

Personal Selling: A Tool of Career Opportunity

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Abstract: -

In the process of personal selling, salespeople are considered as blood in human body to achieve success in promotion of products and services in the present dynamic and changing environment prevailing all throughout the globe. Conversation with potential buyers, as a tool of market survey to encourage prospective buyers to buy items, is of paramount importance in today's changing and competitive market to survive and sustain in future. Customers' service, customers' attention, customers' satisfaction, etc. are of utmost important tasks in today's highly competitive market in the world. The article emphasized on qualities of salesperson, career opportunity of selling personnel, myths and ethics of personal selling and digital marketing in the era of digitization after the introduction of New Industrial Policy-1991, by the Govt. of India.

Keywords: *Personal Selling, Qualities of Salesperson, Career Opportunity, Myths and Ethics and Digital Marketing.*

Introduction: -

“Personal selling” can take place through two different channels viz. retail and direct-to-consumer channel. Under the direct channel, a salesperson visits potential customers in an attempt to make them aware about a new product that the company is launching or it may have a new offer which the customers may not get from the open market. Introduction of the Economic Reforms Policy-1991, by the Govt. of India, has totally changed the scenario of Indian market and competition from different multinational companies has made most business houses more difficult to survive and sustain, particularly in a developing country like India to realize the need for being proactive in communicating their product offerings to the consumer. Promotion, one of the 4Ps of the marketing mix, has assumed much importance to marketers of late to survive and sustain in the global village to direct interpersonal communication between a representative of the firm and the potential customer to convert them actual consumer. In today's marketing practices, products and services are promoted through digital marketing and all other forms of electronic media different from direct selling. Digital Marketing includes marketing via mobile phones (both SMS and MMS), social media marketing, search engine marketing, many other forms of digital media, etc.

Review of Literature: -

Marshall & Johnston (2005) introduced about the role of selling inside marketing. Companies practicing the marketing concept to the customers for gathering the information in making strategic decision about which products to market, where to marketing them and how to get them to the market, at what price and in how to communicate with customers. Selling activity involves not only for make a sale but also for gathering some information that can be used in marketing concept. Furthermore, the 4P's Marketing concept (product, place, price, promotion) are also known as marketing mix, become a marketer tool kit that help to develop marketing strategy which contribute in sales activity. Promotional mix (advertising, sales promotion, public relation, publicity, and direct marketing) is also use by salesperson in selling practice to ensure the practice of integrated marketing communication within a firm and customer are work effectively.

Walker, Boyd, John & Larreche (2003) opined that personal selling is a customer focused strategy that aimed at improving the product or service quality and reducing the cost with the ultimate objective of improving customer satisfaction and loyalty. This orientation needs more focus on customer need and perception to make them satisfy immediately to improve not only in satisfaction but also the retention.

Marshall & Johnston (2005) argued that personal selling involves personal communication (person-to-person interaction) with a prospect buyer. It fits into the marketing mix as a part of a firm's marketing communication mix, along with advertising, sales promotion, public relation and publicity and direct marketing. It is a process of developing relationship, discovering prospect buyer needs, matching the appropriate products with those needs, communicating benefits through informing, reminding or persuading. It also viewed as a process to add value to the product or services offered.

Manning & Reece (2007) highlighted personal selling has been developed to be more adoptable in marketing concept, value-added personal selling and assume the role of a problem solver for helping customer to make buying decision. The development of it are presented as a part of additional strategy in selling process with using consultative selling model that combined with the persuasive activity by which salesperson performs in directing customer unpredictable behavior about their satisfaction toward purchase decision.

Lovelock & Jochen (2011) depicted that consultative selling or solution selling provides more service on management and technical procedure that concentrate on customer to give the best solution to satisfy them.

This approach is valuable supplement to service and selling process in order to render more satisfaction on customer.

Kotler (2002) explained personal selling is the interpersonal arm of the promotion mix, involved two ways of personal communication between sales people and individual customers whether by face to face or telephone or online. However, most sales people spend much of their time maintaining existing accounts and building long-term customer relationship in the process of sales.

Perreault & McCarthy (1999) analyzed consultative selling involves developing a good understanding of the individual customer's needs before trying to close the sales. This name is used because the salesperson is almost acting as a consultant to help identify and solve the customer's problem. This approach taught, the salesperson makes some general benefit statement to get the customer's attention and interest, then the salesperson asks the question and listen carefully to understand the major customer need. The major implementation of consultative selling approach is the two way communication within salesperson and customer to transfer the value about the customer's major need and the products or services for fulfilling their need.

