
DYNAMICS OF PERSONAL SELLING AND CHANGING SALES SKILLS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Serpil ÜNAL KESTANE ^{1,2}

ABSTRACT

The main objective of the study is to determine at which stage firms are in the process of digitalization and what skills they look for in salespeople in the face of digitalization? A semi-structured interview technique was used. An interview form was developed, which included the following questions: 1) What do you think is the most important quality that salespeople should have? 2) What methods do you use to make sales, and what are their advantages and disadvantages? 3) What do you think about digitalization? 4) How do you think salespeople of the future should be? 5) What kind of training should be provided to salespeople to help them improve themselves? Preliminary interviews were conducted with five sales and marketing managers to assess the suitability of these questions in terms of purpose, meaning, and scope. The interview form was finalized based on the preliminary interviews. According to participants, digitalization is inevitable and the game-changer for business, although the firms they represent, make slow progress in that regard. They stated that salespeople of the future should have a good grasp of information technologies, digital tools, and e-commerce. They also noted that the majority of transactions would be conducted through digital platforms in the future. Therefore, salespeople should be trained on issues such as social media expertise, content management, digital body language, etc.

Keywords: Digitalization, personal selling, salesperson, sales skills, sales training

1 Doç.Dr., Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi, İzmir Meslek Yüksekokulu, serpil.kestane@deu.edu.tr,
ORCID: 0000-0002-7520-7247

2 İletişim Yazarı / Corresponding Author: serpil.kestane@deu.edu.tr,
Geliş Tarihi / Received: 24.04.2019, Kabul Tarihi / Accepted: 20.10.2019

DİJİTAL ÇAĞDA KİŞİSEL SATIŞIN DİNAMİKLERİ VE DEĞİŞEN SATIŞ BECERİLERİ

ÖZ

Arařtırmadaki temel amaç, görüřülen firmaların dijitalleşme sürecinde hangi aşamada olduklarını ve bu farklılıklar ile paralel olacak şekilde satış elemanlarında (SE) hangi becerileri aradıklarını ortaya çıkarmaktır. Arařtırmada nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden görüşme tekniđi kullanılmıştır. Yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme tekniđine uygun olarak bir görüşme formu hazırlanmıştır. Formda yer alan sorular řunlardır: 1) Sizce bir SE'nında bulunması gereken en büyük özellik nedir? 2) Hangi yöntemlerle satış yapıyorsunuz, bu yöntemlerin sizin için yarar ve sakıncaları nelerdir, 3) Dijitalleşme hakkında neler düşünöyorsunuz? 4) Sizce geleceđin satışçıları nasıl olmalıdır? 5) "Satış elemanlarına kendilerini geliřtirmeleri ve yenilemeleri konusunda ne tür eğitimler verilmelidir? Bu soruları amaç, anlam ve kapsam açısından deđerlendirmek amacıyla 5 satış ve pazarlama yöneticisiyle görüşölmüřtür. Bu aşamalardan sonra görüşme formuna son hali verilmiş ve sorular araştırma kapsamındaki kişilere yöneltilmiştir. Arařtırmaya katılan satış ve pazarlama yöneticilerine göre, temsil ettikleri firmalar her ne kadar dijitalleşme konusunda ağır ilerliyor olsalar da, dijitalleşme geleceđin adı, kaçınılmaz son ve deđişimin kendisi olarak nitelendirilmektedir. Bu kapsamda geleceđin satış elemanlarının da bilgi teknolojilerine ve dijital araçlara hakim olan, e-ticareti bilen bireyler olması gerektiđi ifade edilmiştir. Ayrıca, gelecekte satış işlemlerinin daha çok dijital platformlara kayacađı tahmini nedeniyle satış elemanlarına verilecek eğitimlerde sosyal medya uzmanlığı, içerik yönetimi, dijital beden dili gibi konular da yer almalıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dijitalleşme, kişisel satış, satış elemanı, satış becerileri, satış eğitimleri

1. Introduction

With rapid advances in information and communication technologies, people can communicate and connect with others much more quickly and easily than they did in the past. This has led to the emergence of the digital age representing a dramatic social, cultural, and economic shift impacting the whole world.

People of the digital age, who both affect and are affected by the new world order, have made technology an integral part of their lives rather than using it as a tool to make their lives easier. This process has transformed every aspect of life, including human behavior and social structure, resulting in changes in communication, interaction, trade, business rules, etc.

According to Kotler et al. (2018: 46), 90% of human interaction is made through smart devices (smartphones, tablets, laptops, television, etc.), and the Internet is the backbone of this screen-based interaction. This transformation has created the “new consumer” who is more skeptical, more intelligent, and immune to marketing. The biggest difference between the traditional consumer and the new consumer is that the buying behavior of the former is predictable while that of the latter is not. The new consumer is global, vibrant, fast, rational, conscious, knowledgeable, and continually changing (Dinç, 2018).

