

Salesman's Personality Trait and Its Effect on Sales Performance: Study of Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) in Abia State, Nigeria

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Abstract

A "suit and hard sell tactics" do not define superior selling. Many determinants impact sales performance and that distinguish superior salespeople from inferior salespeople (Sardar and Patton 2002), thus raising the need to investigate salesman's personality trait and its effect on sales performance among FMCG IN Nigeria. Data were randomly collected through self-administered questionnaire to 54 respondents comprising of sales managers and salespersons of the selected cosmetics firms using convenience sampling technique and were analysed using Pearson correlation co-efficient statistical model. The Cronbach's alpha was used to test the reliability of the measuring instrument. Results show that a positive and strong relationship exists among the three personality traits factor examined to influence sales performance (Empathy, assertiveness and ambitiousness). The study recommends amongst other things; the need for firms to boost salesmen capability, integrity, trust and confidence by matching sales person's sales achievement to the quota or target set for that him/her, rather than comparing one sales person against the other or comparing one sales person to the rest of the team.

Keywords: salesman, personality traits, sales performance, assertiveness, empathy

1. Introduction:

A "suit and hard sell tactics" do not define superior selling. Many determinants impact sales performance and that distinguish superior salespeople from inferior salespeople (Sardar and Patton 2002). While selecting salespeople firms must look out for those personality traits that distinguish a salesperson from the other. The Big five model developed by Costa and McCrae (1992) has emerged as a popular tool for understanding the relationship between personality and various individual behaviors (Poropat, 2009). It has been employed by many researchers; Mount, Witt and Barrick, (2000), Sawyerr, Srinivas and Wang (2009). These "five factors" are conscientiousness, agreeableness, extraversion, emotional stability and openness to experience. However, the researcher includes three other subjective self-assessment variables outside the Big five model developed by Costa and McCrae (1992) which are; empathy, assertiveness and ambitiousness to measure their impact on sales performance. Customers choosing a firms market offering against its competitor's will depend on how well and smart the offer is presented to target audience by salesmen who possess these traits. In identifying, anticipating and satisfying customers need and wants effectively marketers must hire proactive salesmen. Improving a salesman's performance increases the organization's corporate profitability, shareholders welfare and the salesperson's income. In other for firms to achieve its goals, there is need for the recruitment and selection of proactive and smart salesmen with bias to personality trait. Recruitment and selection of an employee has been estimated to cost between fifty and one-hundred and fifty per cent of the employee's annual salary (Chamber of Commerce, 1999). In adopting personality profiling techniques, peak performers will be recruited over mediocre and poor performers and will move up the promotional ladder quicker (Sardar and Patton 2002). Hence, firms must communicate their market offering to customers through personal selling activities by salesmen. As this has the power to cushion the effect of stiff competition, widening of market, changes in tastes and preferences of customers as a result of changes in technology, increasing need for customer relationship and sales volume enhancement.

Personal selling is a presentation by the firm's sales men for the purpose of matching, sales and building customer relationship (Kotler and Armstrong, 2010). Personal selling is an off shoot of sales performance. By engaging in face-to-face contact with prospects, salespeople get more attention than an advertisement or a display. Salespeople can adjust what they say or do to take into consideration culture and other behavioural influences on the customer. Salespeople ask questions to find out about a customer's specific interests for a product. Salesmen occupy a boundary position between buyers and sellers; they are the company to many buyers and account for a major cost of marketing in a variety of industries, and they can create value for customers. Good salesmen don't just try to sell their products to the customer's; rather, they try to help the customer buy by understanding the customer's needs and presenting the advantages and disadvantages of their products. Wiley and Carolyn (2005), views salesman's personality traits as one's capability to perform the job that he or she has the right personal uniqueness and the right mind capabilities for selling.

