

How social media and flexible work arrangements harden salespeople to abusive supervision

Riley Dugan^{a,1,*}, Andrew Edelblum^{a,1}, Ashish Kalra^{a,b,1}, Na Young Lee^{a,1}, Sangsuk Yoon^{a,1}

^a School of Business Administration, Miriam Hall-710, University of Dayton, 300 College Park Dayton, OH 45469-2271, United States of America

^b Department of Marketing, TA Pai Management Institute (TAPMI), Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Manipal, Karnataka 576104, India

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ABSTRACT

Research supports the role of leaders in driving positive sales outcomes. However, while scholars have extensively analyzed the effects of positive leadership styles, the impact of negative managerial behaviors has received comparably scant attention. Grounded in job demands-resources theory (JD-R), we propose a conceptual framework that examines the effect of abusive supervision on job embeddedness and subsequent turnover intentions. Using unique panel data from 237 business-to-business (B2B) salespeople, we find that abusive supervision results in higher turnover intentions, and that this effect is explained partially by reduced job embeddedness. What can be done, then, to curb these effects and harden salespeople to the threat of challenging leadership? Our results indicate that the provision of two critical job resources—workplace social media (i.e., digital communication-based platforms) and flexible work accommodations (i.e., idiosyncratic deals)—jointly mitigate the negative effect of abusive supervision on salespeople's sense of workplace attachment. We conclude our research with implications and directions for future researchers interested in uncovering additional ways to reduce the pernicious impact of abusive supervisory environments on salesperson well-being.

1. Introduction

The sales profession carries a perilous capacity for stress and exhaustion due, in part, to its rampant “hustle” culture. Such work is often characterized as fast-paced and anxiety-inducing (e.g., Amin, Arndt, & Tanner, 2023; Lussier, Hartmann, & Bolander, 2021; Lussier, Philp, Hartmann, & Wieland, 2021), with ever-looming pressures to meet escalating performance quotas and engage in ongoing customer follow-ups (Friend, Ranjan, & Johnson, 2019; Kemp, Leila Borders, & Ricks, 2013). These demands are particularly salient for business-to-business (B2B) salespeople, whose boundary-spanner role entails understanding and bridging the needs of multiple client organizations (Amin et al., 2023; De Ruyter, De Jong, & Wetzels, 2009). As a recent example, salespeople faced increasing pressures exacerbated by COVID-19, working amidst numerous uncertainties such as inventory shortages, supply chain disruptions, virtual work arrangements, and the threat of permanent dismissal (Hartmann & Lussier, 2020). A U.K. study reported that salespeople were diagnosed with depression or anxiety at a rate

three times higher than the national average, reflecting the challenging work environments they experienced during the pandemic (Pugh, 2021). Such emotionally taxing conditions have led to increased turnover, decreased performance, and—notably—a rise in mental wellness challenges among B2B salespeople (Bande, Fernández-Ferrín, Varela, & Jaramillo, 2015; Lussier, Hartmann, & Bolander, 2021).

What might be done to curb these alarming trends? We note that in the face of work-related hardship, many employees turn to the aid of a supportive manager. Indeed, extant research has shown that by providing support, boosting motivation, and modeling adaptive sales behaviors, top-down leadership has a major role in helping salespeople respond to various work-related challenges (Alavi, Ehlig, & Habel, 2022; Alavi, Habel, Guenzi, & Wieseke, 2018; Ingram, LaForge, Locander, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2005; Kalra, Briggs, & Schrock, 2023; Kirkland, Edwards, & Flaherty, 2021). Yet, evidence suggests a concerning prevalence of abusive supervision in B2B sales contexts (Daniel, 2022; Tepper, 2000; Vogel & Bolino, 2020), with a particularly adverse impact on employee self-worth (Bani-Melhem, Quratulain, & Al-Hawari, 2021),

* Corresponding author at: Professor of Marketing, School of Business Administration, Miriam Hall-714, University of Dayton, 300 College Park Dayton, OH 45469-2271, United States of America.

E-mail addresses: rdugan1@udayton.edu (R. Dugan), aedelblum1@udayton.edu (A. Edelblum), akalra1@udayton.edu (A. Kalra), nlee01@udayton.edu (N.Y. Lee), syoon1@udayton.edu (S. Yoon).

¹ All authors contributed equally.

emotional energy (Al-Hawari, Bani-Melhem, & Quratulain, 2020), and overall performance (Gabler & Hill, 2015; Shin, Hur, & Hwang, 2022; Yang, Jaramillo, Liu, Ye, & Huang, 2021; see Fig. 1 for a review).

In response to growing recognition among researchers and practitioners of the importance of salesperson mental well-being (Dugan, Ubal, & Scott, 2023; Schwepker, Valentine, Giacalone, & Promislo, 2021), the current research investigates the effect of abusive supervision (i.e., subordinates' perceptions of the "extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors—excluding physical contact"; *Tepper, 2000*, p. 178) on B2B salespeople's job embeddedness and turnover intentions. Abusive supervision is notably prevalent in modern workaday culture, with reports of harsh leadership styles from middle managers and high-profile executives alike. As an example, Elon Musk has faced scrutiny for his unwavering expectations of employees at Tesla and X (formerly Twitter), including labeling subordinates as "soft" for not working on weekends (Kim, 2022). Public comments from supervisors have similarly received media attention and driven a dialogue about the disposable ways in which some managers view their subordinates. In a widely circulated speaking engagement, for instance, Australian real estate developer Tim Gurner asserted that employees are not putting forth sufficient effort and should face a 40 to 50% increase in job losses to realign performance expectations (Turnbull & Sherman, 2023).

Our work examines the effect of these work pressures on the B2B sales function. Drawing on job demands-resources (JD-R) theory—which considers the role of draining (i.e., demands) and energizing (i.e., resources) workplace factors on employee well-being and performance—we underscore abusive supervision as a pernicious element of workplace culture (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). Specifically, we propose that abusive supervision is a job demand that leads to a decrease in job embeddedness (i.e., employees' feelings of connection and attachment to their current job and organization; Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, & Erez, 2001), leading to an increase in turnover intentions subsequently (i.e., employees' active desire to search for another job; see Jones, Chonko, Rangarajan, & Roberts, 2007).

We further uncover two key resources—social media use (i.e., employees' job-related utilization of digital platforms) and flexible work arrangements² (i.e., idiosyncratic deals; individually bargained arrangements made to suit specific employee needs; Bal & Boehm, 2019)—that we submit will drive B2B salespeople to maintain resilience in the face of abusive supervision. Critically, we focus on social media use and flexible work arrangements because these strategies represent critical low-cost, high-return investments currently being made by contemporary organizations to (a) advance digital initiatives and (b) incorporate personalized work schedules into existing human resource practices (Bal & Boehm, 2019; Itani, Kalra, & Riley, 2022; Kalra, Lee, & Dugan, 2023). Further, prior research has suggested that social media and flexible work arrangements empower employees by offering socio-emotional support in handling various job demands (e.g., Yousaf, Rasheed, Kaur, Islam, & Dhir, 2022) and granting salespeople control over their work environment (e.g., Hornung, Rousseau, & Glaser, 2008). We, therefore, predict that both resources serve to mitigate the detrimental impact of abusive supervision on job embeddedness and turnover intentions.

Using unique panel data from 237 B2B salespeople working across a variety of industries, we find that abusive supervision reduces job embeddedness and ultimately drives higher turnover intentions. However, these effects are curbed significantly by salesperson social media use and the provision of flexible work arrangements. Overall, our work sheds light on how the strategic provision of specific job resources braces

B2B salespeople against the threat of a difficult workplace environment and, more broadly, situates firms to better account for salespeople's mental well-being needs. In so doing, we make three principal contributions to theory and practice.

First, we provide insight into the impact of abusive supervision on B2B salespeople, a population about whom there is limited well-being research, despite being highly vulnerable to the effects of a demanding work environment. While scholars have examined the damaging effects of toxic leadership on frontline employees (Fischer, Tian, Lee, & Hughes, 2021; Gabler & Hill, 2015; Gabler, Rapp, & Richey, 2014; Jiang & Gu, 2016), our work provides special consideration to the B2B sales context, a boundary-spanning area with a discrete set of emotionally taxing obstacles. Specifically, our research highlights the pivotal role of abusive supervision as a prominent workplace stressor with a substantial impact on B2B salespeople's intentions to leave their positions, and this can be attributed to a concurrent decrease in job embeddedness. Such insights further contribute to the relatively scant literature on negative supervisory behaviors like abusive supervision (e.g., Gabler & Hill, 2015; *Tepper, 2000*). Thus, through this investigation, we uncover novel relationships surrounding the impact of draining environmental factors (e.g., abusive supervisory conditions) on B2B salespeople's propensity to engage in the workplace.

