The moderating role of sales experience in adaptive selling, customer orientation and job satisfaction in a unionized setting

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Abstract

Purpose – The principal purpose of this study is to examine the moderating influence of selling experience on the following two relationships – adaptive selling and job satisfaction and customer orientation and job satisfaction – using unionized salespeople as respondents. It also tests for the mediating role of adaptive selling in the customer orientation–job satisfaction relationship.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper uses data from a survey conducted on 208 pharmaceutical unionized salespeople from 46 pharmaceutical firms in India. The model was tested using structural equation modeling. Moderation hypotheses were estimated using process macro and the Johnson–Neyman technique.

Findings – The data fitted the model well. This research found that customer orientation drove adaptive selling behavior and job satisfaction, and that adaptive selling influenced job satisfaction (all positively); it was found that adaptive selling partially mediated the relationship between customer orientation and job satisfaction. Results revealed that job experience negatively moderated the adaptive selling behavior–job satisfaction and customer orientation–job satisfaction relationships.

Practical implications – The results show that pharma firms may hire young recruits and, importantly, measure their customer orientation and adaptive selling levels. For the purposes of training to enhance customer orientation and adaptive selling, pharma firms may send only their less experienced salespersons.

Originality/value – To the authors' knowledge, this study could be the first to examine the interaction of job experience and customer-directed selling behaviors such as adaptive selling and customer orientation on job satisfaction. Moreover, this is possibly the only study in this domain that uses unionized salespeople in an emerging market (India).

Keywords Moderated mediation, Job satisfaction, Customer orientation, Adaptive selling behaviour, Sales experience, Unionized salespeople

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Job satisfaction is important for salespeople because they represent the organization to customers and vice versa. They also deal with the expectations of stakeholders such as customers, distributors and retailers. *Ipso facto*, the salesperson's job satisfaction has a direct consequence on the success of the organization. Factors that impact job satisfaction include adaptive selling and customer orientation (Franke and Park, 2006).

Selling experience is defined as the amount of time spent on a sales job. Experience can help enhance the level of knowledge/skills of salespeople (Schmidt *et al.*, 1986) and can positively impact job behavior (Park and Holloway, 2003). The moderating role of job experience in relationships can be negative (Makoto and Takashi, 2002) or positive (Rapp *et al.*, 2008). Purani and Sahadev (2008) demonstrated that sales experience moderates the relationship between facets of job satisfaction (such as pay and promotion) and disinclination to quit, and the results were mixed – positive, negative as well as no effect. Singh and Das (2013) reveal that an increase in selling experience increases the strength of the relationship between customer orientation and sales performance and between job satisfaction and sales performance; however, the strength of the adaptive selling–sales performance relationship weakens with the increase of experience. Thus, the moderating role of sales experience on the relationships between adaptive selling–job satisfaction and customer orientation–job satisfaction has not been tested so far (Figure 1). This is despite customer orientation and adaptive selling being important job factors that can enhance salespersons' job satisfaction (Franke and Park, 2006). Studying the moderating role of sales experience is important (i.e. filling this gap in the literature is important) because if experience positively moderates the

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relationship between adaptive selling and job satisfaction (and customer orientation and job satisfaction), then firms may invest in training their less experienced salespersons in enhancing their adaptive selling and customer orientation. On the other hand, if sales experience negatively moderates these relationships (which is what we expect), the managerial implications will differ (we detail these later).

Customer-oriented salespersons focus on understanding and satisfying customer needs (Singh and Venugopal, 2015). Salespersons high in adaptive selling present customized solutions to individual customers (Spiro and Weitz, 1990). Both (customer orientation and adaptive selling) are work efforts and can positively influence job satisfaction (Brown and Peterson, 1994). Experience can influence these relationships positively, as accumulation of job experience enhances the quantum of job knowledge, which helps strengthen these relationships. On the contrary, Singh and Das (2013) found that the higher the salesperson experience, the weaker is the relationship between adaptive selling and sales performance. Hence, there is some ambiguity regarding the role of sales experience. Thus, our first research question is:

RQ1. What is the role of salespersons' job experience on the relationship between customer orientation and job satisfaction?

With increasing levels of experience, salespersons' job knowledge advances (Schmidt *et al.*, 1986) and may elevate his/her level of customer orientation and adaptive selling behavior (Franke and Park, 2006). Adaptive selling is a process of learning (Park and Holloway, 2003) that can improve skills (Chonko and Jones, 2005) and help the salesperson evaluate customer needs and respond swiftly to satisfy them. The learning process takes time; consequently, experienced salespeople may perform adaptive selling better. Hence, we intend answering:

RQ2. What is the role of salespersons' job experience on the relationship between adaptive selling and job satisfaction?

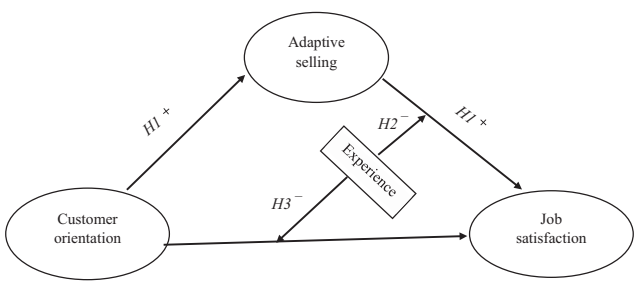
Additionally, this research is performed in a unionized setting. Laroche (2017) argues that one cannot directly apply the findings from a non-unionized setting to a unionized one. Because of collective bargaining rights, unionized salespersons would have more job security (Sverke and Hellgren, 2001) and better working conditions (Laroche, 2016) than non-unionized salespersons. In unionized workplaces, salespersons can possibly exchange notes to a greater extent (because of meetings in unions). This can help elevate the level of adaptive selling and customer orientation. There is a reason to believe the opposite too. In unionized settings, because of enhanced job security, there is a chance of a salesperson losing his/her competitive edge, becoming complacent and therefore less customer-oriented. Hence, research is needed in unionized settings as well. To our knowledge, this is the first study that has unionized salespeople as respondents.

