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### "A Study of Impact of Digitalization on Sales Employees"

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#### **Abstract**

Digital technologies are the path breaking technologies making inroads in almost every sector we know about. Digitalization is prevalent across all industries changing the course of the future. The work aims to study the aspects of digitalization affecting the sales employees in the food and beverage service industry. The study is done on the sales employees of a cafe chain based out of Pune city, to study the effect of digitalization, both on professional and personal front. The sales employees are studied using observations and interviews to know the implications of digitalization on them. Significant impact was found on the sales employees, reflecting in both their professional and personal lives giving rise to sustainability concerns. Resorting to the Job Demands - Resources Model, the demands and resources could be segregated. Thus, leading to the path of discovery of possible solutions to the challenges arising out of digitalization in the realm of Human Resources Management.

#### **1. Introduction**

An invention is a double-edged sword and so is digitalization. The technology which redefines our work and personal lives has made our world digital. The benefits are galore ranging from speed, efficiency, accuracy and so on. However, the impact of digitalization on employees varies in different degrees both positive and negative. Previous studies have shown the effects of digitalization on employees, in the form of physical and psychological stress. This stress then culminates to give rise to different ailments affecting the quality of human life. Some models like Technology Acceptance Model and Job Demands -Resources Model, have tried to find a way out to sustain in the digital environment. An attempt is made to find a relevance of the previous studies on digitalization effects, to the

sales employees. To be specific, to find the implications of digitalization on sales employees in the food and beverage service industry, is the goal of this work.

## 2. Research Questions

- i) What are the effects of digitalization on the sales employees?
- ii) What are the factors arising out of digitalization impacting sales employees?

## 3. Literature Review

Studying the available work done on effects of digitalization on employees, not limiting to a particular area, a definite direction could be sought to start the work on the sales employees. The excerpts from the previous studies on digitalization are summarized to form a basis for the study.

### 3.1 Information Overload

Information technology through digitalization has allowed us an easy access to a vast array of information. Information is the medium to explore new avenues. Digitalization makes it possible to archive the data, process the data and make it readily available to use [1].

This availability of information makes it possible to make rational decision. The decision making is backed by reasonable facts and evidence. The information from a variety of sources helps to discover new facets of a particular concept or scenario. The different views and opinions help to understand a concept in a broader way [2].

The available data could be processed to churn out the knowledge from it. Digitalization technology makes this process in a considerably lesser time. Be it the processing of sales or demographic data, due to digitalization, the operations on these data are quick and accurate and so exceptionally reliable [3]. Through these operations, digitalization gives a meaning to these data sets. It allows permutations and combinations of the available data, which was otherwise not possible for human brains or to be specific not possible in the matter of seconds. This feature of availability of variety of operations to give a relevancy to the data with regards to the scenario, has broadened the realm of knowledge.

Digitalization has also opened the doors to information from all parts of the world. An event in one country is rapidly known to the entire world. This extended reach to information has made the world a single entity, which was not the case before the advent of digital technologies [4]. The access to knowledge or expertise is possible to cross the boundaries of countries and continents through digitalization.

The digitalization offers us with a plethora of data and the different operations and processes in turn makes available the varied information. However, this variety of information gives rise to a dilemma [5]. A salesman dealing with a line of products, is presented with a varied set of information. Information regarding competitors, governmental rules and regulations, demographics, and other information impacting the sales is available to a salesman. To take a decision based on this, the salesman must analyze this information. Different combinations need to be studied

and the best of the available alternatives need to be chosen. This is the point where the salesman is been confronted with the problem of information overload. The validity of the information is an altogether different scenario. However, considering the information is valid, still a lot is offered through digitalization to the salesman. The human brain is loaded with information making a rational choice difficult [6].

### 3.2 Work Life Balance

Digitalization has offered the choice to be connected all the time. There is no need to work from the office anymore. The data sheets and reports are now available on the personal gadgets through the internet technology [7]. The new norm of work from home is a common term now. Employees can work in the comfort zone of their homes. The salespeople are in constant touch with their bosses and peers for the required support. Data is quickly available without the need of going through the paper files and documents. Digitalization has made the connect wider as compared to the traditional setup of work.

The digital employees could be categorized as the Work from Home employees, The travelling elite, and the Crowd Workers [8]. The digital work from home employees, work away from the office setup. They could be working at their homes or at a place of their convenience. The travelling elite category of employees is travelling from one workplace to another for the purpose of the designated work. The third category of workers are the crowd workers, are the digital contract workers, who take up the work through digital media. The ride sharing drivers of Uber and Ola, the food delivery employees, the freelance coders are some of the examples of crowd workers.

