

INDUBITABLE VERACITY ABOUT A JOURNEY OF SALESPERSONS' PERFORMANCE IN A MULTIFACETED PHARMACEUTICAL OUTBOUND SELLING CONTEXT

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Abstract

Purpose: In this unbendable competitive environment, pharmaceutical firms need to craft strategies that are best suited for their salesforce effectiveness as well as for customers, this study aims to highlight the prominence of salesperson's satisfaction with supervisors/field managers and the significance of salesperson's customer orientation in an outbound pharmaceutical sales context, and i.e. how customer orientation can affect the performance of salespeople by using the mediating mechanism of emotional regulation and sales skills. **Theoretical Framework:** This study relied on the Behavioral Equation Theory (BET) of selling and the Adaptive Theory of Selling (ATS). The theoretical model was developed by integrating BET and ATS to test eight hypotheses. **Design/Methodology/Approach:** A quantitative and cross-sectional study was conducted. A self-administered survey was used to collect data from 300 salespeople from 20 pharmaceutical firms (national and international). AMOS-22 and SPSS-24 were used to test the eight hypotheses posited. **Findings: Implications/Originality/Value:** The results supported eight hypotheses and inveterate that a salesperson's satisfaction with supervisors influences the customer orientation of salespersons. Additionally, a salesperson's customer orientation has a positive effect on emotional regulation, the salesperson's performance, and sales skills. Emotional regulation and sales skills have a positive effect on a salesperson's performance. Moreover, Emotional regulation and sales skills partially mediated the relationship between a salesperson's customer orientation and performance. This research contributed to the advancement of knowledge in the field of selling and sales management.

Keywords: Satisfaction with Supervisor, Customer Orientation, Emotional Regulation, and Selling Skills

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Today's marketing and sales environment has become multifarious; varied factors are influencing the market conditions and as a result, the market is becoming exceptionally competitive. Customers are becoming less faithful to the firms and are becoming more educated and at the same time becoming more challenging for the firms to capture sales (Khan et al., 2023). As a result of these changing factors, the nature of buyer-seller relationships and customer management has moved from a basic production and sales outlook to a more composite arrangement of partnering with customers. In this situation, the role of face-to-face selling is becoming very important not only in generating revenue but also in gaining first-hand information on market conditions (Vieira et al., 2022). At the same time, in this unbendable competition where a large number of firms are doing their business, a firm needs to craft strategies that are best suited for not only customers but also for their salesforce to make more productive (Hamzah et al., 2022; Mallin et al., 2022). As the business environment is changing rapidly in terms of technological advancement, rivalry among firms and consumer purchasing configurations are also changing rapidly, considering firms and salespeople need to align them according to the changing business environment. Today companies are increasingly focusing on developing strategies to build long-term relationships with customers; and they are more engrossed in implementing the marketing concept, rather selling concept (Good et al., 2022). Therefore all these strategies can only be helpful if firms realize the significance of their salesforce (Vieira et al., 2022). A supervisor's leadership style influences on attitudes and behaviors of salespeople (Dugan et al., 2022). Supervisors, in a sales context, are a source of knowledge and motivation to the sales force. Conversely, field managers must recognize the attitude and behavior of salespeople toward the customer, like Customer Orientation (CO) of the salespeople, in other words, many researchers have advocated that a salesforce needs to identify the basic needs and wants of customers. However, studies revealed that there is still a lot more work that must be done when it comes to measuring the relationship between salespeople's Emotional Regulation (ER) and the Sales Skills (SS) they possess (which influence the efficacy of CO). Specifically, some researchers raised questions and have diminutive clarity about the influence of CO on salespersons' Performance (PER).

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the factors that influence the PER of salespeople working in the pharmaceutical sector. As far as pharmaceutical companies are concerned, they are facing stiff competition (Limbu & Huhmann, 2022). According to the Pakistan Pharmaceutical Manufacturing Association (PPMA), around 800 national and multinational companies are doing business in Pakistan. Pakistan's pharmaceutical industry is a rapidly growing industry over the last few years. In the pharmaceutical industry, salespeople are monitored by supervisors or field managers, so the relationship between salespeople and supervisors is more critical in the pharmaceutical industry (Morgan & Zane, 2022). This study provides a guideline to the top management of pharmaceutical companies to make appropriate strategies not to just increase sales but to maintain long-term relationships with the customers. The insight of this study also offers applicable and important direction for the formulation of strategies for salesperson's level

of satisfaction with supervisors as well as gives direction, on how supervisors can positively impact the PER of salespeople.

The role of salespeople cannot be ignored in the sales-oriented organization (Khan et al., 2023), because they are not only a source of generating revenue, but also have a deep knowledge of market conditions, and a real understanding of the company's position in a particular market segment, therefore firms need to realize the important role of salespeople in an organization (Kidwell et al., 2021). According to Mallin et al. (2022), it remains challenging for companies to critically analyze how salespeople interact with customers at the individual level, for example, salespeople's CO and its impact on PER have been studied by several researchers. However, initially, researchers were not clear about the behavioral aspect that influences the PER of salespeople (Malek et al., 2022), furthermore, salespeople's ER and salespeople's attitudes and behavior were also not addressed appropriately in measuring the outcome performance of the salespeople. Many researchers had some doubt about the relationship between CO and PER, and how CO can affect the PER (Wierzbiński et al., 2023). Firms cannot achieve their goals due to heavy dependency on salespeople's cognitive factors, this notion shows the importance of ER for salespeople, because researchers suggested that as human beings, salespeople can react differently in different situations, so their emotional aspect cannot be neglected (Wisker & Poulis, 2017). Salespeople's knowledge and experience also positively influenced the PER (Conde et al., 2022; Mallin et al., 2022).

