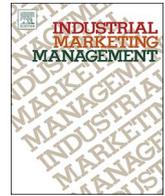




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Social media use in B2b sales and its impact on competitive intelligence collection and adaptive selling: Examining the role of learning orientation as an enabler

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the use of social media by business-to-business (B2B) salespeople to assist in their job functions. The authors propose that a salesperson's attitude toward social media usefulness, as well as a salesperson's learning orientation, will influence how much a salesperson uses social media to assist in day-to-day job tasks. Additionally, the impact that the use of social media has on collecting knowledge about competitors, adapting to customers, and sales performance is considered. Accordingly, a broad literature review is provided to introduce extant theory contributing to the proposed model. The practical uses of social media by salespeople will be described, and then the theoretical foundation is built, encompassing social media use, goal orientations, and adaptive selling theory. Results of an empirical model are provided, followed by a discussion of theoretical and managerial implications.

1. Introduction

In the world of business-to-business (B2B) sales, “social selling” is a relatively new idea but an ever-growing opportunity. Social selling is referred to by Agnihotri, Kothandaraman, Kashyap, and Singh (2012) as a professional selling practice that is “predicated on the strength of social media allies within a social enterprise” (p. 341) and by Trainor (2012) as a capability “to use knowledge about customers and the network of customer relationships to effectively navigate the firm's sales cycle” (p. 324). Social media is associated with different technologies able to provide users with services such as networking, online search, and analytics (O'Reilly & Battelle, 2009). In this paper, we identify the role of social media in B2B sales and examine its impact in the selling process.

For marketers, social media is a promising marketing tool that may complement customer relationship management (CRM) processes and can be used to target specific segments of customers (Heller Baird & Parasnis, 2011). In fact, a 2015 trade study by PeopleLinx found that 73% of the 277 respondents, all of whom were B2B sales and account management professionals, considered social selling to be “valuable.” Increasingly, managers are adding social media as a new element to the traditional promotion mix tools (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

Social media can be technically defined as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). Social media includes social and professional networking sites, social blogs, micro-blogging, podcasts and wikis (e.g., LinkedIn, Twitter, MySpace, Facebook, and Flickr) (Avlonitis & Panagopoulos, 2010). From a marketing and sales research perspective, social media is defined as “the technological component of the communication, transaction and relationship building functions of a business which leverages the network of customers and prospects to promote value co-creation” (Andzulis, Panagopoulos, & Rapp, 2012, p. 308).

In the industrial selling context, buyers are using social media for their purchases as they compare products, research the market, and build relationships with salespeople. Salespeople can use social media in all steps of the selling process, from prospecting to follow-up (Andzulis et al., 2012). Social media channels such as Twitter may be used to prospect or find opportunities, while LinkedIn may assist in identifying names of true decision makers and buyers within an organization. The immediacy and availability of social networks foster relationships that may otherwise be slow to connect, as new contacts are easier to make and participation in industry-specific groups on social

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networks reduces the amount of screening that takes place in the formation of more traditional relationships (Quinton & Wilson, 2016). Overall, buyer-seller relationships can be enriched with the two-way communication mode provided by social media.

However, even though salespeople agree that social media is valuable (PeopleLinx, 2015) and there is support for using social media throughout the selling process (Andzulis et al., 2012), a recent study finds that selling organizations are slower to adopt social media than expected (Moncrief, Marshall, & Rudd, 2015). Rather than at an organizational level, social media use in B2B sales is becoming popular at the salesperson level as an individual initiative. It is important to note that, while salespeople may have a private account for their own personal use on social media platforms, the current research focuses on salespeople connecting through social media in a professional context. At this level, use of social media is aimed “to generate content (e.g., blogs, microblogs, wikis) and develop networks (e.g., social networks, online communities)” (Agnihotri et al., 2012, p. 334) for greater interaction with customers and prospects.

The growing acceptance of social media among the sales force has been credited to its potential usefulness for developing and sustaining networks within and outside organizations (Agnihotri, Dingus, Hu, & Krush, 2016; Marshall, Moncrief, Rudd, & Lee, 2012; Rapp, Beitelspacher, Grewal, & Hughes, 2013; Rodriguez, Peterson, & Krishnan, 2012). Additionally, social media helps salespeople to prospect across cultures and on an international level (Quinton & Wilson, 2016). For example, salespeople wanting to build their professional network online within the United States (U.S.) will likely utilize LinkedIn, while Viadeo is used to attract professionals in France (Lacoste, 2016). Social media creates a more globally-available environment to increase potential leads, availability for conversations, and transfer of information to a broader audience.

An interesting gap in the academic literature on this topic exists, as there is limited research associated with the influence of social media on sales force practice (Marshall et al., 2012). The increased use of social media for business emphasizes the importance of developing a better understanding of users and their attitudes toward it (Gangadharbatla, 2008). But, majority of the studies examining salespeople's use of social media are conceptual (Agnihotri et al., 2012; Andzulis et al., 2012; Marshall et al., 2012; Trainor, 2012). Very limited are empirical papers (please refer to Table 1) that test antecedents and outcomes of B2B salespeople using social media, but this line of enquiry is limited in scope as its setting is almost entirely on U.S.-based sales forces (e.g., Rapp et al., 2013; Rodriguez et al., 2012). To fill these research gaps, we pursue an empirical inquiry involving social media use in B2B sales and set our study in the non-western context of India, which is one of the fastest-growing economies.

2. Identification of research question

While great opportunity exists for using social media, functions of social media platforms are what dictate their value and whether they acquire information (Singaraju, Nguyen, Niininen, & Sullivan-Mort, 2016) or share information to achieve communication goals such as raising brand awareness (Wang, Hsiao, et al., 2016). Social media networks extend the influence of salespeople and provide them with opportunities to enhance their behaviors and, in turn, their performance, as well as the opportunity to connect with customers on a new level. Additionally, social media provides an opportunity for a unique type of communication, as social listening may help salespeople see what is being said about their own brand and competitors. One of the main advantages of social media is the low cost associated with its use compared to that associated with other sales technologies deployed.

Few studies are found to empirically test the role of social media and its effects on the behaviors of salespeople, sales outcomes, and the general selling process (Andzulis et al., 2012), especially in the B2B environment (Michaelidou, Siamagka, & Christodoulides, 2011; Rapp et al., 2013; Rodriguez et al., 2012; Swani, Brown, & Milne, 2014). This

is alarming, as sales executives foresee the potential of social media in facilitating and influencing salespeople's behaviors, competence, and success in today's technology-enabled marketplace (see Appendix A¹). At the same time, academia (e.g., Agnihotri et al., 2012) and industry (see Appendix A) agree on the fact that social media use has been limited at the salesperson level due to the lack of organization-wide social media strategies. Researchers have been slow in pursuing empirical academic research on social media in the B2B context and, thus, they offer little guidance to managers (Wiersema, 2013).

This study examines the role of social media and its effects on the selling process in a B2B setting. Table 1 identifies the academic literature on social media that forms this paper's foundation. Theoretical advances provide valuable direction and guidance for organizations and managers integrating social media into their communications. Additionally, an overview of empirical work in the area is provided, describing each study as well as its respective sample and context.

Literature in the sales technology domain aids in exploring and defining antecedents and outcomes of salespeople's social media use in the B2B context. Additional factors include the quick speeds of social media interactions and the ability for senders to receive confirmation that messages have been read (Wang, Pauleen, & Zhang, 2016). The use of social media has been discussed in the context of the learning process of salespeople (Rollins et al., 2014), and previous literature suggests that the learning style of an individual is highly associated with social media adaption by the individual (Baird & Fisher, 2005; Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012). This is especially relevant within the context of using new technology platforms because learning goal orientated individuals “enjoy the challenge of learning new features of the technology and develop self confidence in using the technology” (Mun & Hwang, 2003, p. 437). Therefore, understanding the role that a salesperson's learning goal orientation plays in a social media context will be of significance to both theory and practice.

This study also examines outcomes of social media use. Andzulis et al. (2012) and Moncrief et al. (2015) suggest that salespeople can use social media to support different steps in the selling process. Social media can increase the amount of information about competitors and customers that can be collected, which in turn can be used by salespeople to adapt their behaviors to suit different selling situations they may encounter. Social media provides salespeople with new approaches to reach potential customers (Inks, Schetzle, & Avila, 2011; Moore et al., 2015). Salespeople were found to deploy social media to support the different responsibilities they are required to complete in the selling process, from prospecting and handling objections to closing and following up (Moore et al., 2015). Accordingly, the proposed framework also includes the effects of social media use on competitive intelligence collection, adaptive selling behavior and performance of salespeople.

