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Can salespeople use social media to enhance brand awareness and sales performance? The role of manager empowerment and creativity

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Abstract

Purpose – Although research analyzing the consequences of salesperson social media use in driving sales behaviors and performance outcomes has proliferated in the recent past, there are significant research gaps in the domain. Grounded in task-technology fit theory, this paper aims to propose a conceptual framework that integrates between previously disjointed areas of research and analyzes the relationships between salesperson social media use, brand awareness, creativity, manager empowerment and company performance.

Design/methodology/approach – Survey responses were collected from a multi-industry sample of 158 business-to-business salespeople. Structural relationships were tested using partial least squares structural equation modeling.

Findings – The analysis shows that salesperson social media use positively affects brand awareness. The relationship between social media and brand awareness is magnified with the increase in salesperson creativity. Findings also show that manager empowerment increases salesperson creativity. Finally, brand awareness positively affects company performance.

Practical implications – Sales organizations should focus on developing digital strategies, especially focusing on salesperson social media use to enhance company's brand awareness, which in turn increases company performance. Moreover, sales managers should also follow empowering leader behaviors to enhance creativity.

Originality/value – The authors amalgamate salesperson social media use literature and branding literature by proposing salesperson social media use's positive effects on brand awareness. This study also expands the knowledge by exploring the moderating effect of individual-level variables such as salesperson creativity on driving the effects of salesperson social media use.

Keywords Salesperson social media use, Creativity, Manager empowerment, Brand awareness, Company performance

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The recent digitalization of business-to-business (B2B) markets has created shifts in the behavior of B2B customers. Not only has digitalization affected the customers, the digitalization of interactions has carried through technology, such as with social media, and has also resulted in major shifts in the way B2B organizations conduct their business. Indeed, as more and more customers rely on the internet to make their buying decisions (Agnihotri, 2020), sales organizations are also investing in carefully crafting their digital strategies to ensure they offer value creation opportunities for their customers. In fact, researchers have propounded that utilizing social media for B2B transactions can unveil millions of dollars' worth of business opportunities for B2B organizations (Chae *et al.*, 2020), and while this is an important area

of future research (Kumar and Sharma, 2022; Schmitt *et al.*, 2021), it is not fully understood in B2B markets (Cartwright *et al.*, 2021). As salespeople are given the ultimate responsibility to manage the relationships with customers, sales organizations have relied on social media usage through their salesforce to create value for their customers. Predictably, the individual (salesperson) level use of social media has also garnered attention from recent sales scholars. Salesperson social media use is defined as “the technological component of the communication, transaction and relationship building functions of a business which leverages the network of customers and prospects to promote value co-creation” (Andzulis *et al.*, 2012, p. 309). Researchers have revealed that salesperson social media use enhances important organizational outcomes such as sales performance, adaptive selling and relationships with

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customers (Agnihotri et al., 2016; Bowen et al., 2021; Itani et al., 2017, 2021; Ogilvie et al., 2018; Rodriguez et al., 2012).

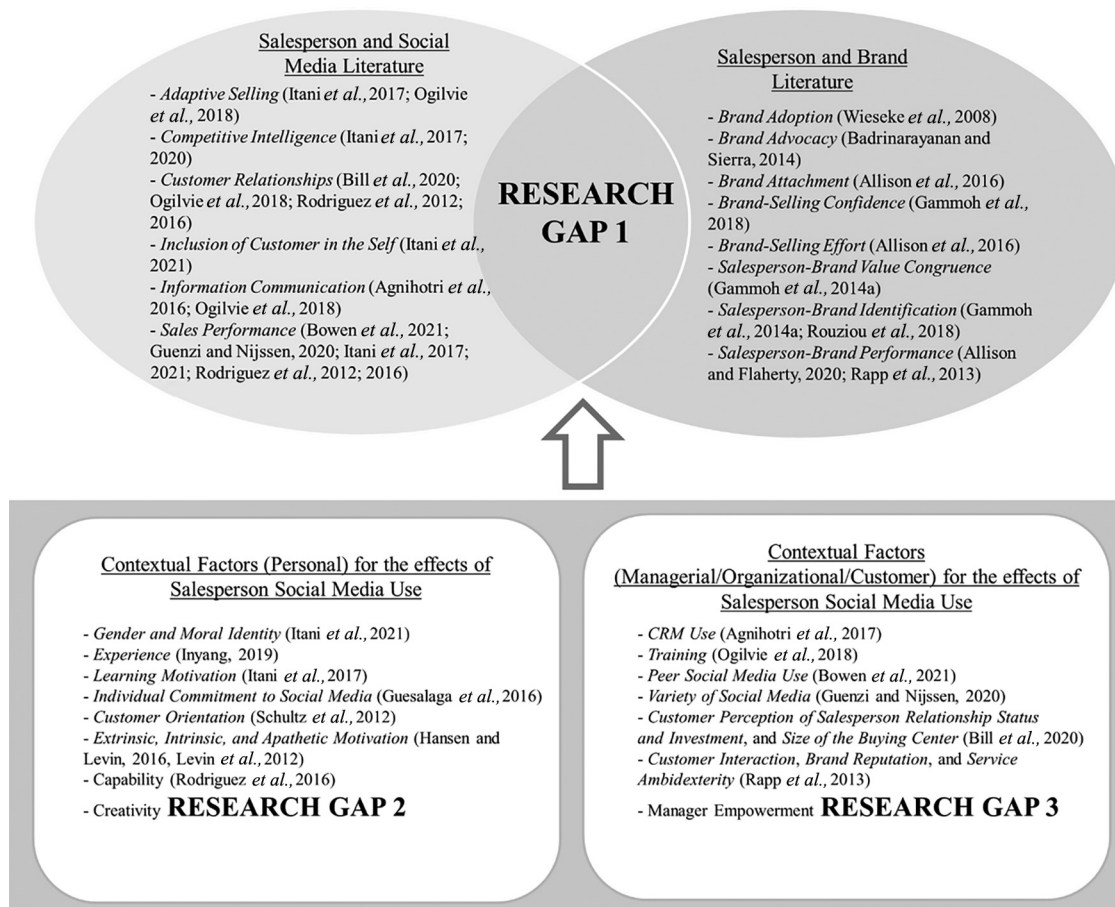
Analogously, organizations also rely on salespeople to develop important brand-related strategies. The brand conveys not only the emotional component but also the values of the organization. Consumer-brand relationships and outcomes have thus received significant attention in past research (Allison et al., 2016; Badrinarayanan and Laverie, 2011; Gammoh et al., 2014a, 2014b; Gillespie et al., 2016; Gyomlai et al., 2022; Rouziou et al., 2018; Tuškej et al., 2013). One important outcome of interest that has not received much attention is that of brand awareness. We define brand awareness as “the ability of the decision-makers in [an] organizational buying center to recognize or recall a brand” (Homburg et al., 2010, p. 202). Brand awareness is a primary step in building a brand (Wang et al., 2016) and a key component of its branding strategy (Homburg et al., 2010). Brand awareness is important in B2B markets as it helps create brand equity and higher engagement opportunities for parties in a B2B relationship (Wang et al., 2016). It is also evinced that brand awareness can significantly increase the market performance of B2B firms (Homburg et al., 2010). Despite that, little is known about the impact of brand awareness in B2B markets (Anees-ur-Rehman et al., 2018; Eid et al., 2020; Homburg et al., 2010; Keränen et al., 2012) and how B2B sellers can raise brand awareness of their firms (Wang et al., 2016). This gap outspreads to the lack in knowledge at

hand concerning the possible role salespeople can play to boost their firms’ brand awareness.

