

Winning in B2B Sales in the Digital Economy: A Systematic Literature Review and the Dynamic Capabilities Approach

Titta Pitman
LUT Business School
titta.pitman@lut.fi

Jonna Koponen
UEF Business School
jonna pauliina.koponen@uef.fi

Anssi Tarkiainen
LUT Business School
anssi.tarkiainen@lut.fi

Abstract

How business-to-business (B2B) firms succeed in digital transformation in sales will determine if they flourish or perish. The adoption of digital technologies creates new opportunities and challenges for firms. Successful adoption can lead to increased revenues and improved customer relations. For B2B sellers and managers to succeed in the digital economy, they need to understand and adapt to these changes. A thorough analysis of the available literature and the strategic use of dynamic capabilities are required due to the changing nature of the B2B sales marketplace. In this systematic literature review, we bring together the digital transformation research of B2B sales management by synthesizing major themes and topics. We analyze the findings with a lens of dynamic capabilities and identify seven dynamic capabilities that managers need to pay attention to in B2B sales to win sales in the digital economy. Additionally, we propose a future research agenda.

Keywords: Digital transformation, B2B sales, B2B sales management, digital economy, dynamic capabilities

1. Introduction

Change in our society is fast and volatile. In May 2022, the European parliament announced that one of its priorities is the digital transformation (DT) of Europe and that it is investing billions of euros into the Digital Europe Program, which aims to “facilitate the digitalization of the European society across all vertical sectors” (EU Monitor, 2022). If the European DT is successful, the EU’s economy could grow by an estimated 2.8 trillion euros by 2030 (Amazon, 2022). Societal economic success depends on how companies manage digital transformation at all levels of their operations, including sales. Still, today, and perhaps because of the rapid development of AI, top-performing CEOs suggest that digital disruption is one of the biggest

phenomena impacting how they will lead their businesses this year compared to previous years (McKinsey, 2023). How successful company leaders and managers are in implementing digitalization strategies and tools in sales will determine whether their businesses will keep up with the competition (Zoltners et al., 2021).

The digitalization of sales is an ongoing process (Wengler et al., 2021) that requires strategic and operational choices and decisions. In firms, digitalization gradually evolved into system integration of data and IT, and in recent years, the digital transformation has taken giant leaps toward the integration of artificial intelligence and machine learning. The digitalization of B2B sales has made product offerings more complex due to the bundling of products and services and the development of technology (Ingram et al., 2005). New types of sales jobs are emerging, and they are characterized by new skill requirements, such as relationship selling and expertise in social media and other technologies (Marshall et al., 2012). The digital transformation of B2B sales is a multi-faceted phenomenon that impacts sales as a profession (Guenzi & Nijssen, 2023), professional salespeople (Zoltners et al., 2021), business models (Linde et al., 2021), value creation (Singh et al., 2019), and the sales process (e.g., Syam & Sharma, 2018). Since the digital transformation impacts different areas of the sales function and involves different types of technologies, the research field is fragmented and typically focused on exploring one aspect of the phenomenon, such as digital technologies in B2B sales (Singh et al., 2019), technology acceptance or adoption (Chatterjee et al., 2021), value (co-)creation in B2B firms (Guenzi & Nijssen, 2023), digitalization strategies (Zoltners et al., 2021), digital technologies impacting the sales process (Guenzi & Habel, 2020), the human side of digital transformation (Kramer & Krafft, 2023), the relational perspective (Loro & Mangiaracina, 2022), or social media (Guenzi & Nijssen, 2020).

The digitalization has transformed the landscape of B2B sales, necessitating a comprehensive review of

existing literature and the strategic application of dynamic capabilities. Fischer et al. (2023) investigated triggers of digital sales and the influence of digital transformation on sales function and environment. Our study complements Fischer et al.'s (2023) study by focusing on the dynamic capabilities that firms need in B2B sales to respond to the challenges and opportunities brought by digitalization and digital transformation.

How the company can keep or enhance its competitive advantage with ever-increasing competition and a fast-changing business environment is a critical factor to company success. An ordinary sales activity can be copied; thus, it is not a competitive advantage in itself (Teece, 2014). In this paper, we investigate the digital transformation in B2B sales management through a dynamic capabilities lens. Dynamic capabilities is one of the key theories in the strategic management of firms and has since developed as a "multidisciplinary framework to explain long-run enterprise performance" (Teece, 2014, p. 328). It is appropriate for studies on digital transformation because, as a theory of strategic management, it examines strategic changes in an organization. Sales researchers have applied the dynamic capabilities theory in prior studies (see, e.g., Liu & Zhao, 2021; Peterson et al., 2021).

The purpose of this study is to provide an overview of digitalization and digital transformation in B2B sales and explore the needed dynamic capabilities of B2B sales to maintain a firm's competitive advantage. This systematic literature review contributes to research on the digital transformation of B2B sales by analyzing the key aspects that B2B sales management need to consider in a digital economy. Additionally, organizations need to develop and enhance their dynamic capabilities to effectively navigate this changing landscape and achieve sustainable success. We propose seven dynamic capabilities in B2B sales that managers should apply to win sales in the digital economy and suggest a future research agenda. The findings of this paper will help B2B sales managers to understand the impact of digitalization and digital transformation, and what can be done about it to maintain the firm's competitive advantage.

Our research questions are: How is digital transformation impacting B2B sales management? What do B2B sales managers need to know about digital transformation to keep the competitive advantage of the firm? What are the key dynamic capabilities of B2B sales management in the digital economy?

