SALES DIGITALIZATION AND SALES PERFORMANCE OF B2B SALESPERSONS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
This research seeks to ascertain the effect of sales digitalization on sales and customer relationship performance. Specifically, this study examines how salesforce automation, social media use, customer relationship management technology, and artificial intelligence affect sales and customer relationship performance. Also, the test mediating effect of Sales-Service ambidexterity on the relationship between sales digitalization and performance. Based on the positivist philosophy, the study adopts a quantitative approach to sample 414 B2B salespeople. The non-probability sampling method involving convenience sampling and snowballing technique were used to collect data from the salespeople online and offline. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data, and the hypotheses were tested using Structural Equations Modeling - path analysis via AMOS v.23. The result showed that Salesforce automation has a positive and significant effect on sales and customer relationship performance; social media use has a positive and significant effect on sales and customer relationship performance. It was also found that customer relationship management predicts sales negatively and positively predicts customer relationship performance and artificial intelligence is negatively associated with sales and customer relationship performance. The implication for practice is discussed.

KEY WORD sales digitalization, social media use, artificial intelligence, salesforce automation, customer relationship management, performance

1. INTRODUCTION

Recent advances in information and communication technology are altering business ecosystems and impacting the society and our daily lives. This trend is spurred by the profound transformation powered by the convergence of mobile computing, data explosion, and mobile technologies such as machine learning, robotics, and artificial intelligence (Syam & Sharma, 2018). These developments known as digitalization is disrupting business operations in ways that threatens the survival of existing businesses (Caputo et al., 2021) – they either innovate or die. Digitalization refers to the growing use of digital technology in value creating or revenue generating opportunities within the value ecosystems (María-Luz Martín-Peña et al., 2020). Recent evidence suggest that the influence of digitalization is likely to be more significant and more far-reaching than previous technologies with profound implications for personal selling and sales management function (Singh et al., 2019; Syam & Sharma, 2018). And with the proliferation of new digital technologies, it would permanently disrupt the salesforce structures, strategies and capabilities and placing increased demands on salespeople to embrace such technologies as part of their value creation toolkit (Itani et al., 2022). Accordingly, scholars and practitioners has predicted that sales digitalization (e.g., customer relationship management, sales force automation, social selling, and artificial intelligence) is a hot topic for future debate (Zoltners et al., 2021).

The digitalization of sales functions represents a discontinuous change compared to the non-digital era that is catapulting sales from an art to a science, enabling selling organizations to improve practically every strategic and tactical decision and process (Syam & Sharma, 2018; Zoltners et al., 2021). In fact, salespeople can no longer ignore or opt-out of the adoption of some technologies in their work, as most sales jobs require a heavy dependence on sales technology (Giovannetti et al., 2021). These sales technologies expand avenues for customer engagement, strengthen relationships with customers, and promote value propositions and creation (Agnihotri, 2021). It also has implications for personal selling and sales functions in terms of how to identify, approach and communicate

with target customers, manage the pre- and post-sales process, and create and maintain customer knowledgebase (Giovannetti et al., 2021). Therefore, it is expedient for sales researchers to view the use of SFA, CRM, social media, Artificial Intelligence, etc. as different dimensions of sales digitalization on sales outcome (Agnihotri, 2021).

Earlier discussions on the use of sales technology revolved around sales force automation (SFA) and its operational orientation, including the utilization of technological tools supporting the routine sales functions. Later, the focus shifted towards Customer Relationship Management (CRM). CRMs are strategic technology systems that incorporate employ tools to help salespeople develop sales strategies (Agnihotri, 2021, p. 22). Also, sales organizations are increasingly investing in customer-oriented technologies such as social media and both salespeople and managers work towards becoming social media ready (Agnihotri, 2020, p. 291). Social media applications reside at the salesperson customer interface and are instrumental for connectedness and interaction. Selling firms are also using tools such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter to interact with buyers and to secure customer knowledge in real-time (Agnihotri, 2020). Another digital technology with profound disruption on sales is Artificial Intelligence (AI). The ability for AI technology to process a massive amount of structured and unstructured data (especially unstructured data) and predict behavior has radically re-shaped the notion of automation in a sales context (Chen & Zhou, 2022). These digital technology in sales has implications in how salespeople perform their job roles, especially conflicting roles.

Salespeople carry out operational (e.g., learning about existing and new products, generating automated reports), strategic (e.g., identifying most important customers, preparing sales presentations based on customers' specific needs), and networking (developing and nurturing social networks within and outside the organization) activities. These activities require that salespersons maintain multiple goals and behaviors, namely sales generation and service provision (Agnihotri et al. 2017). The twin goals of providing quality service while achieving productivity gains by meeting increased sales targets is what is referred to as sales-service ambidexterity (Yu, Patterson, and de Ruyter, 2013). Pursuing these simultaneous goals can mediate the effect of sales digitalization on performance (Agnihotri et al. 2019; Kramer & Krafft, 2023). This means as salespeople use sales enablement technologies, their productivity depends on how they can juggle across multiple tasks. For instance, salespeople can use information derived from CRM technology to better adapt selling behaviour and improve customer relationship (Franck & Dampérat, 2023).

