



Salespeople's work toward the institutionalization of social selling practices

Laurianne Schmitt, Eric Casenave, Jessie Pallud

► To cite this version:

Laurianne Schmitt, Eric Casenave, Jessie Pallud. Salespeople's work toward the institutionalization of social selling practices. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 2021, 96, pp.183-196. 10.1016/j.indmarman.2021.05.008 . hal-03868903

HAL Id: hal-03868903

<https://hal.science/hal-03868903>

Submitted on 24 Nov 2022

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Salespeople's work toward the institutionalization of social selling practices

Schmitt Laurianne
EM Strasbourg Business School
Université de Strasbourg
HuManiS (EA 7308)
Laurianne.schmitt67@gmail.com

Eric Casenave
EM Strasbourg Business School
Université de Strasbourg
HuManiS (EA 7308)
casenave@unistra.fr

Pallud Jessie
EM Strasbourg Business School
Université de Strasbourg
HuManiS (EA 7308)
jessie.pallud@unistra.fr

Salespeople's work toward the institutionalization of social selling practices

Introduction

While the use of social media has become widespread among business-to-business (B2B) salespeople, the depth of usage, that is the diversity of social selling practices undertaken by salespeople and the extent to which they rely on social selling for their sales approach, remains limited. In France, for example, only 30% of B2B decision-makers believe that interactions on social media are more business-oriented than social-oriented¹. In the USA, only 31% of B2B professionals said that social selling allowed them to build deeper relationships with their clients². A recent European study showed that less than half of salespeople use social media for sales intelligence³. Other research findings on salespeople also confirm the limited extent of social media use ($M = 1.49$ on a seven-point scale; Bill et al., 2020). These statistics are surprising, considering that social selling “heralds a new era in professional selling” (Agnihotri et al., 2012, p. 341) by facilitating improved selling behaviors (e.g., adaptive selling; Itani et al., 2017) and performance outcomes (Ogilvie et al., 2018). Thus, the limited exploitation of social selling by salespeople deserves further analysis.

The existing academic literature has attempted to investigate extrinsic factors to explain the use of social selling practices. Organizations diffuse social selling practices within their sales teams as they clarify the scope, policy, and rules of social selling and offer training to salespeople (Ogilvie et al., 2018). Business networks might also indirectly influence salespeople when they compare their social media presence with that of their peers (Wang et al., 2016) or have to adapt their practices to their customer's preferences (Guesalaga, 2016). Although some individual variables have been identified, such as learning orientation (Itani et al., 2017), research has mainly focused on drivers of the use of social selling and has neglected to consider the salesperson as an agent of social selling diffusion. Individual agency may be crucial to the diffusion of social media within an organization; Guesalagua (2016) highlights that within the social selling context, such an individual agency could for example influence the managerial level.

The present study glimpses inside the black box of social media use to discover whether and how the efforts undertaken by salespeople can influence the diffusion of social selling practices. In this research, we adopt a salesperson-centric approach, claiming that a

¹ Study: Social selling barometer France, “Impact of social media on purchase decision in B2B”, 2019

² Study: CSO Insights, “All That Glitters Is Not Gold: 2019 World-Class Sales Practices Study”, 2019

³ Study: LinkedIn, “The State of Sales 2020”, Europe Edition, 2020

salesperson's agency is a key factor for the development of new sales practices related to social media. Therefore, contrary to previous studies, which emphasize the benefits of a top-down approach, we suggest that social selling practices may emerge in a bottom-up way depending on the promotion work initiated by salespeople. Conversely, we identify disrupting efforts from salespeople that can thwart the development of social selling within sales teams. Thus, we aim to understand salespeople's attitudes toward social selling and explore the agency exerted by salespeople to affect social selling practices through everyday efforts.

A micro-level, practice-focused perspective is suitable to better understand salespeople's attitudes and behaviors toward the use of social selling (see Pedersen et al., 2020). Neo-institutional theory particularly fits that objective, as it suggests that actors, including individuals, play a crucial role in creating, maintaining, and disrupting institutions (Lawrence et al., 2009). From this perspective, we explore the concept of practice work, a specific form of institutional work that focuses on practice and seeks to explain how actors engage in "efforts to affect the recognition and acceptance of sets of routines, rather than simply engaging in those routines" (Zietsma et al., 2010, p. 190). Practice work was examined through the lens of salespeople's discourses. We conducted 32 semi-structured interviews with B2B sales professionals (representatives and managers) in different industries.

Our findings highlight the essential role of salespeople in the institutionalization of social selling practices within the sales field. We identify three types of practice work: (1) promotional work, which involves the active diffusion of social selling through the mobilization of organizations and peers within social selling practices; (2) reconciliation work, which involves the legitimation of social selling practices within traditional sales practices; (3) disruption work, which questions the legitimacy of social selling practices. In addition, we aim to supplement the B2B marketing literature in three ways. First, we offer insight into digital marketing work at the salesperson level by studying social selling practices from a new perspective. While past research has focused on the drivers of salespeople's adoption of social selling practices, our study highlights the efforts undertaken by salespeople to diffuse such practices—that is, the constructive process toward social selling practices to move from awareness to institutionalization – or to thwart them—that is, the destructive process toward social selling practices to prevent institutionalization. Second, our paper adds to the established body of work applying neo-institutional theory to marketing. This literature shifts attention away from the way in which marketing norms, practices, and rules are affected by institutional pressures (Hillebrand et al., 2011; Yang et al., 2012) and toward actors' agency and their efforts in regard to institutions (Michel et al., 2019; Palmer et al., 2015).

Relying on the framework of institutional work that has been used in B2B marketing (Chaney et al., 2019; Michel et al., 2019), our study seeks to deepen the understanding of practice work in the context of selling. Third, our study offers new insights into how organizations may develop the depth of salespeople's social media usage. We highlight the essential role of perceived usefulness and perceived organizational support in strengthening salespeople's efforts to promote social selling practices. We also describe ways to better manage social selling practices once they are implemented.

The following section describes social selling practices and how they relate to traditional selling practices. Then, the theoretical framework of practice work and the qualitative methodology are presented. Finally, the theoretical and managerial contributions are discussed, with an acknowledgement of the limitations of the study and suggestions for future research.

2. Conceptual background

2.1. The evolution of sales practices and emergence of social selling practices

Practices are “an organized constellation of different people's activities” (Schatzki, 2012, p. 13). Salespeople's practices rely on a variety of traditional communication and information channels, like face-to-face interactions, phone calls, e-mails, websites, and databases (Marshall et al., 1999; Moncrief & Marshall, 2005). In the era of social selling, salespeople use social media to understand, connect, and engage with customers for business purposes (Agnihotri et al., 2012; Ancillai et al., 2019). More precisely, they engage in social selling practices, which we define as sales practices integrating social media to its full extent within everyday activities to facilitate the whole sales process.

In their seminal work, Andzulis et al. (2012) discussed how social selling practices can be integrated into the sales process. More recent empirical studies focusing on the B2B context (e.g. Ancillai et al., 2019) have extended these authors' work by further integrating social media into the “seven steps of selling”: prospecting, pre-approach, approach, sales presentation, handling objections, closing, follow-up (Dubinsky, 1980). First, prospecting can apply social media to generate leads by using contact data that is available online and by creating content to attract prospects (Agnihotri et al., 2012; Moncrief et al., 2015). Second, during the pre-approach step, salespeople can improve their customer knowledge by gathering precise information on customers' organizations, decision-makers, and specific needs through social media (Ogilvie et al., 2018). Third, approaching the customers becomes attracting the customers through professional reputation—consequently increasing their credibility and

visibility—with an appealing social media profile, effective social media interactions, and insightful posts or comments (Lacoste, 2016). Fourth, to promote their company, brand, or offers, salespeople can share marketing content through social media (Andzulis et al., 2012). Sales presentations turn into an ongoing process where salespeople can nurture customer relationships by engaging in regular interactions on social media and building professional networks to stimulate business exchanges (Agnihotri et al., 2016; Itani et al., 2020). Fifth, once a potential customer is aware of the product or service that is provided, salespeople can solve remaining problems and objections with strong market knowledge and competitive intelligence developed through social media analysis (Itani et al., 2017). Sixth, salespeople may close the sales through exchanges with customers online, which represent attempts to add value for their clients (Moncrief & Marshall, 2005). Seventh, continuous interactions with customers on social media can help to maintain customer relationships (Agnihotri et al., 2017).

2.2. Salespeople's effort at different levels

The drivers of social selling can be found at three levels: the personal, organizational and managerial, and business network levels. Since social selling is considered an individual practice, personal variables, such as sales experience (Inyang, 2019), sales personnel capabilities (e.g. product knowledge, interpersonal communication) (Rodriguez et al., 2016), and learning goal orientation (Itani et al., 2017), have been identified as potential moderators of the adoption of social selling practices. Some authors argue that individual commitment toward social media predicates social media use (Guesalaga, 2016), essentially when holding a positive attitude toward social media usefulness (Bill et al., 2020). Conversely, lack of a positive attitude toward social media results in apathy toward the adoption of social selling (Hansen & Levin, 2016).

Research studying the drivers of social selling tends to highlight a top-down perspective, focusing on the role of organizations and managers in incentivizing salespeople to use social selling practices (Guesalaga, 2016). It has been suggested that organizations develop a social-media-oriented environment, encourage managerial support (Rodriguez et al., 2016), provide supportive technologies (Marshall et al., 2012), and develop training activities to favor salespeople's social media use (Ogilvie et al., 2018).

