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Literature Review

An Essay on the Evolving Role of B2B Salespeople in the Age of Artificial Intelligence: Challenges and Opportunities.

Pedro Mendonça Silva *

ABSTRACT

The integration of Artificial Intelligence in B2B sales is transforming processes, enhancing customer experiences, and reshaping sales roles. This essay examines AI's impact, highlighting its benefits in efficiency, automation, and data-driven decision-making while addressing challenges such as cultural resistance and skill development. A conceptual model outlines key dimensions of AI-driven sales transformation. The study concludes that the future lies in a "Hybrid Model", where AI and human expertise coexist for innovation and competitive advantage. This essay can serve as a basis for future studies by proposing the conceptual model and suggesting empirical approaches to assess the impacts of AI on salespeople's performance.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence; B2B Sales; Sales Technology; Sales Process Automation; Hybrid Sales Model.

* CEOS.PP, ISCAP, Polytechnic of Porto, Portugal. E-mail: psilva@iscap.ipp.pt

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1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, technology has become an essential element in sales, driving transformation across processes, enhancing customer experiences, and providing a competitive advantage. As sales technology evolves, it supports every stage of the sales cycle, improving decision-making and boosting productivity, establishing itself as a cornerstone of modern sales management (Rainsberger, 2023). Among the most significant advancements in this field is the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI), which is reshaping the sales landscape more profoundly and extensively than previous technologies (Singh et al., 2019). Although the full impact of AI on sales remains uncertain, its influence is undeniably inevitable, with far-reaching consequences for both sales processes and professionals (McClure et al., 2024).

However, implementing AI in sales is not without challenges. The integration of such technologies does not automatically guarantee success; it requires a careful balance of objectives, usability, and value creation. Salespeople's resistance is a common obstacle, making it crucial for managers to engage them actively in the process, set realistic expectations, and ensure their commitment (Agnihotri et al., 2023). Despite these challenges, AI is not intended to replace humans but rather to enhance human capabilities (Jazairy et al., 2025). Sales representatives who leverage AI outperform those who rely solely on traditional methods, demonstrating that technology can enhance rather than diminish the human element in sales.

This essay explores the evolving role of B2B salespeople in the age of Artificial Intelligence, focusing on the challenges and opportunities AI presents. It discusses the impact of AI on the sales process, the changing roles of sales professionals, the implications for future sales practices, and the management challenges organisations face when adopting AI-driven sales strategies. Finally, the essay examines the future of sales in an AI-driven world, offering insights into how businesses can adapt to these changes and achieve long-term success.

2. THE IMPACT OF AI ON THE SALES PROCESS

The integration of AI into the sales process is rapidly transforming strategies and dynamics within organizations. Although the adoption of information technology in sales is not a new topic (Schillewaert et al., 2005), the recent surge in AI capabilities has shifted the focus to how AI is reshaping sales operations, particularly in B2B contexts. Research consistently indicates that investments in sales technology are enhancing problem-solving capabilities and market adaptability, while also providing companies with a significant competitive advantage (Silva et al., 2023). The introduction of automation tools and digital listening in sales processes, for example, is paving the way for a new era of innovation and opportunity (Neeb, 2023). Specifically, AI is having a considerable impact on B2B sales, influencing the practices of both salespeople and organizations (Chang, 2022).

In the realm of B2B sales, AI is having an impact across several dimensions. It is improving administrative efficiency, effectiveness in the sales process, and enhancing customer relationship management (Rodriguez & Peterson, 2024). However, despite these advances, there remains a gap between the high expectations for AI and the actual results achieved in B2B environments, highlighting a discrepancy between the optimistic views presented in the literature and the practical challenges businesses face when adopting AI (Keegan et al., 2024).

Several important clusters emerge when examining AI's impact on marketing and sales in the B2B context, based on Labib's (2024) study. These include AI-Enhanced Market Dynamics & Strategies, which explores the role of AI in competition, supply chain management, and the prediction of consumer behaviour; AI for Decision-Making, which describes how AI integration with tools such as Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems, big data, and predictive analytics can optimise decision-making processes; AI for Value-Transformation, which highlights how AI drives innovation, knowledge-sharing, and value co-creation in marketing; and AI for Ethical Marketing, which addresses concerns such as algorithmic bias, employment equity, and the responsible use of data.