We started our paper with an introduction to our research field of digital transformation in B2B sales. We then proceed to a theoretical framework where we define digitalization, digital transformation, and our theoretical lens: the dynamic capabilities theory.

Following that, we explain the methodology of the study and present our findings. Finally, we discuss the implications of our findings and end with conclusions.

2. Theoretical framework

First, we define digital transformation. Vial (2019, p. 118) defined the concept as "a process that aims to improve an entity by triggering significant changes to its properties through combinations of information, computing, communication, and connective technologies." They further explained that digital transformation disrupts and changes value creation paths, consumer behavior and expectations, the competitive landscape, and the availability and use of data. It impacts organizations' structures, such as culture, leadership, and employee skill requirements. Verhoef et al. (2021, p. 889) described the phenomenon in their multidisciplinary article as "a change in how a firm employs digital technologies to develop a new digital business model that helps to create and appropriate more value for the firm." Microsoft's technology executive and global C-Suite advisor, April Walker, defined the topic by saying, "Digital transformation is not just 'doing digital.' Digital transformation is a deliberate, strategic repositioning of one's business in today's digital economy" (Conway & Codkind, 2021, p. 1).

Digitalization is necessary for digital transformation. Digital tools encourage the development of fresh approaches and inventive chances to support clients, which we call digitalization (Singh et al., 2019). Digitalization can lead to improved processes due to modern technology. Digital transformation, however, goes beyond digitalization. Digital transformation refers to the process through which a firm develops a plan to use technology to enhance operations and satisfy changing customer needs (Newman, 2017). Successful digital transformation can lead to increased revenue and customer value.

Dynamic capability is "the capacity of an organization to purposefully create, extend, or modify its resource base" (Helfat et al., 2007, p. 1). The concept of dynamic capability is based on a strategic management theory, and it explores "how and why certain firms build competitive advantage in regimes of rapid change" (Teece et al., 1997, p. 509). Due to complex business environments, dynamic capabilities vary depending on the context and can be industry-specific, operation-specific, or even problem-specific (Teece et al., 1997). The dynamic capabilities definition has developed into a company's capacity to "(a) sense and shape opportunities and threats, (b) seize opportunities, and (c) maintain competitiveness through enhancing, combining, protecting, and, when necessary,

reconfiguring the business enterprise's intangible and tangible assets" (Teece, 2007, p. 1319). Capabilities are divided into ordinary and dynamic capabilities. Ordinary capabilities are operational ones that are necessary to keep the company running. Dynamic capabilities entail "higher-level" activities that can allow a business to redirect its regular operations toward more lucrative ventures. The firm's resources must be managed or "orchestrated" to address and influence the quickly shifting business conditions (Teece, 2014, p. 328).

Teece (2014, pp. 18–19) explains that many operational tasks, such as accounting and sales, no longer support sustainable competitive advantage as they "can be outsourced to the cloud." We do not share this view. Instead, we argue that our literature review findings show that contemporary B2B sales, which have been profoundly impacted by digitalization and digital transformation, cannot simply be outsourced to a "cloud." Instead, a successful B2B sales operation has several dynamic capabilities enabled by new technologies. In previous studies, researchers have investigated dynamic capabilities theory in a sales context, such as sales enablement (Peterson et al., 2021), partner relationship management (Chatterjee et al., 2023), technology-enabled sales capability (Badrinarayanan et al., 2022), dynamic marketing capability (DMC) concerning company product innovations and company agility (Mitrega, 2020), co-creating social media agility to build strong customer–firm relationships (Chuang, 2020), resource orchestration and dynamic managerial capabilities (Badrinarayanan et al., 2019), dynamic capabilities in key account management (Guesalaga et al., 2018), and value-based selling (Liu & Zhao, 2021).

3. Methodology

In our systematic literature review, we follow a four-step process, similar to Fischer et al. (2023), as our methodological approach. First, we defined our topic area and research questions. We found a gap in B2B sales research, and our aim is to contribute to B2B sales research by offering a comprehensive view on the digital transformation phenomenon in the sales field. Second, we conducted a literature search. We used the systematic literature review process to study the literature on digitalization and digital transformation in B2B sales. We started by searching Scopus and EBSCO Business Source Complete databases. We complemented this by searching the Google Scholar database followed by a reference search. Then, we searched the emerging journals individually. Third, following the search, we selected the final sample and then analyzed the corpus by reviewing the articles and

coding them by emerging themes and topics. We present them in the chapter where we discuss our findings (4.1–4.5). Fourth, those recognized themes and topics were synthesized through the dynamic capabilities lens and we present them in section 4.6. Finally, we propose dynamic capabilities that managers need to pay attention to so that the firm remains competitive.

We also set some inclusion and exclusion criteria to focus our search. Following the example of other digital marketing reviews, we chose articles published from 2000 to the present day (e.g., Herhausen et al., 2020; Kannan & Li, 2017; Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). We wanted to keep the time frame long enough to see how the research field has evolved, what the emerging themes and topics are, and what is required from the B2B sales managers to lead and manage the strategic change. Our inclusion criteria were: English language and academic journal articles. Therefore, we excluded the articles published before 2000, that were not in English or were published in conference proceedings.

