

Salesmanship Qualities of Retailers: Customer Perception in the Context of Thimphu, Bhutan

¹Dhanapati Sharma, ²Tenzin Yeshey, ³Ugyen Lhamo, ⁴Tshering Dorji, ⁵Tshering Chopel, ⁶Ugyen Chezom, ⁷Tshewang Yuden

¹Lecturer, Gedu College of Business Studies, Royal University of Bhutan

^{2,3,4,5,6&7}Ex-students, Gedu College of Business Studies, Royal University of Bhutan

Abstract

This study aimed to assess the salesmanship qualities of retail enterprises based on the customer's perception. In this survey-based perceptual study, 383 customers participated giving their views on the salesmanship qualities of the retail enterprises in Thimphu. Four qualities of salesmanship were evaluated: sales personality, knowledge of the goods, knowledge of the customers and their buying motives and services. The results indicated that 47.14% of the customers felt that the salespersons of the retail enterprises in Thimphu lack the most competent salesmanship qualities. There is a need for developing training centres and offering tailor-made courses to the salespersons focusing on their ethical practices and qualities that a competent salesperson is expected to possess.

Keywords: Bhutan, business, retail enterprises, salesmanship

Introduction

In the era of advancement in technology and industrialisation characterized by huge markets, the role of salesperson is imperative to promote sales. The qualities required of a salesperson have been of great interest to research scholars and several prior works describe salesperson qualities contributing to customer satisfaction. Good salesmanship helps retaining existing customers and attracting prospective customers (Pillai, 1987).

In Bhutan, the conventional mindset of doing a business asserts on sales turnover rather than delivering quality products and services (Palden, 2017). In the capital city, Thimphu, with increasing living standards of urban population, salesman qualities are crucial to the success of business because customers expect better services.

Problem Statement

Although the concept of consumerism is relatively new in Bhutan, the urban dwellers expect prompt and reliable services from the retailers with professionalism in salesmanship. Further, Thimphu being a tourist destination, salesmanship amongst the retailers is important to the extent of providing tourists a pleasant experience of Bhutan. The concern of Bhutanese retailers with conventional mindset in running retail businesses also featured in the 7th International GNH Conference in Thimphu, such as “*Gon ba, Manggon Zhag*” which is loosely translated as “If you want, take it; otherwise, leave it” (Kuensel, 2017, Nov. 9). However, in absence of prior study on salesmanship in the context of Bhutan, it is naive to conclude and generalise the prevalence of poor salesmanship. No empirical based evidence is available to authenticate the customers’ experiences in dealing with salespersons in the retail enterprises. Thus, there is a need to study the skills and behaviour of the retail salesperson in Thimphu through customers’ experience and their perception.

Objectives

The study aimed to study the salesmanship qualities possessed by salespersons of retail enterprises in Thimphu from the perspective of the customers. The specific objective was to assess the essential qualities such as sales personality, knowledge of the products and services, knowledge of the customers and their buying motives and services.

Literature Review

Salesmanship resides in an ability of a salesperson to transform customer’s problems into solutions and influence them to buy products and services (Pillai, 1987). Salesmanship involves a process of communicating with the customers and influencing them to gain their attention and confidence to buy products or services (Maheshwari, 1997).

Definition

Salesmanship is defined as an art and profession of selling the products and services (Shah et al. 2010). Similarly, Davar et al. (2008) have defined, “Salesmanship is the art of persuading persons to buy goods or services which will give them lasting satisfaction” (p.18). Aggarwal (1980) states that salesmanship is the method of

coming to one understanding and agreement with the customers regarding benefits of some articles, services, ideas or products. It is also an art of presenting the product or service in such a way that customers feel they are in need of it and mutually come to close the sale.

Sales Personality

There are many essential qualities that salespersons need to possess to sell a product efficiently. In order to sell a product efficiently, a set of knowledge, skills and abilities are essentially required by a salesperson. According to Davar et al. (2008), an efficient sales person needs to possess the most essential qualities such as the sales personality, knowledge of the goods and knowledge of the customers and their buying motives.

