IJCRT.ORG ISSN : 2320-2882

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Impact Of AI On Demand Forecasting And Inventory Management In Business-To-Consumer Industries

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to examine how Artificial Intelligence (AI)-driven demand forecasting and inventory management influence operational job roles, decision-making, and collaboration in Business-to-Consumer (B2C) industries. B2C operations customarily focused on consumer intimacy and efficient supply chain execution; today B2C operations require AI-based demand forecasting and inventory optimization to respond to the market in real-time. Using comparative qualitative research on secondary material and case studies across companies in pharmaceuticals, e-commerce, FMCG and retail, the paper examines such operational changes. Literature shows that AI can improve forecast accuracy, minimize stockouts and shift operational tasks from manual forecasting to interpretation of algorithmic output. Case studies of Novartis, Amazon, Unilever and Walmart demonstrate the effectiveness of AI in optimizing demand forecasting and inventory management despite difficulties such as data integration, compatibility with legacy systems and suspicion by managerial teams. The overall trend highlights a shift towards automated, AI-based forecasting with human control, showing that successful AI integration requires attention to technical, cultural and organizational issues to achieve sustainable value in a changing B2C environment.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Inventory management, Demand Forecasting, B2C Operations, Supply Chain Management

1. Introduction

Business-to-Consumer (B2C) activities are built upon the idea of supplying goods and services directly to the final user, and, in this case, it is important to align the business with the consumer and market trends to achieve success (Tuominen, 2012). Traditionally, the B2C companies concentrated on establishing trust and a competitive edge based on intimacy in relations with consumers, localization, and effective supply chain management. However, with the emergence of increasing digital channels and globalization, the operational breadth has widened, necessitating businesses to mix localization strategies with those of higher levels of demand in the market (Chandramana, 2022). Following the case with consumer co-operatives, placing a lot of premium on locality and member-based governance not only assists in gleaning the preferences of the customers, but also in constituting both the strategic management of operations in line with the various consumer demands (Tuominen, 2012), thereby laying the traditional operational foundation upon which recent technological transformations are now emerging.

Over the past few years, building on this traditional foundation, B2C operations have been redefined by technological innovations with key contributions being the use of AI-based demand forecasting and inventory optimization that help in improving the accuracy of forecasting, minimizing the use of excess information and responding in real-time to market changes (Kumar et al., 2024). Industrial giants such as Amazon and Walmart have used AI to dynamically adjust the inventory and simplify the supply chains, leading to increased customer satisfaction and efficiency of operations (Musani, 2023). Such transformation has brought into focus how B2C operations are moving toward using advanced data analytics and machine learning to compete in volatile markets (Mediavilla et al., 2022), which is a drastic shift compared to the traditional, geometrical models of inventory and demand planning, thus highlighting the need to revisit the core operational pillars of forecasting and inventory management.

Inventory management and demand forecasting are essential pillars for achieving efficiency in B2C operations, particularly in light of this technological transition (Harahap et al., 2025). Accurate forecasting helps determine the future demand of customers based on the past, statistical analysis, and market research, enabling businesses to align the inventory to the current demand (Yusof, 2024). This coordination minimizes the chances of stockouts as well as inventory overages, which eventually saves operating expenses and enhances customer satisfaction. Exponential smoothing, regression models, and bootstrapping methods are most effective in resolving the problems caused by fluctuating market demands, stochastic demand rates, and very long lead times (Alzubaidi, 2020). These techniques allow businesses to improve the performance of supply chains and aid in proactive decision-making in dynamic markets, thereby reinforcing operational resilience.

Better resource allocation, less obsolescence, and service levels are other results of effective inventory management (Rajendra & Raj, 2025), further strengthening competitive positioning in B2C industries. Forecasting enables firms to predict the changes in the consumption volume, cope with the lead time variation, and respond to the changing market conditions (Ogunyankinnu et al., 2024). With the correct demand forecasts incorporated into the planning, the organizations will be able to guarantee the availability of the products, enhance the delivery schedules, and retain the loyalty of the customers. As an example, Walmart has achieved a much more accurate inventory with the help of AI-powered forecasting models that make the company much faster in responding to alterations in demand and reducing imbalances in inventory (Vengal et al., 2023). With B2C industries becoming more complex, demand forecasting and inventory management remain a vital determinant of operational efficiency and competitive advantage (Uche Nweje & Taiwo, 2025), which has consequently encouraged wider AI adoption across operational domains.

In recent years, as a continuation of these operational improvements, B2C activities have changed significantly through the adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) especially in demand prediction, inventory audits, and customer relationship management (CRM) (Chatterjee et al., 2024). The industry giants such as Amazon and Walmart have used AI to manipulate inventory, forecast customer demand with a higher level of precision and optimize its supply chains to deliver goods at a faster rate and satisfy the customer base (Virtasant, 2024). On the same note, Alexa AI-driven CRM systems can create targeted marketing, suggest products, and boost retention using large amounts of both structured and unstructured customer data, including purchase history, social media activity, and browsing behavior (Unilever, 2024). To give an example, the Einstein AI created by Salesforce allows predictive analysis and automated insight, so that B2C companies can customize their approaches in real time. Figure 1 therefore shows that AI in inventory management facilitates costs savings, demand forecasting, real-time insights and smooth supply chains to assist firms to become efficient and minimize risks, illustrating the broader operational implications of AI integration (LeewayHertz, 2023).

The theoretical frameworks, such as the Contingency Theory or the Dynamic Capability View (DCV), also support the increase of AI in B2C because these frameworks emphasize that the strategy of AI should be synced with the internal structures and driven by the forces operating on the external market (Li et al., 2021), thereby providing a conceptual lens to understand these developments. Research findings reveal that the quality information utilized, the homogeneity of the system, and general organizational readiness have been established to be significant in the success or failure of AI-CRM implementation in the B2C scenarios (Chatterjee et al., 2024). According to Chatterjee et al. (2024), an IDC survey revealed that 28% of organizations have implemented AI-integrated CRM systems, while 41% intend to adopt them within the next two years. A combination of these examples characterizes how AI is becoming a competitive driver of personalization, operational efficiency and competitiveness in B2C industries, as opposed to a supporting tool, thus setting the stage for examining its organizational implications (Aggarwal & Aggarwal, 2023).