New consumers actively use social media platforms, download apps, write mini-blogs, and build a social media presence to engage with people and companies, to improve their social lives and to share with family and friends. Beyond using social media technology to post pictures or update their status, consumers who use the Internet (e-consumers) have discovered that communication and information technology empowers them (Ahearne and Rapp, 2010: 109-118). Due to these global technological transformations, businesses, regardless of sector, size, and maturity, have begun to question their business models and products, and the way they conduct business (TÜSİAD, 2016).

Digitalization offers a wide variety of ways for interaction between customers and businesses. M-commerce, business intelligence, and smart investments are some of the driving forces of this process. E-consumers can choose products and make purchases on virtual or online markets using their smartphones and tablets. This allows them to communicate with businesses through a wide range of ways and access and obtain information about products. This, in turn, provides businesses with the opportunity to understand customer behavior and preferences better, to build more profitable relationships with them, and to tailor their promotions to specific demographics (Lamba and Pallock, 2017: 15). For example, the Ford Motor Company used social media to launch its new model Ford Focus. The Ford formed a focus group consisting of 40 social media users and shared test-drive videos of the vehicle on social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) and received positive feedback and comments. Similarly, according to Business Insider, Procter & Gamble plans to lay off 1.600

employees, including marketers, because Facebook and Google are becoming more and more effective than traditional media platforms (Marshall et al., 2012: 349).

All aspects of personal selling and sales management are strongly affected by technological developments. Most importantly, social media is not limited to existing technologies that are open to public consumption, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. It also includes internal social media and networking tools offered by companies such as Salesforce.com. These technologies have the power to influence businesses or industries at large. Therefore, companies should set up and train their own digital sales teams and guide sales based on digital consumer behavior.

There are numerous studies on digital marketing, social media marketing, electronic commerce, mobile marketing, etc. However, this study is original in the sense that it focuses on digital changes in sales and marketing and on new skills that salespeople should have in the future in line with those changes. This study aims to determine sales and marketing managers' views of and attitudes towards digitalization and new skills sought in salespeople. We believe that this study will grip the attention of institutions (universities providing sales education) and SMEs and raise their awareness of changes in personal selling and new skills.

2. Literature

As stated above, there are many studies on digitalization. There are, however, no studies that examine personal selling and digitization together. The studies cited below do not fully address personal selling but deal with sales and sales technologies and digitalization.

Marshall et al. (2012) conducted a focus group research. According to them, digital tools have provided consumers 24/7 access to salespeople, younger people prefer digital tools rather than face-to-face contact for interaction, the possibility of doing business worldwide has increased, the new digital age has blurred the line between sales and marketing strategies, chats on social media platforms influence branding, Twitter has become a significant sales and marketing tool, and the 7 Steps of Selling (determining needs, preparation, pre-approach, presentation, raising attention, handling objections and closing the sale) have been reduced to 3 (determining needs/solutions, price/time/closing and closing the sale). Friendship sites are used to find new customers while wiki and chat rooms are used to retain the existing customers. Besides, e-consumers do not expect an explanation or comment from salespeople. Instead, they share their ideas online. In short, the digital age is a revolution in sales, and the methods and applications in this field are game-changers. Knowledge, referred to by some as a commodity, is now everywhere, and the commodification of information has a significant impact on buyer/seller relationships and the role of salespeople and sales strategies.

Singh et al. (2019) focused on digitalization as technologies used in sales and stated that digitalization and sales technologies, including artificial intelligence,

have a greater impact than previous sales technologies. They addressed this issue from three perspectives (1) sales profession in terms of creating value, 2) sales professionals and organizational issues and 3) salesperson and individual level) and concluded that digitalization cannot replace traditional sales methods but that it offers the opportunity to adopt new learning and opportunities.

Agnihotri et al. (2012: 335) focused on the reality that the salespeople of today use digital channels to attract customers. In the digital age, salespeople are expected to produce content and position themselves as experts to attract customers. Viral marketing consisting of products, services, brands, and recommendations, plays a crucial role in creating customer loyalty, which has, therefore, become a strategic necessity for businesses. Customer-oriented salespeople must also find new ways to increase customer loyalty and interaction. These transformations have particular importance for sales organizations that serve as bridges between organizations and markets. Salespeople, who are often seen as sources of information for organizations, will probably have to use their social links to improve sales performance (Agnihotri et al., 2012: 335).

Andzulis et al. (2012: 305-306) stated that the spread of content created by users (blogs, video-sharing platforms, and social networks), global communities, and user comments have resulted in a revolution in the field of sales. All these developments have led to a transformation in the stages of personal selling.

The stages of personal selling from the perspective of digitalization are below.

3. New Dynamics of Personal Selling in the Digital Age

The stages of personal selling with traditional methods (understanding the customer, approach, exploring needs, presentation, handling objections, and closing the sale) have become more effective with the use of digital tools in sales and marketing.