Limbu and Huhmann (2022) suggested that in the pharmaceutical industry, sales representatives play a very vital role for both, companies, and customers i.e. (physicians). Sales representatives directly interact with physicians, so they must have exceptional knowledge about the products that they are promoting to their customers, salespeople must be trained in terms of technical (product knowledge) and SS. Researchers in this context believe that managers/supervisors are a source of knowledge and motivation for salespeople, consequently, their relationship affects the PER of salespeople.

A meager understanding of the supervisor's interaction with salespeople may lead to a negative impact on the CO process, and weak CO in sales may lead to poor results for salespeople (Wisker & Poulis, 2014: 2017). Although there are so many other factors that can affect the overall PER of salespeople in an organization, however, as far as the reviewed literature is concerned, very few studies are available that highlight the importance of these factors. This study aims to investigate whether Satisfaction with a Supervisor (SWS) affects CO and whether CO affects PER via a mediating mechanism. We posed three questions in this study i.e. does any relationship exist between SWS and the salesperson's CO? Does the salesperson's CO impact the salesperson's PER of salespeople? And do the salesperson's ER and salesperson's SS play the role of mediators between the salesperson's CO and the salesperson's PER?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Satisfaction with Supervisor

The term leadership is widely used in marketing literature. Leadership can be defined as influencing other's behavior and attitude to achieve the overall goals of an organization. Previous studies show that supervisors play an important role in forming job commitment in salespeople, reducing job stress, boosting PER, and reducing the turnover ratio (Windon, 2020). Studies revealed that more than 40% of the job satisfaction of employees depends on the relationship between salespeople and their supervisors (Qureshi, 2017). The role of supervisors in the sales context is somewhat more important as compared to other fields (considering the outbound selling activities). Researchers believe for many reasons, the role of field managers is central especially in a sales context because salespeople work alone in the market, he/she should face all the challenges and customers' criticism without having the direct eye of supervisors on them at the time of sales call, henceforth supervisors' role is crucial for an organization in managing selling function.

Extant literature, highlighted factors, like motivation, goal clarity, training, and satisfaction with supervisors which have always been important in shaping salespeople's behavior and attitude. Numerous studies are available that show SWS influences salespeople's PER, and a strong positive relationship with supervisors reflects on their PER (Pap et al., 2021). Many studies revealed that job commitment, turnover rate, job PER and organizational engagement are highly influenced by the relationship between the workforce and their supervisors (Chang & Wang, 2023). Salespeople consider their managers as a source of motivation and surrogates for the company, therefore managers' actions highly influence salespeople's PER (Mallin et al., 2022). Supervisors are one, who gives feedback to the higher managers and rate the PER of the workforce (Tevfik & Guven, 2017). Baloyi et al. (2014) claimed that supervisors are a source of knowledge, skills, and motivation for the salespeople.

Researchers argued that salespeople feel more comfortable when they have a strong relationship with their supervisors; this may lead to a positive impact on PER because researchers believe that salespeople work better in a favorable/comfortable environment. The extent of the literature shows that the field manager/supervisor plays the role of bridge between salespeople and top management; he/she is a source of knowledge, motivation, and inspiration for salespeople. Organizations believe customer satisfaction is a key to success, but it is not clear, how customer satisfaction can be achieved, or how it could be possible for an organization to satisfy customers (Pap et al., 2021). To achieve an ultimate objective like customer satisfaction, firms now acknowledge the importance of the role of supervisors with the salespeople.

In a sales-oriented organization, success heavily depends on salespeople's PER, researchers revealed that salespeople who are more satisfied with their supervisors are more effectively satisfy customers as compared to those who are dissatisfied with supervisors, hence SWS is one of the factors underneath in the overall effectiveness of the selling process.

