

Impact of Commission-Based Compensation on Sales Revenue: A Case Study of B2C Solar Pay-As-You-Go (PAYGO) Organizations

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Article Info

Volume 7, Issue 5

Publication history

Accepted on 29 July 2026;
Published: 17 October 2026

Key Words

Commission-Based Compensation, Sales Revenue, Sales Agent Motivation, PAYGO Solar, Zambia

Article Doi

10.59413/ajocs/v7.i5.28

Abstract

B2C Solar Pay-As-You-Go (PAYGO) organizations in Zambia face challenges related to sales force costs, customer affordability, and delayed revenue realization. This study assessed the impact of commission-based compensation on sales revenue in B2C Solar PAYGO organizations in Zambia, focusing on commission structures, sales agent productivity, and organizational benefits. A quantitative cross-sectional survey, guided by a positivist philosophy, was conducted among 114 sales agents and 25 managers from four organizations: SunKing, MySol/Engie, Vitalite, and RDG, operating in Lusaka and Kitwe. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, independent-samples t-tests, one-way ANOVA, Pearson correlation, and cross-tabulation in SPSS. Salary plus commission was the dominant compensation structure (55.3%), followed by commission-only arrangements (29.8%). Agents reported modest understanding of commission systems (mean = 3.28), while perceptions of payment timeliness (2.69) and fairness (2.74) were below the neutral midpoint. The mean motivation score was 3.52. No significant differences in motivation were found across compensation structures ($F = 1.388$, $p = 0.251$) or gender ($t = 0.620$, $p = 0.537$). However, a very strong positive relationship was observed between motivation and sales performance ($r = 0.861$, $p < 0.001$). In addition, 84% of managers agreed that commissions improve organizational performance. The findings indicate that commission-based compensation is positively associated with sales agent motivation and performance, although its effectiveness is influenced by agents' understanding, perceptions of fairness, payment timeliness, and age. The study recommends transparent commission communication, timely payments, equitable compensation structures, and targeted support strategies to enhance sales outcomes.

1. Introduction

Sales force compensation is a critical component of organizational strategy because it directly influences employee motivation, productivity, and revenue generation. In competitive markets, organizations increasingly adopt performance-based compensation systems to align employee effort with organizational objectives and improve financial performance (Dessler, 2008; Goel, 2025). Among these systems, commission-based compensation has become one of the widely used approaches for motivating sales personnel by rewarding them according to their sales achievements (Ahearne & Ahearne, 2025). Research suggests that well-designed commission structures can increase employee commitment, improve sales performance, and contribute to sustainable organizational growth, although their effectiveness depends on factors such as fairness, transparency, and timely payment (Goel, 2025; Perros et al., 2024).

In Zambia, Business-to-Consumer (B2C) Solar Pay-As-You-Go (PAYGO) organizations operate in a unique business environment characterized by installment-based payment models, customer affordability constraints, and delayed revenue realization. These organizations depend heavily on field sales agents to educate customers, acquire new clients, facilitate financing arrangements, and support continued customer repayments. Consequently, commission-based compensation has become an important mechanism for motivating sales agents and supporting organizational revenue growth (Schneider & Anderie, 2025). However, the effectiveness of different compensation structures may be affected by issues such as payment delays and perceived fairness (Perros et al. 2024; Yadav et al., 2019).

Despite the use of commission-based compensation in the sector, limited empirical evidence exists on its relationship with sales revenue and sales agent productivity within Zambia's B2C Solar PAYGO organizations. Previous studies have largely focused on solar energy access, affordability, financing, and sustainability, with comparatively limited attention to sales force compensation and its relationship with organizational performance (Perros et al. (2024; Yadav et al., 2019). This study therefore examines the impact of commission-based compensation on sales revenue in selected B2C Solar PAYGO organizations in Zambia by assessing compensation structures, sales agent productivity, and organizational benefits. The findings provide evidence to support the development of effective compensation systems that may enhance motivation, productivity, and revenue generation.