To summarize, while independent research studies exploring the effects of salesperson social media and studies exploring brand-related outcomes have provided valuable insights, significant research gaps remain. We expand the prior work by identifying significant research gaps in the literature as shown in Figure 1. Accordingly, we make three unique contributions to the literature.

Research Gap 1: As discussed before, the effects of a salesperson’s brand identification and other brand-related variables on organizational outcomes have received considerable attention in the past research. However, the analysis of salesperson social media use on brand awareness and company performance remains unexplored in the past research. Researchers have shown that salespeople-brand interaction is an area ripe for future research (Gyomlai et al., 2022), specifically the importance of brand awareness in B2B markets (Homburg et al., 2010) and that exploring the effect of social media use on company performance is an interesting research domain (Agnihotri and Mariadoss, 2022). Using task-technology fit theory (Goodhue and Thompson, 1995), we demonstrate that social media use by salespeople positively impacts brand awareness among the consumers. While other factors can also enhance brand awareness, one research stream that has garnered recent attention of scholars is the role of salespeople in driving brand-related outcomes (Gammoh et al., 2014a; Rouziou et al., 2018). Along with these expectations to affect brand

Figure 1 Research gap model (Summary of Illustrative Research)



outcomes, as argued before, organizations are heavily investing in their digital pursuits and digital-selling environment (Cartwright *et al.*, 2021) so as to enhance salesperson social media use because of the benefits it has for achieving organizational objectives. Hence, an understanding of the additional benefits that these digital transformation initiatives can provide in terms of brand awareness is an important outcome to explore (Cartwright *et al.*, 2021; Homburg *et al.*, 2010) and can provide a meaningful addition to the knowledge of academics and practitioners alike. In the current study, we propose that the usage of social media by salespeople helps create co-creation opportunities through higher brand awareness. We further argue that this, in turn, enhances company performance.

Research Gap 2: We extend prior research that explores the boundary conditions assessing personal level variables (Itani *et al.*, 2021) affecting the consequences of salesperson social media use by exploring the effects of salesperson creativity, which is defined as “the amount of new ideas generated and novel behaviors exhibited by the salesperson in performing their job activities” (Wang and Netemeyer, 2004, p. 806). Creativity has been touted as a critical ingredient of a sales job (Agnihotri *et al.*, 2014; Groza *et al.*, 2016; Kalra *et al.*, 2021). We answer recent research calls in the sales literature that highlight the importance of exploring personal-level variables in social media literature (Agnihotri, 2020; Itani *et al.*, 2021) and the unexplored area of creativity in the sales literature (Evans *et al.*, 2012; Kalra *et al.*, 2021) by analyzing the moderating function of salesperson creativity in the salesperson social media use-brand awareness relationship.

Research Gap 3: We also assess whether managers play a role in enhancing the effects proposed in our framework. More specifically, we explore whether manager empowerment positively influences salesperson’s creativity that ultimately enhances the impact of social media on brand awareness. Manager empowerment is defined as:

[...] a practice or set of practices involving the delegation of the responsibility down the hierarchy to give employees increased decision-making authority in respect to the execution of their primary work task (Leach *et al.*, 2003, p. 28).

Manager empowerment has been shown to enhance employee motivation and performance (Ahearne *et al.*, 2005; Leach *et al.*, 2003; Manz and Sims, 2001). While managers play a key role in driving workplace outcomes, their role in driving creativity through social media use remains unexplored and offers an important research avenue (Agnihotri, 2020; Agnihotri *et al.*, 2014; Itani *et al.*, 2021). Hence, in this study, we explore the role of manager empowerment in increasing salesperson’s creativity and contribute to the growing literature on the determinants of salesperson creativity (Agnihotri *et al.*, 2014; Groza *et al.*, 2016; Kalra *et al.*, 2021). The identification of these research gaps guides our study to answer three relevant research questions:

- RQ1. How is salesperson social media use related to brand awareness and ultimately company performance?
- RQ2. What role can salesperson creativity play in driving the relationship between social media use and brand awareness?
- RQ3. How can managers enhance salesperson creativity? Our hypothesized model is shown in Figure 2.

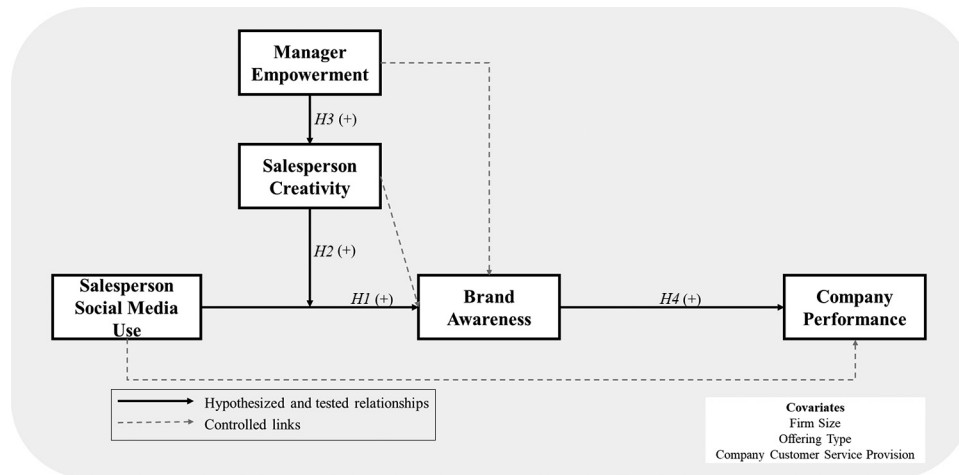
Theoretical background and literature review

Task-technology fit theory

We rely on task-technology fit (TTF) theory to provide theoretical support to our framework. The basic premise of TTF theory is that the fit between the task and the technology that individuals use can lead to higher individual performance outcomes. As more and more jobs are dependent on technology, employees’ utilization of technology and their expected outcomes from using that technology are an important domain for organizations to understand. Technologies, in this context, are defined as all the tools available for an individual to conduct on-the-job tasks. More specifically, Goodhue and Thompson (1995) suggest that “Task-technology fit (TTF) is the degree to which a technology assists an individual in performing their portfolio of tasks” (p. 216). This fit or misfit can then affect an individual’s utilization of technology. In the sales context, the “task” of the salespeople is not only to sell but also to enhance brand awareness that can help spread information regarding the product or service these salespeople represent (Gammoh *et al.*, 2014a, 2018; Rouziou *et al.*, 2018). This combined task of selling and servicing is ambidextrous and is generally considered as one that is challenging in continuous pursuit of knowledge creation and dissemination. Furthermore, because of the challenging nature of professional selling, salespeople are often tasked with maintaining a variety of relationships and are assigned to relay important information to the potential buyers to help them make a buying decision. Because social media offers a platform for salespeople to share important information and maintain a relationship with their buyers, it fits their tasks. This parallels the argument that a match between the task (selling) and the features of the technology (content sharing via social media) leads to an increase in the task and overall firm performance (Dang *et al.*, 2020). Overall, this theory assumes that individuals can effectively evaluate this fit (Goodhue *et al.*, 2000) and then change their behavior accordingly to derive maximum benefit from the technologies used and job tasks completed. The function of this fit in assessing individual-level outcomes was originally introduced in the information system research. Scholars have further argued that TTF can not only lead to individual performance outcomes but also impact organizational performance (Furneaux, 2012).

