

Developing Formative Measures for Understanding Social Media Use in Sales

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With the increasing emphasis on digital marketing for both B2C and B2B organizations there is a need to examine the role of social media in the buying-selling process. The academic literature about social media in marketing and sales is growing. However, little academic research exists considering how and why the various people in the sales function are using the rapidly expanding communication modes. As the use of social media swells, social media metrics will be needed to examine these questions. This paper develops and reports on a specific measurement schema using the Li and Bernoff (2008) “groundswell” model. This model focuses on the objectives of talking, listening, energizing, supporting and managing. The research examines the frequency and value of using social applications by sellers, both salespeople and sales managers. The index developed is found to be inclusive of the social media domain with significant indications of external validity.

INTRODUCTION

Recent research provides powerful support for how participation in what is often referred to as digital marketing is changing the B2B marketing landscape. For example, 94% of B2B marketers use LinkedIn to deliver content, and over 80% consider it the most important social media site they use (Miller 2017). Finding content in the hands of the buyer before the salesperson gets to see him/her is a well-known and increasingly relevant problem (Andzulis, Panagopoulos and Rapp 2012; Travis 2018). Cold calling, and even e-mail as lead generation tools are no longer relevant or as effective as in the past (Halligan 2017).

Organizations are advancing toward integrating social tools into all aspects of their activities. Nearly 60% of B2B companies reported that social business initiatives had a positive impact on business outcomes. For MIT’s 2014 Social Business Global Executive Study and Research Project, social business is defined as “activities that use social media, social software and

technology-based social networks to enable connections between people, information and assets” (Kane et al. 2014a p.5). Organizations have come to realize that conversations are taking place outside the traditional media channels (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010). Maersk is one example of a company that extensively manages B2B conversations using social media tools that were previously valued mostly for B2C marketing efforts. Maersk used Facebook initially to tell the company’s stories to personalize the company. The retelling of an at-sea rescue of Vietnamese fugitives by a Maersk ship, in 1975, generated great interest. Twitter was used to position employees as thought leaders. Sharing photos and stories was estimated to have increased employee pride, customer insights, and innovative ideas (Katona and Sarvary 2014). Gartner Research predicted that “by 2016, 50% of large organizations will have internal Facebook-like social networks, and that 30% of these will be considered as essential as email and telephones are today” (Van der Meulin and Rivera 2013). Two years later, it seems that social media’s role in building more “fluid and functional organizations” has only gained in momentum. Gartner predicts that paid social advertising and video streaming have become mainstream. Meanwhile, new platforms like Snapchat and Instagram will continue to emerge. Artificial Intelligence, Virtual Reality and global messaging apps like China’s WeChat will require firms to continue to adapt their social media strategy (Pemberton 2018).

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As social media usage grows, companies have learned that the balance of control over communication about its brand or service is shifting. Peters et al. (2013) note that social media are about influence, not control, a preference for quality over quantity, and importance over urgency. Customers are insisting on a voice in the conversation. Li and Bernoff (2008) describe this shift in control as a “groundswell” and suggest that organizations will have to develop strategies to participate in the groundswell if they wish to remain relevant (Dorner and Edelman 2015). Five groundswell objectives that executives should incorporate into their strategic plans to become more customer-centric are described: Listening, Talking, Energizing, Supporting and Managing (Bernoff and Li 2008). Choosing to participate in a conversation suggests that every party involved has objectives to fulfill.

The purpose of this paper is to report on the development of a formative index of social media use, specifically by salespeople, but adaptable to buyers and other conversation participants. This index considers the objectives in the Li and Bernoff (2008) framework. The twofold measure explicitly looks at both the frequency of usage and the perceived importance of the usage. Developing a formative versus reflective measure is a purposeful decision in order to gather information to better define the nature of the construct. As salespeople have conversations with many parties in an industry, this measure attempts to capture a fuller picture of the integrated nature of cooperating firms to serve customers. Maechler et al (2017) state it is both important to have the right balance of digital and to focus on the customer experience and meet their needs. The current research seeks to provide an index as a starting point for researchers and managers to evaluate social media usage and align it with the listening, talking, engaging, supporting and managing objectives in their business strategy.

