

## Effect of sales management controls on new product sales performance (Case Study: Chain Stores in Tehran)

### Abstract

This research investigates the impact of perceived sales management controls on the sales performance of sellers' new products on a business-to-business (B2B) base.

The present study surveyed the employees and sellers of chain stores in Tehran. It is applied research in terms of purpose and methodologically descriptive and non-experimental research (a field survey). It used a questionnaire to collect data. Its statistical population includes the sellers and employees of chain stores including Hyper, Shahrvand, Refah, Etkā, and Kourosh stores in Tehran. We obtained the sample size through Cochran's formula being equal to 165. With a 10% probability of loss, we presented 200 questionnaires and obtained finally 180 completed questionnaires. Findings showed that output-based control, behavior-based control, and knowledge-based control have an impact on sellers' innovation and the direct and indirect impact of sellers' innovation on new product sales performance mediated by market orientation was significant.

The results show that sales management controls can directly affect sellers' innovation, which in turn they affect the sales performance of a new product. However, sales management controls cannot directly affect performance. Moreover, market orientation can positively moderate the relationship between sellers' innovation and new product sales performance.

**Keywords:** *new product sales performance, knowledge-based control, market orientation, seller's innovation.*

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### 1. Introduction

Sellers play an important role in selling new products. As pointed out by Fu et al. (2010) and O'Hara (1993), sales representatives are an essential factor in selling new products that were previously unfamiliar to consumers because they interact with potential customers, identify their needs, determine their satisfaction with existing products, and explain product features to consumers. Numerous studies also show that companies generally spend resources on their salespeople more than on advertising. Therefore, ensuring that corporate salespeople are effective and efficient elements is essential for companies (Ahren, Rap, Hughes, & Jindal, 2010; Zeltner & Sinha, 2005). Because new products are sometimes unfamiliar to sellers and potential customers, supervisors may have to use control mechanisms to improve their sales performance (Ditillo, 2012; Evans, Landry, Lee, & Zhou, 2007; Matsui, 2009).

These control mechanisms may comprise implementing actions to measure the sales results of each seller's new product, monitoring the input-output transformation process, or achieving the ability to transfer knowledge to the sales team. In addition to the effects of various mechanisms of sales management control, the impact of an organization's market orientation received by its sellers is important. In the literature on sales management, Hsieh, Tsai, & Wang (2008) and Matear, Osborne, Garrett, & Gary (2002) have pointed out that an

organization's market orientation can have profound effects on sellers' performance (Fu et al., 2010; Spanjol, Tom, Coales, and Bohlman, 2011).

The importance of sellers in selling new products needs more attention. In particular, the current literature does not fully address the combined effect of perceived sales management control and an organization's perceived market orientation on sellers' innovation and new product sales performance, and sellers' perspectives require further research (Baldauf, Cravens, and Piercy, 2005).

Approaching the literature on sales control mechanisms and market orientation studies, this study seeks firstly to examine a model that describes the factors that lead to sellers' innovation and new product sales performance. In particular, we will examine the effects of perceived knowledge-based control. Secondly, this study seeks to reveal more information about sellers' innovation to mediate the relationship between perceived sales management controls and new product sales performance. Thirdly, we will further explore the ability of market orientation to moderate the relationship between innovation and performance. Fourthly, the present research examines sellers' perceptions of the impact of management control and market orientation. Finally, based on information obtained from trainees working in high-tech companies, this research discusses the conceptual implications of this study.

## 2. Theoretical literature

### • *New product sales performance:*

The role of sales has changed significantly over the last two decades, and sales have become strategic and influential in areas that previously belonged to marketing. Many studies examine the role of marketing in the success of new product development, but there is little research on the importance of sales and its intervention with marketing. Both marketing and sales have customer information and may contribute to a customer-oriented innovation process. Studies confirm that salespeople can help with early innovation by showing customers' voices. Other researches reveal that sales representatives contribute to the success of new products by promoting products to customers (Mayo and Evans 2013).