Different authors define sales personality in different ways. Sales personality is the sum of everything of an individual salesperson which can create its image in the minds of customers (Davar et al., 2008). The sales personality can be improved by developing different positive qualities and traits. The positive qualities are: tact, courtesy, kindness, courage, confidence, honesty, un-selfishness, loyalty, cheerfulness and good health; while negative qualities to be avoided include indiscretion, discourtesy, harshness, cowardice, fear, dishonesty, selfishness, disloyalty, gloominess and ill health (Davar et al., 2008). These qualities are significant to understand the overall salesperson's personality.

Successful sale, inevitably, depends on the personality of the salespersons (Ambady, 2006; Belachew, 2013). Sales personality is one of the most important factors for the customer satisfaction and buyer-seller relationship (Tabasum et al., 2014). Salespersons with excellent interpersonal skills can significantly boost sales performance (Basir et al., 2010). Ramsey and Sohi (1997) state that the existence of strong and positive association between salesperson's listening skills and customers' trust in the salespersons promote trust between them. Honesty in the salespersons also boosts the customer trust in salespersons (Zia & Akram, 2016). Thus, prior studies have confirmed positive relationships between salesman's personality and sales performance.

Williams (2012) found that those salespersons scoring high on customer focus have strong concern for serving the customers and feel more important in providing superior customer service. Giving individual consideration to every kind of customer is found to have a positive relationship with customer satisfaction (Ranjabari et al., 2014). Paying attention to customer's interest, their difference in demand and allocating enough time to each customer help promote customer satisfaction. On the contrary, salespersons with low scores pay less attention in putting the customer's interest first. They do not care about the customer's service.

It is also important for the salesperson to possess ethical behaviour as it has an influence on the relationship with customers. Ethical behaviour strengthens the trust of customers on salesperson and business enterprise. Thus, customer satisfaction is directly affected by a high degree of ethical behaviour of salesperson (Tolba et al., 2015). Similarly, Hazrati et al. (2012) also found that the ethical behaviour of salesperson has a positive impact on customer satisfaction and helps to increase customers' trust in salesperson.

It is necessary for the salesperson to provide superior quality service for success in today's dynamic business environment. According to Tuan (2014), service quality helps in developing sustainable competitive advantage of a business because there is a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and service quality. There is also a positive relationship between service quality attributes and customer loyalty (Hassan et al., n.d.). The different dimensions of service quality include empathy, responsiveness, tangibility, reliability and assurance. Out of five dimensions, reliability, assurance and responsiveness were found to have a positive relationship with customer satisfaction in a study conducted by Anjum et al. (2016).

Knowledge of Goods and Services

The knowledge about products and services is an essential component of successful salesmanship. "Salespersons need to know a lot about their own product or services" (Subramanian, 2017, p. 793). In Saudi, the priority is given in training their salesperson particularly in the field of understanding the characteristics of the products and services. Having all the required knowledge about the products and services enhances the good personality of the salesperson. According to Belachew (2013), to be a successful salesperson, it is essential to have sufficient knowledge

about the product line. This is true, since the salesperson can articulate well to the customers about the products and services that the retail enterprise has to offer. Therefore, possessing knowledge about the products and services will increase the sales, which in turn will help obtain more orders for merchandise and provide better service to the customers. Moreover, it also helps salespersons to educate customers about the products and services and appropriately respond to their queries. A salesperson with good knowledge about the products and services significantly contributes to customer satisfaction (Islam et al., 2016).

Understanding the Buying Motives of Customers

Another important quality in salesmanship is knowledge about the customers and their buying motives. The term buying motives is “the feelings, thoughts, emotions and instincts which arouse in the customer as a desire to buy an article” (Davar et al., 2008). According to Salamah (2017), a salesperson needs to possess interpersonal, mentalizing, and emotional intelligence qualities. It is essential for the salesperson to understand the intentions of customers towards buying the products and also to manage emotions of the potential customers. Subramanian (2017) asserts that a salesperson actually needs to be skilful in understanding the customers and their buying motives of goods and services. The competent salesperson should have specialized skills and knowledge in understanding their customers (Salamah, 2017), for instance, understanding the customer’s desire and the need they are trying to satisfy. The salesperson’s knowledge of the customer and the ability to understand the buying motives would help answer questions and deliver the right products and services.