2.2 Customers' Orientation

In this rigid competitive situation, where a large number of companies offer almost homogenous products are trying to make strategies that fulfill the requirements of customers, or in other words, make strategies that align with customers' needs (Cavazos-Arroyo & Puente-Diaz, 2023). In a sales process, a successful salesperson must identify the needs and wants of the customer, and then try to make sales strategies according to their needs, he/she must also be able to handle the objections raised by customers and give them a proper solution which leads toward positive long-term relationship (Yeo et al., 2019). CO plays the role of motivator in salespeople as it enables them to serve customers, and successfully meet the needs of customers as well (Baber et al., 2020). Salespeople who are more skilled and customer-oriented can perform better as compared to those who are not (Bidisha Banerjee & Sudin Bag, 2022). Authors also highlighted that salespeople are considered consultants to customers who are more customer-orientated; hence customers get a higher level of satisfaction from them. Various studies established a positive relationship between CO and sales PER (Grant et al., 2020). In contrast to the selling concept, more customer-oriented salespeople always follow the marketing concept which allows them to make long-term relationships with the customers (Cavazos-Arroyo & Puente-Diaz, 2023). CO in the sales context satisfies and fulfills the needs of customers within the available resources, researchers argued that customer-orientated salespeople are more satisfied with their jobs and are more concerned about the organization's expectations (R.M. et al., 2019). In a sales process, salespeople play a very critical role in creating the relationship between companies and customers as far as the customer-oriented selling concept is concerned. Researchers also argued that salespeople play the role of bridge between the organization and the customer because they are the ones who directly communicate with customers and provide them with information about the product and establish an image of the organization in the eyes of customers. The concept of CO is important if the organization wants to achieve long-term relationships with the customer, while in the selling concept, an organization just focuses on creating demand for the products it produces (Grant et al., 2020). Extant literature on the issue related to a salesperson's CO demonstrates that it is influenced by many factors, some are controllable, and others are uncontrollable.

Hamzah et al. (2016) suggested that CO influences customer relationships, especially at the individual level when a salesperson directly communicates with the customer. Salespeople, who are more customer-oriented, control their emotions while interacting with customers, which positively affects PER because they are more conscious of fulfilling the needs of customers. Bidisha Banerjee and Sudin Bag (2022) studied that a salesperson with strong CO is more able to achieve a higher outcome. CO is all about how to perform the selling job considering the customers' perspectives, and what procedures eventually lead to a positive long-term relationship with a customer, therefore previous studies show there is a positive significant relationship between salesmanship skills and a salesperson's CO. Furthermore, CO is a cost-effective approach especially when salespeople have the resources to fulfill the needs of customers and have a variety of product lines available to offer them.

2.3 Emotional Regulation

In recent years, ER in salesmanship has been found an important variable in decision-making and negotiation, and that is largely interpersonal (Wisker & Poulis, 2014). In a sales context, the impact of ER on an individual salesperson's ability has a strong effect on the PER of salespeople. In the cognitive psychology literature, the term ER was first used in the 1960's. Yoon et al. (2016) defined ER as a trait of an individual who is capable enough to control and monitor his own and others' emotions, and then use this information according to the specific situation. In a sales context, ER has remained an interesting issue for many years. Successful salespeople must have the ability to change his/her behavior according to the situation with different customers in a different way, this tactic will help him/her to close sales calls successfully furthermore, this technique will guide them to maintain a long-term relationship with the customer.

In a sales call during direct interaction with customers, salespersons' behavior and emotions are significantly reflected on PER. Leonidou et al. (2019) argued that in a direct interaction with the customer, ER positively influences buyer-seller relationships; therefore ER or the behavior of salespersons always remains important in maintaining a long-term relationship with customers for sales outcomes. Salespersons' ability to control emotions shows their attachment to social norms of society; this ability enables them to manage goals and objectives and helps them control the overall plan of the sales call (Wisker & Poulis, 2017). Successfully controlling or regulating emotions is one of the most challenging tasks in selling jobs. ER might be controlled or uncontrolled, conscious or unconscious, furthermore, it can also be categorized into two categories, antecedent-focused happens when emotions are not highlighted at the time of the situation, while response-focused occurs when emotions are already fully active (Danish Habib & Attiq, 2020). More customer-oriented salespeople, use ER tactics in situation handling, therefore these tactics enable them to empower in their decisions while interacting with customers (Leonidou et al., 2019). There are fewer chances of failure for an individual who uses ER tactics, but if a failure occurs, they can recover quickly compared to those who do not use ER tactics in the sales process, therefore researchers believe salespeople with highly focused on ER effectively achieve their sales goals (Wisker & Poulis, 2017). In earlier studies, it has been suggested that ER is considered a predictor of PER. Research suggested that, for many years, it has remained important for researchers to investigate the variables that affect the PER, these might be related to some physical aspects and some other psychological factors like ER, behavior, attitude perception, etc. (Yoon et al., 2016). ER theory suggested three basic abilities such as expression of emotion by which salespeople can express his/her views verbally or non-verbally to others, similarly regulation of emotions enables salespeople to manage their emotions at times when they interact with others, and the third ability which salespeople must have is the utilization of emotion that enables salespeople, how to successful utilized the emotions to solve the problem in a sales interaction (Danish Habib & Attiq, 2020).

2.4 Sales Skills

Researchers have inadequate knowledge in finding the relationship between a salesperson's SS and a salesperson's PER and they still have no answer as to what skill specifically is more central to measuring the salesperson's PER, further researchers don't have a definite answer, whether different skills are necessary for different situations (Sindi & Hamas, 2020). A salesperson's SS has been identified as one of the most important variables in the selling process. For many years researchers stressed to find out what important factors can influence PER, but the results they found were very inconsistent and they were unable to identify the specific factor/s, also previous studies do not accurately clarify the reason behind these inconsistencies of results. As mentioned earlier, in a sales context, salespeople need some basic skills to achieve effective results, these skills can be categorized as interpersonal skills like communication, the second is salesmanship skills like presentation skills and the third one is technical skills like product knowledge, territory knowledge, etc. (Ben Amor, 2019).

