

## **B2B social media use as a double-edged sword on trust:**

### **A social presence theory perspective**

#### **Abstract**

**Purpose:** Drawing on the social presence theory, this study aims to explore how supplier-customer social media interactions influence supplier observers' trust in the customers and what mechanisms contribute to variation in trust experience.

**Design/methodology/approach:** 36 semi-structured interviews were conducted with Chinese suppliers using WeChat for business-to-business interactions. Data was analyzed in three steps: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

**Findings:** Findings reveal that varied trust is based not only on the categories of social presence of interaction—whether social presence is embedded in informative interactions—but also on the perceived selectivity in social presence. Observer suppliers who experience selectivity during social and affective interactions create a perception of hidden information and an unhealthy relationship atmosphere, and report a sense of emotional vulnerability, thus eroding cognitive and affective trust.

**Originality:** The findings contribute new understandings to social presence theory by exploring the social presence of interactions in a supplier-supplier-customer triad and offer valuable insights into business-to-business social media literature by adopting a suppliers' viewpoint to unpack the mechanisms of how social presence of interaction positively and negatively influences suppliers' trust and behavioral responses.

**Keywords:** Business-to-business social media, Social presence of interaction, Trust, Supplier-supplier-customer triad, Double-edged Sword

**Paper type:** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, social media (SM) has been increasingly adopted in Business-to-Business (B2B) firms (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2021). An international survey reported that 95% B2B companies use SM, such as LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook, to achieve content marketing, while 65% utilize SM to strengthen B2B relationships (Stahl, 2019). The extant literature has reported a series of B2B informative (e.g., sharing articles and videos), social (e.g., greeting), and affective interactions (e.g., using a hug emoji) on SM (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Karampela *et al.*, 2020). Scholars have conceptualized these interactivities between suppliers and customers as social presence of interaction, defined as the ability to project an organization socially and affectively in the SM interactions (Koponen and Rytsy, 2020; Lu *et al.*, 2016), and report such social presence of interactions increase company reliability and strengthen B2B relationship, thus positively influencing B2B trust development and maintenance (Giamanco and Gregoire, 2012; Jussila *et al.*, 2014; Su *et al.*, 2021).

Despite the positive impacts of SM, there has been a surge of interest in understanding the adverse impacts of SM use on B2B trust relationships. Current studies often focus on the negative effects of SM use on customers' trust in the suppliers (Itani *et al.*, 2020; Zhang and Li, 2019). For example, Banerjee *et al.* (2020) suggest that SM platform signals, such as top supplier ranking or SM feedback, harm customers' perception of competency, confidence, and reliability in suppliers. Nevertheless, the literature has been assailed for being flawed in the following three ways. First, while the significance of suppliers' trust in customers (e.g., increasing transactional efficiency and decreasing opportunities; Chai *et al.*, 2020; Li *et al.*, 2015; Rindfleisch and Moorman, 2003) has been heightened, the present studies largely omit investigating how SM influences suppliers' trust in customers. Indeed, anecdotal evidence has

reported that SM may reduce suppliers' trust in customers when competing firms create and disseminate misinformation, rumors, and fake news (Siamagka *et al.*, 2015). In this regard, Padgett *et al.* (2020) call for research on exploring the influence of SM use on suppliers' trust.

Second, current B2B SM literature pertains directly to the supplier–customer dyad, failing to capture the essence of the supply chain network: customer–supplier–supplier triad and ignoring the fact of the competitive relationship between suppliers (Choi and Wu, 2009). In the past, it was difficult for a supplier (referred to as the observer) to study the interactions between competing suppliers and customers, because such traditional interactions happened offline and privately (Peruchi *et al.*, 2022). Nevertheless, due to the transparency and connectivity of SM, observers make sense of supplier–customer SM interactions to interpret hidden information and social cues, such as the strength of social ties and relationship quality (Chae, 2015), and judge whether the organization is inferior to others (Sutcliffe *et al.*, 2018). As such, observers' trust in the customers declines when they experience uncertainty, inferiority, or unfairness during the social presence of interactions. However, there has been little discussion on how the social presence of supplier-customer interactions influences observers' trust.

Third, although present studies have acknowledged SM use can lead to both positive and negative impacts on B2B trust (Jussila *et al.*, 2014; Sands *et al.*, 2020; Silic and Back, 2016), there is a considerable lack of clarity about the mechanisms contributing to the varied suppliers' trust experience. This question is both theoretically and practically important, as this can help us to further understand the double-edged sword effect of B2B SM use (Coundouris *et al.*, 2021; Wang *et al.*, 2016) and aligns with Tiwary *et al.* (2021) call on exploring how businesses can use SM effectively and wisely to develop trustful relationships.

Consequently, taking these together, this study aims to answer the following research question: *how supplier-customer SM interactions influence supplier observers' trust in the customers, and what mechanisms contribute to variation in observers' trust experience?* To address the research questions, our study conducted 36 semi-structured interviews with Chinese suppliers to collect data. The contributions of this paper are threefold. First, this study extends the knowledge of the social presence of interaction (Lu *et al.*, 2016) in customer–supplier–supplier triad settings, and further provides a research model that demonstrates the process and the mechanisms through which the social presence of interaction has a positive or negative impact on observers' trust in customers. Second, we contribute to the understanding of the impacts of SM B2B interactions (Koponen and Rytsy, 2020) by reporting two mechanisms (i.e., categories of the social presence of interaction and selectivity in the social presence of interactions) through which observers develop positive or negative feelings of trust and behavioral outcomes. We highlight that informative interactions gain cognitive and moral legitimacy, whereas customers' selectivity in affective and social interactions leads to social comparison and a sense of opportunism risks, thus eroding observers' trust. Finally, departing from the previous studies highlighting customers' distrust in suppliers during SM use (Banerjee *et al.*, 2020), we extend the understanding of B2B SM dark-side literature (Chowdhury *et al.*, 2016; Luo *et al.*, 2021) by taking observer suppliers' lens to explore and unpack factors that erode their cognitive and affective trust, ultimately leading to negative behavioral outcomes—passive resistance and unethical behaviors.

The structure of this study is as follows. Section 2 presents a literature review on B2B SM and the social presence of interaction. This is followed by a Research methodology that articulates the sampling and data analysis method. Section 4 demonstrates the Findings, and

section 5 discusses the findings and theoretical contributions. Finally, managerial implications, limitations, and future study are also provided.

## **2. Literature review**

### *2.1 Business-to-business social media use*

SM describes “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). Organizations have extensively used SM and SNS in particular, to achieve B2B branding, communication, and relationship development (Kamboj *et al.*, 2018; Salo, 2017). Firms can perform a wide array of activities on SM, such as posting, forwarding, communication, and gaming (Koponen and Rytsy, 2020; Singh *et al.*, 2023). Existing literature has widely documented the benefits of SM on B2B relationships, such as demonstrating company credibility and benevolence, thus facilitating B2B trust development (Magno and Cassia, 2019; Rose *et al.*, 2021).

However, recently, there has been a surge of interest in the adverse effects of B2B SM use (Baccarella *et al.*, 2018; Chowdhury *et al.*, 2016) (Table I). These studies reflect four themes in the B2B SM dark-side literature. First, the present studies have investigated the negative impacts of B2B SM use on employees’ psychological well-being and behaviors. For instance, scholars have highlighted the salespeople’s technostress in SM use (Aral *et al.*, 2013; Brooks, 2015). Tang *et al.* (2019) further revealed that SM connectivity evokes employees’ psychological frustration and emotional exhaustion, therefore leading to a higher level of turnover intention. The second theme reports the doubt about SM usefulness. SM effectiveness and information insecurity are the main concerns for scholars. SM effectiveness describes a contradiction between high investment in SM activities and lower or uncertain marketing and financial performances (Iankova *et al.*, 2019; Jussila *et al.*, 2014). Information insecurity

depicts the security hole embedded in the SM, resulting in information security issues, such as losing the ability to control phishing risks (Silic and Back, 2016). Third, past studies have investigated the tensions arising from SM use. These papers shed light on the negative influence of SM use on dyadic supplier–customer relationships. One such study is that by Luo *et al.* (2021), who considered a tension between suppliers’ willingness to identify the key persons on the customer side vs customers’ unwillingness to be identified. The final theme elaborates on the negative influence of SM transparency, anonymity, and interactivity on supplier–customer trust. The present studies have taken customers’ positioning and investigated how SM erodes customers’ trust in suppliers. For example, customers’ trust in suppliers is reduced because of negative SM feedback and top supplier ranking lists. (Banerjee *et al.*, 2020). Comparatively, fewer scholars have paid attention to the suppliers’ eroded trust in customers. Among the few, some preliminary attempts indicate that the SM platform works to generate and disseminate misinformation and rumors in the public, damaging both suppliers’ and customers’ reputations and trustworthiness (Siamagka *et al.*, 2015). Overall, the research topic of how SM interactions negatively influence suppliers’ trust in customers has received little scrutiny.