3.1. Understanding the Customer

Understanding the customer is the first step of selling, in which salespeople are mainly tasked to gather information, investigate potential customers, determine communication styles, and identify risks and objections to sales. Salespeople need some general information about the people and organizations that they want to contact. It may be the customer's identity, characteristics, decision-making power, hobbies, needs, and business relationships, as well as his/her resistance and objections and primary or secondary purchasing patterns (Önce, 2015: 35). Digital technologies and social media facilitate information gathering. Popular press articles also provide intelligence on sales and competitors. Salespeople benefit from the latest news and chats on social media to gather information about companies and potential customers. This is a "monitoring" stage. Digital tools (blog search engines, speech charts, forums, message boards, etc.) provide organizations and salespeople with the opportunity to monitor topics discussed, questions posed, and experiences shared by customers and communities (Singh

and Diamo, 2017: 34). Salespersons can actively participate in these platforms to achieve added value or collect real-time feedback from consumers to adapt and share product and marketing campaigns. The stage of understanding the customer is critical because it directly affects the approach step.

3.2. Approach

The second step of traditional selling is “approach,” in which salespeople attract customers’ attention and try to leave an excellent first impression on them to develop a communication (Taşkın, 2003: 161). The purpose of digital platforms is the same. With the first “approach,” salespeople draw the attention of potential customers, introduce themselves to them, analyze expectations, and establish relationships. Salespeople can also integrate information from digital media into their customer relationship management (CRM) processes and software. For example, Clasha Shih has developed an application called “face connector” on salesforce.com. With face connectors, salespeople can invite potential business partners to LinkedIn or Facebook. If potential customers or potential business partners accept online interaction, it becomes easier to find common interests and improve relationships. In this way, salespeople can check the profiles of those potential partners and access personal and demographic information and transfer it to the company’s CRM software. Thus, salespeople can initiate communication with more positive experiences. Sharing links, responding to comments, and facilitating discussions through online surveys also attract customers, which allows salespeople to strengthen their companies and brands (Andzulis et al., 2012: 306).

3.3. Exploring Needs

Having information on customers’ needs, buying motives, and problems in the sales process make a presentation, which is the fourth step, easier. Customers interact with other customers and salespeople on digital platforms. Therefore, they discover not only their real needs but also the answers to questions they had not thought of before. Sometimes buyers may not even know how much they do not know about a product or service before they find out about it online.

3.4. Presentation

In the “presentation” stage, a relationship is established between the characteristics of goods/services and the needs and wishes of customers, and products are displayed. Salespeople should show that they create value by using visuals and presentation tools in a way that customers will understand (Taşkın, 2003: 164). In traditional face-to-face sales, products – teasers- are displayed and introduced for the same purpose. On digital platforms, content is prepared for the presentation of products. Both salespeople and customers play an active role in creating value together in this process. As the interaction and cooperation between salespeople and customers develop, the presentation becomes much more affluent, resulting in content that both parties share.

3.5. Handling Objections

Objections to sales are not an obstacle, but an aiding and facilitating balance (Önce, 2015: 35). Experienced salespeople know that objections are a purchase signal (Taşkın, 2003: 237). Salespeople use effective methods of questioning to get to the bottom of the problems that cause objection. The frequently asked questions section and forums on digital platforms also help them resolve disputes and satisfy customers. This means that digital platforms accelerate sales closure.

3.6. Closing the Sale

The ultimate goal of the sales process is the realization of the sale. The purpose of every salesperson is to close the sale, which is a critical stage that determines his/her success. However, no sale can automatically be closed. To close the sale, the customer needs to be persuaded. Digital platforms serve to close the sale. In traditional sales, salespeople need to refer to previous sales to close a sale. However, influencers and customers themselves already provide buying references on social media platforms without salespeople having to do much (Andzulis et al., 2012: 305-306).

Digital media transforms the personal selling process as well. Verbeke et al. (2011) state that salespeople play an essential role because buyers cannot access large amounts of information effectively online. However, they also state that the younger generations will fill in more organizational buyer positions, and therefore, seek face to face interaction less and less. It is, therefore, necessary to consider how sales professionals can establish good sales relations on social media platforms. Since the quality and timeliness of the flow of information between the buyer and seller is a critical success factor, businesses will need to develop virtual sales teams. In short, salespeople now need to use digital tools and especially social media effectively to create distinctive values for their customers (Marshall et al., 2012: 349).

4. Digital Age and Changing Sales Skills

In traditional face-to-face sales, salespeople play a key role in providing communication and interaction between companies and customers, and in creating positive impressions about products and services (Taşkın, 2003: 178). Customers generally know about companies through salespeople. Therefore, customers' views and attitudes towards companies depend on the impression that salespeople make (Önce, 2015: 19).