Now that social media's presence in B2B sales has been introduced and the current study's research goals have been identified, a conceptual model will be formed. For this, we build upon the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1975) to relate antecedents and consequences to a salesperson's social media use. TRA has been used as a basis for other models such as the Technology Acceptance Model in general (Davis, Bagozzi, & Warshaw, 1989), and sales technology and social media adaption in particular (Hsu & Lin, 2008). Seven hypotheses are developed in a model based on academic research in marketing. Fig. 1 shows the conceptual model with all hypotheses. Results of the study are provided, and both theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

¹ To get a better understanding of the social media landscape within a B2B sales context, we conducted a minor data collection of a qualitative nature. Aligning with the relevant literature (e.g., Jackson & Trochim, 2002), a survey instrument involving three open-ended questions was utilized. The questions (e.g., What do you think the current state of “Social Media in B2B Sales” in your organization's salesforce is?) assessed the current state of social media, associated challenges, opportunities and research needs. Utilizing the snowball sampling technique, six national/regional-level sales executives operating in the B2B area in India completed our survey. All the respondents were male and reported an average age of 46.5 (range from 37 to 51) years old. Please refer to Appendix A for more details.

Table 1
Social media use in the academic sales literature.

Paper	Research type	Use of social media (SM) in the research	Sample (U.S. or International)	Context
Agnihotri et al., 2012	Conceptual	Identifies how a salesperson's use of SM in the B2B environment can create value through the service behaviors of information sharing, customer service, and trust building.	N/A	B2B
Agnihotri et al., 2016	Quantitative (survey-based)	When salespeople utilize SM to interact with customers, they improve communication of information, which ultimately increases responsiveness and customer satisfaction.	U.S.	B2B
Andzulis et al., 2012	Conceptual	Addresses varied definitions of SM, its role in business, challenges associated with using SM, and "ownership" of SM within organizations. Provides an explanation of the sales process with respect to SM, aligning each popular medium to a specific step and purpose within the role of B2B selling.	N/A	B2B
Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011	Conceptual	Case study on the Grammy Awards' use of SM to engage a comprehensive, integrated marketing communications campaign. Notable findings recommend managers to customize their SM ecosystem, identify and track key performance indicators, use a consistent story, realize SM can be effective in any budget, and be unique.	N/A	N/A
Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016	Case study	Acknowledging the relatively new availability of content marketing, this case study uses interviews and digital content to show how marketing automation can use behavioral targeting and content personalization to generate promising sales leads.	International	B2B
Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010	Conceptual	Aims to clarify the term "SM" with classification categories of collaborative projects, blogs, content communities, social networking sites, virtual game worlds, and virtual social worlds. Building on this, advice is provided for companies employing SM with respect to using media and to being social.	N/A	N/A
Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011	Conceptual	This framework provides a framework of seven building blocks (identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups) and then directs firms on how to understand, interact with, and respond to varied SM activities in each one.	N/A	N/A
Lacoste, 2016	Qualitative (interviews)	Investigating key account managers' (KAM) use of SM (specifically, LinkedIn and Viadeo), explores ideas of identity, reputation, connection, retention, and engagement. A key finding differentiates the use of SM by KAM versus salespeople, as KAMs do not rely on SM to nurture relationships.	International (France)	B2B
Marshall et al., 2012	Qualitative (focus groups)	Addressing big changes in technology, emphasizes SM as a selling tool. Focus is given to building relationships while integrating SM and also to the adjustment of being "always on" once SM is integrated into a salesperson's repertoire of communications.	U.S. & U.K.	B2B
Michaelidou et al., 2011	Quantitative (survey-based)	Examines how businesses use social networking sites (SNS) to accomplish brand objectives such as generating new clients. Additionally, addresses the perceived lack of relevance of SNS in some sectors and the need to adopt metrics for assessment.	International (U.K.)	B2B
Moncrief et al., 2015	Conceptual	Addresses sales managers and focuses on how they should interpret, understand, and respond to the recent advance of SM and its relevance to the sales force. Provides lessons sales managers need to know in order to embrace SM.	N/A	N/A
Moore, Raymond, & Hopkins, 2015	Quantitative (survey-based)	Compares B2B and B2C to identify differences in how they use different SM tools for job-related tasks. Also examines differences in how sales managers and sales representatives utilize SM.	U.S.	B2B & B2C
Quinton & Wilson, 2016	Qualitative (networking and interviews)	Focusing exclusively on LinkedIn, examines social networks and the tensions resulting in these business relationship ties. Advantages and disadvantages of participating in SM networks, as well as mannerisms that can enhance business performance, are identified.	U.S. & International	B2B
Rapp et al., 2013	Quantitative	Develops "SM use" measures at supplier, retailer, and customer levels to examine and encourage usage by supply chain members, which positively impacts brand performance, retailer performance, and customer-retailer loyalty.	U.S.	B2B
Rodriguez et al., 2012	Quantitative (survey-based)	During SM's infancy, forward-thinking organizations were already using SM in their B2B sales process. This research provides empirical evidence that SM positively impacts sales performance.	U.S. & International	B2B
Rollins, Nickell, & Wei, 2014	Qualitative (networking)	Exploring blogs maintained by salespeople, evidence is provided for how and why salespeople can learn from reading and writing blogs. Recommendations are made for sales managers, as well as for blogging to be incorporated as a tool for sales training.	Not specified	B2B
Singaraju et al., 2016	Conceptual	Utilizing resource integration, managers are addressed with respect to how value can be co-created by firms and customers through SM platforms. Specific examples in prescribed SM platforms are provided, allowing managers to consider a hierarchy of the resources that various SM platforms offer.	N/A	N/A
Swani et al., 2014	Empirical (content analysis)	Focusing on Fortune 500 firms' Twitter accounts, differences are identified between marketing strategies used for B2B and B2C.	U.S.	B2B & B2C
Trainor, 2012	Conceptual	Incorporates SM technologies to the traditional view of customer relationship management, addressing this new "social CRM." Additionally, provides recommendations to managers on how integration of these technologies can benefit business performance.	N/A	N/A
Trainor, Andzulis, Rapp, & Agnihotri, 2014	Quantitative (survey-based)	Studying social CRM as a firm-level capability, this study provides evidence of integrating SM with existing CRM	Not specified	B2B

(continued on next page)



Table 1 (continued)

Paper	Research type	Use of social media (SM) in the research	Sample (U.S. or International)	Context
Wang, Hsiao, et al., 2016	Quantitative (survey-based)	systems to improve customer relationships. Also, an index was developed to measure SM technology use, allowing respondents to identify and classify their SM activities. Explores the role of social comparison and social identity in co-creation activities in the context of online communities. Insights are provided for effective use of SM in the B2B context to engage online communities, co-innovate, and increase brand awareness.	Not specified	B2B
Wang, Pauleen, and Zhang 2016	Interviews and Case Studies	Investigates the use of SM apps (SMA) in a B2B context, linking SMA capabilities to B2B communication and business performance. Findings also discovered a missing capability of information security and control, which could be an addition to media synchronicity theory in the advent of SM.	International	B2B
Wiersema, 2013	Conceptual	In ISBM's B2B Agenda, academics and practitioners were interviewed to examine potential areas of interest for future research. While many topics are addressed, the advent of SM arises within many topics because of its prevalence, the control it gives to consumers, and the influence it has on customer's decisions, which originally were thought of in a B2C context but now are relevant in a B2B context, creating many unknowns for firms.	N/A	N/A

N/A: not applicable.

3. Theoretical lens and model development

The attitude-behavior relationship is well established in the literature. Ngai, Tao, and Moon (2015) recently developed a causal-chain framework for social media research based on different theories such as Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), among others. In this framework, the attitude-behavior relationship is proposed in the context of social media as per TRA. Attitude is included in TRA (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1975) as a focal construct that can affect performing the related behaviors. TPB, which is an extension of TRA, includes behavioral controls that moderate the influence of attitudes on behavior (Ajzen, 1985).

In line with social psychology literature, attitude is the relative enduring evaluation of a certain object or behavior held by individuals (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). This evaluation includes beliefs about and feelings toward a given entity, object or behavior (Breckler, 1984). According to theory, individuals with favorable attitudes toward a given entity, object, or behavior are likely to behave in certain ways toward it. In other words, individuals act toward an entity or object in a particular way, behaving according to the specific attitude they have toward such the entity or behavior.

Both TRA and TPB are employed by empirical studies within the social media research stream (e.g., Casaló, Flavián, & Guinalú, 2010; Chang & Zhu, 2011; Hau & Kim, 2011; Hsu & Lin, 2008). The specific reason the proposed model is built upon TRA is that, in the current context, salespeople's use of social media is considered as a volitional behavior. Our consideration is based upon the sales literature, which underscores the absence of social media strategy and controls at the firm level (Gupta, Armstrong, & Clayton, 2011) and highlights the salesperson's voluntary participation in social media activities (Agnihotri et al., 2012).