1.1 Statement of the problem

The cost of doing business in Zambia remains persistently high, with human resource and sales force costs constituting a major component of operational expenditure, particularly in sales-driven sectors such as B2C solar Pay-As-You-Go (PAYGO) organizations. These firms rely heavily on large, field-based sales teams to acquire customers, manage installment payments, and provide after-sales support. For example, solar PAYGO companies operating in low-income and peri-urban communities often incur substantial costs related to recruitment, training, supervision, and remuneration of sales agents, while revenue realization is delayed due to installment-based payment models.

To manage these costs and improve revenue performance, many organizations have adopted commission-based compensation systems that link pay directly to sales outcomes. Recent evidence suggests that performance-linked and data-driven incentive systems can help organizations align employee effort with revenue objectives and optimize compensation efficiency (Goel, 2025). However, the effectiveness of such systems in cost containment and sustained revenue growth is highly context dependent. In PAYGO business models, where customer affordability constraints and income volatility are prevalent, commission-based pay may not always translate into predictable or sustainable revenue outcomes (Perros et al., 2024).

Despite the widespread use of commission-based compensation, empirical evidence on its impact on sales revenue in Zambia's B2C solar PAYGO sector remains limited. Existing studies on Zambia's solar energy industry focus primarily on affordability, access to clean energy, financing challenges, and sustainability, with little attention given to sales compensation structures and their cost-revenue implications (Perros et al. 2024). This lack of sector-specific evidence constitutes a clear research gap. If this gap is not addressed, this could weaken the sector's ability to expand access to clean energy and contribute to broader climate and development goals.

1.2 Aim of the study

The aim of the study is to assess the impact of commission-based compensation on sales revenue in B2C PAYGO solar organizations in Zambia.

1.3 Objectives

- Established how commission-based compensation is implemented.
- Examined the effect of commission-based compensation on productivity.
- Assessed the benefits of commission-based compensation to the organization.

2 Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The section reviewed literature on the impact of commission-based compensation on sales revenue, focusing on its effect on productivity, implementation, and organizational benefits within Business-to-Consumer (B2C) Solar Pay-As-You-Go (PAYGO) organizations. The review establishes the theoretical and empirical foundation for the study while identifying research gaps that justify the investigation. Commission-based compensation is widely recognized as a strategic tool for motivating sales personnel and aligning employee effort with organizational objectives, particularly revenue growth and market expansion (Goel, 2025; Ahearne & Ahearne, 2025). In Solar PAYGO businesses, where organizations depend on field-based agents to acquire customers and manage installment payments, effective compensation systems are essential for sustaining sales performance.

2.1 Effect of Commission-Based Compensation on Productivity

Globally, commission-based compensation is associated with improved sales productivity and organizational performance. Goel (2025) found that data-driven commission structures significantly improve sales productivity and revenue forecasting by encouraging employees to exceed performance targets. Similarly, Ahearne and Ahearne (2025) argue that commission incentives positively influence sales behaviour when aligned with organizational goals, while Akuffo-Aduamah (2025) reports that employees perform better when rewards are directly linked to effort. However, excessive dependence on commissions may encourage unethical selling practices, increase job stress, and contribute to employee turnover if poorly designed (Elomari, 2024; Jayaratne & Rathnayake, 2025; Mendes, 2025). These findings suggest that commission-based compensation enhances productivity when supported by transparent and balanced incentive systems.

Across Africa, commission-based compensation has become common because it provides organizations with flexibility while motivating sales personnel. Studies conducted in Nigeria and other African countries show that commission-based employees consistently outperform those receiving fixed salaries (Adegroye & Ojo, 2025; Obiora et al., 2025). Within renewable energy markets, Yadav et al. (2025) and Schneider and Anderie (2025) highlight that commission-driven sales models have been instrumental in expanding access to solar energy among low-income households. Nevertheless, African organizations continue to face challenges including weak performance monitoring systems, labour informality, and employee burnout, which may reduce the effectiveness of commission-based compensation (Kansiime et al., 2025; Anusi, 2025).

