

Motivational Factors Influencing Malaysian Sales Personal Performance in Achieving Sales Targets in Physical Retailing

Renne Pramila Punadi¹, Ramila Devi Ram Singh²

Faculty of Business, UNITAR International University, Tierra Crest, Jalan SS 6/3, Ss 6, 47301

Petaling Jaya, Selangor, 54100 Kuala Lumpur

Corresponding Author Email: ramila@unitar.my

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Abstract

This study investigates the motivational factors affecting sales performance in the Malaysian retail industry. It examines the relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, such as career growth, recognition, advancement, salary, job security, and the working environment, and their impact on job satisfaction and performance. The study employs both descriptive and inferential statistical analysis using a quantitative methodology. Data from retail employees in department stores shows that a dynamic, idea-rich work environment is highly valued, which enhances creativity in marketing strategies, customer engagement, and improving sales effectiveness. The study contributes to understanding how to motivate sales personnel in an evolving retail landscape, providing insights for developing targeted strategies to boost sales performance and achieve organizational goals.

Keywords: Sales Performance, Retail Industry, Intrinsic Motivators, Extrinsic Motivators

Introduction

In the era of online shopping, physical retailing also plays an important role in the Malaysian economy. The physical shops offer unique selling points primarily focusing on the in-store salesperson. The salesperson represents the brand, engages customers and their performance leads to retail store success. It is important to understand factors that motivates the salesperson to achieve sales targets. A motivated employee is more likely to work harder and strive for professional development (Abu Hassan Asaari et al., 2019). Often, motivation is seen as a quality that helps reduce employee attrition in a company (Rahman & Wahid, 2021). Existing research showed a correlation between workplace survivor syndrome and stress, burnout, increased drug use (hypnotics) owing to insomnia, mental illness, suicides, and workplace injuries among those who are still employed (Siu, 2013). Lack of motivation, such as downsizing, can result in workplace survival syndrome (Appelbaum, 1997). It is crucial to acknowledge that this phenomenon affects people's mental well-being, leading to the

emergence of depression symptoms, reduced morale, and lower productivity levels (Giorgi et al., 2020).

Motivated employees are less likely to seek new job opportunities. In 2021, 82% of professionals in Malaysia considered leaving their jobs, but 39% stayed due to lack of employment options. However, more than 81% of Malaysian professionals say they would reconsider leaving the country if the right conditions were provided. This suggests a relatively low level of employee motivation in Malaysia (Rahman & Wahid, 2021). Parker (2020) asserted that many managers believe that motivated employees at work could lead to notable accomplishments for their business. Studies also have shown that motivation has a significant impact on employee performance, benefiting both the organization and society (Rahman & Wahid, 2021).

The retail industry, which represents 43% of the industry, grew by 22.7% in 2022 but only by 5% in 2023, indicating potential expansion challenges. The Department of Statistics Malaysia (2022) estimates that motor vehicles contribute 12.9% of total revenue at RM18.6 billion, while wholesale trade accounts for 43% at RM62.9 billion. The retail industry is growing slowly and witnessing a minimal increase in sales, indicating potential issues and market saturation that could affect future performance. While the wholesale and retail trade sector experienced a modest growth rate of 4.8%, with sales amounting to RM143.9 billion (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2023). This stands in stark contrast to the impressive 13.8% gain in sales that was recorded between December 2021 and December 2022, reaching RM137.3 billion. This indicates a significant slowdown despite increased sales. Additionally, the retail industry in Malaysia faces significant problems with employee motivation, which has led to more than 50,000 retail workers resigning (MRCA, 2021). Furthermore, Malaysian retail has declined during the COVID-19 pandemic due to the transition to a more digitized world (Naseri, 2021), resulting in an environment that is not conducive to sales staff productivity. They also compared this environment to the modern depiction of the "death of a salesperson" (Vanheems & Stevenson, 2013), highlighting the profound impact of low motivation and an unattractive environment for retail sales staff.

