

Practices of a Trading Corporation Sales Staff in Introducing New Products to Customers: Basis for Drafting Sales Communication Plan

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the communication practices of sales staff at a trading corporation in introducing newly developed generic products to customers. The research aimed to generate insights that would serve as the basis for designing an effective sales communication plan. While prior studies have explored the role of the sales team in product development, limited attention has been given to structured communication strategies during new product introductions in a business-to-business (B2B) context.

Employing an explanatory mixed-method design, the study integrated quantitative observations and surveys with qualitative interviews and focus group discussions. Data were gathered from nine sales representatives and 60 customers.

Findings revealed that email, websites, and in-person meetings were highly utilized communication channels, inconsistencies in message content and delivery weakened their impact. Customers emphasized the importance of pricing transparency, efficient delivery processes, order processes, and value-driven messaging. Underutilization of digital tools such as video conferencing and online demonstration was also noted.

The study recommends a comprehensive sales communication plan that aligns channel strategy, message content, and delivery techniques with customer preferences. The plan should incorporate digital enhancements, message consistency, and tailored value propositions to drive engagement and purchase decisions.

Keywords: Sales Staff. Communication Practices. New Products Introduction. Sales Communication Plan, Hierarchy of Effects.

INTRODUCTION

Technological advancements drive new product development, leading to significant changes in production processes and accelerating product introductions to the market. While innovation is crucial for a company's success, customers consistently seek solutions that address their evolving needs (Dabrowski, 2023). To meet these demands, companies invest heavily in research and development (R&D), ensuring that new products meet the highest quality and performance standards through rigorous testing.

Iqbal (2021) emphasized the vital role of sales and marketing in product launches, as sales staff serve as the first point of contact with customers. Their communication skills significantly influence purchasing decisions. Jobber (2009) highlighted the importance of extensive information campaigns and sales promotions, particularly in business-to-business markets. Effective communication was found to be essential for sales performance (Bharadwaj & Shipley, 2020). However, Iqbal (2021) noted a gap in the

literature regarding the impact of a structured communication plan on driving customer purchases of new products.

A trading corporation registered with the SEC since 2000, it consistently launches new products to meet market demands. During the pandemic, the company introduced generic products like personal protective equipment (PPE), cleaning and packaging supplies, and engineering equipment. Despite the products' innovative benefits and active sales efforts, sales outcomes have fallen short of expectations.

This study aimed to develop a sales communication plan for a trading corporation, focusing on the sales staff's role in introducing new products. The researcher emphasized that the company's success relies on the sales team's effectiveness and sales communication skills. The study explored their practices in engaging customers and identified weaknesses in the communication process to recommend improvements. The company sought to enhance its sales competitiveness, expand its product range, and meet evolving customer needs. New products, approved by the company president, were integrated into the product portfolio and promoted by the sales team. However, similar products from competitors existed, making effective communication crucial.

Research Questions

The study focused on the efforts of the sales staff of the subject company in drafting a sales communication plan to introduce generic new products developed to boost the sales and revenue of the company. Specifically, the study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the communication practices of the sales staff of a trading corporation in introducing new products to customers in terms of:
 - 1.1 Communication Channel
 - 1.2 Message Contents
 - 1.3 Message Delivery
2. What is the customer's perspective in the accomplished sales communication based on the hierarchy of effect theory as regards the introduction of the new products to customers in terms of:
 - 2.1 Communication Channel
 - 2.2 Message Contents
 - 2.3 Message Delivery
3. What pertinent inputs could be used in drafting the sales communication plan for sales staff implementation to convince customers to purchase the new products in terms of:
 - 3.1 Communication Channel
 - 3.2 Message Contents
 - 3.3 Message Delivery

Research Significance

Theory: This study enhanced sales communication and guided new product promotion using a communication strategy framework.

Practice: The findings enhanced the sales staff productivity of a trading company by refining sales communication strategies, enhancing engagement, and driving revenue.

Policy: This study guided sales staff in effective sales communication by identifying practices as pertinent inputs to be used in drafting a sales communication plan to enhance engagement and navigate market challenges.

Social Action: This research fostered collaboration among stakeholders to enhance the promotion of new products and achieve goals. It offered valuable insights for readers and researchers, enriching sales communication and customer engagement.

