Tampere University of Applied Sciences

Artificial Intelligence in Business-to-Business Sales

The Reformation of the Selling Processes

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ABSTRACT

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SAFA RAJEB:
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Artificial Intelligence (AI) has been described as the 4th industrial revolution. AI technology has brought changes in all aspects of business, and sales are no exception. AI technology is changing how customers are buying and how salespeople should sell. These significant changes have made its way to business-to-business selling, capture the attention of researchers' in the field of B2B sales and marketing to understand the aspects of changes in how these technologies are changing B2B sales.

This study is part of a project called ROBIN, implemented by the Tampere University of Applied Sciences, to study the phenomenon of using digital tools, AI, and automation technologies in B2B sales in cooperation with Business Finland, Tampere University, and in close collaboration with company partners.

This study aims to understand how the technological phenomenon of artificial intelligence reform business-to-business sales processes by investigating through systems and tools that have developed to automate selling processes and support the salespeople's duties. This study also aims to develop an evolved selling model for B2B sales context to demonstrate the influence of AI technology on the selling processes. Using the traditional 7th steps of selling as a control model.

The study involved 3 companies in the field of developing and distributing AI technologies tools and systems, which are used in B2B selling context. The study also involved 5 salespeople working for different companies, in the field of B2B sales. All the study sample are based in Finland.

The empirical data was collected via interviews with a person of contact of the sample companies participating in ROBINS project. A semi-structured interview approach was used to collect empirical data from the salespeople during June and August 2020.

The study results showed that B2B sales processes under the influence of AI technology comprise of four steps: (1) prospecting and researching, (2) engaging and presenting, (3) negotiating and closing, (4) relationship enforcement. The selling processes were found to become short in steps, activities, and time. Results also showed that salespeople are not adapting to the quick changes in AI technology. Many salespeople still practice the traditional methods of selling in B2B sales activity.

The study concluded that AI technology, through the various aspects of tools and forms, was reforming the B2B sales processes. The reformation of the AI technology on the B2B sales is a fact. The early sales steps showed more disruption of AI technology than the later ones.

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CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

ABBREVIATIONS AND TERMS

TAMK   Tampere University of Applied Sciences
AI   Artificial Intelligent
ML   Machine Learning
B2B   Business-to-Business
B2C   Business-to-Customers
AIaaS   AI as a service
CRM   Customer Relationship Management
CAC   Customer Acquisition Cost
SM   Social Media

1 INTRODUCTION

The past three decades have witnessed an increasingly rapid advances in the fields of Big Data, Artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) as an effective technology that brings improvement over the traditional approaches. From mobile applications to video games, through the Internet. AI, in fact, is part of many technologies that almost every person has used with or without notice. AI has proved a profound influence on many industries where it can reform, enhance, and improve (Davenport, Guha, Grewal, & Bressgott, 2020). However, AI technology influence on sales operations as part of the business industry is no exception (Paschen, Kietzmann, & Kietzmann, 2019). Indeed, the sales operations have seen a lot of improvement made by AI, especially considering the rapid development of sales over the Internet. The electronic selling over the Internet is the most apparent form of sales system that utilizes AI technology in an active sales process, often used in business-to-customer (B2C) and business-to-business (B2B) forms (Vieira, de Almeida, Agnihotri, da Silva, & Arunachalam, 2019).

Recently, considerable literature is growing around the theme of AI technology disruption of B2B sales. Evidence suggests that AI technology is among the essential factors for changing B2B sales (Syam & Sharma, 2018). Studies in the field of B2B markets, emphasises on a gap in the knowledge of B2B markets, that also include the knowledge and comprehensiveness in the understanding of artificial intelligence and how it functions to serve B2B sales processes. Many studies are trying to fill the gaps of B2B markets knowledge. The knowledge gap is increasing with the increase of interfering of the changing factors. That also can be noticed with the persistent lack of research that discusses those factors (Lilien, 2016).

AI technology is considering a factor of change in the B2B markets (Kiruthika & Khaddaj, 2017), which requires a more in-depth understanding of this emerging phenomenon, and how it is changing and reshaping the B2B markets. This study is an effort to fill part of the gap in the knowledge, by examining how the AI technology, as a factor of change, is affecting the B2B sales processes, and how the

B2B sales would be held in the era of AI technologies during the current millennium.

1.1 Motivation

The motivation behind this study is to participate in ROBINS project[1], which Tampere University of Applied Sciences is implementing to revise the phenomenon of using digital tools, AI, and Automation in B2B sales in cooperation with Business Finland and Tampere University. Additionally, the subject of the study allocates the right interest by posing a challenge due to factors, e.g., the innovation and novelty in the academic fields, the scarce of references that discuss the subject in-depth. In addition to meeting the ambitions to attain knowledge about modern and contemporary phenomena.

1.2 Scope

The role of AI technology in B2B sales can cover a variety of aspects. However, this study seeks to explain the AI technologies as an influential phenomenon in B2B sales, which is reforming, adding, improving, and enhancing the B2B selling cycle.

Accordingly, this study will focus on how it varies AI technology applications are disrupting the B2B selling processes. However, there is limited information about how these technologies are disrupting B2B sales due to the novelty. Therefore, acquiring knowledge about these technologies and how it can intervene the B2B sales, are essential to understand the B2B sales cycle is its evolution.

The study subject is highly essential for both practitioners and academicians alike. As from the practitioners' perspective, cognisant the effects of AI technologies will help to enhance the implementation and develop these technologies to be more accurate, precise, and functional. On the other hand, understanding the

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[1] ROBINS project is co-innovation project develops new knowledge about intelligent B2B-sales robotics in close cooperation with company partners. https://projects.tuni.fi/robins/about/

AI technologies and its applications will give the perception to the academicians to improve the knowledge about the role of AI technologies in B2B sales. It will also augment the experience of how AI is disrupting the B2B sale cycle.

1.3 Study Aims and Objectives

In this study, the objectives are to conduct a real-world examination of how AI technologies may affect the nature of the B2B selling process. In particular, the focus on how AI's technologies, when implemented in B2B sales, are able to result in differential selling processes and the implications thereof.

Knowledge about AI technologies is existing within the originators of those technologies. Therefore, the study data will be extracted from companies that are working in the field of providing, developing, and redistributing the AI technologies, either as a standalone service or embedded with other systems, which are used by various businesses that function in the field of B2B markets.

The study is intended to verify the collected information by conducting interviews with a sample of salespeople who are working in various field of B2B sales, and at the same time utilizing AI technologies in their day-to-day sales operations. That, on the other hand, will help to understand how these technologies are reshaping the B2B sales. At the same time, it will also measure the impact on salespeople's function.

Definitively, the intrinsic value of the study, can be demonstrated by answering the research question:

How are the AI technologies reforming the B2B sales processes?

Ultimately by answering such research questions, the study aims to develop an evolved selling processes for B2B sales context to display the influence of AI technology.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Sales in B2B Settings

2.1.1 B2B Sales Perspective Overview

Business-to-business (B2B) or, also it is called BtoB, is a form of sales that take place between two or more companies in exchange for goods, services, solutions, or any other commodities. B2B selling is the opposite of the B2C one, where the company sells directly to the customers. In contrast, the B2C selling process often defined as quick and straightforward because it does not involve a large number of decision-makers. The B2B selling process described as by researchers and practitioners: a long and complex selling process, mostly involve a large number of decision-makers, such as salespersons or sales management, in addition to the organisation management from the seller side, (J. P. Koponen & Rytsy, 2020, p. 1208; Schmidt, Adamson, & Bird, 2015). Additionally, selling under the B2B terms requires more attention to the customers, especially considering selling on the international level, (Libai et al., 2020). The same complexity also reflects on the buyer's side, which again depending on how complex the buyers' (buying centre) are, (Grewal et al., 2015). Moreover, the industry, the size, the goods, services or solutions that are being sold are also affected the longevity and the complexity of the selling process greatly, that in turn, reflect primarily on the buyers' ability to purchase the seller offerings, (Bjørnstad, 2017).

Furthermore, selling in B2B context often built a long relationship between seller and buyer, where trust and loyalty play a significant role in defining that relationship. In that sense, some companies only sell to the customers having a relationship with either through former sale or application to become a customer. However, other factors are affecting the sales relationship between the buyer and the seller, such as the response and satisfaction to the customer's needs, and the ability to configure according to the customers' wishes (Mahlamäki, Ojala, & Myllykangas, 2016; Murphy & Sashi, 2018).

According to CSO Insight report and Marketing Charts analysis, the typical length of B2B sales cycle is often varied. Depending on the customer status with the seller, as if the customer is new, the majority (74.6%) of the responder's reported that the selling operation takes at least four months or more. Whereas only (39.6%) reported the selling function could take the same amount of time if the customer has already existed within the seller customer base, in other means has formed a relationship with the seller, (Insights, 2018; *Marketing Charts*). A similar reading noticed from a survey conducted by Ascend2 (Ascend2.com) in 2017, where the majority of responders (56%) stated that B2B selling is a complex sale (long cycle, many influencers). While only (30%) reported it is short and direct selling (short cycle, few influencers). Though (14%) reported it has an equal view (complex and direct are equally), (Richard K. Miller & Kelli Washington, 2018, pp. 147–148).

Table 1 and figure 1 below highlight the B2B sales cycle, extracted from a chart published at (MarketingCharts.com). Based on a survey of 886 sales leaders around the world, conducted by CSO Insights, the research division of Miller Heiman Group and published at MarketingCharts.com in January 2019.

TABLE 1. Illustration of the B2B sales cycle according to Insights, (2018); Marketing Charts, survey.

Periods (Month)	New Customer	Existing Customer
> 1	5.1%	22.0%
1 – 3	20.3%	38.4%
4 – 6	28.2%	23.9%
7 – 9	15.2%	7.0%
10 – 12	13.1%	2.9%
< 12	18.1%	5.8%
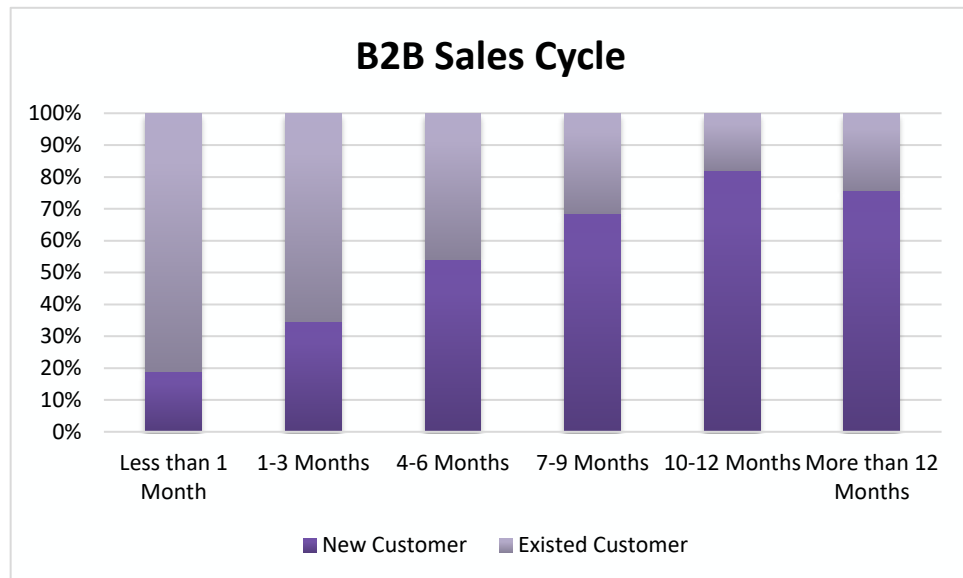
B2B Sales Cycle

FIGURE 1. Visualise the B2B sales cycle according to Insights, (2018); Marketing Charts, survey.

In summary, sales in B2B context is a long and complex process, involving many decision-makers, and often limited to a small number of customers. The B2B customers have the focus and the central role of selling company strategies, which often requires to create a long-term relationship, characterized by loyalty, to make the B2B selling rewarding (Hallikainen, Savimäki, & Laukkanen, 2020).

2.1.2 B2B Sales Processes

Looking at the historical landscape, selling is one of the oldest professions. Selling operations had occurred since the advent of trading (Inks, Avila, & Talbert, 2019). Over the times, selling processes had developed, from being a simple trade operation to a long, complicated, multidimensional, and complex operation, *as in the case of B2B sales*, while there are no rules for how the selling function should be. In general, the sales process defined as a series of interrelated of steps that begins with finding a potential customer and ends with make the sale. Where the salesperson contacts the potential customer, sets an appointment to present the company products, services, or solution discussing the offering with the customer, and complete the sale, then preform after sales follow up activities to collect the customer feedback (Davies & Gibson, 2010).

Back to the 1900s, William Patterson, the owner of National Cash Register Company (NCR) defined what is known as the steps of selling (Hawkins, 1920). Later on, these steps were described by (Dubinsky, 1981) as the "seven steps of selling", which have been and are still widely used by researchers, practitioners and companies around the globe. The seven steps of selling present typical sales scenarios (Moncrief & Marshall, 2005). The steps are (1) prospecting, (2) pre-approaching, (3) approaching, (4) presentation, (5) overcoming objections, (6) closing, (7) and follow-up (Dubinsky, 1981, p. 27). Definition of the selling process is known to be essential and traditional. It has been used, *in many cases*, to define the B2B sales process. The funnelling concept has widely been used to illustrate how the steps work. At the top of the funnel, the seller starts with a relatively high number of potential customers, and the farther the customers travel through the funnel, the less they become until the process finishes with a small number of customers who made the purchase. Figure 2 below shows the relation between sales process, number of customers, and the potentiality of selling applied to the sales funnelling concept.
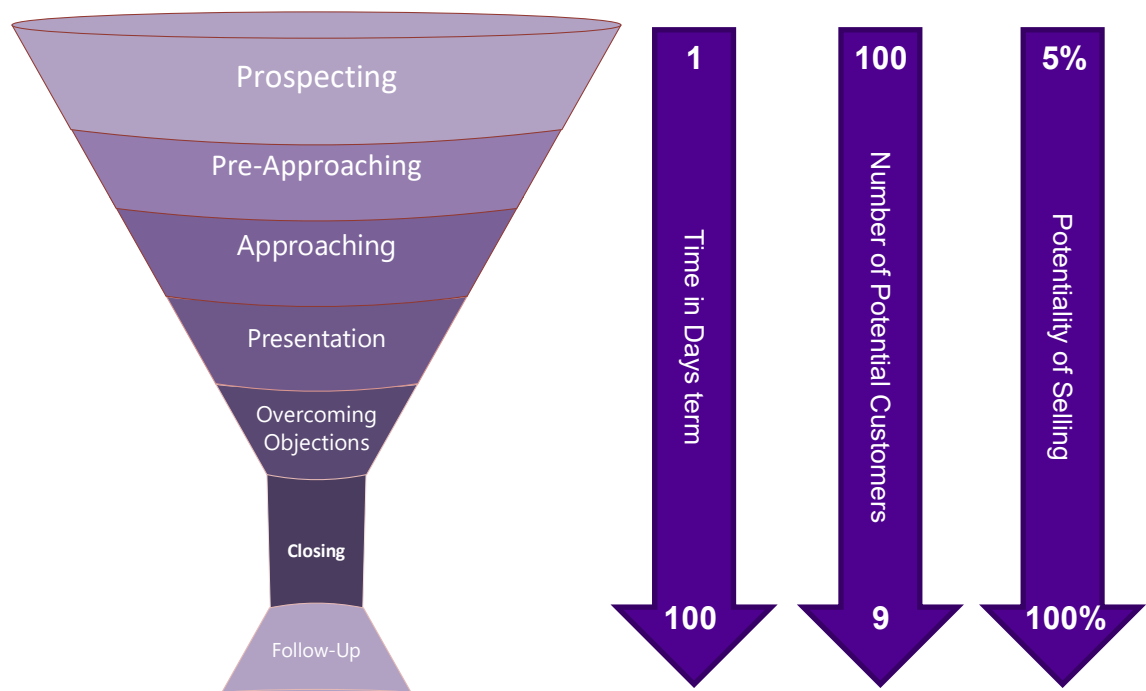

FIGURE 2. Visualisation of the selling process in funnelling concept. Extracted and modified from (Davies & Gibson, 2010, p. 17).