Second, we demonstrate the role of social media as a critical job resource in mitigating the detrimental effects of abusive supervision on B2B salespeople. As B2B organizations continue to invest in digital initiatives, some firms have touted social media as a distinct source of competitive advantage (Itani et al., 2022; Kalra, Briggs, & Schrock, 2023) and a key driver of salesperson performance (e.g., Rodriguez, Peterson, & Krishnan, 2012). Nonetheless, there has been a relatively slow adoption rate of social media in B2B sales environments (Bill, Feurer, & Klarmann, 2020), as well as a more general lack of understanding about the benefits of workplace social media use within these contexts (Itani et al., 2022). Prior research has shown that social media can be a vital tool for salespeople in gathering information or selling products and services (Agnihotri, Dingus, Hu, & Krush, 2016; Kalra, Briggs, & Schrock, 2023). Our work highlights an additional benefit of workplace social media use by demonstrating its utility as a support mechanism that helps B2B salespeople manage their job conditions.

Third, we offer guidance to B2B sales organizations in designing their human resource policies to effectively manage work situations characterized by the presence of abusive supervision. Notably, there is a paucity of literature analyzing the role of organizational guidelines in curbing the effects of toxic leadership, and the sales literature has only recently begun exploring the effects of flexible work arrangements specifically (e.g., Kalra, Lee, & Dugan, 2023). To address this omission, we examine flexible work arrangements (i.e., idiosyncratic deals) as a top-down strategy for driving feelings of job embeddedness (Bal & Boehm, 2019; Kalra, Lee, & Dugan, 2023; Shifrin & Michel, 2022). Indeed, the availability of flexible work arrangements has risen in recent years, particularly in response to disruptions triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, and these changes are expected to become established as standard organizational practices moving forward (Shifrin & Michel, 2022). Overall, we find that flexible work arrangements motivate salespeople to reciprocate positive behaviors toward their organization—even despite an emotionally taxing supervisory environment. We further suggest that the effects of flexible work arrangements may be more profound in sales contexts precisely because of the profession's inherent heterogeneity (Hornung et al., 2008). Our conceptual model is shown in Fig. 2 below.

2. Theoretical background and hypothesis development

2.1. JD-R theory

JD-R theory is a seminal occupational stress model that considers the role of the work environment on employee well-being and performance.

² Flexible work arrangements are implemented through idiosyncratic deals. Hence, idiosyncratic deals and flexible work arrangements are interchangeably used in this paper.

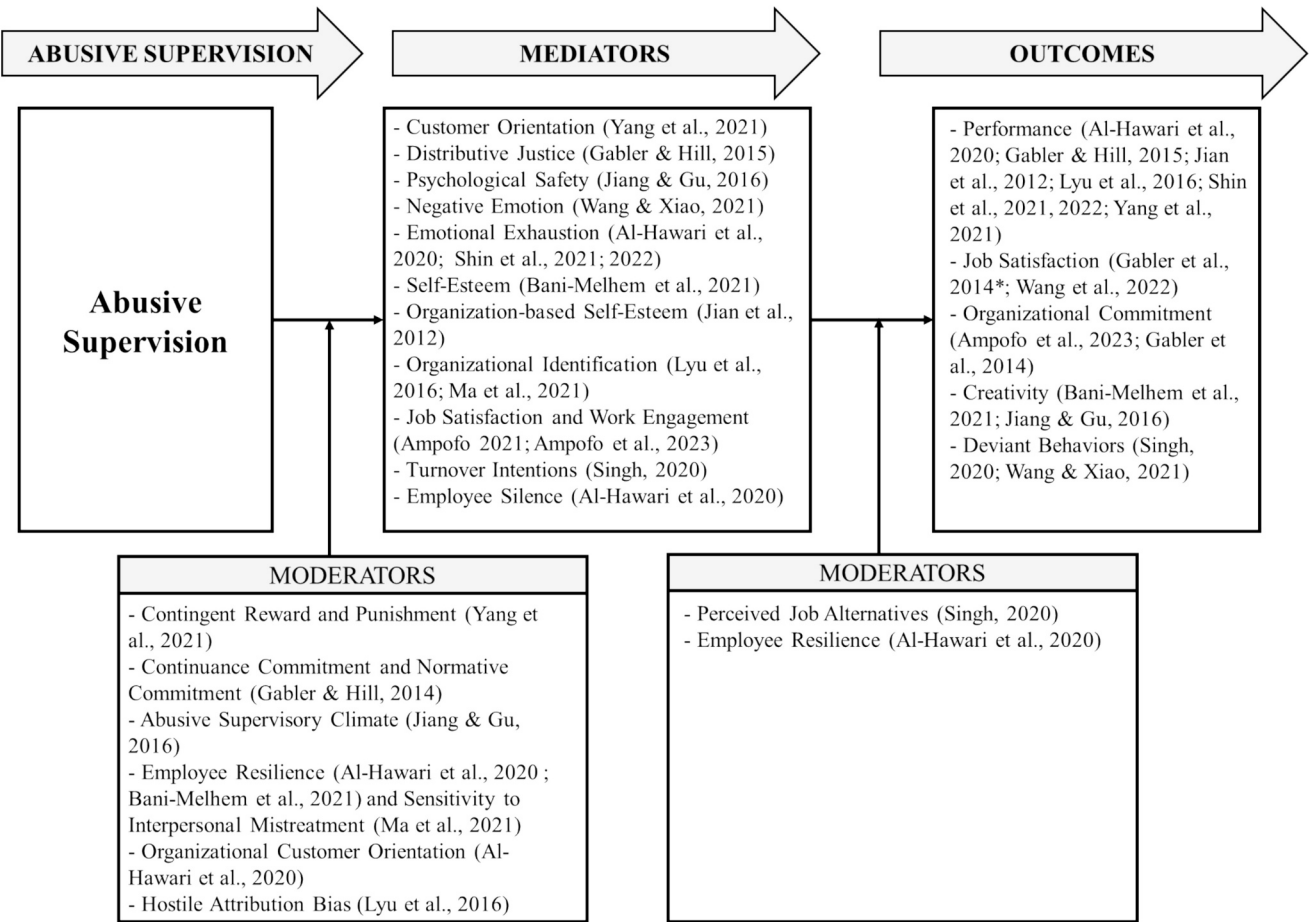


Fig. 1. Illustrative research on Abusive Supervision (Ampofo, 2021; Ampofo, Ampofo, Nkrumah and Ameza-Xemalordzo, 2023; Ma, Zhou and Mu, 2021; Shin, Hur and Kang, 2021; Singh, 2020; Wang and Xiao, 2021; Wang, Lin, Chen and Wu, 2022).

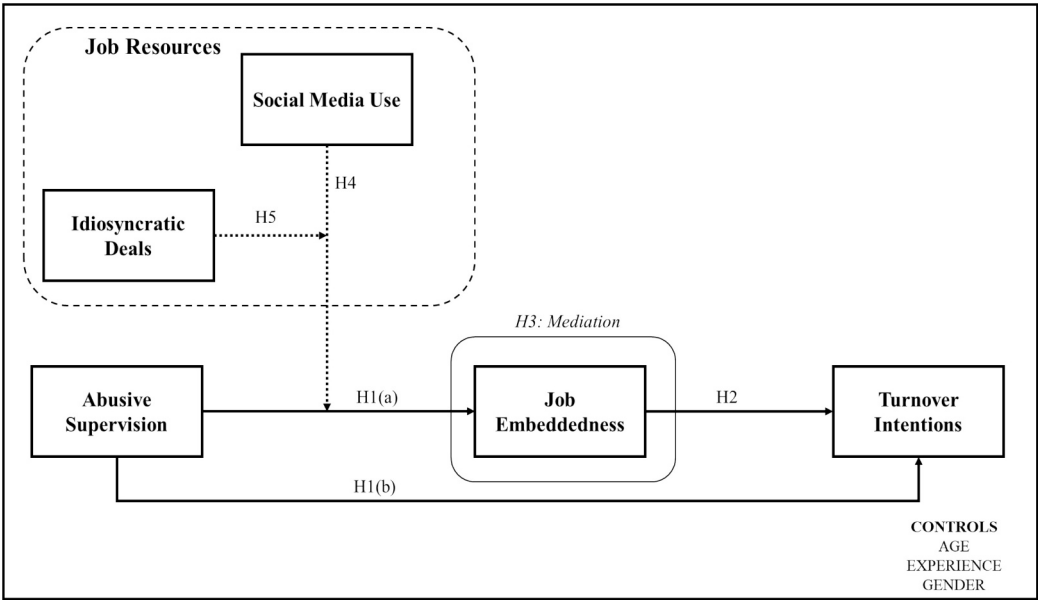


Fig. 2. Hypothesized Model.

