

THE IMPACT OF REMUNERATION ON SALES TURNOVER IN DUBAI'S AUTOMOTIVE AFTERMARKET: PRE-COVID AND AMIDST COVID

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Abstract: The Global Automotive Aftermarket sector was valued at USD 392.5 billion in 2020 and is predicted to surpass USD 525 billion by 2028. The automotive aftermarket of the United Arab Emirates, led by Dubai, is the fastest-growing market, which is expected to reach USD 634.4 million. However, the Covid-19 pandemic diminished the growth rate and profitability of the sector, pressing small and medium enterprises to reduce their costs, including employees' remuneration. This empirical paper aims to analyse the impact of changes in salesforce remuneration on sales turnover and the role of Covid-19 in influencing this causal relationship. The data, before Covid (2019) and during Covid (2020-21), were collected from 80 automotive aftermarket enterprises in Dubai using a single-stage convenience sampling method. The correlation analysis and ANOVA test highlight the significant difference in sales commission within the group and between the groups caused by Covid-19. The results indicate how the reduction in remuneration, especially sales commission, during the crisis significantly declined the sales turnover in automotive aftermarket enterprises. The study proposes guidelines and tips that business leaders, the human resources professionals can implement to revive their sales turnover post-Covid-19 and manage such crises in future.

Keywords: Remuneration, Sales turnover, Automotive Aftermarket, Commission, Salary, Compensation, Covid.

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Introduction

The Global Automotive Industry generated revenue worth 2.5 trillion USD in 2020 and is expected to reach 2.8 trillion USD in 2022. In this, the contribution from the Automotive Aftermarket sector (hereafter, AA) is 392.35 billion USD, and it is predicted to cross 525 billion USD by 2028 (Research and Markets, 2021). However, this is a significant decline in AA value compared to 2019 (803.22 billion USD). The AA of Western countries and the Asia Pacific is studied exhaustively, while little attention is paid to the Gulf region. The AA of the United Arab Emirates (UAE)

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is the fastest-growing market, with a 14.8% CAGR from 2020 to 2025, led by Dubai. By 2025, it is expected to reach 634.4 million USD (Prescient and Strategic Alliance, 2021). The AA experienced the Covid-19 rage in 2020 with a high impact on sales and employees. Prescient and Strategic Alliance (2021) reported that in UAE, the annual vehicles sale reduced from 235,000 units (2019) to 158,711 units (2020). The decline in consumption of light vehicles during the pandemic and the shutdown of business-to-customer trade counters reduced the revenue, forcing small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to reduce employees' costs (Laborda and Moral, 2020). The salesforce in the AA sector also experienced reductions in their monthly salaries, sales commission and other benefits (Pirzada et al., 2017; O'Donnell and Marsh, 2022). Fitch (2021) reported that in UAE, the average increase in salary rate reduced from 4.5% (in 2019) to 3.8% (in 2020). The UAE also experienced an increase in the unemployment rate from 2.64% (in 2019) to 3.19% (in 2020) (World Bank, 2022). However, the market condition improved in 2021 as UAE's AA witnessed increased revenues. The GDP of UAE, which dropped in 2020 to 359.87 billion USD, increased in 2021 to 402.9 billion USD (World Bank, 2022). Additionally, in 2021, the worth of AA also increased to 560.51 billion USD, and the annual vehicle sales in UAE increased by 18.98% (Market Research, UAE, 2022). The improvement in market conditions and UAE's economic recovery during 2021 was presumed by the AA industry as a recovery from the Covid crises experienced during 2020 (Andriani et al., 2021; Intelligence, 2021; Khan, 2021; Laborda and Moral, 2020, 2020; Market Research, UAE, 2022; ReportLinker, 2021). Hence, based on the industry presumptions, for UAE's AA, one can assume 2019 as a pre-Covid period, 2020 as a Covid period and 2021 as a post-Covid period. According to the Automechanika Dubai 2021 report, the AA is expected to boom post-Covid 19, especially due to an increase in demand by customers. This can be attributed to UAE's 100% residents being vaccinated, Expo 2020 in Dubai, improved foreign relations with Israel, and relaxed travel regulations in Dubai (GMI Research, 2020; Market Research, UAE, 2022). Furthermore, the government implemented some fiscal and monetary policies to support SMEs to overcome the economic impact caused by Covid (Jia Qi, 2022; Supriyanto et al., 2022; Hanif et al., 2022). Following the role played by remuneration in motivating sales employees to perform well (Küster and Canales, 2008; Mallin et al., 2017; Saman, 2020; Fachrudin et al., 2022), it can be anticipated that during Covid-19 (2020) sales turnover may have declined as compared to pre-Covid (2019) and as market conditions improved in 2021, the sales turnover and remuneration may also have improved. There is a dearth of literature on this cause-effect relationship between remuneration and sales turnover, in the context before Covid (2019), during Covid (2020) and post-Covid (2021) in Dubai's AA. Hence, the main purpose of this research paper is to investigate the impact of the salesforce's remuneration (salary, commission, and benefits) on sales turnover in Dubai's AA and to determine if Covid-19 played any role in this cause-effect relationship. To study this cause-effect relationship, this