The primary purpose of this research, therefore, is to study the way Artificial Intelligence (AI) is changing the operational roles within the B2C industries by transforming traditional practices into intelligent and data-driven processes (Suman Choudhuri, 2024). As AI technologies like machine learning, data analytics, and automation continue to gain momentum, businesses are incorporating these solutions in the most critical operational processes like inventory management, supply chain coordination, and customer experience (Kaul & Khurana, 2022). Such a transition makes the companies re-think job roles, decision-making authority and job cooperation. To give an illustration, Amazon and Walmart utilized AI in their supply chain to make estimates more accurate and to limit human interaction with it, which demonstrates that AI is gradually becoming a device of regular management (Frazer, 2025), thereby reinforcing the need to analyze its broader organizational impact.

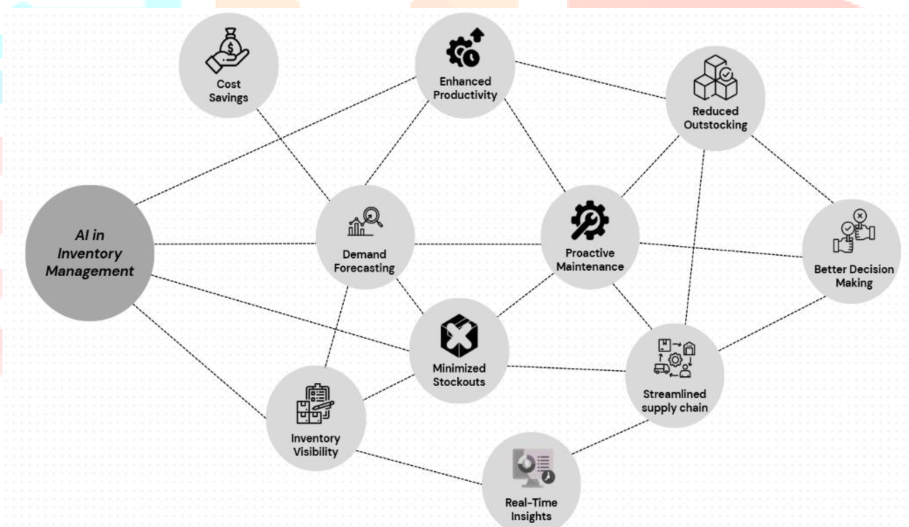

Figure 1: Applications of AI in Inventory Management (**Note:** Adapted from “AI in inventory management: Reducing costs and maximizing profits,” by LeewayHertz, 2023, *Dev Genius.*)

The research examines the affiliation of AI adoption on the operational roles within the B2C industries in an attempt to bridge the disparity existing between the technological implementation and organizational influence, building directly upon the objective outlined above. The research investigates the way supplier, technology provider, and end-user parties collaboratively adapt to AI driven processes, according to the value co-creation conceptual framework (Li et al., 2022). In this light, the paper examines the capabilities of succeeding in AI integration and the threats that it presents to the human aspect of planning, execution, and customer service (Rashid, 2024). By doing this, it adds to the expanding body of research on AI-enabled business transformation and offers practical recommendations to the companies that want to overcome the changing business environment in the B2C sector (Fathima et al., 2024). Accordingly, this study addresses the following research questions:

i. How does AI-driven demand forecasting reshape operational roles in B2C industries?
ii. What operational and strategic impacts does AI adoption create across different B2C sectors?
iii. How do contextual industry factors influence AI implementation outcomes?

2. Related works

The most recent literature has uniformly mentioned the increased use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in demand forecasting and inventory optimization within a variety of industries especially B2C, retail outlets, ERP-based supply chains and e-commerce providers. Machine learning (ML), deep learning, neural networks, reinforcement learning, and large language models (LLMs) are employed to turn traditional inventory planning into consistent, real-time-based, and data-driven. Nweje and Taiwo (2025) report and Kumar et al. (2024) suggest that the accuracy of a forecast, the reduction of out-of-stocks, and optimized inventory turnover can be achieved by using AI to make decisions and collect real-time analytics. According to Rajendra and Raj (2025) and Amosu et al. (2024), in retail, neural networks and predictive analytics not only help control the inventory process but also improve customer satisfaction and operational responsiveness.

Also, AI is transforming the ERP and supply chain significantly. The researchers Choudhuri (2024) and Fathima et al. (2024) proved that the deployment of AI into ERP solutions increases visibility, proactive decision-making, and optimization of logistics. In addition, the review of literature by the authors of the current study published by Mediavilla et al. (2022) categorize and analyze a very large range of possible AI forecasting algorithms and include details concerning the practical use of the algorithms and the process of deciding on support of a specific method. The same applications may apply to SME in which the inventory has become democratized with the adoption of AI in the areas of automation and affordable tools (Al-Amin et al., 2024). These literature reviews give a general and detailed basis of understanding how AI transforms operation planning and inventory efficiency. Building on this overview of technological developments, the following subsection synthesizes the key findings emerging from prior empirical and conceptual studies.

The most recent research has highlighted that AI is an efficient and very accurate method to optimize the process of demand prediction and inventory management. The researchers such as Kumar et al. (2024) and Fathima et al. (2024) point out that AI-enhanced tools can improve the accuracy of forecasts, the level of stockouts, and other overall supply chain dynamics. A shift in operational roles has occurred, as employees now interact with AI systems and focus more on interpreting forecasts generated by algorithms, rather than manually developing them (Ramakrishna et al., 2025; Amosu et al., 2024). Moreover, AI helps to create agility and robustness, especially in Just-in-Time (JIT) stocks, in that deep learning and reinforcement learning algorithms allow organizations to become reactive to changing demand (Ogunyankinnu et al., 2024). The development of AI contributes to the ability to make decisions in real-time in the environment of ERP and e-commerce platforms, increasing demand transparency, as well as inventory alignment (Choudhuri, 2024). Also, when it comes to comparative studies, the need to choose the right AI models is also highlighted, with Mediavilla et al. (2022) saying that the goals and requirements of an industry, the complexity of data, and forecast needs should influence the selection of AI techniques.While these findings establish the operational and performance benefits of AI, it is equally important to examine how these technological changes reshape operational roles in practice. This transition is discussed in the next subsection.

Multiple studies have reported a major change in operational functions because of the demand forecasting and inventory optimization nature of AI. As an illustration, Nweje and Taiwo (2025) described that the supply chain planners no longer indulge in manual forecasting model because of the incorporation of real-time dashboards. In the retail sector, Rajendra and Raj (2025) noted that the demand for inventory control is reduced and the role is likely to go to predictive tools. Similarly, Amosu et al. (2024) observed that stores managers began to rely more on AI-based insights than personal intuition. Ogunyankinnu et al. (2024) discovered that it was a manual schedule that was gradually being replaced by AI timelines in Just-In-Time systems. According to Kumar et al. (2024), an even more significant trend emerged as the forecasting teams could be combined with the data scientists and AI applications to take the responsibilities of operations staff further, becoming tech-sufficient decision-makers and overseers of the systems. Despite the growing body of literature highlighting these transformations, certain conceptual and practical gaps remain, which are identified below.