Broadly speaking, JD-R theory delineates the interplay between two general risk factor categories associated with work-related stress: job demands and job resources. Job demands represent the various aspects

of work that “require sustained physical and/or psychological (cognitive and emotional) effort or skills” (e.g., long work shifts, challenging deadlines, task-switching; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 312). Such

demands are associated with various degrees of strenuous energy costs, including depression, stress, and emotional exhaustion (Hoppner, Mills, & Griffith, 2021). Conversely, job resources represent the various aspects of work that help employees thrive in the workplace (e.g., social support, autonomy, time control, and performance feedback; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Such resources are associated with various degrees of energy maintenance or maximization (i.e., by mitigating the effects of taxing job demands).

We adopt JD-R theory in the current research as a lens for investigating the joint impact of draining (i.e., demands) and energizing (i.e., resources) work-related characteristics on salesperson well-being. Notably, the sales domain presents a fast-paced work culture with employees increasingly susceptible to mental wellness challenges (Pugh, 2021). Stress and pressure are particularly prevalent in frontline contexts, where employees are tasked in hyper-competitive work environments with persistent one-to-one customer interaction (Gabler et al., 2014; Jian, Kwan, Qiu, Liu, & Yim, 2012). Further, because the frontline sales manager's compensation is often a direct function of subordinate performance, he or she is likely to feel a unique set of work-related pressures (e.g., reaching aggregate sales metrics and quotas), the emotional burdens of which are passed along to employees.

In acknowledgment of these sensitive dynamics, researchers have given increased attention to salesperson well-being and its many associated predictors and consequences (Dugan et al., 2023; Schwepker et al., 2021). Still, only scant work has been done in specific consideration of mental well-being in the B2B context (e.g., Gabler et al., 2014; Gabler & Hill, 2015; Lussier, Beeler, Bolander, & Hartmann, 2023). We suggest that B2B salespeople deserve unique recognition in this space as boundary-spanners tasked with understanding and bridging the needs of multiple client organizations (De Ruyter et al., 2009). The stressors associated with a B2B sales role may, thus, present a distinctive set of work-related challenges. What are these strains, and, equally important, how might they be diminished? In the following sections, we discuss abusive supervision as a critical job demand for B2B salespeople, then argue for social media use and idiosyncratic deals as job resources with mitigating effects.

2.2. The effect of abusive supervision on job embeddedness and turnover intention

Supervisors play a vital role in shaping how subordinates feel and perform within the organization. However, the strong influence of organizational leadership on various work-related outcomes is somewhat of a double-edged sword. While managers have a tremendous capacity for positive supervisory impact, extant research also details the destructive side of toxic leadership characteristics on employee well-being and organizational health (Fischer et al., 2021; Tepper, 2007). In the current research, and as previously argued, we focus on one such negative leader behavior—abusive supervision—that involves discrete managerial actions such as breaking promises, failing to give proper credit, wrongfully assigning blame, exploding in fits of anger, and ridiculing employees in front of others (Fischer et al., 2021; Tepper, 2000).

We echo prior research by conceptualizing abusive supervision as a critical job demand that drives strain and burnout among subordinates (Huang, Lin, & Lu, 2020; Tepper, 2000). Indeed, scholars have demonstrated that perceptions of abusive supervision are related to higher emotional exhaustion (Wheeler, Halbesleben, & Whitman, 2013), reduced manager-employee interaction quality (Lian, Ferris, & Brown, 2012), and greater supervisor contact avoidance (Yagil, Ben-Zur, & Tamir, 2011). Consequently, employees experiencing these emotionally taxing work conditions may disengage from workplace life to varying extremes (Barnes, Lucianetti, Bhawe, & Christian, 2015; Tepper, Duffy, Henle, & Lambert, 2006), whether by curtailing productivity (Yagil et al., 2011) or taking more days off from work (Lyu, Zhu, Zhong, & Hu, 2016). Taken together, these findings suggest a negative relationship between abusive supervision and job

embeddedness. Stated differently, employees become less attached to their work under conditions of abusive supervision.

Subordinates may, in turn, explore strategies for alleviating the job demands associated with working in abusive environments (Tepper, Moss, Lockhart, & Carr, 2007). In addition to disengaging from work, employees may opt to leave their jobs altogether. That is, to relieve feelings of work-related stress, a subordinate may elect to quit the organization and thereby terminate his or her relationship with the abusive supervisor—a pattern notably mirrored in work on the severing of toxic romantic relationships (Tepper, 2000). A wealth of prior research has corroborated this association between abusive supervision and turnover intentions, with subordinates more likely to contemplate leaving their jobs when perceptions of abusive supervision are high (Mackey, Frieder, Brees, & Martinko, 2017; Martinko, Harvey, Brees, & Mackey, 2013; Tepper, 2000; Tepper, Simon, & Park, 2017). Based on these collective findings, we hypothesize the following:

H1a. Abusive supervision is negatively related to job embeddedness.

H1b. Abusive supervision is positively related to turnover intentions.

Consistent with this line of reasoning, there is substantial empirical evidence that job embeddedness and turnover intentions are negatively linked (Holtom, Mitchell, Lee, & Inderrieden, 2005; Jiang, Liu, McKay, Lee, & Mitchell, 2012; Mitchell et al., 2001). Put simply, attachment to the workplace makes leaving a job feel like a tremendous loss or sacrifice, as quitting means letting go of the cherished social ties and organizational culture to which the employee has grown inextricably connected (Mitchell et al., 2001). Indeed, job embeddedness has been shown to predict employee turnover, even when controlling for factors like job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Mitchell et al., 2001). Relatedly, in a large-scale meta-analysis, Jiang et al. (2012) illustrate a robust negative relationship between job embeddedness and subsequent turnover (i.e., both intended and actual). Job embeddedness has even mitigated turnover in contexts involving unexpected negative shocks (e.g., significant family illness, unanticipated mergers, and coworker layoffs; Holtom et al., 2005). Thus, consistent with the existing literature, we propose that higher levels of job embeddedness are associated with lower turnover intentions among B2B salespeople:

H2. Job embeddedness is negatively related to turnover intentions.

We further note that job embeddedness partly results from strong relational ties between the employee and his or her coworkers and supervisors (Mitchell et al., 2001). However, such feelings of kinship are less likely to develop when abusive leaders cultivate an overtly stressful and competitive work environment. Indeed, abusive supervisors have been found to diminish workplace involvement by making employees feel incompetent and disrespected (Barnes et al., 2015; Mackey et al., 2017; Teng, Cheng, & Chen, 2021), and these workplace dynamics greatly reduce the quality and frequency of manager-subordinate interaction (Lian et al., 2012; Yagil et al., 2011). As such, we suggest that abusive supervision reduces the job embeddedness of B2B salespeople, which, in turn, leads to increased turnover intentions (Holtom, Mitchell, Lee, & Eberly, 2008; Jiang et al., 2012). Taken together, we posit that abusive supervision motivates turnover intentions, and this is driven by an indirect effect of job embeddedness. Stated formally, we hypothesize the following:

H3. The positive relationship between abusive supervision and turnover intentions is mediated by a decrease in job embeddedness.

2.3. The moderating role of workplace-based job resources

Thus far, we have considered the harsh impact of abusive supervision on job embeddedness and turnover intentions, two important factors related to salesperson mental well-being (Dugan et al., 2023; Schwepker et al., 2021). But are there ways of curbing these unfavorable effects? In line with JD-R theory, we consider abusive supervision a significant job

demand that exacerbates strain but submit that these detrimental effects can be attenuated by allocating certain job resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). In light of critical investments being made to advance digital initiatives and flexible work accommodations, we propose that social media use and flexible work arrangements act as vital resources that attenuate emotional strains stemming from abusive supervision. That is, we propose that social media use and idiosyncratic deals mitigate the negative effect of abusive supervision on job embeddedness (Bal & Boehm, 2019; Itani et al., 2022; Kalra, Briggs, & Schrock, 2023; Kalra, Lee, & Dugan, 2023). Critically, these distinctive, cost-effective resources are unified by their ability to confer a sense of empowerment to employees within their roles. Indeed, from a self-determination theory perspective, social media use and flexible work arrangements enrich employees' autonomy (i.e., control of one's behaviors), competence (i.e., proficiency in one's actions), and relatedness (i.e., belonging among one's group)—three psychological needs long discussed as central to the foundation of individual well-being and personal growth (Deci & Ryan, 2012; Gagné & Deci, 2005). This is evident in (a) the broadening scope of how salespeople are encouraged to interact with internal and external stakeholders (i.e., social media use) and (b) the tailored criteria that establish the terms of the salesperson's employment (i.e., flexible work arrangements). It should be noted that these two job resources are conceptually distinct; the former is an individual factor exercised by an individual salesperson, and the latter is a managerial factor implemented by an organization. Consequently, they serve different roles as critical resources that can help mitigate the negative effects of abusive supervision. We further outline our reasoning for these specific resources in the sections that follow.