Scope and Limitations

This study examined a trading corporation's introduction of generic new products in 2023, including PPEs, tools, and equipment, with a focus on the sales staff's communication practices and customer feedback. Effective sales communication was deemed essential for addressing market competition and guiding customers through the stages of product awareness, knowledge, preference, conviction, and purchase. The research was conducted in selected provinces in Region 4A, specifically Laguna, Batangas, and Cavite as well as Metro Manila. The study involved nine sales staff and 60 customers. An explanatory mixed-methods design was employed, integrating quantitative data collected through observations, company available records, and survey, with qualitative data gathered from interviews. Financial aspects were not explored as the company opted to keep the data confidential.

Definition of terms

Communication Channel: Referring to the medium sales staff use to share new product promotions with customers. The channels used in the study were website, social media email, phone calls, text message, instant message, video conference, and in-person meetings.

Message Contents: Refers to convey significant information about the product to the customers. Contents of message were product features, product benefits, pricing information, case studies or testimonials, technical specification, comparison with competitors, warranty and support information, ordering process, delivery process, aftersales procedure, and product returns due to quality problems.

Message Delivery: Refer to a strategy for effectively conveying new product information through methods like live presentation, product demonstration, printed materials, digital presentations, online webinars, in-house seminars, and exhibit ensuring impact and customer engagement.

New Product: Refers to a newly added item in the company portfolio, differentiated by specifications, design, and manufacturer.

Practices: Refer to sales strategies for introducing new products, channel used with focus on message contents, and message delivery.

Sales Communication Plan: Refer to a strategic framework designed to engage customers and promote new products effectively. It outlines key messages, identifies the target audience, determines optimal timing and communication channels, and establishes success metrics (Bonterra.com, 2022). to influence customer decision-making and enhance message comprehension.

The Hierarchy of Effects Theory: Refers to a framework measuring customer progression influenced by sales staff communication practices. This study adopted six stages of the theory: Stage 1 ("not used"), Stage 2 ("awareness"), Stage 3 ("knowledge"), Stage 4 ("preference"), Stage 5 ("conviction"), and Stage 6 ("purchase").

REVIEW OF PERTINENT LITERATURE

The study of Iqbal (2021) further highlighted that previous studies have extensively examined how sales staff integrate into product development to create a competitive advantage. However, there is a noticeable gap in the literature in the sales staff's use of the communication plan and its significant impact on driving

customers' purchase of new products. Business owners to increase new product information through the use of effective communication dissemination. According to Mohr and Nervin (1990) communication is the glue that holds together a distribution channel. Essentially, business-to-business sales staff strive to choose the right marketing channel to communicate efficiently with the customer (Maier, 2021). According to Smith (2023) essential facets of the communication process include the message (content), the channel (mode), feedback (bidirectional communication), and the communication effects. Different sales strategies explore the use of sales staff through direct sales, outside sales staff meet with customers and conduct the primary aspect of the sales process face-to-face. The sales staff should not be seen as simply an actor in the distribution process but should be integrated into the process of product positioning and sales communication (Iqbal, 2021; Baumgarth & Binckebanck, 2011).

Research Framework

In assessing the communication practices of sales staff in introducing new products, the study was anchored on the communication strategy framework introduced by Michael J. Rouse and Sandra Rouse (2001). This framework served as a guide for planning and organizing messages to minimize communication barriers, enhance comprehension, and elicit the intended response from the customers. To address the research question, the study's conceptual framework examined the effectiveness of communication channels, message content, and delivery by analyzing sales staff practices and their impact on customer perception. It established link sales communication practices and customer engagement, aiming to provide insights into drafting a sales communication plan that would enhance new product promotion and positively influence purchasing decisions.

