Social Media Experience: A Uses and Gratifications Theory Based View in B2B Selling Teams

Balaji Abraham[1,*] and Selvapriya Jeyaraj[2]

[1]IIM Ranchi, Marketing Management, Ranchi, India
[2]Sahasrar Business Solutions, Hyderabad, India
Email: balaji.efpm18@iimranchi.ac.in (B.A.); selva19priya@gmail.com (S.J.)
[*]Corresponding author
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***Abstract*—Social media's emergence as a powerful tool in driving business outcomes is proven. Social media's penetration among Business-to-business (B2B) employees has improved vastly over the years, but the understanding is far from complete. This study aims to determine how social media usage for work purposes by employees, specifically B2B selling teams, influences their experience from the lens of the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT). The study used a sample of 245 selling team practitioners to test the proposed model using the UGT lens. The results confirm that social media usage at work by the selling team employees positively influences their various dimensions of experience at Cognitive (CX), Affective (AX), and Social (SX) levels. Further, the SU, CX, and SX did not differ significantly between sales employees and other selling team members even though AX differed. The findings reveal that selling team employees' experience is influenced by social media usage at work and hence selling organizations need to carve their social media strategy around these dimensions of selling team employee experience.**

***Keywords*—employee experience, selling team, social media, uses and gratification theory**

I. Introduction

Social media garnered significant attention for more than a decade among practitioners and academicians as it is used for work and personal purposes. Over 4.2 billion people globally use social media to achieve work-related outcomes [1]. The use of social media technologies has increased multi-fold over the years across organizations in an attempt to leverage the power of information and knowledge within themselves [2]. Worldwide, ~41% of employees use social media for work-related purposes [3]. Hence, social media's impact in today's context is unchallenged.

Social media impacts both organizations and individuals or employees in work-related contexts [1]. For organizations, it helps to attract potential customers and suppliers, prospective employees, communicate internal updates, engage employees, etc. [4, 5]. For individuals, it helps in networking with potential customers and potential suppliers, sharing information, and collaborating at work [6]. Social media enable employees better to develop social relationships both within and outside the organization and build social capital. Further, it helps to share and seek work-related information within and outside their organizations. Therefore, social media usage by employees in organizations helps them at their work.

The use of social media tends to be positively linked with "positive behavioral and psychological outcomes" such as employee performance, well-being, job satisfaction, and work engagement [7]. Historically, organizations have focused on tangible elements like compensation and work environment to drive positive behavioral outcomes. However, with, intangible elements like satisfaction, the experience started taking over. More specifically, with the advent of digital tools and social media, employee experience (EX) has evolved into a pivotal element for organizations and is a more dynamic and complex one [8]. While social media's influence on behavioral and psychological outcomes is well understood, its influence on employee experience has yet to be studied. To that extent, filling this gap is an original contribution in this domain. Further, this research gap is worth studying as organizations need to know the impact of social media usage at work on the employees' experiential well-being.

This study aims to determine how social media usage for work-related purposes by employees, specifically B2B selling teams, influences their experience from the lens of the Uses and Gratification theory (UGT). In doing so, it attempts to answer the following questions: 1) How does social media usage at work influence the various dimensions of experience in the B2B selling team context? 2) How do this social media usage and various dimensions of experience vary between the sales employees and other members of the selling teams?

With this as a background, this study was conducted among practitioners in B2B selling teams in India among sales employees, and other members of the selling teams in the pharma industry. The B2B segment was chosen as social media usage in B2B is perceived to be less compared to Business-to-customer (B2C) and work-related social media positively influences business outcomes. A survey-based questionnaire was used to capture the responses among the selling team members (n = 245), which comprised respondents from sales employees and other members of selling teams.

The study found that social media usage positively influences the cognitive, affective, and social experience of sales employees and other members of selling teams. Further, there is no significant difference in cognitive and social experience between sales employees and other members of selling teams even though affective experience had one. This study makes key contributions to the B2B social media literature involving sales employees and other members of selling teams in a single study. Further, it contributes to the Employee Experience (EX) and UGT by defining the positive relationship between social media usage and experience dimensions. Finally, it helps the sales organization carve its social media strategy to enable this positive employee experience.

The paper is structured as follows: after analyzing the extant literature in Section II, the methodology of the study is outlined in Section III. Section IV covers the results and findings, followed by the discussion in Section V. The final section covers the study's implications, limitations, and potential avenues for future research.