Recent studies emphasize the changing nature of sales and its increasing strategic role, which leads to sales movement in the marketing domain and thus blurs the distinction between marketing and sales. These changes in the role of sales, sales-marketing dynamics, and the involvement of relevant departments change the company's innovation process. Dealing with the relationship between sales and marketing, past studies show that the intervention of these two variables varies in companies (Rouzies & Hulland, 2014; Rouzies et al., 2005).

### • *Knowledge-based management and control:*

We can apply knowledge management as a risk reduction method in new product development. Yang & Eline examined knowledge management processes including knowledge creation, knowledge acquisition, knowledge conservation, knowledge integration, and knowledge dissemination in the new product development process. According to them, when knowledge management and the new product development process converge, the development process of a new electronic product comes into the world. Knowledge management plays a very important role in innovation, which is the central activity in new product development. Understanding the methodical relationship between these two concepts is crucial for creating and maintaining a sustainable competitive advantage in organizations.

### • *Market orientation:*

Morgan, Vorhies, & Mason (2009) define market orientation as an organization's ability to generate, distribute, and respond to market information about future and current customer needs, competing strategies, and the wider business environment. The present research focuses on sellers' perceptions of the market orientation of their organization.

Having a comprehensive understanding of customer needs, competitive position and market nature are key factors in product development that are provable in many successful product studies (Cooper, 2001; Mishra, 1996). It requires the following factors: recognizing customer needs, understanding

user needs, satisfying market needs, constant contact and interaction with customers, strong market knowledge and market research, quality of marketing activities, and spending more cost and time on marketing activities.

### • *Sellers' innovation:*

In their study, Lumpkin & Dess (1996) define innovation as a company's desire to develop new products, services, or business processes by applying and supporting new ideas, experiencing new approaches, and the emergence of creativity in its business operations.

Our study defines sellers' innovation as sellers' perceptions of their willingness to apply and support new ideas, apply new approaches, and be creative in their sales operations.

## 3. Conceptual model of research based on background

Reviewing the above literature and identified research opportunities, this article has proposed its research framework (Figure 1 in the appendix). Based on the precedents of new product sales performance, this research focuses on the effects of sellers' innovation (Matsuo, 2009). In their study, Lumpkin & Dess (1996) define innovation as a company's desire to develop new products, services, or business processes by applying and supporting new ideas, experiencing new approaches, and the emergence of creativity in its business operations. Our study defines sellers' innovation as sellers' perceptions of their willingness to apply and support new ideas, apply new approaches, and be creative in their sales operations. Grant and Gravens (1996) define sales performance as a salesperson's evaluation of the way he or she accomplishes the goals set by the organization. The present study is consistent with the definition of Grant and Gravens but focuses on sellers' perceptions of the sales performance of their new product. Moreover, based on the work of Evans et al. (2007) and Matsu (2009), this study demonstrates that the perceived sales management controls (i.e., behavior-based control, knowledge-based control, and output-based control), both directly and indirectly affect the sales performance of a new product. Output-based control is definable as a management approach that minimizes governance pressure by allowing employees to determine a method they will use and the effort they will exert to achieve their company goals. As put in the works of Matsu (2009), Verbeke et al. (2011), and Piercy et al. (2009), behavior-based control describes managers who emphasize activity control and prefer to focus on sales behavior, monitor sellers extensively, and provide direct feedback on sellers' performance. Matsu (2009) has defined knowledge-based control as the attempt of managers to evaluate sellers based on their ability to produce transferable knowledge and share this knowledge with other sellers. According to Ditillo (2012), knowledge can be concrete (e.g., ways of satisfying organizational goals and more efficient and

effective methods at work) or abstract (e.g., identifying recently or previously not realized opportunities). Finally, this study examines the moderating effects of an organization's market orientation on the relationship between innovation and performance (Matear et al., 2002). Morgan, Vorhies, & Mason (2009) define market orientation as an organization's capacity for generating, distributing, and responding to market

information regarding the needs of future and current customers, competing strategies, and the business environment. The present research focuses on sellers' perceptions of the market orientation of their organization. The next section presents the hypotheses of this study (Chen et al., 2015: 149).