LITERATURE ON SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE BY SELLERS

Academic research in social media use in a sales context is becoming more prevalent. A literature review proposes that research is needed to identify how salespeople best use social media and what would be effective in enhancing customer engagement

(Rodriguez, Dixon and Peltier 2014). Early conceptual work proposed that social CRM can offer a sales organization distinctive capabilities and competitive advantage (Trainor 2012) while (Agnihotri et al 2012) developed a framework for how social media drives value, asserting salespeople will need to shift from “push” activities to “pull” activities to engage customers earlier. Both papers highlight the value that social media brings to sales related activities. Marshall et al (2012) used a series of focus groups to explore the impact of changing technologies on the sales role, identifying six major themes. For example, the “Selling Tools” theme evolved from respondents’ comments about linking to industry sites and trade publications and using industry blogs to track competitors and keep up with new products on the market. This is similar to our model’s objective of Listening. Participants also indicated that the technology driven sales model forces salespeople to respond to business needs across all time zones as part of the “Global” theme, corresponding to the objective of Managing. The “Sales/Marketing Interface” theme emerged as respondents discussed how traditional marketing activities have become sales activities – from managing Twitter accounts to feeding market information back to the business, aligning with the objectives of Listening and Talking.

In a review of social media research in industrial marketing, Salo (2017) specifically references the emergence of empirical work in the sales field. Most empirical studies focus on social media use in the sales process. Rodriguez, Peterson and Krishnan (2012) examine social media usage in the sales process and B2B sales performance with 1700 respondents. The sales process examined was creating opportunities, understanding customers and relationship management. One strong finding was that social media usage was linked to creating opportunity and managing relationships, but not related to understanding customers or to financial performance measures. The 3-item social media scale used may not have captured its full impact on the customer relationships. Agnihotri et al (2016) also used a three item social media usage scale to link social media usage to the information communication stage of the sales process and then to both responsiveness and customer satisfaction. Their findings imply that customers value an additional channel to communicate

with sales people. A less traditional view of the sales process appears to provide positive results.

Using a more traditional sales process model, Moore, Raymond and Hopkins (2015) identify 12 categories of social media usage in the sales process. They also link each category to seven different sales tasks. Findings indicate high usage of social media tools for sales, but little support for the linkages to the sales process. Their measure was focused on use/ do not use, a dichotomous measure, limiting understanding of how and why salespeople use social media. Schuldt and Totten (2015) tested the model developed by Andzulis, Panagopoulos and Rapp (2012) with some support for the original model. Using a stage of the selling process approach, they found greater usage in the earlier stages of the process. Warren (2016) provides a narrow industry view, ticket sellers in college and professional sports, but links social media usage to stages in the sales process. While the salespeople were active in social media, his sample did not use those tools a great deal in the selling function. The findings in these studies suggest that the traditional sales process may not be the best framework in which to consider social media usage.

Other studies focus on performance. Schultz, Schwepker and Good (2012) used a sample of 273 B2B salespeople to link social media usage and other factors to a measure of performance. They found significant and moderately strong relationships between usage and outcome performance. Schwepker (2018) expands the single item social media usage measure from the above study to include more sales activities impacted by salesperson servant leadership behaviors. Using social media to enhance sales behaviors, specifically the collection of competitive intelligence and adaptive selling was found to lead to an increase in performance (Itani, Agnihotri and Dingus 2017). In a study of supplier salespeople, retailers and customers, Rapp et al (2013) found that social media was influential in improving performance across the channels, expanding understanding of the contagious nature of social media.

Maechler et al (2017), a McKinsey team, take a customer journey focus and argue that the journey and seller outcomes can be improved by understanding and focusing on which parts of the journey really matter and

the role that digital marketing and social media plays. Social media usage was found to be more valuable in the early stages of the Customer Engagement Cycle in a study of Key Account Managers (Lacoste 2016). B2B buyers have strong opinions on how and when they would like to interact with sellers which buyers feel sellers have yet to incorporate into their selling practices (An 2016). A research agenda to refine the current understanding of the relationship between social media and sales proposes a need to consider how social media is used in sales practices and a better understanding of customer engagement (Nunan et al 2018). In summary, the empirical work is fragmented, but useful. Measures of social media usage are mixed, and while there has been some attempt to link social media usage to stages of the sales process, the research may benefit from an expanded measure that covers more sales activities and is more customer-centric.