Accordingly, firms deploy digital technologies to support salespeople and help them improve efficiency, effectiveness, and performance (Franck & Dampérat, 2023). Despite the deployment of these digital sales tools, evidence suggest that most salespeople do not use them and where they are used, it is not clear how these tools help salespeople meet their sales and customer relationship goals (Agnihotri, 2021). Digitalization reflects a disruptive change in sales practices and presents a substantial challenge for sales organizations and their salespeople (Kassemeier et al., 2023). Sales digitalization consisting of sales force automation, CRM, social media use, and artificial intelligence have varying effect on how salespeople do their job and achieve their performance goals (Itani et al., 2020). This study aims to examine the effect of sales digitalization on salesperson sales and customer relationship performance. By so doing, the study investigated how Salesforce automation, social media use, customer relationship management, and artificial intelligence affect salesperson sales and customer relationship performance.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Framework

Sales Digitalization

Sales digitalization builds upon the foundation of salesforce automation (SFA) to create a more sophisticated and technology-driven sales environment (Singh et al., 2019). According to Zoltners et al (2021) sales organizations embrace digitalization to enhance sales effectiveness for three primary reasons. Firstly, it's a necessity driven by market dynamics. Secondly, it's a strategy to drive operational efficiency). Lastly, digitalization is pursued to increase the overall effectiveness of sales efforts. Beyond the sales process itself, digitalization extends to talent management through tools like learning management systems for sales training, performance dashboards, and incentive compensation platforms (Zoltners et al., 2021, p. 89). Relatedly, the integration of AI "coaches" complements human coaching, analyzing sales interactions and providing invaluable training feedback (Luo et al., 2021). Digitalization's effectiveness is maximized in sales stages where information is less pivotal, and data can be easily compared through other means. It is particularly relevant in stages such as identifying the customer, making sales proposals, and offering follow-up support (Rodríguez et al., 2020). Furthermore, digitalization has enabled salespeople to harness the potential of social media platforms like LinkedIn for better engagement with potential leads. The use of cloud services and the industrial internet of things has facilitated more efficient information gathering and storage, enhancing salespeople's interactions (Chen & Zhou, 2022). The overall impact of digitalization is a synergy of enhanced service growth, improved productivity, and efficient communication with customers. By leveraging digital technologies, sales organizations gain the tools to optimize processes,

elevate decision-making quality, and integrate customer interactions (Guenzi & Habel, 2020; Tronvoll et al., 2020; Kassemeier et al., 2023).

Social Media Use in Sales

In the sales landscape, social media acts as a bridge for sharing information, enhancing customer service, and fostering trust (Agnihotri et al., 2012). It has evolved into a platform that not only facilitates networking but also offers a robust means of communication and interaction. As defined by Cohen (2011), social media encompasses digital content and network-based interactions that are developed and maintained by individuals. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) characterize social media as a group of applications rooted in the principles of Web 2.0, enabling the creation and exchange of User Generated Content. In the context of sales, social media encompasses technologies that empower sales professionals to generate content, such as blogs, microblogs, and wikis, and to develop networks through social networks and online communities (Agnihotri, 2020).

The influence of social media on buyer-seller relationships is profound. It serves as a pivotal communication channel that nurtures engagement, reinforces connections, and enhances customer interactions. Repeated exchanges between buyers and sellers, enriched by feedback, foster customer engagement, illustrating the vital role social media plays in the customer journey (Wang, Pauleen, & Zhang, 2016). Customers, increasingly inclined toward content-driven and technology-savvy engagement, seek knowledge through social media platforms. A survey revealed that social media content significantly impacted the purchasing decisions of business customers, highlighting the role it plays in shaping buyer behavior (Minsky & Quesenberry, 2016; Agnihotri, 2020). In response, sales organizations are actively adopting customer-centric technologies, with both salespeople and managers adapting to become 'social media ready' (Agnihotri, 2020). Social media empowers salespeople to proactively connect with potential leads, understand customer preferences, build relationships, and even cultivate personal brands through consistent online presence and engaging content (Terho et al., 2022). Furthermore, research demonstrates that greater utilization of social media platforms enhances salespeople's market knowledge, reputation, and networking capabilities, collectively elevating their performance (Itani et al., 2022).

