The impact of business-to-business salespeople's social media use on value co-creation and cross/up-selling: the role of social capital

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to develop and test a process model of the effect of social media use by business-to-business (B2B) salespeople on their value cocreation and cross/upselling performance. Adopting a research acquisition perspective, the authors claim that salesperson's social media use is critical for generating social capital – an operant resource characterized by superior market knowledge, reputation and networking – which, in turn, directly and synergistically enhances value cocreation and cross/upselling outcomes.

Design/methodology/approach – A model is developed based on extant sales research on salesperson's social media use and social capital theory. Data from B2B salespeople is analyzed using structural equation modeling to test the proposed hypotheses.

Findings – The results demonstrate that salespeople's social media use enhances their social capital with support for direct effects on market knowledge and reputation, and indirect effect on networking. The results also show that the three aspects of social capital drive value cocreation, which enhances cross/upselling performance. Post hoc analysis shows the indirect effects of salesperson's social media use as well as the interconnected effects of the aspects of social capital on value cocreation.

Practical implications – The study indicates that salespeople should be encouraged to use social media as a means for enhancing market knowledge and reputation, which can then be leveraged to build networking skills. Providing training to salespeople and coaching them on how to build their social capital is essential if organizations need to capitalize on novel ways to improve the value cocreation performance of their sales teams.

Originality/value – This study demonstrates how salespeople's social media use can enhance their social capital, which, in turn, is critical for value cocreation and cross/upselling performance. The proposed framework opens opportunities for future studies to examine the role of salesperson social capital and value cocreation in B2B exchanges.

Keywords Salesperson, Social media use, Social capital, Value cocreation, Knowledge, Reputation, Networking, Cross-selling, Upselling, Sales management

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

For business-to-business (B2B) salespeople, value cocreation (Itani *et al.*, 2022) and cross/upselling behaviors (Johnson and Friend, 2015) are critical growth strategies. Specifically, value cocreation refers to purposeful engagement and collaboration with customers to jointly produce and enhance value for customers (Itani *et al.*, 2022; Ranjan and Read, 2016), whereas cross/upselling behaviors refer to efforts directed at generating more value from customers by upgrading them to more profitable offerings (Johnson and Friend, 2015). Given the complex and dynamic nature of the B2B sales environment, salespeople need to continuously search for opportunities to enhance their abilities to create value for and extract value from customers (Rangarajan *et al.*, 2021). Particularly, with the onset of the digitalization age, the proliferation of new digital technologies have permanently altered the sales landscape (Agnihotri, 2020; Ahearne *et al.*, 2022; Singh *et al.*, 2019; Zoltners *et al.*, 2021) and have placed heightened demands on B2B salespeople to embrace such technologies as part of their value creation toolkit (Rangarajan *et al.*, 2021).

One such digital technology that has been the attention of contemporary sales research is social media, whose use by B2B salespeople has been demonstrated to enhance a multitude of sales tasks, routines and outcomes (Bowen *et al.*, 2021; Guesalaga, 2016; Rapp and Panagopoulos, 2012). For the purpose of this study, social media refers to digital technologies that salespeople use for social interactions, generating content and developing professional connections (Agnihotri *et al.*, 2012). Social media sites, such as LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter, offer salespeople novel digital touchpoints for simplifying, personalizing and enriching interactions with customers and prospects (Schendzielarz *et al.*, 2022). Correspondingly, salespeople's social media use is defined as "the extent to which salespeople incorporate social media into execution of sales process-related activities" (Schendzielarz *et al.*, 2022, p. 4).

Social media has assumed tremendous importance in B2B settings, as evidenced by

- B2B organizations intensifying their focus on leveraging social media to enhance their sales and service growth opportunities (Chaker *et al.*, 2022; Guenzi and Habel, 2020; Mattila *et al.*, 2021);
- B2B buyers increasingly rely on social media for interactions with salespeople during the purchase process (Minsky and Quesenberry, 2016); and
- B2B salespeople report that social media use enables them to close deals faster, exceed quotas and outperform their peers (Minsky and Quesenberry, 2016).

Acknowledging the importance of social media in sales settings, sales researchers have examined organizational (Guesalaga, 2016; Rodriguez *et al.*, 2016), individual (Hansen and Levin, 2016; Itani *et al.*, 2017) and peer-related (Bill *et al.*, 2020; Bowen *et al.*, 2021) drivers of social media use by B2B salespeople. In addition, studies have focused on the outcomes of social media use by demonstrating its positive impact on salespeople (Bowen *et al.*, 2021; Guenzi and Nijssen, 2020), organizations (Castillo *et al.*, 2021; Fraccastoro *et al.*, 2021) and customers (Agnihotri *et al.*, 2016; Niedermeier *et al.*, 2016).

However, while extant research suggests that salespeople could reap personal and organizational benefits from incorporating social media into their sales toolkits, paradoxically, B2B salespeople remain skeptical about whether social media use yields any professional benefits (Agnihotri, 2020; Bowen *et al.*, 2021). Unfortunately, the lack of a clear understanding as to *how* salesperson's social media use potentially enhances selling activities and sales performance has hampered sales organizations in directing B2B salespeople to use these emergent technologies in an effective manner (Agnihotri, 2020;

Bowen *et al.*, 2021). Thus, to assist sales organization in better demonstrating the utility of social media for B2B salespeople, scholars have sounded calls to further investigate the *process* through which social media use contributes to salespeople's professional development and facilitates value-creating sales practices (Agnihotri *et al.*, 2012; Haas *et al.*, 2012; Paschou *et al.*, 2020). Responding to such calls, the purpose of this study is to investigate how social media use helps B2B salespeople in the acquisition of a valuable job-related resource, namely, *social capital* (Adler and Kwon, 2002; Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998), whose dimensions operate as facilitating mechanisms for enhancing important performance outcomes, namely, value cocreation for enhancing value for customers and cross/upselling for extracting value for the sales organization.

Specifically, social capital refers to the stock of accumulated resources that is embedded in social relationships and that can be leveraged to benefit individuals and/or organizations (Adler and Kwon, 2002). Whereas various personal or job-related resources are available intrinsically or provided by organizations, social capital is a unique resource in the sense that it is developed and harnessed by salespeople through their day-to-day social engagement efforts. However, although prior researchers have emphasized the importance of social capital for B2B salespeople (Hughes *et al.*, 2013; Rouziou *et al.*, 2018), truly little is known on how salespeople cultivate this valuable resource. In general, while a few prior studies have explored how salespeople can use internal networking, exploratory navigation and internal selling as mechanisms to identify, nurture and channel *internal* organizational resources (Liu *et al.*, 2020; Nguyen *et al.*, 2018; Plouffe *et al.*, 2016; Steward *et al.*, 2010), there are significant gaps in the systematic research on salespeople's entrepreneurial acquisition of resources that are *external* to the organization, such as social capital. In particular, although sales researchers have highlighted that the utilization of digital tools and technologies can enable salespeople to form professional relationships and expand social networks (Itani *et al.*, 2022; Rangarajan *et al.*, 2021), studies are yet to offer compelling evidence on how salespeople's social media use helps in the acquisition of social capital through those relationships and networks spanning organizational boundaries. Correspondingly, by leveraging emergent perspectives from the resource acquisition literature (Maritan and Peteraf, 2011; Martens *et al.*, 2007) and recent research on the utilization of social media by salespeople (Minsky and Quesenberry, 2016), we develop and test a framework that demonstrates how B2B salespeople's use of social media enhances their social capital, which, in turn, contributes to their value creation activities.

Based on results from testing our theoretical framework with data from B2B salespeople, we offer several contributions to the evolving body of knowledge on digital technologies in B2B sales. First, extending extant research on the antecedents of salesperson's social media use, we demonstrate that the use of social media facilitates the acquisition of valuable social resources that are germane for success in B2B sales settings. In doing so, we complement current knowledge on the importance of job-related resources in sales settings by shedding light on how salespeople can proactively acquire external resources and thus, transcend the current focus on the exploitation of internal resources. Second, by examining novel linkages between social media use by B2B salespeople, social capital, value cocreation and, consequently, cross/upselling performance, we delineate the process through which salesperson's social media use influences social capital and, ultimately, value creation outcomes. In this regard, we demonstrate social capital as an important operant resource that mediates the relationship between salesperson's social media use and performance outcomes. Third, by offering empirical evidence in support of how digital technologies, such as social media, enhance B2B salespeople's abilities to engage in value-creating sales activities, we contribute to the nascent literature streams on digital technologies in sales,

technology-mediated buyer-seller interactions and value-creating sales activities (Ahearne *et al.*, 2022; Haas *et al.*, 2012; Singh *et al.*, 2019). In doing the above, our study extends knowledge on the salesperson's social media use-social capital relationship in the sales literature by, first, focusing on the use of public social media platforms as compared to intraorganizational microblog systems (Sun and Shang, 2014) and, second, broadening the conceptualization of dimensions of social capital from interaction ties and referrals (Agnihotri *et al.*, 2022; Sun and Shang, 2014) to market knowledge, reputation and networking, which are in alignment with the cognitive, relational and structural dimensions postulated by social capital theory (Adler and Kwon, 2002).