In 2005, Moncrief and Marshal (2005), wrote a paper which reconsidered the 7th step of selling (Dubinsky, 1981) in the era of digital communications. In their report, they argued that the 7th step of selling (Dubinsky, 1981) was evolved due to the influences of communication technologies, strategic role of selling, adaptation of team-based selling approaches, and the increases of buyers' knowledge, among other factors.

In their argument, the researchers' stated that prospecting step (1), no longer performed as a single systematic step, but instead performed by the organisation else than the sales department. While pre-approaching step (2), was still conducted, but the amount and the quality of information had improved due to technological disruption. On the approach step (3), they argued it was still in practice. They were also indicating that the approaching step becomes simpler and take personal form if the seller and the customer have built a rapport already. In contrast, for a new customer, it works as a foundation base to gain knowledge about the buyers' organisational structure, needs, problems, and issues. As for the presentation step (4), the researchers' considered the evolution in the presentation, especially the computer-based programs such as *Microsoft Powerpoint*, has a significant effect in comparison to traditional presentation methods. Such as the *canned presentation*, and *semicanned presentation*, where the salespeople trained to use predefined scripts to present the products or the services they are selling. They also highlighted the role of computers in giving salespeople more in-depth knowledge about their customers, in addition to the presentation style, where a team from the selling organisation delivers the presentation instead of only a single sales representatives, (Moncrief & Marshall, 2005, pp. 16–17). As for overcoming objections step (5), the researchers indicated that multiple calls might take place from the seller to the buyer, where the seller is mostly listening to the buyer. However, they argued that overcoming objections is not necessarily the goal of this step, where the sales representatives discuss and try to close the sale. Instead, the seller listens and may adjust to the buyer's requirements (Moncrief & Marshall, 2005, p. 17). According to the researchers, the closing step (6), transformed from being closing the sales only to a bridge to build a long-term relationship between the buyer and the seller, where the value of the buyer is the focus, and excluding customers who do not present a fruitful relationship with

negative Return on Investment (ROI). At the same time, the researchers' empha-sised on the increased role of the follow-up step (7), due to disruption of commu-nication technologies, this step became essential. Using different tools, e.g., emails and messaging, among others, has made it easier for the salespeople to follow-up with the buyers (Moncrief & Marshall, 2005, p. 17).

Furthermore, researchers concluded since the communications tools have evolved. The evolvement has reflected on the selling process to become a build-ing relationship, instead of being just a simple selling process (Moncrief & Marshall, 2005, p. 18). Thus, they came up with an evolved version of the selling steps, as follow: 1) customer retention and deletion, 2) database and knowledge management, 3) nurturing the relationship (relationship selling), 4) marketing the product, 5) problem-solving, 6) adding value/satisfying needs and 7) customer relationship maintenance. However, in their approach, the researchers the cus-tomer considered the core of the selling process. And all the steps are oriented toward the customer/buyer. The researchers emphasized that customer-oriented selling is a successful approach for the companies, according to (Schwepker, 2003) mentioned in (Moncrief & Marshall, 2005, p. 18). Table 2 below shows the researchers' version of the selling processes in comparison to the traditional one.

TABLE 2. Shows the traditional in compare to the evolved selling steps by (Moncrief & Marshall, 2005, p. 16).

Traditional Steps		Evolved Steps
(1) Prospecting		(1) Customer retention and deletion
(2) Pre-Approaching		(2) Database and knowledge management
(3) Approaching		(3) Nurturing the relationship (relationship selling)
(4) Presentation	$\Rrightarrow$	(4) Marketing the product
(5) Overcoming objec-tions		(5) Problem solving
(6) Close		(6) Adding value/satisfying needs
(7) Follow-up		(7) Customer relationship maintenance

Furthermore, many researchers' and practitioners' have come up with other def-initions for the selling process. However, in this case, it is not useful to review every different description of the selling process. Instead, this study will briefly

review a sample of those sale processes with emphasizing on the ones that have been developed to function in B2B sales settings. As Below:

Davies & Gibson, (2010, p. 17), have developed a B2B selling process model, built on understanding the customers/buyers demands, and the seller solutions. The model is a hybrid orientation between problem-solving and relationship selling. The researchers defined the selling process model in 8 steps, as follow: 1) the buyer needs or desire existence, 2) the buyer ability to pay for the solution, 3) (*the seller*) developing the solution, 4) (*the seller*) proposing the solution, 5) (*the buyer*) evaluate the solution, 6) (*the seller and buyer*) negotiate the deal, 7) (*the seller*) create contracts and 8) (*the seller*) close the deal. The researchers selling process model was more applicable to the problem solving and relationship theme of sale, and in turn, may not agree with other selling approaches.

Practitioner J. Coe, (2004, p. 181), defined the selling process in 9 steps, as follow: 1) inquiry, 2) qualified lead, 3) proposal sent, 4) sample sent, 5) final negotiations, 6) first sale, 7) multiple sales, 8) long-term customer and 9) past customer. In his approach, there was a consideration for marketing phase, under the *inquiry* point and product or service, under the *proposal/sample sent* point, as well for customer retention and relationship selling under the facts of *first/multiple sales*, in addition to *long-term/past customer* point. In comparison, this approach was straightforward with some extra considerations for marketing. Yet, the model is long and taking into consideration the already longevity of B2B selling operation. Besides, it does not include any follow-up activity.

2.1.3 Other Sorts of B2B Sales Processes

Research in the area of selling process shows other considerations for the selling processes. Arli et al., (2018); Avila, Ramon A.; Inks, (2017); Brent Adamson, Matthew Dixon, (2017); Dixon, (2013); Inks et al., (2019); Borg & Young, (2014), *to name some*, described the selling processes differently. They considered the selling process is how the seller approaches the buyer. These approaches pivot on the methods that are used to persuade customers. These approaches have

been developed by practitioners over a long period and studied by researchers. Some of these approaches are old enough to be rarely used nowadays, *as in case of scripts selling*. However, some are still widely useable among companies and practitioners. These approaches were developed mainly to serve in B2C sales settings, but over time many of them were used in B2B sales as well. The summary below reviews some of these approaches, which also were commonly used in B2B sales settings.

Problem Solving Selling

The problem-solving approach is when the salespeople work with customers to understand their needs and problems. Based on the collected information, the salespeople then propose a solution (Inks et al., 2019, p. 90). However, this approach is not only limited to generate offer solution from the seller. But also can go even beyond to develop an alternative solution to satisfy the customer's needs, which might include competitors' offering as alternatives, (Avila, Ramon A.; Inks, 2017, p. 318), argued.

Solution-Selling

Koponen et al., (2019, p. 238), defined the solution-selling as an approach that salespeople use to build appropriate solutions in long-term relationships with key customers and achieve profitable sales via successful collaborative sales processes. However, the researchers also argued that this approach has moved towards the relationship selling, as it is the more dominant approach that may include many other sub-approaches (J. Koponen et al., 2019, p. 238).

Consultative Selling

Consultative selling is a multistep selling approach, where the seller and the buyer have formed a long-term relationship, which themed this selling approach. Consultative selling is not limited to identifying the buyer problem or needs but also include the cooperation between the seller and the buyer to achieve the strategic goals of the buyer (Avila, Ramon A.; Inks, 2017, p. 320). In this approach, the salespeople role shows they act as a manager of the buyer project. They propose the solutions by product, service, or solution and eventually make the sale. Another prominent theme of consultative selling is agility. This type of

approach marked to be quicker, due to the established relationship between both parties, according to (Hanan, 2011, p. 13).

Social Selling

Social media (SM) selling approach is when the salespeople use digital social media platforms to find and engage with potential customer/buyer. During the selling process, a personal relationship formed because this approach often occurs between individuals who are participating in the selling and buying decisions (Belew, 2014). Itani et al., (2017, p. 64), mentioned in Dewnarain et al., (2019, p. 176), and Kaplan & Haenlein, (2012, p. 61), defined the social media platforms as: "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content". SM are platforms that existed within the Internet environment, mainly to exchange.

The SM approach is relatively new, while it is not clear when the salespeople start using the SM in B2B sales settings. However, countless researcher papers are discussing the effects and dimensions of using SM in a B2B sales context, giving special consideration for platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter, among other, which are very famous for being used in sales. According to (Agnihotri, Kothandaraman, Kashyap, & Singh, 2012, p. 341), practitioners and academicians alike have started to discuss social selling as a prominent contemporary selling approach with considerable potential in the B2B sales domain.

Adaptive Selling

In this approach, the salespeople adapt and adjust to the customers' needs, not only by the ways of communications but also encounter different types of customers behaviours, *different personalities, emotions, motivations etc.*, that also comes from various industries and organisational structures, (Inks et al., 2019, p. 91). In recent years, adaptive selling has been the way to go for many companies, because sellers and buyers are increasingly engaging in a collaborative effort to reduce costs while maintaining the quality already, in addition to the increase of using the various online platforms for selling and buying (Arli et al., 2018, p. 171).

Challenger Selling

Inks et al., (2019, p. 92), defined the challenger selling as "an approach that calls for salespeople to assume the role of strategic teacher, offering the prospective customer new insights into business improvement/development". The challenger selling model was developed by Dixon and Adamson (2011), due to the declining of relationship selling approach, according to the researchers. The researchers believed that the relationship sellers are too soft, afraid to ask for the order, and not willing to confront the buyers when they make the wrong decision, (Avila, Ramon A.; Inks, 2017, p. 321).

The challenger selling has received many critiques by researchers (Avila, Ramon A.; Inks, 2017; Inks et al., 2019; Rapp, Bachrach, Panagopoulos, & Ogilvie, 2014), *to name some*. The researcher's critiques were mainly pointed to the aggressiveness of the approach in B2B selling. In addition to underestimating the importance of the relationship between the seller and the customer, among other negative points (Avila, Ramon A.; Inks, 2017, pp. 321–322; Rapp et al., 2014, p. 245).

Relationship Selling

Relationship selling is a broad umbrella of sales approaches. It pivots mainly around the long-term relationship the seller develop with the buyer, to achieve value for both parties. Inks et al., (2019, p. 91), believed that relationship selling is an orientation more than a model, focuses on building long-term relationships with customers to provide mutual value gain. However, according to Arli et al., (2018, pp. 169–170), relationship selling consist of four perspectives: 1) individual selling, 2) buying centre, 3) adaptive selling, 4) customer orientation and solution selling. While Inks et al., (2019, p. 91), argued that problem-solving, and consultative selling could also be classified under the relationship selling.

2.2 B2B Sales in The Digital Era

The unprecedented advancement in information and communications technologies have brought significant changes to the sales, in general, and the B2B sales, specifically. The Internet and computing technologies have been beneficial for sales. On the one hand, using different online services, e.g., websites, SM sites, communication tools, among other, as a platform to reach customers, sell more directly to the customer, accessibility to distribution networks, and reduce sales costs. Also, facilitating the communications between sellers and buyers, enable the sellers to understand the customers' demands and build a long-term relationship, among the other benefits of the digitalization of the B2B selling. Besides, extending the organisational views for new markets and provide better competitors understandings. According to Singha et al., (2019, pp. 6–7), B2B companies are increasingly digitizing their sales channels and complementing their sales forces with channels that focus on online rather than personal interaction in aiming to increase selling efficiency, reduce costs and improve customers value.

However, considering digitalization effects from a B2B sales perspective, the Internet platform gives the space for obtaining and providing information that is essential and hard to get in B2B settings. According to Mantrala & Albers, (2012, p. 542), the Internet considered a low-cost platform to collect information in large quantity, good quality in a short manner of time. That information is available for both the sellers and the buyers. However, the researchers have summarized the attributes of those information effects on the selling process as follow: 1) the digitization of selling activity, 2) emphasis on inbound marketing, 3) a service-dominant orientation, 4) salespeople's evaluations of potential buyers before the first contact, and 5) the frequency of salespeople's communications with existing customers, (Mantrala & Albers, 2012, p. 549). Additionally, the information gathered from the Internet can improve, *in one way or another,* the first, *or early*, B2B buyer-seller interactions to be transformed to 1) more consultative than transactional selling approach in case of well-known offerings to meet standard needs and 2) from consultative to collaborative selling approach (co-created offerings) to meet new and more customized needs, Mantrala & Albers, (2012, p. 550) argued.

Nonetheless, the development of information and communications has paved the way for a new era in digitalization, where Big Data, AI and ML play a significant role in changing the patterns of business functionality. This revolution called by many (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2019; Kreutzer & Sirrenberg, 2020; Milkau, 2019; Syam & Sharma, 2018), *to name some,* the 4th Industrial Revolution, where automation, robots, AI and ML, Internet of Things (IoT), and big Data mining and analysis, is the main engines of this revolution.

2.2.1 AI Technology Overview

Since the aim of this study is to explore how AI technologies are reforming the B2B selling processes, it would be beneficial to provide a brief explanation that defines the AI and ML technologies.

AI, defined by Haenlein & Kaplan, (2019, p. 5) as: "a system's ability to interpret external data correctly, to learn from such data, and use those learnings to achieve specific goals and tasks through flexible adaptation". On the other hand, ML defined as: "a field of computer science that gives computers the ability to learn without being explicitly programmed" (Mehendale & Sherin, 2018, p. 18).

The descriptive and predictive analysis of the AI and ML, with the existence of data, is what makes those technologies thriving. AI can be applied to an immense amount of data sets to generate new insights and enable for better decision making in prediction and forecasting (Goering, Kelly, & Mellors, 2018). Nonetheless, AI is considered the central theme of technology. Many technologies and processes are functioning under the AI to give results. Including, for example, the ML algorithms which solve robust problems. ML algorithms use historical data to make predictions/projections about what about to happen in the future (CPSA, 2018). Natural Language Processing (NLP), for example, is used to decode talking and writing of humans, process it to extract knowledge and information. Artificial Neural Networks (ANNs), in another example, is used for deep learning, predictions, and real-time analyses, besides other technologies (Kreutzer & Sirrenberg, 2020).

The essential elements of AI technology work according to 'input-process-output' concept. Accordingly, the technology system needs data sets from a defined source like a human or other type of data source, which represents the input for the system. The system then processes the inputted data sets as instructed (process) using predefined models, e.g., ML, NLP, ANNs etc. Then extracts results (output). Paschen et al., (2019, p. 1412), have used the building blocks concept to explain the functionality of the AI systems, as illustrated in figure 3 below.