Researchers also tried to find out the determinants of PER at the micro level e.g. consultation and negotiation skills used by salespeople to achieve sales outcomes. Researchers argued that SS is all about how certain tasks are performed effectively related to sales jobs, without having prior knowledge of SS, salespersons cannot achieve sales targets. SS can also be improved through a training process; therefore organizations spend enormous resources on training to develop skills in salespeople so that they can confidently interact with the customer. Salonen et al. (2021) revealed that the selling approach is different in low performers versus high performers e.g. low performers use an indigenous/traditional selling style which is more standardized whereas high performers are more focused on the modernized way of selling to achieve sales targets, similarly, salespeople who possess good SS, need more updated training to maintain those skills to ensure consistency in their work because on the other hand organizations expectations from that salespeople are higher than those who are a low performer.

Many researchers also examined SS from the buyer's perspective i.e. what buyers think or perceive the sales tactics used by the different salespeople. The study revealed that buyers react differently in different situations but often they closely observe the sales tactics of the seller, salespeople who are more focused on the product technique emphasize more on product demonstration, application, etc. on the other hand salespeople who are more focused on customer-focused selling technique emphasizes more on buyers' objections, a benefits approach (Rodriguez et al., 2023). Researchers believed that skilled salespeople have greater abilities to convince customers, while some researchers argued that PER also depends on other personality traits, like behavior and attitude, as interpersonal and technical skills, furthermore, more skilled people, also have a greater level of CO, organizational commitment, etc. (Høgevold et al., 2023).

Scholars are also interested in investigating the interpersonal skills of salespeople because these skills also influence the PER, studies also suggest that interpersonal skills i.e. (regulation of emotions, rapport building, and social interaction) play an important role

in PER. In today's customer-oriented selling environment, maintaining and building relationships with customers depends on salespeople's activities (Khan et al., 2023). Although researchers have found different ways to measure sales PER, i.e. revenue generated, increase in market share, etc. however it has been found that rapport building in the sales context is considered important, because it shows the level of satisfaction and loyalty of customers (Rodriguez et al., 2023). Researchers argued that non-verbal conversation in buyer-seller interaction has also been significant, hence interpersonal skills allow salespeople to better understand customers' needs and enable salespeople to maintain long-term relationships with customers (Khan et al., 2023). The sales presentation is one of the most important aspects of buyer-seller interaction during a sales call; it is more challenging and needs some basic skills of a salesperson during a sales call (Hu et al., 2024). SS can be categorized into three components, first is interpersonal skills related to salesperson communication skills, their way of communicating with the customer, how salespeople can cope with the conflicting situation, and whether they can resolve the conflict or not, second salesmanship skills or SS which describes how much salesperson is capable of delivering the presentation in front of customers, whether he/she can close the sale calls successfully, third is technical skills which relate to product knowledge, salespeople must know the complete knowledge of the product they are selling.

2.5 Salesperson's Performance

Determining the measurement and effectiveness of salesforce PER has always had a great deal of interest for researchers in the past (Kerr & Marcos-Cuevas, 2022). There are varied factors that influence salespeople's performance like the size of the territory assigned to salespeople and the workload given by salespeople to achieve the sales targets (Oliveira Santini et al., 2019). Besides, what will be the appropriate way to measure the salesforce PER always remains debatable among many researchers regarding the operationalization of PER i.e. behavioral and non-behavioral performances (Hermawan et al., 2021). Although a little progress can be seen in this area but still a huge gap can be found in this area. The salesperson's ER, adaptive selling approach, and salesperson's CO also heavily influenced on salesperson's PER (Høgevoid et al., 2023). Kidwell introduced two methods to measure salesforce PER, perceived PER (i.e., to measure the amount of influence on customer buying decision) which mainly relates to subjective aspects, secondly, supervisors (field managers) rate the PER of salespeople by comparing with other employees, this thing normally consider objective aspect to measure the PER.

The scale of measuring the PER of salespeople in service-oriented organizations is different, salespeople's ability to perform their assigned tasks during their job is always a matter of interest for the top management/employers, Researchers believed that salespeople's PER in the B2B market is altogether different as compared to the salespeople's PER with direct consumers B2C because customer expectations and preferences are different in two different market situations. While examining the relationship between salespeople CO and sales PER, many researchers suggest different variables that influence the relationship of both these two variables, salesperson's

behavior and salesperson's ER are also important variables that affect the overall PER of an individual (Khan et al., 2023).

Numerous studies are available that suggest, SWS is also an important factor that influences on overall PER of salespeople (Alnakhli et al., 2021). Salespeople consider supervisors, as a source of support, knowledge, etc, so their relationship is highly influenced by the PER of salespeople, a study found that more than 40% of job satisfaction depends on the relationship between salespeople and their supervisors (Kerr & Marcos-Cuevas, 2022). For many years, researchers have aimed at finding new ways of modern selling, its procedures, activities, and of course its impact on PER, but researchers still have very limited knowledge, because less than 4% of scholarly articles are related to salespersons PER, rest of the articles are mainly focused on marketing and other issues, although some researchers understand the importance of salesforce PER but still very limited knowledge is available in this field (Rodriguez et al., 2023).

