


# Antecedents and Consequences of Three Selling Strategies in Social Enterprises

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This paper analyzed the effect of a long-term strategic orientation and selling capability on three selling strategies, and their effect on the social impact of hybrid social enterprises.

**Theoretical framework** – This study relied on the conceptual effect of a long-term orientation and selling capability on selling strategies, as well as the influence of these on the impact of the social enterprise.

**Design/methodology/approach** – A quantitative and cross-sectional study was conducted. Telephone and online surveys were used to collect data from 100 sales or general managers in Mexican social enterprises. The partial least squares approach and bootstrapping re-sampling method were used to test the nine hypotheses posited.

**Findings** – The results supported seven hypotheses and confirmed that the long-term strategic orientation and selling capability influence the adaptive, customer-oriented and relational selling strategies. Furthermore, of the three selling strategies studied, only the relational selling strategy increased the impact of the social enterprise.

**Practical & social implications of research** – This research showed that a focus on a long-term strategic orientation and the development of selling capability was mainly articulated with a relational selling strategy in social enterprises that seek to achieve a better social impact.

**Originality/value** – This research contributed to the advancement of knowledge in the field of social enterprise management, as it deepened the understanding of the long-term strategic orientation and selling capabilities and strategies, as key aspects for the generation of a social impact. This study also provided empirical evidence that the relational selling strategy performed a key role in the social impact of the companies studied.

**Keywords:** Long-term strategic orientation, selling capability, selling strategies, social impact.

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## 1 Introduction

Social impact is a relevant research topic because companies seek to be socially responsible and sustainable (Hazenberg & Paterson-Young, 2022; Siemieniako et al., 2022). Also, more and more consumers expect the companies they buy from to make a social or environmental impact (Hosta & Zabkar, 2021), and in collaboration with governments, companies and non-governmental organizations better address the challenges of local society and the planet (Siemieniako et al., 2022). Similarly, hybrid social enterprises are expected to generate economic benefits and produce a notable social impact (Nascimento & Salazar, 2020).

Although hybrid social enterprises exist in several sectors and vary in their approaches and structures, they have in common their dual mission (economic-social) and the reinvestment of most of their profits in the social or environmental cause they focus on (Barraket & Loosemore, 2018). While research has advanced in understanding social impact (Block et al., 2021), there is still a need to explore the strategic antecedents that lead to a positive social impact in social enterprises (Bryson et al., 2022; Nascimento & Salazar, 2020).

Also, organizations need to decide whether they will adopt a long-term or short-term strategic orientation with their customers, as not all customers value the long-term approach in their exchange processes (Viio & Grönroos 2016). However, a long-term strategic orientation has been found to be consistent with value creation efforts over time (Agnihotri et al., 2019). Therefore, this research focuses on analyzing the effect of a long-term strategic orientation and selling capability on three selling strategies, and their effect on the social impact of hybrid social enterprises. Our research contributes to the advancement of knowledge in the field of social enterprise management as it deepens the understanding of the long-term strategic orientation and the role of capabilities and strategies, particularly three selling strategies supported by different marketing paradigms (adaptive marketing/adaptive selling, market orientation/customer orientation, and relationship marketing/relational selling), as key aspects for the generation of a social impact. Thus, it responds to the need to deepen the understanding of research on the impact and growth of social enterprises (Ge et al., 2019), and it responds to the need for an empirical application of advances in the understanding of the marketing capabilities of social enterprises (Cavazos-Arroyo & Puente-Diaz, 2019).

## 2 Literature review

Since Teece et al. (1997) introduced the concept of capabilities in the firm, there has been a constant interest in studying both operational and dynamic capabilities, as they contribute to aspects such as performance and the generation and maintenance of competitive advantage (Laaksonen & Peltoniemi, 2018). Operational capabilities can improve effectiveness, while dynamic capabilities facilitate anticipation of an adaptation to changes in the environment (Teece, 2016), through the exploitation of business opportunities for the generation of new strategies (Teece, 2007; Vogel & Güttel, 2013). Thus, from the perspective of the theory of dynamic capabilities, it is possible to deepen the understanding of how social enterprises face the challenges of the environment.

Dynamic capabilities include dynamic marketing capabilities, which contribute to the organization achieving sustainable competitive advantage through the renewal and reconfiguration of its organizational processes and functional marketing activities as the environment changes and the customer's needs are met (Badrinarayanan et al., 2019; Fang & Zou, 2009). In social enterprises, dynamic marketing capabilities are based on marketing activities that create unique value for customers through variables such as pricing, selling, product, channel management, and market communication (Liu et al., 2015).