MEASURE DEVELOPMENT

How do sellers use social media to reach their objectives? As social media are becoming an increasingly important part of their media mix, Peters et al (2013) note the importance of developing metrics to manage use of social media. Using Bandura's (1971) Social Learning Theory, Peters et al (2013) develop a set of nine guidelines for developing social media metrics. They argue that existing metrics, especially simple metrics such as "likes" on Facebook, may not provide useful information. The authors propose that appropriate metrics will be valuable to managers operating in a complex interactive environment. In developing the measure, both Churchill's (1979) steps for developing better marketing measures and Diamantopoulos and Winklhofer's (2001) index construction was followed. First, the domain of the construct was specified. While social media is probably still evolving as a construct, there is some agreement. O'Leary (2011) suggests social media are "Internet-based applications that allow for the development of user-generated information and provide a forum for users to interact with each other" (O'Leary 2011 p.123). At the beginning of the survey instrument, we defined social media as the use of online platforms to interact with others for the creation, consumption, and exchange of information and stated that it includes both public platforms, such as LinkedIn, Facebook,

Google+, and Twitter, and internal company platforms such as Salesforce's Chatter. While not as explicit as Moore, Raymond and Hopkins (2015) the breadth of possibilities in defining social media was conveyed.

Bernoff and Li (2008) suggest their framework of objectives for the use of social media will allow companies to appropriately include social applications in projects to reach significant strategic business goals. Li (2015) indicates that social networks encourage an increase in agency for individuals to connect with customers and offers the groundswell objectives as appropriate for individuals to develop their digital leadership. The groundswell discussion was updated (Li and Bernoff 2011) to include newer technologies such as Twitter in its examples, while the framework remained much the same. The objective Managing was renamed Embracing, and while the renamed objective focused more on using customer feedback, and reduced the emphasis on the impact of the global nature of the groundswell, it remained conceptually similar. Hundreds of companies have used this framework under the guidance of Dr. Charlene Li in her consulting work at Altimeter. Forrester Research used this model as the basis to award companies on their excellence in the use of social media marketing. B2B "Groundswell Award" winners include Salesforce.com, Dell Computers and Adobe (Forrester Research 2018). AutoDesk, the 2015 B2B award winner incorporated all 5 objectives into the creation of their Expert Elite and Knowledge Network programs that create communities to collaborate with and support their customers (Discher 2015). Our measure incorporates the framework proposed by Bernoff and Li (2008) to examine sellers' perspectives in the social media conversation.

Following the second step in Churchill's (1979) paradigm for developing better measures, items were generated that follow this framework based on a review of articles, practitioner and academic, that describe how social media is currently being used to address business opportunities and challenges. Eight interviews with B2B salespeople were conducted to help in the development of items, primarily to ensure their understanding of the items matched our intent. The goal was to encompass the entire construct and the five sub-constructs while at the same time being

parsimonious. No changes were made either based on discussions with the respondents or a small pretest of the survey. Descriptions of the objectives and the literature that generated the items follow.

Social Media Objectives and Items

Listening. Listening can be described as gaining new insights about the business environment by paying attention to what people are saying about their interactions, experiences, thoughts and feelings with the company, the competitors, the suppliers and markets. GoTradeLive, for example, allows agricultural industries to closely monitor shifts in demand. When supply and demand are closely matched in the food industry, more food can be sold and less wasted (Kosk 2012). The ability of the supply chain to respond to environmental changes is affected by the quality of the conversations and relationships among all the parties in the supply chain. This agility to adjust quickly to demand changes allows producers to consolidate global purchase orders, change productive capacity, alter product mix and improve responsiveness to market needs (Swafford, Ghosh and Murthy 2006; Blome, Schoenherr and Rexhausen 2013). Social CRM capabilities, including the ability to detect changes in product preferences and sense shifts in the industry, were found to be significantly related to customer relationship performance (Trainor et al. 2014).

Gonzalez (2013) suggests social networks enable companies to improve exception management. Unexpected demand spikes, delayed shipments, and shortages can be handled most efficiently by people communicating directly with each other. Twitter reports from people experiencing the 2011 Virginia 5.8 magnitude earthquake reached New York about 40 seconds ahead of the quake's shock wave, outpacing the U.S. Geological Survey's seismometer (Hotz 2011). Real time data permits organizations to deal with disruption events from extreme weather, highway closures and disasters. Even anticipated events, such as parades and outdoor concerts, can cause disruption. Salespeople can learn which of their customers has been affected and provide timely support, for example, halting or rerouting shipments. A customer is most vulnerable during unexpected events (Maechler et al 2017).