Our search terms were B2B sales and digital transformation, and phrases related to these topics such as digit*, digitalization, digitization, digital sale*, business-to-business sale*, B2B sale*, B2B sale* manager*, and salespeople. When selecting the articles, we chose technologies such as digitalization in general, sales force automation tools, CRM, AI, machine learning, big data, and social media. We included all the technologies that are relevant to B2B sales and talked about in conjunction with digitalization or digital transformation of the B2B sales field. We left out all articles related to B2C and retail sales, small SMEs, and COVID-related topics. We focused solely on B2B sales in medium or large companies, and not related to specifically in context to COVID-19. We included all conceptual and empirical papers published in peer-reviewed journals which are at least minimum ABS ranked and fit our other search criteria.

Our final sample size was 101 articles. The article distribution by their journals (number of articles/% of articles) is as follows: Industrial Marketing Management (48/47.5%), Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing (12/11.9%), Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management (12/11.9%), European Journal of Marketing (7/6.9%), Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science (4/4.0%), Technological Forecasting and Social Change (4/4.0%), and Journal of Research Interactive Marketing (3/3.0%). Besides these, nine other journals (9/8.9%) had one article each, which were also included in the sample (the table of included articles can be provided upon request). See our literature search data on Table 1.

Table 1. Literature search

Step	Search results	Restrictions	Search results	Articles selected
1	1246	Academic journal, English	207	40
2	2029	Academic journal, English, business, management and accounting, social sciences, economics	441	
3	41 200	First five pages	10	1
4				2
5				56
Total				101

Step 1 EBSCO Business Source complete
 Step 2 Scopus
 ➤ both, search field: title, abstract, keywords
 Step 3 Google Scholar
 Step 4 reference search
 Step 5 selected journals based on the results of step one and two.
 Total = selected article for the analysis

4. Findings

On Figure 1 we have presented the distribution of the selected journal articles by year. We can see a peak year 2005 and a closer look reveals that nine out of the 11 articles that year were in Industrial Marketing Management Journal, which points at a special edition focused on digitalization of B2B sales. Otherwise, the trend starts peaking in 2020 and is still rising.

We started analyzing the corpus by finding the major themes that were studied. We placed each article in one major theme, but also noted if other themes were discussed in the paper. For example, the major theme was value (co-)creation, but the technology studied was social media. The themes that emerged from our analysis were: technology acceptance/adoption (30 articles), social media (19), value (co-)creation (10), B2B relations/customer relations (nine), digitalization strategies for success (nine), sales process (seven), sales enablement/resource alignment (six), work demands/technostress (five), sales transformation/future of sales (four), and omnichannel management (two). Looking at the last two years of publications, social media had the most articles published (8) as the main theme, followed by customer relations, sales enablement/resource alignment, and technology adoption (four each). Technology adoption has been the interest of researchers throughout the years, with the first article on the theme in 2001. New technologies are emerging, and companies need to decide what technologies to adopt and how to implement them. In recent years (2018–2023), researchers have studied how the sales process is evolving with the adoption of

technologies. The future of sales and research on digitalization strategies have also interested researchers in recent years (2018–2023). On the psychological side, technostress is one of the negative sides of technology adoption and use, and it has been discussed particularly in the last few years (2019–2023).

In B2B sales, digital transformation impacts both sales professionals (Zoltners et al., 2021) and sales as a profession (Syam & Sharma, 2018). We also coded the articles by whether the study or the impact affected sales as a profession or sales professionals. Additionally, we noted the technology that was either studied directly or indirectly. Technologies mentioned ranged from technology such as CRM and machine learning or AI to more general such as digital sales, social media, or digitalization. Next, we present the relevant concepts and topics in B2B sales in the digital economy. Following that, we synthesize our findings and categorize them by dynamic capabilities theory divided into sensing, seizing, and transforming.

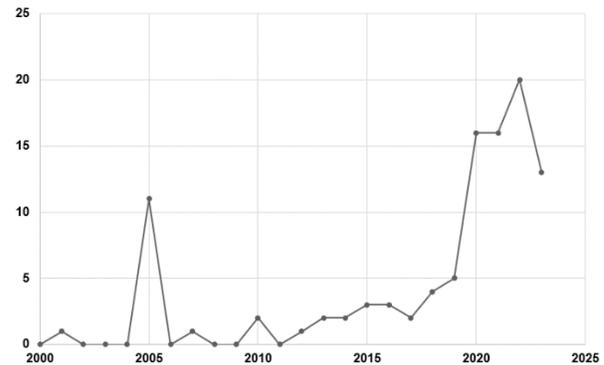


Figure 1. Journal articles by year (2000-2023)

4.1. Digital transformation and professional salespeople

Salespeople must learn to use different digital sales tools, such as AI-integrated CRM systems (Chatterjee et al., 2021) and social CRM (Choudhury & Harrigan, 2014), for improved effectiveness (Mahlamäki et al., 2020). Furthermore, organizational adaptation is needed to achieve the digitalization goals by bridging the gap between departments, such as encouraging marketing–sales cooperation (Mullins & Agnihotri, 2022). Besides the technology acceptance and adoption, the digitalization of B2B sales impacts the salesforce at the psychological and cognitive levels. Salespeople need to learn new skills, unlearn old ways of doing sales (Mattila et al., 2021), and cope with the stress caused by the application of new technology (Guenzi & Nijssen, 2021; Kramer & Krafft, 2023). To support the sales force in the digitalization process, it is critical to align resources correctly across the organization (Lauzi et al.,

2023). Social media requires new ways of working, as some salespeople take an influencer role and aim to grow their expert image by posting on social media (Cheng et al., 2023).