Salesperson social media use. Research has identified sales as a business domain undergoing radical digital transformation, with organizations adapting their existing sales practices to keep pace with an ever-changing business environment (Agnihotri & John-Mariadoss, 2022). In turn, B2B practitioners have expressed growing interest in leveraging social media as a key tool in the sales process—a notable shift from salespeople's low reported adoption rate of social media in earlier years (Agnihotri & John-Mariadoss, 2022; Gustafson, Pomirleanu, Mariadoss, & Johnson, 2021). Accordingly, salespeople have come to use various digital communication-based technologies to achieve their job-related goals (e.g., content generation, network development; Agnihotri et al., 2016). For example, Instagram offers the ability for B2B sales organizations to curate a visual marketing blog with engaging pictures, captions, and hashtags. Slack, meanwhile, promises salespeople a way to “cut out conversation-killing email and talk with customers in a real-time buyer channel” (Salesforce, 2021). Across these various platforms, social media provides a means for salespeople to expand customer outreach, circumvent messaging inefficiencies, and proactively service clients (Agnihotri & John-Mariadoss, 2022). This, collectively, poses tremendous benefits to salesperson performance (Agnihotri et al., 2016; Bowen, Lai-Bennejean, Haas, & Rangarajan, 2021; Guenzi & Nijssen, 2020; Itani et al., 2022; Ogilvie, Agnihotri, Rapp, & Trainor, 2018).

Anchored in JD-R theory, we argue that the use of social media by salespeople acts as a strategic resource to mitigate job demands. Existing literature has documented social media as an asset that aids employees in managing work-related stress (Itani et al., 2022; Leonardi, 2014; Leonardi, Huysman, & Steinfield, 2013), facilitating the exchange of information and strengthening relationships with colleagues and external stakeholders (Itani et al., 2022; Leonardi, 2014; Leonardi et al., 2013; Yousaf et al., 2022). This contributes to the creation of socio-emotional support networks for salespeople within their organizations (e.g., Yousaf et al., 2022). Furthermore, research indicates that social media serves as an efficacious tool for fostering community among employees, thereby enhancing well-being and diminishing intentions to leave the organization (Fu, Sawang, & Sun, 2019; Klingelhofer & Meier, 2023; Yingjie, Deng, & Pan, 2019; Zhang, Ma, Xu, & Xu, 2019). This positive effect is attributed, in part, to salespeople's expanded

access to online networks, which has been shown to revitalize employees' enthusiasm and commitment to their roles (Yousaf et al., 2022).

Even more germane to the topic of abusive supervision, social media offers a cathartic platform for employees to air work-related grievances—including those criticisms directed against a disparaging manager (Arain, Bhatti, Ashraf, & Fang, 2020). It is well-established, for instance, that venting and commiserating with trusted others can externalize pain, reduce stress, and cement social bonds (e.g., Rimé, 2009). The provision of workplace social media use may, therefore, make it easier for employees to receive sympathy from others and feel comforted in response to offenses committed by an abusive supervisor. This social support, we argue, will serve as a resource that attenuates the strains from job demands, helping salespeople achieve their work goals under demanding circumstances.

Altogether, social media use empowers salespeople in line with the three critical needs established in self-determination theory. Namely, this resource provides more flexibility in how employees communicate with clients and coworkers (i.e., appeal to autonomy), offers a critical sales channel for streamlined sales execution (i.e., appeal to competence), and establishes a critical avenue for open communication (i.e., appeal to relatedness; Deci & Ryan, 2012; Gagné & Deci, 2005). Building on this line of reasoning, we propose that social media use will weaken the negative effect of abusive supervision on job embeddedness. Specifically, we predict that the negative effects of abusive supervision effects will be mitigated when social media use is high.

H4. Abusive supervision and social media use interact such that the negative effect of abusive supervision on job embeddedness is attenuated at higher (vs. lower) levels of social media use.

Flexible work arrangements. We further contend that flexible work arrangements, combined with social media use, serve as a critical job resource for B2B salespeople in alleviating the mental strains associated with abusive supervision. Flexible work arrangements are implemented through idiosyncratic deals—personalized and jointly negotiated employment agreements between the employee and employer (Bal & Boehm, 2019; Rousseau, Ho, & Greenberg, 2006). Idiosyncratic deals are tailored to suit an employee's skills, interests, and preferences about various work-related provisions, including job conditions (e.g., remote work or flexible work hours), task assignments (e.g., client-matching), and career development opportunities (e.g., paid conference and workshop attendance; Kong, Ho, & Garg, 2020; Rousseau et al., 2006). Not surprisingly, studies have demonstrated a consistent, positive effect of flexible work arrangements on a variety of critical work outcomes, including job satisfaction (Kong et al., 2020; Rousseau et al., 2006), job engagement (Bal & Boehm, 2019; Rousseau, 2005), work meaningfulness (Ng & Lucianetti, 2016), and work-life balance (Bal, De Jong, Jansen, & Bakker, 2012)—as well as a decrease in work-family conflict (Hornung et al., 2008), extended absences (Guerrero, Bentein, & Garcia-Falières, 2021), and turnover intentions (Ho & Tekleab, 2016; Hornung et al., 2008; Kong et al., 2020).

From a JD-R theory perspective, flexible work arrangements (i.e., idiosyncratic deals) also act as a resource that alleviates job demands. Through jointly negotiated employment contracts, flexible work arrangements grant employees a sense of control over their work conditions (Kong et al., 2020; Rousseau et al., 2006). This arrangement signals a symmetric power structure that puts the employee on equal footing with the employer and compensates for deficiencies in other areas of the employment contract (Hornung, Rousseau, & Glaser, 2009; Rousseau et al., 2006). Consequently, flexible work arrangements have been shown to make employees feel seen, valued, and appreciated by the organization, if not by their direct supervisor (Rousseau, 2005).

Building on this line of reasoning, we contend in our study context that flexible work arrangements alleviate mental strains stemming from abusive supervision. Personalized accommodations granted by flexible work arrangements may signal to salespeople that they are in such demand that the organization is willing to deviate from existing policies to

ensure an optimal working environment. In such a setting, employees can better cope with emotional strains arising from abusive supervision. Thus, flexible work arrangements also empower salespeople in line with the three critical needs established in self-determination theory. Namely, these arrangements grant employees the opportunity to work in line with their personal preferences (i.e., appeal to autonomy), make these individuals feel needed by the organization (i.e., appeal to competence), and establish a tone of inter-organizational openness and care (i.e., appeal to relatedness; Deci & Ryan, 2012; Gagné & Deci, 2005). We suggest that when combined with social media use, flexible work arrangements offered via idiosyncratic deals will serve as a resource that further cushions the impact of abusive supervision on job embeddedness. Specifically, we anticipate that the attenuating effects of high social media use on the impact of abusive supervision on job embeddedness (H_4) will be strengthened (weakened) when idiosyncratic deals are high (low). Taken together, we hypothesize the following:

H5. Abusive supervision, social media use, and idiosyncratic deals interact such that the negative effect of abusive supervision on job embeddedness is most attenuated when social media use and idiosyncratic deals are high.

3. Methodology and results

3.1. Sample details and measurement items

We collected survey responses from a cross-sectional, multi-industry sample of B2B salespeople recruited from an online panel (i.e., Qualtrics). This approach is consistent with recent sales research that has explored similar databases to assess empirical relationships among various factors (e.g., Hartmann, Plouffe, Kohsuwan, & Cote, 2020; Hoppner et al., 2021). Indeed, the reliability of Qualtrics data is considered suitable for rigorous academic research (Douglas, Ewell, & Brauer, 2023; Eyal, David, Andrew, Zak, & Ekaterina, 2021). The research team provided an online survey link, and this was distributed by participating firms to their respective panels of eligible respondents. To ensure high data quality, attention checks were embedded throughout the survey. For example, for two different questions—irrelevant to the core variables in the survey—respondents were told to “click agree on this question.” Respondents were dropped from the survey if they failed to answer these questions according to the instructions. We received a final sample of 237 B2B salespeople (30.8% female, $M_{Age} = 39.57$, $SD_{Age} = 9.09$). Altogether, the final sample was diverse, with representation from salespeople working in six broad industries (e.g., financial, manufacturing, pharmaceutical) for an average of roughly 12 years (see full sample characteristics in Appendix A). By gathering data from a variety of firms across several industries, we generated a wide sample with evidence of cross-sector generalizability (Gabler et al., 2014).

