



Effect of Pharmaceutical Sales Representative's Unethical Practices on Sales Performance: A Comparison between MNCs and National Companies

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ABSTRACT

Pharmaceutical marketing is not a brand-new concept. Pharmaceutical businesses have long used a number of tactics to boost sales. Pharmaceutical companies are the ultimate champions of the selling notion in marketing. Pharmaceutical marketing makes use of medical representatives as a direct sales technique to connect firms and physicians. Unethical practices in pharmaceutical selling are rampant all over the world, and Pakistan is no exception. Society cannot solely place the responsibility for unethical behavior in the pharmaceutical sector on the sales reps because it is a complicated and diverse problem. For instance, there are situations where doctors request favors in exchange for prescribing particular medications to their patients. Even moral salespeople may be persuaded in such circumstances to stay in business, which could lead to monetary losses. There will always be businesses with unscrupulous salespeople ready to meet the demands of the doctors who seek favors as long as there is fierce competition in the market. The purpose of this research was to understand the role of MNCs and National company's pharmaceutical sales representatives who use the unethical practices which directly influences in increasing their sales performance and organizations sales, and subsequently earning rewards and incentives. Unethical practices comprise doctor's sponsorships to continuous medical education programs (CMEs), giveaways, Local Speaker Programs (LSPs), Round Table Discussions (RTDs), and funding clinic renovations. This study targeted 200 Pharmaceutical sales representatives, belonging to MNCs and National companies. Non-probability, convenience sampling method approach was used for the study. For data analysis, PLS-SEM3 was used to analyze the effect of unethical sales practices, mediated by rewards and job satisfaction on the sales performance of sales representatives. The results point to the sales supervisor's role who directly or indirectly influence sales representatives to employ unethical practices in order to achieve their own sales targets. Sales representatives also need recognition, and to that end, this can only be achieved if they achieve or over-achieve sales targets. In order to have job satisfaction, sales representatives resort to unethical practices in the achievement of sales performance.

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Introduction

The idea of pharmaceutical marketing is not new. Pharmaceutical companies have utilized a variety of strategies to increase sales for many years. The true proponents of the selling concept in marketing are pharmaceutical firms. Medical representatives are employed in pharmaceutical marketing as a direct sales strategy that links doctors and businesses. The doctor's practice of prescribing medications depends on his or her knowledge of medicine, relationship with the pharmaceutical industry, and ongoing contact with that sector. Gifts, national or worldwide CME (Continuous Medical Education), marketing techniques like detailed aids, product samples, information about the product, and medical reps' experience can all help improve doctors' prescribing habits (Khushi Muhammad et al., 2020).

According to Malik and Shah (2021), the authors found that clinical procedures used by doctors and marketing initiatives used by the industry are unethical and immoral. The study demonstrates that DRAP's existing performance in controlling the sales and usage of regulated medications is unacceptable and falls short of expectations. Poor enforcement, failure to execute the Drug Act of 1976, and a lack of authority to reduce drugstore malpractice are the categories.

Medical advertising must adhere rigorously to all ethical global standards and laws. A severe conflict of interest is created when a firm offers incentives to doctors to recommend a specific brand, which is bad for the patient. To protect patient interests and control treatment costs, there is a need for a regulatory structure that may penalize both the businesses that pay doctors under the guise of product promotion and the medical professionals who accept such advantages (K. A. Ahmed & Chandani, 2020).

According to Qureshi & Raza (2022), when it comes to the ethical promotion of their products, pharmaceutical companies face a number of challenges, including a lack of external accountability, price wars, pressure to meet sales goals, an unnecessary push to sell products of lower quality, the materialistic attitude of doctors, sales managers who support unethical promotion, and uncompetitive salaries that encourage unethical promotion in order to meet incentive-driven targets.

According to the study conducted, there is evidence that pharmaceutical companies offer general practitioners a variety of incentives for prescribing their products.³⁻⁵ Our earlier research from Pakistan identifies a variety of benefits that general practitioners (GPs) accept from pharmaceutical companies, including cash (in the form of cash or a check), items for clinic/home renovation (such as clinical equipment, air conditioning units, and furniture), and sponsorships for leisure trips and for attending regional/global academic events.⁶ Pharmaceutical incentivization frequently causes conflicts of interest in medical practice because personal benefits from pharmaceutical corporations in exchange for prescriptions may impair general practitioners' professional judgment and their need to take patients' health and well-being into account (Noor et al., 2023).

As a result, even when cheaper alternatives are available on the market, GPs who are required to reciprocate with pharmaceutical corporations may prescribe expensive and/or useless treatments (Noor et al., 2023).

According to Lexchin, (2018), Pharmaceutical corporations endorse their products to doctors, patients, and healthcare facilities all around the world, including in Pakistan, using medical



representatives (MRs), They are normally science graduates (medical or biology). According to the Institute for Health and Socio-economic Policy in California, 64 of the top 100 pharmaceutical companies spent twice as much on marketing and sales as they did on R&D, 58 spent three times, 43 spent five times, and 27 spent ten times as much. According to Berman et al., (2007), organizations deploy various promotional methods such as physician samples, and gifts that are embossed with doctors' names i.e. mugs, pens, and prescription pads, in order for the doctor to remember the drug that they would prescribe to the patient. In a Pakistani scenario, pharma companies also undertake to renovate doctors' clinics/chambers, and sponsor registration to Continuing Medical Education (CMEs) held in Pakistan or internationally. There have been instances where the doctors have been provided leased cars, and its provision is related to the business that doctors generate for the company.

