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Studying the antecedents and outcome of social media use by salespeople using a MOA framework

Paolo Guenzi\textsuperscript{a}, Edwin J. Nijssen\textsuperscript{b,}\textsuperscript{*}

\textsuperscript{a} Università Commerciale Luigi Bocconi, SDA Bocconi School of Management, Via Roentgen 1, 20136 Milano, Italy
\textsuperscript{b} Eindhoven University of Technology, Department of Industrial Engineering & Innovation Sciences, P.O. Box 513, 5600 MB Eindhoven, the Netherlands

A R T I C L E   I N F O

Keywords:
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A B S T R A C T

The innovative impact of digital technologies on sales forces is largely unexplored. Particularly, the understanding of drivers of social media use by salespeople remains fragmented and scant. Drawing on motivation-opportunity-ability theory, this study develops an integrative framework. The individual's opportunities to use social media, including perceptions about market readiness, peer influence, and organizational support are considered as important antecedents of individuals' motivation (perceived usefulness) and ability (perceived ability to integrate social media in the sales tasks) to use social media in their job. Next to a positive effect of social media use on sales performance also a potential negative impact through distraction is accounted for. The framework and hypotheses are tested using a sample of 345 salespeople. The results largely support the model and hypotheses. Market readiness, peer influence, and organizational support positively affect salesperson motivation, and except for organizational support, the individual's ability to integrate social media in his/her sales job too. Findings further show that motivation and ability together drive social media use in sales, but that a lack of ability shuts down the positive influence of motivation on social media use. Finally, a positive effect of social media use on sales performance is detected, suggesting that social media can be an important tool to enhance sales growth. Support for a dark side effect of social media is not found.

1. Introduction

A growing number of companies claim that they use social media for managing client relationships (Houssem, 2013). Currently, 59% of salespeople say they use social media in their work, and the majority (89%) of top-performing salespeople report that social networking platforms, such as LinkedIn, are part of their sales strategy and important in closing deals (LinkedIn, 2019). This evidence suggests that social media holds a great deal of potential for sales. Responding to this development, sales and marketing scholars have begun studying the role and effectiveness of social media in selling.

Table 1 summarizes the key empirical studies on the topic to date. It suggests an embryonic and fragmented field that is shifting from descriptive to more explanatory research. The list of key findings shows that social media can facilitate salespeople’s communication quality (Agnihotri, Dingus, Hu, & Krush, 2016) and adaptive selling (Itani, Agnihotri, & Dingus, 2017), help develop and maintain customer relationships (in terms of, e.g., acquisition, retention, and identifying sales opportunities), and foster customer satisfaction (Agnihotri et al., 2016; Rodriguez, Ajjan, & Peterson, 2016).

Table 1 also identifies several gaps in the literature (see the rightmost column). First, most studies have focused on a few specific variables (e.g., the impact of age or attitude toward social media on usage), and few investigate antecedents and consequences together. As a result, extant research has developed few overarching frameworks that could help the research move forward. Second, the consequences of using social media remain underexplored. For example, many studies do not include sales performance in their research design. Hence, more work on the impact of social media on sales outcomes would be useful. Third, prior research has focused on the bright side of salespeople's social media use and ignored dark-side effects, such as distraction and privacy issues. Hence, a more balanced view would be useful and could help managers both strengthen positive and fight negative influences of social media use in sales contexts. Finally, the operationalization of social media usage has been weak. Most studies focus on the use of one or only a small set of social media outlets (e.g., LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter) and then generalize the findings. Moreover, most study designs involve asking respondents for general usage patterns (e.g., in their private life) and/or do not specifically investigate usage in sales context (e.g., for sales tasks). Hence, improvements in the operationalization of social media use by salespeople using a MOA framework

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\textsuperscript{a} Università Commerciale Luigi Bocconi, SDA Bocconi School of Management, Via Roentgen 1, 20136 Milano, Italy
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| Authors                | Sample                                                       | Core construct investigated | Investigated drivers of SM          | Investigated consequences of SM          | Key limitations                                                                 |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Agnihotri et al.      | Survey of 111 salespeople in the United States               | SM use (adapted from Agnihotri et al., 2009) | Information communication, responsiveness, customer satisfaction | Salesperson use of SM increases information communication behaviors (e.g., frequency), which in turn enhance salesperson responsiveness and customer satisfaction. | No evidence of direct impact of SM use on performance (customer satisfaction). Impact is fully mediated by information communication behaviors and responsiveness. |
| Guesalaga (2016)      | Survey of 220 salespeople in the United States               | SM usage: single item, “Intensity of your company’s social media usage in the sales organization” (10-point scale) | Customer engagement in SM; Organizational competence and commitment in SM; Individual competence and commitment in SM. | Organizational competence and commitment (e.g., training) with SM use are key determinants of SM usage in sales. Individual commitment (e.g., being active) influences SM use. | No investigation of antecedents of SM use. General measure of SM use (no consideration of specific SM types/outlets). Several hypotheses were not supported (e.g., individual competence in using SM does not positively moderate SM use). |
| Hansen and Levin      | 210 individuals (51% mktg/sales, 49% other departments)       | Frequency of postings on Facebook on behalf of the business | Extrinsic motivation, intrinsic motivation and apathetic motivation, behavioral intention | Apathetic motivation diminishes behavioral intention to use SM, whereas intrinsic and extrinsic motivations increase it. Apathetic motivation negatively moderates the influence of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation on behavioral intention (objectives set on social media, self-efficacy, sales performance). Employee job role (mktg/sales) positively moderates behavioral intention and behavioral usage. | Investigation of antecedents of SM use limited to motivation only. No evidence of direct impact of SM use on sales performance. Impact is fully mediated by competitive intelligence collection and adaptive selling. |
| Itani et al. (2017)   | 120 salesperson-sales supervisor dyads in India             | SM use (same scale as Agnihotri et al., 2016) | Attitude toward SM usefulness | SM use increases competitive collection, sales performance. | No support to the hypothesis that attitude toward SM usefulness increases SM use. General measure of SM use (no consideration of specific SM types/outlets). |
| Moore et al. (2015)   | Survey of 395 salespeople, (157 in B2B markets) in the United States | Use of 12 different types of SM | Salesperson product information communication, sales performance, adaptability, diligence, and product knowledge. | Salesperson use of SM technology improves customer relationship performance (objective sales goal achievement, in Study 2) through the impact on two mediating variables: adaptive selling and product knowledge. | No investigation of antecedents of SM use. Only investigates frequency of use of different types of SM by sales task, and compares differences in sales volumes across different media. |
| Ogilvie et al. (2018) | Study 1: Survey of 375 B2B salespeople in the United States   | Use of 12 different types of SM | Customer relationship performance, sales performance, adaptability, diligence, and product knowledge. | Salesperson product information communication, sales performance, adaptability, diligence, and product knowledge. Customer relationship performance, sales performance, adaptability, diligence, and product knowledge. | No investigation of antecedents of SM use. Only investigates frequency of use of different types of SM by sales task, and compares differences in sales volumes across different media. |
| Authors | Sample | Core construct investigated | Investigated drivers of SM | Investigated consequences of SM | Key findings | Key limitations |
|---------|--------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| Rapp et al. (2013) | Multilevel data (283 salespeople, 144 retailers, and 445 consumers) in the United States | SM use (13 items on different forms of using SM) | None | SM usage by retailers and end consumers, brand sales performance | When suppliers use social media, it has influence on retailer SM use, which in turn has impact on customer SM use. This relationship is moderated by brand reputation and service ambidexterity. | No investigation of antecedents of SM use. No consideration of specific SM types/outlets. No evidence of a direct relationship between SM use and seller performance: focus on contagion effect (i.e., use of SM by retailers and end consumers). |
| Rodriguez, Peterson, and Krishnan (2012) | Survey of 1699 B2B salespeople from 25 industries | SM usage (3 items) | None | Creating opportunity, Understanding customers, Relationship management, Relationship sales performance, Outcome-based sales performance | SM usage increases most of the dependent variables examined | No investigation of antecedents of SM use. General measure of SM use, with no consideration of specific SM types/outlets. No evidence of a direct relationship between SM use and sales performance: impact is fully mediated by relationship performance. Predictors not specific to SM. No consideration of specific SM types/outlets. No evidence of a direct relationship between SM use and sales performance: impact is fully mediated by relationship performance. |
| Rodriguez et al. (2016) | 184 companies with more than 500 salespeople | SM use (3 items) | Sales personnel general capability; Upper management general support | Relationship performance, sales performance | Sales personnel general capability and upper management general support increase SM use, which in turn improves Relationship performance that ultimately increases sales performance. Sales process capability positively moderates the impact of SM use on relationship performance. | No consideration of specific SM types/outlets. No evidence of a direct relationship between SM use and sales performance: impact is fully mediated by relationship performance. |
| Schultz et al. (2012) | Survey of 273 B2B salespeople | Use of SM for selling (single item) | Age | Perceptions about SM use on sales success, perceived sales performance | Younger salespeople are more likely to use SM. Users of SM have a higher perception of the usefulness of SM to succeed in their job. The use of SM in sales positively influences perceived sales performance. | Investigation of antecedents of SM use limited to age only. SM use computed as a single item; general measure with no consideration of specific SM types/outlets. |
| Trainor et al. (2014) | Survey on 308 managers of companies in the US | Social CRM capability (i.e., ability to use SM for information generation, information dissemination, and responsiveness) | SM technology use = organizational use of 15 different types of SM, grouped into four functions: sharing, conversation, relationship, and community support; based on Jayachandran et al. (2005), and customer-centric management system | Customer relationship performance | SM technology use and customer-centric management system increase (both individually and in combination one with another) Social CRM capability, which in turn increases customer relationship performance. | No investigation of antecedents of SM technology use. SM use merely computed as number of types/outlets used by the company. No evidence, however, of a direct relationship between SM technology use and customer relationship performance. |