4.2. Digital transformation and B2B sales as a profession

The sales profession is changing because the exchange of information can be automated through a firm's systems (Xue et al., 2013). Digital selling enables the use of different sales channels (Alonso-Garcia et al., 2023), which provides new opportunities for business growth but can also challenge the management to make the right decisions. Access to data and information is transforming the sales process. The application of AI and machine learning offers new opportunities for flexible pricing in B2B e-commerce (Leung et al., 2019), and each step of the sales process can be analyzed for effectiveness (Guenzi & Habel, 2020). Digital transformation also provides new possibilities for value creation, which we will discuss in closer detail later. Furthermore, social media is changing the sales profession, which we will discuss next.

4.3. Social selling and social media

Social media is being increasingly used in different parts of the sales process (Kumar & Sharma, 2022) to gather insights through customer engagement (Lamrhari et al., 2022), to enhance brand awareness (Kalra et al., 2023), and to perform better in sales (Franck & Damperat, 2023; Terho et al., 2022). One of the main goals of social selling is to engage customers and improve customer–firm relationships (Sombultawee & Wattanatorn, 2022). Salespeople are required to have a presence on social media to become influencers in their markets (Kalra et al., 2023) and thereby improve their company's performance.

4.4. Customers and value (co-)creation

The digitalization of B2B sales is impacting B2B customer relations. Sales transactions are moving from face-to-face operations to digital channels and e-marketplaces (Loro & Mangiaracina, 2022). The change from analog to digital may not be synchronized between the partners (Yin et al., 2023), which may cause problems in the relationship. However, if digitalization can be seen as an improvement on both sides of the relationship, it can benefit the relationship (Lin & Lin, 2023). Digitalization has enabled new types of value creation between sellers and buyers, such as digital servitization (Linde et al., 2021), value-based selling

(Alamäki & Korpela, 2021), digital solutions selling (Guenzi & Nijssen, 2023), and value (co-)creation in digital ecosystemic business environments (Rusthollkarhu et al., 2020). AI technologies are positively influencing value creation for customers (Singh et al., 2019), suppliers, and technology companies (Li et al., 2021).

4.5. The future of B2B sales

Sales is constantly transforming due to digitalization (Wengler et al., 2021). To successfully manage the transformation, both technology and humanity need to be carefully considered (Corsaro & Maggioni, 2022). If applied correctly, digitalization can offer keys to competitive advantage and superior value (co-)creation (Fischer et al., 2023). To enable a successful digital transformation of B2B sales management, the resources must be organized effectively, and cross-department cooperation is needed (Lauzi et al., 2023). Customer-driven change requires leadership skills from managers (Giovannetti et al., 2021), and B2B marketing is, in many ways, starting to resemble B2C marketing, for example in social media use (Neuhaus et al., 2022) and business platform adoption (Anderson et al., 2022).

4.6. Sensing, seizing, and transforming

We coded and synthesized the findings and categorized them into sensing, seizing, and transforming in the dynamic capabilities framework. The result of the analysis can be seen in Figure 2. (1) Sensing refers to sensing opportunities in the external environment caused by digital disruption. These opportunities are the firm's internal needs, emerging business opportunities, customer needs, and emerging technologies. This is followed by (2) seizing the identified opportunities, such as adopting the correct technologies, adapting the business model, managing customer engagement, and managing the corporate ecosystem to support the sales function. The last step involves (3) reconfiguring or transforming the sales force design so it can be agile and adaptive to the constantly changing environment. It involves modifying the product and service offering and, therefore, the business model if needed; adapting to a new and agile sales process; transforming the customer relationship to (co-)create more value; and reconfiguring the internal resources and resource-based view with market-oriented customer needs.

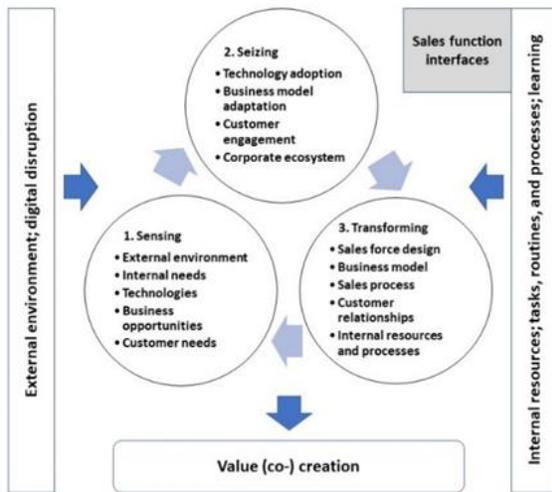


Figure 2. Dynamic capabilities in B2B sales

These dynamic capabilities will then reflect organizational learning, processes, routines, and tasks, and management will make decisions about the firm’s technological position. Keeping up with rapid change requires constant unlearning, learning, and re-learning. Internal resources need to be planned so that the organization and people can develop and adapt to requirements coming from the technology and customer perspectives. We thus identify seven dynamic capabilities in B2B sales management that managers need to pay attention to: (1) technology recognition and adoption, (2) business model adaptation, (3) customer relations and engagement strategies, (4) agile and adaptive sales processes, (5) designing an adaptive and agile sales force, (6) sales enablement, and (7) corporate ecosystem co-operation with the sales function.