Finally, the adoption of social selling practices can depend on salespeople's internal and external business networks. Research generally finds that salespeople are more inclined to use those practices if immediate business partners do so (Rapp et al., 2013), if the practices

fulfil customers' expectations (Guesalaga, 2016), or if their peers support the use of social media (Keinänen & Kuivalainen, 2015). Social selling practices can also be motivated by social comparison and identity construction; salespeople tend to observe how actors in the field use social selling practices and then replicate them when building their own online identity (Wang et al., 2016).

Although a growing number of studies are examining the drivers of social selling, few attempts have been made to envision the salesperson as not only a compliant worker but also an agent who puts effort into diffusing or thwarting social selling practices. Indeed, research has adopted an approach that prioritizes the drivers of social selling practices at the organizational and business network levels while neglecting the salesperson's agency. In the current study, as illustrated by Figure 1, we complement extant social selling literature by focusing on salespeople's efforts. We argue that salespeople engage in specific types of work to influence how the sales field envisions social selling practices and may diffuse those practices at the organizational and business network levels.

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

2.3. Practice work as a form of institutional work

The focus on agency and how actors' efforts affect institutions is of central interest to neo-institutional theory (DiMaggio, 1988; Lawrence et al., 2009), particularly within the framework of institutional work. Institutional work is defined as "the voluntary actions of institutional actors aimed at creating, maintaining, and disrupting institutions" (Lawrence et Suddaby, 2006, p.220), and it involves "detailed analyses of the complex motivations, interests and efforts" of actors (Lawrence et al., 2009, p. 6).

This framework has gained interest in the marketing field, where it has been used to explain how industrial actors maintain their market power (Palmer et al., 2015) and how wholesalers and retailers within food distribution channels not only maintain their positions but also engage in institutional work to change their position within the business network of which they are part (Michel et al., 2019). Chaney et al. (2019) focus on how individuals within organizations perceive institutional work. Other studies adopt a micro-perspective to explore the institutional work that occurs within organizations (Hampel et al., 2017). For example, Yngfalk (2019) shows how marketing managers perform maintenance work by

embedding and mythologizing non-sustainable practices in their discourse in order to justify and preserve current practices.

In this paper, we adopt a micro-perspective and focus on individuals' actions regarding practices. Unlike institutional workers, who are willing to affect institutions (Lawrence et al., 2009), actors engaging in practice work are managing the exigencies of immediate situations and, in doing so, create, maintain, or disrupt practices (Daudigeos, 2013). Actors are essential at each stage of the institutionalization process (Zietsma et al., 2010), from the stability stage, when they contribute to maintaining a practice; through conflict, when they disrupt and defend the practice; to innovation, when they create a practice by linking existing practices to new ones (Maguire et al., 2004); and, finally, to promotion of a new practice, when they build relational legitimacy and apply influence tactics (Daudigeos, 2013). To enrich the framework of practice work, institutional work can be applied to practices. For example, "embedding and routinizing" (a form of institutional work) can be applied to understand how day-to-day practices are reproduced (Lawrence et al., 2009).

The notion of practice work is of particular interest in the context of sales practices for several reasons. First, the sales context is experiencing a transition of practices (Marshall et al., 2012; Moncrief et al., 2015). Traditional sales practices are highly institutionalized and have been accepted as routine for salespeople since the early 1980s. However, the emergence of social selling practices represents a change in the practices that salespeople have to apply. Second, the notion of practice work recognizes salespeople as actors who not only engage with and reproduce practices but also contribute to the institutionalization of those practices. Considering salespeople's agency allows us to highlight a new view on the diffusion of social selling. Institutional work has gained particular interest within the marketing field (Chaney et al., 2019; Michel et al., 2019). We use it to explore actors' efforts regarding sales practices. Third, several types of practice work can coexist (Zietsma et al., 2010). Although some salespeople work to implement social selling practices because they recognize the effectiveness of such a change, others might strive to disrupt those practices or maintain the existing practices in which they are embedded.

In sum, a neo-institutional micro perspective focusing on practice work is well suited to understand salespeople's efforts regarding the institutionalization of social selling practices. This research examines the practice work that salespeople perform as they cope with the evolution of sales practices, highlighting their role in the diffusion of social selling practices.

3. Methodology

3.1. Study design

Our purpose is to explore the practice work of B2B salespeople in the specific context of social selling practices. To the best of our knowledge, no research has examined B2B salespeople's practice work from an exploratory or empirical standpoint. Therefore, we apply a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of salespeople's efforts regarding social selling practices, the shape and variety of those efforts and how they interact with their business environment (Pedersen et al., 2020). In line with most research on institutional work, we explore individual efforts and their interaction with institutions through in-depth interviews (Acquier et al., 2018; Chaney et al., 2019). Interviews are appropriate to explore theoretical constructs with an empirical dataset (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007), and a semi-structured approach is appropriate for deepening concepts as it allows actors to provide rich answers, both retrospectively and in real time (Gioia et al., 2013; Miles et al., 2019). Our interviews followed an evolving interview script (see Appendix 4). When necessary, we performed reformulation and reframing to follow the respondent's reasoning and thoughts.

3.2. Sample

To gather data, we followed a two-phase interview process conducted between 2018 and 2019. We first obtained a convenience sample of 23 B2B sales representatives from our personal network. We did not consider their use of social media, as this provided us access to people who had different attitudes and behaviors regarding the use of social media (Miles et al., 2019). Fourteen representatives declined the interviews, and nine responded positively. Using a snowballing technique, we gained access to five more salespeople who accepted interviews. Thus, the initial sample was composed of 14 salespeople, of whom 10 used some social selling practices and 4 never used social media in a professional context. We then employed a purposeful sampling technique in which we used LinkedIn Sales Navigator to identify potential respondents. We focused on salespeople who were active on LinkedIn, defined as meeting one of the three following criteria: (1) having a LinkedIn premium account, (2) having more than 500 followers, and (3) having posted on LinkedIn within the last 30 days. This technique led us to contact 29 salespeople. We received positive replies from 18, of whom 16 used social media professionally and 2 did not engage in social selling practices and were active on social media for personal reasons.

Our final sample was composed of 32 French sales professionals from 31 different firms (see Table 1 for the list of participants). The professionals came from various industries and company sizes, with differences in gender and experience level. The industries included

construction, information technology, media, retail, and engineering. The sample was predominantly male (6 women and 26 men), but this distribution aligns with the types of B2B industries considered in this research. Participants' industry experience ranged from 1–38 years. Of the 32 interviews, 25 were conducted face-to-face, and the others were conducted via telephone for participants' convenience (Morrison et al., 2012). The interviews lasted an average of 55 minutes. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed, and they were conducted by the same researcher to ensure consistency.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

3.3. Data analysis

Data were coded using NVivo version 10. The first-order concepts correspond to the doing and sayings of actors (Nicolini, 2012). We focused on how actors talk about traditional sales practices versus social selling practices and which actions they take in regard to the practices. Raw data elements for the first-order codes are presented in Appendix 3. Following the Gioia method, we gathered the first-order concepts into second-order themes corresponding to salespeople's efforts (Gioia et al., 2013). Therefore, we relied on both the institutional work framework and existing practice work concepts to perform continuous iterations between data and theory (see Appendix 1 for institutional work that has been reported within the literature). We identified efforts presented in the previous literature (e.g., advocacy) and developed descriptions of additional efforts that match our results. For example, we found that “emphasizing the risk for the organization” and “emphasizing the risk for the salesperson” could be categorized as “warning” efforts. Finally, we identified higher-order aggregate dimensions (Gioia et al., 2013) to categorize efforts into three types of practice work, which we present hereafter.

4. Findings: Three types of practice work salespeople perform in the context of social selling

In this section, we present the three main forms of practice work that salespeople perform in the social selling context (the data structure, which is based on the Gioia methodology, can be found in Appendix 2). Perceived usefulness and perceived organizational support consistently emerged as explanatory factors, and we expand upon them at the end of each section. Section 4.1 describes how salespeople diffuse social selling practices through promotion work. Section 4.2 exposes how salespeople engage in

reconciliation work when working toward simultaneous use of traditional and social selling practices. Section 4.3 analyzes how salespeople engage in disruption work when they thwart social selling practices. Finally, section 4.4 presents the possible coexistence and interplay of the three types of work.

4.1. Promoting social selling practices

In this section, we describe salespeople's efforts to promote social selling practices. We first describe how salespeople diffuse social selling practices by promoting them at the organizational level (e.g., advocating) and within their internal and external networks (e.g., building relational networks).

Salespeople engage in advocacy to mobilize their organization or management to build support for the institutionalization of social selling practices. They can pursue advocacy in three ways. First, they can ask their organization for material resources to efficiently use social selling practices. Although social media platforms tend to be free, their efficiency can be improved with the purchase of "premium" options. For example, LinkedIn has a premium version, called "Sales Navigator," designed specifically for salespeople. Salespeople can engage in advocacy work by asking their organization to provide them with such upgraded versions of social media:

I always used [social media] at the beginning without a professional account, but because I asked the company, they gave me a professional account ... after I asked, I introduced the tool and now it's something [the company] spread to the other salespeople because we realize that it's very important. (P11)

Such efforts build guidelines for social selling practices within the organization while pushing the organization to spread resources among salespeople.

Second, organizational support can be requested by highlighting the information offered by social selling practices and forcing the organization to take action. For example, one salesperson added "social media" as a new prospecting channel to his customer relationship management system. By demonstrating the positive results of social selling to their company, they claim that social media is a relevant communication channel that must be extended.

Third, salespeople advocate for social selling practices by asking to play an active role in the construction of a social selling policy. With the approval of their management and organization, they share their best practices during company meetings, thus acquiring formal authority and defining the organizational rules about social selling practices:

I'm now a key user of LinkedIn, and as I very actively use it for my work, I constantly propose that this tool be used. "Key user" is a term that we use in our company; as soon as you are a key user of a tool, you are allowed to share [best practices] with others. When you share, you do it properly in meetings. (P16)

Ultimately, social selling practices can be integrated into corporate sales practices. Advocacy involves clearly demonstrating to the organization and managers that social selling is a crucial practice within today's business environment. If advocates of social selling truly believe in the competitive advantages it offers, they can be change-makers who aim to contribute to the company's global achievement.