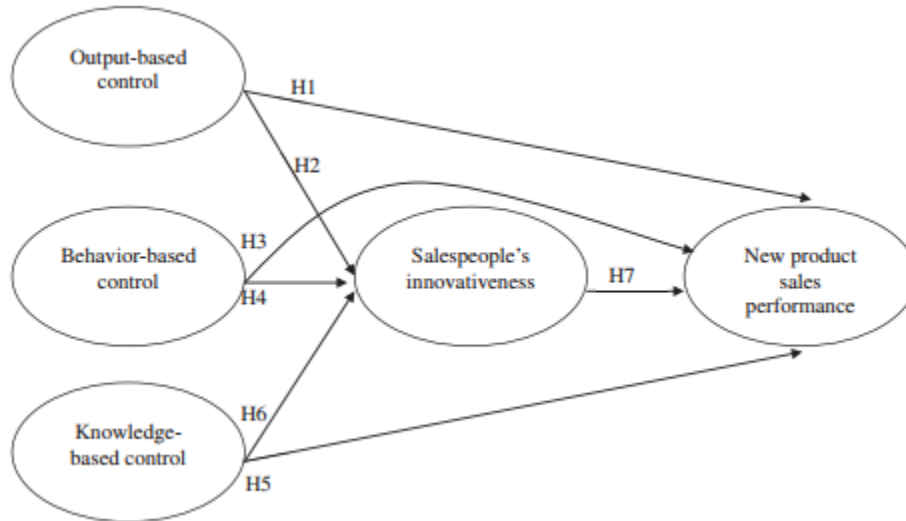


Figure 1: Research framework and structure (A. Chen et al. / Industrial Marketing Management 47 (2015): 149).

Output-based control, Behavior-based control, Knowledge-based control, sellers' innovation, the Sales performance of the new product

#### 4. Research hypotheses

- H1. Output-based control has a positive effect on the sales performance of a new product.
- H2. Output-based control has a positive effect on sellers' innovation while selling new products.
- H3. Behavior-based control has a positive effect on the sales performance of a new product.
- H4. Behavior-based control has a positive effect on sellers' innovation while selling new products.
- H5. Knowledge-based control has a positive effect on the sales performance of a new product.
- H6. Knowledge-based control has a positive effect on sellers' innovation while selling new products.
- H7. Sellers' innovation has a positive impact on the sales performance of their new product.
- H8. (a) In organizations with a strong market orientation, sales innovation has a positive relationship with new product sales performance; (b) In organizations with a weak market orientation, sellers' innovation has no relation with new product sales performance.

#### 5. Research methodology

The present study is an applied-descriptive and non-experimental study (a field survey). Its statistical population includes sellers and employees of chain stores including

Hyper, Shahrvand, Refah, Etkā, and Kouros̄h stores in Tehran. The sample size for this research (obtained through Cochran's formula) is 165 people. It did data collection in two ways: library and field. It used a researcher-made questionnaire through a Likert scale.

To measure the reliability of the questionnaire, we performed a pre-test on 30 employees, managers, and sellers of chain stores in Tehran. Then we performed Cronbach's alpha test using SPSS software to measure its reliability. Cronbach's alpha value for the questionnaire was 0.904. Therefore, as we found, the research questionnaire has acceptable reliability. (The report of Cronbach's alpha coefficients of each factor is observable in Table 1 in the appendix of the research).

All 23 components of the questionnaire had acceptable content validity (above 0.8). Therefore, the content validity was confirmable.

To validate the structure of the questionnaire, we performed confirmatory factor analysis through structural equation modeling by Amos software. If the value of the model fitting indices is within the allowable range and the factor load of each item is at the desired level (ideally higher than 0.4), the validity is confirmable.

In the research appendix, Table 2 shows the desired values of the model fitting indices.