According to Zaidi, (1995), the term "unethical promotion" in pharmaceutical marketing is a well-known practice in Pakistan, mostly conceived and used by multinational corporations (MNCs) due to their significant financial capabilities to finance and promote these tactics. National corporations (NCs) follow in the footsteps of MNCs, but to a greater extent, because local products, with few exceptions, are unable to compete with MNC products in terms of quality, efficacy, and safety. According to Ahmed et al., (2014) in Pakistan, unethical pharmaceutical promotion has become a norm for doctors, pharmaceutical businesses, and their representatives. Companies that do not provide financial incentives to physicians do not receive prescriptions. As a result, unethical practices have become the norm in the Pakistan pharmaceutical industry, which is supported and practiced with a sense of sanctimoniousness by key stakeholders such as doctors, government officials, chemists/pharmacists, and the Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (DRAP) at the expense of patient welfare. There is very little literature that delves into this subject.

According to Misra et al., (2005), some experts on incentives believe it is possible to design an incentive system that brings into line salespeople's benefits with the interests of the organization, such as in "agency theory", which focuses on planning reward systems that bring into line incentives given by companies to sales force in order to achieve shared goals of sales targets and profitability.

According to (Cravens et al., 1993) using incentive compensation as a replacement for sales force control is dangerous. Further, Cravens et al., (1993) state that the amalgamation of sales management and reward control makes the best use of effectiveness. Excessive dependence on sales force inducements connected to short-term, KPIs, can add to a culture that undercuts customer insight. There has been an upsurge in the use of unethical sales marketing methods by pharmaceutical salespeople in order to increase the flow of prescriptions from doctors and in doing so increase sales.

According to (Román & Luis Munuera, 2005), in the short-term, organizations can achieve success by encouraging salespeople to act unsuitably. In theory, incentives can be employed to control the sales force.

Today's use of incentive schemes is hampered by two major concerns. First, incentives encourage inefficient sales force habits, such as salespeople's organizationally unproductive short-term emphasis. When inducements account for a significant amount of sales compensation, salespeople and sales managers can become fixed on achieving monthly or quarterly targets and allocate little time to improving skills needed for establishing relationships with clients on a long-term basis. Wholesalers who engaged traveling salesmen to distribute manufacturer's products to



local retailers discovered that commission-only agents preferred to call on "safe bets" and were less likely to venture into uncharted territory even in the early days of professional selling (Friedman, 2004). As they attempted to overstock stores in order to obtain a large payout, these agents forgot to write reports and undertake promotional activity. Second, sales executives who rely too much on incentives to handle too many management issues are more likely to miss other sales force decisions, such as programs, systems, and processes, which could have a substantial impact on sales force performance.

As educators and consultants, we've seen time and time again that the correct mix of decisions such as how to build and structure the sales team, how to locate and develop the finest salespeople, and how to educate and manage the team for success has a considerably higher influence on corporate performance than incentives. Despite this, sales managers frequently employ incentives to handle a variety of sales management issues, including attracting and retaining top salespeople, rejuvenating and motivating a stale sales staff, enhancing customer satisfaction, and meeting strict sales targets. Companies also update their sales incentive programs on a regular basis. Often, unethical practices are advised by the marketing and sales department of a pharmaceutical organization. The practices are labeled with different marketing themes in order to camouflage the real motive behind the practices. These practices are well-thought-out in advance, often part of marketing and sales plans for the year. Budgets are allocated for the practices / promotional campaigns and salesforce are incentivized, encouraged to utilize the budgets on a monthly basis, and directed to prescribers in order to achieve required sales in value and growth targets.

According to IQVIA Pakistan Pharmaceutical Industry, MAT Q4`2021 Industry Report, the Pakistan Pharmaceutical market is over Rs. 615 billion, with Growth in PKR (2021 VS 2020) 22.54%. CAGR in PKR (2021 VS 2017) 15.62%. Value in US\$3.77 Billion. Growth in US\$ (2021 VS 2020) 21.64%. CAGR in US\$ (2021 VS 2017) 3.67%. A total of 106 products are above "1" Billion with a 34% market share in Pakistan's Pharma Industry. The total pharma market has sold 3.4Bn units in the last 12 months with a growth rate of 11.98%. The industry has shown improvement in value and unit growth on MAT Q4`21 as compared to the previous MAT(Q3`21). The industry has slowed down in value growth in Q4`21 as compared to the previous QTR. The industry value trend has been moving slightly downward during the last 3 months, September`21 is the highest value sales month 9 corporates are growing with double digits on MAT Q4`2021. All top 10 NATs and 5 MNCs are growing by double digits.

The study's main goal is to analyze and compare the properties of unethical practices employed by the MNCs and National companies' pharmaceutical sales representatives on sales performance. Unethical practices' modus operandi comprises doctors' sponsorships, giveaways, Local Speaker Programs (LSPs), Round Table Discussions (RTDs), and funding clinic renovations. These practices have a direct effect on the sales performance of sales representatives in particular and the organization's sales performance in general.

Literature Review

In recent years, organizational transgression has increased, and we are observing more and more instances of individuals acting unethically for personal or organizational advantage, with or without the supervisor's agreement. Research has shown that employees regularly act unethically for personal gain, as retaliation against the corporation or to injure coworkers. Researchers have brought up the subject of unethical pro-organizational behavior (UPB) in this theoretical and empirical discussion. UPB is allegedly caused by salespeople deceiving customers or clients about the



effectiveness of their products in order to boost sales (for their organizations) or by accountants fabricating financial statements in order to lower their company's tax obligations (Vem et al., 2023).

Although unethical activity at work is undesired, a growing body of research suggests that people may do so in order to help someone else or even the company (Vem et al., 2023) According to the study, employees who had a stronger connection to their employer and superiors were more likely to engage in UPB. When they believe that their managers are actively engaging in this desire, it becomes more intense. Additionally, it has been demonstrated that those with strong norms and beliefs in positive reciprocity are more likely to experience UPB. The assumptions and hypotheses in this study were guided by a multi-theoretical approach that drew on social identity, social exchange, social learning, and ethical theories (Vem et al., 2023).