Research on commission-based compensation in Zambia remains limited, particularly within the Solar PAYGO industry. Existing studies mainly focus on renewable energy adoption, affordability, and financing rather than compensation practices. Zambia's PAYGO sector operates under unique conditions characterized by geographically dispersed customers, low purchasing power, and installment-based repayments (da Corta & Bwalya, 2025). These conditions place considerable responsibility on sales agents, making effective commission structures essential for improving productivity and sales revenue. However, little empirical evidence exists on how commission-based compensation influences revenue performance within the sector.

2.2 Implementation of Commission-Based Compensation

Organizations implement commission-based compensation using different structures, including straight commission, salary plus commission, and commission with bonuses. Hybrid systems combining salary and commission are increasingly preferred because they provide income security while maintaining performance incentives (Goel, 2025; Ahearne & Ahearne, 2025). Advances in data analytics have further improved compensation design by enabling organizations to establish transparent, equitable, and performance-oriented commission structures (Marlizan & Rajasegaram, 2025).

Within Solar PAYGO organizations, implementation is more complex because sales agents are responsible not only for customer acquisition but also for repayment monitoring and customer retention. Consequently, commission structures often reward both sales and repayment performance (Yadav et al., 2019; Schneider & Anderie, 2025). However, ineffective implementation, delayed commission payments, and poor transparency can reduce employee motivation and weaken organizational performance (Elomari, 2024; Jayaratne & Rathnayake, 2025).

2.3 Organizational Benefits of Commission-Based Compensation

Commission-based compensation offers several organizational advantages. The most important benefit is improved sales revenue through increased employee motivation and productivity (Goel, 2025). Organizations also benefit from lower fixed labour costs because part of employee compensation depends on actual sales performance rather than fixed salaries (Perros et al., 2024). Additional benefits include greater accountability, improved goal alignment, and enhanced operational efficiency (Aziz et al., 2025). For Solar PAYGO organizations, commission-based compensation facilitates market expansion by encouraging agents to reach underserved rural and peri-urban communities while supporting customer repayment compliance (Yadav et al., 2025). Nevertheless, organizations must carefully manage commission systems to avoid inequities, administrative complexity, and employee burnout that could undermine long-term performance (Marlizan & Rajasegaram, 2025; Anusi, 2025).

The reviewed literature consistently demonstrates that commission-based compensation positively influences employee motivation, productivity, and organizational performance. Global studies emphasize sophisticated performance management systems and data-driven compensation models, while African research confirms the importance of commission-based incentives in improving customer acquisition and market expansion, particularly in renewable energy sectors (Goel, 2025; Adegrooye & Ojo, 2025; Yadav et al., 2025). Despite these findings, important gaps remain. First, most studies concentrate on employee motivation and productivity rather than directly examining sales revenue outcomes. Second, limited research has focused specifically on B2C Solar PAYGO organizations, despite their growing role in expanding renewable energy access. Third, empirical evidence from Zambia remains scarce, with existing studies concentrating mainly on energy access, financing, and affordability rather than compensation systems.

This study addresses these gaps by examining the impact of commission-based compensation on sales revenue in Zambia's B2C Solar PAYGO organizations. Unlike previous studies, it investigates how commission structures are implemented, their influence on sales agent productivity, and their contribution to organizational revenue within the Zambian context.

The literature shows that commission-based compensation is an effective strategy for improving sales performance when incentive systems are transparent, fair, and aligned with organizational objectives. Hybrid compensation models combining salary and commission appear more sustainable because they balance employee motivation with income security. Successful implementation also requires ethical oversight, effective monitoring, timely commission payments, and performance measurement systems. Although international and African studies provide valuable insights, limited empirical evidence exists for Zambia's Solar PAYGO sector. This study therefore contributes context-specific evidence on how commission-based compensation influences sales revenue, providing practical guidance for managers, policymakers, and researchers seeking to strengthen organizational performance within Zambia's renewable energy industry.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Expectancy Theory (Vroom, 1964), Agency Theory (Jensen & Meckling, 1976), and Equity Theory (Adams, 1963), which provide a foundation for understanding how commission-based compensation influences sales performance and revenue outcomes. Expectancy Theory explains that sales agents are motivated when they believe that increased effort will lead to improved performance and attractive rewards. In B2C Solar PAYGO organizations, commission payments create a direct link between sales activities and financial rewards, encouraging agents to increase productivity and generate higher sales revenue.