According to the TTF theory, salespeople using technology, such as social media, can assess the overall significance of the importance of technology in hand, and then use it efficiently to achieve different organizational outcomes. Social media is an invaluable tool that salespeople can rely on to connect with their customers and share important information with them that can lead to better customer outcomes (Itani *et al.*, 2017). In our research, we extend the TTF theory to argue that because salespeople play a critical role in sharing brand-related information with customers, they will also be more inclined to use social media as it provides them with the best fit to achieve their described job tasks, such as generating brand awareness. Furthermore, TTF theory provides a platform to assess moderating variables that affect the outcomes of technology use, as shown in our research, measured as social media use (Bowen *et al.*, 2021). Hence, we explore the role of salesperson creativity that aligns well with the nomological validity of TTF theory that proposes to explore the outcomes of technology use

Figure 2 Hypothesized model



and the factors that can affect such outcomes. Overall, TTF theory proclaims that a fit between task and technology used to accomplish the task is needed for effective problem solving.

While initially applied in the information system research, TTF theory has been applied across a variety of contexts to evaluate the effect of technology on outcomes (Furneaux, 2012; Goodhue *et al.*, 2000; Jarupathirun, 2007; Shirani *et al.*, 1999; Staples and Seddon, 2004). The notion of fit in sales research is attributed to the inherent nature of social media. Researchers argue that since social media enhances the communication between salespeople and the customers, it is considered to be a fit for B2B sales jobs since the enhanced communication will lead to stronger relationships and, hence, help achieve core sales outcomes (Agnihotri *et al.*, 2012; Ahearne *et al.*, 2008; Alnakhli *et al.*, 2021). Sales scholars, in particular, have used TTF theory to explain the relevance and outcomes of social media (Agnihotri *et al.*, 2012; Bowen *et al.*, 2021; Itani *et al.*, 2020). For instance, Itani *et al.* (2020) used TTF theory to propose association among social media use and marketing-sensing and customer-linking capabilities and argued that social media is an appropriate technology that fits in sales jobs and, hence, offers immense performance outcomes. Similarly, Bowen *et al.* (2021) used TTF theory to argue that social media use strengthens individual outcomes through mediating variables such as value-oriented prospecting and that the link between technology use and outcomes is moderated or contingent on contextual factors.

Overall, we extend this line of inquiry and use TTF theory to propose salesperson social media use can also enhance brand awareness and company performance. More specifically, we argue that because social media is an apt tool for sales jobs, it helps offer value-creating opportunities for salespeople and leads to higher brand awareness. Moreover, we also extend the TTF theory by proposing the moderating role of salesperson creativity in strengthening the social media use and brand awareness relationship.

Social media use

Sales scholars have discovered the function of social media use in driving B2B sales outcomes. For instance, Guesalaga (2016)

explored the firm-level competencies that drive social media use. Investigating the impact of social media use on sales performance, Itani *et al.* (2017) analyzed the role of salesperson learning orientation and attitude towards social media use as the drivers of social media use and performance. Agnihotri *et al.* (2017) focused on the interactive role of CRM technology and social media use on post-sales behaviors such as empathy, information communication and diligence among others. Recently, Bowen *et al.* (2021) explored the underlying mechanisms of social media use in driving performance and discovered the moderating role of peers' social media use in enhancing relevant outcomes. A study by Kumar and Sharma (2022) provides a comprehensive summary of the research on social selling and social media use.

Following the TTF theory claims, we argue that a fit between increasing brand awareness and the use of social media by salesperson exist as social media sites provide the place and features needed to create and intensify brand awareness. Overall, researchers have argued that social media use is an important area to explore for the future of the sales domain as sales organizations are now embracing social selling (Schmitt *et al.*, 2021), and they have propounded social media as an area worthy of relevant research enquiry (Cartwright *et al.*, 2021; Kumar and Sharma, 2022).

Salespeople and brand-related outcomes

Brand awareness is a vital marketing outcome in B2B that has not received the required attention in research. Brand awareness is "the ability of the decision-makers in [an] organizational buying center to recognize or recall a brand" (Homburg *et al.*, 2010, p. 202). For that, it facilitates the process of building a brand (Wang *et al.*, 2016) and creating a successful branding strategy (Homburg *et al.*, 2010). Brand awareness helps B2B sellers develop brand equity and increase engagement opportunities with buyers (Wang *et al.*, 2016). Moreover, brand awareness can reduce information costs and perceived risk for buyers (Erdem *et al.*, 2006). For that, it said that brand awareness could drive market performance of B2B firms (Homburg *et al.*, 2010). Despite that, little is known about brand awareness in B2B markets (Anees-ur-Rehman *et al.*, 2018; Eid *et al.*, 2020; Homburg *et al.*, 2010; Keränen *et al.*, 2012) and how it

is possible for salespeople to contribute to their firms' brand awareness (Wang *et al.*, 2016). In earlier studies, it is evidenced that B2B firms use social media advertising (paid media) to increase brand awareness (Eid *et al.*, 2020; Michaelidou *et al.*, 2011). We extend this logic to propose that social media use by salespeople can affect brand awareness of B2B firms.

While organizations can communicate their brands to customers through different channels, salespeople who are at the forefront of B2B sales interactions also work as brand ambassadors (Rouziou *et al.*, 2018) and relay important brand-related outcomes for firms and customers (Gammoh *et al.*, 2014a). Past researchers have analyzed several brand-related outcomes. For instance, Gyomlai *et al.* (2022) showed that salespeople's perceptions of fit with the brand they sell increases effort and, ultimately, brand performance. This salesperson-brand congruence has also been shown to enhance brand identification and ultimately sales performance (Gammoh *et al.*, 2014a). Lastly, organizational factors, such as quota systems, have also been shown to affect salespeople's effort toward the brand (Gillespie *et al.*, 2016). Hence, while past research has focused on several important outcomes in this literature stream, what remains unknown is whether a B2B salesperson's digital adoption, such as social media, helps convey more awareness of the brand to their customers.

Hypotheses development

Social media use and brand awareness

We argue that higher salesperson social media use is related to higher brand awareness. This will happen because social media is a powerful tool that salespeople can use to collect and disseminate important brand and company information (Agnihotri *et al.*, 2016; Itani *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, using social media can increase the breadth of network availability to salespeople (Ogilvie *et al.*, 2018) which, in turn, increases the reachability of the content that the salespeople post on social media. For instance, a salesperson can post and share information on LinkedIn and Twitter to engage with their customer, and this can lead to sharing important information about the brand. Furthermore, social media also helps in an effective communication process with customers (Itani *et al.*, 2021) since social media use enhances the frequency of interactions between the salesperson and the customer (Wang *et al.*, 2016). As each point of contact between a salesperson and the customer is an opportunity to share and collect information, social media use offers a ripe ground for creating value in these interactions. This higher frequency, we argue, will lead to more opportunities for the salesperson to communicate information about the brand to their customer and will increase the value creation opportunities in the sales dialogue. Lastly, social media use also develops virtual communities that offer significant value creating opportunities for customers and sellers (Wang *et al.*, 2016) as social media helps improve the overall communication process between the parties (Agnihotri *et al.*, 2016). Hence:

H1. Social media use is positively related to brand awareness.