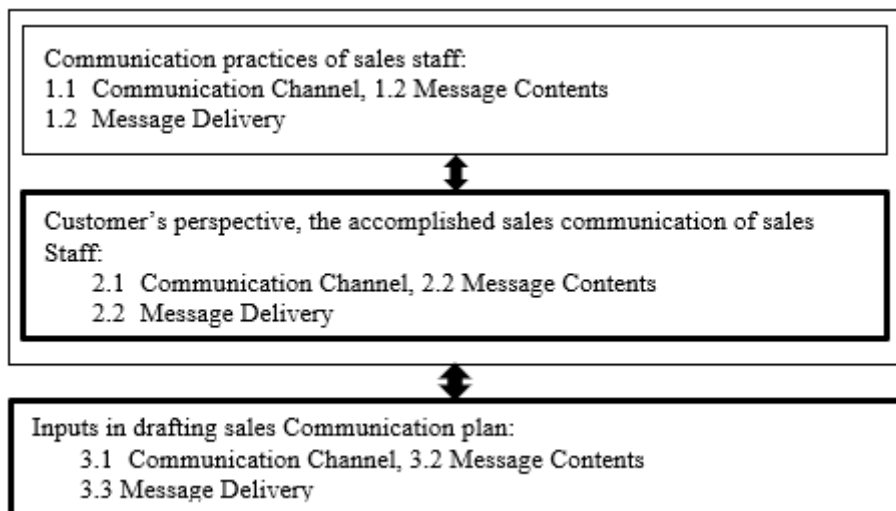


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Philosophical Lens

The researcher employed a mixed-method approach with a pragmatic perspective, combining quantitative and qualitative methods. Citing Elgeddawy and Abouraiia (2024), the study acknowledged that pragmatism allows for balancing objective data with the subjective experiences of stakeholders. This approach involved the analysis of organizational sales records, direct observation and interviews. By integrating diverse data sources, the study aimed to establish a comprehensive foundation for drafting an effective sales communication plan.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed an explanatory mixed-method approach for a comprehensive analysis. A sequential explanatory design was utilized, which allowed for in-depth exploration by initially analyzing the communication practices of sales staff, followed by the collection of customer feedback regarding their interactions (Ivankova, Creswell, & Stick 2006). This approach enhanced credibility, expanded evidence, and provided a thorough understanding of communication effectiveness.

Research Locale

The study was conducted at a trading corporation, an organization based in Sta. Rosa City, Laguna, which markets internationally sourced products to local industries. The corporation operates branches in Cavite, Cebu, Subic, Clark, and Baguio to strengthen customer relationships and support effective product launches. Its extensive product portfolio includes cleanroom equipment, PPE, packaging materials, and engineering tools.

Population and Sampling

This study employed a non-probability sampling technique. The participants consisted of nine sales staff from the provinces of Laguna/Manila, Batangas, and Cavite, as well as from Metro Manila. In addition, a quota sampling method was utilized to select 60 customers as respondents. These areas were selected based on their high customer density and the active introduction of new products in 2023. Respondents were identified based on their approachability and willingness to provide meaningful feedback, thereby ensuring the collection of comprehensive and reliable data.

Instruments

The quantitative data was collected using observation checklists and survey interviews. The researcher formulated a checklist and administered a questionnaire containing close-ended questions. Survey questions used a 6-point Likert scale. The stages are based on the hierarchy of effect theory. It measured customer progression, influenced by sales staff communication practices. Additionally, supplementary interview questions were crafted for selected customers who chose not to purchase the newly introduced product presented by the sales staff.

After the quantitative data collection, focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted with the sales staff. The questionnaire's validity was ensured through validation and pre-testing. Two professionals thoroughly validated the instrument to ensure accuracy and effectiveness. Their evaluations ensured that the questions were clearly understood and capable of producing accurate results.

Data Gathering

The researcher utilized both primary and secondary data. Primary data were gathered through quantitative methods (observation and survey) and qualitative approaches (interviews and FGDs). Secondary data included corporation records, sales materials, and reputable online sources such as journals and websites. A six-point Likert scale survey, based on the hierarchy of effects theory (not used, awareness, knowledge, preference, conviction, and purchase), was used to explore customer perspectives. Ethical standards were maintained, including informed consent and respectful treatment of participant engagement.

Management and Treatment of Data

The data analysis developed for this research is illustrated in the table below.