Artificial Intelligence in Sales

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies into the realm of sales has been a topic of interest since the 1980s. Initially introduced by Collins (1984), AI was described as a technology capable of human-like thinking processes, capable of replicating problem-solving, predictions, alternative strategies, and providing advice like that of human experts. In today's landscape, AI is gaining traction in the sales domain. A survey conducted in 2018 indicated that the professional services sector was among the pioneers in adopting AI technologies for sales (Paschen et al., 2019). AI's capacity to replicate human thinking processes has enabled it to contribute significantly to various stages of the sales process. From estimating customer demands to optimizing sales forecasting and even analyzing exploratory communication with prospects, AI has proven its value (Golec, 2007; Agnihotri, 2021). AI's impact extends to the sales process itself, where it is increasingly utilized. For instance, AI-powered interactive agents like chatbots have the potential to simulate human behavior during conversations, enhancing buyer interactions (Agnihotri, 2021). Post-sales, AI continues to play a role, predicting customer attrition patterns and identifying cross-selling and upselling opportunities. The analysis of unstructured data, like customer interactions, reviews, and sentiment, enables AI to provide insights that can drive deeper engagement and predictive capabilities (Kaput, 2019; Chen and Zhou, 2022). AI's capability to handle both structured and unstructured data sets it apart from conventional information technology. While conventional systems facilitate human transactions using structured data, AI goes further by scrutinizing unstructured data, adding value, and generating insights that benefit sales and marketing professionals (Chen and Zhou, 2022). This ability to resemble human intelligence while improving machines' explanatory power in complex situations holds significant potential (Syam & Sharma, 2018).

Sales Force Automation (SFA)

Sales Force Automation (SFA) is the strategic use of technology to streamline sales activities, fostering better customer relationships and increasing productivity (Buttle et al., 2006). It encompasses a suite of hardware and software tools designed to automate sales processes, streamline administrative tasks, and enhance the overall efficiency and productivity of sales professionals (Perera et al., 2023). The architecture of SFA systems incorporates tools that facilitate organized customer relationship management, offering insights derived from available data to effectively manage interactions, inventory, forecasting, communication history, and sales opportunities (Shahbaz et al., 2021). Empirical findings on Sales Force Automation (SFA) reveal its significant impact on salespersons' performance and organizational dynamics. Ahearne et al. (2008) demonstrated how SFA streamlines tasks, like generating reports, improving performance, and enhancing communication. Moreover, Jridi et al. (2019) connected organizational capacity with SFA use, finding a positive link. They also confirmed SFA's consistent positive influence on salesperson performance, whether for customer management or internal coordination. In essence, these studies collectively underscore SFA's value in optimizing sales operations and outcomes.

Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

Traditionally, CRM has been perceived as a combination of technology, processes, and organizational culture aimed at effectively managing customer relationships (Choudhury and Harrigan, 2014). Payne and Frow, defined it as 'the cross-functional integration of processes, people, operations, and marketing capabilities that is enabled through information, technology, and applications' (2005, p. 168). Boulding et al. (2005) offer a more comprehensive definition, stating that CRM encompasses the intelligent use of data and technology, customer knowledge acquisition, relationship development, and process integration across the firm and its collaborative network. In sales context, CRM is the process of capturing customer information and developing an appropriate strategy in consultation with the salesperson to optimize sales performance. The process includes identification of prospects, up-selling, cross-selling with current customers, and external knowledge sharing (Ahearne et al., 2012). CRM's central tenets is the utilization of technology to automate business processes and enhance customer interactions. Traditional CRM has helped sales professionals shorten sales cycles, improve closing rates, and generate revenue faster (Rodriguez and Trainor, 2016).

Social CRM (SCRM) integrating social media into CRM enhances communication and customer experiences (Rodriguez et al., 2012). The combination empowers sales professionals to build deeper relationships through empathetic interactions (Rodriguez et al., 2012). Mobile CRM (mCRM) takes advantage of smartphones and tablets to provide sales professionals with real-time access to customer data and updates on sales activities. It improves sales efficiency, enables better customer interactions, and supports lead generation and order management (Rodriguez and Trainor, 2016). Electronic CRM (eCRM) utilizes internet technologies such as emails, websites, and forums to enhance traditional CRM processes. It enables personalized interactions, improves customer interactions, and facilitates customization of products and services to meet individual customer needs (Gamage et al., 2023). Lastly, AI-powered CRM enhances data analysis, enabling organizations to extract insights from large datasets and improve customer engagement (Chatterjee et al., 2022).

Salesperson Performance

Sales performance is evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency with which salespeople achieve set targets in the sales process by examining opportunities and improving closing rates (Shahbaz et al., 2021). Chawla et al. (2020) posit that sales performance can be defined in terms of effectiveness, behaviour, and effectiveness and behaviour. As effectiveness, it refers to evaluation of objective outcomes such as sales volume, market share, percentage of quota achieved, number of new customers added, and so on. Then as behaviour, it is based on the behavior that has been evaluated in terms of its contribution to the goals of organization. Proponents of this view argued that, since the achievement of the quantitative outcome depends upon certain factors outside the control of the salesperson (such as market-related factors), effectiveness may not be the right measure. Sales performance can be measured using subjective self- or manager-reported behavior-based measures. And finally, a third view of thought conceptualizes sales performance as consisting of both effectiveness and behaviors.