Sentiment analysis tools help companies gather and understand what is being said about their companies and products across a variety of social media (Sonnier, McAlister and Rutz 2011). Companies surveyed anticipate significantly enhancing their efforts to monitor customer comments and obtain feedback using social media (Cortada, Lesser and Korsten 2012). Leading to the development of items:

1. Detect changes in demand
2. Get early warnings about disruptions in the supply chain (weather, events...)
3. Monitor trends in our industry

Talking. The objective of using social media to talk is explained as “talking with”, distinct from “shouting” or “talking at”. “Talking with” implies moving from one-way mass communication to timely interactive responsive discussion. Weinberg et al. (2013) suggest that social media has created a greater need for knowledge sharing in an open and participatory environment.

Salespeople capable of providing new insights about the customer’s business were found to be five times more likely to be chosen to work with B2B buyers (Minsky and Quesenberry 2016). Salesperson social media use was found to be positively related to effective information communication, salesperson responsiveness to customer needs and customer satisfaction (Agnihotri et al. 2016). Salespeople have commented that technology has impacted business culture such that salespeople must be always available and responsive (Marshall et al 2012). Maersk, an early success in using social media in a B2B company, found telling Maersk stories, using the rich history from their digital archives, enabled the company to develop a large and active following among shipping enthusiasts, many of whom are shipping professionals. Sharing authentic stories via social media helped establish the firm as an industry thought leader (Katona and Sarvary 2014). Prior to engaging with a salesperson, 40% of B2B respondents said they looked at between 3-5 pieces of content, with preferences for blogs and case studies (Anderson 2018). Firms can directly influence content about their company through a corporate user who is designated the “corporate voice” or indirectly by training employees to participate in conversations with their customers directly or through industry blogs and forums (Huotari et al. 2015).

Leading to the development of items:

4. Keep employees up to date
5. Get vital information to customers faster
6. Enhance visibility on industry concerns
7. Tell our company’s stories

Engaging. Li and Bernoff (2008) used the term “energize” for this concept. Looking at social media from a marketing perspective, these authors were referring to getting customers to interact with one another to evangelize a product. The term “engage” was chosen to describe a similar concept of encouraging the industry members, including buyers and sellers, to collaborate, discuss and interact with one another to identify best practices and promote industry problem solving and innovation.

Half of the respondents in an IDG Research Services survey utilize social media to stay current and interact with industry experts and peers (Kosk 2012). Maersk created LinkedIn groups such as “The Shipping Circle” for shipping experts to debate industry challenges and opportunities and used Google + and Google Hangouts to provide an opportunity to discuss innovative ideas with customers, shipping professionals and experts (Katona and Sarvary 2014). Salesforce.com, Cisco, and HP use discussion forums to actively interact with customers and improve customer engagement (Jarvinen et al. 2012). Participation in industry related discussions provides firms a way to directly influence social media content (Huotari et al 2015).

Supporting collaboration and co-creation with customers allows salespeople using social selling technologies to engage in new product development (Trainor 2012). Salesforce.com could use Idea Exchange, which allows customers to suggest and vet new product ideas to speed up its product releases (Bernoff and Li 2008). Beiersdorf, a global manufacturer of skin care products, created an online platform, “Pearlfinder”, to encourage its suppliers and others to submit, refine and pursue new product ideas. The awards Beiersdorf has won for their social business approach has increased the company’s image as an innovator and a desired collaborator (Cortada, Lesser and Korsten 2012).

Leading to the development of items:

8. Participate in forums on industry issues
9. Invite feedback on supply chain performance
10. Involve customers in product development
11. Set up meetings

Supporting. Support consists of providing answers, directions and updates on time sensitive situations to front line decision makers. When crucial information needs to be disseminated to select people quickly, communicating with those inside a supply chain operating network can be much more effective and efficient than e-mails, phone calls or face-to-face meetings (Gonzalez 2013). Salesperson use of social media was found to enhance customer connections and information communication which resulted in a more positive perception of salesperson responsiveness to customer needs. The results suggest that customers appreciate a timely response from sellers (Agnihotri et al 2016).

Delivering more precise information faster to the right decision makers enables the front line, fast moving, often customer facing employees to make better data-based decisions (Doerner and Edelman 2015). Using social media has been positively related to getting better information to departments within the seller's organization more quickly as well as better responsiveness to market shifts (Trainor et al 2014).

Social media can offer the instantaneous access necessary to balance speed and contemplation required for effective decision-making. For example, a best practices blog could be permanently available (Casemore 2012). The Red Cross used its social media capabilities during Hurricane Sandy to manage its supplies and trucks in NYC. The organization kept New Yorkers updated about the ever-changing location of their trucks and what supplies were available in the trucks by tweeting and posting to the social media communities (Kane et al. 2014a). Stronger ties in an organization's social network have been associated with an absence of disruptive conflict (Nelson 1989). Sellers can use Social CRM to identify and respond quickly to customer problems and complaints. For example, Jet Blue, Comcast, and Home Depot use Twitter to monitor and resolve customer service issues in B2C markets

(Trainor 2012). Buyers would like to see sellers focus more on post-sale service (CSO Insights 2018).

