

Impact of Salesperson Behaviour on Trust Towards the Salesperson and Selling Firm in the Pharmaceutical Industry

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Abstract

Personal selling is crucial in generating revenue in the pharmaceutical industry, where effective sales strategies are essential for success. This study explores the impact of various salesperson behaviours on building trust between pharmaceutical sales representatives and their key customers, namely doctors. Four types of salesperson behaviours are identified: Selling Orientation, Customer Orientation, Adaptive Selling, and Unethical Selling. Trust is categorised into two forms: trust towards the salesperson and the selling firm. The study reveals that Selling Orientation and Unethical Selling behaviours negatively affect customer trust, both in the salesperson and the firm. Conversely, Customer Orientation and Adaptive Selling behaviours foster trust, strengthening the relationship between the salesperson and the customer. Given the limited number of studies exploring models linking salesperson behaviour with customer trust, this research fills an important gap by offering a contemporary model highlighting the behaviours that pharmaceutical sales representatives should adopt to build trust and provide value.

Keywords: Adaptive Selling, Customer Orientation, Selling Orientation, Trust, Unethical Selling

Introduction

The Indian pharmaceutical industry is dependent on personal selling strategies. Medical Representatives (Salespersons), Area Sales Managers, Regional Sales Managers, and Zonal Sales Managers are concerned with visiting the doctors, i.e., customers, to sell their products. In the Indian pharmaceutical industry, the business performance of the pharmaceutical company has heavily relied on the performance of the salesperson and personal selling strategies. Personal selling strategies and salesperson's behaviour play an important role in creating customer trust and value by creating customer satisfaction. To this point, we can say that a salesperson's behaviour is the key antecedent for creating customer trust and customer value through customer satisfaction or customer

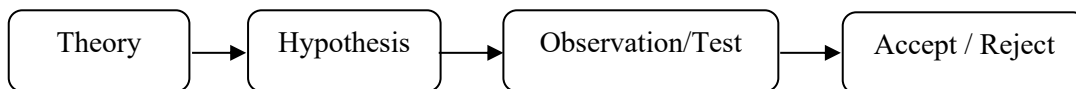
delight (Morgan & Strong, 2003) . It's equally important for salespeople to be trained and motivated to actively "listen" to social conversations for mentions of their brands, industry, or competitors. Sales organisations should also monitor these discussions to identify opportunities for engagement, such as by recognising relevant conversations or trending topics. (Somanchi Hari Krishna et al., 2022) shared the pharmaceutical industry's representatives have progressed to the advantageous stage of the summative task fulfilment procedure.

Salespersons should create a mutually beneficial relationship between customer and salesperson. Salespersons, in general, should be proactive enough to deal with customers' needs and wants. The type of salesperson who is proactive enough to deal with customer requirements will always be a top-notch performer (Boles et al., 2001). The different types of salesperson's behaviour can only be identified at individual levels (Kilic, 2004). There are only a smaller number of studies available in the case where Selling Orientation (SO) and Customer Orientation (CO) were treated separately (Jaramillo et al., 2007). Individual salesperson's behaviour and attributes are essential in creating long-lasting sales performance (Verbeke et al., 2010). Diligence, information communication, sportsmanship and empathy are the service behaviours that form the basis of salesperson Behaviour (Ojiaku et al., 2023). The integration of IoT with digital marketing presents a myriad of opportunities for businesses to enhance customer engagement, personalize marketing campaigns, and drive innovation (Priyanka et al., 2024)

Material and Methods

This study was conducted in India. The state selected was Kerala, especially south Kerala. South Kerala comprises of districts like Trivandrum (capital city), Kollam, Pathnamthitta and Allapuzha; were the number of established multi-speciality hospitals treating diabetics was high compared to other zones of Kerala. As far as Pharmaceutical Industry is concerned, the doctors treating diabetics are the Customers and the patients are the consumers. The primary data were collected by using structured questionnaire which was distributed to respondents i.e., Allopathic doctors treating diabetics. Based on the available list, the total sample size was 168 respondents. Total time taken for this research was 8 months. The first three months was taken for identifying the research gap and to study about the Indian Pharmaceutical Industry and finally I created a conceptual model with the help of extensive literature review. The next 5 months have been utilized for data collection, data analysis and conclusion of the research. The study was conducted in the year 2024. In this study researcher used deductive approach, it is all about developing a hypothesis on the basis of an already existing theory and then formulating and designing a research strategy for testing the hypothesis.