The role of AI in the sales process also underscores the importance of human involvement in value co-creation. While AI provides powerful data-driven insights, human sales managers remain essential in managing interpersonal interactions and building relationships, ensuring that salespeople can leverage AI effectively (Paschen et al., 2021). A significant advantage of AI is its

ability to empower less experienced salespeople by granting them access to expert knowledge and data-driven insights (Singh et al., 2019). As the sales profession becomes increasingly data-driven, with a growing emphasis on analytical and strategic skills (Elhajjar et al., 2023), AI facilitates the automation of both routine and more complex sales tasks, resulting in greater efficiency and decision-making capabilities (McClure et al., 2024).

However, the shift towards a more automated and data-driven sales environment has implications for the traditional role of the salesperson. As customers become more informed and self-sufficient, the informational advantage once held by salespeople is diminishing. This trend is transforming sales relationships into more digital and automated interactions, demanding new approaches to communication and engagement (Fischer et al., 2022b). In this new environment, two main approaches to digital sales transformation have emerged: Enablers, which use digital tools to support consultative, value-based selling in B2B contexts, and Replacers, which automate sales processes, potentially reducing or eliminating the need for salespeople in B2C settings (Guenzi & Habel, 2020).

As digital transformation progresses, managers must be aware of the psychological effects it may have on their sales teams. While digital tools can increase efficiency, they can also lead to increased workload and stress. To mitigate these effects, managers need to reduce uncertainty through proper training, support, and guidance, ensuring that salespeople can adapt to the evolving demands of their roles (Guenzi & Nijssen, 2021). The integration of AI-driven feedback also plays a crucial role in this adaptation process. Studies have shown that environments rich in AI feedback and a salesperson's feedback orientation can predict the perceived accuracy of AI feedback, which in turn strengthens their intention to use it. This process enhances adaptive selling behaviours, which are positively correlated with increased organizational commitment and improved sales performance (Hall et al., 2022).

The implementation of AI in the sales process extends beyond immediate operational efficiency, with deeper implications for long-term strategic decisions. A study focused on Sales and Operations Planning (S&OP) found that integrating AI requires balancing short-term operational needs with long-term development goals, creating complex tensions that require careful management (Jazairy et al., 2025). These tensions arise from the need to centralise AI governance while accommodating diverse regional and functional requirements.

AI has shown particularly significant benefits for inexperienced sales agents. The technology's ability to improve response timeliness, accuracy, and tone has directly resulted in increased sales (Liao et al., 2024). Overall, the integration of AI into sales processes yields seven key outcomes: improvements in efficiency, accuracy, decision-making, customer relationship management, sales growth, cost reduction, and risk management (Chen et al., 2022).

These outcomes collectively demonstrate the transformative power of AI in modern sales operations, highlighting its potential to redefine the very nature of the sales profession, while emphasising the ongoing need for human involvement in areas such as relationship-building and strategy.

3. THE NEW ROLE OF THE SALESPEOPLE

The new role of the salesperson is being transformed by digital transformation and, consequently, by the integration of AI into the sales process. In principle, AI will take over repetitive and operational tasks, such as order processing, information gathering, and customer prospecting, allowing human salespeople to focus on more consultative and strategic roles. Instead of handling administrative tasks, sales professionals will be more focused on creating value, developing authentic customer relationships, and personalising the sales experience—areas where AI has not yet fully replicated human capabilities (Chang, 2022).

Furthermore, salespeople's analytical skills are becoming increasingly important. The ability to analyse large volumes of data and transform this information into tailored strategies directly impacts sales performance, influencing the success of transactions across different business scenarios (Peesker et al., 2022). As a result, the evolution of the salesperson's role is also generating new job categories in sales. Roles such as Sales Analysts, who make data-driven decisions to drive growth; Digital Prospecting Specialists, who use online platforms to attract new customers; and Sales Operations Managers, who focus on planning and efficiently allocating resources, are becoming more necessary (Elhajjar et al., 2023).

In B2C markets, which are typically data-rich and have high transaction volumes, automation may be more effective than direct human interaction. Companies are increasingly exploring self-service tools and AI-driven recommendations, prioritising efficiency and cost reduction over personalised interactions (Guenzi & Habel, 2020). However, in B2B contexts and complex sales, salespeople

remain indispensable (Rodríguez et al., 2020), with AI serving as a supporting tool rather than a replacement. AI can help B2B professionals transform data into different types of knowledge - customer, user, and market knowledge (Paschen et al., 2019).