The temporal orientation is usually classified into short and long term. The short-term orientation focuses on efficiency, while the long-term orientation focuses on effectiveness, thus the organization's strategic priorities are different depending on the approach (Wang & Bansal, 2012). Capabilities are usually built and accumulated over time; thus, a long-term orientation is required so that, based on the position of current resources and capabilities, a firm can adopt strategies that will lead to a better competitive position (Wang & Ahmed, 2007). Therefore, this research studies the long-term strategic orientation. This refers to the tendency of a company to give importance to optimizing the use of resources over time and to focus on long-term decisions, objectives and results to obtain the desired results (Guenzi et al., 2011). Thus, this type of company will seek to build a position in the market by adopting a business approach that does not generate immediate returns (Didonet et al., 2020). Regarding social enterprises, it also implies that the evidence and results of the social impact take time (Maas & Liket, 2011).

Sales strategy refers to the set of processes and techniques that companies use to sell their products or services (Abed & Haghghi, 2009). One of these strategies is adaptive selling, which is understood as “the altering of sales behaviors during a customer interaction or across customer interactions based on perceived information about the nature of the selling situation” (Weitz et al., 1986, p.175). Weitz et al. (1986) built the foundation of adaptive selling theory based on the modification of salespeople’s behaviors during interactions with customer, based on perceived information and its contextualized implementation. Also, adaptive selling theory can be applied at the macro level or at the micro level (Spiro & Weitz, 1990). At the macro level, the perspective focuses on the adaptive selling level of the firm or salespeople and is analyzed through a single construct; whereas at the micro level, selling is organized and evaluated through a process that has a series of steps (McFarland, 2019).

Within the framework of adaptive selling theory, salespeople need to develop key skills that require knowledge about customers, products or services, as well as about the environments, encounters and behaviors associated with selling (Weitz et al., 1986). Thus, it is expected that, based on this knowledge, needs, which are characterized into typologies, can be identified and then the sales strategy is adjusted to each of them (Roman & Iacobucci, 2010; Yurova et al., 2017). Empirical work has identified that this strategy improves sales performance especially in environments facing uncertainty (Arli et al., 2018).

The adaptive strategy uses a flexible selling approach that relies on gathering information about customers prior to and during the selling event in order to design and deliver an appropriate and effective sales message for each customer (Boorum et al., 1998). This type of salesperson requires adjustment or customization of the offer (Singh et al., 2017), sufficient listening and communication skills to understand the needs of each customer, a variety of sales presentations, and adjustment or adaption to the customer’s requests (Abed & Haghghi, 2009). Because of its nature, this selling strategy can offer novel solutions to customers, but it can be costly, risky, and require organizational support to be successful (Shafique et al., 2022).

One relevant example of combining a long-term orientation with values with implications for social enterprises occurs in Asia. Specifically, Asian companies that develop a long-term orientation based on values of empathy, trust and fairness tend to develop an internal

marketing that influences the behavior of their salespeople, regardless of the sales strategy they use, with positive results in terms of purchase intent, positive word of mouth and continuity of the customer relationship (Yi & Nataraajan, 2018). Long-term strategic thinking is likely to influence the adaptive selling strategy in social enterprises. Research involving the use of CRM tools with a long-term orientation found that this approach positively influenced adaptive selling behaviors (Rapp et al., 2008). Also, when the long-term approach permeates the sales department, its employees tend to think more proactively, and if an adaptive selling strategy is used, salespeople tend to improve their customer bonding capabilities and job performance (Jaramillo et al., 2007).

The customer-oriented selling strategy refers to “the degree to which salespeople practice the marketing concept by trying to help their customers make purchase decisions that will satisfy their needs” (Saxe & Weitz, 1982, p. 344). Customer-oriented selling is based on market orientation theory, which involves the generation and dissemination of market intelligence in the firm, as well as the responsiveness of its members (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990). One of the core components of a market orientation is a customer orientation (Ingenbleek et al., 2013; Kohli & Jaworski, 1990). This is based on understanding buyers through the use of market intelligence aimed at creating value for the customer (Narver & Slater, 1990).

The theory sustains that transformation to a customer-oriented culture implies moving from a traditional, reactive, high-pressure, customer-focused sales approach with low concern for long-term customer satisfaction to establishing a bond with the market (Kennedy et al., 2003; Leeflang, 2011), where the long-term focus of the customer orientation can lead to the use of a more proactive style of responding to customer demands and needs (Boles et al., 2001). Customer-oriented behaviors among salespeople are expected to ensure an appropriate strategic response by offering alternative solutions, establishing cooperative interactions, and generating loyalty (Baber et al., 2020; Flaherty, 1999;). Several previous studies have revealed that a customer orientation positively influences salespeople’s outcomes (Zablah et al., 2012). However, other work argues that focusing excessively on customers could reduce innovativeness (Zhou et al., 2005) and performance, especially in non-profit organizations (Voss & Voss, 2000).

