denotes $p < 0.05$, and *** denotes $p < 0.001$

In addition to testing the direct effects between the various research constructs, this study further assesses whether the effects of II, SA, NA, and AS on client trust are influenced by the varying degree of self-efficacy of salespersons. Hence, H6a–H6d are proposed, and the PROCESS macro in Hayes (2013) is used as Model 1 to test these four hypotheses. Specifically, the independent variables (X) are II, SA, NA, and AS; self-efficacy is the moderator variable (M); and client trust is the dependent variable (Y). The PROCESS macro tests whether self-efficacy influences the relationship between political skills and client trust. To avoid collinearity problems, all variables are mean-centered before analysis. The analysis results are presented in Table 3.

H6a proposes that the effect of II on client trust is lower when real estate salespersons have a higher self-efficacy. The result of the interaction effect between II and self-efficacy is negative and significantly influences client trust ($\beta = -0.10$, $t = -3.55$, and $p < 0.05$). To test whether H6a–H6d are supported, an interaction effect analysis is also carried out by referencing Aiken et al. (1991). Specifically, the moderator variable (self-efficacy) is calculated at plus or minus one standard deviation to distinguish two groups: one with high self-efficacy and one with low self-efficacy. The slope values of the two groups of respondents are then compared, which provides the results of the interaction effect shown in Fig. 2. As indicated by Fig. 2(a), when the dependent variable is client trust, the II of the low self-efficacy group exhibits a positive effect on client trust which is larger compared to that of the high self-efficacy group; hence, H6a is supported.

Table 3   **Analysis of Interaction Effects**

Dependent variable = client trust

Independent variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	Unstandardized coefficient	t	Unstandardized coefficient	t	Unstandardized coefficient	t	Unstandardized coefficient	t
1. Constant term	5.50***	61.96	5.56***	61.76	5.48***	61.27	5.53***	60.61
2. II	0.35***	3.29						
3. SA			0.47***	3.74				
4. NA					0.36**	3.00		
5. AS							0.32**	2.81
6. Self-efficacy (SE)	0.20	1.64	−0.11	−0.75	0.24*	1.99	0.08	0.61
7. II × SE (H6a)	−0.10*	−2.17						
8. SA × SE (H6b)			−0.16***	−3.55				
9. NA × SE (H6c)					−0.09*	−2.06		
10. AS × SE (H6d)							−0.12**	−2.68
R^2	0.41		0.43		0.39		0.42	
F	24.92***		27.01***		22.21***		25.71***	

Note: * denotes $p < 0.1$, ** denotes $p < 0.05$, and *** denotes $p < 0.001$.

H6b states that the effect of SA on client trust is lower when real estate salespersons have a higher self-efficacy. The result of the interaction effect between SA and self-efficacy is negative and significantly influences client trust ($\beta = -0.16$, $t = -2.27$, and $p < 0.001$), as presented in Table 3. Figure 2(b) shows that when the dependent variable is client trust, the SA of the low self-efficacy group has a positive effect on client trust which is larger compared to that in the high self-efficacy group; hence, H6b is supported.

H6c states that the effect of NA on client trust is lower when real estate salespersons have a higher self-efficacy. The result of the interaction effect between NA and self-efficacy is negative and the interaction effect significantly influences client trust ($\beta = -0.09$, $t = -2.06$, and $p < 0.05$), as presented in Table 3. Figure 2(c) shows that when the dependent variable is client trust, the NA of both the low and high self-efficacy groups positively affects client trust. However, the NA of the low self-efficacy group has a larger effect compared to that of the high self-efficacy group; hence, H6c is supported.

H6d states that the effect of AS on client trust is lower when real estate salespersons have a higher self-efficacy. As presented in Table 3, the result of the interaction effect between AS and self-efficacy on client trust is significant ($\beta = -0.12$, $t = -2.68$, and $p < 0.01$); hence, H6d is supported. Specifically, the effect of AS on client trust differs with the degree of self-efficacy of the salespersons.

5   Conclusion

Using the SCT as the theoretical basis, this study examines how political skills (II, SA, NA, and AS) affect client trust and in turn, influence client loyalty. In addition, this study uses self-efficacy as the moderator variable to investigate whether self-efficacy affects the relationship between political skills and client trust. The results indicate that among the political skills, II ($\beta = 0.36$, $p < 0.1$) and SA ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < 0.05$) are both positively significant, which show that salespersons who are trustworthy, use II, are very socially astute, and have an exceptional understanding of information and messages exchanged in social settings, are capable of increasing client trust, which in turn increases client loyalty.

