

# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMMERCE & MANAGEMENT

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## LINKING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, SALES PERFORMANCE AND SALES SUCCESS OF RETAIL SALESPEOPLE: A REVIEW APPROACH

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### ABSTRACT

*At present the retail industry in India is accelerating. Though India is still not at an equal pace with other Asian counterparts but it is geared up to become a major player in the retail market. In recent past, retailing has gained lot of importance due to rising investment in this sector. These investments will only be justified with pure performance of the retail outlets and the performance of the retail outlets depend on individual sales performance of retail sales people. Dealing with customer problems and maintaining a smile in difficult situations is very demanding in retail sales and therefore, retail sales providers need to be more supportive and understanding in nature to deal with such demands effectively. Emotional intelligence is the ability to restrain from the negative feelings stemming out of such situations and focus on positive feelings which determines success (Gangai et al., 2013). Many researchers have emphasized the importance of emotional intelligence in sales performance but this has not extended to research in analyzing retail sales performance. This paper tries to explore and investigate the relationship between EI and retail sales people performance through review of various literatures. Based on what literatures indicate, it has been concluded emotional competencies of sales people are very important in determining their sales performance and sales success. More empirical evidence is advocated in future researches.*

### KEYWORDS

Emotional Intelligence, Retail Stores, Sales People, Sales Performance, Sales Success.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

There is a big buzz of FDI in retailing and retailing is seen as a vital sector by most thinkers, politicians, finance specialist, economists, businessmen & investors. In recent past, retailing has gained lot of importance due to rising investment in this sector. Even today's consumer retail purchase decisions have undergone a lot of changes. Consumer shop a lot of products from different types or formats of retail outlets. Both organized and family owned small retail outlets are surviving in Indian markets. There is also a lot of scope of many more organized retail outlets in India.

As lot of new retail companies from India and abroad are establishing their retail outlets in Indian market, the existing retailing outlets both organized and unorganized are facing lot of competition and to survive in this competitive environment they need to perform or otherwise they will perish. The performance of retailing outlets mainly depends on their sales performance. The retail sales performance depends on individual retail sales personnel performance. Dealing with customer problems and maintaining a smile in difficult situations is very demanding in retail sales and therefore, retail sales providers need to be more supportive and understanding in nature to deal with such demands effectively (Levy et al., 2008). Emotional intelligence is the ability to restrain from the negative feelings stemming out of such situations and focus on positive feelings which determines success (Gangai et al., 2013). If employees are emotionally strong then they will be able to handle stressful situations in a better way. Singh (2011) believe that individual competencies such as emotional intelligence of sales force of any organization are strong determinant of success in retail industry.

#### 1.1 RETAILING IN INDIA

Retailing in India is one of the pillars of its economy and accounts for 14 to 15 percent of its GDP. The Indian retail market is estimated to be US\$ 450 billion and one of the top five retail markets in the world by economic value. India is one of the fastest growing retail markets in the world, with 1.2 billion people.

As of 2013, India's retailing industry was essentially owner manned small shops. In 2010, larger format convenience stores and supermarkets accounted for about 4 percent of the industry, and these were present only in large urban centers. India's retail and logistics industry employs about 40 million Indians i.e., 3.3% of Indian population (Anonymous, 2013).

##### 1.1.1 INVESTMENT IN RETAILING

At present the Retail industry in India is accelerating. Though India is still not at an equal pace with other Asian counterparts, Indian is geared to become a major player in the Retail Market. The fact that most of the developed nations are saturated and the developing ones still not prepared, India secures a great position in the international market. Also with a highly diverse demography, India provides immense scope for companies brining in different products targeting different consumers. According to the Global Retail Development Index, India is positioned as the foremost destination for Retail investment and business development. The factor that is presently playing a significant role here is the fact that a large section of Indian population is in the age group of 20-34 with a considerably high purchasing power; this has caused the increase in the demand in the urban market resulting in consistent growth in the Retail business (Domodaran, 2013).