Kotler (2013) noted that personal selling is a useful vehicle for communicating with present and potential buyers that involves the double ways flow of communication between a buyer and seller often in face to face encounter designed to influence persons or groups in purchase decision. However, with advances in technology, it also takes place over the telephone and internet enabled online system, through video conferencing and interactive computer links between buyer and seller, remains a highly human intensive activity despite the use of technology. Salespeople are the critical link between the firm and its customers and are the company in customers' eyes.

Objective of the Study:-

The main objective of the study, therefore, is to examine the relevance of personal selling to foster career opportunities in the present competitive and changing environment prevailing throughout the globe.

Data Base and Methodology of the Study:-

The study is based on secondary sources of information available time to time in various reputed journals, books, newspapers and internet, etc. Simple study is done to gather information on personal sales and its types, steps, significance, ethics, myths of personal selling, essential qualities of a successful salesperson, strengths and weaknesses of personal selling, career opportunities and new dynamics of personal selling in the digital age, etc.

Table-1 reflects the strengths and weaknesses of personal selling:-

Strength	Weakness
1. Interactive: The question can be answered and objective to overcome 2. Adaptive: Presentation can be changed to meet customer needs 3. Complex arguments can be developed 4. Relationship can be built because its personal nature 5. Provides the opportunity to close the Sale	1. Sales activity through meetings and calls are costly 2. Threats from today’s digital market and online business 3. Poor communication channels, Lack of adequate knowledge among salespersons, etc.

(Source: Jobber & Lancaster, “Selling and Management: 8th Edition, pp. 5)

Table-2 depicts the alternative steps of personal selling: -

Prospecting, Pre-approach, Approach, Presentation, Overcoming Objections, Close and Follow-up
Pre-sale, Presentation/Demonstration, Handling Objections, Sales Decision and After Sales Decision
Prospecting and Assessing Quality, Overcoming Objections, Close the Sale and Follow-up
Identifying and Cross Questioning, Needs Assessment, Meeting Objection, Gaining Commitment and Follow-up
Needs Identification, Overcoming Objections, Closing and Implementation/Follow-up.
Planning the Sales Call, responding to Objections, Obtaining Commitment and Building a Long- Term Relationship
The Opening, Need and Problem Identification, Demonstration, Dealing with Objections, Negotiation, Closing the Sale and Follow-up
Selecting and Assessing the Prospects, Demonstrations, to Overcome Objections, Closing and Follow-up
The Sales Presentation, Overcoming Objection, Closing the sale and Follow-up Service.

Table-3 highlights the essential qualities of a successful salesperson (in points):-

Experience	Information	Personality Traits
1. Governance 2. Planning 3. Communication 4. Asking questions 5. Listening 6. Reasoning 7. Drawing attention 8. Raising interest 9. Effective presentation 10. Handling objections 11. Sales closure 12. Time management	1. Marketing strategies 2. Service facilities 3. Product information 4. Market knowledge 5. Customer information 6. Sales techniques	1. Reliability 2. Honesty 3. Kindness 4. Patience 5. Courage 6. Impartiality 7. Optimism 8. Open-mindedness 9. Diligence

Source: Uslu, A. (2010), Personal Selling Techniques, İstanbul: Beta Printing Inc., pp.-36

It is believed that the three qualities in Table-3 will always apply, regardless of age.

Table-4 shows the importance of personal selling (in brief) to various stakeholders': -

For Business Houses	For Customers'	For Society
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Immediate feedback 2. Minimum wastage of efforts 3. Cost Control 4. Customer Confidence 5. Goodwill 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Assists in identification of needs 2. Personalization and Customization 3. Provides Consultation and Guidance 4. Source of Information 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improvement in standard of living 2. Employment opportunities 3. Opportunities for career advancement Scheme in future 4. Free Movement in any industry 5. Improvement in GDP and National Income

Table-5 represents the procedure and stages of personal selling communication: -

Stages	Pre-requisites
One	Pre-sale preparation in connection with selection, training and motivation for sales persons.
Two	Prospecting/qualifying: - This entails finding and identifying prospects that need the product and possess the ability to make a purchase decision.
Three	Approach of salespersons:-The salesperson should approach the customer in a polite and dignified way. Sales personnel should make the customer feel that he/she is getting proper attention of the salesperson.
Four	Presentation/Demonstration: - The sales person actually gains customers attention and presents the products by describing or explaining its attributes and benefits to the prospective consumers.
Five	Handling objections: - The salesperson should clear all doubts and objections without entering into controversy and without losing his temper. He/she must be articulate and possess the ability to convince and persuade the prospect. He should not lose patience if the prospect puts too many queries and takes time in arriving at any decision.
Six	Sales decision: - The prospect makes a decision to buy or not to buy. However, the sales person could guide but not force the prospect to make the decision. He should assure the customer that he has made the right choice if he/she chooses to buy. But if the prospect closed the sales by not buying, the sales person could politely request a repeat visit at his/her convenience.
Seven	After sales activities: - The sales person investigates about the customer was satisfied with the decision of purchase. On the other hand, prospects are revisited to enhance sales probably at subsequent visits. It helps to secure repeat sales to identify additional prospects and to evaluate salesman expertise and effectiveness.