Beyond the organizational and managerial levels, our data reveal that salespeople spread social selling practices to their peers by building relational networks. Salespeople who already apply social selling practices use their relational networks to share knowledge and skills with peers:

I showed my colleagues how social media worked during common lunches and at sales meetings, and they signed up for it. They all signed up, they all registered suddenly on social media, they all got updated. (P22)

Salespeople can also create win-win social selling practices with their peers. Within organizations, peer groups gather to create a network of social sellers. For example, a salesperson could invite his colleagues to join him in creating a video to share on social media:

I'm always the first one to say, "Go ahead, we will make a video; film me or I will film you." I share it on social media if I like it. After that, my colleagues also share it, and it circulates throughout the country. (P18)

Finally, we identified six salespeople who exclusively engage in promotion work. In the interviews, they shared positive opinions regarding social selling and overall satisfaction with their organization's support. Those promoters perceived social selling practices as essential to salespeople's competitive advantage:

Those [salespeople] who are on social media are one step ahead, frankly, I sincerely think so. Those who know how to use it are one step ahead of others, in my opinion. (P22)

For example, P8 considers salespeople who do not engage in social selling practices as "losers" in their professional life.

Additionally, they value the fact that their organization supports their freedom of action: *"The managers don't push me to use social media at all; I do what I want. For example, if I offer to*

write social media posts or anything, I think they would tell me, 'Do it'” (P6). While salespeople can decide whether to engage in social selling practices, organizations may provide encouragement to take the initiative on social media:

We talk about social media at every meeting; [the manager] he always says a little word like, “Don’t forget to post on LinkedIn; it’s important to get noticed,” but he’s not going to tell us, “Every day you have to put something.” That’s not it at all. (P18)

By promoting social selling practices, salespeople diffuse them to the organization and peers.

4.2. Reconciling traditional and social selling practices

In the current sales context, salespeople have to reconcile traditional and social selling practices in order to gain the advantages of each. Thus, we analyzed how salespeople engage in reconciliation work to legitimate both types of practices through supplementing, mythologizing, and embedding efforts. These efforts are not specifically directed toward the organizational or business network level.

The first way in which salespeople engage in reconciliation work is called supplementation. Salespeople are accustomed to traditional sales practices—mainly face-to-face visits, phone calls, and emails—in their daily routines. Rather than substituting new practices for old ones, they supplement traditional sales practices with social selling practices in order to create synergy and overcome the limits of the former. For example, during the prospecting phase, salespeople may find it difficult to directly reach prospects because most of them have assistants or secretaries. Social media eliminates these mediators:

Social media today allows you to have direct access. I am in contact with directors who are super busy, but when I send them a message, they answer me right away. If you ask their assistants, they will tell you to wait two months. (P28)

Social selling practices can also facilitate traditional selling practices. For example, they can be the first step toward a future face-to-face appointment:

[There was] a customer with whom that I was actually trying to get in touch, and I saw him on LinkedIn. I sent him a connection request [on LinkedIn], and he said yes. We exchanged phone numbers, and a month after, we had a face-to-face meeting. (P10)

Some salespeople highlight the richness of face-to-face customer visits and the need for social sellers to still engage in traditional sales practices: “*What I get outside of social*

media, that is to say, via visits or a business meeting or a telephone interview, this is much better information” (P30).

The second effort in which salespeople engage is mythologization. In other words, they create myths about traditional sales practices, how important they are for salespeople, how they define the function of sales, and the need for sales practices to evolve in order to remain competitive. The central practice of the sales context is having face-to-face appointments with customers and prospects. To maintain this practice, salespeople emphasize the need for human contact and direct interaction so that salespeople can better understand their customers:

We like to sell, we love human contact; otherwise, we would do robot salespeople all behind PCs or phones. We send offers, and after a few times, when the sale is near, we send the super salesperson to get the thing done. (P12)

This myth is directed toward the past and relies on what has always been done: “*There’s no substitute for human contact*” (P16). Consequently, social selling is viewed as only a supplement to face-to-face selling practices.

The last effort related to reconciliation is embedding. In their discourse, salespeople embed and routinize both traditional and social selling practices by actively repeating those practices each day. In our study, all the interviewed salespeople described their routine as including traditional sales practices, mainly phone calls and face-to-face interactions:

In my day, I generally do phone prospecting in the morning. In the afternoon, I do physical prospecting when I have appointments. Well, I make appointments, and in addition to that, I do physical prospecting. (P17)

Social selling practices are also regularly included within salespeople’s routines to optimize breaks:

I made myself a habit: when I have moments either at the end of the day or at the midday break, when I have a moment, I go on LinkedIn to look at the news. I will check the wall and what is published by contacts. (P8)

Both traditional and social selling practices are routinized, albeit at different times of day. While traditional sales practices occur officially during work time, social selling practices are part of new routines undertaken during salespeople’s time off.

Finally, we identified seven salespeople engaging exclusively in reconciliation work. Those salespeople acknowledged some beneficial social selling practices, but they highlighted the lack of organizational support such practices received. Instead of integrating social media within their whole sales process, salespeople engaging in reconciliation work use social media

in discrete sales activities, such as avoiding the assistant barrier, gathering information on customers, and getting in touch with prospects. The data highlight that reconciliation work manifests in the presence of absent or limited organizational guidelines regarding the use of social media: *“We never had a social media policy within the organization; I am the only one who develops that part. It is an aging company with old people”* (P3). The salespeople reflected on the requirement to justify social selling practices to their manager or their organization:

My manager knows that I use LinkedIn to prospect. If he sees me on LinkedIn, there is no problem [...]. If I tell him I made an appointment through LinkedIn, he tells me, “great, you use social media,” but he will not tell me to go on LinkedIn. (P14)

By effectively reconciling traditional and social selling practices in their daily routines, salespeople legitimate the combination of both practices within the sales field.

4.3. Disrupting social selling practices

Because changes in sales practices can affect salespeople’s role, they may perceive social selling as a threat and thus disrupt its implementation. In this section, we reveal how salespeople may reframe the use of social media as illegitimate and warn about the dangers of social selling practices for both salespeople and organizations.

Salespeople aiming to disrupt social selling practices generally direct their efforts toward delegitimization. To devalue social selling, they highlight its weaknesses, such as the low return on investment and the uncertainty of new practices. Furthermore, salespeople emphasize the lack of trustworthy information on social media:

Everything is calculated [on social media]. The photos are calculated, and the experiences are calculated, the sentences are calculated. Everything is well done to make things look pretty. It’s a bit of the negative side of social media; you beautify, and the reality is often a little different from what we want to show. That’s why we have to be careful. (P21)

Salespeople engaging in disruption also argue that social selling practices may reduce both sales and behavioral performance. Indeed, some salespeople experience a lack of success when starting to engage in social selling: *“Social selling for me, that doesn’t really mean much because there is no sale. The selling side, I don’t see it”* (P5).

Others do not see the value of social selling practices: *“Existing on social networks is no proof of anything. Actually, it proves nothing. Just because you post anything on social networks doesn’t mean you’re efficient, you’re good, you’re appreciated, or you’re doing a*

good job” (P31). As they are satisfied with their current practices, they can envision their job without social selling practices.

Salespeople may also warn their organization and peers. First, they may emphasize the organizational risks of adopting social selling practices. Business networks are some of the most valuable assets for both salespeople and organizations. However, social selling introduces two main issues regarding these assets: power is given to the salesperson, who will be able to take their business network if they quit, and when professional ties are made public, they can be exploited by competitors:

It [social media] remains a professional network, your network. Even if you choose to make it visible, which is the case by default but which is still quite dangerous, basically, a competitor can be very malicious and probably steal, in a certain way, the list of people in your network, just like you could find salespeople who left the company with the database. (P25)

Second, salespeople emphasize the risk that salespeople will be even more controlled by their organization. They describe social selling as an intrusive “big brother” that can track salespeople and deprive them of business freedom:

[The organization] will measure its employees’ use [of LinkedIn] [...] that’s why I will try to publish things to make myself a little more visible, knowing that we have a social selling index that depends on what we do and what we do not do. (P29)

We identified two salespeople who exclusively engaged in disruption work. They expressed doubts regarding some social selling practices and dissatisfaction with their organization’s support regarding social media. They perceived some social selling practices as useless, or even a burden. For example, P31 questioned the customer information saturation resulting from intensive social media communication. If they struggle with publishing content and communicating on social media, salespeople may feel forced by their organization to engage in those practices:

Within the sales job, it can be valuable to use social media, but for communication practices, we are more forced to do it [...]. (P29)

Indeed, some organizations require the use of social selling: “*In a company like mine, assuming it pays for access to those social media tools, we cannot consider not using them. I am required to use those tools to improve my performance*” (P29). This may lead to reluctance and a desire to become engaged in disruption work. This attitude is exacerbated when company support regarding social media is considered deficient and unhelpful. For

example, P31 highlights that marketing is “supposed to” create content but explained he had to do it by himself as they could not be reactive regarding an event he was organizing.

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

4.4. The interplay and coexistence of the three types of practice work

Salespeople can engage in several types of work simultaneously. This section explores the difference between social media use and practice work regarding social selling, and it highlights the co-existence of conflicting efforts.