This study uses the outcome and relationship-based performance measures. Outcome based performance – sales performance, consists of an objective evaluation of the results achieved by the salesperson in the achievement of the goals set by the company and the evaluation of the sales force managers based on the following criteria: effort, competence, output and quantitative results (Boujena,, Johnston, & Merunka, 2008; Jridi et al., 2019). Relationship-based performance, on the other hand, focus on behaviors that strengthen customer retention and improves qualification of opportunities (Rodriguez and Trainor, 2016). It is defined as the degree to which salespeople develop deeper customer relationships by understanding customers' unique needs and providing a customized solution that meets those needs (Rodriguez and Trainor, 2016).

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Resource-Based View Theory

The resource-based theory (RBT) provides an important framework for explaining and predicting the basis of a firm's competitive advantage and performance (Barney et al. 2011; Kozlenkova et al., 2013). It focuses on understanding and analyzing a firm's competitive advantage and performance by examining its internal resources and capabilities rather than solely looking at the external environment. The RBV theory suggests that the several resources and capabilities of a firm are the primary drivers of performance and long-term success (Chatterjee et al., 2022; Barney, 1991). These resources include the assets, knowledge and processes firms use conceive of and implement its strategies (Kozlenkova, Samaha and Palmatier, 2013). These resources can be tangible, such as physical assets and technology, or intangible, such as knowledge, skills, and organizational culture. On the other hand, capabilities refer to developing a mix of resources that enable firms to achieve superior performance (Choudhury & Harrigan, 2014). The RBV argue that a firm derives competitive advantage through the combination of valuable, rare, imperfectly imitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) resources and capabilities under its control (Eller et al., 2020).

Resources are regarded as the inputs for value creation, while a capability is the potential to deploy these resources to improve performance and competitive advantage. From this perspective, there is an inherent assumption that firms' capabilities are dependent and developed based on the available set of organizational resources (Mikalef &

Gupta, 2021). Past studies consistently demonstrate the strength of the RBT in explaining the relationship between organizational resources and firm performance (Mikalef & Gupta, 2021; Chatterjee et al., 2022; Shahbaz et al., 2020). Mikalef and Gupta, (2021) assessed how organizational resources enable firms to develop AI capabilities, which in turn are argued to result in performance gains using the RBT. Similarly, Wade and Hulland (2004) advocate that the RBT provides a cogent framework to evaluate the strategic value of information system resources. These underscores the relevance of RBT in explaining the role of sales digitalization on performance.

As sales organizations deploy technologies for sales functions, they must identify and develop digital resources that align with their strategic goals and market opportunities. Digital resources include technologies, data, platforms, and digital capabilities that enable companies to enhance their efficiency, create innovative products or services, and improve customer experiences. For example, access to big data and advanced analytics allows companies to gain valuable insights into customer behaviors, market trends, and industry dynamics. Machine learning and artificial intelligence can automate processes and make predictive recommendations, optimizing business operations and decision-making. However, it is essential to recognize that not all digital resources automatically translate into a sustainable competitive advantage. The value of digital resources lies in how they are combined, integrated, and utilized within the organization's overall strategy and operations. Successful digitalization requires a coherent and strategic approach, where digital resources are aligned with the salesperson's competencies and performance.

Job Demand-Resource

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R; Bakker and Demerouti 2007 posit that job demands are stressors in the workplace, such as time pressures, heavy workloads, role conflict or ambiguity, and poor relationships (Tummers & Bakker, 2021). Job demands necessitate effort and skills, potentially resulting in stress, burnout, and reduced motivation when they become overwhelming (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). On the other hand, job resources refer to factors that can help employees cope with job demands and achieve their work objectives. These resources include organizational support, social support, skill development opportunities, and autonomy (Tummers & Bakker, 2021). Job resources act as buffers against stress and role conflict, fostering personal growth and higher achievement (Kramer & Krafft, 2023).

The basic assumption within the JD-R model is that an imbalance between job demands and job resources are both associated with job stress (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Strain – such as role conflict, is the negative emotional, psychological, and physical outcomes that result from this imbalance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). When job demands are high and job resources are scarce, employees are more likely to experience burnout, exhaustion, and decreased well-being (Gabler et al., 2017). The model suggests that organizations can promote employee well-being by managing both job demands and job resources. By reducing excessive demands and providing sufficient resources, organizations can create a more supportive and motivating work environment. This, in turn, can lead to increased job satisfaction, engagement, and overall performance (Tummers & Bakker, 2021).

In the context of sales job, the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model offers insights into how salespeople can leverage digital technologies to mitigate role conflict and enhance their sales ambidextrous role. The JD-R model emphasizes the balance between job demands and job resources, advocating that stressor (job demands) can be counteracted by supportive factors (job resources; Kramer & Krafft, 2023). Digital technologies act as potent job resources, empowering salespeople to navigate complex sales roles effectively. Digital technologies provide tools for information management, customer engagement, and analytics, enabling salespeople to seamlessly handle the dual challenges of customer relationship management and sales performance (Guenzi and Nijssen, 2021). For instance, by employing customer relationship management (CRM) systems, salespeople can better organize customer interactions, leading to improved time management and reduced role conflict (Kramer & Krafft, 2023). Moreover, analytics tools offer valuable insights into customer preferences, guiding salespeople in making informed decisions that reduce ambiguity in their roles (Rapp, Bachrach, & Rapp 2013).

