# The Impact of Monetary Rewards and Employees' Benefits on Frontline Staff Motivation in the Retail Industry

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Manuscript received June 5, 2025; accepted August 2, 2025; published September 18, 2025.

Abstract—This research examined the motivation of employees in Macau's retail industry based on various motivational characteristics. Eight candidates were invited to conduct in-depth interviews to determine different motivators and the reasons behind their motivation. The findings showed that monetary rewards such as salary and sales incentives significantly affect motivation. Other motivators, such as the working environment, employee benefits, etc., motivate the employees. This exploratory study provides initial insights into various factors that are worth exploring. Managers and leaders can develop strategies based on this research, and future research can also examine some other motivational factors with a larger sample.

Keywords—employee motivation, monetary rewards, staff benefit, frontline retail staff

#### I. INTRODUCTION

With the society's development, Macau's retail industry has grown rapidly. As the frequency of tourist visits rose after the COVID-19 lockdown, retail sales steadily increased in 2023 (Vilhena & Antunes, 2024). However, in a high-stress environment, motivation strategies for leaders are essential; work stress problems can be severe if the company does not handle them well since job satisfaction can affect stress levels at work (Prasetio et al., 2019). Employees with low motivation toward their jobs are less productive (Addair, 2019). Resulting in lower sales revenue for retail shops. To look deeper, we compared the motivation that brings employees between monetary rewards, working environment, employee benefits or other factors by interviewing various frontline workers to understand their needs and factors. There is very little research on frontline employees in the retail industry; therefore, this research aims to explore how employees' motivation can affect their job engagement and, thus, the companies' productivity.

This study evaluated motivation characteristics so managers can develop strategies for their employees by adopting a qualitative research method, in-depth interviews. This study used purposive sampling, and eight candidates were selected to conduct the interviews; they are frontline staff of Macau retail stores ages between 20 and 40.

# II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Employee motivation refers to employees' engagement, energy, and enthusiasm about going to work every day. Employees who are engaged and committed to the company will perform better at work; they may even find ways to improve. However, unmotivated employees will finish their jobs and only complete the necessary tasks (Masionis, 2024). Therefore, it is essential to improve employee motivation to

increase productivity. Several motivation factors were identified from existing research.

Sales incentives refer to rewards for employees after they achieve a specific goal or target to raise employee performance. It was typically used in selling goods or services (Lamba, 2023). This type of reward can either be cash or compensation. Ude & Coker (2012) stated that the purpose of incentives is to motivate employees; it can act as a goal and a reward as long as the employee can achieve their aim. Besides, it can also act as a competition between employees. Some companies will launch individual incentive programs, which can drive their self-motivation to win among all other staff.

Recognition is when managers or other staff recognise employees' behaviours, hard work, or achievement of specific goals. Luthans (2000) stated that employees would like to be highly appreciated for their work performance; this can motivate them to perform even better. They think recognition is essential in the whole reward system; they would like to accept a simple award in front of other staff or receive a coffee from managers. Recognition is important because the employee feels valued; it builds trust and confidence, increases productivity and engagement, and lowers the rate of absenteeism since staff being praised tends to be more committed to company goals and targets (Castrillon, 2023).

Salaries are usually given out regularly, weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly. At the same time, the salary amount varies among different levels and industries (SThree-Admin, 2024). According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the salary is classified as the category of security; other than basic physiological needs like water or food, it is crucial for employees to feel secure, and giving out salaries lets them feel safe in the company. Employees can feel satisfied and motivated by their salary. Some of the employees may work only to gain their deserved salaries. At the same time, some will agree that salary motivates them the most among all the factors, like recognition and promotion (Assari, Desa & Subramaniam, 2019).

A work promotion is when an employee receives a higher grade or level; they are taking greater responsibilities with that, too. Assari, Desa, and Subramaniam (2019) stated that staff will perform more efficiently and effectively through promotion. They will put more effort into gaining the trust of their managers. Other than that, after the manager promotes the employee, they will still be motivated, as they can feel valued and trusted; having a greater responsibility makes them perform well to prove that they deserve this position. At the same time, a job promotion can also create long-term

satisfaction for employees, with better positions, increasing salaries and responsibilities, motivating them to bring out their most outstanding performance.