Figure 1: Deductive research Approach



Hypothesis 1: Selling Oriented behaviour of a medical salesperson is having a negative relationship with Trust towards the salesperson.

The relationship between Selling Oriented behaviour and Trust towards the salesperson: The different attitudes of Salesperson Practicing Selling Orientation are “Salespersons will try to convince the customer without understanding the needs and wants of the customers, Salesperson will try to sell maximum without satisfying the customers, the salesperson will pressurize the customer to purchase the product even though if the product in not matching with their needs and wants, the salesperson will try to portray rosy picture about the product and the salespersons will try to persuade the customer rather than understanding the needs and wants” (Saxe et al., 2014).

For selling unsought goods or services like life insurance, burial plots, etc, an oriented approach is important, and it will create some results. Salespersons practicing Selling Oriented behaviour has a negative relationship with sales performance (Dunlap et al., 1988). Salespersons practicing Selling Oriented behaviour will fails to create Customer Satisfaction (Goff et al., 1997). Selling Orientation has a negative relationship with Customer Trust (Tam and Wong, 2001). Selling Oriented behaviour of a salesperson is directed with myopic sales strategies and tactics that hinder customer interest.

Hypothesis 2: Customer Oriented behaviour of a medical salesperson is having a positive relationship with Trust towards the salesperson.

The relationship between Customer Oriented behaviour and Trust towards the salesperson: In customer-oriented approach, salesperson will try to practice marketing concept by taking care of the customers interest and helping the customers to purchase the right products according to their necessity. The concept of customer orientation can be practically explained as “marketing to customers at the individual level” (Jaramillo et al., 2007). The customer-oriented selling behaviour will always create a great positive relationship between the customer and salesperson and finally reflects a positive attitude towards the selling firm (Williams & Attaway, 1996). The salespersons practicing customer-oriented sales behaviour should understand the target customers first, they should understand the customer’s individual needs and wants. As a salesperson if they know the customer requirements individually, then they can deliver superior customer value (Slater & Narver, 1990). The salesperson with an ability to help customers to achieve their needs and wants with a scintillating Customer – Salesperson relationship is called as Customer Orientation. The different attitudes of salespersons practicing Customer Orientation selling behaviour according to Saxe and Weitz are “Salespersons should have a passion in helping the customers to take a suitable purchase decision, the salesperson should act as a consultant to the customers for identifying their needs and wants, the salesperson should only recommend a product suitable according to the needs and wants of the customers, Salesperson should be responsible enough to give accurate information about the product, Salesperson should have good product knowledge, Salesperson should not ever pressurize the customer to buy the product and they should never use any manipulative practices to covert the customers” (Giacobbe et al., 2006). Salespeople's customer-oriented selling behavior has a strong positive impact on sales performance while significantly reducing opportunistic behavior (Yeo & Jan, 2022).

The customer-oriented selling is adopted from the Marketing approach created by Philip Kotler (Kotler, 1980). The company practices Marketing approach will always exhibit a top-notch performance in the industry. For attaining top-notch performance marketing approach, one of the key antecedents is customer-oriented approach towards customers (Frambach et al., 2016). Those salespersons practicing customer orientated style of selling has created customer satisfaction with the salesperson and customer satisfaction with the selling firm (Goff et al., 1997). The companies and salespersons practicing Customer Orientation, has a long run sales performance (Swenson & Herche, 1994). Customer Oriented behaviour of a salesperson will positively lead to the enhancement of Customer Value (Rust et al., 2004).