#### 6. Analysis of data and results

In data analysis, we used Amos structural equation modeling software to test the hypotheses.

Table 3 (in the appendix) shows the results of the K-S test (Kolmogorov-Smirnov) to examine the distribution of data of research variables. As we can see in this table, according to the value of P, the data distribution of the variables is normal ( $P < 0.05$ ). According to this table, data distribution is normal and parametric tests are usable.

- In performing factor analysis, one must first make sure that the available data are usable for analysis. The results (Table 4 in Appendix) indicate the appropriateness of the correlations between the data for factor analysis and the adequacy of sampling. Hence performing factor analysis.

- Considering the KMO number (greater than 0.7) and the significance level of the Bartlett test ( $\text{sig} < 0.05$ ), we can say that the data of the output-based control questionnaire are suitable for performing factor analysis and have the required conditions (Diagram 1 in Appendix).

In this section, to check the fitting of the model, we used the indicators of the model fitting explained in detail earlier (Table 5 in the appendix).

According to the obtained results, we acknowledge that all the fitting indicators of the above model are in an acceptable range and therefore the corporation of the collected data with the model is desirable. Therefore, the fitting of the output-based control model is approvable.

• *Testing research hypotheses*

In this section, we examine the model fitting and test of research hypotheses utilizing AMOS software (Figure 2).

As mentioned before, in the test of model fitting, if the RMSEA index, or Root Mean Square Error of Approximation, is less than 5%, the  $\frac{\chi^2}{df}$  the index is between 1 and 5. If the GFI, CFI, NFI, and NNFI indices are higher than 90%, the model has a goodness of fit or in other words has a reasonable approximation of population (Hooman, 2011) (6) and (Table 7).