Moreover, additional support to the possible relationship between attitude toward social media and social media use is found within the information processing model of media use and social information processing theory. Based on social information processing theory (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978), which proposes that attitudes affect behavior at work, Fulk, Steinfield, Schmitz, and Power (1987) developed the information processing model of media use. According to this model, the use of certain media tools (e.g., social media) is affected by users' attitudes toward its usefulness. Individuals with strong attitudes toward the use of a certain information technology vehicle (e.g., social media) are more likely to accept it enthusiastically (Bhattacharjee & Sanford, 2009). In our study, we argue that each salesperson is likely to form a particular attitude toward the use of social media at work. This attitude will, in turn, affect his or her actual use of social media. To examine this argument, we propose a positive attitude-behavior relationship. The testing of this relationship is important because researchers and practitioners must enhance the awareness of social media use and the users' attitudes with the increased use of social media in business (Gangadharbatla, 2008) and B2B sales.

We incorporate salesperson learning orientation (Sujan, Weitz, & Kumar, 1994) as an influencer as well as a moderator to the link between attitude toward social media usefulness and the actual use of social media technology. This approach is aligned with the sales technology and social media literature, which posits that system characteristics can be influenced by different variables such as salesperson characteristics, social influences and organizational characteristics (e.g., Ngai et al., 2015). Specifically, we propose that the learning goal orientation of a salesperson will affect the attitude of that salesperson toward social media use. We contend that learning goal oriented salespeople are more likely to view social media as useful on the job, because they would view social media as a technology tool that provides them with unique learning opportunities, and they would enjoy taking on challenges and discovering new pathways to improve their performance of job tasks.

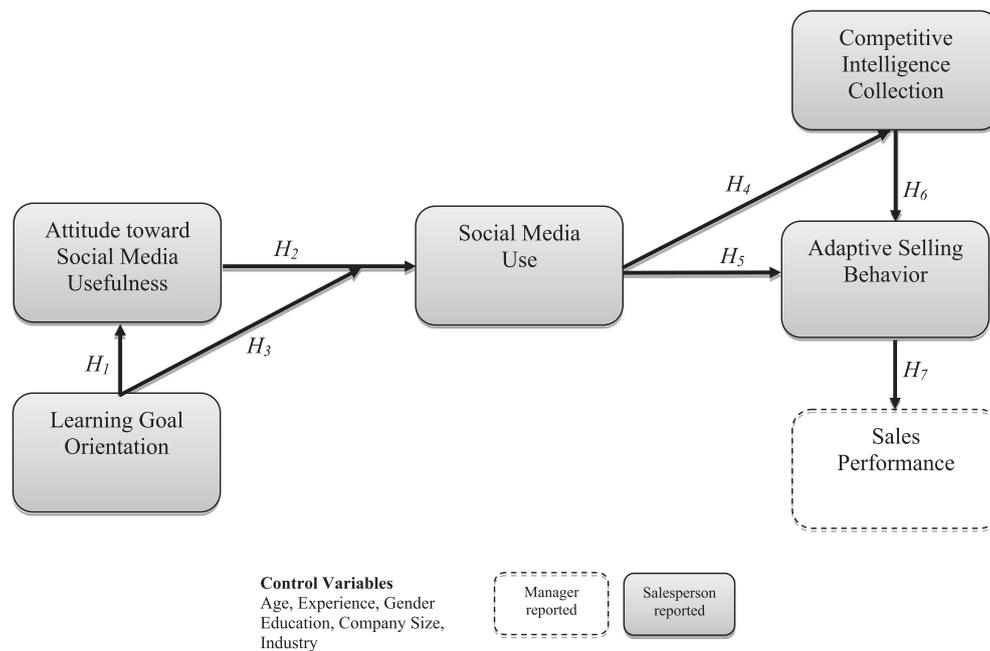


Fig. 1. Conceptual model.

3.1. Learning goal orientation

Learning goal oriented salespeople have a specific need for learning (Harris, Mowen, & Brown, 2005). Individuals with a learning goal orientation are interested in learning for the benefits and welfare associated with learning itself (Payne, Youngcourt, & Beaubien, 2007). They focus on developing their abilities and skills to increase their competencies (Colquitt & Simmering, 1998). Learning goal oriented people are open to accept changes at the personal as well as at the organizational level (Bettencourt, 2004). In the past, researchers have applied learning goal orientation in predicting the utilization of new technologies at the individual (Mun & Hwang, 2003) and the firm level (Schilling, 2002). Considering social media a “new tool” where its impact on performance is still in its infancy, the focus of this study is on learning orientation.

The literature indicates that learning orientated individuals are attracted by challenges because of the learning opportunities these challenges can convey (Ames & Archer, 1988; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). For that, learning oriented salespeople are committed to learning as their primary goal and use a lasting momentum to achieve it, and have the desire to excel at their job's tasks and to enjoy the discovery process, which amplifies their effort toward satisfying customers' needs (Harris et al., 2005). Furthermore, having a learning goal orientation helps salespeople to better adapt to new work environments during times of organizational change (Chonko, Jones, Roberts, & Dubinsky, 2002).

Learning oriented salespeople are likely to perceive social media as a valuable tool that can support them at work and enhance their job performance. A primary focus of individuals with high learning orientation is on the process of attaining new abilities and skills (Seijts, Latham, Tasa, & Latham, 2004) and viewing abilities as incremental skills that can be continuously enhanced by gaining knowledge and achieving competencies (Wood & Bandura, 1989). The willingness and capability to learn are shown in the tendency they have to acquire skills and abilities over time (Zweig & Webster, 2004). Learning oriented salespeople enjoy the process of learning and try to apply what they learn at work (Harris et al., 2005; Sujjan et al., 1994). They also seek new methods and strategies to control the different situations they encounter (Chai, Zhao, & Babin, 2012) and value personal growth, learn how to sell more effectively, enjoy challenging conditions, and view innovative learning tools as important for success in their career (Sujjan et al., 1994).

Because learning goal oriented salespeople enjoy challenges and new methods, we expect them to have positive assessments of new opportunities to engage in their sales role. Similarly, those who perceive new opportunities as valuable are likely to have a learning goal orientation. As has been established conceptually, social media can be a productive avenue for salespeople to engage with the market, industry, and buyers. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1. Salesperson learning goal orientation will have a positive effect on attitude toward social media.

In general, people are more likely to use the technology that they think will help them achieve better job performance (Davis, 1989). Salespeople who possess positive attitudes toward the use of a certain technology (e.g., social media) for the enhancement in their job performance are more likely to use it (Avlonitis & Panagopoulos, 2005). Thus, the attitude toward social media should be translated into actual use which, in turn, may lead to an increase in job performance.

In this study we postulate that attitude, in terms of one's evaluations and feelings toward social media usefulness, is what drives behavior or actual use of it. Bhattacharjee and Sanford (2009) argue that individuals with strong attitudes toward the use of a certain information technology vehicle (e.g., social media) are more likely to accept it enthusiastically. A stronger attitude toward social media should reveal an increased tendency to actually use social media at the salesperson level.

The attitude-behavior relationship is evidenced in social media research (Casaló et al., 2010; Chang & Zhu, 2011; Hau & Kim, 2011; Hsu & Lin, 2008). Attitude is found to be a main predictor of individuals' participation in virtual communities (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006; Chang & Zhu, 2011), and web portals (Yoon, Cropp, & Cameron, 2002). Moreover, industrial buyers are more likely to use the internet for their purchases (e.g., finding and contacting suppliers, comparing offerings, and online ordering) if they hold a positive attitude toward it (Celuch, Goodwin, & Taylor, 2007). However, extant sales literature on social media has not examined the attitude toward usefulness of social media and how it can play a major role in understanding social media use by salespeople.

According to the information processing model of media use (Fulk et al., 1987), which is based on social information processing theory (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978), the use of certain media tools (e.g., social media) is affected by users' attitudes toward its usefulness. Moreover,

Ngai et al. (2015) recently developed a causal-chain framework for social media research based on TRA (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1975, 1980) and TPB (Ajzen, 1985). In line with this framework, the relationship between attitude toward social media (user perception) and the actual usage behavior is postulated. Based on the previous discussion, we argue that social media attitude is a predictor of social media use by salespeople. For that, we hypothesize that a salesperson with stronger attitude toward the use of social media is more likely to use it on job. Accordingly, we formally hypothesize the following:

H2. Attitude toward social media will have a positive effect on social media use.

According to Sujan et al. (1994), salespeople with a learning goal orientation are attracted by tough sales and consider such sales to be quite satisfying. In fact, learning goal orientated individuals seek out challenges because they perceive them as unique opportunities for learning (Ames & Archer, 1988). On the other side, it is well-documented in both the popular press and the academic literature that strategically using social media is associated with difficulties and challenges (e.g., Faulk, 2015; Fidelman, 2015; Smith, 2014).