II. Theoretical Background

Organizations realize the importance of their employees as they help to achieve their objectives [9]. It can be interpreted that employees are the source of competitive advantage. Organizations focused on achieving their objectives tend to focus on enabling positive behavior and enhancing the psychology of their employees. Traditionally organizations have achieved this by providing better compensation and work environment [10]. However, with the advent of millennials and GenZ joining the workforce, things are changing now.

A. Employee Experience

Experience is holistic, subjective, dynamic, and resides at an individual level. The concept of experience in the management area took shape in the early 1960s before it started becoming an important construct in the 1980s when Holbrook and Hirschman mentioned the balanced view of consumer behavior, i.e., logical and experiential perspectives [11]. Similarly, from the employee's perspective, Kahn discussed psychological presence at work involving employees from physical, cognitive, and emotional viewpoints [12].

EX emerges from an organization's cultural, technological, and physical environments, emphasizing that EX is an employee's interactions with their employer over time [13]. The concept of positive employee experience is far ahead of employee commitment practices of organizations, and positive employee experience is aimed at achieving the highest levels of employee commitment, job satisfaction, and well-being which are individual-centric outcomes [14, 15]. Further, employee experience impacts organizational-level outcomes such as customer satisfaction, loyalty, profitability, brand, financial metrics, pride, and organizational culture [16].

The emergence of digital tools and social media platforms has influenced EX over the years. Organizations need to consider these tools to enhance employee experience [16]. While the definition of EX is well established, this paper focuses on how the EX is shaped from a technology perspective, specifically, through social media usage in the B2B selling teams context.

B. Uses and Gratification Theory

UGT is a socio-psychological approach that describes why people seek out media for their needs [17]. The Audiences choose media to satisfy their social and psychological needs that affect individual' reasons. UGT was used to explain traditional media like TV, Radio, newspapers, etc. However, with the rise of the internet and social media, UGT has been applied to understand user motivations for engaging with digital content, such as social networking sites and online communities [18]. Gratifications from content and new technology affect the continuous usage of technology and specifically user experience is a key parameter that explains the media usage behaviour of individuals [19]. UGT explains how social media use results in several variables such as information search, enjoyment, social interaction, etc resulting in enhanced satisfaction [20].

The theory suggests that individuals are goal-oriented, rational, and objective in their choices. However, this is not always true, individuals are not always free to choose the media that helps them to meet their requirements. Sometimes, media is forced either in professional settings or because of social pressure. In B2B settings, employees are more rational in their choices, and their social media usage is governed by the organizational settings [21]. Specifically, selling teams are governed by their organizational settings and customer's requirements to exercise their choices. While the attitudes and satisfaction of the individuals shape social media usage for a prolonged period [22], it is important to determine the individual's experience during this prolonged usage. As such, this theory is apt to seek an answer to why individuals, especially selling teams in B2B settings who are expected to be rational and objective in their choices, use social media by the identification of gratification/rewards they seek.

C. Social Media

Social media usage at work refers to the content about the organization and industry-related information shared both within and outside the organization [23]. Organizations and employees embrace social media at work because it contributes to social interaction, enabling innovation and supporting socio-emotional relationships [24]. Employees' work-related presence on social media platforms is also considered a competitive advantage for organizations [25]. Social media use by employees is categorized into two major purposes—task-specific use and personal/non-task-specific use. The task-specific use of social media refers to the specific use of social media for performing work-related tasks, which includes cognitive use, such as creating content and collaborating with colleagues [26], and informational use, such as seeking or sharing task-specific information [27]. Such task-specific use facilitates knowledge sharing and transfer, as well as work communication between employees, and may enhance individual job performance [28].

The evolving landscape of business-to-business (B2B) sales has led to a significant shift in selling teams' roles. The selling teams comprise salespeople and other functional team members who are required to making the sale. In B2B sales, several factors like technological advancements, relationship management strategies, and organizational support, contribute to the employee experience. The adoption of customer relationship management systems, artificial intelligence, and automation tools has reshaped B2B sales practices. While these technologies enhance efficiency, they also require continuous training and adaptation, impacting employee workload and job satisfaction [29]. In this multi-stakeholder environment, the sustained use of social media creates an experience that in turn used to fine-tune usage [30].

There is a power shift from the sellers' side to the buyers' side now as buyers are empowered with more information about sellers and their offerings [31]. Hence, sales jobs may be under threat. To counter this threat, sellers have resorted to the widespread adoption of social media and changed dyadic, face-to-face, and sequential selling to multi-actor, parallel, and digital relationship-based selling now [32].