Regarding this study, salespeople with dual focus on service and sales would experience role conflict of meeting sales target and the demands of their boss, on the on hand, and attending to customers' needs and request, on the other hand. The JD-R theory suggests that there are likely to be performance deficits in one aspect when resources are devoted to the other (Bergeron 2007; Rapp et al., 2013). This trade-off is a result of the physiological and psychological costs associated with too many demands or insufficient resources to meet those demands (Bakker and Demerouti 2007; Gabler et al., 2017). The JD-R model's emphasis on resource accumulation aligns with the integration of digital technologies that empower salespeople to overcome barriers and conflicting demands efficiently (Guenzi & Nijssen, 2021). The JD-R model's application to sales suggests that digital technologies serve as instrumental resources that alleviate role conflict and enhance sales ambidexterity. In other words, sales digitalization is operationalized as job resources that can reduce the psychological and physical cost such as role conflict. These job resources in turn lead to improved performance and personal growth by reducing cost (role conflict; Gabler et al., 2017).

3. METHOD

Sample and Design

Based on the positivist philosophical stance, this study utilized a quantitative approach to test hypothesized relationship between variables. G * Power tool was used to estimate the sample size using the parameters F - Linear multiple regression tests: Multiple regression Omnibus (R2 deviation from zero), a medium effect size (f2) of 0.15 with the power (1 – β err probability) of 0.95 and 5 number of predictors. Finally, 342 B2B salespeople were sampled using convenience and snowballing technique across B2B sector in Nigeria.

The demographic profile of the respondents as shown in Table 1 indicate that most of the respondents reported to be between 26 – 30 years (62%), followed by 31- 35 years (16%). Less than 10 percent of the respondents are above 50 years. With regards to their gender, there were more male B2B salespersons (55%) than female (45%) in the dataset. The respondents are adequately educated to understand the questionnaire items with more than half of the respondents having at least an undergraduate qualification (54%) and about a third have a postgraduate degree (34%). Most of the respondents have works for between 4 to 6 years (35%), while about 20 percent have worked for more than 10 years only 4.2% have less than a year working experience. Finally, almost a quarter of the respondents work in the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCGs) sector, which consist of the majority, followed by 21% that work in the manufacturing sector. The least number of respondents are from the IT/Fintech sector (4.4%). Table 4.2.1 shows the summary of respondent's profile.

Table 1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Category	Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Age	18-25	49	14.42
	26-30	213	62.22
	31-35	55	16.02
	35-50	18	5.14
	Above 50 yrs.	8	2.2
Gender	Male	189	55.34
	Female	152	44.66
Highest qualification	Secondary School	42	12.2
	Undergraduate	184	53.68
	Postgraduate	117	34.12
Years of Experience	< 1 year	14	4.2
	1 - 3 yrs.	85	24.82
	4 - 6 yrs.	121	35.24
	7 - 10 yrs.	43	12.54
	> 10 yrs.	79	23.2
Industry	Financial Services	36	10.42
	Business/Professional Services	50	14.72
	FMCGs	90	26.24
	Pharmaceuticals	22	6.5
	Media/Publishing	29	8.4
	Manufacturing	72	21.12
	IT/Fintech	15	4.4
	Others	28	8.2
		342	100

Measures

Google form was used to design the questionnaire and distributed electronically to respondents using survey links sent as a direct message to their social media accounts. The questionnaire consists of questions measuring the independent variables. Salesforce automation was measured using 6 items e.g.," I make maximum use of sales support technologies to help me in my work" adapted from Franck and Dampérat, (2022) and "I use SFA to receive and send information to our boss/ manager" adapted from Corsaro and Maggioni, (2022). Social media use was measured with 7-items e.g., "My Company encourages the use of social media for selling purposes". adapted from Corsaro and Maggioni, (2022) and I use of social media as an integral part of my normal work routine adapted from Trainor et al., (2014). Another 7-items adapted from Corsaro and Maggioni, (2022) and from Chi, (2021) measured CRM. While Artificial intelligence was measures consists of items adapted from existing scales e.g., "My company use chatbots to interact with our customers" and "I consider myself a frequent user of AI" were adapted from Ahearne et al., (2007) and Corsaro and Maggioni, (2022). The dependent variable sales performance was measured with 7 items – e.g., "Quickly generating sales of new company products" adapted from Good & Schwepker, (2022) while customer relationship performance will be measured with 5 -items e.g., ..." My customers work with me for a long time" adapted from Trainor et al., (2014). All performance measures will be examined relative to other salespeople and anchored on a 7-point sematic scale ranging from 1 = much worse to 7 = much better