As a result, employee motivation has become an important issue in the retail sector (Legault, 2020), which could hinder Malaysia's economic growth as human capital plays a significant role. There is a noticeable gap in academic research regarding empirical studies on employee motivation in various industries in Malaysia, especially in the retail sector (Rahman & Wahid, 2021). Understanding employee motivation and the balance between extrinsic and intrinsic motivational factors is critical (Legault, 2020) to improve performance and productivity. Addressing this research gap is essential to improving sales performance and maintaining customer loyalty to prevent further decline in the Malaysian physical retail industry.

Despite online shopping, physical retailing also plays an important role in the Malaysian economy. The physical shops offer unique selling point that primarily focuses on the in-store salesperson. The salesperson represents the brand, engages customers and their performance leads to retail store success. Hence, it is vital to understand factors that enables the salespeople meet their sales objectives provides useful information to retailers on

developing the incentive plans, to refine their strategies, to build an effective salesforce and enhance the customer services.

Therefore, this study aims to address the lack of empirical research on retail salesperson motivation by examining turnover rates, job satisfaction, and the impact of motivation on productivity and competitiveness. These results will provide valuable insights for industry stakeholders in Malaysia for improving the salespersons' performance and developing the appropriate recruitment and management strategies.

Literature Review

Organisations are striving to maintain profitability by adapting to evolving circumstances to effectively satisfy the demands of their clientele. When it comes to devising successful methods to improve sales performance in the ever-changing retail market, having a solid understanding essential factors are crucial. Some of theories that often used by retail organisations, worldwide to explain on employee's motivation is the hygiene theory in retailing sales performance, which related to the productivity of employee, and to develop a conceptual framework, which involves workplace environment, training, sales incentive, mentoring and the salesperson performance.

Sales Performance

Sales performance is crucial for organization's success. The Motivation-Hygiene Theory provides a substantial conceptual structure, framework for analysing the motivating elements impacting sales performance in physical commerce in Malaysia. According to Herzberg's theory, there is a distinct demarcation between motivators and hygiene factors. Motivators comprise elements such as success and recognition, while hygiene factors include remuneration and work environment. Motivators play a crucial role in the field of sales due to their substantial contributions to the enhancement of employee satisfaction and productivity (Chiat & Panatik, 2019). Salesperson exhibit their highest level of performance when they are entrusted with challenging tasks, opportunities for recognition, and a sense of satisfaction.

Work environment that is rewarding on intrinsic and extrinsic are likely to exhibit sustained motivation, which in return leads to enhanced sales performance (Mehrad, 2020). Hence, research needs to examining specific strategies for implementing Herzberg's theory within sales environments provides actionable suggestions for organisation seeking to improve the efficacy of their salesperson (Sankaran et al., 2023). Moreover, relating to the dynamic and competitive nature of physical retailing, this theoretical basis acts as a vital guide for creating interventions and policies that are targeted at assisting Malaysia's salespeople in achieving their sales objectives (Valk & Yousif, 2021).

Work Environment

A positive organizational environment is important in encouraging employees, especially those holding sales positions (Porter et al., 2016). The physical environment has been identified as a major aspect that plays a large role in predetermining the outcomes of salespeople's performance and motivation. A pleasant and well-designed work environment influences a salesperson's job performance; hence stores need to focus on creating working conditions that would positively influence healthy working conditions for employees (Kalra et

al., 2021). Studies have demonstrated that a significant correlation exists between a pleasant work environment and the aspect of job performance in a global organization. In which the study explores the influence of work-related stress on an employee while serving in the workforce of a North American company (Mgaiwa, 2021). As a result, the study indicated that 90 percent of the surveyed organizations indicated that job performance declines when the environment is intense. Besides, cultural diversity in Malaysia is the key aspect of its market, one needs to understand how the organizational values align with the cultural setting. An effective organizational culture plays a significant role in fostering motivation that improves sales performance (Helmy & Wiwoho, 2020). Research also evidenced that employees' job satisfaction is positive when the work environment is pleasant and encourages them to do their responsibilities in the best way possible (Sun, 2021).