Prospect theory posits that the order preferences between two options of behavior may be influenced by the framing of the motivational forces of the choices (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). According to Kahneman., and Tversky, (1979), it has been proven that the way challenges are presented has a systematic impact on individual decisions. Individuals are more disinclined to risks and difficulties framed in an optimistic manner (i.e., Problems framed in a positive direction (i.e., problems involving gains) attract more risk-seeking than problems framed in a negative direction (i.e., problems involving losses) (i.e., concerning losses). This concept of framing has a lot of explanatory power for a lot of organizational behavior notions, and it claims that how experimental materials are framed has an impact on how organizational behavior paradigms are formed.

Un-ethical Practices (IV)

According to Qureshi, Raza & Ahmed (2022), every area of society has been put at risk by unethical behavior, but because of the social repercussions, the pharmaceutical industry is especially at risk. The pharmaceutical industry pays doctors with bribes, provides clinic refurbishment services, and sends them to conferences abroad. All of these strategies are used at the expense of the patient's welfare in order to influence the prescription generation. Pharmaceutical sales representatives frequently exaggerate the benefits of their products, conceal accurate facts, and mislead doctors in order to profit their company.

According to Zaidi, (1995) in pharmaceutical marketing, the term "unethical promotion" is a well-known practice in Pakistan, primarily devised and practiced by multinational firms (MNCs) as they have significant financial resources available to them to fund and sustain these procedures, multinational corporations (MNCs) have predominantly invented and practiced them. National corporations (NCs) follow in the footsteps of multinational businesses (MNCs), but they cannot match the quality of MNC products in terms of quality, efficacy, and safety. In Pakistan, doctors, pharmaceutical manufacturers, and their intermediaries are accountable for unethical pharmaceutical promotion (Ahmed, 2014). In Pakistan, unethical pharmaceutical promotion and advertising is due to the fact that doctors, pharmaceutical manufacturers, and their intermediaries are involved. Companies that do not provide financial incentives to physicians do not receive prescriptions. As a result, unethical actions have grown commonplace in the pharmaceutical industry in Pakistan. Major players, such as doctors, government officials, chemists/pharmacists, and the Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (DRAP), engage in these practices with a sense of self-righteousness at the expense of patient welfare. There are few literatures that address unethical pharmaceutical behaviors by medical professionals and doctors in terms of ethical drug promotion.

Sales Performance (DV)



Research shows that pharmaceutical companies for the marketing and promotion of their products and services, adopt a variety of promotional tactics. The objective is to boost sales and shareholder profitability. Studies demonstrate a connection between rising illogical physician prescriptions and misleading promotional tactics, which result in antibiotic resistance (Dr. Fazle Malik et al., 2021).

According to (Vitell et al., n.d.) executives face a difficult situation when choosing between an ethical and profitable option. Recently promoted managers are often warned against being too ethical so that they do not affect performance as stated (Badaracco & Webb, 1995). According to Dubinsky et al., (1992), salesforce would indulge in unethical behavior as they think that it would be beneficial for them to make sales. According to Barles et al., (2002); Grisaffe and Jaramillo, (2007); Verschoor, (2003) there are some indications that ethical behavior is favorably related to organizational performance. Surprisingly, there is little literature that links moral judgment to individual performance. According to Chonko and Hunt (1985), despite not believing that unethical behavior is linked to corporate performance, marketing managers believe that successful managers engage in certain unethical acts (e.g., withholding information that could harm them; making rivals look bad; blaming "scapegoats" for failure; and claiming undue credit).

Rewards (Mediator)

For most pharmaceutical businesses, salespeople are their primary source of attention. Using this marketing strategy, medical representatives can establish relationships, establish rapport, and forge connections with prescribers by offering various gifts and resources. Informational pamphlets on medicine, literature, samples, gifts, freebies, freebies at conferences, seminars at conferences, and other resources are employed in this practice (Khushi Muhammad et al., 2020).

According to Malik (2021), while national enterprises engage physicians in personal commitments and drug incentivization to boost drug use, international pharmaceutical companies engage them in ethical practices and persuade them based on strong evidence. In this case, incorrect prescriptions that lead to antibiotic resistance are a result of the ethical problems with medication advertising. This significantly affects how doctors write prescriptions. They issue patients with improper prescriptions, which promotes the development of antibiotic resistance.

Cash and checks are a fairly typical form utilized by local or franchise businesses in Pakistan to influence doctors and medical professionals. The study's conclusions demonstrated how cash or a check might alter a doctor's prescription patterns. A doctor or physician is obligated to administer their medication only after receiving money or a check from a pharmaceutical corporation (Khushi Muhammad et al., 2020).

Setting targets or strategic goals in relation to the work provided, such as meeting sales targets or accomplishing strategic goals, can be used to improve performance (Maund, 2001). A bonus may be offered to an employee who reaches or exceeds his or her target or achieves strategic goals, motivating them to work more. According to research, when people are acknowledged and commended, they are more likely to improve their performance by attaining their specified targets or goals. Employers should reward their employees more frequently. This significantly improves performance when compared to having awards only once a year. This is the case because frequent incentives are easily connected to performance (Thomson and Rampton, 2003). Another way for businesses to use reward systems to enhance output is to personalize the incentive. When prizes are ambiguous, employees do not associate any value with the prizes. Appraisals or promotions for



employees who have a demonstrated track record can be used as incentives to promote employee performance. Managers should keep an eye out for personnel with great potential.

According to Zoltners et al., (2012), sales management's recourse to incentives or rewards is the primary motivator factor for invigorating and retaining sales force. Incentives are also used to energize a self-satisfied sales force and galvanize them to improve customer relationships and achieve difficult or challenging sales goals. Zoltners et al., (2012) propose that the role of rewards/incentives is paramount in the Sales Force SFE mix, which enables the sales management in creating and maintaining an effective sales organization. When the sales process is straightforward, large short-term individual (LSTI) incentives are effective. However, the complexity of today's sales processes precludes employing incentives as the primary source of motivation for sales force activities.