Agency Theory explains how commission-based compensation aligns the interests of sales agents with organizational objectives by reducing conflicts between managers and employees. By linking earnings to sales outcomes, organizations can improve accountability and reduce monitoring challenges. Equity Theory further highlights the importance of fairness, suggesting that employees are more motivated when they perceive their commission rewards as proportional to their efforts compared with others. Together, these theories explain how compensation design, motivation, fairness, and performance relationships influence sales revenue in B2C Solar PAYGO organizations.

2.5 The Conceptual Framework



Conceptual Framework: Impact of Commission-Based Compensation in B2C PAYGO Solar Organizations

Figure 1: The Conceptual Framework

3 Research Methodology

The study adopted a quantitative research approach, guided by a positivist philosophy, to examine the relationship between commission-based compensation, sales agent motivation, productivity, and sales performance. A deductive approach and cross-sectional survey design were employed. Data were collected using structured questionnaires from 114 sales agents across four B2C Solar PAYGO organizations: SunKing, MySol/ENGIE, Vitalite, and RDG, operating in Lusaka and Kitwe, Zambia. Stratified random sampling was used to facilitate representation across the participating organizations. The questionnaire comprised closed-ended and Likert-scale questions covering compensation structures, commission-system implementation, motivation, and sales performance. Data were analyzed using SPSS, employing descriptive statistics, independent samples t-tests, one-way ANOVA, Pearson correlation, and crosstabulation. Measures were undertaken to ensure the validity and reliability of the research instrument, while ethical principles, including informed participation, confidentiality, and appropriate handling of respondent information, were observed throughout the study.

4 Presentation of Findings

The 114 sales agents were predominantly young, with moderate educational attainment and relatively limited work experience. Female agents accounted for 54.4% (n = 62) of the sample, compared with 45.6% (n = 52) male agents. Although the distribution was relatively balanced, females constituted a slight majority. Regarding age, agents aged 25–34 years formed the largest group at 54.4% (n = 62), followed by those below 25 years at 34.2% (n = 39). Only 11.4% of the agents were aged 35 years and above. Educational attainment was concentrated at the secondary level. GCE certificate holders represented 80.7% (n = 92) of the sample, while 7.9% (n = 9) held a Grade 9 certificate and another 7.9% (n = 9) held a diploma. Only 3.6% (n = 4) had bachelor's or master's degrees. In terms of work experience, 63.2% (n = 72) had between one and three years of experience, 26.3% (n = 30) had less than one year, and 10.5% (n = 12) had four or more years of experience.

4.1 How commission-based compensation is implemented

The analysis of pay structures among the 114 sales agents reveals that the Salary + Commission model is the predominant compensation arrangement, as the figure below shows, employed by 63 respondents (55.3% of the sample). This indicates that over half of the sales agents operate under a hybrid compensation system that combines fixed salary security with performance-based variable pay. The Commission Only structure represents the second most common model, with 34 agents (29.8%) relying entirely on variable pay tied directly to sales outcomes. In contrast, Salary Only arrangements are less prevalent, adopted by only 11 agents (9.6%), while the Salary + Bonus model is the least utilized, accounting for just 6 agents (5.3% of the sample). This distribution demonstrates that B2C Solar PAYGO organizations in Zambia predominantly favor hybrid compensation models that balance income stability with performance incentives, though a substantial minority of agents operate under pure commission structures that offer higher earning potential at the cost of income predictability. The minimal use of Salary Only and Salary + Bonus arrangements suggests that fixed compensation without performance linkage is largely discouraged in this sales-driven sector.