3. DEVELOPMENT OF RESEARCH MODEL AND HYPOTHESES

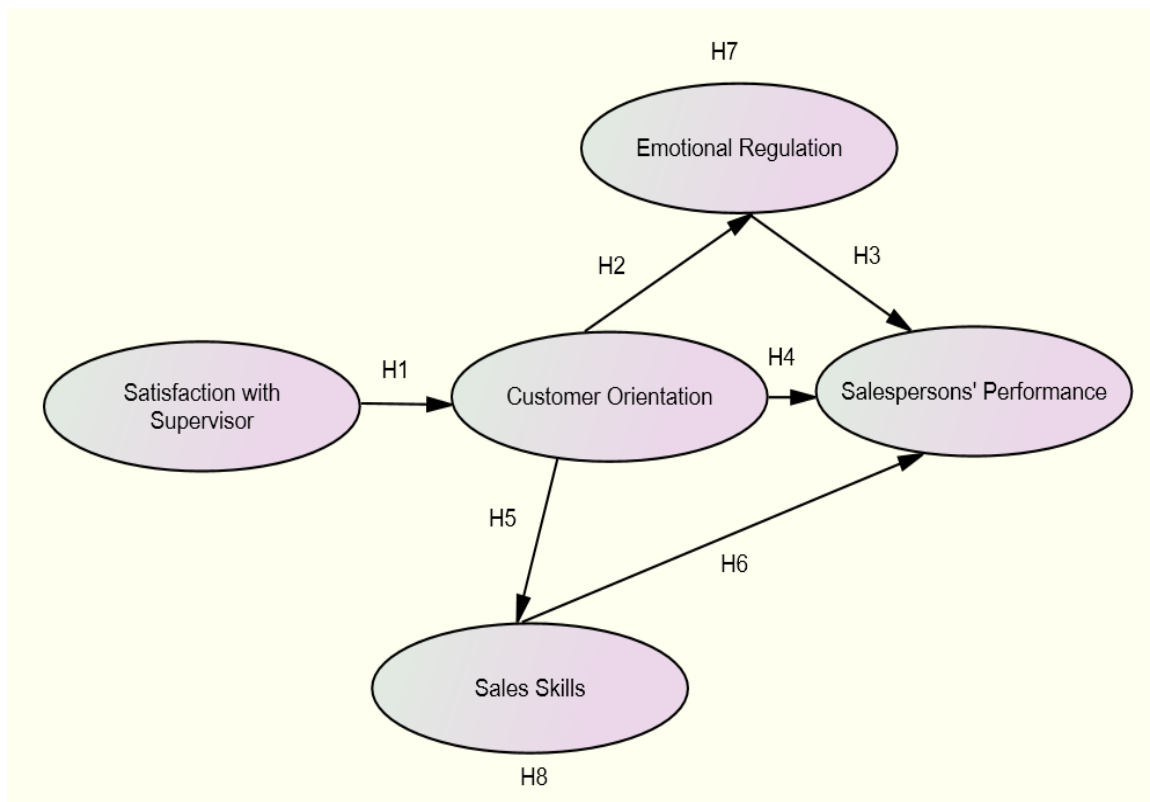


Figure 1: Research Model of Study Proposed by Authors

- H₁: SWS has a positive effect on the salesperson's CO.
- H₂: The salesperson's CO has a positive effect on the salesperson's ER.
- H₃: The Salesperson's ER has a positive effect on the salesperson's PER.
- H₄: The salesperson's CO has a positive effect on the salesperson's PER.
- H₅: The salesperson's CO has a positive effect on the salesperson's SS.
- H₆: The salesperson's SS has a positive effect on the salesperson's PER.
- H₇: The salesperson's ER mediates the relationship between the salesperson's CO and the salesperson's PER.
- H₈: The salesperson's SS mediates the relationship between the salesperson's CO and the salesperson's PER.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The pharmaceutical industry is a collection of National and Multinational firms. According to the Pakistan Pharmaceutical Manufacturing Association (PPMA) data, there are almost 800 pharmaceutical companies with proper marketing setups operating in the country. Data was collected from the pharmaceutical company's salespeople. Moreover, due to the largest sales force employed i.e. having nearly 800 companies nationwide, our sample was the salespeople of national and multinational companies of the pharmaceutical industry. Respondents for this research study are the medical representatives working in different territories for their sales activities. On behalf of their information, we analyzed their perceptions about the focal variables. Data was collected in one shot i.e. (cross-sectional), through primary data collection. For data collection, researchers of this study approached the selected sample of salespersons through managers of different firms. The survey instrument i.e. questionnaire floated to the medical reps directly and through their managers randomly. Deductive research with a quantitative approach and positivism paradigm was used to answer the research questions. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section A constitutes items adopted from previous studies. Items for SWS adopted from the study of Mulki et al. (2015) study. Items related to CO, ER, and SS were adopted from Singh and Venugopal's (2015) study.

Items for salesperson's PER adopted from Behrman and Perreault's (1982) study. The second section dealt with demographics which included information about the salespeople like age, gender, education, and total experience. The questionnaire was distributed to salespersons of pharmaceutical firms based on stratified random sampling. The study intended to measure the impact of SWS and CO on PER through a mediating mechanism i.e. ER and SS.

