



SELL ME THIS ARTIFICIAL PEN: USING CHATGPT TO ENHANCE SALES ROLE PLAYS

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ABSTRACT

The recent popularity of ChatGPT and artificial intelligence chatbots presents both challenges and opportunities for incorporating this modern technology in the classroom. This paper introduces an activity that uses ChatGPT to help students practice their role playing sales skills. The benefits of using this AI chatbot for role play training include allowing students to practice when it's convenient and have the ability to react to a chatbot taking on personas of different buyer types. Survey results demonstrate the effectiveness of this training method for both role play training and general familiarity with ChatGPT.

The object of education is to prepare the young to educate themselves throughout their lives. – Robert M. Hutchins

Never has this quote been so fitting to the education landscape. Recent advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) have become the center of many academic conversations in the education world. While there are evident challenges when adopting AI in education (such as potential systemic biases in the data collection and/or processing, transparency, and fairness, to name a few), there is ongoing research within academia (e.g. Holmes et al., 2021; Nguyen, Ngo, Hong, Dang, & Nguyen, 2023), and support at a global level as stated by UNESCO (2023), that propels both academics and industry partners to find solutions to enforce ethical guidelines for AI systems to better align with societal values. Despite these concerns, at a broad level, the application of AI in education is still considered to be an unprecedented phenomenon (Becker et al., 2018), and is being rapidly adopted across various part of pedagogy (Hwang, Xie, Wah, & Gašević, 2020). More specifically in the context of ChatGPT, a recent review by İpek, Gözümlü, Papadakis, and Kallogiannakis (2023) highlights how widely ChatGPT has already been integrated into the field of education. Not only has ChatGPT demonstrated capabilities in conducting literature reviews, paraphrasing, and generating complex and deep answers for exams (Bishop, 2023; Choi, Hickman, Monahan, & Schwarcz, 2023; Duong &

Solomon, 2023; Pavlik, 2023; Rudolph, Tan, & Tan, 2023), but it also plays a huge role in *assisting* students in their learning experience, by personalizing (Rudolph, Tan, & Tan, 2023; Zhai, 2022), and helping them study (Bishop, 2023; Firat, 2023).

Furthermore, the unique ability of ChatGPT to mimic human conversations (OpenAI/ChatGPT, 2023) creates even more opportunities for integration in education – especially in a sales curriculum. Sales courses often involve sales call role plays, and/or selling related conversational practice exercises. In this paper, we propose a ChatGPT-based learning exercise that can assist students in role play preparation. During the activity, we aim to familiarize students with the use of ChatGPT and train them to use it in practice role play scenarios. In doing so, we contribute to the marketing education literature in three ways. First, we add to the growing literature of adopting ChatGPT as an educational tool by extending it to the marketing discipline. To the best of our knowledge, the use of ChatGPT within a marketing curriculum is in its very early stages. We add a unique pedagogical tool that is simple to incorporate within existing marketing courses. Second, by providing a systematic hands-on practice opportunity using ChatGPT, we create a future-oriented education experience for all students, providing instruction on a powerful tool that will help them in their future

careers. Third, we provide a clear blueprint for adoption of ChatGPT in sales education. Specifically, within the sales domain, we provide guidance on how to use ChatGPT as an effective tool for students to practice their sales skills. The next few sections elaborate on the details of the pedagogical innovation and the student outcomes thereof.

ChatGPT: Our New Friend in a Sales Curriculum

The proposed activity provides a positive spin on how to use ChatGPT in the classroom. While many faculty are focused on how to ban ChatGPT from use in their classrooms or how to detect it in student writing (Jimenez, 2023), this exercise follows the advice of the New York Times article “Don’t Ban Chat GPT in Schools. Teach With It” (Roose, 2023). Specifically, this exercise encourages students to use ChatGPT as a tool to prepare for upcoming conversations (e.g., as a buyer of a product, or in a more nuanced sales call role play) and to explore different paths that sales conversation may take. This exercise utilizes ChatGPT as an asset to further encourage students’ learning while using it as a practice and preparation tool.