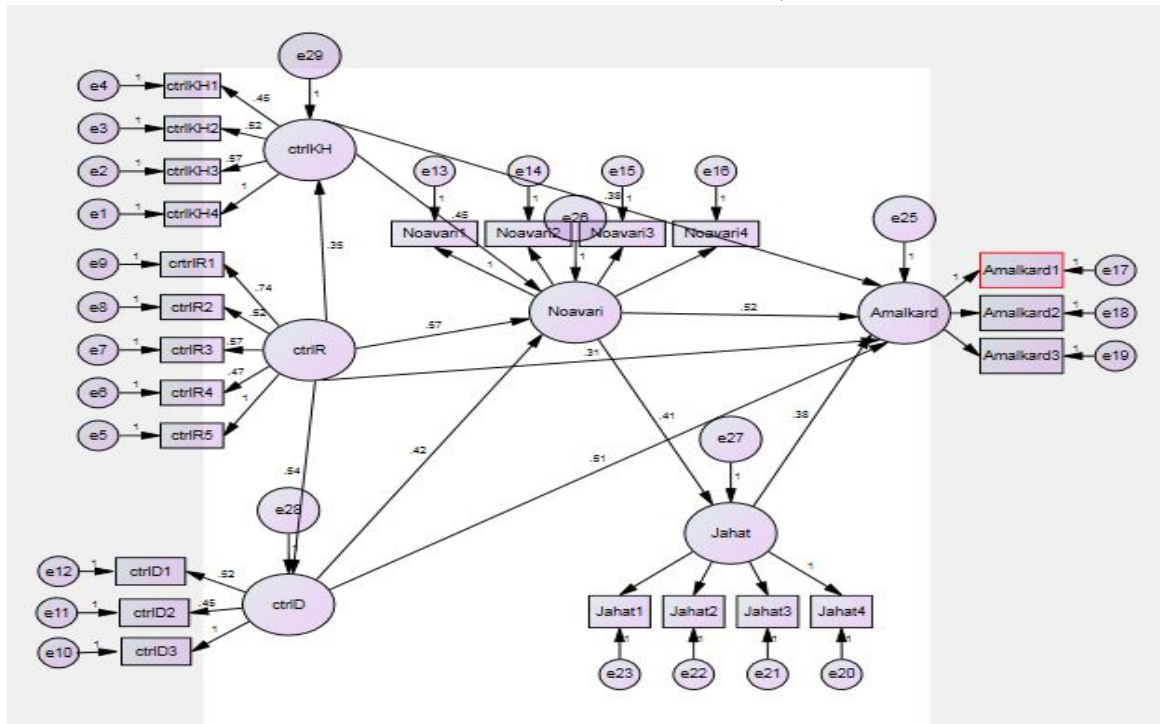


Figure 2: Structural model of research with standard coefficients

Table 6: Fitting indicators of the research conceptual model

$\chi^2/df$	RMSEA	SRMR	GFI	NFI	NNFI	IFI
3.145	0.032	0.027	0.98	0.93	0.91	0.91

Table 7: Investigation of research hypotheses through structural equations model

Hypotheses	Effect value	Significance coefficients	Test result
Hypothesis 1: Output-based control - New product sales performance	38.0	45.6	Confirmed

Hypothesis 2: Output-based control – sellers' innovation	45.0	14.6	Confirmed
Hypothesis 3: Behavior-based control - New product sales performance	31.0	36.7	Confirmed
Hypothesis 4: Behavior-based Control – sellers' innovation	57.0	47.4	Confirmed
Hypothesis 5: Knowledge-based control - sales performance of a new product	51.0	08.5	Confirmed
Hypothesis 6: Knowledge-based control – sellers' innovation	42.0	62.6	Confirmed
Hypothesis 7: Sellers' Innovation - New Product Sales Performance	52.0	51.4	Confirmed
For Hypothesis 8 (a, b): Sellers' Innovation - Market Orientation	41.0	76.6	Confirmed
For Hypothesis 8 (a, b): Market Orientation - New Product Sales Performance	38.0	27.1	Confirmed

According to Table 7, the indirect effect of sellers' innovation on the sales performance of a new product and its significance is calculable. We calculate the indirect effect by the following formula, in which a is the effect of the independent variable on the mediator and b is the effect of the mediating variable on the dependent.

$$B_{\text{indirect}} = a \times b$$

In addition to calculating the indirect effect, we can also calculate the significance of the indirect effect using the Sobel test. It is worth noting that all software calculates the significance of direct effects between variables and presents them in their outputs, but does not provide the significance of the indirect effect, and sometimes provides the value of indirect effect based on the abovementioned formula. Therefore, we must calculate manually the significance of the indirect effect, given in the continuation of the calculation formula based on the Sobel method.

$$t - \text{value} = \frac{a \times b}{\sqrt{b^2 \times sa^2 + a^2 \times sb^2}}$$

Where:

a is the effect of the independent variable on the mediator

sa is the standard error rate of the independent effect on the mediator

b is the effect of the mediator on the dependent

sb is the standard error rate of the effect of the mediator on the dependent

So:

$$B_{\text{indirect}} = 0.15$$

$$t - \text{value} = 2.86$$

Therefore, sellers' innovation also indirectly affects the sales performance of the product, and this effect is significant. Thus, Hypothesis 8 (a) is confirmable. Hypothesis 7 shows that the direct effect of sales innovation on the sales performance of the new product is 0.52, while its indirect effect is 0.15, so the

market orientation has reduced this effect. Considering the positive and direct impact, and strong market orientation, innovation will also have a positive (indirect) relationship with the sales performance of the new product. Due to the indirect impact of sales innovation on the sales performance of the new product, and weak market orientation, sellers' innovation still affects the sales performance of the new product. Hypothesis 8 (b) is therefore rejected.

## 7. Discussion and conclusion

- In this research, the first hypothesis was confirmable. We found that output-based control has a positive and significant effect on the sales performance of the new product. In fact, by upgrading the output-based control, the sales performance also improves. In this hypothesis, the output, financial, and revenue goals of the store are under study; that whether it affects the sales performance of new products. It shows that control over the income and rewards of people based on the sale of new products can be effective. In other words, increasing salaries and incomes as well as rewards can be a good incentive for employees to sell new products. According to previous research, the result of this hypothesis is in line with the results of Matsu (2009) and Evans et al. (2007) and confirms it.