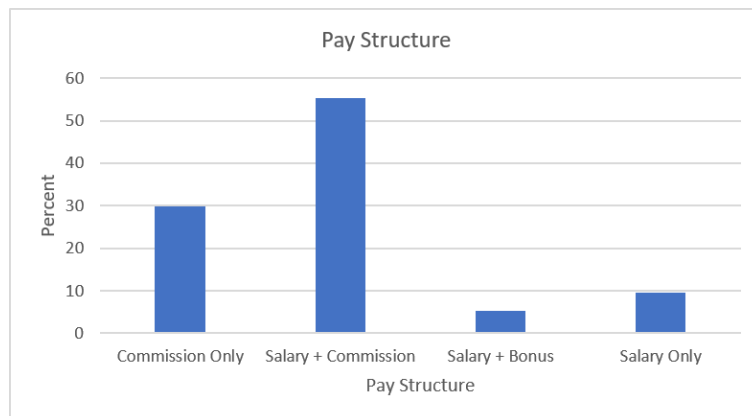


Figure 2: Payment Structure of Sales Agents

Source: Field Data, 2026

The cross-tabulation between gender and pay structure, based on the 114 sales agents, shows that Salary + Commission was the dominant compensation structure, accounting for 55.3% (63 respondents), followed by Commission Only at 29.8% (34 respondents), Salary Only at 9.6% (11 respondents), and Salary + Bonus at 5.3% (6 respondents). Among the 52 male agents, Salary + Commission accounted for 51.9% (27 respondents), while Commission Only represented 36.5% (19 respondents), with Salary Only and Salary + Bonus accounting for 7.7% (4 respondents) and 3.8% (2 respondents), respectively. Among the 62 female agents, Salary + Commission was also the most common arrangement at 58.1% (36 respondents), followed by Commission Only at 24.2% (15 respondents), Salary Only at 11.3% (7 respondents), and Salary + Bonus at 6.5% (4 respondents). Thus, while Salary + Commission was the most prevalent arrangement for both genders, Commission Only was more common among male agents (36.5% versus 24.2%), whereas female agents had slightly higher representation in Salary + Commission, Salary Only, and Salary + Bonus arrangements. Overall, these findings confirm that the compensation structure distribution reported in the study was predominantly characterized by Salary + Commission and Commission Only arrangements.