The very feature of constant connect of digitalization is becoming a matter of concern. It becomes difficult to have a clear and explicit timing boundary for work. Working from home no more ensures working only in the slot of Nine to Five. The employees need all the time be connected to their work. They may have the luxury to go to the supermarket and buy some groceries in the Nine to Five slot. But the feeling of being in continuous supervision does not allow to enjoy that luxury. Also, there is no explicit guarantee that there would be no work allotted beyond the formal office timings. An urgent meeting or an extra chunk of assignment are always on the cards, stretching the time boundaries. This makes it challenging to divide the available time between work and personal life. As there is no demarcation of time slots for work, dedicating a fixed time slot for personal lives is a task in itself [9].

The travelling group of employees always find themselves on the roads, airports, stations, and hotels. Though constantly in touch with work they are hardly in touch with their personal lives. Digitalization is of too little help to connect with the inner self. This emerging trend of always being on the ON mode for work has blurred the line between professional and personal arena.

The crowd workers have the choice to switch between the work and family life. However, the competition brings this flexibility down and these crowd workers always must be ON mode to get work. They are under the constant supervision of

ratings [10]. The more the ratings, more the chances to get the work further. Also, the crowd workers need to have their own investment related to the technology infrastructure. They are their own boss and, they must look after themselves all on their own. There is no organizational support or government assistance as such for these crowd workers. The uncertainty of work and complete self-reliance are the reasons, the crowd workers to all time be available for work, giving little room for their personal lives.

#### **4. Hypothesis**

- i) Digitalization affects the sales employees on professional front.
- ii) Digitalization affects the sales employees on personal front.

#### **5. Research Methodology**

The intent was to study the implications of digitalization on the salespeople in food and beverage service industry. To get the insights from the population of salespeople in food industry, we focused on a particular restaurant chain to get the samples.

The sales team of a cafe chain was interviewed to know the nature of their work and the extent of digitalization in their work. The sales team comprised of 12 area sales manager of the cafe chain who were looking after the retail outlets in different parts of the Pune city. We worked on these samples for 12 days, devoting each day to a particular area sales manager. These area sales managers each had around 50 to 60 restaurant staff under their supervision.

A combination of observation method and interview method was adopted to know about the samples in detail. An entire day was spent with each of these area sales managers, to find the details about their workings. The area managers were probed through conversations instead of a formal questionnaire. Their day-to-day work life, work culture in the organization, leadership styles, work related issues were discussed along with observing their approach to work.

#### **6. Data Analysis**

##### **6.1 The Work Culture**

The area managers were designated the outlets in a particular area of the city. Each area manager had around 10 to 12 outlets depending on the business potential of the outlets. The outlets were classified as corporate outlets, standalone outlets, mall outlets, highway outlets and educational campus outlets.

The area managers had a team of cafe managers and the cafe managers in turn had the cafe staff under them. Thus, the area managers had a team of around 15 cafe managers and the cafe staff in the numbers close to 50.

The team had to report to office every Monday from 11 am to 6 pm. The Monday schedule included weekly meeting of the salespeople with the support staff. Work related to training of the staff, accounts, stocks, and the likes were on the agenda

apart from the sales targets. After 6 pm the managers had to visit their respective cafes.

Tuesday onwards, the area managers had to work at the cafes looking after the business. Weekly-off was distributed among the area managers between Tuesday to Thursday. The timings of the area managers at the cafes were from 11 am to 11 pm.

### 6.2 Plights of the Managers

The area managers had to look at a wide array of areas apart from sales. Though sales taking up the major portion of their duties, the other functions contributed to the sales and so came under the purview of the sales managers.

The area managers had to look after the issues of the staff. The maintenance of the machines and equipment. The documentations of the rent and agreements of the cafe properties. Follow up with the landlords of the cafe properties. Be a part of the procedures to resolve any conflicts arising at their respective outlets.

Regarding the supply of stocks and the merchandise for sale, the area managers had to follow up with the supply chain division. The put up of the marketing collaterals and implementing the marketing activities at the outlets were the part of their duties. The special trainings for the cafe staff related to the marketing campaigns also had to be looked after by the area managers.

Resolving complaints from customers and other grievances, maintaining the standards of customer service, maintaining the brand image on the social media accounts were the responsibilities of the area managers.