research has studied the impact of salesforce's remuneration on sales turnover across three years – 2019, 2020 and 2021.

Theoretical Model and Hypotheses Development

The global AA sector is amongst the most vulnerable and affected sectors by the Covid-19 pandemic. During 2020, the lockdowns, work from home and shutdown of enterprises reduced the usage and maintenance of light-vehicle. Besides, the sales turnover diminished because of the disruptions in the supply chain, closure of manufacturing units, low cash flows and poor working capital (Koh, 2021). The market research has predicted the value of the global AA sector to reach USD 723 billion by 2020, but the actual value attained is USD 392.35 billion (Laborda and Moral, 2020). This can be attributed to the reduction in annual vehicle sales by 14%, as consumers' spending reduced on transportation due to travel restrictions, job insecurities and less spending on spare parts (Arniati et al., 2019; Satoskar, 2021; Macongue and Elizabeth, 2022). During peak Covid-19 (second and third quarter of 2020), UAE's AA observed 75% reductions in revenue because consumers delayed the periodic maintenance (Satoskar, 20210). In 2020, a peak-Covid period, the compound annual growth rate of UAE was reported as (-) 6.1%, which improved to 1.2% in 2021 and is expected to reach 2.5% by 2022 (Satoskar, 2021). Despite the rise in electric vehicles in UAE and the increase in the unemployment rate, in 2021, the annual vehicle sales increased to 188,844 units as opposed to 158,711 units in 2020. Additionally, the worth of the AA industry increased by 42.8% in 2021. UAE's GDP and AA market showed significant recovery, which many considered as a recovery from losses incurred during Covid (2020) and returning to the state that was present in 2019. Based on this and the indications in trade publications (Intelligence, 2021; Jia Qi, 2022; Laborda and Moral, 2020; Market Research, UAE, 2022), this research paper assumed 2019 as pre-Covid, 2020 as Covid and 2021 as post-Covid. Post-Covid, the UAE's AA market has shown positive trends in sales influenced by the 100% vaccination rate, improved foreign relations with Israel, Expo in 2021 and increased mobility of consumers (Khan, 2021; Astawa et al., 2021). The factors mentioned in the existing literature are not based on scientific study and do not indicate if Covid-19 impacted the sales turnover of Dubai's small and medium AA enterprises. This leads to the synthesis of the first hypothesis:

H₁ – The Sales turnover has significantly decreased in 2020 and increased in 2021.