5. NORMALITY CHECKS

Missing values and outliers were checked after the compilation of the data. The plot box technique was used to identify outliers. Furthermore, QQ plots were generated for cross-checking. The results of skewness and kurtosis also show that the data was normally distributed. Bivariate correlation values range from 0.39 to 0.78 for all four variables which refute the issue of multicollinearity among variables. In general, Validity indicates how sound the research was being conducted; face validity and content validity of the data are also examined in this research study. KMO and Bartlett's test is used to measure sampling adequacy and suitability of the data. Researchers also found that KMO and Bartlett's values must be between the ranges of 0.6 to 1.0. All the KMO and Bartlett's values, i.e., for SWS was 0.87; for CO was 0.78; for ER was 0.85; for SS was 0.90; and for PER was 0.62 respectively, which were acceptable.

Table 1: Data Normality Statistics (N=256)

Constructs	Min	Max	Skewness	SE	Kurtosis	SE	Tolerance	VIF
SWS	1.00	5.00	0.07	0.16	0.11	0.33	0.51	1.74
CO	1.17	5.00	0.40	0.16	0.92	0.33	0.72	1.26
ER	1.50	5.00	-0.59	0.16	0.85	0.33	0.53	1.62
SS	1.00	5.00	-0.44	0.16	0.35	0.33	0.51	1.65
PER	1.50	5.00	0.06	0.16	0.39	0.33	Dependent Variable	

Notes: SWS=Satisfaction with Supervisor; CO= Customer Orientation; ER= Emotional Regulation; SS= Sales Skills; PER= Performance; SE = Standard Error; VIF =Variance Inflationary Factor

Descriptive statistics show the mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis of dependent and independent variables. The mean values of all the variables are positive ranging from 2.78 to 3.92. The standard deviation of SS is 0.77, which shows more variation in a data set of SS. The standard deviation of PER is 0.58 which indicates the consistency in data. Skewness shows how the distribution is symmetrical, while kurtosis tells us the sharpness and height of the peak related to the data. The above table presents; all the variables show that overall data is normal and the values of skewness and kurtosis are acceptable. Table 1 also presents the minimum and maximum values, Skewness, and kurtosis.

Table 2: Discriminant Validity (N=256)

Correlations					
	SWS	CO	ER	SS	PER
SWS	0.78†	0.52**	0.39**	0.51**	0.71**
CO		0.79†	0.53**	0.37**	0.78**
ER			0.70†	0.57**	0.65**
SS				0.77†	0.76**
PER					0.79†

Notes: SWS=Satisfaction with Supervisor; CO= Customer Orientation; ER= Emotional Regulation; SS= Sales Skills; PER= Performance; ** $p < 0.01$; †√ (AVE) Values in the Diagonal

As can be seen in Table 2 the correlation between SWS and CO is 0.52, the correlation between CO and ER is 0.53, the correlation between CO and SS is 0.37, the correlation between ER and PER is 0.65, Similarly correlation between SS and PER is 0.76, hence above table shows a relationship between all the variables have a positive correlation.

5.1 Measures Assessment (Confirmatory Factor Analysis)

Uni-dimensionality of measures is an indicator that gauges the underlying concept in reality for items of a scale. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was employed using AMOS 22.0 to establish how well the thirty indicators calculated the five latent constructs. CFA was assessed in the stated manner. Loadings represented the standardized regression weights that are good indicators of CFA, values above 0.5 are considered good enough to proceed with further analysis. Comparative Fit Index (CFI) value, Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), Normed Fit Index (NFI), and Root Mean Square Error Approximation (RMSEA) were considered for finalizing the items. The cut-off values for CFI, GFI, and NFI according to the literature should be more than 0.90, and for RMSEA it should be less than 0.05. Results from CFA show that all factor loadings (standardized regression weights) mostly are in the acceptable range, and are satisfactorily high and significant, which illustrates a considerably good fit of the data. Cronbach’s alpha for all the constructs exceeds the threshold value of 0.70, thus indicating good internal consistency and reliability.

Table 3: Individual and Nested CFA Results (N=256)

Individual Models		Unidimensionality					Convergent Validity			Reliability	
Constructs	Items	χ^2/df	GFI	CFI	RMR	RMSEA	NFI	FL [min-max]	AVE	α	CR
SWS	6	1.81	0.98	0.99	0.04	0.05	0.98	[0.75-0.88]	0.54	0.86	0.78
CO	6	1.85	0.98	0.99	0.04	0.05	0.98	[0.84-0.89]	0.58	0.84	0.86
ER	6	1.65	0.98	0.99	0.06	0.05	0.99	[0.65-0.78]	0.61	0.89	0.86
SS	6	2.92	0.98	0.99	0.05	0.08	0.98	[0.81-0.89]	0.63	0.93	0.90
PER	6	2.52	0.98	0.99	0.05	0.07	0.99	[0.64-0.71]	0.52	0.75	0.82
Nested Model		2.24	0.97	0.92	0.04	0.06	0.91	[0.68-0.79]	0.67	0.82	0.68