Although the technological advantages of using AI in terms of forecasting and inventory optimization have been examined in many studies, there is scarce research explaining how the technological advances in terms of operations affect the transition to specific operational roles in B2C companies. As an example, despite both Fathima et al. (2024) and Choudhuri (2024) talking about the importance of AI in ERP, they offer limited insight into how these systems alter the responsibilities of ERP managers beyond general improvements. In the same vein, Al-Amin et al. (2024) dedicate their works to the advantages of AI tools in Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) and logistics, respectively but do not deeply examine the impact on human positions after the implementation of AI tools. This paper aims to address these gaps by offering a specific analysis of the way in which the introduction of AI is turning the operational positions within the B2C segments of the market, changing the skill set and distribution of responsibilities as well as the performance requirements of the new position holders, including planners, managers of inventory, ERP personnel, and decision-makers. The table breaks down recent research into AI in demand forecasting and inventory optimization including techniques applied, main applications, key findings, and changes in the operational roles.

Table 1: Overview of AI Techniques, Applications, and Findings in Demand Forecasting and Inventory Optimization

Source	Paper Title	AI Techniques/Models Used	Key Industry/Application Area	Key Findings	Observed Trends in Operational Role
Nweje and Taiwo (2025)	Leveraging Artificial Intelligence for predictive supply chain management, focus on how AI-driven tools are revolutionizing demand forecasting and inventory optimization	Machine learning, advanced analytics, real-time decision-making	Supply chain (global)	AI tools improve forecast accuracy, reduce stockouts, and enhance resilience.	Planners use real-time dashboards, shifting from manual forecasting.
Rajendra & Raj (2025)	Cost Reduction Strategies in Retail: Implementing AI-Driven Demand Forecasting for Inventory Optimization	Machine learning (ML), predictive analytics	Retail	Reduces cost, improves cash flow, enhances responsiveness.	Traditional inventory control roles replaced by predictive tools.
Amosu et al. (2024)	AI-driven demand forecasting: Enhancing inventory management and customer satisfaction	Neural networks, ML, external factor integration	Retail, Inventory	Boosts customer satisfaction through better forecasting.	Store managers now rely on AI-generated insights over intuition.

Source	Paper Title	AI Techniques/Models Used	Key Industry/Application Area	Key Findings	Observed Trends in Operational Role
Ogunyankinnu et al. (2024)	AI-Powered Demand Forecasting for Enhancing JIT Inventory Models	Deep learning, reinforcement learning, time-series models	JIT systems	Improves agility, reduces cost through accurate forecasting.	JIT planners replaced manual schedules with AI-driven timelines.
Kumar et al. (2024)	AI-enhanced inventory and demand forecasting: Using AI to optimize inventory management and predict customer demand	ML, Natural Language Processing (NLP), Computer Vision, Robotic Process Automation (RPA)	Inventory Management	Improves turnover, planning accuracy, and efficiency.	Forecasting teams integrated with data scientists and AI tools.
Ramakrishna et al. (2025)	Dynamic Inventory Management Using AI	Machine learning, time-series forecasting, Reinforcement Learning (RL)	Dynamic Inventory	Adapts to real-time data, cuts costs, boosts responsiveness.	Roles have shifted to AI system monitoring and analytics review.
Al-Amin et al. (2024)	AI-enabled intelligent inventory and supply chain optimization platform for SMEs	ML, predictive analytics, automation	SMEs, supply chain	Reduces cost, improves forecasting, supports decision-making.	SME owners use AI tools for stock control instead of spreadsheets.
Fathima et al. (2024)	Impact of AI-based predictive analytics on demand forecasting in ERP systems: A Systematic Literature Review	Predictive analytics, ML	ERP systems	Improves accuracy, enables real-time forecasting.	ERP managers shifted from reactive to proactive AI-driven decisions.
Choudhuri (2024)	AI - Driven Supply Chain Optimization: Enhancing Inventory Management, Demand Forecasting, and	AI in ERP, quantitative modeling	ERP systems, Indian supply chains	Boosts forecasting and logistics efficiency.	ERP staff manage AI modules for planning and logistics workflows.

Source	Paper Title	AI Techniques/Models Used	Key Industry/Application Area	Key Findings	Observed Trends in Operational Role
	Logistics within ERP Systems				
Mediavilla et al. (2022)	Review and analysis of artificial intelligence methods for demand forecasting in supply chain management	Clustering, classification of AI models	Supply chain management	Supports optimal method selection for forecasting.	Analysts now evaluate and implement specialized AI forecasting tools.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Type

The present research incorporates a comparative industry-based approach to explain the use and efficiency of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in demand anticipation and inventory optimization within the four main B2C industries, namely, pharmaceuticals, e-commerce, Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG), and retail. The aim will be to evaluate the performance of AI-dependent models in different industry settings, identify the best practices and evaluate the degree of transformation of the operations as a result of implementing AI. Within the pharmaceutical industry, AI is becoming an important tool to deal with demand fluctuation issues, regulatory considerations, and product expiration. **The research by Deekshitha et al. (2025) demonstrates the consistency of hybrid forecasting models such as Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) and Seasonal Autoregressive Integrated Moving Average (SARIMA) in achieving greater accuracy for sensitive inventory.** Deep learning, Extreme Gradient Boosting (XGBoost), and ensemble models are used in e-commerce to allow tracking the demand changes in real-time and facilitate the process of making decisions in warehouses about inventory (Jain et al., 2024). The advantages of such platforms include the fact that AI will be able to handle such large amounts of data about customers and enhance responsiveness in the supply chain.

FMCG is an industry of fast-moving stock and low margins, so it applies a decision tree and statistical algorithm to solve inventory management fulfilling short cycles and minimizing holding costs and still serving against service targets (Suwignjo et al., 2023). The innovation of AI in the field of retailing improves store-level demand planning, shelf-space, and replenishment programs. According to Amosu et al. (2024) and Mediavilla et al. (2022), the AI-CRM systems in predicting customer demand and enhancing operational agility can be based on the use of neural networks and clustering. Overall, these studies demonstrate that there is a change in operational roles: instead of manual forecasting, there is now AI-guided, data-based decision-making, during which employees are expected to analyze forecasts produced by an AI system (Ramakrishna, 2025). The table describes the application of AI techniques, especially in demand forecasting and inventory management in different B2C sectors, where the techniques have had impacts, including increased accuracy, lower costs, and increased personalization.