SM = social media.
media use would strengthen this research stream. Ancillai, Tehro, Cardinali, & Pascucci, 2019 recent review of social media in B2B selling largely confirms these research challenges.

In this study, we respond to these challenges by developing a theory-driven framework of drivers and consequences of salespeople's social media use for job-related tasks. In doing so, we also investigate a potential negative consequence: distraction. Our aim is to provide a better model of the underlying mechanisms of salespeople's social media use and provide managers with clear guidelines. Our study addresses the challenge summarized by Thomas Hansen, Global Vice President of Revenue at Dropbox regarding the use of social media in sales: “There's no clear manual of answers yet. You have to try things out” (SpencerStuart, 2016, p.3).

This research makes three important contributions. First, drawing on motivation-opportunity-ability (MOA) theory (Blumberg & Pringle, 1982) we develop a framework of organizational and individual (sales professional-specific) factors that affect salespeople's social media use in their job. Researchers have used MOA theory extensively to predict organizational behaviors and work performance (e.g., Siemsen, Roth, & Balasubramanian, 2008). Motivation refers to the individual's willingness to act, opportunity concerns the environmental or contextual variables that enable action, and ability represents the individual's skills or knowledge base related to the action. In the context of our study, the MOA logic suggests that sales professionals should possess the motivation and ability to use social media for sales tasks and perceive the opportunity to use these tools. In addition to identifying antecedents of this type of social media use, we also look at consequences (i.e., the effect of usage on sales performance).

Second, we test our framework using a sample of European salespeople and an enhanced measure of social media use in a salesperson’s daily routine. As highlighted in Table 1, the measures used in prior studies have important limitations. Extending prior work, we account for a comprehensive list of 13 types of social media outlets and measure the time salespeople spent using these outlets relative to alternative communication and information channels (e.g. face to face, telephone) in their job, which provides a more complete and calibrated measure. In the same vein, we focus on the salesperson's ability to use social media together with other media, that is, the ability to integrate social media into the job.

Third, we account for the dark side of salespeople's social media usage. As Brooks, Longstreet, and Calif (2017) note, the current literature shows a bias toward social media's positive effects, and little research focuses on its potential negative consequences in workplace settings. We hypothesize and check for a potential negative impact of distraction on individual sales performance.

The results of a survey of 345 salespeople largely confirm our MOA-driven hypotheses and show that social media, when used to complement traditional communications means, can help enhance salespeople's performance. However, their perceived belief in the tool's usefulness should be accompanied by their ability to use it (i.e., integrate it in their sales tasks). Distraction happens, but there is no evidence that it decreases individual sales performance.

The remainder of this article is organized as follows. We begin by outlining the theoretical background and conceptual framework of our study. We then develop our framework and hypotheses, describe our research method, and present our results. We conclude with a discussion and suggestions for further research.

2. Theoretical background: MOA logic

Extant marketing research has used MOA theory extensively to study topics including new product introductions, managerial assessments of marketing performance, and advertising. Applications in sales context include, for example, research on capabilities of sales organizations that excel at jointly selling existing and new products (Nijssen, Guenzi, & van der Borgh, 2017), sales lead exploitation (Sabnis, Chatterjee, Grewal, & Lilien, 2013), and cross- and upselling efforts on sales job outcomes (Johnson & Friend, 2015). The premise of MOA is that employees should both feel motivated and possess the skills and knowledge to perform a task, but that contextual factors (e.g., market conditions, organizational support) are also necessary to offer them the opportunity to act. In particular, if all these three components are present, action is most likely to occur (Rothschild, 1999). In our case, the behavior we aim to elucidate is a salesperson's use of social media in his/her job. We first define each of the MOA factors in relation to our sales context.

Motivation is a psychological state that stimulates a person to engage in a particular behavior and plays a critical role in explaining how and why behavior happens (Blumberg & Pringle, 1982). Particularly in selling, motivation is important because salespeople need it to deal with customer resistance to change and, sometimes, rejection (Weitz, Sujan, & Sujan, 1986). It is also critical for their adoption of new sales tools (Shilewaert, Ahearn, Frambahc, & Moenart, 2005). If salespeople think a tool useful, they will be more inclined to adopt and use it because they expect a positive outcome and thus think the tool instrumental to the job outcome that they seek. Salespeople's motivation to use social media refers to their perceived usefulness of social media—that is, the extent to which social media can help grow their sales by enhancing customer relationship management with both current and new customers.

Ability refers to the practical knowledge and skill a salesperson possesses, which is relevant to the desired behavior or goal (MacInnis, Moorman, & Jaworski, 1991; Sabnis et al., 2013)—in our case, using social media to better manage the relationship with customers. Weitz et al. (1986) stress the importance of a salesperson's ability to adapt sales behaviors to meet diverse demands and sales situations in the marketplace. This includes choosing the right sources of information and communication tools, and the salesperson's proficiency to use these tools and integrate them into daily tasks. We propose that the perceived ability to integrate social media in the job will stimulate a salesperson to use them. A positive perception of skills implies that social media will be used with self-confidence, which will help the person decide when and how to effectively use these media. Consequently, perceived ability facilitates the successful use of social media as a sales tool.