---

Insert Table I about here

---

## 2.2 *Social presence and trust*

Social presence was originally defined as “the salience of the other in a mediated communication” (Short *et al.*, 1976, p. 65). Lu *et al.* (2016) reconceptualized social presence and described this concept as a multidimensional construct, including social presence of the communication medium, the perception of others, and the social presence of interaction between supplier and customer. The perspective of social presence is adopted in this study as

it helps address the research questions. Specifically, social presence theory articulates the interactions of actors in computer-mediated communication to convey emotional sense and cognitive cues, ultimately influencing individuals' perceptions and behaviors. Indeed, the lens of social presence has also been applied in previous social media B2B studies (Karampela *et al.*, 2020; Koponen and Rytsy, 2020).

Trust can be defined as “a willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence” (Moorman *et al.*, 1993, p. 82), which has been considered as one of the most important variables influencing partnership (Das and Teng, 2001; Buckley and De Mattos, 2021). Trust can be divided into cognition-based and affection-based (McAllister, 1995). Cognition-based trust is grounded in careful and rational thinking that determines “what we take to be good reasons constituting evidence of trustworthiness” (Lewis and Wiegert, 1985, p. 970), while affection-based trust describes the emotional bonding between two parties (McAllister, 1995).

For our paper, we focus on the social presence of interaction, which is defined as actors' ability to communicate, respond, and interact to convey their sociability, friendliness, and affectivity (Koponen and Rytsy, 2020; Lu *et al.*, 2016). Prior research has suggested three categories of how social presence is embedded in SM interactions. These are interactive social presence, affective social presence, and relationship maintenance social presence (Koponen and Rytsy, 2020; Lien and Cao, 2014). Current studies on social presence of interaction and B2B trust have documented how informative, social, and affective social presence of interactions improve B2B trust. Interactive social presence is embedded in SM platforms through informative interactions, such as posting products and certifications (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2021). Interactive social presence provides customer evaluation and feedback and showcases revenues and achievements, which demonstrates credibility and reliability, thus enabling customers to generate higher confidence in the products, services, and company (Agnihotri *et*

*al.*, 2012; Chae, 2015; Karampela *et al.*, 2020; Rose *et al.*, 2021). Affective social presence engages the communications that express positive or negative emotions, such as giving likes and commenting with positive feedback (Juntunen *et al.*, 2020). Scholars suggest these affective interactions increase relationship intimacy and closeness, enhancing affection-based B2B trust (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, relationship maintenance social presence is manifested in communication and chatting to facilitate the preservation of relationships (Jussila *et al.*, 2014). A typical example of relationship maintenance social presence is greeting customers, such as saying “Good morning. Have a productive day!” B2B SM literature has reported that relationship maintenance activities and interactions facilitate the development of personal connections, contributing to a trusting relationship (Lacka and Chong, 2016; Zhang and Li, 2019).

However, there are three limitations in current research on the social presence of interaction and B2B trust. First, although the research on how the social presence of interaction influences customers’ trust in suppliers has been widely understood, it is not yet known how such social presence affects suppliers’ trust in the customers. Suppliers’ trust in the customer is vital because it reduces transactional costs, increases supply chain efficiency, and enhances relationship satisfaction in customer–supplier relationships (Cartwright *et al.*, 2021; Magno and Cassia, 2019). Suppliers’ beliefs that customers will not hide key messages from suppliers increase customers’ reliability and dependability, which are seen as the primary dimensions of cognition-based trust in the customers (Schaubroeck *et al.*, 2011). Hence, in this study, we take the supplier’s stance and define trust as a supplier’s cognitive and affective trust in a customer.

Second, the conventional view discusses the social presence of interaction in a dyadic supplier–customer relationship. However, these studies ignore the essence of supply networks’ customer–supplier–supplier relationship triad setting (Choi and Wu, 2009; Wu and Choi, 2005), and the competitive nature of a supplier–supplier relationship (Wu *et al.*, 2010). In an industrial



supply market, customers need to interact with many suppliers in the same product sector (MacDuffie and Helper, 2006). We highlight that due to the transparency and connectivity of SM, an observer in a broader supply network extracts and interprets the complexity of interactions. Such interactions convey mounting social cues (Swani *et al.*, 2017), including the degree of relationship intimacy and levels of sociality, and mirror real-life transactional relationships (Sutcliffe *et al.*, 2018). Observers use the cues as a basis to explain what has happened in reality (Mumi *et al.*, 2019). For example, when witnessing others being treated preferentially, observers may experience risks and uncertainties, such as fear of opportunistic information leakages (i.e., customers leaking confidential information to competing suppliers) (Mcknight *et al.*, 2017; Ried *et al.*, 2021), which reduces observers' trust in customers. Nevertheless, despite a primary concern of eroded observers' trust, the research on how the social presence of interaction lowers observers' trust in a triad setting still remains void. This lack of research hinders the understanding of the central role and influence of the social presence of interaction in the eye of an observer.

Third, we suggest that an important but largely overlooked research question is exploring the mechanisms contributing to the varied influences of social presence of interactions on observers' trust and behaviors. This lack of clarity regarding where the social presence of interaction does and does not add value has hampered the usability of current important ideas. Indeed, such understanding is crucial in the B2B SM context because it provides important insights regarding how to wisely and effectively use SM to build and maintain trust, given the fact that suppliers and customers increasingly engage in SM use (Baccarella *et al.*, 2018; Sands *et al.*, 2020).

Consequently, taking these together, we aim to explore the influences of social presence of interactions on observer suppliers' trust and behaviors, and the mechanisms contributing to

the variation of trust. In doing so, we extend the understating of social presence theory and enrich the knowledge of the B2B SM literature.

### **3. Research methodology**

#### *3.1 Sampling*

Given the exploratory and interpretative nature of this research, we adopted semi-structured interview as the method to collect the data. This approach creates “research as engagement” (Morgan, 1983), which allows us to be close to the data while exploring the customer–supplier–supplier interactions in WeChat and their potential dark side.

The key informant is the observer, one of two suppliers in a customer–supplier–supplier triad. We adopted a combination of purposeful sampling and snowball sampling to collect the data (Goodman, 1961; Tongco, 2007). We approached suppliers through searching on 1688.com (i.e., China’s leading online B2B marketplace). We sent emails and messages, or called the firm, briefly introducing our team and project. We also asked firms about their willingness to participate and share their experiences and insights. We approached 62 firms through an online search, and 27 firms replied with interest. After this, the authors further communicated with the firms to ensure the firms were satisfied with the selection criteria. The criteria of company selection included the following: (1) participants are suppliers; (2) adding customers and competing suppliers on WeChat; (3) competing suppliers, customers, and our informants using WeChat for B2B interactions; (4) the participants have at least 1 year experience of B2B WeChat use in the current firm.

WeChat is the largest and the most popular SNS adopted by Chinese suppliers and

customers (Gao and Zhang, 2013). The platform was launched in 2011, with over 1.26 billion monthly active users at the end of 2021 (Statista, 2022). B2B WeChat interactions are mainly embedded in the WeChat Official Account, Group Chat (i.e., gathering people and discussion), and WeChat Moment (i.e., the friends' circle that presents friends' updates). Exemplary interactivity between suppliers and customers included giving likes, commenting with emoji/words/stickers, posting and forwarding text/image/video, WeChat group red envelope activity, WeChat group solitaire function, etc.

A total of 16 suppliers were qualified and willing to participate in the project. We further adopted a snowballing strategy in interviews to develop relationships with potential suppliers, and we finally gained access to 20 additional relevant informants. The respondents came from different industries, such as stationery, sewing, glass, laundry detergent, fabric, and corrugated packaging, and the duration of B2B WeChat use in the current firm ranges from 1.5 to 6 years. Table II demonstrates the source of data. We also sent the consent form to the participants and obtained their approval. We emphasized ethical principles, such as confidentiality and anonymity.

---

Insert Table II about here

---

### *3.2 Interviews*

We conducted 36 interviews with suppliers. Interviews ranged from 30 to 90 minutes in duration. Our targeted respondents were marketing and sales managers because they were responsible for B2B WeChat activities. One-on-one, semi-structured interviews enabled us to

reveal interviewees' subjective experiences and valuable insights. We designed an initial interview guideline based on the literature review and practical observations that aligned with the research question. The interview protocol comprised three general themes, namely (1) identifying the interactions between customers and competing suppliers on WeChat; (2) focusing on how the supplier–customer interactions on WeChat influence observers' cognition-based and affection-based trust; (3) when observing the supplier–customer interactions, exploring how the observers behave. As the research progressed, we revised the interview protocol to address the emerging themes and concepts. We stopped the data collection when the data achieved theoretical saturation, which describes that “no additional data are being found whereby the [researcher] can develop properties of the category” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 61).