3.2. Measures

We adapted scales used in prior research to measure the constructs invoked in the current study. Unless otherwise noted, all variables were rated using seven-point Likert scales anchored at 1 = “strongly disagree” and 7 = “strongly agree.”

Independent variable. Our focal independent variable—abusive supervision—was adopted from Gabler and Hill’s five-item scale (2015). Participants indicated the extent to which they agreed with statements such as “My manager puts me down in front of others” (1 = “strongly disagree,” 7 = “strongly agree”).

Dependent variables. Job embeddedness was measured using Dugan, Hochstein, Rouziou, and Britton (2019) three-item scale. Participants indicated the extent to which they agreed with statements such as “I feel attached to my company” (1 = “strongly disagree,” 7 = “strongly agree”). Salespeople further rated their turnover intentions with a three-

item scale adapted from Jones et al. (2007). Participants indicated the extent to which they agreed with statements such as “It is likely that I will actively look for a new job this year” (1 = “strongly disagree,” 7 = “strongly agree”).

Moderator variables. Salesperson social media use was adopted from Agnihotri et al. (2016) three-item scale. Participants indicated the extent to which they agreed with statements such as “I am using social media to its fullest potential for supporting my own work” (1 = “strongly disagree,” 7 = “strongly agree”). Next, we operationalized flexible work arrangements by capturing perceptions of idiosyncratic deals by adapting Bal and Boehm (2019) scale and modifying it to reflect contemporary sales practices (e.g., Ahearne, Jelinek, & Jones, 2007). Specifically, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they are likely to receive various workplace benefits (e.g., permission to schedule flexibly) in comparison to their peers within the organization (1 = “not at all likely,” 7 = “very likely”). Based on the input of three sales researchers, we added two items to the original scale (“reductions in burdensome administrative work,” “additional paid time off (PTO) for personal reasons”) to more fully capture the meaning of idiosyncratic deals in a sales setting.

Control variables. We gathered measurements of salesperson age, gender, and years of sales experience to account for their potential effects on job embeddedness and turnover intentions (Hartmann & Rutherford, 2015; Jones et al., 2007; Macintosh & Krush, 2014).

3.3. Analysis and results

Construct reliability and validity were assessed using standard procedures. Cronbach’s alpha of all measures was greater than the established threshold of 0.7, and all composite reliability (CR) scores were well above 0.85; this confirms that our study items were internally consistent and captured the intended superordinate constructs. All factor loadings were also above 0.6 and significant, providing evidence that these measures have suitable levels of convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). We further demonstrate appropriate discriminant validity in two ways. First, all average variance extracted (AVE) values were above the squared correlation between any two constructs (see Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Second, heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio values were well below the cutoff of 0.85 across all measures (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015).

Lastly, to confirm the predictive relevance of our endogenous variables, we utilized a blindfolding procedure to calculate Stone-Geisser’s Q^2 values (Geisser, 1974) for job embeddedness ($Q^2 = 0.42$) and turnover intentions ($Q^2 = 0.74$). These values were well above zero, thereby validating the predictive relevance of our study constructs. See Table 1 for descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations. Full details on our measurement items and factor loadings are available in Appendix B.

Because we collected responses from a single source (i.e., salespeople), we next utilized a partialing-out marker variable approach to address any potential for common method bias (CMB; Lindell & Whitney, 2001; Tehseen, Ramayah, & Sajilan, 2017). This technique is applied by determining the correlation between latent variables and the marker variable—any measure that does not have a theoretical linkage with key variables noted in the hypotheses. Our marker variable was each salesperson’s preference for the color blue (Simmering, Fuller, Richardson, Ocal, & Atinc, 2015). In turn, we ran two different models—one with the marker variable and one without—then compared the R^2 of endogenous constructs in our model. As shown in Table 2, there was no significant change in R^2 across models for either of the dependent variables (i.e., job embeddedness and turnover intentions), thereby providing sufficient evidence that CMB does not pose a concern in our analysis. Lastly, we found significant two-way and three-way interactions in our main hypothesis tests, which further confirms a lack of CMB (Siemsen, Roth, & Oliveira, 2010).

Additionally, because our data were collected using survey items and for a specific research purpose, we assessed the possibility of

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Matrix.

Constructs	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Abusive Supervision (1)	2.48	1.78								
Job Embeddedness (2)	5.69	1.09	−0.09							
Social Media Use (3)	5.54	1.45	0.06	0.34**						
Idiosyncratic deals (4)	5.21	1.29	0.12	0.37**	0.54**					
Turnover Intentions (5)	3.61	2.10	0.55**	−0.18**	0.09	0.10				
Age (6)	39.58	9.09	−0.14**	−0.16**	−0.25**	−0.18**	−0.20**			
Experience (7)	11.80	7.57	−0.11	−0.07	−0.18**	−0.14**	−0.21**	0.71**		
Gender (8)	–	–	−0.09	0.01	−0.16**	−0.11	−0.13**	0.02	0.01	
Cronbach's Alpha	–	–	0.96	0.79	0.92	0.85	0.95	–	–	–
Composite Reliability	–	–	0.96	0.87	0.94	0.86	0.95	–	–	–
Average Variance Extracted	–	–	0.86	0.70	0.86	0.68	0.90	–	–	–

Significance Level: ** $p < .05$; * $p < .10$.

endogeneity problems. As Eckert and Hohberger (2023) argue, such issues exist when the independent variable is correlated with the error term. In turn, we tested for this using the Gaussian copula approach, an instrument-free estimation procedure that evaluates the significance of the correlation between a regressor and the error term (Becker, Proksch, & Ringle, 2022; Park & Gupta, 2012). We examined the non-normality of endogenous variables by testing the significance of Kolmogorov-Smirnov (KS) and Shapiro-Wilk (SW) tests. The KS test statistics for job embeddedness ($0.15, p < .05$) and turnover intentions ($0.16, p < .05$) were significant, as were those for job embeddedness ($0.89, p < .05$) and turnover intentions ($0.88, p < .05$). These results collectively suggest that Gaussian copula is a reliable test of endogeneity in our framework. Critically, the Gaussian copula term was non-significant for the links between abusive supervision and job embeddedness ($\beta = -0.32, p = .40$), abusive supervision and turnover intentions ($\beta = -0.22, p = .25$), and job embeddedness and turnover intentions ($\beta = -0.09, p = .52$). Altogether, these findings suggest that endogeneity does not hinder interpretation of the results of our structural model.

Following this, we evaluated the coefficients and statistical significance of our hypothesized relationships using SmartPLS4.0. Model estimates and the associated signs are shown in Table 2. First, among our control variables, we find that age was negatively associated with job embeddedness ($\beta = -0.17, p < .05$), and experience was negatively associated with turnover intentions ($\beta = -0.12, p < .05$). However, even accounting for these covariates, our results reveal that abusive supervision negatively impacted job embeddedness ($\beta = -0.35, p < .05$) and positively impacted turnover intentions ($\beta = 0.51, p < .05$), supporting H_{1a} and H_{1b}. In addition, job embeddedness was shown to reduce turnover intentions ($\beta = -0.15, p < .05$), supporting H₂. Our full mediation hypothesis (H₃) was also supported, as job embeddedness had a significant indirect effect on the relationship between abusive supervision and turnover intentions ($\beta = 0.05, p < .05$). Notably, the direct effect of abusive supervision on turnover intentions remained significant when accounting for the indirect effect of job embeddedness; we, thus, uncovered complementary (partial) mediation of our framework (Hair Jr, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2017).

We further proposed a two-way interaction between abusive supervision and social media use. Results aligned with our predictions ($\beta = 0.20, p < .05$), hence supporting H₄. Probing this interaction, a floodlight analysis (Spiller, Fitzsimons, Lynch Jr, & McClelland, 2013) revealed a simple negative effect of abusive supervision on turnover intentions at values of social media use below 0.44 ($b = -0.07, SE = 0.04, t(231) = -1.97, p = .05$), representing 42.62% of the total sample. That is, among salespeople with lower reported levels of social media use, abusive supervision increased turnover intentions. Conversely, there was no simple effect of abusive supervision at values of social media use above 0.44 ($p > .05$), representing 57.38% of the total sample. Therefore, the negative effect of abusive supervision on job embeddedness was specifically curbed at higher perceived workplace social media use (see Fig. 3A).

