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## **Reflections on “Social media: Influencing customer satisfaction in B2B sales” and a research agenda**

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## **Reflections on “Social media: Influencing customer satisfaction in B2B sales” and a research agenda**

### **Abstract**

Given the indirect role of social media in value creation, the article “Social media: Influencing customer satisfaction in B2B sales” by Agnihotri, Dingus, Hu, and Krush (2016) is notable for highlighting the role of social media as an antecedent to value generation within the sales process. Considering the fast pace at which knowledge of the impact of social media within B2B sales is developing, we critically appraise Agnihotri et al.’s work and position it within the emerging literature on social media communication in the sales process. We conclude with a research agenda identifying a diverse set of new directions for investigating social media within the sales process.

*Keywords:* Social media, B2B, Value creation, Sales

## **1. Introduction**

Social media is the communication phenomenon of our time (boyd, 2015), with a growing body of research attempting to better understand the shift in power from firms to consumers brought about by the use of social media (Berthon, Pitt, Plangger, & Shapiro, 2012). As the scope and volume of communication through social media have increased, the last few years have witnessed growing interest in better understanding the benefits and uses of social media in business-to-business (B2B) contexts (Agnihotri, Dingus, Hu, & Krush, 2016). This includes research on the role of advertising and content marketing (Holliman & Rowley, 2014; Michaelidou, Siamagka, & Christodoulides, 2011), relationships and interactions between consumers and salespeople (Sood & Pattinson, 2012; Wang, Pauleen, & Zhang, 2016), the creation of networks (Singaraju, Nguyen, Niininen, & Sullivan-Mort, 2016), social media usage and acceptance (Keinänen & Kuivalainen, 2015; Lacka & Chong, 2016), implementation of online communities (Valos, Turner, Scheepers, & Stockdale, 2015), strategies for brand innovation and popularity (Nguyen, Yu, Melewar, & Chen, 2015; Swani, Milne, & Brown, 2013), and selling processes (Agnihotri, Kothandaraman, Kashyap, & Singh, 2012; Agnihotri et al., 2016; Guesalaga, 2016). Yet, despite soaring social media adoption and the scope of potential benefits of social media for improving communication between salespeople and customers (Agnihotri et al., 2012), research remains limited compared with that in a consumer context (Salo, 2017; Siamagka, Christodoulides, Michaelidou, & Valvi, 2015).

Agnihotri et al. (2016) take a perspective that is at the core of B2B marketing—namely, understanding the influence of social media within the sales process. As such, their theoretical contribution rests on integrating two key aspects of value generation in B2B into a single framework. The first aspect is the link between social media and company performance (i.e., sales); the second involves the way social media use influences consumers and their relationship with the firm throughout the sales process. With this in mind, the purpose of the current article is threefold. First, we provide a critical commentary on Agnihotri et al. (2016). Second, we position their article within the broader body of research, with the aim to refine current understanding of the relationship between social media and sales. Third, we present a research agenda based on five emergent themes to identify future research directions around the use of social media in sales contexts.

## **2. A commentary on Agnihotri et al. (2016)**

Agnihotri et al.'s (2016) research is one of the first empirical studies to highlight and theoretically account for the role of communications mediated by social media in B2B. In the sales context, consumers use social media as part of their information search process to investigate the market, compare products and offers, and establish relationships with salespeople. Agnihotri et al. approach sales through the lens of a previous framework focusing on salesperson social media use, which captures how technology aids salespeople in maximizing customer value (Agnihotri et al., 2012). They incorporate into their conceptual model the view that the use of social media allows information flow between consumers and sales staff.