Moreover, the salespeople are also influenced by the leadership approach that exists within the work environment culture. There is a positive relationship between transformational leadership and motivation (Peesker et al., 2019). Where leaders who inspire and motivate sales teams to go beyond mundane duties and strive for excellence are more likely to result in increased motivation. Therefore, it is pertinent to examine the impact of the leadership approach in the retail sector on the sales personnel in Malaysia. Another factor that affects salespeople in the workplace is technology. Given the fact that Malaysia is progressing fast in the technological frontier, it is crucial to have a clear understanding of how technologies such as e-commerce, customer relationship management software (CRM), and other sales automation tools assist salespersons. On the other hand, it is important to investigate the possible difficulties that are connected to technology. These difficulties include the need for training and the potential influence on interpersonal connections within the sales team (Kalra et al., 2021).

The Malaysian physical retail industry itself has declined during the Covid-19 pandemic due to the shift to a more digital world (Naseri, 2021), causing the environment for salespeople to be uncondusive for productivity. Adapting to changes in the work environment, such as the preference to work from home, is considered an important concern for physical commerce. These dynamics work environment comprise the physical structures of the workplace, the organization's culture, leadership, and the levels of technological advancement. Studies indicated the need to investigate how remote work affects motivation and sales effectiveness (Peesker et al., 2019), mainly in the field where in-person interaction is vital.

Salesperson's Training

The training and development of salespeople is critical in improving business performance (Rahman et al., 2015). Research has shown that salespeople who perceive training as an opportunity for personal and professional growth tend to show higher levels of engagement and enthusiasm for their work (Aqmala & Ardyan, 2019). The two-factor theory considers training and growth opportunities as motivators for work, that enable people to pursue desired roles within the organization (Alrawahi et al., 2020). Effective training programs increase salespeople's confidence in their capacity to meet and exceed performance goals, which adds to the development of self-efficacy (Singh et al., 2021). Management needs to establish training programmes that are significant and meaningful (Shabbir & Wisdom, 2020). The frequency of training programs, how it's delivered, and their

adaptability are the most important factors contributing to sustained motivation and performance improvement (Isa, 2007). The study on Libya's public hospitals revealed that lack of periodic training was one of the main factors that led to poor service (Ali, Kertahadi & Nayati, 2014), besides most employees in the retail industry lack the skills required to perform daily tasks (Belefkah et al, 2019).

Training programs that include intrinsic and extrinsic motivators serve to improve individual performance and overall sales effectiveness. Research also revealed that well-structured incentive systems, when combined with comprehensive training, not only inspire salespeople but also develop a goal-oriented mindset, which has a direct impact on sales goal achievement (Herjanto & Franklin, 2019). Kamarulzaman et al. (2015) claimed that there is a connection between poor motivation with inadequate leadership and training. The organizational environment, which includes leadership style and the ability to adjust to changing market conditions, has a significant impact on training success. Since the retail industry is constantly changing, it is essential to have a detailed knowledge of how training affects motivation and performance to develop tailored tactics that will enable sales teams to achieve their goals (Aqmala & Ardyan, 2019). Besides, it is also important to understand how virtual training modules affect motivation and performance in an industry that has traditionally relied on face-to-face interactions (Singh et al., 2021).

Sales Incentive

Sales incentives are fundamental in motivating salespeople, shaping their interactions with customers, and enhancing performance (Rao et al., 2021). People employed as cashiers in financial institutions. The researcher's findings indicate that bank employees exhibit significant levels of job dissatisfaction and have reduced level of motivation in their work environment. In addition, the research found that inadequate compensation of bank employees is a significant factor affecting job performance in service-oriented organizations (Sitopu et al., 2021). Financial compensation is often seen as the primary driving force for employee. There is empirical data supporting the existence of a positive correlation between financial elements and job performance within service organizations (Gonzalez-Canosa et al., 2021). Incentive structures that are transparent and attainable, with specific and practical objectives increases motivation and encourage continuous employee effort (Alavi et al., 2021). Empirical research shows that the introduction of performance-based compensation systems can lead to an increase in employee productivity (RIYADH, 2022). In addition to financial incentives, intrinsic motivators include opportunities for professional development, recognition and praise (Good et al., 2022). It has the potential to attract, retain and inspire employees to perform better.