Hypothesis 3: Adaptive Selling behaviour of a medical salesperson is having a positive relationship with the trust towards the salesperson.

The relationship between Adaptive Selling behaviour and Trust towards the salesperson: Adaptive selling behaviour refers to use differential selling strategies and tactics in different selling situations (Giacobbe et al., 2006). Deploying adaptiveness in diversified selling situations is known as Adaptive Selling behaviour (Weitz et al., 1986). At the start of the selling encounter, salespersons will have a lot of permutations, combinations and perceptions, but after dealing with the customer the salesperson has to alter the selling strategy or tactics, if they don’t alter according to the circumstances, the selling will become ineffective and will not be effective in creating customer trust (Evans et al., 2012; Hall et al., 2015). Listening skill is very much important to practice adaptive

selling behaviour. Those salespersons who listen to their customers can adapt their selling strategies according to different situations. This helps to adapt their selling approaches in different selling situations and it helps to create more customer trust and customer value (Delpechitre et al., 2019). The salespersons convert their customers using information, by giving them proper recommendations and solutions to their problems, by persuading the customer with verbal prompts, by generating fear appeal, by giving them promises and by inspiring the customers. In adaptive selling, different approaches have to be used to different customers. The salesperson can use autonomy or interaction-based approaches according to the level of knowledge and information known by the customer (Hochstein et al., 2019; Scholz et al., 2021). While practicing Adaptive selling behaviour by a sales person, it important that the salespersons selling approach should match with the customer’s personality and attitude (Menon & Dubé, 2000). (Joseph et al., 2024) Medical Sales Representatives who practice Customer Oriented sales Behaviour is inducing a positive trust towards the Medical Sales Representative.

Hypothesis 4: Unethical Selling behaviour of a medical salesperson is having a negative relationship with Trust towards the salesperson.

The relationship between Unethical Selling behaviour and Trust towards the salesperson: Unethical selling behaviour is undesirable behaviour from the salesperson as far as an organization is concerned. Unethical selling practices practiced by a salesperson are making false promises, partial disclosure of information, misrepresentation of products and services, putting unnecessary pressure on the customers, and forcing them to make a quick decision Customers' negative responses towards the unethical selling factors of salespersons will create a negative impact on customer trust and customer and the negatively affected on reputation and brand image of the company (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001). In Unethical sales behaviour, salesperson (Li & Murphy, 2012). A comprehensive understanding of how graph theory and equivalence relations can be effectively applied to improve hospital management practices and patient outcomes (Sumathi et al., 2024). Antecedents of unethical sales behaviour of a salesperson are the age of the salesperson, the level of education of the salesperson, his commitment towards his organisation, relationship with his immediate supervisor, and Job security (Poujol et al., 2016).

Hypothesis 5: Trust towards the salesperson is having a positive relationship with Trust towards the selling firm.

The relationship between trust towards the salesperson and trust towards the selling firm.

Trust in the Salesperson and Trust in the selling firm are the two important elements contributing directly to Customer Trust (Giacobbe et al., 2006). Reliability, Salesperson’s behaviour, and honesty in the salesperson in a salesperson – customer interaction process will create trust towards the salesperson and selling firm (Jap, 2001). Salesperson’s positive behaviour in buyer – seller interaction process is one of the major reasons for customers trusting the selling firm. A long-term trusted relationship between the salesperson and the customer will lead to trust in the selling firm (Swan et al., 1999).

Table: 1 Scales of variables for the conceptual model

Constructs	Measures	Reference
Selling Orientation	The Medical Representatives approaching me is only putting his effort on persuading me rather than trying to understand my needs and wants.	Saxe and Weitz ²¹
	The Medical Representatives approaching me always exaggerate about the products offered by the selling firm.	Williams and Attaway ²⁸
	The Medical Representatives approaching me stretches the truth, when they detail the product to me.	
	The Medical Representatives approaching are always concentrating on selling more products to me rather than satisfying me as a customer.	