Opportunity refers to perceptions of situational and contextual factors that influence the possibility for achieving a positive behavioral outcome (Rothschild, 1999; Siemsen et al., 2008). If firms want their salespeople to adopt and use social media in their jobs, they should ensure that they have sufficient opportunity to do so. Opportunity may stem from market-related factors (e.g., Alavi, Habel, Guenzi, & Wieseke, 2018; Wu, Balasubramanian, & Mahajan, 2004) and organizational resources that enable salespeople (e.g., Johnson & Friend, 2015; Nijssen et al., 2017; Sabnis et al., 2013). In our case, we distinguish (1) the market environment, in particular the propensity of customers and competitors to use social media in business relationships, and (2) the organizational environment, specifically the social influence (peer use) as well as the organization's support (training as well as information and communication technology [ICT] support) for using social media in its sales processes. Customers' social acceptance is a strong driver for salespeople in any industry to adopt social media in their work (Guesalaga, 2016). If customers are perceived to be open to the idea of using social media in their buying relationships, sellers will be alerted and raise their interest. High competitive pressure and competitors' use of social media may contribute to the adoption and diffusion of social media as well. So, if customers and sellers are ready to accept the new technology, it will diffuse and become the norm in the market (Rindova & Petkova, 2007).

The organizational environment in this context refers to opportunities that the firm affords to the individual salesperson to apply social media in his/her job. In contrast to the more exogenous external factors, these internal factors are under the discretion of a firm's management. The more salespeople believe that their managers and other
colleagues have embraced social media, the more social pressure they will feel to adopt these tools. The greater the number of colleagues who use it, the more expertise will be present and the easier it will be to learn from others (Parthasarathy & Sohi, 1997) through, for example, observation and imitation (Schillewaert et al., 2005).

Technological (e.g., ICT) support and training also represent important internal opportunities that a firm’s management can control. If a company offers specific training on how to use social media, salespeople can quickly familiarize themselves with the new technology and learn how to use it (Moncrief, Marshall, & Rudd, 2013). Research confirms that technical or field support can facilitate use by increasing people’s ability (Robinson, Marshall, & Stamps, 2005; Schillewaert et al., 2005): poor technical support can act as an inhibitor, but excellent support can help remove barriers.

3. Framework and hypotheses

Fig. 1 shows the MOA-based framework that we developed regarding social media usage in the sales context. Each of the specific MOA variables that we selected are inspired by and consistent with Ahearne and Rapp (2010), who, building on prior research, identify social, competitive, organizational, and individual factors as key drivers of technology use in a sales context. More specifically, for motivation and ability we focus on the individual salesperson’s perception of social media usefulness and skill to integrate this tool in the sales job, respectively. To capture the broad concept of opportunity, we use three variables: one external environment (competitive) factor (i.e., perceived market readiness), one social factor (i.e., peer influence in the organization), and one organizational factor (i.e., organizational support).

Despite the popularity of MOA theory in the literature, a single convincing way of connecting its components does not exist (e.g., Siemsen et al., 2008). Although opportunities can act as contingencies that determine the effectiveness of motivation and ability as drivers of a desired behavior, they can also be considered the enablers or drivers of motivation and ability. In our conceptualization and context, motivation, and ability are under the control of the individual salesperson whose behaviors our model aims to predict. In contrast, opportunity concerns the set of exogenous (i.e., market- and organization-related) variables that affect the individual’s motivation and ability to display the behavior; these variables are partly under the discretion of the firm’s management. Therefore, we will consider the opportunity variables predictors of motivation and ability of the individual’s behavior regarding the use social media in his/her job. Because MOA operates at a high-order conceptual level, we employ specific arguments from middle-range theories to develop our hypotheses (e.g., social learning theory, social information processing theory, organizational support theory).

3.1. Impact of opportunities

Perceptions about customer expectations and readiness, as well as about competitors’ use of the technology, may act as important signals affecting a salesperson’s subjective evaluation of the usefulness of a new technology and subsequent adoption. As Rothschild (1999) highlights, when a behavior becomes more widespread in a community, group norms develop, and peer pressure to adopt that behavior grows. In our case, due to network effects the utility of new technologies, including social media, increases with the number of users within a focal salesperson’s social business environment (Majumdar & Venkataraman, 1998). Under these conditions, the salesperson who does not adopt the technological innovation may have high opportunity costs.

Jelinek, Ahearne, Mathieu, and Schillewaert (2006) provide empirical support for the positive impact of these external influences on perceptions of usefulness; they find that customer pressure has a positive impact on a salesperson’s intention to adopt sales force automation tools. Additionally, in the specific case of social media, Rapp, Skinner Beitelspaner, Grewel, and Hughes (2013) show evidence of a contagion effect of social media use across business suppliers, retailers, and consumers in distribution channels.

However, perceptions of customer readiness and competitor engagement will also fuel individuals’ tendencies to develop their abilities regarding a new technology. For salespeople, customer engagement with new tools, like social media, acts as a signal of the level of expertise and skill necessary to adopt, perform, and pressure to adopt that behavior grows.
competence (i.e., ability). Building on this research, we argue the following:

**Hypothesis 1.** The greater a salesperson’s perceptions of market readiness for social media, the greater his/her (a) perception of this tool’s usefulness (motivation) and (b) ability to integrate social media into his/her job.

Prior research confirms the importance of internal organizational variables in salespeople’s adoption and use of new technology (Schillewaert et al., 2005). In our conceptual focus on peer influence and the role of organizational support, the conceptual foundations of the impact of peer influence on salespeople’s motivation to use social media are mainly based on social learning theory (Bandura, 1986) and social information processing theory (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). Social learning theory argues that people in an organization learn by observing and imitating what relevant and influential people near to them do. Top managers, supervisors, and subordinates can all act as role models (Schillewaert et al., 2005). Their behaviors set a standard most salespeople will replicate. They actively seek to behave in congruence with the norms and expectations of their peers. The signal of peers using social media, for example, communicates that these tools are instrumental to achieving positive sales outcomes and should be adopted and used. This signal thus raises the individual’s belief that social media is useful; Schillewaert et al. (2005) support this theory, showing a positive relationship between peer use of sales technology and perceived usefulness. Homburg, Wieseke, and Ruehl (2010) also show a positive, significant influence of coworkers’ and superiors’ adoption of sales force automation on salespeople’s attitude and adoption of tools.

Greater perceived peer use will spur an individual to learn to use a new tool like social media (Bandura, 1986). Observing others (e.g., peers) is a powerful way to develop new and enhance existing skills (Schillewaert et al., 2005). Exposure gives way to observational learning, and frequency and intensity of observation of colleagues make such learning easier (Chen, Wang, & Xie, 2011). Moreover, in an internal network, colleagues’ know-how and capabilities represent relevant resources other employees can access to increase their ability (Turner & Pennington, 2015). Coworkers can supply instructions and information about contingencies (e.g., integrating social media in daily sales activities) as well as offer support and collaboration. Peer mentoring relationships, which are common in sales organizations, may be another important mechanism explaining why peer usage increases salespeople’s ability to integrate social media in sales context (Schillewaert et al., 2005). Therefore:

**Hypothesis 2.** The greater a salesperson’s perceptions of peers’ adoption of social media in the company, the greater his/her (a) perception of this tool’s usefulness (motivation) and (b) ability to integrate social media in his/her job.