Job Satisfaction (Mediator)

Time pressure can be a strategy that managers of sales teams with varying ages, experiences, and backgrounds use to good or bad effect. These managers can probably do more than simply teach salespeople how to manage their time to maximize individual salespeople. The implication is that managers may be able to handle time in such a manner that pressure is channeled toward creativity—and not immoral behaviors—rather than pushing salesmen to the edge of their ethical threshold (Rostami et al., 2019).

The association between reward management and job satisfaction is critical for happy employees (Wright, 2009). Employees with a high level of job satisfaction perform better and have lower turnover rates. Treating employees as assets can lead to improved performance and happier employees, which can help the company meet its strategic objectives. According to (Spector, 1997), satisfaction contributes to performance, according to the early human relation method. Dissatisfaction at work can result in brain drain, labor turnover, poor performance, and absenteeism. Employees, according to

Baron, (1983), must have skills and altitude knowledge if they are to produce results. Similarly, he stated that an employee with talents and competence but unmotivated cannot perform successfully, implying that work and performance are based on the expectation theory.

Beer, (2002) goes on to state that a motivating factor like employee performance can claim that effective performance does lead to compensation. Strikes occur as a result of financial concerns, demonstrating the importance of compensating employees in order to inspire them. More importantly, managers must grasp motivation theories such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs and equity theory, which can provide them with a clear image of how to manage effective incentive management and how people are motivated at work.

Un-ethical Practices (IV) and Sales Performance (DV)

Most physicians said they prescribed more than three medications and acknowledged that they were compensated by the pharmaceutical industry. Pharmaceutical stakeholders rewarded practitioners for exceeding elite goals with lavish packages that included dinners, parties, gifts, financial support, and international trips. Instead of concentrating on marketing, medical sales representatives (MSRs) regularly visited practitioners for their benefit. As a form of marketing promotion, MSRs offered dinner parties and commissions in exchange for getting their medications



prescribed on a priority basis. The two key problems in the pharmacy department's domain are over-prescription and compensation for medications (Latif et al., 2021).

According to (Fugh-Berman & Ahari, 2007), in order to increase sales and achieve their sales goals, medical representatives employ different marketing promotions, such as the use of physician samples, high-value gifts with imprinted names of selected medicines in the form of prescription pads, pens, and mugs, in an attempt to in prescribe and highlight the names of selected medicine so that prescriber remembers when writing prescription to a patient.

Un-ethical Practices (IV) and Rewards (Mediator)

A context that allowed pharmaceutical companies and GPs to use the healthcare industry as a place to maximize profits was created by structural forces like the fierce competition between pharmaceutical companies, the presence of unqualified healthcare providers in the healthcare market, and a lack of regulation by state institutions. GPs stated that two major variables that drove profit-led prescription were the drive to maximize profits and to adhere to socially desirable standards (Noor et al., 2023).

According to Fishers et al., (2004), reward management is defined as a discipline that is related to the development of strategies and policies so that they constantly, impartially, and evenhandedly pay people, according to the value they add to the organization.

According to Maund, (2001), rewards are used so that employee performance is improved by setting sales targets or the company's strategic objectives. The sales targets if achieved/Over achieved, strategic objectives are achieved. When an employee achieves or over-achieves his/her sales targets, the employee can be given an extra amount in their salary as a reward and to motivate them further to strive for more achievement.

Un-ethical Practices (IV) and Job Satisfaction (Mediator)

Employees with a high level of job satisfaction perform better and have lower turnover rates. Treating employees as assets can lead to improved performance and happier employees, which can help the company meet its strategic objectives. According to (Spector, 1997) Satisfaction contributes to performance, according to the early human relation method. Dissatisfaction at work can lead to brain drain, labor turnover, poor performance, and absenteeism. According to (Baron, 1983) employees must have abilities and altitude knowledge, according to contends, without which they will be unable to attain goals. Similarly, he stated that an employee with talents and competence, but is unmotivated cannot perform successfully, implying that work and performance are based on the expectation theory.

Rewards (Mediator) and Sales Performance (DV)

The study showed that for most medical sales representatives (MSR), for much of their time, the essence of their job is to provide the doctor with information about the medications. They do this by identifying them, approaching them, and providing them with a detailed description of the medicines. MSR also needs to know about doctors' needs, their family situations and backgrounds, their demands, and even their personal preferences. MSRs then give doctors money, presents, or other things that make them happy while keeping in mind that they will prescribe more of MSR company's medications than others (Latif et al., 2021).

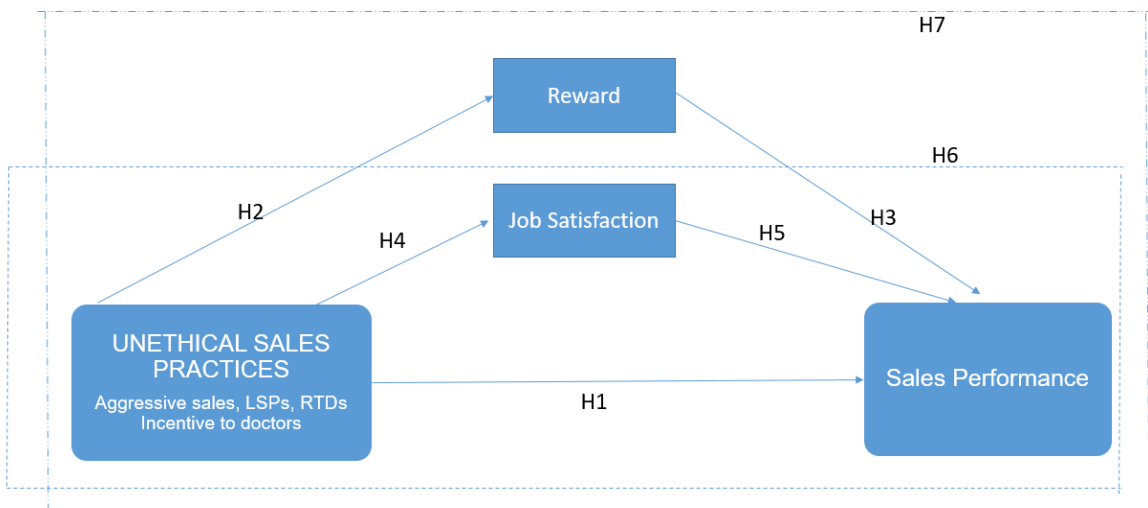


According to (Beer, 2002) a motivating aspect for employees is their performance, and that great performance does lead to reward. More importantly, managers must grasp motivation theories such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs and equity theory, which can provide them with a clear image of how to manage effective incentive management and how people are motivated at work. Task performance refers to how well an employee completes required activities in conjunction with her official responsibilities. Managing performance is critical for achieving organizational goals; the organization's strategy and human resource management must be integrated.