In the succeeding section, we review extant research on salesperson's social media use by B2B salespeople before discussing relevant literature on resource acquisition and social capital. Next, we introduce our theoretical framework and research hypotheses. Subsequently, we present our data gathering and analysis procedures. We conclude with theoretical and managerial contributions as well as study limitations and directions for future research.

Background
Social media use
Buyer-seller interactions in B2B contexts have shifted from traditional selling practices to more digitally-facilitated ones (Bill *et al.*, 2020; Bowen *et al.*, 2021; Guenzi and Nijssen, 2020). Social media is one of the major digital technologies that has precipitated this shift as it holds the potential for digitally connecting and networking with existing and potential buyers in new and dynamic methods. Acknowledging the importance of social media in B2B settings, sales researchers have compiled a substantial body of research on the drivers and performance-related outcomes of social media use by B2B salespeople (Ancillai *et al.*, 2019; Bill *et al.*, 2020). In fact, a review of extant research (see Table 1) reveals that the literature on B2B social media use by salespeople continues to evolve rapidly with researchers adopting a novel theoretical lens to better understand the antecedents and consequences of social media use.

As evident from the table, research on social media use in sales settings encompasses several broad areas. Some researchers have focused on how social media use can help salespeople and sales organizations perform better. For instance, research has shown that social media can be used for collecting and analyzing a wide range of market-related information (Andzulis *et al.*, 2012), improving communication (Agnihotri *et al.*, 2012), prospecting and acquiring new customers (Bocconcelli *et al.*, 2017; Schendzielarz *et al.*, 2022) and adaptive selling (Moore *et al.*, 2015). Another set of studies focuses on salesperson-level as well as organizational-level factors that could influence salesperson's social media use (Hansen and Levin, 2016; Rodriguez *et al.*, 2016). Interestingly, in contrast to the increasing number of studies on the positive outcomes of social media use, some studies question the usage of social media by B2B salespeople and its potential deleterious impact on sales performance (Guenzi and Nijssen, 2020; Rodriguez *et al.*, 2012). However, a thorough review of the literature reveals that the majority of research findings converge toward suggesting that when B2B salespeople routinely use social media as part of their work-related tasks, they are more likely to enjoy the full extent of its benefits during the sales process (Bowen *et al.*, 2021).

Yet, as Schendzielarz *et al.* (2022) point out, empirical research on key areas of social media use by salespeople remains insufficient. As the sales process becomes more complex (Sharma *et al.*, 2020), requiring salespeople to better leverage digital technologies to meet constantly evolving business and customer requirements (Hartmann *et al.*, 2018;

Article	Sample	Social media use outcomes	Sales outcomes	Interaction effects
This study	158 salespeople – USA	Salesperson market knowledge, reputation, and networking	Value cocreation; cross/upselling	Salesperson market knowledge and networking interact with reputation to impact value cocreation
Agnihotri *et al.* (2021)	199 salesperson-customer dyads	Product knowledge; competitor knowledge	Behavioral loyalty; price premium	Customer demandingness strengthens the positive impact of social media use on product knowledge
Bowen *et al.* (2021)	171 salespeople – Germany	Value-oriented prospecting; adaptive selling; proactive servicing	Salesperson performance	Peer social media usage strengthens the positive impact of social media usage on value-oriented prospecting and proactive servicing
Agnihotri *et al.* (2021)	217 frontline employees, 117 managers, 162 customers – India	Social capital development (bridging and bonding); social capital maintenance	Customer loyalty with firm; frontline employee sales performance	Time management skills strengthen the positive impact of online social network use on social capital development and maintenance; perceived innovation climate strengthens the positive impact of online social network use on social capital development
Bill *et al.* (2020)	228 salespeople, 49 sales managers, 19 company, 339 customers – Germany		Customer loyalty	Social media use interacts with customer status to increase customer loyalty; social media use interacts with size of the buying center to negatively impact customer loyalty
Chuang (2020)	241 Sales managers – Taiwan			Social media use does not moderate the positive impact of social media agility on strength of customer-firm relationships
Guenzi and Nijssen (2020)	245 salespeople – Europe	Sales performance	Sales performance	Perceived usefulness and ability to integrate interact to positively impact social media use
Itani *et al.* (2020)	162 salesperson-customer dyad	Seller competitive information collection		Social media utilization interacts with CRM technology utilization to positively impact competitive information collection
Foltean *et al.* (2019)	149 managers (including marketing/sales managers)	CRM capabilities; firm performance	Firm performance	

Article	Sample	Social media use outcomes	Sales outcomes	Interaction effects
Inyang (2019)	162 salespeople – USA	Salesperson implementation of sales strategy	Customer relationship performance; sales performance	Sales experience negatively moderates the positive relationship between salesperson social media use and implementation of sales strategy
Ogilvie et al. (2018)	375 salespeople – USA (Study 1); 192 salespeople (Study 2) USA	Product information communication; adaptability	Sales performance	Use training interacts with social media use to positively impact product information communication, diligence, product knowledge and adaptability
Agnihotri et al. (2017)	162 Salespeople – India			Social media use interacts with CRM technology use to positively impact inducements, empathy and sportsmanship service behaviors
Itani et al. (2017)	120 salesperson-customer dyads – India	Competitive intelligence collection; adaptive selling behavior	Sales performance	Learning orientation interacts with attitude toward social media usefulness to positively impact social media use
Hansen and Levin (2016)	210 (51% marketing/sales employees and 49% nonmarketing/nonsales employees) – USA	Perceived value creation		The positive relationship between social media behavioral intention and behavioral use is stronger for employees with sales/marketing responsibilities compared to other employees
Rodriguez et al. (2016)	184 salespeople	Relationship performance	Sales performance	Sales process capability strengthens the positive relationship between social media use and relationship performance
Agnihotri et al. (2016)	111 salespeople	Information communication	Customer satisfaction	
Rodriguez et al. (2015)	184 salespeople	Customer orientation processes	Sales performance	
Rapp et al. (2013)	28 salespeople, 144 retailers, 445 customers – USA	Retailer social media use	Supplier brand sales performance; retailer sales performance; consumer loyalty	Brand reputation and service ambidexterity moderates the impacts of salesperson social media use and retailer social media usage
Rodriguez et al. (2012)	1,699 salespeople	Creating opportunity, relationship management, relationship performance	Outcome-based sales performance	

Table 1.

Rangarajan *et al.*, 2021), it becomes imperative for systematic research to explicate the process through which digital technologies can facilitate the fulfillment of sales performance outcomes. In other words, the compelling questions of how and why salesperson's social media use matters need to be further investigated. Ogilvie *et al.* (2018) suggest that salespeople's social media use helps them develop social networks, which, in turn, helps them deal more effectively with customers. While this is a useful first step, knowledge is lacking on the process by which social media use helps salespeople develop social capital and the corresponding impact on performance. We build on this evolving literature stream by identifying social capital, specifically in the form of market knowledge, reputation and networking, as a valuable resource that not only ensues from social media use but also serves as the mechanism for facilitating the impact of salespeople's social media uses on sales performance outcomes. In the following section, we draw from the resource acquisition literature to position social media use as a worthwhile strategy for salespeople to cultivate and leverage job resources such as social capital.

Resource acquisition
It is well-established that salespeople draw from a repository of organizational and personal job-related resources to perform sales activities and achieve sales outcomes (Badrinarayanan *et al.*, 2019; Nguyen *et al.*, 2018; Panagopoulos *et al.*, 2016). Job resources refer to physical, social or organizational aspects that enable individuals to "(a) be functional in achieving work goals; (b) reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs; (and) (c) stimulate personal growth and development" (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001, p. 501). Thus, various physical, psychological, social and other occupational resources, which reside at the firm or individual level, are critical for salespeople to accomplish work outcomes (Nguyen *et al.*, 2018; Panagopoulos *et al.*, 2016). Importantly, job resources are essential not only for reducing job demands, as has been commonly studied (Hoppner *et al.*, 2021; Matthews *et al.*, 2018; Schmitz and Ganesan, 2014) but also for stimulating other important work outcomes. That is:

> Resources are those entities that either are centrally valued in their own right (e.g., self-esteem, close attachments, health, and inner peace) or act as a means to obtain centrally valued ends (e.g., money, social support, and credit) (Hobfoll, 2002, p. 307).

As job resources can foster learning, achievement of work goals, work engagement and improved performance for employees in general (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007), the acquisition of job resources attain motivational prominence.

Acknowledging the importance of job resources, prior research has offered extensive insight on tangible and intangible resources:

- provided by the organization to the sales force (e.g. knowledge, autonomy, training, etc.) (Matthews *et al.*, 2018; Panagopoulos *et al.*, 2016; Zablah *et al.*, 2012);
- possessed by individual salespeople (e.g. skills, experience, self-efficacy, emotional intelligence, psychological capital, etc.) (Fu *et al.*, 2009; Hoppner *et al.*, 2021; Hwang and Han, 2019; Liu *et al.*, 2020); and
- provided by or shared with customers (e.g. information, coordination, relational ties, etc.) (Mullins *et al.*, 2014; Zhang and Glynn, 2015).