4. RESULTS

Factor Analysis and Reliability Analysis

A principal component factor analysis was performed for data reduction using the varimax rotation method. The Eigen value was set at one and cut-off of 4. The resulted showed a high commonality loading above 0.50 cut-off and an Eigen value above one. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) scores ranged between 0.86 and 0.89 for all constructs, where the sampling adequacy was ensured by exceeding the minimum level of 0.60. Also, Bartlett's test of sphericity chi-square was 16448.339, significant ($p < .00$); thus, preliminary factor analysis conditions were satisfied. In the PCA, standardized items were loaded on seven factors and Eigen values exceeded one. The first factor consists of seven items measuring sales performance and labelled accordingly. The second factor were factors measuring customer relationship performance, all six items converging in factor two. Four items measuring Salesforce automation converged at factor three and labelled accordingly, while Sales-Service ambidexterity items converged to the fourth factor. The fifth factor is a convergence of the six items measuring social media use. Items, numbering five, measuring customer relationship management converged on the sixth factors. Finally, the seventh factor consists of items measuring artificial intelligence. The factors successfully explained the total variance of 0.81 in the measurement model, surpassing the cut-off limit of 0.60 recommended by Hair et al. (2010). The reliability test score for all constructs were all above the .70 benchmark (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

Table 2a. KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.761
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	16448.339
	Df	378
	Sig.	.000

	SP	CRP	SFA	SMU	CRM	AI
SP						
CRP	.797**					
SFA	.721**	.807**				
SMU	.458**	.605**	.576**			
CRM	.768**	.819**	.808**	.487**		
AI	.723**	.815**	.837**	.463**	.832**	

	SP	CRP	SFA	SMU	CRM	AI	Cronbach alpha
SP7	.906						
SP3	.899						
SP2	.898						
SP4	.888						
SP5	.884						
SP6	.883						
SP1	.874						.997
CRP1		.907					
CRP3		.897					
CRP2		.883					
CRP4		.829					
CRP6		.827					
CRP5		.803					.993
SFA2			.889				
SFA3			.840				
SFA4			.748				
SFA1			.727				
SFA5			.600				.983
SMU1				.875			
SMU6				.855			
SMU2				.831			
SMU4				.830			
SMU5				.766			,986
SMU3				.521			
CRM3					.845		
CRM5					.814		
CRM4					.779		
CRM1					.751		.991
CRM2					.751		
AI1						.927	
AI2						.857	
AI3						.763	
AI4						.726	
AI5						.594	.947

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 7 iterations.

SP- Sales performance, CRP- Customer relationship performance, SFA - Salesforce automation, , SMU - Social media use, CRM - Customer relationship management, AI - Artificial intelligence.

Test of Hypotheses

To test the hypotheses, the 5000-sample bootstrap sample and bias corrected confidence interval set at 95% (i.e., $p < 0.05$). The standardized regression weights, the direct and indirect path analysis are reported for the structural

equation modelling. The R^2 for the dependent variables are 99% and 98% respectively. This implies that the model explains 99 and 98 percent change in the dependent variables – sales performance and customer relationship performance respectively.

The first hypothesis predicted that salesforce automation will have a positive and significant effect on salespersons sales and customer relationship performance. To test Hypothesis 1, the result as shown in table 3a revealed that salesforce automation has a positive and significant effect on sales performance ($\beta = .92$, $t = 14.42$, $p<0.01$), supporting H1a. Similarly, Salesforce automation has a positive and significant effect on customer relationship performance ($\beta = .50$, $t = 8.45$, $p<0.01$), supporting H1b. Hypothesis 2 predicted that salesperson social media use will have a positive and significant effect on salesperson sales and customer relationship performance.

Discussion

The boundary spanning role of salespersons necessitate that they attend to customer service request and strive to meet their sales target. To improve their performance with respect to this dual role, many of them now leverage on digital such as Salesforce automation, social media, customer relationship management tools, and recently artificial intelligence. This study examined how sales-service ambidextrous roles of salespeople mediate the extent they use these sales digitalization tools to enhance their sales and customer relationship. The results from the study revealed a significant positive effect for Salesforce automation, social media use, and customer relationship management on sales and customer relationship performance, but a negative and significant effect for artificial intelligence on sales and customer relationship performance. Furthermore, the result also showed that Sales-Service ambidexterity partially mediates the positive relationship between Salesforce automation, social media use, customer relationship management on sales and customer relationship performance, while no mediating role was found for Sales-Service ambidexterity on the artificial intelligence and sales and customer relationship performance.

The positive and significant effect for Salesforce automation on sales and customer relationship performance demonstrate the relevance of the decade old Salesforce automation technology on sales and customer relationship performance. This finding is consistent with Franck and Dampérat (2022) who found a direct effect between the use of SFA and salespeople's performance; and Jridi et al. (2019) who found that SFA improve organizational capacity and salesperson performance. Salespeople maximize SFA to support their work and improve their performance. The result suggest that sales automation is used to manage routine tasks and daily chores such as receiving and sending information to supervisors and creating reports about customers' interactions. Besides improving sales performance, SFA increases salespersons' customer relationship performance. As salespeople are saddled with meeting sales target and providing services to customers, leveraging on Salesforce automation tools enable them to serve customers and build strong relationship with them and meet their sales target at the individual level. This is consistent with Corsaro and Maggioni (2022) who reported salespersons' use automation to effectively allocate their time and effort with a focus on customer relationship performance. The indirect effect of Salesforce automation on sales and customer relationship performance suggest that salespeople use Salesforce automation tools to manage routine tasks, which inadvertently enhances their productivity in terms of meeting sales target and maintaining customer relationship.