Job Satisfaction (Mediator) and Sales Performance (DV)

Medical sales representatives' (MSR) primary duty at work is to provide the doctor with information on the medications. In order to do this, MSR approaches them and provides them with a detailed description of the medications, as well as information about their needs, family situation, demands, and even personal preferences. MSR then gives them money, gifts, or other items that will make them happy and satisfied with the hope that they will recommend my company's medications more often than those of competitors (Latif et al., 2021).

According to (Krishnan et al., 2002) Salespeople's self-efficacy or job satisfaction is described as their belief that they will be able to complete their sales activities successfully. According to (Krishnan et al., 2002) conversely, it is a person's belief in his or her ability to complete a task successfully. Individuals who believe they are more self-effective put up more effort than those who believe they are less self-effective, and this effort leads to improved performance. According to (Behrman and Perrault, 1984), self-efficacy can take on a variety of forms, including skills, knowledge, customer orientation, and learning orientation. Salespeople play an important part in creating customer relationships; thus, they are a vital resource for businesses.



Hypotheses

- H1: There is a positive significant direct relationship between unethical practices and Sales performance.
- H2: There is a positive significant relationship between unethical practices and rewards.
- H3: There is a positive significant relationship between rewards and sales performance.
- H4: There is a positive significant relationship between unethical practices and Job satisfaction.



- H5: There is a positive significant relationship between Job satisfaction and sales performance.
H6: Rewards mediate between Unethical practices and Sales Performance
H7: Job Satisfaction mediates between Unethical practices and Sales Performance

Research Methodology

In this study, we used the quantitative approach. According to Goddard and Melville, (2004), the validity of the approach is determined by statistical norms, such as the number of respondents required to create a statistically significant result. Despite its positivist philosophy, this research approach can be used for a wide spectrum of social phenomena, including sentiments and subjective perspectives. The quantitative approach is most effective when a large number of respondents are available, the data can be effectively quantified using quantitative approaches, and statistical methods of analysis can be utilized. The study evaluated the effects of promotional unethical practices on the sales performance of medical representatives. The study collected the primary data by using a Google survey form and sending it to medical representatives of multinational and national companies. The independent variable in this study was Unethical Practices and the dependent variable was Sales Performance. Non-probability sampling procedure was adopted as the addresses of respondents are not known. Medical representatives belonging to Multinational companies (MNCs) and National companies. The study targeted 200 respondents from multinational and national companies.

Sampling Technique

Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was used in the research. This is a structural equation modeling technique that allows for the evaluation of complex cause-effect interactions in path models with latent variables. When a smaller population limits sample size; when the structural model is complex and includes many constructs, indicators, and/or model associations; when the structural model is multifaceted and includes many constructs, pointers, and/or model associations; when the structural model (e.g. B2B business-to-business research). The target population in this research is sales representatives of national and multi-national pharmaceutical companies in Karachi, Pakistan. The companies have varied numbers of sales representatives in their field force, depending on the size and sales turnover of the companies. Organizations, such as Getz, which is the number one pharma organization have approximately 4,500 sales representatives. Data was collected through Google Forms, and the link was shared among the field forces of various pharma companies. The identity of respondents is kept confidential and has not been disclosed.

Measures

Un-ethical Practices

Unethical practices measure the views of sales representatives regarding their behavior in dealing with doctors. A 15-item scale developed by Gul et al., (2021) has been used. The respondents expressed their views by employing the Likert scale Strongly Disagree=1, Disagree=2, Neutral=3, Agree=4, Strongly Agree=5.



Rewards

Rewards measure the views of sales representatives regarding the effect of rewards and incentives given by companies in order to boost the sales of the organization and motivate sales representatives in the achievement of sales targets. A 5-item scale which was developed by (Alfandi and Alkawsaneh, 2014). The respondents expressed their views by employing the Likert scale Strongly Disagree=1, Disagree=2, Neutral=3, Agree=4, Strongly Agree=5.

Job Satisfaction

Rewards measure the views of sales representatives regarding how satisfied are they with their present job and whether they feel close to the organization, the organization takes care of them, and the organization gives them recognition. An 11-item scale was developed by Hackman and Oldham, (1975). The respondents expressed their views by using the Likert scale Strongly Disagree=1, Disagree=2, Neutral=3, Agree=4, Strongly Agree=5.

Sales Performance

Rewards measure the views of sales representatives regarding how satisfied are they with their present job and whether they feel close to the organization, the organization takes care of them, organization gives them recognition. A 7-item scale was developed by Sujan et al., (1994) and Kohli et al., (1998). The respondents expressed their views by using the Likert scale Strongly Disagree=1, Disagree=2, Neutral=3, Agree=4, Strongly Agree=5.