Complementing these perspectives, researchers have also examined how salespeople's intrapreneurial actions can facilitate the acquisition of scarce resources from within their own organizations (e.g. internal selling, internal social network, intraorganizational support, etc.) (Liu *et al.*, 2020; Plouffe *et al.*, 2010; Steward *et al.*, 2010). However, relatively less

attention has been devoted to how salespeople's entrepreneurial actions and activities enable them to acquire idiosyncratic external resources (e.g. external ties, external social networks) (Beeler *et al.*, 2020; Guenzi and Nijssen, 2020; Nguyen *et al.*, 2018).

Specifically, resource acquisition refers to proactive actions and activities that are initiated "to create certainty and improve the status quo through information seeking, relationship building and positive framing" (Zhao *et al.*, 2020, p. 1338). Proactive resource acquisition efforts, especially in situations where resources are scarce and constrained, enable individuals to obtain elusive work-related knowledge, build rapport and social support and enhance identity and reputation to facilitate the pursuit of goals and outcomes (Ashford and Black, 1996; Gabler *et al.*, 2017; Zhao *et al.*, 2020). In contemporary digitally-charged sales environments, the abundant opportunities available on a multitude of social media platforms represent challenge demands as salespeople can use such tools to promote their professional competence and professional growth (Miao and Evans, 2013). Whereas other literature streams such as entrepreneurship (Martens *et al.*, 2007), franchising (Dant and Kaufmann, 2003) and, more recently, crowdfunding (Taeuscher *et al.*, 2021) have explored how individuals acquire physical, financial and social capital from external entities, the importance of resource acquisition endeavors has not yet received attention in the sales literature. This represents a notable gap in knowledge since a major responsibility for sales professionals pertains to both exploration of new resources and/or opportunities as well as exploitation of existing ones (Katsikeas *et al.*, 2018; Lam *et al.*, 2019).

Building on this perspective, we propose that salespeople can benefit from the utilization of digital technologies, notably social media, to acquire idiosyncratic social resources that facilitate the achievement of superior selling outcomes. Specifically, we posit that social media use enables salespeople to acquire social capital, a valuable, rare, inimitable and socially complex resource that enables the fulfillment of important outcomes such as value cocreation and upselling. This notion is consistent with recent perspectives, which expound that effective utilization of social media can help salespeople enhance their abilities in terms of researching the customer and sales environment, developing visibility and building relationships (Minsky and Quesenberry, 2016). Thus, as represented in our framework (see Figure 1), we propose that resourceful salespeople (i.e. those who are adept in using social media) are more likely to be successful in resource acquisition efforts (i.e. develop social
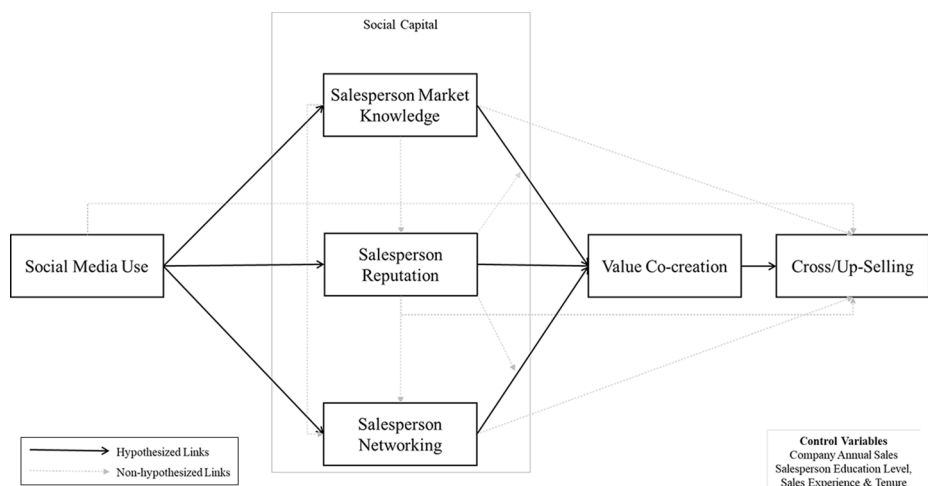

Figure 1.
Model

capital), which ultimately lead to successful resource exploitation outcomes (i.e. value cocreation and upselling).

Social capital

Social capital refers to the collection of actual and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from a social unit's relational networks (Badrinarayanan *et al.*, 2011; Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). Prior research has elucidated that social capital is imperative for the richness of information sharing and exchange of ideas as well as the quality of interactions and, thus, serves as a prerequisite for successful collaborations (Saxton and Guo, 2014; Seibert *et al.*, 2001). Drawing from work on the importance of social embeddedness for resource sharing and economic returns, social capital theory delineates that three dimensions of resources, namely, structural, relational and cognitive, create value and support actions of individuals within a social structure (Coleman, 1994; Granovetter, 1973). The structural dimension refers to the network ties and configuration of the social structure, including roles, rules and procedures; the relational dimension addresses the nature and quality of relationships, including the value that is created and leveraged through interpersonal interactions; and the cognitive dimension refers to shared understandings among parties in a relationship, such as shared language, values, attitudes and beliefs (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). As social capital is created by interpersonal exchanges and can be leveraged to enhance cooperative behaviors (Adler and Kwon, 2002), it holds immense value in B2B customer-salesperson relational exchanges.

Accordingly, studies in the sales literature have explored the relevance and development of specific dimensions of social capital. Some studies have investigated social capital entrenched in internal social relationships. For example, Steward *et al.* (2010) draw attention to the effect of internal social capital for effective account management and investigate the role of diversity, reputation and strength of a salesperson's internal relationship network on their performance. Likewise, Rouziou *et al.* (2018) focus on salespeople's social capital within an organization and show that it influences job satisfaction and performance while being engendered by brand identification and perceptions of pay fairness. Bachrach *et al.* (2017) observe that investments in internal social capital at the sales team level are positively associated with market-driven sales capabilities such as team goal monitoring, commitment to service quality and learning effort, which are directly or indirectly related to sales performance. Similarly, Badrinarayanan *et al.* (2011) propose that social capital in virtual sales teams is positively related to team climate, team efficacy and team potency. In contrast, other studies have focused on social capital entrenched in external relationships between salespeople and other stakeholders. For example, Hughes *et al.* (2014) investigate external social capital residing in customer-salesperson dyads and discover that the strength of customers' bond with salespeople influences the extent of information sharing. Likewise, Yang *et al.* (2011), in their conceptual work, propose that both internal and external social capital are relevant for knowledge transfer and sales performance. Yet, barring a few notable exceptions (Munyon *et al.*, 2021), very little research exists on the antecedents of salesperson social capital, let alone on the entrepreneurial efforts of salespeople to cultivate social capital in external relationships.

Building on social capital theory, we propose that social capital can be embedded in, accrues from, and mobilized for an actor's activities in social media networks (Saxton and Guo, 2014). In line with this perspective, social capital is positioned as the central and proximate resource that salespeople can acquire through their social media activities (Saxton and Guo, 2020). Social capital developed through interpersonal interactions in social media networks inheres within social structures and facilitates the actions of individuals

within such structures (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). Thus, as social capital is embedded in the network of connections formed by salespeople through their social media use, it serves as a key mediator of the relationship between social media presence and sales outcomes (Saxton and Guo, 2020). That is, within these networks, consistent with social capital theory, social capital provides salespeople with the "credentials" for the conduct of social activities by amplifying recognition and mutual acquaintance (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). Indeed, as Saxton and Guo (2020, p. 1) note, social capital is "linchpin of any meaningful benefit from engagement in social media." Consequently, echoing prior sales researchers who hold that social capital enables salespeople to create and/or capture value from internal or external social contexts (Hughes *et al.*, 2013; Munyon *et al.*, 2021; Rouziou *et al.*, 2018), we propose that social capital enhances salespeople's effectiveness by serving as the mechanism that bridges social media use with value creation outcomes.

Following prior research on social capital theory and social media in sales settings, social capital is conceptualized to include three facets, specifically, market knowledge, reputation and networking abilities that are accrued through salespeople's activities within social media contexts. Prior research has noted that the structural ties in social media facilitate access to information, interactive conversations and transfer of ideas and experiences (Zhang *et al.*, 2020). For B2B salespeople, these connections offer the potential to assimilate valuable insights, develop shared understanding and enhance the quality of subsequent interactions with customers. Thus, market knowledge is an important cognitive facet of social capital that is embedded in and can be leveraged through social media networks. Further, through effective connections, B2B salespeople can communicate their expertise and other salient qualities that can reduce uncertainty and increase trust in interpersonal exchanges, which subsequently lead to supportive and collaborative behaviors (Badrinarayanan and Laverie, 2011). Thus, as reputation, or how salespeople are construed by others, shapes professional relationships and performance, it is deemed as an important relational constituent of social capital. Finally, in professional settings, who one connects with and how such connections are developed are important drivers of mutually beneficial exchanges. In particular, identifying and cultivating relationships with key personnel at customer firms is central to effective B2B sales roles (Macintosh and Krush, 2017). Thus, networking abilities, or the capability to identify and develop relationships with decision-makers at customer firms, is considered as the third aspect of B2B salespeople's social capital. In the succeeding section, we elaborate on the three facets of social capital and develop hypotheses on how these facets mediate the relationships between salespeople's social media use and value cocreation as well as cross/upselling.