Additionally, the scholarly literature examines various incentive models, investigating the relative effects of team-based incentives and individual-based incentives on the performance of sales personnel in Malaysia's heterogeneous retail setting (Kim et al., 2019). But the implementation of performance-based compensation is limited by the effectiveness of the performance metrics. Therefore, business that aims to maximise its profits should implement performance-based compensation in a certain position if the performance measure's quality meets a certain threshold (Ahmed, 2019). However, some existing retail enterprises with a small number of salespeople do not encourage them through awards, recognitions, or incentives, resulting in sales performance falls short of expectations (Bagwell,

2023). However, further research is needed to determine the level of openness associated with these incentives and their impact on customer interactions, as well the effect on salespeople performance in the retail (Sitopu et al., 2021).

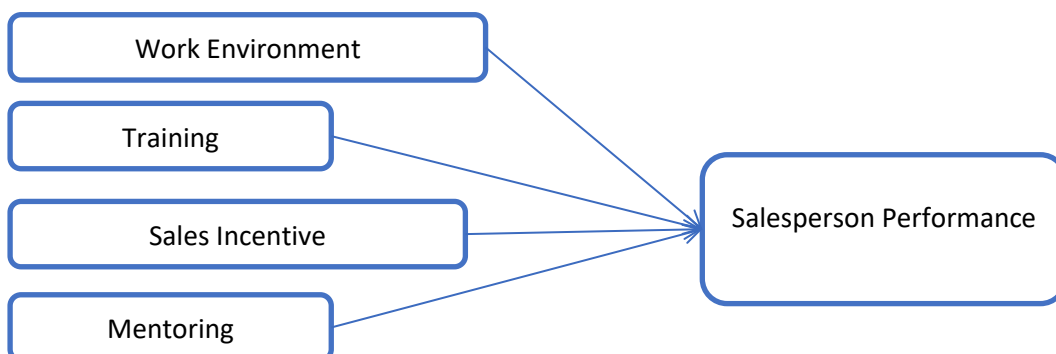
Mentoring

Mentoring is a crucial consideration mainly in a changing retail landscape. demands that salespeople adapt and learn continuously. Mentoring is where experienced individuals guide less experienced employee, and this plays a crucial role in this learning and adaptation process within an organization (Hartmann and Rutherford, 2015). Mentoring could be developed in both formal and informal settings, involving both the internal and external realms of the company that is being mentored (Brashear-Alejandro et al., 2019). Literature examines mentoring approaches as influential, where the mentors help their mentees succeed in their careers, linking mentoring ties to performance-based incentives (Shabbir & Wisdom, 2020). Mentorship typically related to leadership responsibilities, which helps organisations generate engaged and high-performing sales teams (Ahmed, 2019). Effective mentorship affects extrinsic motivation (Kim et al., 2019).

Mentoring is associated with various positive outcomes for salespeople, including increased job performance, organizational commitment, and reduced turnover intentions (Hartmann et al., 2013). While studies also discovered that salespeople with poor performance was related to inadequate mentorship (Brashear et al, 2006). In this study, mentoring is operationally defined as a professional relationship between an experienced salesman, who is referred to as the mentor, and a less experienced or freshly hired salesperson, who is known as the protégé (Coimbra & Proença, 2022). This connection has been developed with the main purpose of encouraging the salesperson's knowledge of their professional obligations, boosting the awareness, and helping their career growth. Research on mentoring in the realm of organization is exclusively concentrated on human resource management. However, there have been cases when research on mentorship have emerged within the field of marketing education (Bolander et al., 2019). Hence, this study aims to investigate the effectiveness of mentoring in the context of the sales industry.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is developed based on the discussion in section above. This Conceptual framework provide a comprehensive understanding of factors that significantly impact the performance of salespersons in the physical retail industry in Malaysia.