Although information communication, responsiveness, and social media usage can be directly self-assessed by surveying salespeople, customer satisfaction cannot be. Considering this entire process by evaluating the perceptions of salespeople is, in our view, a limitation of Agnihotri et al.'s (2016) study. For example, the assessment of satisfaction as perceived by salespeople and buyers may differ. Similarly, the evaluation of consumer perceptions by salespeople is a subjective task that could lead to inflated results and affect the findings. There is also the potential for survey scores to be skewed toward more positive anchors, such as the items "Overall, I feel that my customers are satisfied with my performance"; "My clients feel they have an extremely effective working relationship with me"; and "Overall, my clients feel our relationship is productive." In our view, a more holistic examination of the role of social media communication on buyers' satisfaction in B2B sales would benefit from research based on a sample of consumers that fully reflects the dyadic nature of consumer–salesperson interactions. Agnihotri et al.'s conceptual model could be readily adapted to directly reflect the opinions of B2B buyers who are in contact with the salespeople.

Another aspect under-investigated in the B2B marketing literature is the mediators between social media communication and customer satisfaction. Agnihotri et al. (2016) argue that social media should be used to continuously deliver information from the firm to B2B customers throughout the sales process. They stress that social media extends the capability with which salespeople can help buyers by enhancing the overall information communication flow, which in turn influences satisfaction.

We suggest that the lack of a formal hypothesis and a baseline theory to support the mediational role of information communication in the process of value creation is another limitation of Agnihotri et al.'s (2016) work. Future studies might adopt and test hypotheses on the basis of theories of adoption, such as the technology acceptance model (Davis, Bagozzi, & Warshaw, 1989), the elaboration likelihood model (Cialdini, Petty, & Cacioppo,

1981), the theory of engagement marketing (Harmeling, Moffett, Arnold, & Carlson, 2017), or other theories that fit the computer-mediated communication context. Integrating such frameworks would assist in theorizing about how buyers incorporate received salesforce advice into their actions, leading to a better understanding of the broader phenomenon of value creation in sales relationships.

Finally, Agnihotri et al. (2016) focus on the importance of social media and implications for the sales process. Although they do not approach the sales process from the transactional perspective, their study opens up directions to all aspects of B2B selling and sales management that could be inherently affected by social media. In line with the broad literature on social media and business-to-consumer (B2C) sales, Agnihotri et al.'s conceptual framework theorizes the initial stage of social media implementation into sales (Andzulis, Panagopoulos, & Rapp, 2012), thereby establishing a buyer–seller relationship based on information flow without strict ties to sales strategy.

### **3. The development of knowledge on the use of social media for B2B sales**

We continue by positioning Agnihotri et al.'s (2016) study within the broader literature on B2B sales and social media. Research on the topic has developed from the assumption that B2B sales managers should aim to build long-term sales relationships rather than develop piecemeal, short-term transactions (Andzulis et al., 2012; Lacoste, 2016). Research on the topic can be organized around five main theoretical anchors: (1) descriptions of the value social media marketing creates in B2B sales relationships, (2) characterizations of the social media practices that create value in B2B sales relationships, (3) identification of the drivers of social media practice adoption by B2B sales professionals, (4) explanations of why social media practices create value, and (5) qualifications of the conditions enabling social media practices to generate value in B2B sales relationships. Agnihotri et al.'s work can be positioned in the fourth stream of research exploring the reasons social media creates value.

In the early 2010s, B2B sales managers were focused on integrating social media marketing into their practices, as social media emerged as a key topic in consumer marketing. However, as did their consumer marketing counterparts, sales managers also faced the challenge of demonstrating the positive return on investment (ROI) of social media marketing. Early studies therefore aimed to empirically demonstrate that social media marketing generates value in B2B sales relationships. For example, Sood and Pattinson (2012) show that social media generates informational, social, cooperation, and service

delivery value in sales relationships, thereby generating financial value. Prior research suggests that social media helps build buyer–seller relationships not only in the early relationship stages of building awareness, obtaining leads, and connecting with prospecting for conversion but also in the more advanced stages of building good business relationships and maintaining communications (Andzulis et al., 2012; Rodriguez, Peterson, & Krishnan, 2012; Schultz, Schwepker, & Good, 2012). While some research indicates that social media can directly help in closing deals (Andzulis et al., 2012), a consensus has emerged that the value of social media marketing in B2B sales is indirect, revolving overwhelmingly around its ability to build relationships (Itani, Agnihotri, & Dingus, 2017).