Within our sample, some salespeople did not engage in social selling practices. However, those salespeople do not disrupt social selling practices. While they are aware of the practices, when there is no organizational support and no positive perception of social media, they choose the “safe” path of traditional selling practices (P4, P9, P15, P19, P27). They see social selling practices as something they might adopt in the future, if they have to or want to, but rather than delegitimizing these practices, they simply neglect them:

I am convinced that you can do lots of stuff with LinkedIn to find customers, retain them, it could be great [...] but now it's true that I'm doing nothing. (P19)

While social selling practices are diverse, including prospecting, information collection, networking, and content publishing via social media, some argue social media is not appropriate for every sales practice. For example, P21 engages in both reconciliation and disruption work, valuing social media for outbound marketing (prospecting) but rejecting inbound marketing, which he believes should not be performed by salespeople. Likewise, P7's efforts are oriented toward both promotion and disruption work. His promotion work appears to be driven by the objective to impress his network through personal branding. However, this respondent has a negative perception of online advertising on his personal social media profile. Therefore, he engages in disruption work. These findings emphasize that the diversity of social selling practices need to be considered by sales organizations. The practices are dynamic in nature, as evidenced by the example of P5, who shifted from promotion work to disruption work after being disappointed by a low return on investment.

As an attempt to analyze respondent profiles according to their opinion of social selling, we divided the sample into three categories: (1) Salespeople with a positive perspective as demonstrated through their engagement in promotion and/or reconciliation work (N=17); (2) those with relatively mixed feelings (N=10); and (3) those who shared a negative opinion of social selling either through disappointment in its effects or engaging in disrupting it (N=5).

Considering that age may be an explanatory variable of these attitudes towards social selling, we compared these categories according to two groups of sales experience (1-10 years and more than 10 years). In line with previous studies (Bill et al., 2020; Guenzi & Nijssen, 2020), opinions about social selling in this sample do not appear related to years of experience.

Post hoc analysis

A post hoc test revealed that promotion work depends on a positive attitude toward social selling that is reinforced by organizational support. To proceed with this analysis, we used a convenience sample of salespeople ($N = 75$) to explore the conditions under which they could be engaged in promotion work. To measure the extent to which they promote social selling in their organization, we adapted a scale from the influence behavior questionnaire (Yukl et al., 2008). This “promotion scale” encompasses four items based on rational persuasion and apprising (measured on five-point Likert scales): (1) “I explain clearly to my managers and colleagues why the use of social selling would be necessary to attain or exceed our objectives,” (2) “I explain why the use of social selling would be cost effective,” (3) “I explain to my company/colleagues that there is a need to change the way we use social selling to be successful,” and (4) “I talk to my colleagues about the use of social selling.” Cronbach’s alpha for this construct was .82, which is considered acceptable. As explanatory variables, we used perceived usefulness, measured with a ten-item scale (Homburg et al., 2010, $\alpha = .90$), and perceived training and support, measured with a six-item scale (Homburg et al., 2010, $\alpha = .86$). These variables have been extensively used in prior research and are considered drivers of social media use (Bill et al., 2020). To test for a two-way interaction, we used the bootstrap method and pick-a-point approach described by Hayes and Matthes (2009), which is suitable for small samples. Perceived usefulness explains promotion work ($\beta = .27$; $p < .01$), and it is positively moderated by perceived training and support ($\beta = .02$; $p < .05$), which has no significant direct effect on the dependent variable. When we substituted perceived usefulness for social selling use, measured with the three-item scale presented by Agnihotri et al. (2016) ($\alpha = .82$), the direct and interaction effects become non-significant. These results are consistent with our previous findings, which show that promotion work results from perceived usefulness. Transforming a favorable attitude towards social selling into promotion of social selling requires organizational support.

5. Discussion

In this research, we suggested that the development of social selling practices depends on salespeople's promotion efforts, not solely managerial initiatives or injunctions. Using the concept of practice work and building upon institutional theory, we argued that social selling practices emerge in a bottom-up way depending on the work initiated by salespeople. Conversely, disruptive efforts by salespeople could be detrimental to the development of social selling within sales teams. Our findings highlight the key role of salespeople's agency within the sales and social selling ecosystem. As both the selling process and the diffusion of a new technology engage a broad set of human actors (Hartmann et al., 2018; Papastathopoulou et al., 2007), various selling actors may be involved in the institutionalization of social selling practices, including organizations, sales managers, peers, and members of business networks (e.g., competitors, other employees). However, the boundary-spanning position of salespeople offers them the opportunity to take on a central role in the diffusion process. Hereafter, we discuss the impact of each type of work we identified in our findings.

Reconciliation work is especially useful for legitimating social selling practices among salespeople who are resistant to social selling, as it lowers tension within the field. One source of tension is the uncertainty about the effectiveness of social selling. While some argue that it is a "fundamental selling concept" (Ancillai et al., 2019 p. 11), as it increases outcome performance (Ogilvie et al., 2018), recent studies have shown that social selling may have negative effects, such as decreasing customer loyalty, in some situations (Bill et al., 2020). A second source of tension is the contradictory work in which salespeople engage. Our findings reveal that salespeople using social media can thwart the development of social selling practices when others are actively working toward the diffusion of social selling through promotion and reconciliation work. This type of tension exists between individuals and within the same individual between different time periods or practices. Reconciliation work allows salespeople to respond to those tensions by offering a balanced view of social selling and traditional selling practices. It involves selectively retaining social selling practices that bring value to sales activities (e.g., information communication, prospecting), and it presents social selling as a supplement to, rather than a replacement for, traditional selling practices (e.g., face-to-face interactions with customers). The integration of past practices with new opportunities reaffirms the role of salespeople in companies (see Moncrief, 2017).

Current literature has linked social media use to salespeople's extra-role behavior toward customers (e.g., sportsmanship, Agnihotri et al., 2017). Likewise, we argue that promotion work is a form of extra-role behavior within the organization. Promoters engage in

discretionary behaviors to improve organizational effectiveness, including the co-creation of social selling practices with their organization. In doing so, they help to establish organizational rules and obtain the status of expert benefiting both themselves and the organization. Furthermore, they voluntarily help their peers, informing them about best practices for social selling.

Salespeople engaging in disruption work doubt the efficiency of social media, arguing that it leads to superficial social selling practices. As one respondent acknowledges, the focus may be on raising the social selling index to meet the organization's requests without paying attention to its importance for the organization's performance or customers' success. They portray the shifting of the entire sales process to social media as difficult to achieve. Those findings align with current social selling literature, which points out the importance of social media within particular sales practices, such as information collection and communication (Agnihotri et al., 2016; Itani et al., 2017, 2020) or salespeople's knowledge (Ogilvie et al., 2018), rather than focusing on the general use of social media. In sum, salespeople engaging in disruption work focus on the intensity of usage, but not on the depth of usage, which would favor a reflexive approach. Consequently, measuring social media use as a variable does not account for the development of social selling within an organization.

5.1. Theoretical contributions

This study makes several contributions to the research on B2B personal selling and deepens the concept of practice work within the marketing field. First, our findings extend current knowledge on the diffusion of social selling within the sales field. Rather than focusing on the use or adoption of social media, our study offers a complementary view, which sees salespeople as agents causing the diffusion of social selling. Our findings highlight the interplay between salespeople and the sales ecosystem. We suggest that research on social selling should examine how salespeople in organizations actively interact with their networks (i.e., peers, managers, and business partners). In line with Agnihotri (2020), who highlights the need to deepen the understanding of salespeople's networks and the connection of these networks to social capital, we propose building upon the institutional work framework to gain an in-depth understanding of salespeople's agency.

Second, we contribute to the sales management literature by analyzing the potential negative backlash of imposing social selling on salespeople. In this respect, we argue for salespeople's empowerment. Moreover, this study enriches research on salespeople's social competence (see Ohiomah et al., 2020) by adding the competency of social selling diffusion

to more traditional competencies, such as adaptive selling or interpersonal skills. Researchers should verify whether this competency is related to sales performance.

Third, by applying neo-institutional theory, we provide insight into how marketing actors interact with institutions (Ben Slimane et al., 2019). Focusing on practice work, we studied the institutionalization of practices and the roles of actors (Zietsma et al., 2010). In doing so, we build on the management literature, which has become interested in the institutionalization of practices (Daudigeos, 2013), and the information system literature, which has been interested in the institutionalization of new technologies (Hillebrand et al., 2011). Identifying the practices and actors that have important roles within a field allows one to understand the foundations of the field and better identify changes. As far as we know, our study is the first to use institutional theory to understand how salespeople absorb social selling practices.

6.2. Managerial contributions

To increase social selling practices among its salespeople, a B2B organization may be tempted to rely on a behavior-based control strategy characterized by high levels of supervision and activity monitoring (Anderson & Oliver, 1987). This article encourages the avoidance of such coercive pressure and advocates supporting a positive image of social selling instead. To achieve this, we suggest strategic change (Iankova et al., 2019) such as adapting organizational culture to the social media context to clarify which behaviors and attitudes are appropriate (Barnes et al., 2006; Guesalaga, 2016). We also encourage organizations to facilitate social selling practices with incentives and other initiatives including gamification or salesforce empowerment. This approach could encourage deep, rather than intense, usage. From a managerial perspective, our findings have some noteworthy implications.

Sales organizations should be aware of the practice work in order to align salespeople's work and the organization's objectives and values. Neglecting salespeople's work can have a negative impact on organizations, as salespeople might engage in efforts that go against the organization's objectives. For example, a salesperson who delegitimizes social selling practices in front of peers, customers, or managers might deteriorate the organization's brand image if it tries to implement a long-term digital strategy.

Our study identifies promotion work as a key practice for social selling development. Such work can be considered an extra-role behavior to promote the success of the organization. As such behaviors are positively linked with salespeople's performance (Vilela

et al., 2008), those who engage in such behaviors need to be identified and highlighted, and their efforts need to be encouraged.