India is among the world's most exciting retail destinations, according to a PricewaterhouseCoopers and Confederation of Indian Industry study, many global retailers have not had full access to this \$590 billion market. So far, Indian law allows up to 51% foreign investment in single-brand retail and 100% in cash-and-carry format. The presence of large global companies will afford employment opportunities for thousands of people. This, coupled with negative correlation with inflationary pressures, might help spur the Indian economic growth. Retail, currently, accounts for nearly 14% of the services sector contribution to Indian GDP. Corporate India seems to be opening up of this sector now (Dikshit, 2011).

The government has allowed foreign retailers to open stores in states that have agreed to allow FDI in multi-brand retail. The cabinet said okay for 51% FDI in multi-brand retail sector and 100% FDI in single brand (Ramvenkatesh, 2012).

#### 1.2 EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Emotional Intelligence helps a person to assess one own emotions and that of others, thereby learn to use feelings to encourage, inspire and attain success in one's life (Abraham, 2000).

Emotional Intelligence is defined as "the ability to monitor one's own and other's feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and action" (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). They further improvised this definition and stated as follows: "Emotional intelligence involves the

ability to perceive accurately, appraise and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth".

According to this definition, Mayer and Salovey have suggested five branches of EI:

1. Perception, Appraisal and Expression of Emotion
2. Emotional Facilitation of Thinking
3. Understanding and Analyzing Emotions; Employing Emotional Knowledge
4. Reflective Regulation of Emotion to Promote Emotional and Intellectual Growth

Goleman (1998) has defined "Emotional Intelligence" as a capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships. Goleman has proposed five basic emotional and social competencies:

1. Self-awareness
2. Self-regulation
3. Motivation
4. Empathy
5. Social skills.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature is reviewed in the field of emotional intelligence, performance, sales, retailing, and all other related fields to get insights of relationships between these variables. Here an attempt is being made to find the role of sales people EI in achieving their sales performance and sales success in retailing. Based on the review of literature, conclusions are drawn along with managerial implications and future research works are suggested.

### 2.1 IMPORTANCE OF SALESPeOPLE IN RETAILING

Though the salesperson is at the bottom of the sales organization, he is the lifeblood of the organization and his achievement decides the fate of the organization (Panda and Sahadev, 2005).

Lee and Yang (2013) based on their study have advised retailers to increase interpersonal service quality of retail sales people because it will increase customer retail store patronage. This only means that retail sales people should possess interpersonal skills to handle customers.

Jacob et al., (2011) believe that developing interpersonal bonds between employees and customers in selling contexts can increase sales and positive perceptions of the employees and the store.

The quality of the relationship between customers and service firm employees has been found to be a major driver of customer loyalty and customer retention in traditional service contexts in retail business (Walsh et al., 2010).

In a study conducted by Tafesse and Korneliusson (2012) it was found that consumers' favorable evaluation of retailers' sales staff services, store atmosphere and product assortment led to more customer purchase incidences.

Lombart and Louis (2012) have investigated that retail salespeople's personality trait such as congenial or friendly behavior with customers have direct impact on their satisfaction and loyalty.

The above literature highlights the importance of salespeople in retailing. They are the ones who increase customer retail store patronage, build seller-buyer bonds, increase sales, increase positive perceptions of the store, impact customers' satisfaction and loyalty.

### 2.2 EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND PERFORMANCE

Gangai and Agarwal (2013) have said that emotional intelligence is the ability to restrain negative feelings such as anger, anxiety, stress, self doubt and instead focus on positive feelings such as confidence, congeniality and empathy. So one should emphasize on developing emotional intelligence to overcome negative feelings at workplace and get success in life. If employees are strong emotionally, then they will be able to handle stressful situations in a better way and will take independent decisions in professional as well as personal lives.

Kazi, Shah and Khan (2013), have recommended that in the organizations, employees should be given regular training on developing strong emotional intelligence competencies which will eventually help them to boost up their performance and combat stress in proactive way. In this way organizations could be saved from devastating effects of workplace stress. Once such negative effects are taken care of, then organizations can fully focus on building good work performance levels of their employees. This will steer to the development of a better society as a whole.

Emotionally intelligent people are not only able to perceive, understand and manage their own emotions, but will also be able extrapolate to the emotions of others, their skills of perception, understanding and management in a better way. EI is a dimension that should be taken into account more within the broad range of variables that influence or modulate a person's success. In other words, if psychology is aimed at understanding fundamental human behaviour, EI is a new element to be considered. It is one more piece of the puzzle that allows us to explain the individual's life results which were not predicted so far by existing variables (Extremera and Fernandez-Berrocal, 2004).