Another type of sales strategy is relational selling, which consists of a strong interdependence between a company and certain types of customers to obtain long-

term benefits and loyalty (Guenzi et al., 2007). Relational selling is best understood within the relationship marketing theoretical approach (Edwards & Baker, 2020), as it prioritizes the development of relationships rather than transactions between buyers and sellers (Gummesson & Grönroos, 2012). Also, relationship marketing favors continuous satisfying interactions between a firm and its customers in order to establish and develop long-term relationships between them (Gummesson, 2002). This implies a structured, socially constructed, dynamic, polyadic, results-oriented, activity-focused process with a clear value proposition (Hütten et al., 2018).

The relational selling strategy works because the trust and collaboration existing between the buyer and seller are applied during problem-solving interactions (Jolson, 1997; Weiner et al., 2021). Thus, this strategy goes beyond the immediate transaction and extends to the long term (Edwards & Baker, 2020). Although little research has been done in the field of social enterprises on relationship marketing or on relational selling, it has been found that the practice of relationship marketing tends to occur more informally or unconsciously, and especially because of the need to preserve long-term sustainability (Powell & Osborne, 2015).

Similarly, previous research has found that a long-term orientation is an important antecedent of effective supplier-buyer relationships (Cannon et al., 2010). Relationships based on a long-term orientation generally involve sacrificing short-term profits for both parties to gain long-term benefits (Ganesan, 1994). However, not all customers appreciate these efforts in selling strategies, performing better with a short-term orientation (Viio & Grönroos 2016). Therefore, it is expected that a long-term oriented strategy will have a positive impact on those customers who value a relational selling strategy (Agnihotri et al., 2019). Thus, based on the above, we postulate the following hypotheses:

H1a: A long-term strategic orientation positively affects the adaptive selling strategy.

H1b: A long-term strategic orientation positively affects the customer-oriented selling strategy.

H1c: A long-term strategic orientation positively affects the relational selling strategy.

Social enterprises need to generate income to fulfill their social mission; therefore, they need to sell products and/or services in the market and produce economic

surpluses (Mair & Marti, 2006). While capabilities are a basis for competitive advantage in companies focusing on economic value (Javalgi et al., 2014), they are also a primary source for creating a social impact in social enterprises. Sales capability is a dynamic marketing capability; it is integrated in the value creation process and includes two approaches, managerial and individual, the latter represented by salespeople (Rodrigues & Martins, 2020). In social enterprises this capability includes the development of “the skills needed to train salespeople, build sales plans, control systems and develop a strong relational foundation that motivates the exchange of resources and information among the parties of a community” (Cavazos-Arroyo & Puente-Diaz, 2019, p. 3).

Selling capability is expected to positively influence the adoption of an adaptive sales strategy. An adaptive selling strategy involves salespeople adjusting to the needs of each selling situation. It is possible to implement it if sufficient information about the sales situation and potential customers is obtained and processed; furthermore, it requires a flexible approach to various aspects of serving customers in order to maintain a high-quality standard in the relationship (Kara et al., 2013). Therefore, nurturing selling capability could support salespeople – who usually have to sell standardized products/services at fixed prices – to influence the modification of some variables to adapt to the needs of their customers (Lacoste, 2018).

Selling capability in social enterprises can also positively influence a customer-oriented selling strategy. This strategy involves the salesperson dedicating time to identify the customer’s problem and the solution to help him/her, and if the strategy works, the result will be a long-lasting relationship between the company and customer (Javalgi et al., 2014). It is likely that deployment of the organization’s selling capability, through training and the development of skills in salespeople to empathize, investigate and solve problems in order to get the customers to make appropriate and satisfactory purchasing decisions, will contribute to developing the customer-oriented selling strategy and discovering the needs to be addressed (Pelham, 2002). For instance, in the for-profit arena, research with salespeople in the cosmetics industry in South Korea found that the sales capability of salespeople positively influenced customer-oriented sales behavior (Yi et al., 2021).