Social media use in sales roles has been linked to better job engagement and enhanced job satisfaction. Sales employees who leverage these social media platforms effectively report greater flexibility, and enhanced motivation [33]. Social communities facilitate peer-to-peer learning and knowledge exchange among sales teams. This collaboration enhances skills development and encourages a culture of continuous improvement [34]. Social media usage for work purposes positively influences salesperson performance to create sales opportunities and manage customer relationships [35].

The extant literature on social media discusses its use and role in digital transformation in B2B [36]. However, it did not touch the user experience. Further, no studies discuss the user experience's various dimensions specifically for selling teams. Thus, this study aims to bridge these gaps in the literature by conducting a study on social media usage and its impact on the user experience of selling teams. The findings of this study are expected to show how social media usage for work-related purposes by the selling teams impacts their user experience.

III. Hypotheses Development

Information sharing is crucial to buyer-seller relationships [37]. The multi-stakeholder nature of B2B is a challenge for sales employees to channel-specific content to a specific stakeholder on the customer side. This is in line with the characteristics of social media as it can influence the broad bandwidth of stakeholders both inside and outside the organization [38]. Social media's relevance in information sharing is shaped by its proliferation and as the younger generation joins the workforce. Selling teams use their experience in using social media to constantly evolve and improve further, which impacts them at the individual and business levels [30]. With a wide range of communication options, social media offers great possibilities for selling teams to communicate easily with their existing and new customers.

The holistic nature of experience comprises multiple inner dimensions, which are its building blocks. It is important to map the characteristics of the B2B to conceptualize these experience dimensions. The experience touches upon the cognitive element, which draws itself from the rational paradigm approach [39]. Typical questions in the cognitive dimensions are: How does social media help? How do we measure the performance of social media? The responses to these questions are from the cognitive senses and are primarily based on observable facts [40]. The perceived usefulness of the platform strongly correlates with cognitive gratification [41]. Facts drive B2B selling teams as they use this dimension to engage with the customers. Hence, social media usage influences this cognitive dimension, and it is hypothesized as below:

H_1: Social media usage positively influences the cognitive dimension of user experience

Further, the affective (emotional) element covers the user's thoughts, feelings, etc, and comes from the behavioral approach [42]. Non-observable ones like thinking, feeling, emotions, etc., these drive this. Typical questions in the affective dimension are: How do I feel when I use social media? How does it feel connected with customers on social media? The responses to these questions shape the selling team's affinity toward using social media. Hence, the relationship between social media usage and the affective dimension of experience is hypothesized as below:

H_2: Social media usage positively influences the affective dimension of user experience

The social element in the experience is how one interacts with the environment [43]. As B2B thrives in the multi-stakeholder environment, which involves several functional members, customers, consultants, and other stakeholders, the social element is crucial for the selling teams. Typical questions in the social dimension are: Does my circle accept me based on my social media presence? Will I be accepted in the social media community? Selling teams strive to excel in these social settings and the social dimension plays a key role in enhancing user experience. Hence, it is hypothesized as follows:

H_3: Social media usage positively influences the social dimension of user experience

The study model is in Fig. 1.

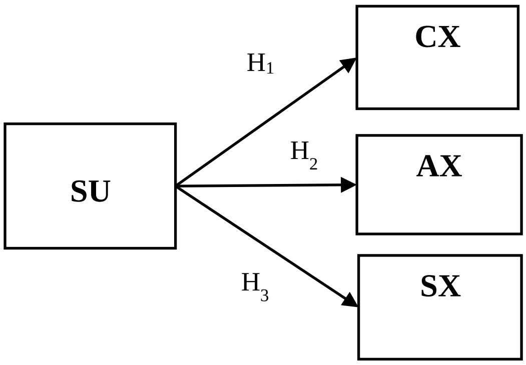

Fig. 1. Study model.

B2B selling teams differ in gender, race, personality, intellectual capability, work experience, culture, etc. Their identity involves primary and secondary dimensions and affects their behavior [44]. The primary dimensions are visible to others, including gender, age, etc. [45]. The secondary dimensions are generally not visible to others as they form the personality. These are acquired through life sentences [46]. The study involves selling teams that are primarily from sales employees and other members of selling teams. Hence, it is hypothesized as below:

H_4: There is a significant difference in means between the sales employees and other members of the selling teams

H_{4a}: There is a significant difference in the mean usage of social media for work between the sales employees and other members of the selling teams.