Cherniss (2000), has established that emotional intelligence abilities are very important for the success in many areas of life and however, in the world of work, the person's emotional element will also become more important with other variables such as cognition, physical resources etc.

Lam and Kirby (2002), based on most famous opinions have established that emotional intelligence boosts performance and productivity at work place. They tried to find out whether emotional intelligence predicts individual cognitive based performance over and above general intelligence of a person. They used Multifactor Emotional Intelligence Scale to measure emotional intelligence. They found that emotional intelligence, emotional perception & emotional regulation explained performance over and beyond general intelligence.

Neale, Spencer-Arnell and Wilson (2009), have emphasized some benefits of learning emotional intelligence. They are improvement in relationships, improvement in communication with others, enhanced empathy skills, performing with integrity, value and admiration from others, better job and career prospects, administrating change more assertively, smaller amount of power games at work, sense of confidence and positivity, condensed stress levels, greater imagination and creativeness and learning from mistakes. All these benefits converge together to give better performance at work place.

Bachman et al., (2000) reported a study which compared more successful account officers (debt collectors) and less successful ones based on their emotional intelligence abilities. The emotional intelligence of the account officers was measured using BarOn Emotional Quotient Inventory. The outcomes of the study substantiate the view that higher levels of emotional intelligence lead to enhanced job performance.

Langhorn (2004) study revealed a strong correlation between emotional intelligence pattern of the general managers and the areas of their profits performance.

Akintayo and Babalola (2012), in their study found that emotional intelligence has significant contributions to workers' job performance, job satisfaction, job involvement, and organizational commitment, which will further lead to organizational goal achievement.

Grewal et al., (2006) study has provided preliminary evidence that emotional intelligence, measured as a set of abilities, is associated with important positive work outcomes.

Prentice and King (2011) has explored the influence of emotional intelligence on service performance of frontline employees in the casino industry. The main hypothesis of the study was EI predicts the service performance of casino service representatives. The results divulged that EI significant predicts the service performance of casino frontline employees.

One et al., (2011) have examined in their study, the extent to which cognitive ability, the Big Five factor personality dimensions and emotional intelligence are related to training and job performance of U.S. federal criminal investigators. The results revealed that cognitive ability and emotional intelligence were positively correlated with job performance.

Based on the review of above literature it is evident that EI helps a person to restrain from negative feelings such as stress, anger, anxiety etc and bring in positive feelings in self, such as happiness, confidence, congeniality etc which are very important to work in an efficient manner at work. An emotional intelligent



person at work will be able to understand his own emotions and in that of others. He can also regulate his own emotions to get positive outcomes in his professional life. Emotional intelligence of person enables him to achieve greater performance at work.

### 2.3 EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND SALES PERFORMANCE

Affective or emotional commitment in service provider-customer relationships is the most significant determinant of customer advocacy and support (Fullerton, 2011).

Daus and Ashkanasy (2005) believe that emotional intelligence clearly has much to offer in the domain of emotional labour and jobs that require high amounts of EI such as customer and social service types of occupations and those that require a high amount of interaction with the public.

The face-to-face encounters enhance cross-selling. The outcomes of such encounters are dependent on customers' and sales peoples' bodily gestures, their expression, sharing of feeling, empathy, happiness, showing signs of interest, sadness, distance, etc. Hence all these embodied and situated factor impact cross-selling and hence the overall sales (Varlander and Yakhlef, 2008).

Soderlund and Rosengren (2010) in their study have found that service worker's high technical service quality along with the display of emotions improves customer satisfaction.

Emotional variables play an important role in the word-of-mouth flow process from the existing customers to the potential customers (Soderlund and Rosengren, 2007). So customers' emotions should be managed well with the help of sales peoples' emotional intelligence.