### *3.3 Data analysis*

We used NVivo 12 software to store, retrieve, and manage the data. Two authors read the transcription, extracted and drafted codes and themes separately, discussed their observations, asked questions, and challenged each other. This study employed Gibbs (2002) and Gioia *et al.*'s (2013) data analysis approach, which involved three steps: namely, open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. This data analysis method allowed us to systematically apply conceptual and analytical discipline in the data interoperations to generate qualitative rigor.

For the first-order analysis, we “tried to adhere faithfully to informant terms” (Gioia *et al.*, 2013, p. 20). We grouped and demonstrated the collected terms and quotes among team members. In this phase, we did not aim to distill categories. Through close examination of the

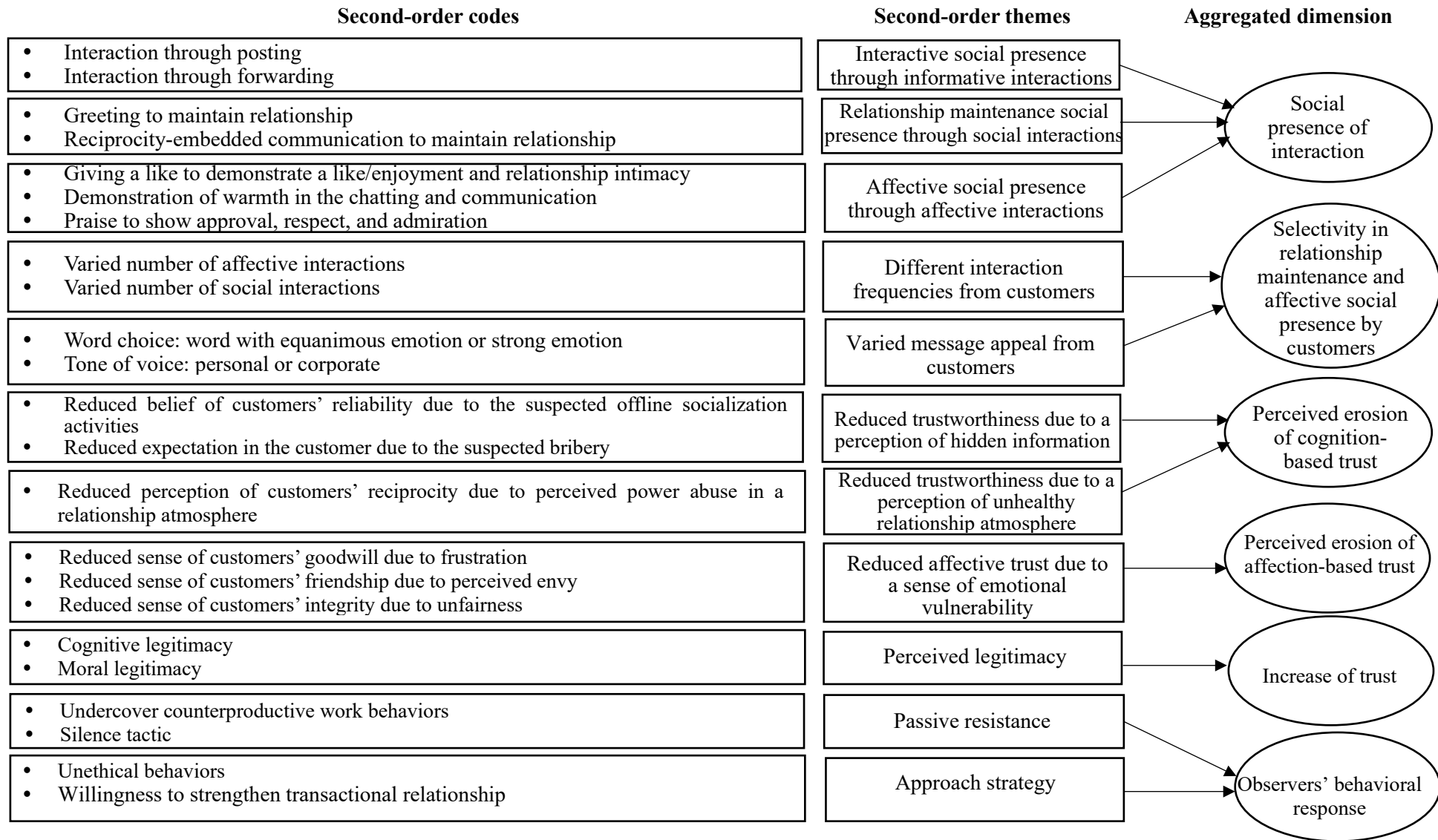
data, a combination of codes emerged to identify (1) B2B interactions/functions used on WeChat, e.g., commenting and giving a like; (2) social presence embedded in the interactions, e.g., affective social presence embedded in affective interactions such as posting a hug emoji; (3) impacts of social presence of interaction on observers' perceptions and emotions; and (4) observers' behavioral responses.

Then, we tried to summarize the similarities and differences among these categories to focus on the emerging concepts and their tentative relationships. For the second-order analysis, our work involved the theoretical realm. We combined our emerging ideas with the current literature to ensure that our suggested concepts had an adequate theoretical foundation. The task was an iterative, back-and-forth process between raw data, categories, and theoretical knowledge. The team held inter-code discussion meetings to address the conceptual differences and ensure the reliability of the data.

Finally, given first-order and second-order analysis efforts, we attempted to develop aggregated dimensions to discover emerging concepts (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991). The concepts were conceptualized to develop a "story line" to describe the observer's perception, emotions, and behaviors (Corbin and Strauss, 2014). For example, the story line of the aggregated dimension of the social presence of interaction is as follows: in the WeChat context, there were three categories of social presence of interaction between suppliers and customers, namely, "Interactive social presence through informative interactions," "Relationship maintenance social presence through social interactions," and "Affective social presence through affective interactions." These three categories of social presence of interaction served as second-order themes, and were grounded in the first-order codes, such as "posting of videos,

text, images” and “greeting.” Finally, this process helped us develop a theoretical framework (Corbin and Strauss, 2014). We used the data structure presented in Figure 1 to represent this three-step data analysis process.

Figure 1: Data structure



## 4. Findings

### 4.1 Unpacking how social presence manifests in WeChat interactions

The nature of the social networking of WeChat facilitates suppliers and customers to add each other on WeChat, follow corporate subscription accounts, post and forward information, and chat and communicate. Our informants reveal three categories of how social presence manifests in WeChat interactions: interactive social presence, relationship maintenance, and affective social presence.

#### 4.1.1 Interactive social presence through informative interactions

Interactive social presence (Lu *et al.*, 2016) emerges when suppliers and customers post and forward information on WeChat. Suppliers and customers are strongly motivated to use Group Chat, Moment, and Official Accounts to post technical/product/industry/corporate information: *“Almost all the suppliers and customers had posted corporate messages. Exemplary posts consist of notices for the meeting, posts of annual summary, information sharing of product innovation, industry news, awards, certifications, and local community activities.”* (Emily).

Posting and sharing news and information helps organizations achieve business purposes, such as creating sales opportunities and building a socially responsible or professional brand image.

Our data also show that suppliers and customers like to use WeChat to support simple Q&A activities, such as asking for registration for a conference and asking for more information about a new product or service. The following selective quotes are used as evidence to illustrate:

*“Moment or WeChat group is useful for supporting simple Q&A activities. We can use the functionality of @ to ask the purchasing company for detailed information on training sessions, e.g., dates and location.”* (Kenny). As such, WeChat allows organizations to address simple



queries in an efficient and real-time manner. Data also suggest that suppliers and customers use WeChat to forward information to stay connected to each other: *“We have a ‘forward culture’.* *Both suppliers and customers forward messages in the Moment or Group Chat, such as new product development and corporate philanthropy activities”* (Leo).

#### *4.1.2 Relationship maintenance social presence through social interactions*

Relationship maintenance social presence happens when suppliers and customers involve themselves in greeting and reciprocity-based communication to maintain the relationship (Koponen and Rytsy, 2020). First, suppliers and customers greet each other in different scenarios, such as birthdays, baby-on-the-way news, festivals, rewards, products, or technology advancements: *“Customers post greeting cards in the Moment when it comes to festivals, such as Spring Festival. Suppliers are likely to comment: “Happy New Year, may all your business be booming and making plenty of money!” Customers may reply with their wishes correspondingly.”* (Michael). Greeting behaviors make their presence known and show attention to each other, increasing B2B intimacy.

Data also suggest that users adopt emoji or sticker-based greeting gestures in communication to demonstrate friendliness: *“Emoji like handshaking, namaste, and hug, and stickers like bowing and high-five are widely used in our chatting and communication to show friendliness and cordiality.”* (Jack) Our data further capture that suppliers and customers use the functionality of red envelopes, featuring virtual money with words written on the envelope, for special occasions in the chat group: *“Some suppliers gift customers money on special celebrations, such as birthdays, to express their wishes. Some Chinese characters, like ‘To*

*Mr./Ms. XXX, Happy Birthday!’ are typed on the envelope.”* (Jeff). Therefore, WeChat’s red envelope allows buyers and suppliers to express goodwill and good fortune for the purpose of increasing the closeness of their relationship.