Beyond a desire to demonstrate the impact of social media on sales, interest has grown in understanding which practices are particularly well suited to fostering sales relationships. The most complete article on this topic is that by Andzulis et al. (2012). In an approach somewhat similar to Muntinga, Moorman, and Smit's (2011) and Schivinski, Christodoulides, and Dabrowski's (2016) on the exploration of consumers' online brand-related activities in a B2C context, the authors identify a list of social media practices in which B2B salespeople can engage, categorizing them on the basis of the relationship-building functions they serve. For example, they identified (1) practices that help marketers understand customers (e.g., posting in LinkedIn groups, monitoring buyers' social media comments, blogging and monitoring subsequent comments), (2) practices that help them approach customers (e.g., sharing news of new product testing, sharing stories about community involvement, generating surveys about relevant topics), (3) practices that enable them to discover customer needs (e.g., Tweeting or developing an app to solicit customer feedback and ideas, creating polls to vote and comment on proposed changes), (4) practices that present the company's offering (e.g., sharing success stories on Facebook, developing an informational YouTube channel, tweeting about price promotions and loyalty rewards), (5) practices that help close deals (e.g., chatter to work one-on-one deal inhibitors, blogs to address issues raised about products or services), and (6) services and follow-up practices (e.g., mining followers for prospects, asking for referrals, tweeting to announce new products).

While early research identified the main social media practices that create value, the challenge of ensuring their adoption by the sales teams has remained. Approximately 70% of companies had not adopted social media or were just exploring their usage in the early 2010s (Sales Management Association, 2012). Research has therefore explored the drivers of social media adoption by salespeople. A recent study (Guesalaga, 2016) indicates that the adoption

of social media depends first on organizational competence and commitment (knowledge, productivity, and expertise), second on the engagement of customers themselves with social media, and third on salespeople's individual commitment to social media. With regard to individual commitment of salespeople, Agnihotri et al. (2012) identify a generational effect in which young employees use social media technologies more than older employees. Overall, this effect has led to recommendations that firms should develop social media training for their employees (Agnihotri, Trainor, Itani, & Rodriguez, 2017).

More recently, a fourth stream of research exploring why social media practices generate value in sales relationships has burgeoned. Itani et al. (2017) find that social media creates value because it enhances B2B sales managers' adaptive sales capabilities—that is, their ability to alter their behavior to adjust to changes in the selling situation. Literature indicates that social media enhances adaptive sales capabilities for two reasons. First, salespeople can access and follow competitors' social media initiatives and interactions with prospects and customers (Agnihotri et al., 2012). Second, social media augments sales managers' ability to communicate with customers. As sales managers can communicate faster, manage multiple conversations simultaneously, and communicate sophisticated messages with good social media channels (Wang et al., 2016), they are able to convey more information to customers, in turn helping them be responsive; display empathy toward customers (Agnihotri et al., 2016, 2017); and, more generally, build a positive reputation, credibility, and trust (Agnihotri et al., 2012, Andzulis et al., 2012, Lacoste, 2016).

Finally, most recent literature has begun exploring the conditions under which social media marketing practices foster B2B sales relationships. Some research has investigated the effect of combining social media with other technologies. For example, Agnihotri et al. (2017) show that social media marketing increases relationship quality between salespeople and customers more when social media channels are used in combination with customer relationship management (CRM) technologies. Scholars have also investigated the effect of using social media and face-to-face encounters in combination. For example, in her qualitative study Lacoste (2016) reports that salespeople find it more effective to use social media to identify prospects and build rapport with them but prefer using face-to-face meetings to close a deal. Similarly, Wang, Malthouse, Calder and Uzunoglu (2017) demonstrate that the combined use of digital events and personal selling increases sales and that the effect is stronger when the targeted leads' job involve high responsibility. Beyond channel and technology combinations, research also identifies company-specific conditions that influence the effectiveness of social media practices. Specifically, Rapp, Beitelspacher,

Grewal, and Hughes (2013) find that social media usage strengthens relationships between suppliers and retailers when suppliers are ambidextrous (i.e., striving for service quality and innovation for improvement) and when their brands have a strong reputation.