Consistent with previous findings (Franck & Damperat, 2023; Guenzi & Nijssen, 2021), result from this study revealed that social media use predicts sales and customer relationship performance. Franck and Damperat, (2023) and Guenzi and Nijssen, (2021) had shown in a recent study the positive effect of social media use on salesperson performance. Result from this study suggests that salespeople use social media to identify opportunities and increase adaptive selling behaviour consistent with Itani et al. (2017). The significant direct effect of social media use on customer relationship performance supports Ogilvie et al., (2018) who found that social media use impact customer relationship performance. However, the result contradicts Bill et al. (2020) who reported a non-significant effect of salesperson social media use on customer loyalty. Furthermore, the indirect effect of social media use on sales and customer relationship performance demonstrates that as salespeople leverage on social media, the more they can simultaneously juggle between meeting sales targets and attending to customer service needs, which in turn improves their relationship with customers and meet their performance target. The influence of social media use suggest that salespeople use social media to identify customer needs, qualify leads, and close deals. Other ways social media is used involves improving customer relationship and performing routine tasks.

Regarding the direct effect of customer relationship management on sales and customer relationship performance, result from this study showed that it has a positive and significant effect on customer relationship performance but a negative effect on sales performance. Interestingly, the finding implies that CRM technology are more of relationship enablement tools and less of sales enablement tool in the context of this study. In other words, CRM tools increase customer relationship performance but decreases sales performance. In the same vein, the indirect effect shows the same pattern of relationship between CRM and customer relationship and sales performance. What this suggest is that when salespeople use CRM technologies at an individual level to support their work, the technology is only effective in maintaining customer relationship. Even, salespeople skilled in simultaneously blending selling and service provision do not differ in how they use CRM technologies for meeting their sales

quota and maintaining customer relationships. It is only effective for managing customer relationship and can be counter-productive for sales professionals that wish to meet sales target. This is consistent with Agnihotri et al. (2017) who showed that sales-based CRM technology has a positive influence on post-sale service behaviour, and Rodriguez and Boyer's (2020) study that found a positive effect of mCRM on customer relationship performance. However, its use for sales related task is counter-productive, as far as our findings suggest. This result supports Moutot and Bascoul (2008) that reported that the main outcomes of SFA implementation in CRM processes include a mostly negative effect on sales activities; and to an extent, corresponds to Itani et al. (2022) that found no significant effect of CRM technology on salesperson value co-creation.

Contrary to hypothesized relationship regarding artificial intelligence, the direct influence means that sales and customer relationship performance decreases as the use AI increases. However, the indirect effects suggest that salespersons' ability to simultaneously perform sales functions and provide customer services does not change the effect of AI on sales performance. This finding underscores the argument that artificial intelligence may replace human actors in specific job roles (Chang, 2022). The fact that this study examined performance at the individual level may explain the negative relationship and the non-significant effect for the direct and indirect relationships, respectively. Artificial intelligences such as Chabot, virtual sales assistants, and sales robots, are deployed at the firm level and their use are effective in improving overall organizations performance, as shown by Chatterjee et al. (2022). But because we measured performance at the individual level, salespeople may not quantify its effect on their individual performance. Moreover, as Chang (2022) argued, AI takes away the time, effort, and commitment salespeople devote to building enduring relationship, which explains its inverse relationship on relationship performance.

5. CONCLUSION

As businesses gradually embrace the digital transformation of their processes. Scholars and practitioners in the sales domain have predicted its revolutionary impact in the sales ecosystem. This study investigated how the sales digitalization tools such as sales force automation, social media use, customer relationship management and artificial intelligence affect salespersons performance through their ability to provide service and sell simultaneously. According to the results, sales automation technology, social media use, and customer relationship management tools are effective for enabling salespersons efficiency and improving their performance in terms of meeting sales target and maintaining customer relationship. Salespersons ability to effectively perform their selling and customer service tasks can also make these technologies more relevant for improving salespersons performance.

However, the latest technology in the trend of digital sales tools have counterproductive effect on salespersons performance. In fact, it decreases their effectiveness and efficiency in meeting their respective sales and customer service goals. Even if the salesperson is skilled in simultaneously selling and providing customer service, using artificial intelligence technology does not help them improve their efficiency and raise their performance targets. As it appears, artificial intelligence competes with salespeople in meeting performance targets and therefore, constitutes a job replacement technology in the context salespeople used the technology in this study.

In conclusion, sales digitalization improves salespersons performance. And Salesforce automation, social media use, and customer relationship management tools increases sales and customer relationship performance. While salespeople ability to simultaneously sell and serve customers partially mediates these effects. In contrast, artificial intelligence is not a relevant tool for salespeople to use at the individual level as it is detrimental to their performance.