Leading to the development of items:

12. Respond to changing conditions
13. Increase speed and accuracy in decision making
14. Identify and reduce customer issues
15. Provide after-the-sale service

Managing. The challenges inherent in managing customer relationships, gathering feedback about a service, and operating across geographic boundaries can be improved by incorporating social media applications. Attracting and cultivating new customer relationships were identified as the preeminent reason to use social networking in a B2B context (Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides 2011). Shriber (2017) describe how top salespeople use social media to identify "intent signals" to optimize their search for new customers. Intent signals, such as a job change, help salespeople determine the best time to reach out to a prospect.

A by-product of companies interacting to share data is that the feedback from the interactions will allow companies to more effectively track performance in customer service, internal efficiency and demand flexibility (Markova and Petkovska-Mircevska 2013). After T-Mobile studied social media complaints about their largest competitors, the telecommunications company revamped its entire business strategy (Kane 2017). Monitoring customer comments in order to resolve complaints was identified as a key use for social media by salespeople (Schuldt and Totten 2015). Managing today's sales force will change as sales people and sales recruits increasingly use social media. Social media driven shifts in salesperson roles, attitudes and motivation will affect performance and how it is evaluated (Moncrief, Marshall and Rudd 2015).

Intensifying global competition led Monsanto to change its business model from a seed supplier to a productivity partner, providing online agricultural advice, and keeping global growers up to date on industry trends (Maechler et al 2017). The Marshall et al (2012) study of social media in the selling environment found that increased global connectivity both opens new market opportunities for salespeople and created managerial challenges in

avoiding increased stress, burnout, and employee churn due to the pressure on salespeople to be available to respond 24 hours a day. Niedermeyer and Wang (2016) found that social media usage in the selling function was very strong in a China sample of 42 pharmaceutical sales people. One survey showed that 92% of respondents from the most mature social companies felt that social media improved their operations across geographic boundaries (Kane et al. 2014b).

Leading to the development of items:

16. Search for new customers
17. Seek performance feedback about suppliers
18. Manage across geographic boundaries

METHOD

Item Development

In line with Churchill's recommendations, data collection is a necessary step in distilling the measures being developed. This would serve to identify which items belong to the domain of the concept of social media and whether the model of the five objectives is relevant. Potentially reducing the 18 items to a smaller amount would also make the measure more usable in future research.

Diamantopoulos and Winklhofer (2001) indicate that the decision of whether to use formative or reflective measures is driven by the domain of the subject at hand. Our study uses both the existing literature as well as

experts to try and capture as much of the domain as possible while limiting the number of indicators for each measure. Items were developed and examined and reviewed to come up with the final list of 18 indicators for the five objectives. The two separate measures were developed differing only in the response endpoints.

For *usage*, the authors developed the following response set; 1 Daily, 2 Weekly, 3 Monthly, 4 Occasionally, 5 Never. For *importance*, the following response set was used; 1 Extremely important, 2 Very important, 3 Moderately important, 4 Slightly important, 5 Not at all important. Neither response set is balanced nor is there a midpoint. However, both have a natural zero. A natural zero was deemed necessary as it was perceived that some people would not use social media at all nor consider it to have any importance. A midpoint was not considered necessary or relevant, and balance can be taken care of within analysis and interpretation. The full social media measure is found in Appendix 1.

Data Collection

Data was collected in a pretest of salespeople who were contacted by the authors and asked to do the pretest. The 13 people who provided the input affirmed that the content was appropriate. Once this was completed, an online panel data provider was contacted to obtain 100 to 120 B2B sales function employees, either salespeople or sales managers, to complete the survey. Demographic information is provided in Table 1, below.

Table 1: Demographics

Total Respondents	n = 117
Balance of Respondents	Salespeople = 78, Sales Managers = 66
Indicated Gender	Females = 66, Males = 51
Respondent Age Range	Largest Percentage (66%) between 20-39 years old

ANALYSIS

The first step in analysis, following Diamantopoulos and Winklhofer (2001) was to determine the level of multicollinearity among the 18 indicators as they note this is a serious issue with formative measures. An analysis was run on both the usage and the value models. For the usage model VIF (variance inflation factor) ranged from 2.520 to 5.662. For the value model the VIF ranged from 2.941 to 7.211. Since the cut off is normally 10 (Kleinbaum, Kupper and Muller 1988) none of the items were removed.