Salespersons in unionized environments derive extra job security (Sverke and Hellgren, 2001). Therefore, they possibly prefer to continue working in the same organization (Freeman and Medoff, 1984), i.e. they become more experienced. The firm trains these experienced salespeople (Lagace *et al.*, 1991) and advises them to customize their presentations to physicians i.e. indulge in adaptive selling. Firms also advise them to be more customer-oriented. However, it is not clear if adaptive selling and customer orientation have a greater or lesser effect on job satisfaction. Hence, from a managerial standpoint, our research would help in resolving this doubt; this paper expands on this in the managerial implications later.

From a theoretical standpoint, research has demonstrated that sales experience moderates the following relationships: adaptive selling–sales performance (Singh and Das, 2013), customer orientation–sales performance (Singh and Das, 2013) and job satisfaction–sales performance (Singh and Das, 2013). However, its role in the adaptive selling–job satisfaction and customer orientation–job satisfaction relationships has not been explored so far. Hence, this research is needed from both the managerial and substantive viewpoints.

In sum, one can argue that the more customer-oriented salespersons are, the greater will be their adaptive selling ability and *ipso facto*, greater will be their job satisfaction. However, the strength of these relationships may also depend on the salesperson's experience levels. This is what this research intends to test. Further, the study is performed in an emerging market (EM) (India), which has a collectivistic culture, whereas generally prior research has been conducted in the West (Panagopoulos *et al.*, 2011). Burgess and Steenkamp (2006) state that more research is required in EMs as the future of numerous firms depends on the performance in EMs. The reason for choosing pharma salespeople is that they characterize business-to-business marketplaces (Limbu *et al.*, 2016) and use their customer orientation and adaptive selling during the selling process to influence job outcomes such as performance and satisfaction. Besides, the Indian pharmaceuticals industry ranks third globally in terms of volume of production and has a consistently high growth rate (IBEF, 2019).

Figure 1 Hypothesized model



2. Conceptual framework and hypotheses formulation

2.1 Indirect effects

2.1.1 Customer orientation, adaptive selling and job satisfaction

Adaptive selling is defined as "the altering of sales behaviors during customer interactions based on perceived information about the nature of the selling situation" (Spiro and Weitz, 1990, p. 62). Adaptive selling emphasizes individual solutions that are custom-made to every individual customer

(Cannon and Perreault, 1999). The salesperson who has a lower level of adaptive selling may deliver the same presentation to all the customers while one possessing a higher level of adaptive selling would give a unique presentation to each customer (Weitz *et al.*, 1986).

Customer orientation is the extent to which a salesperson commits himself/herself to customer needs, enjoys satisfying those needs and engages in enhancing customer well-being (Zablah *et al.*, 2012). A salesperson with a customer-oriented approach focuses on physicians (customers) to help them make suitable decisions (Wachner *et al.*, 2009). Customer-oriented salespersons generally focus on the need of their customers and gather information about physicians' drug preferences (Singh and Venugopal, 2015), mainly through the retail pharmacy audit. This information is helpful to develop a range of stories/presentations, as an adaptive response to the need of each individual physician. Furthermore, customer-oriented salespersons try to resolve customer problems. Consequently, they are likely to collect background information and adjust to individual customer needs (Franke and Park, 2006). Customer orientation is a personal resource of a salesperson (Zablah *et al.*, 2012) that can influence his/her job engagement (Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2007). Miao and Evans (2013) characterized adaptive selling as a facet of job engagement of salespeople. As per the effort–recovery model (Meijman and Mulder, 1998), personal resources of salespeople (i.e. customer orientation) can make the salesperson apply himself or herself to a greater extent in a more creative way. This is akin to adaptive selling. Besides, studies (Jaramillo and Grisaffe, 2009; Guenzi *et al.*, 2014; Goad and Jaramillo, 2014) have found that the customer orientation–adaptive selling behavior relationship is positive. Hence one can expect customer orientation to positively influence adaptive selling behavior.

Job satisfaction is defined as an attitude of an individual toward his job, which can affect a range of "important attitudes, intentions, and behaviors in salespersons" (Boles *et al.*, 2007, p. 312). Moreover, job satisfaction can influence job-associated attitudes and impacts job performance (Franke and Park, 2006). Adaptive selling is the ability of the salesperson to use his/her knowledge to develop selling plans that match the needs of individual prospects (Saxe and Weitz, 1982). In personal selling, adaptive selling is characterized by proactive behavior, as the salespersons are self-starters and "take charge" (Goad and Jaramillo, 2014). As they are proactive, these kinds of salespersons may help build their own environment so that they can be effective in their job (Crant, 2000) possibly leading to job satisfaction. Salespeople who practice adaptive selling know the intentions of potential customers and their needs (Verbeke *et al.*, 2011), and their work efforts may lead to higher levels of job satisfaction (Brown and Peterson, 1994). The conceptualization of adaptive selling suggests that salespeople who practice adaptive selling may manage their ambiguity level better and display more relational orientation. These two can impact job satisfaction positively (Bejou *et al.*, 1996). Research (Franke and Park, 2006; Park and Holloway, 2003) has established that the relationships between adaptive selling behavior and job satisfaction were positive. Hence, adaptive selling could influence job satisfaction positively.