Hypotheses development

Knowledge is regularly generated through exchanges in social spaces inside and outside the organization (Nonaka and Toyama, 2015). Salespeople's market knowledge, such as their understanding about industry trends, changes in the market, competitive intelligence and customer behavioral patterns, is essential for satisfying customer needs and creating customer value (Palmatier, 2008). In particular, we focus on market knowledge gleaned from social media as an important aspect of social capital. Social media sites entail an extensive range of information networks for salespeople to develop market knowledge (Ogilvie *et al.*, 2018) and, through their valuable interactive, search and learning features (Rinaldo *et al.*, 2011), allow salespeople to maintain an *always-on learning* mode (Agnihotri *et al.*, 2012; Dabbagh and Kitsantas, 2012; Marshall *et al.*, 2012). As an example, LinkedIn offers salespeople the opportunity to use its learning solutions and follow groups, pages and hashtags around specific trends, topics, industries and markets. One study (Rollins *et al.*, 2014)

reported that blogs enable salespeople to engage in social learning as they serve as channels to engage with and get feedback from customers, competitors and other professionals. Social media plays a major role in the acquisition and dissemination of market knowledge (Wang *et al.*, 2017). Social media provides instantaneous and extensive social information about changes in the market, industry trends, major events and competitors' activities. In line, Ogilvie *et al.* (2018) suggest that social media prompts salespeople in their collection and dissemination of tacit knowledge about the market. In their recent work, Itani *et al.* (2020) find social media to support salespeople in market sensing activities. Based on this evidence, we suggest that social media use helps salespeople in acquiring knowledge about the market including market trends and changes, prospects and competitors. Accordingly, we hypothesize:

H1. Salesperson's social media use is positively related to salesperson's market knowledge.

Reputation is an important asset for salespeople (Rangarajan *et al.*, 2017). In our study, we deem reputation or salespeople's perceived beliefs and opinions about their recognition and status among others in social media networks as another important aspect of social capital. Social media use can enhance salespeople's social presence and build their professional reputations (O'leary, 2011). As Lacoste (2016) notes, salespeople can use social media to position themselves, build their professional reputation and credibility and signal their experience. In practice, the social selling index (SSI) delivered by LinkedIn Sales Navigator shows that those who use LinkedIn more are more likely to establish a professional brand. Along these lines, social media supports salespeople to unveil their professional "identities" and, consequently, build their credibility and reputation (Lacoste, 2016). Social media also facilitates a two-way communication stream with customers portraying higher responsiveness and reliability, which leads customers to think favorably of the salesperson (Agnihotri, 2020). In the B2B context, social media helps enhance the industry status of key individuals as well as companies' reputation (Bernard, 2016; Vukanovic, 2013). Social media helps establish social standing or reputation for users as seen through the eyes of the beholder leading to more trust within sales relationships (Diba *et al.*, 2019). Based on the above, we argue that the increased use of social media will increase salesperson's reputation. Thus, we put forward the following relationship:

H2. Salesperson's social media use is positively related to salesperson's reputation.

Since social media is, in essence, a collection of social networking sites that were developed for the primary reason of connecting people in wide-digital networks (Jue *et al.*, 2009), it provides ample opportunities for salespeople to develop their social networks for interaction and engagement with customers and other professionals (Agnihotri *et al.*, 2022; Hemsley and Mason, 2013). Networking, the third aspect of social capital, signifies the social facet of social media and refers to capabilities that a salesperson has developed for identifying decision-makers, navigating organizational hierarchies and finding the right people in the customers' firms. Social media networking introduces salespeople to internal and external networks that can help them in designing their operational moves when approaching key customers and decision-makers (Lacoste, 2016). The use of social media equips salespeople with access to social networks to enable social capital development (bridging and bonding) and social capital maintenance (Agnihotri *et al.*, 2022). Salespeople incorporate social media as one of the tools they use for the purpose of researching, prospecting, networking and relationship building (Minsky and Quesenberry, 2016). Through the use of social media,

salespeople can improve engagement with network members, which enhances the likelihood of stronger relationships (Agnihotri *et al.*, 2022). Social media is the major building block of social selling that focuses on connecting salespeople to relevant actors at target buyers (e.g. decision-makers, gatekeepers) through networking and dependable dialogue (Ancillai *et al.*, 2019). With more use of social media, salespeople will be able to better enlarge their networks and engage with people in their networks. Through anecdotal evidence, Ancillai *et al.* (2019) find salespeople who use social selling by leveraging social media platforms are able to follow and engage with top executives and decisions-makers at target accounts and build strong professional networks. In another study, Bernard (2016) shows social media to help B2B chief marketing officers to engage with key influencers, who may include decision-makers at buyers' companies. Based on this evidence, we suggest that salesperson's ability to network through buyers' companies' hierarchy improves with increased use of social media. Accordingly, we hypothesize:

H3. Salesperson's social media use is positively related to salesperson's networking.

Knowledge is a major subset of operant resources that salespeople need to build on in their cocreation of value with customers (Le Meunier-FitzHugh *et al.*, 2011; Vargo and Lusch, 2008). Salespeople use their knowledge about the evolving market trends, changing customers' needs and competitors to better collaborate and cocreate value with customers. The applied knowledge by salespeople is what drives the exchanges between buyers and sellers (Vargo and Lusch, 2008). Salespeople use their knowledge to facilitate customers' engagement in the selling process leading to cocreation of value through the enhanced understanding of customers' needs and improved interactions with them.

Cocreation of value between salesperson and customers may be hampered if a salesperson is not knowledgeable enough to involve customers in the sales process and is not able to collaborate with them to maximize mutual value. According to Hartmann *et al.* (2018), salespeople hinge on their knowledge to understand what customers need, act diligently in solving customers' problems and cocreate value with them. Knowledge permits salespeople to discover the mutable difficulties encountered by customers in a better way and to realize the optimal solutions for these difficulties in favor of exploiting the value cocreated with customers. We suggest that salespeople equipped with additional market knowledge will be more capable of co-creating value with customers. Therefore, we put forward the following relationship:

H4. Salesperson's market knowledge is positively related to value cocreation.

Employee reputation has been said to demonstrate significant effects on job outcomes (Zinko *et al.*, 2012). Personal reputation makes salesperson feel a sense of glory through their work, which increases self-efficacy and promotes better work behaviors. Moreover, perceived positive reputation drives salespeople to go the extra mile with customers and engage them in value cocreation, to maintain and act in accordance with their reputation. For example, employee reputation is a driver of work autonomy, power and career success (Zinko *et al.*, 2012). Within these lines, Echchakoui (2016) shows salesperson's reputation to increase the experiential value offered by the salesperson as experienced by customers through higher economic value, enhanced service efficiency and excellence and better interaction. In another study, salesperson social reputation is shown to increase salesperson equity and customer' share-of-wallet (Echchakoui, 2017). In a similar context, Schaarschmidt (2016) shows that frontline employees are motivated by perceived external reputation to engage in the implementation of service innovation with customers.

Salespeople's reputation is an essential part of their personal brand (Rangarajan *et al.*, 2017). Customers are likely to feel less uncertain and vulnerable during encounters with reputable salesperson while also being able to evince greater receptiveness to interact and engage with salespeople who are well known in the industry. That said, salesperson use personal branding to target customers (Rangarajan *et al.*, 2017). Reputation is likely to be associated with relational trust (Crosby *et al.*, 1990; Swan *et al.*, 1999), which is deemed to facilitate cocreation in salesperson-customer interaction (Baumann and Le Meunier-FitzHugh, 2014). Hence, we argue that reputation is able to increase different pro-customer behaviors of salespeople, such as the engagement in value cocreation with customers. Thus, we investigate the following relationship:

H5. Salesperson's reputation is positively related to value cocreation.

Forming business networks and rapport are important constituents in the cocreation of value in buyer-seller relationships (Salo, 2017). For salespeople, value cocreation involves connecting with buyers and engaging them in identifying opportunities to enhance value provision. According to Lacoste (2016), the networking capabilities in social media can aid salespeople in understanding their customers' needs and planning enhanced engagement in their businesses. Moreover, salespeople who nurture and improve their social networks can be in a better position to appropriate value and enhance sales with customers (Agnihotri, 2020).