A classical dilemma faced by organizations is to leave salespeople to publish their own content or to control this content. The latter decision generally results in sharing exclusively company content, which impedes the assimilation of social selling techniques and limits its development within the sales force. Our research suggests that companies who intend to develop social selling practices should support personal initiatives from their salespeople. We acknowledge that organizational support strengthens promotion work. For example, support may involve empowering salespeople by providing resources and training or by offering them a key user role (e.g., being in charge of social selling within the organization). Salespeople need autonomy and guidelines to use social media (Guenzi & Nijssen, 2020), as our findings reveal that coercive pressure from organizations may favor disruption work.

Furthermore, we suggest that the perceived usefulness of a specific social selling practice should replace social media use as a key variable of attention. Perceived usefulness has been shown to increase overall social media use at the salesperson level (Bill et al., 2020; Guenzi & Nijssen, 2020). To convey the pertinence of social media throughout the sales process, common learning methods, such as trial-and-error learning, vicarious learning, and experimental learning should be used (Bingham & Davis, 2012).

Our research suggests that efforts may change over time (e.g., from promotion work to disruption work in cases of frustration with short-term results). As salespeople mostly expect short-term benefits, managers should promote the long-term benefits of social selling (e.g., valuable long-term business relationships; Ancillai et al., 2019). Social media use includes practices that are personal to sales practitioners and are not always considered by organizations. Consequently, simply asking salespeople to use social media will not help to achieve the full potential of social selling. Rather than focusing on the intensity of usage, managers would be well advised to pay attention to the depth of usage, that is to say, the diversity of social selling practices undertaken by sales representatives. For example, examining the frequency of LinkedIn InMail's to prospects might not be sufficient when opportunities for inbound selling are neglected. We argue that depth of usage might be more important than intensity of usage for long-term performance.

6.3. Limitations and further research

In this study, we examined the variety of attitudes toward social selling as something that can complement or contradict traditional methods. Our findings reveal important insights, but given the exploratory nature of this research, there are some limitations. Our aim was to interview purposefully chosen salespeople with different profiles and from different industries. For generalization purposes, it could be appropriate to randomly select respondents and conduct more interviews with salespeople who work at companies with intensive social selling practices. Additionally, as previously mentioned, institutionalization of new practices is a complex process that involves diverse actors. Thus, examination of managers' and customers' efforts could offer contrasting views. Additionally, our study needs to be replicated with other methodologies. Observing what salespeople actually do with shadowing techniques (Hohenschwert & Geiger, 2015) or netnography (Quinton & Wilson, 2016) would bring materiality to the description of practices. Investigating salespeople's work within one organization through a case study research (Yin, 1994) would allow us to understand the different perceptions salespeople might have regarding their support system. In addition, we could identify their willingness to use such practices and observe potential thwarting that cannot be captured through interviews (e.g., active work to thwart social selling).

A natural next step would be to operationalize measures for our three key concepts by developing scales. Reliable and valid scales would enable testing of the relations of these concepts to sales performance measures, customer satisfaction measures, or the use of certain selling methods, such as value-based selling. Variables that explain promotion work in contrast to disruption work need to be investigated, as do variables describing the consequences of such work, such as individual sales performance. The optimal way for firms to support their sales force has always been an important topic, and the context of social selling is no exception.

References

- Acquier, A., Carbone, V., & Moatti, V. (2018). "Teaching the sushi chef": Hybridization work and CSR integration in a Japanese multinational company. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 148, 625-645.
- Agnihotri, R. (2020). Social media, customer engagement, and sales organizations: A research agenda. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 90, 291-299.
- Agnihotri, R., Dingus, R., Hu, M. Y., & Krush, M. T. (2016). Social media: Influencing customer satisfaction in B2B sales. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 53, 172-180.
- Agnihotri, R., Gabler, C. B., Itani, O. S., Jaramillo, F., & Krush, M. T. (2017). Salesperson

- ambidexterity and customer satisfaction: examining the role of customer demandingness, adaptive selling, and role conflict. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 37(1), 27-41.
- Agnihotri, R., Kothandaraman, P., Kashyap, R., & Singh, R. (2012). Bringing « social » into sales: The impact of salespeople's social media use on service behaviors and value creation. *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*, 32(3), 333-348.
- Agnihotri, R., Trainor, K. J., Itani, O. S., & Rodriguez, M. (2017). Examining the role of sales-based CRM technology and social media use on post-sale service behaviors in India. *Journal of Business Research*, 81, 144-154.
- Ancillai, C., Terho, H., Cardinali, S., & Pascucci, F. (2019). Advancing social media driven sales research: Establishing conceptual foundations for B-to-B social selling. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 82, 293-308.
- Anderson, E., & Oliver, R. L. (1987). Perspectives on behavior-based versus outcome-based salesforce control systems. *Journal of Marketing*, 51, 76-88.
- Andzulis, J. « Mick », Panagopoulos, N. G., & Rapp, A. (2012). A review of social media and implications for the sales process. *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*, 32(3), 305-316.
- Barnes, J. W., Jackson, D. W., Hutt, M. D., & Kumar, A. (2006). The role of culture strength in shaping sales force outcomes. *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*, 26(3), 255-270.
- Ben Slimane, K., Chaney, D., Humphreys, A., & Leca, B. (2019). Bringing institutional theory to marketing: Taking stock and future research directions. *Journal of Business Research*, 105, 389-394.
- Bill, F., Feurer, S., & Klarmann, M. (2020). Salesperson social media use in business-to-business relationships: An empirical test of an integrative framework linking antecedents and consequences. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 1-19.
- Bingham, C. B., & Davis, J. P. (2012). Learning sequences: Their existence, effect, and evolution. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 55(3), 611-641.
- Chaney, D., Carrillat, F. A., & Zouari, A. (2019). Uncovering institutional orientation as a new strategic orientation in industrial marketing. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 80, 242-250.
- Daudigeos, T. (2013). In their profession's service: How staff professionals exert influence in their organization. *Journal of Management Studies*, 50(5), 722-749.
- DiMaggio, P. J. (1988). Interest and agency in institutional theory. In L. G. Zucker (Éd.),

- Institutional patterns and organizations: culture and environment* (p. 3-22). Cambridge, MA: Ballinger.
- Dubinsky, A. J. (1980). A factor analytic study of the personal selling process. *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*, 1(1), 26.
- Eisenhardt, K. M., & Graebner, M. E. (2007). Theory building from cases: Opportunities and challenges. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50(1), 25-32.
- Gioia, D. A., Corley, K. G., & Hamilton, A. L. (2013). Seeking qualitative rigor in inductive research : Notes on the gioia methodology. *Organizational Research Methods*, 16(1), 15-31.
- Guenzi, P., & Nijssen, E. J. (2020). Studying the antecedents and outcome of social media use by salespeople using a MOA framework. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 90, 346-359.
- Guesalaga, R. (2016). The use of social media in sales: Individual and organizational antecedents, and the role of customer engagement in social media. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 54, 71-79.
- Hampel, C. E., Lawrence, T. B., & Tracey, P. (2017). Institutional work : Taking stock and making it matter. In R. Greenwood, C. Oliver, & T. B. Lawrence (Éd.), *The Sage Handbook of Organizational Institutionalism* (p. 558-590). London:Sage Publications.
- Hansen, J. M., & Levin, M. A. (2016). The effect of apathetic motivation on employees' intentions to use social media for businesses. *Journal of Business Research*, 69(12), 6058-6066.
- Hartmann, N. N., Wieland, H., & Vargo, S. L. (2018). Converging on a new theoretical foundation for selling. *Journal of Marketing*, 82(2), 1-18.
- Hayes, A. F., & Matthes, J. (2009). Computational procedures for probing interactions in OLS and logistic regression: SPSS and SAS implementations. *Behavior Research Methods*, 41(3), 924-936.
- Hillebrand, B., Nijholt, J. J., & Nijssen, E. J. (2011). Exploring CRM effectiveness: An institutional theory perspective. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 39(4), 592-608.
- Hohenschwert, L., & Geiger, S. (2015). Interpersonal influence strategies in complex B2B sales and the socio-cognitive construction of relationship value. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 49, 139-150.
- Homburg, C., Wieseke, J., & Kuehnl, C. (2010). Social influence on salespeople's adoption of sales technology : a multilevel analysis. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*,

38, 159-168.