Table 2: Comparative Analysis of AI Techniques, Applications, and Operational Impact across B2C Industries

Source	Industry	AI Techniques Used	Key Applications	Observed Operational Impact
Deekshitha et al. (2025)	Pharmaceutical	LSTM, SARIMA (hybrid models)	Seasonal demand forecasting, sensitive inventory planning	Improved forecast accuracy, reduced wastage, better expiry management
Jain et al. (2024)	E-commerce	Deep learning, XGBoost, ensemble models	Real-time demand tracking, automated inventory	Reduced stockouts, faster fulfillment
Suwignjo et al. (2023)	FMCG	Decision trees, statistical forecasting	Short-cycle inventory management	Reduced holding costs, faster replenishment
Amosu et al. (2024); Mediavilla et al. (2022)	Retail	Neural networks, clustering, AI-CRM tools	Shelf-level forecasting, customer-targeted inventory	Greater personalization, higher efficiency

3.2 Approach

The study adopts a qualitative research method that involves the use of secondary data analysis and the case study approach to explore the aspect of the transformation of job roles in B2C companies in this era of AI-based demand forecasting and inventory optimization. The topical validity of findings is ensured through a systematic review of the existing academic literature, peer-reviewed studies, white papers issued by companies, and market studies, which makes it possible to summarize the emergence of AI in the forecasting and inventory management process and its real-life implementation (Rashid, 2024; Kaul & Khurana, 2022). This way, the study can exploit reputable, current, and cross-industry/organizational evidence, thereby improving the academic strength and applicability of acquired research.

In order to translate this knowledge into valuable managerial knowledge, the study contains the detailed qualitative analysis of published case studies that demonstrate how the integration of AI changes job descriptions, the daily workflow, and the decision-making authority of iterative teams in the supply chain and operations management (Suwignjo et al., 2023; Ma et al., 2024). The cases point out particular changes of operations, e.g., redesigning job functions when projected activities are handled by machines, altering workflows within the processes with incorporated AI dashboards, and adjusting to decision-making between human managers and AI-driven systems. This has been done by analyzing how firms in various industries have managed to power through these changes, noting down the common pitfalls and drivers of success that affect the success of use of AI in making inventory-related decisions (Ma et al., 2024).

As much as practicable, this qualitative discussion is supported by secondary data, i.e., pertinent quantitative information, e.g., forecast error rates, cost savings, service level enhancements, and inventory turnover ratios as presented in the literature reviewed (Rashid, 2024; Kaul & Khurana, 2022). A combination of qualitative comparative analysis with quantitative research correlation will allow the researcher to present balanced and actionable results, answering the questions of operational and strategic implications of implementing AI in demand planning and inventory management. This combined methodology would make the findings of the research academically sound and organizationally helpful to other organizations in regard to either implementing or optimizing use of AI-driven supply chains (Yusof, 2024).

3.3 Criteria for Industry Selection

The selection of industries for this research follows three explicit criteria to ensure that the analysis remains relevant, credible, and comparable. First is to focus on industries that are already in the process of transitioning to digital or are well-known to employ novel practices of AI application. These are some of the industries that can be reasonably selected to witness how AI forecasting and inventory optimization transform operational tasks and decision-making (Rashid, 2024).

The industries chosen were mostly dependent on their strategicity to the research objective and the consistency with the following research questions that were formulated with AI-driven demand forecasting and inventory optimization in B2C settings. The selected industries, which are pharmaceuticals, e-commerce, FMCG, and retail, are unique areas of operation, and the utilization of AI affects the precision of the forecasting, inventory management, and decision-making process in organizations significantly. While the availability of reliable secondary data supported the feasibility of the study.

Third, the study aims to make sure that the industries, which are at various levels of the use of AI, such as early adopters, mature users, and those that are in the transition stage, are covered so that the research could allow making a cross-industry comparison. Based on these criteria, this paper will dwell on four industries, which include FMCG, retail, e-commerce, and the pharmaceutical industry. Combined, these industries present a variety of well-documented examples by showing how AI technologies are changing operational functions within the B2C supply chains (Suwignjo et al., 2023).

4. Industry-Wise Analysis

Case Study 1: Novartis

Novartis is a Swiss pharmaceutical multinational corporation with its headquarters in Basel, Switzerland, which is well-known for the development of drugs and provision of advanced healthcare services. Within a long period of time, Novartis has been strategic to incorporate Artificial Intelligence (AI) in its inventory and procurement systems by aiming at increasing the accuracy of forecasting and efficiencies within its operations. In collaboration with Amazon Web Services (AWS), Novartis developed a procurement platform called the Buying Engine, an AI-based engine that helps the company automate its supply replenishment and consolidate its global procurement activities. The engine undertakes natural language processing (NLP) to normalize the data of the vendor catalogs and forecasts demand at the SKU level, especially of lab supplies and indirect materials using Amazon SageMaker and GluonTS (Mavrodis et al., 2020). This not only simplifies the sourcing decision-making but also the anticipation of the inventory demand to reduce shortages and wastages.

In order to make its AI vision a reality, one key step that Novartis has taken is the introduction of the Buying Engine announced in 2021 as part of one of its in-house digitalization initiatives. The software enables centralized purchasing, improving data in catalogs with the help of NLP and producing forecasts by demand. In the meantime, the Insight Centers are configured as AI-driven command centers to merge real-time analytics to facilitate decision-making throughout the production and logistical processes. Novartis has embarked on these programs which indicate a move towards a digitally connected supply chain, resulting in more operational control, visibility, and flexibility in international locations.

Similar to the above, Novartis envisages savings of approximately 5 per cent year-on-year in procurement spending using the Buying engine as part of its overall digital transformation drive, and its Insight Centers are to improve responsiveness across its supply network (Hale, 2019). Nevertheless, there are still some obstacles. Data quality can be a problem in the forecast reliability, especially in historical sales and seasonality processing. Moreover, the troubles of integrating legacy ERP systems may be an obstacle to the real-time processing of data. One of the limiting factors in operation can be seen as unclear ownership of forecasting power since forecasts made by AI are commonly challenged or overruled by managers in the supply chain who distrust their accuracy and prefer the exclusive nature of their judgment to be exercised (Mavrodis et al., 2020). Our recommendations for improvement include introducing explainable features of AI, enhancing data clean-up pipelines, and increasing communication between machine learning (ML) engineers and operations managers to foster the development of trust and increase the adoption rates of the model. The figure presents the AI-driven buying engine architecture of Novartis that incorporates data ingestion, knowledge base, and data discovery to allow real-time search, recommendations, and inventory optimization.