There are several avenues for future research. A qualitative study of B2B sales management could be conducted to see how B2B sales managers and salespeople cope with digital transformation and how the presented dynamic capabilities are applied in the firm. A preliminary research agenda with research questions is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Future research agenda and questions

Topic	Questions
1. Technology recognition and adoption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to support salesforce technology adoption? • What are the key technologies to ensure a successful digital transformation of B2B sales? • What talent is needed in the salesforce for technology adoption? • How to help the salesforce with technology-related stress situations? • How to recognize if the salesforce is experiencing technostress?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kind of training do salespeople and managers need to adopt new technology in digital transformation? • How to manage and lead technology recognition and adoption in the digital transformation of B2B sales?
<p>2. Business model adaptation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to lead and manage customer value (co-)creation in B2B sales in the digital economy? • What is required from the organization to adapt the business model whilst balancing RBV and market orientation in the digital economy? • How to develop a business model when digitally transforming B2B sales? • What are the dynamic capabilities in business model adaptation in B2B sales in the digital economy?
<p>3. Customer relations and engagement strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can a firm engage best with the customers in a digital economy? • How to adopt relationship selling practices in B2B sales in digital transformation? • How to use technology to help engage with customers better in the digital economy? • How to engage customers in social media in the digital economy? • How to manage and lead customer engagement in B2B salesforce in digital transformation?
<p>4. Agile and adaptive sales process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to apply AI in the B2B sales process? • How to keep the B2B sales process adaptive and agile? • What type of salespeople’s capabilities and skills are needed in the sales process in the digital economy? • How to measure sales process effectiveness in digital transformation?
<p>5. Designing an adaptive and agile salesforce</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to design an adaptive salesforce in the digital economy? • What qualities does an adaptive salesforce have in the digital economy? • How to measure salesforce agility? • What do salespeople need to learn, re-learn, or un-learn when a firm is going through a digital transformation? • What technology is needed to enable salesforce adaptivity and agility? • What talent is needed to enable salesforce adaptivity and agility in the digital economy? • What is required from a manager to lead an adaptive and agile salesforce in the digital economy?
<p>6. Sales enablement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What type of B2B sales enablement is needed in the firm during a digital transformation? • How to manage and lead sales enablement in digital transformation? • How to measure sales enablement in digital transformation? • What are the key functions for effective sales enablement during digital transformation? • How can a firm develop B2B sales enablement in digital transformation?
<p>7. Corporate ecosystem co-operation with sales function</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to break barriers between departments in digital transformation? • What are the critical factors to ensure that collected customer intelligence flows smoothly between departments in the digital economy? • How to involve B2B sales in organization research and development projects? • How to improve B2B sales–marketing cooperation for sales development? • How to improve B2B sales–marketing cooperation for customer engagement in digital transformation?

5. Discussion

With this systematic literature review, we recognize that digital transformation is disrupting B2B sales in many ways. New technologies challenge companies to consider how to adopt them and whether said adoption will bring the desired results. We used the dynamic capabilities theory to categorize the emerging themes and topics of our literature review findings. The adoption of digital technologies is challenging firms to consider whether to adopt new technologies such as AI-integrated CRM systems (Chatterjee et al., 2021). It also makes us ask what the drivers of salespeople's AI acceptance are (Chen and Zhou, 2022), try to understand salespeople's adoption of mobile sales technology (Sanakulov et al., 2018), try to find out how the use of digital technology impacts sales organizations (Micallef et al., 2022), and try to decipher how mentoring or peer support can help overcome resistance or challenges (Sanakulov et al., 2018). Digital tools are shaping the sales process as new tools for pricing systems can be applied (Leung et al., 2019), social media is being used in selling (Kumar & Sharma, 2022; Sombultawee & Wattanatorn, 2022), and AI is enabling machines to make decisions that humans previously made (Syam & Sharma, 2018).

What is important for managers to understand is that digitalization is constantly evolving (Wengler et al., 2021) and digital disruption is changing what skills and knowledge are needed in B2B sales (Elhajjar et al., 2023). Organizations should invest in resources in sales enablement to support the managers and sales professionals in the shift and to align the organizational resources in the digitalization efforts (Lauzi et al., 2023). To bridge the gap between sales and marketing is important (Biemans et al., 2022) as both are crucial to enable success in contemporary sales efforts. On the psychological side, the management of the firm must pay attention to their employees' wellbeing as adoption of new technologies can cause technostress (Kramer & Krafft, 2023).

In strategic sales, it is crucial to analyze the business environment and the customers to position the company and its offerings correctly. However, there has been a major shift in the business environment in the last decade, and digital disruption is impacting all business functions as well as the societies where businesses operate. Fischer et al. (2023) suggest that the role of technology has changed, and we need to change how to manage B2B sales. We have responded to this call by mapping out the dynamic capabilities needed in contemporary B2B sales management.

We have used the classifications of sensing, seizing, and transforming (Teece, 2007) to organize the recognized dynamic capabilities in a B2B sales

function. Sensing is recognizing the business opportunities that digital disruption offers. Companies need intelligence and talent to sense emerging technologies and customer needs. This offers an opportunity to be in the forefront of the development. If this stage is ignored, companies can fall behind and miss out on their customer needs or fail to spot new technologies to improve their processes. In the second stage, the company needs to seize the opportunities that it has recognized. This can be done by adapting the business model or adopting new digital tools. New tools or business models offer opportunities to bring additional revenue or provide new value to customers. In the third stage, some transformations and reconfigurations need to occur to benefit from the full potential of the recognized opportunities. This reconfiguration may be applied to the sales organization to enable adaptive selling or improved sales process to get better results in selling. The organization must learn new ways of doing things and unlearn old habits (Mattila et al., 2021). The whole organization is required to be agile and adaptive to react to rapid change and recognize opportunities.