- Iankova, S., Davies, I., Archer-Brown, C., Marder, B., & Yau, A. (2019). A comparison of social media marketing between B2B, B2C and mixed business models. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 81, 169-179.
- Inyang, A. E. (2019). How social media use by salespeople translates into sales performance: The mediating role of sales strategy. *Marketing Management Journal*, 29(1), 1-15.
- Itani, O. S., Agnihotri, R., & Dingus, R. (2017). Social media use in B2B sales and its impact on competitive intelligence collection and adaptive selling: Examining the role of learning orientation as an enabler. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 66, 64-79.
- Itani, O. S., Krush, M. T., Agnihotri, R., & Trainor, K. J. (2020). Social media and customer relationship management technologies: Influencing buyer-seller information exchanges. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 90, 264-275.
- Keinänen, H., & Kuivalainen, O. (2015). Antecedents of social media B2B use in industrial marketing context: customers' view. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 30(6), 711-722.
- Lacoste, S. (2016). Perspectives on social media and its use by key account managers. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 54, 33-43.
- Lawrence, T. B., & Suddaby, R. (2006). Institutions and institutional work. In S. R. Clegg, C. Hardy, T. B. Lawrence, & W. R. Nord (Éd.), *Handbook of organization studies* (p. 215-254). London: Sage Publications.
- Lawrence, T. B., Suddaby, R., & Leca, B. (2009). *Institutional work: Actors and agency in institutional studies of organizations* (1st ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lemon, K. N., & Verhoef, P. C. (2016). Understanding customer experience throughout the customer journey. *Journal of Marketing*, 80(6), 69-96.
- Maguire, S., Hardy, C., & Lawrence, T. B. (2004). Institutional entrepreneurship in emerging fields : HIV / AIDS treatment advocacy in Canada. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 47(5), 657-679.
- Marshall, G. W., Moncrief, W. C., & Lassk, F. G. (1999). The current state of sales force activities. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 28(1), 87-98.
- Marshall, G. W., Moncrief, W. C., Rudd, J. M., & Lee, N. (2012). Revolution in sales : The impact of social media and related technology on the selling environment. *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*, 32(3), 349-363.
- Michel, S., Saucède, F., Pardo, C., & Fenneteau, H. (2019). Business interaction and institutional work: When intermediaries make efforts to change their position. *Industrial*

- Marketing Management*, 80, 266-279.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2019). *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Moncrief, W. C. (2017). Are sales as we know it dying . . . or merely transforming ? *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 37(4), 271-279.
- Moncrief, W. C., & Marshall, G. W. (2005). The evolution of the seven steps of selling. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 34, 13-22.
- Moncrief, W. C., Marshall, G. W., & Rudd, J. M. (2015). Social media and related technology: Drivers of change in managing the contemporary sales force. *Business Horizons*, 58(1), 45-55.
- Morrison, M., Haley, E., Sheehan, K., & Taylor, R. (2012). *Using Qualitative Research in Advertising* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Nicolini, D. (2012). *Practice Theory, Work and Organization. An Introduction* (1st ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Ogilvie, J., Agnihotri, R., Rapp, A., & Trainor, K. (2018). Social media technology use and salesperson performance : A two study examination of the role of salesperson behaviors , characteristics , and training. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 75, 55-65.
- Ohiomah, A., Benyoucef, M., & Andreev, P. (2020). A multidimensional perspective of business-to-business sales success: A meta-analytic review. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 90, 435-452.
- Palmer, M., Simmons, G., Robinson, P. K., & Fearne, A. (2015). Institutional maintenance work and power preservation in business exchanges: Insights from industrial supplier workshops. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 48, 214-225.
- Papastathopoulou, P., Avlonitis, G. J., & Panagopoulos, N. G. (2007). Intraorganizational information and communication technology diffusion: Implications for industrial sellers and buyers. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 36(3), 322-336.
- Pedersen, J., Ellegaard, C., & Kragh, H. (2020). The praxis of studying interorganizational practices in B2B marketing and purchasing – A critical literature review. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 85, 7-20.
- Quinton, S., & Wilson, D. (2016). Tensions and ties in social media networks : Towards a model of understanding business relationship development and business performance enhancement through the use of LinkedIn. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 54, 15-24.
- Rapp, A., Beitelspacher, L. S., Grewal, D., & Hughes, D. E. (2013). Understanding social media effects across seller, retailer, and consumer interactions. *Journal of the Academy*

- of Marketing Science*, 41(5), 547-566.
- Rodriguez, M., Ajjan, H., & Peterson, R. M. (2016). Social media in large sales forces : an empirical study of the impact of sales process capability and relationship performance. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 24(3), 365-379.
- Vilela, B. B., González, J. A. V., & Ferrín, P. F. (2008). Person-organization fit, OCB and performance appraisal: Evidence from matched supervisor-salesperson data set in a Spanish context. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 37(8), 1005-1019.
- Wang, Y., Hsiao, S., Yang, Z., & Hajli, N. (2016). The impact of sellers ' social influence on the co-creation of innovation with customers and brand awareness in online communities. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 54, 56-70.
- Yang, Z., Su, C., & Fam, K. (2012). Dealing with institutional distances in international marketing channels: Governance strategies that engender legitimacy and efficiency. *Journal of Marketing*, 76, 41-55.
- Yin, R. K. (1994). Case study research: Design and methods. *Thousand Oaks: Sage*, 24(3), 221-222.
- Yngfalk, C. (2019). Subverting sustainability: market maintenance work and the reproduction of corporate irresponsibility. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 35(17-18), 1563-1583.
- Yukl, G., Seifert, C. F., & Chavez, C. (2008). Validation of the extended influence behavior questionnaire. *Leadership Quarterly*, 19(5), 609-621.
- Zietsma, C., Lawrence, T. B., & Lawrence, T. B. (2010). Institutional work in the transformation of an organizational field : The interplay of boundary work and practice work. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 55(2), 189-221.

Tables and Figures

Figure 1: Drivers of social selling practices.

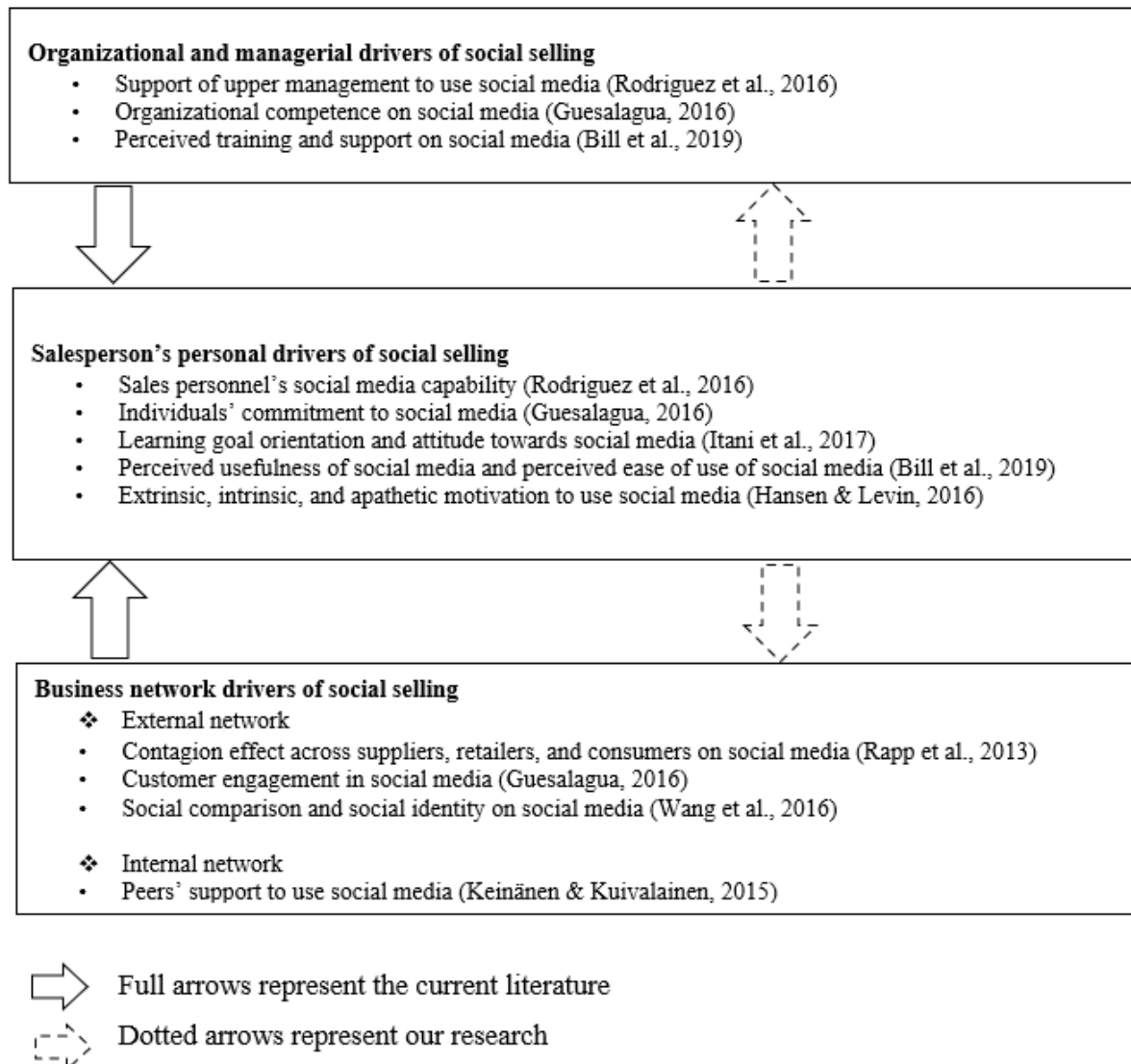


Table 1. Description of the interviewees taking part in the research.