Similarly, selling capability may positively influence the relational selling strategy in social enterprises. Relational selling focuses on securing, building and preserving

valuable relationships for a long time (Koponen et al., 2019), and particularly for hybrid social enterprises, it represents establishing relationships with customers, who are mainly provided with social value. The effect of selling capability on relational selling suggests that, beyond the salespeople and the sales team, it is the organization that cultivates and leverages its capabilities, in this case selling capability, to integrate, build and reconfigure its competencies in the processes, procedures, practices and structures focused on creating and deepening relationships with its customers (Liu & Zhao, 2020). Thus, we posit the following hypotheses:

H2a: Selling capability positively affects the adaptive selling strategy.

H2b: Selling capability positively affects the customer-oriented selling strategy.

H2c: Selling capability positively affects the relational selling strategy.

Although no single social enterprise can solve the social and environmental challenges facing humanity, they can generate a positive social impact in their local realities (Antolín-López et al., 2022). The social impact of a social enterprise is understood as the result of the organization's efforts to change the lives of individuals or groups; thus, it is an evaluation process focused on these changes (Hazenbergh & Paterson-Young, 2022). When a social enterprise measures its performance and seeks to improve on what it has learned, it will adjust its strategies to create a greater social impact for people in need, and will do so in a commercially viable way (Nguyen et al., 2015). Although social impact is affected by several variables (Bloom & Smith, 2010), sales strategies play an important role in both fulfilling the dual, integrated mission of the social enterprise, and seeking the survival and scalability of the business model (Cornelissen et al., 2021).

To the best of our knowledge, the effect of different social enterprise selling strategies on social impact has not previously been empirically evaluated. Previous research on for-profit firms has studied the effect of adaptive selling on firm performance (Spiro & Weitz, 1990), and it has been demonstrated in B2B negotiations that the adaptive selling strategy increases firm performance (Roman & Iacobucci, 2010). Furthermore, it has been suggested that a customer-oriented selling strategy has a greater long-term impact on company performance than using a traditional selling approach (Omar, 2016). Likewise, it

has been identified that the mechanisms with which the relational selling strategy works affect firm performance (Arli et al., 2018). Thus, we posit the following hypotheses:

H3: An adaptive selling strategy positively affects the impact of the social enterprise.

H4: A customer-oriented selling strategy positively affects the impact of the social enterprise.

H5: A relational selling strategy positively affects the impact of the social enterprise.

Previous research reveals that firm size can have an impact on organizational performance (Olawale et al., 2017). For instance, in research conducted based on companies in the United Arab Emirates, it was found that firm size influenced their environmental and social performance (Younis & Sundarakani, 2019). Therefore, in this research, firm size has been considered as a control variable that can affect the impact of social enterprises.

## 3 Methodological procedures

### 3.1 Research approach

A quantitative and cross-sectional study was conducted. All the companies (324) included in the directory of social enterprises in Mexico (RIITS, 2017) were contacted by telephone, the objective of the research was explained and the sales manager or general manager, whichever was appropriate, was invited to answer a survey, either by telephone or online. Responding to the instrument took the respondent between 10 and 15 minutes. After a few weeks, it was necessary to send reminders to those who had agreed to participate in the survey, but had not yet responded. The fieldwork was conducted between February 2020 and May 2021. In the end, 100 questionnaires that were useful for the analysis were obtained (see Appendix A. Supplementary Data 1 – Database). This represented a response rate of 30.9%.

### 3.2 Measures and procedure

Validated scales were used for the development of the instrument. To measure the long-term strategic orientation, we used the scale developed by Guenzi et al. (2011) with three items. We used the selling capability scale developed by Liu et al. (2015) with four items. The adaptive selling strategy, customer-oriented strategy and relational selling strategy were measured with the

Guenzi et al. (2007) scales, with four, three and three items, respectively. Lastly, for social enterprise impact, the scale developed by Bloom and Smith (2010) was used. All the items were evaluated using five-point Likert scales: 5=strongly agree, 4=agree, 3=not certain, 2=disagree, and 1=strongly disagree (see Appendix A. Supplementary Data 2 – Scales used in the research).

### 3.3 Overall analytical strategy

A structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis was performed using the Smart PLS 3.0 statistical software (Ringle et al., 2015). In addition, a reflective model was used in this research. Bootstrapping of 5,000 resamples was used for the evaluation of path coefficients and statistical significance (see Appendix A. Supplementary Data 3 – Algorithm output; Supplementary Data 4 – Bootstrapping output).

## 4 Results

### 4.1 Social enterprise characteristics

Most of the social enterprises studied focused on product manufacturing (43%), followed by companies that provided services (30%), and the rest were engaged in the retail trade (27%). They had been in the Mexican market for an average of 9.9 years. The majority (49%) were micro or small enterprises, and had between zero and 10 employees. 66% had ventured into internet sales and 39% made direct sales. 35% had between one and three distributors, 6% between four and six distributors, 4% between seven and nine distributors and 16% said they had 10 or more distributors for their products.