INPUTS	PROCESSES	OUTPUT
Structured Data	Pre-Processes	Information
Unstructured Data	Natural Language Understanding (NLU)	Natural Language Generation (NLG)
	Computer Vision	Image Generation
	Main Processes	Robotics
	Problem Solving	
	Reasoning	
	Machine Learning	
Knowledge Base		
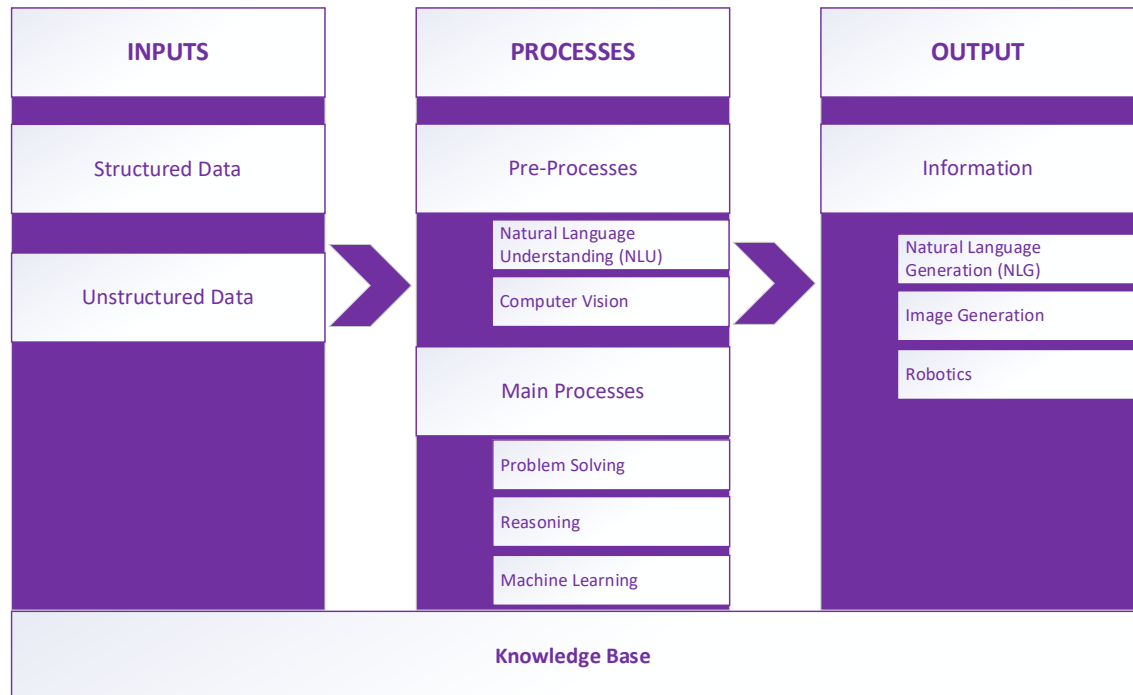
FIGURE 3. AI system in building block concept (Paschen et al., 2019, p. 1412).

AI technology is a comprehensive aspect of technologies, which goes beyond the aims of this study. Still, this section is required to give a basic overview of AI technology.

2.2.2 AI Technology in B2B Selling Process

In their book, Kreutzer & Sirrenberg, (2020, p. viii), stated that AI technology is: "quickly evolving from a nice-to-have technology to a have-to-have technology". Emphasizing that AI technology is not a technology like others, but it is a basic innovation that will penetrate all areas of business and life in the coming years. Typical businesses and B2B business specifically are adapting to the changings

by implementing AI technology in some of their processes. According to Forrester, (2019), up to 53% global data analytics, decision-makers said they have implemented, expanding, upgrading or in the process of implementation, some form of AI technology. Asserting the importance of AI technology for businesses and provide insights into the involvement of the technology in every aspect of companies, including the B2B ones.

Notably, there is a current paucity of studies describing how AI technologies are reforming the B2B sales cycle. Predominantly due to the novelty of the technology in B2B sales. In addition to the lack of studies that deal with B2B marketing in general (Lilien, 2016). However, the role of AI technology in B2B sales have been discussed implicitly by some studies, mainly (Paschen et al., 2019; Paschen, Wilson, & Ferreira, 2020; Syam & Sharma, 2018). There are other non-published studies which also have addressed the role of AI technology in B2B selling processes. However, the published studies considered as theoretical studies because those studies which have discussed the AI phenomenon in B2B sales context from the theoretical perspectives. Also, the study's findings were not built on empirical or experimental data. Yet, those studies have given an envision on how AI technologies can reform the B2B sales process.

Notably, the reviewed studies show that that AI technology can significantly affect B2B selling processes through a disruption at each step. The reviewed studies have used the traditional 7th steps of selling (Dubinsky, 1981) as a frame to define and describe how AI affecting the B2B selling process. Table 3 below reflects the AI contribution at each stage of the selling processes.

TABLE 3. Illustrate the AI contribution in correlation with each stage of the B2B selling processes.

Selling Process	AI Contribution
Prospecting	**Lead/prospect generating**: AI helps to find potential buyers through different methods including, highly personalized, individually tailored advertising and marketing (Syam & Sharma, 2018, p. 142). **Lead/prospect qualification**: AI may predict and evaluate the buyers based on their potentiality to buy and identify high-quality leads (Paschen et al., 2019, p. 1416). **Lead/prospect contacting**: based on a predefined contact strategy, AI could accurate, and scaleup results for how and when to make contact with the lead/prospect (Syam & Sharma, 2018, p. 142).
Pre-Approaching and Approaching *According to (Syam & Sharma, 2018, p. 143), pre-approaching and approach steps typically studied together in sales research with an indication that the stages are being merged. This view also agrees with* Paschen et al., (2019, p. 1416)*, view of the processes.*	**Lead/prospect nurturing**: In this process, the AI has the advantage through gathering and analysing the information about the leads, as this process takes substantial human resources (Syam & Sharma, 2018, p. 143). **Lead/prospect approaching**: AI can automate some of the routine tasks, e.g., schedule meetings, or answering common questions, or make initial contacts with the lead via chatbots agents (Paschen, Wilson, et al., 2020, p. 5).
Presentation	**Presenting**: AI can be a great contributor in the presentation step, especially considering incorporation with other digital technologies, e.g., virtual reality (VR), 360-degree video, and augmented reality (AR), giving the presentation and prototyping an advantage point, using interactive presentation technologies, which empower the customers' experience. In addition to reducing the costs of manufacturing product prototypes, besides the availability to adjust the offered product/service/solution based on customers'

	requirements. AI bots can assist in creating compelling presentations by answering frequently asked questions. AI additionally can support the sales presentation with real-time data to figure out the best prices to quote for different segments of buyers. Further, emotion AI is useful to comprehend the buyers' behaviour, verbal, e.g., speech hesitations and non-verbal, e.g., eye gaze, gestures, as these facets are essential for salespeople to understand the buyers' reaction and adjust accordingly (Kiruthika & Khaddaj, 2017, p. 165; Syam & Sharma, 2018, pp. 143–144). Furthermore, AI can be harnessed to make initial contact with the potential buyer via digital agents, e.g., chatbots, as well in targeting and retargeting with personalised and customised communication messages and channels (Paschen, Wilson, et al., 2020, p. 5).
Overcoming Objections and Closing Paschen, Wilson, et al., (2020, p. 5)*, grouped these stages together. While* (Syam & Sharma, 2018, p. 144)*, discuss the matter of overcoming objections in the closing stage, suggesting that objections may occur during the closing of the deal.*	In the overcoming objections step, emotion AI can help comprehend the buyers' responses, also through the AI-enabled battle cards to superior competitors and improve the seller own value proposition, (Paschen et al., 2019, p. 1416). On the other hand, (Syam & Sharma, 2018, p. 144) argued that robo-advisors could be involved in overcoming objections while indicating to the automation of this step. As for the closing step (Syam & Sharma, 2018, p. 144), point out that closing for straightforward orders is facilitated by Internet base tools, indicating no significant disruption for AI technology. Also, AI could automate the closing step with order fulfilment and order processing automation (Paschen et al., 2019, p. 1416) argued.
Follow-up	As for the follow-up step, different opinions for the researchers were observed. On the one hand, (Syam & Sharma, 2018, pp. 144–145), argued that the follow-up step into two different processes. The first one is the current order filling, and the second one is the follow-up after the current order filled. However, AI-backed system, e.g., AI-CRM (Libai et al., 2020) can automate a wide range of processes, from simple paperwork to

	advance multi-channel marketing orders, where the call for judgment are required, and information is stored outside the selling department but within the organisation. Other uses also indicated in the automation of alerts to salespeople to invoice the buyer after closing the deal. On the other hand, Paschen et al., (2019); Paschen, Wilson, et al., (2020), stated that AI chatbots are used to perform the follow-up tasks, to uncover needs for the buyers through building affluent customers' profiles. However, the researchers did not indicate any differences in the processes (Paschen et al., 2019; Paschen, Paschen, Pala, & Kietzmann, 2020).

To conclude, the reviewed studies showed agreement on the impact of AI technology on the B2B sales function, as well suggest an excellent value creation of those AI technologies in contribution to the B2B selling processes. Although the studies have approached the subject of the impact from a different dimension, they also anticipated more significant impact in the future. They emphasized that the phenomenon needs more in-depth research. Furthermore, the studies have marginally demonstrated how AI technologies are supporting and enhancing the B2B sales processes and salespeople. Besides, most of the cases, the studies depicted the subject on the theoretical framework. At the same time, (Syam & Sharma, 2018) research has marked some real-world, existing cases in referencing to their arguments.

Consequently, what makes this study unique is the aims to unveil how the AI technology are reforming different stages of B2B sales cycle. How long or short the selling cycle could become when various AI technologies are implemented? What are the most significant changes the AI technology could bring to the B2B selling cycle? And ultimately, how are the B2B selling processes becoming after the AI technologies disrupting the sales processes? Further, this study proposed a two-stages approach to the research problem. The first stage by interviewing a sample from companies works in the field of developing AI technologies that are either standalone technology or embedded with another system such as the CRM, also known as AI-CRM, (Libai et al., 2020). The second stage by interview a sample of salespeople who are working in the field of B2B sales and use AI

technologies through their daily sales tasks. Studying the AI technology phenomenon through samples from real-world technology creators and reflect on that with experiences from salespeople, should give a complete vision on how these technologies are reforming the B2B sales processes.

2.3 The B2B Sales Control Model

The key idea in this study is to understand how the AI and ML are reforming the B2B selling processes. That requires using a selling process as a control model, which would help demonstrate how AI technologies are affecting the B2B sales process? Furthermore, the control model is also essential to guideline the study through the data collection process.

In this case, the study elected traditional 7th steps of selling as described by (Dubinsky, 1981), as a control model. Sales and marketing studies have widely used the 7th steps of selling model (Dubinsky, 1981) to explain the sales cycle. Moncrief, 2017; Moncrief & Marshall, 2005; Paschen, Wilson, et al., 2020; Syam & Sharma, 2018, *to name some*, have used the 7th step of selling (Dubinsky, 1981) as a control model to explain the selling processes, especially the B2B ones. According to Syam & Sharma, (2018, p. 140), the 7th steps of selling model (Dubinsky, 1981) is extensively used in the research. Paschen, Wilson, et al., (2020, p. 4), argued that the model applied to most of B2B sales situations. Furthermore, many companies, especially the ones working in the field of AI technology, use the same model to teach their customers how to develop a selling model. Table 4 below describes each step of the 7th step of selling model and its functionality in correlation with the factor of each step, in term of sales, as described by Dubinsky, (1981).

TABLE 4. Describe the functions and the factors of the 7th steps of selling model according to Dubinsky, (1981, p. 27).

Steps	Function	Factors
1) Prospecting	Identifying a potential buyer/prospect.	• Internal sources. • External sources. • Personal contact. • Miscellaneous/others.
2) Pre-approach	Gathering information about a particular buyer/prospect.	• Interview approaches. • Information sources.
3) Approaching	First-time contact with the potential buyer/prospect to gain and hold the buyer's interest.	• Non-product related approaches. • Peaking interest approaches. • Consumer-directed approaches. • Product-related approaches.
4) Presentation	Presentation is the core of selling activity, where the salespeople present the product/service/solution to the buyer, showing the positivity of the strength, and how it best suitable for the buyer's need/demand.	• Visual display techniques. • Sales presentation types. • Non-visual clarification techniques.
5) Handling objection /sales resistance	Attempting to overcome the buyer/prospect unwillingness to buy, by reiterating the benefits of the product, reassuring, and helping the buyer make the buying decision.	• Create strife techniques. • Offset objection techniques. • Clarify objection techniques. • Miscellaneous techniques.
6) Closing	Negotiations and finalizing the details of the offer with the buyer and convincing the buyer to make the order.	• Clarification closes. • Psychologically-Oriented closes. • Straightforward closes. • Concession closes.

7) **Post-sale follow-up**	Undertakes activities to re-duce the customer's negative post-purchase concerns, which should increase the chances of future sales with the customer.	• Customer service activi-ties. • Customer satisfaction-ori-ented activities. • Customer referral activi-ties.

Finally, the idea behind using the 7th steps of selling model (Dubinsky, 1981) is to develop a suitable selling model that represents how AI technologies are changing the traditional and known methods of selling in B2B settings. The study also needed a structured approach that facilitates the understanding and analysis of the B2B selling processes and provides a practical roadmap for the study during the researching, which in this case would be the 7th steps of selling according to (Dubinsky, 1981).

3   METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

3.1 Research Design

This study is aimed to understand how AI technologies are reforming the sales processes in B2B settings. It is in addition to developing a selling process model that shows the influence of the AI technology phenomenon in changing the B2B sales processes. The study data has scarcely existed in the academic literature, but it was found within the context of its subject nature (Saunders, 2019, p. 644). That means where the technology being developed, in this case, the companies work in the field of developing and distributing AI technology either as a standalone AI platform or embedded with other software, such as AI-CRM systems (Libai et al., 2020).

Since the nature of this study was investigating the phenomenon of AI technologies disrupting the B2B selling processes, exploring an expert knowledge usage, and the substantive knowledge about the phenomenon (Goertz, 2012; Sachdeva, 2009). At the same time, it describes the B2B selling processes under the influence of AI technologies. According to Saunders (2019, p. 188), this type of studies is known as descripto-explanatory. Descriptive and exploratory research often blur together in practice (Neuman, 2014). This type of research is used to answers the questions of who, what, where, when, and how (Sachdeva, 2009). According to Basias & Pollalis, (2018); Goertz, (2012); Sachdeva, (2009), the qualitative approach also give answers to research questions, e.g., what, how, when, and where. Moreover, according to Benbasat et al., (1987) mentioned in (Basias & Pollalis, 2018), qualitative research can benefit in case of supporting the researcher to understand the nature and complexity of the phenomenon at hand, and supporting the investigation and natural of environment (Basias & Pollalis, 2018, p. 94). Qualitative research often has the aim of description and researchers may follow up with examinations of why the observations exist and what the implications of the findings are (Sachdeva, 2009, p. 15).

Furthermore, in the literature of business research, the studies related to B2B or B2C are linked to the qualitative studies, more specifically, qualitative interviews,

Granot et al. (2012). Because the qualitative studies are fundamentally explora-
tory by nature, the qualitative data presents a better understanding of the pro-
cesses. It also provides the right disciplines for the study to explore and achieve
its targets. That also agrees with Denzin and Lincoln's (2018) opinion in describ-
ing the qualitative interviews which focused on attain descriptions of the inter-
viewee life experience to understand the related phenomena. This approach and
its data afford the study the ability to develop selling processes, that represented
the B2B sales functioning within the AI technology (Saunders, 2019, p. 176).
However, similar approaches were observed in B2B sales literature (Ancillai,
Terho, Cardinali, & Pascucci, 2019; J. Koponen et al., 2019; Paschen, Paschen,
et al., 2020), *to name some*, which have also implemented the qualitative inter-
view in their studies of the B2B sales.