Participants	Gender	Sales Experience (in years)	Job title	Industry	Company size	Interview	Engage in Social selling practices
P1	M	4	Business developer	Public administration	1001 to 5000	FtoF	Yes
P2	M	2	Inside sales representative	Software	+10 000	Tel	Yes
P3	M	13	Technical sales representative	Industrial machinery	201 to 500	FtoF	Yes
P4	M	15	Business developer	Construction	+10 000	FtoF	No
P5	M	12	Sales manager	Electrical components industry	5001 to 10000	FtoF	Yes
P6	F	2	Account Executive	IT	11 to 50	Tel	Yes
P7	M	7	Technical sales representative	Packaging	51 to 200	FtoF	Yes
P8	F	14	Sales manager	IT	51 to 200	FtoF	Yes
P9	F	28	Sales representative	Electrical components	1001 to 5000	Tel	No
P10	M	18	Director Direct Sales	Industrial engineering	+10 000	FtoF	Yes
P11	M	2	Key Account Manager	Construction	501 to 1000	FtoF	Yes
P12	M	16	Sales director	IT	+10 000	FtoF	Yes
P13	M	18	President and Sales director	consumer services	51 to 200	FtoF	Yes
P14	M	2	Sales representative	Marketing and Advertising	201 to 500	FtoF	Yes
P15	M	38	Business developer	Marketing and Advertising	11 to 50	FtoF	No
P16	F	4	Sales representative	Wholesale	1001 to 5000	FtoF	Yes
P17	M	19	Business developer	Collective facilities	+10 000	FtoF	Yes
P18	M	7	Area sales manager	Industrial machinery	501 to 1000	FtoF	Yes
P19	F	3	Sales consultant	Recruitment	201 to 500	FtoF	No
P20	M	13	Sales manager	IT	+10 000	FtoF	Yes
P21	M	1	Business developer	IT	501 to 1000	FtoF	Yes
P22	M	13	Business developer	Wholesale	11 to 50	Tel	Yes
P23	M	9	Sales Executive	IT	501 to 1000	Tel	Yes
P24	M	2	Key Account Manager	Electrical components	+10 000	Tel	No
P25	M	10	Key Account Manager	Industrial engineering	11 to 50	FtoF	Yes
P26	M	30	Sales director	Collective facilities	5001 to 10000	FtoF	Yes
P27	F	3	Sales representative	Consumer services	+10 000	FtoF	No
P28	M	22	Area sales director	Transport	1001 to 5000	Tel	Yes
P29	M	30	Strategic Account Manager	Software	5001 to 10000	FtoF	Yes
P30	M	19	Chemical Analysis and Sales	Industrial engineering	1001 to 5000	FtoF	Yes
P31	M	17	Sales Engineer	Industrial engineering	1001 to 5000	FtoF	Yes
P32	M	20	Sales director	Education	51 to 200	FtoF	Yes

* Participants in bold have managerial functions. To determine participants' sales experience, we asked the participants and checked their LinkedIn account. Interviews were conducted face to face (FtoF) or via telephone (Tel).

Table 2. Summary of the three types of practice work identified in our study

	Promotion work	Reconciliation work	Disruption work
Characteristic of salespeople's practice work	Active efforts*	Passive efforts**	Passive efforts**
Efforts	- Advocating - Building relational networks	- Supplementing - Mythologizing - Embedding and routinizing	- Reframing as illegitimate - Warning
Perception toward social media	Social selling practices perceived as essential for the salesperson	Social selling practices perceived as useful to support some sales practices	Some social selling practices perceived as a burden
Perception toward organizational training and support	Satisfaction with organizational support (encouragement or empowerment)	No organizational support for salespeople	Dissatisfaction with organizational support (coercive or unhelpful)
Salespeople engaging exclusively in one type of practice work (15 out of 32 salespeople)	P1, P6, P8, P11, P18, P22	P3, P13, P14, P17, P24, P28, P32	P29, P31

*Active efforts are activities done by salespeople to change their organizations', managers', or business networks' attitudes toward new practices (e.g., social selling practices).

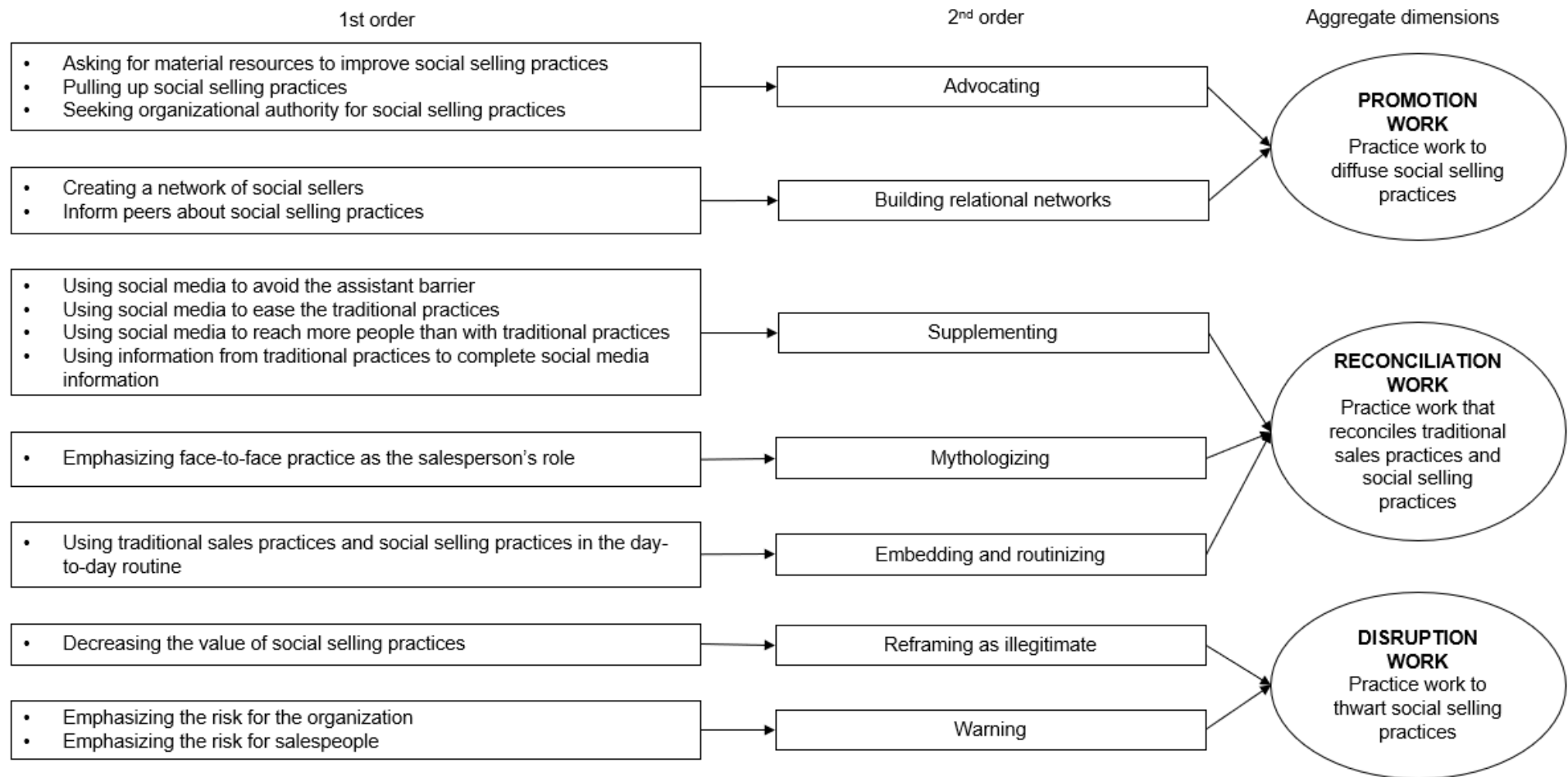
**Passive efforts refer to initiatives done by salespeople to work on the legitimacy of new practices (e.g., social selling practices) to temporize the development of such practices.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Institutional work and practice work that has been reported within the literature.

Institutional work (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2009)	Practice work (Acquier et al., 2018; Daudigeos, 2013; Zietsma et al., 2010)
<i>CREATION WORK</i>	
Advocacy	Changing the meaning and objectives of
Defining	existing tools/projects/ practices
Vesting	Constructing possible solutions
Constructing identities	Creating powerful narratives
Changing normative associations	
Constructing normative networks	
Mimicry	
Theorizing	
Educating	
<i>PROMOTION WORK</i>	
	Theorizing practices
	Removing barriers to adoption
	Promoting legitimacy of new practices
	Adaptive framing of issues
	Instrumental use of organizational
	processes, programmes, and systems
	using their organizations' market power to
	promote practices externally
<i>MAINTENANCE WORK</i>	
Enabling work	Strong regulatory framework and discipline
Policing	Connecting to corporate history and values
Deterring	Anchoring within organizational routines
Valourizing and Demonizing	and artifacts
Mythologizing	Introducing new issues, routines and
Embedding and routinizing	competencies
	Educational structures
	Maintaining solidarity
<i>DISRUPTION WORK</i>	
Disconnecting sanctions	Reframing practices as illegitimate
Disassociating moral foundations	Reframing insiders as illegitimate
Undermining assumptions and beliefs	
<i>DEFENDING WORK</i>	
	Delegitimizing challengers and their framing
	Defending the practice

Appendix 2: Data structure



Appendix 3: Illustrative data from interviews

Aggregate dimension	Type of work	Illustrative data
PROMOTION WORK	Advocacy	<p>Asking for material resources “I always used [social media] at the beginning without a professional account, but because I asked the company they gave me a professional account ... after I asked, I introduced the tool and now it’s something [the company] spread to the other salespeople because we realize that it’s very important” (P11)</p> <p>“[Premium social media] is paid by the company, but not everyone can access it; you have to have a real reason to have it. I was the first one who asked for access, but getting access should be automatic” (P12)</p> <p>Pulling up information “I transfer the information when I do my reporting. I have to provide the origin of the visit in the CRM, and I put [social media]. I note it so that the information goes up, and this why I can say I did 15 or 16 [visits]: because I see the numbers. It makes the company’s numbers go up, and sometimes I’m asked, ‘What do you mean by social media?’, and I say ‘They contacted me on social media’” (P1)</p> <p>Seeking organizational authority on social selling practices “I’m now key user of LinkedIn, and as I very actively use it for my work, I constantly propose that this tool be used. ‘Key user’ is a term that we use in our company; as soon as you are a key user of a tool, you are allowed to share [best practices] with others. When you share, you do it properly in meetings.” (P16)</p> <p>“Every sales meeting with my manager and the six other salespeople, we discuss and we say, ‘What did you manage to find via social media? How did you do it?’ And the salesperson will explain to his colleagues the different uses of social media” (P7)</p> <p>“I myself proposed to train new employees on LinkedIn because it is important. It should be supported by continuous training” (P8)</p>
	Building relational networks	<p>Creating a group of social sellers “I’m always the first one to say, ‘Go ahead, we will make a video; film me or I film you.’ I share it on social media if I like it. After that, my colleagues also share it, and it circulates throughout the country” (P18)</p> <p>“In the company, we are a small group at the global level that uses digital tools, and we have a small network of extremely loyal customers who are friends. And it’s a matter of the goodwill of a small group of salespeople, of R&D people, of customers, of trainers... So, we have a small network, and on each of our sides, we have our small areas of interest that we share with the others” (P30)</p>