H_{4b}: There is a significant difference in the mean cognitive experience between the sales employees and other members of the selling teams.

H_{4c}: There is a significant difference in the mean affective experience between the sales employees and other members of the selling teams.

H_{4d}: There is a significant difference in the mean social experience between the sales employees and other members of the selling teams.

IV. Methodology

A. Measures

The independent and dependent latent variables used in the study are as follows:

- Independent variables—social media usage
- Dependent variables—cognitive experience, affective experience, and social experience

1) Social media usage

A 3-item construct scale obtained from Agnihotri *et al*. [47] was used to measure social media usage. This covered social media's potential support work, its capabilities to help on the job and its integration into the work routine.

2) User experience

As the user experience is holistic, covering three different dimensions, i.e., cognitive, affective, and social, scales were obtained from three different studies. Bleier *et al*. [48] 3-item scale was used to measure cognitive experience. Rose *et al*. [49] scales were used to measure the affective experience in using social media. Finally, [50] scales were used to measure social experience.

B. Sample and Data Collection

This study used a non-probabilistic purposive sampling technique among the B2B practitioners in the Indian pharmaceutical industry. Given the small population nature of B2B selling teams, the purposive sampling method was decided with the following criteria:

- Experience in selling transactions directly or indirectly
- Experience in handling customers
- More than five years of professional sales experience

The survey responses were collected online by e-mail, and the survey was circulated among 484 potential participants. The authors leveraged their existing network in the industry to identify the first set of participants. After that, snowballing was done till saturation was achieved. The final sample size stood at 245 after achieving saturation. The demographic profile of the respondents is as per Table 1.

Table 1. Respondents profile

	Particulars	Number	%
Age	Less than 30	22	9%
	31–40	87	36%
	41–50	86	35%
	51–60	42	17%
	Above 60	8	3%
Gender	Male	202	82%
	Female	43	18%
Function (Department)	Sales employees	96	39%
	Other members of selling teams	149	61%
Job Level (Designation)	Entry Level	48	20%
	Manager	72	29%
	Middle Management	74	30%
	Senior Management	51	21%

V. Results and Findings

A. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

EFA, a dimension reduction technique, is done through Kaiser's eigenvalue rule to identify the number of underlying factors with items having acceptable loading into it. The results of EFA using the principal axis factoring (PAF) method in SPSS (version 25) are in Table 2, and it sets out a single factor structure as eigenvalues > 1 are the acceptable score for factor retention. The amount of variance explained is another way to decide the number of factors. The PAF (without any constraint on the factors) shows that the first factor explains >65% of all constructs. Hence, this is a single-factor structure. SU is a single factor with three items, CX is a single factor with three items, AX is a single factor with six items, and SX is a single factor with three items.

Table 2. EFA results

Construct	Factor	Eigenvalue	Explained variance (%)	Cumulative variance (%)
SU	**1**	**2.244**	**74.791%**	**74.791%**
	2	0.382	12.748%	87.539%
	3	0.374	12.461%	100.000%
CX	**1**	**1.958**	**65.262%**	**65.262%**
	2	0.560	18.679%	83.941%
	3	0.482	16.059%	100.000%
AX	**1**	**3.999**	**66.644%**	**66.644%**
	2	0.619	10.312%	76.955%
	3	0.494	8.231%	85.186%
	4	0.364	6.074%	91.261%
	5	0.289	4.820%	96.081%
	6	0.235	3.919%	100.000%
SX	**1**	**2.097**	**69.892%**	**69.892%**
	2	0.540	18.009%	87.901%
	3	0.363	12.099%	100.000%

B. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

The CFA is used to validate the results of EFA. The CFA was done using *R-Studio lavaan* package. The approach to the model fit is as follows:

The hypothesized model for SU, CX, and SX from EFA included three items, and AX included six items. The fit indices from an accuracy perspective, i.e., the Comparative fit index (CFI) and Tucker-Lewis fit index (TFI), are as per Table 3. Similarly, the indices from an error perspective, i.e., Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and Standardised root mean square residual (SRMR), are as per the below table. The result of RMSEA was more than the recommended threshold of 0.05 or lower, and SRMR was found to be within the acceptable threshold (0.08 or lower).