The research conducted by Kidwell, Hardesty, Murtha and Sheng (2011), examines that how sales professionals use emotions in their marketing exchanges with customers to facilitate positive outcomes for their firms, themselves and their customers. The authors conducted three field studies to examine the impact of emotional intelligence (EI) in marketing exchanges on sales performance and customer relationships. It was found that sales professionals in real estate business and insurance who possess higher emotional intelligence are not only superior revenue generator but are also better at retaining customers. Additionally, the authors demonstrate that EI interacts with key marketing exchange variables such as customer-orientation and manifest influence, to heighten performance such that high EI sales people more effectively employ customer-oriented selling and influence customer decision making.

In study conducted by Jennings and Palmer (2007), front line sales managers and sales representatives were put through a learning and development programme on emotional intelligence. The emotional intelligence and sales revenue of participants were measured before and after the programme. There was a significant improvement in the sales revenue was found with the experimental group when it was compared with the control group. This study revealed how sales person's emotional intelligence is linked to sales revenue which is beyond just sales performance.

Research conducted by Kidwell, McFarland and Avila (2007), indicated that the sales person's ability to accurately appraise the emotions of others, moderated the sales person's practice of adaptive selling and customer-oriented selling on their performance. Further analyses revealed that, high ability to perceive emotions has beneficial effects on selling and low ability to perceive emotions not only limits the use of customer-oriented selling but also has a negative impact on sales performance. Both self-reported and supervisor-reported measures of selling performance were used in this study.

Ahuja (2011) conducted an empirical study to find the relationship between emotional intelligence and work performance of front-line sales executives in Indian Insurance sector. The data was collected from a sample of 100 sales executives on two variables: Emotional Intelligence and Work Performance. The correlation and regression tools were used to analyze the relationship and the findings signified the role of emotional intelligence in work performance of sales executives in insurance industry.

The above part of literature review indicates how sales people emotional intelligence improves their sales performance. The EI helps sales people in their sales encounters, in building relationship with their customers, for cross-selling and up-selling to their customers, satisfying their customers, in generating word of mouth, retaining customers, influencing customer decision making, , customer-oriented selling, in generating sales revenue etc. Overall, it is analyzed from this part of literature review that EI of sales people influences their sales performance and sales success.

### 2.4 EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND SALES PERFORMANCE IN RETAIL STORES

Johlke and Iyer (2013) in their study have found that retail salesperson's customer service attitudes are strongly associated with improved sales performance.

Dealing with customer problems and maintaining a smile in difficult situations are psychologically demanding for sales people. Retail service providers need to be in a supportive, understanding atmosphere to deal with these demands effectively (Levy, Weitz and Pandit, 2008).

Customer can become very emotional about their real or imaginary problems with a retailer. Often this emotional reaction can be reduced by simply giving customers a chance to get their complaints off their chests. Store employees should allow customers to air their complaints without interruption. Interruptions can further irritate customers who may already be emotionally upset. For sales people it becomes very hard to reason with or satisfy an angry customer (Levy, Weitz and Pandit, 2008).

Waterschoot et al., (2008) in their research it was found that cognitive effort and corresponding emotions of the customers play an important role in store learning as well as both store and product learning situations.

Companies should consider selecting staff with high EI or developing the EI skills and abilities so that the employees are ready to pursue particular strategies of customer intimacy, care and nurturing (Othman et al., 2011), which is very important in retail sales.

Bardzil and Slaski (2003) believe that the individuals with high emotional intelligence exhibit strong self awareness, interpersonal skills, adaptive in nature, have more empathy and keep themselves calm and stress free which is very important in customer service jobs. The employees with more self awareness and who understand others emotions will be able to provide better service to their clients or customers and hence they have advocated organizations to employ emotional intelligence while devising organizational policies, processes and procedures – especially for employee selection, training and development, and performance management.

Slaski and Cartwright (2002) conducted a study on management employees of a big retail organization to study the relationship between their emotional intelligence and their stress level, health, morale, quality of working life and management performance. The study found that the managers who scored high on emotional intelligence experienced reduced stress levels, better health and showed better performance.

Singh (2011), in an attempt to investigate the need and applications of emotional intelligence in retailing, has concluded that individual competencies such as emotional intelligence of sales force of any organization are strong determinant of success in retail industry. The author has also urged the need of more studies relating to EI and its dimensions in retailing.