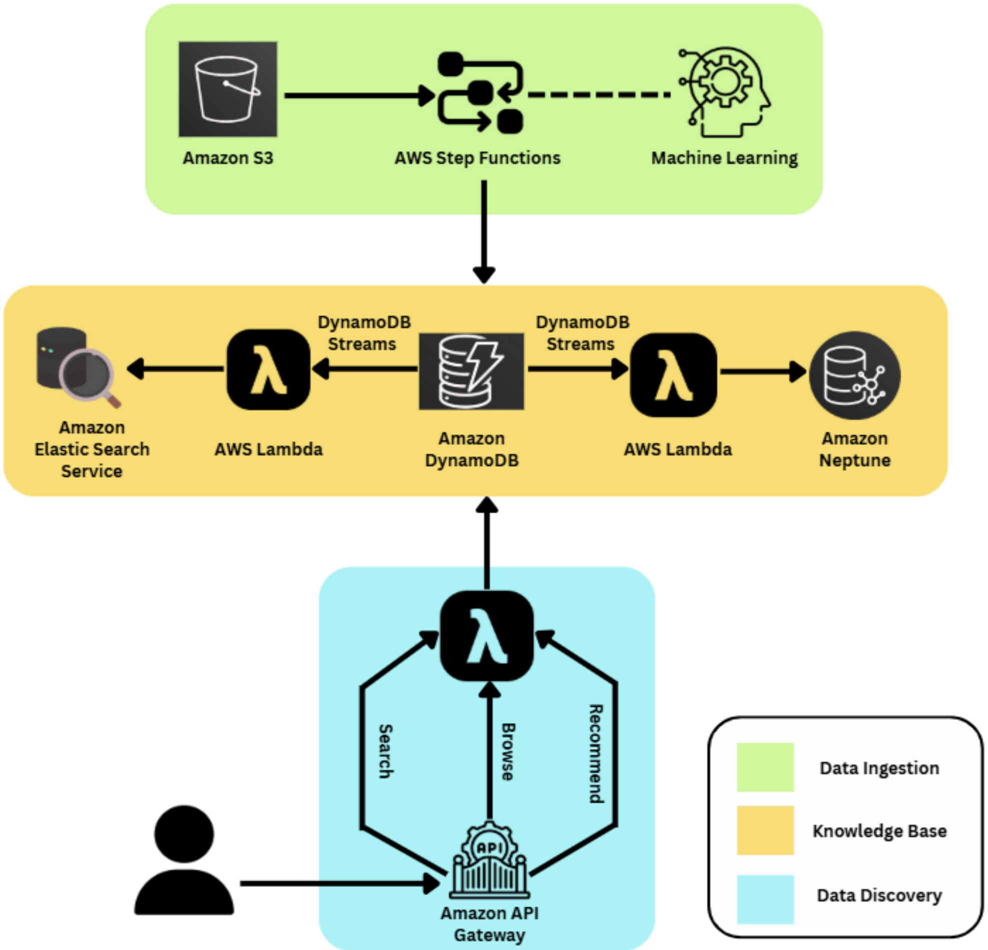

Figure 2: Novartis Buying Engine – System Architecture (Note: Adapted from "How Novartis AG brought SMART into smart procurement with AWS machine learning," by Mavrodis et al., 2020, *AWS Blogs*)

Case study 2 - Amazon

Amazon is the largest e-commerce retailer and cloud service provider that was founded in 1994 by one of the world richest men, Jeff Bezos. With its highly sustainable and complex global supply chain complemented by a fulfilment and sortation hubs, transport network, and the last mile delivery systems, the company operates an intricate supply chain organization. It is much more than just a retailer but stretches into Amazon Web Services (AWS) as well as logistics, streaming, and AI-based innovation. The sheer dimensions of Amazon operation and business need hyper-efficient demand prediction and inventory control because Amazon has to cater to the needs of millions of customers around the world who have different purchasing habits and demands that may not be immediate. In order to sustain such a high level of operations, Amazon employs the latest artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) solutions to almost all areas of its supply chain and warehouse management.

In order to realize its optimum operations, Amazon invested critically in AI-powered forecasting and inventory systems. Using Amazon Forecast, which is a machine learning service, the firm automates the demand planning process by consuming historical sales, promotional calendars, weather trends, and regional information to generate detailed demand forecasts (Amazon Science, 2021; AI Expert Network, 2023). Such predictions are used when automatically creating orders that then result in improved inventory levels and overstocking reduction (Gao, 2025). Moreover, the forecasting systems in use at Amazon have changed in the last 20 years, so that the current ones are more based on complex networks, which can process millions of forecasts per day with great accuracy (Amazon Science, 2021). The company has also implemented generative AIs in mapping out accurate delivery destinations and has created agentic (autonomously handling responsiveness) robots to coordinate shadowing endeavors such as picking and offloading in warehouses (Puzzleheaded-Ad-1754, 2023; Retail Dive, 2024). Such decisions are the sign of the intentional operational position changes the shift at which machines, led by AI, replace the tasks that would be executed by manual labor or relied on the static system. The figure shows the development of Amazon forecasting models, where time series models were used in 2007, up to the current models which include neural networks and transformer based models in 2020