Table-6 narrates the myths of personal selling: -

Myth 1- Anyone can be a buyer	Myth 6- Extrovert salesman perform better than introvert one
Myth 2- Price is the most important criterion for buying a product	Myth 7- fake it, fill it and make it
Myth 3-Same sales techniques will work for everyone	Myth 8- A customer "no" is "never"
Myth 4-Finish the selling process soon as possible	Myth 9-The customer is always right
Myth 5-Explore everything to close the sale	Myth 10- Sales is all about numbers

Ethics of Personal Selling: -

An ethical work climate is a multidimensional construct and its dimensions influence employees' job attitudes and job behaviors. Perceived barriers to career advancement have a significant negative impact on the organizational commitment of sales employees. There is a negative influence of perceived barriers to career advancement on organizational commitment, which is more powerful among account executives than among sales managers/directors.

An ethical climate moderates the influence of performance on intentions to leave, with higher performing salespeople reporting greater intentions to leave in the lower ethical climate condition. Salespeople's perceptions about their companies have a significant effect on individual and organizational outcomes. Moreover, the effects of ethical salesperson behavior on buyer commitment and buyer behavior are completely mediated by this trust. Ethical salesperson's behavior is most influential in driving desirable resource-based and social relationship returns and least influential in driving desirable economic returns. The effects of ethical salesperson behavior are moderated by buyer age such that they become significantly stronger as buyer age increases. Self-efficacy combined with problem-focused behaviour significantly reduces salespersons' turnover intentions.

Table-7 reflects the career opportunities in personal selling:-

Major Reasons for Choosing a Sales Career:-	
1. Earning Potential of a Sales Career	Sales are a performance-based career. The sales career is best for those who like competition and to work hard to stay ahead of others. The reward for the hard work generally comes in the form of monetary measure like periodical bonuses, prizes, trips, commissions and various other incentives.
2. The Flexibility of a Career in Sales	It provides higher incentives to these sales professionals to keep them motivated towards their organization. It is one of those fewest fields which provide highest level of flexibility in work schedule. Most of the sales professionals have the freedom to manage their daily schedule as long as they meet their targets.
3. Job Securities	It is a fact that the employees who are more valuable for the employer are less likely to be terminated, laid off or replaced. However, in time of an economic downturn, if the industry is hit hard, every employee loses value.
4. Psychological Satisfaction	Most of the people like to win and to feel as if their works make difference. For a salesperson, closing a deal is a moment of delight if it brings substantial incentives. It can be more rewarding if the deal helped the client solve a business or a personal issue or if it beats out the competition and helps secure his job.
5. Career Stepping Stone	Sales are a challenging and dynamic field to work in. It requires the sales professionals to constantly learn new skills and brush up the old ones. There are ample opportunities in a sales career to learn, grow and develop new skills. Modern techniques, methods and technology turn up dynamically which need to be learnt and practiced to be able to have an edge.
6. Mastering in-Demand Skills	There is a great importance of soft skills in a sales job. Soft skills are a "combination of people skills, social skills, communication skills, character or personality traits, attitudes, career attributes, social intelligence and emotional intelligence, etc.
7. Challenging Job	Salespersons need to prove themselves every day and in front of every customer. Each customer is an opportunity to prove one. The rewards associated with each target keep the job more challenging. The person learns to face challenges in everyday life.

Table-8 exhibits the salesperson's tasks and assignments in personal selling:-	
Create new customers	The first and foremost task of a salesperson is to keep increasing the sales or replacing the customers that will be lost over time. This requires continuous prospecting which means identifying the potential customers from the today's competitive market.
Sell more to present customers	For increasing the market share, the company not only needs to create more customers but also to sell more occasionally and in more quantity to existing customers. Research says that creating new customer is far costlier than satisfying existing customer.
Build long-term relationships with customers	Satisfying the existing customers become the more essential than creating new as it is more costly. After sales service and regular communications with them is necessary to build long term relations with the customers in order to sell them in repeated manner.
Provide solutions to customers' problems	Customers' problem or issue can be solved by providing goods or service by salespersons.
Provide service to customers	After selling, the salespeople provide a lot of other services to their customers like grievance redressal, returning damaged products, free samples to be distributed to

	customers, suggesting new business opportunities and promotional programs to promote the firm's products.
Helps customers resell products to their customers	Many times sales person's job is to guide and help the customers to resell the products and services to new customers. They provide assistance to their whole seller to retailer and retailer to consumers.
Help customers use products after purchase	This is especially in case of sales of technical products. Many times, the customers need to be demonstrated how to obtain full benefit from the product.
Build goodwill with customers	The salesperson needs to build professional, friendly and personal relationships with his customers and even work as influencer.
Provide company with market information	Another important task of a salesperson is to collect market information and pass it on to the organization. He may collect information about latest trends and preferences of customers, their reaction, complaints, grievances and suggestions on new launches, number of competitors in the market and their activities and new marketing techniques and methods.
After sale service	To provide better after sale service to customer to acquire more and more markets.