Perceived organizational support (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986; Venkatesh, Morris, Davis, & Davis, 2003) concerns how much help an employee feels an organization provides to perform his/her job. It refers to facilitating conditions that remove barriers and impediments and offer individuals the opportunity to efficiently adopt and use a new technology (Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). Social learning theory refers to an individual’s belief in his/her capacity to execute specific behaviors (Bandura, 1986). Proper training is a key organizational process by which firms develop salespeople’s skills by providing them with the required knowledge to direct their actions to increase their productivity (Ahearne, Jelinek, & Rapp, 2005). Training exercises will help build the sales force’s ability to perform specific sales tasks using social media, such as competitor analyses, better communicating with key accounts, and contacting prospects. Together with other forms of organizational support (e.g., tutorials, help lines), it will increase perceptions of self-efficacy to perform tasks involving the use of social media.

Several studies lend empirical support to the impact of support and infrastructure on salespeople’s ability. Sarin, Sego, Kohli, and Challagalla (2010), for example, found empirical support for a positive effect of training on use of new sales technology, while Hunter and Perreault (2006) reported a positive impact of general organizational support on salespeople’s propensity to use and skills in a portfolio of firm-provided information technologies in their sales role. Finally, Clark et al. (2005) reported a strong positive relationship between organizational infrastructure and employees’ ability. Therefore,

**Hypothesis 3.** The greater a salesperson’s perceptions of organizational support for social media, the greater his/her (a) perception of this tool’s usefulness (motivation) and (b) ability to integrate and use social media in his/her job.

### 3.2. Impact of motivation

**Hypothesis 4a.** The greater a salesperson’s perceived usefulness (motivation) of social media, the greater his/her use of social media in his/her job.

**Hypothesis 4b.** The greater a salesperson’s ability to integrate social media in the job, the greater his/her (a) perception of this tool’s usefulness (motivation) and (b) ability to integrate and use social media in his/her job.
3.4. Joint effect of motivation and ability

The impact on behavior of the interaction between motivation and ability remains largely unexplored in MOA research. Although a common understanding that some complementarity between both antecedents should exist, it has hardly been established rigorously (Gruen, Osmonbekov, & Czaplewski, 2007; Siemsen et al., 2008). However, we anticipate that the interaction between motivation and ability will benefit a salesperson's performance. Particularly at the individual level, the ability to integrate social media with other tools may act as a catalyst to the basic motivation to apply this type of instrument (or vice versa); salespeople with high perceptions of usefulness will be convinced of these tools' instrumental value and thus will work hard and conscientiously to develop skills to use them better and ultimately learn how to integrate them into their everyday activities to achieve their goals. In support of this supposition, research shows that ability and self-efficacy will give way to less anxiety in using social media and stimulate feelings of enjoyment (Compeau & Higgins, 1995). Such enjoyment serves as further motivation to perceive usefulness and explains why this combination of motivation and ability will enhance usage.

Similarly, the ability to use social media can help salespeople manage customer relationships better and save time. These positive outcomes will convince these users even more of the tool's usefulness (cf. Sabnis et al., 2013). Although extant research shows mixed support for the interaction between motivation and ability, Sabnis et al. (2013) and Binney, Hall, and Shaw (2003), find some support for a positive interaction in a sales context. Therefore:

Hypothesis 4c. Salespeople who have high levels of ability and perceived usefulness (motivation) use social media more than counterparts with lower levels of ability and perceived usefulness (motivation).

3.5. Consequences of use

By using new technology, salespeople can enhance the quality of their buyer–seller interactions, improve their service, and ultimately grow their productivity (Duncan & Moriarty, 1998). The new technology of social media can facilitate acquisition, interpretation, and analysis of sales information. This not only offers salespeople important new cues of social media can facilitate acquisition, interpretation, and analysis of their buyer–seller interactions, improve their service, and ultimately result in higher sales performance. People using social media tend to be easily distracted (Brooks, 2015). Ubiquity and ease of access make social media a potentially powerful distraction mechanism; social media use generates a constant stream of interruptions when performing job-related tasks. Distraction–conflict theory (Baron, 1986) provides a theoretical lens for explaining the impact of distraction on performance. Distraction can lead to attentional conflict: After an interruption (e.g., a social media message), a person may forget some of the information needed for processing the primary task, and as a result, some cues are lost or never enter working memory again (Speier, Vessey, & Valacich, 2003). Furthermore, a recovery period is needed to reprocess information that was forgotten while attending to the interruption or lost from working memory due to capacity issues (incoming cues being greater than a person can process) and/or structural interferences (the person must attend to two inputs with the same physiological mechanisms) (Cellier & Eyrolle, 1992). Both effects result in lower task performance.

To date, empirical research investigating the impact of social media use on distraction from job-related tasks is scant. As Table 1 shows, there has been no prior investigation regarding this relationship. Based on the preceding discussion, we anticipate a negative relationship between distraction and sales performance. Formally:

Hypothesis 5. The greater a salesperson’s use of social media in his/her job, the better his/her level of distraction.

Hypothesis 7. The higher the level of a salesperson's distraction, the lower his/her sales performance.

4. Research method

4.1. Data collection procedure

To test our framework and hypotheses, we mailed an invitation to participate in an electronic survey to 1800 members of the sales business center of a well-established European business school. Respondents reported (1) their past year's performance compared with their peers' average, (2) the total time in hours they worked in a typical workday, and (3) the minutes they spent using social media in their job in the past few months. In total, 435 surveys (24.2%) were returned, and after accounting for cases with missing values and outliers, we were left with 345 complete surveys for the analysis (net response rate 19.2%). In Table 1, we present some descriptive characteristics of our sample. The data suggest that the majority of our sample is male (80.9%), has between 10 and 20 years of sales experience (42.9%), and works in a business-to-business (B2B) context (57.7%).

4.2. Questionnaire development

Our measures are grounded in extant sales literature, but several scales are new or adapted, because research on social media is still in its infancy and technology evolves rapidly (Ahearne & Rapp, 2010; Ancillai, Tehro, Cardinial, & Pascucci, 2019). Appendix A provides an overview of the study constructs and their measures.

Our measure of market readiness combined one item from Schillewaert et al.'s (2005) scale for the construct of customer interest in social media with one item of the competitor utilization scale emphasizing the normative aspect of social media use in the firm's market (Jelinek et al., 2006). The measure of peer use focused on one item that, in keeping with Homburg et al. (2010), was replicated to account for peer, supervisor, and manager involvement in using social media in a work context. We took the measure of perceived organizational support from Schillewaert et al. (2005), although it originated with Doll, Hendickson, and Xiaodong (1998) and Davis, Bagozzi, and Warshaw (1989). Specifically, we combined one item of the general organizational support scale with another item on information technology support, and we then extended it with a third item to account for the organization's investment in offering training for social media to its sales staff.
The measure of perceived social media usefulness scale is new, although again, we drew from Doll et al. (1998) and Davis et al. (1989) to develop it. Specifically, the measure asked respondents to indicate their level of agreement with six items regarding how social media is useful for accomplishing typical tasks in their selling process. Items refer to, for instance, how useful social media is for strengthening existing customer relationships, generating new contacts and customers, and effectively transferring information to clients.

For the operationalization of ability to integrate social media in the sales job, we built on Guesalaga’s (2016) conceptualization of social media competence. The measure used three items aimed at establishing the salesperson’s skill in integrating social media with other sales tools in their sales tasks. In contrast to general measures of ability to use social media, our measure thus accounts for ability to use them in sales (i.e., a work context).

We adapted the measure for social media use from Moore, Raymond, and Hopkins (2015), who identified 12 main categories. However, building on the feedback from the managers that we consulted in a pretest of our survey instrument, we added the category of instant messaging systems (e.g., WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger) to the original classification. The measure asked respondents to report, for an average workday during the last two months, the amount of time they had spent using this set of new media. We also recorded their time spent using alternative, more traditional ways of interacting and communicating (face-to-face and phone/email). Using these data, we computed, as an ultimate measure of use, each respondent’s usage of social media as a percentage of total time spent communicating in their job.