The moderating role of salesperson creativity

We postulate that the relationship between social media use and brand awareness will be stronger for salespeople with higher creativity. Salesperson social media use is expected to enhance the firm's brand awareness from the perspective of

customers. This is because social media enables salespeople to expand their network, more frequently interact with customers, share brand information and engage with customers (Agnihotri *et al.*, 2016; Drummond *et al.*, 2020; Itani *et al.*, 2020; Ogilvie *et al.*, 2018; Wang *et al.*, 2016). The effectiveness of social media use in increasing brand awareness depends on how salespeople use this tool and their capabilities in communicating and building networks. More specifically, a salesperson needs to actively and creatively use social media to create and share brand-related content, collect information and express innovative ideas and should be able to build professional networks and engage the audience to be able to increase brand awareness. We argue that salesperson creativity plays a key role in the effectiveness of social media use in increasing brand awareness.

Past research suggests that individuals' creativity is related to how they use social media. Acar *et al.* (2021) studied social media and creativity and distinguished active use of social media for creating content and expressing ideas from its passive use for entertainment, spending time and relaxation. They provided evidence that creativity is related to active use of social media to display opinions, gather more knowledge and learn. Salespeople who exhibit creative behaviors are expected to actively use social media to discover and learn more about their company and industry and express their novel ideas. Active use of social media by creative salespeople will be more impactful in engaging customers and disseminating brand information than passive use by less creative salespeople.

Sigala and Chalkiti (2015) showed that creativity is associated with the use of social media for different activities such as searching, reading, sharing and co-creating digital content. Creative salespeople's social media use is aligned with activities that improve brand awareness, such as sharing and co-creating content. For example, LinkedIn can be used in different ways. Time can be spent on LinkedIn to scroll through posts passively and view updates without interacting with other professionals. The same amount of time can be used actively to express ideas, disseminate brand information and engage with other professionals within the network. We argue that social media use by creative salespeople will be more impactful in strengthening brand awareness as these salespeople are more likely to invest their time in more impactful activities such as creating creative and more engaging content, searching smartly through communities and available networks and benefiting from different tools within the platform.

As sales professionals use social media, their creativity makes their communication more engaging and interesting. Kadir *et al.* (2012) studied online communication and found that users' creativity makes their communication more interesting and their threads more engaging for the audience. Moreover, empirical evidence shows that creativity and salesperson networking behaviors are positively related (Krush *et al.*, 2017). Hence, creativity enables salespeople to communicate more engagingly and to grow and maintain their professional network more effectively. Creativity is a vital ingredient for effective networking and is needed for engaging the salespeople's network with brand-related content.

We surmise that salesperson creativity does not affect the time spent on social media. However, there is a relationship between salesperson creativity and productive utilization of social media. We argue that salespeople who are more creative

will better use social media to create and share brand-related content, collect information, express ideas and learn. Furthermore, creativity helps salespeople communicate more successfully and engage their audience. This premise suggests that creativity positively moderates the social media use and brand awareness relationship. Overall, creativity helps salespeople use social media more effectively and efficiently to increase brand awareness. Therefore, the relationship between social media use and brand awareness will be stronger for salespeople with higher creativity:

H2. Salesperson creativity positively moderates the relationship between social media use and brand awareness.

Manager empowerment and salesperson creativity

Adopting the notion that creative behaviors can be impacted by the organizational context (Kalra *et al.*, 2021), we propose that managerially relevant behaviors, such as empowerment, can play a crucial role in directly impacting the salesperson's creativity. Researchers have argued that behaviors of empowering leaders motivate followers to do their best in achieving task and organizational goals (Manz and Sims, 2001) by influencing behaviors of subordinates. We argue that the empowerment salespeople receive from their managers is positively related to salespeople being creative at work because manager empowerment is directly related to higher self-efficacy of employees (Ahearne *et al.*, 2005; Anderson and Huang, 2006; Zhang and Bartol, 2010). Moreover, manager empowerment has been closely linked to transformational leadership style (Martin and Bush, 2006) that enhances salespeople's feelings of self-worth and develops their belief in their ability to come up with creative solutions to the sales tasks. Empowerment has also been shown to eradicate states of powerlessness by improving the inherent meaning of the job (Ahearne *et al.*, 2005) and aligning an individual's objectives with those of the sales organization (Sallee and Flaherty, 2003). In line with the tenets of social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), this alignment of objectives and meaningfulness of the job enables salespeople to reciprocate by generating new ideas for solutions to customers' problems. Empowerment enhances authority-decision making of salespeople (Leach *et al.*, 2003; Sallee and Flaherty, 2003), helping them to easily deviate from the normed guidelines to come up with new solutions. Lastly, it is argued that empowerment increases the trust that the salesperson has in the manager and the organization, and it directs salespeople to achieve a solution for a greater common good. Hence, we argue that empowerment triggers creativity. Hence, we hypothesize:

H3. Manager empowerment is positively related to creativity.

Brand awareness and company performance

Attributes related to brand reputation and corporate image are important in the B2B purchase setting, especially in the early stages and when service or product attributes are difficult to evaluate (Blombäck and Axelsson, 2007; Gomez *et al.*, 2016). Specifically, brand awareness, a unique type of brand equity assets (Aaker, 2009), signals high quality of offerings, supplier commitment and seller expertise leading buyers to trust and work with sellers known for their high brand awareness, which in turn drives better financial outcomes to such sellers. Prior

studies have suggested the positive impact of B2B brand awareness on the firm's financial performance. Anees-ur-Rehman *et al.* (2018) found that brand awareness positively influences brand credibility, which, in turn, increases financial performance. Homburg *et al.* (2010) argue that brand awareness drives market performance by reducing customer information cost and customer-perceived risk.

Brand awareness, as an extrinsic cue, signals product quality, supplier commitment and long-term presence in the market (Hoyer and Brown, 1990; Laroche *et al.*, 1996; MacDonald and Sharp, 2000; Tóth *et al.*, 2022). Therefore, brand awareness reduces the required resources associated with collecting information for a purchase decision (Homburg *et al.*, 2010). Moreover, brand recognition reduces both perceived organizational risk and personal risk of decision-makers in buying (Mitchell, 1995). According to Brown *et al.* (2011), decision-makers rely on the brand for making purchase decisions as a risk-reduction heuristic. Purchasing from a well-known brand minimizes the risk of decision-makers being blamed in case of an unsatisfactory outcome. In addition, purchasing a brand with high awareness reduces perceived functional risk for the organization since the high brand awareness signals high product quality. In sum, brand awareness is of great value to sellers and buyers as it can increase benefits to sellers (e.g. buyer alertness and recognition, improved brand perceptions) and reduce costs for buyers (e.g. perceived risk, decision-making complexity). Thus, brand awareness positively influences company performance:

H4. Brand awareness is positively related to company performance.