Table-9 interprets the new dynamics of personal selling in the digital age:-

Understanding the Customer	Salespeople are mainly tasked to gather information, investigate potential customers, determine communication styles and identify risks and objections to sales. They understand the customer's identity, characteristics, decision-making power, hobbies, needs and business relationships, resistance and objections and primary or secondary purchasing patterns through digital technologies and social media.
Approach	By way "approach," in digital marketing, salespeople draw the attention of potential customers, communicate with them, analyze expectations and establish good relationship. Salespeople can also integrate information from digital media into their customer relationship management processes and software.
Exploring Needs	Having information on customers' needs, buying motives and problems in the sales process, salespersons interact with other customers and vice-versa on digital platforms. Therefore, they discover not only their real needs but also the answers to questions they had not thought of before. Sometimes buyers may not even know how much they do not know about a product or service before they find out.
Presentation	In the "presentation" stage, a relationship is established between the characteristics of goods or services and the needs and wishes of customers. On digital platforms, content is prepared for the presentation of products or services to create value in the selling process.
Handling Objections	Objection to sales is not an obstacle, but an aid to enhance sales as it a signal of getting more faith on the organization results more of revenue. Salespeople use effective methods of questioning to get to the bottom of the problem leads them resolve disputes and satisfy customers to accelerate sales revenue.
Closing the Sale	The ultimate goal of the sales process is the realization of the sale as it determines his or her success in the job. However, influencers and customers themselves in personal selling also, close the sales by providing purchase references on social media platforms without prior consent from the salespeople.
Digital Age and Changing Sales Skills	In traditional face-to-face sales, salespeople play a key role in providing communication and interaction between companies and customers and in creating positive impressions about products and services. Today, in the digital age, salespeople should, therefore, be a solution seeker, a consultant, or even a psychologist to understand customers' needs and wishes. In some cases, salespeople can take on the roles of a teacher, supervisor, business partner and ambassador in large.

Limitation and Future Research:-

Further research can be done on major variables, viz. sales management and salesmanship, career opportunities, salespersons tasks and assignments, qualities of salespersons, myths and ethics of personal

selling, new dynamics of personal selling in digital age, etc. The variables however covers the stated objectives above and the remaining variables like current scenario of personal selling, significance of digital marketing, etc. are subject to discussion and

further research. Although business and other social science's investigation strive to employ scientific tools and methods, even the present research believed various kinds of such problems in the dynamic world. The following propositions identify possible personal selling contexts appropriate for business scholars to pursue future research:-

1. The improvement of communicative skills is necessary for the sales representative to become successful in sales cycle.

2. Similarly, the improvement of communicative goal of successful salesperson can lead to trigger and widen the demand of the customers.

3. Research can be done on customers' mindset as an integral part of customer relationship management to gather valuable information through face to face conversation, study of behaviors, questionnaire, sample survey, etc.

Conclusion:-

Changes in the traditional personal selling and sales management activities are required to support the emergence of the professional role for salespeople which shifts from a focus on influencing buyer behavior to managing the conflict inherent in buyer-seller relationships, as buyer is the primary concern of a businessman. The emphasis on building relationships rather than making short-term sales, salespeople dictates changes in the way firms select, train, develop, evaluate, promote and compensate salespeople to undergo online transactions. A conversation of salespeople with potential buyers is of paramount important in today's competitive and changing business environment to survive and sustain in future. Use of mobile devices, social media apps, virtual machines, digital platforms, advanced analytics, etc. have become indispensable parts of our daily lives and provided us with access to a broad array of information that can be used in modern business arena yielding salespersons to create internal value, coordinate their functions and improve customer relations for the betterment of business and society at large.

Recommendations:

Constant investment in Research and Development will help an organization to get innovative products in the market and in turn lead to higher customer satisfaction. Therefore, it is recommended to work on the qualification, training and development of salesperson and enhance their capabilities to adopt the present scenario, so that they can deal appropriately with customers yielding more and more values to the society at large. A salesperson can discuss the benefits of the products rather than the features of it by comparing with the competitors' products to gain

customer loyalty and to convert potential customers to real one. The welfare package for the sales force should be codified to guarantee commitment and satisfaction of customers enhancing value to the business.

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