- The second hypothesis was also confirmable. We found that output-based control has a positive and significant effect on sellers' innovation. Given the confirmation of this hypothesis, attention, and control over output, income, rewards, and anything that can make the employee efficient, can cause employees to be creative in selling their new products and use different methods to sell better their products. According to previous research, the result of this hypothesis is in line with the results of Matsuo (2009) and Evans et al. (2007).

- The third hypothesis was also confirmable. We found that behavior-based control has a positive and significant effect on

the sales performance of the new product. According to this hypothesis, management's attention to employees' behavior, their constant control, monitoring the information and awareness of salespeople about the work method, and ensuring the expertise of salespeople can educate better and more efficient salespeople and employees and improve the sales performance of new products. According to previous research, the result of this hypothesis is in line with the results of Matsuo (2009) and Evans et al. (2007).

- The fourth hypothesis was confirmable. We found that behavior-based control has a positive and significant effect on sellers' innovation while selling new products. According to this hypothesis, the attention of management to the behavior of employees, their constant control, monitoring the information and awareness of salespeople about the work method, and ensuring the expertise of salespeople will cause employees to improve their awareness about treating customers, looking for new and innovative ways for selling new products. This can lead to their creativity and innovation in the process. According to previous research, the result of this hypothesis is in line with the results of Matsuo (2009) and Evans et al. (2007).

- The fifth hypothesis was confirmable. We found that knowledge-based control has a positive and significant effect on the sales performance of the new product. Given this hypothesis, management's attention to employees' knowledge and their efficiency in the team, as well as sharing their knowledge about selling new products can be very effective in improving the sales performance of the new product. If the manager employs individuals with high knowledge about their profession and the individuals accept their responsibility in improving their efficiency, the team, and the whole store, and share their information and knowledge with the group, the level of awareness and knowledge of the work also increases and consequently this improves the sales performance. According to previous research, the result of this hypothesis is in line with the results of Matsuo (2009) and Evans et al. (2007).

- The sixth hypothesis was also confirmable. We found that knowledge-based control has a positive and significant effect on sellers' innovation while selling new products. According to this hypothesis, management attention to employees' knowledge and efficiency in the team, as well as sharing their knowledge about selling new products, in some cases can even motivate people to innovate in sales. They can solve together the problem better and find effective ways for selling new products. In fact, by providing a creative approach by one person, nurturing and expanding it by other members, and completing it, the efficiency of the store will certainly increase, and this result will encourage more and more employees to create innovation in selling products. According to previous

research, the result of this hypothesis is in line with the results of Matsuo (2009) and Evans et al. (2007).

- The seventh hypothesis was also confirmable. We found that sellers' innovation has a positive and significant effect on the sales performance of the new product. Given this hypothesis, creating innovation as well as providing creative ways to do everything, initially may carry along opposition and risk-taking. This risk can be more or less depending on the volume of creativity, but creativity always opens up new possibilities to a larger and wider world, so creativity can sometimes lead to greater profitability and efficiency with the least facilities and the least labor. Consequently, creativity in many cases can also improve sales performance among competitors. According to previous research, the result of this hypothesis is in line with the results of the research of Matear et al. (2002).

- The eighth hypothesis (a) was confirmable. The eighth hypothesis (b) was rejected, and the strong or weak market orientation affects the relationship between sellers' innovation and the sales performance of the new product. According to the results of this hypothesis, innovation and creativity can sometimes fluctuate due to other environmental factors, no matter how pristine and effective. Market research, considering the possibilities of the present and the future of the market, knowing the competitors, and knowing the needs of the market and customers can have a great impact on the relationship between innovation and creativity. The higher the awareness of employees and management of the market, and the more this collective wisdom leads to innovations in sales and even the generation of newer products, the more efficient the group and the store will be and the more acceptable the performance will be. According to previous research, the result of this hypothesis is in line with the results of the research of Bonner et al. (2002) and Matear et al. (2002).