Salesmen who possess the right personality trait are those who are able to take the prospective customer through the selling process which comprises of; prospecting, pre approach, approach, presentation, close and follow-up. Sales performance is the quality and quantity of sales closed at a particular time. Bandura (2003), Locke (2002) and Luthans and Peterson (2002) in various disciplines have researched on salesman personality and sales performance. However, several studies have been conducted in the area of personality traits and sales performance in developed economies studying products other than consumer goods. But fewer empirical studies were conducted in Nigeria to investigate salesman personality traits on sales performance among FMCG which is a low involvement product. Given the rate at which FMCG companies in Nigeria hire and recruit sales reps/salesman to carry, sale and market their offerings. Yet it is still on the low ebb as compared to other sectors. Hence, it is necessary to investigate salesman personality traits on sales performance for FMGC in Nigeria.

1.2 Problem Statement:

The importance of successful sales forces performance measurement in marketing has been an important topic (Pilling et al., 1999). There have been various theories to explain the factors that influence sales performance; the characteristics theory tried to explore what kind of personality traits should have high performance sales (Keck et al, 1995). Some scholars even pointed out, the interior factors such as organizational cultures (Malik et al., 2012, Miao et al, 2007) or external factors such as competition (Kotler, 2002, Majeed, 2011). However, the sales reports of some companies show that some sales departments are failing to meet their targets or quotas. The players in the industry therefore view sales people as a major promotional tool in achieving sales volume. Churchill, Ford, Hartley and Walker (1985), identified a reasonable exhaustive set of factors influencing sales performance and its interrelationship with salesman's personality traits. However, their result showed inconsistent and inconclusive evidence.

In a study conducted by Lamont and Lundstrom (1977), who investigated the relationships between several personal factors and personality variables and sales performance of industrial salespeople. The result indicated that endurance and social recognition were significantly and positively related to performance while empathy and ego strength were found to be negatively related to performance. Other studies, notably Maslow (1970), Dion, Easterling and Miller (1995), Hollenbeck, Williams and Klein (1988) and Wiley and Carolyn (1997) have also examined the relationship between personality and job performance have generally exhibited numerous results. Bain and Taylor (2000) also pointed out that few attention were given to salesman's personality by marketers of fast moving consumer goods in identifying suitable criteria for hiring, recruiting and selecting salesmen. In order to develop valid selection criteria for identifying successful salesmen in the FMCG they characteristics of those sales men who are likely to be high performers and who would persevere in harsh, stiff and competitive business environments – Nigeria need to be identified. They researcher also suggested that further investigation on personality factors in predicting service performance and turnover rates of salesmen need to be investigated.

1.3 Significance of the Study:

In the past, considerable researches on the origins of sales performance has been conducted in the developed economies and their findings were inconclusive. Churchill, Ford, Hartley and Walker (1985), identified reasonable exhaustive set of factors influencing sales performance or to specify their interrelationships. Maslow (1970), Dion, Easterling and Miller (1995), Hollenbeck, Williams and Klein (1988) and Wiley and Carolyn (1997), examined the relationship between personality and job performance. In spite of volume of literature on this area, there exist a limited empirical research which has investigated salesman's personality trait and sales performance on FMCG from emerging economies-Nigeria. Based on the subject of discourse, this work with its highlight on salesman's personality trait will contribute to existing knowledge on salesman's personality traits and their sales performance in the cosmetics and related industries. It will aid manufactures gain insight into important personality traits that contribute to sales success. It will help distributors and retailers to gain a better understanding of how best to convince prospective buyers of cosmetics to become customers for the firm.

1.4 Objectives of the Study:

The principal objective of this study is to investigate the existence of relationship between salesman's personality traits on sales performance for FMCG.

The subsidiary objectives includes to:

- (i) determine the effect of salesman's empathy on sales performance.
- (ii) ascertain the effect of salesman's assertiveness on sales performance.
- (iii) determine the effect of salesman's ambitiousness on sales performance.

1.5 Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses in null forms serve as anchor to this study as;

HO₁: salesman's empathy do not have significant effect on sales performance.
HO₂: salesman's assertiveness do not have significant effect on a sales performance.
HO₃: salesman's ambitiousness as a personality trait do not have significant effect on sales performance.

2. Review of Related Literature:

Sales manager's job is to determine what leads to superior performance which is significant to the continued existence and success of a firm. Walker, Churchill and Ford (1977) posited a model which is comprehensive of salesman performance where the antecedents of performance were classified into five categories which are, personal, organizational and environmental factors, motivation, aptitude, skills level and role perceptions. Krishnan, Netemeyer and Boles (2002), view sales performance as the salesperson's perception of the amount of sales achieved, the quality of customer relationships they maintain and the information they acquire about their organization's products, competition and also customer needs.