Marketers are challenged to learn the latest technologies and to use popular tools to improve their work. With the sudden popularity of ChatGPT, there are fears some marketing jobs may be eliminated due to myopic views that ChatGPT can generate content and fulfill needs related to writing and social media marketing (Verma & De Vynck, 2023). For marketers to remain successful in their roles, they need to know how to strategically utilize artificial intelligence and tools such as ChatGPT as a means for improving their work and output. Today’s marketing students need that skill too, regardless of whether they will be working in social media management, communications, sales, or strategy. In particular, students in all marketing courses can use ChatGPT to learn how to boost the effectiveness of their work. In the next section, we outline the approach we used to introduce students to ChatGPT by having them evaluate its effectiveness as a sales training tool. This is accomplished by having students ask ChatGPT to sell them a pen and then to follow a set of specific instructions to help them use the tool to prepare for an elaborate sales call role play. A blueprint with instructions for assigning this to students is included in the appendix. As presented, this exercise aided marketing students in strategically using ChatGPT to plan a conversation, foster a deeper dialogue, and practice conversations with several types of customers in a variety of contexts. Evidence of student feedback supports that this exercise improved students’ reported ability to use ChatGPT,

their familiarity with using ChatGPT, and helped in developing their sales skills.

Outlining the ChatGPT Activity Innovation

Planning the Activity

One of the benefits of ChatGPT (and other AI chatbots) is its versatility, as it can be implemented at various points in a semester. We use the “sell me this pen” prompt as it is very basic and can be a great way to introduce the basics of good and bad sales. Using this simple in-class activity, instructors can demonstrate the differences between feature-dumping and asking questions to gauge why a prospect might want to buy a product. Students can engage with ChatGPT to try both methods and compare the results of each interaction to see how it impacts the sales conversation. AI chatbots can also be used by students to prepare for other role playing scenarios during the semester. Students can insert details of the role play into ChatGPT and then prompt it with questions to practice asking questions and responding to potential objections. Additionally, they can prompt ChatGPT with questions of how to develop an overall sales strategy while preparing for a role play.

The proposed activity can be delivered in one class session. First, students are introduced to ChatGPT and are given information on how to interact with the tool. The interface of ChatGPT relies on users to input text to elicit a response from the chatbot. Included in the instructions document was a guide on how best to interact with the chatbot, developed by the authors (these prompt instructions, along with the complete assignment are included at the end of this article in the appendix). These text interactions are referred to as prompt engineering – “instructions or questions given to a computer in natural language that will give the best possible results” (Dictionary, n.d.). Students were then given prompts to engage with the chatbot, including “sell me this pen” and “help me prepare for a role play.” They were then able to create their own prompts to continue each sales conversation. Students completed both a pre- and post-survey as part of the exercise.

Using the framework of Bloom’s taxonomy, the learning objectives of this activity are to assist students in understanding the benefits of using ChatGPT, to apply the program as a tool for practicing role play skills, and to analyze its effectiveness as a role play aid (Anderson et al., 2001; Bloom, Englehart, Furst, Hill, & Krathwohl, 1956). The proposed exercise provides an option to assist faculty with challenges they face to provide scalable tools for practicing and delivering role

plays. The flexibility of ChatGPT allows for students to practice with a variety of buyer types, by prompting the chatbot to act in certain ways (adding only so much variety when students practice with each other (limited knowledge as the buyer) and by providing additional support beyond their professor or fellow students, who may not vary their buyer personas to provide sufficient role play training. Specifically, this paper seeks to explore two research questions (RQs):

RQ 1: Can a ChatGPT-based exercise help students' general usage of ChatGPT as a tool?

RQ 2: Can ChatGPT be a tool to improve students' specific learning about sales skills?

Novelty of the ChatGPT Activity

After an extensive review of the literature, the authors are not aware of any papers published in the academic marketing pedagogy research focused on incorporating ChatGPT into the marketing classroom. This paper provides an innovative way to take a traditional exercise such as the sales call role play – which is established in the literature as an effective and worthwhile skill-building experience for the sales classroom (Carroll, 2006; Dugan & Lee, 2023; Mani, Kothandaraman, Kashyap, & Ashnai, 2016; Widmier, Loe, & Selden, 2007) – and modernize it to help students practice their skills in a creative manner using the latest technology. Conducting this exercise during class allows all students to get customized interactions based on what they put into ChatGPT, rather than observing one student interact with their professor and then discussing the dialogue as a group. When participating in role play scenarios using artificial intelligence, the student can participate in a wide variety of scenarios, allowing them to adapt their unique conversations accordingly. This interactive opportunity allows them to practice sales calls without relying on another person's schedule or level of interest. It also assists in preparing them for a more traditional in-person or virtual role play where they interact in real time with a live buyer.