3.2 Data Collection Methods

The interviews considered the primary data collection technique for gathering
data in qualitative methodologies, while the number of study participants speci-
fies the structure of interviews (Sachdeva, 2009). In this study, the sample con-
sisted of two groups. Group one included three companies and group two in-
cluded five salespeople. Because the study sample consisted of a small number
of participants, the individuals' in-depth interview were selected (Sachdeva,
2009). There are three types of individual interviews: unstructured interview,
semi-structured interview and structured interview (Saunders, 2019; Walle,
2015). Depending on the nature of the sample groups, different methods were
selected for each group.

This study was focusing on a particular subject and specific phenomenon. In this
case, the structured interview was a more appropriate approach for group one
(the companies) sample. According to Sachdeva (2009), the structured interview
allows for more direct comparability of participants' responses. This approach
also eliminated the question variability. Thus, the structured interview answers
variability is assumed to be real. Further, the structured interview can help to
maintain the interviewer's neutrality (Sachdeva, 2009, p. 169). The structured in-
terviews questions were designed explicitly for this research. These questions

also helped the study to obtain knowledge about the specific phenomenon of AI technology in B2B sales.

For group two (the salespeople) sample, the study was aimed to understand the salespeople experience while they are handing and dealing with the various platform of AI technology that functions in the B2B selling context. In this case, the semi-structured interview had a more valid approach. According to (Basias & Pollalis, 2018), the semi-structured interview can involve a series of open-ended questions based on the topic areas. The questions type of the semi-structured interview approach can support the study to define the topic under investigation. Moreover, according to (Sachdeva, 2009), the semi-structured interviews used in qualitative research are distinct from the structured interview in several ways. This approach relies on developing a dialogue between interviewer and participants, which require more creativity, and skill to extract a greater variety of data and to achieve greater clarity and elaboration of answers (Sachdeva, 2009). Furthermore, this approach gave the participants a space to express their opinions, views, experiences, and thoughts about the subject at hand freely, and that in turn served the study aims of verifying the use of AI technology in B2B selling. That, also, gave an in-depth holistic vision framework for the study intentions. Further, a similar structure of the questions related to the selling process, which were used for group one has been used for group two (the salespeople), in addition to open-ended questions.

Additionally, this study has employed a survey methodology for group two (the salespeople), to investigate the impact and effectiveness of the AI technologies in real-world of B2B selling. The survey helped focus the interviews questions to distil more robust understanding and experiences (Granot, Brashear, & Motta, 2012). Also, reduce the overall time and questions amount of the interviews. Besides, the study intended to obtain precise measures for some questions, which if it would be asked during the interview, it will be likely to lengthen the interview time and may not lead to specific answers. Thus, an integration of semi-structured, surveying and structured interviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018) was the technique of data collection, which allowed the study to collect specific measures through the surveys. In addition to maintaining short and focus interviews, which offered the best results in the data collection process (Saunders, 2019, p. 185).

3.1 Study Sample

3.1.1 Group One (The Companies)

Group one (the companies) consisted of three companies which are providing or distributing AI as a Service, and AI-backed systems, that functions in the B2B sales settings. This selection was the criteria for the study sample of the companies. Meaning the sample companies must either have developed the technology or work close to the developers of the technology. The first company (Company A) has developed a standalone AI technology that functions in B2B sales. Company A technology was also capable of being integrated with other software platforms such as the CRM systems. The second company (Company B), and the third company (Company C), were marketing agencies. Those company was working as redistributors for HubSpot sales and CRM software, which has an embedded AI technology. This type of systems is known as AI-CRM systems (Avery & Steenburgh, 2018; Libai et al., 2020).

The study held interviews with key informants of the selected companies between June and August 2019. The study sample for the companies was provided by ROBINS project. The sample companies have agreed to cooperate with the ROBINS project during the project lifetime. An introduction letter was sent to all the companies before the interviews took place. Additionally, the time and the medium of the interview has been agreed on by the research and the participants. Two of the interviews held using video calls, while one of the interviews was over the phone due to participants' inaccessibility to the video call. The selection of the interview to be held over phone and online has benefits for the study. According to Sachdeva, (2009, p. 168), phone and online interviews approach offer the interviewers to be comfortable in participating in interviewing from their home or office, which should increase the quality of the interview.

Furthermore, the study agreed with participants to remove their names and roles in the companies to ensure anonymity. Thus, a code was given instead to keep the right track through the study (Appendix 1). Table 5 below presents the respondents of the companies.

TABLE 5. Presents group one (the companies) participants.

Name	Role	Company	Classification	Interview Duration (Minutes)
MC3J	X	Company A	Provider	104
PE2L	X	Company B	Inbound marketing agency (Consultant)	100
JV2A	X	Company C	Inbound marketing agency (Consultant)	64

An interview protocol has been developed for group one (the companies). The protocol (Appendix 1) helped to guide the interview questions. The protocol included a combination of open and closed questions, and it was tested with a student colleague from Tampere University, who owns a company and has experience using AI technologies in B2B sales. The interviews protocol approaches through three phases: 1) introduction and general part, 2) focus on the B2B sales processes, and 3) other related questions.

In phase 1, the participant introduced himself and the company he is working for and describe the AI technology the company has developed or is redistributing. In phase 2, the participant explained, *according to the 7th steps of selling* (Dubinsky, 1981), how the developed AI technology functions. In Phase 3, the participant answers the questions related to the main subject of the study. However, these questions do not directly impact the descriptions and answers of the participant in the prior two phases. Instead, it is connected to the main subject. The interview finishes with thanks for participating in the study and whether he/she has any questions.

3.1.2 Group Two (The Salespeople)

Group two (the salespeople) of the study sample, consisted of five salespeople who were working for different companies in the field of B2B sales and have used AI as technology in sales. This selection was the criteria for the study sample of the salespeople. Meaning the sample salespeople must have worked and handled B2B sales using AI technology either as a standalone or embedded in the sales software platform. The study sample for the salespeople was provided by ROBIN project and the study researcher network. The study sample has been contacted through email and phone calls to introduce the study aims and invite the targeted persons to the interview. The study has reached a total of 11 salespersons. Three of the contacted persons did not respond to the study calls for interviews. Two responded negatively to participate in the study interviews, explained the reason as they do not use any sort of AI technologies in their sales duties, due to the complexity of their products, and the size of their customer base. Only six responded positively to the study call and admitted to the interviews. However, only five of the participants were valid for the study criteria. At the same time, one excluded due to a total lack of experience using any AI technology. The interviews held between June and August 2019.

An introduction letter has been sent to all targeted persons. Once the participants confirmed they are attending to the interview. The researcher and the participants agreed on the interview date and the interview medium. Additionally, a link to the survey (Appendix 2), sent to the agreed participants to be filled before the interview took place. All five interviews held using video calls. Each participant worked for different companies, but all work in the field of B2B context. Participants' names and working place have been removed as agreed (Appendix 3) to ensure participants' anonymity. A code was given to each participant to keep the right track through the study. Table 6 below presents group two of the study sample (the salespeople).

Furthermore, the survey organized using Microsoft Forms program, and a link shared with all admitted participants before the interview took place, which allowed the study to gather knowledge about the participants before the interviews.

Additionally, an interview protocol was developed for group two (the salespeople). The protocol (Appendix 3) helped to guide the interview questions. The protocol included open-ended questions, where the participants have the space to express their opinion and views about the AI technologies in B2B sales settings. The protocol and the survey were tested with student colleague from Tampere University, who works in the field of B2B sales and have experience of using the AI technologies in B2B sales. Table 6 below presents the respondents of the salespeople.

TABLE 6. Presents group two (the salespeople) participants.

Name	Role	Experience in B2B Sales (Years)	Employer Industry	Interview Duration (Minutes)
P0ER	CEO	18	Financial Consultation	42
S0GS	Sales planning and reporting	5	Marketing agency (Consultant)	61
M0FH	Sales Specialist	8	IT infrastructure- and IT-consulting services	30
HY1V	Sales Development Manager	10	IT Distribution	47
JI2K	Sales Team Manager	7	Communications	30

3.2 Data Analysis

All interviews were transcribed for analysis; descriptive coding was used as a method to analyse the interviews data based on the research perspectives and content analysis (Saldaña 2011, p.103). While the survey was analysed by using measuring and coding. For nominal, ordinal, or scale questions measures was used, whereas coding was done for text questions (Burns, A. C., Bush, R. F., & Sinha, 2014). The findings were summarised for each of the questions, allowing to build a pattern characterizing the similarity, difference, causation, and correspondence of the interviewee's experience with AI technology (Saldaña, 2009).

Since the study uses a sale model to explain the reformation of AI technologies in B2B sales settings, the model also was used in the interviews for both groups of the study sample. The model was used to categorize and highlight the observation in the interviews. The model steps were used to explain how AI technologies interconnected with sales processes. That has led to a broader understanding of the phenomenon of AI technologies and a better contextual understanding of the answers given (Saunders, 2019).

3.3 Data Validity and Reliability

According to Saunders (2019, p. 213), the validity and reliability of qualitative research are the central judgements in social sciences. To ensure the reliability of the study, the researcher used guidelines of Saunders, (2019, p. 214), to reduce the threats to the reliability of the study research. At the end of the participants' description, the researcher summarized the answers and asked if the summary matches what the participant meant or there is something else the participant wants to rephrase, add or disagree about the summary of each question. That helped maintain the validity, mitigate errors and the increase the quality of answers. Additionally, in the main description of the 7th steps selling (Dubinsky, 1981), the researchers explained the meaning of each step, also gave an example extracted from the sources of the study (Appendix 1), which also reduce the participant's response errors.

Oppositely, the study questions for group two of the study sample (the salespeople), was an open-ended question for the description of the users experience using the AI technologies, that also helped to reduce the bias factors of such data collection method. However, the same implementation of the 7th selling steps (Dubinsky, 1981) description used to explain the meaning of each step (Appendix 3), which forbye reduce the room for errors in participants answers (Saunders, 2019, p. 2014).

These steps of verification were more valid to the study data collection methods to ensure the quality in answers to the research questions. It as well helps to improve the validity of the study findings, by mitigating the logical leaps and false

assumptions (Saunders, 2019, pp. 216–219). Next, no participant of both groups there showed any signs of misunderstanding, and none of the participants shrugged neither to answer the interview questions nor the survey.

4   STUDY FINDINGS

The study aimed to understand how AI technologies are reforming the sales processes in the B2B settings. Theories showed further that AI technologies have a potential impact on the B2B sales practices, while also emphasizing on the gaps of understanding all aspects of these impacts that include the subject of the study. Researchers have highlighted that the traditional 7th step of selling processes (Dubinsky, 1981) is the most suitable to describe how the B2B sales operations are organised and used to describe the impacts of different technological advancement that including AI technologies. Thus, this study attempted to discover the reformation of B2B sales processes using the traditional 7th steps of selling (Dubinsky, 1981) as a control model to present the study findings. That has helped to understand the aspects of AI technologies reformation.

4.1 Findings According to The Control Model

The study findings were sorted out in accordance with the steps of the control model of the traditional 7th steps of selling (Dubinsky, 1981). The exploration of AI technologies starts by prospecting step, where the sales representatives either come up with or receive information (commonly from marketing dept.), about a potential customer, which at this step known by the name of prospect, while in marketing terms titled a lead (Prakash, Caton, & Haas, 2019). At this exact step, the selling processes start (Davies & Gibson, 2010). Accordingly, the prospect continues to the next step which is the pre-approaching, and forwarding until reach step six where the actual selling takes place, next the last step occurs where the salesperson follows up with the prospect who became a buyer and eventually the sellers' customer.

4.1.1   Prospecting (and Pre-Approaching)

The prospecting is the first step in the traditional model, where the sales representatives search for potential buyers, in other words prospecting for possible

buyers. That step entails finding names, contact points, personal or any other type of information that might lead to contact with that potential buyer. Sources to find this information is varied depending on the nature of the search approach. However, sources might include external (outbound), e.g., asking another customer about a prospect, or chamber of commerce. Internal (inbound), e.g., an old customer who may not have bought any product for an extended period. Personal contacts, e.g., friends and miscellaneous, e.g., attending to trade shows.

In that sense, and to examine how AI technology is interfering with this step, the study asked the participants to explain how AI technology works in term of prospecting step. Participants' answers revealed that prospecting using AI technology is mainly pivots around automation and gathering real-time intelligence. The participants' responses stated that AI technology is automating the prospecting process almost entirely. Making use of AI technologies and the varies sources of information, AI can generate prospects faster, and easier with little to no efforts from the sales representative. As **MC3J** from (Company A) explained: "We automate what sales rep should be doing, so finding out information about the customers and the point of that is to give (sales representative) a relevant database reason to contact their company".

Additionally, AI is not stopping there but is also prioritizing the most suitable prospect that holds a high likelihood to make buying being engaged with first, making the prospecting process more efficient in manners time and results. As **PE2L** from (Company B) confirmed: "the sales (representative) should not be doing prospecting by themselves, at all. They should only have prioritized list of leads that they should be taking care of".

Using the proportion of three different categories of information sources, as shown below in Table 7, AI technology is able to provide real-time potential prospects. Seizing the available information on various online platforms, that might seem to be unrelated to the human eyes and combines it with data from the seller records, AI creates multiple sources to finding prospects, As **JV2A** from (Company C) described: "for example, customer company (the seller) have a CRM and they are storing a lot of customers information -and that's is basically an AI-driven and when we are connecting into the CRM information, the customers' actual

web usage: what they are looking for, what they are, what they are asking and so on. So, we understand with AI that what happens to this customer, before it comes to a customer and then there is this kind of algorithmic model which calculates likelihood to close the deal using AI technology which means, for example, we know from the customers' database who is going to be customer more likely to be a customer in the next 90 days".

TABLE 7. Shows the different sources of information that AI technology uses to gather sales intelligence and create prospects.

Source Category	Description
External Source (the Internet)	Internet Search Engine
	Social Media
	Newspaper
	Press release
	Public tax information
	Customer own websites
Internal Source	Customer visits and behaviour on the seller website
	Sales records
	CRM database
	Communication contents, e.g., emails, messaging.
Miscellaneous	Personal contacts
	Changes inside the targeted company. Such as acquisitions, or migrations with another company.

During investigation about prospecting step, the study was able to distinguish a significant positive correlation between prospecting step and pre-approaching step. In fact, AI is combing prospecting with the pre-approaching steps. Traditionally, the pre-approaching step entailed the sales representatives look for contact contacting information about the potential customer and explore ways to contact the potential prospect. However, in the case of AI when generating a prospect, it actually brings all information related to the potential prospects, includes: Company information, Financial Information, Personal Information, among other details. Table 8 below presents the various information that AI incorporating with prospecting according to (Company A) AI tool of the study participant.

TABLE 8. Presents the various type of information AI technology can harness while listing potential prospects.

Information Category	Description
Company Information	Business ID, foundation date, auxiliary name, website, physical address, the revenue of last year, number of employees, CEO name, and type of industry.
Financial Information	Total revenues, change in revenue, operating profit, income before taxes, net income, equity ratio, EBIT.
Personal Information	Names of the prospect decision-makers, e.g., the CEO, and board members.
Internet Information	Extended information about the prospect presents on the Internet, e.g., the advertising platform the prospectuses, the various social media platforms, e.g., Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn accounts, and a total number of followers.
Other Information	Might include information about similar companies of the same industry.