Going beyond face value, Kietzmann et al. (2011) claim that social media use is not considered an easy task. In fact, PeopleLinx's (2015) survey found that “only one in four sales professionals feel they know how to use social for selling” (p. 2). Salespeople may also attribute some difficulties and challenges to the usage of social media that can lead to different views about the usage of social media. These difficulties and challenges associated with social media may increase the positive attitude that learning oriented salespeople have toward social media use who consider difficult tasks as a major basis for learning.

The rapid changes in social media technologies and the huge amount of information and updates created every day make it a challenging task for users (Hanna et al., 2011; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Salespeople using social media may need to spend additional time monitoring their network to keep up with the changes, trends, and updated information. Also, using social media may require higher levels of effort for continuous prospecting in such a dynamic context. Beyond time and effort required to operate on one medium, salespeople may need to use multiple social media platforms to stay in touch with customers, keep up with competitors and be aware of what is taking place in industry. For that, the challenges associated with the use of social media could be another reason that leads learning goal oriented salespeople to hold stronger toward social media use on their job.

We argue that learning goal orientation, as one of the user's characteristics, can moderate the relationship between a user's attitude toward social media and that person's actual usage behavior. This is also supported by Ngai et al.' (2015) model in which user characteristics are proposed to moderate the relationships between antecedents of social media use and actual usage behavior. In line with previous discussion, we propose that a salesperson learning goal orientation will moderate the effect of attitude toward social media on social media usage behavior with the following hypothesis:

H3. The positive effect of attitude toward social media on social media use will be strengthened at higher levels of learning goal orientation.

3.2. Social media use outcomes

3.2.1. Competitive intelligence collection

A new stream in the competitive intelligence literature differentiates between competitive intelligence at an individual level and at a firm level (Mariadoss, Milewicz, Lee, & Sahaym, 2014; Rapp, Agnihotri, & Baker, 2011; Rapp, Agnihotri, Baker, & Andzulis, 2015). The importance of collecting information about competitors resides in the influence that competitors can have on customers' needs and on the market in general (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990). Salespeople are encouraged to collect competitive intelligence about competitors'

offerings, selling strategies, and relationships competitors have with customers so they can monitor, adapt and respond quickly to any change in customers' needs.

Salespeople are boundary spanners and in direct contact with customers, competitors and the market in general (Hughes, Le Bon, & Rapp, 2013; Le Bon & Merunka, 2006; Mariadoss et al., 2014). Previous research suggests that salespeople play a vital role when it comes to gathering competitive information and market information (Fouss & Solomon, 1980; Grace & Pointon, 1980). Recent advances in technology have increased both internal and external information availability which, in turn, has made this task easier for salespeople but also more demanded by organizations. Building on that, a new term has been brought into the academic literature—salesperson competitive intelligence. The concept of salesperson competitive intelligence is defined as “the activity of gathering information concerning competitors and the competitive environment” (Rapp et al., 2015, p. 360).

Although salespeople were gathering competitive intelligence before the internet and social media ages, the use of the internet has been found to enhance the quality of competitive intelligence information collected by organizations (Chen, Chau, & Zeng, 2002; Cronin et al., 1994). Social media specifically, through its different platforms, provides salespeople with new approaches and venues to build social capital that may facilitate competitive intelligence gathering (Hughes et al., 2013). It is believed that social technology's development, in parallel with organizations' use of social technology power, will lead this technology to play a broader role in forming competitive strategies (Harrysson, Metayer, & Sarrazin, 2012). For example, the dialogue customers have with each other or with firm representatives may be of relevant importance especially for selling organizations and salespeople (Bhardwaj, Chen, & Godes, 2008). Kietzmann et al. (2011) suggest that competitive intelligence could be collected through scanning different social media platforms. Berinato and Clark (2010) explain how Twitter can be used to learn about customers, complaints, market trends and rivals. According to VanBoskirk, Li, Katz, and Lee (2011), organizations listening to customers through social media can gain more of what they identify as “social intelligence.”

Social media is an enhanced tool to improve information collection and can overcome some limitations of “old-school intelligence gathering” (Harrysson et al., 2012). Social media will not necessarily replace other methods of intelligence gathering, but it will certainly be a major player in providing the knowledge necessary for decision making (Harrysson et al., 2012) and for collecting competitive information (Rapp et al., 2011). Rollins et al. (2014) found that salespeople use social media (e.g., blogs) to search for relevant information needed at work. Harrysson et al. (2012) refer to the information and insights social media can provide for marketers as “social intelligence.” Social media can be a major source of individual competitive information that salespeople may utilize based on initiatives at the individual or organizational level. After all, salespeople should be aware of the crucial role social media can play in collecting information about competitors (both selling organizations and salespeople) and customers (current and new), which they can use to develop their individual competitive intelligence and at the same time enhance the competitive intelligence of their own organizations.

Social media hosts an increasing amount of information that can be beneficial to salespeople once collected. In addition, the technical and ongoing advancements of social media make it more practical for salespeople to use when collecting information about customers and competitors. Our fourth hypothesis is also supported by prior research with the notion that technology can increase the amount of intelligence gathered by salespeople (Ahearne, Jones, Rapp, & Mathieu, 2008; Marshall, Moncrief, & Lassk, 1999). By examining the effect of social media on the collection of competitive intelligence, we would be answering researchers' calls to explore new factors that can influence the competitive intelligence collection of salespeople (e.g., Rapp et al., 2011, 2015). Accordingly, we hypothesize the following:

H4. Social media use will have a positive effect on competitive intelligence collection.

3.2.2. Adaptive selling

Another outcome variable in the proposed model, adaptive selling behavior, is the altering of sales behaviors during a customer interaction or across customer interactions based on perceived information about the nature of the selling situation (Weitz, Sujan, & Sujan, 1986). In the proposed model, we argue that a salesperson's use of social media will impact adaptive selling directly as well as indirectly through competitive intelligence collection. For salespeople to use adaptive selling, they must acquire information about their customers first (Park, Kim, Dubinsky, & Lee, 2010). However, as described by Kohli and Jaworski (1990), competitors can affect customers' needs and preferences and, therefore, salespeople must also be knowledgeable about the offering of their competitors and how their competitors are striving to build relationships with customers. Social media could play a critical role here by enabling salespeople to attain information about customers as well as competitors.

The definition of adaptive selling shows that information about customers, competitors and the market in general plays a significant role when it comes to a salespeople's adaptation of their presentations and selling approach to fit customers' needs. Salespeople can use the information they obtain to adapt to the different customers' needs and concerns (Park et al., 2010). The information gathered is not only about customers, but also about different market players and aspects that may have effects on different steps in the selling process. The nature of a selling situation as discussed by Weitz et al. (1986) can be attributed to competitors and other players in the market. According to Marks, Vorhies, and Badovick (1996), any information collected about the sales situation can facilitate adaptive selling. Salespeople can achieve higher performance by planning and maintaining adequate information about their offerings, customers and competitors (Leigh & McGraw, 1989; Sujan et al., 1994; Weitz et al., 1986).

The more information salespeople have about their customers, the more they tend to adjust their presentations and practice adaptive selling (Hunter & Perreault, 2007). In their exploratory study, Marshall et al. (2012) found that sales managers and salespeople consider social media as an effective tool to increase connectivity, build personal and long-term relationships with customers, maintain global relationships, and at the same time help increase sales. Social media can play a major role in providing salespeople with compulsory information that allows them to adapt their offerings and selling presentation to suit the needs of customers. Social media provides salespeople with access to direct information from customers and/or indirect information through customer-to-customer and/or customer-competitor interactions (Agnihotri et al., 2012).

In addition to providing relevant information to salespeople, social media also offers opportunities for better interactions between customers and salespeople (Hansen, Shneiderman, & Smith, 2010; Trainor, 2012). Social media is effective in identifying customers' needs, providing answers to their questions, and solving their problems efficiently. Additionally, social media can be used to “push” specialized information such as blog posts, demonstrative videos, or testimonials to prospects, while content creation and marketing automation allow salespeople to “pull” potential customers their way (Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016). Thus, it could be argued that social media can help salespeople adapt to different selling situations they encounter. This is in line with prior research finding that the use of sales technology can increase adaptive selling (Robinson, Marshall, & Stamps, 2005), as does the use of CRM technology (Rapp, Agnihotri, & Forbes, 2008). In fact, salespeople who read and write blogs have been found to be motivated to acclimatize their selling behaviors and adapt to selling conditions according to the needs of their customers (Rollins et al., 2014).

This study posits that social media is beneficial for salespeople when

it comes to adapting their selling behaviors to fit different and changing customers' needs. In sum, social media can provide salespeople with an improved ability to interact and learn about their customers, get their feedback and discover any changes in their needs—all of which can increase the adaptability of salespeople. Accordingly, we propose the following:

H5. Social media use will have a positive effect on adaptive selling behaviors.