In summary, as we expect customer orientation to positively influence adaptive selling, and adaptive selling to positively influence job satisfaction, we posit:

H1. Adaptive selling behavior mediates the relationship between customer orientation and job satisfaction.

2.2 The moderating role of job experience

Job experience is an individual difference variable and can moderate relationships among the attitudes, perceptions and behaviors of the salesperson (Churchill *et al.*, 1976). Studies in personal selling have treated job experience as a moderator (Rapp *et al.*, 2006; Singh and Das, 2013; Rapp *et al.*, 2008) and it has been generally believed that "experience may moderate relationships among sales force perceptions, attitude, and behavior" (Russ and McNeilly, 1995, p. 58). The Franke and Park (2006) meta-study has suggested examining the interaction between adaptive selling and sales experience. Specifically they state that "For example, primary research could test for interactive effects of ASB and CO, which was not possible in the meta-analysis, or examine ASB × experience" (Franke and Park, 2006, p. 699) (ASB = adaptive selling behavior and CO = customer orientation).

Human capital theory (Becker, 1962) posits that through more experience, salespersons can enhance their level of adaptive selling and customer orientation because of better developed knowledge structures (Giacobbe *et al.*, 2006). Contrarily, the study of Sonnentag (1998) found that experience need not necessarily increase knowledge. However, the scenario of unionized employees is possibly different. Pharma salesmen may face tough working conditions, which may motivate them to join unions (Laroche, 2017). The exit–voice theory (Hirschman, 1970) holds that unionized environments safeguard employees. Hence, salespersons would possibly be inclined to express their displeasure regarding their working conditions. The union could provide job protection; in addition, union membership may influence job satisfaction negatively (Artz, 2010). This can probably lead to the salesperson withdrawing from the effort (Hammer and Avgar, 2005), not showing interest to learn and not collecting information about customer preferences. We expect that the withdrawing effect can possibly lead to lower level of adaptive selling (e.g. leading to canned presentations), which may influence job satisfaction negatively. This tendency to lower effort may possibly be further decelerated with the increase of salespersons' job experience. In unionized contexts, the higher level of sales experience coupled with the lower level of adaptive selling can influence job satisfaction negatively. Furthermore, sales experience may dampen the level of salesperson's adaptive selling in a non-unionized setting (Singh and Das, 2013). Logically, this effect could be higher in a unionized environment, because of withdrawing from the effort.

Hence, we propose:

H2. The adaptive selling–job satisfaction relationship is moderated by job experience of salespersons, such that for more (less) experienced salespersons, the adaptive selling behavior–job satisfaction path relationship is weaker (stronger).

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In unionized environments, employees can be dissatisfied with the job, because of dissatisfaction with the supervisor and working conditions, thus leading to a lower level of effort (Hammer and Avgar, 2005). The work-related effort (such as customer orientation) is possibly lower for unionized salespeople. Consequently, they would have low intrinsic motivation, which in turn may lead to low job satisfaction (Brown and Peterson, 1994). This effort will decline further with the increase in job experience, as tenure in a job influences job satisfaction negatively in a unionized environment (Artz, 2010). Thus, we posit that:

H3. The customer orientation–job satisfaction relationship is moderated by selling experience of salespersons, such that for more (less) experienced salespersons, the customer orientation–job satisfaction path relationship is weaker (stronger).

3. Method

The Federation of Medical Representatives Association of India (FMRAI) (www.fmrai.org/) has 65,000 pharmaceutical sales representatives (PSRs) as members, as per information culled from its website. Statistics are not available for how many PSRs are there in India that are non-unionized. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this could be another 150,000 pharmaceutical sales representatives. Thus, there are large numbers of unionized PSRs in India and hence, studying them is important. FMRAI periodically conducts zonal conventions in different zones of India, i.e. North, East, West and South. We collected data by visiting three consecutive zonal conventions organized at Tiruchirapalli, a city in Tamil Nadu, South India. One of the authors administered a questionnaire before the commencement of the convention when the PSRs were relatively free. The number of questionnaires administered was 225 and 208 filled in questionnaires were received, with a response rate of 92 per cent. The respondents are from 46 major pharma companies in India, thus ensuring sufficient heterogeneity in the sample.

This research used established measures. A five-item job satisfaction scale was adopted from Churchill *et al.* (1974) and measured using a five-point Likert scale with "1" as "strongly disagree" and "5" as "strongly agree." As recommended by Chakrabarty *et al.* (2004), we used a shorter version of adaptive selling scale (ADAPTS-SV), adapted from Robinson *et al.* (2002), which had five items. The customer orientation scale was adopted from Brown *et al.* (2002). Adaptive selling behavior and customer orientation were measured using seven-point Likert scales with "1" as "strongly disagree" and "7" as "strongly agree." Job experience was measured as the number of years and months like in many previous studies (Rapp *et al.*, 2006). The control variables used were age (Román *et al.*, 2018) and education. Please see Table I for details.

4. Analysis and results

The means, standard deviations and correlations are presented in Table II. The average experience of PSRs was 9.13 years with a standard deviation of 7.16 years.