Furthermore, the study was able to derive during an interview with **PE2L** from (Company B), that AI technology is abbreviating the pre-approaching step into the prospecting step, considering that the prospecting step comes with complete information about the potential prospects. To confirm that the study asked **PE2L** from (Company B) if AI is combining the prospecting and the pre-approaching? The response was strongly confirming that: "(the AI technology) it is combining both (prospecting and pre-approaching) steps in one step? Yeah. Yeah exactly". Further, the study verified that with **MC3J** from (company A) and **JV2A** from (Company C), the respondents agreed on the same fact of abbreviating the prospect and pre-approaching steps in one step. Moreover, similar confirmation also was received from **S0GS** from group two (the salesperson) during the interview, as he explains when asked that AI is abbreviating the pre-approaching step into the prospecting step: "Yeah, yeah, that is that is correct and a person's voice so if I give you an example on that one what that basically means that I go through with the client info and I see that this person has visited these pages on our website so when I contacted person, I kind of know that I should be talking about these subjects in order to get his time".

However, consistent to the ideas of AI advancement in prospecting and gathering sales intelligence about potential prospects, and to compare the amount of time AI takes to obtain valid and up-to-date results about potential prospect versus the traditional methods. The study asked **P0ER**, **S0GS**, **M0FH**, **HY1V**, and **JI2K** participants from group two (the salespeople) of the study sample. How much time normally they spend every day to find the new customer (outbound) or educate themselves about changes in the situation of customer already in their sales records (inbound), using the traditional prospecting methods? Four of the participants asserted they spend on average 20-30% of their daily time on prospecting and educating. At the same time, only one responded reported that this process takes between 10-20% daily. Participants indicated that they use various social media and public news as the primary sources of information, similar to information sources of AI technology.

Additionally, AI technology can contribute more to the functions of prospecting step, e.g., targeting a specific prospect which is suitable for the seller but for some reason in out of selling scope. The AI tool that (Company A) has developed, sends notifications about changes at the prospect side, e.g., having a new board member, implements a new technology, and reaches certain number in revenue, among many other predefined information sales organisation may look after. This type of changes notification often required in case of the personal selling approach, **M0FH** and **HY1V** from group two (the salespeople) of the study sample, averred they spend about 20-30% of their daily time surfing through social media to track any changes of their personal networks, which they argued it might lead to a potential sale. The participants also stated that because they work for companies that sales complex products or services, and have a closed customers base which they only sales to, they tend to rely on links like that to increase the chances of making a sale. This agreed with a similar report from **M07K**, how did not participate in the salespeople interviews. Asserting the reason for that is the clients: "needs a specific custom-tailored solution and we do not have volume sales because our products are very complex, physically big, and expensive".

As of the initial contacting with the potential prospect, AI technology is automating this process of contacting the potential prospect through a sequence of emails,

that can entail details of what the prospect might be interested of the seller products or services. Using trackers and emotion AI technologies (Avery & Steenburgh, 2018), AI can tell if the prospect has opened those emails or not. Whether the prospect has read the emails and which part of it was more interest and how long the prospect spends reading the emails. Tracking also works even if the prospect was offline, or after receiving the contacting emails, the prospect visited the seller website. That gives the sales representatives the advantage to know if the prospect interest in something that the sales representatives overlooked. As **JV2A** from (Company C) stated: "our AI model or HubSpot AI model is learning what happens with people before they come to customers". That also agrees with **S0GS** from the group two (the salespersons) explained: "So if I give you an example on that one, what that basically means, that I go through with the client info and I see that this person has visited these pages on our website so when I contacted person, I kind of know that I should be talking about these subjects in order to get his time".

4.1.2 Approaching (and Presentation)

The traditional approaching step is when the sales representatives attempt to gain the prospect attention using techniques that generally are unrelated to the product offering. That also sometimes evoke that the sales representatives place the product in the hands of prospects for examination. So, to examine how AI technology is interfering with this stage of selling, the participants were asked to explain how AI technology works in term of approaching step. Participants answers showed that, *to very extend*, AI technology combining the approaching with the presentation steps.

However, some of the participants agreed that the approaching step still in practice by some B2B sellers, as **PE2L** from (Company B) explained: "approach to the lead quite traditionally, just call. Basically, if you want to pick up the phone and give a call and as a salesperson, you should do it as its very important step, and that something that companies are doing even nowadays". Whilst **JI2K** from group two (the salespeople), indicated to a similar view, stating that approaching

is an important step to gain more understanding of the prospect needs or problem. Albeit **MC3J** from (Company A), emphasised that it is totally up to the seller to how to approach the prospect. But at the same time explains that the role of AI technology is to give the reason for approaching the prospect through the information provided by the AI technology. That reduces the need for the approach step in term of information collection, due to the amount of information AI technologies can give at hand about the prospect, and their needs, problems or changes in their situation gives the sales representatives the ability to send a direct offer to the prospect. Conversely, **JV2A** from (Company C) presented a different explanation stating that AI has automated the approach step through the personalized emails, LinkedIn messages and targeted advertisements. Once the prospect responds to the emails or messages, the relationship formation starts by answering to the prospect questions and build the trust relationship with the prospect.

Nevertheless, according to **PE2L** from (Company B), the AI technology, is kindly integrating the approaching step with the presentation step, especially when in consideration of the information the sales representatives need about the prospect which is already at hand. Therefore, the approach step is a simple step that serves as an introduction to the prospect in this case, and it can be automated by AI technology subsequently. To verify this understanding, the researcher asked **PE2L** if he means that the approach and the presentation step are unified? The participant attribute to a clear positive confirmation, as stated after finishes the explanation about the approaching: "(the researcher). So, in that sense, it is kindly combining the approach with the presentation, but not quietly, right? (the participant) Yeah, exactly".

The presentation step in the traditional model required the sales representatives to present the offerings as a solution, a proposition, or a mix of both, mainly using methods such as sales presentation, e.g., *canned presentation*, and *semicanned presentation*, or visual, and non-visual methods. The non-visual method includes asking the prospect questions during the presentation or compares the offer with competitor offerings. The visual presentation involves visualizing the offering using frame models, films, or pictures, etc.

As for the role of AI technologies in the presentation, **PE2L** from (Company B) stated that AI technologies provide analytical details that can be advantageous for sales representatives to understand prospect interest in the details of the presentation, as he remarked: "I can see what page they are reading, even though it is PDF (file format), and how long, and what time …. but for example, if I see that, ok they are reading for example page number 7 and they are getting back to page number 7, once again and they are reading it for a long time, ok then on page 7 there is something they might do not understand or there might be something else, so whenever I'm reaching the (prospect), I can high light the things in page number 7, or whatever the thing is. So, they think that I know when they are reading it, and with the 2 seconds delay, and I know it is real-time. So, when they are reading offers or the presentation which page, how long and when, and everything is within the system, you can see".

In contrast, **JV2A** from (Company C), pointed out that with the help of AI automation and sales intelligence, sales representatives could qualify out the proposed prospects, until land on the suitable target prospect the matches the seller criteria, using methods, e.g., Budget, Authority, Need and Timeline (BANT). Goals, Plans, Challenges, and Timeline (GPCT), and Negative Consequences and Positive Implications (C&I). Indicating that the sales representatives can automate the presentation process of targeting the prospect by sending targeted emails, a targeted advertisement showing similar cases of the offering, in addition to the use of social media as a platform for presentation, according to **JV2A** view from (Company C). Furthermore, the participant emphasized this technique in the presentation allows the sales representatives to push the prospect to ask for a quotation instead. As **JV2A** stated: "One of the big criteria is the customer needs to ask an offer. We are not saying that can we make an offer for you. We are asking: How this sound for you? What do you want to do next? And then the customer says: Can you write this down and give me an offer?".

Not least of all, none of the participants indicated to how AI technologies contribute to the presentation visual methods. Still, studies show that AI technologies are being embedded in visual technologies such as Virtual Reality (VR), and Augmented Reality (AR), to pushing the experience for the presentation to a different dimension (Kiruthika & Khaddaj, 2017).

4.1.3   Overcoming Objections (and Closing)

Overcoming objections or sales resistance in the traditional model required the sales representatives to handle the prospect objection over the presented offer, to defence the offering, and to address the prospect's objections by asking questions or compare the offering to a similar of competitors'. While at the closing step, the actual selling is occurring, as the control model stating that the sales representatives might psychologically induce the prospect to make the purchase or close the sale directly by asking for that.

The study participants' answers regarding the overcoming objections step, showed that AI technology contribution pivots by eliminating the need for the overcoming objections or sales resistance step. Through the facts of real-time sales intelligence, AI technology has gathered, processed, and analysed during the prospecting and presentation steps. As **MC3J** from (Company A) explained: "it actually can help with overcoming objections as well, because if you know something about the company and you use that to overcome objections or to build your case towards databased approach". A similar view was also recorded by **JV2A** from (Company C), which states that the likelihood to close the deal with the prospect is what makes the sales representatives continue to build the case to the prospect suites, and eventually eliminating any objections or sales resistance.

Conversely, **PE2L** from (Company B), emphasised that even if the selling dropped at the step before closing, for reasons, e.g., incompatibility of timing. The AI technology of tracking the prospect changes sales representatives will keep feeding notifications about the readiness of the prospect. Additionally, tracking of the offering viewing or the visiting for the seller website will also be notified to sales representatives, which might give an indication that the prospect might become ready to buy. As **PE2L** described: "The customer might say that, hey! Everything looks good … but the timing is wrong. We need to do it within six months … I see that we have already agreed with the customer that let us talk more on November, but I see that the system is sending the automated email, for example,

September and there might be a link to our reference case … I know I get notified when the customer is opening the offering… maybe I should give her recall".

At the closing step, AI contributes to automating the process of making orders, and paperwork using the offering as a reference point. AI turns the information mentioned in the offering, e.g., the names, dates, pricing and included into pre-defined contacts templates which then can be modified by the sales representatives before sending it to the buyer for signature, which also can comprise the e-signature and digital verification. As **PE2L** from (Company B) explained: "It collects all certain fields from the offer, like name, product and pricing and so on. Straight to that contract template which is in the system. … So basically, it makes a lot easier to close the deal and do the paperwork". Similarly, **MC3J** from (Company A) gave a selfsame explanation for the role of AI technology at the closing step.

To conclude, the disruption of AI technology caused the overcoming objections and closing, *to a very extent*, to become one step. Sale objections or resistance, *if needed*, can take place along with the closing step, as in the case of the offering that was built on the prospect needs. That makes the selling process moves from presentation forward to the closing step, without the need for the overcoming objections step, according to the study participants responses.

4.1.4 Following Up

At follow-up step, the sales representatives perform follow up activities with the buyer, e.g., customer after-sale services, customer satisfaction, while the primary goal of this step is increasing the chances of future sales with the buyer, according to the control model.

Regarding AI technology contribution on the follow-up, the step can be summed to automating the follow-up process. As **PE2L** from (Company B), stated that AI technology automates the follow-up process. Using tools such as chatbot, sequencing process, e.g., sending a sequence of emails several times a year, or use other tools, such as the Net Promoter Score (NPS), to collect the customer

satisfaction about the purchase. However, **MC3J** from (Company A), and **JV2A** from (Company C), did not indicate any significant contribution of AI technologies in the follow-up step.

4.2 Salespeople Experiences with AI Technology

Concerning the study target of investigating the salespeople experiences with AI technology, the participants' responses showed a lack of proper use of the technology. In addition to low experience for the salespeople using AI technologies for B2B sales. Despite the acknowledgement of the participants' of being familiar with the technology were 60% answered that they are moderately familiar with AI technology in sales, and 40% were slightly familiar with the technology.

However, when the study asked the participants about the correlation and contribution of AI technology in the sales process. The participants were not able to provide answers to many of the interview questions. Instead, the participants indicated that the use of AI technology in B2B sales was limited to some simple functions of AI technology. Such as basic prospecting functions, sending automated emails to the prospect, and redirecting web traffic to the sellers' website to gain more visits which may generate more prospects. The participants emphasised they still use traditional methods almost throughout the whole sales cycle. Ascribing that for two main reasons: 1) they were working with a limited customers base who already have made purchases before and continue to buy from the same seller, 2) the organisation management was not in favour of relying on AI technology in sales. A similar indication also observed in survey answers (Appendix 2), which shows a limited experience of harnessing AI technology in B2B sales, aside from the uncertainty about the technology.

The interviews also showed that the majority of participants believed that the automation of sales tasks is the most significant benefits and strengths points of AI technology. While lack of understanding human emotions, face or sound expressions were considered the most weakness points of the technology. Although, in term of neglected the implementation of AI technology in sales, the majority be-

lieved the organisation and or sales management represents an obstacle to im-
plementing the technology in sales. Yet, only one participant stated that besides
the management, the salespeople also considered a hinders to the technology,
with emphasising on the laziness of salespeople to feed the system with the in-
formation, which in turn, represent a disincentive for the system to give proper
feedback and correct results.

Furthermore, the participants explained that AI technology holds a string ground
for more disruption in B2B sales in the future. They were stating that AI technol-
ogy will keep advancing. Yet, they showed somewhat of uncertainty about the
future of the coexisting between the salespeople and the technology, as three of
them expressed fear of losing occupation for AI technology. That too can be no-
ticed through the survey answers, where 40% stated that AI technology is neither
reliable nor unreliable on the personal level, and the company level, as shown in
figure 4 below. Nonetheless, the majority believed that AI technology is efficient
in B2B sales, as shown in figure 5. That also agrees with their opinion about the
intensify of the technology in B2B sales, as figure 6 shows that 60% think it is
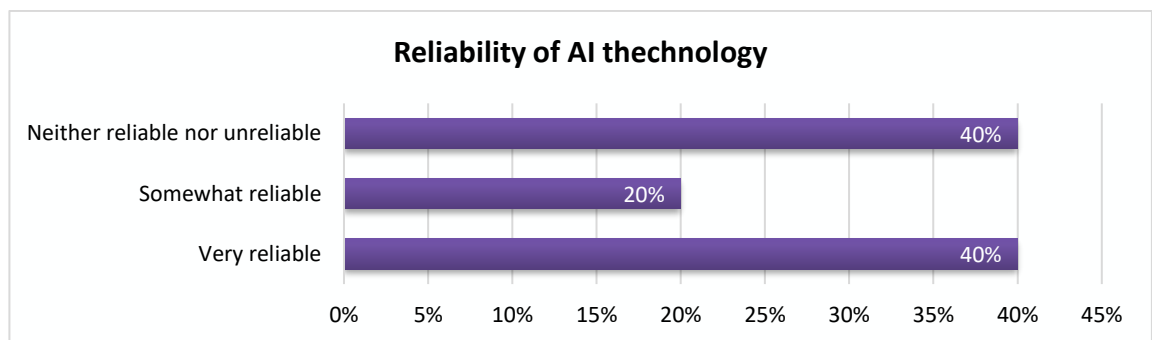moderate intensity.