Nevertheless, for digital transformation to succeed, sales managers must ensure that the technologies adopted align with the company's strategic goals and contribute directly to return on investment (ROI). Sales tools should not only automate processes but also enhance customer relationships and increase productivity (Agnihotri et al., 2023). Sales managers must stay attuned to their teams' daily operations, providing continuous support to help salespeople adapt to digitalisation. Regular one-to-one meetings are essential for discussing challenges and assisting teams in navigating the digital transition (Bongers et al., 2021). Moreover, companies must hire professionals with technological skills, resilience, and confidence in technology, key attributes for managing the rapid changes brought about by digital transformation (Guenzi & Nijssen, 2021).

Nevertheless, sales - especially complex sales - continue to require a human touch. While automation enhances efficiency in routine tasks, human salespeople remain essential for handling situations that involve deep analysis, negotiation, and strategic decision-making, areas where digital tools still fall short (Fischer et al., 2022a). Despite the growing importance of technical and analytical skills, interpersonal skills such as communication, negotiation, and customer relationship management remain critical for successful sales performance (Elhajjar et al., 2023). The balance between digital and non-digital channels will likely be crucial, as digital sales require salespeople to adapt and integrate new technologies to deliver a personalised and effective sales experience (Fischer et al., 2022b).

Ultimately, AI should not be seen as a threat to the salesperson's role but as a tool that enables its evolution. Artificial intelligence can take over operational tasks, allowing salespeople to focus on areas where their creativity, negotiation skills, and complex strategic decision-making are indispensable (Jazairy et al., 2025).

The future of sales will, therefore, be a collaboration between humans and AI, where machines provide valuable data and insights while salespeople use their human skills to maximise the value offered to customers.

4. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR SALESPeOPLE

The digitalisation of B2B sales presents a range of challenges and opportunities for professionals in the field (Rodríguez et al., 2020). One of the most significant challenges is salespeople's resistance to change. According to Giovannetti et al. (2022), sales professionals react to transformations in three distinct ways: (1) Resistance, betting on the idea that everything will return to normal and avoiding the use of new technologies; (2) Acceptance, reassessing sales processes and demanding organisational support for the adoption of new tools; and (3) Leadership, actively promoting the implementation of digital sales processes and advocating hybrid sales as an effective strategy. While some professionals advance rapidly, others persist with outdated practices, generating frustration for sales managers who must balance digital adoption with team productivity (Mattila et al., 2021). Overcoming these tensions is essential for a successful digital sales transformation.

Managing the human factor in the implementation of technology is another relevant challenge. If digitalisation is not well managed, productivity gains may be temporary or even counterproductive, leading to burnout or resistance from professionals (Alavi & Habel, 2021). Furthermore, if AI makes specialised knowledge more accessible and transferable, salespeople may lose influence in the job market and bargaining power over salaries (Singh et al., 2019). Another critical challenge is the need for efficient time management and access to the right information at the right moment (Rodríguez et al., 2020). Technological tools, such as social media, improve communication and salespeople' adaptability, but they do not inherently guarantee better responsiveness or deep product knowledge. Effective implementation of these technologies requires a clear strategy and organisational support (Ogilvie et al., 2018).

Regarding opportunities, AI also offers real-time feedback for sales training and development but may generate tensions related to workload and the introduction of new data-driven KPIs. Therefore, it is crucial that sales managers guide salespeople in adopting these new performance metrics (McClure et al., 2024). AI enables greater efficiency and focus on strategic functions. For example, AI automates repetitive and operational tasks, allowing salespeople to concentrate on value creation (Chang, 2022). AI also allows data to be transformed into knowledge, enabling salespeople to improve their ability to understand customer needs, predict sales trends, and optimise their approach to different business scenarios (Peesker et al., 2022). Another opportunity

is the enhancement of sales roles and the creation of new career opportunities, leading to specialised roles such as Sales Analysts, Digital Prospecting Specialists, and Sales Operations Managers (Elhajjar et al., 2023). Therefore, AI-human collaboration benefits salespeople, managers, and businesses. AI improves learning and performance for salespeople, automates repetitive tasks for managers, and increases revenue and operational efficiency for businesses (Luo et al., 2021).

To take full advantage of digitalisation opportunities, companies must invest in training their employees in digital tools, data analysis, and cybersecurity. A new role dedicated to supporting digitalisation could be created to facilitate professionals' adaptation to new technologies (Rodríguez et al., 2020). AI does not replace human experience but requires a clear alignment of roles and a continuous training effort (Paschen et al., 2021). Therefore, for AI to be implemented effectively, companies must structure themselves as data-driven organisations. Without a sufficient volume of high-quality data, AI systems cannot operate efficiently or provide accurate insights (Schiavone et al., 2023). Thus, it is essential to foster an organisational culture based on data utilisation to maximise the benefits of sales digitalisation.