Therefore, having laid down the importance of the qualities and its impact on sales and customer satisfaction, it is important to investigate the qualities in salespersons in Thimphu retail enterprises.

Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative method and depended on primary data to analyse the salesmanship qualities. Quantitative method in this study is found appropriate in the understanding of customers’ perception of salesmanship in the retail enterprises. The survey was conducted in Thimphu between January to June 2020.

Sampling Approach

The study applied a non-probability convenience sampling technique. The eligible participants were individuals over 18 years of age and residing in Thimphu for more than six months. According to the National Statistical Bureau (NSB), the total population was estimated at 98,676 in 2020. Using the sample size determination by Krejcie and Morgan, a sample size of 422 was confirmed and the survey questionnaires were distributed. The response rate was 90% which corresponds to 383 respondents.

Data Collection

The data was collected solely from the retail enterprises employing salespersons. The questionnaire was written in English, seeking responses on a five-point Likert scale. It was designed to identify four core competencies and skills. The questionnaire was validated and piloted on 5% ($n = 20$) and the Cronbach's coefficients were between 0.75 to 0.84 with personality of the salesmen (0.80), knowledge of the goods (0.75), knowledge of customers and their buying motives (0.84), and service (0.81). The overall reliability of the questionnaire was found to be about 0.919 (Table 1).

Table 1

Reliability of the Questionnaire

	Variables	Cronbach's Alpha
1	Sales Personality (8 items)	0.80
2	Knowledge of Goods (7 items)	0.75
3	Knowledge of Customers (6 items)	0.84
4	Service (2 items)	0.81
	Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the stability	0.92

Prior to the collection of data, verbal consent was obtained from all the eligible participants. The questionnaires were self-administered to literate participants and for illiterate participants, enumerators translated in their local language and helped to fill in the survey questionnaire. The data were collected on-site where the participants made their last purchase.

Data Analysis

Data coding, quality control, and data entry were done using established procedures. The questionnaires were pre-coded to minimise data coding errors. Before data entry, forms were checked for errors and necessary steps were taken to avoid invalid questionnaires. Data was entered by two persons using Epi-data version 3.1. Epi-data software was used to control data entry errors and data cleaning was performed.

Statistical analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 21). The demographic characteristics of participants were presented using descriptive statistics. The analysis of quality of the salesmanship was analysed using frequencies.

Analysis and Results

The demographic characteristics of the participants are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Demographic Characteristics of Study Population

Variable	Characteristics	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	207	54.1
	Female	176	45.9
Age	18-30 years	78	20.4
	31-40 years	101	26.4
	41-50 years	89	23.2
	51 -60 years	66	17.2
	60+years	49	12.8
Highest Qualification	No schooling	92	24
	Primary	112	29.2
	Secondary	98	25.6
	Tertiary and above	81	21.2

Salesmanship

About 60% of the respondents felt that the retail salespersons in Thimphu were not honest all the time. However, around 61% of the respondents felt that they were

cordial. The participants were asked whether the salespersons respond patiently and it was found that 66.8% of them feel that salesperson respond with patience. With regard to the question of sincerity, nearly 50% of the respondents were of the opinion that the salespersons were sincere in serving the customers.

Knowledge about the Products

Approximately 52.46% of the salespersons were reported to be aware of the products that they were selling, and about 47% of the respondents felt that the salespersons were aware of their competitors. On the question of substitute products, 63% of the respondents felt that the salespersons knew well about the substitute products.

Most of the respondents (52.46%) agreed that the salespersons provide them with proper suggestions on the products they buy. However, nearly 50% of the respondents felt that salespersons do not know the technical names of the products.