FIGURE 4. Display how reliable the AI technology in sales according to the study
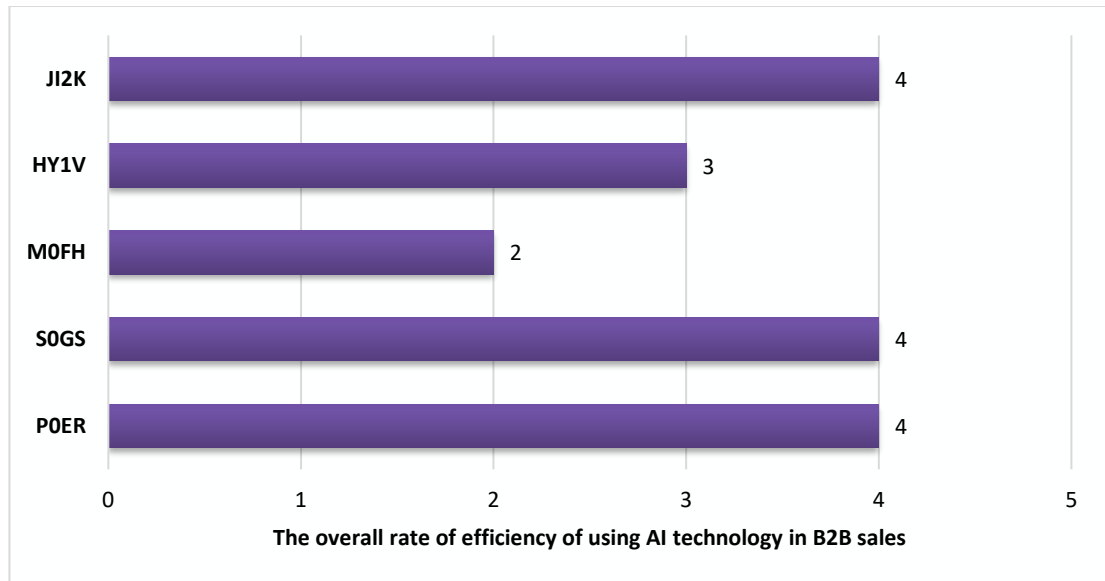participants.

FIGURE 5. Display the study participants rates for the efficiency of AI technology in B2B sales.
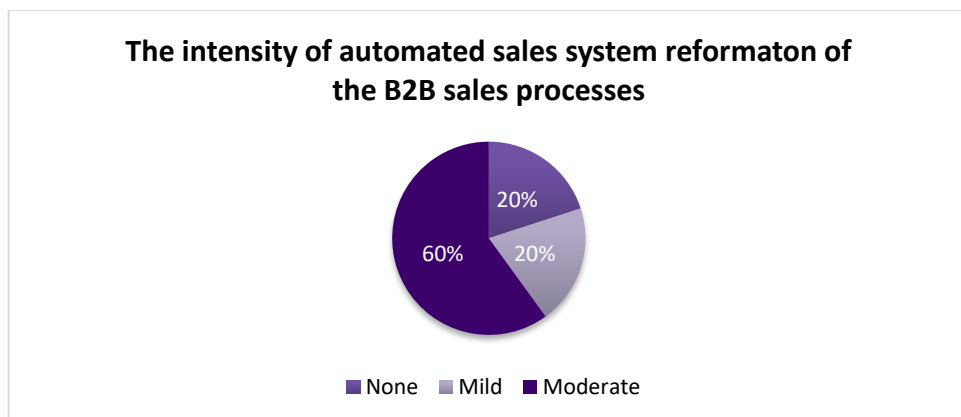

FIGURE 6. Illustrate the reformation intensity of AI technology in B2B sales according to the study participants.

4.3 Other Findings

Further goals of the study were to ask the participants questions that are related to the subject to understand the other dimensions' of using AI technology in B2B sales. The questions were directed to both of the study samples group one (the companies), and group two (the salespeople). The participants' responses were compared to give a proper understanding of the technology perceived by the provider/distributor and the end-user. The questions were mainly related to the impact of AI technology in saving time and or human resources, in addition

to the obscureness of implementing the AI technologies in the sales organization.

In term of timesaving, the median of the answers of group one (the companies) was 30%. In contrast, group two (the salespeople) believed it saves about 20% in the median, as shown in table 9, and figure 7 below.

TABLE 9. Showing the percentage of both study participants' answers.

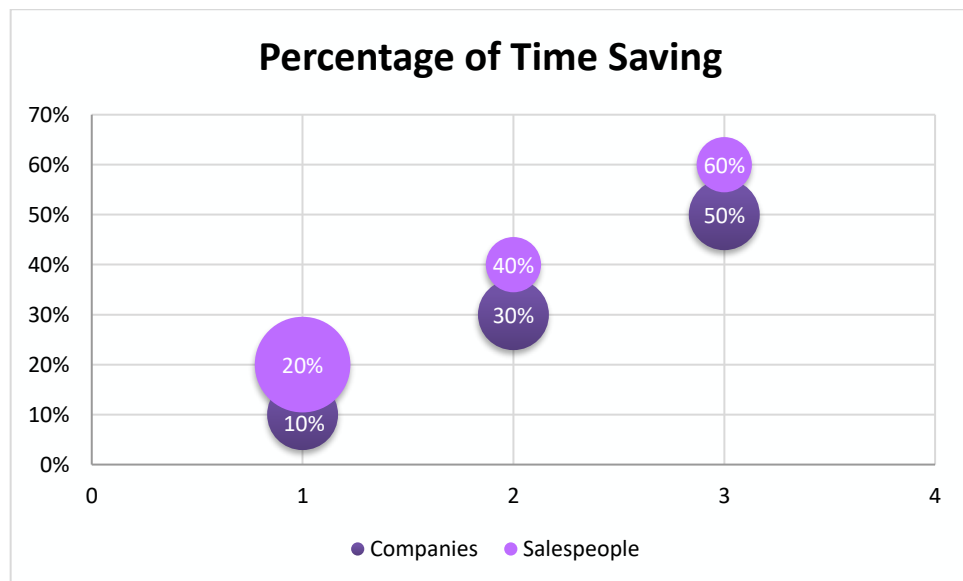| Time saved if AI technology is used in B2B sales				
Companies	**Percentage**		**Salespeople**	**Percentage**
A	10%		M0FH, HY1V, JI2K	20%
B	30%		S0GS	40%
C	50%		P0ER	60%
Median	30%		**Median**	20%

FIGURE 7. Illustrate the percentage of time saving according to both of the study groups.

In term of human resources saving, group one (the companies), did not indicate specific human resources saving. Instead, they emphasised on reallocating the saved time to be used in other sales processes, in comparison to the time allocation in the traditional methods.

While, in the traditional methods, the sales representatives must ensure to execute all the selling processes without being able to pass any of it (Moncrief & Marshall, 2005). Aside from mentioning the process of gathering sales intelligence and following up with the changes in the prospects' or the customers' situation, among other tasks that are a side of the traditional method. Oppositely, the sales representatives may pass on some of selling tasks, e.g., prospecting, sales intelligence gathering, or initial contacting to AI technology, which can deputise for the human to complete those tasks. In return, the sales representatives can focus on the other vital tasks of the selling process. The more proper time allocation of the sales representatives, instead, means they can use the extra time also to process other sales case that is more likely to close in the near future, as **PE2L** from (Company B), stated: "… the reason why (AI) making (the selling process) faster is because: as a sales guy or girl, I'm using my time to the cases which are most likely to be closed right now". Meanwhile, **JV2A** from (Company C), emphasised on the importance of the sales representatives capabilities, education, mindset, and strategic thinking in the era of AI technology in sales, which thought to play a significant role to qualify the right prospects who hold better chances to buy.

Further on human resources saving, **JV2A** from (Company C), stated with the AI automation, sales representatives are barrener from simple tasks that no longer need to execute by sales representatives, e.g., prospecting, pre-approaching, and booking appointments with customers. Instead, there is a need for sales representatives who is more service-oriented, who can serve the customers more prominently. As **JV2A** explained: "So, we do not need people (sales representatives) to set appointments with customers because the customers are booking appointments by themselves. But what we need is salespeople who can understand what they are selling, and they are more likely to be like trusted advisors to the customers". In a similar instance, **S0GS** from group two, and **JV2A** from group one, both agreed that because of the AI technology automation of the earlier steps of the selling processes, sales representatives are handling the sales cases that are more proximate to close than at the earlier steps.

Furthermore, the majority of the participants attributed to similar views on who is neglected to implement the AI technology in B2B sales: the salespeople, the management, or both? With greater emphasizing on sales management as the main obstacle in AI implementation and integration in the sales organisation. The participants argued that the mindset of sales management and uncertainty about the technology are among the main hinders for the proper use of AI technology in B2B sales. In a different view, **MC3J** from (Company A), explicitly ascribe the reason on the whole organisation structure, and not just the matter of implementing the technology itself but also the way of working: "the trick is not to implement the technology. The trick is to implement the new way of working". Indicating that the subject is divided into pivots of traditional versus modern of the organisational structure. Stating that modern organisations are more opens toward modern technologies than the old transitional ones. "I think it is more divided into who is more traditional and who wants to do things more modernly, the more traditional the organization, the harder it is for them to accept that things are going to be not easier", **MC3J** from (Company A) said.

5 DISCUSSION

The present study was designed to determine the reformation of the B2B sales processes when AI technology is used instead of the traditional methods in B2B selling. Understanding the reformation of selling processes is important not only for academicians, but also for the salespeople, the sales organisations, and the technology developer. Although some research has been carried out to understand the role of AI technologies in B2B sales, there is a little of an understanding of how AI technologies are reforming the B2B sales processes?

The current study found that AI technologies, in fact, reforming the B2B sales processes to be shorter in term of selling steps and in the overall time the selling process takes. Perhaps the most significant finding is how the B2B selling processes resemble when AI technologies are used. Thus, and based on these findings, the study has constructed a sales model that symbolises the phenomenon of AI technology in B2B sales. The model also describes how each step is occurring during the sales process. Furthermore, based on the study investigation, the study discussed the benefits that AI technology on the sales operations, as well as the negativity of the technology according to the study participants experienced.

5.1 AI B2B Sales Model

The developed sales model was built upon the study interviews and was based on the study participants' answers to the study questions. The developed model relied on the 7th steps of selling (Dubinsky, 1981) as a control model. Also referred to theoretical literature for the cases of agreeing or conflicting. In this sales model, the study concluded that B2B selling could be achieved in only four steps. Each step represents one or two of selling activities which could be executed simultaneously at the same step. According to the study findings, AI technologies disruption observed at almost all of the sales steps. Disruption at some steps is more substantial and profound than some others. That is, depending on the nature of the step and the activity it is included. The suggested model of this study consists

of the following steps: 1) prospecting and researching, 2) presentation, 3) negotiation and closing, 4) relationship enforcement.

5.1.1 Prospecting and Researching

The study found that the prospecting step which entails identifying a potential prospect has been automated by AI technology. In the AI technology case, prospecting as a time and efforts demanding process is no longer a demanding process. Instead, it became much more manageable and automated, even though AI technology automates this step, sales representatives can instruct the technology for the scope to look for the potential prospects. AI technology could also unify the resources of prospects, as in the case of the external customer (outbound), prospects can be found based on, e.g., the industry sector, products or services, the amount of revenue, among many other criteria. While in case of internal (inbound) prospects, linking to the organisation CRM database to external AI tools or by using an advance CRM system which comes with built-in AI technology. AI technology could extend the sources of information, and the scope of prospecting to include even the ones who bought from the seller, not to mention the tracking changes of the existing customers, which bring new links for sales. While the sources for prospecting for potential buyers can vary depending on the sellers' approach, still, according to study participants: AI technology is able to combine the different sources of prospecting customer into one significant source of finding prospects.

Prospecting and gathering sales intelligence as a process often is a time-consuming process for sales representatives. Adding to it, researching, and educating about the existed customers makes the process even longer. According to group two (the salespeople) of the study participants. Prospecting and gathering sales process consume between 20% to 30% of the participants' daily time. That also agrees with reports from different market studies, which shows that the prospecting process takes between 21% and 41% of the sales representatives' time. According to Pace Productivity report in 2017, the prospecting process that includes activities, e.g., prospecting, generate sales, orders, and marketing occu-

pied about 41% of sales representatives time. At the same time, a study by In-sideSales Labs, published by Voiq.Com in 2017, showed the function of prospecting alone takes up to 10.1% of sales representatives time, adding to that the research time of 11.6%, that makes the total prospecting and researching time to be up to 21.7% of the total sales representatives' tasks time. However, according to report publisher, the functions of prospecting, research, and the general follow-up are parts of the prospecting process, Voiq.Com, (2017), that drives the total time of the prospecting step up to 32.8%.

In contrast, AI technology reduces the prospecting process to be a few clicks which only takes a few seconds to get the results. That saved time for a process that known to be a fairly lengthy process, in turn, reflects on the efficiency of the sales representatives' time management to engage with other steps that require more attention instead. Figure 8 below shows the breakdown of sales representatives' task time allocation. The periods of prospecting, research and general follow-up functions are marked in Red (Voiq.com, 2017).
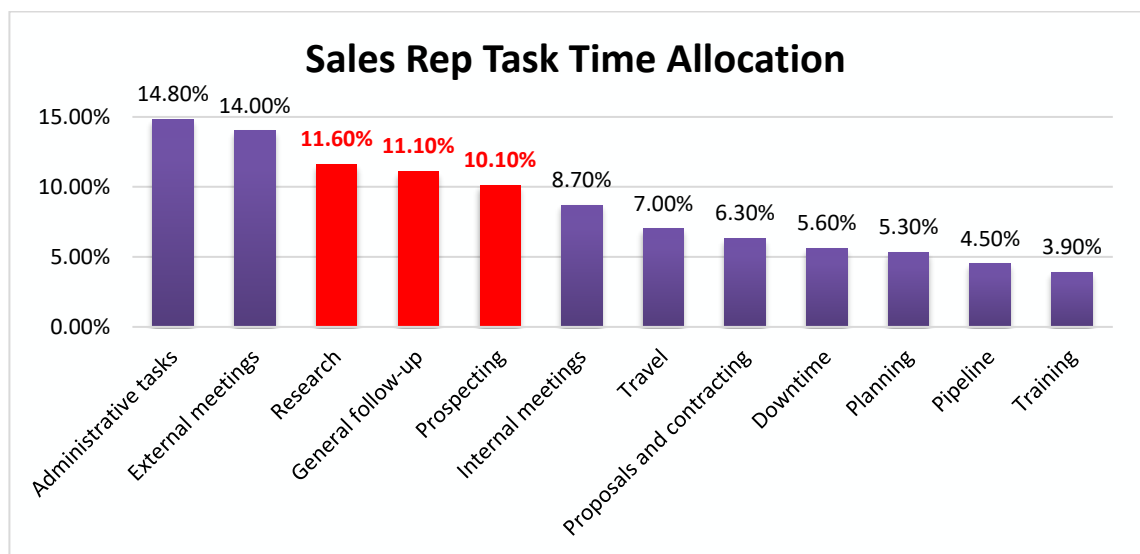
FIGURE 8. Illustrate the tasks time allocation of the sales representatives, according to InsideSales Labs in 2017, published by Voiq.com, (2017).

Additionally, the prospecting under AI technology abbreviates the pre-approach step into the prospecting step. As when the sales representatives forge for a potential prospect, AI brings all the information available about that prospect. Besides, prioritize prospects over others based on a predefined criterion by the sales organisation. Giving the reason for the sales representatives to start initial

contact, which also automated by AI, and initiates the selling cycle. That transforms the prospecting to a single step that only takes a few clicks, and a few minutes to build a list of potential prospects. That also explains the fact the study suggests the name for this process to be prospecting and researching.

This finding found to be incompatible with previous studies (Paschen et al., 2019, p. 1416; Syam & Sharma, 2018, p. 143), which have indicated that pre-approach and approach steps typical have been studied together in sales research. They also indicated that these steps are being merged together, but without any further explanation of how, and what or was the reason for that merging. However, in this study findings, there is strong evidence and statements that pre-approach has become part of the prospecting step, caused by AI technology, which delivers all the requirement of the pre-approach step along with the prospecting step, and that abolishes the need for another step.