## **8. Research suggestions**

### *• Applied suggestions*

1. Considering the acceptable effect of output-based control on the sales performance of the new product as well as the sellers' innovation, the managers should determine rewards for hardworking and innovative employees to increase the efficiency of the sellers and the whole group. In this way, every salesperson and employee can use all their power to promote themselves, and this will be useful for advancing the company's goals. In this regard, it is even possible to ask for the opinion of the best and most efficient employees for organizational and managerial problems, challenge them, welcome useful and innovative opinions, and to encourage them.

2. Considering the acceptable effect of behavior-based control on new product sales performance and sellers' innovation, the management should provide the sellers and employees with

training in the form of short sessions to increase efficiency and motivation in employees. In this regard, it should hold training sessions periodically to improve staff efficiency. Moreover, supervisors and managers should ask periodically employees for work reports, evaluate their performance from different angles and so organize training sessions.

3. Considering the acceptable effect of knowledge-based control on the sales performance of a new product and the sellers' innovation, the management should consult on the work during the sessions it holds with the employees. Thus, it can achieve new ways to continue cooperation and increase the efficiency of the group. In this regard, even from outside the company, it should employ some experts to teach new methods to employees and improve their level.

4. Considering the acceptable impact of sellers' innovation on the sales performance of a new product, it is recommendable that employees with creativity and pure ideas about sales and better performance of the company receive rewards. The

Appendix

Table 1: Hidden variables (Report of Cronbach's alpha coefficients)

Hidden variables	Cronbach's alpha coefficient ( <b>Alpha&gt;0.7</b> )
Sales management control	818.0
New product sales performance	831.0
Sellers' innovation	816.0
Market orientation	822.0

relevant company should encourage this feature for contributing to the better performance of the group and the store. In this regard, it is even possible to train creative thinking to improve the company's performance during the sessions and develop the morale, taste, and talent of the employees in this direction.

5. Considering the acceptable effect of market orientation on the relationship between sellers' innovation and new product sales performance, we recommend appointing a group store management to know efficiently the market and customers' needs at different times. As for the new virtual and electronic methods, a working group can achieve the best database to promote products and services.

Finally, we should note that due to the spatial limitations of sampling in this research, future research could receive an opportunity in different regions and compare different regions, branches, and brands.

Table 2: Values of model fitting indices

Fitting index	Desirable value
$\chi^2/df$	00.<3
GFI(Goodness of Fit Index)	90.>0
AGFI(Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index)	90.>0
RMR(Root Mean square Residual)	05.<0
NFI (Normed Fit Index)	90.>0
NNFI (Non-Normed Fit Index)	90.>0
IFI(Incremental Fit Index)	90.>0
CFI (Comparative Fit Index)	90.>0
RMSEA(Root Mean Square Error of Approximation)	08.<0

Table 3: Results of the K-S test to examine the distribution of data of the research variables

Variable	Statistic indices		Distribution result
	K-S	P	
Output-based control	89.0	11.0	Normal
Behavior-based control	74.0	21.0	Normal
Knowledge-based control	71.0	19.0	Normal
Sellers' innovation	62.0	25.0	Normal
Sales performance of new products	67.0	21.0	Normal
Market orientation	49.0	34.0	Normal

Whole questionnaire	56.0	27.0	Normal
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Table 4: KMO index and Bartlett sphericity test of the output-based control

KMO index	Bartlett sphericity test		
0.760	Degree of freedom	The test statistic ( $2\chi$ )	Significance level
	6	145.922	0.000

Table 5: Fitting indices of output-based control model

Index	Value	Result	
RMSEA	03.0	Confirmed	The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation
GFI	95.0	Confirmed	Goodness of fit
AGFI	93.0	Confirmed	Modified goodness of fit index
NFI	95.0	Confirmed	Normalized Fitting Index (Bentler-Bount)
CFI	91.0	Confirmed	Adaptive Fitting Index
IFI	90.0	Confirmed	Incremental fitting index

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