Chapter 10
Perceptions of the Impact of Mobile Sales Force Automation on Salespeople's Performance

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ABSTRACT

While mobile sales force automation (mSFA) has been studied by a number of researchers, little is yet known about the impact of these solutions on the overall performance of salespeople. This chapter explores the perceived impact of mSFA on salespeople's performance, as seen by the salespeople themselves and also by their manager. The findings indicate that salespeople and management share different perceptions in regards to the extent that mSFA could improve individual performance.

INTRODUCTION

Mobile business, commonly known as m-business, is characterized by the use of wireless networks and other mobile information technologies for both individual and organizational communication and coordination, and the management of the firm. There is little doubt that mobile business applications are providing a significant opportunity not only to enhance organizational productivity and improve the overall operation of the workforce, but also to transform business practices (Scornavacca, Prasad, & Lehmann, 2006, BenMoussa, 2003b; Walker & Barnes, 2005).

During the past few years, a particular class of mobile business application has grown rapidly

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-1939-5.ch010

in popularity: mobile Sales Force Automation (mSFA). These solutions are normally deployed with the goal of improving service levels as well as the performance of salespeople (BenMoussa, 2007; Scornavacca & Herrera, 2007).

The fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) industry is particularly well suited to gain from the potential benefits of mSFA. FMCG can be understood as the group of products that are purchased in relatively regular basis and mostly at low price (e.g. non-durable goods such as soft drinks, toiletries, and grocery items) (New Zealand Food and Grocery Council, 2012). FMCG companies exhibit intensive information requirements, and typically support a distributed workforce (Walker & Barnes, 2005). In spite of a recent increase in research in this field, little is still known about the impact of mSFA solutions on the salespeople's overall performance (Scornavacca, Barnes, & Huff, 2006).

This research aims to explore the perceived impact of mSFA on the job performance of individual salespeople. In addition, it investigates whether sales managers and salespeople share common perceptions towards mSFA.

The remainder of the chapter is structured as follows. A brief overview of relevant literature is followed by a description of the research methodology used. The results of the research are then provided, along with the analysis. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the key research findings, limitations, and suggestions for further research and practice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Mobile Sales Force Automation

Donaldson & Wright (2002) point out that several authors have noted a lack of a clear and convergent definition of sales force automation. According to Morgan & Inks (2001) these technologies involve "the use of computer hardware, software, and telecommunications devices by sales people in their selling and/or administration activities". Scornavacca & Barnes (2008) define mobile sales force automation (mSFA) as the application of mobile and wireless technologies to SFA systems. In order to identify previous research on the topic of mSFA, an extensive search was conducted using the M-lit mobile literature database. This database contains approximately 1200 peer-reviewed references to published academic research on mobile business (Scornavacca 2007). In addition, a subsequent search was undertaken using the Proquest, Emerald and Web of Science databases.

The great majority of research on mSFA has explored this subject at the organizational level (Gebauer & Shaw, 2004; Innes, Barnes, & Scornavacca, 2005; Rodina, Zeimpekis, & Fouskas, 2003). In addition, many of these studies addressed mSFA *adoption,* particularly the benefits that businesses may gain by adopting mSFA solutions (Scheepers, Scheepers, & Ngwenyama, 2006; Scornavacca, Prasad, & Lehmann, 2006).

Previous research indicates that several positive impacts are derived from the application wireless technologies to the sales function. In particular, mSFA improves managers' ability to communicate with salespeople, provides better remote access to back office systems, and access to up-to-date information (Rangone, Renga, & Balocco 2002; Scornavacca & Barnes, 2006). mSFA can provide significant benefits for corporate infrastructure as well as enhancing the efficiency of business operations (Nah, Siau, & Sheng, 2005). However, some researchers found that the development of mobile solutions has been confined to the improvement of existing processes, and has been dependent on the performance of mobile networks and hardware (Prasad, Scornavacca, & Lehmann, 2005).

While the organizational impact of mSFA has been well described in the mobile business literature, much less is known about the effects of mSFA on the individual performance of a salesperson (Junglas & Watson, 2003).