Next, as hypothesized in H₅ and illustrated in Fig. 3B, there was a significant three-way interaction between abusive supervision, social media use, and idiosyncratic deals ($\beta = 0.14, p < .05$). Notably, social media use and idiosyncratic deals had a joint moderating effect on the harmful impact of working in an abusive supervisory environment. Stated differently, the ability of social media to harden salespeople to a difficult work environment is further magnified when the provision of idiosyncratic deals is high. This suggests that social media use and idiosyncratic deals, together, represent important job resources that help salespeople navigate abusive job situations.

3.4. Post-hoc subgroup analysis

Consistent with prior studies that have identified abusive supervision as a low base-rate phenomenon³ (Mackey et al., 2017; Tepper, 2007), the mean level of abusive supervision observed in our dataset ($M = 2.48, SD = 1.78$) fell below the theoretical midpoint (i.e., 4 on a 7-point scale). Indeed, a minority of participants (22.8%) reported experiences of abusive supervision above this threshold. Given the infrequent occurrence of high abusive supervision in our dataset, concerns may arise about the limited validity and generalizability of the findings reported in the prior section. To address these concerns, we conducted a post-hoc subgroup analysis. This method is particularly effective for detecting differential effects across groups in studies involving low base-rate phenomena (Good, Hughes, Kirca, & McGrath, 2022; Kirca et al., 2011). For this analysis, we used the theoretical midpoint of the abusive supervision scale (i.e., 4) as a cutoff and conducted separate analyses for salespeople who reported experiencing high (i.e., $\geq 4; n = 54$) and low (i.e., $< 4, n = 183$) levels of abusive supervision. To support H₄ and H₅, we expected to observe a significant positive effect of social media use and a significant social media use \times idiosyncratic deals interaction on job embeddedness among those in the high abusive supervision group. Conversely, we expected no such effects in the low abusive supervision group.

The results of the subgroup analysis supported H₄ and H₅. For those in the high abusive supervision group, we found a significant positive effect of social media use ($b = 0.41, SE = 0.13, t(47) = 3.16, p = .003$) as well as a significant social media use \times idiosyncratic deals interaction ($b = 0.24, SE = 0.10, t(47) = 2.44, p = .018$) on job embeddedness. Meanwhile, for those in the low abusive supervision group, the effect of social media use ($b = 0.12, SE = 0.07, t(176) = 1.79, p = .075$) and the social media use \times idiosyncratic deals interaction ($b = -0.01, SE = 0.03, t(176) = -0.33, p = .740$) on job embeddedness were non-significant. See Table 3 for full results.

These findings provide corroborating empirical evidence in support of H₄ and H₅, explicitly localizing our effects within salespeople

³ A recent meta-analysis by Mackey et al. (2017) found an average reported abusive supervision score of 1.78 across over 140 individual studies, encompassing a combined sample of 35,000 respondents in multiple countries.

Table 2
Model Results^{a,b}

Relationships	Hypothesis		Estimates			Support
		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3		
Abusive Supervision → Job Embeddedness	H _{1a}	−0.16**	−0.22**	−0.34**	✓	
Abusive Supervision → Turnover Intentions	H _{1b}	0.51**	0.51**	0.51**	✓	
Job Embeddedness → Turnover Intentions	H ₂	−0.15**	−0.15**	−0.15**	✓	
Abusive Supervision → Job Embeddedness → Turnover Intentions	H ₃	0.02**	0.03**	0.05**	✓	
Abusive Supervision × Social Media Use → Job Embeddedness	H ₄	–	0.23**	0.19**	✓	
Abusive Supervision × Idiosyncratic Deals → Job Embeddedness	–	–	–	0.15**	–	
Social Media Use × Idiosyncratic Deals → Job Embeddedness	–	–	–	0.07	–	
Abusive Supervision × Social Media Use × Idiosyncratic Deals → Job Embeddedness	H ₅	–	–	0.13**	✓	
Controls						
Age → Job Embeddedness	–	−0.22**	−0.17**	−0.17**	–	
Age → Turnover Intentions	–	−0.06	−0.06	−0.06	–	
Experience → Job Embeddedness	–	0.08	0.05	0.07	–	
Experience → Turnover Intentions	–	−0.12**	−0.12**	−0.13**	–	
Gender → Job Embeddedness	–	0.01	0.12*	0.12*	–	
Gender → Turnover Intentions	–	−0.17**	−0.17**	−0.17**	–	
R ²						
Job Embeddedness	–	0.04**	0.19**	0.30**	–	
Turnover Intentions	–	0.36**	0.36**	0.36**	–	

Significance Levels (single-tailed): ** $p < .05$; * $p < .10$.

^a Because of the non-normality of our endogenous variables as mentioned in the above comment, PLS approach is the best-suited approach for our analysis (e.g., Hair, Risher, Sarstedt, & Ringle, 2019). However, we still ran the analysis in covariance-based software (AMOS) to check the robustness of our findings. Specifically, as suggested by prior research (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988), we relied on a two-step approach to assess the significance of the structural relationships proposed in our framework. Our measurement model displayed acceptable fit ($\chi^2_{151} = 215.90$, $p < .05$; RMSEA = 0.04 (90% confidence interval: 0.03, 0.06); NNFI = 0.95; CFI = 0.98; SRMR = 0.04) which further allowed us to run a structural model. We first ran a structural model with all linear relationships, and then introduced all two-way and three-way interactions. Our structural model displayed acceptable fit ($\chi^2_{59} = 114.10$, $p < .05$; RMSEA = 0.06 (90% confidence interval: 0.05, 0.08); NNFI = 0.96; CFI = 0.97; SRMR = 0.06). All our hypothesized paths were significant as well. As hypothesized, abusive supervision was negatively related to job embeddedness ($\beta = -0.18$, $p < .05$), as positively related to turnover intentions ($\beta = 0.52$, $p < .05$), supporting H1a and H1b. Job embeddedness was negatively related to turnover intentions ($\beta = -0.17$, $p < .05$), supporting H2. As hypothesized in H3, the indirect effect of job embeddedness on the relationship between abusive supervision and turnover intentions was significant ($\beta = 0.04$, $p < .05$). The two-way interaction of abusive supervision and social media use was significant ($\beta = 0.17$, $p < .05$), as

was the three-way interaction between abusive supervision, social media use, and I-deals ($\beta = 0.16$, $p < .05$), providing empirical evidence of H4 and H5.

^b As mentioned in the manuscript, we tested the effect of marker variable (salesperson preference for blue color) and tested the R^2 values for the endogenous variables to test the effects of CMB. The change in R^2 for job embeddedness and turnover intentions showed no significant changes (Job Embeddedness: R^2 without marker variable: 0.297, R^2 with marker variable: 0.321, ΔR^2 : 0.024; Turnover Intentions: R^2 without marker variable: 0.353, R^2 with marker variable: 0.385, ΔR^2 : 0.032).

experiencing abusive supervision according to our measurement approach. Namely, we find that social media use attenuates the negative impact of abusive supervision on job embeddedness for salespeople experiencing high—but not low—levels of abusive supervision (H₄). Furthermore, social media use and idiosyncratic deals combined significantly mitigate the adverse effects of abusive supervision on job embeddedness for those experiencing high—but not low—abusive supervision (H₅). Thus, our subgroup analysis results confirmed the robustness of our main findings.

4. Discussion

Perhaps now more than ever, the sales function is defined by incredible stressors that impact the well-being of every level of the sales organization—with a heightened impact on those on the frontlines (Lussier et al., 2023). These concerns are uniquely prominent for B2B salespeople, whose boundary-spanner role involves understanding the needs of multiple client organizations (Amin et al., 2023; De Ruyter et al., 2009). Indeed, increased scholarly attention has followed suit, with emerging research focused on wellness programs to reduce stress (Kraft, Maity, & Porter, 2019), the role of spirituality in combatting burnout (Singh, Singh, & Shukla, 2022), and the role of an organization's ethical climate in promoting cultures focused on well-being (Schwepker et al., 2021). However, many of these articles have been conceptual or exploratory in scope (e.g., Dugan et al., 2023; Ranjan & Friend, 2020). As such, our research makes a significant contribution to the literature by identifying actionable ways—through a sample of 237 salespeople—that sales organizations can reduce the negative consequences of abusive supervision, thereby increasing the likelihood that productive salespeople will choose to remain in their respective organizations.