The sales targets were allotted weekly. Also, there were different targets for the food & beverage business and the merchandise sales. Weekends are the prime hours of business, requiring the constant attention of the area managers. Holidays, occasions like valentine's day, friendships day, new year eve are the days of high sales potential and having different targets.

To summarize, the area manager was the whole and sole for the allotted outlets, looking after each aspect of the cafe. Though separate support teams were assigned the other tasks related to training, marketing, supply chain, account and the likes, the area manager had to get the work done to run the cafes.

### 6.3 The Role of Digitalization

The role of digitalization in carrying out the responsibilities of these area managers had increased many folds in the previous three to four years due to implementation of new software systems in the organization. The area managers are now in constant touch with the realities due to real time update of the events. The digitalization has allowed them the access to all the information on their smartphone Apps and laptops. This has helped them to make decisions based on the real time occurrence of events.

The other side to the usage of the digital tools is the information overload. Information from all the directions is available. This is no doubt a good feature. But the real use of this information is when they are combined in the right pattern. For example, the implementation of a marketing campaign for a particular product should be backed by adequate stocks. The marketing department would provide information regarding the campaign. The supply chain management would provide information regarding the stocks. But the information from the different departments needs to be analyzed together. Here comes the point when the human touch is involved. The experience, logic and rationality of the area manager is needed to take a decision based on the merging of the information from these two sources.

The area managers are always overloaded with information and they are always on their toes to process them. Also, due to the introduction of digitalization, there is a reduction in the manpower in the organization. This has added to the plight of the area managers, by getting more implicit responsibilities.

The functionality of digitalization to analyze the information from various sources on a common platform is limited. Human brain must play its role to make out of the digital results.

One more aspect of the digitalization is the continuous flow of information. As soon as an event occurs, the information is passed on to the area managers by the digital systems. This makes the area managers to be always logged on to the system. Working on the available information is necessary as the information becomes obsolete very soon and no reaction to the event may result in missed opportunities.

The requirement of digitalization, to be available all the time has affected the work life balance of the area managers. The area managers were always found to be on call and logged on to their systems. Even while commuting from one cafe to the other, they used to respond to the calls.

This has given rise to the health issues for the area managers. The median age of the area managers is 33 years. 8 out of the 12 area managers have reported issues related to hypertension. Back problems were reported by almost everyone owing to constant sitting and frequent travelling on the two wheelers.

Lack of quality time with the family and self were the concerns shared by them. The median experience of these area managers is 9 years. They have reported a vast difference in the working styles before and after the introduction of digital technologies. Information overload, Work life Balance and Health issues are the major concerns of digitalization, raised by the employees.

#### 6.4 Jobs Demands Resources Theory

In line with the JD-R Model, the demands from the area managers are ample and varied. The area managers are expected to be at the lead of all the aspects related to the cafe outlets, which in turn will result into sales.

The Resources they have is the rich experience, expertise, and autonomy. The Digital systems here are at both the sides of Demand and Resource.

The Digital systems are a resource making some aspects of the work simpler, while they place their own demands on the area managers resulting into a different set of issues altogether. To cope up with the high speed of digitalization, job resources need to be expanded.

Monitoring the health of the employees would be a great step to move ahead in synchronization with digitalization. Giving regard to the concerns of work life balance, delegation of the work of the area manager seems inevitable. The degree of focus required by the area managers on other roles could be lessened by the division of work. More support staff could be engaged to look upon the specialized areas of the business and core sales function to be kept with the area managers.

The concern of information overload could find a solution in a dedicated specialized support staff. Increase in the able support staff would be able to take away the burden of processing of too much information. This reduced load of information processing would help the area managers to focus on decisions related to the core business.

The human resource management could find the probable answers to these concerns in redesigning the roles and responsibilities of the area managers. This is necessary, because now the area managers have become digital area managers and the traditional system needs significant changes to stay relevant in these digital times.

## **7. Conclusion**

The study reflects the plights of the salespeople related to the digitalization. It sheds light on the professional and personal issues arising out of digitalization. Taking cue from the JD-R Model, the solutions to these challenges could be discovered in the Human Resources Management arena. The restructuring of the job descriptions in tune with the digitalization demands, could make the job resources more competent. The study confirms the relevance of the findings of the previous studies, to the sales employees. The limitation of the study revolves around the fact that the findings are focused only on two major aspects of information overload and work life balance. Further studies could dig deeper to know the different facets of digitalization effects. To sum up, the negative effects of digitalization on sales employees could be subdued through Human Resource Management.

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