Utilizing ChatGPT for role plays is an innovative way to familiarize students with the tool and to facilitate their usage in an interesting and productive way. After completing this exercise, students are empowered by their new skill for maximizing the output of ChatGPT. This approach is novel in two ways, both in general to demonstrate how to learn a new technology and specifically as a role play aid. Additionally, it allows faculty to confront fears they

may have as ChatGPT and chatbots grow popularity. Specific to a sales class, this exercise helps role play training by allowing students to practice these skills at convenient times without requiring direct intervention from the professor. Additionally, students can use ChatGPT to practice role playing with buyers of different personalities, motivations, and goals. Traditional role play training is limited by both time and effort; they take between 15 and 30 minutes and are reliant on the buyer to be properly engaged for it to be worthwhile. It is important for the buyer in the role play to be able to “play” different roles, such as focusing on price or acting in a rushed manner, in order to mimic real-life sales scenarios (Widmier, Loe, & Selden, 2007).

Effectiveness of the ChatGPT Activity in Delivering Marketing Education

This pedagogical innovation is effective in delivering marketing education in multiple ways by: (1) creating a more future-oriented education experience for all students, and (2) creating a clear blueprint for adoption of ChatGPT in sales education. First, while ChatGPT is already making inroads into the browsing experience of undergraduates and graduates (whether for academic purposes or not), not every student is familiar, and/or confident in using this technology to its best potential for learning. For instance, students indicated a wide range of familiarity and ability to use ChatGPT prior to the introduction of the innovation. Using a structured assignment to teach ChatGPT in class led to an increase in positive feelings and perceived confidence toward the technology. The innovation activity introduced in this paper is also well-timed, as it responds to the call from Protopapa and Plangger (2023) on exploring educational technology (like ChatGPT) in delivering inclusive marketing education and İpek et al.'s review of integrating ChatGPT in the classroom (2023). This innovation provides evidence of how ChatGPT can be adopted within a marketing curriculum, specifically in teaching sales skills. Students learn to finetune their prompts as they interact with ChatGPT in a sales conversation that is structured like a sales role play. While sales faculty currently adopt the use of sales role play techniques with professional buyers and/or faculty (or students) serving as a buyer, implementation or logistical issues tend to arise from time to time (Dixon & Lindsey-Warren, 2018; Pelletier & Hopkins, 2018; Saavedra Torres & Rawal, 2021). Utilizing ChatGPT as a pedagogical tool in teaching the sales skills

necessary for role playing may help alleviate some of these issues faced by the sales faculty. In the next sections, we present more details on the testing of the innovation and outcomes.

Assessment of the ChatGPT Innovation

Sample and Measures

Thirty undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in professional selling classes at a Midwestern university participated in the study. Data was collected before and after the ChatGPT exercise via online surveys administered in Qualtrics. The exercise was given during in-person class sessions, with students being informed that the results would be used to assess ChatGPT's effectiveness as a sales curriculum innovation. Students reported on general measures of ChatGPT such as "familiarity with ChatGPT" and "ability to use ChatGPT" in the first survey before the ChatGPT exercises were introduced. After the students used ChatGPT in the sales exercises, they reported on the same measures again (i.e. familiarity and ability), in addition to more questions on the effectiveness of ChatGPT in practicing their sales skills and preparing for a sales role play.

Results on General ChatGPT Usage

To test our initial set of research questions regarding students' general experience with ChatGPT, we asked them questions on ability and familiarity. Our first question was on ability (*Does this innovation improve students' ability to use ChatGPT?*). Students were asked to rate their ability to use ChatGPT on a scale of 1 to 100 before (pre-) and after (post-)the innovation exercise. Mean scores of ability from the posttest data were compared to the pretest data using summary independent sample *t*-test. Participants reported a higher ability to use ChatGPT in the posttest ($M = 68.57$, $SD = 28.02$), significantly different from the ability reported in the pre-test ($M = 48.96$, $SD = 32.12$), $t(55) = -2.46$, $p = .017$. The second question was to check for improvement in familiarity (*Does this innovation improve students' familiarity with ChatGPT?*). Students rated their familiarity with ChatGPT on a scale of 1 to 100 in the pre- and post-survey. Means from the post-familiarity data showed that students rated a higher level of familiarity with ChatGPT after

the innovation (posttest familiarity $M = 67.00$, $SD = 25.34$), which is significantly different from that reported in the pre-data (pretest familiarity $M = 48.89$, $SD = 28.73$), $t(55) = -2.53$, $p = .014$. Table 1 illustrates the results.