### 4.2 Nonresponse bias and common method variance

Early responses to the questionnaire were compared with late responses to ensure certainty (Hair et al., 2014) and no significant variations ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) were found between them, considering long-term orientation, selling capability, the three selling strategies studied and social enterprise impact, thus no response bias was detected. Regarding common method bias, two tests were performed, the Harman's single-factor test (Fuller et al., 2016) and the variance inflation factor test (VIF). Harman's test showed that a single factor explains 41.03% of the variance (see Appendix A. Supplementary Data 5 – Harman test

output), which was below the 50% accepted to consider that the responses were not produced by the instrument (Tehseen et al., 2017). Likewise, all VIF scores were less than 5 (see Appendix A. Supplementary Data 3 – Algorithm output), hence there was no problematic collinearity and therefore no common method bias (Hair et al., 2014).

### 4.3 Measurement model

All the loadings of the indicators of each of the constructs evaluated were higher than 0.707 and significant, and so they were maintained (Henseler & Schubert, 2020). According to the reliability and convergent validity analysis, the composite reliability of the constructs yielded results above 0.70, the average variance extracted (AVE) values were above 0.50, and the Cronbach's alpha and rho A values for all constructs were above the cutoff point of 0.70 (Hair Jr. et al., 2020). Therefore, convergent validity was confirmed in the measurement model (Table 1). Discriminant validity was also assessed according to two criteria: the Fornell-Larcker criterion and heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) value. The first consisted of examining the square root of the AVE of the constructs to verify that it was greater than their correlation with any of the other constructs studied. For the second, the correlations within and between constructs were evaluated, expecting values of less than 0.85 for discriminant validity to exist (see Appendix A. Supplementary Data 3 – Algorithm output). As shown in Table 1, the results confirmed discriminant validity in the model.

### 4.4 Structural model

The model complies with the goodness-of-fit criterion based on the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR < 0.08), since the value obtained was 0.07 and was lower than the established limit (Hu & Bentler, 1998). Regarding the predictive capacity of the model, the  $R^2$  level was calculated, which showed the amount of variance of the exogenous constructs over the endogenous constructs in the model. It assumes values between 0 and 1. If the  $R^2$  value is greater than or close to 0.67, it is considered substantial; if it is around 0.35, it is moderate; and if it is close to 0.19, it is considered weak (Henseler et al., 2009). The results obtained were as follows: adaptive selling strategy: 0.321; relational selling strategy: 0.335; customer-oriented selling strategy: 0.227; social enterprise impact: 0.428. So, the predictive capacity

Table 1  
Measurement model - Discriminant and convergent validity

	Discriminant validity												
	Fornell-Larcker criterion						Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT)						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	
1. Adaptive selling strategy	<b>0.861</b>												
2. Long-term orientation	0.357	<b>0.860</b>					0.411						
3. Relational selling strategy	0.526	0.279	<b>0.900</b>				0.592	0.321					
4. Selling capability	0.440	-0.001	0.507	<b>0.890</b>			0.491	0.105	0.561				
5. Social enterprise impact	0.479	0.125	0.558	0.492	<b>0.843</b>		0.539	0.150	0.631	0.538			
6. Customer-oriented selling strategy	0.582	0.261	0.617	0.457	0.543	<b>0.897</b>	0.654	0.298	0.687	0.495	0.617		
	Reliability and construct validity												
	1	2	3	4	5	6							
Cronbach's alpha	0.882	0.825	0.883	0.912	0.863	0.878							
Rho_A	0.883	0.840	0.896	0.915	0.878	0.897							
Composite reliability	0.920	0.895	0.927	0.938	0.907	0.925							
Average variance extracted (AVE)	0.741	0.740	0.810	0.793	0.711	0.804							

of these constructs is moderate and, in this research, the  $R^2$  level of social enterprise impact indicates that the direct effects of the exogenous variables explained 42.8% of the total variance of social enterprise impact (see Appendix A. Supplementary Data 3 – Algorithm output).