This study has managerial implications regarding understanding the strategic nature of modern B2B sales and what managers need to know and do to maintain a firm's competitive advantage. Digital transformation has a big impact on B2B sales management, and B2B sales managers play a key role in resource orchestration. Digital transformation is impacting the sales force (e.g., Chen & Zhou, 2022), sales as a profession (e.g., Kumar & Sharma, 2022), and customer relationships (e.g., Yin et al., 2023). According to our findings, in B2B sales management, there are seven dynamic capabilities that managers should be aware of. This study will be valuable to organizations battling with how to manage the digital transformation and in determining which choices to make to succeed in digitalization and digital transformation of B2B sales (Zoltners et al., 2021).

There are some limitations. We focused our search on digitalization and the digital transformation concept and did not specifically search for articles dealing with aspects like CRM, social media, AI, and machine learning. We did this on purpose to keep the article quantity manageable and to keep the focus on digitalization and digital transformation in B2B sales. This naturally limits the search results on the aforementioned technologies. We did, however, include articles in those domains when they were about the digitalization or digital transformation of B2B sales. The future research agenda and research questions were presented in our findings.

6. Conclusion

The previous B2B sales studies in digitalization and digital transformation have been focusing on technology or topics such as technology adoption or social media, but the field lacked comprehensive research into how B2B sales managers can cope with the digitalization challenge and maintain the firm's competitive advantage. We conducted a systematic literature review on the digitalization and digital transformation of B2B sales. We then coded the literature findings and analyzed them through the dynamic capabilities theory (Teece, 2014) lens. We identified seven dynamic capabilities that contemporary B2B sales managers must master to maintain their firms' competitive advantage. The findings show that B2B sales is no longer just an ordinary operation, instead, it has become more complex and requires strategic decisions. Digital transformation in B2B sales is still a relevant topic.

References

- Alamäki, A., & Korpela, P. (2021). Digital transformation and value-based selling activities: Seller and buyer perspectives. *Baltic Journal of Management*, 16(2), 298–317. <https://doi.org/10.1108/BJM-08-2020-0304>
- Alonso-Garcia, P-M, F., Núñez-Barriopedro, E., & Cuesta-Valiño, P. (2023). Digitalization in B2B marketing: Omnichannel management from a PLS-SEM approach. *The Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 38(2), 317–336. <https://doi.org/10.1108/BJM-09-2021-0421>
- Amazon, (2022). Digital transformation can grow EU economy by 2.8 trillion euros. *Amazon News*. [Accessed 11.4.2023 and available at: <https://www.aboutamazon.eu/news/aws/digital-transformation-can-grow-eu-economy-by-2-8-trillion-euros>
- Anderson, E. G., Lopez, J., & Parker, G. G. (2022). Leveraging value creation to drive the growth of B2B platforms. *Production and Operations Management*, 31(12), 4501–4514. <https://doi.org/10.1111/poms.13866>
- Badrinarayanan, V., Madhavaram, S., & Manis, K. T. (2022). Technology-enabled sales capability: A capabilities-based contingency framework. *The Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 42(4), 358–376. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08853134.2022.2108823>
- Badrinarayanan, V., Ramachandran, I., & Madhavaram, S. (2019). Resource orchestration and dynamic managerial capabilities: Focusing on sales managers as effective resource orchestrators. *The Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 39(1), 23–41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08853134.2018.1466308>.
- Biemans, W., Malshe, A. and Johnson, J.S., 2022. The sales-marketing interface: A systematic literature review and directions for future research. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 102, pp.324-337. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2022.02.001>
- Chatterjee, S., Chaudhuri, R., Vrontis, D., & Kadić-Maglajlić, S. (2023). Adoption of AI integrated partner relationship management (AI-PRM) in B2B sales channels: Exploratory study. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 109, 164–173. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2022.12.014>
- Chatterjee, S., Chaudhuri, R., Vrontis, D., Thrassou, A., & Ghosh, S. K. (2021). Adoption of artificial intelligence-integrated CRM systems in agile organizations in India. *Technological Forecasting & Social Change*, 168, 120783. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2021.120783>
- Chen, J., & Zhou, W. (2022). Drivers of salespeople's AI acceptance: What do managers think? *The Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 42(2), 107–120. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08853134.2021.2016058>
- Cheng, Z., Plangger, K., Cai, F., Campbell, C. L., & Pitt, L. (2023). Charting value creation strategies B2B salespeople use throughout the sales process: Learning from social media influencers. *European Journal of Marketing*, 57(3), 718–744. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-11-2021-0922>
- Choudhury, M. M., & Harrigan, P. (2014). CRM to social CRM: The integration of new technologies into customer relationship management. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 22(2), 149–176. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0965254X.2013.876069>
- Chuang, S-H. (2020). Co-creating social media agility to build strong customer-firm relationships. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 84, 202–211. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2019.06.012>
- Conway, C., & Codkind, M. (2021). Where digital transformations go wrong in small and midsize companies. *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved from: <https://hbr.org/2021/08/where-digital-transformations-go-wrong-in-small-and-midsize-companies>. Accessed on April 10, 2023.
- Corsaro, D., & Maggioni, I. (2022). Sales transformation: Conceptual domain and dimensions. *The Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 37(3), 686–703. <https://doi.org/10.1108/BJM-11-2020-0512>.
- Elhajjar, S., Yacoub, L., & Ouaida, F. (2023). The present and future of the B2B sales profession. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08853134.2023.2183214>
- EU Monitor, (May 12, 2022). Digital transformation: Importance, benefits, and EU policy. [available at and accessed 11.4.2023 <https://www.eumonitor.eu/9353000/1/j9vvik7m1c3gyxp/vli6iyjgcqxh?ctx=vg9pj7ufwbwe>]
- Fischer, H., Seidenstricker, S., & Poepelbuss, J. (2023). The triggers and consequences of digital sales: A systematic literature review. *The Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, (ahead-of-print), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08853134.2022.2102029>
- Franck, R., & Damperat, M. (2023). How social media use enhances salesperson performance. *The Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/BJM-02-2022-0082>
- Giovannetti, M., Cardinali, S., & Sharma, P. (2021). Sales technology and salespeople's ambidexterity: an ecosystem approach. *Journal of Business & Industrial*