To mitigate the problems posed by common method variance among the reported variables by PSRs, the study deployed pre hoc and post hoc strategies. In the pre-hoc/procedural remedial stage, varied important aspects of the research design such as mixing items of criterion and predictor

Table I Measurement model

Constructs	Standardized loadings	CR	AVE
Adaptive selling behaviour (ASB)	–	0.94	0.52
When I feel my sales approach is not working, I change to another	0.525	–	–
I like to experiment with different sales approaches	0.638	–	–
I am very flexible in the selling approach I use	0.781	–	–
I can easily use a wide variety of selling approaches	0.848	–	–
I try to understand how one doctor differs from another	0.758	–	–
Customer orientation (CO)		0.88	0.47
I try to help customers to achieve their goals	0.70	–	–
I achieve my own goals by satisfying customers	0.679	–	–
I get customers talk about their service needs with me	0.691	–	–
I take a problem-solving approach with my customers	0.725	–	–
I keep the best interests of the customer in mind	0.629	–	–
Job satisfaction (JS)		0.86	0.55
My work is challenging	0.714	–	–
My job is very interesting	0.810	–	–
My work gives me a sense of accomplishment	0.698	–	–
Discriminant validity	*ASB*	*CO*	*JS*
ASB	*0.72*	–	–
CO	0.57	*0.68*	–
JS	0.38	0.42	*0.74*

Notes: CR is composite reliability; AVE is average variance extracted; diagonal values are square root of the AVE shown in italic; and rest are correlation between constructs

Table II Descriptive statistics

Variables	Mean	SD	Correlation 1	2	3
1. Adaptive selling behavior	5.11	1.050	–	–	–
2. Customer orientation	5.17	0.961	0.567**	–	–
3. Job satisfaction	4.06	0.672	0.386**	0.421**	–
4. Experience	9.13	7.159	0.001	−0.035	0.078

Notes: **Significant at $p < 0.01$; SD = Standard deviation

variables in the questionnaire (Chang *et al.*, 2010) and having different number of points in the scale were incorporated (e.g. job satisfaction was measured using a five-point Likert scale while adaptive selling was measured using a seven-point Likert scale) (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). Pre hoc methods were further complemented with post hoc or statistical remedies. Among various statistical approaches, the partial correlation method using a marker variable is an effective method (Malhotra *et al.*, 2006). We identified "Individual PC skill" (Al-Gahtani and King, 1999) as the marker variable; this variable was theoretically uncorrelated from the study variables and this was measured using a single item on a seven-point Likert scale. The item was "Your proficiency in Microsoft Word." We found the average correlation (which was 0.08) between the marker variable and the study constructs and adjusted these values of the correlation matrix. Subsequently, we then re-examined the structural model. The results were found to be similar to those obtained using unadjusted correlation values. Additionally, the study performed Harman's single factor test (Harman, 1976) and found that the items of the study did not load substantially on a single factor (only 36 per cent). Thus, common method bias may not be an issue in our research.

4.1 Measurement model

The study assessed multivariate normality using Mardia's coefficient available in AMOS software. The critical ratio of Mardia's coefficient for our sample was 4.2. According to Bentler (2005), the critical value below five is acceptable. We used covariance based structural equation modeling to test the hypotheses and the estimation method used was the maximum likelihood available in AMOS 21. The model was tested empirically by using the two-stage analytical process – measurement and the structural models, as proposed by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). The measurement model had a good fit ($\chi^2 = 82.027$ with degrees of freedom (DF) = 58, goodness of fit index (GFI) = 0.94, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.98, normed fit index (NFI) = 0.94, Tucker Lewis index (TLI) = 0.97, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.045 and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = 0.045). The values of composite reliability (CR) were in the range of 0.86-0.94, which is higher than 0.7, and the average variance extracted (AVE) values are in the range of 0.47-0.55, which is greater than 0.5 as recommended by (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), except for customer orientation, whose AVE value is slightly less than 0.5 (0.47). Still, this research included customer orientation, because the CR value was high (0.88). Hence, all constructs possess reliability and convergent validity. As presented in the bottom of Table I, the correlation values for each pair of constructs are smaller than the square root of the AVE values, thus establishing discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

4.2 Structural model

The results of the structural model suggest a good model fit ($\chi^2 = 101.02$ with DF = 70, GFI = 0.93, CFI= 0.97, NFI = 0.92, TLI = 0.97, RMSEA = 0.046 and SRMR = 0.04). The relationship between customer orientation and adaptive selling was positive ($\beta = 0.598$, $p < 0.001$). The influence of customer orientation on job satisfaction was positive as well ($\beta = 0.206$, $p < 0.001$), and the influence of adaptive selling on job satisfaction was also positive ($\beta = 0.132$, $p < 0.01$). The relationship between job experience and job satisfaction was not significant ($\beta = 0.078$, $p < 0.27$); we did not hypothesize any relationship, we merely report this result. The mediating role of adaptive selling in the customer orientation–job satisfaction relationship was significant, supporting *H1*.

4.3 Moderated mediation

Our model is one of the moderated mediation, as the "mediation relations are contingent on the level of a moderator" (Preacher *et al.*, 2007, p.193). We performed the moderated mediation using Process Macro v2.16.3 (Hayes, 2012), available in SPSS. Before performing this, we calculated the mean value of all items for each construct. The mediation of customer orientation–adaptive selling behavior–job satisfaction was tested using Model 4 (default model) available in Process Macro, using the bootstrapping procedure laid down by Preacher and Hayes (2008) to calculate the indirect effect. Bootstrapping is a resampling method that helps to build a sampling distribution for the indirect effect and that is used to build a confidence interval (CI). The CI that does not contain zero confirms that the indirect effects are significant (Shrout and Bolger, 2002). The benefits of the bootstrapping method include the ability to handle the non-normal distribution of samples, higher statistical power and lower type I errors (MacKinnon *et al.*, 2004). Preacher *et al.* (2007) suggests the estimation of bootstrapping technique by way of 5,000 replications along with the bias-corrected CI.