A working environment is where employees work and might be affected by the surrounding elements. Those elements can be referred to as hardware or software impacts. According to the research of Putra, Yandi and Maharani (2020), a comfortable environment motivates staff to work. Lighting, temperature, and wall colour can also affect their motivation. These can ensure that they work in a safe and secure environment. When they work in an office that lacks lighting, it might decrease their production at work. Raziq and Maulabakhsh (2015) also showed that a healthy working environment can maximise employees' job satisfaction, and managers and leaders need to consider this as an essential factor when adjusting motivational strategies.

A **compensation package** other than salary includes three typical types of employee benefits: insurance, pension plan, and time off (Bika, 2023). Although some benefits were restricted by law, when companies offer more attractive time off schemes, employees' job satisfaction can be improved. Hong *et al.* (1995) found that employee benefits generate greater motivation than work performance, and there are gaps between managers and staff on the importance of different benefits programs. Managers should take more advice from employees to provide a suitable program for them.

Employee motivation is essential to the retail industry. The research of Robinson (2019) stated that the main issue faced by the retail industry was employee retention. It is hard for retail companies to retain staff in their store, and as the industry grows, the issue has become a typical challenge for every retail company. Addair (2019) states that the retail management team applied practical strategies to raise employee motivation. The research examined the motivational strategy that managers use in two retail stores. However, they lack a targeting strategy since motivation can vary among employees. Therefore, retail leaders and managers must be familiar with various motivators and align strategies.

#### III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research adopted a qualitative method to answer the question: What factors affect frontline staff's motivation in the retail industry? We may discover multiple reasons through qualitative research as we draw from their narratives from different circumstances. We used qualitative methods in this initial exploratory research to discover the interviewees' meanings, experiences, and perspectives, and these answers are usually non-countable for research. Unlike quantitative research, they can differ among participants (Hammarberg, Kirkman & Lacey, 2016). We would like to understand the meaning behind each motivator for each participant. Therefore, in-depth interviews were used to collect data for this study. The purpose is to get detailed information through some open-ended questions and let the interviewee illustrate their experience and feelings. It takes more time to process data collection, but it will allow us to understand the interviewee's details (Rutledge & Hogg, 2020). By conducting in-depth interviews in this study, we can have a better result with rich descriptions of the reasons provided by the interviewees.

We adopted a purposive sampling which specifically chose employees working in a retail company located in a hightraffic area in Macao. Eight candidates from such retail shops participated and answered the open-ended questions during the interview process.

The data analysis method of this research is based on thematic content analysis. It is an analysis method for qualitative data, usually used for text like interview transcripts (Anderson, 2007). According to Braun & Clarke (2006), they provide a simple of six steps in using thematic content analysis. First, to become familiar with the text, the transcript of the interview should be read over and over again. Second, we can organise the data with codes and arrange it into various sections. Third, we arrange the codes into themes based on the research topic. Moreover, the two steps followed would be to review and define themes. The themes were reviewed again to limit the numbers and ensure sufficient data supports them. Then, we defined the themes with the research topic and question. Finally, the findings were written to conclude the research.

# IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In in-depth interviews with frontline employees of Macao's retail companies, we revealed factors that profoundly impact employees' motivation and incentives to work. These factors are intertwined and form the core drivers for employees to choose and stay in their current positions and are presented in the following subsections.

#### A. Salary and Sales Incentives

Salary is the primary motivating factor for employees in the retail industry, influencing job choices and retention. Most respondents felt their salaries met or slightly exceeded expectations, though some believed they were underpaid compared to industry standards, which affected their motivation. Mixed views were expressed regarding salary increases and promotion opportunities, which vary by company size and structure. Companies with limited promotion chances may impact employee motivation.

Participant A highlighted salary as a key motivator, appreciating her current company's base salary plus commission model, which provides financial security and incentivises performance. She noted the importance of stable income and suggested improvements like lowering sales targets or increasing commission percentages to enhance the incentive mechanism's effectiveness. This reflects employees' desire for flexible, competitive incentives that align with market changes.

Despite feeling her current retail industry differs from her previous experience, Participant B remains due to higher and more stable salaries compared to other eyeglass stores. However, participants C, G, and H expressed dissatisfaction with their salaries, which they felt were below industry averages, prompting them to consider job changes. Participant G described her salary as sufficient for basic needs, while Participant H noted the low pay compared to other retail firms.