In summary, the challenges faced by sales professionals in the digital age can be overcome through effective change management, continuous skills development, and the strategic integration of new technologies. The digitalisation of sales is not merely about adopting technological tools but also transforming salespeople's mindset and organisational structures to ensure technology is leveraged to drive performance and competitiveness in the market.

5. THE FUTURE OF SALES IN THE AGE OF AI

AI is reshaping the sales industry, evolving from a mere automation tool to actively enhancing complex tasks (McClure et al., 2024). Despite digitalization, face-to-face interactions remain crucial for closing complex B2B deals (Rodríguez et al., 2020). AI will handle repetitive tasks like prospecting and order processing, freeing human salespeople to focus on high-value activities requiring emotional intelligence, creativity, and strategic thinking (Chang, 2022). In addition, leveraging AI for data analysis will enable more personalized sales strategies, improving success rates (Peesker et al., 2022). Meanwhile, emerging innovations like virtual and augmented reality

could transform the customer experience, offering immersive product demonstrations, advanced training, and virtual negotiations (Giovannetti et al., 2022).

The future sales model will be hybrid, combining AI's efficiency with human intuition and expertise (Chang, 2022). AI won't replace salespeople but will redefine their role, positioning them as sales strategists who harness technology to enhance performance, focusing on areas where creativity, empathy, and negotiation are irreplaceable (Jazairy et al., 2025). Therefore, the future of sales lies in a collaborative model, leveraging the strengths of both AI and human sellers. Companies that strategically integrate these technologies will gain a competitive edge, driving greater efficiency and personalization in sales interactions.

6. DISCUSSION AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS OF AI IN SALES

The increasing integration of AI in the sales sector is transforming processes, roles, and organisational strategies. Figure 1 illustrates a conceptual model derived from the analysis of the previous topics, highlighting the key dimensions of this transformation, which include the impact of AI on operational efficiency, decision-making, customer experience, and the role of salespeople. One of the key dimensions is "operational efficiency and automation", where AI takes over repetitive tasks such as prospecting and order processing, optimising resource use, reducing costs, and boosting productivity (McClure et al., 2024). Another relevant dimension is "strategic decision-making", which arises from AI-based tools that analyse large volumes of data, providing predictive insights that enable the personalisation of sales strategies and enhance commercial management (Peesker et al., 2022).

Regarding the dimension of "transformation of the salesperson's role", the literature suggests that salespeople are shifting from operational tasks to more strategic and consultative roles, focusing on developing skills in data analysis, negotiation, and emotional intelligence. New roles are emerging, such as Digital Prospecting Specialists and Sales Analysts (Elhajjar et al., 2023). Figure 1 also highlights the dimension of "human-AI interaction in customer experience" showing that the combination of technology and human interaction strengthens trust and personalisation (Chang, 2022; Jazairy et al., 2025; Rodríguez et al., 2020). An example of this is the use of resources like augmented and virtual reality, which enhance demonstrations and training, creating more immersive experiences (Giovannetti et al., 2022). The model also addresses the dimension

of "organisational challenges and adaptation". The implementation of AI requires overcoming cultural barriers, redefining performance metrics, and investing in continuous training (McClure et al., 2024; Paschen et al., 2021). Additionally, adaptation must consider the psychological impact of digitalisation on salespeople (Giovannetti et al., 2022).

Finally, the model projects the future of sales with the concept of the "Hybrid Model". The future will be characterised by the synergy between AI and human salespeople, and companies that balance automation with human expertise will gain a competitive edge, driven by a data-driven organisational culture and innovation (Giovannetti et al., 2022; Peesker et al., 2022).