Aldoghan et al. (2021) and Daud and Afifah (2021) noted that employee remuneration is positively correlated to employees' performance. The remuneration of the salesforce in SMEs comprises base pay, benefits and pay for results (Atchison et al., 2019; Chingos, 2002; Kurnia et al., 2020; Dmuchowski and Szmitka, 2022). The remuneration strategy for the salesforce cannot be the same as other employees because of differences in the role of the salesforce, supervision and the expectation of job outcomes (Cichelli, 2003). In the AA sector, the sales role is transactional, selling off-the-shelf products in volumes with little scope for price negotiation. The salesperson is required to have knowledge of product and pricing bundled with skills

such as persistence, negotiation and aggressiveness to achieve the targets. In the AA sector, the key measures of sales performance are contingent on sales revenue. The salesforce in the AA sector is driven by an aggressive sales strategy (Cichelli, 2003; Zhen and Hassan, 2021) and commission is the driving motivator for the salesforce. Base pay provides income stability, while commission provides extrinsic motivation to achieve results (Kurnia et al., 2020; Patterson et al., 2020; Sadaa et al., 2022). Besides, this is standard market practice in the AA sector of UAE. The benefits, such as medical insurance, holidays and visa costs, are regulated by the UAE government (Pandya and Rao, 2021); hence, there is little scope for adjustments. During Covid-19, many researchers (Christos and Bussin, 2019; Pandya and Boukareva, 2022; Saman, 2020; Songkilawang et al., 2022; Sieracka and Wirkus, 2022) have reported reductions in remuneration across many industries, including the AA sector. Pandya and Boukareva (2022) considered such actions a crisis response by the companies. Researchers highlighted reductions in salesforce compensation in the AA market as well (O'Donnell and Marsh, 2022; Laborda and Moral, 2020). However, the existing literature does not indicate if such changes in remuneration have occurred in Dubai's AA and if they occurred, which remunerational component is the most affected of all. Hence, the following hypothesis is set with two sub-hypotheses:

H₂ - The total remuneration of the salesforce has significantly decreased in 2020 and increased in 2021.

H_{2.1} - The base pay of the salesforce has significantly decreased in 2020 and increased in 2021.

H_{2.2} - The commission of the salesforce has significantly decreased in 2020 and increased in 2021.

Covid-19 has instigated a reduction in customers' mobility, periodic maintenance of vehicles and reduction in parts replacement. According to Khan (2021), during Covid-19 in GCC, the inquiries for car parts are reduced by 50%, and the revenues have reduced up to 16%. The decline in consumption of light vehicles during the pandemic and the shutdown of business-to-customers trade counters has reduced revenue, forcing SMEs to reduce employees' costs (Laborda and Moral, 2020). The salesforce in the AA sector also has experienced reductions in remuneration (O'Donnell and Marsh, 2022). However, the studies addressing the impact of Covid-19 on sales do not explain the reverse relationship, the impact of the reduction in salesforce remuneration on the sales turnover. The literature related to Covid-19 suggests a positive relationship between salesforce remuneration and sales turnover (Baladraf and Pogo, 2022; Khan, 2021; Kurnia et al., 2020; Satoskar, 2021). Echchakoui and Ghilal (2019) have posited that adequate salesforce remuneration yields enhanced sales performance; Cichelli (2003) has noted that sales remuneration assists in the growth of revenue and profits; and Chingos (2002) used motivation theories and suggested a direct impact of sales turnover on sales revenue. However, these studies do not explain if the same relationship exists in Dubai's AA sector and whether changes in sales remuneration have affected sales turnover. Hence, the following hypotheses are developed:

H₃ – The increase in sales remuneration has positively impacted sales turnover.
H_{3.1} - The increase in base pay has positively impacted sales turnover.
H_{3.2} – The increase in the commission has positively impacted the sales turnover.
Based on the above theoretical discussions, a research model is developed (See Figure 1) to test the three main hypotheses determining the impact of changes in the remuneration of the salesforce on sales turnover.