Second, relationship maintenance is grounded in communication that promotes reciprocity. Reciprocity refers to a sense of mutuality (Liu *et al.*, 2018), which in our case is reflected in the expression of future cooperation intentions and a willingness to help each other. Our informants reveal future-intension-based reciprocity, which involves making promises of mutually beneficial exchanges: *“When a customer posts information of awards, some suppliers comment like this, “It is such a great honor that I can work with the company. For the bright future of our mutual cooperation.” A customer may reply with an emoji and a message like, “Let’s work together in 2021,” an emoji of handshaking.”* (Tony). Reciprocity is also identified in the conversations that convey a sense of willingness to help each other: *“A customer posted an article on WeChat’s official account to introduce how the digital platform and technologies help suppliers increase efficiency and reduce costs after the pandemic. I remembered this article presented a dialogue with one supplier, to demonstrate the resilience capacity empowered by the system. The supplier forwarded this article with a comment like this: “Very appreciated to DUDUO’s [customer, pseudonym] digital platform. Let us join hands to tide over the crisis.”* (William).

#### *4.1.3 Affective social presence through affective interactions*

Affective social presence arises when suppliers and customers experience positive emotions in communication (Murphy and Sashi, 2018), which enhances emotional bonding, relational

warmth, and closeness. Our findings suggest three types of affective interactions in the social presence. These are giving likes, demonstrating warmth, and expressing praise. First, the like serving as an “Awesome button” is given to the posts and forwards to signal a like or enjoyment: *“Suppliers and customers give “a like” to the posts of social activities, such as donations and local community activities. The like allows them to quickly signal their positive sentiment for corporate philanthropy”* (Chris). Some quotes reveal that a like from the customer to suppliers’ posts, in particular to personal private messages, serves as a signal of relationship intimacy: *“We find when the key persons of customers give “a like” to the suppliers’ posts of personal activities, like dining and traveling, it represents a sense of emotional connection, friendship, and warmth.”* (Jeff). As such, the function of like is widely used to demonstrate engagement, express enjoyment, and serve as positive reinforcement for B2B relationships.

Second, suppliers and customers indicate warmth in their communication. Warmth is defined as an actor’s intention (Aaker *et al.*, 2010), which is found to be salient when the conversations elicit a sense of caring: *“One year ago, Ele [supplier, pseudonym] posted a picture of gifts from a customer in the Moment, with a message of Ele’s appreciation for the gifts. This reflects the bonding and care between customer and supplier”* (Mark). The quotes further report that a sense of warmth is produced when organizations are supportive: *“Some suppliers complained about increased prices of materials and labor shortages in the Moment or Group Chat during the pandemic. The key people of customers expressed that we needed to have a solidarity spirit of helping each other in difficult times, and some even replied with emojis, such as a hug or stickers of standing side by side. It creates a comforting atmosphere.”* (Gary). Therefore, virtual conversations and the use of emoji and stickers can create a sense of

caring and supporting, increasing B2B relationship closeness.

Finally, consistent with prior literature on B2B affective interactions on SM (Deng *et al.*, 2021), suppliers and customers praise each other to express approval, respect, and admiration. Organizations are commended for good corporate knowledge, insights, and capabilities: *“Suppliers are praised for good corporate performance, such as high-quality product or resilient production capability after the pandemic”* (Evelyn). Organizations also receive praise for outstanding personal skills and competencies: *“A sales manager of one supplier posted a drawing in the Moment, and received praise from a procurement manager, “Good drawing! Looking forward to demonstrating your skills at annual meeting!” The sales manager replied, “Thank you! How dare I be so indiscreet as to demonstrate my crude skills in front of everyone!”* (Bob). In this regard, conversations and comments carrying respect and admiration positively influence B2B relationship intimacy and affection.

#### *4.2 Selectivity in relationship maintenance and affective social presence by customers*

The quotes demonstrate selectivity in relationship maintenance and affective social presence, which reflects differentiated levels of sociality and affection in interactivity. The selectivity is manifested in the customers’ different interaction frequencies and varied message appeal. First, our informants report that customers select suppliers with a greater number of social and affective interactions on WeChat: *“Some suppliers get more greetings in the Group Chat and Moments and more customers’ likes for the posts. Some suppliers are even preferred to receive red envelopes in the Group Chat for scenarios like birthdays and weddings.”* (Joseph). Hence, the transparency of SM allows observer suppliers to observe a higher number of interactive

frequencies with some suppliers, whereas other suppliers do not receive such treatments.

Second, data demonstrate that some suppliers receive superior message appeal from the customer, defined as an overall style of communication (Swani *et al.*, 2017). Varied message appeal is reflected in the dimension of word choice and tone of voice. Customers use differentiated word choices that contain strong or equanimous emotions: *“We find some comments are long, affective, and have emoji, while others are short and involve limited affection. For instance, ‘The new product looks very promising! Looking forward to our further cooperation! Emoji of handshaking’ vs ‘Good’”* (Sophia). In addition, a tone of voice describes a communication style choice between corporate and personal voice (Barcelos *et al.*, 2018). Some suppliers are favored in a closer and more personal way, while others are characterized as corporate-oriented and official: *“Different conversations are observed, for example: ‘we had a good cooperation this year, looking forward to our cooperation in the next year!’ vs ‘Adada [customer, pseudonym] appreciates your good performance during this year’”* (Jeff). Therefore, word choice with strong emotions and a personal tone of voice reflects customers’ stronger and personal affection with certain suppliers.

#### *4.3 Perceived erosion of cognition-based trust*

##### *4.3.1 Reduced trustworthiness due to a perception of hidden information*

When suppliers observe selectivity in social and affective interactions, they may experience a sense of reduced trustworthiness because of a perception of hidden information. Some quotes indicate that observers make sense of the selectivity as a signal of offline socialization activities, which reduces a sense of customers’ responsibility and reliability, thus eroding the observers’

trust in the customers: *“Interactions between the customer and DUO [supplier, pseudonym] sharply increased, such as birthday wishes, likes, and comments on posts of personal activities in the Moment. The customer demonstrated a higher level of care, like, warmth, and even showed an intention to strengthen the cooperation. Such preferential treatment make us suspect that they had communicated privately and even organized socialization activities, such as having a meal and sports activity, etc. The customer becomes less worthy of trust, because the company is less reliable and may have the possibility of opportunism in the future.”* (Chris).

Other quotes denote that selectivity is understood as a signal of bribery, which increases observers’ perceived risks and uncertainties and decreases their perceived self-interests, lowering customer expectations: *“A competing supplier recently won the opportunity to collaborate with the customer on a new product development project. Here is the weird part: the supplier easily got the collaborative opportunity, without any public bidding activity as usual. We guess there must be corruption. Back in that time, this supplier was preferred in [WeChat] interactions, such as a greater number of social greetings and red envelope activity in the Group Chat, and a more intimate conversation, etc. This creates insecurity and threatens our self-interest, and we need to adjust our customer expectations.”* (David) Thus, selectivity in online interactions may trigger suppliers’ assumptions that there was prior private communication and interactions that led to this public exchange of messages, eroding their cognitive trust.

#### *4.3.2 Reduced trustworthiness due to a perception of an unhealthy relationship atmosphere*

The analysis of the quotes suggests that selectivity elicits a perception of an unhealthy

relationship atmosphere and reduces trustworthiness. An unhealthy relationship atmosphere is grounded in an asymmetrical relationship (Johnsen *et al.*, 2020). Selectivity underlines the customers' power over suppliers, which allows customers to treat the selected suppliers more favorably, while paying limited attention to the others. Such power imbalance and abuse of power by the customers negatively influence reciprocity, thus eroding suppliers' cognitive trust: *"We are pushed to socialize and show our presence. However, we do not like socializing on WeChat. It is shallow and awkward. As a supplier, my responsibility is to ensure high-quality products. Why do we need to invest so much effort and time in WeChat socialization? What do we get in return? Nothing! It only increases our burden. Worse still, it makes us feel that we need to give customers money. It negatively influences our confidence or expectation in long-term healthy supply chain relationships."* (Danny). As such, when perceiving selectivity, observers are pushed to spend more time and effort on SM socialization and even spend money to maintain relationships with suppliers, thus eroding cognitive trust.

#### *4.4 Perceived erosion of affection-based trust*

Data indicate that selectivity results in observers' emotional vulnerability, defined as a loss and scarification in the emotional experiences (Hibbert *et al.*, 2022). Feelings of frustration, envy, and unfairness are reported in our quotes, which lead to a reduced sense of customers' goodwill, friendship, and integrity, thus harming affective trust.