The adaptive selling framework by Weitz et al. (1986) suggests that salespeople have the chance to adapt to different customers and sales situations in order to present their offerings in the most appealing manner. This opportunity is achieved through the acquisition of information using formal and informal processes. Market intelligence and industry knowledge may help salespeople interpret the actions of their competitors so they can take a proactive approach to not fall behind. For that, salespeople may use the information they collect about their competitors as well as their competitors' relationships with prospects and customers to adapt to changes in customers' tastes, and to make sure they present their offerings in a way that highlights their benefits over the competition. The competitive intelligence collected by salespeople provides them with a better understanding and stronger insight about customers' needs and selling environment, and it is part of the information they can use to assist in their adaptive selling (Rapp et al., 2015).

Rapp et al. (2011) suggest that a salesperson's competitive intelligence at the individual level can increase sales performance by enhancing adaptive as well as customer-oriented selling. Salespeople can use the information they collected to modify their selling approach and make it fit the needs of a specific customer (Ahearne et al., 2008). The information gathered about competitors can tap into areas such as competitors' new offerings, existing products' specifications, relationships between competitors and customers, all of which can help salespeople in their adaptive selling. Salespeople should be sure to adapt their selling approach to the one that provides them a competitive lead against rivals.

While Rapp et al. (2015) tested the effect of competitive intelligence use on adaptive selling and not competitive intelligence collection, we argue that competitive intelligence collection could have a direct effect on adaptive selling since other mechanisms can be hypothesized to play a role in the competitive intelligence collection-adaptive selling behavior relationship, such as knowledge, experience and cognition level that may be enhanced by collection of such intelligence. Therefore, we propose that:

H6. Competitive intelligence collection will have a positive effect on adaptive selling behaviors.

Salespeople modify their selling presentations based on information they collect before and during interactions with customers (Franke & Park, 2006). To increase their performance levels, salespeople must have strong planning skills and knowledge about their offerings, customers and competitors (Leigh & McGraw, 1989; Sujan et al., 1994). Salespeople engaging in adaptive selling in their work can use learned behaviors such as collecting information, employing the communicating process, and creating solutions (Eckert, 2006) as they interact with their buyers.

Customers develop favorable attitudes toward salespeople who use adaptive selling, since they feel these salespeople better understand their needs and provide them with customized solutions to address and solve their problems (Chen & Jaramillo, 2014). In fact, salespeople's adaptability to their customers can impact the customers' satisfaction levels with their sales representatives (Ahearne, Mathieu, & Rapp, 2005). Adaptive selling has been found to be positively related to customers' perceptions of future dealings with the salesperson (Román & Iacobucci, 2010) and salesperson-owned loyalty (Chen & Jaramillo, 2014).

Assuming an adaptive selling approach is extremely important because of the long-term focus and crucial role that customer satisfaction plays in building relationships in B2B marketing. According to Jaramillo, Locander, Spector, and Harris (2007), adaptive selling can enhance the salesperson's capability to build quality relationships with buyers and, thus, increase job performance. Román and Iacobucci (2010) find positive effects of adaptive selling on both the customers' satisfaction with the salesperson and on the salesperson's outcome performance.

Mixed results exist in prior literature about the effect of adaptive selling behaviors on salespeople's performance. Some studies find a positive effect of adaptive selling behavior on performance (Boorum, Goolsby, & Ramsey, 1998; Franke & Park, 2006; Robinson et al., 2005), while others find no support for such an effect (Keillor, Parker, & Pettijohn, 1999; Pettijohn, Pettijohn, Taylor, & Keillor, 2000). Furthermore, Ahearne et al. (2005) do not find a significant relationship between salespeople's adaptability and job performance measured by the level of sales quotas achieved, while (Goolsby, Lagace, & Boorum, 1992) find that adaptive selling has dissimilar effects on the different dimensions of performance.

Discrepancies in the literature about the relationship between adaptive selling behavior and sales performance raise the need for additional testing (Ahearne et al., 2008). Several studies that examine the adaptive selling-sales performance relationship warrant further research to clarify the mixed results found in earlier articles (Park & Deitz, 2006; Román & Iacobucci, 2010). In some cases, adaptive selling behavior is found to be situation-specific (Keillor, Parker, & Pettijohn, 2000), as the selling situation can affect the adaptive selling behavior-sales performance relationship (Porter, Wiener, & Frankwick, 2003). To refine the impact of adaptive selling, replication of this relationship is warranted. This study tests the direct effect of adaptive selling on sales performance, where performance is measured using sales managers' ratings of salespeople's sales performance. Building on previous arguments, we propose the following as our final hypothesis:

H7. Adaptive selling behaviors will have a positive effect on sales performance.

4. Methodology

4.1. Sample

For the current study, participants were recruited with the help of a marketing research company based in India. The research company has an extensive fieldwork capacity across the market. Although the purpose of this research is not a cross-national comparison, setting the study in one of the biggest and fastest-growing emerging markets offers valuable contributions to industrial marketing literature (Burgess & Steenkamp, 2006). The India-based sample also fills a gap in the social media research stream as, while there are limited studies that explore this phenomenon empirically, nearly all are based in a western sales force setting—thus leaving out a wide marketplace that involves emerging economies. The selection of B2B salespeople based in any of the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) offers significant implications for managers aiming to learn the sales management process in non-western settings (LaPlaca, 2011).

Adhering to a rigorous process of data collection, we started with enlisting relevant organizations in the manufacturing and service sectors. The selection of target companies was based on the criteria that the company operates within the B2B arena and that there is an ongoing and long-term relationship to be maintained by a certain set of salespeople within the organization. We also made sure we would be able to match the data collected from salespeople to that from their sales managers. Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed for salespeople, sales managers, and their customers.

Prior to data collection, we pre-tested the survey instrument with a group of salespeople and sales managers. Suggestions were taken into

consideration to make the questionnaire more readable and appropriate for administration. Responses from sales managers were matched with those of their salespeople using assigned code numbers to ensure accuracy, anonymity and confidentiality. This use of dyadic data adds rigor when studying relationships that include sales performance as one of the variables. All respondents were told that the purpose of this study is to conduct scholarly research and, in an effort to minimize social desirability bias among respondents, sales managers were told that there was no intention to evaluate the salesperson about whom they are providing information.

During the first stage of data collection, 219 salespeople were approached. With matched salesperson-supervisor responses, the final sample consists of 120 salesperson-supervisor dyads. The final sample consists of B2B salespeople selling industrial products and services, representing both manufacturing and service sectors. The sample is 86% male and has an average age of 28.5 years. The range of sales experience is wide, as several respondents were in their first year of sales while others had 25 years in the profession (average 4.65 years). Finally, respondents come from an array of industries including auto service, automobile, construction, healthcare, marketing, pharmaceutical, information technology, textile, hospitality, and banking, financial services, insurance. Majority (70%) of respondents work for companies operating within the services industry. The average number of employees (company size) is approximately 100 employees.

4.2. Measures

Constructs in the model are measured using scales validated in extant literature. We utilize Kohli, Shervani, and Challagalla (1998) scale to assess individual salesperson's learning orientation. Considering the conceptualization of social media in sales considers it a technology tool that can be used to “leverage the network” inside and outside the organization (Andzulis et al., 2012), items are adapted to focus on associated tasks (e.g., personal socializing/networking or networking within the company). Social media use is measured using the scale from Agnihotri et al. (2016). Attitude toward social media usefulness is adapted from Davis' (1989) scale, which differentiates technologies (i.e., e-mail, spreadsheets, etc.) based on different tasks associated with the use of technology at the workplace (e.g., efficiency, effectiveness, and job ease). Competitive intelligence collection is captured using Le Bon and Merunka's (2006) scale. The adaptive selling behavior of salespeople is measured using Spiro and Weitz's (1990) scale. Measurements are made using 7-point Likert-style scales, where the scale items range from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree).

The outcome variable, salesperson performance, is reported by sales managers. Specifically, managers reported the performance of each individual sales representative on three key dimensions: exceeding sales targets and objectives, generating high level of sales, and selling a full range of products. With respect to these particular measures, the aim is to avoid self-report bias regarding actual performance. Finally, we control for the salesperson's experience, education, age, and gender (male = 0; female = 1), in addition to company size (number of employees), and industry type (product = 0; service = 1), because of the effects these variables can have on variables such as social media use and sales performance (Agnihotri et al., 2016; Pulakos, Arad, Donovan, & Plamondon, 2000; Rapp et al., 2013; Weinstein & Mullins, 2012).² Appendix B provides a summary of the measures used and their relevant statistics.