The second step was to consider external validity. Since Moncrief, Marshall and Rudd (2015) indicate that younger respondents are more apt to use social media than older respondents, the younger respondents, under 39, were compared with older respondents on the 18-item index. Due to missing values only 103 respondents were included and the resulting ANOVA with an F of 4.325 and a significance of 0.039 suggested the two groups were different and an examination of the means demonstrated that younger respondents used social media more often during their selling activities. The same analysis with the value index produced an F of

4.071 with a significance of 0.046 also with means in the correct direction indicating support for the idea that younger respondents found more value in using social media in their selling activities.

The third step was to test predictive validity. Four indicators from Lin (2014) were collected to measure partner relationship quality, which consists of two constructs: partner trust and partner commitment. The index should predict both higher trust and higher commitment when higher levels of use in partnerships with buyers are present. Simple Pearson Correlations were run with trust correlating at .321 (sig< .001) and commitment correlating at .281 (sig< .004) thus confirming what was expected and suggesting the index predicts as expected.

Each variable was summed to construct indices (combination variables) for usage and value, resulting in 18 for the total and three or four depending on the objective. This provided, in effect, an index for each set. Table two provides the basic data for both frequency of use as well as means for the total index and its parts. For each objective, we weighted the response so it reflected the number of responses and is thus comparable across areas. No weighting is done for the total index.

Table 2: Index variables for USAGE by Social Media Objective

Objective Number of Items	Listen 3	Talk 4	Engage 4	Support 4	Manage 3	Total 18	Index 18
Mean	2.67	2.66	3.13	2.98	2.94	2.86	50.16
Median	2.33	2.50	3.25	2.75	3	2.64	45
Std. Dev.	1.25	1.27	1.32	1.45	1.38	1.23	21.77
High	1	1	1	1	1	1	18
Low	5	5	5	5	5	5	90

Note: Lower numbers across categories indicate more usage; the entire range was indicated.
N=117

Distribution of Respondents (N)	Listen	Talk	Engage	Support	Manage	Total
Daily Users	27	30	23	27	23	16
Weekly	22	26	22	20	26	37
Monthly	23	19	29	19	18	14
Occasional	15	23	26	11	18	21
Never Use	19	16	14	32	28	16

Responses are not normally distributed, illustrating some significant kurtosis on all but one item, but little skewness. All means are significantly different from zero (\bar{x} : 2.66-2.98). The data for the index, which is simply the sum of the 18 items provides a value from 18 to 90. To provide context, the table also provides distributions, showing the raw numbers of respondents in each category. The overall index, in this case, could range from 18 to 90. The mean is about 50 with the median being 45 which suggests the sample is slightly skewed to the more usage side.

The total index between sales managers and salespeople was compared. Using ANOVA, the average index for sales managers was found to be 42.03 whereas for salespeople it was 54.70. This was statistically significantly different at a value $p=.006$ ($F= 7.866$). This could indicate that sales managers use social media more than do salespeople, a finding that replicated that of Moore, Raymond and Hopkins (2015).

Then an analysis was done of the responses provided to the value portion of the index. Table 3 provides that data.

Table 3: Index variables for VALUE by Social Media Objective

Objective Number of Items	Listen 3	Talk 4	Engage 4	Support 4	Manage 3	Total 18	Index 18
Mean	2.54	2.58	2.86	2.74	2.84	2.71	48.84
Median	2.33	2.50	2.75	2.75	2.67	2.70	48
Std. Dev.	1.13	1.13	1.25	1.24	1.29	1.15	20.58
High	1	1	1	1	1	1	18
Low	5	5	5	5	5	5	90

Note: Lower numbers across categories indicate more perceived importance; the entire range was indicated N=117

Distribution of Respondents (N)	Listen	Talk	Engage	Support	Manage	Total
Extremely Important	24	24	23	28	23	18
Very Important	39	32	22	20	22	33
Moderately Important	27	27	29	30	29	26
Slightly Important	12	12	26	26	26	21
Not at all Important	13	13	14	12	14	11

The numbers here are similar to table 2, slightly higher on average, (toward more importance) but still mostly close to a 3 for the means which, in this case, indicates the respondents thought the communication in social media was moderately important. Although response covered the whole index, some people do suggest extreme importance while others view these as not important at all. The overall index is also very similar to table 2, but with slightly less skewness as evidence by the median of 48. Again, salespeople and sales managers were compared, in this case on their perceptions of value. The average index for sales managers was 42.29 whereas it was 52.77 for salespeople. This was significantly

different at a value of $p=.013$ ($F=6.349$). This can again be interpreted as sales managers see more value in the use of social media. Sales managers thought that all but the value of listening was more important than did salespeople, and used all five categories and the total more than salespeople.