Table 1. Data Analysis Metrics

Research Question	Instrument	Data Analysis Tools
1. What are the communication practices of the sales staff of a trading corporation in introducing new products to customers in terms of: 1.1 Communication Channel, 1.2 Message Contents, and 1.3 Message Delivery	Primary Data: Three observation checklists Secondary data: Corporate available records	Percentages
2. What is the customer’s perspective in the accomplished sales communication based on the hierarchy of effect theory as regards introduction of the new products to customers in terms of: 2.1 Communication Channel, 2.2 Message Contents, and 2.3 Message Delivery	Primary data: 60 Survey interviews Three FGDs and 60 supplemental interviews	Percentages Rank Thematic Analysis
3. What pertinent inputs could be used in drafting the sales communication plan for sales staff implementation to convince customers to purchase the new products in terms of: 3.1 Communication Channel, 3.2 Message Contents, and 3.3 Message Delivery		Results analysis

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results from the data collected provided pertinent input for drafting the sales communication plan, which helped the sales staff effectively persuade customers to purchase new products.

Communication Practices of the Sales Staff

The results showed very high, moderate, and low communication practices of sales staff in terms of communication channels, message content, and message delivery. The table below presents the result of the quantitative data collected using the observation checklist.

Table 2. Communication Practices of Sales Staff

Communication Channel	Usage	Message Contents	Usage	Message Delivery	Usage
Email, website, social media, and in-person meeting	Very High	Product features and product benefits	Moderate	Live presentation and product demonstration	Very high
Phone calls	High	Pricing information, technical specification, warranty & support information, ordering process, delivery process, and payment terms	Low	Printed materials	High

Legend: 0~20% =very low, 21%~40%=low, 41%~60%=moderate, 61%~80%=high, and 81%~100%=very high

Communication Channels. Sales staff relied entirely 100% on websites, social media, and email for engagement, with Facebook and email marketing playing a crucial role in maintaining customer relationships. In-person meetings were essential for product demonstrations, aligning with the findings of Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) on effective customer engagement. Phone calls were used in 70% of cases as a crucial channel for setting appointments. Video conferencing, however, was completely underutilized (0%), representing an area for enhancement improvement particularly in adapting to evolving digital sales trends (Anders, Coleman, and Castleberry 2020).

Message Content. Sales communications observed 60% on product features and benefits. According to Belch and Belch (2020), transparency in pricing, features, and benefits was critical for building trust and helping customers assess how a product fits their needs. Only 40% of communications included pricing information, technical specification, warranty and support information, ordering process, and delivery process. The prioritization of product benefits and pricing information supported the trust-building approach outlined by Morgan and Hunt (1994). However, the complete underutilization (0%) of after-sales support content indicated a gap in fostering long-term customer loyalty. Clear, accessible return policies and competitor comparisons could further strengthen consumer confidence (Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996), particularly concerning after-sales procedures and product returns due to quality issues.

Message Delivery. Live presentations and demonstrations were used 100% and aligned with Belch and Belch (2020), who emphasized that experiential methods enhance product comprehension and engagement. Printed materials were used 70% support verbal communication by providing customers with a physical reference to revisit after interactions. However, the complete underutilized (0%) digital and interactive presentation methods suggested a missed opportunity to engage tech-savvy customers through webinars or virtual demos (Zeithaml et al., 1996).

Customers perspective the Accomplished Sales Communication Practices of Sales Staff.

The results on the accomplished sales communication practices of sales staff, from customers’ perspective and FGD, were examined in terms of communication channels, message content, and message delivery. The table below shows the top five highest-rated practices during the purchase stage, based on the results of the quantitative survey.

Table 3. Customers perspective, the accomplished sales communication practices of sales staff.

Communication Channel	Percent	Message Contents	Percent	Message Delivery	Percent
In-person meetings	52	Pricing information	55	Product demonstration	38
Email	48	Delivery process	53	Printed materials	27
Phone calls	40	Ordering process	50	Live presentation	18
Instant messaging	28	Payment terms	48	Exhibit	15
Text messages	20	Product features, benefits, & warranty support	47	In-house seminars	10

Communication Channels. In-person meetings were the most effective channel during the purchase stage, as they enabled direct interaction, trust-building, and rapport development. This finding aligns with Maier (2021) and Chapman (2018), who emphasize that personalized interactions as critical to closing sales.

Email communication closely followed, serving as a structured medium for sharing detailed product information. While phone calls and instant messaging supported appointment setting and follow-ups, websites and social media played a key role in creating initial awareness. However, video conferencing remained underutilized, despite its potential for engaging distant customers (Anders et al., 2020).