5. Data analysis

Data analysis for this study utilizes SmartPLS 2.0 (Ringle, Wende, & Will, 2005), first assessing a measurement model and then

² We thank an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

testing a structural model to test the proposed hypotheses. The PLS-SEM method of analysis is applied to the data because of the small sample size (120 salespeople) and the complexity of the model being tested. The PLS-SEM is recommended for use with small sample sizes and complex models (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011). In our analysis of the data, we examine the composite reliability, Cronbach's alpha and average variance extracted (AVE) of all the measures used. This examination can provide evidence of reliability, as well as convergent and discriminant validity of the measures. To accomplish this, we ran the measurement model for the first time and checked indicator loadings of the different constructs in the model; two items were dropped because of low loadings (< 0.5) and one because it cross-loaded on a different construct than the one it was required to load on. We then ran the measurement model for the second time. The results show an adequate measurement model, as displayed in Appendix B.

The composite reliability (CR) is a more appropriate criterion for assessing internal consistency and reliability of the constructs, compared to Cronbach's alpha, when using PLS modeling (Hair, Sarstedt, Pieper, & Ringle, 2012). The CRs of all constructs were well above the 0.7 level, with the lowest equal to 0.83, providing evidence of reliability (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). For assessing convergent validity, we used the AVE values and indicators loadings extracted. The analysis shows that all AVE values are above 0.5, and thus satisfies the suggested criterion (Chin, 1998; Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Moreover all indicators loaded on their respective constructs, with the lowest loading at a level of 0.69 (Vinzi, Chin, Henseler, & Wang, 2010).

We measured the *t*-values and significance levels of all indicators using the bootstrap procedure in SmartPLS (Chin, 1998). The *t*-values for all indicators were statistically significant at the 0.05 level. To test the discriminant validity we followed the suggestions of Fornell and Larcker (1981). The square root of the AVE for each construct exceeded the correlations between the respective construct and any other construct in the model. Moreover, the cross-loading analysis revealed that all indicators loaded on their respective construct to the highest level with no indicators that load higher on another construct (Gefen & Straub, 2005). In sum, the above findings show evidence of reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity for the measures used. Based on that, we are able to proceed with the analysis. Correlations and descriptive statistics are provided in Table 2.

The first step of our analysis was to examine the coefficients of the proposed relationships. To accomplish this, we first ran the linear structural model (Model 1) and extracted the results. Then, we ran another model with the moderating effect of learning goal orientation (Model 2). Table 3 provides a summary of these findings.

Table 2
Correlations and descriptive statistics.

	LGO	ASM	SMU	CIC	ASB	PER
Learning Goal Orientation (LGO)	0.79					
Attitude toward Social Media (ASM)	0.44**	0.85				
Social Media Use (SMU)	0.06	0.05	0.84			
Competitive Intelligence Collection (CIC)	-0.20*	-0.03	0.38**	0.92		
Adaptive Selling Behavior (ASB)	-0.02	0.13	0.48**	0.74**	0.83	
Sales Performance (PER)	-0.05	-0.07	0.25**	0.28**	0.29**	0.84
Mean	6.30	6.47	5.67	5.57	5.80	6.17
Standard deviation	0.72	0.73	1.15	1.82	1.06	1.06

Diagonal elements are square roots of average variance extracted.

* *p* < 0.05.
** *p* < 0.01.

Table 3
Results.

Hypotheses	Model 1	Model 2	Support
H ₁ : Learning goal orientation → attitude toward social media usefulness	0.46**	0.46**	Yes
H ₂ : Attitude toward social media usefulness → social media use	0.03	0.05	No
Learning goal orientation → social media use	-	0.09	-
H ₃ : Learning goal orientation × attitude toward social media usefulness → social media use	-	0.21*	Yes
H ₄ : Social media use → competitive intelligence collection	0.40**	0.40**	Yes
H ₅ : Social media use → adaptive selling behavior	0.22*	0.22*	Yes
H ₆ : Competitive intelligence collection → adaptive selling behavior	0.67**	0.67**	Yes
H ₇ : Adaptive selling behavior → sales performance	0.31*	0.31*	Yes

Control variable	Social media use		Sales performance	
Age	0.17		0.13	
Experience	-0.11		0.18	
Gender	-0.13		-0.08	
Education	-0.07		-0.04	
Company size	0.03		0.06	
Industry	0.21*		-0.02	

* *p* < 0.05.
** *p* < 0.01.

6. Results

Coefficients were assessed with their relative significance level. The findings from model 1 provide support for H₁, as learning orientation was found to strengthen the attitude toward social media usefulness ($\beta = 0.46, p < 0.01$). However, no relationship between attitude toward social media usefulness and social media use was found ($\beta = 0.03, n.s.$); thus, H₂ was not supported. A positive relationship between social media use and competitive intelligence collection was found ($\beta = 0.40, p < 0.01$), in support of H₄. Moreover, social media use has a positive influence on adaptive selling behavior ($\beta = 0.22, p < 0.05$), providing support for H₅. Competitive intelligence collection and adaptive selling were positively related ($\beta = 0.67, p < 0.01$); this supports H₆. Finally, a positive relationship between adaptive selling and sales performance was also found ($\beta = 0.31, p < 0.05$), providing support for H₇³. To test the moderating effect of learning orientation, we created an interaction term between learning orientation and attitude toward social media using the recommended guidelines by Chin, Marcolin, and Newsted (2003) and then ran a new structural analysis. SmartPLS allows the creation of interactive effects using the product-indicator approach, which creates interactions of constructs by multiplying all possible pairs of both scales. The results of this provide support for H₃; learning orientation interacts with a salespeople's attitude toward social media usefulness to impact their social media use ($\beta = 0.21, p < 0.05$).

To examine the importance of testing the moderating effect of learning orientation on attitude toward social media-social media use relationship, we conducted an additional analysis to test the effect size *f*² as suggested by Cohen (1988). For that, we compared the change in

³ Additionally, we conducted a post-hoc analysis in which we tested the mediating path of social media use-adaptive selling behavior-sales performance. The analysis shows that social media has positive relationship ($\beta = 0.24, p < 0.05$) with sales performance, but that relationship ($\beta = 0.13, n.s.$) is not significant when we add adaptive selling behavior. Thus, social media use can play a role in driving sales performance only through the social media-selling behaviors-performance path. We thank an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

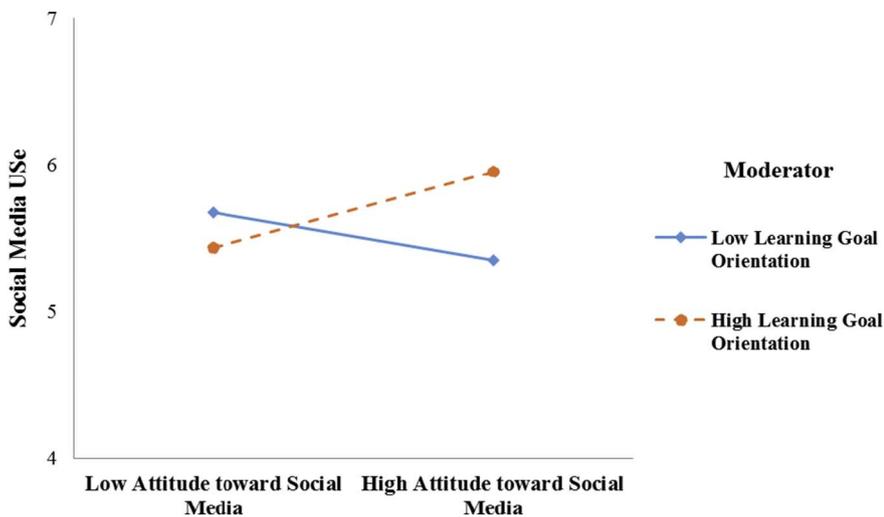


Fig. 2. Interaction effect of attitude toward social media and learning goal orientation.

the proportion of variance explained in the social media use variable by comparing the R^2 found in the main model and that in the moderated model. The effect size f^2 calculated was 0.039; while this effect size is considered weak, Chin et al. (2003) states that a weak effect size f^2 does not imply that the moderating effect is negligible and that such an effect must be examined with respect to its meaningfulness. Thus, it is important to understand that a small f^2 does not necessarily imply an unimportant effect. “Even a small interaction effect can be meaningful under extreme moderating conditions, if the resulting beta changes are meaningful, then it is important to take these conditions into account” (Chin et al., 2003, p. 211). In our study, the moderating effect found shows that a salesperson’s goal orientation and his or her attitude toward social media interact to positively influence social media use. A graphical representation of the moderating effect of learning goal orientation is provided in Fig. 2.