Notes: SWS=Satisfaction with Supervisor; CO= Customer Orientation; ER= Emotional Regulation; SS= Sales Skills; PER= Performance; GFI = Goodness of fit index; NFI = Normed fit index; CFI = Comparative fit index; RMSEA = Root mean square error of approximation

Table 3 represents the constructs’ loading and model fit indices. Cronbach’s Alpha is the most common measure of internal consistency. Table 2 presents the reliability of statistics of variables that were included in the research instrument. The value of SWS and Cronbach’s Alpha is 0.86, which shows the internal consistency in scale. The value shows that the CO scale is reliable for research because its Cronbach’s Alpha is 0.75. The value of ER and Cronbach’s Alpha is 0.84 which shows the internal consistency in scale. The value of SS and Cronbach’s Alpha is 0.89 which shows the internal consistency in scale. Similarly, Cronbach’s Alpha value of PER is 0.93 which is quite acceptable and shows the internal consistency in scale.

5.2 Descriptive of Demographics

For quantitative analysis, the data has been collected from salespersons of different pharmaceutical firms. In this research, 256 questionnaires were used for analysis. All 256 respondents were male. Results show 25.8% of respondents aged between 20-25 years. 26-30 i.e. 51.6% and 31-40 years of range were 19.5%. More than 40 years were only 3.1%. Respondents had F.A., 69.1% respondents had a bachelor’s degree, 24.6% respondents had master’s degree holders, and 3.1% respondents were from other disciplines. Similarly in this research study, 60% of respondents had experience of fewer than 5 years, 37.9% of respondents had experience between 6-15 years, and 5% of respondents had experience of 16-25 years.

6. HYPOTHESES TESTING

In hypothesis 1 we predicted that SWS has a positive effect on the salesperson’s CO. The results from Table 4 show that the effect of SWS on CO is statistically significant ($F=96.44$, $\beta=0.52$, $p<0.001$, $R^2=0.27$) by SWS. Hence H_1 is accepted.

Table 4: Regression Analysis of CO w.r.t SWS (N=256)

Variables	B	S.E	β	t	R ²	F
Constant	1.52	0.13		11.117	0.27	96.44**
SWS	0.46	0.04	0.52	9.82**		

** $p<.001$ SWS= Satisfaction with Supervisor

Hypothesis 2 states that CO has a positive effect on ER. The Results from Table 5 Model₂ we regressed ER w.r.t CO the results show ($F=100.52$, $\beta=0.53$, $p<0.001$, $R^2=0.28$), hence H_2 is also supported. Hypothesis 3 states that ER has a positive effect on salesperson PER. The results from Table 5 Model 3 confirm that the effect of ER on PER is statistically significant ($F=188.97$, $p<0.001$, $\beta= 0.65$, $R^2=0.42$). Hence H_3 is also accepted. Hypothesis 4 states that CO has a positive effect on salesperson PER. The Results from Table 5 Model₁ confirm the effect of CO on salesperson’s PER ($F=414.52$, $p<0.001$, $\beta= 0.78$, $R^2=0.62$). Hence H_4 is accepted. Hypothesis 7 states that ER mediates the relationship between CO and PER.

Table 5: Direct and Indirect Effects of ER between CO and PER (N=256)

Model	IV	DV	B	SE	β	t	R ²	F
Model ₁	CO	PER	0.74	0.03	0.78	8.75**	0.62	414.52**
Model ₂	CO	ER	0.52	0.05	0.53	16.12**	0.28	100.52**
Model ₃	ER	PER	0.62	0.04	0.65	3.15**	0.42	188.97**
Model ₄	CO	PER	0.58	0.03	0.61	14.99*	0.61	414.5**
	ER		0.31	0.03	0.32	7.97**	0.69	

* $p< 0.05$ ** $p < 0.001$. CO= Customer Orientation, PER= Performance, ER= Emotional Regulation

To check the mediation of ER between CO and PER, we followed a four-step approach developed by Baron and Kenny (1986), we confirmed that the effect of CO on PER is statistically significant. Thus, the second regression was carried out to confirm the effect of CO on ER and the third regression was performed to predict the relationship between ER on PER. In the fourth step when CO and ER were regressed on PER, it can be seen that the β reduced from 0.78 to 0.61 but remained significant and R^2 increased from 0.62 to 0.69, based on the change in β and R^2 , results show that ER partially mediates the relationship of CO and PER. Hence hypothesis 7 is also accepted.

Table 6: Direct and Indirect Effects of SS between CO and PER (N=256)

Model	IV	DV	B	SE	β	t	R ²	F
Model ₁	CO	PER	0.74	0.03	0.78	8.75**	0.62	414.52**
Model ₂	CO	SS	0.46	0.07	0.37	10.68**	0.13	40.32**
Model ₃	SS	PER	0.58	0.03	0.76	8.72**	0.58	537.18**
Model ₄	CO	PER	0.55	0.02	0.58	24.86*	0.62	414.52**
	SS		0.41	0.01	0.54	23.31**	0.87	

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.001$. CO= Customer Orientation, PER= Performance, SS= Sales Skills

In hypothesis 6 we predicted that SS has a positive effect on the salesperson's PER. The results from Table 6 Model 3 show that the effect of SS on PER is statistically significant ($F=537.18$, $\beta=0.76$, $p<0.001$, $R^2=0.58$) by SS. Hence H_6 is accepted. To check the mediation of SS between CO and PER, we again followed the same procedure, we confirmed that the effect of CO on PER is statistically significant ($F: 414.528$, $p<.01$, beta: 0.78, $R^2: 0.62$). When CO and SS were regressed on (PER), it can be seen that the beta value reduced from 0.78 to 0.58 but remained significant and R square increased from 0.62 to 0.87, based on a change in beta value and R square, results show that SS partially mediates the relationship of CO and PER. Hence hypothesis 8 is also accepted.