The effect size  $f^2$  was also analyzed. This indicator analyzes the weights of the predictors on their endogenous variables. It estimates the predictive capacity of each independent construct in the model. Values above 0.02 and up to 0.15 are considered small; those between 0.15 and 0.35 are medium; and those greater than 0.35 are evaluated as large (Cohen, 1988; Hair Jr. et al., 2020). The  $f^2$  values in the contrasted model are: long-term orientation → adaptive selling strategy: 0.187 (medium effect); long-term orientation → relational selling strategy: 0.117 (small effect); long-term orientation → customer-oriented selling strategy: 0.095 (small effect); adaptive selling strategy → social enterprise impact: 0.028 (small effect); relational selling strategy → social enterprise impact: 0.090 (small effect); selling capability → adaptive selling strategy: 0.285 (medium effect); selling capability → relational selling capability: 0.386 (large effect); selling capability → customer-oriented selling strategy: 0.288 (medium effect); and customer-oriented selling strategy → social enterprise impact: 0.084 (small effect) (see Appendix A. Supplementary Data 3 – Algorithm output).

The predictive relevance of the model was also verified with the Stone-Geisser coefficient  $Q^2$ . This examines the model's capacity to predict data not used in the estimation through the blindfolding procedure

(Hair Jr. et al., 2016). There is predictive precision of the structural model when the  $Q^2$  value of an endogenous construct is greater than zero, where  $0 < 0.25$  indicates low relevance,  $0.25 < 0.50$  indicates medium relevance, and  $> 0.50$  indicates high relevance (Hair et al., 2020). In this model, the  $Q^2$  values are: adaptive selling strategy: 0.223 (low); customer-oriented selling strategy: 0.199 (low); relational selling strategy: 0.255 (medium); and social enterprise impact: 0.274 (medium).

Once the predictive capacity of the model was tested, the size and significance of the path coefficients were revised. These coefficients assume standardized values between +1 and -1, which indicate the level at which they predict the endogenous variables. The results showed that the control variable measured through enterprise size did have an effect on the endogenous variable social enterprise impact ( $\beta=0.196$ ,  $t=2.242$ ). Seven of the nine hypotheses established were tested. It was shown that the long-term strategic orientation positively and significantly influenced the three selling strategies studied, adaptive selling ( $\beta=0.357$ ,  $t=5.135$ ), customer-oriented selling ( $\beta=0.261$ ,  $t=3.819$ ) and relational selling ( $\beta=0.279$ ,  $t=4.697$ ). In addition, selling capability positively and significantly affected the three strategies: adaptive selling ( $\beta=0.357$ ,  $t=5.135$ ), customer-oriented selling ( $\beta=0.261$ ,  $t=3.819$ ) and relational selling ( $\beta=0.279$ ,  $t=4.697$ ). Finally, when evaluating the three selling strategies studied, it was found that only the relational selling strategy positively influenced the social enterprise impact ( $\beta=0.299$ ,  $t=2.440$ ), while neither the customer-oriented selling strategy nor adaptive selling

strategy influenced it. The structural model results are shown in Table 2 and and Figure 1 (See Appendix A. Supplementary Data 4 – Bootstrapping output).

#### 4.5 Indirect effects

The total indirect effects of the model showed that both the long-term strategic orientation and selling capability positively and indirectly influenced the social enterprise impact. The analysis of the specific indirect effects showed that only two of the six effects were significant, the effect of the long-term strategic orientation on social enterprise affected through the relational selling strategy ( $\beta = 0.083$ ,  $p=0.024$ ) and the effect of selling capability on social enterprise impact affected through the relational selling strategy ( $\beta=0.151$ ,  $p=0.028$ ). The results showed

that the indirect effect of selling capability on social enterprise impact was greater, and that the relational selling strategy had a relevant role in this effect. Table 3 showed these results (see Appendix A. Supplementary Data 4 – Bootstrapping output).

## 5 Discussion

In recent years, interest in studying the characteristics and management of social enterprises has increased (Gupta et al., 2020). Among the diversity of topics to be investigated, a deeper understanding of dynamic marketing capabilities and strategies, such as in sales, can contribute to significant improvements in key aspects, for instance the company's social impact. The results of the research

Table 2  
Structural paths and conclusions regarding the hypotheses

Structural path	Path value ( $\beta$ )	t value	Hypothesis conclusion
H1a: Long-term strategic orientation $\rightarrow$ Adaptive selling strategy	0.357	5.135	Supported
H1b: Long-term strategic orientation $\rightarrow$ Customer-oriented selling strategy	0.261	3.819	Supported
H1c: Long-term strategic orientation $\rightarrow$ Relational selling strategy	0.279	4.697	Supported
H2a: Selling capability $\rightarrow$ Adaptive selling strategy	0.440	4.697	Supported
H2b: Selling capability $\rightarrow$ Customer-oriented selling strategy	0.457	6.517	Supported
H2c: Selling capability $\rightarrow$ Relational selling strategy	0.507	6.980	Supported
H3: Adaptive selling strategy $\rightarrow$ Social enterprise impact	0.161	1.583	Not supported
H4: Customer-oriented selling strategy $\rightarrow$ Social enterprise impact	0.308	1.846	Not supported
H5: Relational selling strategy $\rightarrow$ Social enterprise impact	0.299	2.440	Supported

Note: n = 100. Bootstrapping 5000 subsamples.