Using JD-R theory as a theoretical lens, we demonstrate that salesperson social media use and the provision of flexible work arrangements via idiosyncratic deals help to mitigate the negative impact of abusive supervision on job embeddedness. In doing so, we show that these critical job resources can reduce the stress caused by supervisors seen as demeaning and belittling. Our results further show that more embedded employees are less likely to express a desire to leave the organization, and job embeddedness partially mediates the relationship between abusive supervision and turnover intentions. Collectively, these findings show that a focus on low-cost resources (e.g., social media usage and flexible work arrangements) may provide an outsized impact in reducing the significant costs associated with salesperson turnover (e.g., Kuhn & Yu, 2021; Sunder, Kumar, Goreczny, & Maurer, 2017).

Our observed moderation via social media use suggests that online networks can offer a spectrum of socio-emotional benefits beyond their presumed roles in networking (Itani et al., 2022), content generation (Agnihotri et al., 2016), and customer outreach (Agnihotri & John-Mariadoss, 2022). Indeed, providing employees the ability to “blow off steam” with their coworkers through computer-mediated communication may offer a low-cost means for sales organizations to proactively counteract the negative impact of abusive supervision. We submit that this practice empowers salespeople in their interactions with internal and external stakeholders (Deci & Ryan, 2012; Gagné & Deci, 2005)—even in the face of toxic leadership. Likewise, the provision of flexible work arrangements affords another layer of resource-based

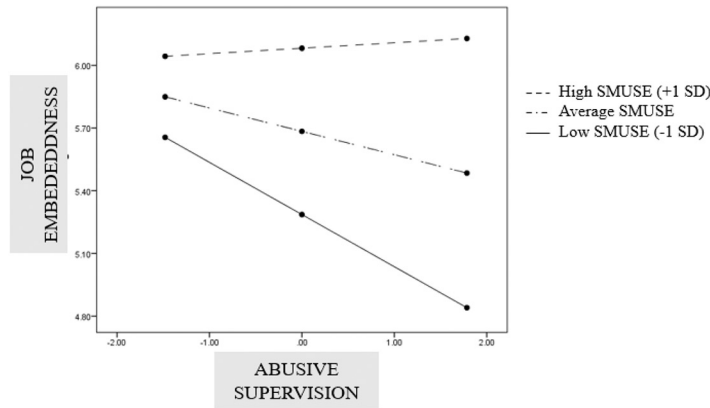
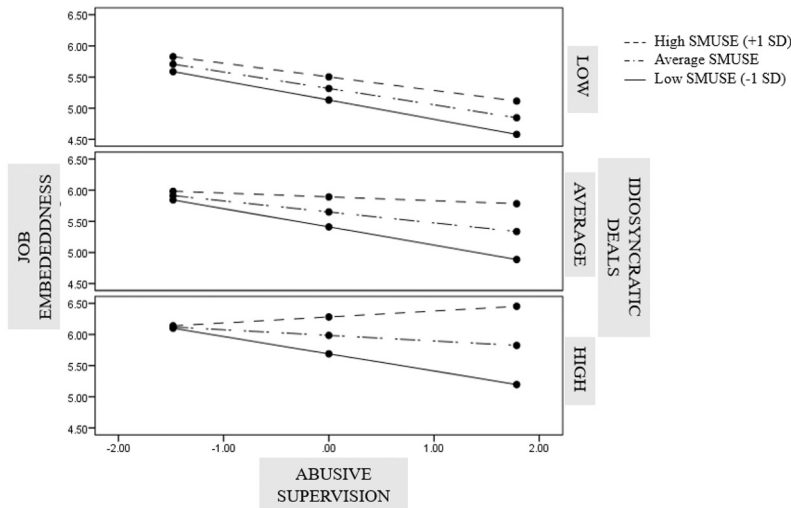
A: Abusive Supervision \times Social Media Use \rightarrow Job EmbeddednessB: Abusive Supervision \times Social Media Use \times Idiosyncratic Deals \rightarrow Job Embeddedness

Fig. 3. Two-Way and Three-Way Interactions.

Table 3
Post-hoc subgroup analysis results.

	DV: Job Embeddedness	
	Low Abusive Supervision (1)	High Abusive Supervision (2)
Social Media Use	0.118 (0.066)	0.408** (0.129)
Idiosyncratic Deals	0.176* (0.068)	0.423** (0.124)
Social Media Use \times Idiosyncratic Deals	-0.011 (0.032)	0.239* (0.098)
Age	-0.023 (0.012)	-0.038 (0.021)
Experience	0.021 (0.014)	-0.022 (0.024)
Gender	0.219 (0.159)	-0.462 (0.302)
Intercept	0.655 (0.384)	1.273 (0.679)
N	183	54

Note: We used respondents' average social media use and idiosyncratic deals scores for analysis. Standard errors are presented in parentheses; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

protection, further helping employees withstand the demands posed by a psychologically harmful boss. Our theorizing suggests that the freedoms granted by flexible work arrangements enhance employees' sense of appreciation for their roles, further reinforcing the replenishing effects of social media use.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that even the most effective managers may have instances in which they engage in actions characterized as abusive by our measurement approach (e.g., demeaning others in front of their subordinates, taking credit for employees' work, etc.). Conversely, supervisors known for engaging in abusive behavior can still provide occasional support (Lian et al., 2012). Indeed, the notion that abusive supervisors might offer flexible work arrangements aligns with research illustrating the “Janus-faced” nature of some managers—and the growing trend among many companies to be adaptable for their employees (Austin-Egole, Iheriohanma, & Nwokorie, 2020). Such “extra benefits” may be needed to prevent more experienced talent from switching jobs or leaving the organization altogether when faced with an abusive supervisor (Mackey et al., 2017).

5. Implications

5.1. Theoretical implications

Our work extends research into the impact of abusive supervision on an organization's most critical asset—its employees. Prior research has shown that the victims of abusive supervision tend to withdraw from the organization or—worse—engage in overtly deviant behaviors (Mawritz, Dust, & Resick, 2014). The current research provides initial evidence of two easy-to-implement strategies (i.e., social media use and flexible work arrangements) to mitigate the negative impact of abusive supervision on job embeddedness. Thus, in furthering the field's understanding of JD-R theory, we uncover novel resources that sales organizations can use to alleviate the pressure from abusive supervisors. Flexible work arrangements are particularly valuable for sales organizations because they represent a resource that does not incur a substantive financial cost for the organization. This could potentially save the firm money by reducing costs (e.g., office space) and delivering added value through more productive employees.

Moreover, we reveal that salesperson social media use can mitigate the negative impact of abusive supervision on turnover intentions. This underscores the importance of cultivating an environment where employees are comfortable sharing their frustrations with supportive colleagues. While prior research on salespeople and social media use has focused on ways that salespeople can use this resource to increase performance (e.g., Rodriguez et al., 2012; Trainor, 2012) or adapt changes to the sales process (e.g., Andzulis, Panagopoulos, & Rapp, 2012), scant work has examined how online networks can function as a therapeutic tool to help salespeople withstand the challenges of an abusive supervisor. Thus, our findings provide a notable contribution, and we encourage more research into the various ways that social media can be successfully leveraged in sales environments.

More broadly, the predominant focus of sales research on the impact of sales managers has been through the lens of positive behaviors, such as servant leadership (e.g., Jaramillo, Grisaffe, Chonko, & Roberts, 2009), effective role modeling (e.g., Bolander, Satornino, Allen, Hochstein, & Dugan, 2020; Rich, 1997), and coaching (e.g., Deeter-Schmelz, Kennedy, & Goebel, 2002). However, our approach takes a divergent stance by contributing to the literature on scenarios when the sales manager proves ineffective. We specifically highlight abusive supervision as a way sales managers can fall short in their effectiveness. Consequently, we recommend that future research in sales explore additional areas where sales managers might offer damaging supervision. That said, uncovering abusive supervision can be a thorny challenge for researchers. Indeed, as Mackey and colleagues note in their 2017 meta-analysis, “We expected abusive supervision to exhibit low means across studies because abusive supervision is a low base-rate phenomenon” (p. 1952). Therefore, while an anecdotal discussion with nearly anyone who has ever had a frustrating time at work would likely reveal abusive supervision to be a familiar problem, alternative research techniques (e.g. in-depth interviews, observational techniques, etc.) to better ferret out the problem may be warranted in the future.

5.2. Managerial implications

In an age of so-called “quiet quitting”—defined in part by a volitional disengagement from workaday life—it has become increasingly common for individuals to share stories online about the taxing elements of their jobs (Rosalsky & Selyukh, 2022). Consequently, it is especially timely for sales organizations to closely consider the challenges their employees face and commit to enhancing their overall well-being. In light of this initiative, our findings demonstrate low-cost strategies—social media use and flexible work arrangements—that firms may apply to limit the impact of abusive supervision on an employee's propensity to withdraw from the organization (Mawritz, Dusk, & Resick, 2014; Yagil et al., 2011). More generally, the current research suggests

that social media use and flexible work arrangements may offer critical ways for firms to cultivate a more durably symbiotic relationship with their employees than other avoidant strategies may allow.