Results

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics, which include mean, standard deviation, reliabilities, and correlations. The total four variables have been categorized in the subsequent manner; Unethical Practices (EP) is the independent variable, Rewards (R) is the mediator, Job Satisfaction is another mediator (JS), and Sales Performance (SP) is the dependent or endogenous variables. The Mean value for EP is 3.8527 (SD= 0.59010; CR=0.881); the mean value for R is 3.6725 (SD=0.73093; Alpha= 0.755); the mean value for JS is 3.5551 (SD=0.71782; Alpha=0.904) and the mean value for SP is 3.7409 (SD=0.66980; Alpha=0.833). All the correlations between variables are significant at 0.05.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Mean	SD	Cronbach Alpha	EP	ER	JS	SP
EP	3.8527	0.59010	0.881	-	0.475		
R	3.6725	0.73093	0.755			0.609	
JS	3.5551	0.71782	0.904				0.581
SP	3.7409	0.66980	0.833				

N=129; p<0.05

The data comprised 129 respondents whose responses were collected. Of the respondents, 75 were females, and 54 males. There are no missing values and the data is highly reliable and valid. The



“Gender” table below shows that of all the respondents, 58.1% are Females and 41.9% are Males. The “Marital Status” table below shows that 91.5% of respondents are Single and only 7.8% are married. The table also shows the respondent's education status. Graduates comprise 45.7%, respondents who have an education of Intermediate are 45% and respondents who have a Master’s degree comprise 9.3%.

Table 2 Demographics

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Female	75	58.1
Male	54	41.9
Marital Status		
Married	10	7.8
Single	118	91.5
Education		
Graduate	59	45.7
Intermediate	58	45.0
Masters	12	9.3
Age		
21-30	86	66.7
31-40	7	5.4
41-50	3	2.3
Less Than 21	32	24.8

N=129

Smart PLS V3.3.7 has been used in order to check measurement and structural model analysis and has been applied. Data collected was from a single source. The issue of common method bias was also addressed (Kock, 2015), by using full collinearity diagnostic. Multicollinearity occurs when an independent variable in a multiple regression equation is significantly related to one or more of the other independent variables. The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) was calculated by regressing all variables against a common variable. If the VIF is less than the number 3.3, the single source data is not biased. All of the variables in our investigation had a VIF of less than 3.3 (Table 3), indicating that single-source bias was not a severe problem. In the model that we have tested, there is no multi-collinearity as the independent variable VIF of Ethical Practices (EP) is 1.298 which is less than 3. Similarly, Rewards (R) and Job Satisfaction (JS) are 1.827 and 2.599 respectively, which are less than 3. All Independent and Mediator variables are highly significant i.e. less than 0.05.

Table 3 Full Collinearity Test

EP	R	JS	SP
1.298	1.827	1.599	1.312

Note: EP= Un-ethical Practices, R= Rewards, JS= Job satisfaction, SP= Sales performance

Measurement Model

According to (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988) a comprehensive 2-step modeling approach has been used. The measurement model has been verified in order to evaluate and evaluate the validity and reliability of the instruments (Hair et al., 2019). In the second step, structural model analysis has



been verified for the hypotheses which were developed. To measure the Convergent Validity and Reliability, Item Loadings, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Composite Reliability (CR) were taken from the model. The threshold of loadings is ≥ 0.5 , AVE is ≥ 0.5 and the CR is ≥ 0.7 . According to Table 4, $AVE > 0.5$, CR is > 0.7 and the loadings are acceptable > 0.6 (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 4 Measurement Model for The First Order Constructs

Constructs	Items	Loadings	CR	AVE
EP	EP12	0.679	0.882	0.517
	EP13	0.771		
	EP3	0.745		
	EP4	0.646		
	EP5	0.788		
	EP7	0.703		
	EP9	0.692		
JS	JS1	0.677	0.918	0.506
	JS10	0.699		
	JS11	0.764		
	JS2	0.723		
	JS3	0.641		
	JS4	0.695		
	JS5	0.705		
	JS6	0.716		
	JS7	0.786		
	JS8	0.719		
R	R1	0.597	0.839	0.514
	R2	0.673		
	R3	0.796		
	R4	0.716		
	R5	0.782		
SP	SP1	0.614	0.874	0.500
	SP2	0.664		
	SP3	0.670		
	SP4	0.687		
	SP5	0.764		
	SP6	0.772		
	SP7	0.765		

Note: EP= Un-ethical practices, JS= Job satisfaction, R=Rewards, SP= Sales performance

Subsequently, we evaluated the Discriminant Validity using the (Hair et al., 2019) Fornell and Larcker (1981) and Heterotrait Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). According to Fornell and Larcker, all diagonal values should be greater than non-diagonal values. Table 5 demonstrates that all diagonal values calculated have shown that they are greater than non-diagonal values. HTMT criterion used is



as per recommendation by Henseler et al. (2015) and updated by Franke and Sarstedt (2019). The HTMT values should be ≤ 0.85 and the values of HTMT are ≤ 0.85 (Table 6), which demonstrates that respondents comprehended that four constructs were unlike from each other. Hence, we can conclude that the measurement items are valid and reliable.

Table 5 Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	EP	JS	R	SP
EP	0.719			
JS	0.299	0.711		
R	0.43	0.605	0.717	
SP	0.52	0.61	0.587	0.707