Networking plays a major role in driving collaborative competencies in seller-buyer relationship (Barnes and Liao, 2012). Indeed, value cocreation is said to take place within networks (Freytag and Young, 2014; Tóth *et al.*, 2018). According to Reypens *et al.* (2016), for value cocreation to be successful, organizations need to engage in collaborative networks that engage them with other stakeholders, especially customers. This is because networks allow effective integration of resources to develop assimilated solutions and cocreate value (Jaakkola and Hakanen, 2013). Moreover, networking makes it easier for salespeople to communicate with and understand the needs of buyers. The interfirm relational networks between buying and selling firms, in which salespeople are entrenched, support proper matching of buyers' needs with the resources and capabilities of selling firms (Üstüner and Iacobucci, 2012). The value cocreated in salesperson-customer relationship is facilitated by social media resources and capabilities through social network enablement and social content enablement (Agnihotri *et al.*, 2022). We argue that the networks salespeople create are also important at the individual level and help in the firms' efforts to cocreate value:

H6. Salesperson's networking is positively related to value cocreation.

Cross/upselling are common sales approaches selling organizations practice to grow the sales revenue their salespeople collect from customers, thus increasing the sellers' share of customer's wallet (Johnson and Friend, 2015). Despite the difficulty in implementing these approaches (Johnson and Friend, 2015), it is considered by firms as a key metric to assess salesperson performance. Value cocreation facilitates cross/upselling as customers who are highly engaged with an organization's offerings are more likely to be receptive to upgrade to or adopt other offerings that match their needs. The salesperson-customer collaborative work that takes place during value cocreation increases the opportunities for salespeople to explore potential matches between customers' needs and the features of upgraded or new offerings.

Value cocreation is embedded in proper customer interaction management that facilitates customer relationship upgrading including cross/upselling (Alnakhli *et al.*, 2021; Itani, 2021;

Payne *et al.*, 2008; Reinartz *et al.*, 2004; Wang and Feng, 2012). For successful cross/upselling to take place, salespeople need to be in direct, collaborative and engaging interactions with customers. Value cocreation gets customers to participate in the production and sales processes to get the best solution for their problems and to maximize the buyer and seller value. In their study, Hochstein *et al.* (2021) find customer success managers to focus on value cocreation and value-based selling, which arise opportunities for cross/upselling. Salespeople with the capabilities to cocreate value with customers may attain the first-mover advantage by answering fast to real-time customers' needs with new offerings through cross-selling (selling new/additional products or services) and upselling (upgraded products or services). Salesperson value cocreation with customers will increase customer involvement through the sales process leading to more knowledge about customers' needs and problems, which will result in more opportunities for the salesperson to engage in cross/upselling. Thus, we argue that salespeople who engage in value cocreation with customers are more likely to understand customers' needs and have many opportunities to cross/up-sell the products and services they offer. Hence, we hypothesize the following:

H7. Salesperson value cocreation is positively related to cross/upselling.

Method
Sample
To assess the hypothesized relationships, we gather data from B2B salespeople used in the USA. First, we collect e-mails of 850 salespeople through an online data solutions company that provides contact information of business professionals including salespeople, prospects and executives. Based on the set criteria (B2B salespeople who work in the USA) and count of potential participants, a list of 850 e-mail addresses is generated. Second, we contact the potential participants by sending an e-mail highlighting the academic nature of the research study along with a link to a Web-based survey. Respondents are guaranteed full anonymity and confidentiality to their information and responses. Filtering questions are included to make sure respondents are salespeople who work in the B2B sector in the USA. The data gathering took place over three weeks, and 158 respondents qualified (i.e. passed the filtering questions). These respondents have fully completed the survey for a final response rate of 18.5% (five of the participants provided incomplete responses to the survey and are eliminated from the final sample).

Checking the presence of nonresponse bias is not expected when a convenience sampling method is used (Hulland *et al.*, 2018). Despite that, we compare between responses collected during week one and responses collected during week three of the data collection in terms of the latent variables and participants' demographics (Armstrong and Overton, 1977). The comparisons indicate no concern for nonresponse bias. Additionally, following Hulland *et al.* (2018), we compare participants' characteristics (i.e. gender – demographics) with those of a referent group in the population. For that, we compare our sample's gender split with that of the general population of B2B sales force working in the USA as reported by secondary data (Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2019). In our study, males constitute 71% (females 29%) of the sample, resembling the gender distribution in the population (Zoltners *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, our sample includes respondents from several major B2B sectors in the USA (e.g. health care, financial services, hospitality, IT and manufacturing). Participating salespeople work for corporations with varied sizes (from 7 to 100,000 personnel). On average, participants have 10.63 years of experience (SD = 7.39) with 57% of them holding a college degree. Finally, our sample is similar to the sample used in other comparable studies in B2B sales (Epler and Leach, 2021). Appendix 1 includes a summary of the sample characteristics.

Measures
To measure salesperson's social media use, we use a measure from Agnihotri *et al.* (2016) that captures the use of social media sites by the salesperson for normal work routine and job tasks. The measure captures sharing and creating of content by salespeople as well as engaging with customers in direct/indirect interactions using social media. As shown in one of the items: "I am using social media to its fullest potential for supporting my own work." This measure fits the scope of our research, which is the individual use of social media at the salesperson level. Salespeople report using LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter as major tools with most of the participants specified using more than one of these tools. These tools are known to include many functions that support learning, building relationships, networking and social selling of salespeople. The market knowledge measure is based on the work of Ahearne *et al.* (2007) and captures salesperson's level of knowledge, in comparison to other salespeople, about the market/industry changes and trends as well as other actors in the market, such as competitors and customers. For example, one of the items states: "I am well-informed about major events in my industry." Salesperson's reputation is captured using a measure adapted from prior studies (Echchakoui, 2016; Ganesan, 1994), which captures the reputation of a salesperson in her/his industry and with customers compared to other salespeople. As an exemplar item: "Customers think highly of me." Salesperson's networking is captured using a three-item measure based on prior research (Groza *et al.*, 2016). The measure assesses the abilities of a salesperson, in comparison to other salespeople, to reach decision-makers and important people in the customers' firms. As an exemplar item: "I easily navigate the organizational hierarchy of my customers' firms."

The salesperson value cocreation measure includes seven items and is adapted from O'Cass and Ngo (2012). The measure assesses the level of value cocreation a salesperson is involved in when interacting with customers and captures the efforts invested to engage customers in the production of the offerings. As an exemplar item: "I interact with customer to design offerings (products and services) that meet their needs." The cross/upselling measure is adapted from Jasmand *et al.* (2012) and captures a salesperson's success in offering additional or upgraded products/services to customers. One of the items states: "I regularly offer additional offerings to meet the customers' needs best." The measures are captured on a seven-point Likert-type agreement scale (1 = strongly disagree versus 7 = strongly agree).

Based on previous studies and to control for any heterogeneity between salespeople, we control for the effects of some factors. This is because variables examined in the model are affected by individual/personal characteristics and learning effects on one hand, and differences on the company level since salespeople work for companies of diverse sizes (Agnihotri *et al.*, 2016; Gabler *et al.*, 2022; Levin *et al.*, 2012). At the level of salespeople, we control for sales experience, company tenure and education level by including them as covariates in our model. Sales experience is measured as a continuous variable to capture the number of years a salesperson has been working in sales. With experience, salespeople gain more knowledge to build their reputation and establish their social networks, as they are better in executing sales strategies (Inyang and Jaramillo, 2020; Macintosh and Krush, 2017). Moreover, experienced salespeople are known to recognize the role of social capital resources and make more benefit from the networks they form (Rouziou *et al.*, 2018). Likewise, company tenure is measured as a continuous variable and capture the number of years the salesperson has been working for the company. Tenure as a variable has learning effects as it plays a role in developing social capital of salespeople and increasing their performance (Bolander *et al.*, 2015; Claro and Ramos, 2018). Salespeople who have been working for the same company for a longer time could have more time to develop their reputations and networks with customers, which leads to better relational and financial performance. To

measure the education level of the salesperson, we used an ordinal scale (e.g. 5 = college work beyond degree; 1 = less than high school) with greater scores representing higher education levels. Similar to sales experience and tenure, education holds a learning effect that could influence how salespeople behave with customers and implement sales strategies. Salespeople with different educational backgrounds may not have the same perceptions of the role of social capital resources. At the company level, we included the annual sales levels of the companies as a covariate and proxy of the firm size. The company annual sales level is captured using an ordinal scale (e.g. 5 = More than $100m; 1 = Less than $1m) with greater scores representing higher sales levels. Appendix 2 includes a summary of the measures.

Analytical procedures

We use partial least squares-structural equation modeling using the SmartPLS software. This analytical method is well-accepted in B2B sales research (Hair *et al.*, 2019) and is appropriate for analyzing complex models containing multiple paths and interaction effects with relatively small sample size (Chin *et al.*, 2003; Hair *et al.*, 2012). We also use the latest advancements in this method, especially the use of "heterotrait-monotrait ratio" test (HTMT) to evaluate discriminant validity and the bootstrapping algorithm to test significance levels (Benitez *et al.*, 2020).