The narratives from participants were analyzed through thematic analysis. To highlight key insights, sales staff confirmed that “Every day, we left at the same time to go to the area. I prefer to have an impact on the customer, and I can more easily explain about a new product”. FGDs supported the multi-channel approach, emphasizing face-to-face interactions for relationship building and effective sales discussions. Message Content. Pricing information emerged as the most influential factor in purchase decisions, underscoring the importance of transparent and competitive pricing strategies. The sales staff explained, “If the product offered is suitable for the company, then asked the price”. The FGDs reinforced this, noting that strong customer relationships encourage open discussions about price negotiations. However, customer feedback about the price revealed concerns: “The price is higher than similar products from other brands”.

The delivery process and ordering process significantly influenced purchases, with customers emphasizing timely delivery and smooth transactions. This aligned with Mappesona et al. (2020), who stress the importance of aligning pricing with perceived value. The study further found that clear communication of payment terms enhances customer trust. Product features, benefits, and warranty information were also crucial, supporting the need for comprehensive explanations to drive customer confidence. Meanwhile, case studies were underutilized, despite their potential to reinforce credibility (Pratama & Belgiawan, 2024). One customer highlighted: “Have a Taylor-fit presentation based on the customer profile and work on value proposition of the product”. Customer-centric communication, tailored presentations, and proactive warranty discussions could improve engagement and conversion rates.

Message Delivery. Product demonstrations were the most effective message delivery method, providing tangible proof of product value and usability. The FGDs supported this, with sales staff highlighting customer preferences for visual presentations, supported by technical teams: “Customers want to see the actual appearance of the product”. Printed materials were also found to be useful, particularly for knowledge retention. Wiener, Flaherty, & Wiener (2022) confirmed that interactive and experiential methods significantly boost customer engagement and purchasing confidence.

Live presentations were moderately effective, reinforcing product value at the conviction stage. Seminars and exhibits, while identified as supplementary tools, were particularly useful in the conviction stage of introducing new products. These settings allowed for detailed discussions and personalized interactions that addressed customer-specific concerns, helping to solidify interest and trust. Other methods, such as digital presentations, in-house seminars, and online webinars, played supplementary roles but had limited impact on purchase decisions. FGDs confirmed that visual and experiential methods significantly enhance customer understanding and trust: “I brought brochures showed photos of the product”. Customers recommended more interactive approaches, including follow-ups, personalized presentations, and clear return-on-investment (ROI) justifications: “Constant follow-up and updates. Keep the customer updated from time to time and respond to inquiries as soon as possible. Better ROI justification”.

Pertinent Input in Drafting Sales Staff Communication Plan

The study’s findings provided critical insights into the sales communication practices that influenced customer engagement and decision-making. The elements served as the foundational input in drafting

sales communication plans. The communication channels, message content, and message delivery were illustrated in the table below.

Table 4. Pertinent Input in Drafting the Sales Communication Plan.

Communication Framework	Key Insight from RQ1 and RQ2	Input for Sales Communication Plan
Communication Channel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. In-person meetings, email marketing were highly effective for building rapport and delivering detailed information. b. Instant messaging provided quick updates tailored to customer preferences. c. Video conferencing was underutilized but was useful for distant customers and group discussions. d. Social media and websites enhanced awareness but lacked personalized engagement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Prioritize in-person meetings and emails for relationship-building and detailed product discussions. ○ Incorporate instant messaging for timely updates based on customer preferences. ○ Enhance video conferencing use for distant customers and technical discussions. ○ Improve website and social media integration for a unified communication approach.
Message Contents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Customers valued pricing transparency, delivery and ordering process, product features, and benefits. b. Technical specifications and stock availability influenced purchasing decisions. c. Extended warranties and after-sales support built trust. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Focus on presenting product benefits, pricing, delivery, and order process information upfront. ○ Proactively includes testimonials and competitor comparisons. ○ Highlight value propositions like extended warranties and after-sales services.
Message Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Live presentations and product demonstrations were identified as the most impactful methods during the purchase stage. b. Printed and digital materials catered to diverse customer preferences. c. Seminars and exhibits enabled personalized engagement and trust-building. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Utilize live demonstrations and hands-on testing to engage customers. ○ Provide both printed and digital materials to suit customer needs. ○ Organize in-house seminars and exhibits to build stronger relationships.