Today's consumers have the widest choice of goods and services ever seen, which, however, leads to consumer confusion. Salespeople should, therefore, be a solution seeker, a consultant, or even a psychologist to understand customers' needs and wishes. In some cases, salespeople can take on the roles of a teacher, a supervisor, a business partner, and in other cases, an ambassador or ombudsman. Therefore, salespeople should be an excellent servant, a good listener, consultant, and guide, analyst, researcher, predictor, and negotiator (Allan, 1992: 71). Businesses that

have recognized this fact spend millions of dollars on training to improve their salespeople's knowledge and skills. Sales training includes understanding and identifying successful sales and putting that information into practice. Sales training teaches salespeople to improve their performance. The goal of a sale is to solve problems, and sales training helps salespeople to understand, anticipate, and meet customer needs (Singh et al., 2015: 54-76).

Traditional face-to-face training includes information not only on products, firms, customers, industry, and rivals but also on finding customers, sales presentation skills, forms of objections, closing sales, and after-sales services (Gürdal, 1996: 180). Listening, reading, and speaking are important skills in personal selling. Therefore, companies like Xerox, Pfizer, General Electric, Ford, and IBM offer training on effective listening. Listening, evaluating, and answering verbal or non-verbal messages of current or potential customers is of paramount importance in personal selling (Sherherd and Castleberry, 1997: 315). Salespeople are also offered training on speech, body language, and communication. As stated above, the use of digital platforms and the new dynamics of personal selling change the nature of skills sought in salespeople and the content of training offered to them. Of course, salespeople should be good analysts and observers to find new customers, retain existing customers, and determine and satisfy customer needs on time. Some of the skills that salespeople should have been analyzing and monitoring digital platforms, listening to e-customers, being articulate on social media and digital platforms, being a good content manager, attracting customers' attention, and using digital body language.

In traditional sales, salespeople focused on understanding the body language of customers and picking up the clues of potential purchase in business negotiations or product presentations. Facial expressions, eye contact, the posture of the head and hand and arm movements give away clues on buying tendency. However, these skills will not work on digital platforms. Therefore, salespeople need to adapt their customers' digital body language to their marketing and sale processes. Digital body language refers to any interaction users make on a website or app and is the online equivalent of facial expressions encountered in face-to-face sales. Online buying behavior draws the most accurate picture of consumers' interests and intentions. Salespeople who use data from websites can gain insight into customers' concerns, interests, and motivations (Oracle, 2014). For example, SAP, a leading software company, started using social media in 2003 and encouraged its salespeople who had been using traditional sales approaches to participate in forums, create content and adopt digital body language to build customer confidence (Agnihotri et al., 2012: 335).

With training, salespeople can become good social media managers and draw potential customers' attention and prepare content that will turn them into regular customers. Salespeople should, therefore, be provided with training on digital skills.

Success in sales depends not only on knowledge and skill but also on personality traits. Uslu (2010) divides the qualities of a successful salesperson into three; experience, information, and personality traits (Table 1).

Table 1. Three Qualities of a Successful Salesperson

Experience	Information	Personality Traits
Governance	Marketing planning strategies	Reliability
Planning	Service facilities	Honesty
Communication	Product information	Kindness
Asking questions	Market knowledge	Patience
Listening	Customer information	Courage
Reasoning	Sales techniques	Impartiality
Drawing attention		Optimism
Raising interest		Open-mindedness
Effective presentation		Diligence
Handling objections		
Sales closure		
Time management		

Source: Uslu, A. (2010), *Personal Selling Techniques*, İstanbul: Beta Printing Inc., p.36

It is believed that the three qualities in Table 1 will always apply, regardless of age.

5. Methodology

This study aimed to determine sales and marketing managers' views and feelings about digitalization and the skills they think salespersons should have in the face of digitalization. The sample consisted of sales and marketing managers working in different sectors in İzmir. Data were collected using an interview form consisting of predetermined questions. A qualitative research technique was used because one of the main characteristics of qualitative research is to determine people's perceptions and experiences about a particular phenomenon or event (Gürbüz and Şahin, 2016: 402). Another reason why qualitative research was the method of choice was that we think that digitalization and personal selling should be interpreted in a social context.

This study explored sales and marketing managers' perspectives of digitization and its resulting impact on salespeople and identified the rationale behind their view by using semi-structured open-ended questions.

An interview form was developed according to the semi-structured interview technique. The interview form consisted of the following questions: 1) What do you think is the most important quality that salespeople should have? 2) What methods do you use to make sales, and what are their advantages and disadvantages? 3) What do you think about digitalization? 4) How do you think salespeople of the future should be? 5) What kind of training should be provided to salespeople to help them improve themselves? Preliminary interviews were conducted with five sales and marketing managers to assess the suitability of the questions in terms of purpose, meaning, and scope. The interview form was finalized based on their feedback.