The measure for distraction was composed of three new items capturing how often the individual interrupted his/her work to look on social media. It captured the individual’s interruptions to not only attend to messages from friends, but also to check the news or use social media for other distractions.²

Finally, we measured sales performance using three items. Both managers and the business press argue that social media can be used for both acquiring new customers and retaining and expanding business with existing customers. Consistent with this argument, we measured individual performance in terms of self-reported goal achievement with regard to total sales, sales from new customers, and sales from existing customers. Several studies have used similar scales of sales performance (e.g., Nijssen et al., 2017).

We then administered the survey instrument including several control variables i.e., age, gender, number of customers managed, industry type [B2B vs. business-to-consumer], role [salesperson vs. salesperson with supervisor role], and degree of autonomy to use social media. Salesperson age, as well as job characteristics and context, might affect perceived usefulness and use of social media; thus, we added them to allow for correct model estimation. Because we included age, we did not account for experience. We added autonomy because some organizations have strict policies on the use of social media, which could affect use for work tasks.

Next, we asked five sales managers to verify the survey instrument’s wording, response formats, and clarity of instructions. Based on their feedback, we made appropriate changes. For example, the item “In your company, to what extent do your supervisors use social media?” was transformed into “In your company, to what extent do your supervisors use social media for business purposes?” to make explicit that we were referring to job-related use. Next, we rolled the survey out to the total sample. Table 2 describes respondents’ social media use. Our salespeople reported spending, on average 13.7% of their work day using social media (vs. 34.8% and 30.1% for phone and face-to-face, and the remaining time [21.4%] being devoted to activities that do not imply any interpersonal interaction/communication). Only 5 of the social media are used by more than 10% of respondents. The most frequently used outlets are messaging systems to directly interact with clients (e.g., WhatsApp, Skype, Facebook Messenger) used by 73 of respondents; social and professional networking (e.g., LinkedIn, Facebook) used by 69%; video hosting/sharing/storing (e.g., YouTube) used by 29%; online conferencing /webinar (e.g., Adobe Connect) used by 19%; and presentation sharing/storage (e.g., Slide share) used by 14%. Notably, the majority of salespeople (i.e., 68.7%) only use one or two types of social media, and the percentage of people using platforms for social and professional networking (e.g., LinkedIn, Facebook) in our sample (69%) is close to the 59% reported by LinkedIn (2019).

### Table 2
demographics of the sample

| Gender | Experience (%) | Age (%) | B2B (%) | Industry (%) |
|--------|----------------|---------|---------|--------------|
| Male   | 80.9 ≤ 10 years | 23.8 ≤ 30 years | 7.2 B2B | 57.7 Food and beverage |
| Female | 19.1 10-20 years | 42.9 31-40 years | 28.5 Mixed | 19.1 Telecom |
|        | > 20 years      | 33.3 41-50 years | 42.3 B2C | 23.2 Construction |
|        | > 50 years      | 22.0      |         | 10.4 Mechanical/industrial products |

| Social media use (top 5) | (%) | Time allocation (%) | (%) | #social media used (%) |
|--------------------------|-----|---------------------|-----|------------------------|
| Messaging systems to directly interact with clients (WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger…) | 73 | Social media | 13.7 | 1–2 | 68.7 |
| Social & Professional Networking (ex. LinkedIn, Facebook) | 69 | Phone | 34.8 | 3–4 | 29.5 |
| Video Hosting/Sharing/Storing (ex. YouTube) | 29 | Face-to-face | 30.1 | ≥ 5 | 1.8 |
| Online Conferencing /Webinar (ex. Adobe Connect) | 19 | Other activities, e.g. deskwork, travel | 21.4 | |
| Presentation Sharing/Storage (ex. Slide share) | 14 | | | |

³Ensuring anonymity, as we did, is a generally accepted strategy to remedy the bias to sensitive questions such as those regarding distraction (see, e.g., Ong & Weiss, 2006).

4.3 Measure validation and common method bias

We assessed the scale reliabilities, all of which were greater than 0.70 (the lowest being 0.82 for subjective sales performance) (see Table 3). The average variance extracted (AVE) for the constructs exceeded 0.50. More importantly, as Table 3 shows, the square root of the AVE exceeds all correlations among the investigated constructs, in support of our measures’ discriminant validity. The multicollinearity diagnostics for the exploratory variables variance inflation factors were well below 10 (highest = 1.7 for peer influence), and the variance proportions for all the variables on the dimensions with the highest condition indexes were lower than 0.50. Thus, we conclude that multicollinearity does not pose a major concern to the interpretation of our data.

To validate our new scale of social media use, we evaluated its nomological network. Specifically, we looked at the intercorrelations with distraction and number of social media used under the assumption
that increased use augments the chance of distraction and increases the variety of social media outlets used by the individual. We observed two significant positive correlations for these relationships, as expected (0.32 and 0.22, respectively, \( p < .01 \); see correlations in Table 3).

To address common method bias concerns, we used different formats to collect the variables of interest and ensured temporal separation between the relevant questions in the survey instrument (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). To examine whether common method bias may augment relationships in the perceptual data collected, we performed Harman’s single-factor test. With an exploratory factor analysis, we found nine factors with eigenvalues exceeding 1 and a first factor that did not account for the majority of the variance (only 22.5%). The hypothesis of one general factor underlying the relationships was rejected (\( p < .01 \)). However, because this test has several limitations (Podsakoff et al., 2003), we conducted additional tests. First, a model fit of the measurement model of more than 0.90 (comparative fit index = 0.99, non-normed fit index = 0.98, root mean square error of approximation = 0.04, and standardized root mean square residual = 0.04) suggests no problems with common method bias (Bagozzi, Yi, & Phillips, 1991). Second, the smallest observed correlation among the model variables can function as a proxy for common method bias (Lindell & Brandt, 2000). Table 3 shows the smallest correlation between core study constructs is \(-0.00\) (between subjective performance and distraction), which provides further evidence that no potential common method bias exists.

4.4. Analyses

We used SmartPLS (Ringle, Wende, & Will, 2005) to obtain partial least squares (PLS) estimates for both the structural and measurement parameters in our structural equation model. Because PLS requires fewer assumptions about data distribution than other covariance matrix techniques, it makes findings less sensitive to data skewness and kurtosis. To test the effects and statistical significance of the hypothesized pathways in the structural model, we used SmartPLS’s bootstrapping option with 500 samples, as generally recommended for obtaining stable results.

To test mediation, we complemented the previous results with Hayes’s (2013) PROCESS analysis using template Model 6. It offers detailed insight into direct and mediated effects of our three antecedents on the dependent variable of social media use by the sales professional. The results add to the robustness of our findings.

5. Results

5.1. Main analysis results

Table 4 depicts the results of the PLS estimations of our MOA-based framework. The results show that our model explains a fair amount of variance in the two central, mediating constructs of usefulness and ability to integrate social media in his/her job (i.e., 20%), distraction (9%), and sales performance (9%). It confirms that social media usage adds to a salesperson’s sales outcomes as well as level of distraction.

The results show that perceived market readiness significantly influences perceived usefulness and ability to integrate social media in the sales job (\( \beta = 0.36 \) and 0.21, respectively, \( p < .01 \)), in support of H1a and H1b, respectively. The effects of peer influence on perceived usefulness and ability to integrate social media are also positive and significant (\( \beta = 0.22, p < .01 \) and 0.17, \( p < .05 \) respectively), confirming H2a and H2b, respectively. The results regarding organizational support are more ambiguous: while its influence on ability to integrate is positive (\( \beta = 0.13, p < .05 \)), the impact on perceived usefulness is not significant (\( \beta = -0.05, \text{n.s.} \)). Therefore, the data support H3b but not H3a.

