

Initiating innovation adoption through salespeople: Stronger selling capabilities are not always better

Julia Auburger

Universität Regensburg

Herbert Endres

University of Regensburg

Roland Helm

University of Regensburg

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Abstract

Customers often have a critical attitude towards a new product and resist its adoption because of the associated uncertainties. In b2b markets it is mainly the salespeople who can mitigate the uncertainties perceived by the customer. Therefore, we focus on salespeople's selling capability, i.e., the capability of individuals to perform salespeople's tasks, addressing the two research questions: (i) "What degree of selling capability serves customers' knowledge adoption best?", and (ii) "How does customers' innovativeness and the perceived degree of innovation affect the impact of the selling capability on customers' knowledge adoption?" For this purpose, we collected survey and objective innovation purchase data from business customers of a German professional electrical tool's supplier. Our study provides two major contributions. First, we reveal that there is an optimum level of selling capability that should not be undercut nor exceeded. Second, we find that salespeople need to adapt the use of selling capability on two contingencies: the perceived degree of innovation and innovativeness of the customer.

Keywords: *selling capabilities; knowledge adoption; purchase decision*

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