Interviews were conducted with 52 sales and marketing managers from different sectors in İzmir between 22 September and 31 December 2018. Interviewees were informed about the purpose and procedure of the study. The interviews were tape-recorded. However, some interviewees were nervous about being tape-recorded; therefore, only notes were taken during their interviews.

The target group of the research is the sales and marketing managers actively working in different sectors. The main objective of the interview technique is to generalize the data obtained from a sample to people with similar characteristics. Therefore, there is no limit to how many samples can be drawn from a population.

Maximum variation sampling was used for qualitative data collection and analysis. This sampling aims to select a relatively small number of samples and to maximize the diversity relevant to the research question (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2008: 108). The diversity in this study is the sectors where and for how long the enterprises operate.

6. Data Analysis

In this qualitative study, the data were analyzed in four stages: 1. Coding the data, 2. Developing themes, 3. Arranging the codes and themes, and 4. Identifying and interpreting the findings (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2008: 228).

The interviews and written forms were transcribed and coded. The data were expressed in the form of frequencies and percentages. Similar statements were grouped into themes. To establish internal validity; a) the significance and integrity of the findings were continuously tested by the researcher, b) the consistency of the themes within and between each other was assessed to test whether they make a meaningful whole and to ensure the consistency of the findings, c) the compatibility of the findings with those of previous studies was evaluated, d) the sales managers reviewed the findings and found them realistic, e) the findings confirmed the predictions. To establish external validity; a) All research steps (from the preparation of the data collection tool to application and analysis) were explained in detail, b) the significance and applicability of the findings were evaluated based on the literature and c) the participants were re-interviewed, and the findings confirmed.

7. Results

Sales and marketing managers of 52 firms operating in various sectors (Table 2) were interviewed. No sampling was performed. The firms that were willing to cooperate focused on personal selling, and had active sales personnel were included in the sample.

Table 2: Sectors of Participant Firms

Sector	f
Automotive	11
Retail	10
Food	5
Construction	5
Textile	5
Leather	3
Chemical	3
Packaging	2
Beverage	2
Logistics	2
Hardware	1
Electricity	1
Financial	1
Tourism	1
Total	52

Most participant firms operate in the automotive (11 firms) and retail (10 firms) sectors. Interviews were also conducted with sales and marketing managers of firms operating in food, construction textile, etc. sectors.

Table 3 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the participants, indicating 37 had a bachelor's degree, 47 were male, and 21 had 6-10 years of work experience as a manager.

Table 3: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Education (Degree)	f
Master's	7
Bachelor's	37
High School	5
Unspecified	3
Gender	
Woman	5
Man	47
Work Experience as a Manager (years)	
0 - 5	8
6 - 10	21
11 - 15	18
≥ 16	5

Sales and marketing managers of 52 companies operating in various sectors (food, textile, construction, retail, etc.) were interviewed. An average of 8 sales employees works in each firm. Although it varies from sector to sector, sales employees have at least a high school degree. The majority of participants with a bachelor's degree graduated from the Faculty of Economics (38%). Others are graduates of agriculture, textile, chemical or mechanical engineering or sports academies, and even literature teaching or opticianry. Though salaries of sales staff vary from company to company, they are paid minimum wage plus commission (2000 to 3000 TL). However, some sales staff are paid up to 10,000 TL. The following sections will analyze the interview data.

7.1. The Most Important Quality Sought in Salespeople

Participants were asked, "What do you think is the most important quality that a salesperson should have in today's business world?" Table 4 shows the frequency of responses to the question.

Table 4. The Most Important Quality of a Salesperson

Quality	Frequency
Persuasion and communication skills	8
Honesty	7
Reliability	7
Smiling face	4
Self-confidence	3
Good morality	3
Curious	3
Diligence	3
Innovation and openness to development	3
Analytical intelligence	3
Unorthodox thinking	2
Problem-solving skills	2

Participants ranked the qualities that salespeople should have in today's business world as follows: (1) high communication and persuasion skills, (2) honesty, and (3) reliability (Table 4).

7.2. Sales Methods Used by Companies

Since companies' digital sales records are of interest, participants were asked what sales techniques they use. They stated that they mostly use face to face, online, and telephone and catalog sales (Table 5). According to participants, the advantages of online selling are practicality, cost-effectiveness, speed, and easy access to target markets. They, however, also argued that online selling is not as

reliable and widespread as personal selling because consumers still have doubts about the safety of digital platforms due to such reasons as receiving something different from what they ordered.

Table 5. Sales Methods Used by Companies

Sales Methods	Frequency	Percent
Personal	36	0.69
Online	23	0.44
Telephone	18	0.35
Catalog	11	0.21
Fairs	3	0.06

Participants stated that personal selling results in more sales due to face-to-face interaction because customers still want to talk to a real person and that persuasion is easier, but costs are high in personal selling. Participants who make telephone sales stated that they were able to communicate easily with customers but that they have difficulty in persuading them to buy. They also stated that more visual elements can be used in catalog sales but that it is costly to prepare, print, and distribute catalogs every year.