- Marketing*, 36(4), 615-629.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/JBIM-01-2020-0034>
- Guesalaga, R., Gabrielson, M., Rogers, B., Ryals, L., & Marcos Cuevas, J. (2018). Which resources and capabilities underpin strategic key account management? *Industrial Marketing Management*, 75, 160–172.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2018.05.006>
- Guenzi, P., & Habel, J. (2020). Mastering the digital transformation of sales. *California Management Review*, 62(4), 57–85.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0008125620931857>
- Guenzi, P., & Nijssen, E. J. (2020). Studying the antecedents and outcome of social media use by salespeople using a MOA framework. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 90, 346–359.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2020.08.005>
- Guenzi, P., & Nijssen, E. J. (2021). The impact of digital transformation on salespeople: an empirical investigation using the JD-R model. *The Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 41(2), 130–149.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08853134.2021.1918005>
- Guenzi, P., & Nijssen, E. J. (2023). The relationship between digital solution selling and value-based selling: A motivation-opportunity-ability (MOA) perspective. *European Journal of Marketing*, 57(3), 745–770.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-11-2021-0907>
- Helfat, C. E., Finkelstein, S., Mitchell, W., Peteraf, M., Singh, H., Teece, D., & Winter, S. G. (2007). *Dynamic capabilities: Understanding strategic change in organizations*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Herhausen, D., Miočević, D., Morgan, R. E., & Kleijnen, M. H. P. (2020). The digital marketing capabilities gap. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 90, 276–290.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2020.07.022>
- Ingram, T., LaForge, R. W., Locander, W. B., MacKenzie, S. B., & Podsakoff, P. M. (2005). New directions in sales leadership research. *The Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 25(2), 137–154.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08853134.2005.10749055>
- Kalra, A., Itani, O. S., & Rostami, A. (2023). Can salespeople use social media to enhance brand awareness and sales performance? The role of manager empowerment and creativity. *The Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JBIM-01-2022-0056>
- Kannan, A., & Li, H. “Alice.” (2017). Digital marketing: A framework, review and research agenda. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 34(1), 22–45.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijresmar.2016.11.006>
- Kramer, V., & Krafft, M. (2023). When and how information and communication technology orientation affects salespeople’s role stress: The interplay of salesperson characteristics and environmental complexity. *European Journal of Marketing*, 57(3), 659–682.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-11-2021-0917>
- Kumar, B., & Sharma, A. (2022). Examining the research on social media in business-to-business marketing with a focus on sales and the selling process. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 102, 122–140.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2022.01.008>
- Lamberton, C., & Stephen, A. T. (2016). A thematic exploration of digital, social media, and mobile marketing: Research evolution from 2000 to 2015 and an agenda for future inquiry. *Journal of Marketing*, 80(6), 146–172. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jm.15.0415>
- Lamrhari, S., Ghazi, H. E., Oubrich, M., & Faker, A. E. (2022). A social CRM analytic framework for improving customer retention, acquisition, and conversion. *Technological Forecasting & Social Change*, 174, 121275–. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2021.121275>
- Lauzi, F., Westphal, J., Rangarajan, D., Schaefer, T., Parra-Merono, M. C., & De-Juan-Vigaray, M. D. (2023). Understanding sales enablement in complex B2B companies: Uncovering similarities and differences in a cross-functional and multi-level case study. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 108, 47–64.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2022.11.008>
- Leung, K. H., Luk, C. C., Choy, K. L., Lam, H. Y., & Lee, C. K. M. (2019). A B2B flexible pricing decision support system for managing the request for quotation process under e-commerce business environment. *International Journal of Production Research*, 57(20), 6528–6551.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00207543.2019.1566674>
- Li, S., Peng, G., Xing, F., Zhang, J., & Zhang, B. (2021). Value co-creation in industrial AI: The interactive role of B2B supplier, customer and technology provider. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 98, 105–114.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2021.07.015>
- Lin, S., & Lin, J. (2023). How organizations leverage digital technology to develop customization and enhance customer relationship performance: An empirical investigation. *Technological Forecasting & Social Change*, 188, 122254–. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2022.122254>
- Linde, L., Frishammar, J., & Parida, V. (2021). Revenue models for digital servitization: A value capture framework for designing, developing, and scaling digital services. *IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management*, 70(1), 1–16.
<https://doi.org/10.1109/TEM.2021.3053386>
- Liu, Y., & Zhao, X. (2021). Successful implementation of value-based selling: A value co-creation and dynamic capabilities perspective. *The Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 36(3), 372–389.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/JBIM-05-2020-0240>
- Loro, C., & Mangiaracina, R. (2022). The impact of e-marketplace on the B2B relationships. *Industrial Management + Data Systems*, 122(1), 37–54.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/IMDS-11-2020-0651>
- Mahlamäki, T., Storbacka, K., Pylkkönen, S., & Ojala, M. (2020). Adoption of digital sales force automation tools in supply chain: Customers’ acceptance of sales configurators. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 91, 162–173.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2020.08.024>
- Marshall, G. W., Moncrief, W. C., Rudd, J. M., & Lee, N. (2012). Revolution in sales: The impact of social media and related technology on the selling environment. *The Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*,