Both perceived usefulness and ability to integrate social media have a significant positive impact on the use of social media in the sales job. Both effects are moderately strong (both \( \beta_s = 0.14, p < .05 \)), in support

| Correlations and descriptives | Mean | Std. Dev. | Composite reliability | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 |
|------------------------------|-----|----------|----------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1.Perceived market readiness | 3.58| 1.65     | 0.88                 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 2.Perceived organizational support | 4.12| 1.99     | 0.94                 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 3.Peer influence | 4.26| 1.66     | 0.94                 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 4.Perceived usefulness | 4.76| 1.31     | 0.87                 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 5.Ability to integrate | 4.94| 1.43     | 0.96                 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 6.Social media use | 2.37| 1.40     | 0.94                 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 7.Sales performance | 2.25| 1.14     | 0.91                 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 8.**Distraction** | 1.23| 1.08     | 0.84                 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 9.#Clients | 122.35| 113.15 | NA                   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 10.Age | 43.77| 8.34     | NA                   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 11.Gender | 1.19| 0.39     | NA                   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 12.B2B | 0.69| 0.40     | NA                   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 13.Work hours per day | 9.69| 1.48     | NA                   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 14.Variety of social media used | 2.44| 1.16     | NA                   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |

**Numbers on the diagonal represent the square root of the AVE.**

\( p < .05 \) level; \( p < .01 \) level (two-tailed).
of H4a and H4b. The effect of these constructs’ interaction on social media use is significant as well (β = 0.13, p < .05), as expected. This finding confirms that motivation and ability jointly fuel usage. Fig. 2 shows the result of a simple slope analysis. The analysis provides insight into how perceived usefulness affects the proposed model by showing that the ability to integrate–social media use relationship behaves differently under different scores of this moderator (one standard deviation above and below the mean). We observe no effect of perceived usefulness on use of social media at low values of ability to integrate, but a strong positive effect with a high level of ability to integrate social media in the sales job. This finding suggests that motivation alone cannot bring about the desired behavior. It lends support to the anticipated positive interaction effect between motivation and ability, but it also shows that without a minimum level of ability, its effect on actual use is completely muted. In other words, we observe only partial support for H4c.

The results also confirm a positive effect of social media use on the individual salesperson’s self-reported sales performance. The effect is positive and significant (β = 0.17, p < .05). Therefore, individuals benefit from using social media in their sales job, in support of H5.

Finally, the results show a positive relationship between social media use and distraction (β = 0.24, p < .01). Interestingly, however, the anticipated negative effect of distraction on sales performance is not confirmed (β = −0.03, n.s.). Hence, we observe support for H6 but not H7. We return to this unexpected finding in our discussion.

Table 4 shows that several controls significantly influence our dependent variables. First, in line with prior research (Schultz et al., 2012) we find that older salespeople have a lower ability to integrate social media into their sales jobs (β = −0.13, p < .01). Second, gender positively affects perceived usefulness and usage of social media. In our case, this means that women (about 19% of our sample) appreciate and use social media more (β = 0.10, and 0.14, respectively, p < .05). Although empirical evidence on this aspect is controversial (Barker, 2009), our finding is consistent with some results in previous research that show women are more attracted by curiosity and social interaction opportunities (Lim, Heinrichs, & Lim, 2017). Third, interestingly, autonomy using social media fuels ability to use and positively affects subjective sales performance too (β = 0.27, p < .01, and 0.18, p < .05, respectively). We speculate that greater freedom in using social media helps salespeople better learn how to use these tools, which in turn helps them achieve better sales outcomes. This finding suggests that strict guidelines and constraints can reduce social media’s effectiveness, although future research should investigate this conjecture. Finally, we observe a positive effect of workhours per day on social media use and sales performance (β = 0.10 and 0.14, respectively, p < .05). The latter effects suggest that time investments in sales pay off, whereas the former influence may be self-enhancing; that is, a salesperson working longer days may use social media more, but higher use of social media may also lead to a person responding to messages and comments outside office hours. Overall, the results for our controls lend extra face validity to our findings and data.

Table 5 includes the results of the mediation test using Hayes’s PROCESS procedure. For each of our three opportunity variables (i.e., market readiness, peer use, and organizational support), we tested the direct and mediated effect(s) on the dependent variable of sales professionals’ use of social media in their jobs. The results show that all relationships are significant (p < .05), except the direct effect of organizational support on social media use (t = 0.60, p > .55). The influences of perceived market readiness and peer influence on social media use are partially mediated, while that of organizational support is fully mediated. The results provide additional evidence of the significant mediating role of motivation and ability in our framework.

5.2. Post hoc analysis: Exploring the impact of variety

Finally, we explore the impact of the mix of social media a salesperson uses on his/her sales performance. We did not develop a formal hypothesis because of conflicting arguments: on the one hand, salespeople who use more varied types of social media may have a larger repertoire, which enables them to better exploit the advantages available and thus to enhance their sales performance more. On the other hand, the use of a larger set of social media may lead to a less focused and less expert use of these media, making them less effective to achieve a better sales result.

To explore the moderating effect of the different types of social media respondents used, we created for each respondent a measure for variety of social media (i.e., the actual number of social media outlets used). The results of this extra analysis showed a nonsignificant moderation of the social media use–sales performance relationship (β = −0.04, n.s.) by this variety measure. Moreover, although the direct effect of variety on performance is positive, this effect was not significant (β = 0.07, n.s.). We conclude that either variety does not play a role or the anticipated positive and negative effects cancel each other out.

6. Discussion and contribution to theory

Our results lend support to the new, integrated MOA framework for the use of social media in sales contexts that we developed. Our study is one of the first attempts to take a more theoretical and comprehensive perspective and to systematically link antecedents and consequences of salespeople’s social media use in their job.

The results confirm that the identified opportunities drive salespeople’s social media use. In particular, perceived market readiness and peer influence are important antecedents. Both stimulate salespeople’s tendency to adopt and use the new technology. The role of perceived organizational support is more ambiguous. Organizational support influences a salesperson’s ability to use social media in his/her job, but not his/her perception of its usefulness. So, although support can help salespeople to master social media, it apparently cannot convince them of social media’s instrumental value. This result is consistent with prior results of, for example, Schillewaert et al. (2005), who found a nonsignificant effect of user training on perceived usefulness in the case of adopting new sales technologies. Our findings also show that perceived market readiness and peer influence have a direct effect on perceived usefulness, whereas organizational support’s influence is fully mediated by usefulness and ability. This latter result appears consistent with Clark et al. (2005), who show a positive relationship between organizational infrastructure and employees’ ability to use tools, and Ogilvie et al. (2018), who show that training ultimately does help make the use of social media more effective.

The finding that opportunities act as drivers of an individual’s motivation and ability is an important contribution to the MOA literature, in which many combinations of the theory’s antecedents have been viewed as driving the phenomenon of study (behavior) as well as performance outcomes. Individuals act based on perceived internal and external opportunities that motivate them to develop ability and help them learn how to use a tool (behavior). The findings extend Guesalaga’s (2016) study of organizational and individual factors, which shows that both drive use of social media in sales but that no interaction occurs between these two levels of variables. In contrast, our results suggest that the joint effect is key: Ability and perceived usefulness jointly mediate the path between antecedents and actual use of social media. When a salesperson thinks social media is useful, s/he will develop his/her capability in pursuit of the desired tool behavior. However, lack of ability will cancel out the positive influence of perceived usefulness (i.e., the motivation to use social media). Thus, it seems important for managers to encourage their subordinates to develop their social media competence. Because organizational support—which is under the control of a firm’s sales management—helps increase salespeople’s ability to use social media, managers should invest in training and ICT support. For the same reason, managers should

2 We used Model 6 (template) with two mediators. It should be noted that this model also accounts for the path between ability to integrate and perceived usefulness.
also encourage social influence by peers and influence salespeople’s perceptions about market readiness.