Method

The research methodology used in this work adheres to a quantitative approach, deliberately selected to methodically examine and quantify data. Consequently, the investigation yields pertinent findings that align with the research objectives and the inherent characteristics of the study. The study focuses on a specific demographic consisting of salespeople who are actively engaged in the physical retail industry within the Kuala Lumpur (KL) area of Malaysia. The geographical focus on Kuala Lumpur is of utmost importance due to its significant role as a vibrant economic and commercial hub. A total of 64 department stores were chosen from the city of Kuala Lumpur for the objectives of this study (SmartScrapers, 2023). Department stores in the area carry an extensive range of merchandise and serve a variety of clientele, thus they constitute a substantial portion of the retail environment. The study is grounded on the systematic sampling technique collected a sample size of 169 for a population of 300 to ensure the reliability of the research findings (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). But the study successfully collected data from 200 respondents, significantly exceeding the initial recommendation. Descriptive statistics used to provide a comprehensive overview of the data. The inferential statistics, such as regression analysis or analysis of variance used to examine the relationships and interdependencies among the factors that significantly impact the performance of salespersons in the physical retail industry in Malaysia.

Discussion and Future Research

The study surveyed 384 salespeople from department stores in Kuala Lumpur, revealing a diverse demographic. Majority of respondents were female (56.5%), predominantly aged between 18 to 25 years (57.8%), holding the position of team leader (84.6%), and with 2 to 5 years of experience in sales (97.1%). This distribution underscores the sales industry's inclination towards employing younger, presumably more energetic, personnel. In contrast, 2.9% have more than six years of experience. This distribution reflects a high turnover rate within the sales industry or a tendency for sales roles to attract relatively less experienced professionals. It's also indicative of a workforce that is relatively young or in the early stages of their careers, which aligns with the industry's dynamic and fast-paced nature. Moreover, the work experience and the sales team leader suggest that leadership roles are accessible to those with relatively modest amounts of experience, underlining the possibility that leadership in this context is more closely tied to performance or potential rather than tenure. Additionally, the fact that team supervisors are also salespeople highlights a dual role where leadership and direct sales responsibilities are intertwined, suggesting a flat organizational structure or a culture that values hands-on leadership.

Based on the correlation analysis result in Table 1. There is a positive correlation ($r = 0.746$, $p < 0.01$) that exists between training and work environment. This finding indicates that the work environment is positively correlated with increased levels of training. In a similar vein, there are noteworthy positive correlations ($r = 0.689$, $p < 0.01$) between Sales Incentive and Training, Mentoring, and Salesperson's performance ($r = 0.634$, $p < 0.01$). Furthermore, it is worth noting that there are strong positive correlations ($r = 0.715$, $p < 0.01$) between sales incentive and salesperson performance; and $r = 0.634$, $p < 0.01$) between sales incentive and Salesperson's performance.

Table 1

Correlation Analysis Result

Pearson correlation	Work Environment	Training	Sales Incentive	Mentoring	Salesperson Performance
Work Environment	1				
Training	0.746	1			
Sales Incentive	0.686	0.689	1		
Mentoring	0.539	0.549	0.695	1	0.715
Salesperson Performance	0.522	0.513	0.634	0.715	1

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

As in Table 2, the coefficient 0.744 reflects strong and positive between the actual and predicted values of Salesperson Performance. The predicted values derived from a linear combination factor such as Work Environment, Training, Sales Incentive, and Mentoring. The Coefficient of Determination, R-square, quantifies the model's goodness-of-fit. Approximately about 55.4% of the variation in Salesperson Performance is explained by the model that includes Work Environment, Training, Sales Incentive, and Mentoring as independent variables, showcasing significant explanatory at 1% level.