		<p>Inform peers about social selling practices</p> <p>“I showed my colleagues how social media worked during common lunches and at sales meetings, and they signed up for it. They all signed up, they all registered suddenly on social media, they all got updated, but you see, it is something that people do not know about” (P22)</p> <p>“I told my colleagues that I’m using social media, and they said, ‘Ah, yeah, I did not think about it.’ Anyway, my colleagues are doing the same thing as me now” (P16)</p> <p>“I encourage people to be on social media because it seems damaging not to be on it. It is not essential, but it’s a shame not to be on it” (P25)</p>
RECONCILIATION WORK	Supplementing	<p>Using social media to avoid the assistant barrier</p> <p>“When I know that it will be difficult to get the person on the phone, I prefer LinkedIn” (P12)</p> <p>“Social media today allows you to have direct access. I am in contact with directors who are super busy, but when I send them a message, they answer me right away. If you ask their assistants, they will tell you to wait two months” (P28)</p> <p>Using social media to make traditional practices easier</p> <p>“[There was] a customer with whom that I was actually trying to get in touch, and I saw him on LinkedIn. I sent him a connection request [on LinkedIn], and he said yes. We exchanged phone numbers, and a month after, we had a face-to-face meeting” (P10)</p> <p>Using social media to reach more people than with traditional practices</p> <p>“[Social media allows to] share information to the greatest number [of people] with a single publication ... if we want to reach 10 people, we must send the same mail to 10 people. With a publication you have 800 views” (P14)</p> <p>Using information from traditional practices to complete social media information</p> <p>“Face-to-face, we are at the client’s place; we will see his working environment, and it is easier to extract information from him. That is what we’re looking for. There is this confidence, also, which is greater when we see the person... a person will inspire confidence or not” (P5)</p> <p>“What I get outside of social media, that is to say, via visits or a business meeting or a telephone interview, this is much better information” (P30)</p> <p>“By prospecting, I have more feedback during an appointment and during direct face-to-face contact than on social media” (P17)</p>
	Mythologizing	<p>Emphasizing face-to-face practices as part of the salesperson’s role</p> <p>“We like to sell, we love human contact; otherwise, we would do robot salespeople all behind PCs or phones. We send offers, and after a few times when the sale is near, we send the super salesperson to get the thing done.” (P12)</p> <p>“If I don't have this face-to-face contact, I would have a hard time perceiving what the client is feeling. All will be automated; everything will be</p>

		<p>computerized. And maybe I'm old, maybe I still live in the past, but I think that for salespeople, you have to keep the face-to-face contact with the customer. I think it's really important" (P24)</p> <p>"The role [of the salesperson] is to go make clients or prospect appointments ... I would always like to keep face-to-face contact with the customer, but I'm sure it will disappear. I will do everything so that it does not disappear" (P16)</p> <p>"The relationship [with the customer] is not created by social media; the core of the relationship is face to face, as what happens there is the best solution. Today, you have to go on the ground; without traveling, [the relationship] is not possible, despite all these new technologies ... you have to go see the client. Without going to see him, selling is not possible in the field; it's too technical" (P3)</p> <p>"In a discussion, we can have an idea, we can have a dialogue of opinions. When you are face to face, you can defend them, or you can say, 'No, I may be wrong.' Things are different when it is computerized; there may be misinterpretations, and there may be unspoken different interpretations. That's why I tell you that the human element is the most important thing. We must keep this human element because if we continue toward digitalization, I don't see the point [of sales]" (P17)</p> <p>"[Salespeople] are not trained [to social media] ... they are field professionals. They are there to make technical visits and bring solutions" (P26)</p> <p>"A salesperson always wants immediacy; the salesperson wants to conclude the order form. He is always more comfortable on the finalization part than on the part that actually involves preparation." (P13)</p> <p>Identifying social selling practices as a technological necessity</p> <p>"You do not have a choice [but to use social media]. Companies do not have a choice; otherwise, what would you do, send phonebooks and look for phone numbers?" (P21)</p> <p>"The use of social media is self-evident; we have entered the digital age, and it is undeniable" (P32)</p> <p>"[Using social media] is mandatory for 10-year business survival, but above all, for salespeople's survival because the salesperson's job is at risk. ... it's an obligation to use social media because that's where [the business] is happening right now" (P30)</p>
	Embedding and routinizing	<p>Using traditional sales practices in day-to-day routines</p> <p>"In my day, I generally do phone prospecting in the morning. In the afternoon, I do physical prospecting when I have appointments. Well, I make appointments and in addition to that I do physical prospecting" (P17)</p> <p>"I always prospect a little because it seems logical to me. When I go on the road to customer appointments, I sometimes have free moments, and I do not see myself going to the hotel at 6 p.m.; I try to see a little bit in the meantime. We know all the clients, and we may not be working with some, so we stop and we will say hello" (P3)</p>

		<p>“I spend hours and hours on the phone each month, dialing a number, pressing the green button, and having people on the phone. That’s how I always use the phone. I think it will always be the only way to move forward” (P23)</p> <p>“Salespeople make a selection, they prospect every day, they do administrative work to call customers, make appointments, to reach the right people and at the same time, when they start to reach customers, they respond and make technical visits. They visit the customer’s sites so that they know the sites well enough to be able to do studies, and then they do the studies. Those are some of their tasks every day” (P26)</p> <p>“I take my own appointments, I do phoning sessions, mailing, I travel myself for appointments [...] and I also do face-to-face prospecting, so for example, I target a zone, and I want to go there, so for the whole morning, I knock on all the doors” (P19)</p> <p>Adding social selling practices into day-to-day routines</p> <p>“Social media happens more at lunch breaks, and if I see an interesting subject, I will view it like reading a newspaper article” (P5)</p> <p>“I made myself a habit: when I have moments either at the end of the day or at the midday break, when I have a moment, I go on LinkedIn to look at the news. I will check the wall and what is published by contacts. I often see that there are people who react to such and such, and when these people are in my sphere, when these people are prospects, I contact them or I will try to ask them to get in touch” (P8)</p> <p>“LinkedIn, I do it at lunchtime or at the hotel” (P22)</p>
DISRUPTION WORK	Reframing as illegitimate	<p>Decreasing the value of social selling practices</p> <p>“If I spend an hour in an appointment with a client, there is something that is built, and there is something concrete and quantifiable. I had three appointments; three times, there was a certain amount [of money], and I know that I have a certain income ... If we do the same thing with LinkedIn, if I spend three times one hour online, how much income is it?” (P5)</p> <p>“Everything is calculated [on social media]. The photos are calculated, and the experiences are calculated, the sentences are calculated. Everything is well done to make things look pretty. It’s a bit of the negative side of social media; you beautify, and the reality is often a little different from what we want to show. That’s why we have to be careful” (P21)</p> <p>“The information on social media is superficial because social media in general mainly reflects only what the person wants to show; it does not necessarily reflect the reality” (P30)</p> <p>“Existing on social networks is no proof of anything. Actually, it proves nothing. Just because you post anything on social networks doesn’t mean you’re efficient, you’re good, you’re appreciated, or you’re doing a good job” (P31)</p>
	Warning	<p>Emphasizing the risk for the organization</p> <p>“It [social media] remains a professional network, your network. Even if you choose to make it visible, which is the case by default but which is still quite</p>

	<p>dangerous, basically, a competitor can be very malicious and probably steal, in a certain way, the list of people in your network, just like you could find salespeople who left the company with the database. It's a bit of the same principle" (P25)</p> <p>"The salesperson will take your client portfolio to a new company. That's why companies are wary and a lot of them ask their employees to delete LinkedIn outright because it becomes too dangerous" (P7)</p> <p>Emphasizing the risk for salespeople</p> <p>"[I use social media] to show my company that I use its tools because it paid me, and it made them available. It [The company] expects something; one way or another, it will measure its employees' use, and if I have to use it [social media] I might as well do it intelligently. That's why I will try to publish things to make myself a little more visible, knowing that we have a social selling index that depends on what we do and what we do not do" (P29)</p>
--	---

Appendix 4: Interview script/standard questions

We started our interview by thanking the respondent for their participation. We briefly presented our general interest in their professional use of social media, assured them of the anonymity of their responses, and indicated how the data would be used. Finally, we requested their agreement to record the interview.

1) Personal information and new technologies used by the salesperson

Can you introduce yourself (your professional background and current job position)?

How have new technologies changed your job? What new challenges do companies face related to these new technologies?

Can you tell me about your current private use of social media?

2) Professional use of social media

Do you use social networks in your professional life?

- If yes,

How do you use social media?

When and why did you start to use social media?

What motivates you to use social media? What is your goal in using social media?

What strategies are you deploying to achieve this goal?

When you interact on social networks, what type of content do you highlight?

What results have you obtained by using social media?

How could you achieve better results?

- If not,

What prevents you from using social media?

Under what conditions would you consider using social media?

3) Organizational culture and support regarding social media

Is your company active on social media?

What is your company's attitude toward social media?

Are your peers or other employees within your company active on social media?

Does your business have an impact on your use of social media?

- How does your company support you in the usage of social media?
- What limitations are imposed by your company regarding social media usage?

Is social media a central theme in your company's meetings?

Do you talk about social media with your peers/within your organization?