	<p>The Medical Representatives approaching me will pressure me to purchase a product that is not suitable to me</p>	
Customer Orientation	<p>The products offered by the Medical Representatives are according to my needs and wants.</p> <p>The Medical representatives approaching me helped to make a satisfactory purchase decision.</p> <p>The suggested products by the Medical Representatives approaching me were adequate to solve my patient's problems.</p> <p>The Medical Representatives approaching me are giving preference to my interest rather than pressurizing me to purchase</p> <p>The Medical Representatives approaching me listens to my queries carefully and gives appropriate answers to make my purchase decision perfect.</p>	<p>Saxe and Weitz²¹</p> <p>Williams and Attaway²⁸</p>
Adaptive Selling	<p>The Medical Representatives approaching me is really flexible in their sales approach</p> <p>The Medical Representatives approaching me have different selling styles in different selling situations.</p> <p>The Medical representatives approaching me are having good adaptive ability to match with different selling situations.</p> <p>The Medical Representative approaching me varies his selling approach to my mood swings.</p>	<p>Giacobbe et al.⁸</p> <p>Weitz et al.²⁷</p>
Unethical Selling	<p>The Medical Representatives approaching me use to answer my queries regarding the product, even though they are not aware about the answers.</p> <p>The Medical Representatives approaching me gives wrong information about the product offered without proper product knowledge.</p> <p>The Medical Representatives approaching me misrepresents about the facts and figures about the product for convincing me to purchase.</p> <p>The Medical Representatives approaching me lie about competitors and competition.</p> <p>The Medical representatives approaching me exaggerates potential advantages of the product offered by the selling firm.</p> <p>The Medical Representatives approaching me uses ambiguous language by the sales person to confuse the customer regarding the products offered by the selling firm.</p> <p>The Medical Representatives approaching me uses ambiguous language by the sales person to confuse the customer regarding the products offered by the selling firm.</p>	<p>Poujol et al.¹⁹</p>
Trust towards the Salesperson	<p>The Medical Representatives never portrayed any false claim about the product they detail.</p> <p>The Medical Representatives approaching me are Honest</p> <p>The Medical Representatives approaching me are reliable.</p> <p>The Medical Representatives approaching me are trustworthy.</p> <p>The Medical Representatives approaching me are dependable.</p>	

Trust towards the Selling Firm	I believe the information's provided by the pharmaceutical companies The Pharmaceutical companies, I am dealing with are trustworthy. The pharmaceutical companies are treating me like an elite customer. The pharmaceutical companies I am dealing with are giving more importance to my welfare as a customer.	Swan, Bowers & Richardson (1999) Poon, Albaum & Chan (2012)
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Source: Secondary Data

Table 2: Value of Cronbach reliability test for latent variables

Constructs	Measures	Cronbach Alpha	Suggestion
Selling Orientation	The Medical Representatives approaching me is only putting his effort on persuading me rather than trying to understand my needs and wants. The Medical Representatives approaching me always exaggerates about the products offered by the selling firm. The Medical Representatives approaching me stretches the truth, when they detail the product to me. The Medical Representatives approaching are always concentrating on selling more products to me rather than satisfying me as a customer. The Medical Representatives approaching me will pressurize me to purchase a product which is not suitable to me The products offered by the Medical Representatives are according to my needs and wants. The Medical representatives approaching me help to take satisfactory purchase decision.	0.957	Scale is Excellent
Customer Orientation	The suggested products by the Medical Representatives approaching me were really adequate enough to solve my patient's problems. The Medical Representatives approaching me is giving preference to my interest rather than pressurizing me to purchase The Medical Representatives approaching me listens to my queries carefully and gives appropriate answers to make my purchase decision perfect. The Medical Representatives approaching me is really flexible in their sales approach	0.936	Scale is Excellent
Adaptive Selling	The Medical Representatives approaching me have different selling styles in different selling situations. The Medical representatives approaching me are having good adaptive ability to match with different selling situations.	0.932	Scales is Excellent