Table 6 Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

	EP	JS	R	SP
EP	-	-	-	-
JS	0.324	-	-	-
R	0.506	0.738	-	-
SP	0.62	0.672	0.723	-

Structural Model

For the bootstrapping procedure, we used 10,000 samples to describe path coefficients, standard errors, t-values, and p-values for the structural model (Ramayah et al. 2018). A combination of p-values, confidence intervals, t-values, and effect sizes have been used in this study. Table 7 shows the summary of the hypotheses tested. First, we tested the effect of Unethical Practices (EP) on Sales Performance (SP); Unethical Practices (EP) on Job Satisfaction (JS); Unethical Practices (EP) on Rewards (R); Mediating effect of Job Satisfaction (JS) on Sales Performance (SP) and Mediating effect of Rewards (R) on Sales Performance (SP). The direct Hypothesis 1 was accepted as $\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.000$, which is significant. The Mediating Effect (EP->R) was $\beta = 0.299$, $p < 0.000$, thus hypothesis 2 has been accepted and significant. The mediating effect of (R->SP) as $\beta = 0.222$, $p < 0.006$, thus hypothesis 3 has been accepted and is significant. The Mediating Effect (EP->JS) was $\beta = 0.299$, $p < 0.000$, thus hypothesis 4 has been accepted. The Mediating effect (JS->SP) was $\beta = 0.383$, $p < 0.000$, thus hypothesis 5 has been accepted. Rewards (R) mediates between Un-ethical practices (EP) and Sales Performance (SP) i.e. (EP->R->SP) with $\beta = 0.115$, $p < 0.006$, thus hypothesis 6 has been accepted, and lastly, Job Satisfaction (JS) mediates between Un-ethical practices (EP) and Sales Performance (SP) i.e. (EP->JS->SP) with $\beta = 0.096$, $p < 0.004$, thus hypothesis 7 has been accepted. T value and p value show the significance while STD BETA shows the path of the relationship which in our case is positive, and that t value and p value cannot be negative.

Table 7

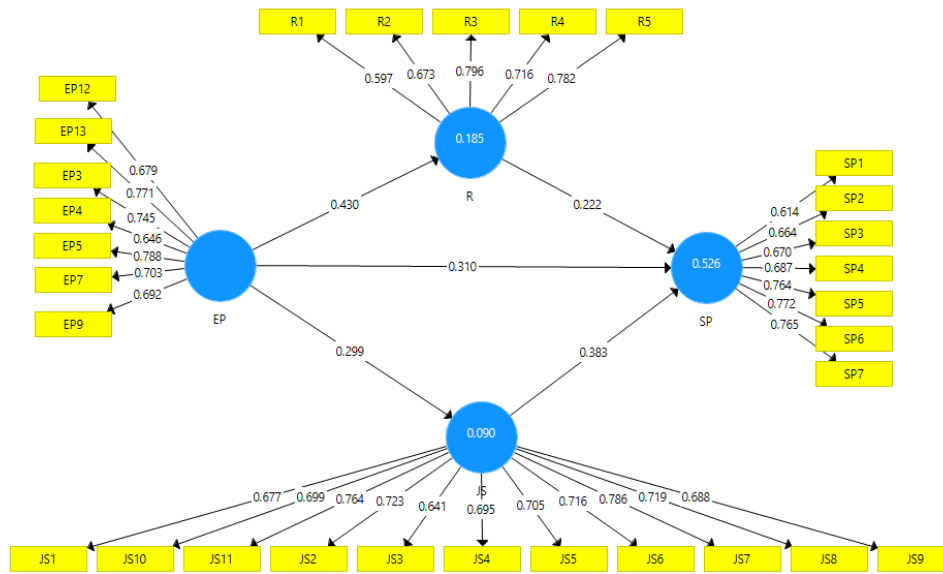
	Std Beta	Std Error	T Value	P Value
EP -> JS	0.299	0.086	3.5	0.000
EP -> R	0.43	0.074	5.793	0.000
EP -> SP	0.31	0.072	4.28	0.000
JS -> SP	0.383	0.084	4.589	0.000



R -> SP	0.222	0.088	2.52	0.006
MED 1 (EP -> JS) -> SP	0.115	0.043	2.65	0.004
MED 2 (EP -> R) -> SP	0.096	0.043	2.227	0.013

Note: EP= Un-ethical practices; R=Rewards; JS=Job satisfaction; SP= Sales performance

Figure 2: Structural Model of Mediation



Hypotheses Assessment Summary

Hypotheses	Status	Remarks
H1 There is a positive significant direct relationship between unethical practices and Sales performance	Significant	Accepted
H2 There is a positive significant relationship between unethical practices and rewards.	Significant	Accepted
H3 There is a positive significant relationship between rewards and sales performance	Significant	Accepted
H4 There is a positive significant relationship between unethical practices and Job satisfaction	Significant	Accepted
H5 There is a positive significant relationship between Job satisfaction and sales performance	Significant	Accepted
H6 Rewards mediates between Unethical practices and Sales Performance	Significant	Accepted
H7 Job Satisfaction mediates between Unethical practices and Sales Performance	Significant	Accepted

Discussion

The objective of this study is to comprehend the relationship between unethical practices (EP) employed by salespersons and the resultant influence on sales performance (SP). This study also helps us to understand the mediating effect of unethical practices (EP) on rewards (R) and



Rewards (R) mediating effect on sales performance (SP). Similarly, we also evaluate the mediating effect of unethical practices (EP) on job satisfaction (JS) and job satisfaction (JS) mediating effect on sales performance (SP). This study concludes that there exists a direct association between unethical practices and sales performance.

Theoretical Implications: Ethical Theories and Frameworks:

Research on unethical practices in the pharmaceutical industry has significant theoretical implications for several fields, including ethics, business, medicine, and public policy. Here are some key theoretical implications:

Deontological ethics: Research can explore how pharmaceutical companies' actions align with or violate deontological principles, such as the duty to provide safe and effective medicines. According to Sawad & Andrews (2021), the study's main goal was to critically analyze and synthesize the literature on the general theory of marketing ethics as well as the tactics employed by pharmaceutical sales managers to enhance ethical marketing education and curtail unethical behavior by sales representatives. The review is divided into six main sections: a general theory of marketing ethics, causes and effects of unethical behavior, advantages of addressing unethical behavior, difficulties encountered in doing so, relationship building as the best strategy for doing so, and training techniques to lessen unethical behavior (Sawad & Andrews, 2021).