Participant D emphasised salary as a fundamental need, indicating that unsatisfactory wages would deter her from considering a company. In contrast, while working at the same company, participants E and F were satisfied with their

salaries, believing they were competitive in the industry, which influenced their decision to stay.

Entrepreneurs in retail must recognise the critical role of salary and sales incentives in motivating employees. A well-structured salary system and performance-linked incentives can boost motivation and satisfaction, enhancing enterprise performance. Regular adjustments to incentive policies are necessary to meet market changes and employee needs, ensuring the system remains effective.

#### B. Job Recognition and Promotion

In retail, promotions motivate frontline employees by offering career advancement, higher income, and respect. However, limited promotion opportunities can hinder motivation and creativity. Participants A and B highlighted the demotivating effects of infrequent promotions and lack of pay raises. Participant C noted that management and business restrictions limit advancement, leading to decreased job identification and underutilised abilities. Even in small settings like a coffee shop, uncertain promotion opportunities can cause a lack of motivation. Participant E mentioned that while development opportunities are available, employees must pursue them independently.

Participant F felt demotivated due to unclear promotion criteria and few opportunities, while Participant G noted that promotions depend on vacancies and require applications and interviews, adding to the uncertainty. In contrast, Participant H's company offers precise promotion opportunities every six months with exams, providing direction and motivation for employees to work harder. This structured approach demonstrates that a clear promotion mechanism and reasonable frequency can stimulate motivation and creativity.

The lack or uncertainty of promotion opportunities can lead to confusion and reduced motivation, as seen in Participants B and C's companies. Promotion opportunities are closely linked to employees' career development planning. Companies should align promotion mechanisms with employees' career plans to enhance motivation and job satisfaction. A clear and reasonable promotion mechanism is essential for motivating frontline employees in retail.

Besides promotions, recognition and support from supervisors are vital motivators. Participant A felt motivated by supervisor recognition, which affirmed their work value. Participant C noted that supervisor approval increased self-confidence and responsibility. Participant E highlighted the motivational impact of regular supervisor feedback and recognition. Participant F felt a sense of accomplishment from positive supervisor evaluations, motivating him to pursue higher goals. Overall, supervisor recognition fosters a sense of accomplishment and motivation, encouraging employees to work harder and achieve their goals.

# C. Working Environment

The working environment is crucial in staff motivation, influencing physical and mental well-being. An uncomfortable environment can lead to decreased motivation, potentially causing employees to resign. For instance, Participant B described a tense work atmosphere where colleagues compete for clients, leading to stress despite the company's stability and achievable commission targets.

Participant G experienced a harsh supervisor who set unrealistic expectations, causing her stress and diminishing her motivation and confidence. Minor mistakes were excessively scrutinised, leading her to consider other career options if dissatisfied with her salary. This highlights how a negative work environment can significantly impact motivation.

In contrast, Participants D, E, and H expressed positive views about their work environments, attributing their continued employment to these factors. Participant E emphasised the supportive team atmosphere, noting that unity during busy periods enhances her well-being. Participant D appreciated the flexibility to sit during less busy times, viewing it as a humane practice uncommon in other companies. Participant H valued the minimal overtime and stable work hours, allowing him to balance work and personal life, such as picking up his children on time.

Overall, the working environment is a significant motivator, with a favourable environment potentially being a priority for employees. Conversely, a negative environment can lead to dissatisfaction and resignation. Retail companies aiming to retain staff should prioritise the working environment as a key motivational factor.

# D. Relationship with Colleagues

An excellent work atmosphere significantly boosts employee motivation and efficiency, as evidenced by the experiences of various participants. Teamwork and positive relationships with coworkers and supervisors are key factors that enhance effectiveness and enjoyment, motivating employees to work harder. Participant D chose their company for its higher salaries, excellent work atmosphere, and high employee satisfaction, highlighting the importance of a good work environment in enhancing employees' sense of belonging, motivation, and efficiency, thereby improving company performance and stimulating employee potential.

Participants A, C, D, E, F, and H expressed satisfaction with their working environments. Interviewee A's store had a positive team atmosphere with close-in-age colleagues who supported each other, leading to increased dedication. The company offered ten days of vacation a month, including statutory public holidays and Sundays, allowing employees to rest and adjust. In contrast, one of the stores initially had a complicated environment due to past disputes and pay differences, affecting employee relationships. However, participants eventually accepted and helped each other. Interviewee C expressed a desire to stay with their current company.