	The Medical Representative approaching me varies his selling approach to my mood swings.			
	The Medical Representatives approaching me use to answer my queries regarding the product, even though they are not aware about the answers.			
	The Medical Representatives approaching me gives wrong information about the product offered without proper product knowledge.			
	The Medical Representatives approaching me misrepresents about the facts and figures about the product for convincing me to purchase.			
Unethical Selling	The Medical Representatives approaching me lie about competitors and competition.	0.970	Scale is excellent	
	The Medical representatives approaching me exaggerates potential advantages of the product offered by the selling firm.			
	The Medical Representatives approaching me uses ambiguous language by the sales person to confuse the customer regarding the products offered by the selling firm.			
	The Medical Representatives approaching me uses ambiguous language by the sales person to confuse the customer regarding the products offered by the selling firm.			
	The Medical Representatives never portrayed any false claim about the product they detail.			
	The Medical Representatives approaching me are Honest			
Trust towards the salesperson	The Medical Representatives approaching me are reliable.	0.924	Scale is excellent	
	The Medical Representatives approaching me are trustworthy.			
	The Medical Representatives approaching me are dependable.			
	I believe the information's provided by the pharmaceutical			
Trust towards the firm	companies sellingThe Pharmaceutical companies, I am dealing with are trustworthy.	9.20	Scale is excellent	
	The pharmaceutical companies are treating me like an elite customer.			
	The pharmaceutical companies I am dealing with are giving more importance to my welfare as a customer.			