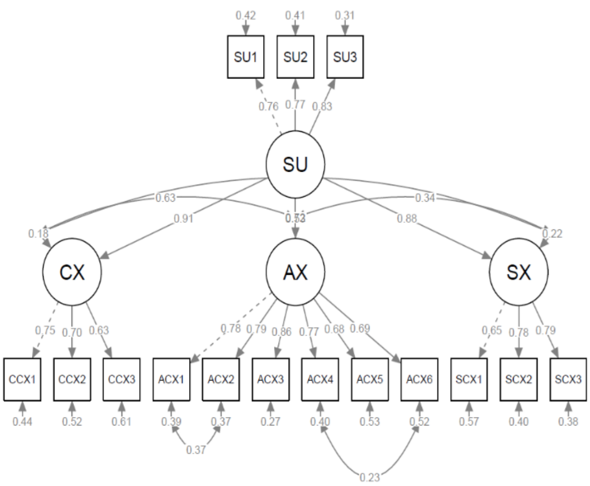

Fig. 2. CFA plot.

Hence, it is confirmed by CFA that SU, CX, AX, and SX are single factors and their factor loadings are above the acceptable threshold. The CFA plot is in Fig. 2.

Table 3. CFA results

Tool	SU	CX	AX	SX
Comparative fit Index (CFI)	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
RMSEA	0.000	0.000	0.003	0.000
SRMR	0.000	0.000	0.017	0.000

C. Model Testing

The structural model analysis to test the hypothesized relationships indicates that all hypothesized relationships were statistically significant. The results are presented in Table 4. Thus, it can be inferred that social media usage for work positively influences cognitive, affective, and social experiences.

Table 4. Model test results

Hypotheses	Beta coefficient	p-value	Decision
H_1: SU → CX	0.908	0.000	Accept
H_2: SU → AX	0.534	0.000	Accept
H_3: SU → SX	0.882	0.000	Accept

D. Model Fit

Standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) and Normed fit index (NFI) were assessed to check the model fit [51, 52]. The results in Table 5 indicate that both SRMR and NFI parameters were as per the recommended threshold, indicating a good fit of the research model.

Table 5. Model fit results

Description	Measure	Result
Model fit	CFI	0.976
	TLI	0.969
	RMSEA	0.049
	SRMR	0.044

E. Test of Difference

Independent samples t-test is used to determine whether a statistically significant difference exists between means in two unrelated groups. The t-test was chosen as the population variance is unknown. The t-test is employed here to test whether there is a statistically significant difference between mean social media usage and experience between sales employees and other members of selling teams. Two different employee groups are taken as the independent variables, and social media usage and employee experience are considered as the dependent variables that are measured using a continuous scale. Thus, it fulfills the criteria of the independent variable being categorical and the dependent variable being continuous. The results are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6. t-test results

Variables	Mean		t- value	Sig	95% Confidence Interval		Null Hypothesis (Reject/Fail to reject)
	Sales employees	Other members			Lower	Upper	
Social media usage	3.49	3.51	−0.21	0.83	−0.27	0.22	Fail to reject
Cognitive experience	3.90	3.74	1.58	0.12	−0.04	0.37	Fail to reject
Affective experience	3.63	3.44	2.34	0.02	0.03	0.35	Rejected
Social experience	3.8	3.55	0.25	0.80	−0.22	0.28	Fail to reject

When the average social media usage of the sales employees was compared with other members of the selling teams, it was found that the p-value was $0.834 > \alpha$ at a 95% confidence level, and there is a zero in the Confidence Interval (−0.271, 0.219). Thus, we reject the null hypothesis, and it can be inferred that there is no statistically significant difference in the mean usage of social media for work between the employees working in the sales and other functions of selling teams.

When the mean cognitive experience of the sales employees was compared with other members of the selling teams, it was found that the p-value- $0.116 > \alpha$ at a 95% confidence level, and there is a zero in the Confidence Interval (−0.041, 0.375) at 95% confidence level. Thus, we reject the null hypothesis, and it can be inferred that there is no statistically significant difference in the mean cognitive experience between the sales employees and other functions of selling teams.

When the mean affective experience of the employees working in the sales employees was compared with other members of the selling teams, it was found that the p-value $0.020 < \alpha$ at a 95% confidence level, and there is no zero in 95% Confidence Interval (0.02999, 0.34863). Thus, accept the null hypothesis, and it can be inferred that there is a significant difference in the mean affective experience between the employees working in the sales and other functions of selling teams. The affective experience of employees working in Sales (Mean −3.62) is higher than the affective experience of other members working in the selling teams (Mean −3.43).