2.1 Salesman Personality

Salesman personality is explained as a way in which a salesman views and understands himself, and the manner in which he/she interacts with the public and reacts to situations. Funder, (2001) defined traits as characteristics, lasting patterns of thinking, emotion and behaviour that are constant over time and explain people's behavior across different situations. Wiley and Carolyn (2005) related salesman personality as one's capacity to perform the job with the right personal characteristics, the right mind capabilities for selling. Bang (2012), view personality as the various enduring and distinctive patterns of behavior and thought that are characteristic of a particular person.

Marketing scholars have acknowledged the significance of personality studies particularly in giving some assistance for the recruiting and hiring of personnel. Salesman personality is linked to three dimensions where the first dimension is linked to a salesperson's physical form or look such as age, height or weight. The second dimension is the personality with the unique traits and attributes patterns of thought, emotion and actions that define the salesperson's personal style and manipulate the interactions with the environment (Atkinson, Smith and Bern, 2006). Some of the personality distinctiveness linked with salespersons is empathy, self efficacy, self monitoring, sociability, self esteem, proactive personality and locus of control. The third dimension on the salesman personality is mental abilities which include verbal astuteness, mathematical ability and musical orientation and these are normally referred as accomplishment in psychology.

2.1.2 Personality factors

Salesforce would be the key factor for business survival, especially in highly competitive markets. If the firm wants profit to keep growing, they must rely on the sales people to promote products launched to the customers. Therefore, the salespeople have to make great effort to collect information and identify potential customers in order to reach the selling goals and obtain the necessary profit for the firm to survive. Santrock (2008) opined personality as a dynamic and organized set of characteristics possessed by a person that uniquely influences his or her cognitions, motivations, and behaviors in various situations. Personality arises from within the individual and remains fairly consistent throughout life.

2.1.3 Sales performance

In the majority field of strategic management, sales performance is a widely discussed issue, but not easy to handle. Some scholars directly link the sales performance to the profit rate, some use productivity (Porter, 1985) or sales volume to define the meaning of sales performance. However, to compare the performance of sales, we can only use the subjective self-assessment of the sales people such as empathy, assertiveness, ambitiousness, alertness and enthusiasm. Sales performance can be defined as "behaviour evaluated in terms of its contribution to the goals of the organization" (Johnston and Marshall, 2006). A survey conducted by Gitomer (2001) found that the following characteristics, if mastered, will boost sales performance of sales men;

- Unyielding belief in the company, the product, and yourself
- Creativity to differentiate yourself from the competition
- Sense of humour that builds deep rapport
- Ability to promote yourself
- Ability to maintain price integrity
- Unyielding personal values and ethics
- Reliability and dependability
- Passion and desire to excel and be the best

2.2 Research Gap

Majority of the studies discussed above related to research conducted outside Nigeria and for products other than consumer goods. It is important to note that different products may differ from each other as they each have unique characteristics of image attributes which may affect the personality of the sales representatives offering

such products. Therefore, findings in the above reviewed literature cannot be generalized to other products categories. Therefore, the salesman personality and its effect on sales performance need to be further validated in other product categories like cosmetics, pharmaceutical, electronics, etc.

3 Methodology:

This exploratory research adopted a correlation type of investigation to explain how personality traits associate with sales performance of salesmen. The research was done on the consideration of the researcher's experience. The research design adopted was descriptive survey design as this offered the researcher the privilege to establish the existing relationship between salesman's personality traits on sales performance. This work was conducted in Abia State and specifically in Aba. The sales managers and salespersons of some selected indigenous cosmetics firms were studied and data obtained were used to arrive at solution to problems of the study. Four (4) cosmetics firms in Aba were chosen by the researcher as case points. The firms are **Starline Nigeria Limited, Beauty Base Industries, PZ cussions and Planet oil**. These firms are selected based on their large involvement in the use of salesmen in marketing their cosmetics products, as well as their nearness to the researcher. The population of the study is 63 according to the record that was made available to the researcher and sample size of 54 was determined using Yaro Yahmen formular . A well structured closed-ended questionnaire was used based on modified likert ranking scale to elicit data from sales representatives and sales managers. The researcher further conducted oral interviews on the salesmen to complement the data collection instrument (i.e. questionnaire). Validity and reliability test were carried out using the pilot study, test re-test technique, and cronbach Alpa model for rating of 0.79 respectively while minor adjustments on the questionnaire were made.. Data generated were bases for the analysis of projected hypotheses using Pearson correlation coefficient statistical model.