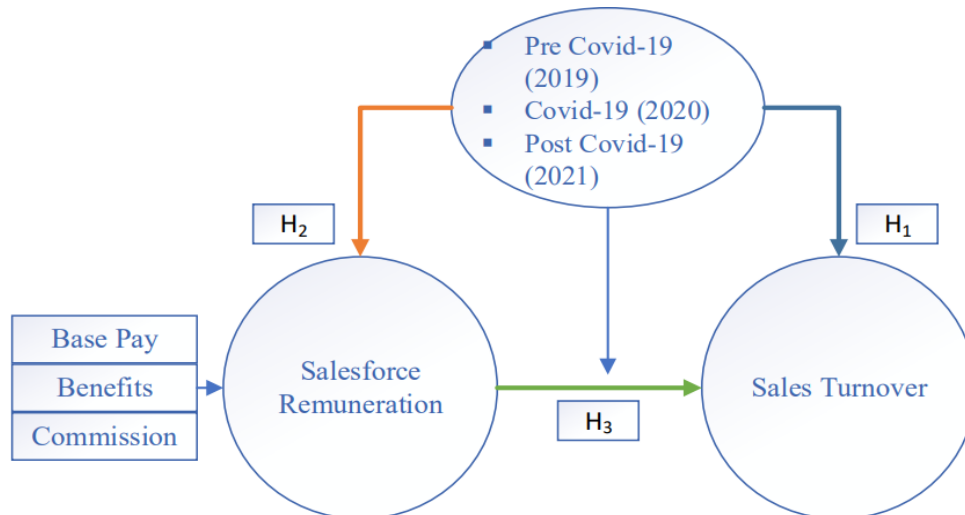


Figure 1: Research model determining the impact of salesforce remuneration on sales turnover

Research Methodology

This is a longitudinal-quantitative nature of the enquiry that stemmed from the positivism research paradigm. An experimental research design is applied to determine if Covid-19 has impacted the relationship between remuneration and sales turnover. The main research questions have investigated if there are any significant changes in remuneration from 2019 to 2021, in sales turnover from 2019 to 2021 and if the changes in remuneration (both salary and commission) have impacted the sales (2019 to 2021). It is assumed that the pre-Covid period is 2019, Covid 19 period is 2020, and the post-Covid is 2021. The primary data were collected for three years (2019 to 2021) from eighty owners of automotive aftermarket enterprises dealing with spare parts (small to medium scale) located in the Deira district of Dubai, using a single-stage convenience sampling method. The Deira district is the hub of AA enterprises in the UAE, representing the AA sector of the UAE. The online survey instrument is used to collect data related to sales turnover, number of employees, number of salesforces, annual salaries of salesforce, an annual commission earned by the salesforce and any other benefits earned by the salesforce. The content validity for language, vagueness and flow is tested through a pilot run covering 6 participants.

The data were collected for each calendar year. The research model was validated by quantitative analyses using descriptive and interpretive statistical methods, including mean, standard deviation, ANOVA test (and post hoc test for multiple comparisons) and correlation analysis. Ethical considerations are followed throughout the research.

Research Results

A total of eighty SMEs from the Dubai AA sector participated in this research. The descriptive statistics findings are presented in Table 1, highlighting the mean values and standard deviation in annual sales turnover, employee remuneration and number of employees and sales employees. All the sales employees are expatriates, male, and working as full-time employees on an employment visa. The results indicate that the number of employees has not changed despite Covid-19, but the sales turnover and employee payment declined in 2020 and increased again in 2021.

The multiple comparisons, two-tailed ANOVA test is used to test H_1 and H_2 determining if there is a significant difference between the means of sales turnover, total remuneration, base pay, and commission within three years, 2019 to 2021. Besides, correlation analysis is used to test H_3 to determine if remuneration significantly impacts sales turnover between 2019, 2020 and 2021.

Table 1. Participants' Profile

	Year	Mean	Std. deviation		Year	Mean	Std. deviation
Annual Sales Turnover (in AED)	2019	7,856,313	3,317,035	Number of employees	2019	6	4
	2020	6,634,221	2,778,298		2020	6	3
	2021	7,811,766	3,209,620		2021	6	3
Total annual employee remuneration (in AED)	2019	425,155	57,431	Number of Sales employees	2019	3	1
	2020	314,243	53,222		2020	3	1
	2021	354,383	70,310		2021	3	1

Table 2. Results from the ANOVA test and post hoc test

	Results from ANOVA-test			Results from post hoc test			
	F	P-value	F crit	P(T<=t) two-tail	Sales Turnover	Total remuneration	Commission
Sales Turnover	3.9721	0.0201	3.0339	2019-20	0.01255	0.00406	0.00082
Total remuneration	3.9073	0.0214	3.0339	2020-21	0.93132	0.22228	0.00540
Base Pay	2.6069	0.0759	3.0339	2019-21	0.01417	0.13685	0.88001
Commission	4.5483	0.0115	3.0339				