7. Discussion and implications

Academic research frequently acknowledges that social media is making its way as a dominant selling tool affecting the selling environment in general (Marshall et al., 2012). Organizations wanting to better deploy sales technology are spending billions of dollars on technological advancements for making their sales representatives more proficient in handling the selling process (Hunter & Perreault, 2007), yet adaptation of social media by B2B salespeople is slow. The results of this study shed light on an interesting phenomenon that currently exists in sales—that while social media use is believed to be very important and beneficial for B2B salespeople (and, accurately so, as our study found it to enhance sales performance by means of collecting competitive intelligence and increasing adaptive selling), it is not predominantly used.

In fact, the empirical findings of our study—that attitude toward social media was not significantly related to salesperson social media use—mirror the findings of PeopleLinx (2015) that, although “73% of [B2B sales and account management professional] respondents found at least one social network valuable,” “only 31% of sales professional[s] say their process includes social” (p. 2). Perhaps this aligns well with Guesalaga’s (2016) recommendation for companies to “explore...hav [ing] an expert in social media, with enough authority to influence senior management in the company” (p. 78). Moreover, there is considerable variability in the degree to which attitude can predict behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2000), and findings regarding the attitude-behavior relation are not as robust as they appear (Glasman & Albarracín, 2006; Kraus, 1995). As this research aims to bridge the gap between expectation and reality, a variety of implications both theoretical and practical have been realized.

7.1. Theoretical implications

The perceived importance of social media for the world of B2B sales has been growing, but empirical support in academic research has provided limited support and substantiation to *how* salesperson social media use is enabling salespeople to execute sales-related activities and behaviors and *if* social media use could improve performance. Hence, our contribution is twofold. First, we provide empirical evidence to bolster social media’s role as an enabler of two key sales behaviors, competitive intelligence collection (Mariadoss et al., 2014) and adaptive selling (Hughes et al., 2013). Second, we cement previous research findings (Agnihotri et al., 2016; Rodriguez et al., 2012) that the value of social media use is reflected through behaviors, rather than impacting performance directly. This study provides a starting point for future research in this area. Considering the outcomes of salespeople who do use social media, we find positive empirical support linking social media use to the improved collection of competitive intelligence as well as to more adaptive selling behaviors, which both lead to an increase in sales performance.

Social media can assist organizations in amassing information about various customers’ connections and then processing such information to discover hidden patterns about customers, which in turn allow companies to adapt their offerings to suit the different tastes of their customers (Woodcock, Green, & Starkey, 2011). Adaptive selling behavior continues to be a learning process that salespeople go through (Park & Holloway, 2003). This process starts with information gathering about customers and competitors, which can be expedited by social media (Andzulis et al., 2012). With the advent of tools that can analyze social media data and possible integration of social media with CRM systems, organizations have a great deal of information available to help a salesperson learn about a customer and tailor their presentation accordingly.

While a statistically significant link was not made between salesperson social media use and sales performance, we believe this is explained by social media being one way to enhance sales performance—but social media use alone does not guarantee such enhancement. Social media use will affect the performance of salespeople through affecting their skills, knowledge and behaviors. This finding is in line with that of a previous study by Rodriguez et al. (2012) in which social media use has no direct impact on the outcome-based performance of B2B salespeople. Moreover, this finding is aligned with other empirical investigations (Agnihotri et al., 2016) finding that social media use may contribute indirectly toward performance outcomes such as customer satisfaction, but “the mere use of social media does not alone ensure the salesperson a means of enhancing customer satisfaction” (p. 177).

According to the cognitive selling paradigm, knowledge impacts the

salesperson's performance through information-based capabilities and behaviors (Porter & Inks, 2000; Weitz et al., 1986). In order to succeed in understanding their customers, salespeople are required to collect timely and precise information about different market opportunities (Üstüner & Godes, 2006). Salespeople should be aware of changes occurring with their customers and competitors, and adapt their selling efforts and behaviors to respond accordingly (Chonko et al., 2002). Salespeople should be interested in implementing continuous prospecting in such dynamic markets where buyers switch to different suppliers, go out of business, and desire better relationships and higher sales levels (Rodríguez et al., 2012). Many scholars and sales professionals would argue that these objectives can be accomplished through the use of social media, so we added a qualitative study to this paper to investigate this notion further.⁴ However, practical observations, supported by our qualitative study, find that salespeople are limited in their use of social media because guidance from their organization is limited regarding best practices and expectations for using social media. This calls for more research to identify the factors, especially organizational and managerial ones, which may enhance the level of salespeople's social media use.

The rapid growth of social media is not associated with enough growth in research on such phenomena (Swani et al., 2014). Because rapid changes happening in the social media arena make it difficult for academic scholars to keep up, more research is needed. We encourage sales scholars to think ahead to the next topic in this area—the measurable impact of social media. As mentioned previously, literature can condone non-significant results while still placing importance on their implications by implying that social media is simply another communication channel and, therefore, a direct effect may not be experienced. We believe that by focusing on the effects of specific channels (including social media) used by organizations and/or salespeople who formally engage in social selling, “big data” can be used to pinpoint the effects. As results are accumulated, parsing out effects with social media will provide a new and stronger foundation for research in this area. The emerging role of social media within the B2B market calls for more research by scholars and practitioners to understand this phenomenon and to guide managers accordingly.

7.2. Managerial implications

Social media is becoming a major player in all types of communication and is creating unique potential for better performance at both the organizational and individual levels. Acknowledging that traditional marketing and advertising experts may not possess expertise in social media (Ferrell & Ferrell, 2012), some organizations have started adding “experience with social media” as a job requirement when hiring individuals in boundary-spanning positions such as sales (Rinaldo, Tapp, & Laverie, 2011) so they can maximize on the perceived benefits of using social media. As a sales executive responding to our qualitative study (R4) put it, firms “can use social media to gather market intelligence and identify value opportunities for their customers.”

While hiring individuals with experience in social media may be a move in the right direction to remain current in the modern marketplace, sales professionals need help knowing when and how to use social media for job-related tasks. When a company does not have a social media strategy, “it is left for [the] individual salesperson to use social media for his/her own competitive advantage,” as expressed by a respondent (R4) in our qualitative study. Although we find a positive link between social media use and competitive intelligence, it is of utmost importance to highlight the risks of using social media from the perspective of learning about the competition. If all salespeople are looking at what competitors are doing, they could fall into a trap and expose

their own selling strategy. Also, salespeople have to be very careful about how they relate to their customers without unveiling their strategy to competitors.⁵

Referring again to PeopleLinx's (2015) study, utilizing social media for the sales process was only encouraged by 22% of respondents' companies and only 11% offer training in such an area; however, “when companies offer formal training programs, social selling adoption jumps from 28% to 74%” (p. 2). Even more compelling as a reason to implement social media use across a sales team is that “78.6% of sales people using social media to sell outperformed those who weren't using social media” (Fidelman, 2015). These statistics advocate for salesperson social media use, but their finding of how few salespeople actually use social media in the selling process or are trained on doing so also demonstrates why so little is known compared to the potential (Fidelman, 2015).

Indeed the non-significant link between a salesperson's attitude toward social media and actual use of social media sheds light on the issue at hand. As reflected through our qualitative data analysis, salespeople often face a dilemma about using social media at work largely due to the lack of an organization-wide social media strategy. Specifically, respondents in our qualitative study stated that “the challenges are primarily in terms of...a weak social strategy at firm level” (R4) and “[social media] usage is at an individual or a business unit level and not company-wide” (R1). Another respondent (R6), head of sales at a regional level, went so far as to say, “I am not sure about the opportunities presented by social media...I believe establishing its usefulness is the first and foremost hurdle.” It makes sense, therefore, to explore the role of moderating variables that may strengthen or ignite the link between the attitude toward social media and the actual use of social media.

8. Limitations

While our model invites a new investigation into the use of social media, it does come with limitations. An earlier version of the model did not find a direct relationship between social media use and performance, so the link was dropped from our model. Our post hoc analysis, however, highlights the mediating path of social media use to adaptive selling to performance. It also is reasonable to mention that the theory implemented in this model works with a number of variables, not only attitude toward social media use or personal attributes such as learning orientation. Our model is not a comprehensive one, and we accept this as a limitation. Social media's impact could be much broader to include components such as network building or lead nurturing, not limited to just competitive intelligence collection or adaptive selling. Moreover, our model is built on the traditional academic definition of social media, which some individuals may not share. Although during the data collection we shared examples of the most commonly used social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn) to draw a boundary with our survey respondents, the use of social media could mean different things to different people.

Another limitation of this research is the use of cross-sectional data in the quantitative analyses. First, the use of cross-sectional survey is criticized for several reasons including common method variance bias (Rindfleisch, Malter, Ganesan, & Moorman, 2008). In this study we implemented a cross-sectional survey design with data collected from salespeople and managers, thus reducing the possibility of such bias (e.g., Doty & Glick, 1998). Specifically, the survey to which the sales managers responded also included the dependent variable measure of salesperson's sales performance (e.g., Ahearne & Lam, 2011).