Another interesting finding from our research is the evidence of a direct link between salesperson’s level of social media use in the sales job and his/her sales performance. Salespeople who use the new media more in their communication mix are more effective and efficient than counterparts who are less involved using these new tools. This result, which previous studies have not found, supports our argument that a measure of social media usage that accounts for implementation is a better predictor of sales outcomes. Another interesting result is that salespeople with more autonomy in how to use social media perform better, which suggests that firms should be careful to not impose too many restrictions on their sales staff regarding the use of social media in the job.

We also find evidence that social media is a distraction. Although distraction is generally considered to have negative consequences, we found no evidence of a negative effect of distraction on sales performance. A possible explanation for this unexpected finding may be the nature of the sales job. Generally considered stressful and somewhat unstructured, the work could benefit from interruptions. Whereas distraction reduces job performance for tasks requiring constant focus of attention (Shimazu & Schaufeli, 2007), it may have the opposite effect for stressful jobs, in which it could help spark creativity and serendipity. The moment of distraction may be critical. For example, distraction during front-end/customer-facing activities might be harmful, but distraction in back-end activities might be beneficial. Future research using a more detailed measure might help elucidate the impact of distraction on performance.

### Table 4
Results of model estimates of PLS.

|                     | Perceived Usefulness | Ability to Integrate | Social Media Use | Distraction | Sales Performance |
|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------|------------------|-------------|-------------------|
| Opportunity:        |                      |                      |                  |             |                   |
| Perceived market readiness | 0.36** (0.05) 6.71 | 0.21** (0.05) 3.89  |                  |             |                   |
| Peer influence      | 0.22** (0.07) 3.40  | 0.17** (0.06) 2.61  |                  |             |                   |
| Perceived organizational support | −0.05 (0.05) 1.02 | 0.13** (0.06) 2.25  |                  |             |                   |
| Motivation:         |                      |                      |                  |             |                   |
| Perceived usefulness |                      |                      |                  |             |                   |
| Ability:            |                      |                      |                  |             |                   |
| Ability to integrate|                      |                      |                  |             |                   |
| Ability to integrate × Perceived usefulness | 0.13*** (0.05) 2.63 |                      |                  |             |                   |
| Social media use    | 0.24** (0.05) 4.57  | 0.17 (0.06) 2.80     |                  |             |                   |
| Distraction         |                      |                      |                  | 0.24 (0.05) 1.92 | −0.04 (0.04) 0.99 |

| Controls:           |                      |                      |                  |             |                   |
| #clients            | −0.04 (0.04) 1.13    | −0.04 (0.04) 1.13    | −0.09 (0.05) 1.92| −0.04 (0.04) 1.92|
| Autonomy of use     | 0.05 (0.04) 1.28     | −0.01 (0.03) 0.37    | −0.06 (0.04) 1.33| 0.18** (0.06) 3.00|
| Age                 | 0.08 (0.05) 1.57     | −0.13** (0.05) 2.86 | 0.04 (0.04) 1.07 | 0.05 (0.04) 1.20 |
| Gender              | 0.10** (0.05) 2.02   | −0.03 (0.04) 0.92    | 0.14* (0.05) 2.61| −0.08 (0.05) 1.47|
| Work hours per day  | 0.01 (0.03) 0.27     | 0.05 (0.04) 1.31     | 0.10* (0.05) 2.18| 0.14** (0.05) 2.88|
| Manager/supervisor  | 0.07 (0.04) 1.87     | 0.07 (0.04) 2.06     | 0.11** (0.05) 2.10| −0.05 (0.03) 1.62|
| R²                  | 0.27                 | 0.31                 | 0.20             | 0.09        | 0.09              |

** p < .01 level.
* p < .05 level (two-tailed).

Fig. 2. Simple slope analysis of interaction effect between perceived usefulness and ability to integrate social media.

7. Managerial implications

Our study provides several important managerial implications. First, sales managers should periodically analyze their customers’ level of social media use in the sales job and his/her sales performance. Salespeople who use the new media more in their communication mix are more effective and efficient than counterparts who are less involved using these new tools. This result, which previous studies have not found, supports our argument that a measure of social media usage that accounts for implementation is a better predictor of sales outcomes. Another interesting result is that salespeople with more autonomy in how to use social media perform better, which suggests that firms should be careful to not impose too many restrictions on their sales staff regarding the use of social media in the job.

Second, social influence could be encouraged, for example, not only through coaching and peer mentoring initiatives, but also by training leaders and supervisors on social media use and by providing incentives (e.g., a prize for the supervisor of the sales teams that performs best in social media use).

Third, training and ICT support are useful to improve salespeople’s skills. Because organizational support—which is under the control of a
firm’s sales management—helps increase salespeople’s ability to use social media, managers could consider investing in training and ICT support. By providing brief trainings with active, on-the-job-coaching, firms can overcome the divide between training and peer influence, and enhance the effect of training on perceived usefulness of social media. Special attention could be given to older employees, who may find it more difficult to develop the necessary capabilities.

Fourth, managers should formulate clear rules on how to use social media but leave employees enough autonomy to use the tools effectively and efficiently. The fact that greater autonomy is correlated with better ability to integrate and sales performance is a strong indicator that managers should aim to strike a balance between the two objectives. Opening up discussions on best practices might facilitate the identification and formulation of good policies for this purpose. Related to this issue, managers should identify potential negative consequences of social media use for individuals and the firm. For example, salespeople who do not pay careful attention to privacy issues may become a liability and thus should be monitored. Policies to promote proper use and respect privacy regulations, should be developed.

Fifth, because young people use social media more easily and because society and markets evolve, managers should anticipate that salespeople’s use of social media will increase in the near future. This implies that in recruitment criteria and processes, they should place more emphasis on an applicant’s ability to use social media. For example, from an omni-channel perspective, the use and impact of social media could be affected by how they are integrated into a company’s overall go-to-market strategy. Accounting for the impact of different incentives, leadership styles, and sales teams’ features (e.g., structure, composition, climate, functioning) might be useful, too. Additional contingencies and moderating variables might be considered—for example, the type of customer relationships a salesperson manages and the nature of interactions with accounts. Social media may align better with specific customer types and interaction styles.

Third, although our sample was substantial and diverse, we acknowledge some limitations. We focused on respondents from a single European country. In other countries social media development and use may lag behind or be more advanced. Cross-cultural studies could be used to study the effects of culture on salespeople’s way of using traditional and new, emerging communication channels. Indeed, cultural differences in social media use are well documented in the literature (see, e.g., Jackson & Wang, 2013), although these studies pertain to consumer behavior rather than salespeople’s behaviors.

Fourth, considering social media as a double-edge sword, we provide an initial account of both its bright and dark sides. However, more fine-grained insights in the effects of each social media type. The power of different combinations, and thus complementarities of social media outlets for each purpose, could then also be investigated. Better tracking actual levels and moments of usage, as well as implementing objective performance measures, could allow for a more robust test of social media’s impact on sales performance as well.