Moderated mediation analysis was estimated using the method outlined by Preacher *et al.* (2007) with the bootstrapping method to test the proposed conditional indirect effects proposed in our hypothesis *H2*. To test for moderated mediation, we examined the "index of moderated-mediation." This is a CI assessment of a function parameter connecting the varying values of the moderator to the indirect effect; this signifies that at least two of the conditional indirect effects defined by various values of the moderating variables are statistically significant (Hayes, 2015). Dawson (2014) recommended testing each interaction separately

to avoid moderators interacting amongst themselves. Moderated mediation and moderation paths were estimated separately and the results were collated and are available in Table III. Results obtained were analyzed together to examine "the combined effects of moderation and mediation" (Edwards and Lambert, 2007, p. 2), presented in Table III. Hence, this research tested the moderation hypotheses (*H2* and *H3*) using models 5 and 14 in Process Macro v2.16.3 (Hayes, 2012). To examine the moderating effect, we performed the analysis using a technique developed by Aiken *et al.* (1991), which involves multiplicative interaction and simple slope analysis. Furthermore, in the modeling of causal relations, unstandardized coefficients are the chosen metrics (Asher, 1983; Hayes, 2013) and the path coefficients reported are unstandardized regression coefficients. To compute the indirect effects, we mean centered the product terms. To get a broad picture of moderation patterns, we used a technique developed by Johnson and Neyman (1936), which reveals all range of values of the moderator where the predictor variable relation to outcome variable is significant or insignificant. The Johnson and Neyman approach is used in recent studies (Petersen *et al.*, 2018).

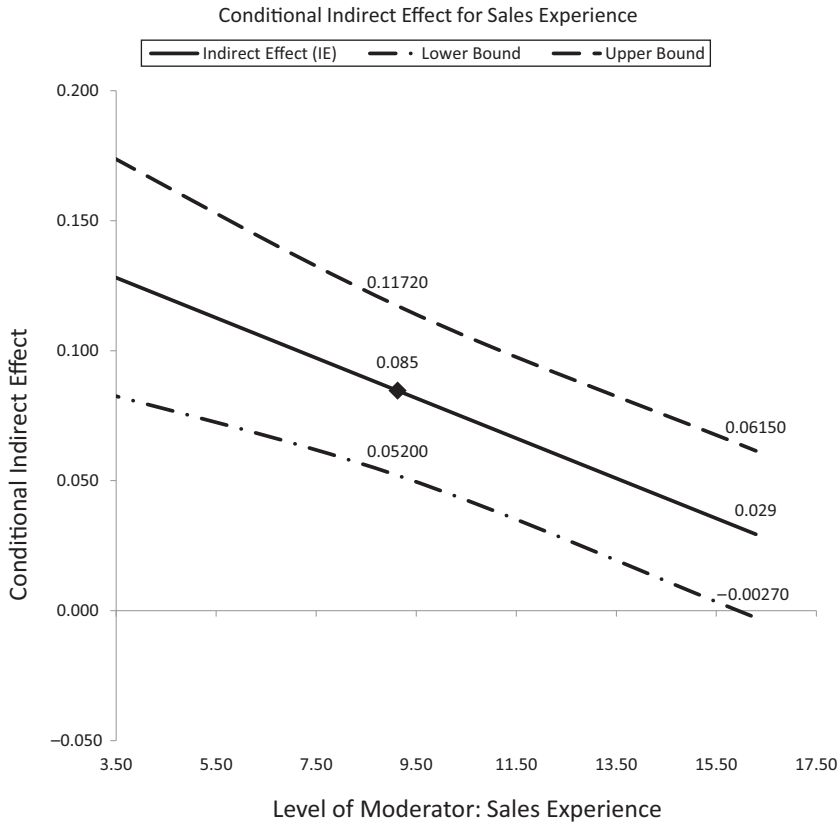
The mediating role (which is an indirect effect) of adaptive selling in the customer orientation–job satisfaction relationship was significant (β = 0.094, $p < 0.01$, CI.95 = 0.036, 0.172) and results show support for a partial mediation model and support for *H1*. The moderation hypotheses (*H2* and *H3*) dealing with experience on the path between adaptive selling behavior and job satisfaction (β = −0.013, $p < 0.01$) and customer orientation and job satisfaction (β = −0.014, $p < 0.01$) were both supported; path coefficients reveal significant negative interactions. In addition, the index of moderated mediation denotes that at least two conditional indirect effects determined using different estimates of job experience are statistically different (index = −0.008, CI.95 = −0.016, −0.001; index = 0.073, CI.95 = 0.021, 0.147). The moderated mediation in comparison with the mediation models indicates an increase of 4 per cent in variance (ΔR^2 = 0.04). To show the occurrence of moderated mediation, we report the values of the indirect effect (customer orientation on job satisfaction through adaptive selling moderated by sales experience) at different points (mean − 1 SD, mean, and mean + 1 SD) of the moderator is presented in Figure 2. The