Although literature on the integration of social media in the B2B context is still in its early stages (Salo, 2017), the review above already provides ample evidence that social media is a valuable instrument to build and maintain relationships. In the following section, we attempt to cast light on relevant marketing issues that are still unresolved in the literature.

#### **4. A research agenda for social media in B2B buyer–seller relationships**

Agnihotri et al. (2016) conclude their article with a call for additional research on B2B buyer–seller relationships. As we have highlighted in this commentary, and has been identified in the B2B literature (Salo, 2017), this call is being addressed, with scholars of industrial marketing turning attention to emerging issues within social media (Moncrief, Marshall, & Ruff, 2015). However, aside from the speed of change within social media technology and usage, we suggest that a research agenda is necessary to address both the paucity of empirical studies and the reality of user-led adoption of social media.

Research streams in this area are characterized by a focus on how social media is adopted rather than how it is used within sales practice. Use of social media within the sales process has emerged through direct adoption by employees and consumers (Siamagka et al., 2015) rather than top-down implementation by organizations, which is typically the case with other forms of sales technology such as CRM. There is also a need to recognize the tensions built into the use of social media within B2B contexts and the difficulty of exerting management control over the decentralized and organic flow of information that characterizes social media.

As such, the following research agenda expands on what is and is not known about the future role of social media in generating value within the sales process. We lay out several new directions for research based on five themes that encompass the major opportunities, challenges, and debates facing social media. We derive the initial four themes directly from the literature discussed previously. The first theme addresses the patterns of adoption of social media by both salespeople and consumers and the way they subsequently use these technologies during the sales process. In the second theme, we reflect on the challenges in building effective online sales processes. In the third theme, we suggest that consumer engagement is also an appropriate thematic lens through which to explore the issues around customer satisfaction that Agnihotri et al. (2016) identify. In the fourth theme,

we adopt another key focus of Agnihotri et al. by highlighting the indirect role of social media in building buyer-seller relationships; their study suggests that novel ways of measuring the impact of investment in social media on company performance are required. Difficulties in demonstrating ROI have been a key managerial and research challenge with social media, and the complexities with B2B communication give even greater valence to this issue. Finally, we suggest a fifth theme that involves the many risks and concerns related to the use and adoption of social media to develop buyer-seller relationships within a B2B context. While scholars have focused on the benefits brought by social media, to both firms and consumers, it is necessary to recognize the growing concerns among the public and policy makers about the economic power and societal costs of the growth of social media. For firms wanting to create long-term value from social media use, an appreciation of these issues is critical, and we suggest that researchers can play an important role in exploring such topics.

#### *4.1. Theme 1: Patterns of social media adoption*

While the business case for social media is often framed around its ubiquity, access to and use of social media platforms are neither consistent nor universal. Marketing scholars have been criticized for presenting perspectives that are either incomplete or theoretically uninformed, such as the focus on younger consumers' adoption of new technologies despite evidence of economic power shifting to older groups (Sheth & Sisodia, 2005). Within B2B contexts, research on social media communications is necessarily biased toward those who have adopted social media platforms. However, salesperson-buyer interactions are increasingly based on complex sets of relationships between multiple stakeholder groups (Ingram, 2004). Recent research has focussed on multilevel approaches to explain the multiplicity and connectiveness of relationships between buyer and sellers (Borg & Young, 2014; Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016). This raises the question about communications in a context in which social media adoption may be low or some stakeholders excluded. Although digital exclusion is typically discussed at a societal level as relating to groups that do not have access to or use the Internet (Friemel, 2016), exclusion can also be conceptualized to occur at a more micro-level. Despite an assumption of homogeneity of access, evidence suggests that adoption and use of social media platforms and behavior on these platforms vary (Greenwood, Perrin, & Duggan, 2016). For example, sales channels may cross borders, creating issues regarding variations in social media platform use between countries. This heterogeneity applies to buyers as well as salespeople, and is reflected in the increasingly