To conclude, the prospecting and researching step. The study findings confirmed that AI technology automating the prospecting process almost entirely. It is starting by finding the most suitable prospects, *according to the predefined criterion*, using a variety of sources to harvest fully detailed information. Then automating the initial contacts with the target, the prospects, and track the changes of the prospects' situation, and enriching the sales organisation database with real-time knowledge about the prospect. However, it is fair to say that prospecting is the step where AI technology demonstrates its real capabilities of capturing a big amount of unconnected data, processing it, and turn it into knowledge that is to be used to achieve directed goals (Paschen et al., 2019).

5.1.2 Engaging and Presenting

The engaging and presenting step corresponds to both the approaching and presentation steps of the control model. With respect to this step, the study found that both activities become integrated when AI technology is used instead of traditional methods. At many cases, AI technology cancelled the need for the engaging activity. Instead, the direct offering as an act, deputies both activities, where the sales representatives can directly send the offering to the prospect.

The offering, in this case, comes in presentation form, which also has a link to book a time with the sales representatives. The presentation configuration, *very much,* depends on what is being sold, e.g., solutions, products, services, or a mix. The presentation approach can take different shapes, including canned presentation, semicanned presentation, visual, and non-visual methods.

Regarding the engaging step, the study observed a different interpretation for this step, each of the control model, the research literature and the study participants' opinion gave somewhat a distinct understanding for what the engaging or the approach in the control model means. According to the control model, the approach step entails identifying the techniques to approach the prospect. According to Blyth (2009), the engaging step resembles an introduction step. This interpretation agreed with one view of this study participants, **PE2L** from (Company B), when stating: "approach to the lead quite traditionally, just call. Basically, if you want to pick up the phone and give a call and as a salesperson, you should do it as its very important step, and that something that companies are doing even nowadays". While another literature, (Paschen et al., 2019), the engaging resembles the point to establish an appointment with the prospect for a presentation session. This understanding agreed with study participants' opinion, **JV2A** from (Company C), who indicated that AI technology automates the appointment tasks, through sent a link to the prospect during the step of targeted emails and advertisements which is the form of presentation, meaning the need for a single engaging step is unnecessary.

In respect to the presentation step, AI found to deliver an unprecedented disruption in this step. AI technology can automate the approach step if the sales organisation uses the traditional approach step to become a self-service, e.g., booking an appointment with the sales representatives, and use the chatbot to answer common questions through the sellers' website. AI technology could also to be embedded with the visual presentations' technologies such as VR and AR. The use of AI with VR or AR technologies together could offer the ability to test the products and adjust the offering to the buyers' need. Besides, using AI technology as virtual sales associate to make recommendations, complete sales requests, and answer the buyers' questions. This type of presentation service is very beneficial for B2B sales organisation, especially if the items being sold is

big, complicated, or heavy products which cannot be easily shown to the prospect in real life.

Furthermore, respecting to the integration between the engaging and the presentation steps. At least two of the study participants have confirmed that the engaging step had become part of the presentation, and there is no exact need for the traditional approaching since the sales representatives have all the information about the prospect and his needs and demands. The sales representatives can move further and present the offering to the prospect directly. The sales representatives and the prospect can then further negotiate the offering in the next step of the sales cycle. This finding is consistent with that of Moncrief & Marshall, (2005), which stated that due to the advancement in communications technologies, there is almost no need for the approaching step. Instead, the sales representatives can move forward to presenting their offering's directly to the prospect.

The transformation delivered by AI technology to the engaging and presentation steps is incomparable when looking at the traditional methods. In the traditional method, sales representatives, use cold calls, cold emails, and even unwelcomed visits to the prospect to get some information about his needs or check if the prospect is interested in buying, which often bear costs that may not pay off. Interestingly, with AI technology, sales organisations can make an offering or presentation in a real-time manner, lower the costs, with greater capabilities. Further, with AI presentation or offering, sales representatives have the ability to detect if the prospect becomes interested in the sales offering or not. The emotion AI and tracking technologies can send notifications to sales representatives that include information about a particular prospect viewing the offering, what is more interest for the prospect in the offering, or even if the prospect did not buy at the time of the offering, yet visited the offer for reconsideration. **PE2L** from (Company B) explained: "later I saw my customer is reading my offer a year later after they said they are not buying from us, and I get a popup that the customer X is reading the offer in the email where I sent the offer".

However, the most obvious finding to emerge from the analysis suggests the name of engaging and presentation for this step. Firstly, this name can unify all

sorts of customers: the known (inbound), the unknown (outbound), and the defected (failed to buy), (Liu & Leach, 2015, p. 909) where engaging is used to represent the contacting activity if it held by the sales representatives. Secondly, it includes both the presentation activities as well, without the necessity to execute both while the possibility is there. The executing of both activities depends on the sellers' approaching, meaning if the sellers' approach is consultive, problem-solving, or personal selling, the need for the engaging step increase. In contrast, if the approach is more toward product-oriented, the need for engaging step decreases.

To conclude the engaging and presenting step, the study findings confirming that AI technology, in many cases, is combing the engaging into the presentation step. While this finding somewhat conflicts with other research (Paschen et al., 2019; Syam & Sharma, 2018), who views stated that pre-approach and approach is one step, without further elaboration on how they conclude to that. This discrepancy could be attributed to the matter where the engaging activity is occurring through the sales cycle. However, at this step, AI technology demonstrates enhancement capabilities which not only changed the form of the presentation but also take to another dimension.

5.1.3 Negotiation and Closing

In respect to the selling negotiating step, no direct distribution was found for AI technology on this step. In contrast, the indirect impact was founded through the knowledge AI technology providing to the sales representatives throughout the different stages of the sales cycle. That information can help the sales representatives build the offering according to the prospect needs. That, in turn, mitigate the sales resistance and eliminate the need for negotiating entirely. However, sales negotiating, *if needed*, can take place during the selling closing. These findings agree with (Paschen et al., 2019) study, in which the researchers have grouped these two-steps together. That findings also agree with (Syam & Sharma, 2018) study, which discussed the overcoming objections step at the closing step, which suggests that objections can be settled during the selling clos-

ing. Thus, this study suggests combining these two steps in one step and re-named to negotiation and closing, to indicate that both activities can be executed at this step of the sales cycle. However, the negotiating activity might not be necessary to be executed to close the selling, but the selling can be close without sales resistance.

Nevertheless, the study also found that AI technology disputes the closing step through the automation of administrative tasks. That alone can save plenty of sales representatives' time because the process of closing the selling often needs time to complete the paperwork. But with AI, a premade template can be used that contain information from the offering, which in turn saves filling the documents time. In addition to the use of e-signature and digital verifications technology to concedes on the selling. These findings exactly have matched (Paschen et al., 2019, p. 1416) study findings regarding the closing step.

5.1.4 Relationship Enforcement

This step corresponds to the following-up in the control model. At this step, AI found to disrupt this step by automating the activities of collecting the customers' feedback and reaction. Using various tools, e.g., chatbot, AI can collect instant feedback from the customers about sales. These feedbacks then stored in the system, to enforce the next sales with that customer or similar sets of customers, which helps improve future sales. And this is why the study has suggested the name of relationship enforcement for this step. Further, the goal of this step is to enforce the relationship with the customers through feedbacks that can be used in future sales. That as well directly affect the shape of the relationship with the customers.

However, AI disruption on this step can be observed by saves the time and efforts this step requires. In the traditional method, sales representatives make calls to the customers or try to book a time to discuss customers' feedback and experience. While by automating this process, the collecting of feedbacks and the experiences can become more effective, besides freeing more of the sales representatives' time, which in turn can be used for other steps of the sales cycle.

These findings are consistent with (Paschen et al., 2019; Syam & Sharma, 2018), results of AI technology disrupt this step.

5.1.5 The Suggested Model Summary

In summary, the study suggested model, surprisingly, found to be in conflict with the control model for one main reason. That is, in the control model, every single step of the selling processes must be executed during the sales cycle (Moncrief & Marshall, 2005). In contrast, the developed model of this study suggests that some activities that are not necessarily to be performed, instead it can be passed. Attributable to either, the step has been achieved by another step, or the need for that step has diminished. Although differences between the suggested model and the theoretical studies opinions still exist, there appears to be some agreement as well.

To illustrate the difference between the suggested model and the control model, Table 9 below shows the suggested selling model in correlation with the control model and literature model. Further, Figure 7 beneath, position the suggested model in sales funnel perspective in comparison with the control model.

TABLE 10. Illustrate the study suggested models in comparison to the control model and literature model.

| Traditional As of (Dubinsky, 1981)	Evolved As of (Moncrief & Marshall, 2005)	Suggested As of this study
Prospecting	Customer retention and deletion	**Prospecting and Researching**
Pre-approaching	Database and knowledge management	
Approaching	Nurturing the relationship (relationship selling)	**Engaging and Presenting**
Presentation	Marketing product	
Overcoming Objections	Problem Solving	**Negotiation and Closing**
Closing	Adding value/satisfying needs	
Follow-up	Customer relationship maintenance	**Relationship Enforcement**
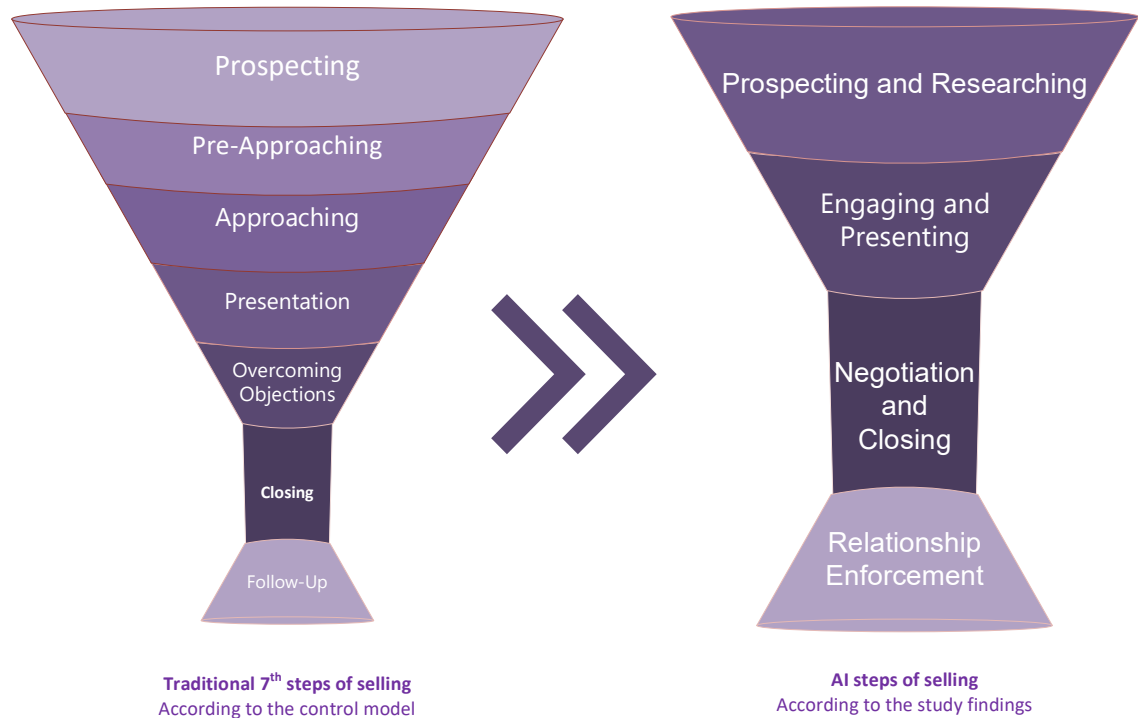
FIGURE 9. Illustrate the study suggested model versus the control model in funnelling concept.

5.2 AI Technology Features

Through the study investigation, several features of AI technology for B2B sales were recorded. Those features are significantly practical to make the B2B sales operations, shorter, simpler, and more manageable in a timely manner. "AI technology does not necessarily mean that sales organisation using AI will sell more, but it can ensure the sales will be more effective" this was emphasised by three of the study participants. As displayed in the study findings and the analysis, the majority of the participants agreed on the time manner saving in the overall sales cycle and considering the administrative tasks saving also profound. The saving probably will afford some 40% extra time for the sales representatives, which can be used to develop more sales. Another significant feature is the integration between the sales organisation records or the CRM system and AI technology. This integration offers personalized services and curating customer relationship to develop more profitable customer Libai et al., (2020) indicated. In this study, the strong relationship between AI technology and CRM system we exceptionally

dominant in the participants' experience. Libai et al., (2020, p. 45) argued that emergence of AI technology is not to overthrow relationship, instead, it will render it to be more accurate, discriminating, and scalable, which this study found through its investigation. Figure 9 below illustrate the role of AI technology in relation to the CRM system.
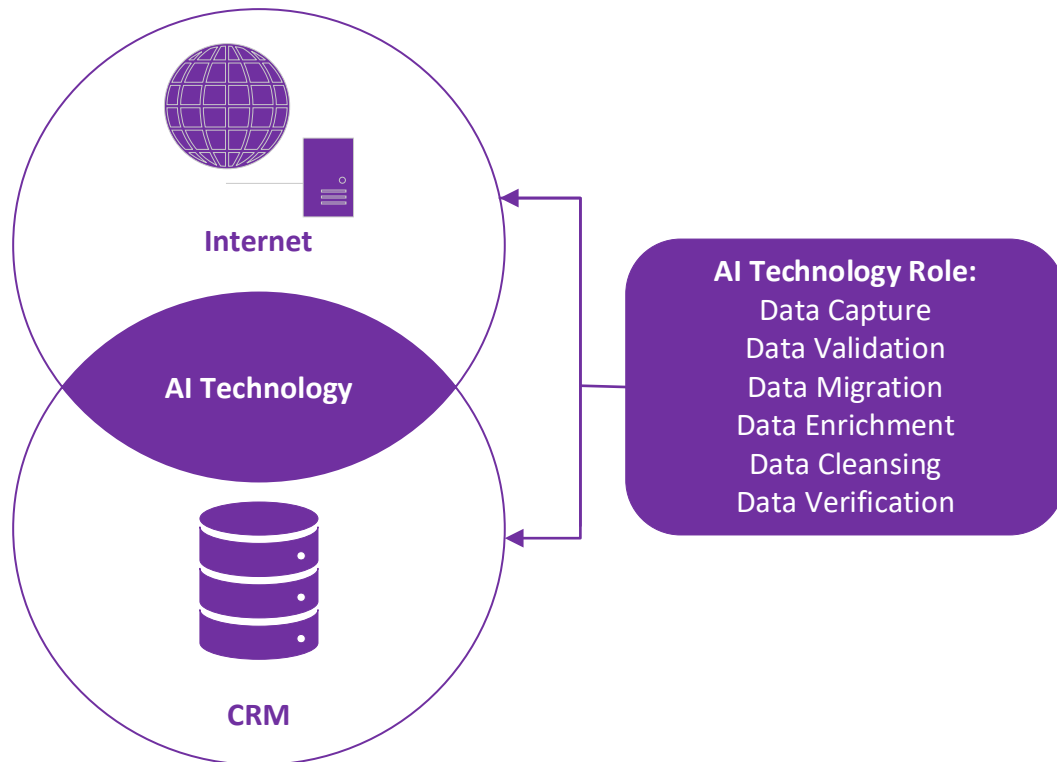

FIGURE 10. Illustrate the role of Artificial Intelligence for CRM in term of an information database.