We believe our findings are particularly relevant in the dynamic sales profession. The diverse nature of sales roles (e.g., inside sales, outside sales, hunter, farmer)—and the distinct requirements at various stages of the sales process—underscore an obligation to recognize and address each salesperson's unique needs. By doing so, managers can better cultivate job embeddedness, ensuring that employees are properly supported and empowered despite abusive supervision. This echoes a longstanding call in the academic sales discipline to foster adaptive selling techniques and behaviors (for a review, see Franke & Park, 2006). The current research suggests that social media use and flexible work arrangements could be helpful strategies for furthering this core objective. Indeed, we note that the psychological tribulations posed by an increasingly demanding profession compel savvy sales organizations to create systems grounded in employee well-being (Dugan et al., 2023). Here, it should be noted that we are not dismissing the many harmful consequences of abusive supervision (e.g., Tepper et al., 2017). Rather, this work stands to acknowledge the harsh reality of toxic managerial behavior and offer policy-based strategies to offset its impact.

6. Limitations and directions for future research

The current study has a number of limitations that provide fertile avenues for future research. For example, our panel data used self-reported ratings from B2B salespeople across various industries to assess the impact of abusive supervision on job embeddedness, which influences turnover intention. Given that intentions often deviate from actual behavior (Sheeran & Webb, 2016), it would be beneficial to assess how more objective measures of job performance and turnover are impacted by abusive supervision, social media use, and flexible work arrangements.

Additionally, future research could analyze respondents from a single firm and triangulate responses between salespeople and their supervisors. While it is unlikely that managers will admit to being abusive, it is nonetheless possible for salespeople who feel ill-treated to be nested under particular managers. Understanding these dynamics could better isolate the supervisory behaviors and characteristics that lead to perceptions of abuse. Indeed, it could be that leaders guilty of abusing their direct reports are the victims of maltreatment from those at higher levels within the firm (Tepper et al., 2007). Promoting a culture of overall well-being at the top of the sales organization may be critical for eliminating abusive supervision at all levels. Further, while the mean abusive supervision score observed in our study is consistent with prior research (Gabler & Hill, 2015; Mackey et al., 2017; Yang et al., 2021), we echo recent research suggesting that the true effect of abusive supervision would be best observed through an ethically responsible experimental design (Fischer et al., 2021).

We further recommend that researchers look more deeply into the impact of workplace social media use on B2B salesperson well-being. Extant work suggests that social media's effects may be curvilinear, such that there is a “sweet spot” usage rate for driving positive organizational outcomes (Chen & Wei, 2019). Indeed, while some degree of social media use has been found to help sales organizations compete (Agnihotri et al., 2016; Bowen et al., 2021; Guenzi & Nijssen, 2020; Itani et al., 2022; Ogilvie et al., 2018), too much time online can sow the seeds of cyberloafing (Lieberman, Seidman, McKenna, & Buffardi, 2011). In sum, future research could provide additional insight into the boundary conditions surrounding the efficacy of social media to curb the negative consequences of abusive supervision.

In addition, the current study employed a cross-sectional design to assess the deleterious impact of abusive supervision on pro-organizational outcomes. Future research could use longitudinal data to assess the cumulative impact of abusive supervision on various measures of interest to the salesforce (Bolander, Dugan, & Jones, 2017).

Indeed, it is common for individuals to have days when they momentarily feel dissatisfied with their jobs and supervisors. Consequently, any cross-sectional analysis of perceptions of abusive supervision may be influenced by temporary mood effects (Rusting, 1998).

Moreover, while our findings offer valuable insights into mitigating the adverse effects of managers’ toxic behavior, a cautionary approach is warranted for the universal application of social media use and idiosyncratic deals to attenuate the negative impacts of such leadership behavior. Given that abusive supervision is a low base-rate phenomenon—as illustrated in prior literature and corroborated in our data-set—our results are particularly relevant to organizations where abusive supervision is a significant managerial concern.

Relatedly, while our post-hoc subgroup analysis enhanced the robustness of our findings regarding abusive supervision, the infrequent occurrence of such cases suggests the need for further studies that zoom in on those who experience abusive supervision. More specifically, building on the current work, we suggest a case study with a specific focus on salespeople who experienced abusive supervision for a complete understanding of the detrimental effects of abusive leadership. This qualitative approach would address the limitations associated with the low base-rate phenomenon in this study by providing an in-depth examination of individuals who have experienced significant abusive supervision.

As a result, future research could aim to more precisely distinguish when abusive supervision transitions from having an “annoying boss” to something that potentially impacts the mental well-being of frontline employees. In a sense, this reflects the “state and trait” nature of abusive behaviors. While some supervisors may have a bad week or undergo a challenging personal situation that they subsequently take out on employees, other managers may be more inherently challenging to work with. It is this latter “trait” category that likely garners the bulk of research attention on the topic. Still, scholars would be wise to focus on those transitory occurrences when normally benign bosses lash out at their employees—and how this might subsequently impact salespeople’s job embeddedness and turnover intentions in the long term. More broadly, longitudinal research may better highlight whether the impact of abusive supervision on job embeddedness follows a linear pattern or involves fits and starts dependent on the individual being supervised, the context of supervision, and the employee’s tenure duration.

Finally, future research could explore other contextual moderators that might mitigate the harmful impact of abusive supervision on job embeddedness. For instance, job-crafting (Debus, Gross, & Kleinmann, 2020) may allow salespeople to tailor their roles to match their strengths

in certain areas of the sales process. This customization may reduce the propensity of supervisors to engage in abusive behaviors, as it is quite likely that a non-trivial portion of abusive supervision is triggered by performance dissatisfaction. Additionally, a formal company mentorship program could provide novice salespeople with a source of comfort similar to the benefits provided by connecting with others on social media.

7. Conclusions

This research examined the increasingly urgent topic of abusive supervision and found that salesperson social media usage—and the provision of flexible work arrangements via idiosyncratic deals—help to mitigate the negative impact of abusive supervision on salespeople’s job embeddedness. Such effects decreased the likelihood of poor treatment in the workplace to translate into subsequent turnover intentions. As such, the current work provided additional evidence of the efficacy of social media use in the workplace and revealed actionable ways for salespeople and their organizations to diffuse the pernicious impact of abusive supervisors. Broadly speaking, our work adds to the growing conversation around the importance of fostering mental well-being in the sales organization—to better ensure that the workplace provides salespeople the greatest opportunity to succeed.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Riley Dugan: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Supervision, Project administration, Conceptualization. **Andrew Edelblum:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft. **Ashish Kalra:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Na Young Lee:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Conceptualization. **Sangsuk Yoon:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

Appendix A. Sample details

Industry	#
Financial	45
Manufacturing	69
Pharmaceutical	10
Advertising, Communication, and Promotion	31
Energy and Natural Resources	10
Others	72
Mean Age in Years (Standard Deviation)	39.57 (9.09)
Mean Experience in Years (Standard Deviation)	11.80 (7.57)
Gender	#
Female	73
Male	164

Appendix B. Construct Items

Constructs	Factor Loadings
Abusive Supervision	
My manager puts me down in front of others.	0.92
My manager invades my privacy.	0.93
My manager doesn't give me credit for jobs requiring a lot of effort.	0.92
My manager makes negative comments about me to others.	0.94
My manager is rude to me.	0.95
Job Embeddedness	
I feel attached to my company.	0.90
I am tightly connected to my company.	0.91
I feel tied to my company.	0.69
Social Media Use	
I am using social media to its fullest potential for supporting my own work.	0.93
I am using all capabilities of social media in the best fashion to help me on the job.	0.92
My use of social media is pretty much integrated as part of my normal work routine.	0.94
Idiosyncratic Deals	
In comparison to your peers within your organization, how much more likely are you to receive:	
Permission to flexibly schedule when you begin and end your workday.	0.81
Permission to flexibly schedule where you work (i.e., from home, coffee houses and other “third space” locations, etc.).	0.83
Permission to flexibly schedule how you spend your workday (e.g., which customers to call-on, etc.).*	–
Reductions in burdensome administrative work.	0.82
Additional paid time off (PTO) for personal reasons.	0.83
Turnover Intentions	
It is likely that I will actively look for a new job this year.	0.95
I often think about quitting.	0.94
I will probably look for a new job in the next year.	0.96

* Item was dropped during item purification process.

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