The measurement model fit is good with SRMR = 0.048 (95% = 0.055), d_ULS = 1.45 (95% = 1.91) and d_G = 1.11 (95% = 1.63). Cronbach's alpha (α), composite reliability (CR) and rho_A are calculated to evaluate reliability and internal consistency of the measures. Results are in support of the internal consistency of the measures with α above than 0.7 and CR and rho_A above 0.8 level. The measures' average variance extracted (AVE) levels are found to be higher than the 0.5 threshold level. Multicollinearity of the latent constructs and their items are checked by assessing the inner and outer variance inflation factor (VIF). The highest VIF level is below the threshold of 3.3 (Kock, 2015), thus ruling out multicollinearity issues.

In our tests to check for validity of the measures, we ensure content validity by adapting formerly validated measures whenever possible. In addition, we use the HTMT test to check for discriminant validity. The values of the HTMT are lower than 0.85, signifying support for discriminant validity (Henseler *et al.*, 2015). To further check for discriminant validity, we compare the interfactor correlations and the square root of AVE of the factors. The results show that none of the correlations are higher than the square root of AVE values, thus providing additional evidence of discriminant validity. The items load on their assigned constructs at 0.05 significance level with no problematic cross-loadings, which provides evidence of convergent validity (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988).

Since our data is collected using a single reporting method (cross-section and self-reported survey data), first, we implement procedural remedies before and at the time of gathering data. In particular, the measures of the variables are counterbalanced and separated throughout the survey. In addition, we use different instructions for participating salespeople when responding to the measures of the variables, while at the same time we adapt formerly valid and reliable measures (Hulland *et al.*, 2018; Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). All measures are validated in a pretest using 16 sales representatives, independent of the actual data collection effort. These precautions are in line with Fuller *et al.* (2016), who show that probability of common method bias decreases in studies when reliable and valid measures are used. In the survey, we highlight anonymity/confidentiality to participants' responses and eased appraisal apprehension by signifying that "there are no right or wrong answers" to the statements and questions of the questionnaire (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003; Rindfleisch *et al.*, 2008).

Second, we check if common method bias is presented using statistical tests. In the first test, we use the Harman's single-factor criterion by applying a single-factor model exploratory factor analysis. Findings from the test provide no support to the single-factor model, with 36% of the variance explained this model, signifying a multivariable model as hypothesized. For the second check, we apply the marker-variable criterion (Lindell and Whitney, 2001). The marker variable we include to the model is the "survey completion duration" factor which is collected for every participant. This factor is not theoretically related to other factors in the model (Itani and Hollebeek, 2021). Our analysis of the model, including the marker variable, reveals no indication of common method bias with nonsignificant changes to the results. As a final procedure, we also included a social desirability factor measured with multiple items of the Marlowe–Crowne measure (Reynolds, 1982). Adding the social desirability factor as a covariate to all endogenous factors in the model do not cause significant changes to the results, thus indicating that social desirability is not a concern in this study (Fisher, 1993). Finally, the structural results show negative and positive moderating effects with prior research showing that moderating effects are not artifacts of common method bias (Siemsen *et al.*, 2010). In conclusion, the statistical checks and the procedural remedies provide evidence to the nonexistence of common method bias. Table 2 lists the correlation matrix, descriptive statistics, reliability, AVE and square root AVE.

Results
The structural model is tested with bootstrapping algorithm (5,000 samples). The model fit of the estimated model is good with SRMR = 0.048 (95% = 0.057), d_ULS = 1.49 (95% = 2.021) and d_G = 1.154 (95% = 1.681). Findings show positive links between salesperson's

Construct	SMU	SMK	SR	SN	VCC	C/U-S	SE	TE	EDL	CAS
Social media use (SMU)	*1*									
Salesperson market knowledge (SMK)	0.53**	*1*								
Salesperson reputation (SR)	0.52**	0.56**	*1*							
Salesperson networking (SN)	0.39**	0.49**	0.64**	*1*						
Value cocreation (VCC)	0.46**	0.62**	0.53**	0.59**	*1*					
Cross/Upselling (C/U-S)	0.49**	0.61**	0.48**	0.55**	0.63**	*1*				
Sales experience (SE)	0.02	0.09	–0.08	–0.04	0.03	0.01	*1*			
Tenure (TE)	0.12	0.01	–0.16*	–0.15	–0.07	–0.18*	0.66**	*1*		
Education level (EDL)	0.16*	0.24**	0.25**	0.28**	0.24**	0.36**	0.06	0.01	*1*	
Company annual sales (CAS)	0.08	0.2*	0.21**	0.28**	0.13	0.19*	–0.06	–0.05	0.31**	*1*
Average	4.83	5.09	5.39	5.05	5.23	5.24	10.63	8.83	–	–
Standard deviation	1.37	1.09	1.05	1.18	1.11	1.05	7.39	6.82	–	–
Composite reliability	0.92	0.9	0.9	0.92	0.91	0.88	–	–	–	–
Cronbach's alpha	0.89	0.88	0.86	0.86	0.89	0.83	–	–	–	–
rho_A	0.89	0.88	0.87	0.86	0.9	0.84	–	–	–	–
Average variance extracted	0.75	0.57	0.65	0.78	0.61	0.59	–	–	–	–
VIF	1.84	2.39	2.54	2.59	3.2	–	1.89	1.99	1.18	1.21

Note: Significance level = *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$

Table 2.
Correlation matrix, descriptive statistics, reliability and AVE

social media use and salesperson's market knowledge ($\beta = 0.51$, $p < 0.01$) and reputation ($\beta = 0.21$, $p < 0.05$), but not networking ($\beta = 0.05$, $p > 0.1$). These results support *H1* and *H2*, but not *H3*. Further, the findings show a positive effect of salesperson's market knowledge ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.05$), reputation ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < 0.01$) and networking ($\beta = 0.32$, $p < 0.01$) on value cocreation. These outcomes offer evidence in support of *H4*, *H5* and *H6*. Finally, the relationship between value cocreation and cross/upselling is positive ($\beta = 0.36$, $p < 0.01$) in support of *H7*. These results and other nonhypothesized direct effects are reported in Table 3.

To gain additional insight into the unsupported relationship between salesperson's social media use and networking, we extend our testing to look for possible indirect effects. Moreover, we assess the mechanisms between salesperson's social media use and value cocreation through salesperson's market knowledge, reputation and networking. These post hoc tests suggest that the effects of salesperson's social media use on networking takes place through market knowledge and reputation (see Table 4). We also find that, in the absence of direct effects of salesperson's market knowledge and reputation on networking, there is a positive impact of salesperson's social media use on networking ($\beta = 0.39$, $p < 0.01$). Furthermore, salesperson's social media use has multiple mechanisms to influence value cocreation including a serial mediation through salesperson's market knowledge, reputation and networking.

Although we conceptualize social capital as consisting of three distinct aspects, we acknowledge the possibility for the construct to be an interconnected operant resource (Madhavaram and Hunt, 2008) and, thus, examine the synergistic effects of the three aspects on value cocreation. We assess the moderating effects between the three variables (market knowledge *X* reputation; market knowledge *X* networking; reputation *X* networking) and find two of the interactions to be significant. The interactive effect of salesperson's market knowledge and reputation is negative ($\beta = -0.23$, $p < 0.01$), while the interactive effect of reputation and networking is positive ($\beta = 0.18$, $p < 0.05$). Since the sign of the interactive effect does not necessarily explain the real dynamics of the relationship between the interaction and the outcome variable, we plot the two significant interactions following an appropriate graphical visualization method (Aiken *et al.*, 1991). The interaction effects are presented in Figures 2 and 3. These plots reveal nuances in the synergistic effects of the three aspects of social capital. Whereas both market knowledge and reputation were positively associated with value cocreation, it appears that cultivating market knowledge benefits cocreation efforts for salespeople with emerging reputation more than for established ones. That is, reputation serves as the "credential" that dominates customer interactions. However, with networking and reputation, given that they relate to the structural and relational aspects of social capital, there is a positive interaction effect on value cocreation such that the effects of one variable is boosted by the other. Stated otherwise, salespeople with established reputations are more engaged in value cocreation when their networking skill is more powerful.