Furthermore, qualitative comments from the posttest survey support these findings. Students responded on an open-ended question, "What did you find to be helpful in this project?" with the following answers:

- "To learn how to use chat GPT effectively."
- "Learning to use the tool and write more effective questions."
- "Practicing using ChatGPT gives students experience in using the system. I now feel confident in my ability to use the AI and the type of prompts I need to enter."
- "I found it helpful to get a basic understand of how ChatGPT works, as well as to see what it is capable of doing."

Together, these results support RQ1 that this pedagogical innovation does improve students' general disposition toward ChatGPT.

Results on ChatGPT Usage to Help in Sales Education

Relevant to the second research question specific to sales (*Does this innovation help students in developing their sales skills?*), two questions were examined. First, we wanted to know if students' level of reported familiarity with ChatGPT after the innovation could help them in practicing sales skills using ChatGPT. To measure this, in addition to the familiarity question, we asked the students the following: *How effective is ChatGPT in helping you practice basic sales skills?* (where 0 = not effective; 10 = very effective). SPSS version 29 was used to test the linear regression equation to determine if familiarity with ChatGPT, as reported in the posttest, helped the students' effectiveness in practicing sales skills. A simple linear regression was calculated to predict the "effectiveness to practice basic sales skills" based on "post-test familiarity with ChatGPT." A significant regression equation was found ($F(1,28) = 4.913$, $p = .035$), with an R^2 of 0.149.

Table 1. Innovation effectiveness on general usage of ChatGPT.

Measures	Pre- Mean (SD)	Post- Mean (SD)	<i>t</i> -test	<i>p</i> -value
Rate your ability in using ChatGPT (1 to 100)	48.96 (32.12)	68.57 (28.02)	-2.46	0.017
What is your familiarity with ChatGPT (1 to 100)	48.89 (28.73)	67.00 (25.34)	-2.53	0.014

Table 2. Innovation effectiveness on sales specific pedagogy using ChatGPT.

<i>How effective is ChatGPT in helping you practice basic sales skills</i>	Regression Results	β	p-value
Explanatory variable 1: Familiarity with ChatGPT (post innovation)	$F(1,28) = 4.913$	0.386	0.035
Explanatory variable 2: Ability with ChatGPT (post innovation)	$F(1,28) = 6.108$	0.037	0.020

Students reported a greater effectiveness to practice basic sales skills based on their increasing levels of familiarity with using ChatGPT ($\beta = 0.386$, $p = .035$). Second, we wanted to know if students' level of reported ability with ChatGPT after the innovation impacts the effectiveness to practice sales skills using ChatGPT. To test this, we conducted a linear regression equation to determine if posttest ability with ChatGPT helped the students' effectiveness in practicing sales skills. A simple linear regression was calculated to predict "effectiveness to practice basic sales skills" based on "post-test ability with ChatGPT." A significant regression equation was found ($F(1,28) = 6.108$, $p = .020$), with an R^2 of 0.179. Students reported a greater effectiveness to practice basic sales skills based on increasing levels of ability with using ChatGPT ($\beta = 0.037$, $p = .020$). Together these results support our RQ2, that the pedagogical innovation does improve students' specific learning about sales skills. Table 2 illustrates the results.

Some qualitative comments from the post survey further support these findings. Students responded on an open-ended question "How beneficial was this project in practicing sales skills?" with the following words:

- "This was beneficial by showing what not to do in sales: feature-bombing. It was evident that it was the one sales skill it expressed and showed no interest in the buyer's needs."
- "This was beneficial to generating objections and how the other side would answer questions or ask questions."
- "As a person with no sales background, I find it is pretty helpful in preparing the sales script for me. It has shed light on how to effectively communicate with customers, offering not just examples and feedback, but also guidance on how to approach their perspective. This has enabled me to gain a clearer understanding of their needs and preferences before making a sale."
- "It was really helpful when building me a script for the sale."

