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Abstract

The challenges, that professional salespeople face, have changed dramatically during the past few decades. Previously salespeople were expected to possess good presentation and argumentation skills and they were mainly concerned with short-term sales objectives. But nowadays salespeople are required to build long-lasting relationships with customers and to understand customers' specific needs and to meet those needs with mutually beneficial solutions. Also the appreciation for the sales profession has increased.

From these premises, the objective of this study is to find out how personal selling has been discussed in academic research during the past ten years (1997-2006). This objective is divided into three research questions: 1. what are the most common themes discussed, 2. what are the key findings, and 3. what are the research methods used. The research material was collected from internet databases and the material search resulted in 53 articles published in 16 different journals. In order to answer to the research questions, qualitative content analysis is utilized.

Customer-salesperson relationships, personal selling situations and the salesperson, and different approaches to personal selling were the most common themes discussed in the articles under analysis. Key findings of the articles concerned the development of the customer-salesperson relationship, the role of trust and retention in these relationship, skills and characteristics required from successful salespeople, and adaptive selling was generally viewed as the best approach to personal selling. Concerning the research methods used, the average article reported quantitative empirical research, where hypothesis testing was the most common approach. The research material was collected through surveys and the most common sampling methods were judgement or convenience sampling; random sampling was rare

The research, reported in the articles under analysis, responded adequately to the challenges that professional salespeople face today. More research, utilizing a wide variety of research methods, is needed. The articles under analysis established the current state of personal selling, but suggestions for salespeople, on how to improve themselves, were missing.

Key words	Personal selling, literature review, content analysis
Further information	