Method

Sample

To test the hypothesized relationships, we chose the survey research as a quantitative method to collect information and analyze it from a sample of salespeople. This method allows us to quantify the direction and magnitude of the relations hypothesized. Survey research is recognized for its reliability, generalizability and cost effectiveness. A list of 850 US-based B2B salespeople and their emails was curated from a B2B online contact database that provides paid data services and solutions (LeadFerret). Via email, these salespeople were asked to anonymously participate in our Web-based survey and were provided information regarding the scholarly endeavor of the data collection to minimize social bias. An email reminder was sent later to encourage participation. The data used in this study was collected in year 2019.

We obtained 163 responses with five that were incomplete, keeping 158 full responses to analyze (18.59% effective response rate). Our response rate is comparable to other similar studies in the area of B2B sales and social media (Agnihotri *et al.*, 2016; Bowen *et al.*, 2021; Ogilvie *et al.*, 2018). To encourage survey participation, we provided the option for respondents to be entered in a drawing for one of the gifts cards we purchased as incentives. While the use of convenience sampling eliminates the probability of nonresponse bias (Hulland *et al.*, 2018), we compared the responses collected in the first week with the responses collected in the third (last

week of the data collection. Specifically, we compared the means of all the latent constructs and demographic variables and found no significant differences between the two groups (Armstrong and Overton, 1977). More so, we compared some of the characteristics of our sample with those of the target population or reference group as suggested by Hulland *et al.* (2018). Our final sample comprised approximately 71% men and 29% women. We found that this distribution of gender is similar to that found in multiple industries (e.g. women represent 30% of the total salesforce of the financial services industry and 27% in the wholesale industry; Zoltners *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, our sample also had similar sampling characteristics used in other research studies (Epler and Leach, 2021). Hence, nonresponse bias is less likely to be an issue in our study.

Salespeople who participated in the study worked for diverse-sized (e.g. seven to 100,000 employees) firms that represented various industries (e.g. manufacturing, healthcare, financial services, information technology and hospitality services). On average, the work experience respondents held was 10.63 years (standard deviation 7.39 years) with the majority (around 72%) holding a university degree or higher education level.

Measures

We adapted well-developed and reliable measures from preceding studies. To capture the use of social media by salespeople, we used a four-item measure from Agnihotri *et al.* (2016). This measure captures the degree to which salespeople use social media for work in their daily routine. For example, an item states: “I am using all capabilities of social media in the best fashion to help me on the job.” Salesperson creativity was captured using a five-item measure adapted from Wang and Netemeyer (2004). The measure catches the degree to which salespeople generate and implement new ideas and behaviors when performing their work tasks. As an example, an item states: “I generate creative selling ideas.” To capture the empowerment salespeople receive from their direct managers, we adapted the manager empowerment measure from Ahearne *et al.* (2005). For example, one of the items states: “My manager believes that I can handle demanding tasks.” At the organization level, a six-item measure (Homburg *et al.*, 2010; Wang *et al.*, 2016) captured the awareness level that decision-makers among customers held about the company (brand). An exemplar item states: “Potential customers can clearly recall some characteristics of our brand/company.” Company performance was captured using the measure developed by Moonman and Rust (1999). The measure takes into consideration a comparison between the company’s financial/sales performance and that of major competitors.

As brand awareness and company performance could be affected by the level of service provision of a company (Jahanzeb *et al.*, 2013; Zhang *et al.*, 2016), we controlled for the company customer-service provision by adapting the measure developed by Jasmand *et al.* (2012). The measure captures the procedures implemented by the company to serve and satisfy the needs of customers by offering products and services that meet the company’s consumption portfolios. Moreover, we collected information about the number of total employees to represent firm size. We also collected information about the firm’s offering type (products vs services) to control for any possible effect of the

heterogeneity in the firm size and offering type on brand awareness and company performance (Homburg *et al.*, 2010). More details about the measures and scales used are provided in Table 1.

When designing the survey, we made sure to separate the measures and used different response scales to reduce the probability of having common method variance (CMV) (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). More so, the use of reliable and valid measures is less likely to lead to CMV (Fuller *et al.*, 2016). In addition, the anonymity given to respondents who were informed that “there are no right or wrong answers” to the questions/items reduces the probability of CMV (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003; Rindfleisch *et al.*, 2008). Using analytical methods, we also checked for CMV by following the Harman’s single factor method. Specifically, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis test (EFA) with a one-factor model. The test shows that the one-factor model is not appropriate with only 36% explained variance. Furthermore, we used the marker variable technique (Lindell and Whitney, 2001). The time it took respondents to complete the survey was used as the marker variable as it was assumed unrelated to any of the constructs in the study (Itani and Hollebeck, 2021). There is no significant difference in the coefficients of hypothesized relationships between the results of the hypothesized model hypothesized and the model with the marker variable.

With the method of data collection we followed, the data could be affected by self-reporting bias. For that, we checked for social desirability (Reynolds, 1982) by using a shortened Marlowe–Crowne original measure. The social desirability factor was included to affect all endogenous factors. In the adjusted model, the path coefficients were not significantly different from those found in the hypothesized model. In addition, the association between the social desirability measure and other factors in the study were non-significant. We also looked into the variance inflation factor (VIF) to check for multicollinearity and CMV (Kock, 2015). The highest VIF level reported was 2.88, lower than the 3.3 threshold (Kock, 2015). Taken together, the methods followed in this study to check for social desirability (Fisher, 1993) and CMV (Hulland *et al.*, 2018; Lindell and Whitney, 2001) should have averted their existence. Descriptive statistics, correlations and reliability values are included in Table 2.

Results

Measurement model

Partial least squares structural modeling is used in this study as a method of analysis using SmartPLS 3. This method is applicable to test complex models with several multi-item measures and interaction effects (Hair *et al.*, 2012). We advanced our analysis with the newest improvements of SmartPLS software including consistent partial least squares algorithm, goodness of fit measures, bootstrapping algorithm for overall model fit and a “heterotrait–monotrait ratio” check (HTMT) to look over the discriminant validity of the measures (Benitez *et al.*, 2020). The relatively sample size used to test a complex model, including several constructs with multiple items and several interaction effects, makes partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) an adequate multivariate analysis method to use (Chin *et al.*, 2003). It has been used in sales studies and has been applied across B2B research (Corsaro and Maggioni, 2021; Hall *et al.*, 2021; Wong, 2016).