In short, digital sales techniques are used by participants but progress slowly for the reasons stated above. The Turkish Industry and Business Association (TÜSİAD), Samsung Electronics, Deloitte, and GfK conducted a study on 58 senior executives operating in different sectors in Turkey to determine firms' perceptions and management of digital revolution. According to the results, 11% of the firms' turnover comes from digital channels, and 66% of the firms have a specific digital strategy. The study asked the firms to score their digital maturity levels on a scale of 1 to 10. 7% of the firms scored 1 to 3 (beginner), 59% scored 4 to 6 (developing), and 34% scored 7 to 10 (mature). The participants of this study state that their companies make 27% digital investments. Therefore, our results are consistent with those of TÜSİAD 2016. However, digitalization changes almost everything in a company's business processes (from production methods to customer expectations and distribution channels). Through digitalization, companies make progress in many areas, from the production and processing of information to decision-making processes and access to new markets. These advantages play a critical role in improving company performance and achieving company goals and, most importantly, enhancing competitiveness.

According to the market size report prepared by the Turkish Informatics Industry Association (TİIA), e-commerce increased by 37% and reached TL 42.2 billion in Turkey in 2017 (TÜBİSAD, 2018). This figure will increase in the coming years. Therefore, the business should keep pace with the developments in digital technology.

7.3. Participants' Views of Digitalization

Participants were asked what they thought about digitalization. Their views were compared with those of CEOs in TUSIAD's research (Table 6).

Table 6. Views of Digitalization

CEOs' Views (TÜSİAD, 11)	Marketing and Sales Managers' Views
Companies that have undergone digital transformation become more distinguished and agile.	A necessity of the age
This is inevitable, so we need to get the right position.	A very effective tool when combined with the workforce.
It makes companies' lives easier and faster.	Not being able to keep up with it will result in huge losses.
We are going through such a process that nothing is going to be the same, and what fuels this is the digital transformation.	Saves time and money
Digital change is critical to get closer to our customers.	The easiest way to find new markets.
Digital processes are indispensable for companies.	The vital element of the global market, although its significance varies from sector to sector.
An inevitable change.	A matter of course
Change digitally or disappear.	The name of the game

Table 6 shows that both CEOs and marketing and sales managers agree that digitalization is inevitable, and the name of the game. However, according to some participants in our study, digitalization destroys intimacy, prevents the transfer of emotions and motivation, and its importance is limited in some sectors.

7.4. Salespeople of the Future

In the digital age, where everything is in constant change and transformation, salespeople need to improve themselves. Participants were asked, "how do you think salespeople of the future should be? Table 7 summarizes their responses.

Table 7. Salespeople of the Future

	f
A strong grasp of information technology	15
Open to development and change	10
Social media savvy	9
Digital technology savvy	8
A superb grasp of e-commerce	8
Intertwined with technology	7
A solid grasp of marketing-oriented software tools	6
Analytical and practical intelligence	5
Versatile	4

According to participants, salespeople of the future should have comprehensive knowledge of information technology, e-commerce, and social media, be able to use digital tools effectively, and be open to development and change (Table 7).

7.5. Do You Think Salespeople Will Be Needed in the Future?

The Industrial Revolution turned peasants into blue-collar factory workers, and the Information Revolution turned factory workers into white-collar office staff. However, with Cybernation, hundreds of millions of people will be replaced by or have to work with robots and smart machines. This inevitable change and transformation lead to fear of unemployment and concern for the future (Tarhan, 2010: 1-2).

Disruptive innovation, a term coined by Clayton M. Christensen in 1995, refers to an innovation that creates a new market and value network, causing significant changes in the established market structure and eventually replacing the existing market and value network. Disruptive innovation poses a risk wherever technology is applicable (TUSIAD, 2016).

The devastating effect of digitization on employment is, of course, a predictable phenomenon. In what way it will affect future salespeople is also a question which this study addresses. This is why participants were asked, “Do you think salespeople will be needed in the future?” Three views emerged from their responses:

1. Absolutely yes (56%): 56% of participants responded “absolutely yes” to the question. Social media and the Internet work to some extent. Salespeople will be needed in cases where strategies of persuasion and bargaining are implemented. Turkish people want to talk to someone in person and want to touch and feel a product before buying it.
2. Yes, but at a decreasing rate (40%): 40% of participants stated that the human factor would be part of sales in the near and medium-term.