The coefficient for Work Environment (0.082) suggests a modest positive impact on Salesperson Performance, implying that as the quality of the work environment improves, salesperson performance marginally increases, although this relationship is not statistically significant at 1% level (p-value = 0.114). While, the Training coefficient (0.027) shows a slight positive effect on performance, which is not statistically significant (p-value = 0.592), indicating that training alone may not be a strong predictor of sales performance within this model. The Sales Incentive coefficient (0.188) indicates a more substantial positive effect on performance, significant at the 1% level (p-value < .001), suggesting that incentives are a key motivator for enhancing sales performance. Lastly, Mentoring has the most pronounced positive impact (0.482) on Salesperson Performance, with a highly significant p-value (<.001), underscoring the crucial role of mentoring in boosting sales outcomes. Based on the standardized coefficients, Mentoring (0.516) emerges as the most critical factor influencing Salesperson Performance, followed by Sales Incentive (0.195), highlighting the importance of mentorship and incentive structures in driving sales effectiveness.

Table 2

Coefficient of Regression Analysis

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	P-Value
(Constant)	3.268	0.528	-	6.185	<.001
Work Environment	0.082	0.052	0.088	1.584	0.114
Training	0.027	0.05	0.03	0.537	0.592
Sales Incentive	0.188	0.056	0.195	3.37	<.001**
Mentoring	0.482	0.045	0.516	10.7	<.001**

Dependent Variable: Salesperson Performance

Note: ** Denotes significant at 1% level

Based on the findings, there is a significant impact of mentoring and sales incentives on the performance of salespeople within the Malaysian physical retail sector, several recommendations emerge for organizations aiming to enhance sales outcomes and salesperson satisfaction. To leverage the effectiveness of sales incentives, organizations should design comprehensive incentive systems that not only reward sales performance but also align with the personal and professional goals of the sales force. These systems should be transparent, equitable, and tailored to motivate employees across different levels of performance, fostering a competitive yet supportive sales environment. Future research should consider the personalized incentive plans based on demographic segments and evaluate the long-term impact of incentive-based motivational strategies in retail settings. Additionally, it would be valuable to examine how sales incentives affect intrinsic motivation and whether certain reward structures lead to more consistent performance over time.

While the relationship between the work environment, training, and sales performance was not as pronounced, but these factors remain crucial for overall salesperson's well-being and long-term organizational success. Therefore, organizations should continue to invest in creating positive work environments that promote collaboration, innovation, and employee engagement. Simultaneously, training programs should be continuously updated to reflect the evolving demands of the retail landscape, ensuring that salesperson are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to meet the changing needs of their roles. Further studies could investigate the specific types of training that maximize sales performance and explore the role of technology in enhancing training effectiveness.

Besides the mentorship is pivotal in enhancing sales performance, therefore organizations should facilitate the formation of meaningful mentor-mentee relationships that offer guidance, support, and career development opportunities. Such programs should be structured to encourage knowledge sharing and foster a culture of continuous learning and improvement. The future research should focus on long-term effects of mentorship programs on both mentors and mentees, and the different types of mentoring style impact sales performance and career satisfaction. In addition, the influence of cultural and generational differences in mentorship effectiveness warrants further examining.

The theoretical contribution of studying motivational factors influencing Malaysian sales personnel's performance lies in enriching existing frameworks of Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory or Self-Determination Theory (SDT). By focusing on physical retailing, this research provides insights into unique motivators such as cultural influences, job-related stressors, and incentives within the localized Malaysian context. It bridges the gap in literature that often generalizes findings from Western or e-commerce environments, offering nuanced understanding of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators in emerging economies. While the contextual contribution highlights the challenges and motivators specific to Malaysia's retail industry, such as competitive pressure, cultural attitudes towards customer service, and the impact of economic fluctuations. Hence, this insight guides the management practices, such as tailoring reward systems or training programs to enhance performance.

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