Note: α value = 0.05

H_1 – *The Sales turnover has significantly decreased in 2020 and increased in 2021.*
The results from Table 1 indicate that the aggregate annual turnover of all participants declined by 16% in 2020, the peak Covid-19 period. In 2021, the correction in annual turnover was reported, though it had not reached the turnover value of 2019. The results from Table 2 show the p-value of 0.0201, supporting the hypothesis that Covid-19 has significantly impacted the sales turnover of all the participants.

H_2 - *The total remuneration of the salesforce has significantly decreased in 2020 and increased in 2021.*

$H_{2.1}$ - *The base pay of the salesforce has significantly decreased in 2020 and increased in 2021.*

$H_{2.2}$ – *The commission of the salesforce has significantly decreased in 2020 and increased in 2021.*

The data in Table 1 suggest that the total remuneration of the salesforce declined by 26% in 2020 compared to 2019, which increased by 10% in 2021. The changes in remuneration are mainly due to changes in commissions paid to the salesforce. In 2020, the commission decreased by 25%, which later increased by 18% in 2021. The changes in base salary were moderate, with a reduction of 13% in 2020 and further reduced by 15% in 2021 compared to 2019. The base salary has continued to decline post-Covid while the commission has increased post-Covid. There are no changes in the benefits due to government regulations. Hence, the benefits component is excluded from further analysis. The results from Table 2 indicate that there is a significant difference in the mean remuneration of the salesforce within the group and between groups ($p = 0.021$). In the multiple comparison test between 2019 and 2021, no significant difference in the mean of total remuneration is found. Further, there is no significant difference in the salary ($p = 0.075$) and therefore post hoc test is not performed. There is a significant difference in commission within the group and between the groups ($p = 0.011$). These results support H_2 and $H_{2.2}$ while rejecting $H_{2.1}$.

H_3 – *The increase in sales remuneration has positively impacted sales turnover.*

$H_{3.1}$ - *The increase in base pay has positively impacted sales turnover.*

$H_{3.2}$ – *The increase in the commission has positively impacted the sales turnover.*

Table 3. Correlation between remuneration and sales turnover

Correlation	Sales Turnover		
	2019	2020	2021
Base pay	0.490011	0.490011	0.490011
Commission	0.745962	0.500393	0.819532
Total Remuneration	0.531009	0.525779	0.517679

The results from Table 2 show a moderate uphill positive relationship between sales and base pay for all three years (0.49). The mean correlation between sales and commission for three years is 0.69, indicating a strong uphill positive linear relationship. In 2020, this relationship was at a moderate level (0.50). Similarly, there is a moderate uphill positive relationship between sales and total remuneration (0.52), indicating that remuneration and sales are positively related. The results support H₃ in full. Furthermore, there is a positive relationship between sales and remuneration in all three years, but as 2020 is marked as the peak Covid-19 period, a moderate relationship is detected between commission and sales. But in 2021, the changes in the salary have not brought a positive result to sales turnover, but the commission did, emerging as the main component impacting the sales turnover. The statistical analysis and interpretive analysis highlighted that the reduction in remuneration during Covid-19 has negatively impacted the sales turnover in Dubai's Automotive Aftermarket. Figure 2 presents the summarised results.