Together, these results support our RQ2, that the ChatGPT exercise helped students practice their sales skills.

Challenges in Adopting ChatGPT in a Curriculum

While the exercise was deemed beneficial by the students, there are a number of issues to consider when introducing and using ChatGPT (or other chatbots) for classroom activities. First, the technology is still new to the market, leading to questions around ChatGPT's reliability and bias. When many users are on the site, users of the free version (as of August 2023) are more likely to see an "at capacity" message, meaning that they are unable to use the tool until the number of users decreases (Leong, 2023). Additionally, language model data gathering algorithms, which includes ChatGPT, are prone to bias and can "create unfair discrimination and representational and material harm by perpetuating stereotypes and social biases" (Weidinger et al., 2021). Educators who consider creating activities for chatbots (e.g., ChatGPT, Microsoft's Bing Chat, Google's Bard) may also wish to develop a more general exercise that isn't dependent on a specific platform, given the uncertain nature of an industry that is poised to change in the coming years. Additionally, the exercise is only as good as the information provided by the student. ChatGPT's results are only as good as the prompts submitted by the user. More descriptive prompts will yield better answers, while basic prompts may elicit simple answers that won't spur conversation between the student and the chatbot. A final limitation is the information on which ChatGPT builds; as of December 2023, ChatGPT informs users at the start that it is using information only as new as January 2022.

Future ChatGPT Adaptability Across Marketing Courses

While the current paper focuses on using ChatGPT as a role playing tool for a sales class, there are many possibilities to bring chatbot technology to the classroom. For example, in an introduction to marketing class, professors can use ChatGPT for marketing plan projects. During class in real time, they can type in their business idea into the chatbot – by using the prompt "can you write a business plan for a coffee shop for a marketing class?" – and then have students provide pros and cons of the results, along with ideas for what customers might think about the potential business. As

an individual assignment students can replicate this exercise by using the same prompt to create a business plan for a coffee shop for a marketing class and then use the prompt “can you provide an example of a business description for a coffee shop, building on the above response” to produce a more detailed analysis that students can analyze. In doing so, students may be able to learn how to use the right prompts in the right sequence to achieve their objectives. Building on this, students can play the role of marketing consultants by having ChatGPT create different plans or content based on a prompt and critique the results using course concepts.

Similarly, ChatGPT can be an effective activity generator for a variety of topics to bring into the classroom. For a discussion on marketing ethics, students and faculty can type the prompt “what are examples of unethical marketing companies” plus “and data,” “and sales,” or “and advertising” (to name a few) to provide answers that spur conversations and additional activities. A similar approach can be taken with any topic in the marketing curriculum, demonstrating how ChatGPT can be used to both initiate and build on marketing concepts to stimulate class activities. Other specific examples are that students in a marketing research course could use ChatGPT to simulate customer interactions for market research, students in a promotions course could use ChatGPT to generate creative marketing copy for products or services, or students can input draft ad copies and have ChatGPT provide suggestions for optimization.

Outside of the classroom, students can use ChatGPT as a tool for interview preparation. Prompts such as “what are questions I can use to prepare for an internship interview” can help students begin the process. They can then practice an interview through prompts like “you are interviewing me for a sales internship. ask me a question.” The student can then interact with the chatbot as an interviewee, answering the question and asking for feedback on the response, which can include ways to improve on the answer given by the student.

Concluding Thoughts

While ChatGPT is poised to be a common tool that students will use, it is important to note that with its current capabilities, ChatGPT is not expected to replace in-person pedagogical approaches by professors. For instance, interacting with ChatGPT within an introduction to marketing course does not replace the necessity to interact with the faculty. Rather, it provides a blueprint of thoughts that students can then brainstorm and work on, along with inputs from their faculty. Similarly, the concerns with biases within the algorithm

behind ChatGPT may lead to issues of fairness and discrimination. Faculty’s active involvement as students navigate this new world of AI-driven education should help mitigate this issue. Last but not the least, context and personal connection with faculty is something that ChatGPT is not capable of replicating. A high-involvement experiential learning opportunity for students in the context that is relevant to the students’ learning goals, and the bonding with an instructor via trust-based interactions, creates value for the students, far beyond the AI-aided conversational aspect of ChatGPT. While AI-driven educational tools like ChatGPT are here to stay, they are at best one of the future-oriented tools in the pedagogical toolkit of a professor.

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