Knowledge about Customers and their Buying Motives

On the question of ability to appropriately handle the customers' queries about the products, about 50% of the respondents felt that the salespersons were not able to respond to the queries satisfactorily and 57.79% of the respondents felt that the salespersons did not understand the desire of the customers or the buying motives.

Services

Although, majority of the respondents felt that salespersons listen to the customers actively, only around 35.60% of the respondents felt that salespersons provided quality services. With regard to expression and emotion, 62% for the salespersons did not understand customer's expressions and 64% did not understand the emotional aspects of customers. The overall response of the salespersons to the queries of the customers was relatively better where only 27% disagreed to the question of whether the salespersons respond to the queries of the customers appropriately.

Discussion

Regarding the salesman personality, 255 respondents out of 383 felt that salespersons in Thimphu retail enterprises were patient in responding to the

customers and 178 out of 383 felt that the salespersons were cordial and sincere. Thus, these are the only three personality traits that respondents felt the retailers of Thimphu were relatively better over other traits. The other personalities like courteousness, consistency in truthfulness, honesty, loyalty, and confidence were perceived low according to the customers. Hence, it implied that the first important quality, sales personality, is lacking in the Thimphu retailers with 49.05% of the respondents conforming to it.

Table 3

Consolidated Result

	Salesmen Personality	Knowledge of Goods	Customers' Buying Motives	Service	Total %
Agreed	35.41%	52.46%	27.02%	27.54%	35.60%
Disagreed	49.05%	32.26%	57.79%	49.47%	47.14%

The knowledge of the products and services consisted of the salesperson's ability to clearly explain about the products or handling queries of the customers. Particularly, the customers were under the perception that Thimphu retailers do not know the technical names of the products and were not able to handle queries. On the contrary, 52.46% of the customers perceive that Thimphu retailers do possess the knowledge of the goods.

The knowledge of the consumers and their buying motives comprise the qualities such as understanding the desire of the customers, their expressions, emotional aspects, technical needs, listening to them actively and winning their confidence. With 57.79% of disagreement, all of the above listed qualities are perceived to be deficient in the salespersons, indicating that they lack knowledge of consumers and their buying motives. With regard to the services provided by the salespersons, 47.14% of the respondents perceived that salespersons do not provide them good services. In totality, the respondents or the customers perceived that salespersons do not possess qualities that salesmanship must possess.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The study has provided a perspective on the professionalism of the salespersons in the retail enterprises of the capital city. The study has empirically validated the

claim that Bhutanese businessmen or shopkeepers are happy turning off a customer from the door (Palden, 2017). This study concludes that 47.14% of the customers find the salespersons of retail enterprises lack qualities of salesmanship.

In particular, the study has highlighted four important issues which need to be addressed to improve the competency of the salespersons as reported by the customers. Special attention should be given to improve the whole process of recruiting the salesperson. Furthermore, initiative should be taken to offer tailor-made training programmes where salespersons can be trained in the areas of ethical practices and qualities of salesmanship.

Limitation and Future Direction

The study was limited to Thimphu retail enterprises. Therefore, the findings of the study cannot be generalised. The application of basic descriptive statistics in the analysis of data and interpretations could have been a major setback to come to a meaningful conclusion. Future studies may adopt robust statistical techniques for in-depth analysis. Future studies may also include the view of the salespersons for validation and comparative analysis of the views of the customers.