Model Specification

(i) The regression model used in determining the effect of empathy on sales performance is implicitly stated as follows;

$$y = \beta_0 + \beta x + e$$

where; y = Sales performance

x = empathy

(ii) The regression model used in determining the effect of assertiveness on sales performance is implicitly stated as follows;

$$y = \beta_0 + \beta x + e$$

where; y = Sales performance

x = assertiveness

(iii) The regression model used in determining the effect of ambitiousness on sales performance is implicitly stated as follows;

$$y = \beta_0 + \beta x + e$$

where; y = Sales performance

x = ambitiousness

4. Data Analysis and Findings

4.1 THE EFFECT OF EMPATHY ON SALES PERFORMANCE

Regression analysis showing the effect of empathy on sales performance

Table 1 Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.867 ^a	.801	.744	12.224

a. Predictors: (Constant), Empathy

Table 2 ANOVA^b

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	33.417	1	33.417	41.408	.000 ^a
	Residual	41.159	51	.807		
	Total	74.576	52			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Empathy

b. Dependent Variable: Sales performance

Table 3 Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.105	1.115		1.887	.041
	Empathy	1.051	.302	.665	3.480	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Sales performance

Table 1 which is the model summary, gives the value of R which stands for the correlation between Salesman's empathy and sales performance. The R value of 0.867 shows a positive and strong relationship between a salesman's empathy and his sales performance. Similarly, the R Square of 0.801 shows that 80% of the variability observed in sales performance is explained by salesman's empathy.

In Table 2, the f-ratio of 41.408 which was significant at 1% level shows that the model has a good fit. Salesman's empathy was statistically found to exert significant influence on sales performance. From the regression result in Table 3 above, it is clear that if empathy which is the independent variable is increased by 1 unit, there will be a 1.051 unit increase in sales performance. It then means that as salesmen build integrity and trust into their products and customers, the more their sales performance increases.

4.2 THE EFFECT OF ASSERTIVENESS ON SALES PERFORMANCE

Regression analysis showing the effect of assertiveness on sales performance

Table 4 Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.773 ^a	.721	.653	14.3412

a. Predictors: (Constant), Assertiveness

Table 5 ANOVA^b

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	34.874	1	34.874	45.349	.000 ^a
	Residual	40.012	51	.769		
	Total	74.886	52			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Assertiveness

b. Dependent Variable: Sales performance

Table 6 Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.101	.318		3.462	.000
	Assertiveness	1.159	.251	.347	4.617	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Sales performance

Table 4 which is the model summary, gives the value of R which stands for the correlation of the two variables (Assertiveness and sales performance). The R value of 0.773 shows a positive relationship between assertiveness and sales performance. Similarly, the R Square of 0.721 shows that 72% of the variability observed in sales performance is explained by the salesman's assertiveness. In Table 5, the f-ratio of 45.349 which was significant at 1% level shows that the model has a good fit and a correct model specification. Salesman's assertiveness was statistically found to exert significant effect on his sales performance. Additionally, from the regression result in Table 6 above, it is clear that if assertiveness is increases by 1unit, there will be a 1.159 unit increase in sales performance. That is to say that the more confident and direct salesmen are in dealing with customers, the more increase in sales performance.