Theoretical Contribution

The study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, to the best of our knowledge, this study is among the first to empirically examine sales digitalization in the B2B context. Besides Corsaro and Maggioni (2022) study that qualitative examined sales digitalization, earlier research in this domain were mostly theoretical and conceptually. By so doing the study showed that sales digitalization operationalized as Salesforce automation, social media use, and customer relationship management and artificial intelligence affect salespersons' performance. The study showed that, except for artificial intelligence that has a negative effect, these tools positively predict performance. However, by examining artificial intelligence this study addresses De Ruyter et al., (2020) call to start a body of research that examines how AI can support the Sales-Service ambidexterity. The research model is shown in figure 2 below. Second, the study integrates social media, CRM, SFA, and AI and test them in a single model against performance and by so doing extends previous studies that examined these constructs independently. Finally, most of the literature in the sales ecosystem domain are from other context such as US, Europe, and Asia. This study adds to the debate by bringing perspective form the sub-Saharan African context.

Practical Implications

Based on the findings of the findings has some implications for sales and business managers. First, salesforce automation is an effective tool for improving sales performance and maintain customer relationship. Therefore, sales managers and businesses should invest substantially to deploy this technology across their sales team. In

addition, as this technology advances, sales organizations should continuously train and retrain their Salesforce to update their knowledge and acquaint them with the latest trend and how to maximize this tool for improve efficiency and performance. Second, since social media use also affect salespersons efficiency and enables improve performance. Therefore, sales organization should incentivize salespeople to use their personal social media profiles for businesses purposes. One area social media use is important is in providing updates, educating, and sharing product information and contents to customers. As such sales organizations should encourage their salespeople to own personal social media accounts across all platforms and provide allowances for internet services. Once salespeople can build a reputation on social media, they win more sales and are able to tend to customers effectively. Furthermore, sales orgainzations should train and support salespeople. This support can be by providing organization wide social media strategy defining situations in which use of social media may contribute to relationship building and wining more sales, and train their salespeople accordingly (Bill et al., 2020).

Third, customer relationship management tool is also another sales digitalization technology with strong effect on performance. The implication is that sales organizations should invest in providing and improving the CRM hardware and software it uses. Particularly, they should integrate CRM tool into sales processes and provide relevant training to enable salespeople maximize the use of this technology. CRM is a tool that can provide motivation and empowerment for salespeople to realize their personal financial goals and helps make salespeople's work life more efficient such that customer satisfaction is maximize. Fourth, with the inverse effect of artificial intelligence on sales performance, the job of the salesperson may be a hybrid one in the future, in which AI co-work with human salespeople (Chang, 2022). Salespeople also need to be trained on how to leverage on AI for improve efficiency at the individual level. Such as learning about products, researching customers and competitors, prospect scoring, and writing sales copy. However, with AI reorganizing the sales role is imminent. Salespeople need to focus on activities such as value co-creating consultation and customer development activities whereas handling orders, collecting information about customer needs, competitors, available products/services, markets, and industry along with analyzing and providing information, prospecting, and making an initial contact will be effectively managed by an AI.

6. Limitations and Suggestion for Further Research

The present study has some limitations, which provides avenue for further studies. The sampled respondents were salespeople of B2B firms in Nigeria. The exposure of this category of salespeople and the resources of the firm limits the extent they are knowledge about and use these digital sales tools. Therefore, future studies may investigate salespeople across the B2C and B2B sectors. In addition, organizational resources corporate culture, leadership, and top management support can affect how salespeople use digital technology, so it would be worthwhile to understand their respective role on how salespeople use and deploy these technologies.

Second, this study was performed at the individual level which may affect the performance evaluation of these technologies. Some of these technologies are deployed and facilitated at the organizational level and the effect accounted for at that level. For instance, virtual salespeople and Chatbot are AI tools company leverage on to attend to customers directly. The performance measure is not attributable to individual salesperson but overall firm performance, therefore, it may be worthwhile to investigate how sales digitalization affects overall firm performance. Third, this study operationalized sales digitalization using SFA, CRM, social media, and AI, other digital sales tools such as big data analytics, cloud computing, etc was not measured in this study. Therefore, future studies may include other technologies and test their effect on performance at the corporate and individual levels. Similar, digital sales tools can affect other performance measures such as creative performance, job satisfaction, work-life balance, and well-being. As we did not measure these outcomes, future studies may delve into these domains.

Finally, scholars have argued that making salespeople use digital technology can them adversely by creating job stress. Moreover, technology is also associated with stress – technostress. Hence, future studies can investigate the role of technostress on the relationship between digital sales tools and performance. Furthermore, the extent salespeople have autonomy, the orientation of the firm, and other subtle factors such as political skills of salespeople their Sales-Service ambidexterity may affect their performance. Therefore, future studies may test the intervening role of these variables on salespeople's performance.

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