multi-platform use of social media as consumers become active on multiple platforms. For example, more than 50% of US Internet users are active across more than one social media platform (Greenwood et al., 2016).

Onto this can be layered the domain-specific factors related to B2B markets. These include issues regarding differing data protection and privacy laws and related variances in corporate policies on information sharing. While many consumers turn to social media to gain information and advice on products and services, there may be issues in trusting these data (Osborne, 2017). Finally, internal rules within organizations as to the appropriate use of social media within sales channels can also vary. *Research challenges include:*

- Exploring barriers and enablers to salesperson adoption of social media within the sales process.
- Developing models to account for the increasing multi-platform use of social media and its synergistic effect on sales.
- Analyzing the impact of legal and regulatory differences (e.g., different Internet ecosystems or access restrictions in China) on salesperson/customer use of social media.
- Understanding the role of demographic (e.g., age, gender) or cultural (e.g., language, cultural norms) factors in the use and acceptance of communication via social media.

#### *4.2. Theme 2: Role of social media platforms within the sales process*

In addition to better understanding adoption and engagement patterns, another focus considers the varying roles of individual social media technologies and actions in the sales process. While constructions of social media use in consumer marketing often take a monolithic approach to selection and use of platforms, within sales environments social media is likely to be one part of a broader set of communication technologies. This reflects the increasing diversity of opportunities for interaction via social media. Social media can be viewed through multiples lenses, including device (mobile, tablet, PC), platform (Facebook, LinkedIn), and media (text, image, video, files). Within B2B, the functions of social media can vary depending on the sales needs to be addressed. For example, one social media platform may be used to make initial contact with a lead, while another is used to maintain the relationship or to ensure a more transactional sharing of information within an ongoing sales process. Social media interactions can be dyadic (between two individuals) or team based, with channels combining offline/online or synchronous/asynchronous communication.

Although researchers have developed typologies of social media that reflect consumer uses of the technology (e.g., Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), there is a need to better understand how different forms of social media can be used for different touch points across the sales process. The position of salespeople working at the boundaries of organizations requires them to adapt to the needs of the clients they serve (Ahearne, Mathieu, & Rapp, 2005), meaning that salespeople may have little choice but to use social media if it is the preferred communication channel of their customers. In addition to interactions between social media platforms, there is a need to understand how social media interacts with other technologies, such as CRM systems, and the processes surrounding them. *Research challenges include:*

- Understanding how to integrate interactions through (personal) social media communication channels with formal sales technology platforms.
- Developing normative tools to help firms identify and manage the most effective form of social media use at each stage of the sales process.
- Understanding how social media use and effectiveness differ depending on the nature and size of the sales transaction (e.g., key account, team sale vs. individual sale) and the stage of the sales relationship (e.g., repeat purchase, new customer).

#### *4.3. Theme 3: B2B consumer engagement and social media*

As consumers spend an increasing amount of time with online channels, how to engage them when face-to-face interaction is limited has become a key focus of research (e.g., Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric, & Ilic, 2011; Brodie, Ilic, Juric, & Hollebeek, 2013; Hollebeek & Chen, 2014). Embedded in research on online consumer engagement is the view that engagement is more difficult to achieve online. Consumer engagement can be understood as a context-dependent psychological state (Brodie et al., 2013) typically focused on interactive consumer experiences rather than transactional interactions (Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan, 2012). Despite a growing body of research on online consumer engagement, little consensus exists on how it works in B2B environments that are becoming increasingly boundaryless and based on inter-organizational networks and ecosystems (Marcos-Cuevas, Natti, Palo, & Baumann, 2016). In contrast with online consumer engagement, which generally presumes online-only interactions, B2B engagement exists across multiple platforms and is dependent on group-level rather than individual-level forms of involvement. For example, while social media might be used to identify a lead, it may take on a supporting role to other communication channels when building a long-term relationship with a client.