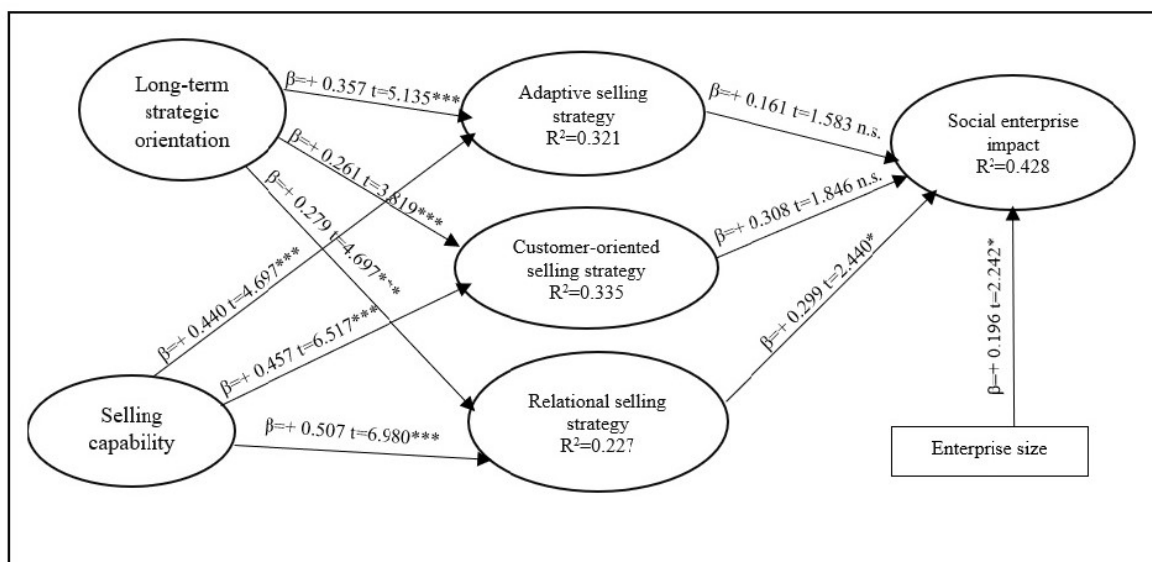


Figure 1. Structural model results

Note: Significance level: n.s. = non-significant, \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$



**Table 3**  
**Indirect effects**

	$\beta$	t statistic	p values
<i>Total indirect effects</i>			
Long-term strategic orientation → Social enterprise impact	0.221	4.477	0.000**
Selling capability → Social enterprise impact	0.363	5.799	0.000**
<i>Specific indirect effects</i>			
Long-term strategic orientation → Adaptive selling strategy → Social enterprise impact	0.057	1.516	0.130 n.s.
Long-term strategic orientation → Relational selling strategy → Social enterprise impact	0.083	2.266	0.024*
Long-term strategic orientation → Customer-oriented selling strategy → Social enterprise impact	0.081	1.555	0.120 n.s.
Selling capability → Customer-oriented selling strategy → Social enterprise impact	0.141	1.685	0.092 n.s.
Selling capability → Adaptive selling strategy → Social enterprise impact	0.071	1.526	0.127 n.s.
Selling capability → Relational selling strategy → Social enterprise impact	0.151	2.198	0.028*

\* p<0.5; \*\*p<0.01; n.s.=non-significant.

showed support for H1a, H1b and H1c, since a long-term strategic orientation positively influenced the three strategic selling styles studied in social enterprises: adaptive, customer-oriented, and relational. There are companies with short or long-term strategic proposals. However, a long-term orientation in particular can be useful for social enterprises because, in most cases, social impacts are achieved after a long time (Maas & Liket, 2011), and/or because the social problem to be addressed is difficult to solve (Spaapen & Van Drooge, 2011). Therefore, it is valuable that the long-term orientation approach through the search for efficiency had a positive impact on all of the three types of strategy used by the social enterprise.