4.3 THE EFFECT OF AMBITIOUSNESS ON SALES PERFORMANCE

Regression analysis showing the effect of ambitiousness on sales performance

Table 7 Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.882 ^a	.860	.821	11.8102

a. Predictors: (Constant), Ambitiousness

Table 8 ANOVA^b

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	30.296	1	30.296	42.790	.000 ^a
	Residual	36.118	51	.708		
	Total	66.414	52			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Ambitiousness

b. Dependent Variable: Sales performance

Table 9 Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	1.283	.521		2.462	.000
Ambitiousness	1.216	.449	.142	2.708	.005

a. Dependent Variable: Sales performance

Table 7 which is the model summary, gives the value of R which stands for the correlation of the two variables (Ambitiousness and sales performance). The R value of 0.882 shows a positive and strong relationship between ambitiousness of a salesman and his sales performance. Similarly, the R Square of 0.860 shows that 86% of the variability observed in a salesman's sales performance is explained by his level of ambitiousness.

In Table 8, the f-ratio of 42.790 which was significant at 1% level shows that the model has a good fit and a correct model specification. Ambitiousness was statistically found to exert significant influence on sales performance. From the regression result in Table 9 above, it is clear that if ambitiousness (the independent variable) is increased 1 unit, there will be a 1.216 unit increase in sales performance. That is to say that sales performance increases as salesmen hit their quotas or close more deals than the previous quotas.

5.1 Research findings

The researcher was able to find the following from the study;

Findings indicate that a positive and strong relationship (0.867) exist between a salesman's empathy and his sales performance. Similarly, the R Square of 0.801 showed that 80% of the variability observed in sales performance is caused by a salesman's empathy. It is clear that if empathy is increased by 1 unit, there will be a 1.051 unit increase in sales performance. Salesmen who possess high empathy achieve high sales results.

A salesperson's level of assertiveness was found to have a positive relationship between with sales performance. Similarly, the R Square showed that 72% of the variability observed in sales performance is explained by the salesman's assertiveness. Thus, a salesman's level of assertiveness was statistically found to exert significant effect on his sales performance.

In Table 7, the R value of 0.882 also revealed a positive and strong relationship between the ambitiousness of a salesman and his sales performance. Similarly, the R Square of 0.860 showed that 86% of the variability observed in a salesman's sales performance is explained by his level of ambitiousness. Thus, a highly ambitious salesman achieves a high sales performance.

5.2 Conclusion

Salesforce would be the key factor for business survival, especially in a highly competitive market. If firms want their profit to keep growing, they must rely on the sales people to promote products launched to the customers. Therefore, the salespeople have to make great effort to collect information and identify potential customers in order to reach the selling goals and obtain the necessary profit for the firm to survive. Significant relationship exists between salesmen personality traits and their sales performances. Using personality traits as identified in the study, successful salesmen can be described as being empathetic, assertive and ambitious

although, other factors may influence their performance but the researcher limited his study to these three factors. All personality traits factors examined were found to positively influence sales performance. Sales performance is often describe as the quality and quantity of sales closed in a specific time period. This marketing function of selling is undertaken by the sales force of a company. For these sales persons to achieve the desired sales result, they must possess certain personality traits that will endear them to their clients. It is vital to identify necessary personality changes in salespersons because they provide an important role in achieving sales growth and corporate profitability. Salespersons play an important part in influencing new product developments. Salespersons also develop marketing strategies by giving ideas on product innovations through their dealings with customers. Information on price changes are gathered through salesmen dealings their clients.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made;

- 1) Sales managers should establish specific, short-term or immediate goals or sales targets that will challenge the sales people, yet still viewed as achievable and realistic. This is in line with Schunk and Pajares, 2002 who states that improving self efficacy of a sales person does not require setting of sales target that are not realistic and achievable.
- 2) Firms should boost the capability, integrity, trust and confidence of sales person's by matching sales person's sales achievement to the quota or target set for that sales person, rather than comparing one sales person against another or comparing one sales person to the rest of the team. This approach along with an encouraging atmosphere can boost one's level of empathy and ambitiousness, whilst unease can challenge it.
- 3) Sales managers can reduce stressful and tense situations and lowering anxiety surrounding the selling process or sales process of the sales people. Sales person's ambitious potential for achieving sales target or quotas can also be improved or made better through guided practice, mentoring and role modeling.
- 4) Employers should use personality traits as criteria in selecting more effective salespeople and in designing job characteristics that optimally fit the profile of proactive employees. Additionally, training interventions may be adapted to the differential needs of individuals who score high versus low on the personality traits.

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