When the mean social experience of the employees working in the sales employees was compared with other members of the selling teams, it was found that the P value- 0.800 > 0.05 at a 95% confidence level, and there is a zero Confidence Interval (−0.216, 0.279) at 95% confidence level. Thus, reject the null hypothesis, and it can be inferred that there is no statistically significant difference in the mean social experience between the employees working in the sales and other functions of selling teams.

VI. Discussion

This study aimed to understand social media usage and the various dimensions of experience (cognitive, affective, and social) among B2B sales employees and other members of the selling teams. The results confirm the proposed model that social media usage for work purposes creates a positive cognitive, affective, and social experience in selling teams. Selling organizations need to enable social media usage for work among selling teams by investing resources. In line with UGT, the positive experience achieved through social media usage for work [53] enables social selling [54]. The positive cognitive experience helps the selling teams enhance their knowledge levels and apply those while handling customers. Similarly, the positive affective experience helps the selling teams to enhance their overall well-being. The main social setting for the selling teams is the interaction with the customers and the positive social experience achieved through social media will help manage these social settings. These findings are crucial for leveraging the social media capabilities of both the sales employees and other members of the selling teams. This positive experience (cognitive, affective, and social) helps to achieve other organizational and individual outcomes.

Social media usage at work was not significantly different between sales and other members of selling teams. This shows an increased adoption of social media by all sections of employees within the organization. Further, this shows that B2B organizations have realized the importance of social media's benefits at work and encourage employees to use the same for work. At the individual level, employees in the sales domain also realized the benefits of social media and integrated it into their work. On the various dimensions of experience, cognitive and social experience did not elicit significant differences between sales employees and other members of the selling teams. This can be attributed to the harmony between the sales employees and the other members of the selling team in their singular goal of achieving the team objectives. Employees in B2B are rational in their choices, which enhances that the cognitive and social experiences did not differ much between sales employees and other members of selling teams. However, the affective experience, which primarily operates at the individual level, is significantly different between sales employees and other members of the selling teams. This could be attributed to their background demographics even though the team's objectives unite them.

VII. Contributions, Conclusion and Limitations

A. Theoretical Contributions

The findings in this research offer several contributions. First, this study on social media usage among B2B sales employees and other functional employees is a key addition to the B2B social media literature. The positive experience of the selling teams because of social media usage at work is a key addition. Second, the study on the user experience using UGT is a unique contribution to the employee experience and UGT literature on social media. The enhanced understanding provides a clearer picture of how uses and gratifications are related to experience. Finally, this study involved salespeople and their user experience dimensions is a key contribution to the social selling and sales management literature.

B. Managerial Implications

The study provides several valuable insights to practitioners. First, social media usage by sales employees and other members of selling teams helps the practitioners carve their resource allocation and social media strategy. Second, the positive influence on experience dimensions reveals interesting insights for practitioners to define their social media content accordingly. The content related to the affective dimension needs customization at the individual level. Finally, this study enhances buyer's understanding of their selling team's social media usage and its linkage with various user experience dimensions.

The study involving selling teams revealed that social media usage at work positively influenced their experiences at cognitive, affective, and social levels. The study involved all selling team members, including sales employees and other members. The study further examined the fact that there was no significant difference in cognitive and social experience between these employee groups. However, affective experience significantly differed. The confirmation of the study model reveals that employee experience and its dimensions are positively influenced by social media usage at work.

There are a few limitations to this study. First, this study covers the role of social media usage on various dimensions of user experience among salespeople in B2B. This can be extended to other functions like buyers, buying centers, research and development, finance, HR, etc.. Second, this study can be extended into B2C domain by bringing other dimensions of experience like physical to bring in a holistic perspective. Third, this study was conducted in the Indian pharma B2B context and hence generalizing to other countries and other industries is a logical extension. Finally, this study covers only social media's role in user experience. However, other emergent technologies like artificial intelligence, machine learning, the Internet of Things, etc, can be studied to understand usage's role in user experience.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Author Contributions

B.A. and S.J. together conducted the conceptualization of the study by going through the initial current literature and its relevance in the academic and industry context. Then, B.A. conducted the detailed literature study followed by arriving at the study model. Together with S.J., B.A. developed the survey questionnaire. S.J. then took lead in reaching out to the respondents to collect the response. B.A. and S.J. then jointly conducted the data analysis. Both authors assembled the data and wrote the paper together. All authors had approved the final version.

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