The disruptive potential of social media also lies in its potential to disintermediate face-to-face communication. Research could explore the longer-term influence on sales relationships if social media replaces face-to-face or other non-digital interactions as a primary means of engaging consumers in the sales process. Embodied in this line is the need to understand how online engagement developed through social media differs from engagement developed in a face-to-face manner. Recognizing the complexity of sales relationships, in many cases disintermediation will be partial with social media complementing, or even enhancing, face-to-face interactions. *Research challenges include:*

- Conceptualizing and operationalizing customer engagement in B2B interactions via social media, and developing a model of its antecedents and consequences.
- Understanding the role of social media in building online customer engagement when it replaces face-to-face interactions.
- Understanding the impact of social media on customer engagement when it is used in a complimentary way or parallel with face-to-face interactions.

#### *4.4. Theme 4: Modeling the ROI of social media*

Finding ways to identify the ROI from social media has been a long-standing research challenge throughout the period of growth of social media (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010). Within B2B marketing, measuring social media using traditional marketing metrics creates the risk of focusing on short-term benefits without considering issues of long-term value creation for customers (Jussila et al., 2011). While the popularity of social media as a communication platform is not in doubt, its ability to generate value within commercial contexts has been widely questioned. Issues include fraud, a reliance on click-data, the difficulties in tracking interactions across devices and platforms, and a reluctance of platform providers to provide individual-level metrics directly to marketers. Although early adopters of social media in B2B may have been less focused on collecting data (Michaelidou et al., 2011), given the need to demonstrate value for money in the marketing budget, managers are under increasing pressure to provide evidence of successful investments in social media.

At the core of the challenge with modeling ROI in the sales relationship is the availability of metrics relevant to sales outcomes. Providers of social media platforms are keen to provide metrics optimized around their advertising-supported business models, such as cookie-matching approaches combined with third-party data providers, to better track responses to advertising (Fulgoni & Lipsman, 2014). However, social media platforms

focused on consumer-advertising-driven business models have little commercial incentive to provide the engagement or response metrics that might be useful for calculating ROI in a B2B context. As a result, measurements of social media engagement outside the narrow platform-reported metrics tend to be more reliant on self-reported survey methods (Kuru & Pasek, 2015; Schivinski et al., 2016).

The paradox is that while there has never been more data generated through social media platforms, the control of these data lies with social media companies, and they are often unavailable to marketers. Even aggregated data provided through analytics tools such as Facebook insights can be problematic in a B2B sales environment, where the focus is on a single account rather than demographic groups and, therefore, individual-level data are required. Identifying suitable metrics available to marketers that are useful for demonstrating ROI is thus challenging. Given the likely supporting role of social media in developing sales relationships, these metrics must also be compatible with broader measures of marketing ROI. *Research challenges include:*

- Identifying metrics to measure the ROI of social media use within the sales process that are achievable within the practical constraints of data collection on proprietary social media services.
- Developing approaches to account for multi-channel use of social media (e.g., across devices or different social media platforms).
- Modeling the links between engagement metrics of social media (e.g., clicks, shares, “likes”) and tangible financial outcomes within the sales process.