Table III Structural model results

IV	DV	Standard regression	SE	*t*-stat	*p*-value	Model R^2
Mediation model						
Direct effects						
CO	ASB	0.716	0.150	6.693	0.000	–
CO	JS	0.373	0.050	2.574	0.033	–
ASB	JS	0.286	0.098	2.138	0.010	–
EXP	JS	0.780	0.005	1.094	0.274	0.202
Indirect effects		Effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	–
CO → ASB → JS		0.094	0.034	0.036	0.172	–
Moderated-mediation model (H2)						
Direct effects		Coefficient	SE	*t*-stat	*p*-value	–
CO	ASB (DV)	0.597	0.061	9.827	0.000	–
CO	JS (DV)	0.201	0.050	3.989	0.000	–
ASB	JS (DV)	0.142	0.048	2.967	0.003	–
ASB × EXP	JS (DV) (H_2)	−0.013	0.005	−2.665	0.008	0.253
Conditional indirect effects		Effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	–
Low experience		0.140	0.049	0.053	0.246	–
Mean experience		0.085	0.033	0.027	0.156	–
High experience		0.029	0.032	−0.038	0.088	–
Index of moderated mediation		Index	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	–
Experience		−0.008	0.004	−0.016	−0.001	–
Moderated model (H3)						
Model 14 results						
Direct effects		Coefficient	SE	*t*-stat	*p*-value	–
CO	ASB (DV)	0.597	0.061	4.360	0.000	–
CO	JS (DV)	0.224	0.050	4.439	0.000	–
ASB	JS (DV)	0.122	0.048	2.549	0.003	–
CO × EXP	JS (DV) (H_3)	−0.014	0.005	−2.665	0.008	0.247
Conditional direct effects		Effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	–
Low experience		0.325	0.066	0.195	0.456	–
Mean experience		0.224	0.051	0.125	0.324	–
High experience		0.124	0.060	0.005	0.242	–

Notes: SE is standard error; LLCI is lower limit CI; ULCI is upper limit CI; CO is Customer orientation; ASB is Adaptive selling behavior; JS is job satisfaction

Figure 2 A plot of adaptive selling behavior on job satisfaction vs the moderator (sales experience) with region of confidence bands



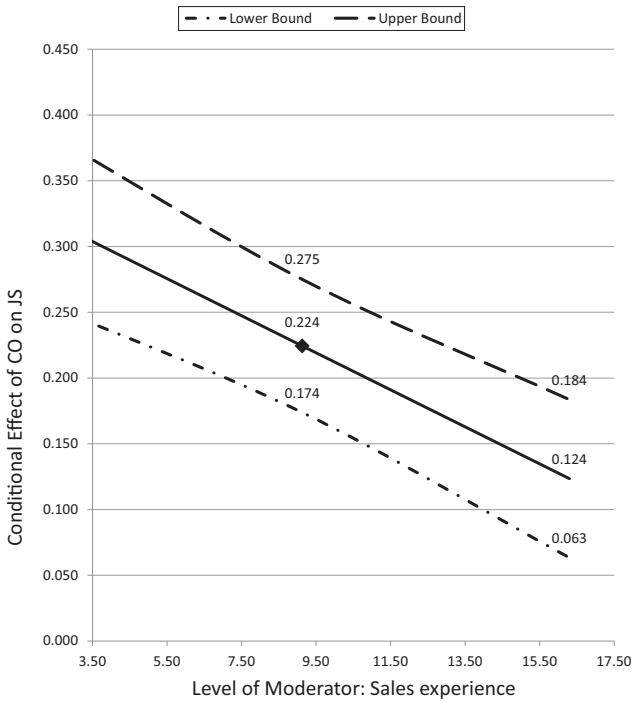
Note: The horizontal line denote an indirect effect of zero and vertical line represents the boundary of the region of significance

conditional direct effect of customer orientation on job satisfaction moderated by sales experience is shown in Figure 3. The values of the moderated indirect and direct effect for varying levels of job experience in influencing job satisfaction (*H2* and *H3*) are shown in Table III. Low and medium levels of job experience have a significant positive indirect effect (indirect effect (low) = 0.140, CI.95 = 0.053, 0.246; and indirect effect (medium) = 0.085, CI.95 = 0.027, 0.156). However, for higher values of job experience, there is an insignificant relation (indirect effect [high] = 0.029, CI.95 = −0.038, 0.088) for *H3*. The conditional indirect effect is positive, but declines as the experience increases. The conditional indirect effects that are significant for all three levels of experience are presented in Table III as follows: indirect effect (low) = 0.325, CI.95 = 0.195, 0.456; indirect effect (medium) = 0.224, CI.95 = 0.125, 0.324; indirect effect (high) = 0.124, CI.95 = 0.005, 0.242. The graph (Figures 2 and 3) shows the values of the indirect and direct effect (adaptive selling and job satisfaction, and customer orientation and job satisfaction, respectively) at varying levels of job experience with a 95 per cent confidence band. The result of the Figures 2 and 3 suggests that the indirect effect between adaptive selling behavior and job satisfaction (and customer orientation and job satisfaction) is conditional upon job experience, such that at higher levels of job experience, job satisfaction decreases. The Johnson–Neyman technique results are shown in Tables IV and V. Results suggest that as sales experience increases above 18.32 years, the relationship between adaptive selling and job satisfaction becomes insignificant. Likewise, for sales experience above 19.76 years, the relationship between customer orientation and job satisfaction is not significant.