The AI technology features to offer new possibilities and tools for the sales organisation to be available at customers' demand. AI may offer the seller a better chance to be presented when the customer is looking for a certain product or a service, with the tracking technology. AI system can detect when the customer starts to look for a certain product or a service, especially if the customer has received an offer from the seller earlier. AI technology is also able to detect if the customer is looking for a similar product of the seller over the Internet. That gives the seller an upper hand to reach to the customers when they need products or services. That cannot be achieved through the traditional method of selling when the seller contacts the customer at times that the customer is not interested or not even in look for a product or a service. The traditional method often works based on the seller guessing, or if an event takes place. The seller notices it or a

call from the customer, that reduces the chances to sale, in compare with the AI technology methods, the selling is in real-time and based on facts related to the buyer, which leads to more proper selling.

Another promising finding was that with AI technology sales organisations are able to reduce the total costs of acquiring customers (CAC) by targeting the right customers who represent a bigger potential chance to buy, in compare to the random targeting base on, e.g., the geographical area or certain industry (Drotsky, 2016). That also helps to place all type of customers into the "customer-centricity" notion, which leaves no chance but to sale more effectively, (Libai et al., 2020). Figure 10 below illustrate the AI sweet spot in the context of the B2B sales, where the sellers', customers' and competitors' share the general selling/buying context. Table 10 beneath summarises the overall enhancement of AI technology on the B2B sales processes.
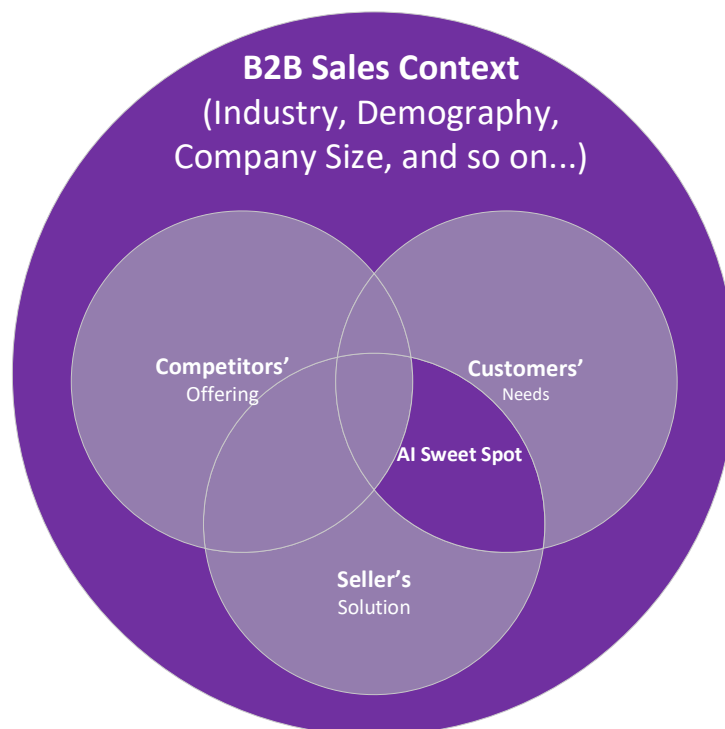

FIGURE 11. Illustrate the AI sweet spot between the seller's and customers' in B2B sales context.

TABLE 11. Presents AI technology features enhancements on B2B sales.

Benefits of AI technology
Automation of complex administrative tasks.
Automate and abbreviate and reduce overall the sales processes, by steps and time manners.
Increase the sales representative's time.
Reduce the overall time of the sales cycle.
Provide sales representatives with instant and quality content in a timely manner.
Improve the quality of the sales interactions via intelligent recommendation.
Measure the impact of the content of the sales cycle.
Integrate sales content into CRM systems.
Customise sales content pitches.
Reduce the costs of sales operations.
Reduce the costs of Customer acquisition cost.
Provide a better understanding of customers' demands.

5.3 AI Limitations

The majority of the study participants of group two (the salespeople) reported limited usage of AI technology at their working premises. Ascribing that to the majority of salespeople are neglected to feed the system with updated information, e.g., the outcomes of the sales meetings, presentations, and customers objections, among other feedbacks. That, in turn, reflect on the functionality of the AI technology to give useful insights and accurate answers. Another limitation of AI technology is if the sales organisation has a limited customer base due to the complexity of the products or the lower need for the products. AI technology can have limited effects in this case if the seller is not looking to extend the customer base, but still very useful in gather sales intelligence and customers follow up.

Another major limitation of AI technology is the little of the presence of the targeted customers on various Internet platforms, e.g., websites, social media, and other public communications. AI technology heavily relies on such existence to

obtain real-time information. However, that appears not to be a problem, as businesses are shifting toward the digitalization and increase their presence on the Internet (Rippé, Weisfeld-Spolter, Dubinsky, Arndt, & Thakkar, 2016).

Additionally, laws and legal regulations being imposed on data sharing and collecting can limit some functions of AI technology, for instance, the EU data privacy and security law. That law might make it challenging for AI to trace the interactivity of the prospects with documents and presentations (Anderson & Coveyduc, 2020), as an example.

5.4 Study Limitations and Validation

This study was limited to the subject of reformation of B2B sales processes by the AI and ML technologies. In that sense, the study did not discuss any technical details such as the algorithms used by the AI and ML technologies, or how the AI and ML technologies technically are able to perform the assigned tasks.

The study information was collected in the perspective of AI technology develops and marketing agencies, who are cooperating with the developers in providing the platforms that are supported by AI and ML technologies. In addition, the study collected the experiences of using AI technology from the perspectives of the users (sales representatives). The study was limited to approaching the subject from business understanding perspectives only.

The study sample was limited to a certain number of companies, in this case, three companies, and also to a limited number of sales representatives, in this case, five persons. These numbers weight to the validity of the study, which was one of the issues the study faced during the data collection phase, as only a limited number of sales representatives has responded to the request of interviewing to explore their experiences with AI technology. A bigger number of salespeople interviews might give different results. Furthermore, the study has a limited time to conduct the interviews and search for samples, which might provide a limited sample in this case. However, AI technology in B2B sales is an emerging phenomenon that essentially reflects on the number of companies and

salespeople who are using it, which might add the difficulty to get more participants.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The B2B sales processes encounter significant changes whenever there is advancement, mainly in the way human communicates with each other. Sales processes started when the only way to hold a sale is through knocking on the buyer's door. Fast forward to the time of digital communication sales through various digital platforms. In 2005, Moncrief & Marshall, argued that very little has changed in the sales process since the 20th century, and digital communication, e.g., the Internet and electronic mailing have delivered changes that require to rethinking about the sales processes. This study has followed the lead of the researchers and set out to examine if the recent advancement in the use of Artificial technology has also changed the sales process.

If the advancement of digital communication technologies has allowed sales to generate more, facilitate the sales operations and makes the wholesale cycle easier and more efficient. AI technology has taken the sales to the next level. Digital information that might seem unrelated and unimportant to human eyes AI technology has turned into valuable knowledge that gives the sales the reason to engage with the customer and ultimately generates more sales.

To the untrained eye, the AI technology can have limited abilities. In fact, there are many incomparable significant beneficial the technology can deliver to the sellers. By hiring AI technology in sales, the sellers should look forward to uncountable enhancements at every step of the selling cycle. Using AI could bring, according to proven experiences, at least twice the amount of what human can, in term of prospecting. AI uses extended sources of real-time information to generate profound prospecting based on facts. AI also makes the contacting and approaching to the prospects easier, and affordable. AI can deliver different other dimensions of products presentation, making the offering and showing a unique experience to the buyers. With the aid of a deep understanding of buyers by the technology, sellers are capable of reducing the buyers' resistance, which in turn, escalate and accelerate the sales.

Moreover, sellers to anticipate saving up to 40% of the sales representatives' time, that would reflect on more productive time. Reduce the overall selling cycle process to as short as four steps to make a sale. Reduces the costs to acquire a new customer to inexpensive levels. AI also to help sellers not only understand their customers but, even themselves. To many extend, AI can give an envision on how the seller is standing in the market, in term of products, the marketing, prices, and more. Understanding competitors using AI technology can provide critical information about competitors on different levels, and in turn, could improve the sellers marketing position.

Returning to the question posed at the beginning of this study, it is now possible to state that AI technology has majorly reformed the B2B sales processes. Those processes have changed from long, time-consuming, and sometimes ineffective processes, to be much effective, shorter and less time absorber. The traditional sales processes have seven steps to make a sale. In Moncrief & Marshall (2005), the sales processes have seven steps to make a sale. In this study, the proposed sale processes consist of only four steps to make a sale. Saves nearly 50% of the sales representative's time, which also uses real-time to sale, making the sales operations more effective.

In 2016, Rippé et al., argued: "in today's selling environment, customers often possess more information than salespeople". In today's AI technology advancement, it is fair to say salespeople can compete on the customers' information possession, not only a similar level of information but also harnessing it to generate knowledge that is changing the shape of the sales journey.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix 1. Companies Interview Protocol

Companies - Interview Protocol

Hello, Thank you for your participation in this interview. I expect that this will be the 1st part of the interview, and we would follow that with another interview unless we have been able to answer all the questions.

To start, I would like to assure you that all personal information, including names, addresses, or any other sensitive information mention during the interview will be kept strictly confidential and will not be shared with any person or group that is not associated with this study. The interviews will be recorded for data collection purposes. All information will be summarized, and no person will be knowingly identifiable from the summarized results. Responses to questions may be quoted, but without identifying the individual source.

Do you have any question before we start? Are you ready to start the interview?

General Part
- Can you please tell briefly about your company?
- How can you explain the function of the AI tool that your company has developed in term of B2B sales?

Traditional Sales Processes Part
- In term of the 7th steps of the traditional sales processes, how the AI has: Add, Reform, Modernize, Improve and Enhance the:

The steps are Prospecting, Pre-approaching, Approaching, Presentation, Over-coming Objections, Close, and Follow-up.

Sales Processes

Steps	Description
Prospecting	Searching for a new customer or leads
Pre-approach-ing	The seller gathers information about the potential customer
Approaching	Establishing and building a connection to the potential customer
Presentation	The seller listens to customer needs and or present the solution to the customer
Overcoming Objections	The seller listens to the customer objection related to the seller solution and improve it or convince the customer with the presented solution.
Close	The customer made the purchase. The seller and the customer develop a future relationship.
Follow-up	After-sale communication, customer expectations, and satisfaction collected.

Other Related Questions:

Overall, how much of time the AI technology has saved on the whole b2b sales processes?

Overall, how much of manpower AI technology has saved on the whole b2b sales processes?

In your opinion, who is more neglected to implement the automated sales system, the salespeople, the management, or both?

Finishes the interview by asking if the interviewee has any questions and closing with thanks for the interviewee.

Appendix 2. Salespeople Questionnaire Survey

SALESPEOPLE QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY

This questionnaire as conducted by a student of (Tampere University of Applied Sciences | ROBNIS Project). In the aim of gather knowledge about automated sales systems that are based on Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning, which operates in a Business-to-Businesses sales context. We value your honest and detailed responses. The questionnaire should take approximately 15 minutes to complete. All information will be kept confidential. Any concerns can be communicated to (Safa Rajeb, safa.rajeb@tuni.fi). Thank you for your time and cooperation.

Please fill in the following questions by writing the most appropriate answer

1. Please fill your name and your company name and website if possible

2. How many years have you been working in the B2B sales field?

3. What is your current position concerning B2B sales at your current company?

4. What are the industry field and the size of the company you are working with?

5. What is the field of operation of the company you are working with?
   o International
   o Local
   o Both

6. How familiar are you with AI technology sales systems?
   o Not at all familiar
   o Slightly familiar
   o Moderately familiar
   o Ver familiar
   o Extremely familiar

7. For how long you have been using any sort of AI technology sales system?

8. What is the AI technology sales tool/s you and/or your company using in B2B selling context?

   As an example: HubSpot CRM, Pipedrive, SugarCRM, ZOHO CRM, etc.

9. Based on your experience: How reliable the AI technology sales systems are? considering the validity of the information, the system generates
   - o Very reliable
   - o Somewhat reliable
   - o Neither reliable nor unreliable
   - o Somewhat unreliable
   - o Very unreliable

10. Based on your experience: How reliable the AI technology sales system for the company you are working for?
    - o Very reliable
    - o Somewhat reliable
    - o Neither reliable nor unreliable
    - o Somewhat unreliable
    - o Very unreliable

11. Based on your experience: How the AI technology sales system has reformed the B2B sales processes?
    - o Never
    - o Rarely
    - o Occasionally
    - o Often
    - o Always

12. Based on your experience: How much of time the AI technology sales systems have saved in comparison with the normal B2B sales processes?
    - o 0 %
    - o 10-20%
    - o 30%
    - o 40%
    - o 50%
    - o 60% or above

13. Based on your experience: How much of manpower the AI technology sales systems have saved in comparison with the normal B2B sales processes?
- o 0 %
- o 10-20%
- o 30%
- o 40%
- o 50%
- o 60% or above

14. Please rate the overall efficiency of using AI technology sales systems in B2B sales: Where 1 is the lowest and 5 is the highest rate
- o 1
- o 2
- o 3
- o 4
- o 5

15. Based on your experience: How you describe the reforming intensity of AI technology sales system of the B2B sales processes?
- o None
- o Very mild
- o Mild
- o Moderate
- o Severe

Appendix 3. Salespeople Interview Protocol

Salespeople Interview Protocol

May I please speak to _*Interviewee name*__?

My name is _Safa Rajeb_, and I am calling from the Tampere University of Applied Sciences. I am conducting research on behalf of (ROBINS Project) on (AI technology in B2B sales). At an earlier time, you indicated that you would be willing to participate in research on (Investigating the AI Tools in B2B Sales Context).

The interview should take about _60_ minutes to complete. We are not asking for money or selling anything.

Background

Now, I am going to read to you some important information about the survey.

To start, I would like to assure you that all personal information, including names, addresses, or any other sensitive information mention during the interview will be kept strictly confidential and will not be shared with any person or group that is not associated with this study. The interviews will be recorded for data collection purposes. All information will be summarized, and no person will be knowingly identifiable from the summarized results. Responses to questions may be quoted, but without identifying the individual source.

Are you ready to continue?

1. Yes, go to begin the interview
2. No, go to Better time

Do you have any question before we start? Are you ready to start the interview?

The Interview

I will begin the interview now.

Please briefly introduce yourself.

Since when you are starting using AI technology sales system technology in your B2B sales tasks?

Please describe your experience with the AI technology sales system.

- In term of the 7th steps of the traditional sales processes, how you have utilized the AI technology sales system?

- How and at which stages of the 7th steps of sales processes, you have noticed the AI has: Add, Reform, Modernize, Improve and Enhance the:

Sales Processes

Steps	Description
Prospecting	Searching for a new customer or leads
Pre-approach-ing	The seller gathers information about the potential customer
Approaching	Establishing and building a connection to the potential customer
Presentation	The seller listens to customer needs and or present the solution to the customer
Overcoming Objections	The seller listens to the customer objection related to the seller solution and improve it or convince the customer with the presented solution.
Close	The customer made the purchase. The seller and the customer develop a future relationship.
Follow-up	After-sale communication, customer expectations, and satisfaction collected.

Other Related Questions:

In your opinion, at what step of the 7th steps is the most significant benefit of using the AI technology sales system?

In your opinion, what is the strengths point of AI technology is B2B sales? Please give me an example.

In your opinion, what is the weaknesses point of AI technology is B2B sales? Please give me an example.

In your opinion, who is more neglected to implement the AI technology sales system, the salespeople, the management, or both?

In your opinion, how the future of AI technology in B2B sales will look like?

Finishes the interview by asking if the interviewee has any questions and closing with thanks for the interviewee.