

## ABSTRACT

### **Flow and Salesperson Performance - A Positive Psychology Approach**

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Researchers and practitioners explored factors that influenced salesperson performance since a long time (Churchill et al. 1985; Vinchur et al. 1998; Verbeke et al, 2011). More recently, the changes in selling environment, increased product complexity, ever demanding customers and technological advancement, have impacted salespersons' performance adversely (Homburg et al., 2011). Extant literature suggests that the determinants of salesperson performance have been able to explain only a small variance (about 10 percent) in the sales performance (Rollins et al 2014). Empirical studies have traditionally focused on what is wrong with the salesperson and suggested corrective or remedial measures (Friends et al., 2016). This exclusive attention on repairing human functioning neglects the well-being of salespersons and the importance of nurturing their positive competencies. There is a dearth of research that focused on the positive competencies of salesperson and this study addresses the gap. Drawing from Flow theory and Broaden and Build Theory, this study aims to advance the understanding of the determinants of salesperson performance.

Flow is a state of consciousness or peak experience that is characterized by absorption, work enjoyment and intrinsic motivation (Bakker, 2005). When in a state of flow, the salesperson would be able to broaden the positive emotions and build further in the form of a positive spiral (Fredrickson, 2001). As hypothesised in this study, such positive emotions reduce negative states such as sales anxiety, salesperson burnout and deviance behaviour. They also enhance positive selling behaviours such as learning orientation, adaptive selling and sales creativity. Both these routes would end up enhancing the salesperson performance.

Following a mixed method approach, this study incorporated a cross-sectional survey, qualitative research design – interview and Experience Sampling Method. The study was conducted on pharmaceutical salespersons in India. About 603 pharma sales representatives of select companies participated in the cross-sectional survey and 31 sales representatives in Experience Sampling Method. Interviews were conducted on 15 sales representatives. Data were analysed using PLS – SEM as advocated by Hair et al. (2014).

Flow, in our study, was found to have reduced the sales anxiety and burnout but had no direct effect on the deviance. Sales anxiety was found to have mediated the relationship between flow and burnout; flow and deviance. Further, flow has enhanced the positive selling behaviours like learning orientation, adaptive selling and sales creativity. Learning orientation mediated the relationship between flow and adaptive selling, flow and sales creativity. Overall, these two routes have significantly enhanced the salesperson performance.

Our study made novel contribution to both theory and practice by bringing positive psychology constructs into sales literature. In addition, the findings offer important implications to sales managers as Flow can be fostered to reduce negative behaviours as well as enhanced positive selling behaviour, and thus improve sales performance.