This study further uses self-efficacy as the moderator variable and examines whether self-efficacy affects the aforementioned relationships. The results indicate that when II, SA, NA, and AS individually interact with self-efficacy, the interaction effects on client trust are all negative and significant, thus suggesting that self-efficacy plays a crucial moderating role. Hence, H6a–H6d are supported. Although the analysis results indicate that NA and AS have no significant differences in their effect on client trust, the NA and AS of salespersons with low self-efficacy can enhance client trust.

Figure 2   Interaction Effects

(a) Interaction between II and self-efficacy   (b) Interaction between SA and self-efficacy
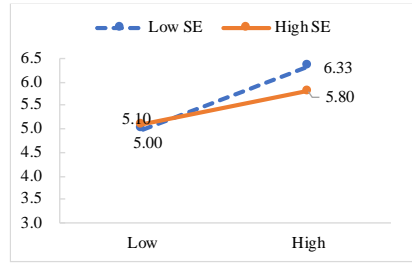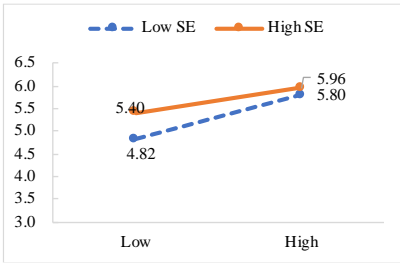
(c) Interaction between NA and self-efficacy (d) Interaction between AS and self-efficacy
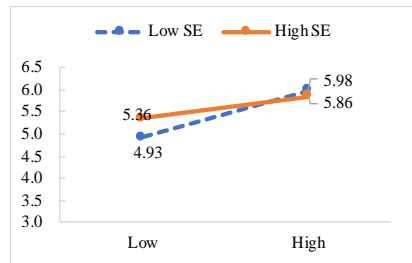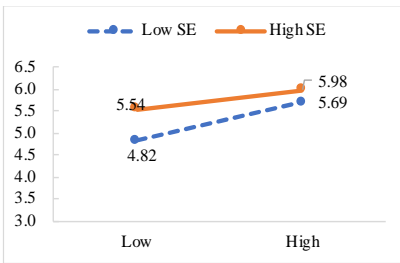
In the real estate transaction market, the asymmetry of information between buyers and sellers, relatively non-transparent information, and heterogeneity of products have furthered the uncertainty of the transaction market. With limited information, following the advice of others is considered a wise decision (Crowston et al., 2015). As such, the assistance of a real estate agent is keenly desirable to complete a real estate transaction (Qiu et al., 2020; Stelk and Zumpano, 2017). For this reason, salespersons affect the transaction market in the real estate industry more than the other industries. Considering that people interact closely with one another in the real estate industry, it is important to pay particular attention to the interactive relationship between salespersons and buyers. Our research findings show that II and SA are positively significant among the political skills, thus indicating that salespersons with high degrees of II and SA are capable of increasing client trust, which in turn, increases client loyalty. However, NA and AS are not significant. Nevertheless, under the interaction effect, the NA and AS of salespersons with low self-efficacy can enhance client trust. Jawahar et al. (2008) state that political skills are a better predictor of contextual performance, and self-efficacy is a better predictor of task performance. Our study concludes that political skills apply to real estate services, and real estate services require political skills to trigger client trust and then increase client loyalty. In increasingly competitive real estate markets, real estate salespersons are expected to rise above and beyond the requirements

listed in their job descriptions. Political skills arise from the social resources owned by an individual and his/her position in the social structure, which in turn reflects the opportunities and limitations in the said structure.

In our study, we collect dyadic data from salespersons and customers. We determine the effect of political skills of salespersons on client trust and loyalty. Perhaps other studies have confirmed other variables that affect client trust and loyalty, however, we do not include them in our model as control variables. Sometimes the term 'control variables' is considered to be an abuse of language because variables cannot be intrinsically 'controlled', such as adding a variable to the model that is related to the predictor but not to the outcome. Doing so may result in a less accurate estimation of the coefficient of the predictor. Nevertheless, it is still interesting to add variables into the model to examine the combined effect of the original predictor and the variable in future research. This can be a method used to strengthen the predictive model, as a pair of predictors may provide better information than either one by itself.

5.2   Implications for Academic Research and Management Practices

The primary purpose of this study is to explore the effect of political skills on client trust, incorporate self-efficacy as a moderator variable, and analyze the differences in the effects of the political skills of salespersons with high and low self-efficacies on client trust. This study makes the following contributions. First, the work explores how the political skills of salespersons affect their sales performance (client trust and client loyalty) and dyadic data (from salespersons and buyers) are collected. Second, the research results provide reasonable insights into whether salespersons with political skills can increase client trust and in turn improve client loyalty. Third, this study separates salespersons into two groups (high or low self-efficacy) to compare their relative influence on client trust, which will help practitioners to gain a more profound understanding of how salespersons with political skills can obtain higher client trust, thus rendering the research findings more generalizable.