- 32(3), 349–363. <https://doi.org/10.2753/PSS0885-3134320305>
- Mattila, M., Yrjölä, M., & Hautamäki, P. (2021). Digital transformation of business-to-business sales: What needs to be unlearned? *The Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 41(2), 113–129. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08853134.2021.1916396>
- McKinsey & Company. (2023) Highlights newsletter. *Monthly Highlights*, April 2023.
- Micallef, M., Keranen, J., & Kokshagina, O. (2022). Understanding the consequences of digital technology use in sales: multilevel tensions inside sales organizations. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08853134.2022.2159422>
- Mitrega, M. (2020). Dynamic marketing capability: Refining the concept and applying it to company innovations. *The Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 35(2), 193–203. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JBIM-01-2019-0007>
- Mullins, R., & Agnihotri, R. (2022). Digital selling: Organizational and managerial influences for frontline readiness and effectiveness. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 50(4), 800–821. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-021-00836-5>
- Neuhaus, T., Millemann, J. A., & Nijssen, E. (2022). Bridging the gap between B2B and B2C—Thought leadership in industrial marketing: A systematic literature review and propositions. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 106, 99–111. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2022.08.006>
- Newman, D. (2017). “Innovation vs. Transformation: The Difference in a Digital World.” *Forbes* February 16. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/danielnewman/2017/02/16/innovation-vs-transformation-the-difference-in-a-digital-world/?sh=74d1cbb565e8>, Accessed on Aug. 30, 2023.
- Peterson, R. M., Malshe, A., Friend, S. B., & Dover, H. (2021). Sales enablement: Conceptualizing and developing a dynamic capability. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 49(3), 542–565. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-020-00754-y>
- Rusthollkarhu, S., Hautamaki, P., & Aarikka-Stenroos, L. (2020). Value (co-)creation in B2B sales ecosystems. *The Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 36(4), 590–598. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JBIM-03-2020-0130>
- Sanakulov, N., Kalliomaa, S., & Karjaluo, H. (2018). Salesperson adoption and usage of mobile sales configuration tools. *Journal of Systems and Information Technology*, 20(2), 168–190. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JSIT-09-2017-0073>
- Singh, J., Flaherty, K., Sohi, R. S., Deeter-Schmelz, D., Habel, J., Le Meunier-FitzHugh, K., Malshe, A., Mullins, R., & Onyemah, V. (2019). Sales profession and professionals in the age of digitization and artificial intelligence technologies: Concepts, priorities, and questions. *The Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 39(1), 2–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08853134.2018.1557525>
- Sombultawee, K., & Wattanatorn, W. (2022). Management of social selling and B2B customer-brand engagement: Is direct selling on social media good for your brand and relationships? *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*, 54, 101167–. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.elerap.2022.101167>
- Syam, N., & Sharma, A. (2018). Waiting for a sales renaissance in the fourth industrial revolution: Machine learning and artificial intelligence in sales research and practice. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 69, 135–146. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2017.12.019>
- Teece, D. J. (2007). Explicating dynamic capabilities: The nature and microfoundations of (sustainable) enterprise performance. *Strategic Management Journal*, 28(13), 1319–1350. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.640>
- Teece, D. J. (2014) The foundations of enterprise performance: Dynamic and ordinary capabilities in an (economic) theory of firms. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 28(4), 328–352. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amp.2013.0116>
- Teece, D. J., Pisano, G., & Shuen, A. (1997). Dynamic capabilities and strategic management. *Strategic Management Journal*, 18(7), 509–533.
- Terho, H., Giovannetti, M., & Cardinali, S. (2022). Measuring B2B social selling: Key activities, antecedents and performance outcomes. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 101, 208–222. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2021.12.016>
- Verhoef, P. C., Broekhuizen, T., Bart, Y., Bhattacharya, A., Qi Dong, J., Fabian, N., & Haenlein, M. (2021). Digital transformation: A multidisciplinary reflection and research agenda. *Journal of Business Research*, 122, 889–901. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.09.022>
- Vial, G. (2019). Understanding digital transformation: A review and a research agenda. *The Journal of Strategic Information Systems*, 28(2), 118–144. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsis.2019.01.003>
- Wengler, S., Hildmann, G., & Vossebein, U. (2021). Digital transformation in sales as an evolving process. *The Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 36(4), 599–614. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JBIM-03-2020-0124>
- Xue, L., Ray, G., & Sambamurthy, V. (2013). The impact of supply-side electronic integration on customer service performance. *Journal of Operations Management*, 31(6), 363–375. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jom.2013.07.010>
- Yin, Q., Song, D., Lai, F., Collins, B. J., & Dogru, A. K. (2023). Customizing governance mechanisms to reduce opportunism in buyer–supplier relationships in the digital economy. *Technological Forecasting & Social Change*, 190, 122411–. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2023.122411>
- Zoltners, A., Sinha, P., Sahay, D., Shastri, A., & Lorimer, S. E. (2021). Practical insights for sales force digitalization success. *The Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 41(2), 87–102. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08853134.2021.1908144>