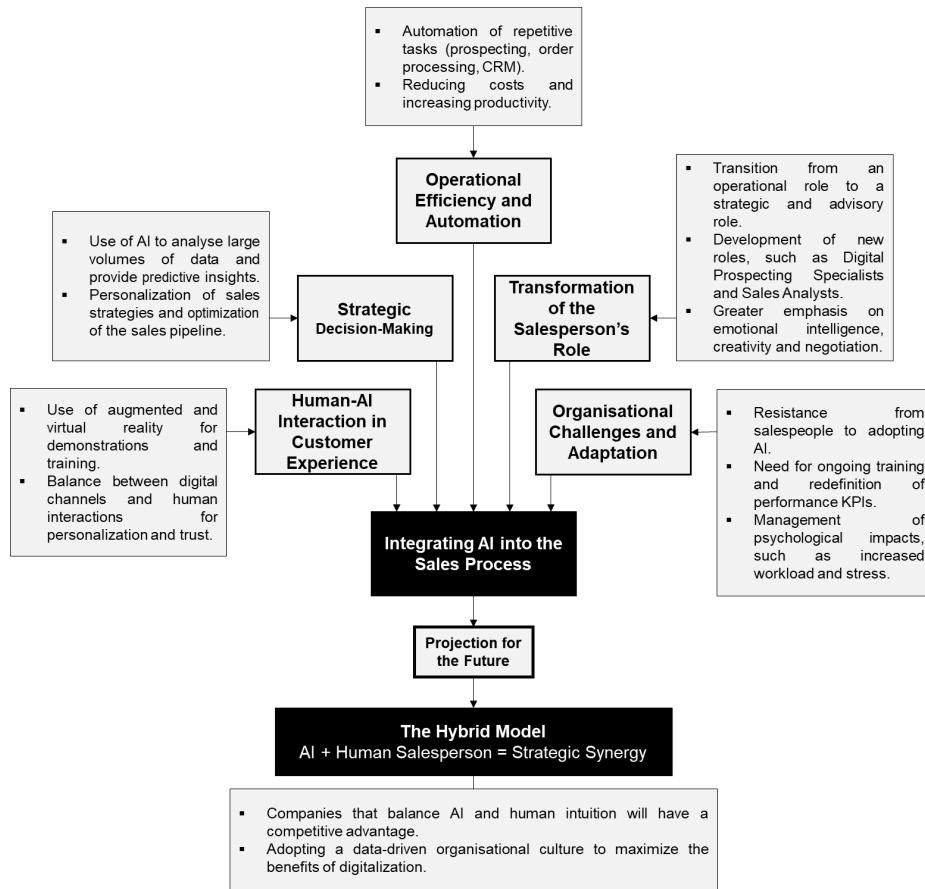


Figure 1. Integrating AI into the sales process - impact dimension

Source: Own elaboration

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the integration of AI in B2B sales is reshaping the industry by enhancing operational efficiency, refining decision-making, redefining the salesperson's role, and transforming customer interactions. As highlighted in the conceptual model, AI automates routine tasks, enabling sales professionals to focus on strategic and consultative activities, ultimately fostering a more data-driven and personalised sales approach. However, successful AI adoption requires organisations to overcome cultural and structural barriers, invest in skill development, and balance automation with human expertise. Looking ahead, the future of sales lies in a "Hybrid Model", where AI and human salespeople collaborate to drive innovation, customer engagement, and long-term competitive advantage. Businesses that effectively embrace this synergy will be best positioned to thrive in an AI-driven sales landscape.

Despite offering valuable insights into the evolving role of B2B salespeople in the age of AI, this essay has certain limitations. Firstly, while the conceptual model provides a structured perspective on AI's impact on sales, it is based on existing literature and may not capture all nuances of real-world applications across different industries and markets. Empirical studies are needed to validate these dimensions in diverse organisational contexts. Secondly, the rapid evolution of AI means that new technologies and applications may emerge, potentially altering the landscape of sales in unforeseen ways. As such, this analysis may require continuous updates to remain relevant. Additionally, the psychological and emotional impact of AI adoption on sales professionals is an area that warrants deeper exploration, particularly regarding motivation, job satisfaction, and the skills required for long-term adaptation.

For future research, longitudinal studies could examine the long-term effects of AI on sales performance, workforce dynamics, and organisational structures. Comparative studies across industries and cultural settings would also provide valuable insights into how different sectors and regions adopt and integrate AI-driven sales strategies. Furthermore, future research could explore ethical considerations related to AI in sales, such as data privacy, transparency in AI-driven decision-making, and the potential risks of over-reliance on automation. Lastly, investigating the effectiveness of training programmes designed to upskill sales professionals in AI-driven environments would help organisations develop more effective strategies for workforce transformation.

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Declaration of Use of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Tools in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author(s) utilized Grammarly and EditGPT for proofreading purposes. Following the use of these tools, the author(s) carefully reviewed and edited the content as necessary and take(s) full responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the final publication.

Declaration of conflict of interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest associated with the publication of this article.

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