Selling capability and selling strategies in social enterprises can become very complex. Both need to be embedded in the process of economic and social value creation (Liu et al., 2015). Often, in social business models, this involves training people who are part of vulnerable communities as salespeople, establishing partnerships, investing in monitoring systems, and continuing to provide support to the sales force (McKague & Tinsley, 2012). As a consequence, investment and dedication of resources will favorably impact any of the three sales strategies used in micro or macro markets. Thus, H2a, H2b and H2c received support, since selling capability positively affected the three selling strategies studied. The greatest impact occurred between selling capability and the relational selling strategy, then in the customer-oriented selling strategy, and finally in the use of an adaptive selling strategy. Some consider that these strategies are an evolution in the relationships between the company and customers (Arli et al., 2018). Furthermore, the relational selling strategy deploys competencies for a more precise

segmentation of the different types of customers, to obtain and exchange valuable information, to forge the bases for establishing collaboration and trust relationships, leveraging technology when conditions allow it, and maintaining a long-term focus (Arli et al., 2018; Habel et al., 2021).

When analyzing the effect of the three selling strategies studied on the social enterprise impact, only the relational selling strategy had a significant influence. Therefore, H3 and H4 were rejected and H5 was supported. Although the three strategies could be useful for selling the products or services of social enterprises, the results indicated that the business's focus on investing in a long-term social business project and on the continuity of its customer relationships will lead to a greater social impact. In addition, it was found that the larger the size of the company, the more likely it is that the social impact will be multiplied in the markets served.

Thus, the objective of this research was to analyze the effect of a long-term strategic orientation and selling capability on three selling strategies, and their effect on the social impact of hybrid social enterprises. It was found that both the long-term strategic orientation and selling capability influenced all three selling strategies studied; however, only the relational selling capability had an effect on the social enterprise impact.

## 5.1 Theoretical contribution

This research contributes to the advancement of knowledge of commercial capabilities, adaptive sales theory, market orientation, and relationship marketing, articulated in business strategies in the field of social enterprises in several ways. First, the study confirms that a long-term strategic orientation, dynamic sales capability, and a

focus on a relational sales strategy should be considered among the aspects of the value creation process and business strategy design of social enterprises. Second, the importance of a long-term strategic orientation in adaptive marketing, customer orientation and relationship marketing is confirmed. And third, although previous studies have included sales among the key aspects for understanding the management and growth of social enterprises (Cavazos-Arroyo & Puente-Díaz, 2019; Ge et al., 2019), this research contributes to the knowledge by corroborating the idea that dynamic selling capability has a positive impact on the three different selling strategy approaches studied. In particular, the results expose the importance of developing strategic relationship marketing in social enterprises in order to optimize their social impact. Lastly, by expanding the study of variables that serve as antecedents to the impact of social ventures, it contributes to strategic alternatives not only to generate social impact, but also to scale it.

## 5.2 Managerial implications

Social enterprises are embedded in different sectors, they vary in size and they have different capabilities (Cho et al., 2022; Thompson & Doherty, 2006). Several of them face challenges such as optimizing their selling capability and deploying a sales strategy that allows them to be financially healthy, while achieving the desirable social impact (Ge et al., 2019). These aspects go beyond a particular mindset, as they involve significant efforts with repercussions in competitive positioning and value creation.

In practice, the decision to assume a long-term or short-term strategic orientation can be a dilemma and a source of tension for social enterprises, because different principles are assumed that influence organizational activities focused on economic and social value (Didonet et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2015). A long-term strategic orientation implies that a social enterprise plans to achieve its business strategy, social impact, and competitive position over a much longer period than fully for-profit enterprises. Thus, an organization that assumes a long-term strategic orientation tends to be more tolerant of experimentation; time is an ally to promote creativity and innovation (e.g., social innovation); it has a lower sense of urgency; it is risk-averse; however, it needs investment and a patient capital presence; and it is less aggressive competitively (Lumpkin et al., 2010). These characteristics articulate

naturally with a relational selling strategy to establish and maintain partnerships that are more enduring and because key elements associated with relationship marketing such as commitment, trust and loyalty are built over time (Slater & Olson, 2000). Moreover, the relationship strategy may be better articulated between the seller and the customer if both identify with a social or environmental cause (Eng et al., 2020).

## 5.3 Limitations and directions for future research

This research has some limitations. A response rate of 30.9% was obtained from the list of businesses contained in the directory of social enterprises used. Furthermore, the fieldwork information came from the same source, and so diversification is recommended in future works. Likewise, this research did not analyze the behavior of the variables studied in terms of the type of business or the supply of services or tangible products, thus future studies could consider studying that in more depth. The findings of this work open up new gaps to study the planning and functioning of the relational selling strategy in social enterprises, as well as its connection with aspects such as solidarity purchasing and the goodwill of customers in their relationship with social enterprise brands.

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