Second, although we made a first step toward an integrated and comprehensive framework, we acknowledge that it could be extended using more predictors and consequences. For example, from an omni-channel perspective, the use and impact of social media could be affected by how they are integrated into a company’s overall go-to-market strategy. Accounting for the impact of different incentives, leadership styles, and sales teams’ features (e.g., structure, composition, climate, functioning) might be useful, too. Additional contingencies and moderating variables might be considered—for example, the type of customer relationships a salesperson manages and the nature of interactions with accounts. Social media may align better with specific customer types and interaction styles.

First, compared with prior studies, we developed and used a more comprehensive measure of social media use. However, more accurate measurement could be achieved using a diary approach. By linking the use of different social media with specific tasks and purposes (e.g., generating leads, nurturing relationships with existing customers), researchers could provide more fine-grained insights in the effects of each social media type. The power of different combinations, and thus complementarities of social media outlets for each purpose, could then also be investigated. Better tracking actual levels and moments of usage, as well as implementing objective performance measures, could allow for a more robust test of social media’s impact on sales performance as well.

Table 5 Results Hayes PROCESS analysis (Model 6, 2 mediators).

| X = market readiness (partial mediation) | Effect | SE | t-value | p |
|-----------------------------------------|--------|----|---------|---|
| Direct effect of X on Y                 | 1.3    | 0.36 | 3.59    | 0.000 |
| Indirect effects of X on Y              |        |     |         |    |
| Total                                   | 0.40   | 0.182 | 0.066 | 0.778 |
| Ind1: X → Perceived usefulness → SM use | 0.11   | 0.175 | −0.226 | 0.468 |
| Ind2: X → Ability to integrate → SM use | 0.16   | 0.078 | 0.028  | 0.328 |
| Ind3: X → Perceived usefulness → Ability to integrate → SM use | 0.14   | 0.054 | 0.047  | 0.257 |

| X = peer influence (partial mediation) | Effect | SE | t-value | p |
|---------------------------------------|--------|----|---------|---|
| Direct effect of X on Y               | 0.55   | 0.277 | 1.99  | 0.047 |
| Indirect effects of X on Y            |        |     |         |    |
| Total                                 | 0.34   | 0.105 | 0.179 | 0.525 |
| Ind1: X → Perceived usefulness → SM use | 0.15 | 0.099 | 0.002 | 0.327 |
| Ind2: X → Ability to integrate → SM use | 0.12   | 0.058 | 0.031 | 0.220 |
| Ind3: X → Perceived usefulness → Ability to integrate → SM use | 0.08   | 0.033 | 0.031 | 0.137 |

| X = organizational support (full mediation) | Effect | SE | t-value | p |
|---------------------------------------------|--------|----|---------|---|
| Direct effect of X on Y                    | 0.12   | 0.348 | 0.34  | 0.736 |
| Indirect effects of X on Y                 |        |     |         |    |
| Total                                      | 0.45   | 0.123 | 0.264 | 0.668 |
| Ind1: X → Perceived usefulness → SM use    | 0.13   | 0.079 | 0.017 | 0.272 |
| Ind2: X → Ability to integrate → SM use    | 0.25   | 0.092 | 0.116 | 0.415 |
| Ind3: X → Perceived usefulness → Ability to integrate → SM use | 0.07   | 0.034 | 0.025 | 0.133 |

Notes: Hayes’ PROCESS template model 6 requires the extra path ”Indirect path” 3 from Perceived usefulness to Ability to integrate to be accounted for in the mediation moderation test. This is an extension of the original model (see Fig. 1). Bootstrap 5000, and level of confidence for all confidence intervals 95%.

* Covariates in the analyses: autonomy, age, and gender; LLCI/ULCI = lower level critical interval/upper level critical interval.

8. Limitations and directions for future research

Consistent with Ancillai, Tehro, Cardinali, & Pascucci, 2019 call in their review of the literature on social selling, we adopted a more comprehensive conceptualization of social media use. We developed and tested a comprehensive framework of drivers and consequences based on the MOA theory. We then tested this model empirically using a sample of salespeople. However, we recognize some limitations of our work, which provide promising avenues for future research.

First, compared with prior studies, we developed and used a more comprehensive measure of social media use. However, more accurate measurement could be achieved using a diary approach. By linking the use of different social media with specific tasks and purposes (e.g., generating leads, nurturing relationships with existing customers), researchers could provide more fine-grained insights in the effects of each social media type. The power of different combinations, and thus complementarities of social media outlets for each purpose, could then also be investigated. Better tracking actual levels and moments of usage, as well as implementing objective performance measures, could allow for a more robust test of social media’s impact on sales performance as well.

Second, although we made a first step toward an integrated and comprehensive framework, we acknowledge that it could be extended using more predictors and consequences. For example, from an omni-channel perspective, the use and impact of social media could be affected by how they are integrated into a company’s overall go-to-market strategy. Accounting for the impact of different incentives, leadership styles, and sales teams’ features (e.g., structure, composition, climate, functioning) might be useful, too. Additional contingencies and moderating variables might be considered—for example, the type of customer relationships a salesperson manages and the nature of interactions with accounts. Social media may align better with specific customer types and interaction styles.

Third, although our sample was substantial and diverse, we acknowledge some limitations. We focused on respondents from a single European country. In other countries social media development and use may lag behind or be more advanced. Cross-cultural studies could be used to study the effects of culture on salespeople’s way of using traditional and new, emerging communication channels. Indeed, cultural differences in social media use are well documented in the literature (see, e.g., Jackson & Wang, 2013), although these studies pertain to consumer behavior rather than salespeople’s behaviors.

Fourth, considering social media as a double-edge sword, we provide an initial account of both its bright and dark sides. However, more research in this area is needed. Because social media can steal
Appendix A. Measures of study constructs

Social media use (based on Moore et al., 2015)

- Which type of social media do you use in your sales job? Please select from following categories the ones used:
  - A personal blog (e.g., Tumblr, LinkedIn Pulse)
  - Microblog (e.g., Twitter)
  - Photo Sharing/Storage (e.g., Instagram)
  - Video Hosting/Sharing/Streaming (e.g., YouTube)
  - RSS Feed Readers (e.g., Google reader)
  - Social & Professional networking (e.g., LinkedIn, Facebook)
  - Live Interactive Broadcasting (e.g., Facebook Live, Periscope)
  - Online Conferencing/Webinar (e.g., Adobe Connect)
  - Social Bookmarking (e.g., Digg)
  - Moderated web community
  - Unmoderated web community
  - Presentation sharing/storage (e.g., Slide share)
  - Messaging (e.g., WhatsApp, Skype, F-Messenger)

- Time spent (in hours and minutes) using these media during average workday in the past two months

Perceived market readiness (seven-point Likert scale, completely disagree—completely agree) (new, based on Jelinek et al., 2006; Schillewaert et al., 2005)

- in your market your competitors use social media
- in your market your customers expect suppliers to use social media

Perceived organizational support (seven-point Likert scale, completely disagree—completely agree) (adapted from Schillewaert et al., 2005)

- Your company provides adequate support to the potential use of social media
- Technical equipment in your company is adequate to ensure you can make the best possible use of social media
- Your company helps you develop the necessary skills in order to exploit the potential of social media in your job

Other media use

- Categories
  - face-to-face
  - phone/email
  - other

- Time spent (in hours and minutes) using these media during average workday in the past two months

Distraction (seven-point Likert scale, completely disagree—completely agree) (new)

During your work:
- you often interrupt what you are doing to read news on social media
- you often interrupt what you are doing to interact with friends on social media
- you often stop to look for some distraction on social media

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