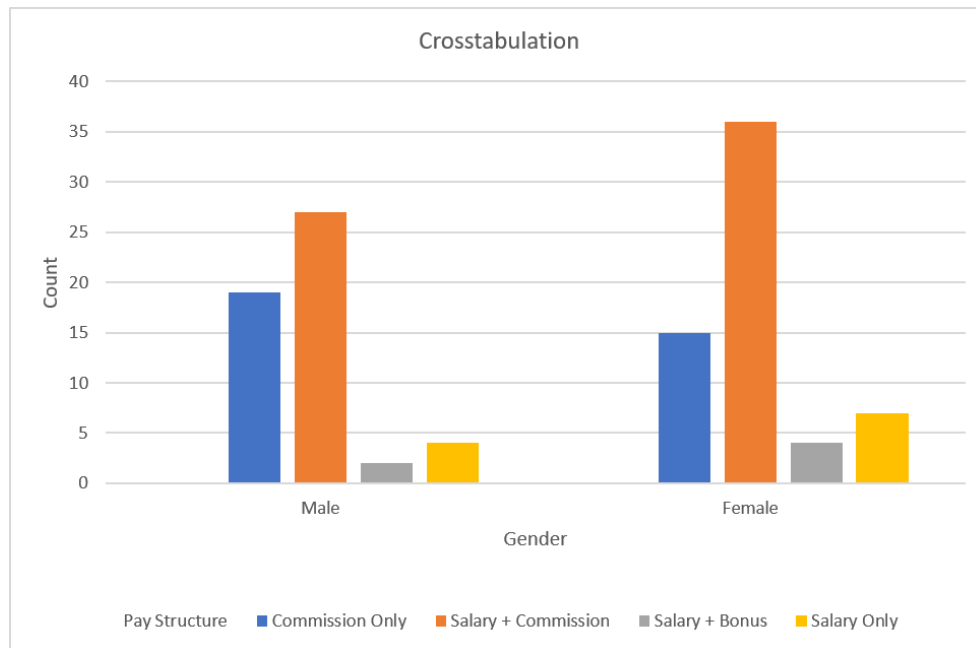


Figure 3: Gender and Pay Structure Crosstabulation Analysis

Source: Field Data, 2026

4.2 Discussions of Findings

The study found that Salary and Commission was the most common compensation structure among sales agents (55.3%), followed by Commission Only (29.8%). This finding supports Ahearne and Ahearne (2025), who argued that hybrid compensation models are increasingly preferred because they provide income stability while maintaining performance incentives. Similarly, Goel (2025) emphasized that organizations are shifting toward performance-based systems to improve sales effectiveness.

However, the significant proportion of agents working under Commission Only arrangements raises concerns regarding income security, employee retention, and long-term sustainability. Although commission-only systems reduce fixed labour costs and encourage sales effort, previous studies have highlighted risks such as income instability, short-term sales behaviour, and employee stress (Elomari, 2024; Jayaratne & Rathnayake, 2025). These concerns are relevant in Zambia's Solar PAYGO sector, where agents operate in challenging markets characterized by customer affordability constraints and delayed revenue collection.

The findings also revealed gender differences in compensation structures, with male agents more likely to work under Commission Only arrangements while female agents were more represented in Salary + Commission structures. This raises possible equity concerns, as explained by Equity Theory (Adams, 1963), which suggests that employees compare their rewards with those of others. Additionally, agents reported only moderate understanding of commission systems (mean = 3.28) and low perceptions of payment timeliness (2.69) and fairness (2.74). These findings suggest that unclear communication and delayed payments may weaken the motivational impact of commission systems, supporting the argument by Goel (2025) and Perros et al. (2024) that transparency and fairness are essential for effective incentive systems.

The findings also demonstrated that commission-based compensation positively influences sales agent productivity, with an overall motivation score of 3.52. More than half of agents agreed that commissions improve time management (54.4%) and encourage customer follow-ups (56.2%). These results support previous studies showing that performance-based rewards increase employee effort, goal orientation, and sales behaviour (Goel, 2025; Ahearne & Ahearne, 2025).

However, the ANOVA results showed no statistically significant differences in motivation across compensation structures ($p = 0.251$). This suggests that while commissions contribute to motivation, the specific pay structure alone may not determine employee performance. Other factors, including organizational culture, supervision, market conditions, and individual characteristics, may also influence productivity. This aligns with Kansime et al. (2025), who noted that productivity outcomes in African markets depend on broader organizational and environmental factors.

The gender analysis further showed no significant difference in motivation between male and female agents ($p = 0.537$). This indicates that commission-based compensation can motivate employees regardless of gender. However, the earlier differences in pay structure allocation highlight the importance of ensuring equal access to compensation opportunities.

The study further found that commission-based compensation provides important organizational benefits, particularly in improving sales performance and revenue outcomes. The strong positive relationship between motivation and sales performance ($r = 0.861$, $p < 0.001$) demonstrates that motivated agents achieve better sales results. This finding strongly supports Expectancy Theory, which argues that employees perform better when they believe their effort will lead to valuable rewards.

Managers also expressed strong support for commission-based compensation, with 84% agreeing that commissions improve organizational performance (mean = 3.81). This supports Agency Theory, which explains that organizations use incentive systems to align employee behaviour with organizational objectives. By linking compensation to sales outcomes, commission systems encourage accountability and reduce monitoring challenges.