Table 1 Construct items

| Measures and items | Loadings |
|--|----------|
| Salesperson social media use [◆] | |
| I am using social media to its fullest potential for supporting my own work | 0.90 |
| Social media is useful for job | 0.85 |
| I am using all capabilities of social media in the best fashion to help me on the job | 0.85 |
| My use of social media is pretty much integrated as part of my normal work routine | 0.85 |
| Salesperson creativity [◆] | |
| I come up with new ideas for satisfying customers' needs | 0.78 |
| I carry out my tasks in ways that are resourceful | 0.83 |
| I make sales presentations in innovative ways | 0.84 |
| I generate creative selling ideas | 0.80 |
| I have fresh perspectives on old problems | 0.71 |
| Manager empowerment [◆] | |
| My manager always shows confidence in my ability to do a good job | 0.74 |
| My manager believes that I can handle demanding tasks | 0.74 |
| My manager allows me to do my job my way | 0.56 |
| My manager allows me to make important decisions quickly to satisfy customer. Needs | 0.76 |
| My manager believes in my abilities to improve even when I make mistakes | 0.87 |
| My manager provides many opportunities for me to express my opinions | 0.80 |
| My manager often consults me on strategic decisions | 0.68 |
| Brand awareness [◆] | |
| The decision-makers of our potential customers have heard of our brand/company | 0.82 |
| Potential customers can clearly recall some characteristics of our brand/company | 0.77 |
| The decision-makers among our potential customers recall our brand/company name immediately when they think of our product category | 0.81 |
| When decision-makers in potential customer firms think of our product category, our brand/company is often at the top of their minds | 0.81 |
| The decision-makers can clearly relate our brand/company to a certain product category | 0.84 |
| Our company/brand is a leading brand in the market | 0.81 |
| Company performance [°] | |
| <i>Rate the following performance indicators of your company in comparison to major competitors in the market</i> | |
| Return on investment | 0.85 |
| Cost position | 0.84 |
| Profitability | 0.88 |
| Competitive position | 0.83 |
| Company customer service provision [◆] | |
| In my company... | |
| ...we usually try to calm complaining customers so that we can jointly handle their needs/complaints about their products/services | 0.78 |
| ...we usually provide solutions to customers' concerns related to the products/services they currently own | 0.83 |
| ...having identified the customers' exact problem with their products/services, we solve it in a reliable way | 0.81 |
| ...we usually listen attentively to customers to take appropriate action to handle their concerns regarding their products/services | 0.86 |
| ...we usually pay attention to the customers' questions about their products/services to answer them correctly | 0.70 |
| ...making sure that we fully understand the reason why the customers contact us allows us to better help them with their questions and concerns regarding their products/services | 0.78 |
| Notes: [◆] Constructs are measured using a seven-point-scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree); [°] Constructs are measured using a seven-point-scale (1 = much worse; 7 = much better) | |

In the analysis we conducted, we began by checking the reliability, internal consistency and validity of the measures. For that, we looked at the outer model. The bootstrapping function (5,000 subsamples) was used to check the significance level of the loading for every item and later for the path coefficients. The results show the items to load significantly ($p < 0.01$) on their corresponding measures with no problematic cross-loadings (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). Two items of the manager empowerment measure that loaded

below 0.7 (i.e. 0.56 and 0.68) were not dropped from the analysis since the measure still holds adequate internal consistency, reliability and validity. Cronbach's alphas reported were greater than the 0.7 threshold, providing evidence of internal consistency of the measures. Composite reliability and rho_A of each measure were also reported with levels greater than 0.8, supporting the reliability of all the measures. Average variance extracted (AVE) was more than the minimum threshold of 0.5. In relation to the AVE, the square root AVE

Table 2 Descriptive statistics and correlations

| Variable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|--------------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|------|
| 1 Social media use | 0.86 | | | | | |
| 2 Salesperson creativity | 0.39** | 0.79 | | | | |
| 3 Manager empowerment | 0.42** | 0.63** | 0.74 | | | |
| 4 Brand awareness | 0.40** | 0.62** | 0.52** | 0.81 | | |
| 5 Company performance | 0.39** | 0.46** | 0.47** | 0.56** | 0.85 | |
| 6 Company customer-service provision | 0.41** | 0.45** | 0.51** | 0.33** | 0.65** | 0.79 |
| Average | 4.83 | 5.25 | 5.18 | 5.12 | 5.30 | 5.39 |
| Standard deviation | 1.37 | 0.99 | 1.02 | 1.11 | 1.16 | 1.06 |
| Composite reliability | 0.92 | 0.89 | 0.89 | 0.92 | 0.91 | 0.91 |
| rho_A | 0.89 | 0.86 | 0.88 | 0.90 | 0.87 | 0.89 |
| Cronbach's alpha | 0.89 | 0.85 | 0.86 | 0.90 | 0.87 | 0.88 |
| Average variance extracted | 0.75 | 0.63 | 0.55 | 0.66 | 0.72 | 0.63 |
| VIF | 1.51 | 2.35 | 2.88 | 1.86 | – | 2.5 |

Notes: Significance level: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$, – Not applicable, Square root AVE values are included on the diagonal, VIF = Variance information factor

values of the measures were found to be greater than the intervariable correlations, presenting evidence of discriminant validity. More so, the HTMT ratios were higher than 0.85, providing additional support in favor of the discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015). The outcomes of the overall saturated model fit evaluation with PLS-factor weighing show the model fit indices (SRMR, d_{ULS} and d_G) to be less than the 95%-quantile of the bootstrap discrepancies. Table 3 includes the discrepancy measures, 95% quantiles of their corresponding reference and conclusion.

Structural model

The overall estimated model shows a good fit model after running a bootstrapping analysis (5,000 subsamples) with a PLS-path weighting scheme. The fit indices of SRMR, d_{ULS} and d_G are found to be lower than the 95%-quantiles of their corresponding reference. The model fit indices are as follows: SRMR = 0.056 (95%-quantile = 0.067), d_{ULS} = 1.856 (95%-quantile = 2.633) and d_G = 1.129 (95%-quantile = 1.743). Overall results are included in Table 4.

According to the findings of the main effect model, the positive link between social media use and brand awareness is significantly positive as hypothesized in $H1$ ($\beta = 0.21$, $p < 0.05$). The same model also supports a positive relationship between brand awareness and company performance ($\beta = 0.25$, $p < 0.01$) in support of $H4$.

In the full model tested, the presence of a significant interaction effect between social media use and creativity shows a positive moderating impact of creativity on the social media use-brand awareness relationship ($\beta = 0.23$, $p < 0.05$) in support of $H2$. Further, manager empowerment is found to

increase salesperson creativity ($\beta = 0.61$, $p < 0.01$) in support of $H3$. It is important to highlight that the direct effect of social media use on brand awareness in the full model is non-significant ($\beta = 0.08$, $p > 0.1$), suggesting that this effect becomes contingent on salesperson creativity once included in the model. In the presence of a significant interaction effect, the relevance of direct effects becomes unimportant. As stated before, the results of the “full model” hypothesized, and that of the “full model with the marker variable” show no significant differences when it comes to the magnitude and directions of the coefficients of the relationships hypothesized.

While not hypothesized, findings show a weak positive relationship between social media use and company performance ($\beta = 0.09$, $p < 0.05$). Moreover, creativity is positively related to brand awareness ($\beta = 0.58$, $p < 0.01$). The moderating effect of creativity on the social media use-brand awareness relationship is presented graphically in Figure 3. The figure shows that creativity complements the positive influence of social media use on brand awareness. Even with the high usage of social media, brand awareness may be impacted negatively in case the salesperson lacks appropriate levels of creativity. Further discussion of the moderating effect is included in the coming sections.