5. Discussion

The results of the data analysis show that the model has a good fit and all the hypotheses were supported. Additionally, this research had a unique feature: respondents in this study were unionized salespeople from an EM (India). The study has major contributions. The main contribution is that we found that job experience negatively moderates the path between adaptive selling–job satisfaction (*H2*) and customer orientation–job satisfaction (*H3*). At a higher level of sales experience, adaptive selling and customer orientation matter less than at a lower level (Figures 2 and 3). These findings would suggest boundary conditions of the human capital theory (Becker, 1962), which would suggest that an increase in job experience would augment the learning process and can improve the level of adaptive selling and customer orientation (thereby leading to greater job satisfaction).

Figure 3 A plot of customer orientation (CO) on job satisfaction (JS) vs the moderator (sales experience) with region of confidence bands



Note: The horizontal line denote an indirect effect of zero and vertical line represents the boundary of the region of significance

Table IV Conditional effects for different values of moderator using Johnson-Neyman technique

Job experience (years)	Effect	*t*-statistics	*p*-value
0.50	*0.3737*	*6.1435*	*0.000*
2.17	*0.3496*	*6.3741*	*0.000*
3.85	*0.3256*	*6.5662*	*0.000*
5.53	*0.3015*	*6.6608*	*0.000*
7.20	*0.2775*	*6.5751*	*0.000*
8.87	*0.2534*	*6.2324*	*0.000*
10.55	*0.2294*	*5.6183*	*0.000*
12.22	*0.2053*	*4.8116*	*0.000*
13.90	*0.1813*	*3.9407*	*0.000*
15.57	*0.1572*	*3.1123*	*0.002*
17.25	*0.1332*	*2.3810*	*0.018*
18.32	*0.1178*	*1.9717*	*0.050*
18.92	0.1091	1.7597	0.080
20.60	0.0851	1.2405	0.216
22.27	0.0610	0.8082	0.420
23.95	0.0370	0.4472	0.655
25.62	0.0130	0.1437	0.886
27.30	−0.0111	−0.1136	0.901
28.97	−0.0351	−0.3334	0.739
30.65	−0.0592	−0.5229	0.602
32.32	−0.0832	−0.6875	0.493
34.00	−0.1073	−0.8316	0.401

Notes: To investigate the interaction of adaptive selling and selling experience, the study used the process macro (Hayes, 2012) that incorporates the Johnson–Neyman technique that uses arbitrary points of the moderator. The results reveal all ranges of the moderator (experience) in which the focal predictor (adaptive selling behavior) is a significant predictor of the outcome (i.e. job satisfaction). Values in italic indicate that the conditional effect was a significant predictor of job satisfaction

Table V Conditional effects for different values of moderator using Johnson-Neyman technique

Job experience (years)	Effect	*t*-statistics	*p*-value
0.50	*0.4230*	*6.5304*	*0.000*
2.17	*0.3979*	*6.8399*	*0.000*
3.85	*0.3729*	*7.1285*	*0.000*
5.53	*0.3478*	*7.3332*	*0.000*
7.20	*0.3227*	*7.3555*	*0.000*
8.87	*0.2976*	*7.0892*	*0.000*
10.55	*0.2475*	*5.6408*	*0.000*
12.22	*0.2053*	*4.8116*	*0.000*
13.90	*0.2224*	*4.6895*	*0.000*
15.57	*0.1974*	*3.7727*	*0.002*
17.25	*0.1723*	*2.9610*	*0.003*
18.92	*0.1472*	*2.2727*	*0.024*
19.76	*0.1347*	*1.9717*	*0.050*
20.60	0.1221	1.6987	0.090
22.27	0.0971	1.2224	0.223
23.95	0.0720	0.8257	0.410
25.62	0.0459	0.4929	0.623
27.30	0.0219	0.2114	0.833
28.97	−0.0032	−0.0288	0.977
30.65	−0.0283	−0.2356	0.814
32.32	−0.0534	−0.4151	0.678
34.00	−0.0784	−0.5721	0.568

Notes: To investigate the interaction of customer orientation (CO) and job experience (SE) on job satisfaction (JS), the study used the process macro (Hayes, 2012) that incorporated the Johnson-Neyman technique that uses arbitrary points of the moderator (i.e. SE) to estimate the effect between CO and JS. The results reveal all ranges of the moderator (SE) in which the focal predictor (CO) is a significant predictor of the outcome (i.e. JS). Value in italic indicate that the conditional effect was a significant predictor of JS

The plausible reasons could be: union members (PSRs or pharma sales representatives) are less satisfied with the job, as the working conditions are unpleasant in Indian pharmaceutical firms (Patil and Meena, 2013). Because of these less-than-optimal conditions, the PSRs' motivation decreases. This decrease in motivation possibly accelerates with an increase in job experience. The increase in experience negatively influences the following relationships: adaptive selling–job satisfaction and customer orientation–job satisfaction. Furthermore, Cron and Slocum (1986) found that salesmen get disengaged at an early age (32 years) and this, when coupled with their union experience, possibly influences these relationships negatively. This paper found that when the sales experience is below (above) 18.32 years; the relationship between adaptive selling and job satisfaction is significant (insignificant) and similarly, when the sales experience is below (above) 19.32 years; the relationship between customer orientation and job satisfaction is significant (insignificant).