Source: Primary Data

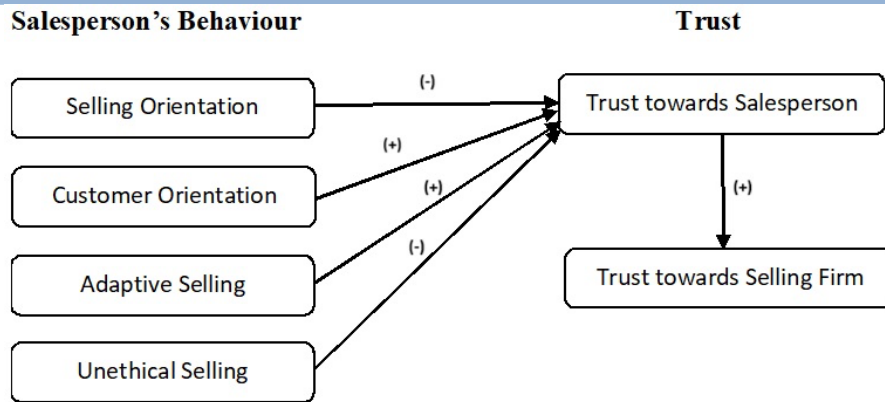


Figure 2: Trust Model based on Salesperson's Behaviour

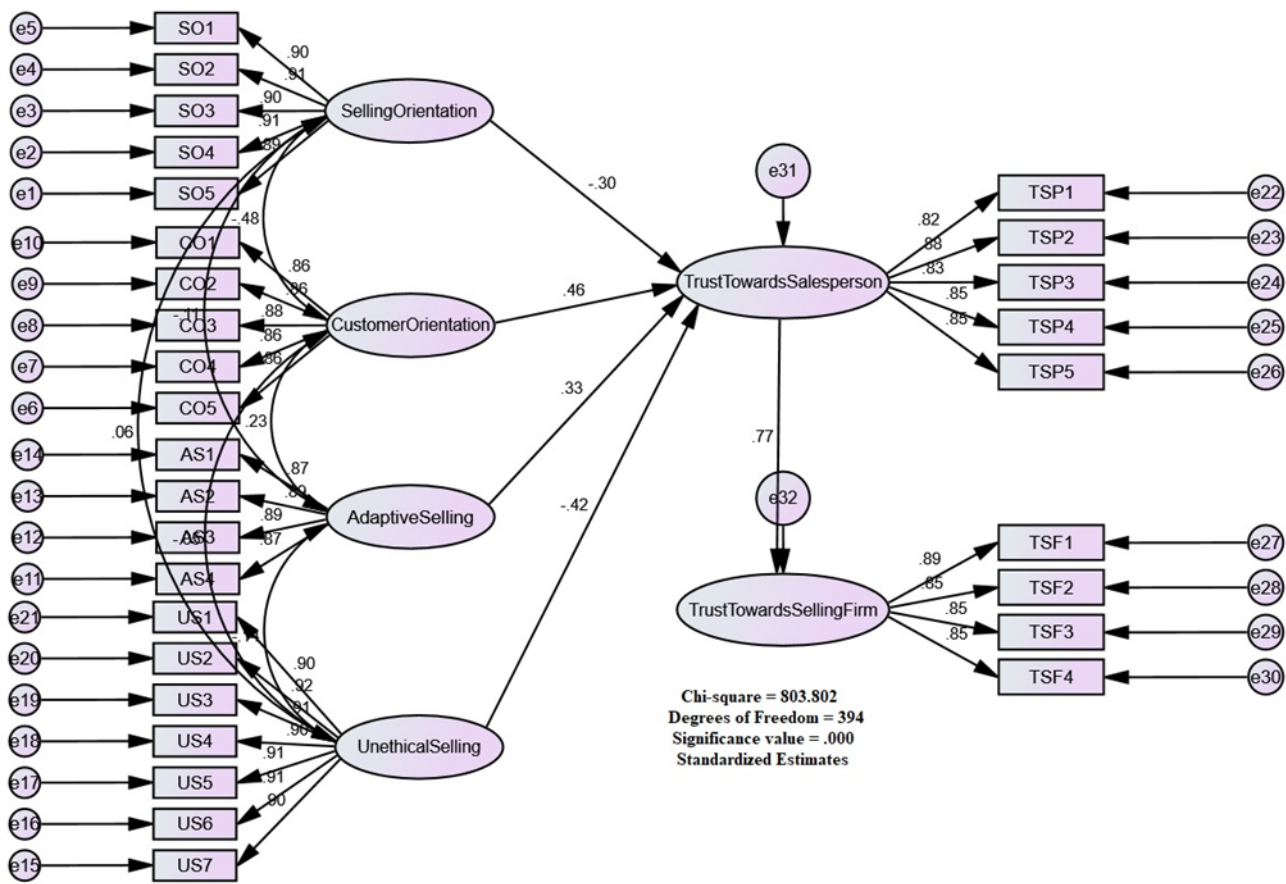


Figure 3: Trust Model based on Salesperson's Behaviour
Structural Model Validation of Hypothesis (H1 – H4)

Table: Model Fit Summary

CMIN/DF	χ^2	GFI	AGFI	RMSEA	NFI	IFI	TLI	CFI
2.040	803.802	0.908	0.886	0.079	0.864	0.925	0.917	0.925

Source: Primary Data

From the table we can understand that the calculated value of CMIN/DF is less than that of the recommended value 5.0. The calculated value of Chi-Square (χ^2) is 803.802 which is greater than the minimum recommended value of

0.05. The calculated value of RMSEA is 0.079 which is less than the maximum recommended value of 0.08. The calculated value of GFI, AGFI, NFI, IFI, TLI and CFI are 0.908, 0.886, 0.864, 0.925, 0.917 and 0.925 respectively are greater than the recommended value of 0.9. So, we can infer that there is a good overall fit for the structured model.