The above literature points out the various challenges faced by retail sales people. They have to interact with different types of customers, make sales presentations, handle their objections & complaint, negotiate, solve their problems and finally close the sale. In doing all these various tasks sales personnel have to be self aware, adaptive, empathetic, keep themselves calm and stress free. This is possible only if sales people are emotionally intelligent. Hence it indicates that sales people EI influences their sales performance even in retailing.

## 3. DISCUSSIONS AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Those retailers who do best job with their customers; will create "experiences" and emotional "connections" for those shoppers. They have to de-emphasizing the actual "purchase" part of the transaction and focusing more on the customer's personal needs or wants. They will be in effect focusing on the "customer experience" (Anonymous, 2011). Customer experience is determined by the intensity of emotions created in specific moments not the overall experience. Customers' non-conscious mind categorizes and catalogues experiences according to the nature and intensity of emotions. Non-conscious emotional responses shaped by past emotional memories determine customer attitudes, perceptions and behavior but not the conscious or rational decisions (Travis, 2013). The attitudes, perceptions and behaviors of customers are some of the vital variables which create sales for organizations. Since customer's past emotional memories determine customer attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors, and retail sales people's emotional intelligence can create such customer emotional memories thereby creating good customer experience of the store and eventually generate sales. Hence it can be inferred that sales people's emotional intelligence boosts their sales performance in retail industry.

The literature indicates the importance of sales people in retailing. It is also observed as to how much the retail store's sales depend on sales people. Hence managers should recognize the fact that sales people's or sales employee's sales performance is very important component which determines the fate of retail stores. The literature further reveals a strong base to establish the relationship between emotional intelligence and work performance. A lot of studies have taken place in different parts of the globe to find evidence for this relationship. In most of the studies emotional intelligence (EI) has predicted work performance. In addition, several other studies were conducted to discover relationship between EI and sales performance. Moreover, a good number of evidence has been found where EI predicts sales performance also but very few studies have been conducted in retailing context.

As any other sales job retail sales is also very challenging, where sales people have to interact with different types of customers to attain sales. These customers will be in different emotional states and setups. So sales people have to deal with lot of customers who are in different emotional states such as happy, sad, depressed, excited, angry, frustrated etc.. Even then sales people are expected get sales from such customers. While dealing with such customers, it is quite obvious that they also get emotionally tangled and react to the customer's emotional states directly. If a customer is emotionally sad or depressed and then the similar emotional reaction of the sales person will further irritate the customer, which might later lead to no purchase decision, customer dissatisfaction, disloyalty, bad word of mouth etc. If a sales person continues to do so, on a regular basis then this behavior might lead to a decline in his sales performance. Since the entire retail store's sales success or sales performance is directly depended on sales person's sales performance, it becomes an imperative to the managers of retail organizations to manage its sales team's sales performance. Since sales person's emotions are the root cause of the problem, their emotional intelligence can rescue the retail stores from such situations. The sales person with emotional intelligence can deal with varied customer's emotions or emotional reactions in an appropriate manner and/or he will behave or respond in a way which makes customer happy, contented and satisfied which will lead to more customer commitment, loyalty and repeat purchases and thereby increasing the sales performance of that particular employee. Hence managers in retail industry should take necessary steps to recruit sales people with emotional competence and to improve the emotional competence of their existing sales force to enhance their overall organizational performance.

#### 4. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Emotions are an integral part of all stages of the retailing experience for customers. During their shopping experiences, consumers may experience a range of emotions such as excitement, happiness, hope, love, sadness, fear, anxiety, anger, disgust, etc., each of which may uniquely impact consumer decision making, purchase behavior, and interactions. Retailers are faced with the unique challenges of not only understanding and predicting the consumers' emotions and experiences, but also with shaping retail environments and service encounters to cultivate desired emotions and eliminate undesired emotions.

Much research has been done to find the impact of emotional intelligence on sales performance but there is less knowledge and empirical evidence to articulate that sales people EI predicts their sales performance and sales success in retail industry. In summary, this paper indicates the need of more empirical studies to find the role of sales personnel emotional intelligence in determining their sales performance. Since customer is the one who ultimately determines success of sales interactions, research can be taken up to examine whether EI in sales people translate into higher levels of customer satisfaction, loyalty, trust, word of mouth etc. which are directly related to sales success of retail sales personnel.

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