Another store fosters teamwork and career development with a friendly working environment. Employees collaborate on complex orders and receive training opportunities, motivated by a cheerful atmosphere and good interpersonal relationships. Horizontal development opportunities and continuous training enhance employees' abilities, with Participants E and F sharing positive comments about their company's work environment.

Participants B and G experienced average working environments. Participant B was unsatisfied with salary and benefits but found the company stable in the retail industry. Coworker relationships were ambiguous, with some pressure from customers and commission grabbing. However, supervisors were generally good, relieving some pressure. Participant G faced high expectations initially but later

received recognition, suggesting that praise and rewards can motivate employees. Participant H, working at the same company as G, found the environment friendly and supportive, with teamwork and vacations contributing to employee satisfaction.

Employee relationships contribute significantly to a good working environment, crucial in motivating frontline employees in the retail industry, enhancing their sense of belonging, motivation, and efficiency, and stimulating their potential. Conversely, bad and negative competitive relationships lead to stress and dissatisfaction, affecting motivation and efficiency.

#### E. Job Benefits

In the retail industry, employee welfare is crucial in motivating frontline employees. An analysis of interview dialogues reveals diverse perceptions and expectations of benefits among employees, reflecting the strengths and characteristics of companies in this area. Employee A praised the company's comprehensive medical benefits, including reimbursement for regular doctor and dentist visits, contributing to their satisfaction and belief that the benefits were sufficient and comparable to industry standards.

In contrast, Participant B felt the current benefits were not as good as those of a larger company they previously worked for, despite acknowledging them as excellent and comparable. This indicates that employees' expectations are shaped by past experiences, and differences in benefits can lead to turnover. Participant C mentioned primary benefits like statutory public holidays but found them inadequate compared to larger companies. They desired more comprehensive and higher-quality benefits, noting that low sales commissions could affect income and motivation. Concerns about unequal pay for equal work were also raised, particularly regarding salaries lower than those in Hong Kong despite good sales, highlighting issues of fair treatment.

Overall, the interviewees identify benefits, including direct material treatment, a fair pay system, a working environment, training, sales targets, medical benefits, and extended maternity leave. However, part-time employees lack vacation time compared to their peers but have better overall benefits. Employees want the company to prioritise their welfare needs and improve work-life balance. While benefits are important, coworker relationships are the main motivator, as they share similar age groups and communicate well. Employee benefits provide security but are not the sole motivator compared to factors like coworker relationships.

Therefore, we identified that job benefits are crucial in motivating frontline employees but are not the main factor. Employees' concerns and satisfaction with benefits depend on personal experiences, expectations, and company specifics. Some prioritise the completeness of primary benefits like medical and vacations, while others focus on the fairness of compensation and reasonableness of sales incentive programs. Each employee has unique needs, as seen with Participant G's concern about maternity leave days. Employees also compare their company's benefits with those of others in the industry to form relative evaluations.

# F. Other Motivational Factors

In the retail industry, frontline employees' motivation and satisfaction are influenced by various factors beyond salary and promotions. Teamwork is a significant motivator, as seen at some retail stores, where employees A and E described a supportive team environment that fostered happiness and commitment. Colleagues helped each other, enhancing trust and friendship. At another shop, while Participant D preferred working alone, she recognised the benefits of teamwork, such as faster task completion. Some interviewees demonstrated an excellent working environment with friendly colleagues and supportive management, leading to better results and a happier work atmosphere. Teamwork at one shop motivated employees, enhanced self-confidence, and improved cooperation and cohesion. Participant H valued teamwork, delight, and good relationships with colleagues, highlighting its role in motivation.

Learning and growth opportunities also play a crucial role in motivating employees by fulfilling their self-improvement needs. Participant A mentioned training for career development, while Participant E noted lateral development opportunities that supported employees' interests. Participant F observed that training changes the work environment, making employees happier and contributing to their career development. Training enhances competence and provides new experiences, keeping employees engaged and challenged.