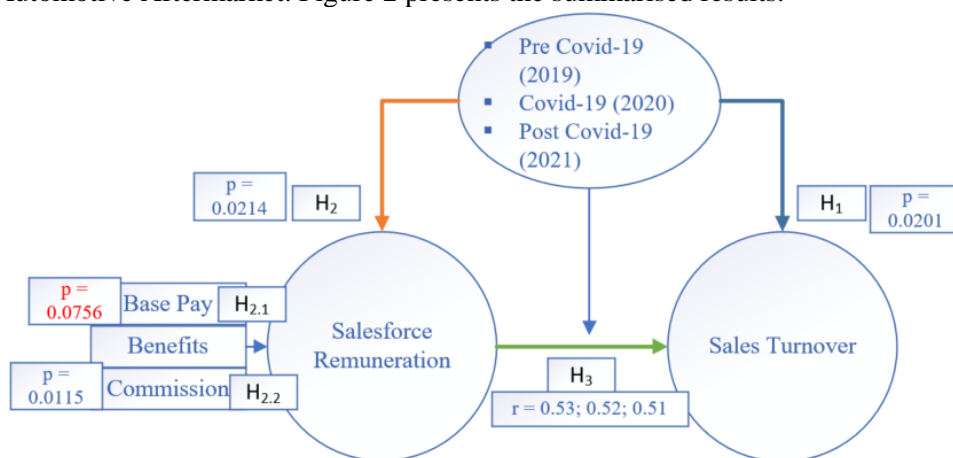


Figure 2: Results depicting the impact of salesforce remuneration on sales turnover

Discussion

The results highlight the cause-effect relationship between salesforce remuneration and the sales turnover in Dubai's AA sector, which specializes in selling spare parts for light vehicles. The decline in sales turnover in 2020 in Dubai's AA is attributed to less consumption of vehicles during lockdowns, customers delaying regular maintenance because of financial instability and fear of Covid-contractions, and forced shutdown of the business enterprises to control Covid-19 cases (Satoskar, 2021). Additionally, the international boundaries were sealed, causing delays or cancellations in the dispatch of products from the supplier (Grand View Research, 2022), causing shortages in stocks. In such circumstances, the AA sector, despite having limited demand, could not fulfil the customer's requirements. Some SMEs with technological infrastructure resorted to online sales. Eventually, consumers started preferring online shopping for spare parts and contactless delivery (Laborda

and Moral, 2020) to avoid Covid-19 infections. The post-Covid period witnessed an increase in sales turnover, but the value did not reach par (or over) compared with the turnover of 2019. Besides the change in consumer behaviour towards online shopping, the availability of hybrid and electric cars has also led to lower maintenance demand, reducing sales turnover (Satoskar, 2021).

It is common knowledge that during economic crises or pandemics, organizations make efforts to sustain the business and reduce costs, including remuneration of their employees and laying off the less critical positions (Rudyanto, and Pirzada, 2021; Pandya and Boukareva, 2022). The results from this study indicate that the sales job is a critical position; hence, Dubai's AA sector reduced the remuneration instead of laying off the salesforce. A reduction in both commission and base pay is reported during 2020. One may presume that SMEs will restore salesforce's base pay post-Covid, but Dubai's AA continued to reduce it in 2021. However, the salesforce commission has improved post-Covid, suggesting the AA sector is focusing more on paying for results (Chingos, 2002; Saman, 2020). The results have established that the remuneration of the salesforce has a positive relationship with the sales turnover, but this relationship is moderate at times of crises, such as Covid-19. Moreover, the sales commission is the key driver in increasing sales turnover post-Covid.

Managerial Implications

The findings from this research added a new piece of knowledge that the increase in sales commission is the key component to increasing sales turnover, especially when SMEs attempt to recover from crises. Further, SMEs will benefit from knowing the component of remuneration that drives employees' performance and design remuneration strategies accordingly. The flexible components, such as commission, can be integrated into the total remuneration as it provides leverage to SMEs to limit the fixed costs trapped in the form of base pay. This will be of interest to labour market economists to observe the trends in base pay and flexible pay during and post crises. The SMEs can further classify the benefits into two categories – government-regulated and flexible benefits. This study noted that the government-regulated benefits did not change during Covid-19 and hence had no impact on the sales turnover.