7. CONCLUSION

At the organizational level, the customer is the focal point of all the marketing strategies that are established to maintain long-term relationships between firms and customers. In a sales context, salespeople are those, who take the responsibility to implement all marketing-related strategies and have a direct relationship with the customer, Salespeople are not only a source of increasing revenue but also play the role of bridge between the company and the customer because they have a complete knowledge about customer preferences and changing trends. In this rigid competition, large numbers of companies are doing business in the market, due to technological advancement and dynamic market trends; a firm needs to make strategies according to market demand. According to the marketing concept, firms try to satisfy the needs and want of the customer, and it is only possible by having a skillful salesforce that enables them to meet the challenges of the market. In our study, we thoroughly discussed the role of supervisors/managers in sales-oriented organizations and how they can impact the process of CO.

The role of a manager is very important, especially for sales-oriented organizations because a supervisor is not only a source of knowledge and motivation, but he/she also gives feedback to the higher management. This study delineated the fact that CO in salespeople helps them to understand customer needs and their satisfaction level and enables them to provide those services that are best suited for them. Among many other factors, customer-oriented salespeople are more sensitive to controlling and managing their emotions, findings suggest that more customer-oriented salespeople have strong ER and have a greater ability to understand customers' emotions. Findings also suggest that SWS correlates 0.52 with CO, in other words, the efficiency of CO highly depends on the relationship of salespersons with their supervisors. It is suggested in our study, that customer-orientation enhanced SS, and the correlation between CO and SS is 0.37, which shows that customer-oriented salespeople are more knowledgeable and more skillful in their sales job, and they can better understand the needs and wants of the customer. The process of CO enables salespeople to improve their SS; similarly, customer orientation also enables salespeople to control his/her own emotions and customers as well, however, customer-oriented salespeople invest more effort to understand the emotions of customers and try to manage their emotions positively, that helps them to successfully negotiate and close the sales call. Our finding also indicates that CO correlates 0.53 with ER, which shows a significant relationship between CO and ER. Our results also indicate that these two factors partially mediate between CO and the PER of salespeople.

8. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study helps scholars enhance their knowledge regarding CO, i.e. how salespeople can achieve the desired objective by satisfying the needs and wants of the customer. This study also helps pharmaceutical firms to make strategies that will help to build a strong relationship between managers and salespeople. This study is also useful for sales-oriented organizations to get a better understanding of customer orientation and salespeople's PER. This study is also beneficial for sales managers to find out, how they can make strategies to retain their employees that help them to minimize the turnover intentions.

9. PRACTICAL IMPLICATION

Salesforce plays a key role in implementing business strategies; therefore, if any organization wants to grow in their business, they have to invest an amount in training and development of their salesforce to make strategies that lead towards the best interest of customers. In the pharmaceutical industry, salespeople play the role of bridge between companies and customers, the pharmaceutical industry is a unique kind of industry, in which customers are more knowledgeable and skillful as compared to salespersons, therefore salespeople should be better equipped and more skillful as compared to other industries. Salespeople's PER highly depends on the relationship with a supervisor. In this inflexible competition, firms need to make strategies that are best suited for the customers; therefore, organizations need to know about the following questions, what are

the preferences of customers? How can we satisfy the wants of customers? How do salespeople successfully play the role of bridge between companies and customers? What are the expectations of customers toward salespeople, and how they (salespeople) can achieve those expectations? What could be the best strategies that sales managers need to follow to make a strong relationship between their salesforce and supervisors? Is ER playing any role during a sales call? Whether SS improve the PER of salespeople? How does CO help to control emotions and improve SS during the sales process? Is a customer-oriented or sales-oriented approach suitable?

This study thoroughly answered all these questions for sales executives, supervisors, and management of the firms. This study helps sales managers to recruit the best salesforce that can meet the customers' expectations and organizational requirements as well. This study also suggested that sales managers not only evaluate the PER of their salesforce by measuring sales outcomes, but it can also be possible by knowing customers' feedback, satisfaction level of customers, loyalty of the customers, etc.

10. STUDY LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This research study, like any other study, has some limitations in terms of their sample size. The study's sample is conducted only from 20 firms to measure the constructs, so it cannot be generalized to all other sales-oriented organizations. This research study is cross-sectional, so future studies should examine all these constructs in a longitudinal setting. The cross-cultural aspect also matters; future research should also review our findings in any other culture because people of different cultures behave differently. In this research study, 100% of respondents were male, as studies show that gender influences emotional regulation, future studies should also use gender-balanced samples to manage these influences, furthermore, there are so many other factors that can affect the PER of salespeople, and future research studies should add some more variables to the model we presented.

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