


# Chapter 13

## Salesmanship Skills in COVID-19 Times: Is There Any Impact on Sales Strategy Implementation and Performance?

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### ABSTRACT

*The activities that depend on direct interaction with the customers were the most affected by COVID-19's restrictions. These include the activities developed by salespeople. This study aims to analyse the impact of salesmanship skills on sales strategy implementation and salesperson performance during the COVID-19 crisis. To achieve the research objective, the authors collected a set of data through a survey (n=517) to test a proposed conceptual model based on the literature. The findings of the study demonstrate that the salesmanship skills are an important resource in highly disruptive environments and impacts sales strategy implementation and salesperson performance. In addition, the study also reveals the important role of digital skills and intrinsic motivation during COVID-19 times. The results attained can be used as a guide to design an effective strategy for sales activities in adverse times.*

### INTRODUCTION

The Covid19 pandemic forced the closures of many companies, leading to an unprecedented interruption of trade in numerous industry sectors (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020). For instance, the real estate

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sector was hit hard by the Covid19 pandemic (Ayodeji-Ogundiran et al., 2021; Chong & Phillips, 2021), mainly because lockdown and social distance rules affected the “traditional” negotiation process (Nanda et al., 2021). Consequently, this environment required particular resilience from salesperson and their ability to adapt effectively and restore balance in the face of Covid19 adversity (Luu, 2021). Moreover, a crisis/disruption situation like Covid19 challenges salespersons to effectively use available resources to create new business opportunities (Epler & Leach, 2021).

From the salesperson perspective, the limitations presented by Covid19 are practical in nature, because with remote work the normal sales process became physical distant and with limited social interaction (Rangarajan et al., 2021). One way to surpass these contingencies are to empower salespersons with new capabilities and skills (Epler & Leach, 2021). Another action taken by companies to face the Covid19 crisis, is to adopt the customer relationship management tools (Kang et al., 2021), where salespersons have an essential role in building long-term relationships with customers (Koponen et al., 2019). In fact, the salespersons were never as critical as they are now, because they are a key element in the negotiation process of sale in the real estate market.

Therefore, based on the above argument, this study aims to analyse the impact of salesmanship skills during the Covid19 crisis on sales strategy implementation and salesperson performance.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Salesmanship Skills and Sales Strategy Implementation**

The Covid19 pandemic forced salespersons to adapt its “modus operandi” (Hartmann & Lussier, 2020; Luu, 2021; Rangarajan et al., 2021), providing challenges and opportunities for salespersons at different levels (e.g. human, task, technology, structure) (Hartmann & Lussier, 2020). Particularly in the real estate industry, salespersons worked under difficult circumstances, whereby digital sales interaction or limited face-to-face interactions were required. Covid 19 pandemic prompt the urgent need for real estate companies to change the physical store and adopt digital platforms for the multichannel retail business (Nanda et al., 2021). Therefore, the transition of salespeople’s tasks occurred mainly in the way the operations were conducted (Rangarajan et al., 2021) as the basic salesperson functions remain the same. For instance, prospecting customers, interaction with customers, persuasion and negotiation, argumentation to surpass objections.

In fact, increased uncertainty during volatile times (such as Covid19), generally requires from the salesperson strategic capabilities to improve performance (Nowlin et al., 2018). For example, sales-influencing tactics, like persuasion, are important for converting leads to sales (Pöyry et al., 2017). The ability of persuasion to encourage the customer to make the final purchase decision is called salesmanship skills (Rentz et al., 2002). These skills also include prospecting for new customers, qualifying customers, identifying opportunities, present solutions to customers and close the sale (Rentz et al., 2002). The intermediary role of the salesperson demands the set of skills to persuade the owner of the property and the buyer (Ulaga & Kohli, 2018).

The implementation of the sales strategy refers to its execution and extension (Nowlin et al., 2018), but it also incorporates a question of resource deployment and allocation (Epler & Leach, 2021), which include new capabilities and skills (Epler & Leach, 2021; Luu, 2021). In fact, the skills are relevant

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