Communication Channels. The study found that in-person meetings and email marketing were the most effective methods for building trust and delivering comprehensive product information. Instant messaging

apps (e.g., WhatsApp, Viber, Messenger) became increasingly valuable for quick, personalized updates. While video conferencing remains underutilized, it had significant potential for engaging distant customers and facilitating group discussions. Social media and websites were essential for creating awareness but lacked seamless integration, limiting their impact on customer engagement.

Message Content. Customers prioritized pricing transparency, delivery process, order process, benefits, and product features when making purchase decisions. However, testimonials, case studies, and comparisons with competitors were underutilized despite their potential to enhance credibility and differentiation. Additionally, extended warranties and after-sales support played a critical role in building long-term customer trust.

Message Delivery. The study confirmed that live product demonstrations and hands-on testing were the most effective methods during the purchase stage, as they offered customers a tangible experience. Printed and digital materials catered to different customer preferences, while seminars and exhibits provided interactive engagement opportunities.

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

Summary of Findings

The study's findings provided key insights into the communication practices of sales staff and customer perspectives on sales communication strategies. These findings served as the foundation for drafting a sales communication plan.

The organization effectively utilized a combination of traditional and digital communication channels to engage customers. In-person meetings, emails, phone calls, and social media were dominant channels, with phone calls and instant messages playing a critical role in appointment setting. However, there were notable gaps in digital engagement, particularly with underutilized tools like video conferencing. Customers highlighted the effectiveness of in-person meetings for trust-building and addressing concerns while also valuing email and phone calls for professional and personalized communication. Video conferencing, despite its potential for technical discussions, remained underutilized.

In terms of message content, the company emphasized pricing, delivery and order process, benefits, and product features in support customer decision-making. However, there was limited use of case studies, testimonials, and competitor comparisons, which diminished trust and differentiation. Customers highly valued pricing transparency, detailed quotations, and tailored value propositions, indicating an area for improvement. Furthermore, inconsistencies in how product benefits were presented across platforms weakened the overall communication strategy. Moreover, the absence of case studies, testimonials, and comparisons with competitors further reduced the company's ability to differentiate its products and build trust.

Regarding message delivery, live presentations and product demonstrations were particularly effective in building customer confidence, while printed brochures provided lasting reference material. However, the limited use of digital engagement methods, such as webinars, digital presentations, and in-house seminars, restricted opportunities to connect with tech-savvy and remote customers.

Conclusions

This study on a trading corporation's sales communication practices highlighted the crucial role of communication channels, message content, and delivery methods in influencing customer engagement and purchasing decisions. While the company effectively utilizes in-person meetings, email marketing,

websites, and social media, gaps in integration and underutilized digital tools present opportunities for improvement. To enhance effectiveness, the company needed to ensure clear, concise, and relevant messaging tailored to customer needs. Strategic delivery timing, persuasive language, and visual aids strengthen engagement and trust. Continuous improvement through customer feedback and performance metrics kept the communication plan dynamic and impactful, positioning a trading corporation to sustain market success.

Recommendations

Based on the summary of significant findings and conclusions presented in this study, the researcher recommended the following:

1. Strengthen Content Quality and Consistency. Standardized product messaging across platforms and incorporated case studies, testimonials, and competitor comparisons to enhance credibility and differentiation. Clear pricing, tailored value propositions, and feedback-driven improvements will further align communication with customer expectations.
2. Enhance Channel and Message Delivery. To address gaps in digital engagement, the use of video conferencing, webinars, and digital presentations. Integrating these with existing traditional channels will improve accessibility, particularly for remote and digitally inclined customers.
3. Message content should incorporate the Features, Advantages, and Benefits (FAB) supporting soft selling techniques aimed at building trust, understanding customer needs, and delivering long-term value.
4. Further research on sales communication strategies focus on individual products to identify patterns that enhance sales performance and customer experience, strengthening the understanding of effective sales communication and its influence on customer decision-making.
5. Adopt a more diverse sampling approach. A broader geographic scope captures a wide range of customer and sales staff experiences.
6. Incorporate additional theoretical frameworks. Framework such as AIDA or Media Richness Theory could provide deeper insights into communication effectiveness.

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