Not surprisingly, the correlation between usage and perceived value in general was high. For example, correlating total perceived value with total usage for the entire sample resulted in a Pearson correlation of .875. So, it appears that people who used social media more considered it more valuable, as might be expected.

DISCUSSION

In addition to the call for more social media metrics (Peters et al 2013), key marketing scholars (Vargo and Lusch 2004; Reibstein, Day and Wind 2009) call on marketing researchers to consider the impact of networked organizations in future research. They observe that the current business environment requires organizations to discard their silo perspectives and the authors call on marketing academia to examine marketing challenges from an integrated viewpoint. Sales focused research agendas acknowledge the need for better understanding of the engagement of the customers themselves with social media in the buying process (Nunan et al 2018) and of the issues involved in acclimating to new methods of collection, utilization and transfer of information between buyers and sellers (Rodriguez et al 2014). A review of the limited literature on social media influence on business relationships and business networks demonstrates a significant need for more cross-functional studies (Salo 2017). This measure was created to enable researchers to incorporate the actions of buyers, suppliers, logistics managers and sellers into the discussion on optimizing the customer experience.

The findings suggest that this research captures the construct of social media through the objectives users have. Salespeople do use social media to reach these objectives and do feel that social media has value in reaching these objectives. Table 2 suggests that salespeople are not heavily invested in using these techniques in their interactions with both prospective and current customers as the means are all close to 3, indicating monthly usage. Sales managers, while using social media more and perceiving it to be more valuable, are also not using it very often on average. Usage in general is relatively light with half the respondents using it monthly or less. Some respondents may simply not have to communicate as often as others so that weekly usage might be heavy for them. The findings may indicate that social media may still be emerging as a first choice tool for salespeople. The distributions in Table 2 show that some respondents do use social media daily. Salespeople appear to be aware that social media could be important in reaching their goals (Table 3), but unsure of how to best use it. The social

media tools may also be first deployed in disruptive situations when the distribution/logistics systems cannot respond fast enough. Salespeople are often local to their customers and are listening to determine if the local bridge collapse, hurricane or parade will impact their customer's business. The salesperson might then take action to shift or delay or reroute deliveries. Salespeople may follow updates on supply disruptions and relay this information to their customers. Social media may excel at handling changing or exceptional trends and salespeople view it as very important to use social media in those circumstances.

Building community and thought leadership are long term commitments that may not align easily with sales quota goals. Many organizations have spent considerable effort in attempting to utilize social media, but have yet to see any tangible evidence of impact whether it be short or long term profitability, or improvement in brand equity, or clear competitive advantage. The social capabilities embedded in CRM offer a salespeople an easy place to dabble.

Bowen and Hass (2015) not only reiterate the issue of generational differences, but note a problem may be that many people are just not familiar enough or creative enough to put social media to good use in their selling function, even if they have some experience in their personal lives. This suggests that if firms want to get their salespeople and managers to use social media as a tool they will need some direction and training.

Limitations

The scope of social media is daunting. B2B companies are using social networks, blogs, mini-blogs (Twitter), video sites, photo sites, wikis, etc. to reach their business goals. For many companies, much of this has become a routine part of business. Participants may not distinguish between social media and other forms of communication. The rapid rate of change in social media capabilities and applications may cause concepts and items to become irrelevant before they can be fully tested.

This measure development is dependent on the practitioner literature, where examples and case studies are prevalent, as the academic literature is limited at this time. Companies may only be presenting their

success stories. Social media may be the preferred method of operating mostly in unanticipated, disruptive or extraordinary occurrences, which makes interesting reading. The measure may be impacted by the information companies are willing to share.

Self-reports are always a challenge and while the survey was structured to ensure a degree of honesty of reply, error of all sorts is possible. The use of panel data raises the concern that the salespeople participating in an online panel may not be representative of all salespeople (Johnson 2016). Lack of knowledge of the sample frame and limited ability to discuss external validity is an issue. The use of a non-probabilistic sample makes any attempt at determining external validity beyond the scope of the research and replication will be needed on other samples. Finally, while the measure is based on business objectives, it is still a sales centric research effort and the buyer was not included in sampling.