In addition, we followed procedural remedies (e.g., Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003) for better validity and reliability (e.g., the use of survey items that were adapted from previously-

⁴ We appreciate the insight of an anonymous reviewer for this recommendation.

⁵ We thank an anonymous reviewer for this insight.

validated measures, the pretest of items used by salespeople and sales managers, and the confidentiality and anonymity assured to respondents). Future research should implement a longitudinal design, with matched data collected before and after the adoption period. Such a design's results may better explain the effects of social media use on performance, while being mindful that organizations face different challenges with social media implementation and still are not able to measure the exact effects of using it.

Another limitation lies in the fact that some of our relationships may be driven by additional mechanisms. For example, the strong link between competitive intelligence collection and adaptive selling behavior could be mediated by the increase in salespeople's knowledge, which is a key factor in sales performance (e.g., Verbeke, Dietz, & Verwaal, 2011). Future research should examine such a possible relationship. Moreover, future studies are encouraged to examine how competitive intelligence collected from social media at the salesperson's individual level can be shared with other salespeople and disseminated through the entire organization. CRM technology that has the capability of achieving such a goal would be a relevant tool for this research to help future studies examine such phenomena both qualitatively and quantitatively.

9. Future research directions

In this study new relationships were identified, including the relationship between social media and one of the most influential selling behaviors—adaptability (e.g., Spiro & Weitz, 1990; Verbeke et al., 2011). Future studies may test the effects of social media on other selling behaviors, such as customer-oriented and service behaviors. For example, it could be argued that the use of social media increases the perceived sociability of salespeople and keeps ongoing connections between salespeople and customers, thus leading them to increase their customer-oriented behaviors. Evidence of this appears in our qualitative study, where a respondent states (R5), “the sales force uses the social media on a personal basis to link on with their regular customers to build up relationship and to keep in touch.” This is in line with the logic, which was also supported in this study, that social media enhances sales performance through specific selling behaviors such as adaptive selling.

In our study, we assumed learning-oriented salespeople would be likely to perceive social media as a tool that can support them at work and enhance their job performance. However, this issue could be linked

to generational issues (e.g., Millennials, Generation X). While we control for many variables in our reported model (i.e., age, experience, gender, education, company size, and industry), we accept this as a limitation. We also expect this transition into social selling to be increasingly important, as “millennials now account for almost half of all B2B purchase decision makers” (Soat, 2015). Of course, we acknowledge Weinstein and Mullins' (2012) finding that more experienced salespeople are generally more resistant to new technologies, so we believe this deepens the call to action for organizations to adopt social selling standards and to offer formal training in this area. We encourage future researchers to investigate this.

In this study, we focused on learning goal orientation. The goal orientation framework distinguishes between two personal orientations that motivate individuals toward achieving their goals: learning goal orientation and performance goal orientation (Ames & Archer, 1988; Dweck, 1986; Elliott & Dweck, 1988). The two different goal orientations generate different mental outlines that, in turn, create separate foundations on which individuals build their actions to achieve the goals associated with particular situations (Elliott & Dweck, 1988). Future studies may want to explore the role of other goal orientations in driving the use of social media.

Finally, future research should consider the chain of events from social media use to behavioral relations of the salesperson when studying effects of social media. In other words, it is not enough for salespeople to simply use social media on its own to increase their sales performance; instead, salespeople should understand how the use of social media can enhance different selling behaviors that, in turn, have direct effects on performance. For example, researchers should try to understand salesperson's simultaneous use of different social media tools and other CRM technologies, and the effect such simultaneous usage may have on performance. Furthermore, new studies are called to help understand the role social media plays in salespeople's simultaneous pursuit of customer service and cross/up selling behaviors (e.g., Agnihotri, Gabler, Itani, Jaramillo, & Krush, 2017; Jasmand, Blazevic, & de Ruyter, 2012). The capabilities social media provide can help salespeople better serve their customers and provide additional opportunities for salespeople to engage and cross/up selling, and eventually, performance. A pressing area for further study is to examine the different perspectives and angles of social media use within the B2B market and the sales context that can help both academics and practitioners achieve a better understanding of these evolving marketing tools.

Appendix A. Industry reflections on the state of social media, associated challenges, opportunities and research needs

Job position	Size/ industry	Current state of social media in the organization	Challenges and opportunities	Research needs
R1 National Head	1K + Media	“Its usage is at an individual or a business unit level and not company-wide. Most sales executives, managers use LinkedIn to connect with B2B decision makers.”	“.....creating or driving such platforms (Knowledge platforms using social media) would be a thrust area for any senior sales director/ head for database expansion, providing depth in relationships.”	“Not sure.”
R2 Partner and Head Client Relations	25 + Consulting	“There is no formal process or strategy to this effect. If at all the individual sales person may be using the medium in his personal capacity.”	“Sales people are generally slow/ reluctant in adapting to technological advancements. Also companies generally do not have a proper social media strategy in place for B2B sales.”	“Creating tools adept enough to sift through the very convoluted world of social media postings and accurate enough to emerge with legitimate predictions of off-line behavior is incredible.”
R3 Deputy General Manager	300 + Marketing	“The increasing dependency of consumers on social media spills not only into business but also into communications between businesses.”	“There is immense opportunity which has not been leveraged at all. Communication on Social media can open up new avenues for generating leads, customer feedback, consumer insights etc.”	“... is there any correlation between the social media strategy of the firm & the individual sales person?”

R4	Former Regional Sales Head	1K + Media	“...company does not have a social media strategy. Therefore, it is left for individual salesperson to use social media for his/her own competitive advantage.”	“This could be a great advantage for firms which are constrained in adapting to the new form of selling. Firms, for example can use social media to gather market intelligence and identify value opportunities for their customers. The challenges are primarily in terms of lower technology adaption at sales force level and a weak social strategy at firm level.”	“What are the drivers of firm level social media strategy? How does that connect with individual salesperson's social media strategy? Can the latter be an effective driver of the former?”
R5	General Manager	140 + Advertising	“As of now the company has no strategy in place for using social media on an organisational scale. However the sales force uses the social media on a personal basis to link on with their regular customers to build up relationship and to keep in touch.”	“Using social media in B2B sales can be a double edged sword. If the company is good in its service and is responsive it can be used to its advantage otherwise if company is not responsive to handling complaints and its image, its image can sour overnight.”	“A study into how effectively has social media usage by the company has affected its turnover or its image among its customers, does the customer feel closer to the company or it has created a divide.”
R6	Regional Sales Head	Investments	“I seriously do not know for sure if social media tools are turning a sales rep's world upside down. It is still all about having trusted relationships with customers so the question is if and how social media tools could help reps in that process.”	“I am not sure about the opportunities presented by social media. As for challenges, I believe establishing its usefulness is the first and foremost hurdle.”	“How to leverage these (social media) tools in the sales process is worthy to explore.”

Appendix B. Measurements, indicators loadings, composite reliability, Cronbach's alpha and average variance extracted

Measurements	Indicators Loading
<i>Learning goal orientation</i> CR = 0.83; α = 0.71; AVE = 0.63	
I am always learning something new about my customers.	0.81
It is worth spending a great deal of time learning new approaches for dealing with customers.	0.69
Learning how to be a better salesperson is of fundamental importance to me.	0.87
<i>Making mistakes when working with customers is just a part of the learning process.</i>	0.40
<i>I put in a great deal of effort sometimes in order to learn something new.</i>	0.41
<i>Attitude toward social media usefulness</i> CR = 0.83; α = 0.63; AVE = 0.73	
I think social media can be useful for personal socializing/networking	0.87
I think social media can be useful for networking within my company	0.84
<i>Social media use</i> CR = 0.88; α = 0.79; AVE = 0.71	
I am using social media to its fullest potential for supporting my own work	0.89
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	0.69
<i>Competitive intelligence collection</i> CR = 0.95; α = 0.92; AVE = 0.86	
When I am in the field, I try to gather and transmit reliable information	0.89
I always assign myself objectives to obtain information about competitors.	0.96
I ask customers about the competition's products and strategies.	0.93
<i>Adaptive selling behavior</i> CR = 0.87; α = 0.77; AVE = 0.69	
When I feel that my sales approach is not working, I can easily change to another approach.	0.86
I like to experiment with different sales approaches.	0.93
I vary my sales style from situation to situation.	0.69
<i>Each customer requires a unique approach.</i> ^a	
<i>Sales performance</i> ^b CR = 0.88; α = 0.81; AVE = 0.71	
This sales representative exceeds sales targets and objectives.	0.87
This sales representative generates a high level of sales.	0.75
This sales representative sells the full range of products.	0.90

Note: Indicators in italic were dropped. CR = composite reliability; α = Cronbach's Alpha; AVE = Average variance extracted.

^a Item cross-loaded.

^b Managers reported data.

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