Employees' interests and hobbies can positively impact their work motivation. Employees find enjoyment and fulfilment when engaged in work that aligns with their passions, leading to increased involvement. Participant D, from a coffee retail store, loves coffee, exemplifying this as her dedication to coffee-making enhances work quality and brings a sense of accomplishment.

Overall, teamwork, recognition, supervisor support, learning opportunities, and the fit of interests and hobbies are crucial motivational factors for frontline employees in retail. These factors create a positive work environment, prompting greater devotion and contribution to the enterprise's development. Enterprises should prioritise these factors to meet employee needs, improve motivation, and foster joint development.

# V. CONCLUSION

Frontline retail employees are motivated by various factors, including salary, sales incentives, work environment, benefits, relationships, and promotion opportunities.

Compensation, such as salary and incentives, is crucial for job selection and retention. A proper compensation system meets basic needs and provides financial security, fostering commitment. However, pay levels and promotion mechanisms vary, leading to demotivation.

A good work environment is essential for motivation. Excellent teamwork, positive relationships, and a sense of belonging enhance well-being and willingness to give their all. Teamwork boosts efficiency and enjoyment, while supportive relationships reduce stress and improve efficiency. Participant A's store has a positive team atmosphere, while Participant D's company has good relationships and teamwork improves efficiency. Participant E's company has an excellent atmosphere with friendly colleagues and a caring manager who motivates employees.

Employee welfare and coworker relationships significantly impact motivation and efficiency. Benefits vary in importance, with some prioritising essentials like medical

insurance and vacations, while others focus on salary fairness and sales incentives. Company benefits directly affect job satisfaction and loyalty. Employee E appreciated excellent benefits, fostering a sense of belonging and loyalty, while Participant C sought improvements in unequal pay and felt sales incentives were unfair. Participant F expressed dissatisfaction with vacation benefits.

Good coworker and supervisor relationships foster support, problem-solving, and a positive work atmosphere. Supervisors' recognition and support boost motivation and creativity. Praise and encouragement enhance self-confidence, while feedback improves skills and efficiency. Participant A's harmonious team and supportive supervisor motivated her hard work. Tense relationships or high expectations can pressure employees and affect motivation. For instance, Participant G's initial pressure from her supervisor impacted her work motivation.

Promotion opportunities motivate frontline employees. A precise promotion mechanism and reasonable frequency show career prospects and stimulate work motivation and creativity. Employees motivated by promotions work harder to improve. Limited or uncertain opportunities reduce motivation. Participant B's company lacks opportunities, causing confusion and job loss. Participant C's company has limited promotion room, lowering job identity. In contrast, Participant H's company offers promotions every six months, with employees applying for exams. This precise mechanism motivates active work and promotion pursuit.

Teamwork, recognition, support, learning opportunities, and alignment with interests influence frontline employees' motivation and satisfaction. Teamwork improves efficiency, while recognition and support make employees feel valued. Learning and growth encourage self-improvement, and hobbies provide pleasure. Participant A appreciates teamwork's benefits, while Participant F finds motivation in positive supervisor comments. Participant E appreciates learning opportunities for skill development. Participant D's passion for coffee enhances focus and enthusiasm, improving skills.

Among the factors mentioned in interviews, salary is the primary motivator for eight participants. They believe they work for money to survive. The working environment and colleagues' relationships significantly impact their motivation. They prefer a good work environment and atmosphere over a stable career. Job benefits affect their motivation, but monetary rewards are more attractive than a suitable package. In the retail industry, monetary rewards have the most significant impact on employees' motivation.

This study offers insights for Macau retail industry leaders and managers. Understanding typical employee motivational factors can help develop strategies to enhance staff retention and engagement, such as improving compensation, communication, or learning and development plans. Specific strategies can be created for each factor to address retention challenges and increase productivity.

However, the study has limitations. Well-known retail brands may not represent all Macau retail companies. Purposive sampling may cause limitations, as the sample size was not randomly selected and may be subjective. Only eight participants were interviewed; some other factors may not have been covered.

Given that this is an initial exploratory research, future research should increase the sample size to include more retail frontline employees and use random sampling to avoid bias. Quantitative research based on this study can collect more data to generalise motivational factors in the retail industry.

#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

# **AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS**

Ho conducted the research, analysed the data, and co-wrote the paper; Phillips edited the findings and structured and cowrote the paper; both authors had approved the final version.

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