Despite these benefits, some concerns were identified. Poorly designed commission structures may encourage unethical selling practices, excessive pressure, and unhealthy competition, as highlighted by Elomari (2024) and Mendes (2025). Therefore, organizations must balance revenue targets with ethical sales practices and customer relationship management.

Age-based analysis showed that agents aged 35–44 years recorded the highest sales performance, while those aged 45 years and above recorded the lowest

performance. This suggests that experience, customer relationships, and familiarity with sales processes may influence how effectively agents respond to commission incentives.

The findings therefore provide support for the three theoretical frameworks guiding the study. Expectancy Theory is supported by the strong relationship between motivation and sales performance, demonstrating that employees increase effort when they expect rewards from improved performance. However, moderate understanding and fairness perceptions indicate that organizations need clearer communication of commission systems.

Agency Theory is supported by the dominance of Salary and Commission structures and strong managerial support for commission systems. The findings show that organizations use commissions as a mechanism to align employee behaviour with revenue objectives. However, poorly designed incentives may create unintended behaviours, such as focusing on sales volume rather than customer satisfaction.

Equity Theory is reflected in agents' concerns regarding fairness and payment transparency. Perceptions of unequal treatment or unclear commission calculations may reduce motivation and commitment. Therefore, effective commission systems must promote fairness, transparency, and equal opportunities. The findings confirm that commission-based compensation can improve motivation, productivity, and sales revenue in B2C Solar PAYGO organizations in Zambia. However, its effectiveness depends on proper implementation, timely payments, fairness, and alignment between employee incentives and organizational goals.

5 Conclusion and Recommendations

It can therefore be concluded that the commission-based compensation implemented within B2C Solar PAYGO organizations in Zambia is the dominant pay structure employed by 55.3% of sales agents. However, the findings also revealed that agent understanding of commission systems is only modest and perceptions of payment timeliness fall below acceptable levels, indicating significant implementation challenges. The effect of commission-based compensation on productivity, was achieved by demonstrating that commissions positively influence agent motivation, with over half of agents agreeing that commissions improve their time management and encourage customer follow-ups. The ANOVA results further confirmed that motivation levels do not differ significantly across pay structures ($p = 0.251$), suggesting that the presence of commission incentives matters more than the specific structure in driving productivity. The organizational benefits of commission-based compensation, was achieved by revealing a very strong positive correlation between motivation and sales performance ($r = 0.861$, $p < 0.001$), confirming that motivated agents generate higher revenue outcomes. Additionally, the finding that 84% of managers agree that commissions improve organizational performance, coupled with the age-based performance pattern showing peak effectiveness among agents aged 35-44 years, validates that commission-based compensation delivers meaningful organizational benefits when properly implemented.

The study therefore recommends the following:

- Solar PAYGO organizations should implement regular training sessions and transparent payment schedules to address the low commission understanding, poor payment timeliness, and weak fairness perceptions identified in this study.
- Solar PAYGO organizations should develop age-specific commission support strategies, including mentorship for younger agents, flexible targets for agents aged 45+ who recorded the lowest performance, and tiered commission structures that accommodate varying career stages and risk tolerances.
- The Ministry of Labour and Energy Regulation Board should establish minimum standards for sales compensation in the renewable energy sector, including written commission agreements, maximum allowable payment delays, and formal dispute resolution mechanisms to protect agents under Commission Only structures.
- Solar PAYGO organizations should audit their recruitment and role assignment practices to address the gender pay structure disparity identified in this study, where male agents are more frequently placed in Commission Only roles compared to female agents.
- Solar PAYGO organizations should establish formal feedback mechanisms, including monthly commission review meetings and anonymous reporting channels, to address the substantial variability in motivation scores and identify agents who are not responding positively to current commission structures before they become disengaged or leave the organization.
- Solar PAYGO organizations should pilot hybrid commission models that incorporate non-financial recognition elements, such as public acknowledgment, awards, or career advancement opportunities, to complement monetary incentives, particularly for agents who reported neutrality or disagreement with commission effectiveness.

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