Testing of Hypothesis 1:

Table: Structural Model Testing for Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis	Relationship	Unstandardized Regression Weight	SE	Standardized Regression Weight	CR
Hypothesis 1	TSP ← SO	-0.217	0.034	-0.295	-6.404

Source: Primary Data

From the above-mentioned table, we can understand that SO is related to TSP with a Standardized Regression weight of -0.217 at a significance level less than 0.001. From this, we can infer that Hypothesis 1 is accepted, which means SO is negatively related to TSP. We can say that the Selling Orientation Behaviour of the Salesperson is negatively related towards Customer Trust with the Salesperson.

Testing of Hypothesis 2:

Table: Structural Model Testing for Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis	Relationship	Unstandardized Regression Weight	SE	Standardized Regression Weight	CR
Hypothesis 2	TSP ← CO	0.398	0.046	0.461	8.602

Source: Primary Data

From the above-mentioned table, we can understand that CO is related to TSP with a Standardized Regression weight of 0.398 at a significance level less than 0.001. From this we can infer that Hypothesis 2 is accepted, which means CO is positively related to TSP. We can say that Customer Orientation Behaviour of the Salesperson is positively related towards Trust towards the Salesperson.

Testing of Hypothesis 3:

Table: Structural Model Testing for Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis	Relationship	Unstandardized Regression Weight	SE	Standardized Regression Weight	CR
Hypothesis 3	TSP ← AS	0.292	0.037	0.345	7.919

Source: Primary Data

From the above-mentioned table, we can understand that AS is related to TSP with a Standardized Regression weight of 0.292 at a significance level less than 0.001. From this we can infer that Hypothesis 3 is accepted, which means AS is positively related to TSP. We can say that Adaptive Selling Behaviour of the Salesperson is positively related towards Trust towards the Salesperson.

Testing of Hypothesis 4:

Table: Structural Model Testing for Hypothesis 4

Hypothesis	Relationship	Unstandardized Regression Weight	SE	Standardized Regression Weight	CR
Hypothesis 4	TSP ← US	-0.308	0.033		-9.373

Source: Primary Data

From the above-mentioned table, we can understand that US is related to TSP with a Standardized Regression weight of -0.308 at a significance level less than 0.001. From this we can infer that Hypothesis 1 is accepted, which means US is negatively related to TSP. We can say that Unethical Selling Behaviour of the Salesperson is negatively related towards Customer Trust with the Salesperson.

Testing of Hypothesis 5:

Table: Structural Model Testing for Hypothesis 5

Hypothesis	Relationship	Unstandardized Regression Weight	SE	Standardized Regression Weight	CR
Hypothesis 4	TSF ← TSP	0.773	0.076	0.766	10.148

Source: Primary Data

From the table above, we can understand that TSP is related to TSF with a Standardized Regression weight of 0.773 at a significance level less than 0.001. This means that Hypothesis 1 is accepted, which means that TSP is positively related to TSF. Trust towards the Salesperson is positively related to Trust towards the Selling Firm.

Discussion and Practical Implication

The central issue in the Pharmaceutical Industry regarding salespersons is that they have a dominant Selling-Orientation culture. This selling-orientation Culture is deep-rooted among the salespersons because of the high targets and pressure exerted by the companies. Companies must create a favourable working environment for the salespersons to practice and implement customer-oriented and adaptive selling behaviours. Companies must never allow salespeople to practice unethical selling behaviour, negatively affecting the company's brand image. Creating an excellent organisational culture and climate is crucial to creating positive sales behaviour (Arun & Krishnan, 2021). The cheerful salesperson's behaviours are Customer Orientation and Adaptive Selling, which positively impact customer trust and value. Companies also must continuously train their employees to ensure they have the proper skills, knowledge, and competence to practice positive selling behaviour with customers (Yi et al., 2023). If a salesperson is not performing well and is practising selling-oriented or unethical selling behaviour, it is also a leadership failure.

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