Discussion

The proliferation of digital technologies has heralded novel opportunities for enhancing value creation in B2B exchanges. Although sales organizations and customers have evinced great interest in leveraging social media platforms for creating and delivering value through digital exchanges, there is still a lot of ambiguity among salespeople on how social media enhances their sales tasks and routines (Agnihotri, 2020; Bowen *et al.*, 2021). Whereas several studies have examined how to induce salespeople to adopt

Relationship	Path coefficient
Social media use → Salesperson market knowledge	0.51**
Social media use → Salesperson reputation	0.21*
Social media use → Salesperson networking	0.05
Social media use → Value cocreation	0.05
Social media use → Cross/Upselling	0.07
Salesperson market knowledge → Salesperson reputation	0.5**
Salesperson market knowledge → Salesperson networking	0.18
Salesperson market knowledge → Value cocreation	0.31*
Salesperson market knowledge → Cross/Upselling	0.13
Salesperson reputation → Salesperson networking	0.61**
Salesperson reputation → Value cocreation	0.41**
Salesperson reputation → Cross/Upselling	0.24*
Salesperson networking → Value cocreation	0.32**
Salesperson networking → Cross/Upselling	0.14*
Value cocreation → Cross/Upselling	0.36**
Company annual sales → Salesperson market knowledge	0.13
Company annual sales → Salesperson reputation	0.06
Company annual sales → Salesperson networking	0.1
Company annual sales → Value cocreation	–0.1
Company annual sales → Cross/Upselling	–0.2
Sales experience → Salesperson market knowledge	0.18**
Sales experience → Salesperson reputation	0.01
Sales experience → Salesperson networking	0.06
Sales experience → Value cocreation	0.03
Sales experience → Cross/Upselling	0.12**
Tenure → Salesperson market knowledge	–0.19**
Tenure → Salesperson reputation	–0.20**
Tenure → Salesperson networking	–0.08
Tenure → Value cocreation	0.02
Tenure → Cross/Upselling	–0.19**
Education level → Salesperson market knowledge	0.09
Education level → Salesperson reputation	0.08
Education level → Salesperson networking	–0.08
Education level → Value cocreation	0.01
Education level → Cross/Upselling	0.13**
R^2	
Salesperson market knowledge	0.41
Salesperson reputation	0.5
Salesperson networking	0.61
Value cocreation	0.72
Cross/Upselling	0.71
Model goodness of fit measures	
SRMR	0.048 (H95 0.057)
d_ULS	1.49 (H95 2.021)
d_G	1.154 (H95 1.681)

Note: Significance level *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$

social media, attention is lacking on the explication of social media's benefits to
salespeople, and, consequently, to sales organization and their customers. Addressing
this gap, this study demonstrates that salespeople's use of social media can induce the
acquisition of social capital, a valuable operant resource characterized by superior

Relationship	Indirect effect	Confidence interval
SMU → SMK → SR°Δ	0.26**	[0.13; 0.41]
SMU → SR → SN°^	0.13*	[0.04; 0.24]
SMU → SMK → SR → SN°^	0.16*	[0.05; 0.27]
SMU → SNⁱ	0.38**	[0.25; 0.52]
SMK → SR → SN°^	0.32**	[0.17; 0.48]
SMU indirect effects on VCC		
SMU → SMK → SR → SN → VCC^	0.07**	[0.02; 0.11]
SMU → SMK → SR → VCC^	0.12**	[0.06; 0.2]
SMU → SMK → SN → VCC	0.04	[−0.01; 0.08]
SMU → SMK → VCC°	0.14**	[0.02; 0.29]
SMU → SR → SN → VCC^	0.05*	[0.01; 0.1]
SMU → SR → VCC°	0.08*	[0.02; 0.15]
SMU → SN → VCC	0.02	[−0.03; 0.06]

Table 4.
Post hoc mediation analysis

Notes: SMU: social media use; SMK: salesperson market knowledge; SR: salesperson reputation; SN: salesperson networking; VCC: value cocreation; °Specific indirect effect; ⁱTotal indirect effect; ◆Serial mediation; ΔPartial mediation; ^ Full mediation; Significance level *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$
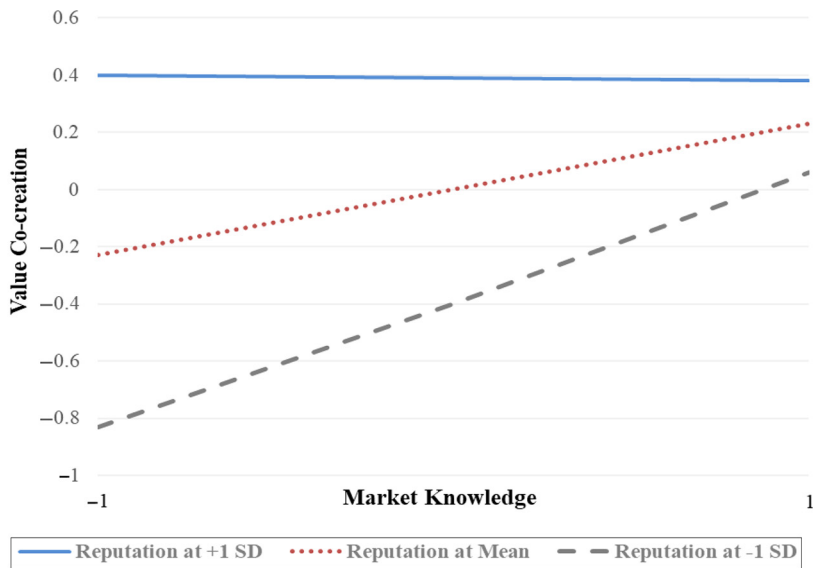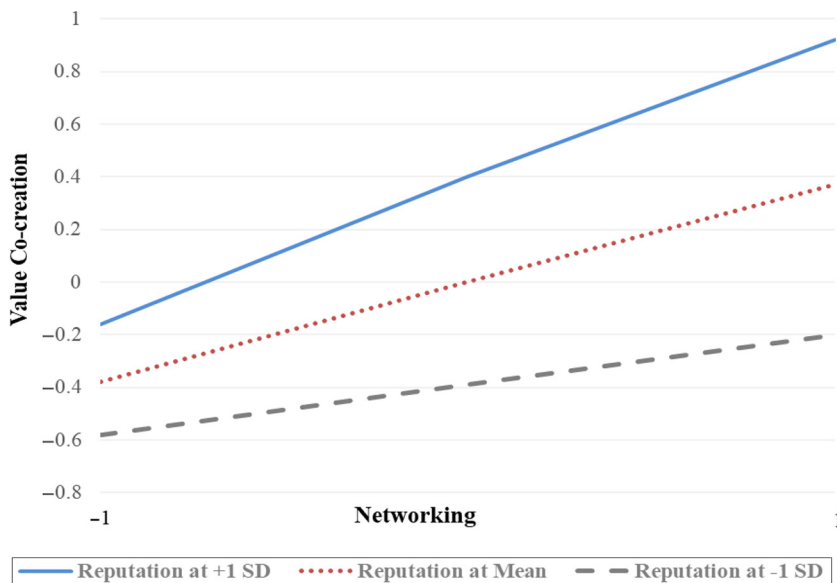

Figure 2.
Interaction effect of salesperson reputation and market knowledge on value cocreation

market knowledge, reputation and networking, which enables them to become more effective in value cocreation and cross/upselling performance. Specifically, this study shows that greater use of social media platforms directly enhances salespeople's market knowledge and reputation, and through these dimensions, indirectly bolsters their networking abilities. Further, our results show that the three social capital dimensions influences value cocreation, which, in turn, enhances cross/upselling outcomes. Below, we elaborate on the theoretical contributions and suggest practical implications based on the findings.

Figure 3.
Interaction effect of
salesperson
reputation and
networking on value
cocreation

Theoretical contributions

We offer three important contributions to the sales literature. First, whereas prior studies have explored individual, peer-related, organizational and technology-related antecedents of social media use by salespeople (Bowen *et al.*, 2021), relatively less attention has focused on the process through which social media use can benefit salespeople. Addressing this lacuna, we contribute to research on social media in B2B sales settings by demonstrating that social media use by B2B salespeople can serve as a means to gather market knowledge, build their reputation and develop networking abilities – all of which are vital for improving their performance. In doing so, we add to the growing evidence on the importance of popular social media platforms as value-creating tools, while also unearthing novel consequences of social media use by salespeople. Second, we contribute to the extant literature on salespeople's job resources (Matthews *et al.*, 2018; Panagopoulos *et al.*, 2016; Schmitz and Ganesan, 2014), which has largely focused on salespeople's utilization of personal resources or those provided by their organizations, by articulating how salespeople can use social media to acquire resources external to the organization. The integration of the resource acquisition literature (Maritan and Peteraf, 2011; Martens *et al.*, 2007) with the sales context is a novel advancement that not only serves to expound on how salespeople can entrepreneurially acquire valuable job resources but also illustrates the relevance of the resource acquisition perspective to boundary-spanning employees, such as B2B salespeople.

Third, by identifying social capital as the conduit through which social media use engenders value cocreation and cross/upselling performance, we advance the literature on social capital theory in general (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998; Seibert *et al.*, 2001) as well as on sales research using social capital theory (Badrinarayanan *et al.*, 2011; Hughes *et al.*, 2013; Rouziou *et al.*, 2018). Specifically, we build on research which shows that social capital can ensue from social media use (Saxton and Guo, 2014) by identifying three novel dimensions of social capital that are idiosyncratic to the sales setting – market knowledge, reputation and networking abilities. Additionally, we extend research on the outcomes of social capital

by identifying value cocreation as novel consequence of each of the three proposed dimensions. Value cocreation and cross/upselling are under-researched sales outcomes and given that they require effective interaction and coordination between firms and their customers (Grover and Kohli, 2012), social capital can serve as the necessary infrastructure for facilitating effective interfirm and interpersonal collaborations (Zhang *et al.*, 2020). Our findings on the synergistic effects of social capital and the post hoc mediation analysis add further nuance to how social capital operates as a social resource that bridges the gap between social media use and value cocreation. In summary, connecting the three contributions enumerated above, this study provides evidence on the theoretical linkages between B2B salespeople's social media use, social capital theory and value cocreation, thus demonstrating that the use of digital technologies in B2B contexts can indeed enhance salespeople performance in new ways that have not been explored before in the sales literature.