Conclusion

This longitudinal empirical study aimed to determine the impact of remuneration on sales in Dubai's AA sector and to investigate the role of Covid-19 in this relationship. Considering 2020 as the peak Covid period, this research concluded that before Covid (2020) and post-Covid (2021), the remuneration of the salesforce had a significant positive impact on the sales turnover of the company. However, during Covid (2020), the reduction in sales commission had a mild impact on sales turnover compared to 2019 and 2021. The study also concluded that post-covid, when the commission rate increased, companies experienced an increase in respective sales turnover. This suggests that during global crises, such as pandemics or economic crises, companies may leverage a reduction in performance-based pay to manage

employees' costs as it does not have a high impact on sales. Furthermore, companies are advised to perform due diligence before reducing the fixed monthly salary and benefits such as medical insurance, visa costs and travel allowance. This research obliterated the factors that impact sales turnover in the AA sector, including pricing of goods, cost of goods sold, tariffs and taxes, fixed costs and macroeconomic factors. Nonetheless, this study will be of value to human resources scholars and practitioners, economists, leaders of the automotive industry and people interested in promoting sales during crises.

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WPLYW WYNAGRODZEŃ NA OBROTY ZE SPRZEDAŻY NA SAMOCHODOWYM RYNKU WTÓRNYM W DUBAJU: PRZED I W TRAKCIE COVID

Streszczenie: Sektor Global Automotive Aftermarket został wyceniony na 392,5 mld USD w 2020 r. i przewiduje się, że do 2028 r. przekroczy 525 mld USD. Samochodowy rynek wtórny Zjednoczonych Emiratów Arabskich, na czele z Dubajem, jest najszybciej rozwijającym się rynkiem, który według przewidywań miał osiągnąć 634,4 mln USD. Jednak pandemia Covid-19 zmniejszyła tempo wzrostu i rentowność sektora, zmuszając małe i średnie przedsiębiorstwa do ograniczania kosztów, w tym wynagrodzeń pracowników. Niniejszy artykuł empiryczny ma na celu analizę wpływu zmian wynagrodzeń sprzedawców na obroty ze sprzedaży oraz roli Covid-19 w oddziaływaniu na ten związek przyczynowy. Dane sprzed Covid (2019) i podczas Covid (2020-21) zostały zebrane od 80 przedsiębiorstw motoryzacyjnego rynku wtórnego w Dubaju przy użyciu jednoetapowej metody dogodnego doboru próby. Analiza korelacji i test ANOVA podkreślają istotną różnicę w prowizjach od sprzedaży w grupie i pomiędzy grupami spowodowaną przez Covid-19. Wyniki wskazują, jak obniżenie wynagrodzeń, zwłaszcza prowizji od sprzedaży, w okresie kryzysu znacznie zmniejszyło obroty ze sprzedaży w przedsiębiorstwach zajmujących się motoryzacyjnym rynkiem wtórnym. W badaniu zaproponowano wytyczne i wskazówki, które liderzy biznesowi i specjaliści ds. zasobów ludzkich mogą wdrożyć, aby ożywić obroty ze sprzedaży po Covid-19 i radzić sobie z takimi kryzysami w przyszłości.

Słowa kluczowe: Wynagrodzenie, Obroty, Motoryzacyjny rynek wtórny, Prowizja, Wynagrodzenie, Covid.

薪酬对迪拜汽车售后市场销售额的影响：疫情前和疫情期间

摘要：2020 年全球汽车售后市场规模为 3925 亿美元，预计到 2028 年将超过 5250 亿美元。以迪拜为首的阿联酋汽车售后市场是增长最快的市场，预计达到 6.344 亿美元。然而，Covid-19 大流行削弱了该行业的增长率和盈利能力，迫使中小企业降低成本，包括员工薪酬。本实证论文旨在分析销售人员薪酬变化对销售营业额的影响以及 Covid-19 在影响这种因果关系中的作用。这些数据是在 Covid (2019 年) 之前和 Covid (2020-21 年) 期间使用单阶段便利抽样方法从迪拜的 80 家汽车售后市场企业收集的。相关性分析和方差分析检验突出了由 Covid-19 引起的组内和组间销售佣金的显著差异。结果表明，危机期间薪酬，尤其是销售佣金的减少，如何显著降低汽车售后市场企业的销售营业额。该研究提出了企业领导者和人力资源专业人员可以实施的指导方针和技巧，以恢复他们在 Covid-19 后的销售周转率，并在未来管理此类危机。

关键词：薪酬、营业额、汽车售后市场、佣金、薪水、补偿、Covid