#### *4.5. Theme 5: The risks of social media within B2B sales relationships*

While the benefits, perceived or anticipated, of social media have featured widely in research, there is a growing public awareness of and academic research on the risks associated with social media. Specifically, we consider the potential for risks to both the sales relationship and the firm itself when engaging on social media platforms in the sales process. Beyond the general security risks associated with technology, social media has been specifically linked to the spread of misinformation and “fake news” (Williamson, 2016), identity theft, malware, and the growing threat of corporate espionage. Questions related to information security in B2B are a specific subset of the broader ethical issues surrounding social media. However, in terms of the sales relationship, two risks related to social media are of particular note because of the high commercial value attached to data within sales processes. B2B scholars have long considered the strategic importance of competitive

intelligence (Le Meunier-FitzHugh & Piercy, 2006) and, by extension, the risks posed to firms subjected to attempts by competitors to gather information (Osborne, 2017). This is not just an issue of what data salespeople hold on their own computers but also a case of the security or verifiability of those with whom they are interacting.

The risks are magnified by the difficulties firms have in controlling the platforms adopted by their employees. Researchers have long argued the importance of communication effectiveness in adaptive selling techniques (Boorum, Goolsby, & Ramsey, 1998; Itani et al., 2017), and given the ubiquity of social media as a communication mechanism, it is necessary to acknowledge that it will feature in many sales interactions, regardless of whether it has been formally sanctioned. These risks can occur on both sides, for salespeople and consumers. One of the attractions of using social media in sales is the way authentic online personas can be leveraged to provide more genuine and meaningful communications. In other words, sales interactions occur between individual rather than corporate personas. This creates a challenge for organizations to manage how information is communicated when they do not have the level of control over usage of technology. Indeed, with the growth of “bring your own” computer policies, firms’ ability to enforce controls over user access and security is limited to self-compliance, and thus such enforcement may be difficult, if not impossible, to audit effectively. An essential tension exists within the use of social media when a business model based on collecting personal data clashes with the needs of data security expected within B2B. Furthermore, different social media platforms, and different functionality within platforms, can lend itself to communication that varies in the extent to which information disclosure can be considered public or private. For example, Facebook Messenger can mix public and private content, whilst information posted on a LinkedIn or Facebook Business page might reasonably be expected to be public. Research to address and quantify the sources of risk within the social media sales process as well as to identify ways to mitigate these risks would be welcome.

Finally, we consider the impacts on the individuals who use social media. Research indicates that the use of social media in a work context can improve work satisfaction (Leftheriotis & Giannakos, 2014), but the potential for interruptions and distraction can create time and social pressures and, in turn, cause stress (Hampton, Rainie, Lu, Shin, & Purcell, 2015). For salespeople and customers, the line between personal and business communications can be blurred. *Research challenges include:*

- Identifying potential risks for fraud provoked by the use of social media within the sales process.

- Understanding and managing risks of the use of personal social media accounts to gain access to sensitive data through hacking, corporate espionage, or use of competitive intelligence techniques.
- Developing effective and enforceable organizational policies to manage and control the use of social media by salespeople.
- Exploring the wider ethical issues embedded in the use of social media, including managing the boundaries between public and private identities, ownership of data and the potential use of ‘big data’ collected via social media within marketing decision making.

## **5. Conclusions**

The work of Agnihotri et al. (2016) provides an important step toward understanding, at both a practical and a theoretical level, the use of social media as a tool within sales processes. Specifically, by highlighting the indirect role of social media communication as an antecedent to customer satisfaction, their study pinpoints a role for social media that is grounded in the reality of B2B marketing. Their work illustrates a central point about the study of social media in B2B marketing—namely, to generate value from social media, marketing strategies must be aligned with the specific dynamics and characteristics of the value chains existing in B2B sales contexts. At the same time, Agnihotri et al. underscore the potentially transformative role of social media in how B2B marketing will operate in the future. In our research agenda, we aimed to identify the diversity of areas in which this transformation may occur. In conclusion, we hope that this review will encourage scholars to undertake further empirical work to generate more evidence of the specific benefits and risks of social media, most notably in expanding knowledge of the consumer perspective.

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