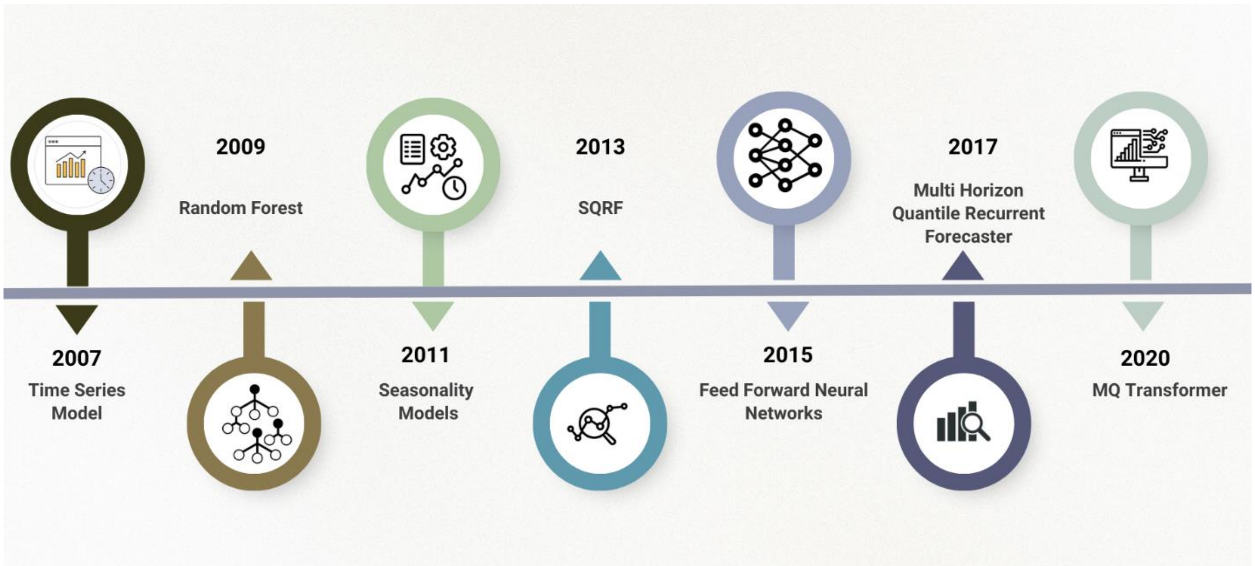

Figure 3: Evolution of Forecasting Models at Amazon (2007–2020) (**Note:** Adapted from "The history of Amazon's forecasting algorithm," by Amazon Science, 2021, *Amazon Science*)

Amazon has severe issues with its forecasts even despite its developments in AI. Another issue that resonates with the third-party merchants is the excessive use of recent sales metrics (30-90 days) on restocking recommendations with disregard to seasonality and issue of product lifecycle significantly contributing to mismatched inventory levels during such high seasons. Moreover, as the data processing grows in complexity, it is also expected to require continuous fine-tuning and enormous cloud resources to be provided, but at the same time, limited capacity of AWS is not always available to support it. To eliminate these drawbacks Amazon can improve its models by adding longer cycles of seasonal demand, signals of user behaviour, and interdependencies across categories. Furthermore, the customization of seller-specific forecasting methods and introducing real-time anomaly detection would help to enhance precision in the inventory, especially during promotions or out of pattern demand patterns. It will be important to ensure that Amazon makes its operations open and transparent with its sellers and operates as a collaborative entity so that the organizational agility achieved with the help of AI can be sustained at scale.

Case study 3 - Unilever

Unilever is a global giant in the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) market with a collection of more than 400 brands in nutrition, hygiene, beauty, and home care categories. Unilever is a company that sells its products in more than 190 markets and ships units of its products in billions of units; therefore, its operations cannot be askew. In a bid to sustain its competitive advantage and guarantee effectiveness in its supply chain globally, Unilever has turned to digital transformation, especially through the application of AI. The scope of the company, its product range, and coverage of various geographies make it one of the obvious candidates of AI-based operations strategy, particularly in demand forecasting, inventory planning, and connectivity with the customers (Unilever, 2024; Law, 2024).

In order to make its supply chain more agile and precise, Unilever has installed AI-driven forecasting and replenishment technology in various markets. One of their major projects is the “Customer Connectivity” project that involves the incorporation of real-time data of Unilever and their retailers that helps them to plan together, get better forecasts, and have smaller inventory cushions. The system operates more than 13B computations per day and has demonstrated enormous success in pilot implementations with some of the largest retailers in the world like Walmart Mexico, placing the invention at 98 percent in-order-availability and a decreased cost of logistics within 1 year (Unilever, 2024; Law, 2024). Besides, Unilever collaborated with AI-related companies such as Cronos and Aera Technology to use AI models to optimize SKU-level sales forecasting to achieve continuous innovation, dynamic decision-making, and a proactive rather than reactive perspective across operations (Cronos AI, 2023; Durak, 2023). The tools have enabled Unilever to monitor carbon emissions, minimize environmental effects, and ensure greater predictability (Estes, 2025; Virtasant, 2024).

Although Unilever is well-developed in terms of the AI integration, it still has certain restrictions. Much of the success of such platforms as Customer Connectivity will rely on data sharing and digitalization of retail partners, which may vary by region and country. The forecasting capability of AI might reduce in fragmented or emerging markets where real-time access to data is not possible. Additionally, although AI is used to carry out most of the forecasting, unusual situations like prompt promotions or world events (e.g. pandemic, geopolitical turmoil) can still warrant manual intervention and elasticity. To mitigate these problems, Unilever can scale the AI-driven processes and channel them into small-size retail and develop cloud-based integrations that can scale the process as well as invest in the models that would combine human elements and AI-driven information to manage the edge-cases. To secure the wider and fairer implementation of its AI systems into the worldwide markets, it will be important to improve transparency, governance, and retailer education.

Case Study 4: Walmart

Walmart, an American-based company, is the largest retailer in the world regarding revenue and maintains a large global supply chain network in its retail stores and virtual provisioning e-commerce systems. The business has turned out to be an expert in using AI to forecast demand and optimize merchandise in the retail industry. Walmart utilizes various artificial intelligence frameworks, including time-series analysis, neural networks, and regression models combined with external information (e.g., the weather, events, social media trends) to produce localized demand prediction of up to 100,000 SKUs (Musani, 2023). These predictions affect automatic replenishment that works by dynamically adapting orders placed at store level in order to minimize stockouts and overstocked goods.

The Data Café is also a very crucial aspect of Walmart's infrastructure, where petabytes of data consisting of point-of-sale (POS), e-commerce, and third-party data get processed. The given platform can be used to create customizable planning interfaces so that different users can make adjustments in the forecasts, track error rates, and conduct backtesting to validate the forecasts (Digital Product Analytics, 2025). The scenario simulation features can also enable the planners to project how the demand will be affected by weather disturbance or a promotional event, and then implement the inventory decisions.

Its operational results are also impressive: according to Walmart, the rate of stockouts went down by 30%, there is a 20–25 percent decrease in duplicative inventory, and the forecast accuracy at several product categories reached over 90 percent (Frazer, 2025). Nonetheless, similarly to Novartis, Walmart also has some implementation challenges. Disjointed data between ERP and POS systems usually makes the integration problematic and slows the update with regard to forecasts. Additionally, a minority of planners have a low level of trust in AI models and they are reluctant to use them unless the system is understandable in its decision-making. Taking into account too many signals of the trends, including on the internet, might cause bias without taking into account anomalies (Virtasant, 2024). To alleviate those fears, Walmart can be advised to implement explainable AI and make more improvements to data pipeline automation as well as the creation and collaboration with planners on models to enhance the usability and acceptance of forecasts. The figure shows that Walmart employs AI to protect anomalies, visual data processing, textual data improvement and prediction and optimization to reinforce the retail operations.

