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Sales Pressure and Ethical Selling: Moral Reasoning Framework for Business and Marketing Decisions

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Research Background

The study explores the tension between sales pressure and ethical selling practices in competitive business environments. It highlights the ethical challenges faced by sales professionals who must balance aggressive sales targets with maintaining transparency and integrity in customer interactions. The research emphasizes the importance of moral reasoning frameworks (MRFs) in guiding ethical decision-making, particularly during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, which significantly impacted global businesses and consumer behavior.

Industry Context

The paper focuses on the marketing and sales industry, where professionals often face ethical dilemmas due to high-pressure environments. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these challenges, leading to changes in consumer behavior, reduced demand, and increased scrutiny of business practices. The study highlights the need for businesses to align sales performance goals with ethical principles to maintain customer trust and brand reputation in a competitive and evolving marketplace.



Research Objectives

- Propose Moral Reasoning Frameworks (MRFs): Develop structured frameworks to guide ethical decision-making in sales contexts, especially under high-pressure conditions.
- Explore Sales Pressure and Ethical Behavior: Investigate how sales pressure influences ethical decision-making and the factors contributing to unethical practices.
- Develop Practical Strategies: Provide actionable recommendations for organizations to foster ethical selling practices while balancing long-term sustainability and sales performance.

Theoretical Framework

The study integrates established ethical theories, including:

- Rest's Four-Component Model: Focuses on moral sensitivity, judgment, motivation, and character.
- Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development: Explores the progression of moral reasoning.
- Ethical Principles: Utilitarianism, deontology, care ethics, and virtue ethics are applied to guide decision-making.

The proposed MRF consists of four interconnected phases:

- ✓ Problem Identification: Recognizing ethical dilemmas and aligning decisions with moral principles.
- ✓ Context/Fact Analysis: Conducting situational, problem, and stakeholder analyses to understand the ethical implications.
- ✓ Optimum Choice Selection: Balancing legal, ethical, and economic responsibilities to select the most ethical and practical course of action.
- ✓ Implementation: Translating ethical decisions into actionable steps, supported by organizational policies and accountability mechanisms.

Research Methodology

The study employs an integrative synthesis approach to analyze existing literature and develop the MRF. It follows a structured process:

- ✓ Literature Identification: Peer-reviewed journals, media articles, business reports, and expert opinions were reviewed.
- ✓ Concept Shortlisting: Key concepts such as moral principles, crisis management, sales pressure, and ethical selling were identified.
- ✓ Framework Development: Insights from theoretical models and empirical studies were synthesized into a practical, actionable framework.



Key Findings

- Sales Pressure and Ethical Behavior: Intense sales pressure often leads to ethical compromises, prioritizing short-term sales targets over long-term ethical standards.
- Role of Organizational Culture and Leadership: Strong ethical culture and leadership significantly mitigate unethical practices in high-pressure environments.
- Application of MRFs: Structured frameworks like Rest's model and Kohlberg's stages of moral development can guide sales professionals in navigating ethical dilemmas effectively.
- Strategies for Ethical Selling: Ethical training programs, comprehensive guidelines, and ongoing ethical support are essential for promoting ethical behavior in sales teams.



Academic Contribution

- **Addressing Research Gaps:** The study fills gaps in understanding the long-term impacts of sales pressure on ethical behavior and the application of MRFs in sales contexts.
- **Practical Insights:** It provides actionable strategies for organizations to integrate ethical principles into sales practices, including tailored training programs, ethical metrics, and leadership development.
- **Framework Development:** The proposed MRF offers a structured approach to ethical decision-making, applicable across industries and crises, contributing to the broader field of business ethics and sales management.

This research provides a valuable foundation for future studies on ethical decision-making in sales, particularly in high-pressure environments and crisis scenarios.