First, observers suggest that selectivity can be a source of frustration. This is because a lack of superior interaction makes observers less confident and feel frustrated regarding the relationship quality (Lacey *et al.*, 2007). Such frustration leads to a reduced sense of customer

kindness and goodwill and diminishes the observers' affective trust in the customers: *"If we did not receive superior treatment, this means that the relational intimacy with this customer is currently reduced. We are wondering what is wrong with the relationship. Is it a temporal situation, or is it a signal that we need to put more effort into online and offline socialization? It only creates frustration and stress for us. We have huge doubt regarding customer goodwill because such selectivity is selfish and perversely."* (Willy).

Second, selectivity may consciously or unconsciously trigger a social comparison and evoke a sense of envy because the observers find their standing inferior (Chan *et al.*, 2019). Envy impairs collaborative friendship by reducing the relationship intimacy and commitment, thus eroding affection-based trust: *"A competing supplier posted an article introducing their new rotating hook product that can be freely rotated 360 degrees axially. A customer replied with a long sentence that expressed approval and an intention to strengthen the cooperation, with an emoji of a thumb. A sense of envy unconsciously arose because we also had similar posts a few months ago, but we failed to receive any comments or likes. We are wondering whether our friendship is as strong as previously."* (James).

Third, informants assume that selectivity serves as the evidence of prior communication and activities that happened not publicly, which causes a feeling of unfairness and subsequently violates the integrity and erodes observers' affective trust: *"In 2019, a tier 2 supplier snatched customers from us [tier 1 supplier]. Indeed, we had collaborated with the customer for years. It definitely had corruption, like gifts and money. This was also in line with what happened in the online [WeChat] interactions. This tier 2 supplier received superior treatment, such as more likes and encouraging comments. We thought it was unfair and violated mutual benefits, and it*



*felt like the customer treated us without honesty and integrity. This customer became less trustworthy.” (Michael).*

#### *4.5 Increased trust*

Data show that observers’ trust in the customers increases when they perceive the social presence of interaction as legitimate. Two dimensions of legitimacy are observed: cognitive legitimacy and moral legitimacy. Cognitive legitimacy means that actors perceive organizational activities as taken for granted (Suchman, 1995). Interactive activities gain cognitive legitimacy because the platform, interactions, and social presence are widely used across industries: *“Posting and forwarding on WeChat is appropriate and is utilized across many industries. The interactivity on WeChat, such as posts of technical advancement and greeting, also signals that the partner is competent, viable, and intimate, thus to some extent increasing our trust.”* (Joseph). In addition, interactive activities also gain moral legitimacy, defined as the practices or activities that conform to social rules, values, and ethics (Suchman, 1995). Respondents report that interactive activities conform to the social values and norms, e.g., integrity and fairness: *“The interactions are transparent...We are not discriminated against, no matter we are tier 1 or tier 2 suppliers. Such sociality and affection facilitate relationship commitment and trust.”* (Allen).

#### *4.6 Observers’ behavioral response*

Data suggest that observers adopt passive resistance or an approach strategy when perceiving selectivity. First, a passive resistance tactic describes a nonviolent opposition to the customers

(Gunkel *et al.*, 2015) by adopting “undercover” counterproductive work behaviors and a silencing method. Undercover counterproductive work behaviors describe suppliers’ unobserved actions that reduce the efficiency of supplier–customer transactions (Bowling and Gruys, 2010). Examples of behaviors identified in the data include production delay: “*We do not treat this customer as our priority. Some components could have been manufactured and delivered earlier, but now we do it at the last minute, as long as we send the products to them before the last day of the contract.*” (William). Another example relates to creating and spreading rumors: “*Peer producers and I talked about the superior [WeChat] treatment received by one supplier. They definitely have economic bribery under the table. It may have started six months ago.*” (Chris). Data also show that observers who experience selectivity can be silent in social networking activities to express their dissatisfaction and noncooperation: “*We barely comment, give likes, send a red envelope on WeChat. It is risky and time-consuming to manage social media. So, we just keep silent on these social activities.*” (Eric).

Additionally, data also indicate that when witnessing a selective social presence, observers may adopt an approach strategy that describes the behaviors enacted toward the customer to garner positive outcomes (Ferris *et al.*, 2016). These approach activities are considered unethical, as observers bribe the customers to influence future transactional relationship quality and outcomes: “*When we notice customers have frequent interactions with our key competitors, it gives us a signal that our relationship with the customer has faded, and we need to ‘socialize’ under the table, such as gift-giving and money.*” (Ashley). Therefore, when perceiving selectivity, observers adopt passive resistance and approach strategies (e.g., bribery) to reconcile relationships and ensure self-interests.

Finally, data show that when observers perceive social presence as legitimate, observers are more likely to adopt the approach strategy and strengthen the transactional relationship. According to John: *“We would like to strengthen the cooperation with a customer who treats us [suppliers] ethically, such as starting cooperative projects on new product development. We are less worried about customers’ opportunism. We are also motivated to treat them as a priority and improve production and delivery efficiency.”* Therefore, observers perceive fair SM interactions and treatment reflect customers’ corporate values and principles. In this regard, suppliers reduce their concerns about opportunism risks and a lack of integrity and are more willing to devote more effort to enhancing transactional efficiency and strengthening cooperation.

## **5. Discussion**

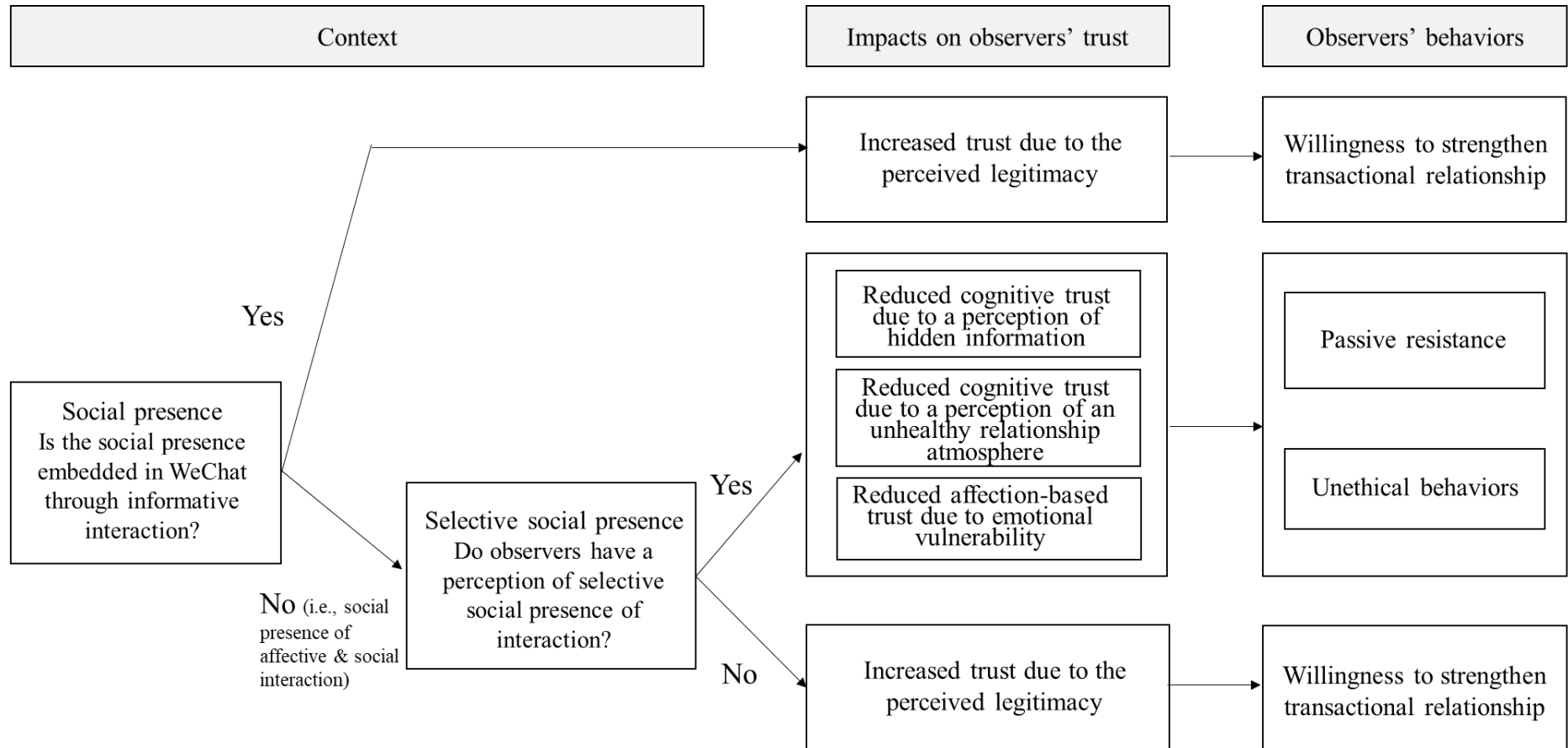
Motivated by a primary concern of the debates regarding the positive and negative effects of SM on B2B trust, this study highlights that due to the transparency and connectivity of SM, observers interpret interactive, relationship maintenance, and affective social presence, influencing their trust and behaviors. We present a research model and demonstrate the process and mechanisms through which the observers experience positive or negative trust and behaviors (Figure 2).