Prior studies have tested the direct effects in developed countries, mainly in the USA and the UK, while our study is conducted in India (an emerging market i.e. EM) and the hypotheses (*H1*, *H2* and *H3*) *hitherto* were not tested in EMs. Customer orientation had a positive effect on adaptive selling, like in many other studies (Jaramillo and Grisaffe, 2009; Guenzi *et al.*, 2014). The influence of customer orientation on job satisfaction was positive, consistent with extant research (Donavan *et al.*, 2004; Pettijohn *et al.*, 2007). PSRs with high levels of customer orientation are concerned about customers and consequently engage in activities such as attending to customer feedback and solving their problem (Jaramillo and Grisaffe, 2009) and this, in turn, enhances salesperson job

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satisfaction (Zablah *et al.*, 2012; Franke and Park, 2006). Further, customer orientation is a work value and can influence job satisfaction (Zablah *et al.*, 2012). Adaptive selling behavior positively drove job satisfaction, in sync with extant research (Park and Holloway, 2003; Franke and Park, 2006). Selling experience is not related to job satisfaction; this too is consistent with extant research (Franke and Park, 2006; Román *et al.*, 2018). However, we did not hypothesize any relationship between selling experience and job satisfaction. We merely report the results.

The partial mediation of adaptive selling on the path between customer orientation and job satisfaction is significant, which supports the notion of customer orientation being a psychological variable that "motivates employees to satisfy customer needs" (Zablah *et al.*, 2012, p. 22) and "derives satisfaction from making the customer happy" (Harris *et al.*, 2005, p. 25).

6. Theoretical contributions

This paper adds to the body of research that uses sales experience as a moderator (Russ and McNeilly, 1995; Rapp *et al.*, 2006; Purani and Sahadev, 2008). The research of Singh and Das (2013) has demonstrated that sales experience moderates the relationships between adaptive selling–sales performance, customer orientation–sales performance and job satisfaction–sales performance. Singh and Das (2013) further reveal that increase in selling experience increases the strength of the relationship between customer orientation and sales performance, and job satisfaction and sales performance; however, the strength of adaptive selling–sales performance relationship weakened with the increase of experience. Our study tested and demonstrated the moderating influence of sales experience on the relationships between adaptive selling–job satisfaction and customer orientation–job satisfaction; to our knowledge, no research has tested these relationships. However, we find that sales experience negatively moderates the relationship between customer orientation and job satisfaction and between adaptive selling and job satisfaction. This is the main contribution of our study.

Additionally, most research in this genre has found sales experience to positively moderate relationships i.e. greater the sales experience, better it is. For instance, Singh and Das (2013) found that sales experience positively moderated the relationship between customer orientation and sales performance. However, we find that sales experience negatively moderates the relationship between customer orientation and job satisfaction. There is some research that shows the negative effect of job experience (Schmidt and Hunter, 2004; Tharenou *et al.*, 1994) and we add to this stream of research.

Furthermore, most sales research was conducted in developed markets (Panagopoulos *et al.*, 2011). Our study is performed in a typical EM (India), and to our knowledge, this was the first study to have unionized salespersons as respondents. We found that sales experience moderates the adaptive selling behavior–job satisfaction and the adaptive selling–customer orientation relationships negatively. Specifically, the effect is significant for a lower level of experience. Thus, we contribute to the body of knowledge that job experience is counterproductive (Schmidt and Hunter, 2004; Tharenou *et al.*, 1994). While this is not a contribution, a noticeable feature of this study is that we have used the Johnson–Neyman technique to find the level of experience at which the relationships (adaptive selling–job satisfaction and customer orientation–job satisfaction) is significant.

7. Managerial implications

Apart from extending the literature, this study has some useful managerial implications. Our findings show that for veteran salespersons (compared to less experienced ones), the effect of adaptive selling and customer orientation on job satisfaction is low. Specifically, for less experienced PSRs, adaptive selling and customer orientation can influence job satisfaction and contrarily, for more experienced salespersons, adaptive selling behavior and customer orientation do not influence job satisfaction. Therefore, firms can hire young people to work as PSRs; possibly at the time of recruitment, firms can measure candidates' customer orientation and adaptive selling behavior and hire only those candidates who are high on both. Further, for some candidates who are somewhat moderate on both (but are outstanding on some other critical aspects such as interpersonal skills; hence they get hired), training needs to be imparted to develop their adaptive selling behavior and customer orientation skills. This is a key managerial contribution; to the best of our knowledge, no pharma company in India measures customer orientation and adaptive selling behavior at the time of recruitment. Our results point strongly to this need.

Our results show that with more-experienced salespeople, the effect of adaptive selling behavior and customer orientation on job satisfaction is marginal at best. Therefore, if firms conduct training programs to enhance customer orientation and adaptive selling behavior, they need not send highly experienced salespeople because customer orientation and adaptive selling behavior have no effect on their job satisfaction. They need to send only their less-experienced salespersons to such training programs. At this point in time, on talking to senior managers in pharma companies, we learn that all salespeople were sent to such programs. This is not optimal. Hence, our research makes a key contribution in this direction. However, firms cannot sack these experienced salespersons. Instead, they may promote them early or use them in different jobs, e.g. key account management, training young recruits and so on.

8. Limitations and future research

Our study was conducted in a unionized setting alone. Future research may test our model in non-unionized settings in EMs such as India initially and later, in developed markets as well. Our interaction hypotheses specifically deal with unionized salespeople. Future research may study these relationships among non-unionized salespeople as well. We considered only adaptive selling behavior, customer orientation and their effect on job satisfaction, in conjunction with experience. Apart from experience, other moderators may exist (e.g. therapeutic segments such as cardiac and skin). Research may incorporate these variables as well. Further, variables such as selling skills can be measured and the moderating effect of experience on the

selling skills–job satisfaction relationship can be tested, in unionized and non-unionized environments, in EMs and developed countries.

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Further reading

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