Future Research

Clearly, as social media is so new, there are many unanswered questions about its value. Creating a measure usable for understanding social media from a strategic perspective supports answering these questions. Future research should extend this measure to first, buyers, and then to other participants in the customer experience. The potential to examine social media as a collaborative network across organizations is essential to the social, conversational nature of social media. Resource Advantage theory argues that understanding the many nuances and interdependencies within a network model has value (Hunt and Davis 2008, 2012). Which platforms are best for achieving these objectives and which of these objectives are or could be handled by marketing, rather than sales, are potential questions. The complexity of the sale may moderate which objectives are most important to the seller. The ability to better understand what social media can achieve should spur evaluations of outcomes such as sales performance, customer centricity, and other business goals.

Future users of the measure might wish to consider rewording the item “detect changes in demand” to “detect changes in customer sentiment” or “detect changes in customer preferences” depending on the

sample selected. The term “demand” is strongly focused on the supply chain literature which is not a concern of all B2B sales.

Practitioners would likely find useful research that developed best practices and identified areas of training needed for salespeople. Use of this index would help determine gaps in the optimum usage of social media and the strengths and weaknesses of salesperson usage. Many salespeople are likely challenged to use the full range of tools effectively. Most of the objectives measured are incorporated into Customer Relationship Technology (CRM). It would be useful to identify the appropriate balance in deploying either CRM embedded or independent social media to achieve sales goals.

Managerial Implications

A broader perspective of the capabilities of social media, not just of the sales process but the sales environment, would be useful for sales managers developing or optimizing a sales media strategy. Understanding that social media should be a conversation with customers along with other industry participants, allows the manager to consider a greater number of objectives. Those social media objectives are best not limited to searching for new customers, but expanded to new possibilities such as increasing industry thought leadership that would better position salespeople to succeed. Salespeople could initiate involving customers in product innovation by connecting customers to product developers resulting in stronger relationship ties. Using this index could help managers find the right balance in using resources, more listening, less talking, for example.

This index could help identify individual salespeople’s strengths and weaknesses in using social media, identifying organizational best practices, and training and supporting salespeople in best practices. For example, providing thought leadership to a customer may require a firm to expose their salespeople to a greater variety of developmental experiences. Anecdotal evidence suggests many salespeople are still experimenting on their own. These findings suggest that sales managers and sales people have differing views on social media. A better understanding of the salesperson’s viewpoint could help align the differing values. A sales manager

would find this index useful to 1) increase both the sales manager's and the salesperson's awareness of a fuller range of possible uses for social media, 2) identify gaps where salespeople are not using, don't value, or are uncomfortable with social media, and 3) better connect social media use to business strategy. Focusing on objectives, not tools, allows the sales manager to consider how social media resources can support business strategy, perhaps throughout the organization, as firms strive to become social businesses.

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Appendix 1: Index Items for Social Media Measure

Use of Social Media at Work	
<i>For the following questions, please answer A. Daily; B. Weekly; C. Monthly; D. Occasionally; or, E. Never</i>	
1	Detect changes in demand
2	Get early warnings about disruptions in the supply chain (weather, events...)
3	Monitor trends in our industry
4	Keep employees up to date
5	Get vital information to customers faster
6	Enhance visibility on industry concerns
7	Tell our company's stories
8	Participate in forums on industry issues
9	Invite feedback on supply chain performance
10	Involve customers in product development
11	Set up meetings
12	Respond to changing conditions
13	Increase speed and accuracy in decision making
14	Identify and reduce customer issues
15	Provide after-the-sale service
16	Search for new customers
17	Seek performance feedback about suppliers
18	Manage across geographic boundaries
Social Media Value to Attaining Goals	
<i>For the following questions, please answer in relation to level of importance (Important-Not at all Important)</i>	
1	Detect changes in demand
2	Get early warnings about disruptions in the supply chain (weather, events...)
3	Monitor trends in our industry
4	Keep employees up to date
5	Get vital information to customers faster
6	Enhance visibility on industry concerns
7	Tell our company's stories
8	Participate in forums on industry issues
9	Invite feedback on supply chain performance
10	Involve customers in product development
11	Set up meetings
12	Respond to changing conditions
13	Increase speed and accuracy in decision making
14	Identify and reduce customer issues
15	Provide after-the-sale service
16	Search for new customers
17	Seek performance feedback about suppliers
18	Manage across geographic boundaries