Discussion

The digitalization of B2B markets has led to a new meaning of the interactions between customers and sellers. With the majority of the customers trusting digital channels, such as social media, to make their buying decisions (Agnihotri, 2020), sales organizations must adopt digital technologies to create and offer value to their customers. Because salespeople are often tasked with deploying digital initiatives, factors that drive salesperson social media use and the associated positive outcomes have been of interest to researchers and managers. Furthermore, salespeople are also brand ambassadors (Rouziou et al., 2018), who are undertaking initiatives to promote brand-related outcomes for the organization. While these two research streams have received significant attention in past research, scholarly work combining these two domains has not received much attention. Our study is an important research endeavor since it will help enhance knowledge of the outcomes of

Table 3 Overall saturated model evaluation

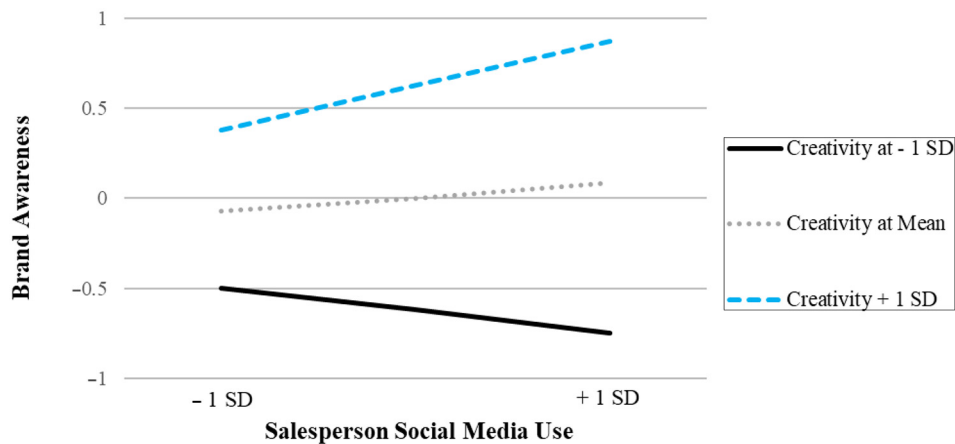
| Discrepancy | Overall saturated model fit evaluation | | |
|-------------|--|------------------|------------|
| | Value | HI ₉₅ | Conclusion |
| SRMR | 0.048 | 0.056 | Supported |
| d_{ULS} | 1.417 | 1.898 | Supported |
| d_G | 1.094 | 1.711 | Supported |

Table 4 Model results

| Relationships | Main effects model | Full model | Full model with marker variable |
|--|--------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <i>Hypothesized</i> | | | |
| Social Media Use → Brand Awareness | 0.21* | 0.08 | 0.08 |
| Social Media Use * Creativity → Brand Awareness | | 0.23* | 0.22* |
| Manager Empowerment → Creativity | | 0.61** | 0.6** |
| Brand Awareness → Company Performance | 0.25** | 0.25** | 0.25** |
| <i>Nonhypothesized</i> | | | |
| Social Media Use → Company Performance | 0.09* | 0.09* | 0.09* |
| Creativity → Brand Awareness | | 0.58** | 0.56** |
| Manager Empowerment → Brand Awareness | | -0.02 | -0.03 |
| Social Media Use * Manager Empowerment → Brand Awareness | | -0.06 | -0.04 |
| <i>Controlled</i> | | | |
| Company customer-service provision → Brand Awareness | 0.42** | 0.15* | 0.16* |
| Company customer-service provision → Company Performance | 0.55** | 0.55** | 0.55** |
| Firm size → Brand Awareness | 0.23** | 0.21* | 0.2* |
| Firm size → Company Performance | 0.02 | 0.02 | 0.02 |
| Offering type → Brand Awareness | 0.18** | 0.24** | 0.25* |
| Offering type → Company Performance | -0.12** | -0.12** | -0.12** |
| <i>R² (Adjusted R²) – Full model</i> | | | |
| Brand awareness | | 0.68 (0.66) | |
| Creativity | | 0.51 (0.5) | |
| Company performance | | 0.72 (0.71) | |
| <i>Goodness of fit measures – Full model</i> | | | |
| SRMR | | 0.056 (H ₉₅ 0.067) | |
| d _{ULS} | | 1.856 (H ₉₅ 2.633) | |
| d _G | | 1.129 (H ₉₅ 1.743) | |

Notes: Firm size = Number of employees^(log); Offering type (service = 0; product = 1); Significance level **p* < 0.05; ***p* < 0.01

Figure 3 Moderating effect of creativity on salesperson social media use and brand awareness relationship



salesperson social media use on brand awareness and company performance. Employing TTF theory, our study is an attempt towards this direction that also seeks to fill important research gaps and extend previous research in meaningful ways (Agnihotri et al., 2016; Itani et al., 2017, 2021; Kalra et al., 2021).

We integrate two areas of research, salesforce use of social media and brand awareness, in B2B marketing. We contribute

to the theory by showing how the two areas are related and provide collective knowledge on how to enhance brand awareness and sales performance. Prior studies have separately examined the areas of brand awareness and social media use by salesforce despite the suggestions to consider them jointly (Chaker et al., 2022; Dwivedi et al., 2021). Brand awareness is vital for B2B firms to develop their brand equity and extend

engagement opportunities with buyers (Wang *et al.*, 2016), leading to improved market performance (Homburg *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, managers of these firms must put every possible way in place to increase brand awareness, including the role that salespeople can play as boundary-spanners. We show that by the use of social media for work, salespeople can contribute to the brand awareness of their firms, adding new answers to the question of how salespeople can support their firms in increasing brand awareness (Wang *et al.*, 2016). We add to prior studies that integrate social media and brand awareness in B2B context by showing that the individual use of social media by salespeople, and not only social media marketing or advertising, is a driver of brand awareness and company performance.

We also explore the boundary condition of the outcomes of salesperson social media use by exploring the moderating effect of salesperson creativity on salesperson social media use – brand awareness relationship. More specifically, our results show that salespeople who display creative behaviors are more inclined to use social media to enhance brand awareness. Lastly, our findings show that brand awareness positively affects company performance. As argued before, salespeople rely on social media to relay important information to the customers. Highly creative salespeople are more prone to find unique ways to use social media in converting brand awareness. Hence, our study provides empirical evidence on the effects of social media use on brand-related outcomes such as brand awareness.

Implications

Theoretical implications

The results of this study contribute to advancing marketing theory in multiple ways. While salespeople's brand identification and other brand-related variables on organizational outcomes in the B2B setting have received attention (Gammoh *et al.*, 2014a; Gyomlai *et al.*, 2022), the role of salespeople's social media use in brand awareness remained unexplored in this context. To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first to examine the influence of salesperson social media use on brand awareness in the B2B context. The goal of B2B firms is to enhance brand awareness to develop their brand equity and increase brand engagement with buyers (Wang *et al.*, 2016) leading to enhanced market performance (Homburg *et al.*, 2010). Nonetheless, our understanding of how B2B firms can increase brand awareness is limited (Anees-ur-Rehman *et al.*, 2018; Eid *et al.*, 2020; Homburg *et al.*, 2010; Keränen *et al.*, 2012), especially that related to how firms can use their salesforce for such goal. For that, we integrate three main areas of research in B2B literature including salesforce use of social media, brand awareness and salesperson creativity.