3. No (4%): Only 4% of participants believe that salespeople will not be needed in the future because they believe that artificial intelligence and smart mirrors will reduce the need for human labor, whose role will be reduced to planning

To sum up, participants, in the majority, think that salespeople will be needed in the future. According to Kotler et al. (2018: 50), “the future of marketing will be a seamless blend of online and offline experiences across customer paths... If customers decide to make a purchase, they will experience a personalized touch from both the machine and the human interface.” Salespeople will continue to use technology to increase productivity and effectiveness over the next few decades. Similarly, technology will require salespeople to achieve the best results (Ahearne and Rapp, 2010). Although technology is inanimate, it turns into a living thing in a necessary sales process. However, technology cannot replace salespeople when products are to be more complex, relationships more valuable, and art of convincing more essential than ever. Like it takes two to tango, salespeople and technology need each other. Two people can work independently, but cooperation brings the most remarkable success (Ahearne and Rapp, 2010). Salespeople will, therefore, always be needed in the age of Cybernation where human mind, technology, and external intelligence play an active role in decision making, problem-solving and production processes because the ever-growing digital world calls for people who know how to develop and manage digital platforms (Gökşin, 2018: 5).

7.6. Training for Salespeople

Salespeople should take into account disruptive innovation and develop themselves. Another question posed to participants was, “What kind of training should be provided to salespeople to improve themselves?” Table 8 summarizes their responses.

Table 8. Training for Salespeople

	f
Foreign language	11
Voice/speech and diction	9
Computer-Based Training, Microsoft Office programs	6
E-commerce and digital sales	4
Social media management	3

According to participants, salespeople should have a grasp of speech and diction and Microsoft Office programs, and know foreign languages to adapt themselves to the new and changing circumstances of sales and marketing. Research mostly investigates the potential impact of social and digital platforms on younger generations because they are born into a digital world and will be the consumers of the future. Therefore, some new professions, such as social media expertise and content marketing, will be popular and in high demand in the future (Çağıl,

2017: 139-140). This means that salespeople should develop in social media management, e-commerce, and digital sales.

8. Conclusion

Mobile devices, social media apps, virtual machines, digital platforms, and advanced analytics have become an indispensable part of our daily lives and provided us with access to a broad array of information that we can use when performing purchasing activities. It also forces salespeople to create internal value, coordinate their functions, and improve customer relations. However, salespeople should improve and adapt themselves to the new and changing circumstances to be able to take advantage of these opportunities.

This study explored at which stage of digitalization firms operating in various sectors in Izmir are and what skills they look for in salespeople in the face of digitalization. The results show that the firms use digital sales methods but are making plodding progress in that area. According to participants, online sales are practical, cost-effective, fast, and provides access to target markets. They, however, also argue that customers do not trust online tools and still see personal selling as a more convincing method, and that is why their firms make slow progress in digitalization. On the other hand, they see digitalization as the name of the game, the change itself, and the inevitable destination, and therefore, maintain that the salespeople of the future should know about information technology, digital tools, social media, and e-commerce and be open to development and change.

Participants regard high communication and persuasion skills, honesty, and reliability as the most important qualities that salespeople should have in today's business world. As previously stated, Uslu (2010) point out that successful salespeople should have the experience, information, and positive personality traits. Our results, however, suggest that participants attach more importance to personality traits than information and experience, which also confirms what Kotler et al. wrote (2018: 77) "In an increasingly transparent world, authenticity is the most valuable asset."

Participants were asked, "Do you think salespeople will be needed in the future?" based on the presumption that digitization will cause devastating changes and affect some professions positively or negatively. They state that salespeople will be needed in cases where strategies of persuasion and bargaining are implemented and that human factors will be part of sales in the near and medium-term. These results are consistent with those of Kotler et al. (2018: 50) and Ahearne et al. (2010: 109), who argue that sales are a mix of online and offline experiences and that salespeople and technology need each other. Only 4% of participants believe that digitization will reduce the role of human labor in planning.

According to participants, salespeople should have a grasp of speech, diction, Microsoft Office, and other computer-based training programs and know foreign

languages to develop themselves and adapt to the era. They are also of the opinion that salespeople should develop social media management, e-commerce, and digital sales skills.

Artificial intelligence and other industrial innovations in the future might lead to the disappearance of many professions and reduce the need for human labor. However, salespeople will always be needed in situations involving emotions and strategies of persuasion. The age of Cybernation requires cooperation between technology and human. To increase their efficiency and productivity, salespeople should, therefore, collaborate with digital tools and field-related technologies and create synergy by combining their skills with technology.

Universities and institutions providing sales education in Turkey should revise their curricula according to these developments, and SMEs should anticipate the requirements of the future business world and take necessary measures to improve their staff training accordingly.

One limitation of this study is that it elicited information on the views of sales and marketing managers of only 52 firms in Izmir. Therefore, it is not possible to generalize the findings. Further studies on this topic can compare sectors or different-sized enterprises and use quantitative research techniques and generalize their results. In this way, they can both help to adapt the profession of sales to the future and make a difference in creating employment that will increase the success of firms in the digital world.