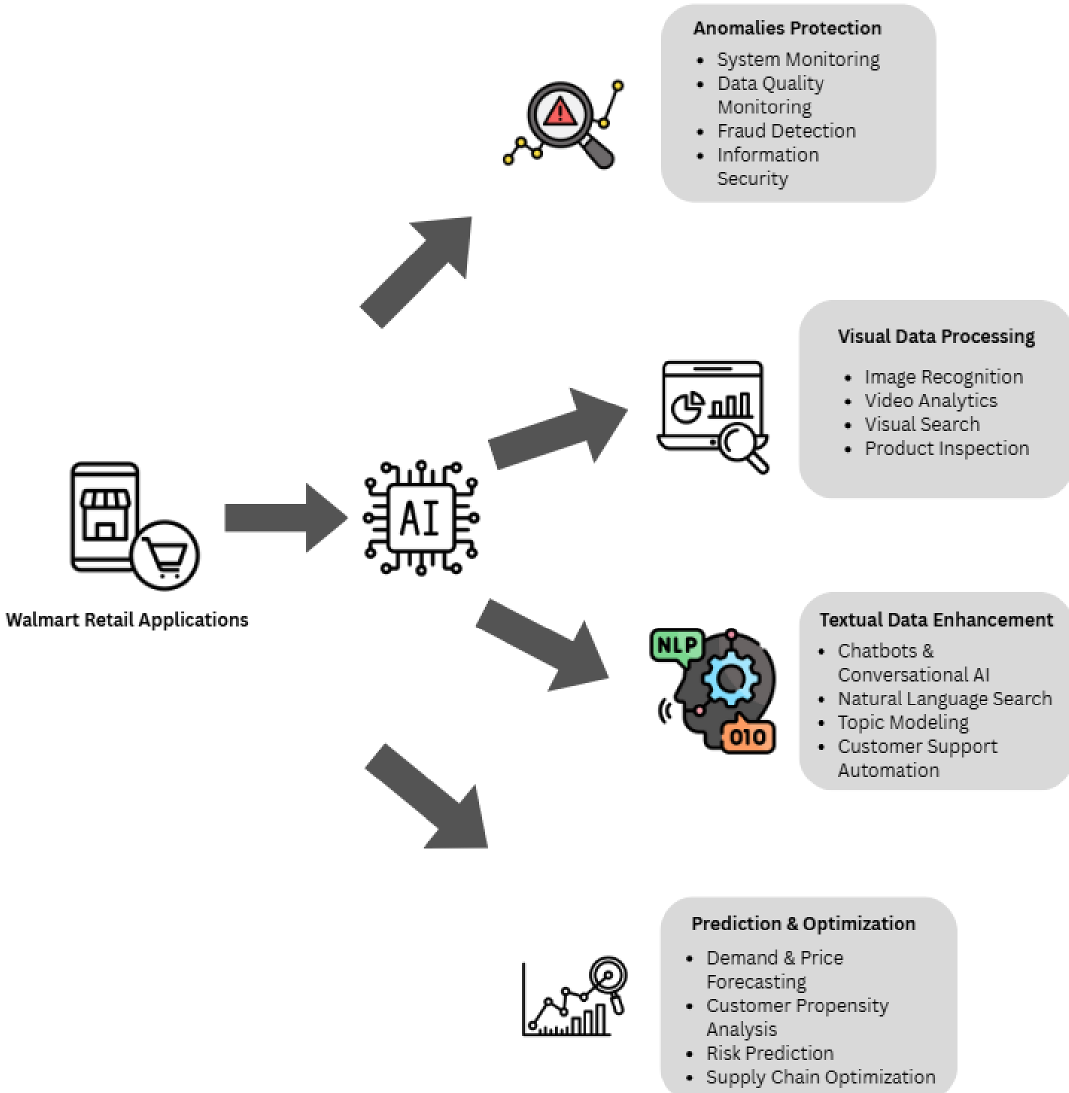

Figure 4: AI-Driven Functional Areas in Walmart's Retail Operations (**Note:** Adapted from "Machine learning platform at Walmart," by Thomas Vengal et al., 2023, *Walmart Global Tech Blog.)*

5. Discussion

The case study of Novartis, Amazon, Unilever, and Walmart gives an informative outlook of how artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming business-to-consumer (B2C) applications in the different sectors. Although the sectoral attributes, products types, and customer demands differ, the four cases demonstrate the same tendency to use AI to enhance the demand prediction, inventory optimization, and decision-making. This section provides a critical cross-comparison of the operations of these companies, establishes areas of convergence and non-convergence and presents the general managerial implications.

Pharmaceuticals vs. E-Commerce: Novartis and Amazon

One of the differences between Novartis and Amazon is that they belong to different industries that vary considerably in terms of regulatory environment, customer needs, and operation focus. Novartis, a pharmaceutical company, focuses on compliance, accuracy, traceability since improper management of inventory can have a direct effect on patient outcome. Its proprietary AI-based Buying Engine, which ables it to consolidate all the procurement data together, standardize vendor catalogs, and predict SKU-level demand in laboratory supplies, has been made in partnership with Amazon Web Services (AWS). It is not only to achieve cost effectiveness but is also aimed at shortage and wastage of valuable supplies.

Amazon being the largest company offering e-commerce globally is under a highly changing, customer-focused realm where much importance is placed on speed, scalability and instant reaction. Amazons AI service, e.g., Amazon Forecast and generative AI to warehouse automation are a part of the solutions to process millions of forecasts each day and convert them into restocking plans. Forecasts are made using various streams of data including sales history, promotions, weather conditions, and tendencies in different regions. Compared to Novartis where AI is used mostly as a tool to support procurement and operational visibility or in other cases the distribution of operational information, Amazon uses such technology as the keystone of its logistics, warehousing, and last-mile delivery.

One of the most significant points of comparison expressed here is that, whereas Novartis applies AI to optimize more accuracy within a sensitive supply chain, Amazon can apply it to scale and efficiency. Nevertheless, both of them are subject to difficulties. Novartis is challenged by the legacy integration of the ERP and managerial distrust of AI forecasts, whereas Amazon has to face seasonality effects that distort sales forecasts, recent sales-weighted metrics overemphasis, and the effort-demanding aspect of massive AI modelling engagement. This comparison demonstrates how industry context is a strong determining factor of AI adoption practices: pharmaceuticals are scrupulous of accuracy and compliance, whereas e-commerce is driven by speed and breadth.