Managerial implications

As technological advances continue to transform sales practices, sales organizations must become adept at harnessing these technologies to better serve their customers and enhance business performance. However, as B2B salespeople continue to show skepticism about the benefits of social media, sales managers and organizations would benefit from actionable approaches to justify the importance of social media use to the sales force. Drawing from our findings, sales leaders in B2B organizations can persuade salespeople to incorporate social media as part of their sales toolkits by explaining how social media usage helps in the acquisition of social capital, which can then be leveraged to enhance value cocreation and performance. Specifically, social media use can help with gathering market knowledge about customers, suppliers and even competitors such that salespeople are more capable to enhance their capacity to collaborate with customers and conjointly create value. Additionally, providing and sharing market insights can result in customers trusting the salesperson more (and by association the sales organization itself), which could result in mutual value cocreation opportunities. Our research further indicates that social media use by salespeople can enhance salesperson's reputation. This can help salespeople bolster their own "personal brand" (Rangarajan *et al.*, 2017) which helps increase the credibility of the salesperson and promote customers' willingness to engage with them more closely. To help with salespeople's efforts to build their personal brand, managers must equip salespeople with essential knowledge on customers, competitors, and industry trends such that salespeople can project this knowledge when they utilize social media. Doing so by means of sales enablement tools and a better alignment with marketing is likely to provide salespeople with interesting content to share on social media – thereby enhancing their reputation in the eyes of their network.

Furthermore, work by Hartmann *et al.* (2018) suggests that contemporary B2B sales has become more complex, necessitating an ecosystem-based selling approach that includes interactions with a wide network of partners. In this context, salespeople who have a good networking ability are likely to have access to the right resources within and outside the organization's boundaries. As such, the findings from our study suggest that sales managers should encourage their salespeople to use social media more actively as it enhances networking abilities through the attainment of greater market knowledge and better reputation. Actively building and engaging with their professional networks on social media can help salespeople become more effective in their sales efforts, as networking abilities can be leveraged to reach appropriate stakeholders and decision-makers dispersed across the ecosystem.

Providing the right kind of training to salespeople on how to use social media platforms to build their social capital is key to promoting and managing effective use of these platforms. Such training programs could include strategies, guidelines and best practices for connecting, communicating and collaborating with stakeholders on different social media platforms. Recent work by Bill *et al.* (2020) suggests that sales managers themselves should set an example for salespeople by using social media actively. In addition to imparting necessary skills on how to use social media, periodic monitoring of how well salespeople use social media could be important for organizations to better exploit this powerful digital technological tool. While sales managers should empower their salespeople to use social media for increasing their productivity, attention should be paid to ensure that salespeople do not get distracted by their social media efforts (Guenzi and Nijssen, 2020). Perhaps, rather than tracking superficial metrics and indicators such as the number of posts, connections or groups associated with social media usage, sales managers can observe and evaluate rich metrics such as the social capital dimensions of market knowledge, market reputation and networking abilities, as true indicators of how well salespeople are engaged in social media. In fact, recently developed industry tools that track social media use and social selling reflect this premise. As an example, the SSI provided by LinkedIn evaluates social selling efforts on four elements: establishing a personal brand, finding the right people, engaging with insights and building the right relationships. Similar to this commercially available tool, sales managers can develop metrics for capturing social capital dimensions illustrated in this study across different social media platforms so that salespeople's social media use can be measured to reflect their sales efforts in more meaningful ways. Such metrics can become part of key performance indicators that are used to not only assess the performance of existing salespeople on social media but also to make recruitment decisions. Ultimately, persuading salespeople to use social media the right way, providing a checklist of beneficial outcomes for salespeople to pursue coaching, and monitoring the achievement of such outcomes, and linking accrual of social media resources to salesperson performance appraisal should foster greater understanding of how and why social media should be leveraged to enhance value creation for the firm and its customers.

Limitations and future research

Our research has some limitations. Given that the complexity of the B2B selling process is exacerbated by factors such as the industry in which buyer-sellers are operating in, the stages of the buying-selling process, the nature of the decision-making unit on the buyer side, the nature of the offerings, the length of the sales cycle and personal characteristics of individuals involved in the exchange, future research could investigate constructs pertaining to these factors as potential moderators and build on our framework of social media use by salespeople and key salesperson performance outcomes. For instance, it would be interesting to investigate the outcomes of salespeople's social media use across varying levels of social media usage preferences by key customers or across salespeople who are predominantly "hunters" versus "farmers." In addition, our post hoc analysis yielded interesting insights into the process by which social media use impacts sales outcomes illuminating different pathways for the accrual of resources and achievement of performance outcomes. Future research can develop moderated-mediation models to understand whether distinct moderators do buffer or suppress the serial mediation relationships between salesperson's social media use and sales outcomes. In addition, control variables like age, gender, sales manager use of social media, prior experience of salespeople in using social media for personal goals and peer usage of social media can help isolate the impact of social media use on salesperson outcomes.

Our study uses self-reported measures by salespeople. While we performed statistical checks to account for self-report bias, future research should consider using multiple sources of data – for example, from customers, peers and managers – for measuring constructs such as social capital and value cocreation. While our analysis reveals linkages between salespeople's perceptions of social media use and specific outcomes, it would be intriguing to investigate whether sales managers and customers echo these sentiments. Furthermore, as our findings are constrained by limitations associated with using cross-sectional data, we suggest that future research can assess longitudinal data to better understand the effects of sustained social media usage on various outcomes. Also pertaining to the data, future research could complement our self-reported measure of social media usage with objective measures of social media use by salespeople – such as the SSI provided by LinkedIn. Finally, our research asked respondents to specify which particular social media outlet they prioritize, instead, future research can adopt a more generalized perspective to gauge usage in a platform agnostic manner. However, as different social media platforms are evolving toward catering to specific audiences, purposes and activities, future research could benefit from comparing any relevant differences in the outcomes of salesperson usage across different social media platforms.

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Appendix 1

Characteristic	Count
Education level	
Less than high school	0
High school diploma	12
Some college	32
College degree	90
College work beyond degree	24
Firm offering	
Services	67
Products	91
Average age in years (STD)	32.65 (8.79)
Average experience in years (STD)	10.63 (7.39)
Average tenure in years (STD)	8.83 (6.82)
Gender	
Female	46
Male	112
Firm annual sales ($ million)	
Less than 1	22
1 to 10	58
11 to 50	44
51 to 100	16
More than 100	18
Total	158

Table A1.
Sample

Appendix 2

Measure and items	Loading
Social media use	
My use of social media is pretty much integrated as part of my normal work routine	0.85
I am using all capabilities of social media in the best fashion to help me on the job	0.85
I am using social media to its fullest potential for supporting my own work	0.9
Social media is useful for job	0.85
Salesperson market knowledge	
I have a lot of information on industry trends	0.76
I am well-informed about important events in my industry	0.79
I track all changes in the market	0.75
I am knowledgeable about our competitors' activities	0.8
I update my information about new developments in the market	0.79
I look for new entrants (potential customers, new competitors) to the market	0.72
I am an excellent source of information about the offerings sold in my industry	0.69
Salesperson reputation	
I am well known by customers	0.77
I have a reputation for being concerned about customers	0.72
I am well known in my industry	0.83
Customers think highly of me	0.9
I am highly reputable in the market	0.8
Salesperson networking	
I am very good at identifying the decision-maker in the customers' firms	0.9
I easily navigate the organizational hierarchy of the customers' firms	0.86
I usually know the important people I need to talk to within the customers' firms	0.89
Value cocreation	
I interact with customers to serve them better	0.78
I provide offerings for and in conjunction with customers	0.86
I gather as much information as possible to offer suitable offering to customers	0.66
I co-opt customer involvement in providing offerings for them	0.8
I work together with customers to co-produce offerings that mobilize them	0.79
I work together with customers to cocreate additional value	0.8
I provide customers with supporting offerings to help them maximize their value	0.75
Cross/Upselling	
I usually explore potential matches between the customers' needs and the features of a product/ service which they do not currently own	0.81
I usually try to identify good ways of familiarizing customers with another product/service that can satisfy their needs	0.86
I hardly neglect a good opportunity to advise customers of product/service which they could benefit from	0.71
I regularly offer additional offerings to meet customers' needs best	0.68
I regularly ask questions to assess whether the customer would be willing to buy additional products/services	0.77

Table A2.
Measures

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