Figure 2 demonstrates two conditions where the social presence of interaction would increase observers’ trust in the customer: (1) social presence is imbedded in WeChat through informative interaction; and (2) no perceived selectivity in relationship maintenance and affective social presence. Against such background, the social presence of interactions can gain cognitive and moral legitimacy, and observers may increase B2B trust and are more likely to

be motivated to strengthen the transactional relationship.

Moreover, our findings report that when suppliers observe selectivity in social presence, they try to understand what is happening in the supplier–customer relationship. We find that by witnessing a higher interaction frequency and superior message appeal from a customer on SM, observers experience an erosion of cognitive and affective trust. Specifically, selectivity sparks a perception of hidden information and an unhealthy relationship atmosphere, triggering observers’ emotional vulnerability, and thus eroding cognitive and affective trust. The findings further suggest that observers adopt passive resistance and an approach strategy to deal with selective social presence.

Figure 2 Research model of how social presence of interaction influences observers' trust and behaviors



These findings and insights enrich the current understating of B2B SM and social presence theory in three themes that have been highlighted as both vital and promising (Koponen *et al.*, 2020; Rose *et al.*, 2021). These themes are the social presence of interaction, mechanisms of how the social presence of interaction influences suppliers' trust, and understanding of the dark side of B2B SM use.

### *5.1 Contribution to the understanding of social presence of interaction*

We enrich the understanding of social presence of interaction (Lu *et al.*, 2016) by exploring it in a customer-supplier-supplier setting and provide a research model that explicates how social presence of buyer-supplier interactions influences observer suppliers' trust and behaviors. Rather than focusing social presence of interaction in a supplier-customer dyad (Koponen and Rytsy, 2020), we emphasize the complexity of social presence of interaction in a triad as observer suppliers who experience competitive pressures are motivated to monitor and interpret the supplier-customer interactions on SM, leading to both positive and negative influences on their trust in customers. By exploring social presence of interactions in a triad setting, this study emphasizes SM use in the interconnected relationships within the supply chain network, which helps businesses unravel the inner complexity of B2B SM use and avoid failing in the trap of simplicity of B2B SM marketing. Additionally, responding to the call from Cartwright *et al.* (2021) on exploring the complexity of B2B SM use, the research model reported in this study provides a holistic picture regarding the varied influence of social presence of supplier-customer interactions on observers' trust and situated behaviors.

## *5.2 Contribution to the understanding of mechanisms of how social presence of interaction influences trust*

Our study provides additional insights into understanding the influences of SM B2B interactions (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2021) by reporting two vital mechanisms (i.e., categories of the social presence of interaction and selectivity) contributing to supplier observers' varied trust and behavioural outcomes. We highlight informative interactions that are evaluated as instrument-oriented by observers, leading to the development of moral legitimacy and B2B trust. Yet, selectivity (i.e., different interaction frequency and varied message appeal) in SM affective and social interactions leads to social comparison and suspicion of opportunism in the eyes of observers. Specifically, when perceiving different SM interaction frequencies, observers assume that there was prior communication and interactions that led to this public exchange of messages, leading to feelings of emotional vulnerability and negative behaviors. This finding extends the understanding of B2B SM marketing (Pomirleanu *et al.*, 2022) by highlighting that differentiated SM interaction frequency creates a perception that SMs are there to support other offline marketing and operational activities. Additionally, we highlight while a personal tone of voice and a word with friendly emotion are more likely to engage SM users to achieve business purposes (Pitt *et al.*, 2019; Steinmann *et al.*, 2015; Swani *et al.*, 2017), varied message-appeal levels among suppliers lead to social comparison, suspected information leaking, and opportunism, which further reduces trustworthiness and triggers negative behaviors. Therefore, resonating with the call from Tiwary *et al.* (2021), the two vital mechanisms contribute to the effective and wise use of B2B SM among buyer-supplier-supplier settings.

### 5.3 Contribution to the understanding of the dark side of B2B SM use

By drawing on one supplier's lens in a customer–supplier–supplier triad setting, we enrich the knowledge of B2B SM dark-side literature by demonstrating observers' vulnerability in SM interactions in terms of reduced cognition-based and affection-based trust in the customer. First, the findings contribute to the understanding of B2B SM and information asymmetry. Existing research has highlighted the advantages of the social presence of interaction as a credible signal for businesses to reduce information asymmetry and demonstrate credibility and reliability, thus building and maintaining trust (Ancillai *et al.*, 2019; Davison *et al.*, 2018; Rose *et al.*, 2021). However, our results differ from the prior studies by highlighting that in a customer–supplier–supplier triad setting, selectivity in social presence can adversely trigger a perception of information asymmetry, such as private socialization activities and bribery. Such perceived hidden information creates uncertainty and risks in supplier–customer relationships and fear of customer opportunism (Pavlou *et al.*, 2007), which reduces observers' belief in customers' expectations, reliability, and dependability.

Additionally, we provide valuable insights into the unintended consequence of social presence of interactions on suppliers' perception of a healthy relationship atmosphere and cognitive trust in customers. Prior research indicates that online communication between dyad suppliers and customers facilitates a harmonized relationship atmosphere because it reflects mutuality and avoids conflicts (Ou *et al.*, 2014). However, our findings report that customers' varied SM interaction frequency and message appeal in a broad supply network are considered as evidence of abusing power, leading to the development of an unhealthy relationship atmosphere in the eyes of suppliers. This harms observers' sense of reciprocity and erodes cognitive trust. Besides, our study goes beyond the traditional focus on investigating the



negative impacts of SM use on cognitive trust (Siamagka *et al.*, 2015). We report that selectivity in social presence erodes affective trust by triggering social comparison, creating emotional vulnerability, such as frustration, envy, and unfairness, and reducing their sense of goodwill, friendship, and integrity.

## **6. Managerial implications**

This study provides at least three practical implications. First, findings help customer companies avoid falling into the “simplicity” trap of SM B2B interactions. We highlight the complexity of B2B SM interactions in the supplier-customer-customer setting because of the rival nature between suppliers in the triads (Wu and Choi, 2005; Zhang *et al.*, 2011). Observer suppliers actively monitor and interpret SM interactions and view them as signals of B2B relationship quality and intimacy. Our findings suggest that customers should pay attention to the selectivity issue of online social presence in triad relationships. Selectivity creates a series of negative perceptions and emotions, including perceived information asymmetry, an unhealthy relationship atmosphere, and a sense of emotional vulnerability, which leads to passive resistance (e.g., delayed production, nonengagement in SNS activities) and unethical behaviors (e.g., bribery).

Second, after uncovering insight into the dark side of B2B SM interactions in a triad, the paper provides a useful account of how customers can wisely use SM to manage B2B relationships. This study encourages informative B2B interactions on social media, such as posting educational videos or articles regarding the company, sharing updates regarding the product and service, and keeping the partners informed about the company’s awards and contribution to the local community. Such B2B interactions are regarded as instrumental-

oriented, and taken for granted by suppliers because they feel such interactivity is adopted across industries. In this regard, informative interactions on SM can increase suppliers' trust and willingness to improve transactional relationships.

Moreover, to address the selectivity issue and facilitate healthy B2B relationships, we suggest fairness of B2B SM marketing (Cassia *et al.*, 2021) can be developed when customer organizations strategically consider the type of content, interaction frequency, and message appeal for engagement. For instance, specifying the interaction frequency with first-tier and second-tier suppliers. This study also recommends moving the public conversations and interactions on SM to a private channel. For example, socialization interactions carrying a strong sense of personal connection, such as expressing wishes and entertainment socialization, are advised to happen privately. Additionally, we advise customers to invest in employee training and development to ensure the consistency and quality of B2B SM interactions. The related training themes may include (1) the development of moral principles, such as honesty and integrity; (2) SM-use orientation knowledge, such as increasing awareness of the unintended consequences of B2B SM interactions; and (3) offering tactics for communicating with suppliers, such as being respectful and setting clear expectations for communication. We further suggest that a reporting system should be developed to strengthen social supervision and develop punishment policies for both parties to increase the cost of opportunism.

## **7. Limitations and future study**

Despite the theoretical contribution and managerial implications, the study has a few limitations. First, our study focuses on the social presence of interaction among customer–supplier–supplier triads. However, supplier–customer interactions are influenced by other

social actors as well, such as the media, government, and end consumers. As such, a further study could explore how interactions in a broad SM social network influence B2B relationships. Second, our study explores the impacts of B2B SM interactions on B2B trust in the context of a Chinese social media platform. Further research might explore observers' perceptions of social presence of buyer-supplier interactions in international contexts. A comparison approach between B2B social presence interactions in Asian and Western market contexts would greatly help further understand the value and effectiveness of SM. Third, we adopted a qualitative method to uncover different dimensions of the dark side of B2B SM. Future studies could use quantitative methods, such as surveys, to confirm and extend our findings.