FMCG vs. Retail: Unilever and Walmart

Unilever and Walmart are similar in regards to size and product multiplicity, but the usage of AI by these companies is different because of structural differences of the processes in FMCG and retailing business. Unilever as a global FMCG leader focuses its work on collaboration with retailers to improve joint demand forecasts through the Customer Connectivity effort, where real-time data sharing with the aim of reducing product oversupply is applied. The system conducts billions of calculations daily, and pilot tests of the system, including one with Walmart Mexico have shown very positive results, including 98 percent in-stock availability. At Unilever, AI is not only a method of efficiency in operations but also a means of improving links to retail partners in the fragmented markets worldwide.

At Walmart, in contrast to this, there has been the development of state-of-the-art systems to include the so-called Data Cafe which combines point-of-sale (POS), online data, and externals to generate localized predictions of as many as 100, 000 SKUs. Walmart uses neural networks, regression models to auto-replenish the stores on store-level basis. It is oriented towards operational control and simulation and is able to allow the planners to determine the effect of promotions, weather conditions or interruptions prior to taking the inventory decisions. Walmart has announced that this has produced significant results such as a 30 percent gradual decline in the stockout and an improvement in forecasting to above 90 percent in certain categories.

The difference between the two is the strategic orientation. Unilever AI systems are externally collaborative and it relates well with its strong retailer partnerships, whereas Walmart AI systems are internally centralized and it focuses on precision of analysis and the control used therein. The two strategies stress the versatility of AI applications to the demands of the organizations-cooperation in the FMCG markets and independence in the retail.

Table 3: Cross-Case Comparative Analysis of AI Capabilities, Contextual Conditions, and Operational Impact across B2C Industries

Analytical Dimension	Novartis (Pharmaceuticals)	Amazon (E-commerce)	Unilever (FMCG)	Walmart (Retail)
Industry Context (Contingency Conditions)	Highly regulated, compliance-sensitive supply chain	High-velocity, demand-uncertain digital marketplace	Globally distributed FMCG network with retailer dependence	Large-scale retail with store-level inventory complexity
Primary AI Objective	Procurement optimization and SKU-level forecasting	Large-scale demand forecasting and automated replenishment	Collaborative forecasting and supply chain integration	Localized demand prediction and inventory optimization
Core AI Capabilities Developed (Dynamic Capabilities)	Data integration, NLP-based catalog normalization, predictive procurement	Scalable ML forecasting, neural network modeling, warehouse automation	Real-time data sharing, partner integration, adaptive forecasting	Data consolidation (POS + ERP), scenario simulation, predictive analytics
Operational Outcomes	Cost reduction (~5%), improved supply visibility	Improved forecast accuracy, reduced overstocking	Higher in-stock rates (98% pilot), logistics efficiency	Reduced stockouts (~30%), improved forecast accuracy (>90%)
Key Implementation Challenges	Legacy ERP integration, data quality issues, managerial resistance	Seasonality bias, model complexity, infrastructure intensity	Retailer data fragmentation, limited real-time access in emerging markets	Data silos, planner distrust, signal overfitting risks
Strategic Orientation of AI Adoption	Accuracy and compliance-driven optimization	Scalability and speed-driven automation	Collaboration and ecosystem integration	Centralized analytical control and operational precision

6. Conclusion

AI has become a revolution in demand prediction and inventory optimization in Business-to-Consumer (B2C) business. The present paper has considered the transformation of the operational functions, decision-making framework, and supply chain organization in the pharmaceutical businesses, e-commerce industry, FMCG, and retail world through AI-based systems. The results show that even though AI is highly effective in improving forecast accuracy, minimizing stockouts, improving inventory turnover, and operational responsiveness, its most significant effect is the organizational change. The use of artificial intelligence-enhanced predictive dashboards, automatic replenishment systems, and real-time analytics systems are gradually replacing traditional forecasting functions which were founded on manual data analysis. Consequently, the operational employees are moving away to routine forecasting activities to interpretations, system monitoring and strategic oversight functions.

The cross-industry comparison shows that despite the fact that the technological potentials of AI are generally similar, the results of implementation are highly dependent on the contextual conditions of the industry. In the pharmaceutical industry, the use of AI is mostly compliance-based, which focuses on accuracy and traceability. In e-commerce, scalability and speed are the variables that dominate and demand highly dynamic forecasting systems that can handle large amount of real-time information. The FMCG organizations pay more attention to joint forecasting and integration into the ecosystem with retailers, whereas the retail companies are oriented on the localized demand forecast and centralized analytical control. In all the cases, it turns out that hybrid decision making models, i.e. a combination of algorithmic forecasts and human judgments, are the most prominent operational model, which means that AI supplements, and does not substitute, managerial judgments.

Theoretically, the research contributes to the current body of literature by bridging the connection between AI-based predictions and organizational role restructuring. Implicitly referring to Contingency Theory and the Dynamic Capability View, the results prove that AI utility is not merely technologically advanced, but also aligned to environmental circumstances, organization preparedness, and cultural goodwill. AI has served as a dynamic capability and it allows firms to reorganize resources and redesign workflows and increase adaptability in unstable B2C markets.

On the managerial level, the results imply that the implementation of AI as an organizational change initiative, as opposed to a technological upgrade, should be considered. To enhance good adoption, firms need to invest in employee reskilling, data governance systems, and explainable artificial intelligence systems to earn trust. It is crucial to enhance the integration of data between ERP and POS to increase the level of forecasting. Besides, a balanced human-AI model in collaboration is essential in order to ensure efficiency and flexibility in unpredictable conditions.

Limitations

There are some limitations on this study. To begin with, the study is based mostly on secondary data and published case studies, which could limit access to internal measures of performance and real-time decision-making. Second, the research only considers four chosen B2C industries and, thus, the results cannot be entirely generalised in all industries and regions. Third, AI technological development is very fast, and the tools and practice of implementation can change further than this study covers and takes place. Such limitations imply that conclusions can be made in the framework of determined comparative and qualitative framework.

Future Research Directions

Future research could extend this study through primary empirical investigations, including interviews, surveys, or longitudinal case studies examining operational role transformation after AI implementation. Quantitative research measuring the relationship between AI maturity levels and operational performance indicators such as forecast error reduction, inventory turnover, and service level improvement would provide stronger statistical validation. Additionally, further studies may explore governance mechanisms, ethical considerations, workforce adaptation strategies, and AI explainability frameworks within B2C supply chains. Comparative international research examining AI adoption across developed and emerging markets would also contribute to a deeper understanding of contextual influences on implementation outcomes.

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