References

- Aggarwal, V., D. (1980). *Handbook of sales management and salesmanship*. Chandigarh, India: India Directories Publishers.
- Ambady, N., & Krabbenhoft, A., M. (2006). The 30-sec sale: Using thin-slice judgements to evaluate sales effectiveness. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 16(1), 4-13.
- Anjum, U., Aftab, J., Ahmed, M., & Sultan, Q. u.-A. (2016). Factors affecting the service quality and customer satisfaction in the telecom industry of Pakistan. *International Journal of Management, Accounting and Economics*, 9(3), 509-520.
- Basir, M. S., Ahmad, S. Z., & Kitchen, P. J. (2010). The relationship between sales skills and salesperson performance: An empirical study in the Malaysia telecommunications company. *International Journal of Management and Marketing Research*, 1(3), 51-72.
- Belachew, N. (2013, June). An assessment of salesmanship practice with reference to Zhongshun cement manufacturing PLC. Retrived from <http://197.156.93.91/bitstream/123456789/483/1/NAHOM%20BELACHEW.pdf>
- Davar, S. R., Davar, R. S., & Davar. R., N. (2008). *Salesmanship and publicity*. Delhi: Vikas Publishing Private Limited.
- Hassan, M. U., Malik, A. A., & Faiz, M. F. (n.d.). An empirical assessment of service quality and its relationship with customer loyalty evidence from the telecom sector of Pakistan. *International Journal of Asian Social Science*, 2(10), 1647-1663.
- Hazrati, S. S., Zohdi, M., Zohdi, M. H., & Seyedi, S. M. (11 April, 2012). Examining impacts of the salesperson's ethical behaviour on the customer's satisfaction, trust and commitment. *African Journal of Business Management*, 14(6), 5026-5033.

- Islam, M., Paul, K., S., Nasira, S., Pritom, T., S., & Rabbi, E., R. (2016, January). Exploring the relative effects of selling skills on customer satisfaction: A study on SMES of IT hardware industry in Bangladesh. *International Journal of Business and Management Invention*, 5(1), 45-58.
- Maheshwari, P. R. (1997). *A complete course in I.S.C commerce*. East Park Road, Karol Bagh, New Delhi: Pitambar Publishing Company (P) Ltd.
- Palden, T. (2017). *Cultural beliefs hinder infusion of GNH in business*. Retrieved <https://kuenselonline.com/cultural-beliefs-hinder-infusion-of-gnh-in-business>.
- Pillai, R., S. (1987). *Modern marketing*. Ram Nagar, New Delhi: Chand & Company Ltd.
- Ramsey, P. R., & Sohi, S., R. (1997). Listening to your customers: The impact of perceived salesperson listening behavior on relationship outcomes. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 2(25), 127-137.
- Ranjabari, M., Ahmadi, M., Karimi, A., & Afshar, A. (2014, July). Relationship between carpet-sellers' behavior with customer satisfaction (case study: carpet shops in Markazi province, Iran). *International Journal of Scientific Engineering and Technology Research*, 15(03), 3111-3115.
- Salamah, N. H. (2017). An empirical study about customer preferences of retail sellers' qualifications. *International Business Research*, 3(10), 193-202.
- Shah, N. B., Nayak, S. B., Jain, C. V., & Shah, P., D. (2010). *Textbook of pharmaceutical industrial management*. Haryana, India: Reed Elsevier India Private Limited.
- Sharabi, M., & Davidow, M. (2010). Service quality implementation: Problems and solutions. *International Journal of Quality and Service Sciences*, 2(2), 189-205.

- Subramanian, K. R. (2017). Selling skills and the myopic marketing outlook. *International Journal of Combined Research and Development*, 2(6), 789-803.
- Tabusum, F., Ibrahim, M., Rabbani, M., & Asif, M. (2014). Impact of salesmen personality on customer perception and sales. *Global Journal on Management and Business Research: E-Marketing*, 14(8), 2249-4588.
- Tolba, A., Seoudi, I., Meshriki, H., & AbdelShahid, M. (2015). Impact of ethical sales behaviour, quality and image on customer satisfaction and loyalty: Evidence from retail banking in Egypt. *International Journal of Management and Marketing Research*, 2(8), 1-18.
- Tuan, N. P., & Linh, N. T. (2014). Impact of service quality performance on customer satisfaction: A case study of Vietnam's five-star hotel. *ABAC Journal*, 3(34), 53-70.
- Williams, C. (2012, January). *Sales performance assessment (SPA) development report*. Portland, Maine USA, Management Research Group.
- Zia, U. N., & Akram, W. M. (2016). Impact of salesman behaviour on customer satisfaction: An empirical study of dairy retail handlers. *Kuwait Chapter of Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review*, 8(5), 20-32.