Reference

- Agnihotri, R., Kothandaraman, P., Kashyap R., and Singh, R. (2012). Bringing “Social” Into Sales: The Impact of Salespeople’s Social Media Use on Service Behaviors and Value Creation, *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 32 (3): 333-348.
- Ahearne, M, and Rapp, A. (2010). The Role of Tecnology At the Interface Between Salespeople and Consumers, *Journal Of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 30 (2):109-118.
- Allan, J. M. (1992). *1990-2000 Yıllarında Satış Yönetimi*. AMACOM: Amerikan Pazarlama Birliği, Çev: Fatih Gündoğan, İstanbul: Rota Yayınları.
- Andzulis, J.M., Nikolaos G. P. and Rapp, A. (2012). A Review of Social Media and Implications for the Sales Process, *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 32(3): 305-316.
- Çağıl, A. (2017). *Sosyal Medya İle Dijital Pazarlama*, İstanbul: Dikeyksen Yayınları.
- Diñç, B. (2018). Dijitalleşmenin Tüketici Alışkanlıklarına Etkisi, Ekonomistler Platformu, <http://www.ekonomistler.org.tr.asp> (23.01.2019).
- Gökşin, E. (2018). *Dijital Pazarlama Temelleri*, , 3. Baskı, İstanbul: Abaküs Yayınları.
- Gürbüz, S. and Şahin, F. (2016). *Sosyal Bilimlerde Araştırma Yöntemleri*, 3. Baskı, Ankara: Seçkin Yayıncılık.
- Gürdal, S. (1996). *Satış Yönetimi*. Eskişehir: Anadolu Üniversitesi İşletme Fakültesi Yayını.
- Kotler, P., Kartajaya, H. and Setiawan, I. (2018). *Pazarlama 4.0. Gelenekselden Dijitale Geçiş*, Çeviren: Nadir Özata, İstanbul: Pasifik Ofset.
- Lamba, P. and Pollock, S. (2017). Digitization in The Retail Industry: Insights On The Possibilities Beyond E-Commerce & The Driving Force Behind Its Omnichannel Growth, *International Journal of Sales & Marketing Management Research and Development (IJSMMRD)*, ISSN(P): 2249-6939; ISSN(E): 2249-8044, 7 (2): 15-24.
- Marshall,G.W., Moncrief, W.C., Rudd, J.M. and Lee, N. (2012). Revolution in Sales: The Impact of Social Media and Related Technology on the Selling Environment, *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 32(3): 349-363.
- Önce, G. (2015). *Satış Yönetimi*, İstanbul: Beta Yayınları.
- Oracle Marketing Cloud (2014). Digital Body Language, Reading and Responding to Online Digital Buying Behaviors, https://www.oracle.com/marketingcloud/gatedform/gated-content-overlay-content.html?elqoffer=DigitalBodyLanguage_WP_2014.asp (24.01.2019).
- Sherherd, C. D. and Castleberry, S.B. (1997). Linking Effective Listening with Salesperson Performance An Exploratory Investigation. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 12 (5): 315-322.

- Singh, J, Flaherty, K. and Sohi, R.S. (2019). Sales Profession and Professionals in the Age of Digitization and Artificial Intelligence Technologies: Concepts, Priorities, and Questions, *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 39(1): 2-22.
- Singh, S. and Diamo, S. (2017). *Sosyal Medya Pazarlaması For Dummies*, Çeviri: Asım Veli Başdaş, 3. Basım., Ankara: Nobel Akademik Yayıncılık.
- Singh, V.L., Manrai, A.K. and Manrai, L.A. (2015). Sales Training: A State of the Art and Contemporary Review, *Journal of Economics, Finance and Administrative Science*. 20: 54-71.
- Tarhan, U. (2010). Geleceğin Meslekleri. *İşveren Dergisi*, 48 (5): 2.
- Taşkın, E. (2003). *Satış Teknikleri Eğitimi*, İstanbul: Papatya Yayıncılık.
- TÜBİSAD (2018). *E-Ticaret 2017 Pazar Büyüklüğü Raporu*, <https://www.tubisad.org.tr/tr/images/pdf.asp> (08.02.2019).
- TÜSİAD (2016). *Türkiye'deki Dijital Değişime CEO Bakışı*, <https://tusiad.org/tr/yayinlar/raporlar/item/8867>, asp (02.04.2019).
- Uslu, A. (2010). *Kişisel Satış Teknikleri*. İstanbul: Beta Basım A.Ş.
- Verbeke, W., Dietz, B. and Verwaal, E. (2011). Drivers of Sales Performance: A Contemporary Meta-Analysis. Have Salespeople Become Knowledge Brokers?. *Journal of The Academy of Marketing Science*, 39 (Juun): 407-428.
- Yıldırım, A. and Şimşek, H. (2008). *Sosyal Bilimlerde Nitel Araştırma Yöntemleri*, Ankara: Seçkin Yayıncılık.