The model proposed in this paper clarifies the relationships among three distinct but interrelated B2B streams of research: salesperson social media use, salesperson creativity and brand awareness. Interestingly, we find that the relationship between social media use and creativity is nonsignificant when we consider the moderating effect of creativity. This is important as our findings reveal that the positive effect of social media use on brand awareness is contingent on the creativity of salespeople. In other words, our findings suggest that salesperson creativity

positively moderates the relationship between social media use and brand awareness. Aligned with past research on social media use and creativity (Acar *et al.*, 2021; Sigala and Chalkiti, 2015; Kadir *et al.*, 2012), our result hints that salesperson creativity might be related to how they use social media. Salespeople that are more creative actively use social media for sharing ideas, creating content and engaging their customers in discussions. Therefore, the effect of creativity on the social media use and brand awareness link was strengthened for more creative salespeople, as they effectively use social media for sharing ideas and engaging customers rather than entertainment or relaxation.

By integrating social media use by salespeople, brand awareness and creativity research streams, we demonstrate that the use of social media for work by creative salespeople can contribute to their firms' brand awareness. This research paves the way for more research investigating how salespeople can enhance brand awareness (Wang *et al.*, 2016). With that, we recommend scholars look into additional intersections between salespeople's social media use and brand awareness rather than studying the areas of salesforce social media use and brand awareness as separate research streams.

Results in our study shed light on the positive impact of manager empowerment on salesperson creativity. It is worth mentioning that manager empowerment contributes to the effects of salesperson social media use on brand awareness based on the direct positive effect on salesperson creativity. Finally, the findings provide evidence for the impact of brand awareness on firm outcomes in the B2B setting (Homburg *et al.*, 2010). In line with research on brand awareness in the B2B context (Homburg *et al.*, 2010; Anees-ur-Rehman *et al.*, 2018), our study suggests that brand awareness positively affects organizational performance.

Managerial implications

In this study, we offer multiple valuable insights and recommendations for selling organizations and managers. With the recent focus on social selling (Schmitt *et al.*, 2021), organizations are constantly looking for ways to understand the relevant outcomes of social media use. While companies seek to enhance their brand awareness and sales performance (Wang *et al.*, 2016), managers look for approaches to develop their salesforce creativity and sales activities that can help with such goals. Although previous studies present a positive link between social media and brand awareness as well as sales performance of B2B firms (Eid *et al.*, 2020; Enyinda *et al.*, 2021; Michaelidou *et al.*, 2011), our study extends prior findings by showing how salespeople enhance their firms' brand awareness and then sales performance when using social media for work purposes. For that, B2B firms need to start looking at brand awareness and social media use by salespeople as interdependent and not disjointed activities that can drive company sales performance.

Our managerial implications stem from the integrative role of salespeople, managers and organizations in driving sales performance. We offer methods to boost brand awareness by salesperson use of social media and the empowerment managers provide to their sales force to develop the salesforce's creativity. The first question for selling organizations, then, is how can salespeople enhance brand awareness of their firms?

With the rise in social selling, salespeople have additional impact on brand awareness because of what they do on social media. While social media use takes many forms, the impact of such use on brand awareness is not limited to executives (Heavey *et al.*, 2020). We show how the individual use of social media by salespeople affects brand awareness. In sum, it also reveals that salesperson social media use is helpful not only in driving customer engagement and individual sales performance (Chaker *et al.*, 2022; Guenzi and Nijssen, 2020) but also in selling organization's brand awareness and, in turn, organizational sales performance. It is also important to reiterate here that the relationship between social media use and brand awareness is non-significant when we include the moderating effect of creativity. It is clear that the outcomes of the individual-level use of social media by the salesforce can transcend personal outcomes to organizational outcomes subject to salesperson creativity. With that, the relationships salespeople maintain through social media, the networks of customers and prospects they form, the engagement they have with customers and customers' content and the other activities they do on social media platforms are able to enhance organizations' brand awareness. This is also in line with the emerging need to enhance employee advocacy via social media in favor of the organization (Cervellon and Lirio, 2017; Lee and Kim, 2020).

The second question that managers may have is how can the use of social media be supported by the salesforce to make a larger impact on brand awareness? As found, the impact of social media is strengthened when salespeople possess higher levels of creativity for work purposes. Innovative salespeople who can come up with new selling and job-related ideas are more effective in using social media. For example, they can be creative in coming up with content that can be more engaging. Moreover, they carry out their use of social media in ways that are resourceful by building on social media's networking capabilities. Furthermore, salespeople are more likely to leverage the learning and other resources of social media to enhance customers' awareness about their companies and brands. In this context, managers have a vital role. Specifically, we show that manager empowerment can drive higher levels of creativity at the salesforce level. As said, this creativity is able to enhance the power of social media to elevate brand awareness. For that, managers need to learn that empowering their salesforce is important in today's dynamic and digitally disrupted sales process. The confidence and autonomy managers provide to salespeople can inspire creative ideas and permit the use of innovative ways to manage the customer-seller relationship and satisfy consumer needs (Gabler *et al.*, 2017).

Lastly, this research offers insights on training and development policies related to the use of social media in sales organizations. Knowing the positive impact of salesperson social media use on brand awareness, managers should direct salespeople's social media efforts in the right direction by offering training and giving the salespeople authority. To use social media effectively, salespeople need first to establish a network with their industry professionals. At the same time, salespeople need to be able to acquire and disseminate brand-related information and engage their audience. Sales professionals require autonomy and the ability to create relevant and engaging brand-related content. In addition, managers should encourage and incentivize salespeople

to actively use social media rather than passively spend time reading random posts.

In short, selling organizations are required to motivate their salespeople to use social media for the impact such usage has on brand awareness and, in turn, organizational performance. Moreover, managers are encouraged to empower salespeople to enhance their creativity deemed important for growing the impact that social media has on sales.

Limitations and directions for future research

Though our research provides interesting insights, our study suffers from limitations that also offer ground for future work in expanding our framework. First, our measure of performance in this study was self-reported and was cross-sectional. While we ensured that same-source bias does not affect the applicability of our findings, an analysis involving either a dyadic dataset comprising of responses from other sources such as managers or objective performance data can provide stronger support to the findings of our study. Similarly, studies exploring the longitudinal nature of the effects of salesperson social media use on outcomes can offer a meaningful direction for future research. In line with this notion, studies examining the cross-level effects of social media use on organizational performance will be an interesting area to explore for future sales scholars. One of the disadvantages of using a commercial database is the low response rate. While the response rate in this study is comparable and acceptable considering the nature of the database used and the target participants, we recommend future studies collect data using alternative sources (e.g. selling organizations) to ensure higher response rates.

Second, our study expands on the research exploring the role of personal-level variables (Itani *et al.*, 2021) in driving social media outcomes. We analyzed the role of creativity in our framework, but there are other potential variables, such as salesperson's goal orientation among others, that can also affect the relationships in our study. We future studies to explore such variables.

Third, social media use and the associated outcomes can be affected by personal and managerial variables. Such an interplay of the variables was not included in the study as it was not the focus of our research. For instance, recent studies have shown that technology usage can be impacted by organizational strategies (Mullins and Agnihotri, 2022). This also can be an important area for future scholars.

Lastly, while our study analyzes the use of social media in driving brand-related outcomes, the measure of social media use in our study captures the overall usage of social media rather than focusing on the specific activities for which the salesperson use the social media. Though this scale is been used in past sales research and provided rigorous findings, studies focusing on the exact nature of the usage of social media can offer critical insights to the domain.

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Further reading

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