Regarding the theory, this study extends the theoretical scope of the literature on political skills. By incorporating the political skills concept into research on real estate sales behavior, this study bridges the literature gap of the lack of discussion on the social abilities of salespersons in the real estate industry. As for management practices, the research findings provide valuable suggestions for the business operators of real estate companies. Specifically, training the political skills of salespersons should be a focal point in the training programs of companies to improve client attitude and, in turn, improve the overall business performance of the company.

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Appendices

Appendix 1   Measures of Research Constructs for Salespersons

Political skills (adapted from Ferris et al. 2005)	
II	I can communicate easily and effectively with others.
II	I am good at getting people to like me.
II	It is easy for me to develop good rapport with most people.
SA	I am particularly good at sensing the motivations and hidden agendas of others.
SA	I understand people very well.
SA	I have good intuition or am savvy about how to present myself to others.
NA	I am good at building relationships with influential people at work.
NA	I am good at using my connections and networking to make things happen at work.
NA	I spend a lot of time at work developing connections with others.
AS	I try to show a genuine interest in other people.
AS	It is important that people believe I am sincere in what I say and do.
AS	When communicating with others, I try to be genuine in what I say and do.
Self-efficacy (Wang and Netemeyer, 2002)	
SE	Overall, I am confident of my ability to perform my job well.
SE	I feel I am very capable at the task of selling.
SE	I feel I have the capabilities to successfully perform this job.

Notes: II=Interpersonal Influence, SA=Social Astuteness, NA=Networking Ability, and AS=Apparent Sincerity. All items are measured by using a 7-point Likert scale to determine the views and perception of respondents on various items, where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree.

Appendix 2   Measures of Research Constructs for Buyers

Client trust (Lee, 2012)
The service of the real estate agent is trustworthy.   The real estate agent will keep his/her promise.   The real estate agent is very dependable.   The real estate agent can conduct related sales based on customer perceptions.   I get along with my real estate agent as a friend.   The real estate agent will prioritize the interests of customers.   The real estate agent offers me an honest transaction.   The real estate agent can properly answer any questions that I ask.
Client trust (Lee, 2012)
I very much support my real estate agent.   Compared with other real estate agents, I am willing to pay a higher agency fee for this real estate agent than other real estate agents.   I am very satisfied with my real estate agent.   If I have the opportunity next time, I will still use the services of this real estate agent.   I intend to continue to support my real estate agent.

Notes: All items are measured by using a 7-point Likert scale as the measurement scale for understanding the views and perception of respondents on various items in which 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree.

Appendix 3   Descriptive Statistics

	Sample characteristics	Salesperson				Buyer			
		Number of people	%	M	SD	Number of people	%	M	SD
Sex	Male	8	61.50			62	57.4		
	Female	5	38.50			46	42.6		
Marital status	Single	4	30.80			19	18.4		
	Married	7	53.80			82	79.6		
	Other (divorced)	2	15.40			2	1.9		
Age				50.15	8.00			47.67	10.02
	Senior high & vocational	2	15.4			24	22.9		
	University, college, and junior college	7	53.8			65	61.9		
	Postgraduate and higher	4	30.8			16	15.2		
Occupation	Government related[1]					19	17.90		
	Information technology					3	2.80		
	Finance					15	14.20		
	Service					40	37.70		
	Manufacturing					9	8.50		
	Self-employed					13	12.30		
	Mass communication/advertising					1	0.90		
	Housekeeper					3	2.80		
	Other					3	2.80		

(Continued…)

(Appendix 3 Continued)

Monthly income[2]	≤ NT$25,000	2	16.7		6	5.60
	NT$25,001–50,000	2	16.7		51	47.70
	NT$50,001–75,000	5	41.7		16	15.00
	NT$75,001–100,000	1	8.3		20	18.70
	≥ NT$100,001	2	16.7		14	13.10
Real estate purchase purpose	Self-occupation				79	73.80
	Investment				24	22.40
	Job transfer				2	1.90
	Other				2	1.90
Real estate company brand	Yung-Ching Realty Group	3	23.1			
	H&B Housing	5	38.5			
	Great Home Realty	4	30.8			
	Fu Tian Real Estate Development Limited	1	7.7			
Business model	Regular chain	1	7.7			
	Franchise	12	92.3			
Job tenure[3]	< 1 year	1	7.7			
	1–3 years	3	23.1			
	3–6 years	2	15.4			
	6–10 years	2	15.4			
	> 10 years	5	38.5			
Average work hours/week				43.77	14.71	

Note: 1. Government related denotes military officers, police officers, civil servants, and teachers.
    2. 1 USD = 28.5 TWD
    3. "1-3 years" means ≥1 year and <3 years; "3-6 years" means ≥3 year and <6 years; "6-10 years" means ≥6 year and <10 years.