## References

- Aaker, J., Vohs, K. D., and Mogilner, C. (2010), "Nonprofits are seen as warm and for-profits as competent: Firm stereotypes matter", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 37 No. 2, pp. 224–237.
- Agnihotri, R., Kothandaraman, P., Kashyap, R., and 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*, Vol. 32 No. 3, pp. 333–348.
- Agnihotri, R., Dingus, R., Hu, M. Y., and Krush, M. T. (2016), "Social media: Influencing customer satisfaction in B2B sales", *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 53, pp. 172–180.
- Ancillai, C., Terho, H., Cardinali, S., and Pascucci, F. (2019), "Advancing social media driven sales research: Establishing conceptual foundations for B-to-B social selling", *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 82, pp. 293–308.
- Aral, S., Dellarocas, C., and Godes, D. (2013), "Introduction to the special issue—Social media and business transformation: A framework for research", *Information systems research*, Vol. 24 No. 1, pp. 3-13.
- Baccarella, C. V., Wagner, T. F., Kietzmann, J. H., and McCarthy, I. P. (2018), "Social media? It's serious! Understanding the dark side of social media", *European Management Journal*, Vol. 36 No. 4, pp. 431–438.
- Banerjee, A., Ries, J. M., and Wiertz, C. (2020), "The impact of social media signals on supplier selection: Insights from two experiments", *International Journal of Operations and Production Management*, Vol. 40 No. 5, pp. 531–552.

- Barcelos, R. H., Dantas, D. C., and Sénécal, S. (2018), “Watch your tone: How a brand's tone of voice on social media influences consumer responses”, *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, Vol. 41 No. 1, pp. 60–80.
- Bowling, N. A., and Gruys, M. L. (2010), “Overlooked issues in the conceptualization and measurement of counterproductive work behavior”, *Human Resource Management Review*, Vol. 20 No. 1, pp. 54–61.
- Brooks, S. (2015), “Does personal social media usage affect efficiency and well-being?”, *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 46, pp. 26–37.
- Buckley, Peter J., and Claudio De Mattos (2021), “Understanding the processes underlying inter-firm collaboration: mutual forbearance and the principle of congruity”, *British Journal of Management*, Vol. 32 No. 1, pp. 20-39.
- Cassia, F., Haugland, S. A., and Magno, F. (2021), “Fairness and behavioral intentions in discrete B2B transactions: a study of small business firms”, *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, Vol. 36 No. 13, pp. 129–141.
- Chae, B. (Kevin). (2015), “Insights from hashtag supplychain and Twitter Analytics: Considering Twitter and Twitter data for supply chain practice and research”, *International Journal of Production Economics*, Vol. 165, pp. 247–259.
- Chai, L., Li, J., Tangpong, C., and Clauss, T. (2020), “The interplays of coopetition, conflicts, trust, and efficiency process innovation in vertical B2B relationships”, *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 85, pp. 269–280.
- Chan, K. W., Yim, C. K., and Gong, T. (2019), “An investigation of nonbeneficiary reactions to discretionary preferential treatments”, *Journal of Service Research*, Vol. 22 No. 4, pp. 371–387.
- Choi, T. Y., and Wu, Z. (2009), “Triads in supply networks: theorizing buyer-supplier-supplier relationships”, *Journal of Supply Chain Management*, Vol. 45 No. 1, pp. 8–25.
- Chowdhury, I. N., Gruber, T., and Zolkiewski, J. (2016), “Every cloud has a silver lining— Exploring the dark side of value co-creation in B2B service networks”, *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 55, pp. 97–109.
- Corbin, J. and Strauss, A. (2014), *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. SAGE Publications.
- Coundouris, S. P., Tyson, C. L., and Henry, J. D. (2021), “Social networking site use and relationship quality: A double edged sword”, *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 123, pp. 106871.
- Das, T. K., and Teng, B. S. (2001), “Trust, control, and risk in strategic alliances: An integrated framework”, *Organization studies*, Vol. 22 No. 2, pp. 251-283.
- Davison, R. M., Ou, C. X. J., and Martinsons, M. G. (2018), “Interpersonal knowledge exchange in China: The impact of guanxi and social media”, *Information and Management*, Vol. 55 No. 2, pp. 224–234.
- Deng, Q., Wang, Y., Rod, M., and Ji, S. (2021), “Speak to head and heart: The effects of linguistic features on B2B brand engagement on social media”, *Industrial marketing management*, Vol. 99, pp. 1–15.
- Dwivedi, Y. K., Ismagilova, E., Rana, N. P., and Raman, R. (2021), “Social Media Adoption, Usage and Impact in Business-To-Business (B2B) Context: A State-Of-The-Art Literature Review”, *Information Systems Frontiers*, pp. 1-23.

- Ferris, D. L., Yan, M., Lim, V. K., Chen, Y., and Fatimah, S. (2016), “An approach–avoidance framework of workplace aggression”, *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 59 No. 5, pp. 1777–1800.
- Giamanco, B., and Gregoire, K. (2012), “Tweet me, friend me, make me buy”, *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. 90 No. 7, pp. 89–93.
- Gibbs, G. R. (2002), *Qualitative data analysis: Explorations with NVivo*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Gioia, D. A., and Chittipeddi, K. (1991), “Sensemaking and sensegiving in strategic change initiation. *Strategic Management Journal*”, Vol. 12 No. 6, pp. 433–448.
- Gioia, D. A., Corley, K. G., and Hamilton, A. L. (2013), “Seeking qualitative rigor in inductive research: Notes on the Gioia methodology”, *Organizational research methods*, Vol. 16 No. 1, pp. 15–31.
- Glaser, B. G., and Strauss, A. L. (1967), *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*, New York, NY: Aldine.
- Goodman, L. A. (1961), “Snowball Sampling. *The Annals of Mathematical Statistics*, Vol. 32 No. 1 No., pp. 148–170.
- Gunkel, M., Schlaegel, C., Rossteutscher, T., and Wolff, B. (2015), “The human aspect of cross-border acquisition outcomes: The role of management practices, employee emotions, and national culture”, *International Business Review*, Vol. 24 No. 3, pp. 394–408.
- Håkansson, H., and Ford, D. (2002), “How should companies interact in business networks”, *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 55 No. 2, pp. 133–139.
- Hibbert, P., Beech, N., Callagher, L., and Siedlok, F. (2021), “After the Pain: Reflexive Practice, Emotion Work and Learning”, *Organization Studies*,
- Iankova, S., Davies, I., Archer-Brown, C., Marder, B., and Yau, A. (2019), “A comparison of social media marketing between B2B, B2C and mixed business models”, *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 81, pp. 169–179.
- Itani, O. S., Krush, M. T., Agnihotri, R., and Trainor, K. J. (2020), “Social media and customer relationship management technologies: Influencing buyer-seller information exchanges”, *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 90, pp. 264–275.
- Johnsen, R. E., Lacoste, S., and Meehan, J. (2020), “Hegemony in asymmetric customer-supplier relationships”, *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 87, pp. 63–75.
- Juntunen, M., Ismagilova, E., and Oikarinen, E.-L. (2020), “B2B brands on Twitter: Engaging users with a varying combination of social media content objectives, strategies, and tactics”, *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 89, pp. 630–641.
- Jussila, J. J., Kärkkäinen, H., and Aramo-Immonen, H. (2014), “Social media utilization in business-to-business relationships of technology industry firms”, *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 30, pp. 606–613.
- Kamboj, S., Sarmah, B., Gupta, S., and Dwivedi, Y. (2018), “Examining branding co-creation in brand communities on social media: Applying the paradigm of Stimulus-Organism-Response”, *International Journal of Information Management*, Vol. 39, pp. 169–185.
- Kaplan, A. M., and Haenlein, M. (2010), “Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media”, *Business Horizons*, Vol. 53 No. 1, pp. 59–68.
- Karampela, M., Lacka, E., and McLean, G. (2020), “‘Just be there’: Social media presence, interactivity, and responsiveness, and their impact on B2B relationships”, *European*

- Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 54 No. 6, pp. 1281–1303.
- Koponen, J. P., and Ryttsy, S. (2020), “Social presence and e-commerce B2B chat functions”, *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 54 No. 6, pp. 1205–1224.
- Lacey, R., Suh, J., and Morgan, R. M. (2007), “Differential effects of preferential treatment levels on relational outcomes”, *Journal of service research*, Vol. 9 No. 3, pp. 241–256.
- Lacka, E., and Chong, A. (2016), “Usability perspective on social media sites’ adoption in the B2B context”, *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 54, 80–91.
- Li, Y., Li, G., and Feng, T. (2015), “Effects of suppliers’ trust and commitment on customer involvement”, *Industrial Management & Data Systems*, Vol. 115 No. 6, pp. 1041–1066.
- Lien, C. H., and Cao, Y. (2014), “Examining WeChat users’ motivations, trust, attitudes, and positive word-of-mouth: Evidence from China”, *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 41, pp. 104–111.
- Liu, Y.-H. S., Deligonul, S., Cavusgil, E., and Chiou, J.-S. (2018), “Always trust in old friends? Effects of reciprocity in bilateral asset specificity on trust in international B2B partnerships”, *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 90, 171–185.
- Lu, B., Fan, W., and Zhou, M. (2016), “Social presence, trust, and social commerce purchase intention: An empirical research”, *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 56, pp. 225–237.
- Luo, J., Toth, Z., Liu, M. J., and Yuan, R. (2021), “Social media-related tensions on business-to-business markets—evidence from China”, *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 93, pp. 293–306.
- Magno, F., and Cassia, F. (2019), “Establishing thought leadership through social media in B2B settings: Effects on customer relationship performance”, *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing*, Vol. 35 No. 3, pp. 437–446.
- McAllister, D. J. (1995), “Affect- and Cognition-Based Trust as Foundations for Interpersonal Cooperation in Organizations”, *The Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 38 No. 1, pp. 24–59.
- Mcknight, D., Lankton, N., Nicolaou, A., and Price, J. (2017), “Distinguishing the effects of B2B information quality, system quality, and service outcome quality on trust and distrust”, *The Journal of Strategic Information Systems*, Vol. 26 No. 2, pp. 118-141.
- Moorman, C., Deshpande, R., and Zaltman, G. (1993), “Factors affecting trust in market research relationships”, *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 57 No. 1, pp. 81–101.
- Morgan, G. (Ed.). (1983), *Beyond method: Strategies for social research*. Sage.
- Mumi, A., Obal, M., and Yang, Y. (2019), “Investigating social media as a firm’s signaling strategy through an IPO”, *Small Business Economics*, Vol. 53 No. 3, pp. 631–645.
- Murphy, M., and Sashi, C. M. (2018), “Communication, interactivity, and satisfaction in B2B relationships”, *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 68, pp. 1–12.
- Nunan, D., Sibai, O., Schivinski, B., and Christodoulides, G. (2018), “Reflections on “social media: Influencing customer satisfaction in B2B sales” and a research agenda”, *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 75, pp. 31–36.
- Ou, C. X., Pavlou, P. A., and Davison, R. M. (2014), “Swift guanxi in online marketplaces: The role of computer-mediated communication technologies”, *MIS Quarterly*, Vol. 38 No. 1, pp. 209–230.
- Padgett, D., Hopkins, C. D., and Williams, Z. (2020), “Buyer dependence in B2B relationships: The role of supplier investments, commitment form, and trust”, *Journal of Business*

- Research*, Vol. 119, pp. 13–24.
- Pavlou, P. A., Liang, H., and Xue, Y. (2007), “Understanding and Mitigating Uncertainty in Online Exchange Relationships: A Principal-Agent Perspective”, *MIS Quarterly*, Vol. 31 No. 1, pp. 105–136.
- Peruchi, D. F., de Jesus Pacheco, D. A., Todeschini, B. V., and ten Caten, C. S. (2022), “Moving towards digital platforms revolution? Antecedents, determinants and conceptual framework for offline B2B networks”, *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 142, pp. 344–363.
- Pitt, C. S., Plangger, K. A., Botha, E., Kietzmann, J., and Pitt, L. (2019), “How employees engage with B2B brands on social media: Word choice and verbal tone”, *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 81, pp. 130–137.
- Pomirleanu, N., Gustafson, B. M., and Townsend, J. (2022), “Organizational climate in B2B: A systematic literature review and future research directions”, *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol 105, pp. 147–158.
- Quinton, S., and 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*, Vol. 54, pp. 15–24.
- Ried, L., Eckerd, S., Kaufmann, L., and Carter, C. (2021), “Spillover effects of information leakages in buyer–supplier–supplier triads”, *Journal of Operations Management*, Vol. 67 No. 3, pp. 280–306.
- Rindfleisch, A., and Moorman, C. (2003), “Interfirm cooperation and customer orientation”, *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 40 No. 4, pp. 421–436.
- Rose, S., Fandel, D., Saraeva, A., and Dibley, A. (2021), “Sharing is the name of the game: Exploring the role of social media communication practices on B2B customer relationships in the life sciences industry”, *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 93, pp. 52–62.
- Salo, J., Mäntymäki, M., and Islam, A. K. M. N. (2018), “The dark side of social media – and *Fifty Shades of Grey* introduction to the special issue: The dark side of social media”, *Internet Research*, Vol. 28(5), pp. 1166–1168.
- Sands, S., Campbell, C., Ferraro, C., and Mavrommatis, A. (2020), “Seeing light in the dark: Investigating the dark side of social media and user response strategies”, *European Management Journal*, Vol. 38 No. 1, pp. 45–53.
- Schaubroeck, J., Lam, S. S. K., and Peng, A. C. (2011), “Cognition-based and affect-based trust as mediators of leader behavior influences on team performance”, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 96 No. 4, pp. 863–871.
- Short J, Williams E, and Christie B. (1976), *The social psychology of telecommunications*. Wiley, London.
- Siamagka, N. T., Christodoulides, G., Michaelidou, N., and Valvi, A. (2015), “Determinants of social media adoption by B2B organizations”, *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 51, pp. 89–99.
- Silic, M., and Back, A. (2016), “The dark side of social networking sites: Understanding phishing risks”, *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 60, pp. 35–43.
- Singh, S., Gandhi, M., Kar, A. K., and Tikkiwal, V. A. (2023), “How should B2B firms create

- image content for high social media engagement? A multimodal analysis”, *Industrial Management & Data Systems*.
- Stahl, S. (2019). B2B content marketing 2020. Available at <https://contentmarketinginstitute.com/articles/success-differentiators-b2b-research/> Accessed on 24, February, 2024.
- Statista (2022), “Number of monthly active WeChat users from 2nd quarter 2011 to 4th quarter 2021(in millions), “<<https://www.statista.com/statistics/255778/number-of-active-wechat-messenger-accounts/>>. Accessed at 21<sup>st</sup> October 2023
- Steinmann, S., Mau, G., and Schramm-Klein, H. (2015), “Brand communication success in online consumption communities: An experimental analysis of the effects of communication style and brand pictorial representation”, *Psychology and Marketing*, Vol. 32 No. 3, pp. 356–371.
- Su, C., Min, Q., Scornavacca, E., and Liu, Z. (2021), “A Dual-role Trust Model for Social Commerce: A Guanxi Perspective”, *Information and Management*, 58(7), 103512.
- Suchman, M. C. (1995), “Managing legitimacy: Strategic and institutional approaches”, *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 20 No. 3, pp. 571–610.
- Sutcliffe, A. G., Binder, J. F., and Dunbar, R. I. M. (2018), “Activity in social media and intimacy in social relationships”, *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 85, pp. 227–235.
- Swani, K., Milne, G. R., Brown, B. P., Assaf, A. G., and Donthu, N. (2017), “What messages to post? Evaluating the popularity of social media communications in business versus consumer markets”, *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 62, pp. 77–87.
- Tang, G., Ren, S., Chadee, D., and Yuan, S. (2019), “The dark side of social media connectivity: influence on turnover intentions of supply chain professionals”, *International Journal of Operations and Production Management*, Vol. 40 No. 5, pp. 603–623.
- Tiwary, N. K., Kumar, R. K., Sarraf, S., Kumar, P., and Rana, N. P. (2021), “Impact assessment of social media usage in B2B marketing: A review of the literature and a way forward”, *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 131, pp. 121–139.
- Tongco, M. D. C. (2007), “Purposive sampling as a tool for informant selection”, *Ethnobotany Research and Applications*, Vol. 5, pp. 147–158.
- Wang, W. Y. C., Pauleen, D. J., and Zhang, T. (2016), “How social media applications affect B2B communication and improve business performance in SMEs”, *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 54, pp. 4–14.
- Wu, Z., and Choi, T. Y. (2005), “Supplier-supplier relationships in the buyer-supplier triad: Building theories from eight case studies”, *Journal of Operations Management*, Vol. 24(1), pp. 27–52.
- Wu, Z., Choi, T. Y., and Rungtusanatham, M. J. (2010), “Supplier-supplier relationships in buyer-supplier-supplier triads: Implications for supplier performance”, *Journal of Operations Management*, Vol. 28 No. 2, pp. 115–123.
- Zhang, C., Viswanathan, S., and Henke, J. W. (2011), “The boundary spanning capabilities of purchasing agents in buyer-supplier trust development”, *Journal of Operations Management*, Vol. 29 No. 4, pp. 318–328.
- Zhang, C. B., and Li, Y. N. (2019), “How social media usage influences B2B customer loyalty: Roles of trust and purchase risk”, *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing*, Vol. 34 No. 7, pp. 1420–1433.