Utilitarianism: Scholars can assess the overall societal consequences of unethical practices in terms of harm to patients, cost-effectiveness, and public trust. Normative ethics advocates and recommends ideal behaviors based on facts, theories, and frameworks. For example, implementing the statement of ethics of AMA and the theory of classical utilitarianism in companies to earn goodwill is normative ethics. It studies the gap between marketing practices and the epitomes of marketing ethics. The company's ethical guidelines must consist of some important hyper-norms such as its genuine responsiveness to all stakeholders, an overarching sustainable alignment with the ecological environment, and compliance with the letter and spirit of the law (Malik, 2023)

Virtue ethics: Studies may examine how ethical virtues, such as honesty and integrity, relate to the behaviors of pharmaceutical professionals. This study shows that without a solid ethical foundation, it is impossible to establish or maintain strong team connections. The study's main conviction is that for people engaged in organizational teamwork, a set of values that emphasize individual and organizational action rather than the issue is crucial. Emphasis is placed on the corporate character of both teams and individuals through the practice of good habits rooted in virtue ethics. Establishing these honorable behaviors necessitates leaders and mentors modeling ethical behavior that aligns with the organization's ethical goals. Teams that practice virtue ethics are better able to match their actions with the common ideals that prioritize achieving organizational goals over all other considerations (Adler et. al., 2021).

Moral Development: Research in this area can contribute to our understanding of how moral reasoning develops within the pharmaceutical industry and whether it is influenced by organizational culture and external pressures. According to the study, the social psychology notion of moral dissonance might help throw light on how people feel and resolve ethical problems resulting from a mismatch between their values and the expectations of the organization. The study results capture how marketers experience moral dissonance and the processes spontaneously adopted for reducing it in real organizational settings. The study is therefore able to provide a more detailed



picture of moral dissonance and strategies developed by individuals who experience it (Bourcier-Béquaert et al., 2022).

Organizational Ethics: Studies can investigate the role of corporate culture, leadership, and organizational structure in promoting or discouraging unethical behavior in pharmaceutical firms. The study results are consistent with earlier studies in this field. The resources that each member can access and use to accomplish their goals are represented by organizational social capital (OSC) at the individual level, per social capital (SC) theory. According to this study, staff creativity stems from their participation in OSC practices that draw from a variety of knowledge-sharing (KS) channels. When employees feel more engaged with their work and organization, they are more likely to share information with their coworkers thanks to good coworker relationships. Employees with this KS behavior exhibit higher levels of creativity. In a similar vein, researchers have discovered that people understand their function in the organization and value their working connection with their coworkers when they perceive their work as important (Bhatti et al., 2021).

In summary, research on unethical practices in the pharmaceutical industry can have far-reaching theoretical implications across various disciplines, helping to advance our understanding of ethics, business ethics, healthcare, and public policy while also informing strategies for addressing and preventing unethical behavior in the industry.

Practical Implications

The prevalence of unethical behavior in the pharmaceutical sector has drawn the attention of numerous people and organizations and has had serious repercussions. For example, some patients believe that pharmaceutical company representatives utilize doctors as salespeople for the brands that they are prescribed, leading them to have doubts about the medications that their doctors recommend. In these situations, some patients could prefer generic medications to the prescribed brands or might decide to completely skip medicines in favor of alternatives like natural cures. Patients blame the industry as a whole, which is seen as a subculture in and of itself, for unethical behavior by salespeople. Unlike other professionals, sales representatives are employees who operate in a setting that is becoming more complicated and multifaceted and may offer several opportunities for unethical behavior. Salespeople may encounter doctors who seek bribes or commissions from them in order to purchase their goods. Moreover, salespeople may feel pressure from managers and supervisors to generate more revenue, which causes them to prioritize metrics over other qualities like ethics and integrity. The manner in which new drugs are adopted depends on the interaction between doctors and salespeople. Positive relationships can therefore encourage early drug adoption whereas bad relationships can prevent it. Society cannot solely place the responsibility for unethical behavior in the pharmaceutical sector on the sales reps because it is a complicated and diverse problem. For instance, there are situations where doctors request favors in exchange for prescribing particular medications to their patients. Even moral salespeople may be persuaded in such circumstances to stay in business, which could lead to monetary losses. There will always be businesses with unscrupulous salespeople ready to meet the demands of the doctors who seek favors as long as there is fierce competition in the market. This study suggests that unethical practices employed by Salesforce have a direct effect on the sales performance of sales representatives and in general on the company's sales performance. Organizations, on the other hand, also roll out various rewards and incentive schemes for the achievement of the company's sales targets. These rewards in turn motivate sales representatives to employ unethical practices in order to achieve their sales targets and hence the company's sales target. The study also suggests that the job satisfaction of sales representatives has a mediating effect on sales performance. The



sales supervisors, directly and indirectly influence sales representatives to employ unethical practices in order to achieve their sales targets. Sales representatives also need recognition, and to that end, this can only be achieved if they achieve or over-achieve sales targets. In order to have job satisfaction, sales representatives resort to unethical practices in the achievement of sales performance.

Limitations and Future Research

Studies may be conducted in the future using longitudinal design, which would be helpful to examine the perceptions of sales representatives on a periodic basis, and their attitude towards employing unethical practices in achieving sales performance for themselves in particular and for the company in general. Future studies may also evaluate the effect of rewards and incentives given to the sales force. Rewards and incentives can be designed in such a way that they are not an inducement to employ unethical practices. We have used non-probability, convenience sampling as the population of the sales force was unknown. Furthermore, for the quantitative survey, Google form was used and its linkage was sent to different groups which comprise salespeople. However, there is a possibility that there could be method bias as the questionnaire was responded to by themselves and could be a factor in results being overestimated. However, self-reported questionnaires are useful to get the perceptions of sales representatives regarding employing unethical practices to achieve sales performance. The samples collected were 129, which is quite small, given the fact that sales representatives employed with different MNCs and national companies are estimated to be around twenty-three thousand two hundred and sixty-eight (Gul et al., 2021). In addition, another mediator, such as Incentive Policy can also be used to assess the behavior of sales representatives. Lastly, researchers can further delve into integrating quantitative research methods and qualitative research methods, in order to enable them to comprehend the instruments which may be used to desist sales representatives from using unethical practices



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